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The Alabama

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**On the Cover:**

Cover art by Karl Franklin, Graphic Designer, ALM. This issue highlights several challenges and opportunities – from reserve police officers and municipal audits to wayfinding, agritourism, electric vehicle infrastructure, public spaces and rural health – that are integral to Alabama's municipalities.

# Thank you for your support!

Gregory D. Cochran • Executive Director

Before highlighting a few of the exciting training and networking opportunities our team has planned for the second half of 2022, I would like to start by commending Mayor Walt Maddox, the City of Tuscaloosa and its team, the Convention & Visitors Bureau and the University of Alabama for their hospitality and for working day and night throughout the last several months to ensure the 2022 Annual Convention was top notch! With 1,000 attendees and 100-plus exhibitors, this might have seemed like no easy task; however, thanks to them, as well as several outstanding keynote speakers, our ever popular Ask Your Attorney session, roundtables and so much more, we provided intentional resources, education and networking opportunities that further enhanced our sole purpose – to strengthen municipal government in the state of Alabama.

I also would like to thank our strategic and community partners, as well as conference sponsors, for their participation. Their investment in the League supports us as we aim to bring quality programs to our membership – and we appreciate it! Lastly, I want to thank our members – without your engagement, we could not do what we do. So, THANK YOU, for showing up and making your voice heard.

Now, we look ahead to our summer and fall events that are purposefully planned to build continuing educational and engagement opportunities for our members and partners. In August, our team will host the Annual Congressional Luncheons throughout each district. To register for a luncheon, visit [www.almonline.org](http://www.almonline.org). Additionally, our Municipal Leadership Institute (MLI) conference is scheduled for early November. We are excited to announce that this year's conference will be held at The Perdido Resort in Orange Beach! This year's MLI will include our CMO Graduation, the Certified Municipality Achievement Award presentations and, in conjunction with the Alabama Community College System, a ceremony for our first graduating class of the Economic Development Academy. Registration will open later this year, and we hope you will join us to experience Alabama's beautiful coast and all it has to offer!

Lastly, we appreciate your leadership in your organization and your communities, and if there is anything we can assist you with, please do not hesitate to reach out to a member of our team.

Peace be with you. ■

## MUNICIPAL LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

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# Leadership Perspective

Mayor Lawrence "Tony" Haygood, Jr. • Tuskegee • ALM President



Since 1935, the League has represented Alabama's cities and towns – advocating on their behalf at the state and federal level, offering legal guidance and developing educational training designed specifically for municipal officials and staff. As the League approaches its centennial, the leadership has committed to focusing on additional education and outreach efforts. ALM is continually exploring new programs and expanding its strategic narratives to further position our organization as the expert in and voice for municipal government while expanding its reach to include citizens, thought leaders and strategic partners who can assist the state's cities and towns as Alabama continues to evolve. To that end, three years ago, we developed a Strategic Partners program that is also evolving. Strategic Partnership levels are designed specifically for organizations and companies that share the same mission and vision as the League. They provide unique and intentional collaboration opportunities to help foster vibrant communities where businesses want to invest and where citizens want to live, work, play and prosper.

Three different partnership levels are available: \$10K, \$15K and \$25K. Based on the level, each company or organization has access to exhibiting at League events, complimentary event registrations, invitations to networking events as well as inclusion in printed and online materials as it relates to sponsored meetings and conferences. We are very appreciative of our 2022 Strategic Partners and look forward to working with them in 2023: Adams and Reese, LLP; Alabama First Responders Benefits Program; Alabama Municipal Electric Authority; Alabama Power; AT&T; CSpire; Cardiac Solutions; Carr Riggs & Ingram; Electric Cities of Alabama; Frazer Lanier; Johnson Controls; Millennium Risk Managers; Poarch Creek Indians; PowerSouth; SAIN Associates; Spire; Stifel; TheGovApp.com; Thompson Engineering; Truckworx; Trulieve; and Volkert.

If you know of a company or organization that might be interested in partnering with the League, please have them contact Kayla Bass, our Director of External Affairs, at 334-262-2566 or via email at [kbass@almonline.org](mailto:kbass@almonline.org). Additional information is also available on the League's website at [almonline.org](http://almonline.org) under the "Partnerships & Engagement" tab. ■



Councilmember Adam Bourne • Chickasaw • ALM Vice President

This August, the League's Advocacy Team is organizing seven congressional luncheons throughout the state. This will be our second year to hold these luncheons, which are intentionally planned as a way for municipal officials to have the opportunity to meet and greet with Alabama's congressional delegation and their staffs, as well as our state lawmakers and their staffs, in a casual setting. Last year we found that, following months of COVID shutdowns that essentially eliminated in-person access to our congressional and legislative leaders, we all had a much greater appreciation for the opportunity to fellowship together in the same room instead of through computer screens. We all know that politics is a people endeavor – and while technology can enhance our reach and effectiveness, it will never supersede the importance of relationships derived from direct interaction in settings

that allow for natural conversation, idea exchanges and the opportunity to share an experience, a success story or specific issues and concerns where the nuance and emotion are seen, felt and heard in person.

We found that last year's late summer luncheons were an excellent outreach tool as well as a way to remind us just how important developing personal, lasting relationships with our state and federal delegations is to local leaders as we work with our constituents daily. These luncheons also proved to be a great way to put us on track for the upcoming Regular Session – for us to start thinking about how we can not only help our own communities but assist the League with legislative challenges and initiatives that affect us all. While our League staff is comprised of exceptional professionals, they can't do all the lifting for us – and personal relationships are the make-or-break factor in every aspect of life, particularly the political realm. Therefore, we must be willing to walk into the room and be part of the conversation. So please join us at this year's round of congressional luncheons in August. The date and location for each luncheon is available on our website at [almonline.org](http://almonline.org) and, while there is no cost to attend, you'll need to register online for the luncheon in your area so the League can adequately prepare. Thank you for your leadership and your support! ■

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By Lori Lein, ALM General Counsel

## An Overview of Alabama Municipal Audit Requirements

**U**nder Alabama law, the mayor is required to secure an annual audit with some very limited exceptions based on annual revenue. The League Legal Department is frequently asked what happens if the mayor fails to get an audit done. Until recently, the simple answer was: Nothing. Prior to 2019, there was no penalty provision. The only real solution to the problem was for someone, a citizen or the council, to seek a remedy in court such as a Mandamus action compelling the mayor to have the audits updated and performed. Rather than a court action, however, the typical path for finally getting audits updated came about as a result of a municipality seeking financing or grant funding opportunities; both require up-to-date audits.

In recent years, there have been changes to Alabama law relating to municipal audits – both to add penalty provisions for willfully failing to secure an audit and to ease the requirements for an annual audit for smaller municipalities.

### How often does a municipality have to audit?

The annual audit requirement is nothing new under Alabama law yet every year we'll hear from some mayor who is surprised to find out they are required to have one done. Since the codification of the Code of Alabama as far back as 1907, the law has provided that every mayor is charged with hiring an accountant to make a detailed examination of all books and accounts of the city or town to cover the period since the preceding examination. Code 1907 §1229, now appearing as Section 11-43-85, Code of Alabama 1975.

In 2022, the Alabama Legislature passed Act 2022-345 which amended Section 11-43-85. The Act made changes to the frequency of municipal audits depending on the amount of a municipality's annual expenditures.

In a municipality with annual expenditures of three hundred thousand dollars (\$300,000) or more, the mayor or city manager shall provide for and cause to be made an annual audit of the financial affairs and transaction of all funds and activities of the municipality by an independent public accountant for each fiscal year of the municipality. Nothing has changed here. An annual audit continues to be the requirement for larger municipalities.

For municipalities with annual expenditures of less than three hundred dollars (\$300,000), the mayor or city manager shall provide for and cause to be made a biennial (every 2

years) audit of the financial affairs and transactions of all funds and activities of the municipality by an independent public accountant for each fiscal year of the municipality. The audit conducted pursuant to this subdivision shall include each fiscal year since the preceding audit.

And for those municipalities with annual expenditures of less than one hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000), the city council may elect to provide for and direct the mayor city manager to cause to be made, in lieu of the biennial audit, an annual report that complies with procedures established by the Department of Examiners of Public Accounts. These procedures are being developed now and will be released to conduct FY2022 procedures. The annual report shall be provided to the Department of Examiners of Public Accounts and shall constitute an annual audit report. The report should include the following:

1. Proof and reconciliation of cash.
2. Confirmation of cash balances.
3. A list of bank balances.
4. A statement of cash receipts and cash disbursements.
5. A statement of compliance with state law.
6. A report of agreed upon procedures.
7. A report of motor fuel excise taxes collected and the distribution and use of those proceeds.
8. Any other procedures established by the Department.

Like the audit, the municipal audit report authorized for smaller municipalities, must be submitted to the council at its first meeting after the completion of the report and must be spread upon the minutes.

It is important to note that a municipality may still be required to obtain a full audit to comply with other finance requirements.

### Who has to approve the cost of an audit or audit report?

The hiring of an accountant to perform an audit is completely within the authority of the mayor, including the fee to be paid for the service. Section 11-43-85 authorizes the mayor to enter into a contract fixing the accountant's fee at a reasonable amount without the approval of the council. The council is legally obligated to pay a reasonable fee for such services, although it did not authorize or take part in the agreement. AGO to the League of Municipalities, November 4,

*continued page 48*

# RESERVE POLICE OFFICERS

## WHAT IS THE RISK?

Louis G. Zook, CLEE • Public Safety Consultant • AMIC/MWCF

Municipal police departments often struggle with providing sufficient personnel to respond to calls for service and meet the other expectations of the community. A shortage of officers has become the norm in today's society, yet communities want and *need* the protection and daily services provided by their police departments. In addition, local police departments strive to increase their engagement with the community and are constantly soliciting community participation in the policing process.

One option to address these issues is the creation and operation of a Reserve Police Officer Program. Reserve officers are, quite simply, individuals who volunteer to serve their local municipal police department. The concept of volunteer police officers pre-dates the beginning of our country and the practice continues today. Reserve officers can provide financial, personnel and operational benefits to police departments. This additional help can be a blessing but can also pose liabilities – the key is to *understand* and *minimize* the risks through the proper management of these programs. Each municipality must determine for themselves if reserve officers are a realistic option as factors and considerations will vary locally. Keep in mind Reserve Officer Programs are not for every department, and for every advocate there is one or more critics.

### What is the Risk?

While there can be benefits to operating a Reserve Police Officer Program, risk management should also be a consideration. This article focuses on the potential liabilities and other issues that can exist for a municipality. Remember, unlike the use of volunteers for other activities, the reserve officer will utilize a uniform, car, weapon and other public equipment while assisting in law enforcement activities.

One of the greatest potential liabilities is when a municipality allows reserve officers to exceed their limited authority and duties as outlined in state law. Usually, these situations occur because of poor program supervision and management. In some instances, it is the direct result of a department trying to stretch its resources and allow reserve officers to work alone and conduct duties outside of their scope without direct supervision.

Although Alabama law provides civil liability to public volunteers, such as a reserve police officer, there is no question that a municipality is liable for negligent actions committed by their reserve officers. Section 6-5-536(d), Code of Alabama 1975. This includes actions for state torts under Section 11-47-190, Code of Alabama 1975, and claims for civil rights violations brought pursuant to 42 U.S.C. Section 1983.

Alabama law allows a municipality to organize a reserve police force of private citizen volunteers who have no powers of arrest other than those of private citizens. Section 11-43-210, Code of Alabama 1975. As volunteers, reserve police officers serve without pay and assist with some of the tasks ordinarily performed by certified police officers; however, these officers are not an alternative to paid certified officers and are limited in their duties – even though some municipalities have tried.

There have been incidents in Alabama where reserve officers work alone at security details, athletic events, prisoner transports or even on patrol. The justifications range from “we need the help,” “we’re short staffed” to “it’s just a ballgame – what could go wrong” or “they’re just patrolling; they won’t take any action.” Reserve officers can conduct patrol operations to detect, prevent and suppress crime or enforce traffic laws “provided the reserve law enforcement officer acts at all times under the direct control and supervision of a certified law enforcement officer.” §11-43-210. Reserve officers may also perform traffic direction and control and render crowd control assistance “provided supervisory control will be exercised by a certified law enforcement officer whose span of control would be considered within reasonable limits.”

Reserve officers may *not* fill in for regular officers during on-duty or off-duty assignments. In addition, neither a municipality nor its certified officers have any authority to grant reserve officers additional powers or direct them to act in



excess of state law. Keep in mind that any willful, intentional or conscious decision to violate state law, municipal ordinance and/or department policy only increases risk and liability – as well as the size of the check written to resolve a claim.

Properly trained reserve police officers can assist a department with natural disasters or other emergencies as well as special events such as parades or athletic events. They can also assist with bookings, fingerprinting, traffic control and securing crime scenes. The keyword here is *assist* – not perform on their own. According to Alabama Attorney General’s Opinion 88-0356, a reserve officer is not authorized to perform routine patrol and enforcement activities but may assist regular officers in their performance of such duties.

In addition, Alabama Attorney General’s Opinion 1992-350, states a reserve police officer who is performing or assisting in patrol duties must be physically accompanied by a certified law enforcement officer who maintains direct control and supervision over him at all times. In other words, if the reserve officer is in a patrol car, a certified officer must be in the car with him.

### **Creating a Reserve Police Officer Program**

A municipality that decides to organize a reserve police officer program must do so by ordinance in accordance with §11-43-210. A sample ordinance is available in the *Alabama League of Municipalities Selected Readings* or online at [www.losscontrol.org](http://www.losscontrol.org) under Reference Documents, by keyword search “Reserve” or resource “PSOP-006”. At a minimum, the ordinance should establish the program, along with the qualifications, appointment, duties and limitations of reserve officers.

Secondly, police departments should enact policies and procedures that more specifically define the scope of the reserve officer’s authority; a definition of the duties to be performed; activities they can participate in and any restrictions; requirements for number of days worked per month or year; training; and any other guidance as needed. This policy must clearly state that non-APOSTC certified reserve officers cannot work without direct supervision of an APOSTC certified officer as defined in the CODE of Alabama. A sample policy is available at [www.losscontrol.org](http://www.losscontrol.org) as noted above.

Third, it is strongly recommended that reserve police officers receive training to adequately and appropriately perform their duties and responsibilities. A municipality that fails to provide such training increases their liability in addition to creating a safety hazard to certified officers and the public. The better trained a reserve officer is, the less likely he or she is to negligently perform their assigned duties. It should be noted that failure to train could be the basis for a cause of action against a municipality. At a minimum, municipalities should ensure that reserve officers are proficient in firearms (including initial and annual qualification), driving, the law and department policy and procedures (including use of force). Ideally, reserve officers should receive the same or similar levels of continuing education and training as certified officers. Proper training will help prepare these officers for the varied situations they are likely to encounter while on active duty.

Lastly, municipalities should ensure that their workers compensation insurance carrier covers reserve officers. Otherwise, the municipality may be directly liable to the reserve officer for any injury he or she suffers while on duty. The Municipal Workers Compensation Fund (MWCF) provides separate volunteer coverage for reserve police officers; however, some workers compensation companies do not cover reserves or volunteers.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, municipalities considering implementing a Reserve Police Officer Program should weigh the potential benefits against the probable risks and liabilities. If implemented, proper selection, training, supervision and management of reserve officers, along with strict adherence to state law, municipal ordinance and department policy will help reduce a municipality’s exposure to risk and liability.

For more information or assistance, please contact the Alabama League of Municipalities Legal Department or your Loss Control Police Safety Consultant at 334-262-2566. ■

**Resource List:** *Alabama League of Municipalities Selected Readings; Alabama Office of the Attorney General; Code of Alabama 1975*

*Louis joined the AMIC/MWCF Loss Control Division in 2018 after more than 37 years of law enforcement experience. He is responsible for traveling to member police departments in the northern region with liability or workers compensation insurance in an effort to reduce municipal liability and employee injuries. He can be reached at [lzook@almonline.org](mailto:lzook@almonline.org). For additional risk management and loss control resources, visit [losscontrol.org](http://losscontrol.org).*



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# Review of the 2022 Legislative Session

Kayla Bass • Director of External Affairs • ALM

The Alabama Legislature returned to Montgomery on Tuesday, January 18, for the 2022 Regular Legislative Session and shortly after were called into a special session by Governor Ivey to appropriate the remaining funds from the first tranche of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).

As you may recall, Alabama will receive roughly \$2.1 billion in ARPA funds through two tranches. When the special session began, the state had roughly \$580 million in funds remaining to allocate from the first tranche. The state previously allocated \$400 million for the construction of two new men's prisons in Elmore and Escambia counties and \$80 million for health care facilities.

As the 2022 Special Session ended, the Legislature approved a plan to spend \$772 million in ARPA funds, which is combined with additional monies from a separate capital improvement fund provided through ARPA. With those funds the Legislature made investments of:

- \$277 million for broadband expansion.
- \$225 million for water and sewer infrastructure projects.
- \$80 million for hospitals and nursing homes.
- \$79.5 million for Alabama's unemployment compensation trust fund to restore it to near the level of January 2020.
- \$37 million for health care services through assisted living facilities, mental health, rehabilitative services, and other entities.
- \$30 million for rural hospitals.
- \$20 million for emergency medical responders, including \$10 million for volunteer fire departments.
- \$11 million for counties to help pay for state inmates held in county jails because of the pandemic.
- \$7.8 million for the cost of the reporting and auditing requirements for using the money.
- \$5 million for telemedicine

Alabama will receive its second tranche of ARPA funds in the next several weeks, and the League's Advocacy Team will continue to collaborate with state agencies to ensure that cities and towns are provided the opportunity to maximize their local funds for the purpose of broadband, water, sewer and other quality-of-life projects.

