

# Wisconsin Towns Association

## January 2026



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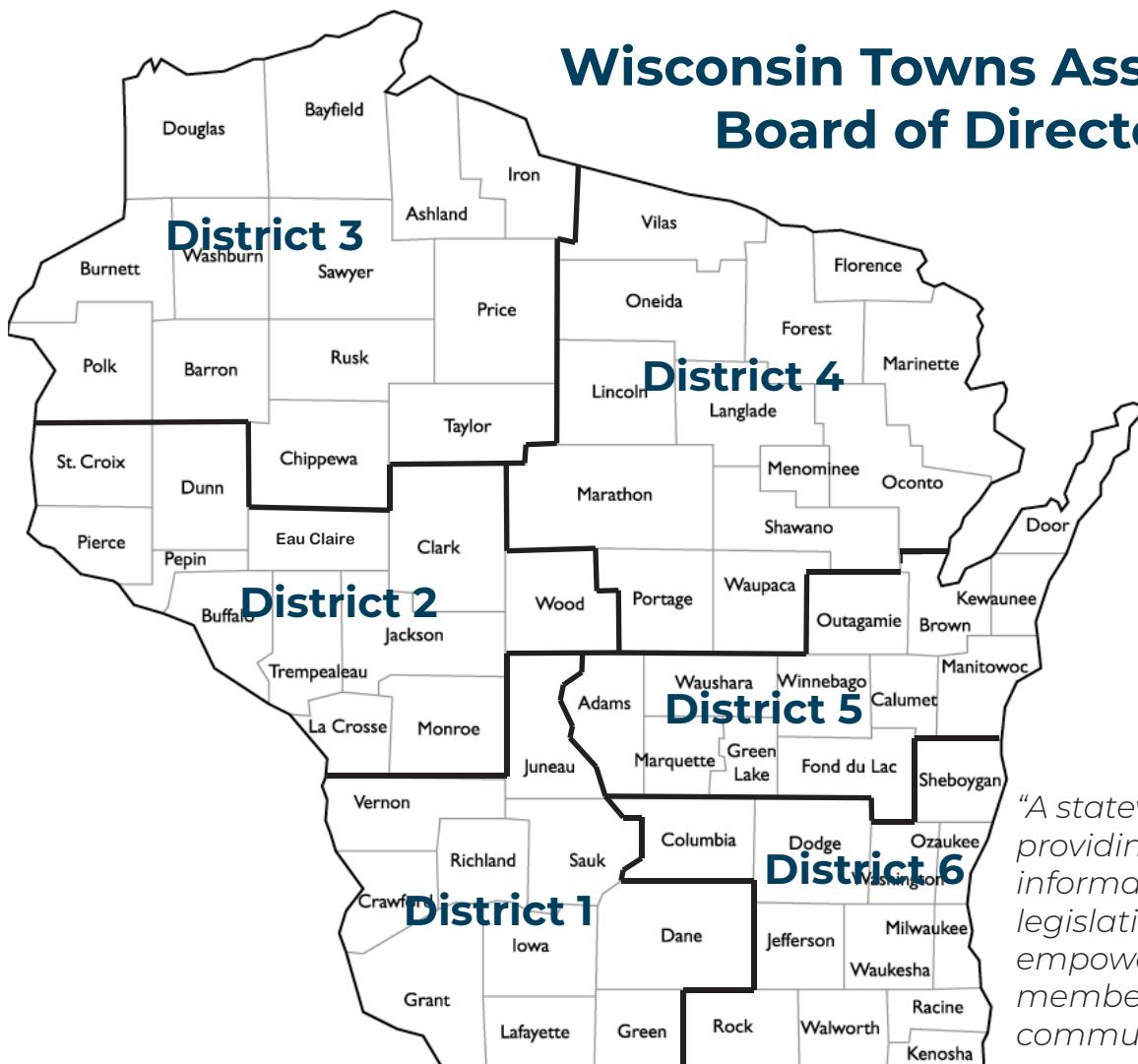
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Volume 455

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# *Wisconsin Towns*

January 2026

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*Empowering Town Officials*

# FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



By  
**Mike Koles**



**42**

I would guess all town officials, even those completely disinterested in baseball, are familiar with Jackie Robinson. His impact on not only Major League Baseball, but all of society will be forever remembered.

On April 15, 1947, Robinson broke the color barrier when he started first base for the Brooklyn Dodgers. This proved to be the end of racial segregation in professional baseball, which had forced black players to the Negro leagues for six decades. He opened the door for many others to succeed, and Major League Baseball recognized this achievement by retiring his number for all of baseball. #42 is, however, worn by all players every April 15<sup>th</sup> – Jackie Robinson Day.

Robinson won Rookie of the Year; was recognized as the National League MVP in 1949; and retired with an unbelievable .313 batting average, 1,563 hits; 972 runs scored, and 200 stolen bases. During his 10 years playing for the

**“A life is not important except the impact it has on other lives.”**

Jackie Robinson

Brooklyn Dodgers, they won 6 pennants and 1 World Series.

Robinson one said: “A life is not important except the impact it has on other lives.” His contribution did not begin or end with baseball. Even before his time with the Dodgers, he led by example through refusing to sit at the back of the segregated Army bus. His commitment to the value that all people are created equal earned him a court martial. After retirement, he became the first black television analyst, helped establish a black owned bank in Harlem, and became the first black vice-president of a major American corporation.

His ability to adhere to a non-violent ideological approach to the civil rights movement despite enduring mental, emotional, and physical abuse promoted him to perhaps his most important role – civil rights leader. Dr. Martin Luther King was crystal clear about Robinson’s role: **“Jackie Robinson made my success possible. Without him, I would never have been able to do what I did.”**

Jackie Robinson helped empower a generation of Americans to bend the pendulum of justice toward fulfilling the potential of democracy.

**42**

Even the casual WTA magazine reader has likely become accustomed to my analogies, extended metaphors, and hidden messaging I often deploy in my articles. It should not be surprising that 42 is also an important number at the Wisconsin Towns Association.

