

THE ADMINISTRATOR

SHEPHERD ANNOUNCES RETIREMENT

Has served as Executive Director of NCCCMA since 2012.

After a distinguished career spanning nearly four decades in public service, Rob Shepherd announced his retirement as Executive Director of the North Carolina City & County Management Association (NCCCMA), effective June 30, 2026.

Shepherd has served as the Secretariat/Executive Director of NCCCMA since 2012, guiding the association through a period of transition, growth, innovation and strengthened partnerships. His leadership has been marked by a deep commitment to ethical governance, professional development and the advancement of city and county management across North Carolina.

Shepherd's career began in 1987 as Town Manager of Walkertown, where he served until 1990. He then became Assistant Manager and Human Resources Officer for the Town of Kernersville, a role he held until 1996. His dedication to supporting municipalities led him to the N.C. League of Municipalities, where he served as Member Services Representative (1996–2005), Director of Member Services (2005–2016)

and Assistant Director of Business & Member Development (2016–2019).

In 2019, Shepherd joined the UNC School of Government as Partnership Manager, continuing his mission to connect and empower local government professionals through education and collaboration.



“It has been the honor of a lifetime to serve the members of NCCCMA,” he said. “I’ve been inspired daily by the dedication and integrity of our local government professionals. As I prepare to step away, I do so with immense pride in what we’ve accomplished together and full confidence in the future of the association.”

As NCCCMA begins the process of selecting its next Executive Director, Shepherd will continue to support a smooth transition and ensure the continued success of the association's mission.

LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES ABOUND

Nominations open for NCLM, NCCCMA & ICMA positions.

As we approach the end of the year, several key leadership opportunities are opening for members of the North Carolina City & County Management Association (NCCCMA). These include nominations for the **NCLM Board of Directors**, the **ICMA Southeast Regional Vice**

President, and the **NCCCMA Executive Committee**.

These roles offer a unique opportunity to represent North Carolina at both the state and national levels, contribute to strategic decision-

making, and support the advancement of ethical and effective local government leadership.

Why You Should Consider Serving

ICMA Southeast Regional Vice President

Represent North Carolina and neighboring states on the ICMA Executive Board. This role includes attending regional and national meetings and serving as a liaison between ICMA and local government professionals. While ICMA has not yet released its official timeline, nominations typically open in **October**, with a submission deadline in **early January**. Interested members are encouraged to begin exploring the responsibilities and expectations of this position. This is a three-year term beginning in 2026.

NCLM Board of Directors

Help guide the League's advocacy, member services, and strategic initiatives. This year's open seat is for the **Central/Piedmont region**, defined as the area between **I-77 and I-95**. The seat is currently held by **Tasha Logan Ford**, City Manager of High Point. There is ongoing discussion about whether these regional boundaries should be reevaluated, given the concentration of managers in the central region. Term begins in April 2016.

NCCCCMA Executive Committee

Play a vital role in shaping the direction of our association. This year, there is a particular emphasis on restoring **county representation** on the Executive Committee, following recent resignations and job changes that have shifted the balance toward municipal leadership. Terms begin in June 2026.

Get Involved

Members interested in nominating themselves or others for any of these roles are encouraged to complete a [Nomination Form](#) on or before **September 30th**. Questions about any of the nomination process or any of the positions, please contact Rob Shepherd, shepherd@sog.unc.edu or 919-962-4252.

This year's Nominating Committee includes:

- **Mary Furtado**, County Manager, Catawba County (Chair)
- **Elton Daniels**, City Manager, City of Rocky Mount
- **Michael Peoples**, City Manager, City of Gastonia

NEW AI CHATBOT

Offers an easier way to navigate.

We're excited to announce that a new AI- powered chatbot is now available on the [NCCCCMA website](#), offering members and visitors a faster, easier way to find information and navigate resources.

Developed by Polimorphic, this tool has already proven successful in several North Carolina local governments, including Craven County, Rowan

County, Polk County, and Watauga County, as well as the cities of Greenville and Lowell.

Key Benefits:

- **24/7 Support:** Get immediate answers to questions using natural language.