Following the Special Session, lawmakers returned to Montgomery on February 1 to reconvene for the remainder of the Regular Session.

## 2022 Regular Session Highlights

Throughout every legislative session since the League's inception, our organization has served as the primary legislative advocate for Alabama's communities – and this year proved to be no different!

As soon as lawmakers returned to Montgomery, the Advocacy Team kicked off *Coffee and Conversations*, a series of thoughtful discussions with state leaders. Several weeks throughout the legislative session special guests, such as elected officials and state leaders, virtually joined municipal officials to discuss their legislative priorities, department updates and resources available to municipalities.

In addition, we hosted several weekly dinners with various legislators at our headquarters in downtown Montgomery to share our perspective on legislation impacting municipalities. Together, the virtual calls and dinners proved to be an effective way to spend time with state leaders and develop lasting relationships; however, we must remain vigilant.

Of the 873 bills introduced, the League's Advocacy Team tracked and engaged on more than half. There were several critical issues up for debate that attempted to limit local authority and create an undue burden on communities. Our team worked diligently to prevent or compromise on legislative proposals that would have been detrimental to municipalities and were successful in the passage of several other proposals for our membership; however, this would not have been possible without the engagement of our local officials and various stakeholders. Contacting your legislators remains one of our most powerful advocacy tools. Several times throughout the session, your calls to legislators stopped bad policy from becoming law. Thank you for collaborating with us throughout session to preserve the voice of municipal government.

Highlights of the 2022 Regular Legislative Session are below; however, for a full recap, visit [www.almonline.org](http://www.almonline.org) >Legislative Advocacy >State Legislation >State House Advocate.

## League Supported Legislation That Passed

Act Number 2022 – 399, carried by Representative Hill and Senator Elliot, authorizes a city or town that has a population of 12,000 or more, but less than 25,000 per the last census, by ordinance adopted by a majority vote of the council at least six months prior to the next general municipal election, to elect to operate as a city or town with a population of less than 12,000 inhabitants as it relates to the exercise of the legislative functions of the mayor.

Act Number 2022 – 338, carried by Representative Baker and Senator Albritton, clarifies that the governing body of a county or municipality has authority to approve or disapprove each new solid waste management site or a modified existing solid waste management site. The Department of Environmental Management would approve or disapprove a permit for a facility itself.

## League Opposed Legislation that Failed to Pass

SB44 by Senator Jones, if passed, would have phased out any occupational license tax levied by a municipality based on an

*continued page 49*

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# Agritourism

## Homegrown in Alabama

Carrie Banks • Communications Director • ALM



**A**labama's agricultural, forestry and related industries are not only a cultural mainstay that have sustained Alabamians for generations, they are also responsible for more than \$70 billion of Alabama's annual economy. According to the Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries ([www.agi.alabama.gov](http://www.agi.alabama.gov)), Alabama has more than 44,000 farms covering 8.9 million acres. One out of every 4.6 jobs in the state relates to agriculture and forestry. Alabama's top commodities include timber at \$31.4 billion, poultry at \$15.1 billion, beef at \$524.5 million, greenhouse and nursery at \$561.6 million, catfish at \$158.2 million, cotton at \$290.1 million and soybeans, corn and wheat at \$576.5 million. The state ranks second nationally in broilers, catfish and quail; third for forestland, peanuts and sod; and sixth for pecans. About half the peanuts produced in the U.S. are grown within a 100-mile radius of Dothan, Alabama, and cotton is the state's most abundant row crop grown in 59 of Alabama's 67 counties.

And thanks to a growing national interest in agritourism, Alabama's iconic farm heritage is rapidly becoming available to anyone interested in this multifaceted foundational industry – or in simply spending some quality time in a natural setting.

### **Agritourism in Alabama**

Farm-related recreation has long-standing appeal in the United States and can be traced back to the early 1800s when urban-based families would escape the summer heat by visiting farming relatives. Modern-day agritourism, also referred to as agritainment, is now surging in popularity and incorporates activities around visiting a working farm or any agricultural, horticultural or agribusiness operation to enjoy the rural setting, be educated or be involved in a special activity. Examples include retreats and rendezvous centers, farm tours for families and school children, children's educational day camps, bird and wildlife watching, corn mazes and haunted forests, fishing excursions, U-pick fruit and vegetable farms, made-on-the-farm products, farms with animals, vintage tractor events, farmers markets, vineyards and wineries, farm-to-table dining, pumpkin patches, living history farms, farm festivals and rural weddings – all of which can contribute to a region's local economy in significant ways.

On May 5, 2022, Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourist Association (AMLA) launched the North Alabama Agriculture Adventures Trail ([www.northalabama.org/trails/agritourism-trail/](http://www.northalabama.org/trails/agritourism-trail/)) that stretches across 16 counties and encourages visitors, tourists and guests to savor, shop and share more than 35 agritourism destinations highlighting everything from orchards and farms to wineries, farmer's markets, breweries and distilleries to agritourism-related festivals. Showcasing a diverse array of engaging agricultural activities, this new Trail is designed to take visitors (and locals) on a journey to businesses and farms that have agriculturally-related products for sale or offer educational, entertainment, historical, cultural or recreational activities that allow the general public to observe or participate.

“The North Alabama Agriculture Adventures Trail is one of eight self-driving trails and part of our overall initiative to attract more visitors while supporting local businesses,” said Tami Reist, AMLA President/CEO. “Farming is important to local communities offering environmental, economic and cultural benefits so we wanted to create a fun and informative journey to support the many farmers and agriculture-based businesses that serve a critical need in Alabama. The Agriculture Adventures Trail provides to both North Alabama residents and visitors direct access to fresh, locally-produced farm

products by connecting them directly with farmers and producers, many of whom established roots generations ago, and a chance to enjoy hands-on agricultural experiences.”

Additionally, the State of Alabama is making a concerted effort to support the agritourism movement and the state’s growers, makers and landowners. “Those in the agritourism business can apply to be a member of Alabama’s state branding program, Sweet Grown Alabama,” said Commissioner of Agriculture and Industries Rick Pate. “Their searchable database allows consumers to easily connect with local farmers and agritourism operations in their area.”

Sweet Grown Alabama ([www.sweetgrownalabama.org](http://www.sweetgrownalabama.org)) is a non-profit organization that enhances marketing opportunities for farmers by connecting retailers and consumers to Alabama-grown foods and other agricultural products. Farmers, product makers, restaurants, retailers and others are encouraged to join the branding initiative and use the Sweet Grown Alabama logo on their locally grown products. More than 50 agritourism stops are members of Sweet Grown Alabama and benefit from the agritourism promotional blogs, social media posts, farm tours and more.

“Agricultural is a 70.4-billion-dollar industry for the State of Alabama,” said Tami Culver, Deputy Commissioner of Agriculture and Industries, at the launch of the North Alabama Agriculture Adventures Trail on May 5th. “People don’t realize the impact that money has on individual communities but also the quality of people’s lives. We need to find our food locally, eat our food locally and support the local economy.”

According to the Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the demand for locally grown products grew significantly as families were spending more time at home and in the kitchen. Also, people were looking for outdoor activities, which increased the demand for agritourism operations. Agritourism continues to attract thousands of travelers to the state and the income from tourists provides much-needed revenue boosts in areas of the state that have experienced economic hardships throughout the pandemic. As agritourism expands, it will continue to boost Alabama’s agricultural revenue and production. Many “U-pick” farms, where customers pick their own fruit, such as strawberries and blueberries have sold out multiple days throughout the season.

“Oftentimes we don’t recognize that the things we need are right around us,” said Greg Anderson, owner of Sullivan Creek Ranch in Vinemont ([www.sullivancreekranch.com](http://www.sullivancreekranch.com)) where the Agriculture Adventures Trail was launched. “So by shopping local, you help out those people and their families and we’re able to continue to provide the supply that families need.”

Sullivan Creek Ranch has been intentional about finding ways to offer visitors and guests experiences “beyond the pasture.” Not only does the Ranch specialize in Akaushi beef, it hosts outings that include riding, local artists and food experiences featuring the Chat & Chew food truck as well as unique “pop-up picnics” arranged and staged depending on the preferences of the guest. In addition, the Ranch serves as a special event venue for weddings, retreats, birthdays and more.

### What to do?

From the recently launched North Alabama Agriculture Adventures Trail to delicious Chilton County peaches and strawberries, glorious sunflower fields in Autauga County, the Conecuh Sausage and Collard Green Festivals in Evergreen, Dothan’s National Peanut Festival and Gordo’s Mule Day/Chickenfest, nearly every Alabama community has an ag-related product, service or event that will draw people to your area. Reach out to local farmers, makers and landowners and find out what makes your community unique; encourage them to be part of the Sweet Grown Alabama program; reimagine your capacity for a festival or event (or re-market an existing event); and then come up with a plan for attracting visitors to your area farms as well as your community – and to ultimately spend money in your region! ■



# HARPERSVILLE

## Rich History • Poised for Growth

Mayor Theoangelo Perkins • Town of Harpersville

**W**elcome to Harpersville, Alabama, one of Shelby County's oldest communities. Its existence precedes that of Shelby County and the State of Alabama. The Harper, Kidd and Morgan families settled the area around 1815. Prime farmland, the abundance of creeks, springs and branches are what attracted the first families to the area. Soon after the first settlers, others from North and South Carolina, Virginia, Georgia and Tennessee took up residency here. They established stores, blacksmith shops, a steam-driven cotton gin and a variety of businesses. Mail delivery soon followed and Harpersville boasts of having the longest continuously operating post office in the state of Alabama. "The Florida Short Route", or Highway 280, has brought many opportunities to Harpersville, and the Town of Harpersville officially incorporated in 1945. However, Harpersville has been a thriving community for more than 200 years.

Students attend Shelby County Schools in Vincent or Coosa Valley Academy in Harpersville. Both schools are committed to helping students reach their greatest potential. Both schools have a well-qualified staff and low student/teacher ratio. Both schools offer a variety of academic and sports programs. Additionally, Harpersville is minutes from several community colleges and universities.

The Town of Harpersville has outstanding, 24-hour firefighters and paramedics who offer fire and EMT services for our residents. We have one of the very best fire ratings in Shelby County. Harpersville has its own Police Department committed to the safety of residents and guests and is proud to have a low crime rate.

### Poised for Growth

Situated along the Coosa River, Hwy. 280 and Hwy. 231 with a population of just over 1,700, Harpersville is poised for growth. Along with our immediate municipal neighbors, Harpersville constitutes around 5 percent of the total population of Shelby County but has around 25 percent of the available land. Within the last year, our town, with the assistance of the Birmingham Regional Planning Commission, developed and adopted a new Master Plan. It will serve as a guide for town officials regarding land use, future growth and development, housing, community facilities and services, public infrastructure and capital improvements. Several new Housing Developments are already underway, including the newest – Harper's Creek – with 99



*Morgan Creek Vineyards is a must visit ([morgancreekwinery.com](http://morgancreekwinery.com)).*

new homes.

In Harpersville, you can experience “Small Town Living” just minutes from the city. CSX Railway runs through town and provides an opportunity for industrial growth. Two of our larger employers are Bama Budweiser and Morris-Shea Bridge Company. These companies, along with numerous other businesses, make Harpersville a great place to work and do business. Our commercial motto is: *Every Business Counts!*

### **Agritourism and More**

Located 30 miles south of Birmingham and within easy driving distance to Lay Lake, Lake Martin, Lake Logan Martin, Talladega Super-Speedway, Barons baseball games, The Summit and Grand River Shopping, Harpersville is truly the “Crossroads to Family Fun!” Locally, there are two walking tracks, a baseball field, soccer/football field, tennis courts, playgrounds and pavilions at J.W. Donahoo Municipal Park, and the beautiful 18-hole Meadows Golf Course located conveniently along Hwy. 280 has putting and chipping greens. Harpersville is also home to the Coosa Valley Beagle Club.

In addition, agritourism is a significant draw to our community as we are home to numerous cotton, cattle and horse farms as well as excellent venues for fishing and hunting. Stone Hollow Farms and the Old Baker Farm yearly attract thousands of children and adults alike from across the state and beyond. Whether it is a school trip to the pumpkin patch, Fall Festivals, Summer Shindig, Christmas on the Farm ... there’s always something fun to experience. Morgan Creek Vineyards is one of the south’s finest and most reputable wineries and boasts a variety of wines from its state-of-the-art facility that incorporates the entire process from vines to the glass. Tours and tastings are offered daily.

Harpersville has several historic homes that are more than 170 years old including the Chancellor Home, Wallace House, The Newman Rock House, The Baker Home and The Darby/Borum House. Additionally, Klein Arts & Culture, which provides a venue to facilitate racial reconciliation through the arts and education, was birthed out of the shared experiences of descendants of the Wallace House and Plantation. Klein Arts & Culture is converting a remnant of America’s racist past into a symbol of a more equitable future. Participants have the opportunity to acknowledge and express a painful past and move to a brighter future by engaging in activities that raise consciousness about race through dance, music, poetry, visual arts and education.

Harpersville has produced two NBA Stars: George McGinnis (Philadelphia 76ers, Denver Nuggets and Indiana Pacers) and Warren Kidd of the Philadelphia 76ers. Hollywood Pioneer stage and film actor Henry B. Wathal is a Harpersville native and would bring Hollywood celebrities to town. There are several Revolutionary War Patriots, along with Chief Boz Sheppard, the last chief of the Kewohatchie Tribe, buried at Harpersville’s Historic Garden of Memories Cemetery.

We have all the conveniences of suburban life with a small-town family atmosphere. I as mayor, our council and our citizens are committed to ensuring that Harpersville lives up to our town slogan: *Rich Past – Bright Future!*

Come visit. And if you decide to stay, we’d love to have you! ■



*Stone Hollow Farms herb gardens (stonehollowfarmstead.com).*



*Theoangelo “Theo” Perkins is serving his fourth term as mayor of Harpersville, where he also served on the City Council for six years. Additionally, he serves as superintendent for the Harpersville Water Systems. A graduate of the University of Alabama and a dedicated servant leader, Theo is a pastor, real estate broker, former educator and has been a school bus driver for 29 years. During his time with Shelby County Schools, he received the Outstanding Faculty Service Award and was an Alumni of the Year recipient. He also received the Trail Blazer Image Award from the University of Montevallo. Theo recently released his first book, Monday Motivation – Words You Know, available on Amazon.*



# Wayfinding: A Community Image and Tourism Tool

Jason Fondren, AICP - Principal Planner - KPS Group



Downtown Mobile wayfinding sign. KPS Group with the Douglas Group

By helping people find places, wayfinding systems improve the visitor experience and take away some of the stress of going somewhere unfamiliar. Visitors will also recognize the care that a community has taken in building a wayfinding system.

Imagine going to a new grocery store that does not have signs letting you know what products are on each aisle. Even if that store has good products at good prices, you would have to question whether you would go back. Imagine an airport or hospital with confusing or no directional signs. Regardless of the quality of services, this can tarnish your impression of the place.

Think of your community as a commodity and your visitors as customers. Wayfinding is all about optimizing the customer experience. Businesses that give customers a good impression are more likely to see them return and recommend those businesses to friends and family. Wayfinding helps create *that* kind of experience for visitors.

Most communities invest in wayfinding to help people find local places of interest, or *attractions*. It is especially valuable to cities and towns that have *several* unique attractions that draw people from out of town. Not just historic sites or downtowns, attractions come in many different forms. Maybe you have a conference center, a sports complex

that attracts travel ball tournaments, a Robert Trent Jones golf course or a mountain biking trail or a haunted house that Kathryn Tucker Windham wrote about in one of her books. A good wayfinding system can help visitors find those places on their itinerary *and* alert them to destinations they might not have been aware of or that they didn't know were nearby.

Wayfinding can include more than attractions. Consider business areas that offer goods or services that visitors would be interested in – local restaurants, shops, places to go at night when a conference or ball tournament is over. This is how wayfinding can most directly support the economic potential (sales tax revenue!) of tourism and visitation.

## Creating a Wayfinding System

The first step in creating a wayfinding system is putting a plan together. You will often find that there are many stakeholders who need to be involved in putting together a wayfinding system. The planning process should identify and offer opportunities to engage them. The chamber of commerce, tourism and historic groups and transportation officials may be important to consult during the process. By being inclusive early on, you are more likely to garner support for the effort, politically, financially or otherwise.

One of the first steps in planning out a wayfinding system is developing an inventory of destinations. Cast as wide a net as possible so that you have a complete list to work from as you start planning the system. Uncovering a “missing” destination late in the process can throw a wrench in the works.

Ultimately, the goal is laying out an effective, efficient network of signs that direct drivers – and sometimes pedestrians – to important places. Not only can it be financially impractical to have signage for every local destination, doing so can make the system less effective. Having too many signs makes it more difficult for visitors to discern the signs for the destination they are seeking and can hurt the community's appearance.

