

Summer 2024 Volume 82, Issue 1

The Alabama MUNICIPAL Journal

Official publication of the Alabama League of Municipalities



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



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In this Issue:

Executive Director's Report	5	ALM Launches Live Locally Alabama Campaign	32
Leadership Perspective		The League Wishes Todd McCarley a Happy Retirement ...	34
One-On-One with President Mark Saliba	6	What You Need to Know about Stormwater - How It Works, How Waterways are Impacted by Land Use and How It Relates to Flooding, Water Quality and More	36
Vice President Sherry Sullivan	9	Alabama's Winning Streak: How Strategic Investments and New Policies are Shaping the State's Economic Future	39
Legal Viewpoint: A Moment in Your Term: Changes in Municipal Election Laws Since the 2020 Election	11	Empowering Alabama's Childcare Infrastructure: A Legislative Leap Forward	42
Alabama Municipal Official Training Act - Q&A	14	NLC City Summit in November - Register Soon!	44
EDA Spotlight: Someplace Special: Scottsboro Shares EDA Experience	18	Workshop Addresses Alabama's Ongoing Need for Affordable Housing	45
ACE Spotlight: Montevallo Preserves its History, Embraces the Future and Has a Heart for the Arts	21	Upcoming League Training Opportunities	51
Review of the 2024 Legislative Session	24		
American Rescue Plan Act - Important Deadlines	27		
Adam Kilpatrick Joins the League Team	29		
2024 Fall Law Conference Registration	29		



6



14



21



32

On the Cover:

Live Locally Alabama is a new quality-of-life campaign championed by local officials across the state to ensure every Alabamian has the opportunity to lead a fulfilling life. Living locally is more than a choice — it is a commitment to support Alabama. Let us build a brighter future together! Discover how you can get involved on page 32.

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ALM Celebrates Milestones Achieved Over Summer and Welcomes Fall Activities

Gregory D. Cochran • Executive Director

Following a successful convention, the ALM team has worked diligently to deliver intentional resources and tools to our membership to ensure our cities and towns are continuously prepared to build vibrant communities. In August and September, we were very proud to host our annual congressional luncheons in every district and were pleased with great turnouts. The team has also been active with regional and national conferences, visiting with our contemporaries from around the southeast and nation, in an effort to discover what resources they are developing for their members and how they can be of value for our members.

This is how we discovered the Municipal Intercept Services (MIS) program. In 2014, the Alabama Legislature enacted an amendment allowing municipalities and counties to collect delinquent debts owed to them by collecting this debt from an individual's state tax refund. In 2015, ALM formed MIS as its clearinghouse entity to act as a conduit between participating Alabama municipalities and the Alabama Department of Revenue. Since 2016, we have intercepted and disbursed over \$31.8 million in funds to participating municipalities. If you are interested in learning more about this effective debt recovery program, I strongly encourage you to reach out to Richard Buttenshaw, ALM director of financial services, at rbuttenshaw@almonline.org.

In other exciting news, our organization celebrated the 30th anniversary of the Certified Municipal Official (CMO) program on September 22. We have had over 5,200 municipal officials participate in this training program since 1994, and we are thrilled 120 officials are set to graduate with their basic, advanced or emeritus certifications at the Municipal Leadership Institute (MLI) on October 30 - November 1. Additionally, we will recognize 15 communities with a Certified Municipality Achievement

Award. This is an annual CMO award that recognizes cities and towns where the mayor and all councilmembers have earned at least the basic designation of Certified Municipal Official thereby distinguishing them as a Certified Municipality.

Because of the success and value these trainings provide for municipal officials, we were able to lead the effort to pass the Alabama Municipal Official Training Act during the 2024 Regular Legislative Session. We appreciate Sen. Jabo Waggoner and Rep. Jim Hill for their partnership with us to sponsor this legislation, and we especially thank Gov. Kay Ivey for signing it into law. **This act will take effect on January 1, 2025.** Please turn to page 14 to learn more about the training requirements.

Speaking of 2025 – a majority of municipal elections are right around the corner. Our legal team, led by Rob Johnston, has put together a thorough elections update on page 11 along with other resources to ensure everyone is adequately prepared as we head into August elections in 2025.

In other news, ALM Deputy Director Kayla Bass and Communications Director Lori Johns spearheaded the launch of a new quality-of-life campaign called Live Locally Alabama. The goal of the Live Locally Alabama campaign is to increase public awareness about the importance of local government and to encourage civic engagement. Lori, Karl Franklin, Caroline Carter (intern) and a third-party strategic communications firm have prepared a host of resources for our members to utilize via our website at <https://almonline.org/LiveLocallyAlabama.aspx>. Learn how you can participate on page 32.

It is imperative that once you access these materials, you partner with our organization to share this message with your citizens and state leaders at civic clubs, chamber meetings and other public forums. It will take **all of us** working in unison to change the narrative in our communities and at the state house.

We appreciate each of you and your commitment to your community and our association. ■

Peace be with you,

Gregory D. Cochran, CAE



Leadership Perspective

Mayor Mark Saliba • Dothan • ALM President



One-On-One with President Mark Saliba

Why did you run for mayor?

I think the decision to run for mayor came from a former mayor that had come to me and asked about running. Twenty-five years ago, my father served as mayor for two terms in Dothan. I felt a strong sense of wanting to get back into the community. When my father would be asked why he did it, he would always say it's to give back to the community that has given me so much, and that inspired me to want to be a part of that.

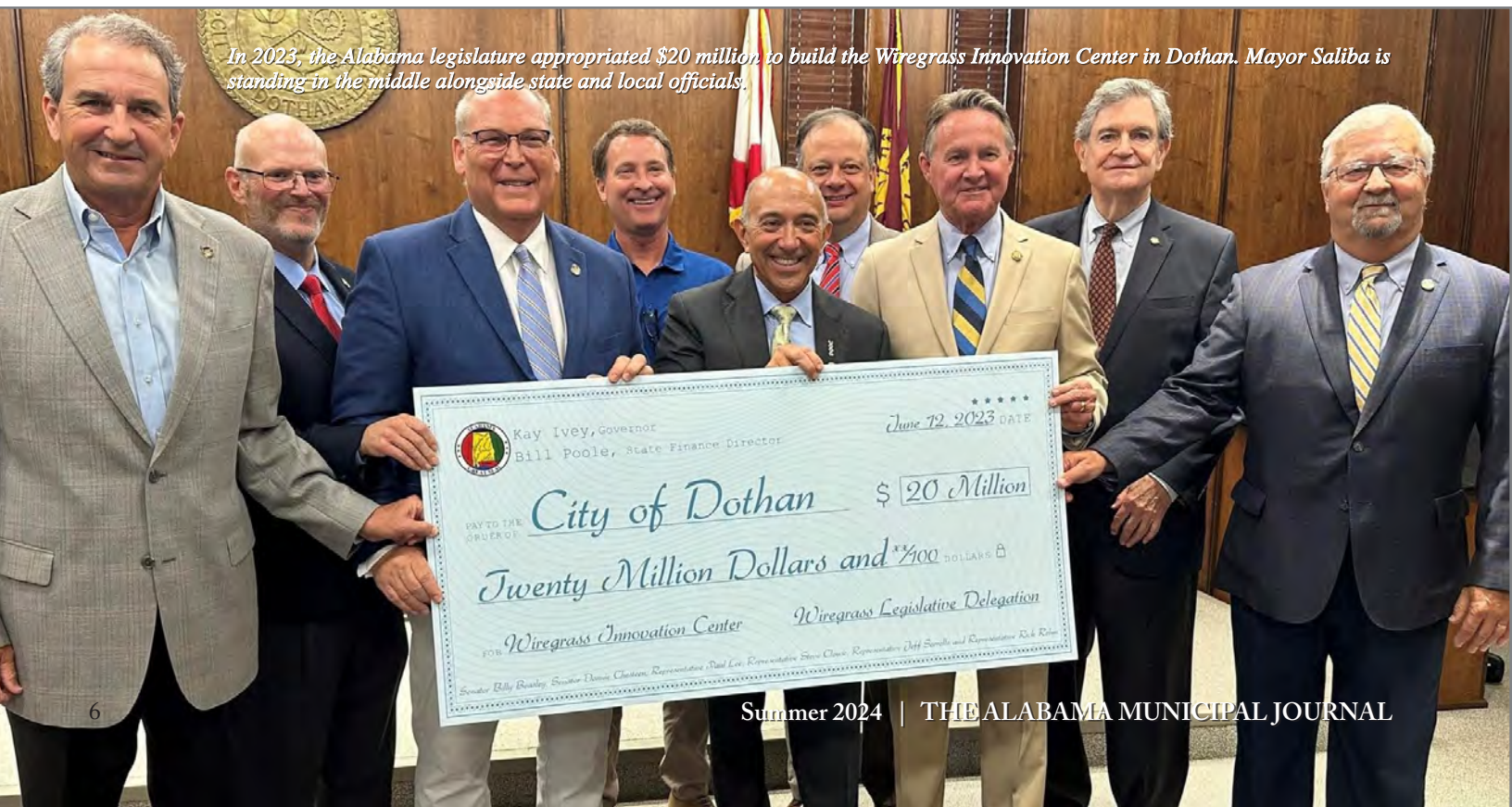
How long have you been mayor, and what did you do before?

I have been mayor since 2017 and am proudly serving my second term. Before being elected, I spent most of my life in residential construction, which is a business I loved being in. Ironically, I think it prepared me for my service in municipal government as an elected official because of knowing all the ins and outs of infrastructure and the needs municipalities and those in the industry have.

Why did you run for president of ALM?

I am a huge association guy, and I love being involved on a team where you have a common goal that you're all working toward. I think part of the reason that I have been a member of the League is the fact that you have over 465 cities and towns working together as the voice of local government in the state of Alabama. It's great to be a part of that and to learn what works and what doesn't work from other cities and towns. It's been an honor and a blessing for me to be a part of something this big.

In 2023, the Alabama legislature appropriated \$20 million to build the Wiregrass Innovation Center in Dothan. Mayor Saliba is standing in the middle alongside state and local officials.



What are your goals for your term as president?

It is important to intentionally and proactively address the issues our communities are facing. Through collaboration with the ALM community, our legislative partners and state leaders, I aim to communicate this message before and during the next legislative session in February 2025. I encourage my fellow mayors and councilmembers to join me in working together as a unified voice to be prepared for the 2025 legislative cycle. I have no doubt that ALM can be the example of diplomacy in the state.

What have your first few months as president been like?

The advantage to serving as vice president last year is that it helped me to get acclimated to the schedule of activities expected in the role of president. So far, we have hit the ground running. We had a great summer board meeting, congressional luncheons, launch for our new Live Locally Alabama campaign and have standing committee meetings coming up. I am looking forward to a great year with the League!

What have you found to be most valuable about the CMO program?

One of the great things about being a part of any association, especially the League, is the opportunities to learn and to hear various speakers at seminars and conferences. Through the Certified Municipal Official program, I have learned so much about the revitalization of our downtown, placemaking and how we individually deal with topics like sales taxes and revenues compared to other municipalities. I'm proud I have earned the basic and advanced certifications in the CMO program and will continue to achieve as much as I possibly can.

What do you like most about your city?

Our slogan is "Love Dothan," and I think it really speaks to loving your home and feeling like it's family. What I like most, I think for me, is understanding where our city has been, where it's come to and where we're growing. I love Dothan! We are a bigger city, but a small city. Even though we're the eighth largest city in the state, we still feel like a small town because everybody knows everyone, and we care about each other. All that compassion for each other really means a lot to me.

What kind of short term and long term projects are you working on in Dothan?

