

SEP/OCT 2024

MINNESOTA CITIES

A PUBLICATION OF THE **LEAGUE** of MINNESOTA CITIES

Public Art

City-supported art projects aim to bring vibrancy to shared spaces.

PAGE 13

Recruiting Practices

Prepare for the new 2025 rule requiring salary ranges in job postings. PAGE 23

LEAGUE RECOGNIZES CITY LEADERS

PAGE 8



RICK MILLER

WAITE PARK MAYOR

C.C. LUDWIG AWARD



TOM LAWELL

APPLE VALLEY CITY ADMINISTRATOR

**JAMES F. MILLER
LEADERSHIP AWARD**



NADIA MOHAMED

ST. LOUIS PARK MAYOR

EMERGING LEADER AWARD

FREE CYBERSECURITY COURSES FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

Is your city prepared for cybersecurity risks?

We are partnering with Norwich University Applied Research Institute to offer three **FREE** FEMA funded and approved courses to help your city protect against, respond to, and recover from cyber incidents.

Courses are FREE! Pick and choose which courses are the best fit for your city.

Learn more at lmc.org/cybercourses



Cybersecurity Risk Awareness for Officials and Senior Management

Identify your city's cyber risks.

SEPT. 20 — STAPLES

OCT. 30 — MANKATO

JAN. 8 — ST. PAUL

FEB. 12 — WAITE PARK



Critical Thinking and Risk Management in a Cyber Converged World

How can we measure risk?

SEPT. 20 — STAPLES

OCT. 30 — MANKATO

JAN. 8 — ST. PAUL

FEB. 12 — WAITE PARK



Integrating Cyber Hazard Response into Exercise Planning

Include cyber exercises in your emergency management planning.

JAN. 9 — ST. PAUL

FEB. 13 — WAITE PARK

PRESENTED BY:





Features

8 League Recognizes City Leaders

13 Public Art: Bringing Vibrancy to City Spaces

17 State Housing Aid Programs: What Cities Need to Know

19 Managing PFAS Concerns in Your Community: 5 Common Resident Questions

Departments

3 Director's Message

Building Successful Communities Through Thoughtful Leadership

4 Bits & Briefs

St. Cloud Mayor Dave Kleis hosts milestone 1000th town hall, updated LMC Handbook includes recent election law changes, and more

7 Two-Way Street

What Strategies Has Your City Used to Support Housing Development?

21 Focus on Small Cities

Staying Social: Tracy Creates More Ways for Residents to Mingle

30 Ideas in Action

Owatonna Coptober Event Fosters Connection Between Officers and Area Youth

Legal Ease

23 Letter of the Law

Show Me the Money: Get Ready for the New 2025 Rule Requiring Salary Ranges in Job Postings

24 From the Bench

Supreme Court Rules Public Camping Ordinances Do Not Criminalize Homelessness

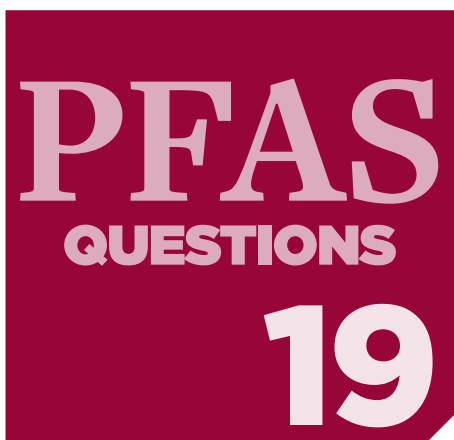
Up for Discussion

27 Ask LMC

What Should Cities Know About Donations and Fundraisers?

29 Message Matters

'The Dig' Keeps Shakopee Residents Up to Date on New Developments



ON THE WEB

Check out *Minnesota Cities* online at mncities.org.

MINNESOTA CITIES

Volume 109, Issue 5



PUBLISHED BY

League of Minnesota Cities

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Luke Fischer

BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2024-2025

PRESIDENT

Justin Miller | City Administrator, Lakeville

FIRST VICE PRESIDENT

Wendy Berry | Council Member, West St. Paul

SECOND VICE PRESIDENT

Courtney Johnson | Mayor, Carver

PAST PRESIDENT

Jenny Max | City Administrator, Nisswa

Sharon Hanson | City Administrator, Marshall

Phil Kern | City Administrator, Delano

HwaJeong Kim | Council Member, St. Paul

Emily Koski | Council Member, Minneapolis

Julie Maas-Kusske | Mayor, Maple Plain

John Mulder | City Administrator, Hermantown

Scott Neal | City Manager, Edina

Audrey Nelsen | Council Member, Willmar

Larry Odebrecht | Council Member, Stillwater

Jorge Prince | Mayor, Bemidji

Clinton Rogers | City Administrator, Janesville

Evan Vogel | City Administrator, Cambridge

CGMC REPRESENTATIVE

Pat Baustain | Mayor, Luverne

METRO CITIES REPRESENTATIVE

Dan Buchholtz | City Administrator, Spring Lake Park

MAOSC REPRESENTATIVE

Brian Heck | City Administrator, Montgomery

MINNESOTACITIES

MNCITIES.ORG

EDITORIAL

Rachel Kats | Editor | rkats@lmc.org

Erica Norris Perlman | Freelance Editor

DESIGN

Kathryn Forss | DaisyMaeDesign

REPRINTS Contact Rachel Kats at (651) 215-4032 or rkats@lmc.org to request permission to reprint articles. *Minnesota Cities* (ISSN-0148-8546) is published bimonthly for \$30 per year, \$5 per single copy, by League of Minnesota Cities, 145 University Avenue West, Saint Paul, Minnesota 55103. Telephone: (651) 281-1200. Website: lmc.org. Periodicals postage paid at Eagan, Minnesota, and other mailing offices. Publication number 351960. © 2024 League of Minnesota Cities. All Rights Reserved.

POSTMASTER Send address changes to *Minnesota Cities*, 145 University Avenue West, Saint Paul, Minnesota 55103-2044.

ON THE WEB

For upcoming Board meetings and minutes, visit **lmc.org/board**.



Smart solutions for all your engineering needs.

Streets and storm sewers	Site grading and drainage plans
Wastewater systems	Flood control
Water systems	Groundwater studies
Solid waste/landfills	Community planning
Airport improvements	Funding
Wetland delineation/mitigation	Engineering survey and environmental planning

WiDSETH

Widseth.com



Building Successful Communities Through Thoughtful Leadership

BY LUKE FISCHER

I recently had the chance to sit down with a reporter who was tasked with writing stories that feature news from communities across Minnesota. During our conversation, he asked relevant questions that we often hear from journalists: What makes a community successful? What does good local leadership look like? How do city officials actually make it work? I'm sure many of you are wrestling with the same questions as you adopt preliminary levies and refine your budgets for the upcoming year.

This issue of the magazine spotlights stories of three city officials, two elected and one appointed, who have been thoughtful about their approaches to leadership and problem solving. Within their stories, you might discover a lesson or two that you can use in the places you call home.

So, what makes a community successful? Often, we look to ribbon cuttings for splashy new initiatives or highly visible projects as the markers of jobs well done. While it's great to celebrate those milestones, it is day-to-day discipline that creates an environment for cities to accomplish the more extraordinary work. James F. Miller Award winner Tom Lawell, city administrator in Apple Valley, is someone who has proven this during the 24-plus years he's served the city.

Through Tom's intentional financial management and solid long-range planning, the city has achieved an AAA rating — the highest bond rating possible. This superior rating reflects strong internal controls, frequent calibration of the city's goals to resources, and consistency in the basics of fiscal performance. While the strong bond rating indicates solid financial management, it also paves the way for the city to do costlier projects through lower borrowing costs — a tangible benefit of good discipline.

What does good leadership look like?

While we tend to think about leadership as simply "the person in charge," it's much more than that. More than ever, communities need strong standard bearers if they're going to make an impact that stands the test of time. C.C. Ludwig Award winner Rick Miller, mayor of Waite Park, has achieved this in spades over the past 30 years of leading his city.

Rick developed a long-range vision for what the community might become and matched that vision with a financial plan to make big dreams into realities. Part of what has made his work so enduring is the idea that he never lost sight of the basic services the city is expected to provide all while pursuing big investments that have changed the trajectory of the community.

How do city officials make it all work? It's often not enough to focus only on the basics or have a long-range plan to make your city's dreams become reality — at the same time, you need to successfully guide the community along. The League's Emerging Leader Award winner Nadia Mohamed, mayor of St. Louis Park, has perfected the art of bringing people together — giving folks a seat at the table so they all have a shared sense of ownership of what the community might be.

St. Louis Park has seen significant socioeconomic and demographic changes over the past 20 years. More simply, many of the people that call the city home are new to the community. Nadia has worked hard to ensure the city is ahead of the curve in involving



and serving residents, including looking for new ways to get input, adjusting to evolving needs, and building a shared vision for tomorrow. It takes a special kind of leader to foster opportunities for bringing people in and lifting them up, and Nadia has clearly demonstrated the importance of that work.

Tom, Rick, and Nadia are three folks who have a track record of making their communities successful. Their stories offer ideas and strategies that might be good fits for the places you serve. As you would expect, it was fun sharing a little about our award winners with the reporter.

And I was proud to let him know that many more of you have developed your own approaches and have your own ideas about what it takes to make a city successful. Please tell us your own local stories — there's lots of good news that we are eager to share. 📸



Luke Fischer is executive director of the League of Minnesota Cities. Contact: lfischer@lmc.org or (651) 281-1279.



St. Cloud Mayor Dave Kleis Hosts Milestone 1,000th Town Hall

Longtime St. Cloud Mayor Dave Kleis hosted his 1,000th town hall on July 1, making good on his 2005 campaign promise to increase community engagement.

“The highlight for me is public service, meeting and hearing the stories of thousands of people I’ve had the honor to represent,” Kleis said.

His public service began when he joined the United States Air Force and later the Air Force Reserve. It continued when he was elected to the Minnesota State Senate and then for nearly 20 years as St. Cloud mayor. As he wraps up his final term in the position, Kleis emphasizes the importance of relationship building and notes the town halls were a great way to do that.

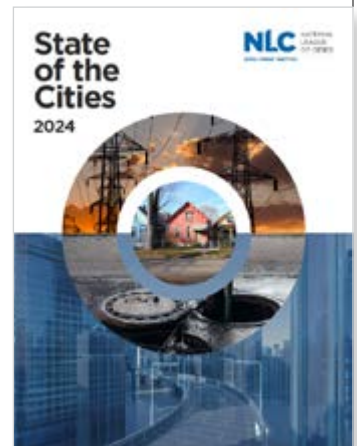
“The most important thing I’ve learned is that when you engage and involve all people in your community, you build trust, relationships, and success in moving forward on all issues,” he said. “Without relationships, you have no trust, and without trust, you cannot succeed as a community.”

