

Wisconsin Towns Association

June 2025



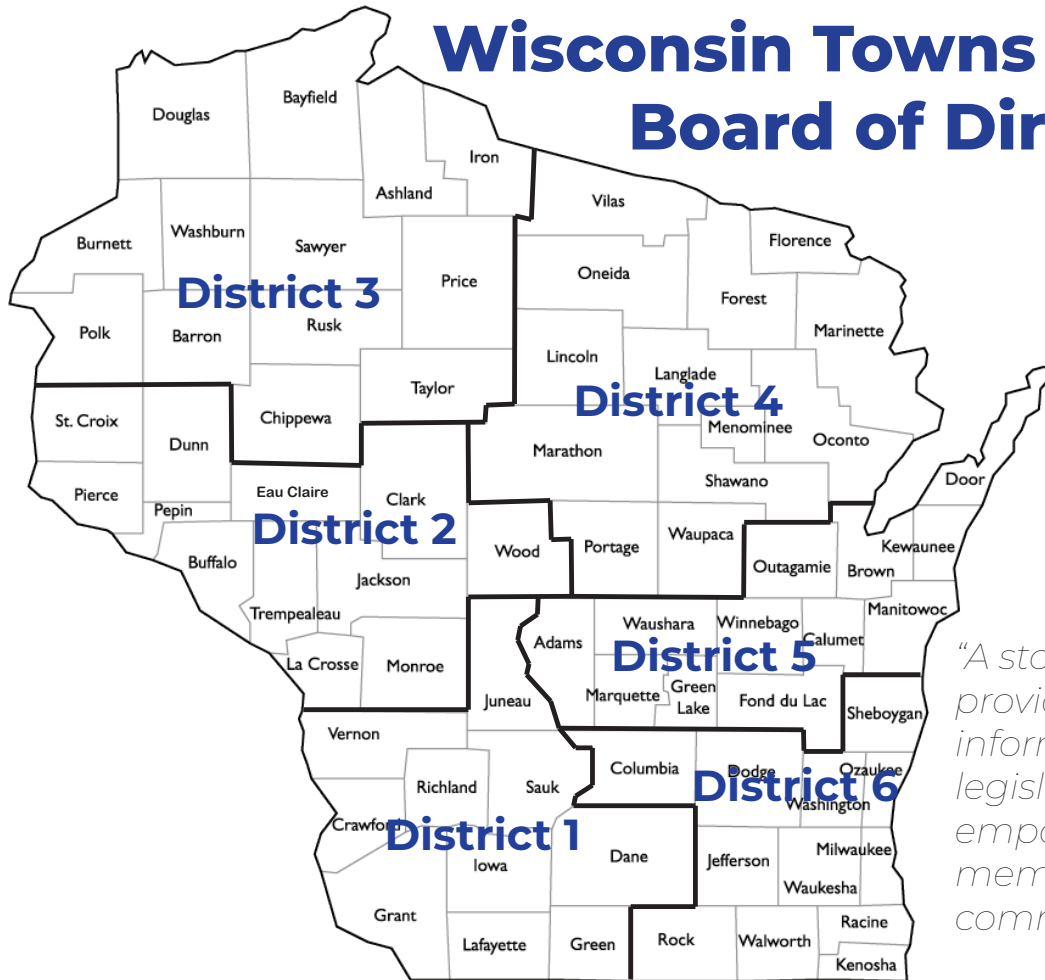
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"A statewide association providing education, legal information and grassroots legislative advocacy to empower and inspire our members to lead in their communities."



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Volume 448

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The publication *Wisconsin Towns* is published by the Wisconsin Towns Association at W7686 Co. Rd. MMM, Shawano WI 54166 715.526.3157
Third Class Postage Paid at Shawano, WI

Wisconsin Towns

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Empowering Town Officials

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



By
Mike Koles

Welcome Town Officials

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

– Margaret Mead

I was introduced to this quote nearly three decades ago. The words are as inspirational now as they were then. Perhaps it is the quote’s simplicity that attracts me to her wisdom, or it might be the complexity. Regardless, a truer statement would be hard to find.

It was a small group of thoughtful committed citizens that started the American Revolution. It was a small group of reformers in the mid-19th century that prompted the women’s suffrage movement. In the 1940s, it was a small group of central Wisconsin town officials that beat the odds and formed the Wisconsin Towns Association. Today, a small group of local government officials in each town throughout Wisconsin is charged with providing leadership to accomplish incremental changes to positively transform their community.

For the newly elected officials, you are now one of those leaders. For returning officers, not only do you have the opportunity to lead in your community, but you also have the chance to mentor a new official, perhaps in a nearby town or maybe even your own.