**Eligibility criteria and a rating system** help winnow down a large number of destinations to something more workable. This will identify destinations that are automatically eligible to be included on signs and others that must be scored to determine whether they will be included. “Pre-approved”

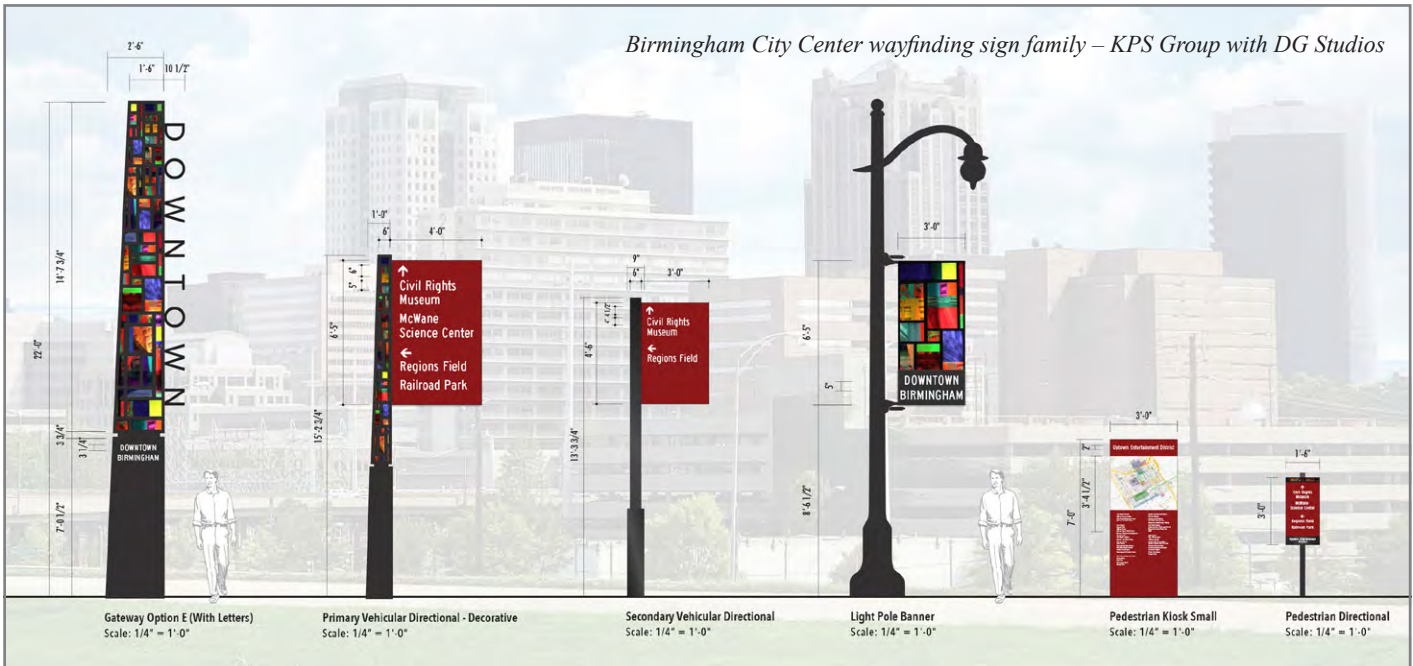


Downtown Selma wayfinding family concept. KPS Group with Copperwing

District & Event Banner

Vehicular Direction Sign

Pedestrian Kiosk



destinations are usually historic, cultural and recreational sites of national or statewide significance, federal or state government facilities that are open to the public, airports, hospitals, universities, downtown areas and so on. Other destinations are then scored against criteria, such as how many visitors they have annually, how many hours per week they are open, whether they are open throughout the year or only seasonally.

**Take into account whether destinations have a website – not just a Facebook profile.** If they do, when was it last updated? Is the destination listed on the state or other tourism websites? If it is hard to find recent information on the internet, it’s probably not a place many people are trying to find.

The rating system needs to be clear and objective. In communities with a large number of destinations, it may need to be relatively strict. This will create a sound and fair basis for approving some destinations and denying others.

Generally, you want to evaluate any places that are actively bringing people into town – conference centers, performing arts venues, museums, tournament complexes and other kinds of attractions. Also look at “supporting” destinations – places that visitors are likely to seek out when they are not attending conferences or ball games or visiting tourist sites – such as restaurants, shopping areas, nighttime entertainment and hotels.

Including the names of specific businesses on wayfinding signs can be tricky. A restaurant or other private establishment might change names or go out of business. You then end up with signs directing visitors to a place that no longer exists or at least not by the same name. If there is an area of town where there are restaurants or retail stores clustered together, signs can give directions to these “dining” or “shopping” areas rather than to individual businesses. “Lodging” can be used rather than listing a specific hotel. If a local business is widely recognized and will be around for a while, it may be worth including. Make sure that your rating system supports that kind of decision or other businesses may cry foul.

## Signage

In terms of signage, two or three sizes of vehicular directional signs are at the core of a wayfinding system. The largest signs are for about five or six “messages” – the destination name and directional arrow. More than that and drivers will not be able to absorb the information quickly enough. You don’t want them taking their eyes off the road for too long. Small signs are sized for one, maybe two messages at most. An intermediate sign size may be useful for locations where no more than about three directional messages are needed. In addition to the number of messages, roadway size and speed affect the size of signs. On higher speed roads, the messages need to be larger so that motorists can read them easily.

Wayfinding systems may also include pedestrian signs and kiosks. These are used when there are a lot of destinations within walking distance of one another, such as in a downtown or some other special district. Because you are not limited by constraints of driving safety, you have a lot more freedom in the placement and design of pedestrian wayfinding.

## Additional System Options

Directional signs are not the only parts of a wayfinding system. More comprehensive wayfinding systems might include gateways, banners and on-premises signs.

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# HARTSELLE: WHO WE ARE

Mayor Randy Garrison • City of Hartselle

**C**hurch, faith, family, community, the letter “H” and hospitality – that is Hartselle. These words and nouns all came together to form our community branding and the signage for the new municipal building. While I was not surprised at the outcome, it was great to see that so many folks in Hartselle felt the same about our city and community. The symbol towers proudly on the east and west side of the building. The symbol stands out in the morning and evening sun and is backlit each evening to remind those passing by what our city stands for – what is important to our citizens. The design is also located by each entrance to the building and inside as well.

Located in North Alabama along the edge of the Cumberland Plateau and the Highland Range, Hartselle is positioned along Interstate 65 with U. S. Highway 31 running through the city’s center. Hartselle is the second largest city in Morgan County. It is 35 miles southwest of Huntsville and considered a bedroom community with many of our citizens working in other nearby cities. Known affectionately as the “City of Southern Hospitality,” Hartselle boasts a top ten school system and that, along with an excellent quality of life, bring folks here to make their home.

Hartselle was founded in 1870 due to the North & South Railroad needing a stopping point. The community grew along the railroad tracks and soon had a bustling downtown with stores and shops catering to farmers coming to town to gin cotton and trade animals. After World War II, Hartselle moved from an agricultural town to more of an urbanized area that continues to grow. Hartselle’s population as of the 2020 Census was 15,445 and continues to expand with increased housing developments throughout the city. Retail and industrial growth continue as well. The city is governed by a mayor/council form of government with the council president officiating meetings and the mayor serving as CEO of the city.



## Branding for the Present and the Future

Early in 2021 when the City of Hartselle began work on the redesign and remodel of the former Wells Fargo building as our municipal building, signage for the structure came into discussion. The architects recommended an updated logo be included because the logo in use at that time would not work on the outside and inside of the building due to large images that composed most of the design. We were encouraged to develop a strong but simple image that portrayed Hartselle that could then be used for all our needs, including signage.

The architecture firm the City had under contract recommended a graphic designer they had worked with for many years.



*Signage in front of the new Hartselle municipal building.*

This gentleman has and continues to design logos for Target, TJ Maxx, Amazon, as well as other companies and municipalities. He has a great reputation, and his work samples are amazing.

Although the graphic designer chosen was not familiar with Hartselle when he was contracted, he invested time in researching our history and virtually visiting Hartselle via internet capabilities. He also had a unique, distinct and proven approach to graphic design. He did not ask for photos of Hartselle or descriptions of our city. He did not ask our group to describe Hartselle or give him ideas of what a new design should look like. Instead, he simply asked for community input in the form of nouns that came to mind when someone thought of the City of Hartselle. Our group was tasked with gathering input from folks connected to Hartselle – not necessarily all from within the city, but to include

*continued page 38*

**Gateways help set the tone.** They can create that great first impression for visitors and project the community's brand right from the start. Gateways are used at the primary entrances into a city or into a downtown or other special district. In addition to the signage aspect, gateways can also incorporate lighting, landscaping and other features. They offer the most artistic freedom for the community to express itself.

**Banners identify districts and corridors.** Typically attached to light poles or on their own decorative poles, banners are used along district streets or a city's major roads. Communities with multiple districts may have different banner designs to distinguish one from another. In those cases, citywide brand graphics might be used along with district branding for continuity. One side of a banner might carry district branding while the other side can have local art or other graphics on them.

**The design of the wayfinding signs can be incorporated in on-premises signs.** Identification signs at parks, city hall and other municipal facilities typically have a cohesive design. When they are designed in unison with directional signs and other elements, it projects a very strong, coordinated image for the community. There may be some non-municipal destinations that would warrant on-site signage consistent with the wayfinding system, such as museums, historic sites and other cultural facilities operated by local nonprofit groups.

## Additional Tips

Here are some tips on planning and designing a wayfinding system:

**Update your city brand.** Determine if the existing city logo will be used in the sign design or if it needs to be updated or replaced. The wayfinding design process is a great opportunity to determine the image you want to project and apply it throughout the community. I encourage communities to get creative and not just settle for an effective, but possibly boring, sign design. They are not cheap, and they will be up for a long time. Be bold!

**Don't forget a turn.** Make sure, once a destination appears on signs along a route, that there is a sign at each intersection where a turn must be made to get there.

**Consider your routes carefully.** Signage routes should be consistent with directions from GPS and mobile apps. But in some cases, the most direct route given by an app may not give the best impression of the community. Wayfinding signs can direct visitors along a more preferred route – people will tend to trust local signage over their phone app. This should be done with care, though. You don't want to send drivers on an out-of-the-way route.

**Install signs in the right places.** Signs need to be placed in advance of upcoming turns to give motorists the space to change lanes if needed. Usually, they should be on the right side of the road, but there may be cases where installing them on the left side will work best.

**Use a sturdy sign design.** The signs should be solid, both the post and the sign panel, and installed securely to remain plumb. Leaning and bent signs take away from the image you are trying to convey. You also want to take into consideration the potential for vandalism. Larger directional signs should be of a height so that the bottom edge of the sign is out of reach of spray cans.

**Use a simple, legible font.** A sans serif font is best for legibility. There should be optimal contrast between the color of the sign background and the text for day and nighttime visibility, such as white colored lettering on a dark background.

**Do not use ALL CAPS.** On vehicular directional signs with multiple messages, using capital letters reduces legibility for drivers trying to read signs quickly. Capital letters also take up more space, forcing you to abbreviate names or break messages into multiple lines. The more space one destination takes up, the less room there is to include other destinations.

**Use both sides.** Most directional signs will only carry directional information on one side leaving the other side potentially blank. Local art, historic photos or other visuals can be used to decorate the back side of signs.

**Make an app for that.** If your community has a lot of cool places to visit, invest in a wayfinding app that offers directions and an interactive tourism guide, providing historic or other interpretive information about places of interest. ■



*Jason Fondren, AICP, is the Principal Planner at KPS Group in Birmingham, Alabama. In his 25-year career, he has led a wide variety of planning and urban design projects including comprehensive and land use plans, downtown and neighborhood revitalization initiatives, wayfinding plans, parks and recreation plans and development regulations. Jason volunteers his time to DesignAlabama, Alabama Communities of Excellence (ACE) and YourTown Alabama and is currently working with Macon County EDA on a countywide wayfinding system. He can be reached at [www.kpsgroup.com](http://www.kpsgroup.com), [jfondren@kpsgroup.com](mailto:jfondren@kpsgroup.com), 205-458-3267.*



Jessica Walker • Special Projects Manager • City of Fairhope

**O**n the bluffs of the Eastern Shore of Mobile Bay, the picturesque City of Fairhope has experienced exponential growth in the last decade, catapulting this small town into a new era.

Fairhope Mayor Sherry Sullivan, who ran on addressing infrastructure, employee stability and parks and green space, hit the ground running upon election in 2020, and has spent the time since navigating the thin line between the challenges and the opportunities that the tremendous growth has brought with it, while also maintaining an upbeat attitude that is reflected in the work she is doing.

“Challenges create more opportunities,” Sullivan said. “Anytime you have challenges it creates opportunity to do better, improve processes and not just do things the way they have always been done. It’s time for us to think outside the box about better ways of doing things to improve Fairhope for future generations.”

Those areas of challenges, like so many other communities, are plentiful.

“Infrastructure issues, managing the growth and making a plan for continued growth in the future are some of the biggest challenges we’re faced with,” said Sullivan. “The cost of inflation, supply chain challenges and staffing also present unique challenges, too.”

Making a plan for growth in the middle of growing is difficult, but Sullivan, a Fairhope native, is undeterred.

“We have been diligent about taking the time to formulate a plan for the future whether it be updating the comprehensive plan, mapping utility systems, increasing system capacities, infrastructure projects or being good communicators with our citizens,” she said.

The increased communication that Sullivan has stressed in her time in office isn’t just for residents. She tirelessly endeavors to create and build relationships that advance the City of Fairhope and make it a great place to work for its more than 400 employees.

“Building relationships is the basis of anything you do,” Sullivan said. “It starts with leadership in our small town; the relationship between the Mayor and the Council is important to getting projects done and to creating the utopian community that Fairhope was founded on. We have to be moving towards a common vision, not just with leadership but with staff as well. For me that has been about being a team player, respecting different opinions and communication.”

In a year that has seen staffing shortages, communication and improvement of benefits for staff have been key to attracting new talent. It is of great benefit to employees that Sullivan’s perspective is characterized by her nearly 17 years as a City employee, notably as the Community Development Director. The employees are the ones serving our citizens every single day and the ones that deserve the credit for our friendly, clean and beautiful community.

“COVID-19 taught us that we have to be flexible with our workforce,” Sullivan said. “When you have people who don’t live in your immediate community, being able to offer flexible schedules is valuable. And with the rising cost of inflation, being able to add things like our Symbol Employee Health Clinic helps us be a better employer. Sometimes you can’t just increase the salaries to be competitive; we have to look for other creative ways to attract and retain employees.”

Her emphasis on collaboration and creativity also reaches past the city limits to growing relationships with leaders in Baldwin County and the State of Alabama that, ultimately, help increase the success of the City.

“We don’t always have to reinvent the wheel,” Sullivan said. “Collaboration is reaching out to other local leaders and neighboring communities and leaning on them to find out how they have done things, where they have been successful and encountered challenges. There are valuable ideas that we can borrow from other communities, but we can only find them through active and continued communication.”

In recent months, Sullivan has been named to the Policy Board of the American Public Power Association and to the Alabama League of Municipalities’ Committee on State and Federal Legislation as well as the League’s Board of Directors.

“Those are the types of organizations that are important for Fairhope to be involved with,” she said. “Again, these organizations are vital to educating elected officials on important issues that can impact Fairhope and, ultimately, our citizens. They also help

Fairhope's new Justice Center named for former police chief Joseph Petties



identify grant funding for projects that are necessary to the continued growth of our community.”

She believes that increasing grant funding and managing the current grant awards is vital to the overall health of the community.

“The amount of infrastructure, maintenance to systems and parks we need in Fairhope is expensive. The RESTORE Act grants, ADECA grants, FEMA grants – all of these help us do large money projects for 50 or 20 cents on the dollar while directly contributing to our quality of life,” Sullivan said. “Right now, for instance, we are investing in infrastructure, updating our Fairhope Municipal Pier and Park and developing one of largest pieces of property in the City for bicycle and pedestrian trails and park amenities.”

Along with building infrastructure and increasing park capabilities for citizens, preserving

the small-town feel is a top priority for Sullivan who notes that Fairhope was a Main Street town before Main Street was a thing, installing brick sidewalks and regularly changing out the beautiful flower plantings to enhance the charm of downtown.

“We’ve always been a little eclectic here,” said Sullivan. “As we continue to grow, we have to make sure that additions are reflective of our community. We want to maintain the charm and embrace the growth, but we have to make sure it continues to fit the vision of the City.”

### An Eclectic History

One of the most charming parts of Fairhope is its history. Founded in 1894 by a group of reformers, the occupation of the area was similar to more than 100 Utopian communities that were started, and ultimately failed, in other locations throughout the United States. Borrowing from economist Henry George’s Single Tax philosophy detailed in the 1879 book *Progress and Poverty*, the 28 founders – nine of which were children, settled on the bluff in November 1894 with the goal of having a “fair hope” of succeeding using the Single Tax plan. Throughout the past 127 years, the Fairhope Single Tax Corporation has purchased a patchwork of land amassing nearly 4,500 acres – or 20 percent of property – throughout the City. According to the organization’s constitution, no individual ownership of land is allowed within the jurisdiction of the Corporation.

When residents purchase homes, they sign a 99-year renewable lease with the Single Tax Colony which allows them to own all improvements they may make to the land during their time as a lessee. Rent charged to lessees for the land includes taxes due on the land and improvements, an administrative fee to Single Tax and a demonstration fee that is calculated from the appraised value of the land. The demonstration fee is used by Fairhope Single Tax Corporation for community improvements. In past years, this investment has benefitted public parks, the City library, the Fairhope Museum of History, sidewalks, Thomas Hospital and many others.