- **Streamlined Navigation:** Quickly locate documents, contacts, and event details.
- **Secure and Reliable:** Uses only NCCCMA website content to ensure accurate responses.

NCCCMA is especially **grateful to Polimorphic**, an annual sponsor of NCCCMA, for providing this valuable resource **at no cost** to the association. Their generosity and commitment to supporting local government innovation are deeply appreciated.

Visit www.ncmanagers.org and try it out today!

REMAINING ICMA COACHING WEBINARS FOR 2025

Still lots of training opportunities left this year.

There are three remaining "live" [ICMA Coaching Webinars](#) available for 2025, listed below. All webinars are 90 minutes and will begin at 1:30 p.m. ET.

September 17: [New Job Overnight: How to Make the Successful Transition](#)

October 15: [Your Career, Your Compass: Proactive Career Development Strategies](#)

November 17: [Workforce Revolution: Trends Transforming the Workforce and What You Can't Afford to Overlook](#)

To register for the webinars individually, please click on any of the links above. To register for ALL remaining webinars, click [HERE](#).

ICMA Coaching Program webinars give local government professionals of all career stages the

opportunity to bolster skills and learn about new and leading practices, strategies, tactics, developing issues, and trends in the profession of local government management. Participation in free coaching webinars also qualifies for [ICMA-CM \(Voluntary Credentialing Program\)](#) credit.

NCCCMA is an ICMA State Coaching Program Partner which makes all ICMA Coaching resources available to NCCCMA members and members of their staff free of charge. Please feel free to share this information with anyone in your organization. Please note that non-ICMA members are required to create a [free ICMA](#) account to view the ICMA Coaching Webinars.

To learn more about the ICMA Coaching resources including access to all previous coaching webinars, please click [HERE](#).

JOIN US AT THE ICMA ANNUAL CONFERENCE

NCCCMA offering a reception and dinner.

Heading to the ICMA Annual Conference in Tampa? Be sure to mark your calendar for the **NCCCMA Reception and Dinner** on the evening of **Monday, October 27**. This year's gathering will take place at [American Social Bar & Kitchen](#), located just a few blocks from the convention center.

This is a great opportunity to connect with colleagues from across North Carolina in a relaxed and welcoming setting. Additional details will be shared as the date approaches.

We look forward to seeing you there!

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: REAGAN PARSONS

Our “Member Spotlight” offers a glimpse into the personalities and lives of you – the N.C. City & County Management Association member. Our “Member Spotlight” this month features Southern Pines Town Manager Reagan Parsons.



Birthplace? New Lexington, Ohio.

Any siblings? Younger brother Ryan, now a licensed architect in Cleveland. We were close but competitive raised in a home with high expectations. With names historically tied to “Prince/Little king” (Ryan -Irish, Reagan – Norse/Viking) as sons of Rex (king – Latin) it was a loving mother that kept things sane!

Favorite vacation spot? The next one. Currently that means the Kenya Safari/Uganda Gorilla Trek I am about to embark on.

Favorite hobby? Cooking. It’s my artistic outlet and my wife would tell you any given night might turn into a “Chopped” episode involving whatever happens to be in my chest freezer, garden and pantry that evening. My favorite pastime is travel, particularly to places I’ve never been. Having done very little of it until my twenties, my mother would tell you I’m a gypsy at heart.

Childhood dream job? Genetic Engineer. I wanted to cure the world until the realization that bureaucracy would always be in the way.

Favorite Quote? “*Knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom*” – Aristotle.

First local government job? Technically, I suppose lifeguard at age 15, but was appointed the first CAO in Wintersville, OH, following a Charter amendment three months out of graduate school September 1994. Jimmy “The Greek” Snyder’s half-brother John Synodinos was on my first Council.

Western or Eastern BBQ? Texas Beef, Memphis Ribs, and whether Eastern or Western Carolina Pork the sauce had better have some heat. I love it all.

Mountains, beach or Piedmont? Mountains, they remind me of the area I worked hard as a youth to “escape” and have grown now to appreciate in many ways.