The major projects we are working on are centered around our downtown revitalization City Center Project. We have kicked off phase one with a pre and post event space addition and renovations to our 100-year-old opera house, to include an outdoor amphitheater space next to it. We have also broken ground on



our 45,000-square-foot Wiregrass Innovation Center, which will house HudsonAlpha Wiregrass and many other tenants focused on education, research and economic development. We have plans under way for construction to begin soon on a new city hall, as well as several residential, commercial, retail and restaurant projects downtown. In the short term, there are always ongoing road infrastructure, sewer, water and emergency response projects.

What do you do to connect with local leaders in the Wiregrass and with other big cities?

The city of Dothan's geographic location in the southeast corner of Alabama has us surrounded by many smaller towns and communities. As an economic hub for the Wiregrass, we are connected with our neighboring communities in a number of ways, such as job creation, economic development, medical care, retail and restaurants. Regionalism with Dothan and our neighbors is very important to us. We connect quarterly with mayors in Houston and surrounding counties. As the eighth largest city in the state, I am a part of the Big 10 Mayors that meet quarterly to continue to discuss our common issues. I am grateful to be a part of ALM and the Big 10 Mayors.

What changes have you seen in today's construction and housing industry since you first got started?

There, of course, have been many changes over the last forty years in the residential construction and housing industry, especially since the recession in 2008. There has been a decrease in the number of residential contractors, and an increase in the size of larger companies in the state and the nation. The volume seems to be king. Workforce development has always been a challenge for residential construction. There have been demographic and socioeconomic changes in the workforce as well. In the past, we pushed for more people to go to college, instead of trades, and now we see a shortage of men and women in trades.

The biggest challenge for small communities is the issues they face with residential construction and housing. I have spoken to many smaller towns and cities that are trying to increase housing and residential construction and are not sure where and how to start. Financing and capital for smaller builders is challenging. Locating state and federal funding for housing is just now getting more attention. As a member and former president of the Homebuilders Association of Alabama, I hope to connect our associations, along with others, to have discussions on ways we can help cities and towns maneuver these challenges.

Can you describe what the Innovate Alabama Network is, and how it has helped Dothan?

The Innovate Alabama Network serves as a resource that connects communities, nonprofits and educational institutions across the state that are fostering innovation. We as a city have recognized that there is a focus on innovation and entrepreneurship in Alabama. We found that aligning ourselves with state initiatives allows us to have the ability to be more successful in acquiring funding and help from the state and other entities such as Innovate Alabama, the Economic Development Partnership of Alabama, the Business Council of Alabama and other entities that provide resources and funding to our city. I would strongly recommend other communities get involved and learn more about programs like what Innovate Alabama provides. ■



The city of Dothan hosted a ribbon-cutting ceremony for a new fire station on July 12, 2024.



Mayor Saliba and the city broke ground on phase one of their City Center Project on Jan. 16, 2024.

Watch President Saliba's interview at the League by scanning the QR code.



Leadership Perspective

Mayor Sherry Sullivan • Fairhope • ALM Vice President



It is with great excitement that I have been elected to serve as vice president of the Alabama League of Municipalities. I look forward to working together with the board and members throughout the state to serve the needs of your cities and towns. Before being nominated to serve in this capacity, I was a member of the League's Board of Directors, the League's Committee on State and Federal Legislation and the Alabama Municipal Funding Corporation's Board of Directors. I also currently serve on the American Public Power Association's Policy Makers Council and the executive board of Electric Cities of Alabama.

My journey with the Alabama League of Municipalities began in 2000. I knew then that the League could be beneficial to any community willing to take advantage of its many resources. Little did I know that 24 years later, I would be a mayor and serve as vice president of ALM.

With over 16 years of service dedicated to Fairhope, I am proud to be serving in my first term as mayor. Fairhope continues to be a desirable place to live, and I am filled with excitement to see all the wonderful things happening throughout the state of Alabama. Whether you are a small town or one of our biggest cities, I believe we all have something to learn from each other. Every community has their strengths and that special something that makes it the place folks want to call home. Communities must identify their strengths and build on those special qualities.

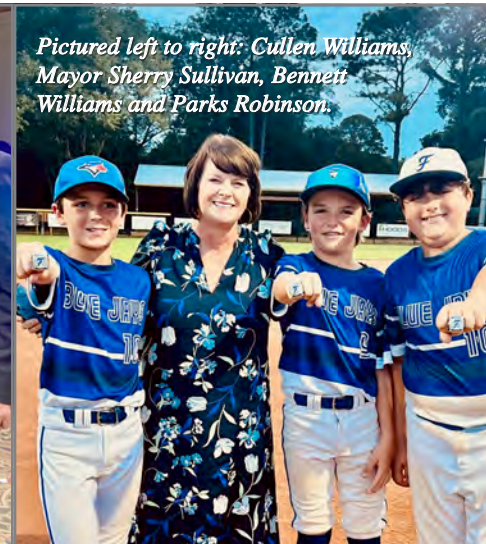
We know that local government is the best government, and it directly impacts the people. It is time to share this message so folks understand what our mayors and councilmembers do at the local level. This is why I am so excited about our new Live Locally Alabama quality-of-life campaign, which will help us do that. I urge you to utilize the tools the League is providing and participate in this initiative. We are the ones who manage infrastructure projects to build and

improve our communities. We develop budgets when there are insufficient funds and strategies to retain staffing to maintain services. We create social programs and maintain public safety, all while attending ribbon cuttings, little league games and more.

No matter the size, geographic location or budget of your town or city, remember you are doing great things that benefit your residents and visitors. Sometimes, these things can be overlooked, but you are making a positive difference in the lives of Alabama residents. I look forward to being a small part of that and continuing to watch Alabama grow. If I can be of assistance to you, do not hesitate to reach out. Wishing you all the best! ■



Pictured left to right: Loxley Mayor Richard Teal, Foley Mayor Ralph Hellmich, Mayor Sherry Sullivan and Congressman Jerry Carl.



Pictured left to right: Cullen Williams, Mayor Sherry Sullivan, Bennett Williams and Parks Robinson.



The city of Fairhope broke ground on the Flying Creek Nature Preserve on June 25, 2024. Pictured left to right: Richard Johnson, Nicole Love, Jimmy Conyers, Jack Burrell, Mayor Sherry Sullivan, ADCNR Commissioner Chris Blankenship, Gary Gover, Katie Bolton, Michelle Melton, Cyrus Dorsey and Justin Hammers.

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By Rob Johnston, Director of Legal Services, ALM

A Moment in Your Term: Changes in Municipal Election Laws Since the 2020 Election

“The days are long, but the years are short.”

This quote is often given as advice to new parents upon the birth or adoption of children. The same advice can be applied to elected municipal officials. In some ways, it may seem like the term that began with the 2020 municipal election, held during the COVID-19 pandemic, was a lifetime ago. In other ways, the time may seem short; however, while you were focused on things like the municipal budget, economic development, zoning, road maintenance, staffing and other ways to keep your town moving forward, there have been several changes to municipal election laws that will directly impact your next municipal elections. Let us review some of the key changes.

Municipal General Election Moved to 2025

Many wonder why they have an extra year for this elected term. A legislative act in 2021 changed Section 11-46-21 of the Alabama Code, which sets the time of elections for most municipalities. Act 2021-157 moved the year of Alabama’s municipal elections so they “shall be held on the fourth Tuesday in August 2025 and quadrennially thereafter...”

While a few municipalities follow a local act that sets their elections at a different time, most municipalities in Alabama

follow Section 11-46-21. **This means for most municipalities, the next municipal general election will take place on August 26, 2025.** Runoff elections, if necessary, will take place on September 23, 2025. Municipal officials who are elected will take municipal office on November 3, 2025, at the council’s organizational session. The purpose of the act was to relieve the burden of election resources required for both municipal elections and the federal presidential election during a short time span.

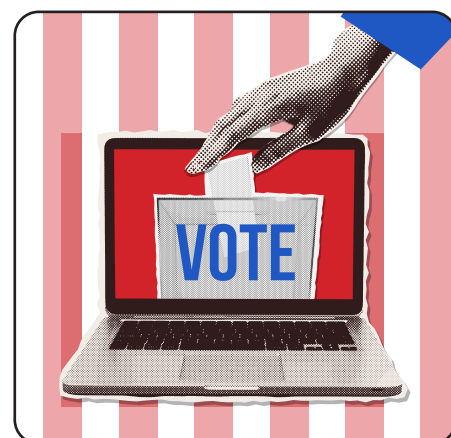
After the 2025 elections, municipal elections will take place *every four years*.

Municipal Runoff Elections Now Occur Four Weeks After the General Election

In 2021 the Alabama Legislature also passed a law that shortened the time between the municipal general election and the runoff election. Prior to 2021, runoff elections were held six weeks after the general election. According to Act 2021-164, runoff elections now occur four weeks after the general election.

A New Requirement to File Certificates of Municipal Election

In addition to changing the runoff election to four weeks after the general election, Act 2021-164 added a



filing requirement for municipalities after its candidates are elected. Once an election is canvassed, the act requires municipalities to file, within 10 days from the canvassing date, certificates of its election to the probate judge in the county where it is located, the secretary of state and the Alabama League of Municipalities. This act will enable the public and the League a way to know a municipality's elected officials, and for the League, a way to reach out and include them in League events.

More Time to Apply for an Absentee Ballot

Another 2021 legislative act revised the timeframe for applying to vote by an absentee ballot. Act 2021-364 provided a few days closer to the election to apply for an absentee ballot. In elections prior to 2021, a voter was required to submit an application for an absentee ballot to the municipal clerk no later than 10 days prior to the election. This act now requires absentee applications to be received *by mail* no less than seven days prior to the election. Absentee applications delivered *by hand* must be received by the clerk no less than five days prior to the election.



Changes in Campaign Finance Laws for Municipal Candidates

★ Municipal Candidates Now Must File FCPA Forms Electronically with the Alabama Secretary of State

In the 2021 Regular Legislative Session, Act 2021-314 changed a portion of the campaign finance laws, commonly referred to as the Fair Campaign Practices Act (FCPA), that directly impacts municipal candidates. The act changed the filing procedure so that, commencing with the 2024 municipal election cycle, all campaign committees must now file *electronically* with the Alabama secretary of state. Prior to the change, municipal candidates were required to file with their county probate judge. FCPA forms are no longer filed with probate judges, but instead, they are now electronically filed with the secretary of state.

★ Municipal Candidates Only File FCPA Forms if They Raise or Spend Over \$1,000

In the 2024 Regular Legislative Session, Act 2024-104 changed a different portion of the FCPA, regarding municipal candidates. This act provides that: "A candidate running for office is exempt from filing requirements of Sections 17-5-4 and 17-5-8, Code of Alabama 1975, unless and until the candidate receives contributions or makes expenditures in excess of one thousand dollars (\$1,000)."

In other words, since June 1, 2024, municipal candidates are *not* required to file an Appointment of Principal Campaign Committee form or any monthly or weekly campaign disclosure reports after they qualify with their municipal clerk, until the candidate raises or spends more than \$1,000. This act relieves the filing burden for many municipal candidates who do not raise or spend \$1,000.

While this may relieve the burden for filing FCPA forms, it is important to note that candidates must still file a Statement of Economic Interests form with the Alabama Ethics Commission.

Candidates may begin receiving and spending money 12 months prior to the August 26, 2025, municipal general election. If a candidate raises or spends more than \$1,000, he or she must file electronically with the secretary of state as soon as he or she meets the threshold amount. Campaign finance reports can be filed electronically on the secretary of state's website at <https://www.sos.alabama.gov/alabama-votes/media/campaign-finance-reports>. Scan the QR code above to access it now.