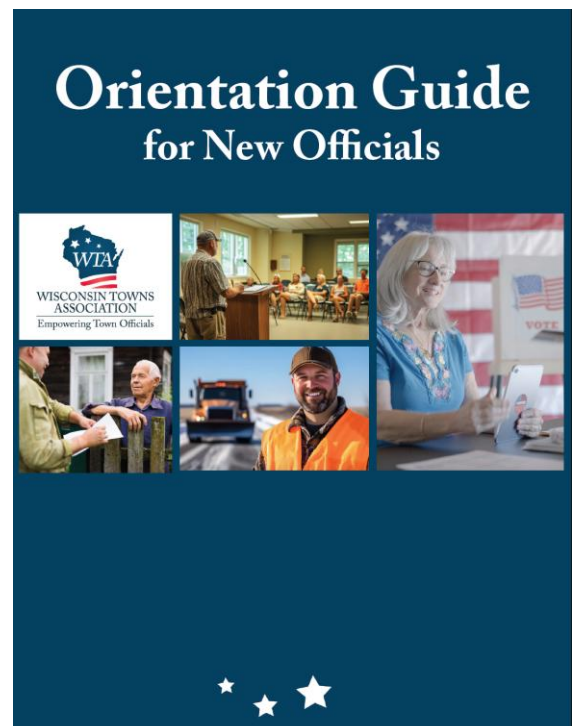
For many newcomers, this is likely your first magazine edition. It is an honor to welcome you as a town official and member of the WTA. Town government has been around for several centuries and was America’s first form of government. It remains an unwavering bastion in upholding the principles of democracy that make this country

great. That spirit flows into everything that we do at the association.

We actively search out the steep mountains that must frequently be climbed to support town government. We work to address the challenges of today, and we remain vigilant about what is on the horizon. Through our work in legislative advocacy, legal information services, and education, we work tirelessly to assist our members to unlock the potential of democracy. Empowering you is in the blood that courses through our veins, and it is what drives us forward. I look forward to meeting and working with each of you.

First Edition of Orientation Guide Available

To help orient new officers to the WTA and town government, we recently published the Orientation Guide for New Officials. These will be provided to each new officer attending the New and Continuing Officials Workshops. For those unable



to attend, a copy will be sent to your town once all rosters have been sent to WTA (early July).

Standing Room Only

Over a decade ago, when I used to teach leadership development for the UW, I used to run a program containing the theme – **“there are no home runs in leadership.”** I am a firm believer in this thesis. Leaders rarely transform communities with one big swing of the bat. Instead, leadership is about incrementally muddling through step by step. In softball terms, creating change is about stringing together a couple of singles, stealing a base, and bunting the runner home. Leadership is almost never about hitting home runs.

This strongly held belief was recently shaken because Town Road School is just about as close to a home run as I’ve seen in some time. This educational event was invented in 2024 to provide both town officials and road workers with the opportunity to learn tried and true, as well as innovative and new techniques to construct and maintain your town roads. We were excited to have over 250 attendees in the first year.

In late April, the WTA hosted the 2025 event and attendance increased 58% to nearly 400...and for good reason. Where else could you learn from experts about everything from chip sealing solutions to capital improvement planning to utility accommodation policy to cutting edge culvert maintenance techniques and much more?

Heck, there was standing room only for our opening session! Don’t worry, the Chula Vista is

planning to open a larger facility in the fall of 2026, and we’ll have plenty of room for growth.

The best part is that we increased the funds raised from the college scholarship auction from \$6,000 last year to \$10,000 this year. Combined with other fund-raising efforts, over \$16,000 in college scholarships will be provided in 2025. Thanks to all who donated items and generously bid. At



times, competition was fierce. I gave up my battle against former WTA Director Kevin Koth when the 8 pounds of cheese I was after hit \$675. Kevin didn’t win either. A gent came out of nowhere and

got a steal at \$700. In a nutshell, that is why town government is magical and why so many non-townies don’t get it. Where else would someone pay \$700 for \$80 worth of cheese but at a WTA event to support kids! **Mark your calendars for April 27 – 29 for the 2026 Town Road School to be held at the Chula Vista in Wisconsin Dells.**

Capitol Day

One of WTA’s three main purposes is legislative advocacy. The work we’ve collectively implemented with town officials over the last decade has produced results that are the envy of many. In fact, the recent level of success might be all but impossible to reproduce. Grand total, towns have benefited from 109 legislative initiatives being signed into law, which has resulted in approximately \$637 million of direct investment in towns over the ten-year period.

There are many reasons for this success. 600+% growth in the last decade in Town Advocacy Council (TAC) membership, the legislative arm of

WTA, has been one of the instrumental factors. If your town is not a TAC member, please consider joining through this year's regular dues statements that were sent out in March and due in June. If that's not in the cards just yet, please thank the neighboring town. They are likely a member (two-thirds of towns are), and they have helped produce the aforementioned success that has brought more road funding, increased shared revenue, greater staffing flexibility for your EMS service, enhanced local control, and so much more.



Joe Ruth, WTA Government Affairs Director, moderates a legislator panel during Capitol Day. (L to R) Representative Clinton Anderson, Representative Todd Novak, Senator Cory Tomczyk; and Representative Nancy VanderMeer.

Another reason for the accomplishment level is Capitol Day engagement. Every two years, at the front end of each legislative session, the TAC hosts this event where town officials come to Madison to lobby their legislators. On April 30th over 100 town officials advocated for greater EMS funding flexibility, increased general transportation aids, a series of town law technical fixes that will make your jobs more efficient, and restoration of democratic (i.e., elimination of dictatorial) processes in land division law.

EMS Bills Receive Public Hearing

As noted above, one of the WTA's legislative priorities is to increase EMS funding flexibility. It doesn't matter if someone lives in the most rural or most urban environment - every Wisconsinite

should have access to quality EMS. Unfortunately, this is far from reality.

It is well documented that many ambulance services are struggling. A 2023 Wisconsin Office of Rural Health study revealed a significant number of alarming issues.