“What a great community partner they have been to help the City build things that directly impact the quality of life for our residents,” Sullivan said. “The art components and the connectivity they have invested in are so important to preserving the quality of life that Fairhope is known for. One thing that makes Fairhope more special is the very generous philanthropic community. That is important when you move to a town, to give of your talents and make it a better place. We have many residents who put their time and talents to work here so they can leave it better than they found it.”

Throughout the years, the City has also garnered a history for attracting artists, writers and craftsmen alike who have claimed the area as a creative haven, due in large part to the climate, surroundings and abundant scenery. The numerous community events and programs held each year also do their part to attract residents and visitors.

“The Walking School Bus, Fourth of July celebration, Christmas events – these are what people want in a small town, and we are proud to help make events like this possible,” Sullivan said.

Fairhope has also been a resort community since its early years, welcoming visitors by bay boat from Mobile to vacation in the cottages and hotels along the bluff.

“We still see that today,” Sullivan said. “We have become a wedding destination, and the Grand Hotel attracts visitors who come back again and again. We have heard so many stories of people who visited the Grand Hotel or participated in a community event and decided to buy a house here to experience the charm year-round.”

As she prepares to head into her third year as mayor, Sullivan is excited about the opportunities. “We have everything it takes to have a successful community – good health care, schools and churches, amenities, charm and great people,” she said. “We want to keep the momentum and the tradition going for decades to come.” ■

# Alabama's 12 Regional Councils Provide Numerous Services to Cities and Towns

Michelle Gilliam Jordan • Executive Director • Top of Alabama Regional Council of Governments (TARCOG)

They have unusual acronyms for their names but address pressing needs in their communities. No two are alike yet they are all similar. Some are large, some are small – but they are all mighty! And even though they have all been around for more than 50 years, they are still vibrant and nimble. Have you figured out who they are?

I am describing the 12 Regional Councils that house all 67 Alabama counties in “governmental units” across the state. They are like the rivers that flow through Alabama, each separate and distinct yet merging and blending to form a system of waterways that provide a variety of different functions to our state’s population and economy. Each of the 12 regional councils is a separate organization that collectively forms the Alabama

Association of Regional Councils (AARC), the organization I proudly serve as President for 2022.

We were created by Act No. 1126 on September 13, 1969, (even though several of the 12 were in operation before this time) and are referred to as “Regional Planning and Development Commissions” in this piece of forward-thinking legislation. The authors of this Act knew that these governmental units were a critical part of ensuring that our state continues to grow and thrive for the 4.89 million residents that call Alabama home!

One might ask: *How do they do this?* Follow along with me and I’ll tell you.

## Alabama’s 12 Regional Councils

Per Act No. 1126, all 12 Councils are empowered to “carry on continuous, comprehensive planning for our regions”, and we each do this, in partnership with our local elected officials and stakeholders, for all 67 counties and 400+ municipalities in Alabama. Each Council has professional planners on staff who prepare comprehensive plans and reports for their member agencies that document current conditions and forecast future opportunities for growth and development. Those plans then become the blueprint for communities to follow as they recruit new businesses, housing developments or transportation services to their front door. Each of the 12 Councils also meets the social economic needs of their region in creative ways that are the envy of Regional Councils across the United States.

Let’s take a closer look at the incredible work being implemented throughout Alabama by *your* 12 Regional Councils!

## Northwest Alabama Council of Local Governments (NACOLG) – Keith Jones, Executive Director

NACOLG is the regional planning and intergovernmental coordination agency created in June 1967 by the local governments pursuant to Alabama State Legislation. It is a voluntary Association of 37 governmental units in the five-county region of Colbert, Franklin, Lauderdale, Marion and Winston counties along with the municipalities therein. NACOLG’s Executive Director, Keith Jones, is most proud of the work his agency did on the 2020 Census and on their Revolving Loan Fund (RLF). “NACOLG’s work on the 2020 Census included a grassroots campaign that brought the public and private sector together utilizing all forms of mass communications,” he said. “The results were growth in a significant number of our municipalities and in three of our counties.” Keith added that NACOLG’s Covid loan forgiveness program that was funded through existing state bond funds allowed their RLF Administrative Committee to set aside \$800,000 for small business and industry that were impacted by Covid. This program

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Alabama has 12 Regional Councils that serve the state through continuous, comprehensive planning in each region. Pictured at ALM’s 2021 Annual Convention Expo Hall are Dennis Stripling, former mayor of Brent and Executive Director of the West Alabama Regional Commission (WARC), and Michelle Gilliam Jordan, Executive Director for Top of Alabama Regional Council of Governments (TARCOG) and 2022 President of the Alabama Association of Regional Councils (AARC).

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served many small businesses in his region that weren't assisted by other Federal programs.

## West Alabama Regional Commission (WARC)

– Dennis Stripling, Executive Director

The West Alabama area encompasses Bibb, Fayette, Greene, Hale, Lamar, Pickens and Tuscaloosa counties and serves 35 municipalities under their organizational goal to improve the quality of life in West Alabama. The scope of the commission's work includes economic and community development, transportation planning, nutrition and assistance programs for the elderly, a part-time employment program for low-income senior citizens, technical assistance, tourism promotion and public information. WARC's Executive Director is Dennis Stripling, the former mayor of Brent and a proud former member of the Alabama League of Municipalities (ALM) Board of Directors. Stripling is committed to ensuring that WARC, and all of Alabama Regional Councils, work closely with ALM. "The work we do on educating our member governments on statewide opportunities enhances the work that both the ALM and AARC does to help improve the Quality of Life for ALL Alabamians," he said.

## Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham (RPCGB) – Charles Ball, Executive Director

The RPCGB works through a consultation process with local governments, citizens, non-profits and the private sector in Blount, Chilton, Jefferson, St. Clair, Shelby and Walker counties to provide opportunities and cost-effective solutions to assure physical and economic growth for everyone. The RPCGB supports the region through planning services, economic development and initiatives to make lives better through the implementation of 25 programs focused on meeting the needs of this dynamic region's residents. Charles Ball is especially proud of RPCGB's RLF: "The RPCGB has a robust RLF that was created with growth in mind. We work with entrepreneurs to help start or grow small businesses, and we use the interest paid on each new loan to expand the total amount we are able to loan."

## East Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission (EARPDC) – Lori Hodge Corley, Executive Director

The East Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission (EARPDC) serves Calhoun, Chambers, Cherokee, Clay, Cleburne, Coosa, Etowah, Randolph, Talladega and Tallapoosa counties. EARPDC is tasked with the mission of serving the municipal and county governments and their citizens in East Alabama to improve quality of life, create opportunity and facilitate economic development by providing a regional forum; building regional partnerships; promoting regional solutions; serving as a catalyst for regional progress; and responding

to regional and local needs and issues through planning and advocacy, the provision of professional and technical services, seeking and leveraging federal, state and other resources and the administration of regional and local programs.

EARPDC houses one of 13 Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) and is proud of the accomplishments made in serving thousands of Older Americans during the pandemic. (Nine of the 12 Regional Councils house AAA's). An Area Agency on Aging is a public or private nonprofit agency designated by a state to address the needs and concerns of all older persons at the regional and local levels. In Alabama, the 13 AAA's form the Alabama Association of Area Agencies of Aging (A4A), and all operate as non-profits. Lori Hodge shared that EARPDC's AAA staff and volunteers fed more than 836,000 older Americans during the pandemic and offered support to 5,138 clients during very difficult times. "My staff went above and beyond in making sure that their clients felt connected to the outside world during times of isolation," she said. "They not only regularly

spoke to our clients on the phone during times when we couldn't visit in-person, but we also visited with them on their porches and front yards to make sure they were thriving throughout the pandemic."



## South Central Alabama Development Commission (SCADC) – Tyson Howard, Executive Director

The South Central Alabama Development Commission (SCADC) is a quasi-governmental agency that encompasses the Area Agency on Aging and Planning and Economic Development activities for South Central Alabama. SCADC serves Bullock, Butler, Crenshaw, Lowndes, Macon, Montgomery and Pike counties and is committed to assisting seniors with services covered under the Older Americans Act, Medicare, Medicaid and other state funded programs and also has a devoted team focused on assisting communities with economic development projects, including Planning and GIS, for its member governments. SCADC has successfully assisted local governments in preparing planning strategies, securing and administering development grant funds and providing aging assistance, thereby allowing local officials to make informed decision regarding their communities' future and providing additional benefits for their citizens for several decades. "The SCADC region is one of the most diverse Planning Councils in Alabama," said Tyson Howard. "And it is my board members and staff members' pleasure to help close gaps and bring opportunities to this most deserving part of the state."

## Alabama-Tombigbee Regional Commission (ATRC) – John Clyde Riggs, Executive Director

The Alabama-Tombigbee Regional Commission represents Choctaw, Clarke, Conecuh, Dallas, Marengo, Monroe, Perry,

*continued page 47*

# Rethinking Public Spaces

Elizabeth Barbaree-Tasker • Chief of Finance and Administration • REV Birmingham, Inc.



*A vibrant commercial district is one with lots of activity and lots of people. Since Birmingham's award-winning Railroad Park opened in 2010, it has drawn beautifully diverse crowds of people to its winding paths and native greenery and it has catalyzed economic growth all around the park. Photo courtesy of REV (revbirmingham.org).*

Public servants – whether in office, as municipal employees or devoted citizens – tend to share a love of places. Have you ever taken a trip to another town or city just to see the sights? A Sunday afternoon drive, a weekend trip to the next state over or a week-long visit to one of the best cities in the world are all grounded in our inherent interest in and love of places. Why do we take those trips? What draws us to a place to explore and experience what a town or city has to offer? The answer to that question may vary with each of us, but I have a theory that good design has a role in many of our stories. Good design is a foundational part of what makes a place memorable, and harnessing that can help us build *more* iconic places that draw more people (and therefore more economic growth) over time.

Consider this: what comes to your mind when you think of the best cities or towns in the world? When you think of New York or San Francisco or D.C., does a picture come to mind? What image do you associate with those places? Maybe the Empire State Building, the Golden Gate Bridge, the US Capitol? These are icons that are so tied to the places in which they exist, we have collectively associated them with those places over time.

Here in Alabama, there is much to love about our state – its natural beauty; the rich history and character of towns and cities, tiny and large; our people; our food! Our landmarks may be lesser known than some in New York, but we have icons here as well. Let me ask you to imagine for a moment. What do you think of when you think of Alabama? What makes this state *the Alabama you know and love*?

We have icons throughout Alabama that capture this unique place, and how it varies from top to bottom, east to west. The state capitol is an obvious icon in Montgomery, set on a hill and designed to evoke the stature of state government. The Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma is an icon for its place in Civil Rights history during the first march for voting rights. A prime industry for our state is represented in the icon of the U.S. Space and Rocket Center's Saturn V rocket in Huntsville. And more subtle icons, too, are worthy of preservation. There are historic buildings. There are cotton, peanut and other fields that connect us to our land and agricultural history. And of course, we cannot talk about Alabama and leave out the white sandy beaches of the Gulf Coast. Alabama has a wealth of "natural wonders" that exist only in our state (seven officially chosen by the Alabama Tourism Department!), and these iconic wonders are frequent drivers of tourism and the jobs that come with those tourism dollars spent.

Icons are assets that represent their unique place in the world. They tell a bit about our history, of who we are and what we value. As an economic development nonprofit (where I work), REV Birmingham (revbirmingham.org) has a team of people who share a love of community places and a commitment to building from the assets in the places we work. Our work is *place-focused*, meaning we push to grow the economy in Birmingham's historic downtown and the historic Woodlawn neighborhood by *creating vibrant commercial districts*. How?

- We strengthen places by improving public and private spaces to make them cleaner, safer and more attractive;
- We support business owners and developers in growing and developing businesses and projects that are authentic and sustainable; and
- We create experiences that make people want to engage with the historic districts in which we work.

Good design is a thread that weaves all our work together. Our approach is about working with the communities we serve to guide our workplans and using good design to make places better! A vibrant commercial district is one with lots of activity; well-recognized for good experiences; and teeming with people. We need everyone – business owners, employees, residents, tourists, property owners, young people, retirees, families, young professionals and students – to find reasons to spend time and money in our downtowns or

neighborhood commercial districts. When we are designing spaces and places, ad campaigns and art projects, a business mix or a use for a vacant structure, we have to ask ourselves – what will make people come, and how can we use good design to make it more likely that they will come back? REV sees good design as a tool for making all our work more impactful and more engaging with the people in our community.

Good design not only helps us engage people more, it also helps us connect them to the icons in their community. The Alabama Theatre in downtown Birmingham is the state’s official historic theater, an unquestionable asset, and its beautifully lit *Alabama* sign at its entrance on 3rd Avenue North is a recognizable icon. In operation since 1927, countless dedicated citizens have recognized the Theatre’s unique place in history, preserved it and built a business model around its continued use. Concerts, dance recitals and themed movie series bring thousands of people into the city each year, giving them memories in exchange for their investment in tickets and perhaps dinner before the show. This is downtown vibrancy at work! The historic theatre is a constant labor of love for Birmingham Landmarks, the nonprofit that owns the building. In 2017, REV recognized an exciting way to help their cause of keeping history alive by supporting their project to create and install a historically accurate replica of the iconic sign on 18th Street, which had been missing since the 1950s. REV nominated the project for a national grant given through the National Trust for Historic Preservation via their Partners in Preservation: Main Streets campaign. We then designed a promotional campaign geared towards getting votes from the public, competing with other historic preservation projects across the country. The project finished in the top 10 of the competition and received \$120,000! Those funds were combined with local fundraising led by Birmingham Landmarks to make possible the replacement of the sign and improvements to the main entrance marquee.

When we recognize the assets we have, good design helps us expand them, celebrate them, and tell a compelling story that people connect with, leading to greater investment in our communities. Good design offers a way to take an underutilized asset in our communities and work to improve it.

REV uses good design to solve problems, and, in one project, a new community icon emerged from our work. Birmingham Lights is a transformative project that made four historic railroad underpasses feel authentically Birmingham. It is the collective name for the artistic rainbow lighting installations in the underpasses that connect the north and south sides of downtown at 14th, 18th, 19th and 20th Streets. The project created vibrancy by transforming dark and dirty sidewalks into attractive, accessible paths that encourage people to enjoy destinations on both sides of the rail lines. The project also began to shift perceptions about the now-thriving Parkside District, and it helped inspire additional lighting projects like 20/59 and Regions Field. Other cities have also drawn inspiration from Birmingham’s project and have reached out to REV about the design and management of Birmingham Lights. Photos and videos are still taken under the lights, and street parties have been hosted there because the rainbow lights are now an unmistakable part of downtown Birmingham’s identity.

Good design also creates opportunities for more and better growth to occur. In the historic Woodlawn neighborhood, just east of downtown, REV has worked to be part of the community since 2006 when we first located our office in a vacant historic building there. Since then, we have been part of a broad community effort to grow Woodlawn into an authentic community that is a hub for equitable entrepreneurship. We purchased a total of three vacant buildings and using not much more than paint and shared amenities, we converted them into affordable spaces that nonprofits, creatives and service providers work in every day. We created a meeting space that has welcomed thousands of people into the district, using good design to keep the budget lean and engage the community in its use. Over time, we added more small design elements throughout Woodlawn’s business district – banners, murals, landscaping – to create a unique sense of place and a feeling of arrival.



*Good, thoughtful design can create new icons and drive economic growth. A REV project that began in 2013, the Birmingham Lights tunnels draw pedestrians into what used to be a dark and scary place. They have become icons in the city - countless engagements and parties and music videos have been showcased under their brilliant colors. Photo courtesy of REV ([revbirmingham.org](http://revbirmingham.org)).*



*The Magic City Mural Festival brought vibrant art into the Woodlawn district with *The Way*. In a joint venture between Blank Space Birmingham, Woodlawn Neighborhood Association, Woodlawn United and REV's Woodlawn UrbanMain team, seven female muralists transformed the alleyway between 55th Street North and 55th Place North. This project honors the women of Woodlawn, and includes plants, animals, and people which makes the art more accessible and familiar for all to enjoy! Pictured courtesy of REV: *The Way* Mural #3 by artist Sarah C. Rutherford.*

Ten years after our largest renovations, retail demand is growing and community members are taking the lead on new design projects that improve the Woodlawn experience and make the commercial district more of a destination. In 2021, community leaders noted how empty an alley central to the district seemed. New businesses were opening on the street side of this alley, and the community decided to strengthen both those businesses and the Woodlawn experience with a new destination. Those community leaders recruited mural artists, REV and several other partners to fill the alley walls with six murals honoring the women of Woodlawn and *The Way* was born. The murals are incredible, and they've drawn new visitors to the district to enjoy their beauty. As a result of the positive response to the murals, we're now working with the community to raise funds to improve the pedestrian pathways in the alley and open the rear of the new businesses to that experience. It is clear that good design helped connect people to each other and to a place; it solved a problem borne of neglect and created an opportunity for more and better growth.

As Alabama's towns and cities change and grow to respond to a rapidly modernizing world, we have the opportunity to use design to make all of Alabama remain uniquely *Alabama*. In the words of Urban Land Institute Fellow Ed McMahon, a well-respected Alabama native who has studied the economic impact of good design for years: "Growth is inevitable and desirable, but the destruction of community character is not. The question is not whether your part of the world is going to change. The question is, how?"