This January marks the end of an era at the WTA. Karisa Schulze (36) and Sandy Wanta (6), with a combined **42** years of service to town officials are retiring. I invite you to read Jake's article in this magazine summarizing an interview he conducted with them about their successful careers.

As aforementioned, Jackie Robinson wisely recognized that a life is not important except for the impact it has on other lives. If that is the metric, then Karisa and Sandy have lived gargantuanly important careers at WTA.

Not much would happen without Karisa and Sandy. Their behind the scenes "work" has fueled county unit meetings, district meetings, convention, the magazine...pretty much everything we do. Truly, their contributions are too many to list. They have helped empower

thousands of town officials over the years to work to accomplish the WTA vision of unlocking the potential of democracy.

In responding to President Kennedy's inquiry about the role he played, a janitor at NASA once responded by telling the President he was helping to put a man on the moon. In the same way, Karisa and Sandy's blue collar "work" hasn't really been about achieving a task, but something so much bigger. It has always been about assisting town officials in helping Wisconsinites breathe life into the American experiment.

Like Dr. Martin Luther King recognized the foundation Jackie Robinson built for him, Karisa and Sandy made my personal and the WTA's success possible. **Without them, the WTA, towns, and the influence of democracy in local government would not be what it is today.**

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# 2026 WTA Convention Lodging

**Sunday, October 4 - Tuesday, October 6, 2026  
Holiday Inn Hotel and Convention Center, Stevens Point**

Room Blocks will open January 15th and are set up under Wisconsin Towns Association or WTA at the hotels listed below.

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

Please DO NOT call our office concerning rooms.

**HOLIDAY INN HOTEL & CONVENTION CENTER - 715-344-0200  
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**HOLIDAY INN EXPRESS – 715-344-0000  
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**LA QUINTA – 715-344-1900  
4917 Main St., Stevens Point – RATE - \$94.00**

**FAIRFIELD INN & SUITES – 715-342-9300  
5317 HWY 10 East, Stevens Point – RATE - \$139.00**

**COBBLESTONE HOTEL & SUITES – 715-343-0522  
1117 Centerpoint Dr., Stevens Point – RATE - \$110.00**

**COMFORT INN – 715-496-2007  
1560 American Dr., Plover – RATE - \$110.00**

**HAMPTON INN PLOVER – 715-295-9900  
3090 Village Park Dr., Plover – RATE - \$98.00**



Rates subject to change. Please confirm your rate with the hotel of your choice and have your tax exempt number ready before calling the hotel.

# LEGAL OPINIONS



By Atty. Carol Nawrocki  
Assistant Director

## Fuel Tax Refunds

### Q. Can we get a refund on any of the federal fuel taxes that we pay?

A. Towns *may* be eligible to seek a refund on federal excise taxes imposed on gasoline and undyed diesel fuel purchased by the town. (Dyed diesel fuel does not have the tax imposed in the first place, so no refund is available.) Various rules apply, depending on how the purchases were made. For example, if the purchase was made with a town credit card, a registered credit card *issuer* may be the one that is entitled to claim the refund, not the town. If a credit card was not used to make the purchase, a registered fuel *vendor* would be entitled to the refund, if the town has provided him/her with a certificate waiving the refund. If neither of those two scenarios is applicable, the town may be able to file for the refund. To see if your town is eligible for the refund, review IRS Form 8849, Schedule 1, and the accompanying instructions. Your town can claim the refund annually. Note that you must file your claim within 3 years following the close of the taxable year. For more information, read IRS Publication 510, which can be found at: <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p510.pdf>

### Q. Can we get a refund on state motor vehicle fuel taxes?

A. Fuel sold to local municipalities *is taxable* unless the sale qualifies as exempt. The most common exemption applicable to towns would be gasoline sold for “off road” use in mobile machinery and equipment, provided the gasoline is delivered directly into a customer’s bulk storage tank in an amount of not less than 100 gallons. Purchasers can make such a gasoline purchase tax-exempt by executing an exemption certificate (MF-209) and filing it with their suppliers.

Undyed diesel fuel must be purchased *tax-included*, even though the purchaser uses it for off-road purposes. To avoid having to claim a refund on undyed diesel fuel used for off road purposes, it is suggested that you purchase dyed diesel fuel which is not taxed. (Note that dyed diesel fuel cannot be mixed with undyed diesel fuel.)

Towns with “off-road” usage of motor vehicle fuel who purchase fuel *tax-included* may file a refund claim form with the Wisconsin Department of Revenue. A refund claim must be filed within one year of the date the fuel is purchased and must cover at least 100 gallons. For claim forms and more information, call (608) 266-6701.

If the gasoline or diesel fuel the town purchases will be placed in the fuel supply tank of a licensed motor vehicle, snowmobile, ATV, etc., it is *not* tax exempt. Use of untaxed fuel for taxable purposes will subject the user to severe state and federal penalties. To read more about this topic, see the “Motor Vehicle Fuel Tax” Frequently Asked Questions page on the Department of Revenue’s website: <https://www.revenue.wi.gov/Pages/FAQS/ise-mofuel.aspx>

## New Year's Resolutions

It's that time of year when we think about the bad habits we should give up and the positive steps we can take to improve ourselves in the coming year. Why not also spend some time thinking about the things we can do to improve our own town or village governments and making sure things are able to run smoothly in 2026? To get you started on your own list, I am providing you with some ideas.

### **1. Has your town board adopted a public records access policy pursuant to Wis. Stat. § 19.34?**

This would be the document that spells out when public records can be accessed, what fees will be charged, who is the custodian of which records, etc. I regularly speak with clerks who receive a request for records and they call our office to ask how much they can charge for paper copies, locating a record, recordings, etc. The law *requires* that each authority adopt a public records access policy and post it where your records are kept. The policy would set your local fees and provide other required information. Don't be caught flat footed. If someone makes a time-consuming request for a myriad of records and you don't already have a policy in place, you are going to be at a disadvantage. A sample public records access policy can be found in the Wisconsin Town Law Forms book.

