

Wisconsin Towns Association

November 2025



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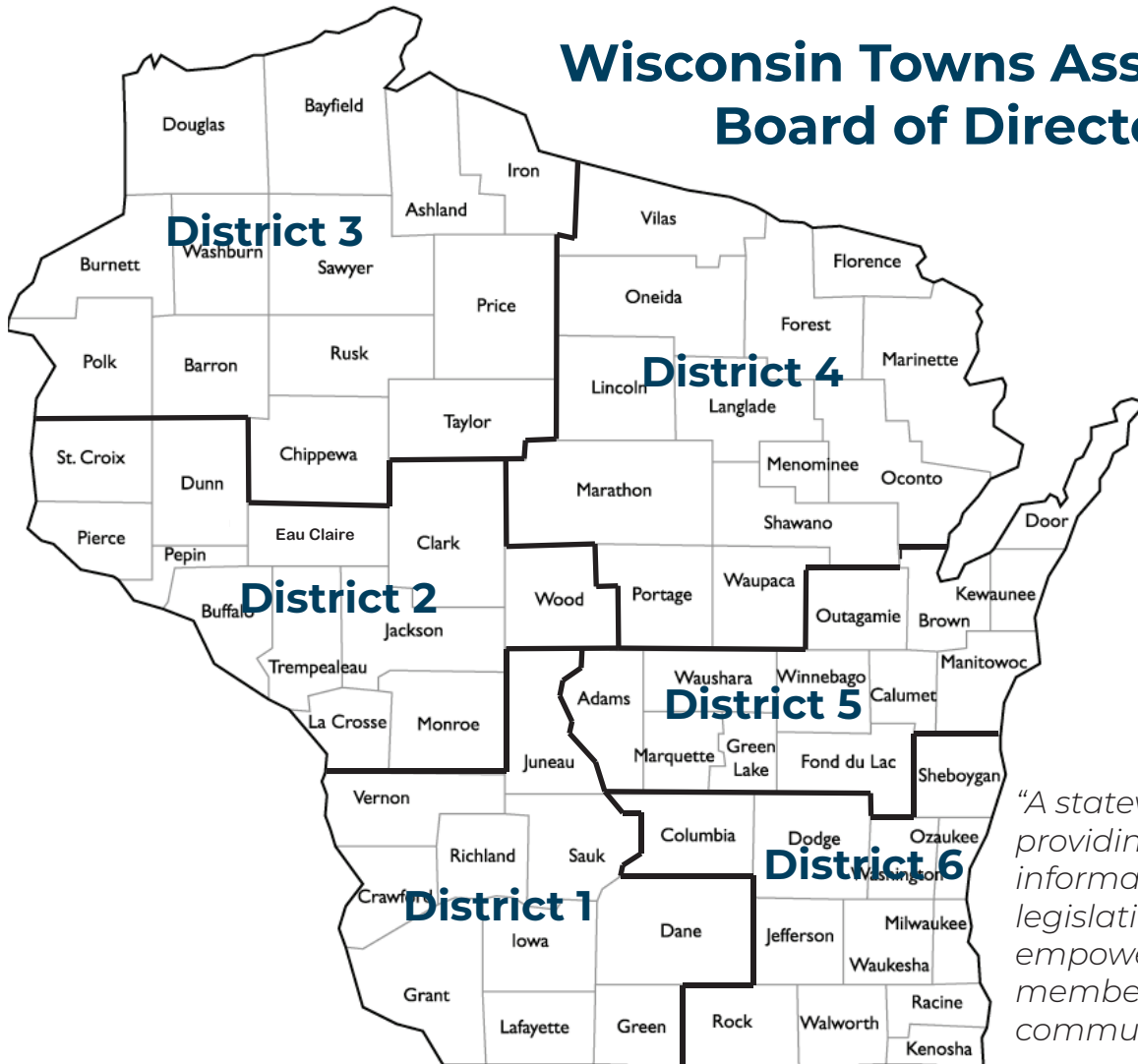
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Volume 453

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Wisconsin Towns

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Empowering Town Officials

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



By
Mike Koles

I enjoy reading books, mostly non-fiction, but occasionally fiction. I used to finish one per month. In my current role, it's hard to find time to crack open more than a book per year; however, recently I've been fortunate to reread two favorites: *White Fang*, by Jack London, and *A Sand County Almanac*, by Aldo Leopold.

More on that in a bit...

I was also recently blessed with the opportunity to engage with over 700 town officials at our annual convention, held at the Kalahari in Wisconsin Dells from October 12 – 14. This event proved to achieve a trifecta of outcomes: learning, fun, and networking.

Participants were afforded the chance to learn from 34 breakout sessions covering topics ranging from fire dues to recycling to even how to bring your cemetery “back to life.” One general assembly speaker taught us how to manage a situation in which your town catches an **STP** – the **same ten people** that frequently cause an uproar in the community. If you've been in town government long enough, you surely have caught an STP and know exactly what the speaker was talking about. Once, when I was School Board President, I actually caught an STHP – the same two hundred people. Unsurprisingly, nobody ever apologized after the media uncovered the truth that I couldn't talk about because of closed session protections 😊

The more fun an event is, the more learning and networking occurs. In addition to an impromptu viewing of the first of four dismal Brewers games against the Dodgers, Neil (“Eric”) Diamond sang

the favorites; we were taught how to memorize all of the numbers on 10 different dollar bills in a matter of seconds; and, a scavenger hunt turned out to be wildly entertaining.

