

Summer 2026 Volume 84, Issue 1

The Alabama MUNICIPAL Journal

Official publication of the Alabama League of Municipalities

RURAL PAST, URBAN FUTURE: HOMEWOOD CELEBRATES 100 YEARS



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About ALM:

The Alabama League of Municipalities is a nonpartisan membership association of over 450 incorporated cities and towns. Since 1935, the League has worked to strengthen municipal government through advocacy, training and the advancement of effective local leadership. As the recognized voice of Alabama's cities and towns, ALM's member municipalities benefit from a variety of member programs, services and activities that are impossible to accomplish alone.



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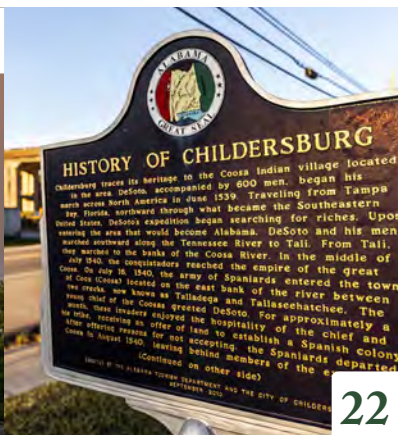
Summer 2026 • Volume 84, Issue 1

In this Issue:

Executive Director's Summer Report	5	DesignAlabama's Philip A. Morris Mayors Design Summit Celebrates 20 Years of Creating Vibrant Communities	44
Leadership Perspective	7-10	New NLC University Class: Emergency Management and Mitigation Solutions	46
Legal Viewpoint		ALM Proudly Recognizes Members in Leadership Positions with the National League of Cities	48
Expenses of Municipal Officers and Employees: What is Allowed and What is the Best Process?	12	A New Chapter in a Familiar Friendship	50
EDA Spotlight - Center Point Leverages Economic Development Academy Experience to Shape its Future	16	Join an ALM Standing Committee and Be Heard!	53
ACE Spotlight - Childersburg: A Community Rooted in History and Built for Excellence	22	Powering Prosperity: How USDA Rural Development Partners with Alabama's Municipal Leaders	54
Review of the 2026 Legislative Session	26	2026 MLI and Graduation Ceremonies	58
Modern Improvements Strengthen Ozark's Community Hub	32	2026 Congressional Luncheons	58
Supporting Alabama's First Responders:		The League Welcomes Our Newest	
Communicating PTSD and Crisis Resources	36	\$25,000 Level Strategic Partner: Good Grit	59
100 Years of Homewood: Celebrating a Century as a City	40	Loss Control Summer Seminars 2026	60
City Hall Selfie Day is August 11, 2026!	43	NLC City Summit - Nashville	60
		Important Upcoming ARPA Deadlines	62



16



36



22



48

On the Cover:

In April 2018, while preparing to repave Broadway Street in the Edgewood neighborhood of Homewood, a road construction contractor unearthed a section of the city's original 1920's streetcar tracks and bricks at the intersection of Oxmoor Road. Construction was halted and experts examined the tracks and suggested preserving a section of the street that enabled the trolley tracks and bricks to remain visible to the public, while also keeping the roadway safe for vehicles. See page 40 for more about Homewood's history. Photo by Blair Ramsey/Southern Intrigue Photography

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Executive Director's Summer Report

Gregory D. Cochran • Executive Director

I trust everyone has had a wonderful summer; our team has certainly enjoyed the warmer weather and visiting with our members throughout ALM events! Allow me to reminisce a moment and share how much we enjoyed hosting the 2026 ALM Annual Convention in Montgomery. We had our largest attendance ever for an ALM event and one of our biggest municipal marketplaces! Our ALM staff outdid themselves this year, from curating topics, lining up keynote speakers, building the branding and choosing the entertainment, it was a great opportunity for our members to engage, learn and network. Thank you to ALL that attended the convention!

We have continued to host regional in-person training workshops around the state, providing the latest information on key topics of interest to our members. We appreciate the Alabama Community College System (ACCS) for allowing us to host these workshops on their campuses and for continuing to partner with ALM to provide educational opportunities for municipal leaders. We are excited to announce that we signed another memorandum of understanding with ACCS to expand our online learning portfolio with several new topics from our legal team. Our goal is to add ten additional online learning courses within the next year, allowing members to acquire additional credit hours as your schedules allow.

Following the ALM convention, we participated in the International Council of Shopping Centers (ICSC) Conference and Tradeshow in Las Vegas, Nevada, the nation's premier



retail conference. While there, we hosted our Live Locally Alabama expo booth to provide our municipalities with an opportunity to meet with developers and retailers to bring new developments to their communities. This has been an exciting new role for ALM in bringing additional value-added services to our members, which enhances your ability to build vibrant communities.

Our participation in ICSC Las Vegas and ICSC Southeast, which will be held in Atlanta, GA on October 19-20, 2026, are just a couple of examples of how we are providing resources and value to our members. These investments are an extension



of the Economic Development Academy (EDA) — a program we started back in 2021 to teach municipal leaders strategies to implement sustainable economic investment. The EDA takes a selected class of municipalities and leaders through several workshops where they gain knowledge in preparing a strategic plan and tactics for attracting new retailers to their community. Additionally, we have invested in a new software platform for graduates that will identify economic recruitment opportunities within their communities. We will send out more information on how graduates can utilize this service soon. Registration for our next EDA ends on September 15. In the meantime, you may reach out to Mary Pollard at mpollard@almonline.org if you have any questions.

Looking ahead we have a fantastic line up of events scheduled for our members later this year!

In August, we will host our in-state congressional luncheons, which are free to our municipal officials. This is an excellent opportunity to visit with your congressional representative and their staff to discuss federal resources you may be desiring for your community.

The Municipal Leadership Institute and graduation ceremonies will be held in Mobile on October 20-22. Our team has built an intentional lineup of speakers and networking opportunities for attendees. Within that same conference, we are expanding our municipal marketplace venue to allow more vendors to visit and share information with our members on their services and products. To register, visit www.almonline.org.

We will wrap up the calendar year participating in the National League of Cities' City Summit in Nashville, TN on November 18-21. While in Nashville, we will host the Alabama Delegates' Reception in coordination with one of our valued strategic partners, Alabama Power!

Our team looks forward to seeing you throughout the remainder of the year. As always, if we can be of assistance to you, please do not hesitate to reach out to a member of our team.

Peace be with you,
Gregory D. Cochran, CAE
Executive Director

Have you seen the latest episode of "Municipal Matters?"



YouTube: @MyALMTV

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Be sure to watch the League's monthly video series, "Municipal Matters," filmed in our studio in Montgomery! The goal is to educate municipal leaders on a variety of topics including League services and programs, grant opportunities, legal and legislative updates, state and federal initiatives and more.

We have interviewed leaders from across Alabama who are working to make our state a great place to call home from our own president and vice president to leaders with the Alabama Department of Mental Health, the USDA Rural Development Office and the Economic Development Association of Alabama.

Please feel free to send us your feedback or suggestions for future shows and do not forget to like, share and subscribe to our YouTube channel @MyALMTV! ■

Leadership Perspective

Mayor Rusty Jessup • Riverside • ALM President



One-On-One with President Rusty Jessup

What is Riverside known for?

The city of Riverside is a scenic, rural, bedroom community nestled along the beautiful Coosa River. Established in 1882 around a vital train depot, it boasts the region's only river bridge across the Coosa River. The city is now split in nearly two equal halves by Interstate 20 just before it crosses the water.

Our community has about 2,500 permanent residents but supports many part-time residents and second-home owners who use the lake throughout the year. Lake Logan Martin, impounded in the late 1950s, serves as the primary economic engine for us by driving tourism and recreation. Over 12 miles of its shoreline is in the Riverside city limits.

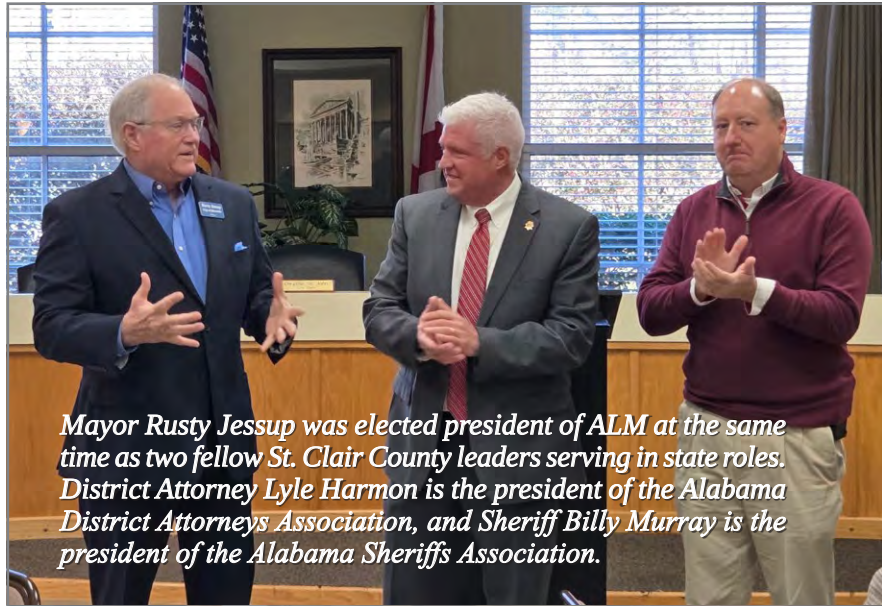
What made you run for mayor?

I have always had a heart for public and community service. Whether it was church work, youth sports, civic clubs or any chance to pitch in, I was there. Funny though, running for public office was not even on my radar until later in life when my friends and neighbors started nudging — well, pushing me — toward running for city council. I finally took the leap, won the seat and the rest, as they say, is history. I served one term on the council, then ran for mayor. I have been here ever since, and I just got elected to my fifth term!

It has been incredibly rewarding. Honestly, I sometimes wish I had started this journey earlier in my life. It has been such a fun, wild ride. I see so many good young people out there that are not interested in public service, and it breaks my heart. I want to tell them how rewarding it can be, and to get started! There is such a real need for good, grounded servant-hearted leaders in our local governments.

What did you do before becoming mayor?

After graduating from Jacksonville State University with a degree in criminology, I spent nearly a decade in law enforcement. Then, after several heartfelt and occasionally stressed conversations with Jesus, I felt it was time for a change. I moved into the insurance world and enjoyed a much calmer pace. I eventually retired from that career in 2012.



Mayor Rusty Jessup was elected president of ALM at the same time as two fellow St. Clair County leaders serving in state roles. District Attorney Lyle Harmon is the president of the Alabama District Attorneys Association, and Sheriff Billy Murray is the president of the Alabama Sheriffs Association.



Why did you run for president of ALM?

When I was elected to the city council, I quickly realized I needed real training to understand how to properly manage a city. I enrolled in the League's Certified Municipal Official (CMO) program and immediately fell in love with the organization. While the CMO program provided the essential foundation for navigating municipal rules and regulations, it was the profound camaraderie and shared experiences with my fellow elected officials that truly taught me how to be a better mayor. I made new friends all across the state, and my vision for my own city grew by leaps and bounds.

It did not take long to see how vital the League is to Alabama's quality of life and developing leaders who can move our communities forward. I went "all in!" I got involved, stayed involved and cultivated a genuine desire to help shape the direction of the organization. Now, after reaching the level of CMO Emeritus II, serving as president is both an honor and a joy.

What have your first few months as president been like?

It has been absolutely fantastic! I have been crisscrossing Alabama, representing our elected officials, and traveling nationwide on behalf of the Alabama League of Municipalities. Honestly, I cannot see how much better it can get! I am meeting novel people everywhere I go, picking up fresh new ideas and learning something distinct and diverse at every stop.

I sincerely look forward to every meeting, every training session and every event! I love hearing how other officials tackle challenges, strengthen their communities and grow as leaders. Every conversation broadens my own perspective on just how vital local government truly is. When it comes to impacting everyday lives, nothing compares to the work done by our local governments — closest to home.

What are your goals for this year?

1. Promoting dignity in public and personal discourse

With all the talk about "division" in our country, I firmly believe the real issue is not what we disagree on but it is how we disagree. I want to introduce what we will call the "dignity index;" a set of ideas and programs that encourage and teach us to treat each other with respect, even when our political views differ. It is about less insult-throwing and being more solution-seeking.

2. Educating the public about taxes and services

We are living in a world where the public demand for services far exceeds what local governments can provide. We need to do a better job explaining the true cost of those services. Taxes are a fundamental ingredient to our quality of life, and I am not sure the general public understands this. Electing someone simply because they promise "lower taxes" sounds great until you realize what disappears along with those missing tax dollars. This year we will be talking openly about what things cost through our Live Locally Alabama campaign along with what communities will lose when revenue drops, and why all taxes are not bad.

What are some of the things that you and the city do to connect with other leaders in the region?

I am very active in the St. Clair County Mayor's Association, which includes all elected officials from the county in its membership. It is an excellent vehicle to develop a strong local network and work together. Over the past several years, we have noticed that grant applications receive significantly more attention and competitive preference when multiple government entities apply jointly. The organization meets monthly, on a rotating schedule, with a different municipality hosting each consecutive month's meeting. ■





Riverside Council

Leadership Perspective

Mayor Jason Reeves • Troy • ALM Vice President



The opportunity to serve as an elected official has been part of my life for more than half my lifetime. As I complete my 30th year in public service, including four terms as a councilmember and four terms as mayor of Troy, my election as vice president of the Alabama League of Municipalities is both a tremendous honor and a highlight of my service. The educational opportunities and resources provided by the League, along with my service on its board of directors and as chairman of the Municipal Workers Compensation Fund Board, have enhanced my ability to serve the citizens of Troy and strengthened my effectiveness as a public servant.

The programs and services offered by the Alabama League of Municipalities are vital to strengthening local government, the level of government closest to the people, and the one to which you have dedicated your service. Through initiatives such as the Live Locally Alabama campaign, the League provides valuable resources that help promote communities and educate citizens about the benefits of being engaged in local affairs. Active participation in our cities and towns enhances the quality of life for all residents, and I encourage you to take advantage of these valuable resources. One upcoming opportunity is City Hall Selfie Day on August 11. It is a fun and engaging way to showcase your city hall, celebrate local government and connect with citizens through social media. I encourage every municipality to participate and use the tools provided through the Live Locally Alabama campaign to highlight the important work being done in your community and the people who make it possible.