★ New Crimes and Offenses Regarding Elections

The 2024 Regular Legislative Session produced two laws addressing criminal actions and elections. Act 2024-341 increased penalties for a crime committed against an election official that is motivated by the individual's role as an election official. Act 2024-349 criminalizes distributing materially deceptive media in an attempt to influence an upcoming election. The act also authorizes an ability to seek permanent injunctive relief against anyone who distributes materially deceptive media in an attempt to influence an upcoming election. ■

In an effort to help you prepare for the 2025 municipal election cycle, the League's Legal Department has developed an **Elections Calendar**; scan the QR code below to view it. We are also working on an **Elections Manual**, which will be shared and published on our website in the coming months. As your municipality works through the municipal election process, please do not hesitate to reach out to the League's Legal Department so that we can assist you.





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Alabama Municipal Official Training Act - Q&A

On May 3, 2024, Gov. Kay Ivey signed the Alabama Municipal Official Training Act (“Training Act”) into law. The Alabama League of Municipalities (ALM) drafted the legislation, in partnership with sponsors Sen. Jabo Waggoner and Rep. Jim Hill, to support communities by requiring Alabama municipal officials to complete mandatory training. This training will better position local officials to understand core subjects necessary to maintain their operations, abide by state laws and help their communities prosper. The League has developed the following list of questions and answers to assist municipal leaders in learning more about the act, which takes effect January 1, 2025. While this is a brief overview, the League’s legal team is available to assist members with questions during regular business hours. Any updates will be distributed through the League’s usual communication methods.

What is the training hour requirement mandated by the Training Act?

The Training Act requires that all mayors and councilmembers complete 10 hours of training annually during their first term in office beginning January 1, 2025, regardless of whether the official has previously served as a mayor or

councilmember. Each mayor and councilmember who has successfully completed and received their basic Certified Municipal Official (CMO) certification from the Alabama League of Municipalities is exempt from the 10-hour annual requirement. However, starting January 1, 2025, those that are CMO certified still must complete five hours of training annually. Additionally, all elected local officials who have completed the 40-hour training requirement in their first term, are required to complete five hours of training annually each year thereafter. In general, 40 hours of total training is required in a local official’s first term beginning January 1, 2025, and if re-elected, only 20 hours per term is required.

What are the requirements for a municipal official to complete and receive their basic Certified Municipal Official (CMO) certification?

Forty credit hours are required for the basic Certified Municipal Official (CMO) certification. Twenty core curriculum credit hours and 20 basic credit hours are required. These trainings can be completed at in-person ALM events or through online training on the ALM website. Online training

Members of the League joined Gov. Kay Ivey for the ceremonial signing of the Alabama Municipal Official Training Act on May 8, 2024 in the state capitol. Pictured left to right: Baker Allen, Cindy Price, Kayla Bass, Sen. Jabo Waggoner, Gov. Ivey, Rep. Jim Hill, Greg Cochran, Bryan Parker, Rob Johnston and Kaleb Beck.



provides high quality power point and audio presentations with a required test submission with a score of 70% or above to earn one credit hour. Basic credit hours are earned by attending ALM events throughout the year. ALM events offer approximately 30 or more credit hours each year. Any official who has completed and received their basic CMO certification prior to January 1, 2025, will be exempt from the 40-hour training requirement in their first term; however, they are still mandated by the Training Act to obtain 20-hours of training per term. For more information regarding basic CMO certification scan the QR code or visit www.almonline.org/Assets/Files/BasicCertification.pdf.



Can municipal officials begin to work toward their CMO basic certification requirements before January 1, 2025?

There are several opportunities for officials to earn credit hours needed for basic certification before January 1, 2025. Upcoming events qualifying for credit hours are the ALM Municipal Leadership Institute, NLC City Summit and online training. Officials are encouraged to sign into the ALM member portal and review their CMO transcript and register for training.

How do municipal officials find out how many credit hours they have earned in the CMO Program?

Officials can review and print CMO transcripts by signing into the ALM member portal. If you do not have a username and password, contact the ALM office at 334-262-2566 for assistance.

How does a municipal official enroll in the CMO Program?

Program enrollment is automatic when an official registers and attends an event approved for CMO credit. Then the official must submit an online credit form to receive credit. Another way an official can enroll in CMO is by registering and completing one of the many online training courses available on ALM's website.

How can a municipal official satisfy the mandated training requirement?

The bulk of the training hours will have to be satisfied by attending League sponsored or endorsed training conferences or events including, but not limited to, the ALM Convention, ALM Municipal Leadership Institute, ALM Advocacy Day, ALM orientation sessions, ALM CMO regional training, ALM congressional luncheons, NLC Congressional City Conference and NLC City Summit. However, officials who are not able to attend the in-person conferences and training can satisfy the training requirements by attending and completing online training offered by the League. To receive credit for online training, officials must take and submit the test on the materials presented once prompted at the end of the webinar. A score of 70% or above is required to earn credit.

What subjects satisfy the mandated training requirement?

The following subjects are required to be covered by the Training Act: the general powers of municipalities; duties of the mayor and council; ethics; annexations; authority to expend municipal funds; parliamentary procedure; conflicts of interests; legislative advocacy; liability; public records; police and planning jurisdiction; public works bidding; revenue sources; the competitive bid law; budgeting; audit requirements; the public purpose doctrine; the Open Meetings Act; municipal boards and zoning. The Training Act also gives the League discretion to recommend topics that will satisfy the mandated training. Any training provided shall be developed in consultation with the Alabama Ethics Commission, the attorney general's office, and the Alabama Department of Examiners of Public Accounts.

Is the official's municipality required to pay for the training?

Yes. The Training Act requires that the municipality reimburse any mayor or councilmember for any reasonable expenses incurred as a result of receiving the required training. However, the League recommends that officials obtain prior approval from the council, as a body, prior to attending any training, even virtual training. A municipal council has the authority to mandate that a portion of the hours required to satisfy the training requirement be virtual to cut down on costs.

What is the cost for the training?

The League will provide annual training as cost efficiently as possible; on average, training costs less than \$50 an hour, pending economic conditions. Members may consider looking for supplemental funding opportunities in their municipality such as community partnerships and foundations.

Does the Training Act sanction those officials who do not complete the mandated training?

No. While there is no penalty provision for participating, the Training Act helps local officials stay up-to-date with best practices for operating a local government and abreast of any state policy changes and reporting requirements. Attending this training also proves to citizens their municipal leaders' commitment to maintaining and improving their quality of life.

How do officials access registration for in-person ALM events and online training that qualify for training credit hours?

Registering for an ALM event or online training is simple. ALM in-person event registration is promoted across ALM social media platforms, emails and its website. Access the online training registration page by clicking on Online Training under the Training and Resources tab on the ALM website, www.almonline.org/OnlineTraining, or by signing into the member portal and click on the events tab. After registering for online training, look for a registration confirmation email containing the training video link and the test link. Scan the QR code to visit the online training page.



How does earning the designation Certified Municipal Official or Certified Municipality help my city or town?

A certified municipality designation recognizes and commends cities and towns where the mayor and all



councilmembers have earned the professional designation of Certified Municipal Official thereby distinguishing the municipality as a Certified Municipality. This designation represents the mayor and all councilmembers have completed a minimum of 40 credit hours of formal training on municipal government conducted or endorsed by the Alabama League of Municipalities in compliance with the Alabama Municipal Official Training Act. Learn more by scanning the QR code at right or visiting www.almonline.org/CertifiedMunicipalAchievementAward.



Where can an official find more information on the CMO Program and Alabama Municipal Official Training Act?

Scan the QR codes or visit the links below.

CMO Program →
almonline.org/CMOProgram



←
**Alabama Municipal
Official Training Act**

arc-sos.state.al.us/ucp/L1538405.AI1.pdf





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Someplace Special: Scottsboro Shares EDA Experience

Lori Jhons • Communications Director • ALM

With a tagline of “Someplace Special,” any passersby, tourist or family looking for a new home would be enticed to visit! These two words reflect the warm feeling the citizens of Scottsboro experience as they return home from a long day at work, from an outing on the lake or a hike on the Singing River Trail amidst incredible views. The city of Scottsboro is nestled at the tail end of the Appalachian Mountains, adjacent to over 30 miles of the Tennessee River, in the northeastern part of Alabama. With all the mountains, lakes and rivers surrounding Scottsboro, it is no wonder it adopted the slogan “Where the mountains meet the lakes.”

The city, founded in 1870, serves as the county seat for Jackson County and has more than 15,000 residents. Other draws to the area include the famous Unclaimed Baggage Center, which is the nation’s only retailer of lost luggage; bass fishing on “The Miracle Mile,” a stretch of the Tennessee River in Scottsboro; Goose Pond Colony Resort, a beautiful municipally-owned resort complete with two golf courses, a marina and lodging; Payne’s Sandwich Shop and Soda Fountain, which is believed to be Alabama’s oldest soda fountain (founded in 1869); the Scottsboro Boys Museum, a living memorial commemorating the Scottsboro Nine and part of the Alabama Civil Rights Trail; and the Scottsboro-Jackson Heritage Center.

Scottsboro even hosts a special tradition in their downtown courthouse square called Trade Day for local craftsmen, food vendors and anyone who wants to come sell or trade their items. When it first started in 1902, it was originally called “First Monday” because it was held on the first Monday of the month. Trade Day is now observed on the Saturday before the first Monday of each month and brings in hundreds of visitors to take part in each month’s different theme.

In 2022, Scottsboro was selected for the first class of the Alabama League of Municipalities’ Economic Development Academy (EDA) program.

EDA was developed in conjunction with the Alabama Community College System with the goal to educate and engage



The Shops of Scottsboro features a Publix, Pet Depot and TJ Maxx.



municipal officials on the essential elements and phases of economic development while highlighting their vital role in economic initiatives and projects within their communities.

Scottsboro Mayor Jim McCamy, who was elected in August of 2020, shared why the city applied for the program.

“We had a strong collective desire among our municipal leadership to grow our community by recruiting and supporting businesses and industries that could create good paying jobs and provide a diverse economic base,” Mayor McCamy said. “The academy provided us the opportunity to participate and learn as a group.”

The Scottsboro EDA team consisted of Mayor McCamy, City Council President Richard Bailey, City Councilmember Mike Ashburn, Jackson County Economic Development Authority President Nathan Lee and Scottsboro Industrial Development Board Treasurer Roy Light.

Over the course of a year, the team attended four one-day training sessions and heard from several speakers on a variety of topics ranging from retail, grants, industrial development, creating deals using resources and incentives, and networking with state and federal agencies.

Mayor McCamy shared, “I enjoyed the opportunity to listen and learn from economic development experts and listening to thoughts, ideas, goals and diverse approaches from community leaders from other cities.”

As part of the class, Scottsboro participated in an economic vitality survey. Their survey revealed many positives about their community. They have beautiful mountains and lakes with outstanding recreational opportunities; strong infrastructure with a four-lane U.S. highway and two state highways intersecting in Scottsboro; both rail and water access throughout the city and county; county-wide broadband gigabit service; and solid, expanding municipal general aviation airport facilities.

In addition to these attributes, the city is fortunate to have access to two industrial parks. The Scottsboro Industrial Park, established in 1985, consists of 295 acres. It is considered one of the state’s oldest advantage sites. The second one, Jackson County Industrial Park, is a 311-acre site located in the adjoining town of Hollywood. It opened in 2002 as a joint venture between the Jackson County Commission and the city of Scottsboro.

Like many communities around the state, the city is facing a workforce shortage for various job openings. Scottsboro and Jackson County officials are working together to counter this problem with the recent opening of the Kevin Dukes Career and Innovation Academy for high school skills development and training. This \$31 million institution is located on 30 acres at the Jackson County Industrial Park.