Favorite local government hero? My (eventual) Father-in-Law William Knight was a longtime COG Director in northern Ohio, Michigan and eventually Vermont and part of my internship with his COG involved visiting managers throughout his region. That led me to switch from Hospital and Health Care Administration to Local Government Management midway through my MPA. Dr. Craig Ramsey, a professor at Ohio Wesleyan, first interested me in declaring Pre-Public Admin. as a second major to supplement Politics and Government and an Economics Minor. ... If you haven’t worked outside of North Carolina, you can’t fully appreciate how good it really is for the profession in this State.



BLUESTEIN PASSES AWAY

Taught Local Elected Officials Ethics course for many years.

The UNC School of Government is saddened to share the news of the passing of former faculty member Frayda Bluestein. Bluestein joined the Institute of Government in 1991 and served as a trusted member of the faculty for three decades.

In her prolific career at the School, Bluestein established herself as one of North Carolina's most relied upon and valued experts on governmental structure and powers, conflicts of interest, and transparency laws. Her work and expertise stretched to every corner of the state and equipped local government officials with the skills and knowledge they needed to maintain trust and credibility with the communities they serve.

"If you were lucky enough to have had the opportunity to know her, you would have seen that she was a brilliant lawyer and teacher, as well as an incredibly kind, supportive and patient person," said School of Government Dean Aimee Wall wrote in a note to her colleagues. "I loved Frayda - she was one of my best friends and she was an amazing mentor."

After graduating from UC Berkeley and completing the first two years of law school at UC Davis, she moved from California to North Carolina with her husband, John Cullen. She finished her last year of law school at UNC, where she had the good fortune to take a local government law course with Professor Judith Wegner. She was hooked. She joined a small firm with a strong local government and land use law practice, where she loved working alongside Bob Hagemann and learning from Mike Brough. She left the firm and worked at the General Assembly for a short while before ultimately joining the Institute of Government in September 1991 as an Assistant Professor. She specialized in public purchasing, contracting, and conflicts of interest and worked closely with the legendary Jake Wicker and David Lawrence. Over the years, Frayda's role expanded and evolved into more of a local government law generalist and she ultimately became the go-to expert on public records, open meetings, and First Amendment issues affecting local government. She also loved teaching *Legal Issues in State and Local Government* for our MPA students.



"Our public official students trusted her and adored her - just like her colleagues did," wrote Wall. "Shortly after Whitney Afonso joined the faculty, she surveyed her faculty colleagues to find out who they turned to for guidance and advice. She shared her findings at a faculty meeting and absolutely *no one was surprised* to see that Frayda was the big red dot in the middle of the SOG faculty network analysis. We all looked to Frayda for legal guidance, career advice, editing, and a listening ear. Without question, Frayda was at the heart of our faculty and our organization as a whole for many, many years. She cared about and served this organization with intensity, candor, and generosity. She directed the summer law clerk program, chaired the faculty recruiting committee, served as Associate Dean for Faculty Development for over ten years, and volunteered for every committee she could."

During her career, she was a fixture in several of the School's flagship courses that educated thousands of public officials, including *Municipal and County Administration*, *Essentials of Municipal Government*, the *Municipal Attorneys Winter Conference*, and *Ethics for Elected Officials*. In her name, the School launched the Frayda S. Bluestein Scholarship Fund for the *Municipal and County Administration* course. This gift-endowed scholarship

provides funding to public officials wishing to attend the course and gives first preference to those whose participation is, in part, dependent upon financial support.

Her expertise was regularly sought by state and national media outlets in matters related to transparency, public records, open meeting laws, and First Amendment issues affecting public bodies. Bluestein wrote extensively on local government authority, and her published scholarship is considered a source of record by officials across the state—and beyond.

To honor her expertise and service, Bluestein's time on the School of Government faculty was, to no one's surprise, met with many distinguished awards—one of which became her namesake:

- Albert and Gladys Coates Term Professor for Outstanding Junior Faculty Achievement (Institute of Government; 1998)
- Albert and Gladys Coates Term Professorship for Teaching Excellence (School of Government; 2004)
- David Lawrence Distinguished Professorship (School of Government; 2014)
- Grainger Barrett Award for Excellence, Government and Public Sector Section (North Carolina Bar Association; 2016)
- Ernest H. Ball Award for Excellence in Municipal Law (North Carolina Association of Municipal Attorneys; 2016). This award was renamed the Ernest H. Ball and Frayda S. Bluestein Award (2021).
- Edward Kidder Graham Faculty Service Award (UNC-Chapel Hill; 2022)

Bluestein's contributions to the School's faculty cannot be overstated. She served more than a decade as the School's associate dean for faculty development and was a mentor and friend to many of her faculty peers. Upon her retirement announcement, one colleague described her as "the heart and soul of the School."