Attendees also had plenty of opportunities to network with each other. I can't tell you how many times I heard someone say to one of our staff or another town official – “I have a question that will only take a second” – only to see the same two folks talking fifteen minutes later. That interpersonal learning can't be replicated and only occurs when we get together in person at events like convention. Please reserve October 4th-6th for the 2026 Annual Convention, which will be held at the Holiday Inn and Convention Center in Stevens Point.

Perhaps some of the richest networking conversations occur with the vendors. Over 60 companies or public agencies that provide an array of services to town government were on hand to help town officials understand how they can help the community thrive.

Without the services of these partners, it would be more difficult for town governments to achieve success. The same can be said about the WTA. We rely on the knowledge and expertise of many vendors to inform our legislative advocacy and education efforts. The WTA is also supported by these firms in various other ways, including sponsorships. Please thank a sponsor or two whenever you get a chance (see next page for a listing).

Now for the rest of the story....

My favorite few lines in *White Fang* vividly describe the toil of life:

“It is not the way of the Wild to like movement. Life is an offence to the Wild, for life is movement; and the Wild aims to destroy movement. It freezes the water to prevent it from running to the sea; it drives the sap out of the trees until they are frozen to their mighty hearts; and most ferociously and terribly of all does the Wild harry and crush into submission, man – man, who is the most restless of life, ever in revolt against the dictum that all movement must in the end come to the cessation of movement.”

Most recently I read this line while snow fell on my tent in the middle of nowhere well over a 90-minute plane ride from the nearest road. While the picture painted by these words is a bit morbid and certainly gave me pause in that particular moment, I actually spent most of the next minutes thinking about how this quote might read if it were about town government. Perhaps...

“It is not the way of the System to like Town Government. Town Government is an offence to the System for Town Government is common sense, local input, democracy, efficiency, and service; the System creates unnecessary rules, regulations, and associated paper work to drive the passion out of town officials until they are helpless to their mighty hearts; it detests the consent of the governed to rule the government; and most ferociously and terribly of all does the System harry and crush into submission, the town leader – the town leader, who is the most restless of government officials and who revolts against the notion that it is acceptable to settle for wastefulness and just being average.”

Recently, I’ve watched the System wage increasing attacks on town leaders. Literally the day before I penned this article, WTA finally won

a two-week war with the System, which was intent on making what would have been perhaps one of the most ridiculous decisions to have impacted town government in a very long time. Unfortunately, our fight with the System isn’t getting any easier or less frequent.

And yet...and here’s the good news...at our Annual Convention we celebrated 88 people in attendance that have been town officials attacking the System for over 25 years. Two have persisted for over 60 years! How have they avoided being beaten down by the System and becoming lifeless, like the sap in a January maple? How have they kept the fire in the belly burning and that passion fueling a continuous defense against the snares of the bureaucrats?

That’s where Leopold comes in. I was recently prompted by an inspiring gift from a dear friend and town official to reread Leopold’s seminal work. My favorite chapter is and has always been one entitled “Thinking Like a Mountain.” And, that is exactly how so many town officials have kept up the fight against the System for so long. They think and act like mountains.

Mountains are in the fight for the long term. Through the teacher of time, they’ve figured out how the dots all connect and that attacks by the System only serve to strengthen. Mountains understand that fires might scar the landscape, but the wounds are temporary, build character, and lead to new growth that will eventually produce grand forests. Similarly, these 88 leaders have been around long enough to witness various attacks by the System, some at first successful, but all defeated in the end because of the leader’s mountain like persistence.

Thanks Lyle for the book and the hats!

If we give up, they win.



Thank You!

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Municipal Liability

Concerns regarding potential liability will likely be on the minds of all local municipal officials at one time or another during their terms of office. This article will discuss some sources of potential liability and selected immunities that offer protection to municipalities and their officers and employees.

Q. A resident is threatening to report a town official to the local authorities for failing to abstain on a vote where they might have had an ethical conflict. Can a resident really do this?

A. Yes. Public officials may face potential civil and/or criminal liability for the violation of various state statutes. Examples of activities that can result in a civil forfeiture and/or criminal prosecution include:

1. Open meeting violation--forfeiture of between \$25 and \$300, Wis. Stat. §19.96
2. Ethics code violations--forfeiture up to \$1,000, Wis. Stat. §19.59(7).
3. Public records requests that are arbitrarily or capriciously denied or delayed--forfeiture up to \$1,000, Wis. Stat. §19.37(4)
4. Fraud by board of review member--forfeiture of between \$50 and \$250, Wis. Stat. §70.502
5. Neglect of duty by fence viewer -\$5 forfeiture, Wis. Stat. § 90.15
6. Misconduct in public office, Wis. Stat. § 946.12 (Class I felony)
7. Private interest in public contracts, Wis. Stat. § 946.13 (Class I felony)
8. Refusal to deliver papers, records and other items to successor in office--up to six months imprisonment and fine up to \$100, Wis. Stat. §19.24

Q. Our town board has been asked by several residents to adopt an ordinance restricting the use of wake boats on a local lake. Our board is studying the issue, and we recently voted to hire a municipal attorney to draft an ordinance. Following our last meeting, a boat owner showed up at the town hall and threatened to sue the town if we adopt a wake boat ordinance. Can the board members be sued for adopting an ordinance?