At the time of its opening in October 2023, Jackson County Superintendent Jason Davidson said, “This state-of-the-art facility currently offers 11 career tech programs including welding technology, precision machine technology, electrical



City officials cut the ribbon on Jim Olyniec Scottsboro Pickleball Complex in March 2024. Pictured left to right: Donnie Wood, Councilmember Mike Ashburn, Mayor Jim McCamy, Jim Olyniec, Council President Richard Bailey and Councilmember Donna Fredrick.



Mayor Jim McCamy welcomed Chick-fil-A to Scottsboro at a grand opening ceremony on September 12, 2023.



technology, HVAC-R, diesel technology, collision repair, building construction, masonry, health science, cosmetology and additive/CAD manufacturing. Culinary and cybersecurity are also being added to the list of programs that students can pursue. Many of our CTE programs have dual enrollment opportunities available with our partnerships with local community colleges.”

As this project points out, Scottsboro has access to an excellent community college, Northeast Alabama Community College, which is located nearby in Rainsville. The college also has a few satellite educational spaces in Scottsboro that are focused on skills development for specific local industrial jobs.

On the negative side, the city’s economic vitality survey metrics determined their community lacked affordable housing; had a limited variety of restaurants; needed to attract industries that provide higher paying jobs; and had a shortage of entertainment venues for young people.

These results helped the Scottsboro EDA team to develop a strategic plan focused on improving each of those areas in addition to enhancing their efforts to promote the Singing River Trail, provide more hiking and biking trails and increase wayfinding signage.

Mayor McCamy said, “EDA reinforced the necessity to be more patient and listen fully to what others have to offer and share, the importance of setting meaningful, achievable goals and the importance of attention to details.”

Since graduating from the EDA program in November 2022, the city has had major success attracting a Publix, TJ Maxx, Jersey Mike’s Subs, Tidal Wave Car Wash, Mavis Tires & Brakes, Chick-fil-A, Whataburger, Dunkin Donuts and Five Below.

On the housing front, they have made significant progress. They recently opened 56 apartments on Crawford Road’s Timbers at Galloway. DR Horton is constructing 116 single-family homes on Phillips Drive and Lambert Contracting is currently building 70 single-family homes. Additionally, clearing is scheduled to begin in October for another 150 single-family home development in Stonebridge.

Furthermore, the city was able to make headway on increasing high paying jobs.

In August 2023, Huntsville-based CFD Research broke ground on a new 19,000-square-foot facility at its Engineering Test Center in the city’s section of Jackson County Industrial Park. This \$5.2 million project is their third expansion in four years. It will expand their capability to provide services; perform technology development; enable increased test capacity; and will provide 32 new, high paying engineering jobs. The ribbon cutting is scheduled for October 28.

At the Scottsboro Industrial Park, they have two more projects in the works. Johns Manville Corporation is conducting a \$21.8 million expansion of new manufacturing and related operations equipment at their existing facility. The Scottsboro Industrial Development Board is also expecting to announce soon a \$61.6 million project that will create 60 new jobs.

In addition, the city is in the process of finalizing an incentive package to secure a nationally recognized craft store.

“As one of our first EDA participants, the League is proud to see the city of Scottsboro excelling in recruiting new businesses, expanding old ones and finding timely solutions to issues within their community,” Bryan Parker, ALM director of governmental affairs and EDA program facilitator, said. “I always enjoy hearing updates from members of the Scottsboro team and providing advice and assistance in our continued partnership.”

Scottsboro’s outlined success is a testament to their commitment to their citizens and their application of EDA knowledge and resources. “Someplace Special” looks even more special! ■



CFD Research broke ground on a new facility at its Engineering Test Center in August 2023. Pictured left to right: U.S. Rep. Dale Strong, Jackson County Commission Chair Bill Nance, Scottsboro Mayor Jim McCamy, CFD Research President and CEO Sameer Singhal, State Sen. Steve Livingston, and CFD Research Director of Test and Evaluation Adam Elliott.

Scottsboro Industrial Park, established in 1985, consists of 295 acres.

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



ACE Spotlight: Montevallo Preserves its History, Embraces the Future and Has a Heart for the Arts



By Lori Jhons • Communications Director • ALM

The city of Montevallo, incorporated in 1848, is located about 40 miles south of Birmingham in southwestern Shelby County. Its name is believed to be derived from a geographical reference to being a little mountain in a valley.

The city has tried to maintain its original charm, character and natural beauty as it continues to grow.

With a population of more than 7,000, Montevallo is home to the state's only public liberal arts college. The University of Montevallo was originally founded in 1896 as the Alabama Girl's Industrial School. The campus is just a short walk from Montevallo's Main Street and historic downtown. The university enrolls approximately 3,000 students annually and is ranked in the top 10 Best Public Regional Universities in the South by the U.S. News and World Report. Montevallo's campus holds a fascinating feature, a star marker designates the approximate geographic center of the state. ★

Montevallo is also known for the American Village, a nationally pioneering classroom of American history and civics. This education center has engaged and inspired over a half million students from Alabama and surrounding states since opening in 1999. It is one of the few places in the nation with a full-sized replica of The White House's Oval Office. In addition to serving its primary role, the American Village hosts an annual Festival of Tulips. During its eighth celebration this spring, thousands of visitors strolled through a field of 100,000 tulips in all the colors of the rainbow.

★ Furthermore, the Alabama National Cemetery is within a short walk from the institution. This 479-acre cemetery serves as the final resting place for thousands of our nation's heroes and is a lasting tribute to the military service and sacrifice of those willing to lay down their lives for our freedom.

In 2009, city officials began formulating a strategic plan for economic development, infrastructure improvements and revitalization of its historic downtown. The plan also focused on parks and recreation, with activities for youth and seniors. Montevallo's leadership was confident the Alabama Communities of Excellence (ACE) program was the best course of action to achieve these goals.

The ACE program, established in 2002, offers select small cities, with populations ranging from 2,000 to 18,000, assistance with resources and tools to help them promote long-term growth and prosperity. ACE understands the uniqueness of each community, recognizing that every city has different assets, values, concerns and priorities. In 2022, ACE became an official program of the Alabama League of Municipalities.

Participating in the ACE program, Montevallo leadership set its sights on completing the comprehensive, three-phase approach to establish long-term goals: assessment; leadership development and strategic planning; and implementation and comprehensive planning. In 2012, Montevallo was proud to earn the distinction of becoming an Alabama Community of Excellence and has continued to move in a positive direction.

Hollie Cost, the former mayor of Montevallo, said at the time, "ACE provided us with a platform to consolidate our vision as a community. They brought us together to develop a strategic plan, and then we had direction. We had a real path for moving forward, so we were able to clearly define our goals as a community."

Montevallo hosts its annual Festival of Tulips in February at the American Village.

The American Village is a nationally pioneering classroom of American history and civics.



Throughout its more than 200-year history, Montevallo has been a community that has continued to move forward and adapt to changes without sacrificing its historic character. In fact, 73 homes and buildings in Montevallo have earned their place on the National Historic Register. Some, such as Aldrich Coal Mine Museum and Farrington Hall, have become tourist attractions. Being a part of the ACE program laid the foundation for the city to form several partnerships and initiatives over the years to enhance its quality of life.

During the time the city was working on becoming an ACE community, it formed the Montevallo Development Cooperative District (MDCD), which is a unique partnership between the city of Montevallo, Shelby County and the University of Montevallo. The MDCD was created in 2012, under the Capital Improvement Cooperative Districts Section of the Alabama Code, to facilitate capital improvements by acquisition, construction and installation throughout the city. MDCD serves as an example of cooperation among public entities to leverage resources and maximize tax dollars.

Since its creation, MDCD has invested \$11 million with over \$6 million coming from the city and the remainder approximately evenly split between the University and Shelby County. The MDCD's only continual source of funding comes from an appropriation of 90% of the city's 2011 1% sales tax. The funding has supported the downtown revitalization project; building a National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) women's softball field and a regulation track, field and lacrosse facility at the University of Montevallo; revitalization of downtown buildings such as the University of Montevallo on Main, which turned an old dilapidated building into classrooms for college students; restroom improvements to Dailey Park, Orr Park and Stephens Park; sidewalk and crosswalk improvements on Highway 25; and resurfacing of the walking track in Orr Park.

In 2016, Main Street Alabama designated Montevallo as a Main Street community. Montevallo Main Street is dedicated to strengthening the historic downtown district by encouraging local spending and tourism through promotion of the arts, education, entertainment, outdoor recreation and historic preservation; enhancing existing businesses; and attracting new development, thereby creating an inviting place where everyone can thrive.



The University of Montevallo enrolls approximately 3,000 students annually.



Montevallo's Main Street Façade Grant Program is offered annually to businesses in the Main Street District.

In addition to its rich history and beautiful parks, Montevallo is a destination community for art to flourish. Art is not only located throughout the city but also on the University of Montevallo campus. Visitors enjoy the public art trails of sculptures, murals and galleries, like the Pendleton Fire Hydrant Art Trail. Tinglewood Trail in Orr Park offers over 50 whimsical cedar tree carvings created by local artist Tim Tingle. Every year Montevallo

celebrates its art with an art festival in April and the Tinglewood Festival and Art Walk in the fall. Last year, the city welcomed approximately 8,000 visitors and hundreds of vendors to the Tinglewood Festival – the largest ever!

Montevallo is also investing in its future with programs such as Impact Montevallo and the Montevallo Junior City Council (MJCC). Impact Montevallo is a collaborative partnership of concerned citizens raising awareness of youth substance use issues. The program educates youth and adults to take action to prevent youth substance use. Impact Montevallo works closely and partners with student resource officers (SROs) and the MJCC, a group of eighth through twelfth graders that promotes youth involvement in Montevallo through community outreach. The MJCC serves as the voice of the youth in Montevallo.

The city's current mayor, Rusty Nix, said, "With all the progress we have made, we're continuing on a positive path. I would highly recommend the ACE program to cities that are interested in finding collaborative partners, funding mechanisms and partnerships. The ACE program will assist your city on how to achieve those goals." ■

Photos, top to bottom:

Montevallo has over 25 murals throughout the city and on the University of Montevallo campus.

Montevallo Main Street hosted its inaugural Dia de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) Festival on November 2, 2023.

Pendleton Hydrant Parade Trail is a self-guided, 2.6 mile walking adventure throughout Montevallo's Main Street District

Tinglewood Loop in Orr Park boasts more than 50 whimsical tree carvings by local artist Tim Tingle.





Review of the 2024 Legislative Session

Baker Allen • Director of Policy and Research • ALM
Bryan Parker • Director of Governmental Affairs • ALM

The 2024 Alabama Legislative Session began on February 6, which also started the second year of the quadrennium. While every year, the Alabama Legislature can only meet 30 times within 105 calendar days; this year is best defined by its busyness. Normally, the Legislature meets twice a week with a committee day on Wednesday; however, this year's session took a different approach. The first half of this session consisted of three-day work weeks. An extra day a week allows a bill to pass in a week and a half as opposed to two and a half weeks.

Fortunately, the Alabama League of Municipalities has developed a strong legislative strategy to ensure, even during the most hectic periods of the session, that we stay ahead of issues impacting our members. Our bill review team, which consists of the advocacy and legal departments, reviews every bill for intended and unintended impacts on municipalities. Additionally, we utilize some of the most industry revered technology to prepare and organize our approach while in session. Last but not least, the advocacy team builds strong relationships with legislators through various meetings and engagements.

Legislators care about how a bill will affect the communities in their district. A two-minute phone call with a legislator can make the implications of a bill become real. On behalf of the League, we thank those who took the time to heed our call to action by making phone calls, coming to Montgomery and providing timely information for our research and advocacy efforts. Your actions truly made the difference.