### **2. Has your town or village updated its comprehensive plan within 10 years of the date it was adopted pursuant to Wis. Stat. § 66.1001(2)(i)?**

Under the state comprehensive planning law, a comprehensive plan *must* be updated no less than once every 10 years. If your town or village adopted a comprehensive plan, you should check to see how long it has been since the plan was last updated. The comprehensive planning law required most plans to be in place by January 1, 2010, so it is quite possible that your plan is overdue for an update. The statute does not specify how in depth or how detailed the update must be. But, at minimum, you should have your planning body review the plan, recommend any necessary changes, and adhere to the same public input, notice, hearing, and ordinance procedures that were required under Wis. Stat. § 66.1001(4) when the original comprehensive plan was adopted.

### **3. Have you been keeping a watchful eye on the finances and making sure things add up?**

Have the clerk and treasurer been reviewing the bank statements and reconciling their books every month to make sure they balance? Has the board asked to see copies of the bank statements periodically just to make sure things look right? Has the board been insisting on reviewing every itemized credit card statement and making sure the corresponding receipts match up? Has the chair made sure not to sign any blank checks and made sure to keep sole control over the use of their signature stamp? Resolve not to be the local government that makes headlines for fraud or embezzlement.

### **4. Have the local officials in your town or village been exercising civility towards each other?**

It's normal to have differences of opinion amongst the board members. But, what happens when you don't agree? Do you personally attack the other board members during meetings or on social media? Do you try to sabotage the meetings so that business cannot be conducted or make it difficult for the other officials to do their jobs? Do you act like the procedural rules don't apply to you or try to keep the opposition uninformed about things so they cannot stand in your way? No one runs for local office because they want to be verbally abused or kept in the dark about what is going on. The least we can do is strive to treat each other with civility and respect. Make it a goal to treat others how you want to be treated in 2026.



# Staff Profile

*Featuring Karisa Schulze & Sandy Wanta*

*By: Jake Langenhahn, Outreach Specialist*

If you've ever called the WTA office, sent an email to the WTA, or attended the WTA Annual Convention, there's a high likelihood you interacted with Karisa Schulze and Sandy Wanta. Their hard work and dedication has made them a part of the WTA's very identity. Even as I write this, I struggle to think of a day at the office without both of them present. Karisa and Sandy will be retiring in January 2026, and our office will dearly miss them. As they are winding down their time with us, we wanted to take the time to recognize the work that they've done and give them an opportunity to reflect on their time with the WTA. Karisa and Sandy sat down for an interview with me to chat about their work, and what they hope for the future.

Asking someone to reflect on a job they've been doing for a long time isn't easy, so I figured we'd start at the very beginning for Karisa and Sandy. I asked them both "Why did you want to work for the WTA?" Karisa responded by saying that her mom played a large role in getting her connected with the WTA. She said, "My mom was friends with Barb, who was the (WTA) office manager at the time." During our discussion Karisa enjoyed thinking back to her interview with then WTA Executive Director Rick Stadelman. "I thought I had a horrible job interview" she said with a grin "I thought I'd never get hired, but I got the call the day after!" Sandy said that she wanted to work at the WTA because she thought the job posting was "made for her." Sandy's previous office work involved being adept with Microsoft Excel, recordkeeping, and being a team member. She said that "I knew this was likely going to be my last



*Karisa Schulze (pictured left) and Sandy Wanta (pictured right) celebrating their upcoming retirements.*

job before retirement, so I wanted to find something that I'd be good at."

Karisa started with the WTA on May 15, 1989 and Sandy started on January 20, 2020. Despite their tenures being different lengths, both have said their jobs have changed over time. Karisa recounted her earliest days in the office where she was responsible for updating the roster database in the first computer that the WTA ever owned. It was large, clunky, and inconveniently located in the previous WTA office. Now she manages the database on her work laptop with software that's much easier to use. Sandy says that she appreciates how the WTA has modernized its filing system. When she started, everything was hand filed in large filing cabinets and now most things are digitized. She said that "It's SO much easier

now compared to when we had to spend time filing messages every morning.”

While Sandy is happy she won’t have to get the office mail in the winter or rain anymore, and Karisa is eager for days without her enormous roster update duties, both are going to miss working for the WTA. Karisa is specifically going to miss coordinating the monthly magazine, and Sandy is going to miss supporting county unit meetings. Karisa said “I’m going to miss my coworkers, the people I work with, and the people I’ve met along the way. The old (WTA) directors and former coworkers.” Sandy wholeheartedly agreed. She said “I’m going to miss the people I worked with including my coworkers and the town officers.” Both are going to miss the Annual Convention because they got to see so many of the town officers that call into the WTA office.

I was looking forward to asking Sandy and Karisa what they hoped to do in retirement. Karisa is planning on doing more with her green houses and gardens. She also wants to spend more time relaxing up north with her husband Dean, visit her son Sam in La Crosse more often, and begin taking piano lessons. I asked her why she wanted to start playing piano, and Karisa said someone suggested she learn an instrument in retirement. Sandy and her husband Dan (also retired) are going to do a lot of traveling, and already have a condo booked in Florida for

March. She also plans to stay active in civic life by volunteering to be an election worker. I asked Sandy if she thinks her time at the WTA inspired her to be an election worker and she confidently replied “YES”. Sandy and Dan also plan on spending more time with their children Heather and Travis and their spouses, as well as their grandchildren Emmitt and Leighton. Towards the end of the interview, I asked them both if they could tell themselves one piece of advice before starting at the WTA, what would it be? Karisa says that she’d tell herself to “work hard but remember to celebrate”. “Have fun, you’re going to meet some amazing people while you’re working here, so make some great memories with them!” Sandy says that she’d tell herself “Don’t blink, it’s going to go fast!” She said that retirement seemed really far away from her when she started at the WTA, but the years went by very quickly.

The children’s television host Mr. Rogers once wrote “Often when you think you’re at the end of something, you’re at the beginning of something else.” I will greatly miss working with Karisa and Sandy, but I’m very happy that they’re about to embark on wonderful journeys in retirement. I hope they accomplish everything that they want to do and much more! On behalf of the WTA office, we’d like to congratulate Karisa and Sandy on their retirement and wish them all the very best!

