

THE ADMINISTRATOR

LEARNING, LEADING & LASTING CONNECTIONS

Summer Seminar brings local government leaders together in Asheville.

For more than six decades, the North Carolina City & County Management Association has provided local government professionals with opportunities to learn, collaborate, and strengthen the profession of local government management. This summer, that tradition continued as members from across the state gathered in Asheville for the Association's 62nd Annual Summer Seminar.

Against the backdrop of the Blue Ridge Mountains, attendees spent three days sharing ideas, discussing emerging issues, strengthening professional relationships, and reaffirming the values that unite North Carolina's city and county managers.

The Summer Seminar has long been more than a conference. It is an opportunity to reconnect with colleagues, exchange ideas with peers facing similar challenges, and return home with practical tools that improve local government organizations and the communities they serve. This year's seminar once again demonstrated why professional associations matter and why investing in leadership development remains one of the best investments a local government can make.

Beginning Before the First Session

The seminar officially began before the opening general session, as participants took advantage of a variety of optional pre-conference activities designed to encourage networking in a more informal setting.

Members explored Asheville through a guided bus tour, experienced a guided bicycle ride through the Biltmore Estate, enjoyed fly-fishing in the mountains, participated in a guided hike along Craggy Pinnacle Trail, or competed in the annual golf tournament supporting the NCCCMA Civic Education Program. These activities reminded

participants that some of the strongest professional relationships are often built outside the meeting room.

The pre-conference workshop on Artificial Intelligence and



Local Government Innovation also drew significant interest, providing attendees with practical examples of how AI can support local government operations while emphasizing organizational readiness and responsible implementation. Rather than focusing on technology for technology's sake, presenters

explored how innovation can improve service delivery and administrative efficiency while maintaining public trust.

Learning from Western North Carolina

Perhaps no session better reflected the importance of local government leadership than the opening general session, **"Helene and Everything After: The State of Recovery in Western North Carolina."**

Nearly two years after Tropical Storm Helene reshaped communities across western North Carolina, local government leaders shared firsthand accounts of navigating one of the most challenging periods in their professional careers. Rather than simply recounting disaster response efforts, panelists discussed the ongoing realities of recovery, resilience, and rebuilding communities long after national attention had shifted elsewhere.

Attendees heard honest reflections from managers who continue balancing infrastructure restoration, financial challenges, community expectations, employee well-being, and the emotional toll disasters leave on residents and public servants alike.

The session served as an important reminder that local government managers often lead during their communities' most difficult moments. Whether responding to natural disasters, economic uncertainty, or rapidly changing public expectations, professional management remains essential to effective local government.

Governor Josh Stein, although unable to attend in person, provided a recorded welcome recognizing the work of North Carolina's local governments and the critical role they continue to play in helping communities recover and move forward.

Practical Solutions for Today's Challenges

Throughout the seminar, concurrent sessions reflected many of the complex

issues currently facing local governments across North Carolina.

Participants explored strategies for changing organizational culture, recognizing that successful organizations require intentional leadership and continuous attention to employee engagement and workplace culture. Discussions emphasized that lasting organizational change depends not only on policies but also on leadership behaviors, communication, and trust.

Another session focused on earning and maintaining public trust—a topic that continues to receive increased attention nationwide. Panelists discussed transparency, civic education, fiscal responsibility, and community engagement as essential components of effective local governance. Rather than viewing trust as something that simply exists, presenters challenged attendees to think about trust as something earned through consistent actions and thoughtful leadership.

The afternoon sessions highlighted two very different but equally timely issues.

One explored opportunities surrounding America's 250th anniversary and how local governments can use this historic milestone to strengthen civic pride, educate residents about local government, and build lasting community engagement initiatives.



The second examined one of North Carolina's fastest emerging development issues: data centers. As communities increasingly receive proposals for large-scale digital infrastructure projects, attendees heard practical lessons from communities that have approved, denied, or delayed data center developments. Discussions addressed infrastructure capacity, environmental considerations, economic development, tax policy, and citizen expectations—providing valuable insights for managers who may soon face similar decisions in their own jurisdictions.

The seminar concluded with two sessions that reinforced the profession's core values.

During the ethics session, participants worked collaboratively through real-world scenarios based upon the ICMA Code of Ethics, engaging in thoughtful discussions about the difficult decisions local government managers routinely encounter. Rather than offering easy answers, the session emphasized professional judgment, integrity, and peer learning.

The closing keynote, "**A Heart to Serve**," reminded attendees that leadership extends beyond technical competence. Effective leadership requires humility, empathy, service, and a genuine commitment to improving the lives of others. It was a fitting conclusion to a conference centered on servant leadership and professional excellence.