The best tools to achieve that engagement and involvement, he said, are accessibility, accountability, and transparency. “That’s why I held over 1,000 town hall meetings, dinners with strangers, weekly updates, podcasts, radio call-ins, and showing up everywhere and anywhere.”

Each of the now 1,000-plus town hall meetings have been beneficial, Kleis said, ranging in attendance from one person to more than 500. He recalls one of the most memorable being a 24-hour town hall meeting earlier this year, when more than 85 people were in attendance steadily from midnight to midnight. It could’ve continued to go on beyond the 24 hours with nearly a dozen people still there at the end of the event.

“The issues were as diverse and exciting as the individuals who showed up,” he said. “They kept me awake during that 24-hour town hall.”

National State of the Cities Report



The 2024 National State of the Cities report summarizes the challenges cities, towns, and villages face and the innovative solutions that mayors nationwide employ to address these issues. In its 11th year, the National League of Cities’ report offers an in-depth exploration of the complex challenges confronting municipal governments and the strategic objectives city leaders set to elevate the quality of life for their residents. It also explores the predominant themes that surfaced in the 2024 mayors’ annual addresses. This year’s report includes new public sentiment research, revealing a clear alignment between resident concerns and mayoral priorities. View the report at nlc.org/resource/state-of-the-cities-2024.



Fire Grants Reauthorization Bill Signed Into Law

The Fire Grants and Safety Act was signed into law in July, ensuring that the nation’s fire and emergency services can continue to access vital federal support.

The law will support fire and EMS first responders by reauthorizing the Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) and Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grant programs through fiscal year 2028; reauthorizing the U.S. Fire Administration through fiscal year 2028; and extending the sunset date for AFG and SAFER to Sept. 30, 2030.

Retired Sartell Firefighters Help Seniors With Detectors

People lead busy lives, so it's no surprise that many forget to regularly check their smoke and carbon monoxide detectors. However, it's important to replace the batteries annually, change carbon monoxide detectors every seven years, and replace smoke detectors every 10 years.

To keep Sartell and LeSauk Township residents safe, a group of retired Sartell firefighters, known as Retired Engine Company #844, have been replacing detectors yearly for more than a decade.



"The fire department supports their efforts by providing batteries, but the program is primarily operated by these dedicated volunteers," said Sartell Fire Chief Peter Kedrowski. "We are very grateful for their contributions."

Dennis Molitor, a retired firefighter, is part of this initiative and estimates that around 1,000 old detectors in the area need replacement, some being 30-40 years old and ineffective, according to *The Newsleaders*.

The replacement service is free for Sartell and LeSauk Township residents 55 and above, or anyone who is disabled. The service operates through October, which is Fire Prevention Month, to mid-November. If you're interested in starting something similar in your city and would like to learn more about Sartell's program, contact Dennis Molitor at (320) 333-1293.



Updated LMC Handbook Includes Recent Election Law Changes

As the 2024 general election draws closer, cities that administer elections and absentee voting should be up to date on election procedures, including recent law changes. The *LMC Handbook for Minnesota Cities* can help. The recently revised Chapter 5: Election Procedures outlines notices, ballot requirements, qualifications and training of election judges, and voting and counting procedures. Learn more at lmc.org/elections.

LMCIT to Offer Public Safety Workshops

Public safety professionals can enhance their skills and support their teams with two essential workshops that will be offered by the League of Minnesota Cities Insurance Trust (LMCIT) this October and November.

The Peer Support Training workshop equips first responders with the tools to provide emotional and mental health support to colleagues. Participants will learn to identify signs of stress and trauma, and develop strategies to offer effective assistance.

The After-Action Review (AAR) Training focuses on improving safety through a structured review process. By analyzing incidents, attendees will learn to identify areas for improvement and implement changes to prevent future occurrences.

Both workshops will be held at multiple locations across the state. For more information and to register, visit lmc.org/events.

LMC LEARNING & EVENTS

Safety and Loss Control Workshop: After-Action Review

Oct. 1 — St. Cloud

Oct. 2 — Cottage Grove

Fall Forums

Oct. 21-25 — Online

Safety and Loss Control Workshop: Peer Support Training

Oct. 22-23 — Mankato

Oct. 29-30 — Plymouth

Nov. 6-7 — Hermantown

Cybersecurity for Local Governments

Various dates & locations

ON THE WEB

Learn more about these and other events at lmc.org/events.



**BOLTON
& MENK**

Real People. Real Solutions.

www.Bolton-Menk.com

HELPING YOU TELL YOUR STORY FOR 75 YEARS.



In our Commitment to Communities video series, learn about Bolton & Menk's humble beginnings, explore the expertise in the solutions we create, and envision the future where every community is safe, sustainable, and beautiful.

GROWTH TAKES POWER. THAT'S WHERE WE CAN HELP.



Visit economicdevelopment.xcelenergy.com
to learn more.

Our top-quartile reliability and industry-leading renewable energy portfolio, combined with our competitive pricing and energy efficiency incentives, make our service area an attractive option for businesses. We have a variety of certified sites, ready sites and ready buildings available to match your needs.

We're ready to serve your business.



© 2024 Xcel Energy Inc.

What Strategies Has Your City Used to Support Housing Development?



HOLLY HANSEN

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR
CLOQUET (POPULATION 12,635)

After recovering from the impacts of the late-2000s housing recession, Cloquet city staff educated elected officials on the importance of economic development tools and incentives to support housing development. To keep the ball rolling, in 2014, the city initiated a housing study and formed an

implementation steering committee. The process inspired the city and the Cloquet Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA) to act. Since then, many partnerships have been formed and housing projects developed.

For example, the city partnered with Carlton County on tax-forfeited properties, transferring them to contractors to ensure their redevelopment. Cloquet attracted multifamily, single-family, senior development projects, and grant opportunities to rehabilitate homes, and it collaborated with school district ISD 94 to solicit a developer to redevelop its 235,000 square-foot historic facility into workforce housing called Carlton Lofts.

The city also has attracted housing developers interested in adaptive reuse projects. To do that, Cloquet acquires and condemns properties that are strategic housing opportunities. Recent city projects include redeveloping a city-owned vacant water tower site, redeveloping a farmhouse site into townhome construction, and pursuing condemnation and redevelopment of the historic Hotel Solem. The hotel will be revamped into housing using tax increment financing, an Economic Development Administration (EDA) loan, and a Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development redevelopment grant.

Cloquet has initiated a housing study update and will adopt the International Property Maintenance Code to assist with existing property maintenance. It also created a local housing trust fund to allocate Statewide Affordable Housing Aid for future affordability projects, and the Cloquet EDA modified a loan fund to allow gap financing for housing development loans that are in partnership with the city.

The infrastructure needed to support market-rate and workforce housing projects remains a hurdle. While there are some new state programs, there are few statutory tools to support infrastructure for market-rate housing ownership. Developers are hesitant to invest in infrastructure costs in light of incremental housing demand and tight profit margins.

Looking ahead, Cloquet is focused on seeing more mixed-income housing projects developed. As a state, we need to find pathways of funding for either cities or developers to acquire land and implement infrastructure more flexibly than what is currently available. This will create more pathways to expand housing ownership in our cities.

JULIE URBAN

ASSISTANT COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR
RICHFIELD (POPULATION 36,710)


For years, the City of Richfield saw itself as an affordable community whose greatest needs were to replace housing lost to airport expansion and to diversify our housing stock, in both types and price. Several factors led to a shift in focus in the late 2010s: the conversion of the 698-unit Crossroads at Penn apartment community to the more expensive Concierge apartments, and a growing awareness of homeownership disparity rates and the role racial covenants played in shaping the community. Awareness and urgency of the larger housing crisis also greatly increased community support for this work.

City leaders heard from the community that prioritizing housing stability, preserving and maintaining affordability, and meeting the housing needs of all residents was considered critical. Leaders stepped up and urged staff to concentrate efforts and resources on meeting these housing needs.

Since 2017, we've:

- ▶ Formalized an inclusionary housing policy that prioritizes larger and accessible units.
- ▶ Created a down payment assistance program focused on underserved communities.
- ▶ Created an apartment remodeling program for property owners.
- ▶ Adopted tenant protections.
- ▶ Created an affordable housing trust fund.
- ▶ Amended ordinances to allow accessory dwelling units and duplexes throughout the community.
- ▶ Helped to preserve and expand a manufactured home community when it became cooperatively owned.
- ▶ Supported the construction of over 1,400 apartment units and nearly 100 for-sale units, and the preservation and rehabilitation of 475 aging apartments.

Barriers to housing can take many forms, some of which we can control or influence, others that we cannot. As a fully developed community with a well-established land use pattern, growth can only happen within the existing landscape. In addition to the usual challenges that accompany redevelopment, we've heard worries from residents who are wary of the changes that are taking place. As we continue our work to update ordinances and devote funding to this work, creativity, strong leadership, communication, and effective partners have been key to making progress.

Cities are facing increasing pressure from other levels of government to step up and help address regional housing needs. We are grateful for the state's support of this work through the new Local Affordable Housing Aid and Bring it Home legislation. Additional funds that offer communities the flexibility to address the particular needs of their community are a great way to support this work. 



LEAGUE RECOGNIZES CITY LEADERS

BY ANDREW TELLIOHN

PHOTO BY MATT WALES



RICK MILLER
WAITE PARK MAYOR
C.C. LUDWIG AWARD

PHOTO BY MATT WALES



TOM LAWELL
APPLE VALLEY CITY ADMINISTRATOR
**JAMES F. MILLER
LEADERSHIP AWARD**

PHOTO COURTESY OF ST. LOUIS PARK



NADIA MOHAMED
ST. LOUIS PARK MAYOR
EMERGING LEADER AWARD



THE C.C. LUDWIG AWARD for elected city officials, **JAMES F. MILLER LEADERSHIP AWARD** for appointed officials, and the **EMERGING LEADER AWARD** for city officials with less than eight years of experience were presented by the League of Minnesota Cities at the 2024 Annual Conference.

These awards honor individuals who have consistently done outstanding work to improve

the quality of their own cities as well as cities throughout the state. The 2024 winners are Waite Park Mayor Rick Miller, Apple Valley City Administrator Tom Lawell, and St. Louis Park Mayor Nadia Mohamed.

