

Wisconsin Towns Association

September 2025



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Wisconsin Towns

September 2025

What's Inside...	Page
From the Desk of the Executive Director, Mike Koles	4
2025 Fall Town and Village Workshops	8
General Transportation Aids - Atty. Joe Ruth, Government Affairs Director	13
2025 WTA Annual Convention	16
2025 WTA Annual Convention Registration Form	22
2025 WTA Annual Convention Lodging	23
Exceeding the Levy Limit - Atty. Lara Carlson	25
The County Unit System - Jake Langenhahn, Outreach Specialist	28
Town Officer Handbook Order Form	29
2025 Town Law Conference	30
Slow the Flow: Reducing Flood Risks with Culvert and Upstream Solutions	32
New Employee Paperwork - Melissa Kono, UW Extension/ WTA Clerk Specialist	35
"What strategies can be implemented by town officials in collaboration with citizens to maintain civility in local government?" - Connor Schroeder, 2024 Scholarship Winner	39

Empowering Town Officials

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



By
Mike Koles

The Leadership Challenge

With the recent success of Clerk Bootcamp (147 of 161 new town clerks attended – a 91% penetration rate) and a couple of very well attended lunch & learn webinars on maintenance of effort reporting and obtaining a .gov email address (over 400 live attendees between the two), our new clerk outreach program has now started to also focus on the implementation of the inaugural class of Clerk College. The first virtual and in person sessions were held in mid-July and late August, respectively. It is difficult for me to describe how bullish I am on this program.

Clerk College is designed around a tried-and-true leadership development education framework that was pioneered by UW-Extension in the 1980s and first manifested as the Wisconsin Rural Leadership Program (subsequently renamed Leadership Wisconsin). The methodology was adapted by dozens of universities and eventually thousands of organizations, consultants, and businesses. For nearly two decades, I had the opportunity to coordinate and teach a four-day segment on state government to each class and even helped their Board of Directors develop several strategic plans. WTA President, Tom Winker, and a number of other town officials are graduates. Eventually, I took the leap and ran my own local leadership development program for 11 years before transitioning from a UW-Extension faculty member to your Executive Director.

FIVE PRACTICES OF EXEMPLARY LEADERSHIP

Model the Way
Inspire a Shared Vision
Challenge the Process
Enable Others to Act
Encourage the Heart

In a nutshell, Clerk College is focused on not only teaching clerks the content they need to know to succeed (the what), but also the how and the why. Leadership requires all three, and teaching it requires a unique approach, which UW-Extension cracked the code on four decades ago. Programs must largely be in person; interactive; deploy a variety of teaching techniques – not just sit and be PowerPointed to death; and utilize peer-based learning that can't be achieved unless a course has the same group of people over an extended period of time (a cohort). So, while I know some clerks were disappointed I wouldn't allow them to audit a

single session, miss a class or two, or only attend virtually, that would have caused us to fall short of the course goals to increase both content knowledge and leadership skills. There have and will continue to be plenty of programs for clerks that can't commit to Clerk College. Remember, the outreach

specialist program is only 5 months old.

Also, don't worry if a clerk couldn't attend this year. There will be a second class next year. Not only is WTA fully committed to this strategy, but we had to cut off participation at 30 in order to maintain a workable cohort methodology. We even developed a waiting list of 18 clerks that will get the 50% off price for next year! We're going to limit it to 25 next year, so if someone is interested they will want to look for the registration announcement for Class II in the spring of 2026.

That's a long introduction into the main topic of my article this month, but the prelude was necessary because the beginning of Clerk College reminds me of one of my favorite leadership books, which participants of the leadership program I taught read as part of the course requirements. **The Leadership Challenge** is a research-based summary of what two professors, James Kouzes and Barry Posner, found to be five critically important leadership traits. As they state in the introduction to the fifth edition: *"Times change, problems change, technologies change, and people change. Leadership endures."* Yes, content knowledge matters, but there will always be new and different content. To take your government to the next level requires leadership. That has and will always be the case.

Let's take a very brief look at the five practices of exemplary leadership necessary for folks to foster making extraordinary things happen in their businesses, communities, and homes.

Model the Way

DWYSYWD! Do What You Say You Will Do. Actions and behavior, not words, earn respect and attract people to your team. Even if actions take longer than anticipated in today's complex and politically nutty environment, make sure to eventually get to them. If you have to change course because of unforeseen circumstances, make sure to let people know, or they will think you just dropped the ball.

To truly model the way, actions must be based on a solid set of guiding principles that are clearly communicated. That is precisely why the WTA has developed a set of core values. Let's look at one that recently got me in a little bit of hot water with some state government officials.

A portion of our Values Statement reads: "WTA values: Character – Doing the right thing and fixing the wrong." We not only strive to do the right thing and help towns do the same, when we see something that is wrong, we aim to fix it. Towns and villages were recently wronged, and while it would have been easy to simply let it go, our team couldn't. A WTA core principle is to fix a wrong! Every external party we work with (and I mean every single one) told us we needed to get over it. We were told it was impossible to fix this wrong. Although we ruffled some feathers, the wrong was indeed fixed.

Inspire a Shared Vision

I used to have my leadership students watch the entirety of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I have a dream" speech. If I had more time, I would have had them watch Churchill, Reagan, FDR, and Kennedy and study Lincoln, Carnegie, Susan B. Anthony, and Marie Curie. They all inspired a team, some small and others very large, with a vision of where the boat would land if we all rowed very hard in the same direction.

How can we forget Churchill's fight vision: *"We shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall never surrender."* My childhood was tattooed with Reagan, especially, *"Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall,"* a vision that came true only a few years later. And, without the persevering vision of Susan B. Anthony, where would our mothers, daughters, aunts, and nieces be today?

The WTA vision is to provide town officials with the keys to protect and engage the power of town decision making and unlock the potential of democracy. We do this through education, legal information, and legislative advocacy, but it is up to you to put the key in the lock and turn the knob.

Challenge the Process

Goals are the enemy of the status quo. The status quo will fight hard to remain the status quo because, after all, it is the status quo. Victories and advancement only occur by challenging, fighting, and changing the existing situation. At risk of diminishing the importance of the other four traits, if I had to pick my favorite, this would be it. I get an adrenaline rush from being entrepreneurial and defeating “the way we’ve always done it” mentality. If it’s been working good for a while, then it’s time to break it and find a better way.

One of the WTA core values reads: “Be creative, think outside the box, and take calculated risks.” This always manifests itself in our staff meetings. I usually come with an idea or two on how to address things. WTA encourages the team to challenge others’ ideas. Consequently, nine times out of ten we walk out of the staff meeting doing things differently and better than I had originally proposed.

Edison challenged the darkness and kerosene lamps and created the light bulb. What status quo do you need to challenge to make your town a better place?

Enable Others to Act

Visions do not become reality and the status quo is not defeated through the actions of a single person. Carol cannot accomplish answering the dozens of legal hotline calls every week without her team. Jake, Lara, and Melissa cannot provide effective educational programming without a host of internal and external teachers. Joe would not be nearly as successful at legislative advocacy without effective county unit meetings, the Town Advocacy Council members and Executive Committee, his fellow lobbyists, and the Town Ambassadors. The whole office would fall apart without our top-notch support staff.

Leaders mentor others, develop the relationships and trust-based environment that empowers others to act and lead, and then give their power away.

Two frequent enemies of empowerment are lack of training and micromanagement. Are you empowering your staff through training? If not, how can one expect them to succeed? Are you slowly letting go of the reins and letting them run on their own?

Encourage the Heart

The authors of the Leadership Challenge provide a mechanism to test and determine your level of skills in each of these areas. I first took the assessment twenty years ago and was certain the results were wrong. Upon reflection, they were indeed correct. If there was such a thing as an F minus, that’s what I would have scored on Encourage the Heart.

I’m a hard charger. I do the job because it’s my job and the right thing to do. I don’t expect a ton of gratitude from others. As a young man, empathy was something I absolutely did not understand. I thought everyone could blindly push through every situation no matter the circumstances.

A few more trips around the sun have helped me understand that I couldn’t have been more wrong. Gratitude is critical, especially to individuals with particular personality types. Thank your team – a lot! Reward them – a lot! Celebrate the successes – a lot!

And, we’re human. Things happen at home. People get sick. Town citizens can be a handful. Town officials and workers can be unjustifiably attacked. Be empathetic. Your team doesn’t care how much you know, until they know how much you care.



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Fall Workshops September 2025



Join us to learn about budgeting, levy limits, financial procedures, tax bills, EMS funding, capital improvement planning, town road safety, and more!