# Congratulations

# LEGAL OPINIONS



By Atty. Lara Carlson  
Legal Counsel

## Traffic Regulations

### **Q. What procedures are required to install a stop sign at a busy intersection on a town road?**

A. A town board can install stop signs on roads over which they have exclusive jurisdiction. To make a stop sign enforceable, the board must adopt a stop sign ordinance or resolution, indicating where official signs will be placed. See Wis. Stat. § 349.07(8). A sample ordinance for this purpose is available in the Wisconsin Town Law Forms. The ordinance will take effect after the clerk provides the required notice under § 60.80 and the board installs official stop signs at the designated intersections.

A town board has discretion to decide whether a stop sign is necessary at a particular intersection, but any signs that are erected must be properly installed and maintained. Wisconsin law requires that any traffic control devices installed by local governments, including stop signs, must conform to the Wisconsin Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD). § 349.065. The MUTCD is available on the Wisconsin DOT website: <https://wisconsindot.gov/Pages/doing-bus/local-gov/traffic-ops/manuals-and-standards/wmutcd/wmutcd.aspx>. Section 2B of the MUTCD provides instructions for proper installation of stop signs, as well as guidelines for when stop signs are recommended as opposed to other types of warning signs. If a town board installs a stop sign, the town has an ongoing responsibility to maintain the sign and ensure the sign remains visible to drivers.

### **Q. Our town has some narrow roads where our board feels that parking is unsafe. Can the town board prevent people from parking on one or both sides of a town road?**

A. Local governments have authority to regulate parking on roads under their jurisdiction via the adoption of parking ordinances. See Wis. Stat. § 349.13. For example, a town board could adopt a parking ordinance to ban parking on a certain section of a town road or limit parking during overnight hours. The ordinance must outline the details of what parking regulations the town intends to enforce, on which town roads, and what penalties may be imposed for violations, such as fines and/or towing of vehicles. In addition to properly adopting and noticing such an ordinance pursuant to § 60.80, the town board must post official signs, pursuant to MUTCD guidelines, alerting drivers to the parking regulations. See §§ 346.02(7) and 349.13(1e)(c)1. A sample parking ordinance is available in the Wisconsin Town Law Forms.

### **Q. What can our town do to limit parking on town roads during snowstorms?**

A. In addition to the general power to enact parking ordinances outlined above, local governments also have authority to call snow emergencies and to take such actions necessary during snow emergencies to protect public health and safety. Wis. Stats. §§ 349.13(1e)(c)2., 323.11, and 323.14(4)(a). This “includes the power to bar, restrict, or remove all unnecessary traffic, both vehicular and pedestrian, from the

highways.” Adopting a snow emergency ordinance can be a helpful way to define the types of conditions that may constitute a snow emergency and delegate authority to a specific official (such as the town chair) to declare and provide public notice of snow emergencies. Although state law generally requires that parking restrictions be posted on each street where they’re effective, an exception allows municipalities to post signs regarding snow emergency regulations only at the municipality’s corporate limits, if approved by a 2/3 majority board vote. § 349.13(1e)(c)2. This exception also applies to signs for parking regulations governing calendar or alternate-side parking during winter months.

**Q. Town residents are complaining that cars are driving dangerously fast on one of our roads. What steps are required to lower a speed limit on a town road?**

A. The first step is to determine the statutory speed limit for the road in question by checking Wis. Stat. § 346.57(4). The default speed limit on most town roads is 55 miles per hour. § 346.57(4)(h). But lower speed limits are sometimes required or permitted under specified circumstances. For example, a town road that has been designated as a rustic road under § 83.42 has a statutory speed limit of 45 miles per hour. § 346.57(4)(k). Local governments have some limited authority to alter speed limits on roads under their jurisdiction, as explained below. However, state law prohibits local governments from establishing speed limits that are *higher* than 55 miles per hour. § 349.11(8m)(a).

If a town board believes that the conditions on a particular town road require a lower speed limit than established by state law, the board must follow the procedures outlined in § 349.11 to establish a legal and enforceable lower speed limit. State law requires that local governments establish any speed limit change (no matter how small) “upon the basis of an engineering and traffic investigation” which shows that a different speed limit is necessary in the location in question. The statute does not define exactly what constitutes an engineering and traffic investigation or how formal the investigation must be, but the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (DOT) website has some guidance for performing this type of speed study and analyzing the results: <https://wisconsindot.gov/Pages/doing-bus/local-gov/traffic-ops/speed-management/default.aspx>. The WTA office also has additional speed study handouts available upon request.

Next, in addition to conducting the required engineering and traffic investigation, if the town board wishes to reduce a town road speed limit by more than 10 miles per hour from the default statutory speed limit, the board must get approval for the change from the Wisconsin DOT. Contact info for regional DOT staff is available at the website linked above.

After the town board has completed the required engineering and traffic investigation, determined that a lower speed limit is appropriate, and received any needed approval from the Wisconsin DOT, the board must adopt an ordinance to enact the lower speed limit. A sample ordinance for lowering a speed limit on a town road is available in the Wisconsin Town Law Forms. Once the ordinance is adopted, the clerk must provide public notice pursuant to § 60.80. Finally, the town board must post appropriate signs giving drivers notice of the new speed limit. All of these steps must be completed to make the lower speed limit effective and enforceable. If a town fails to follow every step of the process, a driver cited for speeding may be able to challenge the speed limit’s validity in court.



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## WTA 2026 DISTRICT MEETING IN PERSON AGENDA

Virtual Session agenda is available at [www.wisctowns.com](http://www.wisctowns.com).