To learn more about these award winners, watch the videos at lmc.org/awards24.



RICK MILLER WAITE PARK MAYOR **C.C. LUDWIG** **AWARD WINNER**

Through Rick Miller's tenure as mayor of Waite Park, he's helped oversee acquisition of state and regional funds for several road projects, spearheaded the construction of major infrastructure projects such as The Ledge Amphitheater and the River's Edge Park — a premier baseball facility with national and state acclaim — and led the push for local infrastructure, such as new public works and water treatment facilities. He also advocated for the regional sales tax authorization between six St. Cloud regional cities.

Despite his efforts and dedication, he does not seek the limelight, sharing credit with city staff and others who have helped push these initiatives along, often quick with a self-deprecating joke in the process.

"I was born and raised in Waite Park, so I just want to keep doing things that are good for Waite Park," he says. "Everybody said, 'Why do you do it? It's a lot of work,' but it's not when you have good staff. I've got good staff and I always say they make me look good. Anybody can do my job when somebody else is doing most of the work."

Big projects, big progress

Among Miller's proudest moments was reclaiming property from Burlington Northern Railroad, now known as BNSF Railway, in the early 2000s. The polluted space and railroad were cleaned up, and the city built the baseball complex, which is comprised of eight parks, six of which are lit. It's been a boon to the area.

"That brings a lot of tournaments and a lot of people from not only Waite Park, but out of state," he said.

A few years later the amphitheater further "put Waite Park on the map," he said.

Throughout all the growth and development, colleagues note that Miller has never sought praise for his efforts. Miller has been involved in everything, but he never seeks recognition and it's all for the betterment of the community, according to Jon Noerenberg, who has worked with Miller for nine years as the city's planning and community development director.

"He is nothing but a fantastic leader for the city," Noerenberg said. "He's always been a booster for Waite Park and he acknowledges that what's good for the city does not always come quickly."

Noerenberg pointed to the development of two hotels and the Park Event Center in Waite Park. Miller took a long-term approach that involved ensuring that city residents who would be displaced by the project were treated as fairly as possible. The results of that initiative have been tremendous for the city and region, but he also helped people find alternative living arrangements.

"That's become a pretty good example of redevelopment for our city," Noerenberg said. "It's a difficult thing to look at a project that involves relocating people. He helped a number of people. That was a heavy lift for the city to work with all that and then the private partners for the development, as well."

History of service

His first tenure as mayor ended about the same time he retired from his day job in 2001 as a network technician for the telecommunications company now known as Lumen Technologies.

He had been mayor since 1996 and was ready to step aside from public life.

"Everybody always said 'what made you run for mayor,'" he said, adding jokingly, "I always say 'there was nothing else to do in town.'"

But on a serious note, he'd already built a reputation for service. He spent a dozen years working in the Navy before beginning with the city. His dad was a volunteer firefighter, so he did that, as well.

His desire to stay retired changed in 2007 when he decided to wage a write-in candidacy to retake the may-

oral role. He won and has maintained the seat ever since.

Regional reputation

While he's done well for Waite Park, peers in surrounding communities admire his selflessness and say he does a great job of working for the region as a whole.

When Rick Schultz was elected mayor in St. Joseph, he said one of the first calls he received came from Miller. Schultz said Miller helped him understand how the six cities surrounding St. Cloud could work together.

He cites Miller's efforts to extend the Lake Wobegon Trail into Waite Park and the City of St. Cloud as a catalyst for the creation of The Ledge Amphitheater as a destination entertainment facility.

"You had to get BNSF involved, you had to get Stearns County involved, you had to get St. Joseph Township involved, you had to get the city of St. Cloud involved and, on top of that, we had to get our state senators involved to negotiate with BNSF," Schultz said. "It took a while — four to five years. Rick really wanted to get that done. It was very complicated."

Miller also has worked hard to collaborate among six cities surrounding St. Cloud, Schultz said, adding that specifically, Miller advocated strongly for money from a half-cent sales tax collected by these cities to be dedicated to entities like libraries and the St. Cloud Regional Airport for the betterment of each.

"Rick was very vocal about what he wanted to do with that," Schultz said. "He has the best temperament. I would call it a good balance between trying to force your way through some political issues versus keeping it light and keeping everybody moving forward."

Ready for retirement

Now, as the city works on plans for expanding its City Hall to create more space for the police department, Miller is making plans for retirement when his current term ends. There are Council members interested in the position and he thinks this time it will be for real.

But as usual, he's quick with a joke.

"I will definitely tell them they better not have me come back," he said.

(continued on page 10)



TOM LAWELL

APPLE VALLEY CITY
ADMINISTRATOR

JAMES F. MILLER LEADERSHIP AWARD WINNER

When Tom Lawell started working with the small-but-growing City of Apple Valley as an intern in 1984 it was no ordinary internship. The city was growing fast, and he immediately jumped in on development-related activities such as analyzing tax increment financing as a tool for economic development, creating a partnership for the city's cable television operations, and working on a collaborative ambulance joint venture with Lakeville and Farmington.

"We did a joint powers agreement between the three cities, and I was Apple Valley's lead staff person helping to get that launched," Lawell said.

They quickly hired the entity's first executive director, added paramedics, acquired equipment, and began delivering the service.

"It was an amazing opportunity to learn how things work," he said. "That's really what I like about local government — the things you do matter immediately."

Left and came back

Lawell moved up the ranks quickly, becoming administrative assistant in 1985 and assistant city administrator in 1986. He left to become city administrator in Mendota Heights in 1990 and

then became the first ever city manager in Sequim, Washington in 1995. But when he and his wife began starting their family, he returned to Apple Valley as city administrator in 1999 and he's never left.

"Not many people get a chance to work in a community for a long time, leave for 10 years and then come back again," he said. "It's been a good experience all around. Apple Valley is blessed to have amazing elected officials and staff members. I just love the profession and being able to do what we do to help our community thrive."

Through his second tenure, Lawell has also been executive director of the Apple Valley Economic Development Authority and has overseen tremendous growth, with the population increasing from 45,000 to 56,500 since he became city administrator and the number of housing units available increasing from 19,000 to 21,650.

Planning ahead

He played a role in formulating and executing city comprehensive plans for 2010, 2020, 2030, and 2040, and oversaw during his tenure the addition of new city infrastructure, including the Apple Valley Municipal Center, Apple Valley Transit Station, Fire Station No. 2, and Municipal Liquor Store No. 3, much of which was built in a sustainable, environmentally friendly way.

"Having a long-term leader like Tom be involved in the Apple Valley community has been a stabilizing force for all the growth that Apple Valley has had

over the preceding 20 years," said Rotary Club President Bill Butler.

Finding partners

While being a steward for Apple Valley, Lawell has also become known as an advocate for collaboration among local governments. He and his staff have been instrumental in creating more than 50 joint service agreements and he's been the long-time chair of the Dakota County Managers Association, a group that meets regularly to discuss solutions to various common issues, one of which these days is the implementation of new cannabis laws.

"I'm always looking for the most efficient and effective way to deliver a service," he said. "A lot of times, partnerships make all the difference in making that happen. I'm a strong proponent that all of us are smarter than any one of us. So, collaboration really makes us all better."

In the mid-2000s, Lawell helped lead the development of the High-Performance Partnership, a cooperative among cities in Dakota County dedicated to pursuing collaboration that would reduce the cost-of-service delivery for residents. He also recognized the need for and helped create Dakota 911, the emergency communications center for all of Dakota County.

Apple Valley Mayor Clint Hooppaw said Lawell's long-term vision and planning efforts and his ability to make residents feel as though they have been heard, even if they aren't agreed with, are part of what makes him a strong leader.

Hooppaw cited the recent need to begin renovating roads that were approaching 50 years old. The city had to figure out how to pay for full-road replacement and began planning for that years in advance so they could be paid for as part of a regular tax levy rather than through a large special assessment to residents and businesses.

"It's easier to chunk a little bit monthly than it is to have great big bills show up," he said. "It never sounds exciting when you say this, but it's that consistent leadership and long-term vision that make all the difference."

NADIA MOHAMED

ST. LOUIS PARK MAYOR

EMERGING LEADER AWARD

In 2023, with backing from several heavy-weight state political figures like Lt. Gov. Peggy Flanagan and Congresswoman Ilhan Omar, Nadia Mohamed was elected the first Somali mayor in the U.S. and the first woman of color elected to the role in St. Louis Park.

She'd already been on the City Council since 2019 when, at 23, she became the city's youngest council representative on record. Before that, she had served on the police department's Multicultural Advisory Committee.

But Mohamed's career in service in some ways kicked off well before that when, at the age of 10, her family came to the United States from Somalia and she began translating for her parents to help them navigate their new home.

"I don't regret that and don't look back and wish I hadn't experienced that," she said. "It's that very experience that has led me to want to advocate, to want to be able to navigate this complex system for people who don't know how or don't have the time to do it."

Diversity efforts started with policing

She was an effective and valued member of the Multicultural Advisory Committee, said Police Lt. Mikael Garland, who praised her work and her support of the department.

"Nadia was an invaluable asset, working toward the betterment of the community and connections with the police department," he said. "She has shown a remarkable ability to collaborate with others, listen to diverse perspectives, and drive change. Her efforts have had a measurable impact on the lives of our community members, and she has played a pivotal role in advancing the goals and initiatives of our police department."

Mohamed is proud to have played a role in ensuring the department is making the effort to better hear from all factions of the community.



"They put together this multicultural group," she said. "I got to join it and that's how it got started."

Inclusion has been a part of her focus in her roles as city councilor and mayor, as well, say colleagues, who add that her affable personality has helped move this and other issues forward within the city.

"Diversity, equity, and inclusion are not buzzwords for mayor Mohamed," said City Manager Kim Keller. "They are baked into who she is. She trains on diversity and inclusion all day at the state."

Her efforts at connecting people through events, classes, and conversations earned her the St. Louis Park Human Rights Award in 2018.

Other goals and interests

Mohamed has also been an equity specialist at Robbinsdale Area Schools and is now a diversity, equity, and inclusion specialist at the Minnesota Department of Human Services.

"I think Mayor Mohamed's commitment to diversity comes from her lived experience, not just as a Muslim woman and coming from an immigrant family but also her diversity of experience in the health and human services field," said Rep. Cheryl Youakim, DFL-Hopkins.

In addition to her inclusion and public safety efforts, Mohamed is proud of the work she's put in revamping how the city's boards and commissions operate so they work better for the public.

She has also become an advocate for affordable housing, in particular, supporting the city's first-generation home ownership and payment assistance programs.