In 2021—as she entered phased retirement from her distinguished faculty tenure—she reflected on what brought her to the School of Government.

"What drew me to this work is that it's interesting, it affects people in so many ways, and it's so practical," she said. "Academia isn't always practical. At the School, we get to work with people who are in government, but we also help people understand how government works and help people in government make it work well for its community members. I believe in that."

"Outside of the School, Frayda had a rich and fulfilling life," Wall wrote. "She grew up in a very musical family and was a gifted singer, guitar player, and clogger. Just google *The Bluestein Family* for some amazing songs, videos, and history of the band. She and John welcomed their daughter, Rachel, in 2000. If you ever wanted to see Frayda's face light up and her eyes twinkle, you would just ask her about Rachel. Her family was her true love and her heartbeat."

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The Administrator is a monthly newsletter of the N.C. City & County Management Association., a professional association of city and county managers and assistant managers from counties and municipalities throughout the state of North Carolina.

For comments or suggestions, please contact the editor, Matt Lail at 919-819-3979, or email collards12@yahoo.com.

UPCOMING EVENTS

2026 NCCCMA Winter Seminar

January 28-30, 2026
Winston-Salem

2026 NCCCMA Summer Seminar

June 25-27, 2026
Asheville

MEMBERS IN TRANSITION

If you are looking to keep up with your colleagues in the profession, be sure to check out the Members in Transition page:

www.ncmanagers.org/page/ManagerInTransitionReports

BULLYING & HARRASSMENT IS A COMMUNITY PROBLEM

The effects are real and dangerous – to employees the public and beyond.

By Jaime Laughter, County Manager, Transylvania County

Something is breaking in the heart of local government. Across towns, cities, and counties, public servants—the very people responsible for keeping our communities running every day, every week, every month and every year—are facing growing and insidious threats: bullying, harassment, and abuse on the job.

These are not isolated incidents. From clerks and code enforcement officers to public health workers and city/county managers, local government employees are increasingly reporting harassment not only from the public they serve, but also from elected officials or even colleagues. The effects are real and they're dangerous to employee well-being, to public trust, and to the long-term health of our communities.

Impact on Staff

One of the clearest signs of the damage is in the recruitment and retention crisis many local governments are now facing. Talented professionals are leaving public service. Potential candidates are thinking twice about pursuing a career that seems to mean accepting that abuse as part of the job. In many local governments, vacancy rates are climbing while applicant pools are shrinking. Local government is largely person-to-person services that don't happen if there isn't someone willing to fill the job. And it's not just about wages or benefits motivating the exodus—workers are fleeing local government career fields seeking psychological safety and the expectation of basic respect in the workplace and in the communities where they live. Who wants to work in an environment where threats are shrugged off, angry words elevate into a lack of personal safety, public meetings have become arenas for intimidation, and social media campaigns target staff by name?

The cost of this growing toxic public work culture is steep. Workers are facing personal impacts like increased anxiety, burnout, and even PTSD on top of the known mental health impacts already inherent in

many public service careers. Local governments are also paying more in turnover costs, recruitment strategies, and the loss of institutional knowledge costing tax payers more to maintain the same levels of service. Training a new employee can cost tens of thousands of dollars. When seasoned staff leave, they take years of expertise with them, leaving governments less effective, less responsive, and less cost-efficient.

Respect

Let's be clear: this is not about shielding government employees from criticism or accountability. Public servants should and do expect scrutiny. But there's a line between free speech and abuse and that line is increasingly being crossed, often by the very public they are trying to serve.