Tuesday, 9/9: Barneveld, Deer Valley Lodge
Wednesday, 9/10: Fond du Lac, Prairie Theater
Thursday, 9/11: Green Bay, Rock Garden

Monday, 9/15: Stevens Point, Holiday Inn
Tuesday, 9/16: Eau Claire, Florian Gardens
Wednesday, 9/17: Cable, Lakewoods Resort
Thursday, 9/18: Rhinelander, The Pines

Monday – Thursday, 9/22 – 9/25: Webinars

All workshop registrants will receive access to recordings of the presentations. Register on the Wisconsin Towns Association website, wisctowns.com, or by mail.

2025 Fall Town & Village Workshops

PROGRAM DESCRIPTIONS

Budget and Levy Adoption Procedures

Carol Nawrocki and Lara Carlson, Wisconsin Towns Association

Learn the step-by-step procedures required to hold your town or village's budget public hearing, adopt a final budget and make amendments to it, set your total property tax levy, and exceed your allowable levy limit.

Municipal Levy Limit Worksheet Reporting

Andrea Newman Wilfong and Frank Bozich, WI Department of Revenue (DOR)

Join staff from the DOR's State and Local Finance Division for a walkthrough and discussion of Wisconsin's levy limit law, with a focus on reviewing key lines of the 2025 Municipal Levy Limit Worksheet. This session equips attendees with a deeper understanding of the worksheet, shares helpful filing tips, and highlights available resources.

Closing the Books: Year-end Duties for Clerks & Treasurers

Melissa Kono, Wisconsin Towns Association / Local Government Education

This presentation will cover several end of year responsibilities, including an overview of how to complete the Statement of Taxes report and best practices for financial reconciliation for clerks and treasurers.

Building Your Tax Bill

Karl Green, Local Government Education

This course will examine who contributes to your local tax bill, handling special assessments, best practices for tax collection, the tax apportionment process, and how to calculate your municipal mill rate. Participants will walk through the steps to create a tax bill, based on sample levy limit worksheet information.

Useful Local Government Financial Procedures

Jake Langenhahn, Wisconsin Towns Association

Does your town or village have a policy for reimbursing officers? Or an alternative claims procedure ordinance to allow certain bills to be paid in advance of board meetings? This session will review useful financial procedures for local governments, where to find sample policies and ordinances in the Wisconsin Town Law Forms, and steps for adoption.

Capital Improvement Planning for Local Units of Government

Karl Green, Local Government Education

An introduction to Capital Improvement Planning (CIP), a critical process for local governments to strategically manage their long-term infrastructure and asset investments. You'll gain knowledge and tools to develop, implement, and monitor an effective CIP that aligns with community goals and provides transparency to the public.

Bringing Effective Leadership Skills Into the Town Boardroom

Bill Oemichen and Daniel Foth, Local Government Education

Build core leadership skills in the context of specific needs of effective town government, including team building and group decision making, change management and conflict resolution, and effective communication strategies.

Improving Town Road Safety Using the Safe System Approach

Andi Bill and Ben Jordan, Wisconsin Local Technical Assistance Program

The Safe System Approach (SSA) integrates engineering solutions with behavioral countermeasures to create a road safety strategy aimed at eliminating fatalities and serious injuries. The SSA recognizes that human errors are inevitable and emphasizes creating a transportation system that is resilient to these errors. Review examples of how the SSA can be implemented on a town road system and discuss the challenges and opportunities in applying this in rural areas.

Legislative Update

Mike Koles and Joe Ruth, Wisconsin Towns Association

WTA staff will provide an update on recent legislative changes and an explanation of what those changes mean for your town or village. With a focus on the 2025-27 state budget, this presentation will highlight changes in state aid and help

town and village officials remain compliant with state law.

Navigating the Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Funding Maze

Bill Oemichen, Local Government Education

This program will focus on efforts being made by local units of government and EMS providers to ensure local EMS services are adequately funded at a time of greater demand, rapidly rising costs, and decreased voluntarism. We'll examine efforts across Wisconsin to fund EMS services through the county tax levy, as well as current studies of local EMS funding options being financed by the State Collaboration Grant Program.

IN-PERSON WORKSHOP SCHEDULE

Clerks and Treasurers		General Topics	
8:00 - 8:30 a.m.	Registration	8:00 - 8:30 a.m.	Registration
8:30 - 9:30 a.m.	Budget and Levy Adoption Procedures	8:30 - 9:30 a.m.	Capital Improvement Planning
9:30 - 11:00 a.m.	Municipal Levy Limit Worksheet Reporting	9:30 - 10:30 a.m.	Effective Leadership Skills
11:00 - 11:15 a.m.	Break	10:30 - 10:45 a.m.	Break
11:15 a.m. - 12:15 p.m.	Year-end Clerk and Treasurer Duties	10:45 a.m. - 12:15 p.m.	Improving Town Road Safety
12:15 - 1:00 p.m.	Lunch	12:15 - 1:00 p.m.	Lunch
1:00 - 2:00 p.m.	Building Your Tax Bill	1:00 - 2:00 p.m.	Legislative Update
2:00 - 2:15 p.m.	Break	2:00 - 2:15 p.m.	Break
2:15 - 3:00 p.m.	Local Government Financial Procedures	2:15 - 3:00 p.m.	Navigating the EMS Funding Maze
3:00 p.m.	Evaluations / Adjourn	3:00 p.m.	Evaluations / Adjourn

LIVE WEBINAR / TELECONFERENCE SCHEDULE

Monday, 9/22	9:00 - 10:00 a.m.	Legislative Update
	10:15 - 11:45 a.m.	Improving Town Road Safety
Tuesday, 9/23	1:00 - 2:00 p.m.	Capital Improvement Planning
	2:00 - 2:45 p.m.	Navigating the EMS Funding Maze
	3:00 - 4:00 p.m.	Effective Leadership Skills
Wednesday, 9/24	9:00 - 10:00 a.m.	Budget and Levy Adoption Procedures
	10:15 - 11:45 a.m.	Municipal Levy Limit Worksheet Reporting
Thursday, 9/25	1:00 - 2:00 p.m.	Year-end Clerk and Treasurer Duties
	2:00 - 2:45 p.m.	Local Government Financial Procedures
	3:00 - 4:00 p.m.	Building Your Tax Bill

2025 FALL WORKSHOPS REGISTRATION FORM

All registrants (including in-person attendees) will receive access to the live webinar presentations, as well as on-demand access to recordings of each session. **Limited printed materials will be provided to in-person attendees; copies of PPT slides and materials for virtual attendees will be provided on the WTA website.** Registered attendees will receive an email (at the email address you provide below) with information about how to join the webinars and how to access the materials and recordings on the website. **AN EMAIL IS REQUIRED FOR REGISTRATION.** If you plan to attend the webinars via telephone, the phone number from which you will be calling is also required.

Name _____ Office _____
Town _____ County _____
Mailing Address _____
City/State _____ ZIP _____
Telephone (**REQUIRED for teleconference access**) _____
Email (**REQUIRED**) _____

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

- ☐ Tuesday, September 9: Barneveld – Deer Valley Lodge
- ☐ Wednesday, September 10: Fond du Lac – Prairie Theater and Event Center
- ☐ Thursday, September 11: Green Bay – Rock Garden
- ☐ Monday, September 15: Stevens Point – Holiday Inn
- ☐ Tuesday, September 16: Eau Claire – Florian Gardens
- ☐ Wednesday, September 17: Cable – Lakewoods Resort
- ☐ Thursday, September 18: Rhinelander – The Pines Event Center
- ☐ Virtual Programming Only (Live Webinars Sept. 22 – 25 + On-Demand Access to Recorded Presentations)

FEE: \$70 – Early registration (**payment must be received at least 10 days in advance of the workshop date**)
\$85 – Late registrations and walk-in registrations

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 the meal. Refund requests submitted 30 or more days after the event will not be processed.

If you are or have recently felt ill or have been in contact with someone that is ill, please stay home! Contact the WTA office to either cancel your registration as explained above or change your registration to “Virtual Programming Only.”

This form should be copied for multiple registrations. Make checks payable to the Wisconsin Towns Association and mail along with registration forms to:

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

If you plan to attend virtual programming only, please return your registration form(s) and check(s) to the WTA office by Wednesday, September 17, 2025 to ensure you receive information about where to download materials and how to connect to the live webinar/teleconference sessions in a timely fashion.

Registration and payment may also be submitted online on the WTA website, www.wisctowns.com. A \$2.65 credit card processing convenience fee will be added for payments made via credit card.

