

Wisconsin Towns Association

September 2026



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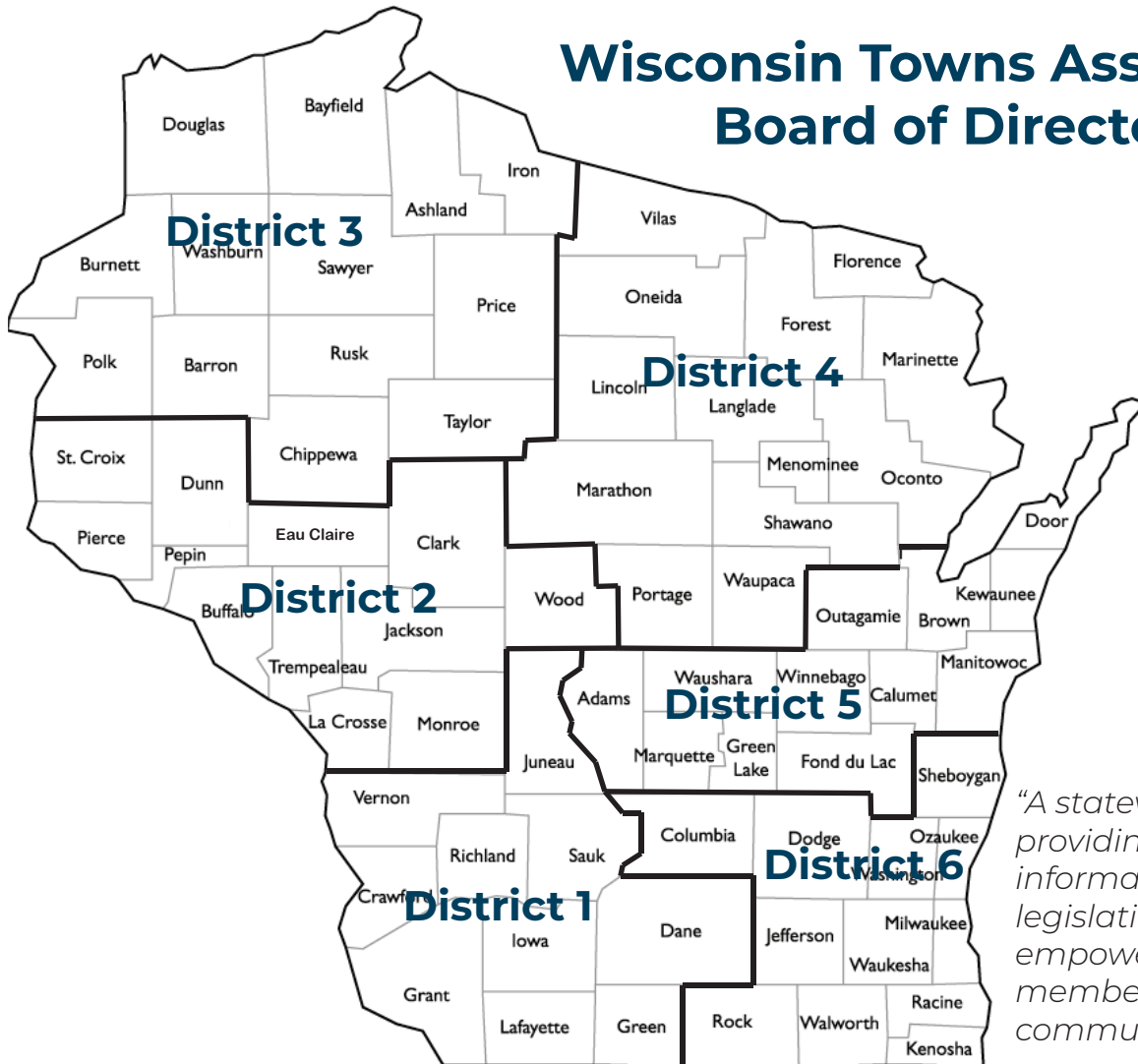
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"A statewide association providing education, legal information and grassroots legislative advocacy to empower and inspire our members to lead in their communities."



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Volume 463

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Wisconsin Towns

September 2026

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Empowering Town Officials

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



By
Mike Koles

County Unit Leadership Engagement

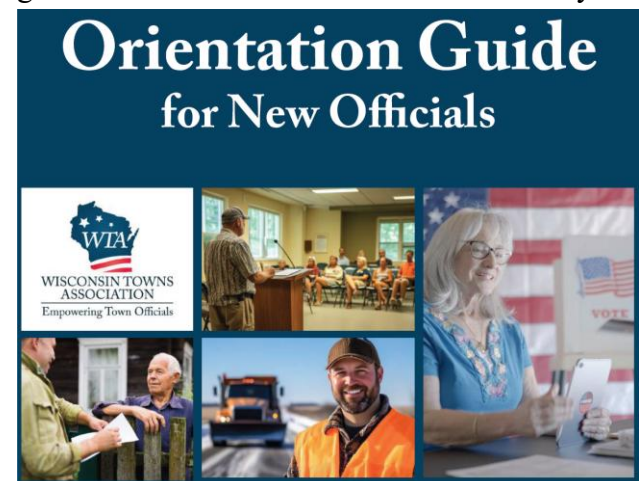
During the months of June and July, the WTA restarted our annual in person county unit leadership meetings that were a victim of the pandemic. For newer town officials, county unit leadership includes the chair, vice-chair, secretary, and treasurer of your county unit. Many counties choose to combine the secretary and treasurer positions. If you've never been to a county unit meeting or haven't been in a while, I encourage you to check one out soon.

The county unit is comprised of the town and village WTA members within a particular county that assemble to network and learn from each other; benefit from an educational program arranged by town officials in your county; get updates from a WTA Board Director, and hear from and advocate for town positions with state and federal legislators or their representatives that are in attendance. In my opinion, it is the most important thing we do at the WTA.

We started hosting unit leadership meetings in each of the six WTA districts in 2016 as a step to enhance the already effective county unit meeting tool. After a brief hiatus, we have brought them back, and this summer used them to discuss several upcoming strategic plan action items that will be implemented shortly. This includes a change to unit meeting notices, which you'll learn more about at year's end. Suffice it to say that our goal is to have the entire unit meeting schedule for the next year developed by unit leadership and in your hands by the end of the calendar year. That way you can plug the dates into your schedule well in advance.