Mohamed said she'll serve the city as long as the city wants her and then figure out the future later. But for now, she's immensely popular with the Council and colleagues, who say she's smart and friendly, knows when to be serious, but also realizes it's OK to have fun sometimes.

"It's been a pleasure to know Nadia for at least a decade and I look forward to every time we come in contact," Garland said. "She's a great person."

At a young age, she's taken on leadership roles that would be difficult for even those with greater levels of experience.

"It's really hard to be an elected official, to stand up and say I want to take on this difficult job," Keller said. "And she does it with grace and humility."

Pressure to succeed?

So, as a young Somali woman accomplishing many firsts, does she feel pressure to excel? She takes it in stride, recognizing that she is carrying a banner for folks who will follow but is not doing so alone.

"It's been a whirlwind, but it's been steady," she said. "I have been fortunate enough to be surrounded by an amazing support system, both with city staff, my mentors, my friends, my family. It kind of feels like you're lifted off your feet." 📺

Andrew Tellijohn is a freelance writer.



Shaping the future, one project at a time

Working with communities to build what's next in infrastructure
— the places, spaces, and systems that support our lives.

wsb
wsbeng.com




**Minnesota
Healthcare
Consortium**
Participating Minnesota Service Cooperatives



The Minnesota Healthcare Consortium is a partner in bringing cities, counties, and schools customizable health insurance plans at competitive pricing, along with extensive wellness resources to keep your staff happy and healthy.

VISIT [MNHC.GOV](https://mnhc.gov)

PUBLIC Art

BRINGING VIBRANCY TO CITY SPACES

BY RACHEL KATS

Throughout Minnesota there are many cherished city-supported art events, projects, and installations. These city-supported public arts projects and programs play an important role in fostering community and can beautify spaces, lead to economic growth, and help showcase a community's spirit or character.

Public artwork often begins with community engagement efforts, according to the Minnesota State Arts Board. Community members share how they want their city to be known and determine what values, traditions, or stories are most important to convey. Develop-

ORGANIZATIONS LIKE THE MINNESOTA STATE ARTS BOARD OFFER A VARIETY OF GRANT FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES. TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THEM, VISIT THE STATE ARTS BOARD WEBSITE AT [ARTS.STATE.MN.US](https://arts.state.mn.us).

ing this shared identity can help facilitate positive conversations and connect residents. Other ways public art can benefit cities include:

Enhancing public spaces and revitalizing areas. Public art can transform mundane or overlooked areas into vibrant and attractive spaces. It also plays a crucial role in revitalizing areas that have suffered from decay or neglect. By adding beauty and interest, these artworks can stimulate increased property values, and improve the overall quality of life.

Creating destinations and raising visibility. Iconic public artworks can become landmarks and destinations, attracting visitors, new residents, and businesses to contribute to the local economy.

If you're interested in bringing more public art into your city, these seven examples can provide ideas and inspiration.

Eden Prairie

Eden Prairie's public art program includes a rotating art series that awards artists the opportunity to have their works displayed in the community for one year. The project began as a rotating sculpture series, but the annual juried process has expanded to include multiple artforms and permanent installations throughout the city.

A few of those permanent installations are located at Staring Lake Park, including a mosaic installed on the Staring Lake Park Building, and a nearby ground mural, which transforms a walking path into a Mississippi River ecosystem that is integrated with the park's playground.

Learn more about Eden Prairie's public art program at edenprairie.org/PublicArt.



"River Rapids" by Liv Novotny and Ramon Madden



"Biodiversity and Belonging" by Chloe Rizzo



Hopkins

Public art in Hopkins contributes toward a shared perception of the arts as an integral part of community life. Since 2010, the core of the city's public art programs, ArtStreet, has made visual arts accessible to all residents and visitors. ArtStreet was joined by The Artery in 2018, a bike, pedestrian, and vehicle connection studded with numerous permanent artworks along 8th Avenue South between the future METRO Green Line Extension Light Rail Transit Station and the city's historic downtown. Then in 2023, two murals by national artists were completed, with two more on the way in fall of 2024.

Hutchinson

Hutchinson's 11th annual Sculpture Stroll, curated by the Hutchinson Public Arts Commission, is enchanting residents and visitors with an immersive outdoor gallery experience. Featuring an eclectic mix of styles and themes, the Stroll includes 13 rotating sculptures displayed downtown and in city parks and public spaces, including the historic downtown district, Crow River, and Luce Line State Trail. The event encourages exploration of the city's parks and trails and features Judge's Choice and People's Choice awards to recognize exceptional talent. The Stroll also includes 15 permanent artworks of varied mediums that have been installed at public parks and other locations around Hutchinson to further enhance the already stellar park system and downtown area.

PHOTO BY JUSTIN BECK



PHOTO BY JESSICA HANEVLIK, MANKATO



Mankato

The Silo Art Mural in Mankato is a vibrant celebration of local culture and history, commissioned as part of a community revitalization effort. Created by renowned artist Guido van Helten, the mural transforms an old grain silo into a dynamic canvas, depicting scenes that reflect Mankato's agricultural roots and community spirit. Funded through a combination of local grants and private donations, this striking artwork has become a focal point for visitors and residents alike, sparking pride, and drawing tourists to the area. The mural not only beautifies the landscape but also strengthens community identity and fosters local engagement.

North St. Paul

Creating community through public art and cultural expression is the mission of North St. Paul's Arts and Culture Commission, and the Snowy Statues project was a perfect fit.

The statues play off the city's iconic giant snowman statue and give businesses around the city a chance to sponsor a statue and show city spirit and promote their business through art. The city asked artists to submit ideas on how to design and decorate the statutes. A wide range of submissions were received reflecting the city's diversity and creativity. The final eight statute designs were then chosen by the Arts and Culture Commission.

The Snowy Statues project generated a lot of excitement within the community, with many people attending the unveiling party, locating all eight statues, and even high-fiving each of the statues on their morning run around the city.

PHOTOS BY AVA GRIEMERT





Rochester

This mosaic, installed in May 2024 at the new Soldiers Field Aquatics Center entrance, is one of Rochester's newest public art pieces. Local artist Mary Beth Magyar designed it as a friendly, welcoming, and colorful meeting spot. Students from Apex, a recovery program within the Alternative Learning Center, fourth graders and staff from Riverside Elementary School, and immigrant community members from Intercultural Mutual Assistance Association helped cut tiles and glue pieces, giving people hands-on involvement. This is one of dozens of art installations the city has undertaken in the last few years, adding additional vibrancy to the community.




Mural by artist Taylor Bermann, 2023



Mural by artist Adam Turner, 2023

Stillwater

The City of Stillwater was approached by local business owners concerning the condition of an alley known informally as "garbage alley." The local businesses proposed that the city allow murals in the alleyway as well as outdoor seating. Stillwater was excited about the public-private partnership

and worked with them to allow for the creation of Union Art Alley. Business owners partnered with ArtReach St. Croix to create a new vibrant arts hub in Downtown Stillwater. Learn more about the project at union-artalley.com/committee. 

Rachel Kats is publications and web editor with the League of Minnesota Cities. Contact: rkats@lmc.org or (651) 215-4032.

Seeing things from a long-term PERSPECTIVE

"Your improvements plan should be a living document. With just a few clicks you can reprioritize for today and prepare for the future."

Jacob Strombeck, AE2S Engineer



Water Engineering and Beyond

Building Minnesota Communities

Together, it's what we do!

Economic Development & Redevelopment • Continuing Disclosures
Financial Management Planning • Debt Planning & Issuance
Investments & Treasury Management • Interim Staffing
Arbitrage Consulting • Paying Agent Services



ehlers-inc.com



(800) 552-1171

The information provided in these materials does not create or imply any fiduciary relationship. It is solely for the purpose of marketing our services to you.
For complete disclosures, visit www.ehlers-inc.com/disclosures.



A PROVEN PARTNER TO MINNESOTA COMMUNITIES



Integrated Design Solutions

Learn more about our integrated team approach
to building and site design at tkda.com



Engineering | Architecture | Planning

State Housing Aid Programs

What Cities Need to Know

BY KEITH DAHL AND DAN TIENTER

Establishment of the Local Affordable Housing Aid (LAHA) and Statewide Affordable Housing Aid (SAHA) by the Minnesota Legislature provides cities with much needed funding for affordable housing. While communities with populations greater than 10,000 will receive funds directly from the Minnesota Department of Revenue (paid in two installments on July 20 and Dec. 26), cities outside the seven-county metropolitan area with populations less than 10,000 may access funding through a competitive grant process with the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency (Minnesota Housing). As cities begin to deploy these resources and navigate reporting requirements, there is essential information you need to know.

Spending requirements

In 2024, the Minnesota Legislature clarified the spending requirements for the two state housing aid programs. Cities receiving direct housing aid must commit the funds to qualifying projects by Dec. 31 in the third year after receipt and spend the funds by the fourth year after receipt. For instance, a city receiving direct aid in 2024, the year of receipt would be Dec. 31, 2024. You would then have until Dec. 31, 2027, to commit the funds and Dec. 31, 2028, to spend the funds.

So, what does “commit” mean? While Minnesota Housing hasn’t released guidance on this question yet, cities should presume it means an action that legally requires payment, such as a contract. If a city council simply passes a resolution to dedicate the aid for an activity, it may not meet the threshold of committing the funds.

Cities must return any unspent funds to Minnesota Housing. Under state statute, absent the funds being spent on an eligible project within the timeline, a city

may also consider the funds spent if both of the following conditions are met:

- ▶ Certifies to Minnesota Housing it is unable to spend the aid due to factors beyond its control.
- ▶ Deposits the funds into a housing trust fund. Although this process achieves compliance with spending requirements, state statute stipulates that any transferred funds may only be spent on allowable uses for the original housing aid. To prevent the return of funds to Minnesota Housing, all cities receiving funds directly should create a housing trust fund.

Additionally, legislation passed during the 2024 legislative session requires that affordable housing aid under the LAHA and SAHA programs must supplement and not replace any existing resources the city dedicated to affordable housing, such as Community Development Block Grants, the HOME Investment Partnerships Program, and levy dollars of an economic development administration or a housing redevelopment authority (HRA). While many cities may not have existing affordable housing assistance or expenditures, it’s important to be aware of this requirement and determine whether it applies to your organization.

Accounting practices

Given the legal restrictions and reporting requirements, cities should avoid depositing these funds into the general fund. Instead, any city receiving housing aid should establish a special revenue fund such as a local housing trust fund. Communities receiving direct funds should establish the housing trust fund now, while those cities that must apply for housing aid may opt to wait until shortly before the receipt of funds after award from Minnesota Housing. In either case, cities must track allocations and expenditures from LAHA and SAHA on an annual basis to comply with spending and reporting requirements.