The energy and enthusiasm of our president, Mayor Rusty Jessup, are truly contagious. As we begin this term together, supported by an exceptional leadership team and staff, our shared goal is to strengthen communities across Alabama by providing municipal leaders with the tools, training and support they need to succeed. I look forward to working alongside you, building meaningful relationships and advancing the mission of serving our cities and towns together. ■





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LEGAL VIEWPOINT

By Rob Johnston, Director of Legal Services, ALM

Expenses of Municipal Officers and Employees: What is Allowed and What is the Best Process?

Most municipalities are almost nine months into their first term. As we go deeper into the first year of the new term, the legal department has received questions on the issue of expenses. What is allowed? What is reimbursable? What is a good process for reimbursing municipal elected officials and employees?

This Legal Viewpoint article will walk you through the rules addressing the method for municipal reimbursement. It discusses expense allowances and some of the issues that have arisen concerning reimbursement of municipal officials and employees for their expenses.

This article is written with a general approach applicable to most municipalities in Alabama. It is important to keep in mind, however, that there are some local laws and general legislation for certain classes of municipalities that regulate expense allowances. Before implementing an expense policy, or amending an existing one, it is important to research whether any special rules apply to your municipality.

The Fundamental Rule: Reimbursement for Actual Expenses

In Alabama, Sections 36-7-1 through 36-7-5, Code of Alabama 1975, provide a fundamental method for municipalities to reimburse officials and employees for expenses incurred while traveling beyond the municipal limits on official business. In addition, the attorney general's office has consistently held that officials may be reimbursed for all expenses incurred in the performance of official duties.

The fundamental rule is that municipal officials and employees can only be reimbursed for actual travel expenses incurred. See Section 36-7-1, Code of Alabama 1975. This is very different from state officers and employees who are authorized to be reimbursed on a per diem basis. Itemized statements must be presented to the municipal treasurer, and the council will approve or disallow the expenditures at a regular meeting within 30 days after presentment. See Section 36-7-2, Code of Alabama 1975.

Advances for expenses are allowed but only if they are permitted by a resolution adopted by the council. See Section 36-7-3, Code of Alabama 1975. Even when expenses are advanced, an itemized statement of actual expenses must be presented by the municipal official or employee immediately upon returning to the municipality. See Section 36-7-4, Code of Alabama 1975.

Expense Allowances: Extra Compensation Prohibited

While there is no express statutory or judicial requirement that municipalities in Alabama reimburse employees and officials for their expenses, most municipalities do so. By the same token, there is no prohibition on reimbursement, if the actions of the municipality do not violate Sections 68 and 281, or Amendment 92, of the Constitution of Alabama



1901, or Sections 11-43-9 and 11-43-80, Code of Alabama 1975. These sections prohibit granting extra compensation to officers and employees after a service is rendered. They also prohibit increasing or decreasing the salaries of municipal officials during the term in which they serve.

Additionally, to advance travel expenses, the municipality and the official receiving the advance must comply with Section 36-7-3, Code of Alabama 1975, which sets out mandatory procedures to account for travel advances.

Clearly, the reimbursement of actual expenses does not violate these laws. The municipal official or employee is not receiving any extra compensation when reimbursement is received for expenses; instead, the official or employee is left in the same position that he or she occupied prior to incurring any expenses.

Attorney generals' opinions provide that a municipality may establish a flat expense allowance for its employees or officials if it is an accurate reflection to the actual expenses incurred. In an opinion addressed to Hon. W. W. Malone Jr., city attorney for Athens, dated October 20, 1965, the attorney general's office stated "this office has consistently held...that a flat expense allowance, if based upon a reimbursement to the officer concerned for expenses incurred by him in the performance of his official duties and bearing a reasonable and substantially accurate relationship to the actual expenses incurred, is not considered as an increase in compensation." See, also, AGO 2008-0038.

Thus, a municipality may, by ordinance, establish a flat expense allowance to be paid to its officials on a periodic basis provided the allowance bears a reasonable and substantially accurate relationship to the actual expenses incurred. The danger is when flat expense allowances exceed the actual expenses. To the extent an expense allowance exceeds actual expenses, it is an unauthorized increase in salary and violates the sections of the constitution and code cited above. AGO 1981-0187. Also, amounts above actual expenses must be treated as income by the official or employee for income tax purposes.

Recognizing the difficulty of determining whether an expense allowance is reasonably related to actual expenses incurred, the attorney general's office pointed out in AGO 1981-0187 that the better practice is for municipalities to adopt a policy of reimbursing their officers for the actual expenses incurred while performing their duties only after receiving an affidavit from the officer listing the expenses. This method helps avoid the potential legal and tax problems encountered when a municipal official is paid a fixed periodic sum for expenses; however, the attorney general's office pointed out that no law is violated when a municipality authorizes paying its officials a fixed expense allowance.

Items Allowed in Expense Allowances

Regardless of whether a municipality chooses to reimburse its officials only for their actual expenses or to authorize paying them a fixed expense allowance, the general rule appears to be that municipal officers are entitled to reimbursement for all reasonable and necessary expenses legitimately incurred in the performance of their official duties. Regarding the specific items which may be considered as legitimate expenses, the attorney general's office has stated that this determination must ultimately be made by the council. In AGO 1981-0187, the attorney general stated that expenses for phone calls, gasoline and automobile repairs may be included in the expense allowance, provided that the expenses were incurred in the performance of official duties. The time spent performing these official duties cannot be included in the expense allowance. Municipal officials are compensated for their time by salary and any extra money received for their time equates to an impermissible salary increase.

In an opinion to Hon. George W. Ivy Jr. and Hon. John M. Anthony Jr., dated December 2, 1974, the attorney general ruled that municipalities have no authority to furnish telephone service at a city commissioners business or residence, even if he or she establishes his or her official office at either location.

The provision of telephone service is particularly appropriate for demonstrating the difficulties of using a flat monthly expense allowance. If the official is allotted a certain amount of money for telephone expenses yet does not make enough official calls to justify this amount, the official would be required to refund the extra funds to the city. Similarly, if the official spends more money for telephone calls than is allotted, reimbursement would be requested from the city. Reimbursing the official for actual expenses removes these difficulties.

Finally, in the opinion to Ivy and Johnson, the attorney general ruled that municipalities may not pay the civic club dues of their officers or employees; however, municipalities may furnish city officials with automobiles, provided the automobiles are used solely for official municipal business. AGO to Hon. John M. Franklin, January 28, 1974. A municipality has the power to reimburse volunteers for mileage they incur on municipal business, if the council determines that reimbursing mileage serves a municipal purpose. AGO 1995-0134.

Travel Expenses

While flat expense allowances are permissible for municipal officials who incur expenses in the performance of their official duties while in the municipality, in an opinion to Hon. Emory Folmar, mayor of Montgomery, dated May 19, 1980, the attorney general stated that this allowance

cannot “include reimbursement for expenses incurred while traveling or remaining beyond the limits of the municipality.” Instead, reimbursement for expenses “beyond the limits of the municipality” is governed by Sections 36-7-1 through 36-7-5, Code of Alabama 1975.

Procedure for Approval

Section 36-7-1 of the Alabama Code provides that no officer or employee of a municipality or county in Alabama shall be reimbursed from the treasury of the municipality or county unless an itemized statement of expenses is presented and is approved in a procedure provided in Section 36-7-2.

Section 36-7-2 requires the officer or employee, immediately upon return, to present the statement to the municipal comptroller in a commission-governed municipality and to the treasurer in a council-manager municipality. This statement must be presented to the council or commission at a regular meeting held within 30 days after it is presented to the comptroller or treasurer. If the governing body disallows the statement, the official or employee cannot be reimbursed. It is the opinion of the League that if the governing body finds only certain items should be disallowed, those items may be deleted from the statement and the statement approved as amended.

In an opinion to Hon. B. R. Winstead Jr., director of finance for Birmingham, dated October 31, 1973, the attorney general ruled that, although Section 36-7-2 requires the official who incurred the expenses to present the itemized statement of expenses immediately upon returning from his or her trip, the official must simply present the statement as soon as is practicable after returning. Then, for the official to receive reimbursement for those expenses, the municipal governing body must, at a regular meeting within 30 days after the statement is presented, approve the statement of expenses. The Attorney General has held that a town council may require its municipally sanctioned volunteer fire department to provide the town with unredacted copies of fire and emergency medical services reports to keep on file for use in determining the reimbursement of expenses of department personnel making fire and medical calls. 2007-0111.

Advances

As mentioned earlier, Section 36-7-3 of the Alabama Code states that no amount can be advanced to defray travel expenses of a municipal official or employee unless the council passes a resolution allowing the expense. This resolution must state the purpose and object of the proposed trip.

The Court of Civil Appeals of Alabama has held that a city council may not retroactively approve an advance of

travel expenses that were not properly made pursuant to Title 36, Chapter 7, Article 1, Code of Alabama 1975. *Cassady v. Claiborne*, 590 So.2d 339 (Ala. Civ. App. 1991).

When funds are advanced to a municipal official or employee, an itemized statement must be presented immediately upon the return of the official or employee. Failure to present this statement and to have it approved renders the officer or employee personally liable to the municipality for the advanced funds. If the officer or employee receives a salary for services, the amount of the advance can be deducted from any future salary received from the city. See Section 36-7-4, Code of Alabama 1975.

The provisions of the code that deal with reimbursement of expenses for traveling beyond the municipal limits – including the provisions relating to advancement of funds – do not apply to the use of a municipal credit card beyond the corporate limits on official municipal business. See Section 36-7-1, Code of Alabama 1975. Thus, a municipal council does not have to approve, by resolution in advance, the use of a credit card issued in the name of a municipality for trips outside the municipality by municipal officers and employees.

Reimbursable Travel Expenses: Must Be Related to Official Municipal Business

While no attorney general’s opinions or Alabama cases deal with the question of what items may be claimed as travel expenses, it seems clear that items such as gasoline, business-related phone calls, automobile expenses, hotel rooms and meals are permissible. In addition, traveling officials and employees can probably participate in special planned events, assuming that the events are part of a convention or meeting the official or employee is attending. Again, however, the time the official spends away from the municipality is generally not reimbursable. These are questions that must be answered on a case-by-case basis with the ultimate decision on the items which are allowable resting solely with the municipal governing body.

In addition, no opinions or cases explain what trips are reimbursable. The general rule is that if the trip is related to official municipal business, the officer or employee is entitled to be reimbursed for expenses.

However, a municipality may not pay the expenses incurred by the spouse of an official or employee while traveling. AGO to Hon. George W. Ivy Jr. and Hon. John M. Anthony, Jr. December 2, 1974. Further, a city may adopt a personnel policy that provides for the reimbursement of travel expenses for select candidates for employment with the city and for the reimbursement of moving expenses for select new employees, subject to restrictions to prevent abuse and promote fiscal responsibility. AGO 1999-0278.

Some boards or municipalities have legislative acts that specify the items that can be included as reimbursable expenses or that limit the amount of expenses an official can claim. These acts would govern the amount or the type of expenses that can be claimed in these instances. Officials should be aware of the acts and code sections that govern their operation.

Penalties

Any officer or employee drawing or approving any warrant drawn on the municipal treasury in violation of these provisions shall be guilty of a misdemeanor and punished as provided by law. Therefore, proper care should be taken before deciding what items to allow as part of the expense allowance and the municipal governing body must ensure that the expenses, which are being claimed by the officer or employee, are legitimate.

Additionally, officers and employees who fail to account for travel advances may be convicted for a violation of the Alabama Ethics Law. *Langham v. State*, 662 So.2d 1201 (Ala. Crim. App. 1994).

Recommended Accounting Procedures

There appears to be a conflict in the attorney general's opinions regarding flat expense allowances and actual expense reimbursements. The opinions indicate that officials may receive a flat expense allowance, but this allowance may not exceed actual expenses incurred. The better practice seems clear – municipalities should reimburse officials for the actual expenses incurred. This method generates a record for disbursing to municipal officers. It also documents that the payments are reimbursements for actual expenses and deters speculation of unauthorized salary increases for municipal

officials. This satisfies all the requirements of the various code sections as well as the accounting requirements of the Internal Revenue Service.

In deciding which expenses to allow, one requirement is common to both the IRS and state laws – the expense must be both reasonable and necessary. Reimbursing officials only after they present a list of actual expenses helps the municipality ensure that this requirement is met.

Regarding travel expenses, in most cases, an official or employee will request an advance from the municipal treasury to help defray expenses. As noted above, the Code of Alabama permits this practice, provided a resolution to this effect is passed by the governing body of the municipality. This resolution should include detailed instructions concerning the accounting to be made by the official or employee upon his or her return. When the accounting, in written form, is made to the municipality, it relieves the employee from making an accounting to the IRS, provided the procedure is done properly. The League suggests enlisting the aid of the city auditor and municipal attorney to ensure that the proper procedure is followed.

Conclusion

A municipality can reimburse municipal officials and municipal employees for all reasonable and necessary expenses legitimately incurred in the performance of their official duties. Municipalities should use a practice of reimbursement in paying the documented, actual expenses incurred in the performance of those municipal duties. If you have further questions regarding the reimbursement of municipal officials and employees, please do not hesitate to contact the League's legal department at (334) 262-2566 or via our website at www.almonline.org. ■

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Center Point Leverages Economic Development Academy Experience to Shape its Future

Lori Jhons • Communications Director • ALM



The Alabama League of Municipalities, in partnership with the Alabama Community College System, created the Economic Development Academy (EDA) in 2021 to educate and engage municipal officials on the essential elements and phases of economic development. The EDA engages elected officials from participating cities and towns with municipal peers from their region to prepare their communities for growth. Up to seven people can participate per community including mayors, councilmembers, city administrators, city clerks, economic developers, business leaders and more.

In this magazine edition, we are excited to spotlight the city of Center Point for their participation in the first EDA class in 2022! The city of Center Point has existed as a long-established community in northeastern Jefferson County, Alabama for decades, but it officially gained incorporation status in 2002. It serves a diverse suburban community within the Birmingham metropolitan area, accounting for more than 16,000 residents. As a young city, it continues to build its identity through revitalization efforts, community beautification initiatives, youth engagement programs and ongoing investments in public safety, infrastructure and quality-of-life improvements.

Center Point Pursues Economic Development Education

The Center Point EDA committee consisted of Mayor Bobby Scott Jr., Councilmember Glenn Williams, Councilmember Ebonee Copeland, Councilmember D.M. Collins, Councilmember Sharon Jones, Councilmember Tiffany Moore and Buddy Aydelette, the city's economic development specialist.