In addition to addressing pre-planned agenda items, the unit leadership meetings allow for free form discussion. Unsurprisingly, this led to several great ideas, including a request to put together a brochure explaining everything the WTA does for towns. With all of the newer town officials that have been elected in the last several cycles combined with the increasingly complex and busy schedule of local government officials, it was hypothesized by unit leaders that too many town officials don't take full advantage of all of the educational, legal information, and legislative advocacy opportunities.

For town officials that were elected in the last 18 months, you were provided a hard copy of the *Orientation Guide for New Officials*. This is a new tool the WTA developed in April, 2025. The guide can be accessed on our website by all



members. While it includes a robust summary of the services we provide, unit leadership requested a short and sweet version. The abbreviated synopsis was created and then reviewed by unit leadership at this year's annual meeting of the WTA Corporation in August. Please look to receive a handout of this at an

upcoming county unit meeting late this fall or early winter.

In the meantime, let's break it down in just one page. The WTA mission is to ***“provide education, legal information and grassroots legislative advocacy to empower and inspire our members to lead in their communities.”***

Despite having only 8 employees and one non-lobbyist contracted individual, the WTA team provides nearly non-stop **educational** programming throughout the year.

A YEAR IN EDUCATION

- ✓ **County Unit Meeting**
2 - 10 per year depending on county
- ✓ **Lunch-n-Learn**
approximately monthly
- ✓ **District Meeting**
full day, 14 sites+virtual, Jan – March
- ✓ **Road School**
3 days, one location, April
- ✓ **New Officials Workshop (odd year)**
full day, 7 sites+virtual, May-June
- ✓ **Clerk Workshop (even year)**
full day, 6 sites+virtual, April-May
- ✓ **Clerk Bootcamp (odd year)**
full day, 6 sites, May-June
- ✓ **Clerk College**
13-month cohort running June to June
- ✓ **ACE Twilight**
evening farm tours, 4 sites, August
- ✓ **Fall Workshops**
full day, 7 sites+virtual, September
- ✓ **Convention**
3 days, one location, October
- ✓ **Town Law Conference**
1 day, virtual, September/October

The WTA takes our information and education strategies to the next level by providing targeted **legal information** through both the town law conference and our legal hotline. Town and village officials of member governments can contact the WTA for general legal information relayed in a one-on-one fashion by one of our attorneys. We pride ourselves on having the highest customer service standard in the industry. A real receptionist answers the phone. A veteran attorney answers a question received during the business day within 24 hours and nearly all of the time on the very same day! No telephone trees or artificial intelligence – just real five-star support staff and attorneys.

Our **legislative advocacy** efforts have been superbly successful by any standard over the last dozen years, influencing the adoption of over 120 different legislative initiatives that positively impacted towns. This has increased direct investment into town checkbooks to the tune of over \$1.2 billion. This does not include indirect savings or financial gains. The typical town has had over \$465,000 additional state funding provided during this timeframe, 16% gained over a million dollars, and 55 towns benefitted from additional support exceeding \$2 million.

This wouldn't have happened without town and village investment in the Town Advocacy Council. Town officials also have opportunities to engage in legislative advocacy through listening sessions (held in summer of even year), Capitol Day (held in spring of odd year), county unit meetings as noted earlier, and becoming a town ambassador. For more information on how to become more involved, don't hesitate to reach out to our Governmental Affairs Director, Joe Ruth.



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2 Will the building design fit on our site?

SITE
ANALYSIS

3 What will the design look like?

ARCHITECTURAL
DESIGN

4 How will the interior look/feel?

INTERIOR
DESIGN

5 How much will it cost?

RELIABLE
BUDGETING

6 Who can help us?

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2026



WTAW

Convention

Holiday Inn Convention Center
1001 Amber Avenue, Stevens Point
October 4 - 6, 2026

Whether you are a seasoned leader or newly elected official, our annual convention offers something for everyone. Connect with your peers, gain fresh ideas from experienced educators, and build relationships that will help your community thrive. Register today!

Sunday October 4th

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

Monday October 5th

There will be a General Assembly from 8:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. Speakers will be announced when confirmed. Workshops will begin at 11:00 a.m. and run through 4:45 p.m. with a break for an Italian pasta buffet lunch.

Monday Afternoon Exhibitor Reception

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

Clerk Meet Up

All clerk attendees are invited to grab a drink from the Exhibitor Reception and then join Clerk

Specialist Melissa Kono at 5:00 p.m. for an opportunity to mingle with other clerks from around the state.

Monday Evening Banquet

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

Long-standing town officers will be recognized for their service. To receive this recognition, please mark your registration form accordingly and indicate that you will be attending the banquet. We will also be awarding the WTA, Scott Construction, and Rural Mutual Insurance Scholarships to the essay contest winners. The banquet is an optional event which will feature a buffet dinner at a cost of \$40 per person and is not included in the general registration fee. The dinner buffet will feature mixed green salad, freshly baked rolls, sliced turkey, roast ham, whipped potatoes, buttered corn and peas, pasta salad, and carrot cake. (Spouses and guests are also welcome to attend the banquet at a cost of \$40 per person.)

Monday Night Entertainment

All registered convention attendees are invited to join us for the CJB Rock & Variety Band which will entertain us following the banquet. They play a variety of music including Classic Rock & Roll, Classic Country, Big Band, and more. We had a great time when they played at our 2024 Convention. So, grab a table, share some laughs, and dance to your favorites. Enjoy complimentary beer, soda, and snacks. You won't want to miss out on the FUN!

Visit the exhibitors on Sunday and Monday to collect the stamps that you will need to enter the Monday night prize drawing. Before the music starts, we'll be announcing the winners. Good luck!

Tuesday October 6th Breakfast and General Assembly

On Tuesday morning, a breakfast buffet featuring scrambled eggs, sausage, breakfast potatoes, and fresh coffee will be served from 7:00 a.m. to 7:45 a.m. Tuesday breakfast is included as part of the full convention registration and as part of the single day Tuesday registration. Spouses and guests may purchase a separate breakfast ticket on the registration form if they would like to attend. After breakfast, we will be having a plenary session from 8:00 a.m. to 8:45 a.m., with guest speaker(s) to be announced when confirmed.

Tuesday Workshops

Next, get ready to learn with a variety of workshops. Wisconsin Elections Commission staff will be providing elections training for clerks from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. The other workshops will begin at 9:15 a.m. and conclude at 11:30 a.m. Lunch will be a deli sandwich buffet.