When developing the accounting structure, a city may want to establish departments or divisions for ongoing programs (e.g., rental assistance) and project accounts for limited or one-time activities (e.g., housing project assistance), depending upon the capabilities of the accounting system.

Lastly, while the guidance to-date lets cities deposit their housing aid directly

into a housing trust fund, they should use a distinct special revenue fund and only transfer funds after receiving approval from Minnesota Housing. Generally, this approach will allow cities to better account for and report on their housing aid allocations and activities.

Reporting


Beginning in 2025, housing aid recipients must submit annual reports to Minnesota Housing by Dec. 1. The report will be required to provide the following documentation:

- ▶ Certification affordable housing aid will supplement and not replace.
- ▶ Relevant documentation of locally funded housing expenditures in two prior years.
- ▶ Qualifying projects completed or planned.
- ▶ Location of unspent funds.
- ▶ Inability to spend on a qualifying project prior to the deadline.
- ▶ Accessibility requirements for housing projects that are four or more units.
- ▶ Relevant resolution and certifications for market-rate developments (SAHA only).

Ineligible costs

While housing aid provides broad flexibility for cities to preserve existing housing stock and construct new housing options, it’s important to be aware of the following ineligible costs:

- ▶ Costs to create a housing improvement area.
- ▶ Staff and services related to general housing quality and licensure.
- ▶ Staff and administrative costs for operation of an HRA or county or city housing department.
- ▶ Commercial, industrial, or public space development projects.
- ▶ Projects located outside of Minnesota.

The resources provided by LAHA and SAHA will give cities a powerful tool to respond to the ever-growing need for affordable housing options in their communities. As with any new financial resources, cities will need to use them thoughtfully and thoroughly understand the allowable uses and reporting requirements. 

Keith Dahl and Dan Tienter are municipal advisors with Ehlers (ehlers-inc.com). Ehlers is a member of the League’s Business Leadership Council (lmc.org/sponsors).



RATWIK, ROSZAK & MALONEY, P.A.



Trusted legal advisors providing straightforward solutions to Minnesota cities.

444 CEDAR STREET, SUITE 2100 | SAINT PAUL, MN 55101
612-339-0060 | ratwiklaw.com

Find us on social media



DRINKING WATER.
WASTEWATER TREATMENT.
WATER RESOURCES.

SOLVING YOUR MOST PRESSING WATER CHALLENGES.

With SEH, you are a true partner and collaborator.



Building a Better World for All of Us®

Engineers | Architects | Planners | Scientists

800.325.2055 | sehinc.com/subscribe

NORTHSTAR
TRUCK SALES
320-281-6059
St. Cloud, MN

We have a Nice Inventory of
PLOW TRUCKS!
Call Today for the
BEST Selection!

by11me



2012 INTERNATIONAL WORKSTAR 7500 105K mi, Very Nice 1 Owner Plow Truck 12' 1-way Plow, 9' Wing Blade, Belly Blade, 11' Stainless Dump, Stk# 2093 \$87,500

by45zw



2012 INTERNATIONAL WORKSTAR 7400 29,393 mi, Low Miles on a Nice 1 Owner Plow Truck 12' 3-way Plow, 10' Wing Blade, 10' Dump, Belly Blade and inbox Sander, Stk# 2165 \$97,000

cb47jn



2004 STERLING L8500 50,683 mi, Low Miles on a Very Nice 1 Owner Plow Truck With a 11' 3-way Plow, 10' Wing Blade, Belly Blade, 10' Dump and Sander, Stk# 2787 \$49,500

bz51bf



2006 STERLING LT9500 Cat, 224K mi, Very Nice 1 Owner Tandem Axle Plow Truck With a 12' 3-Way Plow, 9' Drivers Side Wing, Belly Blade, 14' Stainless Dump and Sander, Allison Auto, Stk# 6403 \$49,500

cb47jo



2011 FREIGHTLINER M2 106 63,500 mi, Very Nice 1 Owner Plow Truck, 12' 3-Way Plow, 10' Rear Mounted Wing Blade, Belly Blade and 10' Dump, 8.3L Cummins, Allison Auto Trans, Stk# 5671 \$129,000

Nationwide Delivery Available! • www.northstartrucksales.com

Managing PFAS Concerns in Your Community

5 COMMON RESIDENT QUESTIONS

BY MILES JENSEN

It's in the headlines, across social media, and a growing topic of unease around the dinner table — per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). The number of people who are not only aware of PFAS but actively engaged in learning more about how these “forever chemicals” are impacting the health and safety of their families and communities is quickly increasing. Being prepared to address resident concerns will help foster trust and engagement to tackle PFAS head-on as a united collective.

QUESTION 1: Do we have PFAS in our community?

Before considering this first question, it's important to have an educated, basic understanding of what the broad term of PFAS encompasses, where it has been found, the risks associated, etc. Reliable resources for this include the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Minnesota Department of Health, and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency.

The CDC has recognized that most U.S. residents have been exposed to PFAS in some form — it has been found in all 50 states and in the bloodstreams of 97% of U.S. residents. So, it's safe to say your answer to this first inquiry will be “yes.” Begin from a place of honesty by recognizing that PFAS is now everywhere.

QUESTION 2: What are we doing as a community to protect ourselves or clean up any known contaminants?

Community members will want to know you have developed a plan with actionable items to combat PFAS. This is your opportunity to highlight steps your municipality is taking to implement best practices and share additional efforts to identify potential risks. These may include:

- ▶ Improvements to your water treatment system to administer PFAS-testing practices and remove these chemicals from drinking water.
- ▶ Any steps you are taking to engage and work with industries in your area that have historically used PFAS, while learning more about phase-out measures, disposal methods, and safer alternatives.
- ▶ How your wastewater management facility is combating PFAS so as not to cause further environmental exposure.

QUESTION 3: Am I at risk for contamination, and what are the potential health impacts of PFAS exposure?

The EPA has stated that current scientific research shows a range of adverse health effects linked to PFAS exposure. While the exposure risk for most individuals is relatively low, the range and severity of these outcomes will depend on the level and length of exposure. The impacts of PFAS will be felt differently in each community based on location, air conditions, water quality, proximity to exposure sites, etc. Doing your due diligence by seeking advice from local authorities, universities, environmental agencies, and health professionals will inform your plan to manage PFAS and build a reliable network to consult with as information changes.

QUESTION 4: How is our community being informed and educated about PFAS risks?

Having a plan to keep residents informed about PFAS regulations and guidance is essential to establishing a trustful relationship. No matter where you're at in the development of a communication plan, reliable and timely updates need to be put in place. Additionally, providing a point of contact who can be easily reached and dependably respond to

resident questions is a key part of this process.

Your methods of information distribution will depend on the needs of your community. Possible tools you can use to communicate with residents include:

- ▶ Building a webpage on a community website.
- ▶ Holding community meetings virtually, in person, or both. Consider inviting local experts from health, environmental, or academic institutions to participate in Q&A discussions.
- ▶ Mailing out informational brochures in several languages.
- ▶ Utilizing local news outlets.


QUESTION 5: What can I, as a citizen, do to help?

The wonderful thing about establishing open communication is it builds a connected community where members feel activated, engaged, and eager to get involved. Because of this, offering residents practical steps they can take in their daily lives to minimize exposure will provide a sense of control and choice while yielding long-term benefits.

Here are six easy steps residents can take to avoid using and spreading PFAS:

- ▶ Instead of using nonstick cookware, consider using ceramic-coated or PFOA-free cookware.
- ▶ Avoid using dental floss that contains the chemical PTFE.
- ▶ Make your own popcorn; most microwave popcorn bags contain PFAS.
- ▶ Make sure your outdoor or hiking gear is PFAS-free.
- ▶ Bring your own to-go food containers to restaurants.
- ▶ Research the names of common PFAS chemicals and read product labels, especially those with stain-resistant coatings, to limit PFAS exposure.

Challenging? Yes. Impossible? No.

PFAS is a daunting issue to tackle, so don't try to do it alone. Reach out to professionals in the field to help build an actionable plan based on the unique needs of your community. Remember that PFAS is something that can be managed, mitigated, and eventually overcome. 

Miles Jensen is a senior project manager and water engineer at SEH ([sehinc.com](https://www.sehinc.com)). SEH is a member of the League's Business Leadership Council (lmc.org/sponsors).

ACCOUNTING | CONSULTING | FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT | LONG-TERM PLANNING

Lighting the path forward for Minnesota Cities



abdosolutions.com info@abdosolutions.com



The logo for ISG, consisting of the letters "ISG" in a bold, blue, sans-serif font, centered within a white square.

From government facilities to
parks, streets, and utilities,
**ISG IS PROUD TO SERVE
MINNESOTA CITIES**
with planning and design solutions.



Architecture + Engineering + Environmental + Planning
ISGInc.com



Staying Social: Tracy Creates More Ways for Residents to Mingle

BY HEATHER RULE

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the City of Tracy recognized that its residents were tired of being cooped up. As a result, the city implemented multiple social infrastructure projects to get people out and socializing again, according to Tracy Public Library Director Val Quist.

“We also wanted to encourage positive relationships with local government,” Quist said. “So, we decided to start trying to do more community activities where everyone could just come and hang out in the park. Just be out together again.”

Tracy, a city of about 2,000 people, had a proactive City Council and staff that established these social infrastructure projects, and they kept up the opportunities for community engagement even following the pandemic. The new events, most notably, include the summer kickoff event, Burgers, Bands, and Brews, and the arts at Tracy Public Library.

Summer kickoff event

Burgers, Bands, and Brews was one of two new festivals started in Tracy, the other being Aloha Night. Burgers, Bands, and Brews is held the first Saturday in June in Tracy as a “kickoff to summer,” said Tracy City Administrator Jeff Carpenter.

This summer was the third annual event, and it coincided with the season opening of the Tracy Aquatic Center. The activities bring in people from the city and surrounding areas, and — as the event’s name would suggest — attendees are able to enjoy burgers and brews, while they listen to music from both local and out-of-town bands.

The event was another success for Tracy in 2024, and city leaders heard plenty of “thank you’s” from community members, showing their appreciation for the hard work that goes into putting on the event, according to Carpenter.

Arts programming for all ages

The public library also has been key in developing the city’s social opportunities. While Tracy has always had a fantastic library, Quist said, they’ve tried to form more partnerships over the past four years by working with the local school district and local museum to provide programming at the library for residents. Those relationships also include sharing costs and getting grants to help provide these opportunities.