2024 Regular Legislative Session

Since the League's inception in 1935, our organization has proudly served as the primary legislative advocate for Alabama's communities during every session, and this year proved to be no different!

The Alabama Legislature adjourned sine die from the 2024 Regular Session on May 9 using all 30 of their available legislative days. Both budgets, the Education Trust Fund and the General Fund, were signed by Gov. Kay Ivey. The Legislature passed a \$3.4 billion General Fund budget and a \$254 million General Fund supplemental budget. The General Fund and General Fund supplemental budget includes increases to the Alabama Medicaid Agency, the Alabama

Department of Corrections and the Alabama Department of Mental Health. Additionally, the Legislature passed a \$9.3 billion Education Trust Fund budget and a \$1.7 million Education Trust Fund supplemental budget.

The 2024 session dealt with several significant issues such as election security; school choice; in vitro fertilization (IVF); diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI); and workforce development. All of these pieces of legislation eventually passed, many with several amendments added. Other significant pieces of legislation, like ethics reform and gaming passed the House but did not receive Senate approval.

The only way to know what a bill does is to read it. With 844 bills filed, the League's bill review team developed an in-depth review process. Most bills impacting municipalities are obvious, but at times legislation intended to address one issue will sometimes unintentionally impact municipalities. The League's bill review process involves meeting twice a week during session. On Thursdays, the team meets to assign newly filed bills and any amendments to legislation. Then on following Mondays, the team reconvenes to assign a tracking status and discuss any concerning legislation. This process allows the advocacy team to manage the large number of bills and respond quickly to legislation.

League Supported Legislation that Passed

Act 2024-194, carried by Sen. Jabo Waggoner and Rep. Jim Hill, requires municipal officials to participate in and complete yearly training. Additionally, this act allows for the municipality to cover expenses related to the training. This legislation was a League initiative. Learn more on page 14.

Act 2024-104, carried by Rep. Chad Roberston, exempts a municipal candidate running for office from filing a statement designating his or her principal campaign committee and filing campaign finance reports unless and until the candidate receives contributions or makes expenditures greater than \$1,000 in the aggregate. You can view the latest election information on page 11.

Act 2024-303, carried by Rep. Anthony Daniels, creates the employer tax credit, childcare facility tax credit and nonprofit childcare provider tax credit to incentivize employers to fund childcare for their employees.

Act 2024-437, carried by Rep. Phillip Pettus, revises the overtime exemption to exempt amounts paid as overtime

compensation in accordance with the U.S. Fair Labor Standards Act from state income tax.

Act 2024-280, carried by Sen. Sam Givhan, includes county public building authorities that contract for the purchase or construction of certain plants, buildings or other facilities designed for industrial development within the existing exemption. The League worked with the sponsor to include language that clarifies that contracts with municipalities and other government entities are exempt from the competitive bid law.

Act 2024-333, carried by Sen. Steve Livingston, changes the sales tax rate on the Alabama Alcoholic Beverage Control (ABC) Board store products to the sales tax rate of the location where they are being sold.

League Opposed Legislation that Failed to Pass

SB17, carried by Rep. Chris England, if passed, would have increased the Simplified Sellers Use Tax (SSUT) to 9.25% with the additional 1.25% going to local boards of education.

HB128, carried by Rep. Mark Gidley, if passed, would have prohibited municipal historic preservation commissions from designating places of worship as historic property; places of worship could agree to historic designation; retroactive application. This bill could have negatively affected historical districts in municipalities.

HB238, carried by Rep. Phillip Rigsby, if passed, would have regulated pharmacy benefits for managers; however, it did not make it to the House floor.

SB38, carried by Sen. Gerald Allen, if passed, would have allowed for businesses to deduct excise taxes from their gross receipts for the purpose of calculating business license taxes. The League estimated that this would apply to over two billion dollars in sales.

SB220, carried by Sen. Dan Roberts, if passed, would have prohibited any state or local awarding authority from awarding a contract with a company or its subsidiaries as listed in the Federal Communications Commission's Covered List. Additionally, the bill would have required that any company awarded a bid would not contract with a company on that list. As introduced, the penalty for violating this bill would have been a Class C felony and a civil fine.

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

Legislation Affecting Taxation and Business Licenses

Act 2024-344, carried by Rep. Phillip Pettus, as introduced, would have limited the annual increase in assessed value of real property to at most 3% for residential and agricultural



Baker Allen, ALM director of policy and research, addressed legislators at a public hearing in the state house during the 2024 Regular Session.

property and 5% for businesses. The League successfully amended this legislation to limit its impact on municipalities. Before passing, the bill received several major amendments which raised the property tax cap to 7%, exempted Tax Increment Financing (TIF) districts and sunset the legislation after three years.

Legislation to exempt certain items from sales tax occurs every year. This year, the League was able to include opt-in provisions so that a municipality can decide if it wants to exempt those items from its sales taxes. That legislation includes:

- Act 2024-400, by Rep. Margie Wilcox, exempts hearing aids and hearing instruments.
- Act 2024-169, by Sen. Jack Williams, exempts agricultural fencing.
- Act 2024-448, by Sen. Josh Carnley, exempts honeybees and their byproducts.

Other Legislation Engaged by the League's Advocacy Team

Alabama Adventure Awaits sales tax holiday (HB257) and the SSUT increase (HB258) were a legislative package that required both bills to pass for either of them to go into effect. HB257, carried by Rep. Joe Lovvorn, if passed, would have created a sales tax holiday on the first weekend in March and the first weekend in August on certain items for hunting and outdoor recreation. Additionally, the bill would have allowed municipalities to opt in to the sales tax holiday by passing a resolution at least 90 days prior to the holidays. HB257 by Rep. Chris England, if passed, would have added 1.3 cents to the SSUT and distributed the revenue with municipalities getting 80% and counties getting 20%. The last version of the legislation would have distributed the funds like this: municipalities 65%; counties 15%; and

school boards 20%. Further, the funding to municipalities would have been distributed with 60% for populations over 50,000 and 40% for populations under 50,000. HB257 passed the House floor while HB258 was carried over on the House floor before the session ended. However, the League expects to see this type of legislation in future sessions.

Act 2024-278, carried by Sen. Arthur Orr, establishes procedures for requesting public records. The original bill was substituted for a cleaner version of the bill that our attorneys and many other organizations worked to amend.

Act 2024-81, carried by Rep. Leigh Hulsey, requires fire-protection personnel, certified volunteer firefighters, and emergency medical services personnel to undergo annual training on interacting with individuals with sensory needs or invisible disabilities. This training takes effect January 1, 2025.

Act 2024-237, carried by Rep. Craig Lipscomb, provides the owner of a dwelling with a method to request the removal of an unauthorized individual. As introduced, this bill placed a substantial burden on municipal police departments. The League was able to work with stakeholders to amend the bill to address our concerns.

HB174, carried by Rep. Barbara Drummond, if passed, would have increased the penalty to a Class A felony for discharging a firearm into an occupied dwelling or vehicle.

HB226, carried by Rep. Cynthia Almond, if passed, would have provided for the procedures for an aggrieved party to file an appeal of the final decision of a municipal zoning board of adjustment in the circuit court.

HB310, carried by Rep. Terri Collins, and SB223, carried by Sen. April Weaver, if passed, would have created a rural Hospital Investment Program.

Stay Engaged!

Want to get involved? The easiest way to start is by reading our weekly legislative newsletter, *The State House Advocate*, during session and visiting our legislative advocacy tab on our website almonline.org. Not sure how to have a phone call or meeting with your legislator in person? Give us a call at the contact information listed to the right, and we are more than happy to talk you through the process.



Members of the League joined Gov. Kay Ivey for the ceremonial signing of the Alabama Municipal Official Training Act on May 8, 2024 in the state capitol. Pictured left to right: Baker Allen, Cindy Price, Kayla Bass, Sen. Jabo Waggoner, Gov. Ivey, Rep. Jim Hill, Greg Cochran, Bryan Parker, Rob Johnston and Kaleb Beck. (Photo credit: Hal Yeager, Governor's Office)

We encourage all our members to make sure you are signed up for our legislative text alerts by reaching out to one of us using the contact information below. Our new text alert program will allow us to notify you when engagement is needed immediately. We rarely need to send alerts, but if you receive one, it might be our last opportunity to preserve municipal authority.



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. ■



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AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT

IMPORTANT DEADLINES

DEC. 31
2024



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

DEC. 31
2026



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

SEPT. 30
2026



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

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



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



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



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

Who is eligible to use the MIS system?

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

Adam Kilpatrick Joins the League Team



Adam, a native of Andalusia, Alabama, joined the Alabama League of Municipalities in May 2024 as a grassroots coordinator.

His educational path led him to Huntingdon College, where he distinguished himself both academically and athletically, earning a golf scholarship and ultimately graduating with a Bachelor of Arts degree in business administration. During his tenure at Huntingdon, Adam actively engaged with various organizations and committees, including the Student Athlete Advisory Committee, the Center for Career and Vocation Student Council and the Business Club, showcasing his leadership skills and commitment to campus involvement.

Upon relocating to Montgomery, Adam balanced his academic pursuits with professional endeavors, contributing his talents to Your Golf Superstore as a dedicated sales associate. Through his role, he fostered meaningful connections within the community, exemplifying his dedication to customer service and community engagement. He also served as an intern within the

League's advocacy team throughout the 2024 Alabama Legislative Session.

Outside of his professional commitments, Adam finds enjoyment in outdoor activities such as golfing and fishing. His passion for the game of golf is evident, as he often seeks the golf course when not occupied with work responsibilities. ■

2024 FALL LAW CONFERENCE

The Lodge at Gulf State Park October 24 - 26



Join us for this three day event conference for Judges, Attorneys and Prosecutors that will provide in-depth discussions of timely municipal legal topics, addressed by experts who have experience with the subject. For more information go to our training page, almonline.org/ConferencesAndTraining, or scan the QR code above. Members of AAMA and AMJA receive reduced rates. If you are unsure of your membership status, please contact us.

Continuing Education: This conference will be submitted for 12.0 hours of credit (including 1 hour of ethics) from the Alabama State Bar MCLE. Required 6 Judicial CLE will also be submitted to the Judicial College.



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ALM Launches Live Loc

Kayla Bass • Deputy Director • Alabama League of Municipalities

Local government is the closest, most responsive form of government to the people. It is directly responsible for quality-of-life services, such as police and fire protection, parks, roads, bridges, education, economic development and so much more. These are services that citizens not only expect but demand. They are also the services it takes to build vibrant communities where all citizens want to live, work, play and worship, and where businesses want to invest.

As our team travels this state advocating on your behalf during the legislative session, it is becoming clear that very few people understand the true value of municipal government. Unfortunately, when citizens and lawmakers do not understand the importance of local government and the quality-of-life services it provides – we, like many of you – find that they have a tendency to enact harmful policies. In some cases, despite all our efforts, we have come to realize that some people simply do not have an appreciation for the work you do each day.

Because of this, our organization is thrilled to launch a quality-of-life campaign called Live Locally Alabama! The goal of this initiative is to encourage civic engagement, instill community pride and highlight the crucial role municipal government plays in the daily lives of Alabama's citizens.

Alabama is home to 465 unique municipalities – each with a story to be told and opportunities for its citizens to thrive. There is no one better to tell those stories than our local officials, which is why the campaign will include messaging for You to take the lead on showcasing your municipality's uniqueness and the services you provide to create a sustainable future for your citizens and future generations.