- ✓ 41% of EMS agencies reported that they had periods in their schedule where they did not have adequate staffing to respond to an ambulance call. Unfortunately, this resulted in about a dozen calls that were never answered over the course of a year.
- ✓ 78% had responded to another agency's request for mutual aid due to a lack of staffing at the first EMS agency. This results in delayed response times, which can have deadly results.
- ✓ 41% are operating with six or fewer staff members providing 80% of staffing hours.

The towns in Ashland County know the issue well. Recently over 100 square miles went without a dedicated ambulance service for nearly seven months. Luckily neighboring services were able to cover every time there was a need because they didn't also have an active call. But, if there ever would have been two calls at once, then the 1950s drive yourself to the hospital strategy would have been all that was left! **In addition to the obvious health, safety, and human life concerns, can you imagine what happens to small businesses, economic development, and property values if we continue to move backwards toward a 1950s model of ambulance service?**

On April 23rd, Assembly and Senate Committee hearings were held on **AB197/SB181**, respectively. This creates the option to raise your levy for regional EMS by the amount of the Consumer Price Index plus 5%. Regional EMS is defined as

either 232 square miles or 8 participating municipalities. Not coincidentally, this is the same size as our smallest county (Pepin) or the same number of municipalities as the county with the fewest communities (Florence). There is already no levy limit applied to countywide EMS so these two counties can choose to provide EMS and not have a levy limit applied.

Why not extend similar, but more limited flexibility (because there is a CPI plus 5% cap) to everyone that has the same size service?

Ambulance service provision was not taken into account when county lines were drawn nearly two centuries ago. When a community attempts to save EMS services by shoe-horning them into an artificial county boundary in order to eliminate the levy limit, both inefficiency and ineffectiveness can and has resulted. Ask some of the towns who have been forced to participate in this provision as

a strategy of last resort if it is the cheapest or most effective. Many would answer with an emphatic no. Different population center locations, big rivers, and lots of lakes and forests are a few of many factors that contribute to the challenges associated with a county service provision model.

WTA thanks Senator Marklein and Representative Kurtz for authoring this bill and also all of the bipartisan support for this effort. The bill will increase collaboration, produce a better service model compared to today or a countywide service that is shoe-horned together. And, it will avoid the extra costs of a having to artificially increase staffing or capital facilities simply to get to the small portion of the county “on the other side of the river.” Simply look at Dunn and Winnebago County as a starting point.

The next step is for the committee chairs to hold a vote on these bills. WTA has and will continue to request this vote occur.



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Stray Dog FAQs

Q. What does the state law say about capturing dogs running at large?

A. Section 174.042(3), Wis. Stats., states that “an officer *shall* attempt to capture and restrain any dog running at large and any untagged dog.” An “officer” may be a peace officer, local health officer, humane officer, warden, an employee designated by DATCP, or other person designated by the governing body of the county, city, village or town. See Wis. Stats. §§ 174.001(4) & 95.21(1)(b). This means that when dealing with stray dogs a town has options: hire a certified humane officer, hire a dog catcher, contract with an organization or another municipality to pick up stray dogs, or ask the local sheriff’s department for assistance. An “officer” does not need to be an official or employee of the town, but this is an option.

Q. Is a town chair *required* to pick up stray dogs?

A. It is important to note that Wis. Stat. § 60.24(3)(w), only charges the town board chairperson with the responsibilities to perform the *chair’s* duties related to *stray animals* under ch. 170, Wis. Stats. Under chapter 170, if someone *chooses* to take a stray into custody, as the finder of the stray animal, they must notify the owner that they have possession of that stray. Wis. Stat. § 170.02(1). This notice must be provided to the owner within 7 days of finding the stray and the notice may include the requirement that the owner pay the reasonable charges related to the animal’s care and that the owner take the stray away. If the owner of the stray is unknown, the finder, must within 10 days after finding the stray, file a notice with the town clerk noting that they have found the stray. The town clerk is then required to send a copy of that notice to the county clerk. The town chair must appraise the value of a stray valued at \$10 or more. Wis. Stat. § 170.03. If the dog or other animal is valued at \$50 or more, the finder of the stray must publish a class 3 notice under ch. 985 in the county. The notice must include the description of the stray, the name and address as the finder, and the time when the stray was picked up. If the chair has not been designated by the town board as the “officer” responsible for catching dogs running at large, no such duty automatically attaches to the town chair.

Q. When is a dog considered to be running at large?

A. Section 174.042(1), Wis. Stats., states that a dog is running at large “if it is off the premises of its owner and not under the control of the owner or some other person.” A dog actively engaged in hunting activities or training sessions is not a dog running at large if the dog is monitored or supervised by a person and the dog is on land open to hunting or has permission to be on the land for hunting or training.

Q. When is a dog considered to be untagged?

A. The law requires that all dogs over the age of 5 months be licensed. See Wis. Stat. § 174.05(1). This process includes verifying that the dog is current in its rabies vaccination. Upon verification, the owner receives a rabies vaccination tag that must be attached to a collar and kept on the dog at all times. A dog

is considered untagged if it is outdoors in an unconfined area and does not have a valid license tag attached to the collar located on the dog. See Wis. Stat. § 174.042(2).

Q. Are towns required to contract with a humane society or other dog shelter so that any stray dogs picked up in the community can be dropped off there?

A. There is no state law that requires a town to sign a contract with a humane society or other dog shelter for services. This is *optional* under Wis. Stat. § 173.15(1).