Tuesday BINGO

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

Workshop Schedule and Topics

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

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

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

1. Maximizing Your Road Funding--Lessons from Successful Grant Applications and How to Leverage Available Funding: With growing transportation needs and limited local resources, securing road funding requires more than identifying a grant opportunity. This session will highlight practical grant writing tips, examine successful applications to identify what makes them stand out, and discuss strategies for building stronger, more competitive funding requests. Participants will learn how to leverage General Transportation Aids (GTA) and other available funding sources to maximize the impact of local investments. Presented by WTA Government Affairs Director Joe Ruth.

2. Clicks, Hacks, and Cybersecurity Attacks: Three municipal case studies of cyber-attacks or compromises will be reviewed and the impacts will be discussed. What did it cost the community? How long did it affect them? Next, common vulnerabilities in municipal systems will be addressed along with best practices and how to avoid being a case study. Lastly, the presenter will detail how to make an Incident Response Plan so that your town can plan for the worst. Presented by Gregg Gokey, President of Wildcard Corp.

3. Fire Protection Service Fees: As the costs of providing emergency services continue to rise, towns across the state are considering alternative options for funding those services and ensuring costs are allocated equitably among property owners. This session will focus on annual fire protection service fees. WTA staff will review the legal requirements to provide fire protection service and options for funding that service under Wisconsin law, including takeaways from case law regarding fire protection fees. Local government officials who have implemented a system for collecting annual fire protection service fees will speak about their experiences and what they've learned.

4. Getting Your Docs In a Row--End of Year Financial Preparation for Successful Spring Reporting: A little organization and forethought at the end of the year can help you prepare for springtime reports such as the Form C/CT and Annual Financial Report. This session will provide an overview of the documents typically received at the end of the year and the role they play in reporting. Presented by UW Extension/WTA Clerk Specialist Melissa Kono.

5. Four Towns, One Community: Exploring Shared Services in Vilas County: Ever wonder if your town could save money, improve services, or accomplish both by sharing services across town lines?

Over the past year, the neighboring Vilas County towns of Boulder Junction, Manitowish Waters, Presque Isle, and Winchester came together, with financial support from an Innovation Grant, to explore this question. Now town leaders and their facilitation team want to share their experiences and lessons learned with other towns. Join us to hear about the project, the opportunities and barriers, and recommendations for other towns exploring shared services. There will also be time to respond to your questions and to work together to identify how WTA and others can support you in exploring similar opportunities moving forward. Presented by Alison S. Lebwohl, Owner & Lead Facilitator at Alison Lebwohl Consulting, Al Eschenbauch, Town Chair at Town of Presque Isle, John Hanson, Town Chair at Town of Manitowish Waters, Thomas Wilson, Retired Attorney/Administrator/Clerk-Treasurer at Town of Westport.

Monday 2:30 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.
(Repeated 3:45 p.m. - 4:45 p.m.)

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

2. WI DOR Debt Collection Programs for Local Governments: Are you having trouble collecting a debt owed to your community? The Tax Refund Intercept Process (TRIP) and State Debt Collection (SDC) programs run by the WI Department of Revenue (DOR) allow state, county, and local agencies to submit outstanding debts for collection assistance. Between the SDC and TRIP programs, DOR collected more than \$130 million in FY 2025 and \$133 million so far in FY 2026. New enrollments are now being offered for the TRIP program. However, there is currently a waitlist for new local governments to join the SDC and a goal of expanding enrollment if funds for more staff are included in the next biennial state budget. Come learn more about these programs and how to add your community to the SDC waitlist. Presented by Roxy Walker, WI DOR Agency Collection Programs.

3. Building Inspection 101: This session will review the roles of the town, building inspector, and Department of Safety and Professional Services in the building inspection process. There will also be discussion about the building plan review process and what triggers it. Next, learn about the permitting process, inspection process, enforcement tools, and record keeping. Finally, time will be spent on the State Seal Program and what a good inspection program looks like. Presented by Gregg Borucki, PE, MSA Professional Services, Inc.

4. Understanding Emergency Management In Wisconsin—Your Role and Responsibilities: Emergency management is a fundamental responsibility of county and local government in Wisconsin, yet its scope, structure, and expectations are not always fully understood. This session will provide local elected officials with a clear, practical overview of how emergency management functions across the state, including the core phases of mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery, and how these efforts are coordinated at the local, county, and state levels. Presented by Brandon Larson, President, Wisconsin Emergency Management Association.

5. Overview of USDA Rural Development Programs: USDA Rural Development Wisconsin State Director Andrew Iverson and State Engineer Stephen Opatik, P.E. will provide an overview of USDA Rural Development programs and provide a gateway for you to learn more.

Monday 3:45 p.m. until conclusion

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

Tuesday 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. Election Training (Pre registration required, session will not be repeated)

Wisconsin Towns' Guide to 2026 Elections

Elections Commission staff will provide an overview of the latest developments in elections, with a special focus on issues of concern to smaller jurisdictions. Topics of discussion will include the all-new Election Law and Administration in Wisconsin manual, the latest updates in absentee voting procedures, town clerk FAQ, and computer security for the regular person. This session will count for recertification training. Please note on the registration form that you plan to attend.

Tuesday: 9:15 a.m. - 10:15 a.m.

(Repeated 10:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m. - Except Slow the Flow which is a 2-hour workshop)

1. Slow the Flow – Flood Resiliency Workshop: This 2-hour interactive session will provide an opportunity for town officials to work through specific culvert and flood risk issues affecting their communities with the help of staff from the Wisconsin Wetlands Association, Trout Unlimited (tentative), and WTA. We'll highlight case studies showing how local governments have found creative natural flood management solutions for dealing with sediment/debris, ditches, ravines, beavers, and road overtopping. Participants will have an opportunity to share and discuss practical tips and experiences with flood management issues in their towns. We'll also review opportunities for towns to connect with funding and technical support to implement these approaches, including how to pair the prioritization for the DOT small structure program with flood-focused protocols like the Great Lakes Stream Crossing Inventory.

2. Does Your Town Have a Plan for Dealing With Large-Scale Wind and Solar Projects? Dozens of large-scale wind, solar, and battery storage projects have already been approved in Wisconsin, and dozens more are in permitting. It is projected that large-scale renewable energy will occupy approximately 3% of Wisconsin's harvested cropland by 2050. Local governments are responsible for siting projects less than 100 megawatts, and the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin has siting

authority for anything larger. Town actions can include documenting community priorities, updating zoning ordinances and comprehensive plans, and negotiating agreements with developers. Come learn about the siting process from RESET, a UW-Madison Extension program to educate communities on their options, and how towns might engage in the process for projects of any size.