We hope our members take advantage of the marketing materials we have created for you to engage with your community at local events, during state of the city addresses and when speaking to rotary groups, chambers of commerce, state leaders and so on.



ally Alabama Campaign

If you are not a local official, we want you to know that we need your help too. Community engagement is pivotal to encourage more equitable, sustainable decisions to continue to improve livability in communities across Alabama. So how can you get involved?

It's easy. Shop locally at stores in your community, eat locally at your favorite restaurants, and explore locally by taking your kids to nearby parks and museums. You are encouraged to attend local council meetings, engage with community initiatives and follow your municipalities' social media pages to stay up-to-date with the latest activities and plans. You can also follow the League's social media pages to see the latest with the campaign.

By investing your time, money and resources, you can make a positive difference in your community. It takes all of us – the League, our communities, the legislature and the public – working in unison to ensure that our cities and towns are prosperous and positioned to attract economic growth.

If you have any questions about the campaign, please reach out to our Communications Director Lori Jhons at ljhons@almonline.org. ■



For more information about
the new Live Locally Alabama
Campaign and resources,
scan this QR code.



SHOP LOCALLY



SERVE LOCALLY

The League Wishes Todd McCarley a Happy Retirement!

Upon his retirement on May 15, 2024, the League extends its sincere gratitude to Todd McCarley for his dedicated service as a loss control representative for AMIC and MWCF members since December 2003.

After more than 20 years of service, Todd provided a unique skill set and perspective to working in the field. As one of the veteran members of our Loss Control Department, Todd served as a major resource and mentor to the new team members as the division expanded.

Prior to joining the Loss Control Division, he worked with the Prattville Fire Department for 17 years where he earned the rank of lieutenant supervisor. His numerous certifications include: fire inspector, arson investigator, hazardous material technician, confined space rescue, rapid deployment search and rescue and personal watercraft rescue. He also served as an instructor for the Alabama State Fire College.

Todd has been a tremendous asset to our organization and our members and will be greatly missed by our team.

Happy Retirement, Todd! ■





What You Need to Know about

STORMWATER

How it works, how waterways are impacted by land use and how it relates to flooding, water quality and more

Laura Bell Cooley • Project Manager • Auburn University Water Resources Center

For many cities, development equates to jobs and economic growth, but new roads, parking lots, cars and homes can bring a hidden challenge: managing stormwater. We at the Auburn University Water Resources Center frequently hear from municipalities that their top water concerns are flooding, drought, sewer overflows, aging infrastructure, eroding streambanks and water contamination. Although it is not obvious, stormwater is central to most of these concerns.

For many, stormwater is an “out of sight, out of mind” city function. We have efficiently designed our urban areas to shed and remove water as quickly as possible, depositing it untreated to the nearest waterbody. As many areas in Alabama continue to grow and develop, they also become increasingly impervious. Managing and planning for the impacts of stormwater runoff is becoming undeniably important.

What is stormwater?

Stormwater is rainwater that runs off impervious surfaces like streets, parking lots, rooftops and sidewalks. Impervious surfaces prevent rainwater from naturally soaking into the ground and reconnecting with groundwater.

In urban areas, the stormwater conveyance system moves water from sidewalks, streets, curbs and gutters to storm drain inlets, underground pipes, and empties into local waterways. This stormwater conveyance system is called the Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4). These pipes and structures are not connected to the sanitary sewer system which drains wastewater from inside a home to a sewage treatment facility or a private septic system. Municipal engineers and public works departments spend significant amounts of time addressing the effects of stormwater such as flooding, pollution and erosion.

Why should I care about stormwater?

- **Flooding**

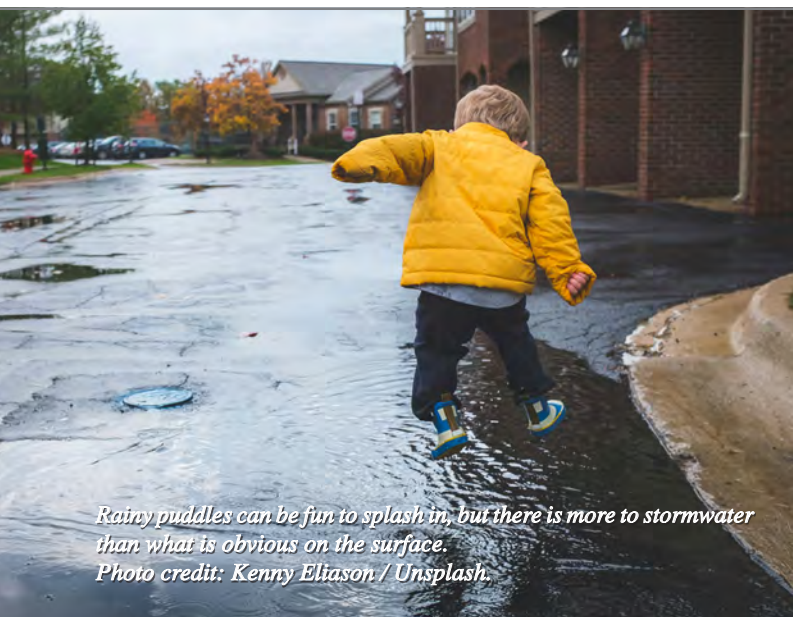
When excess water has nowhere to go, stormwater can back up and overflow. When rain falls in a forest, it is intercepted by trees and filtered into the soils – becoming groundwater that fills our aquifers and replenishes our waterways. In developed communities with limited places for water to soak into the ground, stormwater runs off of rooftops and over streets, until it reaches a storm drain or low point like a stream or river. This causes water to arrive to streams faster and in a higher volume, causing flooding and erosion. In the past few decades, rainfall patterns have become more intense and frequent. Many of our cities have aging infrastructure, and systems that were not designed to deal with increasingly heavy rains on increasingly developed land.

- **Pollution**

Stormwater picks up anything on the ground and carries it along with it. Animal waste, chemicals, pesticides, fertilizers, oil, metals and sediment all end up in waterways and potentially in our sources of drinking water. By carrying all these different kinds of pollution into our waterways, stormwater itself becomes a pollutant.

- **Impacts to Recreational Opportunities**

Stormwater runoff can cause polluted waterways which can lead to restrictions on boating, swimming and fishing in



*Rainy puddles can be fun to splash in, but there is more to stormwater than what is obvious on the surface.
Photo credit: Kenny Eliason / Unsplash.*

recreational areas. An important source of revenue for many cities, protecting the water quality of local water ways is of the utmost importance.

- **Streambank Erosion**

As the volume of stormwater runoff being directed to local streams increases, so does streambank erosion, leaving bare soil and exposing tree roots. This can lead to property and infrastructure damage and cause issues with streambank stability. Streams that are mowed to the edge and have little riparian buffer are especially at risk.

- **Sedimentation**

Erosion and runoff contribute to excess buildup of soil in streams and rivers, or sedimentation. Sedimentation of waterways smothers aquatic habitats and is harmful to fish and other stream life. Water becomes more turbid or cloudy, which leads to increased costs for water treatment. Sedimentation also fills in waterways and ponds, which can increase the flooding potential. Sediment is the number one pollutant of Alabama waterways.

- **Lack of Groundwater Recharge**

If stormwater is not soaking into the ground, it can affect recharge of groundwater resources. Many municipalities rely on groundwater (aquifers) to supply their drinking water. A lack of recharge can affect water levels in drinking water wells and surface water.

How can leaders in Alabama cities help manage stormwater?

Connect with your MS4 managers, public works and engineering departments to better understand the issue locally.

Under the federal Clean Water Act, states establish the Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) General Permit. This permit regulates how municipalities (and institutions) with a certain population threshold manage their stormwater to help reduce the number of pollutants being carried into water bodies. The MS4 refers to all stormwater conveyance structures managed by a municipality, county or other designated non-governmental facilities. MS4s have to have a stormwater management program. MS4s are regulated by the Alabama Department of Environmental Management under the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Program.



A construction site in need of erosion and sediment control. In a rain event, this sediment will be washed into waterways.



Aerial view of eroding streambank. Without vegetation to protect the stream edge, the bank is being slowly eroded, threatening infrastructure.



An example of how excess lawn fertilizer runoff can cause oxygen depleting algae blooms.

MS4 Stormwater programs are developed to prevent harmful pollutants from being washed and/or dumped into our stormwater conveyance structures and ultimately into waterways. Because every MS4 faces unique stormwater challenges, each management plan is unique. Each management plan includes the same six focus areas that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) considers essential for success, called Minimum Control Measures (MCMs). These areas are listed below:

- Public Education and Outreach
- Construction Site Erosion Control
- Public Participation and Involvement
- Post Construction Stormwater Management
- Illicit Discharge Detection and Elimination
- Pollution Prevention and Good Housekeeping



2 Plan, think long term, develop a vision.

Take the time to consider how your community wants to use and value its local waterways. Is your drinking water protected in years to come? Do local development strategies consider stormwater impacts? Are your local waterways also recreational areas, and are they protected? Does your plan for future growth consider the impact of stormwater on flooding and water quality? The answers to these questions often need input and planning from many partners in a city. Taking the time to develop and follow a plan can make a big difference now and years down the line. It will also help your city have shovel-ready projects in mind when external funding sources are available. The U.S. Department of Transportation, the State Revolving Fund, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the National Fish and Wildlife Fund can all be creative sources of external funding for projects that manage stormwater, make environmental improvements and protect infrastructure.



3 Manage stormwater at its source.

When considering future development, try to manage stormwater where it falls by slowing it down, holding it in place and letting it soak in. Traditional detention and retention ponds serve this purpose but are not always enough to manage the amount of stormwater urban areas see. Consider stormwater “treatment chains” or using multiple best management practices in a sequence to help slow down, retain

and slowly drain stormwater. Green stormwater infrastructure practices like bioretention cells, bioswales, rain gardens and permeable pavement are additional options that, especially when used in tandem with other practices, can help reduce the impacts of stormwater by mimicking natural hydrology.



4 Get to know your watershed.

A watershed is the area of land that drains to a particular waterbody. Watersheds span city and county boundaries. Learn about your watershed and whether your local streams are impaired (polluted). Where does the water flow in your area? Where are the headwaters and tributaries? What might be causing some of your biggest stormwater concerns? You can visit the EPA’s How’s My Waterway website, mywaterway.epa.gov, or scan the QR code to look up your zip code to see watershed boundaries in your city. The site also shows whether state water testing has determined if local water quality is considered polluted.



Stormwater challenges can be daunting, but small interventions can add up over time to make big impacts. Now is a great time to start planning for your city’s stormwater future. ■

Helpful resources for learning more about stormwater management:

Auburn University Water Resources Center
aaes.auburn.edu/wrc

Alabama Stormwater Association
www.alabamastormwater.org

Alabama Soil & Water Conservation Committee
alabamasoilandwater.gov

EPA’s Website: MS4s - National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System
www.epa.gov/npdes



Laura Cooley is a project manager, planner, facilitator and community builder. She provides leadership to initiatives that involve multiple agencies in environmental planning, decision-making and restoration. She helps facilitate educational training opportunities, often for sectors working in green stormwater infrastructure and watershed planning. Cooley also develops communication strategies to engage the diverse audience that works with the Auburn University Water Resources Center.

ALABAMA'S WINNING STREAK:

How Strategic Investments and New Policies are Shaping the State's Economic Future

Ellen McNair (CEcD) | Secretary | Alabama Department of Commerce

It is hard to miss the signs that Alabama's economy is on a winning streak — and the great news is that the momentum is building to produce more gains.

Employment levels have soared to record levels for the state, while the jobless rate remains minuscule. At the direction of Gov. Kay Ivey, the state has made massive investments in expanding access to broadband, particularly in rural communities. Alabama companies set a new annual export record in 2023, and we have become the No.1 auto-exporting state.