Q. Where should a stray dog be taken if it is taken into custody?

A. If a person takes a stray or abandoned dog into custody on behalf of the town, he or she is required to deliver the dog to a pound, to a facility contracted with the town under Wis. Stat. § 173.15(1) or to a humane officer or law enforcement officer for disposition under Wis. Stat. § 173.23. See Wis. Stat. § 173.13(1)(c). Practically speaking, if the county does not provide a pound or other location to take stray animals, the town will have to come up with a location to avoid having a pack of wild dogs roaming the town.

Q. Who is responsible for the costs of caring for and impounding the stray or abandoned dog?

A. A town has the option to provide for its own facility or to contract with another person to provide for the care, custody and disposal of animals taken into custody by a humane officer, law enforcement, or other officer. See Wis. Stat. § 173.15(1). As part of providing for this service, the town may establish a fee schedule that sets the costs for providing the care, custody and treatment of that dog. If the owner claims the dog, then they are responsible for paying these costs. See Wis. Stat. § 173.23(1)(d). If some other person claims the dog, then that person would pay for such costs. Even if a town fails to establish a formal fee schedule, it may still charge for the actual costs of the care, custody or treatment of the dog. Wis. Stat. § 173.15(1). A town or village board may raise the statutory minimum dog license fees (by resolution) to an amount that will not exceed the total cost of all its dog licensing, regulating and impounding activities from the previous year. Wis. Stat. § 174.05(3).

Q. What happens if the owner fails to claim the dog?

A. If an abandoned or stray dog is not claimed and returned to its owner within 4 days of being taken into custody, it is considered unclaimed. See Wis. Stat. § 173.19(1). Pursuant to Wis. Stat. § 173.23(1m), unclaimed animals may be released to any person other than the owner if: 1) The person provides his or her name and address; 2) The animal is licensed or assurance of licensure is given by evidence of prepayment; 3) The animal is vaccinated or assurance of vaccination is given by evidence of prepayment; and, 4) The charges for the care, custody and treatment of the dog are fully paid or waived.

If an abandoned or stray dog is unclaimed, it may be euthanized after 7 days have elapsed or it may be released to a higher educational institution if requisitioned by the institution for scientific or educational purposes. See Wis. Stat. § 173.23(1m). Be sure to provide notice to the owner, if known, so that the owner has a chance to claim the animal before the 7 days elapse. The longer notice requirements described above apply if a person (such as a resident) takes a stray *animal* into custody. Different notice requirements apply if a certified humane officer or law enforcement officer (acting on behalf of a political subdivision) takes custody of the animal. See Wis. Stat. § 173.13(3).

Wisconsin Towns Association

New Clerk Bootcamp

Workshop Agenda

June 2025 Cohort



*A one-day session designed for **new town clerks** to learn the duties and functions of the clerk role.*

8:00AM Registration

8:30AM Welcome & Introductions

8:45 – 10:00AM Overview of Clerk Role

10:00 – 10:15AM Break

10:15 – 11:45AM Meetings are more than Minutes

11:45 – 12:00PM Break & Get Lunch (provided)

12:00 – 12:45PM Working Lunch – Elections

12:45 – 1:00PM Break – Transition to afternoon session

1:00 – 2:30PM Reports

2:30 – 2:45PM Break

2:45 – 4:00PM Financial

4:00 – 4:30PM Additional resources, wrap-up, evaluation

Wisconsin Towns Association

New Clerk Bootcamp

Registration

I plan to attend the following workshop (please check one):

- | | | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------|----------------------|-------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Monday, June 9 | Clark Co. Courthouse | 517 Court St., Neillsville |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Tues., June 10 | UW Barron Co. Campus | 1800 College Dr., Rice Lake |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Friday, June 13 | Town of Grover Hall | W5161 Town Hall Rd., Peshtigo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Tues., June 17 | Dodge Co. Courthouse | 210 West Center St., Juneau |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Thurs., June 19 | Town of Holland Hall | W7937 Co. Rd. MH, Holman |

\$50 – Early registration (registration includes lunch and materials)

(payment must be received at least 10 days in advance of the workshop date)

\$65 – Late registrations and walk-in registrations

Name

Town

County

Mailing Address

City/State

Zip

Telephone

Email

Make check payable to the Wisconsin Towns Association and mail along with registration form to:

Wisconsin Towns Association; W7686 County Road MMM; Shawano, WI 54166.

Registration and payment may also be submitted online on the WTA website, www.wisctowns.com.

Total charges will include a \$2.65 credit card processing convenience fee for payments made via credit card.

If you have any questions, please email wtowns@wisctowns.com or call (715) 526-3157.

Cancellations received 10 days or more in advance of the workshop date will receive a full refund less a \$15.00 administrative fee. Cancellations received less than 10 days in advance will be charged a \$15.00 administrative fee plus the cost of food. Refund requests submitted 30 or more days after the event will not be processed.

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Alcohol Licensing FAQs

Towns and villages issue retail licenses to sell alcohol. These licenses expire each year on June 30, and the new licensing year begins July 1. All applications filed with the clerk on or before April 15 must be granted or denied by the board no later than June 15. Wis. Stat. § 125.51(1)(c)1. For detailed information about alcohol licensing, as well as copies of application forms, please visit the Wisconsin Division of Alcohol Beverages (DAB) website: <https://www.revenue.wi.gov/Pages/AlcoholBeverage/home.aspx>.