3. Industrial Development 101--What It Means for Wisconsin Towns: Industrial development is a practical tool that helps Wisconsin communities grow their tax base, support local businesses, and create high quality jobs for residents. This presentation and panel discussion will offer a high level look at modern industrial development and how location selection unfolds, along with information on how towns can support industrial development. The session is designed to ensure town officials are better informed and prepared to address these topics if and when they arise. Presented by staff from the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC).

4. Wisconsin DOT's Rustic Roads, Scenic Byways, and TEA Programs: Wisconsin Rustic Roads and Scenic Byways are sister programs that promote the state's natural beauty and history along its roads. Both Rustic Roads and Scenic Byways have a locally-initiated nomination process, promote local-state partnerships, and foster civic pride in their communities. The Transportation Economic Assistance (TEA) program supports business development in Wisconsin by providing grant funding to local governments for transportation improvements. The improvement must be based on a partnership between the local government and a local business to support business expansion and growth leading to job creation and/or retention. Come learn from WisDOT staff about how these programs might benefit your community.



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2026 WTA Convention Registration

October 4 - 6, 2026, Stevens Point Holiday Inn & Convention Center

Copy form for multiple registrations and return by **September 14, 2026**. Online registration available at www.wisctowns.com.

Name _____ Office or Title _____

Town/Village _____ County _____

Email: _____ Phone _____

Years of Service as a Town Officer _____ Spouse or Guest name _____
**(20 or more years)*

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

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

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

FULL CONVENTION

Amount

_____ Town/Village Officer **\$225**

_____ Spouse or Guest **\$55**

_____ Election Training for Clerks
(Registered Officers only)

_____ Free Tuesday Breakfast

_____ Tuesday Guest Breakfast **\$19**

_____ Guest Lunch **\$20/day**
Mon. _____ Tues. _____

_____ Monday Evening Banquet **\$40/person**

TOTAL \$ _____

SINGLE DAY Monday _____ Tuesday _____

Amount

_____ Town/Village Officer **\$145**

_____ Spouse or Guest **\$55**

_____ Election Training for Clerks
(Registered Officers only)

_____ Free Tuesday Breakfast

_____ Tuesday Guest Breakfast **\$19**

_____ Guest Lunch **\$20/day**
Mon. _____ Tues. _____

_____ Monday Evening Banquet **\$40/person**

TOTAL \$ _____

Please return completed registration and payment to Wisconsin Towns Association, W7686 County Road MMM, Shawano, WI, 54166-6086 **by September 14, 2026**. Registrations received after that date will be **\$15.00 per person higher for late registration fee**.

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

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Access to Landlocked Property

Q. If someone buys a parcel of landlocked property in our town, does the town board have an obligation to provide them with access?

A. In Wisconsin, property owners do not have an inherent right to access landlocked property. If the landowners are unable to purchase access from an adjoining neighbor, they may submit an application to the town board requesting access. Wis. Stat. § 82.27. But the town board, in its discretion, determines whether laying out a town road to allow access to the property would be in the public interest. *Tagatz v. Township of Crystal Lake*, 2001 WI App. 80, 243 Wis.2d 108.

Q. How does a landlocked property owner apply to the town to lay out a road?

A. Under Wis. Stat. § 82.27, the landlocked property owner (or lessee) may petition the town board by submitting an affidavit which contains a description of the property and one of the following circumstances: a) the land is landlocked and the petitioner cannot purchase a right-of-way to a public highway from the owners of adjoining real estate or that it can only be purchased at an exorbitant price (the price should be stated in the affidavit); or b) the petitioner owns a private road that is too narrow to afford the petitioner reasonable access from the property to a public highway and he or she cannot purchase land to make the road of a sufficient width or it can only be purchased at an exorbitant price (which price must be stated in the affidavit). This means that the petitioner must actively contact his or her neighbors and attempt to purchase access before a petition is submitted to the town board.

Once a sufficient affidavit has been submitted, the town board must schedule a hearing. The hearing must be held not less than 10 days and not more than 30 days after the board receives the affidavit. Notice of the hearing must be published or posted as a Class 2 notice under ch. 985. The town board or, at its discretion, the applicant also has the burden of providing notice of the hearing to interested parties as required under Wis. Stat. § 82.10. This means notice must be provided by registered mail to all occupants and owners of land through which the public access may pass if laid out or the owners of all lands abutting the existing private road sought to be widened. Notice must also be given to the Department of Natural Resources and the County Land Conservation Committee. The Wisconsin Town Law Forms book contains a sample notice that may be used as a template to create the required notices. The applicant is also required to file a copy of the meeting notice/lis pendens with the county register of deeds office, along with a map showing the land area involved, before the hearing. See Wis. Stat. § 82.10(5) and Wis. Stat. § 840.11.

When the hearing is called to order, the board should first verify on the record that all of the proper notices were given as required. Also, make sure that the return receipts from the mailings and copies of the public

notices are all made a part of the record. At the hearing, the applicant should be allowed to present his or her information and then anyone who wishes to comment on the petition should be allowed to speak.

Q. What type of access can the town board provide?

A. It is important to note that a town board can only lay out a public town road. The town board does not have the authority to grant the landowner a private road or give a private easement. If the petition is granted, the town will be responsible for maintaining the new road or widened road as a public highway thereafter. As a result, the town must weigh whether laying out the highway is in the “public interest”. Will this be a stub-end road that will only benefit one landowner or is there potential for more development and meaningful additions to the tax base if the road is laid out? If the road will not benefit the public, the town has a valid reason for denying the application.

If the town board decides to grant the petition and lay out a new road, it must lay out a road that is at least 66 feet wide, unless the board determines that width to be impracticable. Wis. Stat. § 82.27(4)(a). If the board decides to widen an existing way or road, the resulting highway shall be at least 49.5 feet wide and not more than 66 feet wide.

Q. If the petition is granted, who pays for the road?

A. Pursuant to Wis. Stat. § 82.27(4)(b), the town board must determine the damages to the owner of the land over which the right-of-way will be laid out or widened, and the advantages to the applicant. The “advantages” means *the greater of the following*: the increase in value of the landlocked property after the highway is laid out or widened or the administrative costs under Wis. Stat. § 82.27(5) and the estimated cost of constructing or widening the highway, including both the cost of constructing a turnaround, if one is necessary, and the damages paid to the owner of the land over which the highway is laid out or widened. See Wis. Stat. § 82.27(1). Any turnaround shall be laid out on the applicant’s land. Note: The town board may not determine *damages* in an amount exceeding the price stated in the affidavit of the applicant.