On the economic development front, Alabama is enjoying a prolonged period of success. From the beginning of 2021 through the end of 2023, Alabama secured growth projects involving over \$23 billion in new capital investment and 30,000 job commitments — perhaps the state's strongest three-year run ever.

These positive trends have had significant impacts on communities across Alabama. Better still, there is strong

cause for continued optimism, thanks to developments now unfolding that will further enhance the state's economic future.

SEEDS Act Funding Boosting Alabama's Growth

I want to start with a look at one important element of The Game Plan, Gov. Ivey's initiative to update the state's economic development strategies, adopted last year. The groundbreaking Site Evaluation and Economic Development Strategy (SEEDS) Act — a key part of that package — has already steered \$30 million in grants to Alabama communities for critically needed site development activities.

A second round of SEEDS funding, potentially totaling another \$30 million, is wrapping up applications on September



30. The Economic Development Partnership of Alabama (EDPA), which is administering the SEEDS program, houses the application portal on its website. The State Industrial Development Authority (SIDA) will evaluate the applications and announce results early next year.

The initial SEEDS grants came at a time when the number of available, publicly held sites in the state had decreased by 30% from its peak, and the program's impact is already evident.

In Round 1, SIDA approved 14 site assessment grants valued at \$1.1 million, chiefly for environmental and geotechnical surveys of early-stage industrial sites in communities including Ashland, Sulligent, Hamilton, Prattville and Montgomery. Local matches pledged total a combined \$629,000.

SIDA also approved 15 development grants valued at \$29 million for purposes such as infrastructure improvements, land purchases and site grading. Communities, including Jasper, Atmore, Opelika, Dothan and Mobile, will provide matching funds totaling \$37.8 million.

The program has already enhanced Alabama's competitiveness on the economic development playing field, with the new industrial sites created through SEEDS funding allowing Alabama to compete for more than a dozen corporate growth projects involving a combined \$13.5 billion in new capital investment and 5,000 jobs.

I urge you to consider taking advantage of SEEDS grant opportunities.

Innovate Alabama Paving the Future

Another positive initiative I want to share with you is the development of a new, future-forward economic development strategic plan to guide statewide efforts into the next decade and beyond.

Joining me on the executive committee leading the development of the plan are Greg Barker, president of EDPA; Bill Poole, chair of Innovate Alabama and director of the Alabama Department of Finance; and Dr. David Bronner, CEO of the Retirement Systems of Alabama.

We are starting this effort with a blank slate because we want to incorporate important new concepts into the plan, such as fully developing the potential of the state's human capital, energizing entrepreneurship through innovation, enhancing rural development efforts, and elevating a focus on quality placemaking by leveraging our outdoor recreation resources.



Commerce Sec. Ellen McNair joined state leaders and the Alabama Port Authority to share a record-breaking economic impact announcement at the state capitol on February 1, 2024, in Montgomery. (Photo credit: Hal Yeager, Governor's Office)

We have recruited McKinsey & Company, the multinational consulting firm, to help us with high-level analysis and insights that will strengthen the comprehensive plan's foundations.

Troy University's Continuing Education and Outreach unit is another important collaborator in this effort. The Troy team is currently leading rounds of focus groups involving internal stakeholders, including regional economic developers, private sector leaders and business associations.

Alabama A&M University's Center for Educator Preparation and Certification Services will add an academic focus through extensive note-taking and review, as well as the preparation of a final report based on the information gathered.

In addition, our ongoing relationship with the Hoover Institution will continue to shape the executive committee's thinking on the next-generation strategic plan.

Gov. Ivey has set a deadline of Oct. 1 for delivery of the plan, so we are moving full steam ahead.

Economic Advancement through "Working for Alabama" Bills

Another noteworthy development is the bipartisan "Working for Alabama" package of six bills that Gov. Ivey signed into law this year to drive and sustain economic growth around the state. The package aims to get more people into the state's workforce, streamline economic development efforts, and invest in Alabama communities, especially those in rural areas.

I believe the Working for Alabama package represents a milestone in an ongoing effort to modernize the state's economic and workforce development approaches.

One of the primary goals of Working for Alabama is to solve one of Alabama's biggest economic challenges, its labor force participation rate, which is one of the lowest in America. Almost half of the state's working-age individuals are neither employed nor seeking jobs.

The package aims to change that by removing obstacles such as the lack of affordable childcare, housing and transportation that keep some people out of the workforce.

Another element of Working for Alabama is the creation of the Alabama Growth Alliance, a public corporation governed by a board of public and private leaders. The alliance will coordinate the development of the state's long-range economic development strategy, set annual objectives, and devise key tactics to achieve the long-range strategies.

Taken together, all these developments promise to steer Alabama's economy toward a new path to long-lasting growth that lifts communities and families throughout the state. Smart strategic investments and new policies are positioning us to keep our winning streak running over the long haul. I am excited about this future — and hope you are, too. ■



← For Alabama Department of Commerce, scan this QR code.
For more information on Innovate Alabama, scan this QR code. →



Ellen McNair began her tenure as secretary of the Alabama Department of Commerce on Jan. 1, 2024. McNair formerly served as the chief economic development officer for the Montgomery Area Chamber of Commerce, where she successfully located 600 national and international projects with a combined investment exceeding \$8 billion, creating almost 30,000 jobs. She is one of only a handful of economic development professionals in Alabama to hold the Certified Economic Developer (CEcD) designation from the International Economic Development Council. She is Alabama's first female commerce secretary.

Empowering Alabama's Childcare Infrastructure: A Legislative **LEAP FORWARD** ▶▶▶

Robin Ricks ♦ Vice-President of Policy and Advocacy ♦ Manufacture Alabama

With parents making up 35% of Alabama's existing workforce, Alabama knows the critical role childcare plays in empowering its workforce and nurturing its youngest citizens. With Manufacture Alabama serving as the voice of the business community, the Women's Foundation of Alabama representing the childcare industry, and the Alabama Department of Revenue and the Alabama Department of Human Resources all coming to the table at the very beginning, we were able to create a piece of legislation packed with incentives and financial support mechanisms during the 2024 Regular Session. We know that there are three key challenges for working parents (or parents who wish to work) as it relates to childcare: access, affordability and quality. With the introduction of this first of its kind piece of legislation, we sought to address each of these problems. Following the childcare tax credit's unanimous passage by both houses of the Alabama Legislature, and the signature of Gov. Kay Ivey, our state is poised to usher in a new era of investment and innovation in childcare services. The inception of this program represents the power of public and private partnerships. We expect to leave a meaningful impact on the landscape of childcare infrastructure and service delivery in Alabama.

Employer Tax Credit: A Catalyst for Corporate Engagement

The cornerstone of this legislative initiative is the Employer Tax Credit, designed to motivate Alabama's for-profit businesses to support childcare services for their employees. Eligible businesses can receive up to \$600,000 per year in tax credits for approved childcare-related expenses, with a total aggregate cap starting at \$15 million and increasing to \$20 million by 2027.

This credit covers a broad range of expenses, including the construction and renovation of childcare facilities, equipment purchases and payments to childcare facilities or employees for childcare services. Moreover, to ensure that this financial support reaches those who need it most, employers are required to prioritize the payment of eligible expenses for employees who qualify for the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). The legislation is designed to ensure that funds are allocated equitably, with priority given to small businesses and providers in rural areas.

Childcare Facility Tax Credit: Quality and Expansion Incentives

Childcare providers in Alabama stand to benefit significantly from the Childcare Facility Tax Credit. This incentive is aimed at encouraging providers to improve and expand their facilities. The credit amount, which can go up to \$25,000 per facility per year, is determined based on the facility's quality rating and the number of eligible children served.

With a quality rating system ranging from one to five stars, the program rewards providers for enhancing their standards and increasing their capacity to serve more children. This initiative is crucial in ensuring that children across Alabama have access to high-quality childcare services.



Grants for Nonprofit Childcare Providers: Boosting Nonprofit Capacities

Recognizing the unique role of nonprofit childcare providers, the bill includes grants of up to \$50,000 per provider per year to support facility improvement and operation. These grants are designed to help nonprofit providers, particularly those in underserved areas, to expand their capacity and improve the quality of their services.

Looking Forward: What Happens Now?

The successful implementation of these incentives requires robust rules and administration. The state revenue and human resources departments are tasked with establishing and adopting the necessary regulations in early 2025.

Upon completion of the promulgation of rules by the Department of Revenue, further education and support will be rolling out to the business community. Municipal leaders will play a key role in connecting employers and childcare providers with this game-changing program. We won't consider ourselves successful until we see the spending cap reached each year, and to do so, we must spread the word. As you communicate with your economic development partners and corporate citizens, please share this credit with them. This comprehensive framework of incentives marks a significant step toward enhancing childcare accessibility and quality in Alabama, fostering a more inclusive and productive workforce, and supporting the overall welfare of our communities. ■



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WORKSHOP ADDRESSES ALABAMA'S ONGOING NEED FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Jessica Armstrong ♦ DesignAlabama Contributor

Decent housing for all should be the bedrock of any community - providing human-centric spaces built on the belief that people of all income levels are worthy of good design. Yet, affordable housing has historically been soulless and nondescript, with design secondary to the cost of construction.

Good design and affordable design can indeed work hand-in-hand, achieved not necessarily through expensive materials and building techniques but through elements such as proportion, scale, light and a sense of place. However, finding ways to alleviate the ever-growing housing shortage in Alabama's small and rural communities is no easy task.

A one-day workshop, called Community Seeds, was held on June 13 in Prattville to look at how Alabama's developers, designers and municipalities can best respond to the problem. The challenges the state's small and rural communities face include how to build housing that builds communities and finding common ground for communities and developers.

Community Seeds was conducted by experts in housing design, permitting, construction and financing. They presented examples of projects, policies and strategies that have fostered high-quality housing in Alabama. They also shared ways to address the housing shortage and challenges, such as the state's rural character, limited resources and underserved communities. Alabama Communities of Excellence, DesignAlabama, Main Street Alabama and Your Town Alabama hosted the event.

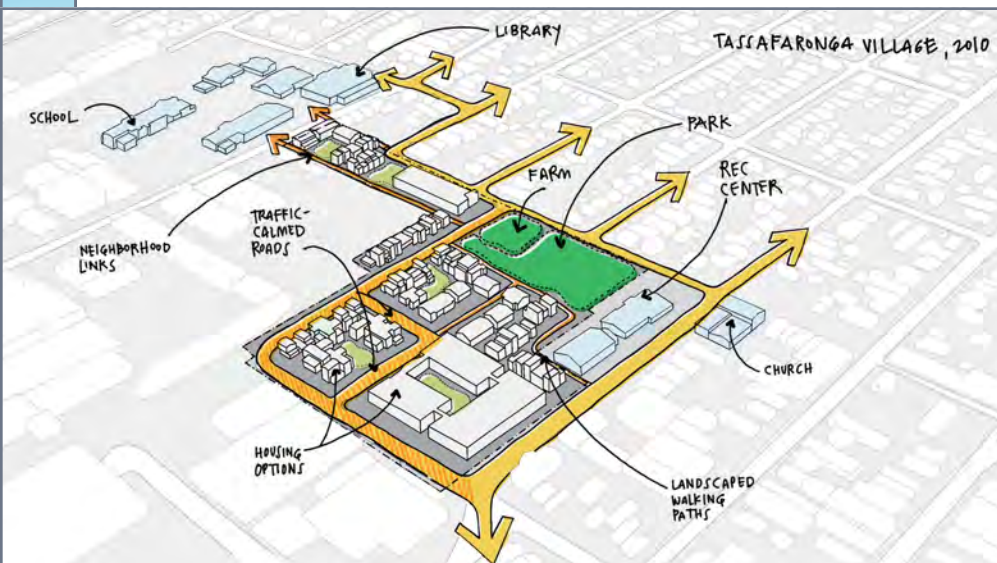
Amanda Loper, of Birmingham and San Francisco Bay area-based David Baker Architects, was the event's keynote speaker. Her presentation, "Housing, Community and Betting on the Future," focused on a simple but powerful message: communities need well-designed, affordable and attainable housing options.