Q. How does a business determine which retail alcohol licenses to apply for?

A. Wisconsin law generally categorizes retail licenses to sell alcohol beverages in two ways: 1) by letter, to indicate whether beverages may be sold for consumption *on or off* the licensed premises, and 2) by quotation marks, to indicate the *type* of alcohol beverages that may be sold. Class **A** licenses authorize the sale of alcohol for **off**-premises consumption, such as a grocery or liquor store that sells bottles/cans of alcohol for customers to take *away*. Wis. Stats. §§ 125.25 and 125.51(2). Class **B** licenses authorize the sale of alcohol for **on**-premises consumption, such as a restaurant or tavern that sells glasses of alcohol for customers to drink at the *bar*. See §§ 125.26 and 125.51(3). (Think *away* for Class A, *bar* for Class B.)

Quotation marks indicate whether a license authorizes the sale of fermented malt beverages (such as beer, wine coolers, and non-liquor based hard seltzers) versus the sale of liquor and wine. A license with quotation marks surrounding only the **letter** (Class “A” and Class “B”) allows the sale of *fermented malt beverages*. A license with quotation marks surrounding the **full phrase** (“Class A” and “Class B”) allows the sale of *liquor and wine*. Applicants that plan to sell both beer and liquor/wine must obtain both types of licenses, and all retail “Class B” licensees are also required to obtain a Class “B” license. See § 125.51(3)(f).

If a business wishes to sell *wine* for on-premises consumption, but not other types of liquor, they also have the option to apply for a “Class C” wine license. Wisconsin law previously limited “Class C” wine licenses to restaurants. But, as of May 1, 2024, “Class C” wine licenses may now be issued to any person otherwise qualified to hold an alcohol beverage license. See § 125.51(3m)(c). Note that a business could apply for and be issued both a Class “B” beer license and a “Class C” wine license for the same establishment.

Q. Which types of retail alcohol licenses are subject to a quota?

A. Only “Class B” liquor licenses are subject to a statutory quota. Wis. Stat. § 125.51(4). Each municipality’s quota is based on the number of licenses actually issued in good faith and in force on December 1, 1997, plus the number of *reserve* “Class B” liquor licenses that the municipality is authorized to issue. If you are unsure what your town or village’s quota is, please contact the WTA office for help calculating this number. There is **no** statutory quota for any other type of retail alcohol license. However, a municipality may adopt an ordinance to create local quotas for “Class A” liquor and Class “A” and B” beer licenses, and/or establish a *more* restrictive local quota for “Class B” liquor licenses.

Q. What forms are required to apply for a new retail alcohol license or renew an existing license?

A. Both new businesses and renewing licensees must submit DAB Form AB-200, the Alcohol Beverage License Application. Additionally, applicants must submit the following forms with their application:

- a) Individual Questionnaire (AB-100) for each agent, officer, member, partner, or individual owner of the business, **and**
- b) Appointment of Agent (AB-101) *if* the business is an LLC or corporation.

Q. What fees must municipalities charge for retail alcohol licenses?

A. License fees are set by local ordinance, but municipalities must set the fees within the minimum and maximum amounts established by state statute. For example, the minimum annual licensing fee for a “Class B” liquor license is \$50, and the maximum that can be charged each year is \$500. The quota restrictions for “Class B” licenses also require that municipalities must charge a minimum \$10,000 initial issuance fee for *reserve* “Class B” liquor licenses (in addition to the annual “Class B” license fee). The clerk cannot issue a retail alcohol license until the applicant files a receipt with the clerk showing payment of all required license fees to the treasurer. Wis. Stat. § 125.04(8).

Q. What notice do clerks have to publish for retail alcohol license applications?

A. All applications for licenses to sell alcohol beverages must be filed with the municipal clerk at least 15 days prior to the granting of the license. Wis. Stat. § 125.04(3)(f). During that time, the clerk must publish a notice in the newspaper of all applications for annual retail licenses to sell beer, liquor, and wine (Class “A,” Class “B,” “Class A,” “Class B,” and “Class C” licenses). Wis. Stat. § 125.04(3)(g). The notice must include each applicant’s name and address, the type of license applied for, and the location of the premises intended to be licensed.

The notice must be published in either a newspaper that has been regularly published in the town or village for at least the past two years, or, if no such newspaper exists, a newspaper with circulation in the municipality. If the newspaper is a daily newspaper, the clerk must publish the notice at least 3 times on consecutive dates. If the newspaper is a weekly newspaper, the clerk must publish the notice at least 1 time. The statutes do not specify an exact timeline for publication. We recommend publishing alcohol license application notices about one week before the meeting when the board will make its determination. Applicants must pay the cost of publication to the municipal clerk at the time their application is filed.

Q. How can someone apply for the new statewide bartender permit from the DAB?

A. Effective January 1, 2025, the DAB now has the authority to issue an “operator’s permit” (aka bartender’s permit) to any qualified applicant under the statute newly created by 2023 Wisconsin Act 73, Wis. Stat. § 125.175. The DAB permits have the same requirements and applicability as operators’ licenses issued by municipalities, but they are valid statewide. The permit fee is \$200 every 2 years, plus a \$7 background check fee. The application and a fact sheet with more detailed information can be found on the DAB website. Municipalities still have the authority to issue *local* operators’ licenses that are valid only in that municipality. It’s up to each applicant to decide whether to apply for an operator’s license from the municipality where they plan to work as a bartender or to apply for the statewide permit.