A. Under state law, government officials have something called “discretionary” immunity. Section 893.80 (4), Wis. Stats., states, “[n]o suit may be brought against any...[political] corporation, subdivision or agency or volunteer fire company or against its officers, officials, agents or employees for acts done in the exercise of legislative, quasi-legislative, judicial or quasi-judicial functions.” This statutory language has been collectively interpreted by the courts to include any act that involves the exercise of discretion and judgment. Lodl v. Progressive N. Ins. Co., 2002 WI 71 at ¶ 21. So, in general, the board members would have immunity for a discretionary decision about whether to adopt (or not adopt) an ordinance. That said, if the board decides to adopt an ordinance, the town could still be sued over the question of whether the ordinance itself is constitutional, in excess of the board’s authority, and/or was adopted using

proper legal procedures. The town's insurance carrier would generally assist with defending a suit over the validity of a town ordinance.

Q. A sheriff's deputy called me late last night during a thunderstorm to report that a tree had fallen across a town road. I called our highway worker to take care of it and he did. But, what if our worker had not answered the phone or was out of town? Could the town have been held liable if someone was hurt?

A. An injured party could sue the town for pecuniary damages for injuries sustained as the result of a breach in an owed duty of care. Remember that towns are required to keep roads passable at all times under Wis. Stat. § 82.03(1). While the state statutes, as mentioned above, provide discretionary immunity for local governments, such immunity provides limited protection.

Discretionary immunity protects municipal officers and employees from liability for discretionary acts performed within the scope of their employment. Kierstyn v. Racine Unified Sch. Dist., 228 Wis.2d 81, 91, (1999). Discretionary acts require the application of statutes or other laws to facts or the subjective evaluation of the law. Examples include the decision whether or not to adopt an ordinance, grant a rezone, or issue an order to lay out a new road.

It is important to note that the general rule of immunity for public officers in their performance of acts within the scope of employment is subject to four exceptions identified in case law. The four exceptions to public officer immunity are set forth as follows: 1) the performance of ministerial duties imposed by law; 2) known and compelling dangers that give rise to ministerial duties on the part of public officers or employees; 3) acts involving medical discretion; and 4) acts that are malicious, willful, and intentional.

As a result, the failure to take steps to protect the public from what a court might consider a "known and compelling danger" could open the town up to potential liability. To limit such liability, towns and villages should establish "back up" plans and have a list of people to be called to assist in such situations.

Q. Our town is being asked to approve a temporary "picnic" beer license and a fireworks permit for a local club that wants to hold a music festival on a private property in the town. The club seems to be eligible for these licenses and has indicated they have adequate liability insurance in place for such an event. If the town board grants the license and permit, will the town be civilly liable if someone is overserved or an attendee is injured by the fireworks?

A. Probably not. Under Wis. Stat. § 125.037, municipalities and their officers are not civilly liable for damages to any person or property caused by the consumption of alcoholic beverages by virtue of the fact that the municipality issued a license, allowed someone to sell, giveaway, or serve alcohol on municipal property, or failed to monitor the activities of a licensee or permittee. So, just issuing an alcohol license will not make a town or village liable for something the licensee does after being licensed. Similarly, under Wis. Stat. § 167.10(7m), no municipality, committee, official or municipal employee is civilly liable for damage to any person or property caused by fireworks for the sole reason that the municipality issued a permit in accordance with the requirements under § 167.10(3) and any applicable requirements authorized under § 167.10(5) that authorized the purchase, possession, or use of the fireworks.

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LEGAL OPINIONS



By Atty. Lara Carlson
Legal Counsel

Cemetery FAQs

Q. Can a town be forced to take over an abandoned cemetery?

A. Yes, in certain circumstances. If a cemetery authority abandons or fails to manage or care for its cemetery for 5 or more years, the municipality where the cemetery is located must take control and manage and care for the cemetery. Wis. Stat. § 157.115(1)(b)2. Further, whenever any cemetery in a town is falling into disuse, or is abandoned or neglected, because the persons interested in its upkeep have died and there exists no association or group with authority to transfer ownership and operation of the cemetery to the town, the town board, at the expense of the town, must take charge of the cemetery and manage and care for it, and if the town board fails to take charge of the cemetery, the circuit judge may, upon petition by 6 or more persons interested in the cemetery's upkeep, order its transfer to the town, including the transfer of all assets. § 157.115(1)(c).

Q. How do we determine whether a burial site is a “cemetery” that the town has to take over once abandoned? Does this apply to any family cemetery or burial plot on private land?

A. The Wisconsin Supreme Court has clarified that not every parcel containing buried human remains constitutes a cemetery for the purposes of Wis. Stat. § 157.115(1)(c). In *DeWitt v. Ferries*, 2018 WI 117, the court held that a 1-acre parcel where the plaintiffs claimed some relatives had been buried years ago did not satisfy the statutory definition of a “cemetery,” and therefore the mandatory transfer mechanism in § 157.115(1)(c) did not apply. The court noted that a cemetery may not be used for burials unless it was in use on April 4, 1864 or was organized and operated by one of the cemetery authorities listed in § 157.065(1)(b). The court pointed out that the detailed statutes and regulations governing cemeteries indicate that a certain degree of formality is required to form a cemetery, beyond the simple burial of bodies. For example, to prove the existence of a cemetery, there must be evidence of the forming and incorporating a cemetery authority under § 157.062, surveying and recording plats or maps with the register of deeds under § 157.07, dividing plats into lots for sale, maintaining cemetery records and filing reports, etc. Without such evidence, § 157.115(1)(c) cannot be invoked. Therefore, a town is unlikely to be required to take over maintenance of informally created family plots that later become abandoned.