The applicant is required to pay the town treasurer the amount of the advantages within 30 days of the decision of the town board. Within 10 days of payment, the town board shall file the order with the town clerk and record the order with the register of deeds. See Wis. Stat. § 82.27(4)(c). If the town board grants the application, the board may include attorney fees, survey fees, expert valuation fees reasonably incurred by the town in deciding the application, administrative fees, publication fees, and possibly board member per diems in calculating the advantages. See Wis. Stat. § 82.27(5). Note that the town will only be able to charge 50% of these costs to the applicant, as a special charge under Wis. Stat. § 66.0627 if the petition is denied. See Wis. Stat. § 82.27(5).

Q. If the board grants the petition, can the road later be discontinued so that it becomes a private road under Wis. Stat. § 66.1005?

A. A road laid out under this procedure must remain a public road for at least 2 years. Wis. Stat. § 82.27(10).



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Natural Flood Management: The Relationship Between Hard and Soft Infrastructure

Maintaining road infrastructure is the greatest expenditure for most towns. These expenses increase when towns find themselves repeatedly repairing roads, bridges, and culverts in flood-prone areas, a problem exacerbated by the growing frequency and intensity of storms. In response, many local governments are investigating the *sources* of flashy flows, excess sediment, and debris that cause roads and culverts to fail while also analyzing how natural flood management may mitigate damage. This requires examining the relationship between the health and functionality of “soft,” natural wetland and floodplain infrastructure across a watershed and the resilience of “hard,” manmade infrastructure within the same region.

Hard transportation infrastructure, comprised of roads, culverts, and bridges, is critical to community access, public safety, and economic development. Likewise, the soft infrastructure systems of wetlands and floodplains throughout watersheds are equally critical to the well-being of our communities, especially in providing natural flood control.

Watershed	area where all waters – rain, snowmelt, streams – flow down to a common body of water
Wetland	area covered with water either permanently or seasonally, with aquatic plants specifically adapted to the very wet soils found there
Floodplain	area adjacent to a river that is covered with water during floods, where silt and deposits are left behind as the river meanders downstream

Wetlands act as water storage devices in times of high water, absorbing excess water and releasing it back into the landscape slowly, reducing erosion and minimizing the severity of flood damage. Floodplains provide room for water to spread out and filter into natural water retention areas, slowing the flow of water during floods and regulating the amount of sediment transported downstream. Wetlands and floodplains also provide many other public benefits, such as improving air and water quality by filtering out pollutants and excess nutrients, providing food and habitat for wildlife, helping to recharge groundwater, protecting against drought, and providing spaces for public recreation. To see an illustration of soft infrastructure at work, visit: <https://www.wisconsinwetlands.org/updates/how-wetlands-manage-water/>.

Today we better understand the relationship between healthy soft infrastructure and stronger flood resilience, but historically many thought of hard and soft infrastructure as being at odds with each other. This prompted ditching and drainage efforts to redirect water away from floodplain and wetland areas. However, when waterways become disconnected from floodplains, water can no longer spread across the landscape and absorb slowly. Over time, downstream flood damage is amplified as water and sediment flow higher, faster, and with greater force. But this can be reversed. Targeted natural flood management strategies can be used to restore floodplain and wetland functionality, maximizing the benefits soft infrastructure can provide to people and wildlife, while preserving the longevity and flood resilience of hard infrastructure.



One community capitalizing on this cohesive approach is in Juneau County. Towns in this area are responsible for maintaining roads that run through the Necedah National Wildlife Refuge. This can be a challenging task due to wet conditions in the floodplain along the Little Yellow River, beaver dams, and the high velocity of water moving through local drainage ditches. The refuge recently began a multi-year restoration project along the Little Yellow River. Several community partners, including Juneau County and the Town of Kingston, are collaborating with the refuge to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes from the project.

The Necedah National Wildlife Refuge covers an area of over 40,000 acres of wetlands along the Little Yellow River. Historically, the river meandered through spongy sedge meadows, across a vast floodplain capable of absorbing large volumes of rain as water slowly dispersed across the landscape. This changed in the early 1900s, when settlers dug a system of more than 100 miles of drainage ditches to clear the land of water so they could farm the fertile floodplain soil. The river's course was straightened and deepened, channeling water quickly downstream, draining wetlands and lowering groundwater levels. Over time, this led to downstream flooding and depleted local soil quality, resulting in land no longer suitable for most farming. Eventually, much of the land in the area was purchased by the federal and state government and set aside to create the Necedah National Wildlife Refuge and Meadow Valley State Wildlife Area.

Today, the refuge attracts tourists from across the country who enjoy hiking, hunting, fishing, and wildlife viewing. However, the 100-year-old drainage ditch system remains, and it continues to cause flooding issues. The amount of water and debris moving through ditches in heavy rain events can be vast, fast-moving, and unpredictable. Beavers are attracted to the large spoil piles along the sides of the ditches, building dams that cause abrupt changes in water levels on surrounding roads. This makes maintaining the low-lying roads in the refuge a difficult and expensive task. Towns responsible for these roads struggle with persistent overtopping, erosion, washouts, and culvert damage, leading to frequent road closures.

In response to concerns about the drainage ditch system's detrimental impacts to both wetlands and roads, the refuge began a multi-year project to restore the Little Yellow River. The refuge and several community partners – Juneau County, the Wisconsin DNR, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the Wisconsin Waterfowl Association, Ducks Unlimited, and students from local schools – have all worked together on this project in the last few years. Restoration work primarily involves removing the spoil piles along the drainage ditch banks and “plugging” that soil back into the ditch at specific locations where the ditch crosses the original, historic



streambed of the river. Soil plugs are placed strategically, starting at the top of the watershed where the volume and speed of water is lowest, then slowly working downstream. This turns off the “firehose” effect created by the drainage ditch system at the “spigot” (source), allowing water previously confined by the ditches’ high banks to flow back out, little by little, to its former, meandering river channel.

The Town of Kingston is at the top of the watershed, where the Little Yellow River begins. The refuge has restored about 5 miles of river and 12 miles of drainage ditches in Kingston, with hopes to continue working down through the watershed to restore thousands more acres of artificially drained wetlands. Reconnecting the river to its floodplain should build flood resilience by minimizing flashy flows of water and debris in storms. Removing the ditch spoil piles, which attracted beavers to build dams near roads, should also result in less flood damage and more stable and predictable water levels going forward. However, increasing the wetlands’ capacity for water retention also means increasing the overall high-water level in the refuge, above the existing capacity of many town roads there.