Good design has been a catalyst for positive change in Birmingham, but this kind of magic extends far beyond the Magic City's borders. There are excellent examples all over the state, along with a wealth of resources to help municipalities learn how to recognize their assets and engage design professionals in community projects. We can *all* use the powerful tool of *good design* to connect people to each other, solve problems, encourage more and better growth and make our communities stronger. ■



*Elizabeth Barbaree-Tasker has been an active leader in place-focused economic and community development in Alabama for more than 25 years. Her work has focused on applying financial, strategic, creative and problem-solving skills to the opportunities and challenges of urban neighborhoods and small towns. She has consulted on strategic and downtown planning; historic preservation; small business growth; market analysis; and affordable housing development across Alabama. As Chief of Finance & Administration, Elizabeth provides the leadership needed to manage the flow of funds and administrative support to carry out all of REV's programs and projects. She also plays an integral role in REV's catalytic development efforts, strategizing partnerships and funding to make historic districts more vibrant. She is also deeply committed to community service. She served as a member of the Birmingham Planning Commission for 15 years and as an early and long-standing volunteer in the development of Birmingham's highly-acclaimed Railroad Park.*

# ADECA: Building a Charging Station Infrastructure for Electric Vehicles

Jim Plott • Public Information • Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs

## Listen.

Hear that?

Of course not.

That sound of silence is the sound of progress. It is the sound of electric vehicles quietly but surely making their way into mainstream America as they take to the roads alongside their louder, gasoline-powered counterparts.

“No matter what your feelings are about electric vehicles, get ready; they are here,” said Kenneth Boswell, director of the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA). “Automobile manufacturers – including

many with a strong presence in Alabama – have crossed that threshold where they have made significant commitments to producing electric vehicles, and I do not think there is any going back. It seems like almost every day that you hear an automobile manufacturer is planning to build an electric-motor version of a popular model of a vehicle.”

Automotive manufacturing is Alabama’s top export with employment exceeding 40,000. As the automotive industry adds more and more electric models to their product lines, state leaders want to ensure that Alabama remains a major player in the industry. At the state government level, ADECA is helping lead the charge to prepare for electric vehicles. This includes two components: awareness and charging infrastructure.

In late 2021 with the help of Governor Kay Ivey, ADECA launched Drive Electric Alabama. This statewide educational effort has a simple mission: To raise awareness of electric vehicles by engaging and educating Alabama residents. You may have already seen or heard some of these messages on TV, radio, the internet and billboards. The hub of the initiative is the website at [driveelectricalabama.com](http://driveelectricalabama.com).

To facilitate public charging stations, ADECA released the “Alabama Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Plan,” a statewide comprehensive plan completed with the help and input of many public and private groups, including the Alabama Clean Fuels Coalition. The plan is designed to guide expected funding to install EV charging stations in targeted interstate areas and spread from there.

Two programs administered by ADECA provide the foundation for the plan. The Volkswagen Settlement Plan and the state Electric Vehicle Program both are geared toward providing electric vehicle charging stations in Alabama.

“Our goal is to put electric vehicle charging stations where they are most needed and utilized and work from there,” Boswell said. “Ultimately we want to have a vast network of charging stations, but with limited resources we have to go where there is the most demand.”

The VW Settlement Plan arose out of a nationwide payment from the German automobile maker involving air pollution violations. Alabama used a



Fort Payne EV Station ribbon cutting in January 2022. ADECA provided a \$45,000 grant for the two EV Fast Chargers in downtown Fort Payne.

portion of those funds along with funding allocated by the Alabama Legislature to help businesses and governments install electric vehicle charging stations with the focus on the Interstates 20/59 corridor from the Alabama-Georgia border to the city of Tuscaloosa. That area was designated as a priority because of its high traffic volume between Atlanta and Birmingham and the fact that the Birmingham metro area has the highest concentration of electric vehicles in Alabama.

In 2021, Gov. Ivey awarded \$4.1 million to help install charging stations at 18 locations in the state. There was great demand with 76 applications totaling \$18 million in funding requests submitted for this round of funding.

Among those was a \$45,500 grant to the Fort Payne Improvement Authority to install a pair of stations in the city's downtown area.

Fort Payne Mayor Brian Baine said the charging area is attracting "quite frequent" business, including some from nearby Interstate 59. The charging station is displayed on mobile phone applications, and Baine said he hoped it would bring people into the city.

In at least one case that proved to be true. Baine said he recently found the charging station being used by someone traveling from Louisiana to Tennessee.

"He was in the process of moving from Louisiana to Knoxville and said he was so glad he found the charging station because he only had 20 minutes remaining (on his current charge)," Baine said. "He said he had never been to Fort Payne, and I told him about some of our festivals. He said he would definitely be back."

The Alabama Legislature also set aside \$1.8 million for the Electric Vehicle Program in 2022 that supports charging stations. The application period for this funding ended in early June. One tier of this funding will support electric vehicle charging on Interstate 22 with the remaining funding geared toward non-interstate highways. Grant amounts vary depending on the type and location of a charging station.

While the complete details are still to come at the federal level, ADECA anticipates federal funding of approximately \$79 million to come to Alabama over a five-year period for electric vehicle charging infrastructure, primarily on the interstates with any additional state funds likely to support development of charging infrastructure in other areas. ADECA

will provide more information about these grant opportunities as more details become available at the federal level.

"The goal of this program is to get ready for electric vehicles when they become more common on our roads," Boswell said. "With so many automobile manufacturers here in Alabama producing or beginning to produce electric vehicles, it only makes sense that our state make a charging station grid that can accommodate those vehicles as they make their way out onto the roads and highways."

Boswell said that Alabama's municipalities should see electric vehicle chargers as an opportunity to attract travelers to stop, eat and shop in their communities.

"This really is an economic opportunity as more and more electric vehicles are on the roads," Boswell said. "Drivers will need to recharge their vehicles, and municipalities will benefit when they stop. I highly encourage mayors and municipal leaders to start planning now and to keep an eye out for future grant opportunities in this area."

ADECA programs have also helped usher in electric vehicles in other ways.

In 2019, nearly \$2 million in ADECA-administered grants were awarded to the town of West Blocton and Bibb County to assist with infrastructure needed for Mercedes Benz U.S. International to construct a \$300 million plant that will produce batteries for Mercedes electric vehicles. The plant, which opened this spring, will hire at least 265 people.

In February, Gov. Ivey awarded a \$1 million grant to help Alexander City provide the needed infrastructure for Alabama Graphite Products to build a \$202 million graphite processing plant in Kellyton. Graphite is a key component in manufacturing batteries for electric vehicles.

"The electric vehicle industry is producing not just jobs, but good paying jobs in Alabama either through the direct manufacturing of vehicles or the essential components for those automobiles," Boswell said. "That's a move that is not going to go away any time soon. In fact, you are probably going to see electric vehicles and the electric vehicle charging technology vastly improve over the next few years, and that will likely drive-up demand.

"At ADECA, we like being in the front seat, so to speak, as this industry emerges and expands," he said. ■



*A graduate of Auburn University with a degree in journalism, Jim Plott has been in public affairs with the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs for nearly 20 years. Before that he served as staff writer with several newspapers including The Montgomery Advertiser, the Prattville Progress and the Monroe Journal.*



# WOMEN'S FOUNDATION OF ALABAMA

## Clearing the Path for Alabama Women

Rachel Bunning • Vice President, External Affairs • Women's Foundation of Alabama

There is a simple, yet powerful Chinese Proverb that says, “Women hold up *half* the sky.” Yet throughout much of the world, including right here in Alabama, one of the most untapped economic resources is the female half of the population, *including the 490,000 Alabama women surviving and caring for their families on less than \$21,000 dollars per year.*

That is roughly the equivalent to the combined populations of Huntsville, Hoover and Mobile. Simultaneously, our state's leading workforce officials predict a shortage of half a million skilled workers by 2025. These two data points combined highlight a challenge, and – most importantly – a solution. A solution that centers on women regardless of income as key drivers of their family's economic success and as a targeted part of the solution to the state's workforce challenges.

Since our inception 25 years ago, Women's Foundation of Alabama has invested more than \$6 million in innovative solutions that accelerate economic opportunity for women. Our philanthropic investments have impacted the lives of nearly 15,000 women and over 10,000 children. Yet, too many women and their families continue to experience complex social conditions that philanthropy alone cannot address. So, we study these conditions by commissioning statewide research that serves as a resource for policy makers, businesses and civic leaders alike. We utilize this research to identify non-partisan public policy solutions that advance economic opportunity for women and these solutions make up our annual ‘Agenda for Women.’ Our data-driven, commonsense policy approach has yielded four consecutive years of legislative wins for women and we are just getting started.

### Where women lead, change follows.

Throughout history, women have always led. Lest we forget, it is women and women of color who have been at the helm of nearly every humanity-centered movement our nation has ever seen – from voting rights to civil rights to

fair wages – driving us toward a more perfect union. It was women who were the backbone of the economy during times of war. It was women who shaped and constructed public policy and legal protections that advanced women's rights to where we are today.

And just like those women who led generations before, this is a special year for the Women's Foundation of Alabama, and we are leading the way for our state. 2022 is our first official year as a statewide women's organization, and the only statewide women's organization dedicated to the economic opportunity of women across Alabama. In October 2021, we officially expanded our operations and Women's Foundation of Alabama was born.

It will be women – us and our allies – forging a new

**Alabama has the third highest maternal death rate; eighth widest wage gap; and the lowest labor force participation rate in the South.**

future, in communities across the state. Women in Alabama are powerful and resilient but are not thriving overall. Here is what the data shows: Alabama has the third highest maternal death rate; eighth widest wage gap; and the lowest labor force participation rate in the South. And we know from our latest research report, *Clearing the Path: Galvanizing the Economic Impact of Women*, that women are paid less than men in every occupation, at every level of education, in nearly every county and are three times more likely to be minimum wage workers. Women are the backbone of our communities and are on the whole paid less and lack adequate supports such as quality, affordable childcare, family-friendly workplace policies, health care coverage and access to training that allows them to matriculate in the workforce.



That's where Women's Foundation of Alabama comes in. Because of our collective efforts, women in Alabama now have a legal pathway to fight pay inequality; women are entering the workforce at an accelerated rate due to our innovative, public-private partnerships with community colleges to fund critical wraparound supports to strengthen the pipeline of women to in-demand careers; more Alabama parents have access to quality child care thanks to the state's first meaningful investment in child care; and 30,000 moms will go from 60 days of state-funded postpartum healthcare coverage to 12 months – a policy shift linked directly to reducing maternal deaths.

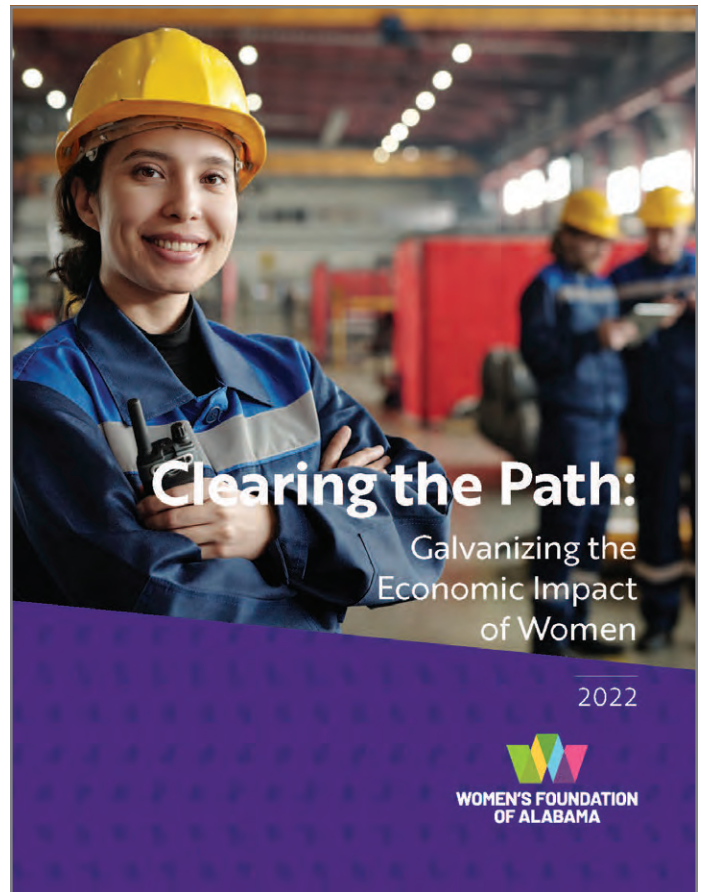
### *Clearing the Path*

Since the pandemic took hold, more than two million women dropped out of the workforce and in Alabama, more than 300,000 unemployment claims were filed by women in 2020. As the pandemic lingers into its third year, women are facing a wide array of barriers to returning to the labor force, notably low wages, lack of adequate, affordable childcare and significant family caregiving roles. Because of the significant role played by women, removing these barriers will not only improve the economic well-being of women themselves, but also strengthen the overall health of Alabama's economy.

Considerable research from the United States and across the world demonstrates the broad-based economic growth that results from ensuring women are fully engaged and benefiting from their participation in the economy. Most importantly, the more women who enter the labor force, the more earnings rise for everyone. A recent study in the *Harvard Business Review* showed that metro areas experiencing a 10 percent increase in female labor force participation over the past 30 years saw as much as a five percent growth in wages. In effect, increasing women's participation in the labor force serves to reduce the wage stagnation so many other regions experienced.

Some researchers have estimated that if women throughout the United States entered the labor force at the same rate as men, the American economy would grow by an additional \$5.87 trillion over the next decade, helping to offset the expected negative effects of the coming wave of Baby Boomer retirements.

In Alabama, women make up half the state's workforce, representing more than one million workers. Almost four out of every 10 businesses across the state are owned by women, yet few women are CEOs at major Alabama companies. Women workers generate more than \$43 billion in earnings annually, accounting for one out of every three dollars earned by working people in the state. These earnings, in turn, are spent and invested at businesses across the state, growing the economy and supporting more hiring and job creation.



*Clearing the Path* research reports can be found online at [www.wfalabama.org](http://www.wfalabama.org).

Our latest *Clearing the Path* report outlines the current economic landscape, defines the impacts of women's full engagement in Alabama's economy, and provides tangible solutions to strengthen women's economic impact, thus strengthening the economy for all. The report provides both statewide and county level data to ensure state and local leaders have relevant information to address barriers within their regions.

This report paints a promising picture and a pathway to true economic vitality for all Alabamians. If Alabama closed the gender pay gap, the state would add 59,000 new jobs; \$15 billion in new income; and the state's overall economy would grow by almost \$22 billion. If Alabama removed barriers to raise women's labor force participation rate to that of men's in the state, it would add 209,767 women into Alabama's labor force; \$7.1 billion in labor income; and the state's overall economy would grow by almost \$12 billion.

*Clearing the Path: Galvanizing the Economic Impact of Women* provides strategies for removing these barriers, closing these gaps and ensuring women can fully participate in the economy and reap the fruits of their labor. Each tactic includes actionable strategies for policy makers, businesses and civic leaders alike to address the systems and structures

obstructing the path for women in Alabama. Two of these strategies are highlighted below.

**Close the gender pay gap** by strengthening the state's equal pay protections and enacting additional pay protections such as transparency in recruitment efforts such as posting salary and wage ranges and utilizing job applications that do not ask applicants to reveal prior wage and salary levels as well as increasing wages for Alabama workers by raising the wage floor for all workers.

**Pave the way for women to participate in the workforce** by increasing the supply of childcare; supporting

more women in board rooms and C-suites bring their unique skills and perspectives. An Alabama where, because of expanded access to health care and quality childcare, more women are earning a living, thriving wage and creating a brighter future for themselves and their families.

Women's Foundation of Alabama is working to build this vision for Alabama. And we are eager to partner with Alabama's municipal leaders. We know that the most effective solutions for a community reside within that community. And we acknowledge there isn't a one-size-fits-all approach to every issue in every locality in the state.

That's where you come in. Join us!

**First, use our research to drive internal conversations and decision making.** Our *Clearing the Path* and *Status of Women* research reports can be found on our website at [www.wfalabama.org](http://www.wfalabama.org). We made sure to include county-level data that will help you address barriers in your specific areas of the state.

**Second, target your giving.** Nationally, less than 1.9% of charitable giving directly benefits the lives of women and girls. Giving to public women's foundations like ours and organizations that explicitly serve women and girls is a straightforward way to make an impact.

**Finally, be a partner.** Lend your voice and advocacy to advancing issues that affect women. We host an annual advocacy fellowship, Women's Policy Institute, to bridge the gap between community and the legislative process. Our Fellows – 90 to date – are leading powerful local and state efforts to move our state forward on everything ranging from increasing representation of women on boards and commissions to prison birthing reform.

Whether you are in Tuskegee, Birmingham, Fairhope or any of Alabama's 464 municipalities, there are actionable steps you can take to help remove the barriers blocking women's economic potential. But it is not just about women. Closing the gender pay gap in Alabama adds \$22 billion to Alabama's economy. That benefits everyone. Join us in building stronger families, stronger communities and a stronger Alabama. ■

**There are actionable steps you can take to help remove the barriers blocking women's economic potential. Lend your voice and advocacy. Be a partner.**

childcare affordability and quality for families at all income levels; and prioritizing childcare in Alabama's economy and labor force policymaking as well as strengthening paid family and sick leave policies in the state's public and private sectors.

In Alabama, news headlines frequently tout the addition of thousands of new jobs to Alabama's economy. Yet, in cities and towns across the state, Main Street windows are lined with 'Now Hiring' signs. So, we ask the inevitable question: what happens when Alabama has more work than workers? At Women's Foundation of Alabama, we know the multi-billion-dollar solution lies within 52% of the state's population – women. We hope you will join us in taking actionable steps and leaning into your own spheres of influence to help us remove barriers, close gaps and ensure women can fully participate in Alabama's economy.