"Rural and small communities face unique challenges to housing production," Loper explained. "The programs we have at the state and federal levels make sure to disperse funds around the state, but they still often aren't enough to fill the needed financial gap to provide housing in small communities."

In addition, she said rural communities often lack needed infrastructure, such as sewer and power, and developments are often smaller, so these communities lose the economies of scale found in bigger projects. So, ultimately the cost to build those units can be higher.

"Through creativity, tenacity and partnerships, there are opportunities to provide housing all over Alabama," Loper said. "We should especially look at re-using existing buildings within our communities to convert to housing or mixed-income housing projects."

Loper's presentation contained a graph stating that more than 40% of renters in Alabama are cost-burdened, and the need for



quality affordable housing in the state has increased during the past two decades. She shared a New York Times article about how the singular character of cities is vanishing due to the ongoing construction of nondescript affordable housing, even though good design and affordable design can indeed happen simultaneously.

“I don’t think the two are mutually exclusive,” Loper shared. “We [David Baker Architects] wrote our book, ‘9 Ways to Make Housing for People’ to illustrate strategies that are pragmatic and accessible but still deliver quality in affordable housing.”

These nine principles and strategies to achieve quality and value in new housing were included in Loper’s presentation and can be beneficial to municipalities:

- ❶ **Reweave the urban fabric. Create, repair and enhance connections within existing neighborhoods.**
- ❷ **Make big moves. Design a bold and interesting building form.**
- ❸ **A little goes a long way. Concentrate premium materials at points of shared enjoyment. Keep it simple everywhere else.**
- ❹ **Activate the edges. Energize the streetscape with a generous, mixed-use ground floor.**
- ❺ **Be welcoming. Set a positive tone with a bright and engaging entryway.**
- ❻ **Cultivate connection. Place compatible uses together to add convenience, support social encounters and build lasting bonds.**
- ❼ **Enlighten circulation. Bring light and fresh air into hallways and stairs to connect with nature and encourage walking.**
- ❽ **Art for all. Use art to invigorate common spaces, help with wayfinding and create a strong visual identity.**
- ❾ **Get personal. Reflect the character of the community and offer opportunities for personal expression.**



The nonprofit Navigate Affordable Housing Partners has a long track record of working to improve all aspects of the housing industry to ensure people have access to quality, livable housing choices. Navigate Affordable Housing was incorporated in 1980 as the Jefferson County Assisted Housing Corporation and has expanded to serve other areas in the U.S. in addition to Alabama.

In his presentation “Navigate Community Seeds,” the organization’s Director of Planning and Community Development Matthew Churnock shared what Navigate Affordable Housing is currently doing in Birmingham’s North Titusville neighborhood, where their housing work centers on renovations and new construction.

“Navigate believes that preserving the existing housing stock is critical to providing affordable housing,” Churnock said. “We work to acquire dilapidated and vacant homes and renovate them to provide affordable housing solutions in the community.”

To date, Navigate Affordable Housing Partners has renovated more than 25 single-family homes in North Titusville. This was achieved by renovating the existing homes or, in some cases, helping to renovate them by providing the necessary funding.

“Our new construction work focuses on how to create a scalable system for creating more affordable housing in communities,” Churnock explained. “We are doing this by breaking down the barriers of home construction and developing a tool kit, which can rapidly deploy housing.”

The Bandsaw Building, in downtown Birmingham, is the adaptive reuse of a mid-century masonry building with three retail spaces including a bakery, barbershop and café, which share a courtyard with two collaborative offices at the rear of the building. Photo credits: Bruce Damonte



One of their performance metrics in this work is creating high-performance housing using advanced design, manufacturing and construction, which lowers operating costs for the homeowner, allowing people to afford more house, while at the same time increasing the quality of living within the home.

“All of this work is done keeping the community in mind by actively engaging with community members and using urban design principles,” Churnock stated.

Many issues affect housing affordability, and as a result, there is no one “right” way to address it, explained city of Opelika Planning Director Charles M. ‘Matt’ Mosley, who presented “Finding Common Ground for Communities and Developers” at the Community Seeds workshop.

“Cities should ensure that their plans incorporate the goals and objectives of safe and affordable housing for all residents,” Mosley said. “Many times, regulatory documents like zoning ordinances and subdivision regulations create housing and residential developments that do not meet current market demands or are unattainable.”

While the average household size in Alabama is 2.53 people per household, approximately 30.4% of households have only one person. According to the American Community Survey, one-person and two-person households account for 65% of all Alabama households. Zoning ordinances that only allow single-family detached homes or favor large suburban lots with large setbacks put cities and potential residents at a disadvantage, Mosley shared.



Top left: A zephyr is a gentle breeze from the west. The airy Zephyr Barber space pairs fresh, materials-first details with the building's revealed textures. Bottom left: Last Call Baking Co. opened in November 2022. Bottom right: The north-facing wall is punctuated by three glass garage doors inset into the existing structure, allowing the coffee shop and office spaces to open widely and spill out into the courtyard.

Instead, cities should allow a range of housing types, including small single-family homes, townhomes, duplexes, cottage courts, apartments and mixed-use housing. Being sensitive to the location and context of the surrounding areas, by developing design guidelines, can help ensure these housing types are in character with the neighborhood. He also shared allowing accessory dwelling units (ADUs) also increases the number of units without changing the area's character.

"Generally, the denser a development, the more important good design is to the overall outcome," Mosley continued. "Infill developments often benefit from having access to utilities and infrastructure, which can further reduce costs. Our historic neighborhoods can also provide a great guide on how to create affordable housing with solid design components."

Opelika practices what it preaches. The city recently approved several projects within walking distance of downtown, which added more affordable housing. Most of these projects focused on one to six units and included various housing types, including modern bungalows, cottages, duplexes and townhomes.

"In each case, different methods were used to help projects become more successful," Mosley explained. "For some, this included setback variances and reducing parking requirements or allowing on street parking to count. Others included improving infrastructure like sidewalks, pedestrian lighting, drainage and utilities while working on existing public improvement projects."

Furthermore, he shared ensuring that existing homes in disrepair can be brought up to code in place without being torn down was the only incentive that one project needed. Allowing some types of development, like townhomes and cottages, to be subdivided into fee-simple lots, in unique configurations, has aided many residents in gaining more conventional mortgages. None of the incentives for these projects required any direct funding outside of improvements to the city's own rights-of-way or infrastructure.

Opelika has also partnered with groups like Habitat for Humanity and the Fuller Foundation, which work to provide affordable housing. In the past, Opelika has waived permit and access fees, provided surplus property for building sites and subdivided lots. Community Development Block Grants are used to help keep homeowners in their existing homes through Opelika's Emergency Home Repair Program and provide down payment assistance for qualifying buyers. Many cities are even providing pre-approved architectural plans for single-family homes and duplexes to homeowners and builders, which can reduce costs and permitting time.

If your community is interested in learning more about housing resources, please reach out to DesignAlabama to get the conversation started. ■



David Baker Architects developed an adaptive, reuse design for the historic Blueprint Building, a disused mid-century masonry structure that originally housed a printing company and production space in downtown Birmingham. Photo credit: Chris Luker



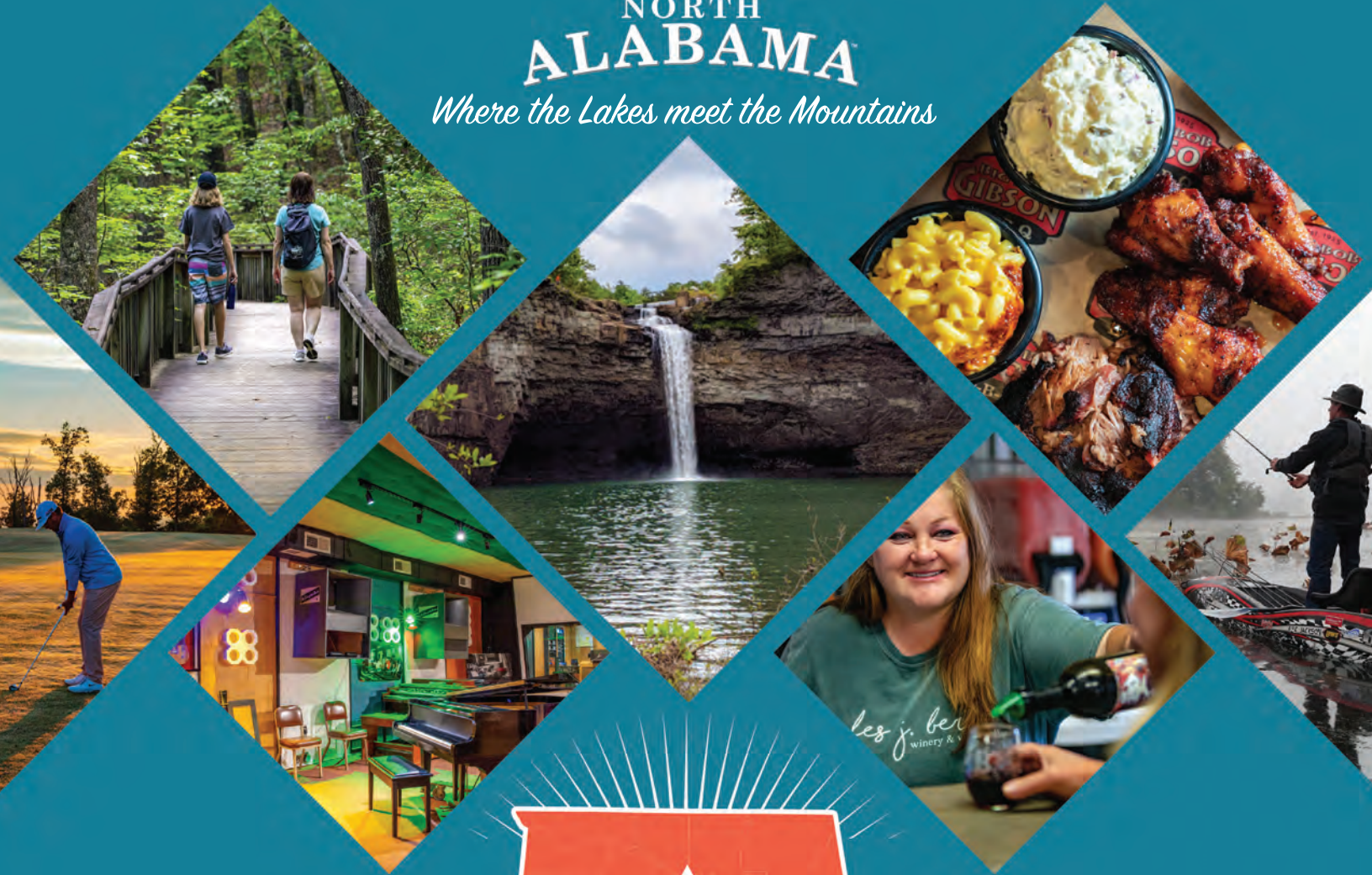
Jessica Armstrong is a longtime contributor to DesignAlabama who taught journalism at Auburn University for 17 years. She shares a love of good design with her husband, Don Armstrong, a registered architect and retired associate professor of architecture at Tuskegee University's Robert R. Taylor School of Architecture and Construction Science.

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2025 CMO Training Calendar

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