Questions? Please email wtowns@wisctowns.com or call (715) 526-3157.



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General Transportation Aids

General Transportation Aid (GTA) is a state reimbursement program designed to help counties, cities, villages and towns offset a portion of the costs incurred in constructing, maintaining, and operating roads under their jurisdiction. Unlike grant programs that require applications and are generally very competitive, GTA funding is automatically distributed to each local government.

Q. How is General Transportation Aid (GTA) calculated?

A. The state calculates GTA using two methods, and each municipality is automatically awarded aid under the method that results in the greatest payment:

- Rate-per-mile calculation: Provides a straightforward per-mile reimbursement. Most towns receive GTA through this method.
- Share-of-cost calculation: Rewards municipalities that spend more on eligible expenses, averaging costs over six years. Only a small number of towns and villages receive GTA under this method.

Q. What per mile amount of GTA are we eligible to receive?

A. From 2023 through 2025, the GTA rate per mile has been \$2,734 per mile. This amount will increase to \$2,930 per mile in 2026 and \$3,018 per mile in 2027.

Q. Is it true that we can lose GTA funding if our town/village doesn't spend enough on annual road maintenance?

A. Yes. GTA payments generally may not exceed 85% of a town's three-year average highway spending. So, to receive the full per-mile rate of \$2,930 in 2026, a town would need to have spent \$3,447 per mile on average over the prior three years. For 2027, a town would need to have spent \$3,551 per mile on average over the prior three years. Simply, your average local road spending must keep pace with GTA increases over time or you will miss out on GTA you would otherwise be eligible for because of this 85% cap.

Towns in the bottom 25% of equalized property value may receive up to 98% of their three-year average highway costs rather than the standard 85%, providing additional flexibility for lower-value municipalities that often have more difficulty raising revenue themselves. Because equalized values are recalculated annually, eligibility for this higher cost cap can change from year to year. WTA recommends that towns near the threshold budget conservatively as though the standard 85% rule applies.

Q. Where does the Department of Transportation obtain the information it needs to calculate GTA?

A. The Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) relies on the information that your municipality reports in its Municipal Financial Report form (also known as the Form C or CT). The MFR must be submitted electronically to the Department of Revenue (DOR) each year. For municipalities less than 2,500 in population, the report is due by March 31st of each year. For municipalities greater than 2,500 in population, the report is due by May 1st of each year. There is an automatic extension to May 15th for all municipalities, so you have until May 15th of each year to file the MFR with the Department of Revenue before incurring a penalty. The DOR then forwards the pertinent information from the MFR to WisDOT for its review. Late submission will result in a \$100 reduction of GTA for each working day the form is late, up to a maximum \$2,200 penalty.

WisDOT will also look at the number of miles your municipality has reported on the highway inventory which is filed with WisDOT by December 15th of each year. Keep in mind that there is about a one-year lag between the time date mileage is certified and when the new data is used to calculate GTA payments.

Q. What information in the MFR is the Department of Transportation reviewing? What are eligible costs?

A. WisDOT reviews the MFR to collect data from specific expense and revenue lines located in the report. The Transportation Aids Cost Reporting Manual drafted by WisDOT itemizes eligible expenditures and deductible revenues in several categories. A copy of this manual can be found at: <https://wisconsindot.gov/Documents/doing-bus/local-gov/astncepgms/highway/gta-manual.pdf>. The manual also lists the appropriate line that each expense or revenue should be reported on in the MFR. In reviewing the MFR, WisDOT subtracts the deductible revenues from any eligible expenditures to calculate your annual costs.

Q. What years does the state look at when calculating average annual costs?

A. WisDOT looks at the average annual costs for the most recent three-year period. So, for GTA payments made in 2026, the state will be looking at the highway expenditures your town reported for 2022, 2023, and 2024. Remember that your 2025 highway spending numbers will not be reported to the state until May of 2026.

Q. When will we know our 2026 GTA amount, and when will payment be received?

A. GTA payments are made in equal installments on the 1st Monday in January, April, July, and October. Most municipalities will see this payment electronically deposited into their bank accounts. WisDOT is working on new calculations for 2026 GTA and will send those reports out to municipalities in October. The WisDOT website has more information about GTA and several years of past data online. You can find all of this information and WisDOT contact info at: <https://wisconsindot.gov/Pages/doing-bus/local-gov/astnce-pgms/highway/gta.aspx>

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2025



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Convention

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Looking for an opportunity to gain more in-depth knowledge about your role as a municipal official? Our annual convention is filled with exciting opportunities to network with your peers, learn from experienced educators, become acquainted with state agency staff, and enjoy some time away. Mark your calendar and come spend some quality time with us this October!

Sunday October 12th

Registration will be open from 1:00 p.m. until 6:00 p.m. The exhibitor area will open at 1:00 p.m. Come meet, learn from, and build relationships with vendors and companies that provide products and services of interest to towns. Highlights of the afternoon will include projection of the Green Bay Packer game on the big screen in the Exhibitor Area along with complimentary beer, soda, and snacks during the game. If you are lucky, you might even win a prize at half-time! Dinner is on your own Sunday evening.

Sunday Evening

Curious about Clerk College? WTA Clerk Specialist Melissa Kono will be meeting with the current Clerk College participants and anyone interested in learning more about Clerk College and educational options for Town Clerks.

Monday October 13th

Breakfast will be served in the General Assembly Area from 6:45 a.m. to 7:45 a.m. for those attendees who pre-registered for the buffet on their convention registration form. **The cost for breakfast is \$33.00 per person and is not included in the general convention registration fee.** Breakfast will include fresh cut fruit, muffins, breakfast breads, fruit-filled Danish, scrambled eggs, smoked bacon, turkey sausage links, breakfast potatoes, orange juice, apple juice, coffee, and tea.

There will be a general assembly from 8:30 a.m. to 10:45 a.m. We'll be having two keynote speakers this year! First, Sam Toles, former Chief Content Officer of Bleacher Report and a former City Council Member, will present, **"From Chaos to Connection: Transforming Social Media In Your Town"**. This special presentation will transform the way you think about social media. Discover the secrets behind the data to unlocking a more positive, proactive communications approach. Learn how to handle your STPs—the "same ten or twenty people" who often stir up chaos for Towns like yours in the comments and community groups. Next, Paul Mellor, a Communications graduate of Western Carolina University, will present, **"Memory Power"**.

Continued...

In today's business world, having the ability to remember names and faces, beat absent-mindedness, and recall facts and figures puts you at the head of the pack. In this interactive session you'll learn time-tested techniques for recalling names, speaking without notes, and gaining control of your day without the fear of forgetting. When you're skilled in memory all your other skills get better. This program shows how!

Workshops will begin at 11:00 a.m. and run through 4:45 p.m. Join us for lunch at noon while we enjoy roasted pork loin, green beans, carrots and onions, new potatoes, and rolls.

Monday Afternoon Exhibitor Reception

There will be a reception in the exhibitor area with complimentary beer, soda, and snacks for all registered attendees. Note that the exhibitors will close down at the end of the day Monday and they will **not** be present on Tuesday. Be sure to visit the exhibitors on Sunday and Monday to complete the Scavenger Hunt game card which you will need in order to enter the prize drawings to be held on Monday night. Deposit your completed game card into one of the designated boxes in the Exhibitor Area by 5:00 p.m. Winners will be announced after the awards banquet.

Monday Evening Banquet

The annual banquet and awards ceremony will be held on Monday night of the convention with doors opening at 6:00 p.m.

Long-standing town officers will be recognized for their service. To receive this recognition, please mark your registration form accordingly and indicate you will be attending the banquet. We will also be awarding the WTA, Scott Construction, and Rural Mutual Insurance Scholarships to the essay contest winners.

The banquet is an optional event which will feature a buffet dinner at a cost of \$45 per person and this cost is not included in the general registration fee. The dinner buffet will feature roasted chicken and pot roast, salad, rolls, chef's vegetable, starch, and mini dessert buffet. (Spouses and guests are also welcome to attend the banquet at a cost of **\$45 per person**).

Monday Night Entertainment

All registered convention attendees are invited to join us for the "Neil Tribute and Nostalgia" show featuring tribute artist, Eric Diamond, following the banquet. Eric has been wowing crowds not only with his spot-on vocal performance of Neil Diamond's biggest hits, but also his tributes to artists like Johnny Cash, John Cougar Mellencamp, and the nostalgic "one-hit-wonders" of the 60s and 70s. So, grab a drink, find a seat, and listen to your favorites. Enjoy complimentary beer, soda, and snacks. You won't want to miss out on the FUN!