Q. Could a town take over a cemetery voluntarily instead of waiting for it to fall into abandonment?

A. Yes. Under Wis. Stat. § 157.115(1)(b)1., if a cemetery authority has failed to care for its cemetery for 1 or more years the municipality *may* take control of that cemetery. A still-functioning cemetery authority may also vote to transfer its cemetery to the municipality under § 157.064(5), in which case the municipality may accept the transfer via adoption of a resolution. These options can be helpful to ensure that a municipality receives any remaining association funds, burial records, surveys, and other documents in a timely fashion, rather than taking over an abandoned cemetery that is unfunded, in disrepair, and for

which records may be lost. Either way, a municipality should work with their local municipal attorney to make sure that all the transfer paperwork is in order and properly recorded.

Q. If a cemetery association asks the town for financial assistance, can the town provide funding?

A. If a cemetery association has insufficient maintenance funds, it may submit a written request to the local municipal clerk. The request must state the amount of money the association needs for the next year, the amount the association has for the next year, and the resulting deficient amount. In response, the municipality may levy and collect a tax in the deficient amount and pay that amount to the association. Wis. Stat. § 157.062(7). Although this is optional, a poorly funded association is more likely to dissolve, so offering this assistance may help a town or village avoid having to take over the cemetery itself.

Q. Are towns required to maintain perpetual care funds for town cemeteries?

A. No. A municipality has the option to terminate a cemetery's perpetual care fund and transfer the money into the municipality's general fund, if the municipality owns the cemetery and provides all maintenance expenses in perpetuity for the graves in the cemetery at the time of termination. Wis. Stat. § 157.50(6).

Q. How are town cemeteries required to be managed?

A. A municipality in charge of a cemetery must adopt an ordinance outlining systems for the cemetery's management and operation. Wis. Stat. § 157.50. A sample ordinance is in the Town Law Forms. Some towns and villages create a cemetery committee or hire a cemetery caretaker/sexton. In others, the town or village board oversees management of the cemetery.

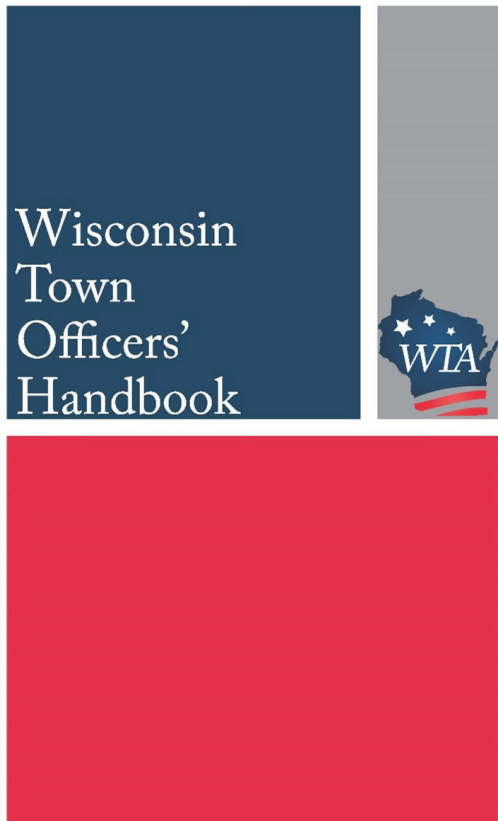
Q. Can a town refuse to perform winter burials in town cemeteries?

A. Under Wis. Stat. § 157.114, "insofar as practicable," burials must be provided in all seasons, including winter, but the cemetery authority may charge a reasonable fee to recover the costs related to providing for a burial during difficult weather conditions.

Q. What obligation does a town have to care for veterans' graves?

A. Wis. Stat. § 45.85 requires every municipality to ensure that the graves and tombstones of all veterans, including women's auxiliary organizations, who served in any branch of the armed forces of the United States, as well as any of the spouses or surviving spouses of those veterans, receive proper and decent care. Municipalities may employ all necessary assistance to carry out this requirement. Counties are required to bear the expense of caring for veterans' graves and tombstones, except where suitable care is otherwise provided. The amount of expense charged to the county can't exceed the charges for care of other graves in the same cemetery. Under § 45.85(2), on or before September 1 each year, municipalities must report to the county clerk: the location of the eligible graves cared for by the governing body, the names of the deceased, and the amount claimed for care of the graves for the fiscal year from the previous July 1 to June 30.

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 of Burke, Dane County

Town of Burke, Dane County, is seeking a qualified individual to fill a Limited Time Employment (LTE) position in the Public Works Department. Qualifications include: valid WI Commercial Driver's License, high school diploma, and three years of experience. Must be willing to work nights, holidays and/or weekends as required. Responsibilities include maintaining Town roads, buildings, grounds, vehicles, equipment, plowing, salting, and brush disposal. Hourly wage will be dependent on qualifications and experience. Position is subject to random testing in compliance with the Town of Burke Substance Abuse Policy and the Federal DOT and Highway Administration drug and alcohol; testing regulations contained in Title 49 CFR. The Town of Burke is an equal opportunity employer hoping to fill this LTE position for 6-8 weeks beginning mid-November. Send resume including salary requirements to Town of Burke, 5365 Reiner Road, Madison, WI 53718, Atten: Town Administrator, email: Clerk@TownofBurke.com. www.townofburke.com for complete job description.

The Town of Arthur, Chippewa County, Seeks Proposals for Assessment Services

The 2025 total assessed value is \$145,528,900, with revaluation completed in 2025.

Deadline: November 11, 2025

Submit to:

Town of Arthur

Attn: Assessor Bids

PO Box 278

Cadott, WI 54727

Email: clerk@townofarthur.com **Phone:** 715-289-3113

Expected Award Date: November 11, 2025 **Expected Start Date:** January 1, 2026

The Town reserves the right to reject proposals, award based on overall value (not just lowest cost), and adjust the timeline. Contact the Clerk for more information.