Community meetings were held to address the need to elevate refuge roads above the new high-water level. These discussions resulted in staff from the Juneau County Conservation and Highway Departments working with the Town of Kingston to apply for a Municipal Flood Control Grant from the Wisconsin DNR. They were awarded over \$480,000 in grant funding to perform flood resilience road work on a section of 5th Avenue. The refuge contributed federal funds toward the town’s cost-

sharing requirement, and the County Highway Department performed the road work, allowing the town to undertake this large road reconstruction project with minimal local cost.

Juneau County and Kingston took a natural flood management approach, tailoring the project design to work in harmony with the low-lying, swampy conditions. They elevated the road surface about two feet to be above the new anticipated high-water level. They also reconstructed the road base. To deter beavers from building dams, they limited the total number of culverts along the road. Instead, they replaced the existing road base with a layer of large, 4-to-6-inch clear stone, followed by a layer of geotextile fabric, then a layer





of 1.25-inch base gravel, another layer of geotextile fabric, and crushed red granite on top. The combination of large stone and geotextile fabric creates a secure, stable base but allows water from the surrounding marshlands to seep underneath the road, keeping water levels stable and consistent on either side while maintaining a dry road surface.

Benefits of the joint wetland and road restoration projects are already being appreciated by communities throughout the watershed. The wetland restoration work completed so far has resulted in a slower flow of

water through the floodplain, better floodwater storage ability, reduced erosion, improvements to wildlife habitat, and measurably cleaner water quality within the refuge and in lakes downstream. Since the initial roadwork was completed, 5th Avenue was tested by significant spring flooding from snowmelt and heavy rains, and most of the road stayed dry and passable despite surrounding wetlands being fully saturated. A few areas of the road were still inundated, so Kingston worked with the Wisconsin Waterfowl Association to raise the road slightly higher in a few spots and add a couple culverts where needed. By learning from and working with the natural landscape, the town feels ready to weather the next major storm. Project partners hope to continue collaborating in future years to improve the flood resilience of refuge roads as the Little Yellow River restoration project progresses downstream. These achievements demonstrate the immense public benefits and cost efficiencies that can be gained when communities understand and leverage the interconnected relationship between hard and soft infrastructure. To learn more about this story and similar flood resilience efforts around the state, please join us for the “Slow the Flow” workshop at the WTA Convention this October!

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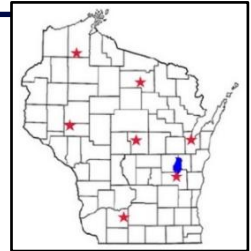
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Fall Workshops September 2026



Join us to learn about budgeting, leadership, grant writing, assessment roll corrections, financial reconciliation, comprehensive planning, road safety, and more!

Tuesday, 9/15: Barneveld, Deer Valley Lodge
Wednesday, 9/16: Fond du Lac, Prairie Theater
Thursday, 9/17: Green Bay, Rock Garden

Monday, 9/21: Stevens Point, Holiday Inn
Tuesday, 9/22: Rhinelander, The Pines
Wednesday, 9/23: Cable, Lakewoods Resort
Thursday, 9/24: Eau Claire, Florian Gardens

Monday – Thursday, 9/28 – 10/1: Webinars

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

Thanks to our 2026 Fall Workshops sponsor:



2026 Fall Town & Village Workshops

PROGRAM DESCRIPTIONS

The Power of Perspective

Wisconsin Towns Association and Local Government Education Staff

It is said that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. The conclusion that something is beautiful is a personal perspective influenced by our own individual perceptions. Perspective and perception lead different folks in the exact same scenario to make widely differing conclusions, acting as the gas that fuels conflict. Learn to recognize perspective, what drives it, and how to manage it to become a more effective community leader.

Understanding Local Government Revenue Sources

Wisconsin Towns Association Legal Staff

Learn about the various revenue sources available to local governments – state aids, property taxes, fees, borrowing, etc. We'll discuss how to access and maximize these resources and how revenue estimates affect local government budgeting decisions.

Effective Grant Writing

Daniel Foth and Bill Oemichen, Local Government Education

Securing a grant for a community project can make a huge difference for town/village finances. Presenters will discuss how to find grant programs and how to complete a successful grant application. Training will also address how to use artificial intelligence to create greater grant opportunities for your community.

Using and Updating the Comprehensive Plan

Rebecca Roberts, Wisconsin Towns Association

Learn about the role of the comprehensive plan in local decision-making and the importance of updating your plan to achieve town goals. We'll discuss plan commission and town board roles, changes impacting neighboring municipalities, and how to work with the county, regional planning commission, and consultants as needed.

Master the Basics of Building Safer Roads

Andi Bill and Andrew McFadden, Wisconsin Local Technical Assistance Program

Learn how to navigate the Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD), understand when and where different traffic control devices are appropriate, and walk away with practical answers to the questions local agencies ask most often.

Trust but Verify: End of Year Reconciliation and Audit Tips

Melissa Kono, Wisconsin Towns Association / Local Government Education

This presentation will provide an overview of financial reconciliation requirements for clerks and treasurers and recommended audit procedures for local governments.

Correction of Assessment Errors and Chargebacks

WI Department of Revenue (DOR) Staff

Join the DOR's State and Local Finance Division for an overview of property assessment corrections, omissions, and chargebacks, and the role of local government in correcting and preventing errors. The session will also address the role of revaluation and equalized values in the property assessment process.

BONUS SESSION (Only Presented Via Webinar / On-Demand Video Recording)

Municipal Levy Limit Worksheet Reporting

Frank Bozich, WI Department of Revenue (DOR)

Review Wisconsin's levy limit law, with a focus on key lines from the 2026 Municipal Levy Limit Worksheet. This session will equip attendees with a deeper understanding of the worksheet, helpful filing tips, and info regarding available resources.