Visit the exhibitors on Sunday and Monday to complete your Scavenger Hunt game card which you will need to enter the Monday night prize drawing. Before the music starts, we'll be announcing the winners. Good luck!

Tuesday October 14th

On Tuesday morning breakfast will be served from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 a.m. as an optional event for \$33.00 per person for those attendees who pre-registered on their convention registration form. The breakfast will consist of fresh-cut fruit, muffins, breakfast breads, fruit-filled Danish, orange juice, apple juice, coffee, tea, scrambled eggs, smoked bacon, turkey sausage links, and roasted red bliss potatoes. After you have enjoyed breakfast, get ready to learn with a variety of workshops that begin at 8:30 a.m. and conclude at 12:00 noon in time for a taco buffet lunch featuring chips and salsa, ground beef, soft tortillas, borrracho beans, shredded cheese, chopped tomatoes, lettuce, and sour cream.

Tuesday BINGO

Registered spouses and guests are invited to join us for BINGO at 10:00am. Cash prizes will be awarded.

Workshop Schedule and Topics

Please Note: There will be a three-hour long election training class provided by the Wisconsin Elections Commission on Tuesday. Please indicate on the registration form if you plan to attend the **Election Training** so that we can accurately gauge the number of attendees and plan accordingly.

Workshops are scheduled for both Monday and Tuesday. Many have one hour time slots and will be repeated a second time. Some of the workshops will be presented only once, as noted.

Monday: 11:00 a.m. - Noon
(Repeated 1:15 p.m. - 2:15 p.m.)

1. Clerk Cracker Barrel: Join us for an informal question and answer session on clerk topics. Presented by WTA Clerk Specialist Melissa Kono and other WTA Staff.

2. Taking Action: Adopting and Enforcing Local Ordinances: Ordinances can be used for a variety of purposes, and it's important for local government officials to understand the steps necessary to ensure that the local regulations they adopt will be fully legal and enforceable. This session will answer common questions about when and how ordinances can be used, how to draft and format ordinances, procedures required to adopt various types of ordinances, how ordinances can be amended or repealed, notice requirements related to ordinances, and how to set up a system for ordinance enforcement. Presented by WTA Legal Counsel Lara Carlson.

3. 2% Fire Dues Self-Certification: In this session, clerks will learn what the fire dues certification is and receive a live start to finish demo of the complete 2% Fire Dues self-certification process. Presented by Sarah Brown, Operations Program Associate & NFIRS State Program Manager and Aaron Andre, District 2 Fire Coordinator, Fire Prevention/Safety and Health Program, Wisconsin Department of Safety and Professional Services.

4. Does your community need a RESET in Planning for Large-Scale Renewable Energy Installations?: Over the past five years, Wisconsin has seen large-scale renewable energy and battery storage projects built or approved in 22 counties, and it is projected that large-scale renewable energy will occupy approximately 3% of Wisconsin's harvested cropland by 2050.

RESET (Renewable Energy Siting & Engagement for Tomorrow) is a UW-Madison Extension program that helps local governments and communities plan for large-scale renewable energy projects. RESET offers tools and resources to help communities understand and engage in the siting process based on community priorities, and develop agreements and ordinances based on community input. Although the Public Service Commission has the permitting authority for projects of 100 megawatts or larger, local governments and communities can still provide input during the process. Large renewable energy projects also provide a significant revenue stream for local governments. Join this session to learn how RESET's education and engagement can benefit your community! Presented by Jessy Bradish, MA/MBA, Renewable Energy Specialist, University of Wisconsin, Division of Extension, Victoria Solomon, Associate Professor, Community Development for University of Wisconsin Madison Division of Extension - Green County and Diane Mayerfield, Sustainable Agriculture Coordinator, UW-Madison Extension.

5. DSPS Delegation Program for Residential and Commercial Construction: This presentation will provide an overview of the Department of Safety and Professional Services (DSPS) delegation program. We will discuss which permitting, plan review, and inspection responsibilities the municipality has by default, and which are delegated to the municipality by DSPS. The presentation will include a walk-through of the delegation request process, requirements and conditions of a delegated municipality, and offer time for Q&A. Presented by Etta Strey, Industry Services, WI DSPS.

Monday 2:30 p.m. - 3:30 p.m. (Repeated 3:45 p.m. - 4:45 p.m. except for Leveraging Generative AI which is a two-hour session and will not be repeated)

1. Legal Cracker Barrel: Join WTA legal staff for an informal question and answer session on any town topic. This is always a popular session with convention attendees and we encourage you to bring your questions!

2. Local Government and Social Media: Social media's ability to efficiently communicate information to the public has prompted many towns and villages to create social media accounts. While this can make the work of local government easier, social media webpages can create many issues such as, public records retention, the creation of online public forums, etc. This session will explore these issues so that attendees will gain a better understanding of how to manage their social media pages. Towns and villages who are considering creating a social media page are encouraged to attend. Presented by: Jake Langenhahn, WTA Outreach Specialist.

3. Cemeteries Come to Life! Cemetery management has long been a challenge for Towns. It's a big responsibility. Not only are cemetery records often kept in old record books that may be falling apart or getting harder to read, but there are also questions such as how many burials are in a cemetery, who is buried where, or how many plots are still available for purchase? The use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) can assist in not only knowing where individual plots and grave sites are located but also help preserve records for years to come. This session will discuss and demonstrate the benefits of converting cemetery records into a GIS format and the capabilities that come with having an all-in-one system to search for records and help manage your Town's cemetery. Presented by Nicole Barbiaux, GIS Coordinator and Ken Jaworski, Director, Cedar Corporation.

4. Leveraging Generative AI (Artificial Intelligence) for Local Government—A Practical Introduction: Economist Richard Baldwin, speaking at the 2023 World Economic Forum's Growth Summit, stated "AI won't take your job, it's somebody using AI that will take your job." This course will introduce government leaders and employees to practical uses of generative AI in their work to help them prepare for a future in which AI use is expected and integrated into our daily lives. We'll cover what generative AI is, how to use it responsibly, some common pitfalls to avoid, and gain hands-on experience using freely available commercial AI chatbots. This session will focus on the human-centered implications of AI, as articulated in the UW-Madison RISE AI initiative. This is a two-hour session. In the first hour (2:30 p.m.-3:30 p.m.) we will cover understanding AI and responsible use of the technology and in the second hour (3:45 p.m.-4:45 p.m.) we will cover practical applications and provide hands-on practice. Presented by educators from Extension's Local Government Education Program, Extension's Office of Digital Solutions and from U.W.-Madison's Data Sciences Institute.

5. Recycling Rule Revision--Changes for Responsible Units (RUs): DNR staff have been working on revisions to the administrative code that oversees Responsible Units' (RUs) Effective Recycling Programs and other aspects of the Recycling program. After over three years of development, public comment and approvals, the rule revisions became effective on July 1, 2025. This session will go over changes for RUs as a result of the code revision including: RU education, collection requirements, recycling ordinance modifications/multi-family recycling, elimination of a pounds/person collection standard, changes for haulers and Material Recovery Facilities (MFRs) that affect RUs. Presented by Jennifer Semrau, Waste Reduction and Diversion Coordinator, WI DNR.

Monday 3:45 p.m. until conclusion

The Town Advocacy Council (TAC) will hold its Annual Meeting. Learn more about WTA's Town Advocacy Council and its efforts advocating for towns and villages in Madison. From listening sessions to Capitol Day, TAC has been essential in WTA's efforts to secure a plethora of recent legislative victories. The TAC annual meeting is your opportunity to engage with WTA's lobbying team and better understand how WTA navigates the legislative issues important to your community. TAC will also elect three board members to its Executive Board during this meeting. All town and village officials are welcome to attend the annual meeting, although voting will be limited to current TAC member towns and villages.

Tuesday 8:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. Election Training (Pre registration required, session will not be repeated)

Elections 2026: Preparing for the Year Ahead: This session will be a high-level overview of things to keep in mind in a general election year. From the basics like Photo ID vs. Proof of Residence to the more complex like the new judicial privacy law processes, WEC staff will cover a wide range of pertinent information to help clerks and other election officials get back in the election mindset. This session will count for 3 hours of recertification training for clerks.

Tuesday 8:30 a.m. - 9:30 a.m. (Repeated 9:45 a.m. - 10:45 a.m.)