Mayor Scott has served in his role since 2020, after previously serving on the city council from 2016 to 2020. Prior to public service, he worked for 17 years as a software engineer for a Fortune 500 financial, technology company as well as in hospitality roles at two major hotels.

"My experience in software engineering taught me analytical thinking, efficiency and long-term problem solving. My hospitality experience reinforced communication, responsiveness and customer service," Mayor Scott said. "Together, these experiences shape my belief that local government should be data-driven, accessible and focused on delivering practical solutions for residents and businesses."

Utilizing his experiences, he said their community applied to the League's Economic Development Academy to strengthen their economic development strategy and better position Center Point for long-term growth. Their goal was to gain structured guidance, data-driven tools and practical strategies to improve business recruitment, retention and redevelopment efforts.

**For more information
about the EDA program,
scan this QR code.**



“The most valuable aspect of EDA was collaborating with municipal leaders from across Alabama,” Mayor Scott said. “The program provided an opportunity to share challenges, exchange ideas and learn practical strategies that could be applied directly to local economic development efforts.”

Using a collaborative municipal team approach, EDA participants convene four times throughout the year to complete assignments and develop strategies to enhance their economic development efforts. Every participating community is required to complete a community economic vitality survey to assess positives and areas for improvement within their communities.

The survey highlighted strengths such as strong community pride, strategic location within the Birmingham metropolitan area and redevelopment opportunities. It also identified challenges including infrastructure needs, commercial vacancies, public perception concerns and the need for expanded economic opportunities.

Center Point Positions Itself for Long-Term Success

Each participating EDA municipality is required to implement a community project and to report on its progress. Center Point’s approved EDA project focused on developing a long-term economic development strategy centered on business recruitment and commercial corridor revitalization. A key component of this plan was securing a \$250,000 American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) business development grant to attract new commercial investment and support façade improvements for brick-and-mortar businesses along State Route 75 (Center Point Parkway).

Mayor Scott added, “The program has remained active through 2026 and has proven successful, helping attract multiple restaurants and retail establishments while improving the appearance and economic vitality of the corridor.”



ALM Executive Director Greg Cochran, Center Point Mayor Bobby Scott, Center Point Councilmember Glenn Williams and ACCS Chancellor Jimmy Baker pose for a photo during the first EDA graduation ceremony in 2022.



In addition to these efforts, Center Point has continued to advance sidewalk improvements, commercial redevelopment planning and expanded partnerships with businesses and community stakeholders. The city has also increased its use of grants and strategic investments to support economic growth.

Mayor Scott adds that the city has attended International Council of Shopping Centers events, in partnership with the League, as part of its strategy to recruit national and regional businesses during the past couple of years.

Furthermore, EDA participating communities are able to work with a slate of state and federal leaders that serve on the EDA Advisory Council to provide advice, training and resources from their unique perspectives.

“Key learning areas included strategic planning, economic development recruitment, community branding, stakeholder engagement, project prioritization and sustainable development practices,” Mayor Scott said. “The program also emphasized leveraging partnerships and using data to guide decision-making.”

Mayor Scott recommends cities participate in EDA with openness and a willingness to collaborate.

“It is important to be honest about challenges while also recognizing strengths,” he said. “The greatest value comes from actively applying the strategies learned to long-term planning and implementation.”

Community Success Takes Vision and Leadership

Every successful community needs vision and strong leadership. The League loves to highlight the value of its programs and those that represent the organization exceptionally well. It is important to note that before participating in EDA, Center Point earned the designation of becoming an Alabama Community of Excellence in 2020! The League oversees the Alabama Communities of Excellence (ACE) program, which was created in 2002.

Mayor Scott serves on the ALM Board of Directors, the Alabama Municipal Funding Corporation (AMFund) Board of Directors and has earned the Certified Municipal Official (CMO) Emeritus designation. On the national level, he currently serves as president of the National Black Caucus of Local Elected Officials and as vice chair of the Information Technology and Communications Committee through the National League of Cities.

Mayor Scott said, “Each program has provided distinct value. The CMO program strengthened municipal leadership and governance knowledge. ACE focused on strategic planning and community assessment. The League and national committee involvement expanded policy exposure, networking opportunities and innovative ideas from municipalities across the country. Together, these experiences have strengthened our ability to implement economic development strategies and prepare for programs like EDA.”

The League has had a total of 50 communities to graduate from the EDA program. The League did not hold an academy in 2026 since the majority of Alabama municipalities hosted elections in the fall of 2025. The League will open applications for the 2027 class very soon! Reach out to Mary Jackson Pollard, director of professional and community development, if you are interested in learning more about the program or scan the QR code to access the EDA webpage.

The League is excited for the future of Mayor Scott and city of Center Point as they continue focusing on their goals of redevelopment, infrastructure improvements, business recruitment and quality-of-life initiatives to support youth, working families and senior citizens. ■





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Childersburg: A Community Rooted in History and Built for Excellence

Ty Rayford • Digital Media Specialist • ALM



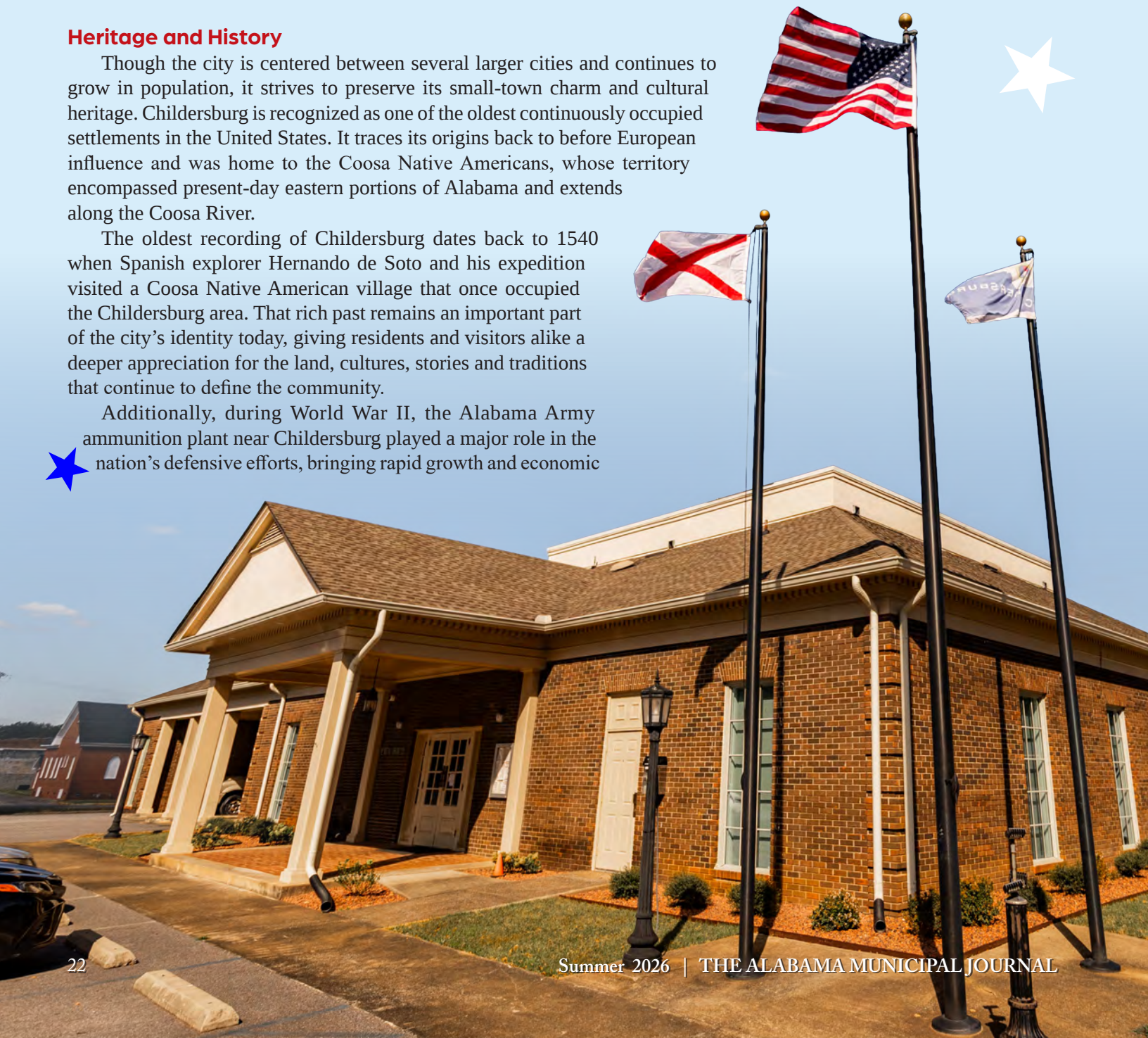
Located in the southwestern part of Talladega County, Childersburg, Alabama holds a unique and fascinating history. Tucked into the center of Alabama between U.S. Highways 280 and 231, this city of 4,800 residents is grounded in historical significance. Incorporated in 1889, Childersburg has always stood as an important industrial and transportation center in our state. Its location, history and people have helped shape a community that continues to honor where it has been, making it this magazine edition's Alabama Communities of Excellence spotlight story.

Heritage and History

Though the city is centered between several larger cities and continues to grow in population, it strives to preserve its small-town charm and cultural heritage. Childersburg is recognized as one of the oldest continuously occupied settlements in the United States. It traces its origins back to before European influence and was home to the Coosa Native Americans, whose territory encompassed present-day eastern portions of Alabama and extends along the Coosa River.

The oldest recording of Childersburg dates back to 1540 when Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto and his expedition visited a Coosa Native American village that once occupied the Childersburg area. That rich past remains an important part of the city's identity today, giving residents and visitors alike a deeper appreciation for the land, cultures, stories and traditions that continue to define the community.

Additionally, during World War II, the Alabama Army ammunition plant near Childersburg played a major role in the nation's defensive efforts, bringing rapid growth and economic



development to the community. The plant's presence left a lasting imprint on the area's economy, infrastructure and sense of service during a defining period in American history.

Excellence of Leadership

Wanting to further demonstrate its commitment to strategic growth, leadership and community development, Childersburg started on its ACE journey in 2008 before earning the ACE Community designation in 2012.

ACE was created in 2002 as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization to provide small communities, in the 2,000 to 18,000 population range, resources and knowledge that focus on the importance of planning, leadership development and broad-based community engagement. The program uses the collective expertise of partner organizations, including state agencies, associations, banks, utilities, universities and other technical specialists to help communities focus on their specific assets and long-term economic success. ACE provides community leaders with training and workshops to develop a vision and implementation strategies for their city. The program is designed to walk communities through a three-phased approach, which consists of assessing a community's strengths and weaknesses, developing a strategic plan and implementing it. ★



Childersburg's participation in ACE started under the leadership of Mayor Billy Joe Meeks who had a vision for a stronger, more vibrant Childersburg. Through strategic planning, Mayor Meeks laid the foundation for many of the improvements seen in the city today during his tenure from 1987 to 2014. His leadership helped set a tone of intentional planning, public service and community pride that has influenced Childersburg long after the city first began its ACE journey.

Deciding to seek someone who knew the importance of local leadership and the community's standing in historical distinction, Mayor Meeks asked Howard Smith, assistant general manager of the Childersburg utility department, to serve as the city's ACE local coordinator in 2008. The local coordinator plays a central role in the ACE process by spearheading efforts locally and serving as the liaison between the community and the ACE team.

A lifelong member of the Childersburg community, Smith's connection to the community and understanding of municipal operations made him an important part of the city's effort to turn long-term goals into visible improvements through the ACE program.

Though Mayor Meeks passed away in 2014 before he could see several of his visions fully realized, his commitment to the city's future continued through the election of Mayor Pro Tem Jimmy Payne, who assumed office in 2015.

Mayor Pro Tem Payne carried that momentum of merit and community development until current Mayor Ken Wesson took office in 2016. Mayor Wesson continued the vision established by Mayor Meeks and Mayor Payne while introducing new initiatives that further improved Childersburg.

"Mayor Meeks loved the city of Childersburg. In his tenure as mayor, he laid the foundation for growth for our city using our historical significance and resources," Smith said. "Part of that vision was to participate in the ACE program to utilize their resources as well."

Under consistently imaginative leadership, the city has remained focused on practical improvements that support residents and reinforce the value of planning for the future.



Products of Commitment

In the final phase of the program, communities shift their focus from planning to implementation, turning their strategic plan into reality. For Childersburg, being a part of the ACE program laid the foundation for the city to start and complete many renovations to enhance its quality of life. Its parks and recreation department built the RS Limbaugh Community Center, which offers an activity room, several meeting rooms and a gymnasium. The department also renovated its old John Cox Football Stadium to improve the enjoyment of its sporting events.



In its follow-through of the city's strategic plan, Childersburg has also completed several upgrades to the BJ Meeks Sports Complex, adding pickleball courts and new batting cages. It also finished phase one of its downtown sidewalk replacement project, all to enhance public services, infrastructure and quality of life for Childersburg residents.

"We have made much-needed improvements to our recreation department, police department, judicial building and utility department. These upgrades have provided our citizens with safe, clean and modern spaces they can be proud of," Smith said. "Our next major improvements will focus on the fire department and street department."

Each project demonstrates how the city has taken steady, meaningful steps in the ACE program to improve everyday services while also making public spaces more accessible and welcoming.

Continuous Residential Growth

Along with significant structural and economic development, Childersburg has also experienced residential growth that expanded available housing opportunities through the development of new subdivisions like College Park and Griffin Creek, which created more than 70 new homes and exemplifies the city's commitment to building a strong, forward-looking community. As more families look for places that offer both convenience of location and a close-knit community atmosphere, Childersburg has positioned itself as a place where people can live, work, play and invest in the future.

Both Mayor Wesson and Coordinator Smith share a deep assurance to its continuous growth and success through strategic planning, infrastructure improvements, housing development and community-focused leadership and reflects a willingness to prepare Childersburg for the next generation. That continued commitment reflects one of ACE's central principles: communities are strongest when local leaders, residents and stakeholders work together to create and carry out a successful strategic plan. Today, nearly 15 years after the city joined the program, Childersburg has exemplified what it means to be a part of ACE and the impact it can have when there are clear goals and strategic planning.

Today, Childersburg maintains the excellence of a community rooted in heritage, natural beauty and civic pride. Its story is one of history, leadership and progress which is a reminder that even the oldest communities can keep growing when its people remain committed to a shared vision for the future.