### IN PERSON

**8:15am-8:45am**

#### **Registration**

*Morning refreshments sponsored by Scott Construction, Inc.*



**8:45am-9:00am**

#### **Call to Order, Introductions and Announcements**

**9:00am-11:15am**

#### **Board of Review (BOR) Certification Training**

*State law requires that at least one BOR member be certified annually. The WTA recommends that all BOR members attend this training.*

**11:15am-11:45am**

#### **Town Board Vacancies and Appointments**

*Does your town have an upcoming retirement? Maybe a current town board supervisor is going to be moving out of the town? Wondering what you're supposed to do? This session will review town official vacancies and what your town can do to fill a vacancy. This presentation, provided by WTA staff, will also review several important changes created by the recently passed Town Law Fix bill.*

**11:45am-12:45pm**

#### **Lunch**

*Lunch sponsored by Thunder Road.*



**12:45pm-1:45pm**

#### **Saving EMS: One Size Does Not Fit All**

*This past decade has proven that Emergency Medical Services (EMS) have been in a state of crisis, and Wisconsin EMS has not been immune to these challenges. Something must be done to save EMS in our local communities, but what? Using successful real-life case scenarios from across Wisconsin, presenter Dana Sechler will highlight solutions that municipalities have implemented to create a viable ambulance service that can provide sustainable EMS within their communities. Dana has been involved in the fire service and EMS communities in various capacities for over 34 years and is one of the co-founding Principals of Strategic Management and Consulting, LLC.*

**1:45pm-2:00pm**

#### **Break**

*Afternoon refreshments sponsored by Rural Mutual Insurance.*



**2:00pm-3:00pm**

#### **Transportation Funding: Today and Tomorrow?**

*Over the course of the last decade there have been significant increases in state funded transportation investments. The Local Road Improvement Program witnessed the creation of the Supplemental and Agricultural components. General Transportation Aids increased as well. The enhancements were funded in large part through general purpose revenues and to a lesser degree through dedicated transportation revenues. This was possible due to a strong economy and significant and multiple state budget surpluses. When the economy cools, surpluses cease, or inflation runs rampant again, how will local road funding keep up in the absence of large amounts of general purpose revenue? Learn from Debby Jackson, Transportation Development Association Executive Director, and WTA staff about how you can play a role in ensuring transportation funding isn't decreased, addresses needs, and keeps up with inflation.*

## **2026 DISTRICT MEETINGS** **Dates & Locations**

**Friday, January 30, 2026 – The MARQ**, 3177 French Rd., De Pere, WI 54155

**Saturday, January 31, 2026 – The Eagle’s Club**, 1104 S. Oak Ave., Marshfield, WI 54449

**Friday, February 6, 2026 – Deer Valley Lodge**, 401 W. Industrial Dr., Barneveld, WI 53507

**Saturday, February 7, 2026 – The Wilderness Resort – Glacier Canyon Lodge**, 45 Hillman Rd., Wisconsin Dells, WI 53965

**Friday, February 13, 2026 – The Pines Event Center**, 5840 Forest Ln., Rhinelander, WI 54501

**Saturday, February 14, 2026 – Potawatomi Carter Casino**, 620 HWY 32, Wabeno, WI 54566

**Friday, February 27, 2026 – Holiday Inn Hotel & Convention Center**, 1001 Amber Ave., Stevens Point, WI 54481

**Saturday, February 28, 2026 – Farm Discovery Center**, 7001 Gass Lake Rd., Manitowoc, WI 54220

**Friday, March 6, 2026 – Stony Creek Hotel & Conference Center**, 3060 S. Kinney Coulee Rd., Onalaska WI 54650

**Saturday, March 7, 2026 – The Florian Gardens Conference Center**, 2340 Lorch Ave., Eau Claire, WI 54701

**Friday, March 13, 2026 – 841 Brewhouse**, 841 W. Milwaukee St., Whitewater, WI 53190

**Saturday, March 14, 2026 – Old Hickory Golf Club**, W7596 State Road 33, Beaver Dam, WI 53916

**Friday, March 27, 2026 – Turtle Back Golf Course**, 1985 18 ½ St., Rice Lake, WI 54868

**Saturday, March 28, 2026 – Lakewoods Resort & Lodge**, 21540 CTH M, Cable, WI 54821

**Monday, March 30, 2026 – Virtual Session** – agenda available at [www.wisctowns.com](http://www.wisctowns.com).

**Tuesday, March 31, 2026 – Virtual Session:** agenda available at [www.wisctowns.com](http://www.wisctowns.com).

**Please see our website for a link to Google maps for each location.**

***Inclement Weather: If a meeting is going to be cancelled due to inclement weather, there will be a Message on the WTA voicemail between 6am and 7am the day of the meeting. 715-526-3157***

## **2026 DISTRICT MEETING REGISTRATION FORM**

**\$65 – Early registration**

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

**\$80 – Late and walk-in registration**

All registrants (in-person or virtual) will receive a packet of printed materials, access to virtual programming, and access to recorded videos of each presentation. Registered attendees will receive an email with information about how to participate in the virtual events via telephone/computer and how to access the recordings. **AN EMAIL IS REQUIRED FOR REGISTRATION.** If you plan to attend the virtual events via telephone, the phone number from which you will be calling is also required.

Name	Office	
Town	County	
Address		
City	State	Zip
Telephone (REQUIRED for teleconference access)		
Email (REQUIRED)		

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

- Friday, January 30, 2026: De Pere – The MARQ
- Saturday, January 31, 2026: Marshfield – The Eagle's Club
- Friday, February 6, 2026: Barneveld – Deer Valley Lodge
- Saturday, February 7, 2026: Wisconsin Dells – The Wilderness Resort-Glacier Canyon Lodge
- Friday, February 13, 2026: Rhinelander – The Pines Event Center
- Saturday, February 14, 2026: Wabeno – Potawatomi Carter Casino
- Friday, February 27, 2026: Stevens Point – Holiday Inn Hotel & Conference Center
- Saturday, February 28, 2026: Manitowoc – Farm Discovery Center
- Friday, March 6, 2026: Onalaska – Stony Creek Hotel & Conference Center
- Saturday, March 7, 2026: Eau Claire – The Florian Gardens Conference Center
- Friday, March 13, 2026: Whitewater – 841 Brewhouse
- Saturday, March 14, 2026: Beaver Dam – Old Hickory Golf Club
- Friday, March 27, 2026: Rice Lake – Turtle Back Golf Course
- Saturday, March 28, 2026: Cable – Lakewoods Resort & Lodge
- Monday, March 30, 2026 & Tuesday, March 31, 2026 - **VIRTUAL PROGRAMMING ONLY**

**This form should be copied for multiple registrations.** Make check 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 registration forms and checks to the WTA office by March 6, 2026.** Registrations received after that date may not receive printed materials or connection information prior to the live teleconference/webinar sessions.