1. Frequently Asked Questions About Roads: Managing your highway infrastructure is a core responsibility for town officials. Learn the basics and nuances of town road creation, abandonment, speed limits, and more. Presented by Joe Ruth, WTA Government Affairs Director.

2. WISLR 101--A Brief Overview: WISLR is a useful tool for decision making and managing roads. WisDOT staff will cover helpful features in WISLR for local governments and answer questions along the way.

3. Improving Highway Safety at Railroad Crossings: Participants will learn about the Office of the Commissioner of Railroads processes related to improving railroad safety across Wisconsin. The presentation will provide an overview of general railroad safety principles, the OCR's role and decision-making processes, and how towns, railroads, and state agencies share responsibilities at public railroad crossings. Attendees will hear about the top 5 safety issues inspectors find at railroad crossings while conducting routine inspections. Attendees will gain a better understanding of how to identify safety issues, navigate OCR processes, and collaborate effectively to improve crossings in their communities. Presented by staff from the Commissioner of Railroads office.

4. Wisconsin's Managed Forest Law: Wisconsin DNR staff will provide a brief introduction to Wisconsin's Managed Forest Law program. They will cover the program's intent, eligibility requirements, and the roles and responsibilities of landowners and other stakeholders, including municipalities. Presented by R.J. Wickham, Tax Law Section Chief and Ryan Conner, Tax Law Administration Coordinator.

Tuesday 11:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. (will not be repeated)

1. Simplify your PASER Ratings and Road Planning: Compiling PASER ratings and using the WISLR system can be an overwhelming task. This session will highlight what is important and how to simplify your job. We will focus on practical methods for decision making for road maintenance and how to maximize your road budgets. Presented by Jeff Delmore of Delmore Consulting LLC.

2. Innovation Grant Program: This session will provide information about the Innovation Grant (IG) program that was created under 2023 Wisconsin Act 12 and designed to provide funds to counties, municipalities, and tribes who completely transfer one or more of certain eligible services/duties to another county, municipality, tribe, nonprofit organization, or private entity to create cost savings. We will share IG stats, provide helpful IG filing tips, and explain the beneficial changes to the program that were included in the most recent state budget. Presented by Valeah Foy, State and Local Finance Administrator, WI Department of Revenue.

3. Highway to Harmony—Shared Roads to Shared Solutions: Through open dialogue and *shared responsibility*, farmers and officials are *paving the way* for rural road systems that work for everyone. Presented by a panel of guest speakers on behalf of Professional Dairy Producers of Wisconsin.

4. Slow the Flow: Opportunities to Increase Flood Resilience in Wisconsin Towns: This interactive session will highlight a collaboration between the WTA, WI Wetlands Association (WWA), and Trout Unlimited (TU) to help towns work proactively to reduce flood risks and damages to road infrastructure. Presenters will share examples of assessing the root causes of infrastructure risks and flood vulnerabilities and discuss natural flood management solutions that can be used by towns to protect and improve the resilience of culverts and bridges. This session will also highlight new programs and resources that can support assessment and implementation projects in your communities. Presented by Kyle Magyera, WWA; Atty. Larry Konopacki, Stafford Rosenbaum LLP; and Sara Strassman, TU (tentative).



From Inspiration to Implementation: Mastering Social Media as A Local Elected Official

Tuesday, October 14, 2025 - 1:00-3:30pm, Africa 10/20

After Sam Toles' high-energy keynote sets the stage, we invite you to join him for an exclusive add-on interactive workshop designed to turn inspiration into action. This special session is tailored for local elected officials who want to go beyond simply "having" social media and start leading conversations, shaping narratives, and building trust with their communities online.

Here's what you'll experience:

1. The Three Pillars of Social Media Success

- **Permission + Structure:** Struggling with resources to manage a modern social media program? Sam opens this training by sharing how you can identify and empower the natural storytellers within your town (both inside the government you lead, and beyond). This requires building a process that keeps your social media in the proper tone, safe to share with the community as a whole, and aligned with your goals as an elected official, and the organizations goals.
- **Culture of Content:** Discover how to inspire creativity, remove barriers, and model the kind of leadership that encourages town staff and others to proudly share the amazing story of your work.
- **Test & Learn:** Shift your mindset to one of experimentation and continuous improvement—because even Mr. Beast started with zero subscribers. Social media success comes from a smart, iterative process.

2. Lights, Camera... Action!

We'll get hands-on by filming some content. Sam will challenge members of the workshop to create their very own short, authentic video in the room - highlighting their work. **Uncomfortable on camera?** This process will help unblock those natural jitters? **Think it's too hard?** Sam will show you how small tweaks and tools (like the free CapCut app) can turn quick clips into ready-made social content in just a few minutes!

3. Turning Engagement into Opportunity

This portion is almost like group-therapy. We'll work through participants real-life examples of challenging social media comments and community group conversations. Learn how to spot the feedback worth acting on, avoid the "STP" (Same Ten People) trap, and keep social media from dominating your life and ruining your day!

4. Defining Your Voice

Your voice sets the tone for how your community experiences you online. Together, we'll create a voice profile for one lucky volunteer—live in the session—so you learn the process on defining the core of your own communications presence on social media.

Throughout this special, add-on workshop, Sam blends his experience as former Chief Content Officer at Bleacher Report, Head of Digital at MGM Studios, and founder of CiviSocial (whose transformed 17 local governments in 14 states with his revolutionary program) with practical, no-nonsense, easy to understand and implement ideas and tactics.

5. The AI Future Of Social Media

Sam will close this workshop with information on the latest AI tools that make social media creation even simpler and more manageable. And he'll explain how to use these tools appropriately, the coming risk of AI oversaturation of the feeds, and answer your questions about this emerging technology.

FREE GIFT: All add-on workshop participants will receive a complimentary, personally signed copy of Sam's brand-new book, *The Social Media Playbook for Local Elected Officials*, as his "thank you" for wanting to find a different way forward on social media.

\$25 Advance Registration - \$50 At The Door

Name _____

Office or Title _____

Name of Town/Village _____

County _____

Please return completed registration and payment to Wisconsin Towns Association, W7686 County Road MMM, Shawano, WI, 54166-6086 **by September 27, 2025**. Cancellations received 10 days or more in advance of the start of the convention will receive a full refund less a \$15.00 administrative fee.



2025 WTA Convention

Registration

Copy form for multiple registrations and return by September 27, 2025. Online registration available at www.wisctowns.com.

October 12th - 14th 2025, Kalahari Resort and Convention Center, WI Dells

Name _____ Office or Title _____

Mailing Address _____

City _____ Zip _____

Name of Town/Village _____ County _____

Email: _____ Spouse or guest name (for name tag _____

Years of Service as a Town Officer _____ Were you recognized with a certificate at the 2022, 23 or 24 Convention? Yes / No

Full Convention Registration includes: Monday and Tuesday lunch, 2 exhibitor receptions, digital materials, Monday evening entertainment, all Workshops and General Assembly Admission.

Single Day Convention Registration includes: Monday OR Tuesday lunch, exhibitor receptions, digital materials, Monday evening entertainment, all Workshops and General Assembly Admission.

FULL CONVENTION REGISTRATION

Amount \$\$\$

_____ Town/Village Officer **\$210.00** _____

_____ Spouse or Guest **\$50.00** _____

_____ Election Training for Clerks
(Registered Officers only)

_____ Optional Officer Breakfast **\$33/day** _____
Mon. _____ Tues. _____

_____ Optional Spouse Breakfast **\$33/day** _____
Mon. _____ Tues. _____

_____ Optional Spouse Lunch **\$20/day** _____
Mon. _____ Tues. _____

_____ Optional Monday Evening Banquet _____
\$45.00 per person

TOTAL \$ Amount _____

SINGLE DAY: Monday _____ Tuesday _____

Amount \$\$\$

_____ Town/Village Officer **\$130.00** _____

_____ Spouse or Guest **\$50.00** _____

_____ Election Training for Clerks
(Registered Officers only)

_____ Optional Officer Breakfast **\$33/day** _____
Mon. _____ Tues. _____

_____ Optional Spouse Breakfast **\$33/day** _____
Mon. _____ Tues. _____

_____ Optional Spouse Lunch **\$20/day** _____
Mon. _____ Tues. _____

_____ Optional Monday Evening Banquet _____
\$45.00 per person

TOTAL \$ Amount _____

Spouse/Guest Registration includes: Exhibitor reception(s), Bingo, Monday night entertainment, General Assembly admission.
Meal tickets must be purchased separately.

Please return completed registration and payment to Wisconsin Towns Association, W7686 County Road MMM, Shawano, WI, 54166-6086 **by September 27, 2025**. Registrations received after that date will be \$15.00 per person higher for late registration fee.