If your municipality needs assistance with updating your strategic plan or is interested in becoming an ACE community, contact Mary Jackson Pollard at mpollard@almonline.org. ACE program applications will close September 15, 2026. ■

Scan the QR code for more information about the ACE Program.



Review of the 2026 Legislative Session



Baker Allen • Director of Governmental Affairs • ALM

On April 9, 2026 the Alabama Legislature adjourned sine die, concluding the last regular session of the quadrennium. In previous election years, municipalities have escaped the focus of the Legislature. However, this session the advocacy team engaged on more legislation than ever.

Even with a busy legislative landscape, the Alabama League of Municipalities succeeded in passing our supported legislation and either holding off or amending unfavorable legislation. Every member of the advocacy team — Kaleb Beck, Adam Kilpatrick, Lillian Pitman and I — play a critical role in the League’s legislative strategy, but no voice is more effective than your own. This session we saw record engagement from our membership. Frequently, in our conversation with legislators, they told us that they have already heard from their mayors or councilmembers. Your phone calls, your texts and your emails are working! Legislators know improving the quality of life for their constituents requires partnerships between state and local governments. Sometimes, your engagement is the reminder they need to ensure that legislation is fostering that partnership and not breaking it down.

Partnership, not Preemption.

Legislative leadership remained unchanged this session with the exception of a new majority leader in the House. Rep. Scott Stadthagen resigned as majority leader to become the next chair of the Alabama Republican Party. The House elected Rep. Paul Lee — a former Dothan commissioner — as the next majority leader. With the general election in November, we expect some new legislators for the 2027 Regular Session.

2026 Regular Legislative Session

As in every year, the budgets were a major priority. The General Fund budget for fiscal year 2027 totaled \$3.72



billion, plus supplemental appropriations. The Legislature allocated a 2% cost of living raise for state employees and a one-time lump sum bonus for state retirees. Additionally, they allocated over \$203 million in federal funds for the Rural Health Transformation Program. The Education Trust Fund budget for fiscal year 2027 totaled \$10.5 billion, plus supplemental appropriations. Notably, the Legislature increased funding for the CHOOSE Act and made changes to the school funding formula in the RAISE Act.

A varying array of topics gained traction during this session. Two of Gov. Kay Ivey's priorities passed dealing with safety requirements for overnight camps and the death penalty for child predators. Two bills that have been filed in previous sessions passed, health insurance reimbursement for ambulances and tax deductions for overtime. Very few people in the state house expected the Legislature to take up restructuring the Public Service Commission and incentives for data centers; yet, the Legislature did.

With all the issues both expected and unexpected, the only way to preserve municipal authority is to read bills. This year, 1,046 bills were filed, which is the most filed in recent memory. To handle this volume, the League's bill review team — the advocacy and legal teams — developed an in-depth review process. Most bills impacting municipalities are obvious, but, at times, legislation intended to address one issue will unintentionally impact municipalities. The League's bill review process involves meeting twice a week during session. This process allows the advocacy team to manage the vast number of bills and respond quickly to legislation. By the end of session, the League tracked bills can be categorized as seven supported; 15 opposed; 450 neutral; 329 monitored; 195 pertained to local issues and 81 related to education.

League Supported Legislation that Passed

Act 2026-579, by Sen. Wes Kitchens and carried in the House by Rep. Jeana Ross, requires that in any municipal election, including an election with only two candidates on the ballot, where no candidate receives a majority of all the votes cast in the election, the municipal governing body shall order a second or runoff election between the two candidates having received the most and second-most votes.

Act 2026-509, by Rep. Bill Lamb and carried in the Senate by Sen. Will Barfoot, increases the annual expenditure threshold amounts that trigger municipal audits. This act raises the annual expenditure requirement for a municipality to submit an annual audit from \$300,000 to \$500,000. Additionally, this act raises the annual expenditure requirement for a municipality to submit a biennial audit from expenditures



of less than \$300,000 to less than \$500,000. Finally, this act raises the annual expenditure threshold for submitting an annual report in lieu of an audit to under \$300,000.

Act 2026-381, by Rep. Allen Treadaway and carried in the Senate by Sen. Will Barfoot, establishes a state-funded program to pay tuition and associated expenses on behalf of the children and spouses of long-term city, county and state law enforcement officers.

League Opposed Legislation that Failed to Pass

HB-36 by Rep. Reed Ingram, if passed, would have authorized the attorney general and governor to appoint an interim police chief of certain municipal police departments. This bill would also provide procedures and requirements for a municipality with an interim police chief.

HB-167 by Rep. Jamie Kiel, if passed, would have changed the cap on increases in the assessed value of real property. The cap would have limited increases to no more than the percentage increase of the Consumer Price Index (CPI).

HB-480 by Rep. Chris England, if passed, would have required each county and municipality to distribute a portion of the Simplified Sellers Use Tax (SSUT) proceeds to the local boards of education serving students in the respective jurisdictions.

HB-561 by Rep. Jim Carns and SB-148 by Sen. Gerald Allen, if passed, would have provided that a municipality may only levy a new tax or license fee or increase the rate of a tax or license fee, by ordinance. This bill would have provided that the ordinance may not be considered for adoption until after a public hearing and would require at least 30 days' notice before a public hearing. This bill would also provide the requirements for providing notice.

SB-6 by Sen. Gerald Allen, if passed, would have required a controlling governmental entity that replaces a memorial building to maintain the original name or erect a marker memorializing the name. This bill would have provided that a petition for waiver is deemed denied if the Committee on Alabama Monument Protection fails to act on an application for waiver within 90 days. This bill would also revise the penalties for violations and would authorize the attorney general to commence a civil action.

SB-36 by Sen. Greg Albritton, if passed, would have required any sales and use taxes collected by an Alabama municipality from the purchase of tangible personal property by an Alabama resident from a different jurisdiction to be refunded to the taxpayer upon proper proof of payment and residency.

SB-37 by Sen. Greg Albritton, if passed, would have exempted sales of tangible personal property to an Alabama resident who does not reside within the municipality from municipal sales and use taxes.

SB-105 by Sen. Keith Kelley, if passed, would have mandated that all county commissions and municipal governing bodies in Alabama must publish their financial statements, audits, monthly expenditures and budgets online annually. This information must be made available for the 12-month period ending on the last day of the fiscal year as determined by the respective county or municipality. If a county or municipality does not have an official website, the required information must be posted on the website of the Association of County Commissions of Alabama or the Alabama League of Municipalities.

SB-150 by Sen. Greg Albritton, if passed, would have required that in the case of court fees, the ten-dollar docket fee be deposited into the State General Fund instead of being retained by the municipal court.

SB-223 by Sen. Josh Carnley, if passed, would have prohibited the use of Automatic Dependent Surveillance-Broadcast data for the purpose of identifying aircraft in order to impose fees or other charges on the owners and operators of the aircraft.

SB-298 by Sen. Will Barfoot, if passed, would have required Class 3 municipalities to have a minimum ratio of full-time law enforcement officers for every 1,000 residents of the municipality. Additionally, this bill would have included certain compliance requirements.

ALM opposed these bills, and we appreciate our membership for reaching out to their delegation to ask that they continue to allow local governments to manage local resources how they best see fit, to address local needs.

Legislation Affecting Taxation and Business Licenses

Act 2026-506, by Sen. Wes Kitchens, exempts households whose sole source of income is veterans' benefits from paying solid waste collection fees if their income is below the federal poverty level. Local governments may opt-in to provide this service to those that are above the federal poverty level.

Act 2026-437, by Sen. Greg Albritton, allows businesses in the building trade to exclude gross receipts derived outside of the corporate limits of the licensing municipality from its business license fee calculation. Additionally, municipalities would be prohibited from requiring a business license for work performed on behalf of a county government when the project is located on county property or on a county-maintained road, bridge, right-of-way or easement.

Legislation Affecting Sales Tax Exemptions

Of the bills filed, 27 bills created sales tax exemptions. Throughout the session, the League worked to ensure that opt-in language was included in these bills so that it is the decision of the local government on whether it wants to apply that exemption to local sales tax. We expect this trend to continue in future sessions.

Act 2026-587, by Sen. Arthur Orr, excludes the amount of any credit card transaction fee charged for an electronic payment transaction from the amount on which sales and use tax is assessed for that electronic payment transaction.

Act 2026-576, by Sen. Jabo Waggoner, exempts Precision Ocular from paying state sales and use taxes. The exemption has a sunset from October 1, 2026, through September 30, 2031. This act includes local opt-in language.

Act 2026-510, by Rep. David Faulkner, exempts 10 different community foundations from paying state sales and use taxes. The exemption has a sunset from September 1, 2026, through August 31, 2031. This act includes local opt-in language.

Other Legislation of Interest

HB-452, by Rep. Chris Pringle and SB-313 by Sen. Bobby Singleton, would have extended the Historic Tax Credit Program for five years. Of the annual \$25 million, 60% was earmarked for urban projects, with 40% for rural projects. Urban projects could have received up to 25% in historic tax credits based on the total cost of the project. Rural projects could have received up to 30%. These were League supported bills, and we look forward to working with the sponsors next year to pass this legislation.

SB-347, by Sen. Greg Albritton, would have changed the methodology for distribution of the county and municipal share of the Simplified Sellers Use Tax (SSUT) to be based on population projections from the U.S. Census Bureau Population and Housing Estimates Program be updated every five years. Current law recalculates the population every 10 years and is based on the most recent federal census. SB-347 did not make it out of a Senate committee.

Act 2026-286, by Rep. Kenneth Paschal, authorizes employment for certain retirees of the Employees' Retirement System or Teachers' Retirement System. Notably, under certain conditions, a retiree may serve as a municipal police officer without suspension of his or her retirement allowance, provided that the compensation earned does not exceed fifty-two thousand dollars (\$52,000) per year.

Act 2026-371, by Rep. Reed Ingram, authorizes the 911 Board to institute a system to measure the emergency response performance of local communication districts. Additionally, it allows 911 Boards to audit local communication districts, to submit a report on audit findings to the attorney general to be made public and provides for a remediation plan by which to improve the district's emergency response performance.

Act 2026-574, by Rep. Rick Rehm, allows a county, municipality, or other political subdivision of the state to grant a preference in hiring and promotion to an eligible veteran; the spouse of an eligible veteran; the spouse of an active duty service member and the surviving spouse of a deceased eligible veteran. A political subdivision that grants preference in hiring or promotion may adopt an ordinance providing for the implementation of the preference.

Act 2026-559, by Rep. Anthony Daniels, prohibits discrimination in obtaining insurance coverage for living



ALM Deputy Director Kayla Bass interviewed Alabama House Speaker Nathaniel Ledbetter during the 2026 Advocacy Day in Montgomery.

organ donors, provides optional paid medical leave for public employees including municipal employees who donate organs and provides a tax credit to private sector employers that provide similar paid leave to their employees.

Act 2026-573, by Rep. Leigh Hulsey, makes changes to tax abatements for data processing centers.

Act 2026-545, by Rep. Norman Crow, authorizes the rounding of the total amount of any in-person cash transaction to the nearest five cents. The rounding provision shall not apply to any transaction where payment is made to a governmental entity.

Act 2026-512, by Rep. Andy Whitt, creates the Alabama Small Craft Alcoholic Beverages Act which establishes new categories of licenses for small craft distilleries, small craft wineries and small craft alcoholic beverage manufacturers that operate a brewpub, small craft winery or small craft distillery or any combination of these. The act maintains local zoning, licensing and taxation authority.

Act 2026-333, by Sen. Arthur Orr, addresses public corruption convictions among public servants by requiring the forfeiture of retirement benefits for individuals found guilty of felony offenses related to their public service. The forfeited retirement contributions are redirected to pay restitution to the affected public agency or entity.

Act 2026-594, by Sen. Tim Melson, provides that in all cities and towns with a population greater than 12,000 and an even number of council seats, the mayor may vote as a member of the council in the case of any tie vote of the council, provided that the local governing body has adopted a resolution authorizing the mayor to act as such.

Act 2026-111, by Sen. Chris Elliott, creates a peer-to-peer car sharing program. Peer to peer is ultimately vehicle

owners renting out their personal vehicles through a sharing program. The act mandates car sharing program facilitators only have to pay rental taxes on revenue generated from vehicles where sales and use tax was not paid when the vehicle was purchased or at the time of initial titling and registration in Alabama. Existing law requires municipal rental taxes collected by the Alabama Department of Revenue (ADOR) to mirror the state rental tax.

Act 2026-56, by Sen. Linda Coleman-Madison, exempts local governments and their instrumentalities from competitive bidding requirements for repairs of vehicles under certain circumstances.

Act 2026-398, by Sen. Dan Roberts, requires food trucks and other mobile food vendors to have one health inspection and fire inspection to apply statewide after January 1, 2027. Additionally, the act clarifies that this act does not prohibit the governing body of a county or municipality or political subdivision thereof from requiring a mobile food unit, as a condition of operating in that jurisdiction, to comply with any ordinance or regulation, including requiring a business license. Further, the act clarifies that it does not prevent a health officer or fire safety officer from inspecting a mobile food unit and taking other appropriate measures if he or she reasonably believes there is an immediate risk to public health or safety.

Act 2026-349, by Sen. Bobby Singleton, prohibits balance billing and establishes minimum reimbursement rates by health care insurers for emergency medical service providers in Alabama. The act sunsets June 1, 2029.

Act 2026-533, by Sen. Bobby Singleton, allows sites owned by one or more entities to qualify for Growing Alabama tax credits if all parties listed on the deed are eligible applicants.

Act 2026-427, by Sen. Garlan Gudger, establishes regulations for the tethering and confinement of dogs and sets standards for their care when kept outside. Local governments may appoint one or more animal control officers to investigate alleged violations of this act. An investigating officer shall not be required to be a certified law enforcement officer. Additionally, a county, municipality, animal control officer, or certified law enforcement officer, acting in good faith, may not be liable for any actions taken pursuant to this act, regardless of whether a dog that is removed is returned to its owner.

2026 First Special Session

On May 1, Gov. Kay Ivey called for the Alabama Legislature to go into the first special session of 2026. Specifically, she asked the Legislature to consider legislation focused only on a special primary election for electing members of the United States

House of Representatives and the Alabama State Senate in districts whose boundary lines are altered by court action. On Monday, May 4, the Legislature started the first special session and met for five days concluding on May 7. No other legislation was introduced outside of redistricting.