IN-PERSON WORKSHOP SCHEDULE

Plenary Session for All Attendees			
8:15 - 8:30 a.m.		Introductions and Overview	
8:30 - 9:30 a.m.		The Power of Perspective	
9:30 - 10:30 a.m.		Understanding Local Government Revenue Sources	
10:30 - 10:45 a.m.		Break	
10:45 – 11:45 a.m.		Effective Grant Writing	
Lunch			
Breakout Sessions			
General Topics		Clerks and Treasurers	
12:45 - 1:45 p.m.	Using and Updating the Comprehensive Plan	12:45 - 1:15 p.m.	Reconciliation and Audit Tips
		1:15 - 1:45 p.m.	Assessment Corrections and Chargebacks
1:45 - 2:00 p.m.	Break	1:45 - 2:00 p.m.	Break
2:00 - 3:00 p.m.	Building Safer Roads	2:00 - 3:00 p.m.	Corrections and Chargebacks (cont.)
3:00 p.m.	Evaluations / Adjourn	3:00 p.m.	Evaluations / Adjourn

LIVE WEBINAR / TELECONFERENCE SCHEDULE

Monday, 9/28	1:00 - 2:00 p.m.	The Power of Perspective
	2:15 - 3:15 p.m.	Effective Grant Writing
Tuesday, 9/29	8:00 - 10:00 a.m.	BONUS SESSION: Municipal Levy Limit Worksheet
	10:15 - 11:45 a.m.	Assessment Corrections and Chargebacks
Wednesday, 9/30	1:00 - 2:00 p.m.	Local Government Revenue Sources
	2:15 - 2:45 p.m.	Reconciliation and Audit Tips
Thursday, 10/1	9:00 - 10:30 a.m.	Using / Updating the Comprehensive Plan
	10:45 - 11:45 a.m.	Building Safer Roads

2026 FALL WORKSHOPS REGISTRATION FORM

All registrants (including in-person attendees) will receive access to the live webinar presentations, as well as on-demand access to recordings of each session. **Copies of PPT slides will not be printed, but will be available on the WTA website prior to the workshops.** Registrants will receive an email (at the email address you provide below) with information about how to join the webinars and how to access the materials and recordings on the website. **AN EMAIL IS REQUIRED FOR REGISTRATION.** If you plan to attend the webinars via telephone, the phone number from which you will be calling is also required.

Name _____ Office _____
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Email (**REQUIRED**) _____

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

- ☐ Tuesday, September 15: Barneveld – Deer Valley Lodge
- ☐ Wednesday, September 16: Fond du Lac – Prairie Theater and Event Center
- ☐ Thursday, September 17: Green Bay – Rock Garden
- ☐ Monday, September 21: Stevens Point – Holiday Inn
- ☐ Tuesday, September 22: Rhinelander – The Pines Event Center
- ☐ Wednesday, September 23: Cable – Lakewoods Resort
- ☐ Thursday, September 24: Eau Claire – Florian Gardens
- ☐ Virtual Programming Only (Live Webinars Sept. 28 – Oct. 1 + On-Demand Access to Recordings)

FEE: \$75 – Early registration (**payment must be received at least 15 days in advance of the workshop date**)
\$90 – Late registrations and walk-in registrations

Cancellations received 15 days or more in advance of the workshop date will receive a full refund, minus a \$15.00 administrative fee. Cancellations received less than 15 days in advance will be charged a \$15.00 administrative fee plus the cost of the meal. Refund requests submitted 30 or more days after the event will not be processed.

If you have to miss an in-person workshop due to illness, please contact the WTA office to either cancel your registration as explained above or change your registration to “Virtual Programming Only.”

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

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

If you plan to attend virtual programming only, please return your registration form(s) and check(s) to the WTA office by **Wednesday, September 23, 2026** to ensure you receive messages about where to download materials and how to connect to the live webinar/teleconference sessions in a timely fashion.

Registration and payment may also be submitted online on the WTA website, www.wisctowns.com. A 3.65% credit card processing convenience fee will be added for payments made via credit card.

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

REACHING OUT



By **Jake Langenhahn**
Outreach Specialist

Farewell

This is a difficult article to write. By the time you read this, I will no longer be employed as the Outreach Specialist for the Wisconsin Towns Association (WTA). My last day was August 14, 2026. I have been blessed with over 6 wonderful years at the WTA. I've been fortunate enough to work with some amazing coworkers, meet incredibly dedicated local government officials, and travel all over this state. I've told many of our members about my departure these past few weeks, and many respond with a single word "why?" To answer that question, we have to go back in time to July 29, 2024.

July 29, 2024 began as a forgettable day, but it had an unforgettable conclusion. I went to an eye appointment that morning because I was having some vision issues. I assumed that I just needed a prescription update. After the eye doctor completed their exam, took some pictures, and analyzed what they saw, they called me back into the exam room, and informed me in dire terms that I needed to see a doctor immediately. I left the eye care office and called Mike to tell him that I would be late for a meeting with himself, Carol, and Lara. In the end, I never made it to that meeting. I made my way to the emergency room, clinging to the belief that a 29-year-old could not have something seriously wrong with him. Later in the evening, after completing several tests, a doctor informed me that they found a mass in my head. To be frank, my entire world shattered in a matter of seconds.

I remember being admitted to the hospital shortly after receiving the news. The next few days were a blur, but I do remember a few things. I was informed that the tumor was not cancerous, I had a spinal tap to drain excess brain fluid that built up in my head due to the tumor, and the USA Olympic Men's Basketball team won their game against a Nikola Jokic led Serbia team (USA!). After I was discharged, I had several follow-up appointments, and eventually, my care team determined that the best course of action was surgery. On October 15, 2024, I had a craniotomy at the University of Wisconsin Hospital in Madison. Following surgery, I spent three days in the ICU (the most difficult days of my life), and another two days on the main hospital floor. I was discharged on October 20, 2024. Following discharge, I had two months of recovery. While I spent a lot of that time sleeping and going to appointments, I also had a lot of time to think. My experience during those months made me realize that I only get so many hours on Earth to accomplish what I want to do. I, like many of you, have life goals that I want to achieve. Admittedly, due to the general hustle and bustle of life, I lost sight of those goals in the time leading up to my tumor's discovery.

In high school, if someone asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up, I would've said "Lawyer". Now, I believe a significant part of the reason behind that response was due to the overexaggerated lifestyle of attorneys portrayed in fictional legal dramas. After working with municipal attorneys almost my entire adult life, I know for a fact that they typically don't drive Lamborghinis and smoke cigars on balconies at night...or at least the ones I've met don't. A typical attorney spends their day doing an enormous amount

of reading and writing. They also provide support to their clients by analyzing the law and advising them as to their best path forward. So much of life is filled with uncertainty, and I've always felt that I was the best version of myself when I was helping others navigate that uncertainty. I want to help others find their best path forward.

In May 2025, I registered for the August 2025 Law School Admittance Test (LSAT). The LSAT is a required step for most people before applying to law schools. It is a difficult and frustrating test to study for and complete. I applied to the University of Wisconsin Madison the evening of Thanksgiving 2025, and I was notified of my acceptance on December 12, 2025. Life moves fast sometimes!