It's time for communities to take a hard look at the climate this trend has created and exacerbated with social media. What happens when even increasing pay isn't enough for workers to subject themselves to the personal impacts we are seeing? Will it take no answer on the other end of the line when we dial 911 or when there isn't a social worker to check in on a neglected child to open our eyes? That reality could be closer than we think if we don't start supporting our public workers with the same seriousness we expect in their performance.

Respect should not be negotiable. We all know toxicity drives good people away, and when that happens, the entire community suffers. Safe, respectful workplaces aren't a luxury. They're the foundation of good government.

The ability for local government employees to enjoy non-work time in their own community without personal attacks keeps the backbone of our civic lives strong.

I come from two generations before me that committed their lives to public service and I have carried that family legacy for 25 years myself. I married into the same family culture. Serving others is practically in our DNA, yet we've found ourselves

fearing our children may follow these career paths and where they may be headed. In my worst fears, that they would be victim to escalating violence that seemingly softer forms of bullying precede if they did.

Endgame?

Growing up and working, I've witnessed the frequency and intensity of attacks on public employees grow. Somehow it has become acceptable to launch personal barbs in every public comment, on social media, and even from seated elected officials—dealing unsubstantiated accusations, derogatory criticism, persecution without due process, and then expecting workers to show up on time and unphased the next day for another round. Public servants are becoming our whipping posts for anger over anything we don't

like—taxes, lack of immediate satisfaction, or partisanship when it doesn't align with our own partisan ideology. Ironically, these are all things that will get worse if the workforce evaporates and there is no one there to punish or serve.

I don't pretend that this issue is going to be easy to navigate. In many ways, this is a byproduct of larger cultural shifts that justify uncivil behavior instead of correcting it or a desensitization to empathy from behind a keyboard. My concern is that if we don't figure out how to address it for our public workers—through policies, education, or advocacy—the backbone of our communities that often gets taken for granted anyway will erode and disappear and the integrity and nobility of public service lost with it.

NOW'S THE TIME TO JOIN

Join ICMA – and attend the ICMA Annual Conference!

Starting June 25, 2025 and ending October 25, 2025, the JOIN, GO AND SAVE offer allows new ICMA members to maximize their savings with 50% off a first-year membership fee* and attend the ICMA Annual Conference at the member rate.

Save 50% on a first-year membership fee to join ICMA* **A savings of up to \$700!**

**This special offer applies to new members only. Offer ends October 25, 2025. Not valid for reinstatements or renewals.*

Attend the Annual Conference at the ICMA Member Rate! The best value rate for ICMA Members is \$890. The best value rate for nonmembers is \$1,790. After September 17, the regular registration rate for ICMA members increases to \$980; for nonmembers, \$1,960.

Becoming an ICMA Member gives you access to dozens of [membership benefits](#) throughout the year and you'll join a community of like-minded professionals at the ICMA Annual Conference, where there is a wide range of opportunities for you to engage with the people who “speak your

language” and face the same challenges day-to-day that you do.

ICMA membership is the professional community you need for the community that needs you. The ICMA Conference is the most visible platform for understanding the value of ICMA, but your annual membership offers ongoing learning and networking opportunities that benefit your career, your community, and the local government management profession.

Because we want you to consider a longer-term investment in your career and your community, we'll offer you half-off your first-year dues if you join ICMA as a member today, as well as extend the registration discounts offered exclusively to ICMA members.

Benefits of Attending the ICMA Annual Conference:

- Inspirational keynote speakers with diverse backgrounds and expertise

- New tools and techniques presented by experts in the local government management profession
- Networking opportunities with local government professionals from around the world
- [Join, Go, and Save!](#) Special Discount for New Members Only

During the event, you will experience the best of ICMA—learn new skills, explore new products

and services and connect with people who will enhance your career. The conference is an exceptional value for members and nonmembers alike.

We hope you Join us in for a one-of-a-kind networking and learning opportunity that thousands of local government managers consistently rate as an exceptional professional development experience not to be missed!

STUDY: N.C. LAGS IN CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Gaps in civics learning part of the problem.

On a national stage, North Carolina often serves as a state to watch for its purple and swingy political nature. However, its own citizens are opting out of civic engagement at higher rates than most of the country, according to the [2024 Civic Health Index](#). Ineffective civics education could be part of the problem.