Act 2026-612, by Rep. Chris Pringle, establishes provisions for the governor to call a special primary election for congressional districts that are affected by a federal court ruling which permits the reinstatement of the last legislatively enacted congressional districts to be used in the 2026 General Election. Those districts affected are the 1st, 2nd, 6th and 7th congressional districts.

Act 2026-613, by Sen. Chris Elliott, establishes provisions for the governor to call a special primary election for legislative state Senate districts that were affected by a federal court ruling permits the reinstatement of the last legislatively enacted state Senate districts to be used in the 2026 General Election. Those districts affected are the 25th and 26th state Senate districts.

Stay Engaged!

The 2027 Legislative Session starts February 2! It will bring with it a new quadrennium, new legislators and a new state house. However, we will still be facing the same old “Potato Chip Problem.” Starting conversations with your legislators during session is too late. Take the time to regularly meet with them and share the good work your municipality is doing for its community.

Want to protect municipal authority? The easiest way to start is by getting involved with the League. Make sure to participate in the Certified Municipal Official program, utilize Live Locally Alabama campaign assets, serve on a standing committee and attend our events and trainings. During the session, you can also read our weekly legislative newsletter, *The State House Advocate*.

We look forward to seeing you at Advocacy Day on February 10! ■



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Modern Improvements Strengthen Ozark's Community Hub

Alabama Power Energy Services

The city of Ozark recently completed a comprehensive modernization of its civic center, an important gathering place for residents, visitors, organizations and event organizers. As the city looked for ways to update aging facility systems while preparing the venue for future needs, it partnered with Alabama Power Energy Services to identify practical, cost-effective solutions. The collaboration focused on improving energy efficiency, updating technical infrastructure and enhancing the overall user experience for the wide range of events hosted throughout the year.

Alabama Power Energy Services focuses on technical expertise as well as providing comprehensive, turnkey services and professionally managed customer experiences that emphasize reliability, clarity and ease. Working collaboratively with the city of Ozark, the team identified key areas where modern technologies could deliver immediate and long-term benefits. Through this partnership, the city of Ozark was able to identify cost effective solutions, leverage modern technologies and implement upgrades that deliver measurable benefits and important cost savings.

Identifying Priority Improvements

The project centered on three areas that offered the greatest opportunity for impact:

- Interior lighting upgrades
- Mechanical system replacement and control improvements
- Modernization of audio, visual and stage equipment

Together, these enhancements prepared the civic center to support community activities more effectively while reducing maintenance challenges and operational costs.

Interior LED Lighting Upgrades: A Brighter, More Efficient Environment

Lighting plays a central role in how a space feels and functions. At the Ozark Civic Center, older fluorescent, incandescent and high intensity discharge fixtures were replaced or retrofitted with modern LED lighting systems. The new fixtures offer improved illumination quality for ceremonies, performances, meetings and public events.

The upgrades also reduce energy use and provide longer lamp life, which supports more predictable operating costs and lowers the frequency of maintenance. The result is a brighter and more welcoming facility that can better accommodate the diverse needs of the community.

Mechanical System Upgrades: Improved Comfort and Operational Control

Before the renovation, the civic center's mechanical systems had reached the end of their useful service life. As part of the project, the city removed existing rooftop HVAC units and installed six new air conditioning units designed to provide consistent temperature control in all seasons.

Along with the equipment replacement, new control systems were added to allow for more precise scheduling, better responsiveness to occupancy levels and reduced energy consumption when the building is not in active use. These improvements help city staff operate the facility more efficiently while reducing the likelihood of unexpected equipment failures during large community events.

By modernizing these systems, the civic center is now better equipped to provide comfortable conditions for attendees and staff, regardless of event size or activity type.



The city of Ozark partnered with Alabama Power to complete a comprehensive modernization of the Ozark Civic Center. As part of the initiative, lighting, mechanical, audio and stage equipment are upgraded to modern, energy-saving technology while reducing long-term energy costs. This project entails a comprehensive upgrade of the audio, lighting, and stage systems including installation of new line-array speaker systems, new LED wash lights and a lighting control module for dynamic lighting effects, and the integration of a digital sound board and stage patch box for advanced audio control.

BEFORE

AFTER

Audio, Lighting and Stage Enhancements: Supporting a Wide Range of Events

The civic center's role as a multipurpose venue requires dependable audio, visual and stage infrastructure. To strengthen this capability, the existing audio system was removed and replaced with new line array speakers, subwoofers, a digital sound board and a stage patch box. Wireless microphones were also added to support speakers, performers and presenters.

These upgrades provide more even sound distribution and clearer audio throughout the venue, which improves the experience for audiences and event organizers alike.

The project also included updated lighting for performances and presentations. New LED wash lighting and modern control modules were installed, along with DMX capable programming for greater flexibility. These systems accommodate a wide range of event types and offer improved visual effects, reduced energy consumption and lower maintenance needs compared to older theatrical lighting.

To support different room layouts and event styles, the city replaced the existing stage with a modular, movable platform. This feature allows staff to reconfigure the space quickly for banquets, concerts, ceremonies, or community meetings, increasing the usefulness of the facility for many types of gatherings.

A Civic Center Positioned for Long Term Service

The improvements made at the Ozark Civic Center reflect the city's commitment to responsible facility management and continued service to residents. By working with Alabama Power Energy Services, the city was able to identify cost effective solutions, leverage modern technologies, and implement upgrades that support better performance and long-term cost savings.

The enhanced lighting, updated HVAC systems and modernized audio and staging equipment support better day-to-day operations while improving the quality of events held in the space. These upgrades ensure the civic center remains a welcoming and adaptable resource that can meet the needs of residents, local organizations and visiting groups for years to come.

As communities across Alabama look to modernize public facilities, the Ozark Civic Center project offers a practical example of how thoughtful planning and collaborative partnerships can support both efficiency and community value. ■

Alabama Power installed a new rooftop unit and controls, swapping systems for more energy-efficient, cost saving units.



One of the sophisticated lighting control modules used for dynamic lighting in Ozark's updated civic center.



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Supporting Alabama's First Responders: Communicating PTSD and Crisis Resources

Kimberly Boswell • Commissioner • Alabama Department of Mental Health

In 2025, the Alabama Legislature created the Interim Study Commission on PTSD in First Responders to strengthen mental health support, awareness and communication for Alabama's first responders. The commission worked together for several months before presenting its research and findings at the start of the 2026 Legislative Session. The commission received information from state leaders, reviewed newly developed resources and affirmed its strategy to distribute critical information through strong partnerships with state, municipal and county associations.

A Unified Mission to Support Mental Health

The committee was charged with identifying effective ways to connect first responders with existing resources to address the growing need for PTSD education, treatment and support. Findings from a recent survey highlighted two major challenges: lack of education on available PTSD resources and the persistent stigma surrounding mental health.

The Alabama Department of Mental Health (ADMH) briefed the commission in November 2025 on tools designed to help first responders access treatment and crisis support.

1 988 is the nationwide three-digit Suicide & Crisis Lifeline that provides immediate, confidential, 24/7 support for individuals experiencing emotional distress, mental health challenges or a behavioral health crisis.

For first responders, who are at higher risk of PTSD due to repeated exposure to traumatic events, 988 offers a critical, accessible lifeline. First responders who contact 988 can:

- Speak directly with trained crisis counselors who understand trauma, high-stress professions and the unique pressures faced by emergency personnel
- Receive immediate emotional support during moments of overwhelming stress, anxiety, intrusive memories or panic
- Connect to local resources, mental health providers, crisis centers or follow-up services in their community

Representatives of the ADMH and partners, including ALM's Richard Buttenshaw (far left), joined Gov. Kay Ivey to officially recognize June 2026 as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Awareness Month during a proclamation signing ceremony at the state capitol.



- Access help without stigma, since calls are confidential and do not involve workplace reporting

ADMH reported that the local answer rate for the 988 Suicide and Crisis Hotline reached over 90% since July 2025. This means calls answered by local centers, giving local resources.

② The Connect Alabama app, maintained by ADMH and VitAL, an initiative supported by the University of Alabama, is a free mobile resource for finding behavioral health, substance use and mental health services as well as offering a treatment locator, crisis hotlines (click-to-call/text), opioid overdose prevention information (like Naloxone access), and educational resources for both iPhone and Android devices. It helps individuals, families and professionals locate treatment, connect to help quickly and access essential support for mental and substance use disorders.

③ Alabama has a network of 24/7 Crisis Centers across the state in Mobile, Huntsville, Montgomery, Dothan, Birmingham and Tuscaloosa for mental health/substance use crises that offer evaluation, stabilization and resources, accessible by calling 988 or walking in. Mobile crisis teams are also available for response as part of the Alabama Crisis System of Care.

④ ADMH has also created a statewide flyer specifically for first responders. It includes:

- The 988 suicide and crisis hotline
- A QR code for the Connect Alabama app
- A QR code for crisis centers across the state

⑤ Another important resource is the VitAL First Responder webpage, which is tailored specifically for veterans and first responders with training videos, toolkits and direct resources.

It is important to normalize help-seeking behaviors. It's not a personal failure or weakness; it's a natural psychological response to traumatic events. Getting that message out is one of the things that the committee has done and will continue to do.

To view the Municipal Matters Podcast, featuring ADMH Commissioner Kimberly Boswell, scan the QR code.



MENTAL HEALTH & SUBSTANCE USE HELP IS HERE YOU'RE NOT ALONE

Even the strongest need support.
If you or someone you know is struggling, help is a call or click away.

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline
24/7, Free, and Confidential



Connect Alabama
Local mental health
resources and
support at your
fingertips



Crisis Centers
Walk in 24/7/365 to
regional centers



988 SUICIDE & CRISIS
LIFELINE



Alabama Department
of Mental Health



CONNECT ALABAMA
BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES
& TREATMENT FINDER

ALM hosted a health care panel with state leaders during the 2025 Advocacy Day in Montgomery, which included ADMH Commissioner Kim Boswell (seated far right).



Understanding PTSD and Related Risks

PTSD symptoms vary widely and may appear within months or even years after a traumatic event. Symptoms may fall into four categories:

- Intrusive memories
- Avoidance
- Negative changes in thinking and mood
- Changes in physical and emotional reactions

April Turner, state head injury coordinator for the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services, highlighted to the committee the connection between traumatic brain injuries (TBIs) and PTSD. Mild TBIs are often overlooked due to “invisible” symptoms and can double the risk of PTSD. She noted that the cultural norms of first responder professions, which emphasize loyalty and courage, can both support and hinder mental health care.

“It is crucial that we address traumatic brain injury alongside PTSD,” Turner said. Individuals who have experienced brain injury can contact the Alabama TBI Helpline at 1-888-879-4706 to begin an assessment.

Collaborative Communication Through State and Local Government Partners

To ensure all resources reach the first responders who need them most, the committee is working closely with the Alabama League of Municipalities (ALM) and the Association of County Commissions of Alabama (ACCA). Information will also be distributed to the Local Government Insurance Board and law enforcement agencies. These partnerships are essential to distributing materials efficiently to municipal police and fire departments, county sheriff’s offices, volunteer fire agencies and emergency management teams across the state.

Through these established networks, the committee and partners have been distributing digitally and in print:

- PTSD education materials
- Crisis hotline and app information
- Flyers and digital toolkits
- Training and awareness resources for local governments and emergency agencies

Building a Stronger, More Supported First Responder Community

The Interim Study Commission on PTSD in First Responders was composed of representatives from the Alabama Fire College, ADMH, state legislators, the Legislative Services Agency, ACCA, the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency (ALEA) and the Alabama League of Municipalities. Together, they are shaping a comprehensive strategy to address PTSD, reduce stigma and connect first responders to lifesaving mental health resources.

By aligning its goals with the communication power of statewide associations, the committee has helped to ensure that first responders in every Alabama community receive the guidance, tools and support they need — strengthening both individual well-being and public safety across the state.

We encourage everyone to help spread the word to your contacts about these critical resources. ■

To access the
First Responder Toolkit,
prepared by the Alabama
Department of Mental
Health, scan the QR code.



100 Years of Homewood: Celebrating a Century as a City

Barry Wise Smith • Co-Chair • Homewood Centennial Committee

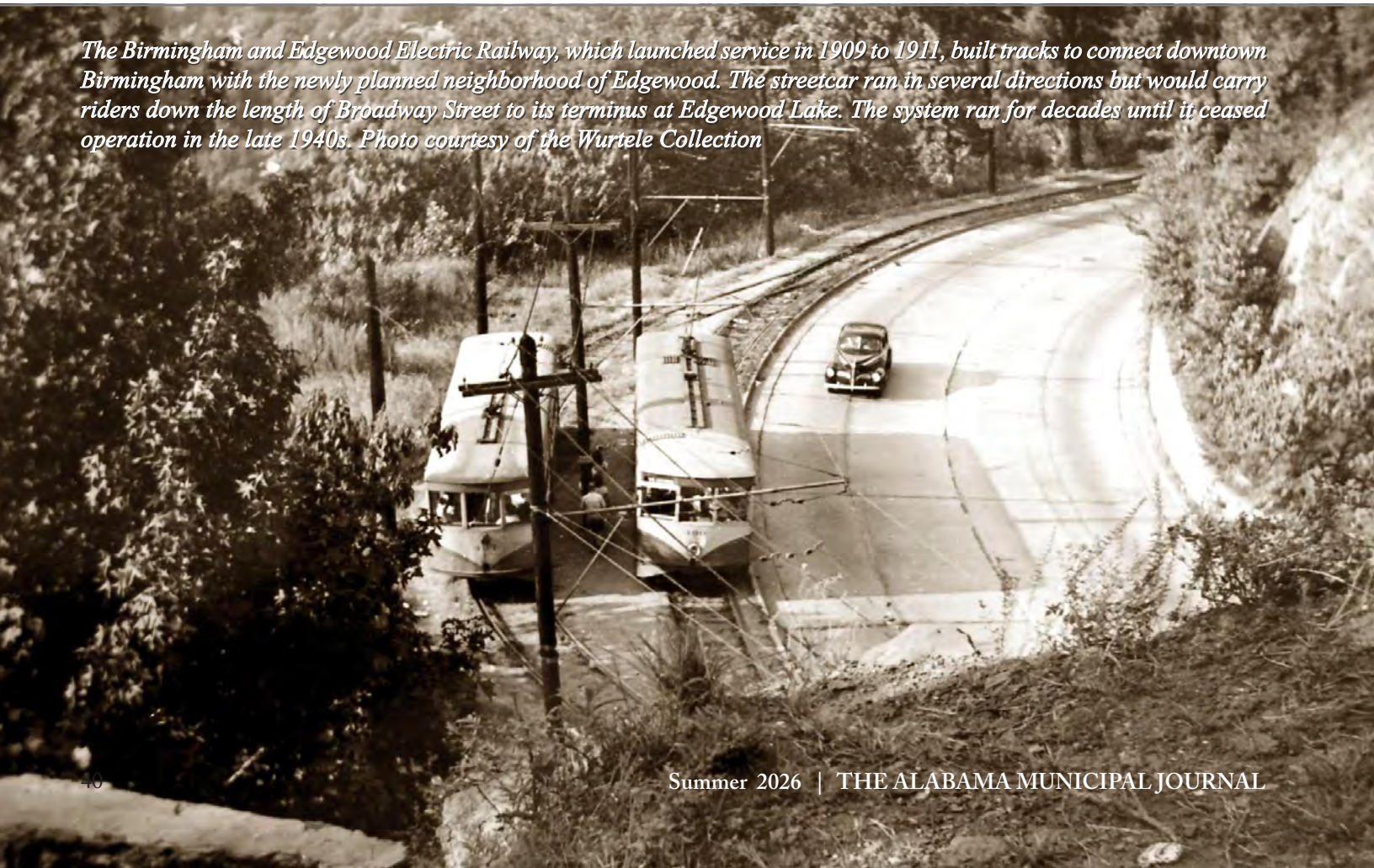
From its beginnings as a small rural settlement in the shadow of Red Mountain to its development into a vibrant, modern community, Homewood has always been a great place to live. With Homewood's legal incorporation in 1926, it became the first "over-the-mountain" city, and since that time it has continued to lead the area in educational quality, business success and civic pride.