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Clerk's Corner



By: Melissa Kono, UW Ext./WTA Clerk Specialist

Upcoming Training Reminders, Maintenance of Effort (MOE) Lunch and Learn, Clerk College FAQs

It was wonderful to meet so many of you at the Spring Workshops and I am looking forward to seeing some of you again and meeting new clerks at the **New Clerk Bootcamps** throughout the state this month. This is a last-minute reminder that if you are a new clerk to consider attending one of these workshops held in-person in Neillsville, Rice Lake, Peshtigo, Juneau, and La Crosse. These one-day workshops will give new clerks the information and resources they need to navigate their clerk role. New clerks, and clerks with less than three years of experience are strongly urged to attend. Register at: <https://www.wisctowns.com/bootcamp-form/>

Maintenance of Effort Reminders

Just a reminder that the Maintenance of Effort (MOE) report is due July 1st for all municipalities. Fire and Emergency Management Services (EMS) partners must send their certification of effort form (SL-307 for combined Fire/EMS, SL-308 for Fire Services, and SL-309 for EMS) to clerks by June 15th. If your municipality is covered by multiple EMS and/or Fire Service providers your municipality will need a form from each. The clerk will upload these forms from the Fire and EMS partners in MyDORGov along with the Maintenance of Effort report Form SL-305. The Wisconsin Towns Association and the Wisconsin Department of Revenue held a Lunch and Learn webinar on MOE on May 28th, and a recording of this webinar is available in case you missed it or would like to review the information before filing.

MyDORGov Annual Refresher

For a general overview of the MYDORGov system, the Department of Revenue recently offered their Annual Refresher Webinar on navigating MyDORGov on May 21st and a recorded version is available on their website. This webinar includes information on obtaining log in information, navigating the dashboard, how to file forms, and recent improvements to the site. Many of the reports clerks are required to file such as the Form CT, the Levy Limit Worksheet, and Board of Review documents (among several others) are filed through the MYDORGov site.

Clerk College FAQs

We are excited to offer the first year of Clerk College, a year-long, in-depth, professional development program developed specifically for Town Clerks. There has been an overwhelming interest in Clerk College, and a few commonly asked questions I would like to address here.

Q: I'm interested in just a few of the courses, or I'm unable to attend all of the sessions—can I still attend Clerk College?

A: Clerk College is designed to be an immersive professional development certificate program to develop clerk careers and thus attendance at all sessions throughout the year is required. One of the major benefits of participating in a cohort with other clerks over the course of a year is the ability to network and build relationships. If there is a session or two that interests you, please be encouraged that several of these topics such as completing the Form CT are offered as webinars apart from Clerk College.

Q: What is the structure of Clerk College?

A: The inaugural Wisconsin Towns Association Clerk College kicks off in July 2025 and concludes in June 2026 with a graduation ceremony. We will meet monthly either in-person or via Zoom, depending on the topic we are covering. Some topics, like the Annual Meeting, can easily be covered in a one-hour Zoom, while in-depth topics such as Human Resources Management for Towns, or personality assessments are better suited for in-person learning. Clerk College courses are held either in-person over the course of two days at the Holiday Inn in Stevens Point or via Zoom lasting approximately one hour. There are three in-person sessions at the Holiday Inn in Stevens Point throughout the year starting at 9:30 a.m. on the first day, and ending by 3:00 p.m. on the following day to allow for travel. Built into the Clerk College curriculum is attendance at other WTA educational workshops and events including the Fall Financial Workshops, the WTA Convention, and the District Meetings.

Q: What is included in the tuition cost of Clerk College?

A: Clerk College tuition includes printed materials and handouts, breakfast, lunch, and snacks at in-person sessions, in addition to a certificate and 50 hours of course instruction. Additionally, registration fees for both the Fall Financial Workshops and the District Meetings are included in the cost of Clerk College tuition (a \$170 value). Please note that the cost of the WTA Convention is not included in the Clerk College tuition due to the one-day or multi-day registration options for Convention. Travel to the in-person events and hotel stays are not included in the tuition price, but there is a room block set aside at the state rate (\$98 single occupancy and \$120 for double occupancy) at the Holiday Inn in Stevens Point for those requiring overnight accommodations during the three in-person sessions.

Q: Where can I find detailed information on Clerk College

A: More information on Clerk College including an agenda, list of courses, and registration can be found at: <https://www.wisctowns.com/clerk-college/>

Finally, I want to assure you that I am developing additional options for clerk education and support. We understand that not everyone is able to commit to a year-long program at this time. Because we appreciate—and understand—the desire to attend clerk-focused training, educational offerings outside of Clerk College will be offered throughout the year that cover the essentials and provide professional development opportunities for clerks. Please look for monthly Lunch and Learn webinars, as well as clerk-focused topics at the Fall Financial Workshops in September, and the WTA Annual Convention in October.

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Date	Topic	Format
7/10/25	Introduction to Clerk College Webinar	Via Zoom
7/31/25	Introduction to Clerk Roles and Responsibilities	Holiday Inn, Stevens Point
8/1/25	Human Resources Management for Towns	Holiday Inn, Stevens Point
8/28/25	Open Meetings and Public Records	Via Zoom
9/9/25-9/18/25	Fall Financial Workshops	In-Person & Virtual
10/12/25-10/14/25	WTA Convention	Kalahari, Wisconsin Dells
11/6/25	Municipal Core Training (or credit for prior learning)	In-Person & Virtual
12/4/25	Town Boards and Town Meetings	Via Zoom
1/20/26	Working with Different Personalities	Holiday Inn, Stevens Point
1/21/26	Reports, Reports, Reports	Holiday Inn, Stevens Point
Jan-March 2026	District Meetings: Legislative updates and BOR	In-Person & Virtual
3/19/26	Form CT	Via Zoom
4/9/26	Annual Meeting	Via Zoom
6/25/26	Intergovernmental and Conflict Management	Holiday Inn, Stevens Point
6/26/26	Graduation	Holiday Inn, Stevens Point

Wisconsin Towns Association

Clerk College

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Open Meetings Law FAQs

Q. What is the open meetings law?

A. The open meetings law refers to Wis. Stat. §§ 19.81-19.98. The purpose of the open meetings law is to increase transparency and openness in government. The open meetings law requires that all meetings of governmental bodies be preceded by public notice and held in places that are open and reasonably accessible to the public.