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

Convention Lodging

Sunday, October 12 - Tuesday, October 14, 2025
Kalahari Resort & Convention Center, Wisconsin Dells

Booking Information

Phone: 877-254-5466

Website: <https://book.passkey.com/e/50924325>

Rates: Single - \$129.00, Double, Triple or Quad - \$159.00

Room Rate Includes 1 Waterpark Pass per Registered Guest

You may not make more than 3 room reservations under your name.

Please DO NOT call our office concerning rooms.

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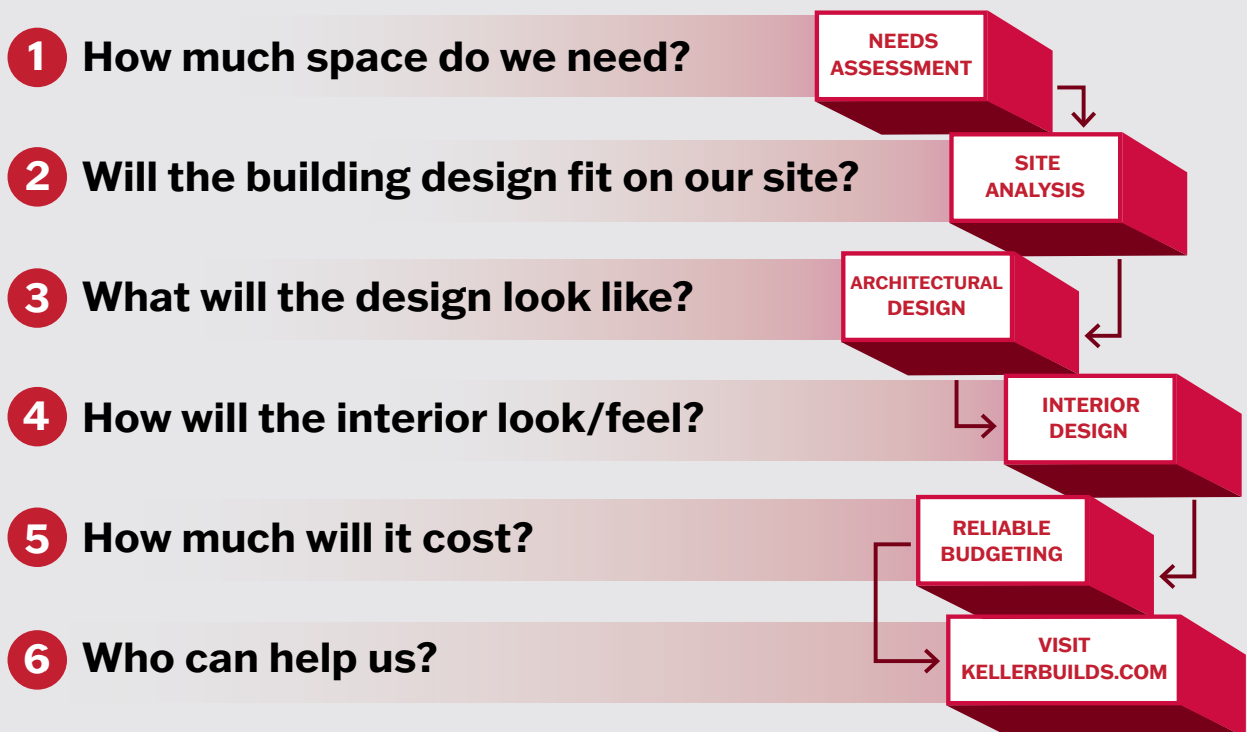
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Exceeding the Levy Limit

Q. What is Wisconsin's levy limit law?

A. A municipal levy refers to the total amount of taxes assessed on property within the municipality's jurisdiction. Since 2006, Wisconsin has imposed "levy limits" on municipalities, linked to a municipality's rate of new construction. Initially, a municipality's levy limit increased from year to year based on either the rate of new construction or a minimum amount of approximately 2%. But a 2011 law change eliminated that minimum floor and instead tied levy limits exclusively to the amount of "net new construction." Today, a municipality's allowable tax levy increases each year by either the amount of net new construction, as determined by the Wisconsin Department of Revenue (DOR), or 0%. This means a municipality's allowable levy will stay the same as the previous year if no new construction occurred.

Q. How do municipalities determine the maximum allowable property tax levy they can collect?

A. The DOR provides each municipality with a "Municipal Levy Limit Worksheet" (form SL-202m) each year, which municipalities must use to calculate the property tax levy that will be collected for the next fiscal year. Each town or village clerk receives an electronic notice from the DOR when this worksheet is available to download, typically in early September. The DOR pre-fills the first several lines of the worksheet and notes the maximum allowable "2025 levy limit before adjustments..." in Section A, Line 8, which includes the calculation of any net new construction increase, as well as other automated adjustments. After reviewing the DOR's pre-filled numbers for accuracy, the clerk and board must work through each remaining line of the Levy Limit Worksheet, making adjustments as allowed under Sections B, C, and D and performing a final calculation in Section A, to determine the municipality's total adjusted allowable levy for the coming year. See Wis. Stat. § 66.0602(2m)-(3). The completed worksheet must be filed electronically on the DOR website by December 15.

Q. What steps are required if a town or village needs to exceed its allowable levy limit?

A. Towns and villages may exceed the allowable levy limit calculated on the Levy Limit Worksheet *if* the electors give their approval, either via a referendum election or via a vote taken at a special town elector meeting. There are several steps that must be followed, in a specific order and with specific timing requirements. If a municipality exceeds its allowable levy without properly completing these steps, the state will impose a dollar-for-dollar penalty to the municipality's shared revenue payments. Therefore, if you have any questions regarding the levy process, we encourage you to reach out to our office or the DOR directly for assistance. We also encourage you to use the sample forms in the "Levy Limits" section of the WTA website's Information Library to guide you through these processes, and to attend the Fall Workshops this September, where levy limits and the Levy Limit Worksheet will be discussed in detail.

If a town or village's population is 3,000 or more, a referendum is required to exceed the levy limit. Wis. Stat. § 66.0602(4). The referendum must take place at a regularly scheduled spring primary (Feb.), spring election (Apr.), partisan primary (Aug.), or general election (Nov.), and the board must adopt a resolution calling for the referendum at least 70 days prior to the election, so at this point in the year it's too late to accomplish this for the 2025 property tax levy. If your community is considering a referendum for 2026, you should reach out to the DOR staff (lgs@wisconsin.gov / 608-261-5167) for assistance with estimating required calculations and ensuring the process is completed correctly. See the DOR website: <https://www.revenue.wi.gov/Pages/FAQS/slf-levy.aspx> for more information.

In towns with a population under 3,000, the electors can approve exceeding the levy limit by voting in person at a special town elector meeting (instead of holding a referendum election). See Wis. Stat. § 66.0602(5). First, at a town board meeting, the town board must adopt a resolution requesting a specific dollar amount and percentage increase to the allowable levy and calling for the question to be placed on the agenda of a future special town elector meeting. The town board must adopt its resolution and schedule the special town elector meeting far enough in advance for the clerk to provide at least 15 but not more than 20 days' public notice, as required by § 60.12. The notice for the elector meeting must indicate that a purpose of the meeting is to have the electors consider the adoption of a resolution endorsing the town board's proposed levy increase. Finally, at the town elector meeting on the scheduled date, a majority of the electors present must vote to adopt a resolution endorsing the town board's resolution to exceed the levy limit. Importantly, the electors may *not* make adjustments to the town board's resolution or propose their own levy increase amount – they may only vote yes or no to the exact amount of levy increase requested by the town board. If the electors vote no but indicate that they might approve a different amount, the town board would have to start the process over at a new town board meeting by adopting a new resolution requesting a different amount, scheduling another special town elector meeting, providing another 15 days' public notice, etc.

Q. What proof must be submitted to the DOR to show that the electors properly gave their approval to exceed the levy limit?

A. Within 14 days after the electors' vote, the town or village clerk must certify the results of the vote to the DOR. The required documentation includes a signed and dated copy of the board's initial resolution to exceed the levy limit, as well as a copy of the ballot and the voting results for a referendum election, or, for a town elector meeting, a copy of the public notice that was provided at least 15 days in advance of the special town elector meeting and a signed and dated copy of the town electors' resolution endorsing exceeding the levy limit.