Election Inspector (Poll Worker) Appointments

Q. What is an election inspector?

A. Election inspectors, commonly referred to as poll workers, are public officials who staff polling places on all election days during the term they serve. They are responsible for setting up the polling place, issuing ballots, registering electors, recording voter numbers, monitoring voting equipment, counting votes, and properly completing required forms. Election inspectors serve for 2-year terms that begin on January 1 of each even-numbered year, meaning the current term of your local election inspectors will expire this December 31, 2025.

Q. How many election inspectors is a town required to have?

A. State law requires that an odd number of inspectors be appointed to work at each election. Wis. Stat. § 7.30(1)(a) states that each polling place must have 7 election inspectors at each election, but that number may be reduced to 5 if a voting machine is used. However, a town or village board may adopt a resolution reducing the minimum number of election inspectors to no fewer than 3 at each election. See § 7.32. Such a resolution could include language giving the clerk discretion to increase the number of election inspectors if needed for a particular election. The town or village board may also adopt an ordinance providing for the selection of alternate election inspectors or multiple sets of inspectors to work at different times on election day to ensure that adequate staffing levels can be maintained at all polling places for every election. Sample resolutions and ordinances are available in the Wisconsin Town Law Forms.

Q. How are election inspectors appointed?

A. The town chair or village president must nominate election inspectors to the board, and the board must hold a meeting to consider those nominations and make election inspector appointments, no later than December 31. See Wis. Stat. § 7.30(4)(a). This is typically an agenda item at the board's December meeting in odd-numbered years. Election inspector appointments must be made from lists of names submitted by the two dominant political parties, so that half of the inspectors are affiliated with the Democratic Party and half with the Republican Party. The parties must submit these lists to the town or village clerk no later than November 30. Lists must be signed by the political committee chair and secretary, and the party must certify that the listed nominees have been contacted and are willing to serve. The political party whose candidate received more votes at your polling place in the November 5, 2024 presidential election is entitled to have one more inspector at that polling place than the other party, as there must always be an odd number of inspectors. See § 7.30(4)(b)-(c). For example, if Donald Trump received more votes at your polling place last November and you appoint 5 election inspectors, 3 would be appointed from the Republican Party's list and 2 would be appointed from the Democratic Party's list. However, if either party fails to submit a list by the deadline or their list is insufficient, the positions that would otherwise be assigned to that party may be filled without regard to party affiliation, based on nominations of any qualified individuals. The board may also appoint one additional person to serve as a greeter at each polling

place without regard to party affiliation. See § 7.30(1). For detailed information about this appointment process, please review the resources available on the Wisconsin Elections Commission's (WEC's) website located here: <https://elections.wi.gov/>. They will likely be providing more information as we get closer to December 2025. Within 5 days after the board makes the appointments, the clerk must send a notice to each appointee, per § 7.30(5). Appointees must file an official oath form with the town or village clerk within 10 days after the notice was mailed.

Q. What is the process to fill a vacancy in an election inspector position?

A. The municipal clerk appoints qualified individuals to fill election inspector vacancies. See Wis. Stat. § 7.30(2)(b). If political party lists have been submitted, the vacancy must be filled from any remaining names on the list submitted by the party with which that inspector was affiliated, or from any additional names submitted by the chair of the county party committee as part of a supplemental list. If the vacancy is due to a temporary cause such as illness or the inspector's own candidacy on the ballot, the appointment of a substitute is only effective for the election at which the temporary vacancy occurs.

Q. Who is qualified to serve as an election inspector?

A. Election inspectors must be qualified electors of the county in which they serve (county residents who are eligible to vote) and must be able to read, write, and understand English. The chief election inspector must be a qualified elector of the municipality itself, or an elector of the county if you are unable to find a qualified local resident. See Wis. Stat. § 7.30(2)(a). Recruiting high schoolers to serve is an option. See Melissa Kono's Clerk's Corner article in this month's magazine for more information. An elected town officer, such as a town board member, may serve as an election inspector. See Wis. Stat. §§ 7.30(2)(a) & 66.0501(4)(b). Please note that all poll workers are prohibited from working at elections where they themselves or an immediate family member of theirs is a candidate for office.

Q. How should election inspectors be compensated?

A. Election inspectors may be paid a daily or an hourly compensation, both for attending trainings and for performing election duties. See Wis. Stat. § 7.03(1). The amount of compensation is set by the town or village board. See Wis. Stat. § 7.03(2). Inspectors have the option to volunteer their services by filing a written "declination to accept compensation" with the municipal clerk. The inspector's volunteer status will remain effective until they file a written revocation with the clerk. See Wis. Stat. § 7.03(1)(a). Generally, the local municipality is required to pay inspectors' compensation. However, when a special election is called by the county or a school district, technical college district, sewerage district, sanitary district, or public inland lake protection and rehabilitation district, the county or district that called the election is responsible for compensating the election inspectors for that election. See Wis. Stat. § 7.03(1)(bm).

Q. Are election inspectors required to file an oath of office?

A. Yes, pursuant to Wis. Stat. § 7.30(5), within 5 days after the board makes its appointments, the municipal clerk is responsible for providing notice to the election inspectors that they have been appointed to serve. Each inspector must file the official oath with the municipal clerk within 10 days after the mailing of the notice. After taking the oath, an inspector may administer any oath required to conduct an election. A sample oath can be found on the WEC website – form EL-154, available online here: <https://elections.wi.gov/forms>.