The area's first settlers came over Red Mountain from Elyton (now Birmingham) into the heavily wooded and largely uninhabited valley of Shades Creek in the mid-1820s. The 1850s brought mining and the railroad, and with them, increased population. Soon the largely unorganized populace began to come together into several autonomous communities: historic Rosedale, which was championed by florist Theodore Smith and became a thriving African-American community; Grove Park on the west side of the city; Edgewood, which was developed by Stephen Smith and Troupe Brazelton and incorporated in 1920; and finally, Hollywood, which was the brainchild of Clyde Nelson and incorporated in 1926.

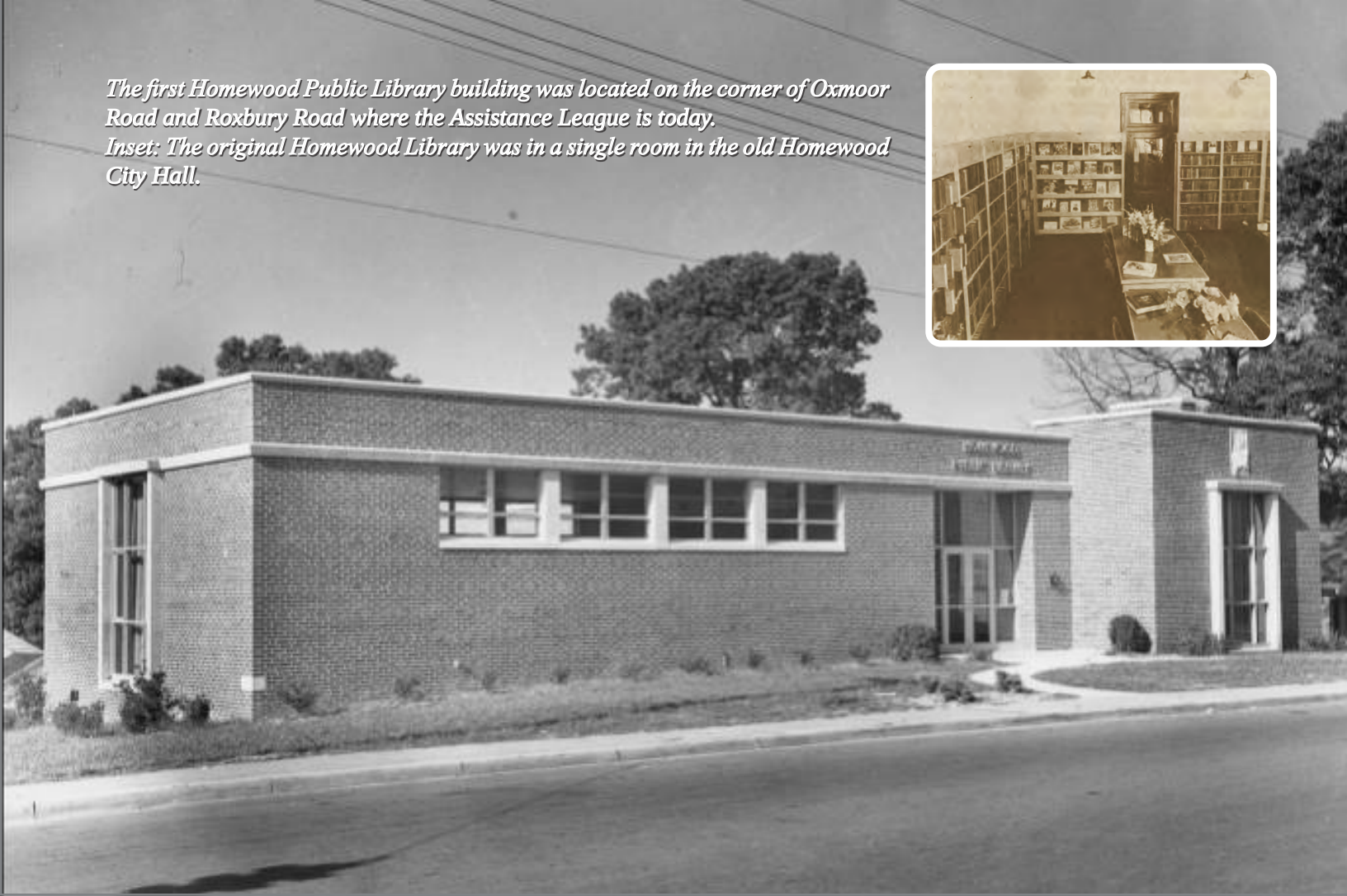
Always educationally focused, citizens immediately set about founding schools to educate the area's children. But in the 1920s and 1930s, formal schools like Edgewood Elementary, Shades Cahaba High School (a Jefferson County school) and the Rosedale School started to educate the young city's children.

The population continued to grow with Edgewood's introduction of an electric rail line that greatly improved transportation in the area and extended from Edgewood down Broadway Street to the newly created Edgewood Lake. In late 1926, Rosedale, Grove Park and Edgewood voted to merge and become the city of Homewood. The state legislature legally incorporated Homewood, and Hollywood was annexed by Homewood in 1929.

The Birmingham and Edgewood Electric Railway, which launched service in 1909 to 1911, built tracks to connect downtown Birmingham with the newly planned neighborhood of Edgewood. The streetcar ran in several directions but would carry riders down the length of Broadway Street to its terminus at Edgewood Lake. The system ran for decades until it ceased operation in the late 1940s. Photo courtesy of the Wurtele Collection



*The first Homewood Public Library building was located on the corner of Oxmoor Road and Roxbury Road where the Assistance League is today.
Inset: The original Homewood Library was in a single room in the old Homewood City Hall.*



The decade between 1940 and 1950 saw a 74% surge in Homewood's population as people fled the heavily industrial city of Birmingham on the other side of the mountain. The next several decades saw an increase in city services, residential development and economic growth.

Hometown Homewood

In 1970, Homewood decided to leave the Jefferson County school system and establish a system of its own. Existing schools were now Homewood City Schools, and in 1972, the new Homewood High School opened to acclaim as one of the state's most high-tech: the high school underwent a major renovation that was completed in 2020, adding 100,000 square feet, new classrooms, new fine arts and athletics wings and reorienting the school to face Lakeshore



Homewood's current mayor and council stand in the city chambers. Pictured left to right: Councilmember Paul Simmons II, President Pro Tem Nick Sims, Mayor Jennifer Andress, Councilmember Chris Lane and Councilmember Winslow Armstead.



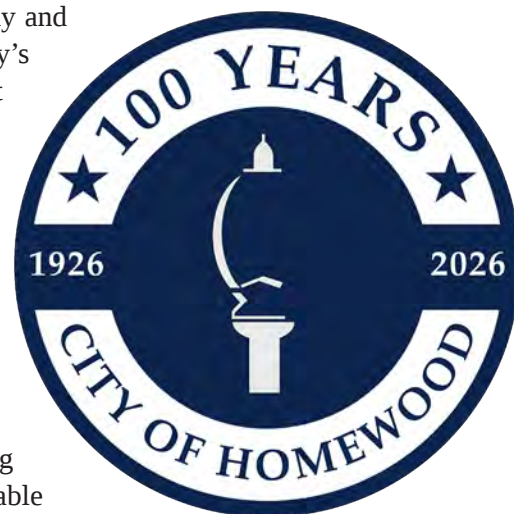
In its first 100 years, Homewood has grown from a small, rural settlement in Shades Valley to the thriving city it is now.

Drive. By the 1980s, with the construction of the Red Mountain Expressway and Homewood's annexation of over 500 acres of land in West Homewood, the city's economic base grew exponentially. Homewood continued annexation until it expanded its borders to its current 8.3-square-mile area.

In 2024, the citizens of Homewood voted to change the city's form of government from council-mayor to council-manager ushering in a change that would poise Homewood for its future. In 2025, after a year with an interim manager, Homewood citizens elected its first five-person city council—including the city's first female mayor, Jennifer Andress, who serves as president of the council and is a voting member. In early 2026, Cale Smith was named the city's first permanent city manager.

Today, Homewood is a bustling city of nearly 28,000 citizens, making it one of the state's most densely populated cities. It is home to a thriving business community, a nationally recognized school system, highly desirable neighborhoods and friendly citizens. From its humble beginnings to the sophisticated city it is today, Homewood is celebrating a century of success!

As Homewood approaches its 100th anniversary on October 29, 2026, check out the schedule of upcoming centennial events at cityofhomewood.com/centennial. ■



Barry Wise Smith is the co-chair of the Homewood Centennial Committee that is planning centennial celebrations throughout the year. Smith served 11 years on the Homewood City Council representing Ward 4 and finished her service in 2025 as the council's president pro tem.

City Hall Selfie Day is August 11, 2026!

What is City Hall Selfie Day?

City Hall Selfie Day is a celebration of public service showcasing pride in local government institutions. Every year since 2016, government employees, elected officials, members of the media, and community members participate in the event.

City Hall Selfie Day is organized by ELGL, Engaging Local Government Leaders, a professional association for people who work in and with local government.

Visit cityhallselfie.com to learn more and see photos from past City Hall Selfie Day celebrations.



How can I participate?

Celebrating City Hall Selfie Day is easy:

- 1 Take a picture of yourself, with a group, or with a community member in front of your local government building. (It doesn't matter if it's a town, city, county, library, or special district building.)
- 2 Use the hashtags #CityHallSelfie and #LiveLocallyAlabama when posting the photo to social media.
- 3 Tag ALM and ELGL in your social media posts: @ALALM and @ELGLNetwork on Facebook, @alabamacitiesandtowns and @ELGL50 on Instagram, @alabama-league-of-municipalities and @ELGL on LinkedIn, @AL_League and @ELGL50 on X, @ELGL50 on Threads, or @localgov on TikTok.

How can I get the word out?

Share information about the celebration with your friends, colleagues, and community members! ELGL recognizes the people and organizations showing the most pride and creativity on the big day.

How Can I Use This Event to Promote the Importance of Municipal Government?

The Alabama League of Municipalities launched Live Locally Alabama on behalf of Alabama's municipal leaders to encourage civic engagement, instill community pride and highlight the crucial role municipal government plays in the daily lives of Alabama's citizens. Utilize events like City Hall Selfie Day to promote this quality-of-life initiative and remind citizens that the community they have chosen is a great place to live, work and play. Visit the Live Locally Alabama webpage for more information and resources: almonline.org/LiveLocallyAlabama.



DesignAlabama's Philip A. Morris Mayors Design Summit Celebrates 20 Years of Creating Vibrant Communities

Gina Clifford • Executive Director • DesignAlabama

On March 31, close to 100 people from around the state gathered in Prattville for a 20th anniversary party. While they were not celebrating two decades of a loving marriage, they were toasting to a union of sorts, commemorating the countless connections created and the cities strengthened by DesignAlabama's Philip A. Morris Mayors Design Summit since it began in 2006.

DesignAlabama is a citizen-led not-for-profit organization operating in partnership with the Alabama State Council on the Arts. Every year, its Mayors Design Summit brings five different design professionals (ranging from building and landscape architects to civil engineers, urban planners and graphic designers) together with five Alabama mayors for an immersive two-day event that functions like an idea incubator. DesignAlabama tailors each summit to its mayors' unique design issues, and summit facilitators pair them with the design professional best equipped to help.

As a group, they talk through the cities' challenges, point out their existing positives and share visions of a brighter future, all through the lens of design. The conversations and collaborations fostered at the summit lead to reimagined public spaces, preserved and reinvigorated historic districts, revitalizations and refined city identities, which all result in stronger communities.

It started when DesignAlabama and the Alabama State Council on the Arts saw communities struggling with design-related issues. Knowing design is essential for enhanced livability and robust economic development and recognizing that the foundation of any fix lay in civic leadership, DesignAlabama founded the summit. The summit's multi-prong mission is to make mayors aware of how good design can improve city functions and quality of life and give them direct access to some of the state's best and brightest design minds to work alongside them and discover actionable design solutions.

"Often, these mayors know they need to make some changes but simply don't know what they need to do or how to do it," Ben Wieseman, DesignAlabama board member and summit facilitator, said. "That's where the summit shines — starting these conversations for them and introducing them to the architects, engineers and other specialized talent who can help them tackle their problem."

As DesignAlabama's executive director, I praise participating mayors for fully committing to the process. Great credit goes to every mayor who has attended a summit. Their enthusiasm and engagement still surprise me and contribute mightily to the event's collaborative atmosphere, which allows them to walk away with exciting ideas and valuable expertise.

Numbers tell the summit's success story. In 20 years, 100 mayors from 90 Alabama communities have teamed up and worked with 75 design professionals who have donated their talents and time, totaling more than half a million dollars in in-kind investment. However, the most compelling proof of the summit's power comes from the people reaping the program's rewards: the mayors and the residents they serve.