### Join the movement.

Take a moment and imagine an Alabama where more women are advocating and shaping policy that centers on the needs of 52 percent of the population. An Alabama where



*Rachel Bunning serves as Vice President, External Affairs for Women's Foundation of Alabama and leads their Montgomery office. Women's Foundation of Alabama is a community-driven foundation impacting the world around them by accelerating economic opportunity for women. WFA envisions a society where power and possibility are not limited by gender, race or place. Founded as a regional women's fund in 1996, Women's Foundation of Alabama is the state's only public women's foundation applying a gender lens to grantmaking, research and advocacy. Learn more at [www.wfalabama.org](http://www.wfalabama.org).*

# ALABAMA HUMANITIES ALLIANCE

## Bringing Expanded Grant Offerings and Smithsonian Exhibits to Communities Statewide

By Phillip Jordan • Communications Director • Alabama Humanities Alliance

In 2021, the Alabama Humanities Alliance (AHA) – the state’s primary funding source for public humanities programming – awarded 125 grants totaling more than \$1 million to cultural nonprofits, towns and community landmarks statewide. Why is AHA so committed to supporting the humanities in Alabama? Because the humanities bring neighbors and communities together. They ignite civic engagement. They inspire lifelong learning. And for cities and towns across Alabama, AHA-funded humanities projects can have a tremendous local impact – culturally *and* economically.

In Atmore, an AHA CARES Relief Grant enabled the Atmore Historical Society to “maintain, prepare and open a museum space that would not have opened without this grant funding,” said the Society’s Dana Vickrey. In Eufaula, another AHA CARES Relief Grant awarded during the pandemic “saved the Shorter Mansion,” according to the Eufaula Heritage Association’s Pam Snead. And in Fort Payne an Alabama Public Humanities Grant made possible a public event for locals and tourists alike to learn more about northeast Alabama’s Trail of Tears National Historic Trail. “I can’t say enough about how

helpful [AHA] was during this entire process,” said Annette F. Reynolds, director of Manitou Cave. “AHA really is working to expand public educational programming in the state of Alabama.”

### 2022: Additional Grant Opportunities; Simple Application Process

In 2022, AHA has updated its grantmaking guidelines to offer more funding opportunities and to make the application process as easy as possible. Updates include:

- **Larger grant awards** for all grant types: Up to **\$2,500** for Mini Grants, up to **\$10,000** for Major Grants and up to **\$15,000** for annual Media Grants.
- **More opportunities for first-time applicants** through now-monthly Mini Grants that no longer require preliminary applications *or* matching cost shares.
- **Revised, easy-to-follow guidelines** and a simplified application process.

AHA’s grants are also more versatile and valuable:

- Mini Grants can now be used for planning projects.
- Media Grants can be used for production team salaries.
- Scholar honoraria are no longer capped on any grant type.

Municipal leaders are encouraged to share these grant opportunities with libraries, archives, museums, historic sites, colleges and other cultural and community organizations in their towns. Funding for AHA grants comes from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Learn more at [alabamahumanities.org/grants](http://alabamahumanities.org/grants).

### Crossroads: Smithsonian exhibit is Alabama-bound

Another Smithsonian exhibit will tour Alabama in 2023-2024, thanks to AHA’s partnership with the Smithsonian’s Museum on Main Street program and the Smithsonian Institution’s Traveling Exhibition Service. *Crossroads: Change in Rural America* looks at the remarkable societal changes that have reshaped rural communities since the dawn of the 20th century – a century that dawned with 60 percent of Americans living in rural communities and closed with that figure at 17 percent.

*Crossroads* highlights how rural Americans have responded to a century-plus of change. It also offers small towns a chance to examine their own histories, identify inequities they’ve faced and celebrate what makes them unique.

The exhibit’s Alabama circuit will run from September 9, 2023, to June 23, 2024. Following a competitive application



An Elba resident chats with Bill Deutsch, Ph.D. (at right), a retired aquatic biologist at Auburn University and an AHA Water/Ways project scholar. Photo courtesy of AHA.

process, AHA has selected six communities to host *Crossroads* across the state:

- Blount County Memorial Museum (Oneonta)
- Lowndes Interpretive Center (White Hall)
- Triana Historical Society (Triana)
- Annie L. Awbrey Public Library (Roanoke)
- Dale County Council of Arts and Humanities (Ozark)
- Baldwin County Department of Archives and History (Bay Minette)

“We’re excited for this Smithsonian exhibit tour to spark conversations about our shared future,” said Laura C. Anderson, AHA’s director of partnerships and outcomes. “Engaging young people and students of all ages will be key as we explore, together, how rural Alabamians are shaping changes yet to come to their lives and communities.”

*Crossroads* is just the latest Smithsonian exhibit that AHA has brought to Alabama since 1997. Most recently, in 2021-2022, *Water/Ways* made a 268-day journey across five towns (Danville, Guntersville, Bessemer, Camden and Elba), highlighting the role that water plays in the history of our state and the everyday lives of Alabamians. ■

*Phillip Jordan is AHA’s communications director. Founded in 1974, the nonprofit Alabama Humanities Alliance is a state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities. Through its grantmaking and public programming, AHA connects Alabamians to impactful storytelling, lifelong learning and civic engagement – because the humanities can bring our communities together and help us all see each other as fully human. Learn more at [alabamahumanities.org](http://alabamahumanities.org).*

## AL Public Humanities Grants Annual Deadlines

### MINI GRANTS

First of each month: No preliminary applications necessary

### MEDIA GRANTS

- May 1: Annual application preliminary deadline
- June 1: Annual application final deadline

### MAJOR GRANTS

- February 15: Winter application preliminary deadline
- March 15: Winter application final deadline
- May 15: Spring application preliminary deadline
- June 15: Spring application final deadline
- August 15: Summer application preliminary deadline
- September 15: Summer application final deadline
- November 15: Fall application preliminary deadline
- December 15: Fall application final deadline

[www.alabamahumanities.org](http://www.alabamahumanities.org)

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# AU's Rural Health Project: A Collaborative Telehealth Model to Address Rural Healthcare Disparities

Dr. Linda Gibson-Young • Outreach Coordinator • Auburn University College of Nursing and Hollie C. Cost, Ph.D. • Assistant Vice President • University Outreach and Public Service • Auburn University



AUBURN

UNIVERSITY OUTREACH

Rural communities across the country face ongoing health disparities and, like many counties in Alabama, are designated as medically underserved (Rural Health Information Hub, 2021). Past efforts to address challenges to rural healthcare access have resulted in limited success in improving health outcomes. Therefore, multi-level approaches that integrate key elements for effective, sustainable solutions are needed. Increased risk factors in rural communities include an increase in the aging population, unhealthy behaviors (e.g., smoking, obesity, decreased physical activity), barriers to healthcare access, decreased prevention screening rates and environmental and occupational factors (Rural Health Information Hub, 2021).

Every county in Alabama faces shortages of licensed healthcare professionals, and only five critical access hospitals serve a population of 1,146,765. In 2018, 16.4% of adults in Alabama were unable to see a healthcare provider due to cost (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2018). Along with several other Southern states, Alabama exceeds the nation on many indicators of chronic illness and poor health (Rural Health Information Hub, 2021; Jackson et al., 2017). Across many national assessments of health, Alabama ranks near the bottom in health outcomes, health behaviors, and clinical care access and quality (United Health Foundation, 2021).

Patients who live in rural communities are at increased risk of poor health due to fewer resources, healthcare access and healthcare cost. Healthcare access is a growing concern among rural communities. Rural communities account for 20% of the American population, but only one-tenth of healthcare providers practice in rural settings. The lack of resources can be detrimental to the health of these communities. In a study conducted by Harvard University, 46% of these households reported they could not get



*Auburn University is piloting a model in collaboration with the OnMed® telehealth company to deliver healthcare experiences within rural communities.*

an appointment during the hours they needed, while 40% reported they could not find a doctor who would see them, and 39% reported they could not afford that health care. One in four (25%) report they felt the healthcare location was too far or too difficult to get to, while about one in eight (12%) report they could not find a healthcare provider who would take their health insurance. When primary care or acute health access is limited, the high cost resonates throughout the family, community and surrounding areas (NPR, Robert Wood Johnson & Harvard, 2020). Overall, 16.4% of adults in Alabama were unable to see a healthcare provider in 2018 due to cost. Access to healthcare is limited in rural regions with distance to nearest provider requiring up to 45-minute transportation time (Rural Health Information Hub, 2021).

Midway through 2020, with the coronavirus spreading rapidly throughout the U.S., the federal government declared a national emergency. Within a week, organizations across industries were

*continued page 40*

those with some knowledge and past association with the city. These people were then asked to list the first word or words that came to mind when they hear “Hartselle”. No descriptions, thoughts or phrases were needed, simply nouns that were thought of when Hartselle was mentioned.

In requesting input, the designer recommended we not use a social media blast since we would likely receive more nouns and suggestions than we could work with or properly handle. Therefore, emails, phone calls, texts and requests via social media messenger options went out to over 100 individuals and organizations from many walks of life and varying positions in and outside of our community. This included folks of all ages, local leaders in business and education, retirees, municipal officials, school system employees, civic club members, local church members and leaders and even people who no longer live in Hartselle. Each audience was covered as much as possible, with as much diversity as was possible. The correspondence requesting the nouns was sent out with a deadline to participate. A better response than was expected came in as many were excited and willing to help with this project. After the set deadline passed, the responses were recorded and tallied with the top five being shared with the designer. Following the designer’s advice, we were able to reach a good cross section and sampling of people who were willing to share their Hartselle nouns and he ultimately received a solid list from which he could work.

It was interesting but not surprising the total numbers for the top five nouns were very high, with many others having only one and maybe two suggestions for a particular noun. The top five were:

- Church/Faith (very close number for both)
- Family
- Community
- The letter “H”
- Hospitality

There were other nouns shared with the designer, but emphasis was placed on the top five.

From the beginning of the process the designer suggested, as did the architects, that something simple but strong be used. The desired outcome was to have Hartselle automatically coming to mind when someone sees the logo – such as



*Night shot of the new Hartselle municipal building. Photo by Iven Holt.*

the Nike swoosh or the Amazon and Under Armor logos. He went to work.

A couple of weeks later, and according to his contract, he shared 18 possible designs. We were tasked to choose the top three. He did a great job on all of them but the top three really stood out. The top three were also shared with others who participated in the original noun survey to ask for input.

To finish the task, the group had to choose one design. All agreed on the same design – and it was the recommended one from outside responses as well. As the process continued, changes were made as far as spacing, size of image, etc., to reach a final product. When the final design was placed on a rendering of the building, the choice was confirmed. The design was simple, strong, to the point and contains what, according to survey results, folks think of when Hartselle is mentioned.



Hartselle is a strong faith-based community with local churches working to support and strengthen faith, hope and love in the community. From Hartselle’s beginning in the 1870s, church and faith have been strong foundations from which the city has grown and prospered. Each house of worship is willing to share or lend a helping hand to not only their members but extending that same help and hospitality to those outside the church and to those who visit our hometown as well. Those in our churches support whatever might be needed.

The words and text from a church anthem come to mind: *Within these walls, let there be harmony; a common bond; a Spirit from above. And as Your children let us love each other as sisters and as brothers united by Your love. Within these walls, let there be refuge, a place of rest when doubts and trials form. And let us lift each other as we gather to find Your peace no matter how terrible the storm.*

The City is also made up of citizens with strong family ties, a sense of community and belonging, along with always being willing to help others. Those who call Hartselle home are always willing to reach out with a helping hand. We reach out to help those in need, whether it be our neighbors, friends, youth, seniors, civic clubs, schools, athletic teams or even a stranger down on their luck.

To simplify – within our borders, that which makes up our community of Hartselle (which surrounds the inside “H”), all who call Hartselle home know that they are part of a hometown that cares for each other, with each person having the ability to be a part of this strong community. Each person is part of something larger than themselves, but they make up an important piece of the community. Each person is also willing to reach out and over to help make sure all are important and have their needs met as much as possible, in good times and not so good times.

Hartselle is a family-friendly community with a sturdy foundation formed by those who left it better because of their time here. Those in our past and those who call Hartselle home now believe you need to leave your hometown better for future generations after you have departed – reaching out and reaching over, connected by our faith, our strong sense of community and wanting to be there for our neighbors in both good times and bad.

This visual update for the City of Hartselle can mean one thing or many things. Some see bold, strong, stable, linked or a foundation. Others will perceive evolving, expanding, fluid, open and one without borders. Many have commented they see faith, family, friendship, hospitality, closeness and even a handshake. Most importantly, however, the majority agrees that those words and nouns are Hartselle. Collectively, all these ideas and realistic qualities make up our great community. Although this simple but bold symbol can mean many different things to many different people [admirers], one thing is for sure, all of these ideas and qualities are what make up our great community and should make our citizens proud and thankful to call Hartselle home. ■



*A lifelong resident of Hartselle, Randy Garrison was first elected to the mayor’s office in 2016. A graduate of Athens State University, he was the publisher of the Hartselle Enquirer for 14 years. He is an active member of First United Methodist Church Hartselle, Hartselle Rotary Club and secretary of the Hartselle Kiwanis Club. He also serves on the boards of the Hartselle Alumni Association, Hartselle Historical Society, Educator Hall of Fame, Chamber of Commerce, Decatur Morgan County Community Free Clinic, North Alabama Regional Council of Governments and is Board Chair of the Decatur Metropolitan Planning Organization. He was appointed to the Alabama Municipal Insurance Corporation (AMIC) board of directors in 2020 and is the Vice Chair for the League’s Committee on Community and Economic Development.*



closing their doors. During this time, Auburn University faculty and administration identified the need to develop alternative service delivery models to impact the increasing healthcare needs of the citizens across rural Alabama. Based on our analysis, a model with telehealth at the center seemed to be a viable option. Unique to this service delivery model, project leadership will engage university students to support telehealth by providing health and nutrition education and activities to reduce health risks and support the wellness of community members. Our team, composed of academic partners and community partners, is working together to plan and test an innovative, healthcare equitable access model.

## Telehealth

Telehealth is an innovative method used to decrease access needs in response to the growing issues among rural populations. Utilizing remote patient assessment and monitoring, telehealth services allow patients and providers simpler access while providing benefits to traditional in-office visits. Benefits of telehealth include easier access, decreased disease exposure, and increased engagement from providers and patients. Over the past two years, the use of telehealth increased to decrease the spread of COVID-19.

Although telehealth has increased, telehealth is not new to the healthcare industry. Telehealth can be beneficial in managing chronic diseases where patients have limited access to care, such as patients who live in rural communities (CDC, 2021). Rural households reporting telehealth use express wide satisfaction with telehealth visits, as most (88%) report being satisfied with the advice or treatment they received during their most recent experience (NPR, Robert Wood Johnson & Harvard, 2020). The use of telehealth may be beneficial to decrease access barriers and prevent emergencies in the communities (Gajarawala & Pelkowski, 2021).

## Auburn University Rural Health Project - Outreach Model

As a land grant institution, Auburn University provides practical solutions to pressing societal problems. Our outreach mission leverages the value of our students, faculty, staff and partners to transform our research and scholarship efforts into products, methods and services that meet communities' most pressing needs. One urgent problem, particularly within rural areas of our state, is the lack of healthcare access necessary to reduce the large and growing burden of preventable chronic disease across Alabama. This fall, Auburn University is **introducing a novel approach to reaching populations in the rural environment by coupling telehealth with health and wellness activities and education.**

Auburn University is piloting a model in collaboration with the OnMed® telehealth company to deliver healthcare experiences within rural communities. OnMed® provides a self-contained telehealth station featuring strategic technological advancements that addresses barriers to care experienced within communities. This accessible and innovative healthcare option combines the state-of-the-art OnMed® telehealth station with hands-on wellness care provided through university faculty and students in health-related fields. This rural health initiative is launching to focus on testing, treatment, prevention and reduction of the spread of COVID-19 and other infectious diseases in collaboration with multiple disciplines, recognizing that individuals with chronic conditions who contract COVID-19 are at higher risk of complications and extended stays in hospitals (Hartman-Boyce, et al., 2020).

Our proposed model supports a holistic, client-centric health and wellness experience integrating state-of-the-art telehealth provider services and targeted clinical and education outreach programming. The OnMed® telehealth station provides users with an affordable, private and efficient experience by facilitating a real-time patient encounter with an Alabama licensed clinician in a virtual setting using diagnostic tools available for practitioner-guided self-use. Features of the station include:

- tools to measure basic vitals, such as height, weight and blood pressure
- thermal imaging to provide body temperature and diagnose infection
- readings of respiration and blood oxygen saturation
- the option to securely transmit results to the patient's primary care provider
- the ability to dispense prescription medications, provide paper prescriptions, and transmit electronic prescriptions to the pharmacy of the user's choice
- ultraviolet surface and air sanitization.

This telehealth station is designed to be physically placed in the community for healthcare providers to diagnose health problems and dispense prescription medications. The overall objective of this innovation is to facilitate patient connections with virtual healthcare providers (e.g., DO, MD, NP, PA) to deliver affordable, quality healthcare. The plan is to supplement and enhance existing medical services currently available. This innovation will offer extended health services for the rural populations.