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

Recruiting, Training, and Staffing Election Workers

Ensuring properly staffed elections is one of the most important yet stressful aspects of our jobs as clerks. With a busy election year looming ahead in 2026, having a fully staffed and trained election board is crucial. Election inspectors (the official term for election workers) need to be appointed to serve no later than December 31st for the next two-year term which runs January 1, 2026-December 31, 2027.

Recruitment Strategies

The two political parties receiving the most votes in the last general election (held in November 2024) may appoint workers to serve by November 30th. For more information on election inspectors, including party appointed election inspectors, please see the article titled “Election Inspector (Poll Worker) Appointments” in this month’s magazine. If there are not enough appointments received from the political parties to satisfy staffing requirements, additional workers will need to be recruited to serve. One of the questions I receive often from clerks is how to find qualified people willing to be election workers. It has been my experience as a clerk that many people are willing to serve as election workers simply if they are asked. I suggest surveying existing workers for their ideas on who would be an excellent addition to the election crew, and consider the following talking points when recruiting additional workers:

- Emphasize the importance of serving as an election inspector to help friends and neighbors access their right to vote and election integrity depends upon fully staffed elections
- Stress that elections are infrequent—typically two to four per election cycle so the time commitment is limited to only a few times per year, plus training
- Assure them that pre-election and on-the-job training is available and consider starting new election inspectors in less demanding positions such as being a greeter or shadowing another worker
- Offer flexibility with staffing to allow those with work and family obligations to be able to serve without committing to a 13-plus hour shift. Split shifts may be utilized if the town board passes an ordinance. See Wis. Stat. §. 7.30(1)(a).
- Point out that state law requires *all* employers to grant employees time off to serve as election workers, if employers are given 7 days’ notice. See Wis. Stat. § 7.33 (3). Additionally, state and local government employees are allowed time off to serve as election workers with *no* reduction in pay or benefits with a couple stipulations: employees must give 7 days’ notice, and if taking paid leave and receiving election pay, must report it to their employer to be deducted from their pay. Additionally, it may be preferable for state and local government employees to volunteer as election workers by filing a “declination to accept compensation” in writing with the clerk. See Wis. Stat. §.7.03(1)(a). It has been my experience that most employers understand the value of serving as an election inspector and are generous with offering time off and benefits to employees who serve.

Recruiting high school students to serve as election workers is a wonderful way to encourage civic participation for youth and inspire future voters. High school students ages 16 and over may serve as election inspectors, with a couple additional requirements, per the Election Administration Manual:

- Be 16 or 17 years of age and enrolled in grades 9-12 of a public, private, tribal school or home-based education program
- Have at least a 3.0 GPA or receive written permission from the principal if less than 3.0 GPA
- Receive written parental approval and be a resident of the municipality
- Cannot serve as chief inspector or challenge a voter, and there must be another election inspector (other than the chief inspector) who is a resident of the municipality present.

Training

Election inspectors are required to complete training prior to serving in an election but the clerk determines the length and content of training. For smaller municipalities like towns, it can be a heavy burden on the clerk to develop comprehensive election training. The Wisconsin Elections Commission (WEC) has a library of election training topics on its webpage under ElectEd to provide training resources clerks can utilize to train workers without having to develop an election training curriculum from scratch. Clerks should keep a record of training for the chief inspector(s) and election inspectors on file and need only report their own training hours to WEC. Just a reminder that clerks are required to have six hours of training per two-year term to recertify for the next term and the training report for the 2024-2025 term is due to WEC by December 31, 2025. See recent memo issued by WEC on the training report: <https://elections.wi.gov/memo/municipal-clerk-training-report-112024-12312025>

Appointment and employee paperwork

Clerks are to notify those who have been appointed as election inspectors within 5 days and appointees must file an oath of office within 10 days of notification of appointment, see Wis. Stat. § 7.30(5). The EL-154 Oath of Office is found at the end of the Election Day and Election Administration Manuals or at <https://www.wisctowns.com/documents/official-oath-el-154.pdf>. Clerks should keep these oaths on file. Election inspectors are considered employees of the town and are subject to the following:

- Employers with a Federal Employer Identification Number are to report new employees, including election workers, to WI Unemployment Insurance and the State Directory of New Hires within 20 days of hire: <https://dwd.wisconsin.gov/uinh/>. Poll workers need only be reported once and are exempt from rules under WI Administrative Code DWD 142.02(7)(b) regarding recalled employees, even if there is a 60-day employment lapse between elections.
- Election workers earning less than \$2,400 are exempt from social security and Medicare (FICA) and election workers are exempt from federal and state income tax withholding: https://www.revenue.wi.gov/Pages/TaxPro/2012/news-2012-120507.aspx#:~:text=Content_Area1,to%20federal%20income%20tax%20withholding.
- Election workers earning more than \$600 should be issued a W-2. For additional guidance on election worker pay and exemptions please see the current IRS Employer guide at: <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p15.pdf>.

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"What are 3 top priorities your local town government officials should pursue to improve the quality of life in your community?"

Written By: Caleb Radart

The Wisconsin Towns Association, Rural Mutual Insurance Company, and Scott Construction, Inc. award \$1000 scholarships to graduating high school seniors that enroll in a Wisconsin public or private college. Read all of the winning 2025 winning essays at www.wisctowns.com/resources/scholarship/.

The Town of Scott, Wisconsin, located in northeast Wisconsin along the east bank of the Bay of Green Bay, offers a sense of peace and simplicity often lost in urban areas. With a population that thrives on agriculture, natural beauty, and a close-knit community, the Town of Scott represents the many small towns across the U.S. that face unique challenges and opportunities. While the town is a wonderful place to live, there are several areas where local government officials can focus their efforts to improve the overall quality of life for residents.