I can already hear Mike asking me what I've learned from my experiences these past few years and how it can help our town/village officers. Firstly, do NOT neglect your physical and mental health. I firmly believe that our members are servant leaders which is essential for the long-term success of local government and democracy! However, in my observation, servant leaders can set expectations so high for themselves that they overlook other important parts of their life. Be sure to listen to your body and talk to others if you are struggling! Secondly, I think it's important to celebrate the support systems that we have in our lives. Whether that be our families, friends, coworkers, etc. A "thank you" can go a LONG way in life.

I'd like to thank all of the WTA members I got to work with these past 6 years. I'd also like to thank my coworkers Mike, Carol, Joe, Lara, Melissa, Casey, Heather, and Kelly for being excellent people to work with. I'd also be remiss if I didn't thank Karisa and Sandy whom I'm sure are enjoying retirement right now. So, to ultimately answer the question: "Why am I leaving the WTA?", the short answer is that I am leaving to attend law school. Although, I felt this article would provide a more complete response. Thank you for reading and I wish you all the very best!

"I regret to announce-this is The End. I am going now. I bid you all a very fond farewell." - Bilbo Baggins, The Fellowship of the Ring

Jake Langenhahn



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

In-Person Absentee Voting (IPAV)

In-person absentee voting (IPAV) is available to Wisconsin voters who are unable or unwilling to vote at the polling place on Election Day. IPAV is limited to the 14 days preceding each election, with the exception of the day before the election (Monday) in which no IPAV may occur. The Type E notice lists the hours and location of IPAV and is to be published the 4th Tuesday before the election. See Wis Stat 10.01 (e). The clerk may add hours to those that are published but cannot decrease hours. IPAV may be offered via posted hours, by appointment, or a combination of the two, and it is the clerk's discretion to offer evening or weekend hours. There is no minimum number of IPAV hours to offer but there must be some, and "by appointment" is acceptable. The Wisconsin Elections Commission (WEC) recommends posting at least some in-person hours each week during the two-week IPAV period, with one suggestion being to offer in-person voting hours the Friday before the election since the clerk is required to be available until 5 p.m. for voter registration. See Wis. Stat 6.29(2)(a).

IPAV location considerations

Prior to the IPAV period the town board may designate a site other than the clerk's office where electors may request and vote absentee ballots and to which voted absentee ballots may be returned. A notice of the alternative site should be prominently displayed. See Wis Stat. 6.855. An important consideration in determining whether to designate an alternative location is that the clerk's office cannot perform any activities taking place at an alternative IPAV site such as registration and in-person absentee ballot return. While the governing body (the town board) may designate an alternative location other than the town hall, several considerations should be made before offering IPAV at another location, such as the clerk's home. The alternative site should be accessible for those with disabilities and voters must have a private place to mark their ballot. Observers are allowed to observe any IPAV, including at alternative locations. See Wis Stat 7.41 and Admin Code 4.02 (11) and 4.05 (2)(a). There should be no activities at the alternative site which could be construed as electioneering such as political yard signs.

IPAV process reminders

Voters opting for IPAV must be registered, show an acceptable photo ID, and checked against the ineligible voter list. In the presence of the voter, the clerk reviews the ballot certificate envelope for sufficiency and serves as the witness by signing and providing the clerk's address on the ballot certificate envelope. See Wis Stat 6.86(1)(b). Voted ballots should be placed in a secured container until Election Day. Enter IPAV applications on the absentee ballot log (reliers) or into WisVote (providers).

IPAV for Towns Lunch and Learn webinar

For more information and guidance on IPAV, please see the recording of the IPAV for Towns Lunch and Learn webinar presented by WEC staff which can found on the WTA website at: <https://vimeo.com/1212101277/664046f835?share=copy&fl=sv&fe=ci>.

Town Law Conference

Friday, October 30, 2026 - Virtual Event

\$175 Attorneys • \$60 Non-Attorney Municipal Officials
Register at: www.wisctowns.com

AGENDA

9:30am Welcome

9:40am-10:40am Regulating Short-Term Rentals - What Can You Do?

Presented by Atty. Matt Fleming, Murphy Desmond SC

10:40am-10:45am Break

10:45am-11:45am The Long Arm of Municipal Law - Citations, Collections and Circuit Court: Ordinance Enforcement Essentials

Presented by Atty. Luke Martell, Municipal Law and Litigation Group SC

11:45am-1:00pm Lunch Break

1:00pm-2:00pm Can Your Community Regulate Data Centers?

With the surge in large-scale data center development, local governments are wondering if they can regulate data centers. This presentation will cover how local governments can regulate data centers including via zoning, development moratoria, licensing, and development agreements.

Presented by Atty. Eric Hagen, Boardman Clark LLP

2:00pm-2:05pm Break

2:05pm-3:05pm Order in the Town Hall! - Conducting Effective Public Hearings and Turning Them Into Good Decisions

Conducting orderly and effective public hearings is often one of the greatest challenges for town officials, and converting public hearing evidence into defensible decisions is perhaps more difficult than ever, particularly in light of 2017 Wisconsin Act 67. This session will discuss practical suggestions for conducting public hearings that are organized and free from disruption as well as how to use the evidence you have gathered to make a sound decision that represents the Town's reasoned judgment rather than its will.

Presented by Atty. Matt Parmentier, Dempsey Law Firm LLP

This program will be submitted to the Wisconsin Board of Bar Examiners for 4.5 CLE credits.

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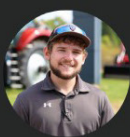
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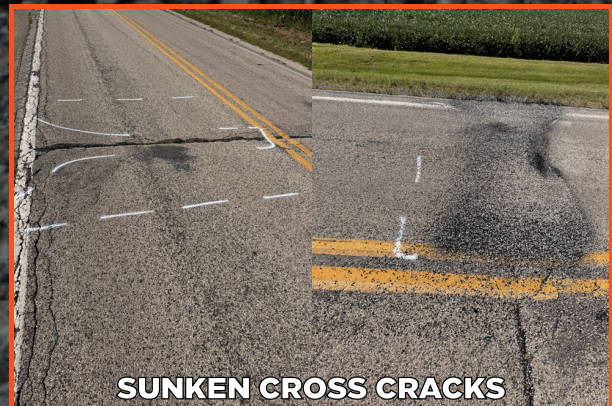
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Notice for Bids - Village of Wyeville Notice

Wyeville is looking for Bids to put in New Upgrade/New Sewer System. Bids for Design and Engineering.

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