# Chambers C O U N T Y

**STRENGTH WOVEN IN**

Supplemental to the services provided through the OnMed® telehealth station are education and outreach activities coordinated by faculty throughout Auburn University. Led by the Auburn University Outreach division, faculty members from Academic Effectiveness, Business, Education, Engineering, Human Sciences, Industrial and Graphic Design, Liberal Arts, Nursing, Pharmacy and Veterinary Medicine engaged in the conceptualization of this project. Being introduced in phases, students from Nursing, Nutrition, Pharmacy and Speech, Language, and Hearing will be among the first disciplines to provide health and wellness education and screenings to community members.

### **Chambers County Paves the Way**

After reviewing community capacity and health needs across the region, the Auburn University team elected to partner with Chambers County as the pilot site for this model. Data from the community are clear and emphasize high percentages with COVID-19, obesity (38% in Chambers County in 2018), hypertension (40%) or diabetes (16%) in this region. Individuals who experience an illness might suffer complications from the delay in treatment as they rush to healthcare facilities miles away. Specifically, obesity has been identified as increasing the risk of hospitalization and death for patients diagnosed with COVID-19 (Kompaniyets, Goodman, Belay et al., 2020). In the Chambers County City of LaFayette, the nearest emergency medical treatment facility is 24 miles away. In 2020, 12% of residents in Chambers County were uninsured, with a primary-care healthcare provider to patient ratio of 2,410:1 (University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute, 2022).

Importantly, Chambers County and the City of LaFayette offer an incredible capacity and desire to serve their citizens' healthcare needs. City administration, including Mayor Kenneth Vines, City Clerk Louis Davidson and Fire Chief Jim Doody as well as Chambers County Commission and Economic Development Authority representatives Sam Bradford, Debra Riley and Chris Busby, have been instrumental in facilitating and forging this partnership. Over the past year, members of the Auburn University/Chambers County/City of LaFayette team met weekly to design a model that will adequately address the community's most pressing health needs. Additionally, the team attended civic meetings and special

events to engage with citizens and secure a better understanding of population healthcare interests and desires.

Through these collaborative discussions with faculty, extension agents, alumni, community members and administration, the team decided to pilot this Rural Health Project through the development of a Chambers County Community Health and Wellness Center in the county seat of LaFayette by repurposing a vacated health clinic. In addition to the services provided through the OnMed® telehealth station, initial services provided within this rural-based clinic will include medication management, diabetes self-care education, speech and hearing screenings and nutrition education. Education regarding other high-risk factors will be provided to reduce the impact that COVID-19 has on the general population. Other services will be added as needs arise and personnel capacity increases. Importantly, this center will be open during hours when other clinics or similar programs are unavailable to the public.

As our collaborative team initiates this model, we will be exploring questions to enhance the services for Chambers County and develop a model that is sustainable and scalable to rural communities throughout the state. Specific questions of interest include:

1. What is the optimal use of the OnMed® health station to provide access to healthcare (day, nights and weekends) to a rural population in a location that has limited access to urgent and emergent care?
2. What information do the citizens of Chambers County need to find healthcare delivered in this manner acceptable?
3. Are there ways to improve the responsiveness of the OnMed® station? Are any changes/additions needed to the integrated diagnostic tools?
4. Will people seeking healthcare find the care provided at the OnMed® station convenient and a good value?
5. What additional services can Auburn University provide that will improve the quality of care and health throughout this rural community?

### **Forging Ahead**

The Auburn University Rural Health Project has abundant potential to foster collaborations among academic, community and healthcare partners to advance understanding of how to assess patient-centric factors that affect accessibility to cross-system healthcare. This scalable model will contribute to improvement in public health, individual health, rural health accessibility and



**City of LaFayette**  
**STRENGTH WOVEN IN**

sustainability. Importantly, this project should lead to increased public understanding of evidence-based strategies for managing health and increased public engagement with technology-based tools. Findings from this project will be used to advance healthcare and wellness promotion in this rural environment and could be scaled and expanded to include other rural Alabama counties and other colleges and universities across the state.

The Auburn University Rural Health Project – Chambers County initiative is funded through Chambers County, the City of LaFayette, Auburn University, BlueCross BlueShield of Alabama, Alfa Corporation and the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA).

To engage more deeply with this project, please visit [www.auburn.edu/outreach/ruralhealth/](http://www.auburn.edu/outreach/ruralhealth/) or contact project director Hollie Cost at [hollie.cost@auburn.edu](mailto:hollie.cost@auburn.edu). ■

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*Dr. Linda Gibson-Young has 20+ years’ experience as a dual-certified nurse educator and family nurse practitioner. She is active in scholarship and outreach with communities, families, and children in rural Alabama. Around Alabama, she works with Asthma Camp Eagle and TigerCHAT, an education-focused intervention in rural county schools across Alabama. As the Outreach Coordinator with Auburn University College of Nursing she links with the innovative team focused on linking health disparities and telehealth with this rural health project.*



*Hollie C. Cost, Ph.D., is the Assistant Vice President for University Outreach and Public Service at Auburn University. She was the mayor of the Montevallo, Alabama, from 2012 until 2020, beginning her civic service as a Montevallo city council member in 2004. She served as a professor of special education at the University of Montevallo from 2000-2020. Her current projects at Auburn University include remapping Alabama’s system of providing government identifications to individuals who are incarcerated and increasing healthcare access across rural Alabama. She is a graduate of Leadership Alabama XXVIII, is certified by Alabama League of Municipalities as an Advanced Municipal Official, serves on the boards of directors for the National Issues Forum Institute and the David Mathews Center for Civic Life and is a partner in Keys to the City Community Coaching firm.*

# Leveraging Funds from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law

Clarence Anthony • CEO/Executive Director • NLC

**W**e have a \$1.2 trillion opportunity on our hands in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. Billions of dollars are available for Alabama communities alone – but now it’s up to local leaders to ensure that their residents aren’t left out of this once-in-a-generation investment.

The Alabama League of Municipalities and the National League of Cities worked hard to secure this funding from Congress – an effort we couldn’t have achieved without the critical support of our 130 Alabama member cities, NLC’s largest contingent from a single state. As a result, today, more than ever, local governments in Alabama finally have the funds to build more resilient communities while increasing equity, creating good jobs and strengthening local economies.

Whether it’s rebuilding airports and railways or repairing water and sewer systems, this law touches every type of infrastructure out there. With so much flexibility and so many resources available, now is the time to get infrastructure projects done.

In Alabama, that means improving transportation and updating roadways to ensure the safety of everyone who drives on them. It means updating shipping infrastructure in places like the Port of Mobile, where upgrades will help drive economic development for the whole state. And it’s not just about roads and bridges – it means connecting rural towns and counties with high-speed internet to bring the digital marketplace to everyone and ensure children and families can attend online classes and work remotely.

This is nothing new for Alabama cities. The state is already prioritizing infrastructure investments – we’re seeing this in the use of its local governments’ American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) dollars. In **Jemison**, the city will spend over \$600,000 of its ARPA funds addressing long-standing sewer issues and improving water service. **Birmingham** plans to allocate over \$18 million of its funds to build out its public transportation network. In **Mobile**, the city is designating a significant portion of its ARPA funds to improve broadband infrastructure and close the digital divide.

Now we have another opportunity to leverage a new pot of money specifically designated to build stronger infrastructure that will make projects go further and last longer. As the former mayor of South Bay, Florida, I’ve seen firsthand how investing in infrastructure can improve people’s day-to-day lives. In many cases, money available in this law will go directly to your cities, towns and villages, meaning you, as local leaders and the authority on your own communities’ needs, will choose how to spend it.

*Clarence E. Anthony is the CEO and Executive Director of the National League of Cities, and previously served as the Mayor of South Bay, Florida.*

As Alabama cities embark on this process, remember that NLC is your partner on this journey – no matter how small your community is. We’re here to help you take advantage of these new federal resources to the fullest extent possible. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law offers nearly 400 grant opportunities for local governments that will open over the next two years – that’s a lot, and especially if you’re a local leader in a small town, that task can seem incredibly overwhelming.

NLC is here to serve you, and to ensure you have support in accessing this money so you can implement the projects that you know will meet the needs of your communities. Our new program that we’re launching in partnership with



**CITIES STRONG TOGETHER**

Bloomberg Philanthropies, the Local Infrastructure Hub, will bring together nonprofits, city networks around the country and policy experts to help your communities understand the various opportunities in these grants and develop competitive applications. And because we recognize that every community deserves the chance to improve its infrastructure, we’re specifically focusing on helping those small towns and mid-sized cities that have traditionally had fewer resources access these funds. NLC will be rolling out this program in the coming months, so look forward to more details from us at [www.nlc.org](http://www.nlc.org).

Larger municipalities with populations of 8,000 and above can check out NLC’s Federal Grant Navigation program, which uses data to help cities measure which areas of their communities can benefit most from both the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and ARPA, identify which grants will help them meet their needs and navigate the application process.

This is a new era for infrastructure – and this law offers a ripe opportunity to improve the ways we build our communities to last in the long run. Together, we can help make Alabama’s cities, towns and villages better places for everyone to live. ■





Creating Jobs. Keeping Character.

# Why MAIN STREET Matters

Mary Helmer Wirth, CMSM • President/State Coordinator • Main Street Alabama

I am truly blessed to have a job that I believe in and know that I can live my mother’s mantra of “leave it better than you found it” every day. Main Street is a 40-plus-year model for downtown neighborhood commercial district revitalization. Why does Main Street matter? Because a community’s central business district often accounts for as much as 30 percent of a town’s jobs and 40 percent of its tax base, or clearly has the potential to be a renewed economic driver for the city. However, it is more than an economic asset. It is a community’s crossroad – a place in our hearts and minds that evokes strong emotions and helps define our identity.

*Downtown is important because it’s the heart and soul of any community. If you don’t have a healthy downtown, you simply don’t have a healthy town.* – Ed McMahon Chair Emeritus, National Main Street Center Board of Directors

### A Movement of Community Changemakers – Main Street America

*Main Street empowers communities to set their own destinies. While revitalization is challenging work, the Main Street program offers a road-map for locally-owned, locally-driven prosperity. Across the country, thousands of communities have used the Main Street Approach to transform their economies, leverage local leadership, and improve overall quality of life.*

Over the years many approaches to revitalization, from urban renewal to paint-up and fix-up projects, have failed because they focused on just one or two problems rather than dealing with the full commercial district. The Main Street program’s approach to district revitalization has succeeded in thousands of towns and cities throughout the nation. Main Street Programs are more than having great events and making districts look better. At its core, Main Street is an **Economic Development** tool that:

- Enhances the tax base of a community
- Fosters entrepreneurship
- Builds community capacity
- Creates partnerships among key groups in a community

Today, Alabamians are looking at our downtowns not simply as places for memories but also as places for bold economic opportunity. New restaurants are coming to small towns; long time businesses are discovering new ways to thrive; and creative downtown events are breathing new life into once empty streets. Our communities are rediscovering that the uniqueness of our historic downtowns offer a new frontier for innovation, creativity, collaboration and economic prosperity.

In a few short years, Main Street Alabama has expanded to include small towns, cities and neighborhood commercial districts across the state in a network of volunteers, professionals and partners with simple goals: to provide training, networking, resources and educational opportunities to galvanize community leaders, merchants and citizens with tools necessary to help turn



*Lavish Coffee Bar and Boutique in Downtown Jasper utilized information from the Market Analysis to justify the coffee bar. Photo courtesy of Main Street Alabama.*

their downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts into powerful economic development engines.

Main Street Alabama’s approach inspires people young and old not only to give back to their community but also to come back to their hometowns – to live, to become entrepreneurs, to breathe new life into our downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts and, most importantly, to remember what is old can be new and thriving again. Main Street Alabama isn’t just about Building Better Downtowns – it is about making your hometown the best it can be.

### Expanding Statewide Reach; Becoming Main Street Designated

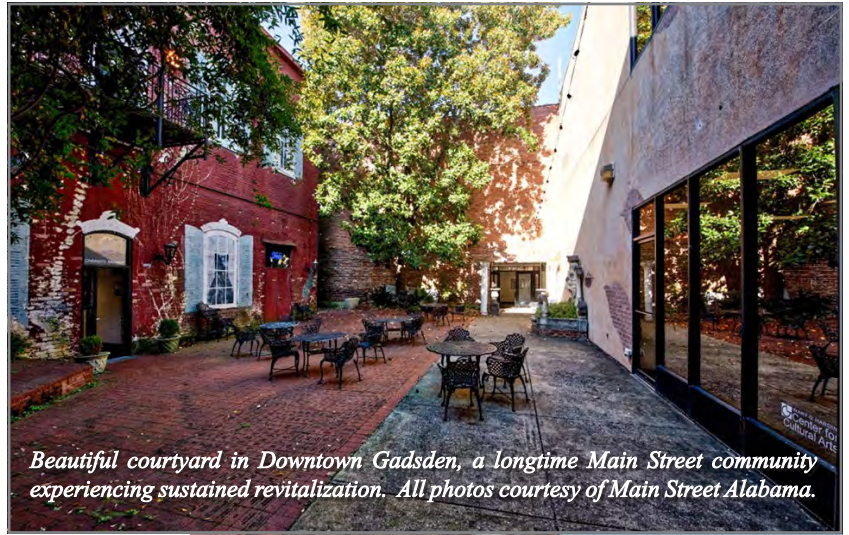
Our program continues to expand its statewide reach and selected four communities for Designation on June 1, 2022. The new communities are Demopolis, LaFayette, Leeds and Talladega and each began receiving technical services following the June 1 announcement.

Applying for Main Street Alabama designation takes time, dedication and commitment from several people in a community. The process begins with attending a new city application workshop in January and then deciding to move forward with a letter of intent to apply that shows both public and private support for the effort as well as need and capacity.

The application itself is meant to have a community take a good look at themselves from vacancies, absentee property owners, underutilized properties and the current economy in the downtown or neighborhood commercial district. It generally takes about two to three months to complete the application with a group of people working in concert. Applicants also make an in-person presentation to the selection committee – this is their opportunity to go beyond the written portion of the application and show the heart and soul of their community and why they feel it is time for them to have a designated Main Street program. It is a wonderful process of self-discovery.

In Demopolis (pop. 6,734), the group expressed a desire to capitalize on outdoor recreation. The Tombigbee and Black Warrior Rivers meet in Demopolis and is a tourist attraction year-round with the annual Chamber sponsored Christmas on the River drawing nearly 40,000. Main Street Demopolis wants to make downtown Demopolis a place that brings those tourists into the district by crafting a strong marketing presence, increasing the number of shopping and dining options and renovating the historic Marengo theater.

LaFayette’s, (pop. 2,684) goals during the designation process included an improved appearance of historic buildings and streetscapes, diversification of the retail mix, increased activity in the district after normal business hours and more community participation in the overall improvement of the city.



*Beautiful courtyard in Downtown Gadsden, a longtime Main Street community experiencing sustained revitalization. All photos courtesy of Main Street Alabama.*



*Historic 4th Avenue Business District – Birmingham.*



*Hubbard's Off Main – restaurant in downtown Oxford that opened after Oxford was designated.*

In their application, Leeds (pop. 12,324) expressed, “with the help of Main Street Alabama, we hope to truly flesh out the strong bones that already exist in our historic, charming downtown so that we can bring in jobs, increase foot traffic and capitalize on the community involvement that already exists. We also hope to achieve a facelift of our historic business district, including design details, branding, streamlining and beautifying the look of our downtown area, while maintaining the small-town charm.”

For Talladega (pop. 15,861), creating a district for all users is important to them. In their application, they stated, “we aspire to develop an economically-healthy pedestrian community where diverse individuals of all ages, including college students, children, elderly citizens and the deaf and blind come together to live, learn, play and enjoy life.”

Main Street Alabama began working immediately in these communities to provide board development, goal setting, work planning, market study with economic development strategies, targeted design assistance and training related to district development.

### More About Main Street Alabama

Main Street Alabama is a private non-profit and state coordinating program of Main Street America. The National Main Street Four Point Approach™ is a model that focuses work in four areas: organization, design, promotion and economic vitality with strategies unique to the community and based on market-based outcome. Setting achievable goals using community input and market data is critical to the revitalization of the district, but it’s also equally crucial to bring stakeholders to the table to work towards a common goal.

Demopolis, LaFayette, Leeds and Talladega join Alexander City, Anniston, Athens, Atmore, 4th Avenue Business District - Birmingham, Calera, Columbiana, Decatur, Dothan, Elba, Enterprise, Eufaula, Florence, Foley, Fort Payne, Gadsden, Headland, Heflin, Marion, Monroeville, Montevallo, Jasper, Opelika, Oxford, Scottsboro, South Huntsville, Wetumpka and Woodlawn district - Birmingham, in using Main Street’s comprehensive and incremental approach. Each Designated Community listed above reports their success by tracking their reinvestment statistics.