Registration and payment may also be submitted online on the WTA website, [www.wisctowns.com](http://www.wisctowns.com).

Total charges will include a \$2.65 credit card processing convenience fee for payments made via credit card. If you have any questions, please email [wtowns@wisctowns.com](mailto:wtowns@wisctowns.com) or call (715) 526-3157.

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

# LEGAL OPINIONS



By Atty. Joe Ruth  
Government Affairs  
Director

## 2025 Wisconsin Act 71 – Town Law Reforms

On December 9, 2025, Governor Tony Evers signed 2025 Wisconsin Act 71 into law. The legislation was published on December 10, 2025, and took effect the next day – allowing towns immediate access to the updated authorities and procedures the law provides. This Act delivers a series of targeted updates to town law requested by towns over the last several years.

Act 71 was developed in response to longstanding concerns raised by Wisconsin towns through listening sessions and ongoing dialogue with local officials. The WTA advocated for these targeted changes over multiple years, aimed at increasing administrative efficiency and consistency in town government procedures. WTA extends special thanks to Senator Romaine Quinn and Representative Alex Dallman for their leadership on this bill, and to all who helped make Act 71 possible.

### New Flexibility for Clerk and Treasurer Positions

The most anticipated changes in Act 71 focus on giving towns practical tools to respond to vacancies and staffing challenges in the clerk and treasurer offices. First, towns now have increased flexibility when they choose to move from an elected clerk or treasurer to an appointed position. Prior to Act 71, smaller towns were required to hold a referendum vote to make these changes while larger towns had the option of holding a referendum or voting at an elector meeting (such as your annual meeting in April). Act 71 simplifies this process by allowing all towns the option to change from an elected position to an appointed one by voting at an elector meeting – regardless of population. Note that all towns continue to have the option to make this change via referendum if preferred.



Act 71 Bill Signing Ceremony

This act also updates the timeline for when a change from elected to appointed may take effect. Previously, no change from an elected clerk, treasurer, or combined clerk/treasurer could take effect until the end of the elected term. This posed a significant challenge for many towns that were making the change to an appointed position in order to find someone willing and qualified to fill a vacancy. Act 71 now allows towns to make the change in the middle of a term, provided the position is vacant, allowing towns to promptly fill critical offices and avoid prolonged disruptions to essential town functions.

Act 71 also gives towns more flexibility when combining the clerk and treasurer offices, allowing a combination of the offices to take effect as soon as both offices are vacant or, if the appointee already holds one of the offices, when the other office becomes vacant.

## **Deputy Clerk and Deputy Treasurer Clarifications**

The new law clarifies that Deputy Clerks and Deputy Treasurers are not required to be town residents, removing a common point of confusion. Act 71 also gives town treasurers the ability to appoint multiple Deputy Treasurers, mirroring the existing authority granted to town clerks for Deputy Clerks.

## **Budget Public Hearing Notices**

Act 71 modifies town budget public hearing notice requirements to better align them with other statutory public notice provisions. Under prior law, towns were required to post notice of the budget public hearing and budget summary in three physical locations. Act 71 provides towns with the same notice options available to villages. Towns may now satisfy this requirement by either:

1. posting the notice in three physical locations;
2. posting the notice in one physical location and on the town's official website; or
3. publishing the notice in a newspaper.

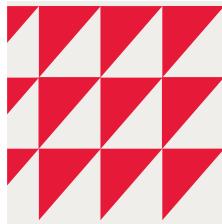
These changes simplify compliance for towns and bring the budget public hearing notice requirement into alignment with most other public notice requirements.

## **A Technical Fix to Wis. Stat. § 82.19(2)(a)**

Wis. Stat. § 82.19(2)(a) provides that a town highway ceases to be a public highway four years after it is ordered to be laid out, except for parts that have been “opened, traveled, or worked.” Act 71 deletes the word “traveled” from this section to ensure that only town board actions determine when a town road ceases to be a public highway. The change responds to a situation in which a town ordered a highway under ch. 82 but never constructed it. After four years, the town reasonably believed the highway had ceased to exist because the road was never built. However, a claim was later made that the route had been “traveled” within the statutory period because an individual had driven a truck across the area, despite the absence of an actual roadway. Act 71 makes clear that the determination depends solely on the town board’s decision to “open” and “work” a highway – not on whether members of the public travel the land. This fix places control squarely with the town board and prevents unbuilt or abandoned routes from being deemed town highways based on incidental or informal travel.

## **Learn More**

Town officials can learn more about filling vacancies and implementing Act 71 – and much more – by attending **WTA’s upcoming District Meetings**. Dates, locations, and registration information are available in this magazine and on the WTA website.



# Classified Ads

✉ Send your ad to: [wtowns@wisctowns.com](mailto:wtowns@wisctowns.com)

- \$25/mo Magazine Only
- \$15/mo Website Only
- \$30/mo Magazine/Web Combo
- \$5/Photo
- 150 words or less

The Town of Perry, Dane County, is offering for sale a 2013 Model Western Star Dump Truck, equipped with 11-foot Universal plow, 9-foot Universal side wing, a Swenson tailgate spreader with 9-inch auger and extreme discharge and heavy-duty hitchplate. 62,000 miles. Contact Town Patrolman at 608-444-6242 or [eastman2012@hotmail.com](mailto:eastman2012@hotmail.com)

The Town of Perry reserves the right to reject any or all bids and to accept the bid most advantageous to the Town.



## Utility Clerk/Administrative Assistant

The Town of Sheboygan is accepting applications for a full-time Utility Clerk/Administrative Assistant. This position will report to the Town Clerk/Treasurer and be the backup for reception.

Status: Full-Time

Work Schedule: Monday through Thursday Time: 7:00 am-4:00 pm/7:00 am -5:00 pm on Tuesday  
A Utility Clerk/Administrative Assistant provides clerical and administrative support, handling utility billing and customer service tasks. This role requires strong communication, organizational, and computer skills, as well as the ability to handle cash transactions and maintain records.