Beyond the Classroom

While the educational sessions formed the heart of the seminar, equally valuable were the countless conversations that occurred between sessions, during meals, and throughout networking events.

For many members, the Summer Seminar provides one of the few opportunities each year to reconnect with colleagues from across the state. These informal conversations often become opportunities to exchange ideas, discuss difficult personnel issues, compare approaches to community challenges, and build lasting professional relationships.

For newer managers and assistant managers, the seminar also serves as an opportunity to meet experienced professionals willing to share lessons learned throughout their careers. Those relationships frequently become lasting mentoring connections that strengthen both individuals and the profession as a whole.

Professional development is important, but professional community may be even more valuable. The willingness of North Carolina's managers to learn from one another—and support one another—continues to distinguish the Association.

Celebrating Professional Leadership

The Friday evening networking reception also provided an opportunity to recognize one of the Association's most respected leaders as attendees celebrated the remarkable career and retirement of former Executive Director Rob Shepherd.

For decades, Rob helped shape the Association while supporting generations of city and county managers across North Carolina. His leadership, professionalism, and unwavering commitment to ethical local government have left an enduring impact on both NCCCMA and the profession itself.

The reception served not only as a celebration of Rob's career but also as a reminder of the importance of leadership succession and investing in future generations of local government professionals.

A Community Effort

Events of this scale are never possible through the efforts of one individual.

Special appreciation is extended to the NCCCMA Program Committee, chaired by **John Hodges**, Assistant Town Manager for the Town of Garner, whose leadership helped develop a thoughtful program addressing many of today's most pressing local government issues. The Association also recognizes the tremendous behind-the-scenes work of the UNC School of Government staff—particularly **Ling Rudicil**—

whose planning and coordination ensured a successful seminar experience for every attendee.

Thank You to Our Sponsors

The success of the Summer Seminar also depends upon the generous support of the Association's corporate partners. Their investment allows NCCCCMA to provide high-quality educational programming, valuable networking opportunities, and professional development experiences that benefit local government leaders across North Carolina.

NCCCCMA extends sincere appreciation to our sponsors for their continued partnership and commitment to strengthening local government management.

Premier Sponsor

- **Civic Federal Credit Union**

Gold Sponsors

- **VC3**
- **Atrium Health**
- **Eddifice Construction**
- **Freese and Nichols**, sponsor of the conference lanyards
- **McGill Associates**, sponsor of the pre-conference bike ride at Biltmore and guided fly-fishing experience
- **WithersRavenel**, sponsor of the guided hike and conference Wi-Fi

The Association also recognizes **McAdams** as a General Sponsor for its support of the pre-conference Asheville bus tour.

Their partnership extends well beyond financial support. Many sponsor representatives participated throughout the conference, attended educational sessions, joined networking events,



and engaged directly with members, demonstrating a shared commitment to advancing excellence in local government.

Looking Ahead

As attendees departed Asheville, they returned to communities large and small carrying more than presentation materials and

conference notes.

They returned with new ideas for strengthening organizational culture.

They returned with practical solutions for emerging challenges.

They returned with renewed appreciation for ethical leadership.

They returned with stronger professional relationships.

Most importantly, they returned reminded that while every community faces unique challenges, none of North Carolina's local government leaders faces those challenges alone.

The strength of NCCCCMA has always been found in its members—the willingness to share ideas, mentor one another, celebrate successes, and work together in service of North Carolina's communities. The 2026 Summer Seminar demonstrated once again that professional excellence is built not only through education, but also through collaboration, service, and a shared commitment to ethical local government leadership.

As the Association begins planning for future conferences and educational opportunities, the lessons learned and relationships strengthened in Asheville will continue to benefit local governments across North Carolina for years to come.

‘NONE OF US SUCCEEDS ALONE’

New President Eddie Smith presents his initiatives.

The following are remarks NCCCMA President Eddie Smith presented after being sworn in during the 2026 Summer Seminar.

By Eddie Smith, NCCCMA President

What an incredible honor it is to stand before you today as President of the North Carolina City and County Management Association. To say I'm humbled would be an understatement.

I've spent nearly three decades in local government, and I've learned one thing above everything else: none of us succeeds alone.

This Association has been there for me throughout my career—as a place to learn, to ask questions, to celebrate successes, and yes...sometimes to simply be reminded that you're not the only one facing difficult days.

That's the culture I want us to continue building over the next year.

Rather than launching a long list of new initiatives, my goal is simple: continue investing in the people who make local government work.