Main Street Alabama’s Designated Communities have reported 909 net new businesses, 2,984 net new jobs, \$688,329,640 in private investment, \$96,331,635 in public improvements and 139,177 volunteer hours in their districts collectively since June of 2014. For more information, visit [www.mainstreetalabama.org](http://www.mainstreetalabama.org). ■

*Mary is an experienced professional specializing in community and economic development strategies, relationship building, training and leadership development. Ten years as a local Main Street Director in Emporia, KS, forged a lifelong interest in district revitalization and community development. Emporia was the first Kansas community recognized with the prestigious Great American Main Street Award from the National Trust Main Street Center. In 2007, Mary became a coordinator for the Kansas Main Street Program and served in that capacity for 5 years. In 2012, she formed Helmer Consulting, LLC and worked with communities in several states on market understanding, economic development implementation strategies, leadership development, fundraising and more. Following a 10-year hiatus that left municipalities without resources to revitalize their downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts, Main Street Alabama was incorporated in 2010 as a 501(c)3 nonprofit to serve as the state coordinating Main Street program in Alabama. Mary was hired in 2013 as the President/State Coordinator to re-launch the statewide coordinating program. She can be reached at [mary@mainstreetalabama.org](mailto:mary@mainstreetalabama.org) or 205-910-8819.*



*Plant is one of nine new businesses in downtown Calera in the last two years. Photo courtesy of Main Street Alabama.*



Sumter, Washington and Wilcox counties. The office is located in Camden and ATRC is dedicated to improving the lives of everyone who lives in the region by connecting leaders and communities to resources to help them help themselves.

John Clyde Riggs is often referred to as “The Dean” of the Alabama Regional Commissions by his colleagues. He earned this title by serving as a mentor and big-picture-thinker in his long tenured role as Executive Director. One big picture idea he and other ATRC leaders had for their region was the creation of Black Belt Treasures. “Black Belt Treasures, located here in Camden, is one of the most successful initiatives that the ATRC has ever undertaken,” he said. “Begun in 2005, Blackbelt Treasures (BBT) markets and sells art, crafts and other items made in the Black Belt counties of Alabama. Since the beginning of BBT we have had visitors from all 50 States and 35 foreign countries come to the store in Camden and they have purchased well over a million dollars worth of items from our 300+ vendors. This venture is just one of the many creative ways a regional council can assist it’s region in economic and community development.”

### **Southeast Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission (SEARP&DC) – Scott Farmer, Executive Director**

The Southeast Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission (SEARP&DC) was created in 1969 under legislation passed by the Alabama State Legislature. The Commission is administered and governed by a group of 35 individuals from the seven member counties. These individuals act as liaisons for the citizens in their counties. SEARP&DC’s mission is to improve the quality of life for the citizens of Barbour, Coffee, Covington, Dale, Geneva, Henry and Houston counties and assist communities with a variety of services including Community and Economic Development, Head Start, Senior Aides and Wiregrass Transit. Scott Farmer shared that SEARP&DC has been delivering Head Start services since 1974, which is unique for a Regional Planning Commission. “Currently, we serve 316 children and families as part of our Head Start, Early Head Start, and Pre-K programs,” he said. “SEARP&DC is proud to provide services from birth to mature ages throughout our region.”

### **South Alabama Regional Planning Commission (SARPC) – John F. (Rickey) Rhodes, Executive Director**

South Alabama Regional Planning Commission (SARPC) is a locally controlled and organized instrument of local government in Southwestern Alabama. SARPC serves the three counties of Mobile, Baldwin and Escambia and 29 municipalities through the provision of programs and services in community development, employment and economic development, grant administration, senior and social services and transportation planning. Through its role as a resource for communication, coordination, advocacy, policy-making and technical assistance, SARPC helps facilitate the deliberation and resolution of common problems and issues of member government representatives, elected and non-profit officials and private-sector leaders throughout the South Alabama region.

SARPC was founded as the Mobile Regional Planning Commission in 1964 and in 1968 was expanded to include Baldwin and Escambia counties and was re-branded the South Alabama Regional Planning Commission. Rickey Rhodes said the SARPC staff, especially during COVID, has served the needs of his Region “with dedication and professionalism as we met the challenges and opportunities during this unprecedented time. I am blessed to work with a great Board and wonderful staff.”

### **Central Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission (CARPDC) – Greg Clark, Executive Director**

The Central Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission was established to provide technical assistance to local governments in the areas of planning and development. CARPDC partners with communities in Autauga, Elmore and Montgomery Counties to support local governments in the areas of Community and Economic Development, Planning, and Housing projects, policies and initiatives. CARPDC’s mission is to provide exemplary service to the local governments and citizens in the region through community and economic development programs and projects; extensive local, state and federal partnerships; and various engagement and funding opportunities.

CARPDC administers the Weatherization Program, and is proud of the role they have played in reducing energy cost for low-income, elderly, and disabled households throughout the region. Greg shared that “the ultimate goal of the Weatherization Program is to keep our clients warmer in the winter, cooler in the summer, and safe all year long, all at a reduced cost to them.”

### **Lee-Russell Council of Governments (LRCOG) – Lisa M. Sandt, Executive Director**

The Lee-Russell Council of Governments (LRCOG) is a regional planning and development organization with diverse services that impact citizens, local governments and businesses of Lee and Russell counties in countless ways. LRCOG operates these services for Lee and Russell counties and the cities of Opelika, Auburn and Phenix City. LRCOG manages programs, promotes collaborative efforts, develops grants and serves as a clearinghouse to acquire and administer federal, state and local funds to come to the Lee-Russell region. LRCOG administers 50 + programs and services for its member governments through the AAA, Planning and Economic Development department and Transit department. One example of LRCOG’s commitment to address the increasing needs facing seniors in the region was to partner with Dementia Friendly Alabama (DFA) and local schools to provide dementia education for school-aged children. “With 27,991 residents 65 or older in the region, and age being the greatest risk factor for dementia, LRCOG is committed to raising dementia awareness to diverse groups in our region,” said Lisa Sandt. “Due to COVID precautions still in place at the schools, our agency decided to create several Read-Aloud videos of the dementia friendly books. LRCOG’s Area Agency on Aging recorded agency staff, senior volunteers and our LRCOG

*continued page 50*

1959. This is perhaps the only area of the mayor's duties that authorizes payment of fees without council approval or input. However, if annual audits have been made for previous years and were accepted by the council, the mayor may not employ, without the consent of the council, an auditor to re-audit the books of the city for such years. AGO to Hon. E. R. Caldwell, June 15, 1965.

Upon completion of the audit or audit report, the mayor must make a full report, in writing and under oath to the council at its first meeting after the completion of the report. The audit report must be spread upon the minutes of the council. The mayor is required to employ an independent public accountant. There is no prohibition against employing the same accountant for successive years, although there are laws applicable to some municipalities prohibiting the hiring of the same auditors in some circumstances.

### What's the council's role in the audit?

If the council is not satisfied with the audit provided by the mayor's auditor, the council may order an additional audit to be made by the auditor of its choice, but this audit does not constitute the official audit required by law to be performed under the direction of the mayor.

Under Section 41-5A-12.1, Code of Alabama 1975, if the mayor of a municipality does not provide for an audit or examination to be conducted on the municipality as required by law, or when fraud or mismanagement of funds by the municipality is suspected, a majority of the members of the governing body of the municipality, by resolution, may submit a written request to the Department of Examiners of Public Accounts for an examination by the department of the books, records, vouchers, and accounts of the municipality. The department, pursuant to a cursory review, shall determine whether an in-depth audit by the department is necessary as required by law or by evidence of fraud or mismanagement, and, if warranted by the department, shall conduct a formal audit or examination during the six-month period following that determination.

### What's the role of the Department of Examiners of Public Accounts? Standards, reporting and penalties.

Act 2022-345, in addition to making changes to the frequency of some municipal audits, also makes it clear that the standards for municipal audits and audit reports must be conducted in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards in a format prescribed by the Department of Examiners of Public Accounts (Examiners or Department).

In 2019, the Legislature passed Act 2019-449, known as the Municipal Audit Accountability Act. This law is codified at Section 41-5A-12.1 of the Code of Alabama 1975 and gives the Examiners the authority to perform an audit of a municipality when fraud or mismanagement of funds is suspected. Further, it requires that upon receipt of the final report of the independent audit or examination, the municipality shall provide a copy of the report to the department within 60 days after completion. This information is then placed in a repository established by the Examiners. The department is also charged with providing, on a weekly basis, notice to the public of reports received; and, upon request, provide copies of reports received to the public.

It is important that municipalities comply with the provisions of 41-5A-12.1 because unlike in the past, when the law did not provide for penalties for municipal officials who failed to secure an audit, the law now provides that if a municipality fails to comply with the reporting requirements, the Department has the authority to assess financial penalties up to \$250 per week against municipal officials or municipal councils for failure or refusal to perform audits or submit audits requested by the Department. These penalties are assessed against individuals personally.

### Further questions?

Please contact the League Legal Department at 334-262-2566 ([www.almonline.org](http://www.almonline.org)) or the Department of Examiners of Public Accounts ([www.examiners.alabama.gov](http://www.examiners.alabama.gov)) if you have any questions regarding the requirements for municipal audits. ■

*Lori joined the League's legal department in 2001, bringing with her a solid background in local government issues after practicing law in Montgomery, Alabama, where her primary clients were county officials. In addition, she gained in-depth experience working with the state legislature while serving as a legislative analyst for the Alabama Legislative Reference Service for two years. Lori presently serves as the League's General Counsel and is responsible for advising municipal officials and employees from over 400 member cities and towns. She also works closely with the League's state and federal legislative agenda and is a frequent speaker on issues relating to municipal law in Alabama. Originally from Las Cruces, New Mexico, Lori received a bachelor of science degree from Auburn University's College of Engineering in Textile Management and Technology in 1992 and then returned to New Mexico and earned her law degree from the University of New Mexico School of Law in 1996. She is licensed to practice law in Alabama, New Mexico and Colorado. Additionally, she is a member of the International Municipal Lawyers Association (IMLA), the Alabama Association of Municipal Attorneys (AAMA) and the American Bar Association.*





annual reduction in the percent of the tax until the tax would be repealed. The bill would also provide that any occupational license tax levied by any municipality would not apply to any person performing an occupation in the police jurisdiction of the municipality or on any property annexed into the municipality after January 1, 2021. The bill would have also prohibited any municipality from levying a new occupational license tax or increasing any existing occupational license tax. **ALM opposed this legislation, and we appreciate our membership 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.**

## Other Legislation Engaged by League Advocacy Team

Act Number 2022 – 425 by Senator Orr does the following:

- makes the now voluntary Municipal Court Annual Survey compiled by the Administrative Office of Courts (AOC) mandatory for all municipal courts
- if a municipal court fails to respond within 60 days of due date, the court forfeits municipal fees and fines until it complies with the reporting. The forfeited fees go to AOC.
- clarifies that municipalities currently using a third-party software provider may continue to do so
- allows municipalities that do not currently have a reporting system to choose either a third-party software provider OR use the state's system known as alacourt
- requires all software providers interface with the state's system at no cost to the municipality

**The League appreciates the House and Senate sponsors (Representative Chestnut and Senator Orr) as well as our membership for working diligently this session to come to a compromise that is fiscally responsible while ensuring transparency and accountability. We especially thank Representative Faulkner and the municipal clerks for preserving the municipal courts' rights as it pertains to their selection of a third-party software provider.**

Act Number 2022 – 419, carried by Senator Gudger and Representative Givan, provides that only 10 percent of a municipality's budget may come from fines and penalties generated from traffic tickets. It also provides that excess funds will be distributed to the Crime Victims' Compensation Fund and the Fair Trial Tax Fund and would provide for the disbursement. **The League worked closely with the bill sponsors and several stakeholders to ensure that the final legislation had minimal impact on cities and towns.**

Act Number 2022 – 372, carried by Senator Chesteen and Representative Paul Lee, does the following:

- As written, the legislation would have preempted out of jurisdiction rental and leasing businesses from having to purchase a business license.
- Currently, municipalities treat out of jurisdiction rental and leasing businesses just as they would a business within the jurisdiction.
- This means that all rental and leasing transactions qualify as having to purchase a business license, regardless of the dollar amount spent within that jurisdiction.
- Under current law, any out of jurisdiction business that delivers products or services into a municipality must purchase a business license of \$100 if the sales exceed \$10,000, but below \$75,000.
- The out of jurisdiction business would be treated the same as a business located within the jurisdiction once sales in the jurisdiction exceed \$75,000.

**The League worked diligently with the bill sponsors and stakeholders to amend the current law to treat rental and leasing transactions the same as sales transactions.**

Act Number 2022 – 428, carried by Senator Orr and Representative Kiel, prohibits a public official or public employee from expending public funds to advocate in favor of or against statewide and local ballot measures. **The League worked with the bill sponsors and several stakeholders to have an amendment added to the bill which states that nothing shall prohibit a municipality from expending public funds to hold a referendum election authorized by the municipal governmental body as provided by law nor prohibit municipal officials or employees from advocating in favor of or against the underlying purpose of the referendum.**

Thank you, again, to our members and stakeholders for working with the League's Advocacy team this session to ensure that Alabama's communities are a place where citizens want to live, work, play and prosper, and where businesses want to invest. ■

*Kayla was born in New Brockton, Alabama. She received her Associate of Arts degree at Enterprise State Community College in 2011 and her B.S. degree in journalism from Faulkner University in 2013. Prior to joining the Alabama League of Municipalities,*



*Kayla served as the Communications Specialist to Governor Robert Bentley, Press Secretary to Alabama's Secretary of State John Merrill and Communications Director for VOICES for Alabama's Children. Kayla currently serves as ALM's Director of External Affairs where she works to promote League legislative positions through the development and implementation of grassroots campaigns and specific advocacy strategies as well as year-round communications efforts by the League. In addition, Kayla provides direct lobbying support when the Legislature is in session and works to cultivate additional strategic partners while overseeing current League partners and stakeholders. In 2017 she was named one of "30 Women Who Shape the State" by AL.com and Birmingham Magazine and in 2019 Kayla received the Faulkner University Young Alumna Award for the College of Arts and Sciences English, Humanities, Music, Great Books Honors Program. She is a 2021 Leadership Montgomery Torchbearers graduate.*

Board Chair reading the dementia friendly books aloud. I'm extremely proud of the impact this program is having on our most deserving residents.”

### **North Central Alabama Regional Council of Governments (NARCOG) – Robby Cantrell, Executive Director**

NARCOG is an organization dedicated to improving the quality of life for individuals and the livability of communities within Cullman, Lawrence and Morgan counties by connecting families to programs and services that help older adults and disabled individuals. NARCOG connects regional and community leaders, organizations and businesses to resources that create more vibrant and livable communities. Originally created in 1966 as the North Central Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission, NARCOG was re-established with its new name on November 1, 1971. This re-establishment was done through an inter-local agreement by and between Cullman County, Lawrence County, Morgan County, the City of Cullman, the City of Decatur, the City of Hartselle and the City of Moulton. Currently, the agreement consists of the same three County Commissions who then select members of the Board of Directors to represent all the local governments – three counties, eight cities and 15 towns, as well as the broad economic interests of the area. Robby Cantrell said two areas of great interest for NARCOG's region, and the entire state, are outdoor recreation and tourism. “We all saw how important being able to connect to nature was during the pandemic,” he said. “The Regional Councils play an important role in ensuring that everyone, regardless of age, location or income, can find a park, trail or playground to enjoy throughout our beautiful state!”

### **Top of Alabama Regional Council of Governments (TARCOG) – Michelle Gilliam Jordan, Executive Director**

Established by a local initiative in 1968, the Top of Alabama Regional Council of Governments (TARCOG), where I am honored to serve as Executive Director, aims to identify and address common regional issues, opportunities and challenges throughout DeKalb, Jackson, Limestone, Madison and Marshall counties. Local governments recognized that in order to address issues and concerns facing the region adequately and comprehensively, they must work together in a collaborative manner.

TARCOG helps 46 member governments improve the quality

of life for the region's more than 700,000 residents. The Council does this by obtaining funding for local government assistance; coordinating local governments' responses to regional issues; and providing a wide range of services to the region's governments and residents. TARCOG helps member governments work together to address issues best solved cooperatively rather than independently and also provides services and technical assistance to different communities that are unable to provide their own personnel due to funding issues. The services are in three program areas: Aging, Economic Development and Planning.

### **More About AARC**

I am proud that all 12 of the Regional Commissions facilitate important conversations with leaders at every level across our state. We allow elected officials and citizens to “think outside of their city or county limits” and collaborate in ways that make our state the best it can be for all of our residents.”

The mission of the AARC is “to expand and strengthen the capabilities of Regional Councils to serve local governments and the citizens of Alabama.” The AARC promotes this mission through many activities. Once a year, the directors of the regional councils meet in a workshop forum to identify issues affecting all the regions and to formulate objectives that enhance and promote economic, community and social improvements for the citizens in their regions, and, collectively, for the citizens of the State of Alabama.

Under the umbrella of the AARC, the regional councils are also able to undertake and coordinate statewide planning and economic development initiatives that are of statewide consequence. Examples of these statewide projects include the Human Services Coordinated Transportation Plan and the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. Additionally, the AARC hosts a training conference each year that offers informative track-specific work sessions and general sessions. This annual conference provides opportunities for local leaders to share information and ideas and has been a successful initiative in generating regional solutions to local and statewide issues.

**To learn more about AARC or any of the 12 Councils, visit [alarc.org](http://alarc.org).** Information and a link to each Council can be found under the “About” tab on the home page. We have been serving Alabama for more than 50 years and look forward to continued collaboration throughout our great state! ■



*Michelle Gilliam Jordan is the Executive Director of the Top of Alabama Regional Council of Governments (TARCOG) in Huntsville, Alabama, a role she has held since June 2019. She has worked as an Urban and Regional Planner in North Alabama for more than 25 years, having served as the Planning Director for the City of Huntsville and the City of Decatur, and as a Planner for the City of Madison. Michelle was inducted into the American Institute of Certified Planners College of Fellows (FAICP) in 2020, and is a member of the American Planning Association and the DesignAlabama Board of Directors.*



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