This summer was the third year Tracy’s library held summer art camps for kids in three age groups, and it has also held multiple art classes for kids and adults. Additionally, the library started an art program with Every Citizen Counts Organization (ECCO), bringing clients with developmental disabilities into the library to do art projects with other community members.

Not only does the library foster making art, it has also started featuring it. A couple of teen art exhibitions have been displayed

PHOTOS COURTESY OF VAL QUIST



The City of Tracy has created more opportunities for residents and visitors to get together and socialize. The events include movies in the park and the Burgers, Bands, and Brews summer kickoff event.

and gallery hardware was installed in its meeting rooms for rotating art exhibits. Leaders also created a large art installation at the library in early 2024. The art project at the library is a historical portrait of days gone by, connecting residents to the history of Tracy, according to Tom Dobson, economic development administration (EDA) coordinator and community development director.

“We’ve had a tremendous influx of individuals who have no history [of Tracy] that have moved in post-pandemic,” Dobson said. “I think it’s important that we feel like it’s not a cliquish town.”

Social infrastructure projects have positive impacts

These new opportunities to socialize have had positive effects on Tracy. For instance, on a Tuesday afternoon in June, “the whole downtown ... was full,” Carpenter said. He added that summer school was in full swing, the library held a story-time event, and the summer meals program was available at two places in town.

Quist notices how the social infrastructure has “fostered relationships between us as public figures” and the City Council and community. It brings everyone closer together with something other than city government, she added.

“Then, where there’s that more positive relationship, we’re more likely to talk to each other about other things, too,” Quist said.

Carpenter saw community members pitch in with clean-up efforts following Burgers, Bands, and Brews, with as many as 30% to 40% of event attendees helping, which cut the clean-up time from about an hour to 15 or 20 minutes.

“I think that’s a good example of how the community has come together to be participants, not just to be entertained, but to be part of it,” Carpenter said.

He added that Tracy would like to continue to have these social events so residents can enjoy things right in the city, especially on weekends.

“We’re trying to keep our downtown as lively as possible,” Carpenter said. “We want to be able to offer things so that people stay here in town.” ☑☑

Heather Rule is a freelance writer.



Extensive public finance
experience to help communities
innovate and grow.

Mary Ippel (612) 977-8122
Maren Magill (612) 977-8779
Dan Andersen (612) 977-8290

Taftlaw.com



**You don't hire engineers who are "good enough."
You hire the very best.**

Incidentally, so do we.



There is no B-Team.

ApexEngGroup.com

Show Me the Money: Get Ready for the New 2025 Rule Requiring Salary Ranges in Job Postings

BY JOYCE HOTTINGER

In the 2024 Minnesota legislative session, a new law promoting pay transparency was included in the omnibus labor bill. Starting Jan. 1, 2025, the new law will require employers with 30 or more employees to include the starting salary range, a general description of benefits, and details of other compensation (including health and retirement benefits) in any job posting.

This requirement applies to Minnesota employers, including cities, for any electronic or printed job posting. If a city uses a third party for recruitment, like an executive search firm, the starting salary range and general description of benefits is required for those job postings as well.

A “salary range” under the law is defined as the minimum or maximum salary or hourly range of compensation for a job at the time of posting based on an employer’s “good faith estimate,” but the salary range may not be open-ended. If a city does not offer a salary range, the position must list a fixed pay rate.

Minnesota pay transparency goals

This 2025 law continues to build on the state’s employer pay transparency goals. Effective Jan. 1, 2024, Minnesota prohibited employers from asking about or considering job applicants’ past or current pay during the hiring process. The law applies to all job applicants, including current employees seeking an internal promotion or transfer, and full- and part-time employees. While job applicants can voluntarily, without prompting, share past and/or current pay to negotiate higher pay, employers may not request that information.

The new Minnesota requirement that job postings include salary ranges is already in place in other states, including California, Colorado, Connecticut, Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, Nevada, New

York, Washington, and Rhode Island. Colorado was the first state to pass such a law.

Proponents of pay transparency feel that not only does including salary ranges help avoid discrimination, but it can also save time for employers and candidates

alike in the recruitment process. For job seekers, including salary ranges can help them decide if the pay range is sufficient for their needs. In a LinkedIn study, 91% of U.S. respondents say that salary ranges affect their decision to apply for a job. In addition to helping attract talent, employers that include pay ranges can save time and stress in job offer negotiations because the salary and benefits have already been laid out.


Complying with the new law

Here are some next steps cities should take to ensure compliance with the 2024 and 2025 Minnesota pay transparency laws:

- Confirm that your employment applications are not requesting previous salary information. The League’s model employment application may be a good starting place if your city has not updated its employment application in a while. Access the LMC model employment application at lmc.org/employmentapp.
- To support pay transparency efforts, employers should know if their pay and salary offers are within the market range. If it has been a while



since you reviewed your pay rates and ranges, consider participating in the Local Government Salary & Benefits Survey. Members who update their salary and benefits data by the deadline have free access to survey data. Learn more about the survey at lmc.org/salarysurvey.

- Begin reviewing your job ads to ensure they include the necessary information, like salary ranges and benefits, in order to be in compliance in 2025. The League will be updating its model job ads, so be on the lookout for some model language later in 2024.
- Ensure your hiring teams are aware of the new laws as to avoid asking applicants about previous wages, as well as making sure job postings in 2025 include salary ranges and benefit. 

Joyce Hottinger is assistant human resources director with the League of Minnesota Cities. Contact: jhottinger@lmc.org or (651) 281-1216.

Supreme Court Rules Public Camping Ordinances Do Not Criminalize Homelessness

CONSTITUTIONAL LAW

Eighth Amendment

City of Grants Pass, Oregon v. Johnson, No. 23-175 (U.S. June 28, 2024)

The facts: Grants Pass, Oregon, a city of 38,000 people, has approximately 600 people who are unhoused on any given day. Beginning in 2013, the city increased enforcement of existing ordinances banning camping in public places. The city's ordinance defined "camping" as "any place where bedding, sleeping bag[s], or other material used for bedding purposes, or any stove or fire is placed ... for the purpose of maintaining a temporary place to live." Violation of the ordinances result in increasing penalties, beginning with fines, escalating to an order barring the individual from city parks, and then to criminal trespass.

The type of case: The plaintiffs, unhoused individuals, brought a class action lawsuit arguing the ordinances were unconstitutional. Imposing criminal penalties on unhoused

people for sleeping outdoors when no indoor shelter is available, they contended, violated the Eighth Amendment's prohibition on cruel and unusual punishment. Specifically, they said camping ordinances made being unhoused a crime, rather than applying to actions

The city asked the United States Supreme Court to hear the case, **saying the ordinances did not target unhoused people or make it a crime to be unhoused, but rather were generally applicable camping ordinances.**

taken by unhoused people. The plaintiffs prevailed at the lower federal district court and at the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. The lower court found that unhoused individuals in Grants Pass were "involuntarily" homeless because the unhoused population exceeds the number of shelter beds.

The issues: The city asked the United States Supreme Court to hear the case, saying the ordinances did not target unhoused people or make it a crime to be unhoused, but rather were generally applicable camping ordinances. The city also contended it was difficult to determine whether an individual was "involuntarily" unhoused.

The court's ruling: The Court reversed, holding the ordinances did not criminalize being unhoused, but instead criminalized the act of choosing to sleep outside. The Court also

ruled the punishments under the ordinances were not cruel and unusual, as penalties were relatively minor and similar punishments exist across the country. Finally, the majority found communities need flexibility to address issues of homelessness at the local level.

What this means for cities: Cities can pass ordinances (or enforce existing ones) that criminalize sleeping outdoors in public spaces, even if the city does not have adequate shelter beds. However, cities cannot target such ordinances at unhoused individuals specifically, but rather must pass laws that apply equally to everyone.

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW

Scope of authority of administrative law judge

City of Eden Prairie v. Serafin, 7 N.W.3d 132 (Minn. Ct. App. 2024)

The facts: Travis Serafin was employed as a police officer by the City of Eden Prairie from 2000 to 2018, when the city terminated him over allegations of misconduct. Serafin was reinstated by an arbitrator, and the city moved to vacate the arbitration award. In 2021, the parties reached a separation agreement. Serafin agreed to settle all claims and the city agreed to pay Serafin a fixed amount that included Public Employees Retirement Association (PERA) contributions. In 2022, PERA informed the city that Serafin had applied for duty disability benefits for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), it had approved the application, and the city was responsible for continued health insurance coverage.

The type of case: The city petitioned for a contested case hearing under Minnesota Statutes, section 299A.465, which covers continuation of health care coverage when an officer is disabled in the line of duty. Before an administrative law judge (ALJ), the city argued the separation agreement cleared the city of that obligation but did not contest whether Serafin was entitled to duty disability benefits generally. The ALJ agreed with the city, saying Serafin waived all rights to continuation of coverage in the separation agreement.

The issues: Serafin petitioned the Minnesota Court of Appeals to review the ALJ decision, arguing the ALJ did not have the authority to determine whether someone contractually agreed to waive a claim for health insurance coverage.

The court's ruling: The Minnesota Court of Appeals reversed, saying the ALJ exceeded its statutory authority when it determined whether a claim to continued health insurance had been waived. Administrative law judges only have the authority granted in statute, but the statute states only that after an officer is eligible for duty disability

benefits, the officer's employer "shall" continue to provide health coverage.

What this means for cities: Cities cannot ask an ALJ to assess whether a duty-disabled officer has waived a claim to continued health insurance. Either party could have asked the district court, rather than the ALJ, to address the matter, but the language of the statute still seems to require employers to contribute to health coverage even in that instance.

OFFICIAL IMMUNITY

Discretionary acts

Honcik v. Norman Cnty., No. A23-1821 (Minn. Ct. App. July 1, 2024) (nonprecedential opinion)

The facts: In February 2022, a snowplow driver for Norman County, Justin Wilhelm, was clearing snowdrifts for the county. When Wilhelm approached an intersection, he saw a snowdrift just past the intersection and decided to go through the intersection without stopping with the plow blade down to clear the drift. Wilhelm did not see the car of the plaintiff, James Honcik. Honcik's car hit the snowplow and he was injured.

The type of case: Honcik filed a lawsuit against Norman County, stating Wilhelm was negligent in operating the snowplow. (The claim and court resolution are the same as if the lawsuit was brought against a city.) The county moved for summary judgment (a court-ordered judgment without a trial), asserting official immunity because Wilhelm was engaged in a discretionary act. Discretionary acts involve an exercise of indi-

vidual professional judgment reflecting the factors of a situation. The district court agreed with the county and Honcik appealed.