Q. How is the total town property tax levy amount finally decided?

A. In towns, the electors must vote, at a special town elector meeting, to approve the total tax levy amount to be collected (unless the electors previously voted to give the town board power to set the tax levy). Wis. Stat. § 60.10(1)(a). This is a *separate vote* from the electors' vote to endorse exceeding the levy limit by a certain amount (see above). In villages, the village board must vote to approve the total property tax levy amount via a written resolution no later than December 15. Wis. Stat. § 61.46.



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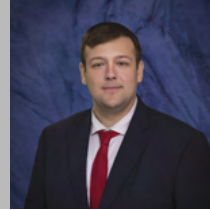
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REACHING OUT



By **Jake Langenhahn**
Outreach Specialist

The County Unit System – the “Backbone” of the Wisconsin Towns Association

One of the things that sets the Wisconsin Towns Association (WTA) apart from other government associations is its county unit system. In the late 1940s and 1950s, then WTA Executive Secretary (now called the Executive Director) is known to have tirelessly traveled around the state, going as far as to sleep in the back of his truck, to bring the county unit system to life. We often refer to our county unit system as the “backbone” of the WTA. Why is that the case? County units help the WTA implement its mission and they drive the governance of the association. Let’s start with how county units help the WTA implement its mission. Each town officer in the state is a member of their respective county’s “unit”. These units typically meet at a “county unit meeting” 3-4 times a year to discuss local government issues, receive education from guest speakers, and engage in legislative advocacy with area legislators. The county units, by design, help the WTA achieve its mission of being “A statewide association providing education, legal information, and grassroots legislative advocacy to empower and inspire our members to lead in their communities.” Each unit meeting is an opportunity to fulfill this mission.

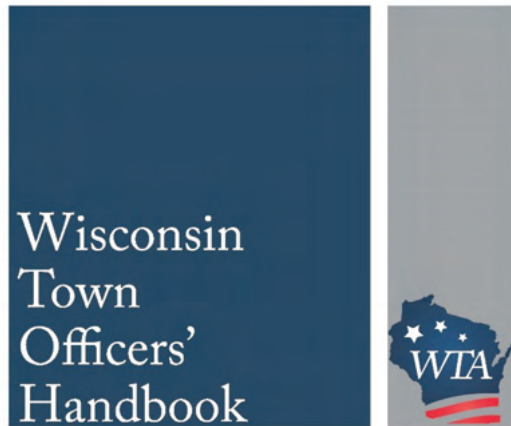
The county units also play an important role in how the WTA is governed. On August 8th and 9th, the WTA held its annual Council Meeting. The Council Meeting is a meeting of all of the county unit chairs (or their designees) and is considered the meeting of the corporation. Each county is represented by their delegate at this meeting. At the Council Meeting, county unit leaders receive education on important topics, approve the WTA budget, and elect the WTA Board of Directors. We’d like to thank all the county unit leaders that attended the 2025 Council meeting. Some traveled from over 3 hours away!



County unit officers conduct business at the 2025 Council Meeting.

Because county units help the WTA implement its mission and they are instrumental in the governance of the association, we want to see our county unit system flourish. As an association, we all have an interest in ensuring that our “backbone” is as strong as it can be. If you haven’t attended a county unit meeting in a while, please consider attending the next one! If you’re a dedicated long-term county unit meeting attendee, please don’t stop now! Lastly, we cannot effectively implement the WTA’s mission without the help of the county unit leaders that volunteer their energy in each county unit. It takes a lot of time and commitment to create county unit meeting agendas, coordinate meeting locations, keep financial and meeting records of the county unit, and handle the day-to-day matters that inevitably come up. If you are a county unit officer, thank you so much for your support!

Fourth Edition Town Officers' Handbook



Fourth Edition, 2023

The 2023 version of the Wisconsin Town Officers' Handbook is now available! This newly revised Fourth Edition incorporates recent law changes through the end of the 2021-2022 Wisconsin Legislative Session.

Topics discussed include ethics, open meetings, public records, town highways, bidding for public contracts, and zoning and related land use regulation, just to name a few. This is the "go-to" reference book for seasoned town officers and new officials who want to understand their role, powers, and duties and do things "by the book".

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Town Officers' Handbook Order Form

Please complete and return this form with payment to:

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

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Mailing Address _____

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*Will ship in 1-2 business days.

Town Law Conference

Friday, October 31, 2025 - Virtual Event

\$175 Attorneys • \$60 Non-Attorney Municipal Officials

Register at: www.wisctowns.com

AGENDA

8:55am Welcome

9:00am-10:30am Wisconsin Public Records Law:

This session will review the essential concepts of the state public records law and then explore the common questions that arise with regard to storage, retention, and access to electronic records. Presented by Assistant Attorney General Paul Ferguson from the Wisconsin Department of Justice, Office of Open Government.

10:30am-10:45am Break

10:45am-11:45am Making Waves and Harnessing the Wind:

Whether your town is thinking about regulating wake boats or wind turbines, it's important to understand the limits of your regulatory authority and bear in mind some best practice tips for drafting defensible ordinances on these controversial subjects. Presented by Atty. Remzy Bitar, Municipal Law and Litigation Group, S.C.

11:45am-1:00pm Lunch Break

1:00pm-1:55pm Towns Under County Zoning --- and the Rezoning Process:

This session will review the rezoning process for towns under county zoning and provide in-depth analysis from a recent Wisconsin Court of Appeals decision which highlights the importance for towns under county zoning or town zoning to keep comprehensive plans and ordinances up to date to best preserve local decision making as part of the rezoning process. Presented by Atty. Rick Manthe, Stafford Rosenbaum, LLP.

1:55pm-2:00pm Break

2:00pm-3:00pm Room Tax Basics from Creation to Collection:

This presentation will outline the process for towns to establish a room tax, including the legal requirements and administration. It will detail the responsibilities of towns and lodging providers in collection and remittance. Finally, the presentation will explain the regulations governing the use of these funds. Presented by Atty. Sean P. Griffin and Atty. Andrew J. Adams, West and Dunn LLC.

***This program will be submitted to the Wisconsin Board of Bar Examiners for 5 CLE credits.**

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**Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center
Wednesday, October 29, 2025, 1 – 4 pm**

The Wisconsin Wetlands Association, Trout Unlimited, and other Lake Superior Collaborative partners are offering an interactive workshop about road infrastructure and natural flood management solutions that can help communities withstand, adapt to, and learn from flooding and storm events. The workshop will also highlight the South Shore Flood Resilience Assessment, which is evaluating infrastructure risks, flood and erosion hazards, and opportunities to slow the flow of water in priority Lake Superior watersheds in Ashland, Bayfield, Douglas, and Iron Counties.

Participants will discuss and learn about:

- Root causes of flashy flood flows and excess erosion, sediment, and debris
- Easy to replicate assessment approaches that help flood-prone communities identify flood and erosion hazards
- Examples of natural flood management solutions that combine infrastructure upgrades and wetland, stream, and floodplain reconnection
- Partnership opportunities and strategies to diversify funding options and be competitive for grant programs



Exploring natural flood management opportunities with town road supervisors

Who: Road workers and superintendents, local government officials

Where: 29270 Co Hwy G, Ashland, WI 54806

***RSVP to Kyle Magyera, Local Government Outreach Specialist:
localgovs@wisconsinwetlands.org or 608-575-3702***

Please RSVP by October 17th; space is limited. This free workshop is funded by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) through a 4-year project:
Accelerating Natural Flood Management in the Lake Superior Basin.

This workshop takes place immediately following the Lake Superior Collaborative Symposium (Oct 27–29, 2025)—a three-day gathering of conservation professionals, tribes, agencies, and local partners working together to advance restoration and resilience in Wisconsin’s Lake Superior Basin. Workshop attendees will receive free registration to the Symposium.

For more information about the Lake Superior Collaborative, visit:

<https://lakesuperiorcollaborative.org/>

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- Customizable, community-first solutions

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Clerk's Corner



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

New Employee Paperwork

The Clerk as the Human Resources Manager

One of the challenges of being a Town Clerk is the variety of roles we fill, from election administration to human resources, we wear many hats and report to a variety of entities. Our Town recently hired a new Patrolman and since it had been several years since our last new hire, I had to revisit the employment forms that are required from multiple agencies. It was also a good review to ensure I had all the proper documentation on file for current employees. I've compiled the basic steps and forms here, I hope it provides a review as well as serves as a guide for clerks to streamline the process when hiring new employees and maintaining employee files.