"The Mayors Design Summit allowed me to be around multiple engineers and architects, all experts in their industry," Brian Pucket, former Helena mayor, said. "And, they're all outsiders to our community, so they brought fresh perspectives. It was an absolutely amazing experience."

Mayor Drew Gilbert's 2013 summit experience helped Cordova rebuild after two tornadoes hit the small city in 2011, damaging almost every structure in town. The mayor before Gilbert secured state funds to help bring back the city's grocery store, but Gilbert was tasked with executing the project. The initial plans for the store were underwhelming. He shared, "It was pretty unimaginative, so I brought my thoughts on that to the summit."

During an event exercise, Gilbert chatted with summit facilitator Cheryl Morgan about the proposed store's bland style. "It was the first piece of downtown coming back," he said, "and I knew we wanted something more." As they continued the discussion, the designer started sketching. "She drew an old-fashioned, corner-style grocery store built to the curb with on-street parking. It was perfect," Gilbert exclaimed!

In 2014, the grocery store welcomed its first customers, who entered the building's stately front façade under striped awnings. "The environment created in that room, the environment of the entire summit, which is so conducive to brainstorming and sharing, led to that store and to that success," Gilbert said.

Pine Level Mayor Zachary Bigley said the summit was a catalyst that jumpstarted moving his young city forward. Pine Level is one of the newest municipalities in Alabama and the first created in Autauga County in almost a century.

When he thinks back on the event, its atmosphere of openness and accessibility stands out. “Every person at the summit was generous with their time, advice and experiences. They never made me feel like I was bothering or bugging them, and I had a lot of questions. After the summit, they stayed accessible,” he said.

Furthermore, the summit’s transformative positives are not restricted to design expertise. The relationships between participating mayors bring benefits, too, as the city leaders find common ground and learn from each other. “Seeing how other mayors handle issues was encouraging. It’s nice to know I’m not alone in this process,” Bigley said.

Foley Mayor Ralph Hellmich echoes Bigley. “Interacting with the other mayors showed me how other cities dealt with various situations,” he said. “I came away with some proven strategies that had already helped them improve their cities.”

Additionally, while the summit is DesignAlabama’s signature program, the organization offers much more. Its DesignDash is a one-day design blitz allowing interaction between community members and design professionals. The two-day DesignVision workshop partners with Auburn University’s Urban Studio to spark bold community visions, and a follow-up program for cities whose mayors attend the summit called DesignPlace, which guides these communities through the needed next steps to bring summit plans to fruition.

For the Mayors Design Summit’s 20th anniversary celebration during the spring, friends, alumni and supporters from all over Alabama soaked up the insight of keynote speaker Jeff Siegler, founder of Revitalize or Die. Afterwards, state Rep. Kerry Underwood (former mayor of Tuscumbia and 2019 summit alumni) presented DesignAlabama with a commendation from Gov. Kay Ivey honoring the summit’s work. Attendees were also given a copy of a book outlining the summit’s history and impact.

The recognition and the first-person accounts of positive change that rang through the room at the celebration underscore the summit’s impressive track record and its ongoing significance. By introducing mayors to design industry experts in a forum that stimulates thought and the free exchange of ideas, the summit arms city leaders with inspiration, understanding and practical tools, plus enduring alliances.

Every summit reminds me that while design is what we do, people are who we do it for. The program builds such meaningful connections for me, for our design professionals and the mayors, and these relationships remain some of the program’s most powerful and beneficial outcomes.

In the years to come, the Mayors Design Summit will continue to encourage mayors and their communities to dream big and equip them with the resources to realize those dreams. Learn more about our programs at designalabama.org. ■



Scan the QR code to see
*DesignAlabama's 20th
Anniversary video.*



New NLC University Class: Emergency Management and Mitigation Solutions

Katya Mayer • Senior Regional Specialist, Southern Region • NLC

In cities and towns across Alabama, municipal leaders are asked to do more with less, respond quickly to emerging challenges and deliver services that residents can trust. That is where NLC University (NLCU) can make a meaningful difference.

NLCU is the National League of Cities' hub for education, offering local elected leaders and municipal staff the learning opportunities they need to strengthen governance and drive innovation in communities of every size.

The value of NLCU is straightforward: it turns complex municipal challenges into practical learning experiences. The platform is not just about training for training's sake, but it is about helping municipalities make better decisions, improve operations and better serve their residents.

Learning That Fits Local Government

One of NLCU's biggest strengths is flexibility. Municipal leaders and staff are busy, and their schedules rarely align neatly with a traditional classroom model. NLCU meets that reality by offering virtual courses, self-guided modules, live instruction and in-person learning at NLC conferences.

That flexibility matters because local government work does not slow down for professional development. A city clerk, finance officer, planning director or councilmember can participate in learning opportunities without having to step away from day-to-day responsibilities for long periods of time.

This is especially useful for smaller Alabama communities, where staff may wear multiple hats and have limited time for travel. The ability to access courses online makes high quality professional development more realistic and sustainable.



Local elected leaders and city staff from NLC member cities participate in live NLCU courses.

Topics That Matter Now

This summer, certified instructors will lead programming for a new online class on emergency management and mitigation solutions. Participants will receive a comprehensive overview of

the governing legislature that established disaster response in the United States, beginning with defining “disaster” and reviewing the disaster cycle. The course will explore the physical characteristics of a floodplain: the National Flood Insurance program: and the implications of development in the Special Flood Hazard Area: and the jurisdictional responsibilities and relationships between the federal government, states and territories, special districts and local jurisdictions, including how positions within city government fit into the overall structure.

The six-module learning program includes courses on: Hazards and Risks, Housing Mitigation, Mitigation Strategies, Funding Strategies and Project and Grant Implementation.



Take the Next Step

The Emergency Management and Mitigation Solutions Course is a self-guided program available for self-learning through December 2026.

Additional live and self-guided classes are being offered from August through September. To register, visit nlc.org/nlcu, or email nlcuniversitydirector@nlc.org with questions. ■

BECOME A NLC MEMBER



Membership with NLC includes **exclusive access, tools, and resources** available to your entire city, town or village!

Scan the QR Code to complete the NLC interest form and connect with the NLC membership representative for your region

"The National League of Cities is the oldest and largest national association serving local government."

ALM Proudly Recognizes Members in Leadership Positions with the National League of Cities

The National League of Cities (NLC) is an organization comprised of city, town and village leaders that are focused on improving the quality of life for their current and future constituents.

With more than 100 years of dedication to the strength and advancement of local governments, NLC has gained the trust and support of more than 2,700 cities across the nation. NLC's mission is to relentlessly advocate for, and protect the interests of, cities, towns and villages by influencing federal policy, strengthening local leadership and driving innovative solutions.

NLC Board of Directors

NLC is governed by a board of directors that is comprised of four officers (president, first vice president, second vice president and immediate past president), all past presidents still in local government service, eight state league directors, seven advocacy committee chairs and forty at-large members. The president, first vice president, and second vice president are elected to one-year terms during the annual business meeting, and twenty local elected officials are elected to serve two-year terms as at-large members of the board.



Birmingham
Councilmember
Darrell O'Quinn
Board Member



Rainbow City
Councilmember
Clark Hopper
Board Member

NLC National Black Caucus of Local Elected Officials (NBC-LEO) Committee

One of NLC's six constituency groups, NBC-LEO was established in 1970 to bring together African American municipal leaders to discuss problems and explore solutions, debate policy issues and contribute to the success of American cities and towns.



Center Point
Mayor
Bobby Scott
President



Gadsden
Councilmember
Larry Avery
Secretary



Bessemer
Councilmember
Cleophus King
Treasurer



Birmingham
Councilmember
Wardine Alexander
Regional Director
(South)



Center Point
Councilmember
Glenn Williams
Regional Director
(South)

NLC Women in Municipal Government (WIMG) Committee

One of NLC's six constituency groups, WIMG was formed in 1974 to raise awareness about issues of concern to women and encourage women to seek public office in their communities. It has successfully forged a prominent role for women in the development of NLC's National Municipal Policy and its agenda for the nation's cities and towns.



Birmingham
Councilmember
Crystal Smitherman
At-Large Board Member

NLC Information Technology and Communications (ITC) Committee

The Information Technology and Communications Committee is responsible for developing policy positions and leading NLC's advocacy on issues involving broadband access and affordability, net neutrality, cable TV, phone services, spectrum issues, wireless facilities siting, smart cities and cybersecurity. Most recently, the committee's work has focused on defending against federal preemption of wireless facilities siting authority, closing the digital divide, and broadband consumer protections for city residents.



Center Point
Mayor
Bobby Scott
Vice-Chair



A New Chapter in a Familiar Friendship

Robin Ricks • Executive Director • Economic Development Association of Alabama

To the mayors, councilmembers, managers and staff who make Alabama's cities and towns work, hello! It is an honor to introduce myself in the pages of *The Alabama Municipal Journal*, a publication that has been a trusted resource for our state's local leaders for longer than I have been in this business. My name is Robin Ricks, and I serve as the executive director of the Economic Development Association of Alabama, better known as EDAA. If our paths have not crossed yet, I hope they will soon, preferably at a ribbon cutting, a groundbreaking, or one of the many community celebrations our shared work makes happen.

For those unfamiliar with EDAA, we are the professional home for the men and women who recruit jobs, retain industries and build the economic future of our state. Our members are the economic development professionals who work in chambers of commerce, county commissions, regional development authorities, utility companies, universities, and, yes, in city halls across Alabama. Whether the project is a Tier-1 automotive supplier, a downtown retail redevelopment or a hometown manufacturer adding a second shift, an EDAA member is often the hand helping move it forward. We exist to make those professionals more capable, more connected and more confident in the work they do every day.

When I stepped into this role, I told our board that I wanted EDAA to be three things: the most trusted, the most connected and the most forward-thinking partner for economic developers in Alabama. Trust is earned slowly and lost quickly. We earn it by showing up, telling the truth about what works and what does not, and putting our members and their communities first. Connection is the currency of our profession; the deals that change a town's trajectory are almost always built on a relationship that started years before the first site visit. Forward-thinking is how we keep Alabama competitive in a national economy that does not slow down for anyone. Workforce, site readiness, broadband, energy capacity, housing: these challenges will not wait for us, and neither will the companies looking for a place to grow.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
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That vision is not something EDAA can deliver on alone. Economic development in Alabama only works when state agencies, allied associations, the private sector and local governments are pulling in the same direction. Which brings me to the reason I am especially grateful for this column.

The Alabama League of Municipalities is absolutely one of EDAA's most trusted and valued partners. The simple truth is this: every successful economic development project in Alabama impacts a city or a town. Every job announcement is a community's job announcement. Every new rooftop, every expansion of the tax base, every revitalized downtown is the product of municipal leaders who partnered with their economic developer and said "Yes." These are the type of leaders who took a risk, who zoned for growth, who funded the infrastructure, and who showed up when the cameras did and stayed long after they left. ALM represents those leaders, and the work it does to equip, defend and champion Alabama's municipalities is critical.

Allow me to recognize the visionary leadership of ALM's executive director, Greg Cochran. Greg is the kind of leader

To view the Municipal Matters
Podcast featuring EDAA
Executive Director
Robin Ricks, scan the QR code.



our state is lucky to have. He understands that municipal government is where the rubber meets the road, and he has positioned ALM to be both a steady advocate at the state house and a forward-leaning resource for the cities and towns it serves. Under his direction, ALM has expanded its policy reach, modernized its member services and elevated the profile of municipal leadership across Alabama in ways that benefit every economic developer in the state. Greg's instinct for collaboration is evident in his willingness to pick up the phone, make introductions and put people in the same room. That is exactly the kind of leadership that moves Alabama forward. I am personally grateful for his counsel and his friendship, and EDAA is fortunate to call ALM and Greg true partners.

Let me also brag, if you will allow me, on a program every municipal official in Alabama should know about: ALM's Economic Development Academy. ALM has built a curriculum that takes the often-mystifying world of economic development and breaks it down into practical, useful knowledge for elected officials and municipal staff. What is a tax abatement, and when does it make sense? What do site selectors actually look for? How do you read a

project announcement and understand which incentives are doing the work? How does your community get itself ready for opportunities you cannot yet see? These are the questions that determine whether a town lands the next project or loses it to a neighbor, and ALM is doing the unglamorous, essential work of teaching the answers. I would encourage every mayor, every councilmember and every city manager reading this column to participate. The knowledge you gain will pay dividends for your community for years. EDAA





ALM hosted a panel discussion during the 2024 Women in Government Brunch in Montgomery, which featured Robin Ricks (centered) as a panelist.

will continue to support this program in any way we can, because a better-informed municipal partner makes every economic developer's job easier, and every community's future brighter.

One of the most exciting areas of growth in our partnership is retail recruitment. For several years now, EDAA and ALM have shared a presence at the International Council of Shopping Centers (ICSC) Conference and Tradeshow in Las Vegas and Atlanta, where developers, brokers and retailers from across the country gather to talk about what is next for their portfolios. Standing shoulder to shoulder with ALM at these events sends a powerful message: Alabama's economic developers and Alabama's municipalities are aligned, organized and ready to do business. The meetings that happen in those booths and over those dinners do not always produce press releases the next morning, but they plant the seeds for restaurants, grocery stores, soft goods and entertainment concepts that will eventually serve our residents and bolster our sales tax bases. My commitment is to keep growing this partnership: adding more communities to the table, sharpening our shared message and turning more conversations into commitments.

Before I close, let me give a word of thanks. ALM has been a generous and consistent supporter of EDAA's events, from our summer conference to our winter conference and the gatherings in between. That support is not just financial; it is a visible signal to our members that the relationship between economic developers and municipal leaders in Alabama is strong, intentional, and built to last. I do not take that for granted, and on behalf of EDAA's board, staff and members, I thank you.

To the municipal officials reading this column: please consider EDAA as a resource. Our doors, our phones and our calendars are open to the cities and towns we are privileged to serve alongside. Alabama's best days are still ahead, but only if we build them together, city by city, town by town, project by project. I look forward to meeting many of you in the months ahead; stay in contact by visiting edaa.org. ■



Join an ALM Standing Committee and Be Heard!

The League has six standing committees comprised of mayors and councilmembers from each congressional district in the state. Each fall, the League's six standing committees convene in Montgomery to hear from state and federal resource advisors and to recommend any pertinent legislative considerations to the Committee on State and Federal Legislation ahead of the legislative session.