The issues:

Honcik asserted official immunity only protects snowplow drivers when they are actively removing snow and drivers are not exempt from traffic statutes otherwise. Wilhelm was therefore required to stop for the stop sign and not doing so was negligent.

The court's ruling: The Minnesota Court of Appeals upheld the lower court ruling. Wilhelm testified his decision to go through the intersection was to effectively plow a snowdrift. He was actively considering weather conditions and other factors. Moreover, Norman County gave snowplow drivers broad discretion and did not require drivers to follow traffic statutes.

What this means for cities: Cities should review the discretion given to snowplow drivers, including whether they are required to follow traffic statutes. A protocol that authorizes drivers to exercise professional judgment in determining the best methods to clear snow will create a discretionary duty, while one that rigidly controls a driver's actions likely would not.

(continued on page 26)



Providing Practical and Experienced
Representation to Cities for more than 75 years.



LEVANDER
GILLEN &
MILLER P.A.
ATTORNEYS AT LAW

www.levander.com | (651) 451-1831

FREE SPEECH

First Amendment

Sessler v. City of Davenport, Iowa, 102 F.4th 876, 881 (8th Cir. 2024)

The facts: Street Fest, a commercial event that drew thousands, was conducted subject to the city's approval and permitting process. The festival area was fenced in, and vendors were required to contract with event organizers. Cory Sessler, a street preacher, entered the restricted area and shared a religious message amplified by loudspeakers. Sessler's group relocated at the request of police, but the new location led to issues with vendors as Sessler's group was telling people they were going to hell and customers took offense. Sessler's group was again relocated, this time outside the fenced-in area, where they preached for an additional two hours.

The type of case: Sessler brought a Section 1983 action against the city, saying the city violated his First Amendment rights to free speech and free exercise. The lower court granted summary judgment to the city and Sessler appealed.

The issues: Sessler contended his First Amendment rights were violated when his group was asked to leave the fenced-in area because of complaints from vendors and customers.

Sessler alleged this was a "heckler's veto," where police silence a speaker to prevent violent backlash from others.

The issues: Government restrictions on speech generally must be content-neutral and cannot be based on issues with the speaker or their speech. Sessler alleged he was asked to move because of the content of his speech.

The court's ruling: The Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals agreed with the lower court, saying the city's restrictions were content-neutral and reasonable. Police worked with Sessler to find an acceptable alternative location, the issue was the volume and disruption of Sessler's speech, not the content, and Sessler was allowed to continue to preach to large crowds outside the fence.

What this means for cities: Cities should ensure that any restrictions on speech are not targeted at content. Restrictions that address the volume and disruption levels of speakers are permissible. In the event a city chooses to relocate individuals engaging in speech, it should ensure

they continue to have a space to share their message without causing undue disruption. 🗣️

Written by Lisa Needham, research attorney with the League of Minnesota Cities. Contact: lneedham@lmc.org or (651) 281-1271.




651-439-2878 • eckbergammers.com

Helping Build & Strengthen Communities



Our attorneys work to build strong relationships with Minnesota municipalities, helping them find effective solutions to the issues facing their communities.

- Civil Municipal Representation
- Labor & Employment Services
- Economic Development & Redevelopment
- Organizational Training & Consulting

CELEBRATING 75 YEARS OF EXCELLENCE
75 ECKBERG LAMMERS
 ATTORNEYS AT LAW

What Should Cities Know About Donations and Fundraisers?

Donations

Q What should cities know about donations and fundraisers?

LMC Donating and fundraising nurture cities' cooperative spirit and community. However, there are important requirements cities must follow to ensure that these activities serve to foster transparency.

Cities can accept donations (gifts of money) that are not for religious or political purposes if the council adopts a resolution by a two-thirds majority vote, accepting both the donation and the donor's terms. Cities can accept donations for the benefit of their residents; accepting donations, like making donations, must be done for a public purpose.



In most circumstances, cities cannot give away public funds as donations. Donations are treated as expenditures of public funds. To spend money, cities must

have statutory or charter authority and the expenditure must be for a public purpose.

Although cities (including city departments, like fire departments) generally do not have authority to fundraise or solicit donations, there are two exceptions.

Cities can, by resolution, allow officials and staff to solicit donations for National Night Out events that build positive relationships between law enforcement and the community.

Cities can, by resolution, allow full-time firefighters employed by the city and while on duty, or volunteer firefighters serving the city while not on duty, to solicit contributions from motorists for another charitable organization, most commonly the Muscular Dystrophy Association's Fill the Boot program.

Whenever there are questions about donating and fundraising, it is always recommended that cities consult their city attorney for their opinion and guidance. For more information, see the LMC information memo at lmc.org/donation.

Answered by Staff Attorney Josie Rosene: jrosene@lmc.org.

Wage Reporting

Q I've heard there is an October deadline for submitting wage reports for Minnesota's paid family medical leave program. What is due and when?

LMC Minnesota's paid leave program is leveraging the process that employers already use to submit quarterly wage detail for unemployment insurance (UI). This means that in October

when you submit your normal wage detail for July through September 2024, you will be meeting both your UI and paid-leave wage reporting requirements.

You may have some employees, like elected officials or election judges, who are not covered by the UI law. These wage records will need to be kept separate from those that are covered by UI. The UI program is not quite ready to accept those records yet, so it is important that you do not include them in your regular wage detail submission until paid leave and UI provide more instructions on handling this population.

Payroll deductions for paid leave will not begin until Jan. 1, 2026, and the first paid leave premiums will be due in April 2026. Additional reporting wage details can be found at bit.ly/reporting-wages.

Answered by Assistant Human Resources Director Joyce Hottinger: jhottinger@lmc.org.

Insurance Coverage

Q Is it true that the League of Minnesota Cities Insurance Trust (LMCIT) can provide coverage for nonprofit corporations?

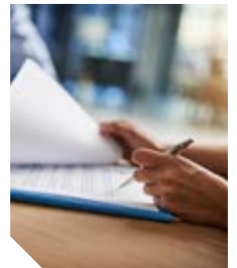
LMC Yes. LMCIT can provide coverage for some nonprofit corporations that are deemed to be an "instrumentality" of a city. Although there is no precise definition of "instrumentality," the key criteria are whether the corporation serves a city purpose, and whether the corporation's articles of incorporation, bylaws, and other documents such as contracts between the city and the nonprofit corporation, give a city a reasonable degree of control over the corporation's activities.

Common examples include nonprofit firefighting corporations, historical societies, and community festival organizations. If LMCIT determines that a nonprofit corporation is an instrumentality of a city, LMCIT can provide coverage in either of two ways:

- By adding the corporation as a covered party on the city's existing LMCIT coverage.
- By issuing separate coverage to the corporation in its own name.

If the nonprofit corporation does not meet the criteria for an instrumentality regarding control by the city, LMCIT may be able to suggest changes to the supporting documents that would establish the nonprofit corporation as an instrumentality of the city and be eligible for LMCIT coverage. Your city can have its documents reviewed for coverage determination by submitting them to LMCIT Risk Management Attorney Chris Smith at csmith@lmc.org. lmc.org

Answered by Risk Management Attorney Chris Smith: csmith@lmc.org.





THE FOUNDATION FOR A SUCCESSFUL PROJECT STARTS HERE.

Needing something short-term for a one-time project or just an extra push for part of the season? Rent what you need to get the job done right from Ziegler. From landscaping to earth moving and even power solutions, we have you covered.

Visit ZIEGLERRENTAL.COM or call 866.985.9897 to get started.

ZIEGLER **CAT** Rental



‘The Dig’ Keeps Shakopee Residents Up to Date on New Developments

BY ANDREW COONS

If you’ve ever heard your director of planning or engineering describe a new development and felt a pit welling up in your stomach as you think of all the questions residents will have about it — you’re most definitely not alone.

In Shakopee (population 45,735), we are experiencing swift growth. To keep our residents informed and help support our city staff in answering questions, we knew we needed a way to reach people with timely, engaging information. The obvious answer was video communication, which has historically proven to be a successful tactic when communicating with our community.

Aiming to inform, entertain, and support

As we developed a video series centered around new developments, three key goals rose to the top. We knew we needed to inform, entertain, and direct community members to even more information.

Informing residents meant that videos needed to hit the highlights that apply directly to them. While details about an upcoming building are helpful, the most helpful information is letting people know which roads will be shut down to accommodate construction and how long construction is expected to last. Identifying our audience and thinking about which facts are most important to them is the most crucial part of this proactive video series.

You can have all the pertinent information in the world, but if people aren’t eager to watch your video, what good is it doing you? A good video entertains the audience while informing them, and that is what drove our second goal. We made our video series entertaining through several different approaches. We branded the series “The Dig” and came up with the catchphrase, “We bring you all the dirt on the latest developments happening in Shakopee.”

We also recommitted to the consistency and branding of the video series, developing a logo specifically for “The Dig,” creating a high-energy intro sequence, and increasing the pace of the videos to match the expectations of viewers on social media.

But informing people in an entertaining way is only two-thirds of the goal. We also wanted to help direct people to the best place for them to learn more. This was accomplished by having a dedicated page on the city’s website that we refer to at the end of every video.

By visiting ShakopeeMN.gov/currentdevelopment, viewers can learn more about the project talked about in that month’s episode and learn about other projects that aren’t covered in a video. This also helps direct people with questions to a place where they can learn the vast majority of the




information they need, freeing up city staff to focus on projects rather than answering phone calls and emails. Directing viewers properly is a win-win for both our community and our staff.

The series evolves

As the series has progressed, we have made strategic adjustments, including releasing shorter, more mobile-friendly versions of “The Dig” on our Instagram page.

Perhaps the most important change we’ve made was committing to releasing monthly episodes, which we have been able to accomplish in 11 of the last 12 calendar months. Keeping information and “The Dig” branding in front of our community members regularly has grown our viewership over time, which in turn results in a more informed community.

To date, “The Dig” is one of our most viewed video series. We have shared the videos on Facebook, YouTube, YouTube Shorts, Instagram, and LinkedIn, and have seen varied levels of success on each platform, with Facebook and Instagram being the strongest. We’ve produced episodes about the new amphitheater being built in Shakopee, roundabouts, disc golf course renovations, a hospital addition, SandVenture Aquatic Park’s renovations, and more. This broad range of topics under the umbrella of “new development” has allowed us to reach different pockets of our community, from the business community to parents to senior citizens and more.