I-9 Employment Eligibility Verification

Form I-9 through the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) verifies the identity and employment authorization for employees. U.S. employers are required to have a complete Form I-9 found here: <https://www.uscis.gov/i-9> for each employee. New employees should complete Form I-9 and present acceptable documents, typically either a U.S. Passport OR a state-issued drivers license/photo ID card that is accompanied by a Social Security card or birth certificate, however other documents are accepted. For a complete list of acceptable documents please see: <https://www.uscis.gov/i-9-central/form-i-9-acceptable-documents>. Employers must examine these documents and determine whether they appear genuine and relate to the employee. Form I-9 is retained by the employer and is not submitted to USCIS.

WT-4 Employee's Wisconsin Withholding Exemption Certificate/New Hire Reporting

New employees should complete the WT-4 Employee's Wisconsin Withholding Exemption Certificate/New Hire Reporting form: <https://www.revenue.wi.gov/TaxForms2017through2019/w-204f.pdf>. The function of the form is two-fold: it indicates withholding amounts for state income tax and serves as a report to the State Directory of New Hires. This information is used in a national database to identify those with child support payment obligations. Those with a Federal Employer Identification Number (FEIN) are required to report new employees and any employees who are rehired, recalled, or returning to work to the Directory within 20 days of hire. For the purposes of the WT-4, "employee" is anyone who is receiving a paycheck from the Town. Use the WT-4 to report new hires or file online at: www.wi-newhire.com. Wisconsin law (s. 103.05 and Ch. DWD 142, Wis. Adm. Code) requires employers to report each employee hired after 1998 or later. If you have never reported to New Hire, current employees should be submitted to ensure compliance. Additional information on this process may be found at: <https://dwd.wisconsin.gov/dwd/publications/ui/newhire.htm>

W-4 Federal Withholding

In addition to the state income withholding reported on the WT-4, new hires will indicate the number of exemptions on the W-4 form to determine the amount of federal withholding, which can found here: <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/fw4.pdf>. Guidance on federal withholding can be found on the IRS website at: <https://www.irs.gov/forms-pubs/about-form-w-4>. The employer should keep a copy on file.

Unemployment Insurance

Employee information submitted through to the State Directory of New Hires is also used to check for unemployment insurance fraud. Under Wisconsin law, covered employers, including local government units, are required to maintain an account with the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development Unemployment Division. Local government employers are not required to pay into unemployment insurance fund, but may have to pay unemployment insurance benefits to former employees who file for unemployment and meet eligibility. Any new employees hired by the Town will need to be added to the Quarterly Unemployment Report on the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development website.

Workers Compensation and Town Insurance Policy

An additional step I take during the hiring process is to send a copy of the employee's drivers license to our insurance agent, who will conduct a Motor Vehicle Report (MVR) on the employee's driving record. Providing the drivers license to our insurance agent immediately ensures that the employee is covered under our Workers Compensation and the Town's Business Policy for operating the town equipment and vehicles. I also provide the employee with the Workers Compensation contact information and instructions in the event they are injured on the job.

Other considerations for new employees

I have outlined the required paperwork for new employees and these documents should be maintained in an employee file. Here are some other steps you may wish to consider for onboarding new employees:

- Employee benefits offered by Towns vary greatly so there may be additional health and dental insurance, life insurance, retirement benefits, etc. paperwork to be completed by new hires.
- Human resources management best practices advise providing an offer letter to new hires that outline the position title, compensation, benefits, start date, etc.
- An employee handbook helps new and existing employees understand workplace expectations and policies. Samples of employee handbooks can be found in the Information Library on the WTA website.
- Consider an orientation process for new employees to familiarize themselves with the Town facilities and the equipment they will be using, as well as introducing them to important contacts at other government entities such as the county highway department, sheriff's office, neighboring municipalities, and providing contact information for vendors.
- One last tip is to obtain emergency contact information for each employee that includes the name, contact information, and relationship to the employee of a person to contact in an emergency involving the employee.



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

Written By: Connor Schroeder, Wausau High School

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In the process of democracy, civility is a crucial element in bringing communities together, especially within small, rural governments. However, political differences have recently become increasingly divided, often leading to controversial interactions within these same local governments. For rural towns in Wisconsin, where close-knit communities play a significant role, nurturing civility in local governments is imperative for effective decision-making and community solidarity. In the heart of rural Wisconsin lies a unique network of communities where civility and cooperation are deeply ingrained values. However, like any community, maintaining civility in local government requires ongoing effort and collaboration between town officials and citizens.

The first strategy to maintain civility in local government is to foster a welcoming environment for citizens; for many governments, this includes implementing an Agenda Guidance policy, where local agencies include language on their agendas to ensure the free expression of all viewpoints. Local agencies allocate specific time limits for speakers and suggest effective communication approaches, such as leading with key points and indicating agreement instead of repeating similar views. Additionally, a welcoming environment encourages participation free from heckling, applause, or confrontation, both verbally and non-verbally. Body language is vital in conveying receptiveness or intimidation. Prohibiting disruptive behavior such as clapping, booing, or shouting during meetings demonstrates mutual respect and fosters genuine dialogue. Addressing the fear of public speaking is also crucial, as it may hinder individuals from sharing their ideas. Allowing heckling, even silence or lack of applause, can discourage participation and detract from productive discussions. Ultimately, communities striving for mutual respect must reject all forms of disruptive behavior, whether verbal or non-verbal, to promote meaningful engagement and decision-making processes.



The second strategy to maintain civility in local government is to shift from debates to dialogues and encourage active listening during such dialogue. While debates often

focus on winning arguments and defending positions, dialogues prioritize exploring various aspects of an issue to understand the bigger picture and find optimal solutions with minimal unintended consequences. Encouraging active listening is another crucial strategy for the implementation of a dialogue. All meeting attendees should respect each other's right to be heard and give full attention, refraining from interruptions and distractions like phones. Decision-makers should model attentive listening by repeating core points made by speakers, signaling respect for their perspectives even if there's disagreement. Creating an equitable process for sharing views ensures everyone has an opportunity to contribute, fostering a respectful and inclusive atmosphere. Disruptive behaviors like private conversations or smartphone use during meetings should be discouraged to maintain focus and respect for the discussion. Demonstrating genuine interest in public input and respecting constituents is essential for fostering a civil and productive local government environment.

The third strategy to maintain civility in local government is to have a plan once tensions start to rise. One such plan for de-escalation is by following the CLARA model: (C) Calm and Center Yourself, maintaining composure and avoiding aggressive postures; (L) Listen actively, allowing individuals to express their concerns without resorting to personal attacks; (A) Acknowledge shared feelings and values, demonstrating understanding without necessarily agreeing; (R) Respond clearly to the issue at hand, making requests or proposals to address concerns; and (A) Assess the situation, knowing when to seek additional assistance or remove individuals if de-escalation efforts fail to restore order. Additionally, officials can opt for a recess to allow emotions to settle or, in extreme cases, eject disruptors from public meetings. This step-by-step approach aims not to win arguments but to calm situations and maintain order, aiming to foster constructive dialogue and decision-making within the community.

Institute for Civility Founders Cassandra Dahmke and Tomas Spath state, "Civility is claiming and caring for one's identity, needs, and beliefs without degrading someone else's in the process." Maintaining civility in local government requires a multifaceted approach that involves collaboration between town officials and citizens. By fostering a welcoming environment that empowers citizens, promoting active listening through a dialogue-oriented approach, and implementing effective conflict-resolution protocols, rural Wisconsin communities can nurture a civil culture. These strategies aim to strengthen community bonds and enhance the effectiveness of the local governing processes.

CLASSIFIEDS

SEEKING ASSESSOR

The Town of Stephenson, in Marinette County, located in Crivitz, Wisconsin, is looking to contract with an Assessor. For more information, please contact Clerk, Elaine Olson, at 715-927-8476 or by email at townofstephenson@centurytel.net.

SEEKING PROPOSALS FOR ASSESSMENT

The Town of Hay River, Dunn County, seeks proposals for assessment services to begin January 1, 2026. Details can be obtained from Town Clerk Samantha Bird at hayrivertownship@hotmail.com or by calling 715-308-4956. Deadline for submission: September 22, 2025.

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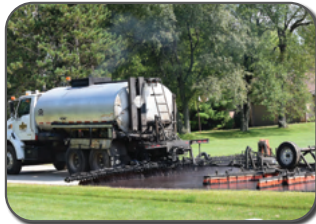
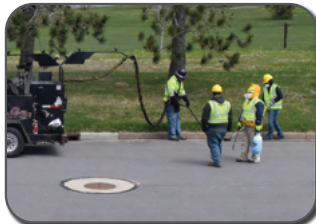
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