These efforts should focus on three key priorities: enhancing infrastructure and connectivity, supporting local economic development, and improving community health and recreation opportunities. Addressing these areas will help ensure a sustainable, vibrant future for its residents.



One of the fundamental aspects of improving the quality of life in any town is ensuring that its infrastructure is both functional and sustainable. Many small-town communities in Wisconsin, including the Town of Scott, face challenges when it comes to maintaining their roadways. Rural roads are often subjected to harsher weather conditions and more frequent use from heavy vehicles on the roadway. This leads to wear and tear in the form of potholes, eroded shoulders, and poorly marked intersections. Also, according to TRIP, "Rural roads are more likely to have narrow lanes, limited shoulders, sharp curves, exposed hazards, pavement drop-offs, steep slopes, and limited clear zones along roadsides" (2024). These factors contribute to unsafe driving conditions. By prioritizing road maintenance and improvement, town officials can not only increase safety but also improve the efficiency of transportation.

Another aspect of infrastructure the Town of Scott should prioritize is the lack of reliable high-speed internet. In an age where digital connectivity is integral to nearly every aspect of life, the absence of robust broadband access can create significant disadvantages. For residents, especially those working remotely or seeking educational opportunities, fast internet can be spotty, hindering both professional and personal growth. Expanding access to reliable and affordable high-speed internet would not only improve residents'

daily lives but also open up new opportunities for local businesses, telemedicine, and education. Ensuring that no resident is left behind in the digital age is critical for the town's long-term success.

A strong local economy is essential for any community, but it is especially important in rural areas like the Town of Scott. Small businesses are the backbone of the local economy. In fact, many of the town's unique qualities—its agriculture, natural resources, location, and sense of community—lend themselves well to entrepreneurial ventures. “The Town is experiencing increased residential, commercial, and industrial development pressure due to its proximity to the City of Green Bay, University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, highly sought-after bayshore property, and improvements to STH 57 from a two-lane rural highway to a divided four-lane expressway (this expressway is the main highway to Door County)” (Town of Scott, 2025). To support local businesses, town officials could offer incentives such as tax breaks, grants, or low-interest loans to entrepreneurs starting or expanding small businesses. Additionally, creating a supportive environment through business development resources, such as mentorship programs or networking events, can help entrepreneurs succeed. By focusing on small business development, the town can create jobs, encourage innovation, and provide residents with more options for goods and services without needing to travel to neighboring cities.

As a rural area, the Town of Scott benefits from its agricultural roots, which provide an opportunity for both economic growth and environmental sustainability. The town government should explore ways to support sustainable farming practices, such as offering grants or technical assistance to farmers who want to adopt eco-friendly practices or diversify their crops. Local agriculture can also be leveraged as part of a broader tourism strategy, with agritourism becoming a growing sector across the U.S. Whether it's through farm-to-table restaurants, agricultural festivals, or farm tours, promoting the Town of Scott's agricultural heritage could bring in tourists, stimulate local spending, and showcase the town's natural beauty. In the long term, this could provide a significant boost to the local economy while preserving the town's rural character.

The health and well-being of a town's residents should always be a top priority for any local government. One of the most effective ways to improve the physical and mental health of residents is by offering accessible and well-maintained parks and recreational facilities. The Town of Scott, with its natural beauty of features like the Niagara Escarpment and open spaces, has several parks, walking trails, and outdoor recreational areas that it should strive to maintain and improve. Specifically, the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay has a broad and extensive trail system that can be more utilized and promoted to the public. Partnering with counties to manage local parks like Bay Shore and Red River, which feature the priceless beauty of the natural landscapes of the Niagara Escarpment, offers residents spaces to stay active, socialize, and engage in family-friendly activities. “[These parks] preserve and provide public access to areas that could only be admired from distant points if they were in private ownership” (Stieglitz et al., 2016). Additionally, establishing recreational initiatives such as youth sports leagues or fitness classes can help foster a sense of community and promote healthy lifestyles. Whether it's a weekend walk through a nature trail or a neighborhood soccer game, recreational activities create opportunities for individuals to connect with their surroundings and each other.

Improving the quality of life in the Town of Scott, Wisconsin, requires a holistic approach that addresses infrastructure, economic development, and community health. By focusing on these areas, the town government can create an environment that is conducive to both personal and community growth. As the Town of Scott looks toward the future, these priorities will help ensure that the town remains a vibrant, sustainable place for residents to live, work, and thrive. By implementing these initiatives, the Town of Scott can preserve its rural charm while embracing the opportunities necessary to adapt to an evolving world.

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2025 Scholarship Winner

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"What are 3 top priorities your local town government officials should pursue to improve the quality of life in your community?"

Written By: Carly Matias

The Wisconsin Towns Association, Rural Mutual Insurance Company, and Scott Construction, Inc. award \$1000 scholarships to graduating high school seniors that enroll in a Wisconsin public or private college. Read all of the winning 2025 winning essays at www.wisctowns.com/resources/scholarship/.

Fundamental. It's a key word for Wisconsin's town government. Ninety-five percent of Wisconsin's geography and thirty percent of its population is served through the fundamental provisions of Wisconsin's 1245 towns ("Town Government"). Wisconsin Towns Association lists important basic services provided by each town, which include administering elections, conducting property tax assessments, disputing procedures, billing and collection; fire protection and ambulance service; providing for a recycling program, and maintaining town roads. So, when asked, What priorities should local town government officials pursue to improve the quality of town life in my community? I know the improvements must fall within the scope of function authorized by Wisconsin state law for Wisconsin towns. Although there are many pursuit-worthy possibilities, I believe communication, educating the community, and land use management/economic development are three concepts which, if considered, could generate positive ameliorations.