The first is our **Incivility Initiative**.

Every one of us has watched the public service environment change. Our employees increasingly find themselves navigating angry meetings, hostile emails, social media attacks, and difficult interactions that simply weren't as common years ago.

The research confirms what many of us already know—incivility isn't isolated. It's everywhere. That's why I'm excited that NCCCMA is

partnering with Dr. Leisha DeHart-Davis and the UNC School of Government to develop practical, on-demand training that gives our employees the tools to de-escalate conflict, build resilience, and continue serving our communities with professionalism.

This isn't about teaching customer service. It's about strengthening public service. Because when we better prepare our employees, we strengthen every community we serve.

The second initiative is one that has become deeply personal to me—**Mental Health and Resilience**.

Many of you know my wife is a travel agent. She normally drags me all over the world, which does have a professional benefit of me being able to see great examples of public service or ideas in other communities. Unfortunately, my wife couldn't be here today. I asked her Tuesday, "Remind me why you aren't joining me in Asheville?" Her response, "I had a better offer." She's in Cancun.

My personal life is wonderful. But as many of you know, sometimes life reminds us that professional challenges don't stay at work.

Over the past several months, I've faced some of my own. And I made a decision I probably wouldn't have made years ago. I sought counseling.

There was a time when I believed asking for help was a sign of weakness. I was wrong. It's a sign of strength. It's a sign of self-awareness. And



it's a reminder that none of us is expected to carry the weight of this profession alone.

I'm incredibly proud of the work Mary Furtado and our committee have done to expand confidential mental health resources and peer support opportunities for our members.

If there's one thing I hope we continue to normalize, it's this: It's okay to ask for help. Because taking care of yourself allows you to better take care of your community.

Finally, I'd like to introduce one new initiative that's especially meaningful to me as a Navy veteran. I believe local government is one of the greatest places for military veterans to continue serving. Veterans already understand leadership, teamwork, accountability, adaptability, and service before self. Those are exactly the qualities our profession needs.

Over the coming year, I'll be working with Will Doefer, Brent Trout, and anyone else interested in exploring ways to better recognize veterans already serving in local government while also

encouraging more veterans to see this profession as their next mission. Because public service doesn't end when military service ends. It simply takes on a different uniform.

So let me close with this. The challenges facing local government are real. But so is the talent in this room.

So is the passion. So is the commitment. And so is the willingness to help one another. That's what has always made this Association special.

Over the next year, my hope is that every member leaves our conferences, trainings, and conversations feeling just a little more connected, a little more supported, and a little more inspired than when they arrived. Because when we invest in one another, we invest in every community across North Carolina.

Thank you for the trust you've placed in me. I look forward to serving alongside each of you this year.

Let's make it a great one.

IT'S (STILL) RENEWAL TIME

Log in to your Member Profile to pay your dues.

The N.C. City & County Management

Association (NCCCMA) would like to remind its members to renew their membership, although dues will not be considered past due until August 1st. We ask that you have an outstanding membership dues balance for the current year, please settle that outstanding balance prior to initiating your renewal.

Also, as you renew your membership, we are asking all members to verify their personal information, especially current work email addresses and phone numbers, as well as provide an alternate personal email address and personal cell phone number so that NCCCMA has an alternate way to get in touch with you.

Lastly, your continued membership with NCCCMA demonstrates your high standard of professionalism through your continued pledge to uphold the ICMA Code of Ethics. As stated in the NCCCMA constitution, NCCCMA members are governed by the ICMA Code of Ethics as a condition of membership.

Invoices have been mailed out each month beginning in May. Members can also log in to their profile on the www.ncmanager.org website to pay their dues.

MORRISVILLE: AN ALL-AMERICA CITY

Recognition bestowed by the National Civic League.

North Carolina City & County

Management Association congratulates the Town of Morrisville on being named one of the 2026 All-America Cities by the National Civic League. As one of only ten communities nationwide to receive this prestigious recognition, Morrisville joins a distinguished group of local governments recognized for strengthening civic engagement, building public trust, and fostering meaningful collaboration with residents.

The All-America City Award, established in 1949 by the National Civic League, is one of the nation's most respected honors for local governments and communities. Rather than recognizing a single project or initiative, the award celebrates communities that demonstrate inclusive leadership, innovative problem-solving, and a sustained commitment to improving the quality of life for their residents. Each year, communities from across the country submit applications highlighting local partnerships and initiatives before presenting their stories to a national panel of judges.