If you are a municipal official that would like to serve on one of the League's six standing committees, please email Lillian Pitman, ALM legislative policy analyst, at lpitman@almonline.org.

This is a great opportunity to get more involved with the League and advocate for issues important to cities and towns across the state!

Committee on State and Federal Legislation

Chair: Mayor Donna McKay, Wadley

Vice Chair: Mayor Richard Teal, Loxley

The League's six standing committees are:

- **Committee on Finance, Administration and Intergovernmental Relations (FAIR)**
Chair: Councilmember Crystal Smitherman, Birmingham
Vice-Chair: Mayor Stanley Allred, Millport
- **Committee on Energy, Environment and Natural Resources (EENR)**
Chair: Councilmember Willis Thompson, Muscle Shoals
Vice-Chair: Councilmember Melvin Duran, Priceville
- **Committee on Transportation, Infrastructure and Communication (TIC)**
Chair: Councilmember Don Mack, Centreville
Vice-Chair: Mayor Eddie Smith, Opelika
- **Committee on Public Safety (PS)**
Chair: Councilmember Wardine Alexander, Birmingham
Vice-Chair: Councilmember Clark Hopper, Rainbow City
- **Committee on Human Development (HD)**
Chair: Councilmember Kent Back, Gadsden
Vice-Chair: Councilmember Bridgette Jordan-Smith, Vincent
- **Committee on Community and Economic Development (CED)**
Chair: Councilmember Newton Cromer, Saraland
Vice-Chair: Councilmember Jae'Ques Brown, Greenville

For an in-depth description of each committee, please scan the QR code.



Powering Prosperity:

How USDA Rural Development Partners with Alabama's Municipal Leaders

Twinkle Cavanaugh • USDA Rural Development State Director for Alabama
and Joe Freeman • USDA Rural Development Deputy State Director for Alabama

Across Alabama, rural communities are the backbone of the state's culture, economy and identity. From the Wiregrass and Black Belt to the Tennessee Valley and Appalachian foothills, local governments face the daily challenge of providing modern infrastructure and economic opportunity while preserving the character that makes their cities and towns unique.

One of the most powerful — but often underutilized — partners available to municipal leaders is the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development office. This federal mission area invests billions each year in rural housing, infrastructure, business development and community facilities, working through local governments, utilities, lenders and nonprofits to strengthen rural America.

For Alabama's municipal leaders, understanding the breadth of Rural Development programs can unlock transformative opportunities. USDA Rural Development is about opportunity. We work hand-in-hand with local leaders to ensure rural Alabamians have the infrastructure, housing and economic tools they need to thrive.

This article provides an in-depth overview of USDA Rural Development in Alabama, its key programs and how municipalities can partner to deliver projects that improve quality of life and drive long-term economic growth.

The Mission: Investing in Rural Prosperity

USDA Rural Development exists to drive economic security and prosperity in rural America through loans, grants and technical assistance. Its work spans housing, infrastructure, utilities, broadband and business financing. Our success depends on partnerships. Cities and towns know their needs better than anyone, and USDA Rural Development brings the financing tools to help make those projects real.

For municipal leaders, this mission aligns directly with the core responsibilities of local government:

- Providing safe and reliable infrastructure
- Supporting economic development and job creation
- Ensuring access to housing and essential services
- Building resilient and future-ready communities

In Alabama, where many municipalities fall within USDA's rural eligibility thresholds, Rural Development can be a cornerstone funding partner. Rural communities face a common set of challenges: aging water and wastewater systems; limited access to capital for economic development; gaps in broadband connectivity; shortages of affordable housing; and pressure on rural hospitals and emergency services. USDA Rural Development programs directly target these challenges.



To view the Municipal Matters Podcast featuring USDA State Director of Rural Development, Twinkle Cavanaugh, scan the QR code.

Infrastructure is the foundation of opportunity. When we invest in water systems, broadband, public safety and housing, we are investing in the future of our towns and the families who call them home. For municipal officials, Rural Development funding often fills the gap between local resources and project needs, making projects feasible that might otherwise remain unfunded.

The Three Pillars of Rural Development

USDA Rural Development operates through three primary agencies:

- Rural Housing Service
- Rural Utilities Service
- Rural Business-Cooperative Service

Together, these agencies deliver a comprehensive toolkit for community development.

Pillar One: Community Infrastructure and Essential Facilities

The Community Facilities (CF) Program is one of the most impactful tools available to municipalities. It provides direct loans, loan guarantees and grants to build or improve essential public facilities in rural areas. It can be paired with other federal and state sources, making it a critical piece of the capital stack for municipal projects.

Eligible projects include:

- Public safety facilities (fire stations, police stations, emergency vehicles)
- Hospitals and health clinics
- Schools, libraries and community centers
- City halls and courthouses
- Childcare and senior services facilities

A new fire station or health care clinic does more than provide a service — it builds confidence in a community's future and helps attract new residents and businesses. For Alabama towns, this program can mean the difference between maintaining aging facilities and building modern public infrastructure.

Housing: The Foundation of Community Growth

USDA Rural Development provides direct and guaranteed loans to help low- and moderate-income families achieve homeownership in rural areas. Municipal benefits include workforce housing availability, neighborhood revitalization and an increased property tax base. Communities grow when families can afford to live there.

USDA also finances affordable rental housing developments, helping communities attract and retain workforce populations. Housing availability is increasingly recognized as a key economic development issue, making these programs highly relevant to municipal leaders.



USDA Alabama Rural Development Deputy Director Joe Freeman (left) and Director Twinkle Cavanaugh (center) visit communities throughout the state to see how USDA grants and programs are benefiting them.



Pillar Two: Water, Wastewater, and Broadband Infrastructure

Water and Environmental Programs

For many small communities, USDA is the primary funding source for water infrastructure projects. Reliable water and wastewater systems are fundamental to economic growth and public health. USDA Rural Development provides financing to:

- Construct or improve water treatment facilities
- Upgrade sewer and stormwater systems
- Replace aging distribution lines
- Ensure regulatory compliance

Safe drinking water and reliable wastewater systems are not luxuries — they are necessities. USDA Rural Development is proud to stand with local governments as they modernize these critical systems.

Broadband and Telecommunications

Broadband access is now considered essential infrastructure. USDA's ReConnect and telecommunications programs help rural communities deploy high-speed internet infrastructure. Broadband connects students to education, patients to health care and businesses to markets around the world. Municipal leaders can partner with electric cooperatives, telecommunications providers and public utilities to pursue broadband expansion projects that support economic growth and remote work opportunities.

Pillar Three: Economic Development and Job Creation

Business & Industry Loan Guarantees

The Business & Industry (B&I) Guaranteed Loan Program supports private-sector investment in rural communities by guaranteeing loans made by local lenders.

Eligible uses include:

- Manufacturing facilities
- Warehousing and distribution
- Food processing
- Tourism and hospitality
- Health care facilities
- Renewable energy projects

When we help businesses expand or locate in rural Alabama, we are creating jobs, strengthening the tax base and building long-term prosperity. Municipalities benefit indirectly through job creation, increased revenue and local economic diversification.



Rural Economic Development Loan & Grant Program

This unique program provides zero-interest loans to local utility organizations, which then relend the funds to businesses and community projects that create jobs. REDLG projects often include industrial parks, workforce training centers, downtown redevelopment and business incubators.

We love projects that bring partners together — utilities, cities, businesses and educators working toward the same goal of job creation. Municipal utilities and electric cooperatives are key partners in these projects.

The Municipal Role in Funding Local Projects

Municipal leaders play a critical role in successful Rural Development projects. Cities and towns often serve as project sponsors or applicants, infrastructure owners, facilitators for private-sector investment and conveners of local partners.

The best projects start with local vision. When mayors and councils bring forward their priorities, we can help them turn those ideas into reality. Successful projects typically involve partnerships among local governments, economic development organizations, utilities and cooperatives, banks and lenders, nonprofits and regional planning agencies. Municipal leadership is often the catalyst that brings these partnerships together.

USDA Rural Development financing offers several unique advantages such as long-term, affordable housing, which offers long amortization periods, competitive interest rates and flexible underwriting. Through blended funding opportunities, projects can combine loans, grants loan guarantees and technical assistance. Furthermore, USDA often fills funding gaps that other sources cannot. Lastly, programs are designed specifically for rural populations, ensuring smaller municipalities remain competitive for funding.

Municipal leaders can maximize USDA partnership by developing a pipeline of eligible projects, including:

- Public safety upgrades
- Water and sewer improvements
- Industrial site development
- Broadband expansion
- Workforce housing initiatives
- Downtown revitalization projects

Communities that plan ahead are the most successful. Having projects ready allows us to move quickly when funding becomes available.

How Municipalities Can Get Started

We want to hear from local leaders. Early conversations lead to stronger projects and better outcomes.

1. Engage Early with USDA Rural Development.

Contact the Alabama state office and discuss community needs and project ideas by calling (334) 279-3400 or visiting rd.usda.gov/al. You may also email twinkle.cavanaugh@usda.gov or joe.freeman@usda.gov.

2. Develop Feasibility Studies and Planning Documents

Engineering reports, market studies and capital improvement plans strengthen applications.

3. Build Partnerships

Collaborate with utilities, regional planning commissions and economic development organizations.

4. Align Projects with USDA Priorities

Focus on job creation, infrastructure modernization, economic resilience and sustainability.

Alabama's municipalities have an extraordinary opportunity to leverage federal resources to meet local challenges. USDA Rural Development offers one of the most comprehensive toolkits available to support rural infrastructure, housing and economic development.

By building strong partnerships, developing strategic project pipelines and engaging early with USDA Rural Development staff, municipal leaders can unlock transformative investments for their communities.

The message for Alabama's municipal officials is clear: USDA Rural Development is ready to partner. The next generation of rural prosperity begins with local leadership willing to seize the opportunity. ■

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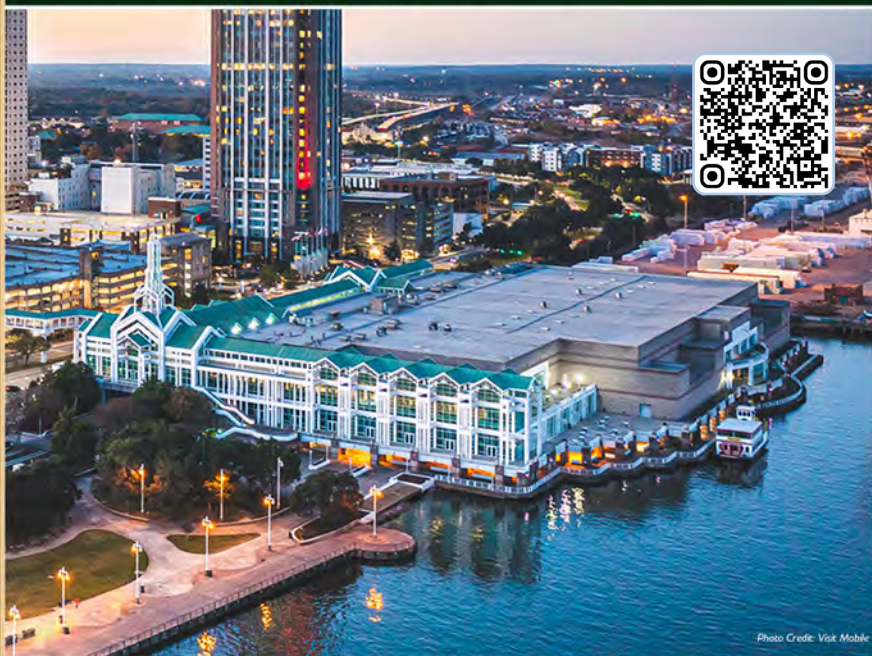


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CONGRESSIONAL LUNCHEONS

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SAVE THE DATE

SUMMER SEMINARS 2026

All AMIC and MWCF members are encouraged to expand their understanding of risk management practices for public entities by attending one of our Loss Control Seminars this summer. To register for the Summer Seminars, visit www.losscontrol.org. The cost to attend is \$30 per person, and lunch will be provided.

Topics include: Workplace Ergonomics, Safety Isn't a Game, Social Media Policy and Legal Issues, Reducing Risk Behind the Wheel, Safety and Risk Management Roundtables

These training sessions have been approved for a total of four (4) credit hours in the Certified Municipal Official Program. Any municipal employee may register, but only elected officials will be awarded credit hours in the CMO Program.

Tuesday, August 25

Municipal Complex, Saraland

Wednesday, August 26

Beeland Park Community Center,
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Tuesday, September 1

City Hall, Athens

Wednesday, September 2

City Hall, Vestavia Hills

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DEC. 31
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All funds must be **obligated** by **December 31, 2024**.

DEC. 31
2026

All funds must be **expended** by **December 31, 2026**.

SEPT. 30
2026

However, if funds are used for **surface transportation projects or projects eligible under Title I of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974**, the funds must be **expended** earlier, by **September 30, 2026**.

After the deadline to expend the funds, municipalities are required to return any remaining funds to the U.S. Department of the Treasury.



Scan the QR code to access more information about ARPA on the League's website. almonline.org/AmericanRescuePlan



Scan the QR code to learn more about the State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF) program. home.treasury.gov/policy-issues/coronavirus/assistance-for-state-local-and-tribal-governments/state-and-local-fiscal-recovery-funds



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MIS is **NOT** a debt collection agency or service. MIS does not do what debt collection services do and debt collection services cannot offer what MIS does. MIS is a unique way to attempt to recover money owed to your municipality by "intercepting" an individual's Alabama State tax refund. Debt collection agencies CANNOT offer you this service. MIS is a legislatively sanctioned conduit with the Alabama Department of Revenue (ADOR) that enables ADOR to recover delinquent debts owed by individuals to your municipality by collecting this debt from the individual's Alabama state tax refund. This system was made possible by an Alabama legislative change enacted in 2014 through which ADOR agreed to process these debts through only two clearinghouse organizations: the Alabama League of Municipalities (ALM) for municipal entities and the Association of County Commissions of Alabama (ACCA) for county entities. In 2015, ALM formed MIS to act as the clearinghouse on behalf of its municipal entities. **NOTE:** If the debtor is not eligible for an Alabama State tax refund, no money can be collected.

Who is eligible to use the MIS system?

Only municipal entities within Alabama are eligible to use the MIS system. This includes cities, towns, certain utility boards, housing authorities and hospitals. **For more information, visit: www.alintercept.org.**



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- and look over our Frequently Asked Questions page. If your question is not answered, feel free to email us with questions regarding your particular situation.



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