For more information please go to the Towns website: [townofsheboyganwi.gov](http://townofsheboyganwi.gov) to the front-page news boxes and click on Job Applications and Resumes Being Accepted. This will bring you to current job listings and links to more information.

## Deputy Clerk/Treasurer and an Office Assistant

The Town of Algoma has a population of ~7,000 and is conveniently located along Highways 41 and 21. The town is the City of Oshkosh's western border and Lake Butte des Morts serves as the town's northern border and public landing with fishing pier provides access to nearby Fox River and Lake Winnebago. Primarily residential and agricultural in composition, the town offers recreational opportunities with community parks and recreation areas. With the town's close proximity to Oshkosh, residents can enjoy quieter living with access to large city amenities including outstanding public and private schools, churches of most denominations, excellent medical facilities, a wide range of services, shopping and a wide variety of restaurants. The Town of Algoma is currently looking for a Deputy Clerk/Treasurer and an Office Assistant. Please visit our website for further information [www.townofalgomawi.gov/job-openings/](http://www.townofalgomawi.gov/job-openings/)



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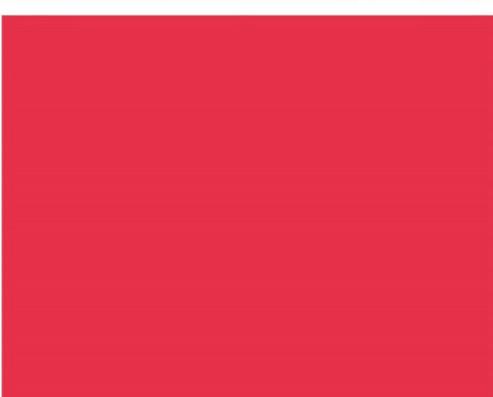


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# Fourth Edition Town Officers' Handbook

Wisconsin  
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

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Town \_\_\_\_\_ County \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_

Quantity of Handbooks \_\_\_\_\_ x \$50.00 = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Quantity of Handbooks \_\_\_\_\_ x \$9.00 shipping (for each book ordered) = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Total Enclosed = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

\*Will ship in 1-2 business days.

# 2025 Scholarship Winner

**Sponsored By:**



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

**Written By: Cassidy Klebsch**

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/](http://www.wisctowns.com/resources/scholarship/).

A thriving community is built on safe, engaging, and well-maintained spaces that foster connection and growth. The quality of life in our town is shaped by the spaces we interact with daily, whether it's the parks where families gather or the streets we walk on. Local government has a crucial role in maintaining these spaces. By prioritizing the upkeep of recreational parks, the safety of roads and crosswalks, and community engagement programs, we can ensure that everyone has a safe and welcoming place to call home.

## **1. Safety of Roads and Crosswalks: Protecting Pedestrians and Drivers**

At the heart of a successful community is safety, something that directly impacts every resident. I've witnessed how poor infrastructure and a lack of attention to pedestrian safety can create real hazards. As someone who enjoys walking and driving through our town, I can attest that poorly marked crosswalks, potholes, and uneven streets are not just inconveniences but safety concerns. In my early years of high school, as I began driving, I quickly realized the importance of clear and unobstructed intersections. As I improved my skills behind the wheel, I found it much easier to navigate when branches and overgrown brush didn't block my line of sight. Having a clear view of the road allowed me to spot oncoming traffic and pedestrians more easily, making the driving experience safer for everyone.



To enhance safety, local governments should prioritize repaving damaged roads, clearing intersections, and installing clearer pedestrian markings and traffic signals. Crosswalks, especially in high-traffic areas near schools or parks, should feature flashing pedestrian signals to increase visibility. Moreover, enforcing speed limits in residential neighborhoods and incorporating traffic-calming measures such as speed bumps can significantly improve pedestrian safety.

In addition, creating bike lanes and pedestrian-friendly walkways will encourage residents to use healthier,

eco-friendly modes of transportation. Safer streets mean more people walking, biking, or simply enjoying their surroundings, which in turn promotes a more connected community. Ensuring safe infrastructure is not just about reducing accidents, it's about giving residents the confidence to engage more with their town.

## **2. Upkeep of Recreational Parks: Spaces for Joy and Connection**

Parks are the heart of a community, they provide spaces for children to play, families to bond, and friends to gather. Growing up, I spent countless years playing recreational softball in local leagues.

These parks were not just places for fun, but spaces where I learned life skills like teamwork, discipline, and leadership. As a child, I didn't realize how much effort went into creating those experiences, but as I grew older, I saw the importance of giving back. I started volunteering in the concession stands during games, organizing snacks, serving drinks, and contributing to the overall experience.

Volunteering in these spaces taught me that community engagement is a two-way street—it's not just about receiving services but also about contributing to the places and experiences that shape our lives. It was a rewarding experience to connect with parents, coaches, and other players, and I grew to appreciate how vital these spaces were for creating connections. These recreational programs help to build life skills and a sense of belonging, especially for young residents who, like me, are learning how to engage in their community.

For local governments, this means prioritizing the upkeep of parks and recreational facilities. Regular maintenance such as mowing, repairing playground equipment, and improving restroom facilities can go a long way in encouraging more families to utilize these spaces. Adding amenities like walking trails, picnic areas, and updated sports facilities can help expand park usage, attracting people of all ages. Parks are not just places for recreation, they are community hubs where residents can form connections and experiences that last a lifetime.

## **3. Community Engagement Programs: Strengthening Connections**

A thriving community also relies on active participation and engagement. Having grown up involved in various local activities, I've seen how powerful it can be for individuals to feel connected to the decision-making processes and programs in their town. Community engagement, whether through volunteer programs, neighborhood meetings, or cultural events: helps create a sense of shared responsibility.

When I volunteered in the concession stands during my recreational games, I realized that these small contributions could create big impacts. Community engagement is not just about attending events but also about fostering relationships across generations. Programs that encourage youth involvement, like internships or mentorship opportunities, help instill a sense of pride in the next generation. I know from personal experience that youth leadership programs can ignite a passion for giving back and participating in civic life.