Q. Who is subject to the open meetings law?

A. Every meeting of a governmental body is subject to the open meetings law. A governmental body includes any “state or local agency, board, commission, committee, council, department, or public body corporate and politic created by constitution, statute, ordinance, rule or order...” See Wis. Stat. § 19.81(1). This would include town boards as well as their committees, commissions, boards, and sub-units.

Q. What constitutes a “meeting” of a governmental body?

A. Pursuant to Wis. Stat. § 19.82(2) a meeting means “the convening of members of a governmental body for the purpose of exercising the responsibilities, authority, power or duties delegated to or vested in the body.” The Wisconsin courts provide a two-part test to determine whether a meeting has taken place. Both tests must be met for a meeting to be taking place. Firstly, the purpose test is met when members of a governmental body meet to conduct government business. If there is information gathering, discussion, or decision-making taking place, then the group is meeting for the purpose of conducting government business. The second test is the numbers test. The numbers test is met when there are enough members of the governmental body present to determine the outcome of an action. Under the open meetings law, if a majority of the governmental body is present, there is a presumption that a meeting is taking place. See § 19.82(2). However, there are some decisions (e.x. the town board voting to amend the budget) that require a two-thirds vote of a body to pass. Therefore, if just two members of a five person board, for example, were to privately discuss opposing a proposed budget amendment, they could determine the outcome of such a vote with less than a majority of the governing body. This is referred to as a “negative quorum” which would also violate the open meetings law.

Q. How is notice provided for a meeting of a governmental body?

A. Wis. Stat. § 19.84 requires that the governing body’s chief presiding officer or their designee provide separate notice for each of the body’s meetings. The notice must be provided at least 24 hours in advance of the meeting. In the event of an emergency, there is a good cause exception where a notice may be provided no less than 2 hours in advance of a meeting if a 24 hour notice is impossible or impractical. Notice must be provided to (1) the public; (2) any news media who have made a written request for your notices, *and* (3) either your town’s official newspaper or, if your town does not have an official newspaper, to at least one news medium likely to give notice to people in your area. Please note that the newspaper does not have to print the notice and you do not have to pay to publish the notice, but you must send the

notice to the newspaper or other news source (whether they publish it or not). All three notice requirements must be met for every meeting of the governmental body for there to be proper notice. State statutes should always be reviewed to ensure that all notice requirements are met.

Q. Our town board heard that general public comment is not a requirement for our monthly town board meetings. Is that correct?

A. Yes, state statute does not require that each meeting of the town board include general public comment. If your town board accepts public comment, it must be included as part of the town board's meeting notices. Please note that there are certain functions (such as the town budget) that require public hearings. Public hearings are different than public comment. Certain state statutes require that public hearings be held for various events like comprehensive plan amendments, zoning amendments, etc. Please be sure to review state statute to determine when a public hearing is required. In addition, your town board may have an internal policy that requires general public comment on the town board agenda.

Q. Can the town board set limits on public comment?

A. Yes, the town board could choose to establish a policy that limits public comment. Please note that in the absence of rules/policy, the town chair would be responsible for establishing public comment rules. See Wis. Stat. § 60.24(1)(a). The town could choose to set rules that address matters; such as, the number of times that an individual can speak, the amount of time that each person has to speak, and whether there are limitations to the topics that the public can address. As an example, some local governments require that speakers under public comment only address items that are on the meeting notice/agenda.

Q. The town board would like to inspect the town roads to determine what road work needs to be completed this summer. They would like to travel and inspect the roads together on a "road tour". How do we provide notice?

A. There may be times when the town board will need to travel to accomplish its business. Certain precautions must be taken to comply with the open meetings law. Since the town board is convening together to conduct town board business on the road tour, notice must be provided. In addition, the locations where the town board is meeting must be open and accessible to the public. On p. 21 of the Wisconsin Department of Justice's (DOJ's) Open Meetings Law Guide (available here: https://www.wisdoj.gov/Open%20Government/OML_guide.pdf), the DOJ provides the following:

1) First, the public notice of the meeting must list all of the locations to be visited in the order in which they will be visited. This makes it possible for a member of the public to follow the governmental body to each location or to join the governmental body at any particular location;

2) Second, each location at which government business is to be conducted must itself be reasonably accessible to the public at all times when such business is taking place; and

3) Third, care must be taken to ensure that government business is discussed only during those times when the members of the body are convened at one of the particular locations for which notice has been given. The members of the governmental body may travel together or separately, but if half or more of them travel together, they may not discuss government business when their vehicle is in motion, because a moving vehicle is not accessible to the public.