Effective and clear communication between the town board (composed of a town chairperson and usually two to four supervisors) and the community it serves is vital for bettering the quality of life. A Citizen's Guide to Land Use in Wisconsin encourages communication, stating, "Newsletters and information meetings are important ways to keep citizens informed about the progress of the planning...a continuous flow of information is crucial..." In our tech-savvy world, information can also be shared through email, online updates, and social media posts. Communication is important in town leadership because it will unify people around a shared purpose and goal (Chabot). It ensures the community feels engaged and valued. Projects, budgets, land use changes, service adjustments...these and many other topics will be better received and conducted when both sides, town officials and town dwellers, are communicating clearly. Blogger Leonard Horowitz from Ultatel notes

the following on communication in government, "In the world of governance, strong communication plays a vital role. It's like the glue that holds everything together, helping people understand what's happening and why it matters." It builds trust. It creates connections. Communication should serve to improve life in our community!

Secondly, it is important each town is well-educated on town government, on how the town's elected board members continue to serve and improve the quality of life. Educating both youth and adults would allow residents in their respective towns to better understand and appreciate the duties and responsibilities of town government. Simple informational and interactive educational programs could be introduced in classrooms for children as young as kindergarten. This material could be re-presented at various ages, giving students repeated opportunities to learn and understand town government. Similarly, programs for adults could be created and offered intermittently to encourage understanding, participation, and appreciation for services provided by towns. Repeated educational opportunities should encourage knowledgeable participation when it comes to improving the quality of life in one's own community. If folks do not understand the function of town government, or if they are intimidated by it, they may be less willing to contribute. An informed people betters a town, ideally producing cooperation, collaboration, and additional education between townspeople and town government.

Finally, residents of towns often choose town life because it offers benefits that cities may not: spacious areas, residential properties, sense of community, lower taxes and cost of living. The list goes on. Land use and economic development are central components to how a town looks, "feels", and functions. A map of Wisconsin shows Wisconsin divided into seventy-two counties, and from there, 1245 towns (Wisconsin Blue Book 2023-2024 #341). With such small divisions, the land in Wisconsin can be managed very carefully, very thoughtfully. Each town, its government and population, has the responsibility to care for the land within it, bringing the best quality of life to the families and the businesses within. There must be a balance of recreational, residential, and business (and agricultural) space. With wise distribution, positive results occur: agricultural and business zones generate income, open spaces enable recreation or preservation, and spacious areas accommodate comfortable living. The decisions made about a community's growth and development have an important impact on landscapes and on individuals and should incorporate input from town residents (The Land Use Institute). It is common to assume that growth is progress and therefore, desirable. After all, a growing town brings in more revenue. However, many people choose to live in towns because of what they are, not what they could grow into. Those people intentionally picked town living; they may not want their town to grow into a city. Town government is capable of assessing, addressing, and prioritizing needs, while gleaning valuable insights from town residents. Careful management of land and economic growth will certainly improve life in our communities.

In summary, communication, education, and proper land use are components which can contribute to improving the quality of life in a community. A Citizen's Guide to Land Use in Wisconsin reminds us, "One of the most significant outcomes of proper land use is to create a community that functions cohesively, looks pleasant, and feels welcoming." Town government should strive to make connections and communicate with its people, educate residents on town government services and functions, and work to utilize town land which offers optimal benefits to the community. Improving a community's quality of life is a partnership. Town government and town residents can work together on fundamental issues to create a dynamic, economically healthy, and flourishing community.

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***Edit to October 2025 Article “Town Websites”**

The first paragraph of the answer portion of the first question should read as follows:

A. In the modern digital age, it can be beneficial for the town to have an online presence. Being able to post important announcements on the website can help the town communicate with its residents. It can also assist with providing certain legal notices electronically. For example, towns that have websites have the option to provide Open Meetings Law notices to the public by posting on their town website and in one public place likely to give notice to persons affected. See Wis. Stat. § 19.84(1)(b)2. Similarly, towns that do not have official newspapers have the option of providing Ch. 985 notices by posting in lieu of publication. One of the posting methods is providing notices by posting them on the town website and in one public place likely to give notice to persons affected. See Wis. Stat. § 985.02(2)(a). Please review state statute to determine if stricter statutory requirements apply.

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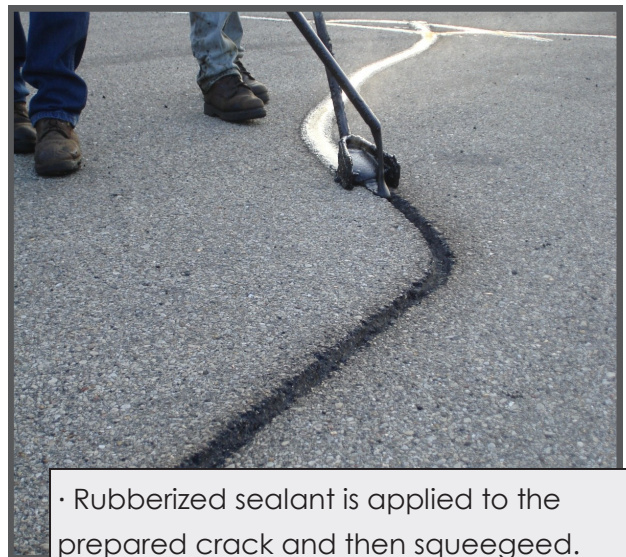
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