Additionally, embracing technology can make these programs more accessible. Online platforms, social media, and virtual town halls help keep residents informed and allow them to share feedback even if they can't attend in person. These tools are essential for bridging the gap between residents and local officials, making it easier for people to stay engaged in shaping their community.

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# 2025 Scholarship Winner

**Sponsored By:**



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

**Written By: Emily Fetzer**

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/](http://www.wisctowns.com/resources/scholarship/).

Improving the quality of life in a community should be the number one priority for local officials. It's important to focus on issues that really matter to residents, because that is the way to make a noticeable difference in their lives. If town officials focus on these three things, improving infrastructure, supporting local businesses, and increasing community engagement, their town will likely become a safer, more connected, and better place to live.



Most importantly, public infrastructure is something that needs attention. This includes the roads we drive on, the sidewalks we walk along, and the parks where we enjoy with family and friends. Cracked sidewalks and potholes aren't just annoying, they're dangerous. According to the American Society of Civil Engineers, bad infrastructure costs drivers up to \$1,000 a year in repairs and wasted fuel. I can speak for this, as I have had to re-align my vehicle multiple times because of my road. Fixing things like potholes and cracks will not only improve safety, but also make the town look nicer and feel more welcoming. Well-maintained parks also matter a lot. People use parks to stay active, meet up with friends, or just relax. If parks are neglected, they don't serve the community as well. Taking care of parks encourages healthier lifestyles and brings people together.

Second, supporting local businesses is another key area. Small businesses are the heart of any town. Not only do they create jobs, but they also give the town a unique identity. The U.S. Small Business Administration points out that when you spend money at a small business, a good portion of that money stays in the local economy. This is important for keeping the town strong and supporting the people who live here. One way to support these businesses is by offering incentives, lowering unnecessary regulations, or even hosting special events like “Small Business Saturdays.” These

events can help drive more traffic to local stores, giving businesses a boost.

Beyond just helping businesses survive, town officials can also organize annual events that draw people from outside the town. These events can help bring in visitors who will spend money and support local businesses. For example, a food festival or a craft fair could attract tourists and get them to explore the town, creating excitement and boosting the local economy. The key is making sure these events are right for the size and character of the town, so it doesn't become too overwhelming for the resources available.

Finally, getting residents more involved in local decision-making is crucial. When people feel like they have a say in what happens in their community, they are more likely to care about it. Officials can make it easy for residents to get involved by holding town hall meetings, using social media to keep people updated, or even setting up platforms where people can give feedback. The more engaged people feel, the more invested they are in making the town a better place.

One of the biggest ways to boost community engagement is by increasing voter turnout. In small towns, it's easy for people to feel like their vote doesn't matter. However, in these communities, every vote does count. Town officials should make sure that everyone knows when elections are coming up, how to vote, and where to go to vote. Promoting voter registration helps make sure that all voices are heard.

It's also important to get young people involved in local government. By asking for input from young voters about community projects, officials can start to build the next generation of leaders. Giving younger people a role in shaping the community helps ensure they stay involved as they grow older. They care, but they need to know that they are heard.

Making it easier for residents to attend meetings is another good way to encourage participation. Offering online options to join town hall meetings or providing livestreams can help people who can't make it in person stay connected. It's also helpful to provide easy ways for residents to submit ideas and feedback outside of meetings. This way, everyone has a chance to be heard. It is also dangerous to filter their opinions. Even negative opinions have value.

Finally, annual events, like "Pickle Fest" in the town where my high school is, can help build a stronger sense of community. These events should be appropriate for the size and needs of the town, so it doesn't overwhelm local businesses or residents. Hosting events like a local craft fair or a food festival for smaller towns can help attract visitors while giving residents something to look forward to. These kinds of events build a sense of pride in the town and contribute to the local economy by encouraging visitors to shop and eat and drink locally.

In the end, improving the quality of life in our town comes down to a few key priorities, better or keeping up with infrastructure, support for local businesses, and greater community involvement. Fixing up the roads and parks will make the town safer and more inviting, while supporting small businesses creates a resilient local economy. Community engagement ensures residents' voices are heard and fosters a sense of pride. These priorities are essential for building a town where people want to live, work, and invest. Through thoughtful leadership and a shared commitment, we can ensure a brighter future for our community.

# MANAGE YOUR TOWN'S LARGEST ASSET



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## INVENTORY AND MAPPING

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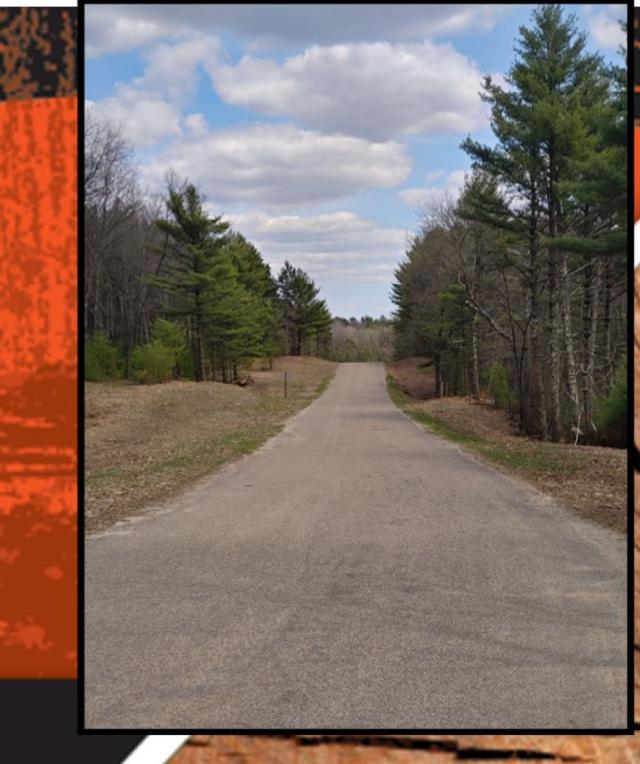
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