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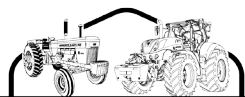
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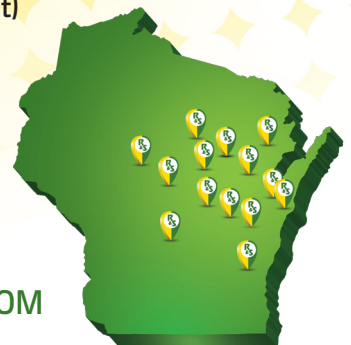
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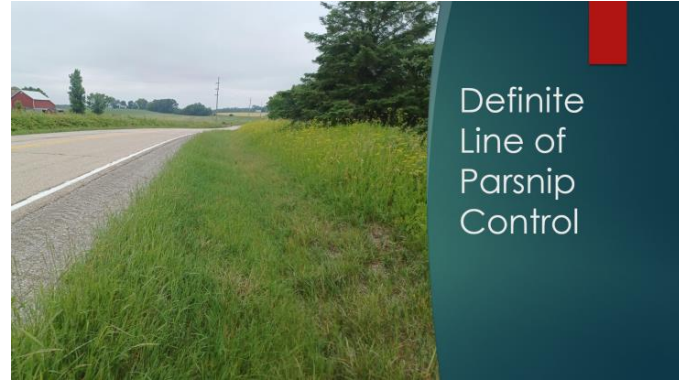
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"What strategies can be implemented by town officials in collaboration with citizens to maintain civility in local government?"

Written By: Reina Arndt, Owen-Withee High School

The Wisconsin Towns Association, Rural Mutual Insurance Company, and Scott Construction, Inc. award \$7000 in scholarships to high school seniors graduating from either a public or private high school that enroll in a Wisconsin public or private college or university. The winners are determined by independent judging of an essay contest.

Local government serves as the cornerstone of democracy, providing essential services and representing the interests of citizens at the grassroots level. However, in recent years, the discourse within local government has become increasingly polarized and divisive, undermining the ability of officials to govern effectively and serve the needs of their communities. In order to maintain civility and promote constructive dialogue, collaboration between town officials and citizens is essential. This essay explores strategies that can be implemented by town officials in partnership with citizens to foster civility in local government.

Effective communication is fundamental to fostering civility and trust between town officials and citizens. Town officials should actively seek input from residents through town hall meetings, public forums, and online platforms. By providing opportunities for citizens to voice their concerns, ask questions, and engage in dialogue with officials, the town can promote transparency, accountability, and citizen participation in the decision-making process.



Town officials can establish civility codes or guidelines that outline expectations for respectful behavior and discourse in local government meetings and interactions. These codes should emphasize the importance of listening to diverse perspectives, avoiding personal attacks or derogatory language, and maintaining a constructive and respectful tone. By setting clear expectations for behavior, town officials can create a culture of civility and mutual respect within the community.

In instances where tensions or conflicts arise between town officials and citizens, mediation and conflict resolution techniques can help facilitate constructive dialogue and find mutually acceptable solutions. Town officials can enlist the support of trained mediators or facilitators to facilitate discussions, identify common ground, and work toward consensus. By addressing

conflicts early and proactively, town officials can prevent the escalation of disputes and promote collaboration and cooperation within the community.

Town officials and citizens alike can benefit from education and training programs focused on effective communication, conflict resolution, and civic engagement. Workshops, seminars, and online resources can provide town officials with the skills and knowledge necessary to navigate challenging situations and engage with citizens in a constructive manner. Similarly, citizens can benefit from education programs that promote civic literacy, encourage informed participation in local government, and foster a greater understanding of democratic principles and processes.

Town officials can implement community engagement initiatives that seek to involve citizens in the decision-making process and build consensus around key issues. These initiatives may include citizen advisory committees, task forces, or community forums focused on specific topics or projects. By actively involving citizens in the governance process, town officials can harness the collective wisdom and expertise of the community, build trust and legitimacy, and ensure that decisions reflect the values and priorities of residents.

Town officials play a critical role in setting the tone and culture of civility within local government. By modeling respectful behavior, active listening, and a willingness to engage with diverse perspectives, officials can inspire citizens to do the same. Town officials should demonstrate a commitment to transparency, accountability, and ethical conduct, and hold themselves to the highest standards of integrity and professionalism. By leading by example, town officials can foster a culture of civility and collaboration that permeates throughout the community.

Maintaining civility in local government requires collaboration and partnership between town officials and citizens. By implementing strategies such as open communication channels, civility codes, mediation and conflict resolution, education and training, community engagement initiatives, and leading by example, town officials can foster a culture of civility, trust, and respect within the community. By working together, town officials and citizens can ensure that local government remains responsive, inclusive, and effective in serving the needs of the community.

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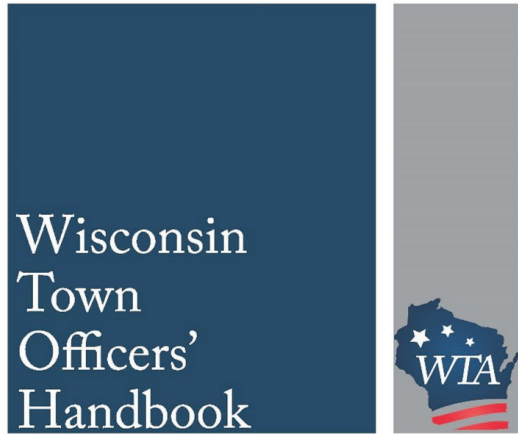
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Fourth Edition, 2023

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