Charlotte Independence High School junior April Alonso knows this firsthand. She struck out the first time she tried getting her fellow students at the Charlotte school to pre-register to vote. For her AP Government & Politics class, Alonso had to do a service project. So, she enlisted a group of friends to walk around the cafeteria at lunchtime and get 16- and 17-year olds to pre-register.

They could not have been less interested, she said.

Right now, distractions and disconnect may be winning. According to the [2024 Civic Health Index](#), North Carolina lags behind most of the country on several key markers of civic engagement.

Turnout in the 2022 midterm elections and voter registration fell short of the national average. North Carolinians regularly discussed political and social issues with friends, families and neighbors less often than in most states. In several areas — participation in public meetings, contacting public

officials and frequent consumption of political news — the state placed in the bottom 10 in the nation.

While there could be a host of reasons for North Carolina's relative disengagement, one factor is at the center of it all: civic education, or the lack thereof.

Civic education teaches students how their government works, and their place in it. If done well, it arms them with the knowledge, confidence and motivation to participate in their local communities, and demonstrates the influence they can have in governmental decision making.

But too often, civic education is pushed to the side to make way for other priorities, and what instruction remains may be watered down to avoid conflict.

In 1997, North Carolina public leaders sensed a looming crisis. They worried that North Carolina's civic education was inadequate, and would lead to a generation of citizens unprepared to lead their communities.

So they worked with the North Carolina Civic Education Consortium, within the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's School of Government, to develop a [report](#) on the state's civic health.

The report, published in 2003, centered around a phone survey of 800 teens and 800 adults, found that household income was the best predictor of civic engagement. Wealthier adults and students from high-income families were more likely to have worked with others to solve a community issue, discussed political issues at home, contacted public officials and showed interest in voting, among other civic activities.

Two decades later, these patterns persist. White North Carolinians report greater engagement than their Black counterparts in every indicator of civic health besides participation in public meetings. College-educated citizens also surged ahead of citizens with less formal education, and North Carolinians 30 and older reported significantly higher involvement than younger generations.

Education in civics should level the playing field, in theory. But, it isn't. While North Carolina's standards integrate civics into broader social studies instruction beginning in kindergarten, no stand-alone civics course exists until high school.

After the 2021 standards were released, North Carolina earned a [failing grade](#) from the conservative educational think tank Fordham Institute, which found the content, rigor, clarity and organization of the standards lacking. The report pulled no punches.

"Grades three and four target state and local government, but not in a way that is likely to promote understanding."

"...the civics standards for (fifth) grade provide dubious guidance."

"Here, again, the standards tease big concepts... but offer nothing concrete."

"Finally, although the inquiry strand includes a category on 'taking informed action,' it is thoroughly uninspiring." ...

The way students are raised by their parents and their communities is an early determinant of their eventual civic engagement. For example, if a

student's parents talk about voting, they're more likely to follow in their footsteps. If there's no community culture around participating in local politics, it may feel less important.

But formal education plays a significant role, too.

Civic education may be particularly impactful among certain groups who have fewer opportunities to develop civic skills outside of the classroom. Nearly 30% of students learn about civics only or mostly in schools, according to a [2022 report](#) by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement.

White rural youth and Black and Latino men are overrepresented in these groups. On the other hand, urban teens tended to receive higher quality civic education, including media literacy lessons, classroom discussions and service learning opportunities.

Civic education builds a student's concept of the world and their place in society outside of family, said Bryan Proffitt, former high school social studies teacher and vice president of the North Carolina Association of Educators. It is crucial that it doesn't take shortcuts, he said.

If students are able to pass a civics class by reciting the roles of the three branches of government, they're probably not going to be prepared to understand what it means to vote, follow a debate or participate in a school board meeting, Proffitt said. The world isn't "uncomplicated" or "uncontroversial," he said; effective civic education needs to encompass all of its nuance.

"There is an incredibly consequential political decision that is up in the next election," he said. "Do we have a set of people who are able to think for themselves, versus a set of people who are just going to believe whatever propaganda someone foists on them?"

This article was edited for space. [Click here to read the full article.](#)