The 2026 award theme, "America at 250: Strengthening Civic Health and Building Trust," challenged applicants to demonstrate how they are creating stronger connections among residents, organizations, and local government while preparing communities for the future. Morrisville's selection reflects the community's ongoing commitment to engaging residents, encouraging collaboration, and creating opportunities for meaningful civic participation.

Recognition through the All-America City Award is never the result of a single department or individual. It represents the collective efforts of elected officials, professional local government

staff, community organizations, volunteers, businesses, and residents who work together to solve challenges and improve their community. The award serves as a reminder that successful local government depends on strong partnerships and a shared commitment to public service.

For North Carolina's local government profession, Morrisville's achievement is particularly meaningful. Communities across the state continue to develop innovative approaches to serving residents while navigating increasingly complex challenges. National recognition through programs such as the All-America City Award showcases the outstanding work taking place in North Carolina and highlights the professionalism

and dedication of local government leaders throughout the state.

The North Carolina City & County Management Association applauds Morrisville for this

well-deserved honor and recognizes the leadership, vision, and collaboration that made this achievement possible. The Association also extends its appreciation to the employees, community partners, and residents whose commitment to civic engagement reflects the very best of local government.

Congratulations to the Town of Morrisville on earning designation as a **2026 All-America City**. This recognition serves as an inspiration to local governments across North Carolina and reinforces the important role that professional local government management plays in building vibrant, resilient, and engaged communities.

For more information about the All-America City Award program and the 2026 winners, visit the National Civic League's All-America City program website.



MEMBER MILESTONES

Welcome to a section in *The Administrator* where we will highlight career milestones of N.C. City & County Management Association (NCCCMA) members. These milestones may include job changes, retirement announcements, educational/professional achievements, civic achievements and more. If you have a milestone to share, please send them to Nathan Lozinsky, Director, at nlozinsky@sog.unc.edu.

Here are other recent Member Milestones from across North Carolina local governments:

New appointments:

- Matthew Geelen appointed Town Manager for Pilot Mountain effective August 2026.
- Brad Guth appointed Town Manager of Lowell effective 2026.

Retirement Announcements:

- Ken Noland announced his retirement as Manager of Wilkesboro effective July 31, 2026.
- Tina Cline announced her retirement as Assistant City Manager of Kannapolis effective July, 2026.

Resignations:

- Casey Martin resigned as Davidson County manager effective July, 2026 to become Assistant City Manager for the City of Lexington.
- Ryan Thompson resigned as Pine Knoll Shores Interim Town Manager/Police Chief, effective August 2026.
- Calla Godwin resigned as Assistant Town Manager of Benson, effective June 2026



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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

2027 NCCCMA Winter Seminar

January 27-29, 2027
Winston-Salem

2027 NCCCMA Summer Seminar

June 17-19, 2027
New Bern/Craven County

2028 Joint Summer Seminar

June 22-24, 2028
Hilton Head, SC*
**Joint Conference with SC City & County Management Association*

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

LEADING THROUGH CHANGE

Why adaptive leadership matters more than ever.

By any measure, local government leadership has become more complex. City and county managers are expected to navigate workforce shortages, fiscal pressures, infrastructure needs, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, natural disasters, housing affordability, and growing public expectations—all while maintaining the confidence of elected officials, employees, and residents. These issues are rarely solved with a single policy, consultant, or technical expert. They require leaders who can guide organizations through uncertainty. That is the essence of adaptive leadership.

Frank Benest's ICMA Career Compass article, 'We Need Adaptive Leaders Now,' provides a timely reminder that leadership today is less about possessing all the answers and more about creating an environment where organizations can learn, adapt, and move forward together. Although written several years ago, its message has become even more relevant as local governments face accelerating change.

One of the most valuable distinctions Benest highlights is the difference between technical problems and adaptive challenges. Technical problems have known solutions. Replacing a water main, implementing a payroll system, or updating an ordinance generally relies on expertise, funding, and project management. Adaptive challenges are different. They involve people, values, competing priorities, and changing behaviors. No manual can fully solve employee recruitment, rebuilding organizational culture, restoring public trust, or preparing a workforce for AI. Those challenges require leadership.

North Carolina managers see this distinction every day. A county may purchase

new cybersecurity software, but protecting information also depends on employee behavior. A municipality may increase salaries to recruit employees, but retention depends upon culture, development opportunities, and leadership. Communities can secure grant funding for infrastructure, yet successful implementation often depends on collaboration across departments, elected officials, and community partners.

Adaptive leadership begins with humility. Effective managers recognize that complex issues deserve diverse perspectives. Rather than immediately presenting solutions, they ask questions, invite discussion, and encourage others to contribute expertise. This approach strengthens decisions while building ownership throughout the organization.