Keep “The Dig” in mind the next time your city embarks on a roundabout installation or major public amenity improvement project and know that you, too, can prevent the onslaught of resident phone calls by getting out ahead of the message. If you dig deep enough, you might just find a clever solution to keeping your community members in the loop and off the phones. 

ON THE WEB

Access Shakopee’s “The Dig” video series at bit.ly/Shakopee_TheDig.

Andrew Coons is a communications specialist for the City of Shakopee.

Owatonna Coptober Event Fosters Connection Between Officers and Area Youth



BY DEBORAH LYNN BLUMBERG

First encounters with law enforcement often aren't the happiest of affairs. A resident might get pulled over for speeding, or maybe they call the police for help after a car accident or an assault. At the same time, overall trust in the police has weakened in recent years. A 2022 Gallup poll found that only 45% of U.S. adults surveyed said they felt confident in law enforcement.

Key to building trust between the police and residents are positive encounters. One recent study showed a single positive, nonenforcement interaction with an officer can significantly improve

Key to building trust between the police and residents are positive encounters. One recent study showed a single positive, nonenforcement interaction with an officer can significantly improve a person's perception of the police and their willingness to then cooperate in the community.

a person's perception of the police and their willingness to then cooperate in the community. Over the last few years, the City of Owatonna's Police Department has taken a proactive approach to the resident-officer relationship by creating and fostering a variety of outreach programs and opportunities to forge close

ties between its community members and police.

Owatonna won a 2024 LMC City of Excellence Award for its latest program addition, Coptober, a now annual one-day event where students in grades five and under interact with law enforcement while participating in officer-led activities like fingerprinting, learning how evidence is processed at a crime scene, and experiencing the latest tools and technology used by the department.

"Unfortunately, police have to have more negative interactions," said Kris Busse, Owatonna's city administrator. "Events like Coptober enhance awareness of community programs and humanize the officers. Residents get to know them and recognize them, so that then when they see them in the community they stop and say hello."

From the seed of an idea to making it Owatonna's own

Owatonna Police Chief Jeff Mundale had the idea to start Coptober after attending a specialized training at the FBI National Academy in Quantico, Virginia three years ago. He read an article about another city's community engagement program called Coptober in a mailing he received after the training.

Mundale thought the name was catchy.

"In Owatonna, the police department participates and engages in our community quite heavily," said Mundale, who's been in law enforcement for some 29 years, "and this was another way to engage people."

He brought the name and the general idea back home to Owatonna, where a group of police officers and city staff sat down together to brainstorm police-related activities that would interest and



engage local children. They also created an event logo.

"The chief let us run with it," said Owatonna Police Captain Joshua D. Sorensen, who was part of the initial planning team. "We developed it, and we made it our own. Having positive interactions makes my job easier, and it is a good way to humanize us."

To get maximum participation, the group decided to hold the three-hour event from 9 a.m. until noon on the third Thursday of October each year, which coincides with MEA Break; during this break schools are closed so Minnesota public educators can attend a training conference.

Police and city administrators also chose to partner with the Owatonna Public Library on the event as a way to spark interest in reading and books, as well. Public libraries often have a positive association as a safe and happy place for many people. The event was held at the library, and Children's Librarian

Darla Lager read police-themed books to attendees during story time and led youth through police-themed games.

Through hands-on activities and one-on-one conversations, kids bond with officers

To advertise the event in its first year, the city printed brochures that were mailed to residents' homes, and it pushed out messages on the city's social media accounts. The local school district also helped to spread the word to families.

In its first year in 2022, Coptober drew 147 local youth who learned how to process evidence from a crime scene, saw how shoeprints were cast, dressed up in police uniforms and took photos, and had their fingerprints taken.

Children interacted with more than a dozen officers — of the department's 36 — including detectives, K9 officers, and the SWAT team. They also had a chance to look inside squad cars and get an up-close view of the departments' e-bikes, which officers explained let them more easily navigate locations where police cars can't go. The bikes are especially useful during large community events.

One officer piloted a tactical drone to show kids how the device works and explained how drones keep officers safe by exploring buildings before the police go in. Kids also saw equipment like Stop Sticks, a tool police use to pop tires during a pursuit or keep a car stationary after a police officer has stopped the vehicle.

After filling out a booklet while visiting each activity station at the event, participating children received "evidence bag" gift bags that were filled with prizes like stickers, candy, and fruit snacks.

"It's always fun when you get to interact with kids, and they ask such interesting questions," Busse said. "It's a positive, uplifting experience."

A growing program that stimulates both kids and adults

In 2023, the city budgeted \$1,500 for Coptober and it also received a \$750 grant to go toward the program from the Minnesota Chiefs of Police Association.

Funds from the grant paid for glow sticks and lanyards that officers gave to kids who attended Coptober to use while they trick-or-treated that Hal-

loween, as well as crayons and police-themed books. Children at Coptober participated in a coloring contest, too — the prizes were pumpkins grown by Sorensen's parents.

"We also have grandparents that show up filling in as caregivers who say, 'this is so fun, and I learned something new today,'" Mundale said.

Around the same number of youths attended Coptober last year. This year, the city is hoping to increase that number. In addition to helping to foster community and police relations, city staff and the Owatonna Police Department also see Coptober as a potential recruitment and retention tool.

"Right now, law enforcement across the country does struggle to get good candidates through the door," Sorensen said, "and if we can catch them when they are younger, maybe we'll be able to keep their interest."

Adds Busse, "Coptober is hopefully even encouraging that next generation to consider law enforcement."

Coptober complements a variety of programs designed to foster close connections between Owatonna officers and residents

For 2024, Owatonna designed and produced refrigerator magnets with the Coptober logo on it to hand out to advertise the now annual event. Instead of specifying a year, the magnets cite the third Thursday of October, or MEA break, making it a timeless marketing tool. Coptober in 2024 will be held on Oct. 17.

The Coptober program complements a series of events Owatonna has developed to forge close relationships between its law enforcement and residents. It's not uncommon for officers to drop by kids' lemonade stands when they're out and about or toss a football with neighborhood kids for a few minutes as they're driving around.

"Our police department does enjoy a lot of community support," Busse said, "and it is due in large part to these positive interactions that we have with our residents. We're always looking for opportunities to have that positive contact and interaction with both kids and adults in our community."

During Owatonna's "Shop with a Cop" program each December, officers pair


"It's always fun when you get to interact with kids, and they ask such interesting questions. It's a positive, uplifting experience."

Kris Busse
City Administrator
Owatonna

with youth from low-income families to shop for holiday gifts for their family members. In the past, companies like Target have donated money to the program. The officer and youth duo then spend time in the store together choosing gifts for parents or siblings.

Steele County also holds the two-day Steele County Kids Safety Camp for third graders who live in Steele County. Owatonna is the host community for the camp. Some 200 children learn safety tips around boating, fishing, fire, and the internet from local firefighters, police officers, emergency medical service workers, and other first responders. A highlight of the summer program is the last day when participants watch an Apache helicopter land nearby.

Owatonna runs a Police Explorers program too — one for youth ages 14 to 17, and another for adults from 18 to 20 — which gives hands-on experience in the basic skills that people need to work in law enforcement. The Owatonna Police Department has hired from the program in the past.

"Now, more than ever, it's an important time to continue to build that trust with our citizens," Mundale said, "and for them to see us as human beings, as parents, as brothers, as sisters. Even if we touch just a few new lives and we build just a few new connections and relationships, that is a bonus for us." 

Deborah Lynn Blumberg is a freelance writer.

ON THE WEB

Access a video of this Owatonna initiative at lmc.org/Owatonna.

**MINNESOTA'S
FIRE STATION
DESIGN EXPERTS.**

Dedicated to serving
those that protect and
serve our communities.

*Serving Minnesota
Cities since 1978*

CONTACT:

Paul Michell, AIA
p: 816.405.7585

Craig Carter, AIA
p: 217.390.3006

e: MnGov@bkgvgroup.com

WWW.BKVGROUP.COM



*We build timeless facilities
that will serve communities
for many years to come*



CONNECTING CITIES & COUNTIES

- + 16,500 route-miles of fiber network
- + Ethernet (Point-to-Point)
- + Dedicated Internet Access
- + Hosted Voice (HPBX)
- + Wavelength
- + Dark Fiber
- + Utility/Fiber Locating & Maintenance



Let's Connect

 **arvig**
arvig.com

©Arvig 2024



THANK YOU!



Business Alliance Program Members

2024

Building Relationships, Creating Partnerships That Last

Members of the League of Minnesota Cities Business Alliance help provide valuable financial support to the League, ensuring our ability to provide important research and information services and educational and training opportunities.

Find out how to join this group and reach city decision makers—

VISIT [LMC.ORG/REACHCITIES](https://www.lmc.org/reachcities)



Members of the Business Leadership Council are the League's premier partners, providing the highest level of financial and expert resources to support the organization's mission.



BUSINESS PARTNERS

Abdo
Eckberg Lammers
Gallagher
ISG
LeVander, Gillen & Miller, P.A.
Taft Stettinius & Hollister LLP

BUSINESS ASSOCIATES

AE2S
(Advanced Engineering and Environmental Services, Inc.)
Baker Tilly
Barna, Guzy & Steffen, Ltd.
CenterPoint Energy
David Drown Associates, Inc.
Flaherty & Hood P.A.
Hakanson Anderson
Hamline University
School of Business
HDR Engineering
Honeywell Energy
Solutions Group

ICS
Kraus-Anderson
Lockridge Grindal Nauen P.L.L.P.
LOGIS
McKinstry
Moore Engineering
MSA Professional Services, Inc.
National Insurance Services
RBC Capital Markets
Stantec
Stonebrooke Engineering
Ulteig
Widseth

**REGISTER
NOW!**

PUBLIC SAFETY PROFESSIONALS:

Join us for two different Safety and Loss Control Workshops this fall.

Peer Support Training



**OCT. 22-23
MANKATO**

**OCT. 29-30
PLYMOUTH**

**NOV. 6-7
HERMANTOWN**

Champion mental health and well-being in your department! In addition to the foundational concepts and skills for being a peer support team member, learn the basics of setting up and maintaining a peer support team, how to conduct defusings at your agency, and options for clinical consultation for your team.

Learn more and register at lmc.org/24peersupport

After-Action Review Training



Research shows that Minnesota's top-performing public safety agencies use an extensive and practical after-action review practice. This half-day workshop will provide you with strategies for using after-action reviews to reduce risk, improve processes, and prepare for future events in your own agency.

**OCT. 1
ST. CLOUD**

**OCT. 2
COTTAGE GROVE**

Learn more and register at lmc.org/24afteraction