Communication becomes especially important during uncertainty. Employees generally understand that leaders cannot predict every outcome. What they value is honesty, transparency, and consistency. Adaptive leaders explain what is known, acknowledge what remains uncertain, and commit to sharing updates as information evolves. That openness builds credibility even during difficult circumstances.

Another hallmark of adaptive leadership is remaining grounded in values. The ICMA Code of Ethics reminds professional managers that integrity, stewardship, political neutrality, and service to the public should guide every decision. When circumstances become difficult, these principles provide a stable foundation. Decisions rooted in clearly articulated values are more likely to earn trust, even when they are unpopular.

Psychological safety also deserves attention. Organizations adapt more effectively when employees believe they can ask questions, respectfully disagree, identify risks, and acknowledge mistakes without fear of ridicule or retaliation. Innovation rarely emerges from environments where everyone is afraid of being wrong. Managers who cultivate trust create organizations capable of continuous improvement.

Adaptive leaders also embrace experimentation. Complex problems seldom yield perfect solutions on the first attempt. Pilot projects, phased implementation, after-action reviews, and continuous evaluation allow organizations to learn quickly while limiting risk. This mindset shifts the conversation from avoiding failure to accelerating learning.

Perhaps the greatest strength of adaptive leadership is relationship building. Managers succeed through influence rather than authority alone. Strong relationships with governing boards, neighboring jurisdictions, state agencies, professional associations, nonprofit organizations, businesses, and residents create networks of trust that become invaluable during crises. Collaboration is no longer optional; it is essential.

Artificial intelligence provides a timely example. AI offers opportunities to improve efficiency, summarize public comments, analyze data, and automate routine tasks. Yet successful implementation is not merely a technology project. It requires conversations about ethics, transparency, workforce impacts, cybersecurity, public confidence, and responsible governance. These are adaptive questions requiring thoughtful leadership.

Professional associations such as NCCCMA play an important role in developing adaptive leaders. Conferences, committee service, mentoring relationships, regional networking, and educational programs expose managers to new ideas and provide trusted colleagues who can offer perspective when unfamiliar challenges arise.

Leadership development is not an event—it is an ongoing practice.

Adaptive leadership is also deeply personal. It requires curiosity instead of certainty, resilience instead of rigidity, and courage instead of comfort. It asks leaders to listen before speaking, seek understanding before deciding, and remain willing to adjust course when evidence suggests a better path. These habits strengthen organizations while developing future leaders.

As Executive Director of NCCCMA, I have been reminded repeatedly that every community is unique, yet many of the challenges facing local government professionals are remarkably similar. Whether serving a rural county, a growing suburb, or a major city, managers are being asked to navigate unprecedented complexity while continuing to deliver excellent public service. The common denominator is leadership.

The future of local government will not be determined solely by budgets, technology, or organizational charts. It will be shaped by leaders who can bring people together, foster collaboration, build trust, and help organizations adapt to constant change. Technical expertise will always matter, but adaptive leadership is increasingly becoming the defining characteristic of successful public servants.

As Benest suggests, disruption creates opportunities for leadership. Every difficult conversation, organizational challenge, or emerging issue presents an opportunity to strengthen relationships, encourage innovation, and reinforce the values that define professional local government management. Those who embrace adaptive leadership will not simply respond to change—they will help shape the future of their communities.

-Nathan Lozinsky, NCCCMA Executive Director

Key Takeaways for Local Government Leaders

- Distinguish technical problems from adaptive challenges before choosing a solution.
- Communicate frequently, honestly, and consistently during uncertainty.
- Anchor decisions in professional ethics and organizational values.
- Create psychological safety so employees can innovate and learn.
- Invest continuously in relationships across your organization and community.

- View leadership development as a lifelong practice.

References

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A BLOCKBUSTER LINEUP

ICMA 2026 prepares to offer sensational speakers.

The momentum for the 2026 ICMA

Annual Conference in Long Beach continues to shatter expectations. Fresh off record-breaking opening wave of registrations, ICMA is thrilled to announce that acclaimed presidential historian, Pulitzer Prize-winning author, and global leadership voice Jon Meacham will headline the Monday General Session keynote.

Meacham will share insights into the American presidency and our shared history,



offering a non-partisan perspective for leaders navigating modern civic challenges.

Combined with Sunday's Opening General Session with Simon Sinek, this year's lineup brings two world-class leadership voices to the Long Beach stage.

[Register now](#) for both the conference and for housing. Don't miss your spot!

