

THE ADMINISTRATOR

A LEGACY OF SERVICE

Honoring Executive Director Rob Shepherd.

After more than 14 years as Executive Director of the North Carolina City and County Management Association (NCCCMA) and nearly four decades dedicated to strengthening local government across North Carolina, Rob Shepherd is retiring, leaving behind a legacy defined by service, leadership, and an unwavering commitment to the local government profession.

For many NCCCMA members, Rob has been the face of the Association—a trusted advisor, thoughtful leader, and steady presence through times of growth, transition, and change. Since assuming the role of Executive Director in 2012, he has worked tirelessly to ensure that NCCCMA remained focused on its mission of supporting excellence in local government management while fostering meaningful connections among members across the state.

Under Rob's leadership, the Association expanded professional development opportunities, strengthened partnerships with organizations such as the UNC School of Government, the North Carolina League of Municipalities, the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners, and the International City/County Management Association (ICMA), and continued to build one of the strongest state management associations in the nation. Throughout his tenure, Rob helped guide numerous Executive Committees, supported countless conference planning efforts, and served as an invaluable resource to city and county managers navigating both opportunities and challenges in their communities.

His impact, however, extends well beyond his time with NCCCMA.

Rob's career in public service began in local government, where he served as Town Manager for the Town of Walkertown before becoming Assistant Manager and Human Resources Officer for the Town of Kernersville. Those early experiences provided him with firsthand knowledge of the rewards and complexities of local government management—experience that would later shape his work supporting managers throughout North Carolina.



He then spent more than 22 years with the North Carolina League of Municipalities, serving in several leadership positions focused on member services, education, and professional development. During that time, Rob built lasting relationships with municipal officials across the state and became widely respected for his collaborative leadership style and his dedication to helping local governments succeed.

In 2019, Rob joined the UNC School of Government as Partnership Manager while continuing to serve as Executive Director of NCCCMA. In that role, he helped strengthen the long-standing partnership between the School of Government and the Association, creating new opportunities to support professional education,



leadership development, and lifelong learning for North Carolina's local government professionals.

Throughout his career, Rob has been known not only for his institutional knowledge and leadership but also for his humility, integrity, and genuine care for others. Whether welcoming first-time conference attendees, mentoring emerging leaders, assisting members through career transitions, or offering thoughtful advice to seasoned managers, he consistently placed the needs of others before his own. His calm demeanor, collaborative approach, and ability to build consensus earned the trust and respect of colleagues throughout the state.

His influence can be measured not only in programs launched or conferences organized, but in the relationships he cultivated and the countless local government professionals whose careers he encouraged and supported. Many members have benefited from Rob's quiet leadership behind the scenes—often without realizing the countless hours he devoted to ensuring that the Association operated effectively and remained responsive to its members.

In recognition of his distinguished career and extraordinary contributions to the State of North Carolina, Rob has been awarded the Order of the Long Leaf Pine, one of the state's highest civilian honors. Presented by the Governor of North Carolina, the award recognizes individuals whose exceptional service and lasting contributions have strengthened their communities and improved the lives

of North Carolinians. It is a fitting tribute to a career devoted to public service and to advancing excellence in local government.

As Rob begins this well-earned retirement, the NCCMA Executive Committee, staff, and membership extend our deepest gratitude for his years of dedicated service. His leadership has left an indelible mark on our Association and on the local government profession throughout North Carolina.

While Rob's daily presence at conferences, committee meetings, and Association events will certainly be missed, the foundation he helped build will continue to serve members for years to come. His legacy lives on in a stronger Association, a more connected membership, and generations of local government leaders who are better equipped to serve because of his commitment.

Thank you, Rob, for your remarkable career, your steadfast leadership, and your enduring dedication to North Carolina's local governments. We wish you and your family every happiness in the years ahead.

LEADING THROUGH CHANGE

Six priorities for local government in 2026.

Local governments across North Carolina continue to navigate a period of sustained change. Workforce challenges, technological innovation, and rising community expectations are reshaping how services are delivered and how organizations are led. While these pressures are not new, their convergence requires a renewed focus on leadership, adaptability, and organizational effectiveness.

One of the most pressing challenges remains workforce sustainability. Even as recruitment conditions have improved slightly in recent years, many organizations continue to struggle to fill positions and retain talent. Data from national public sector surveys shows that staffing shortages continue to increase workloads and strain employees, reinforcing the need for local governments to think beyond traditional hiring approaches. In North Carolina, where communities range from rapidly growing urban centers to smaller rural jurisdictions, competition for talent can be especially pronounced. Flexible work arrangements, expanded recruitment pipelines, and a renewed focus on organizational culture are becoming essential tools for retaining employees and maintaining service delivery.

Closely tied to workforce challenges is the increasing need to support employees facing difficult public interactions. Local government staff frequently serve on the front lines of community engagement, often navigating high-stress or uncivil environments. For many North Carolina city and county managers, this resonates with day-to-day operations at public counters, public meetings, and community events. Building organizational resilience—through supervisor support, peer networks, and recognition of emotional labor—has emerged as a critical leadership responsibility. Addressing these issues proactively not only supports employee well-being but also strengthens overall organizational performance.

At the same time, technological change is

accelerating, particularly with the emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) in local government operations. While adoption is still developing, most communities are exploring how AI can improve efficiency and responsiveness. Early use cases include automating routine customer service inquiries, streamlining permitting processes, and improving internal workflows. For North Carolina communities experiencing growth and increased service demands, these tools offer a way to do more with limited resources. However, successful implementation depends on leadership. Local governments must establish governance frameworks that prioritize transparency, accountability, and public trust while ensuring staff are prepared to integrate new tools into their daily work.

Organizational leadership itself is also evolving. The role of assistant and deputy managers has expanded significantly, reflecting broader changes in local government structure and expectations. These professionals are increasingly responsible for cross-departmental coordination, strategic initiatives, and organizational change efforts. In many North Carolina jurisdictions, assistant managers are leading major initiatives such as housing strategies, infrastructure planning, and community engagement efforts. Their ability to balance operational expertise with strategic leadership is critical to maintaining organizational effectiveness in complex environments. As a result, investing in leadership development and mentorship is essential to succession planning and long-term success.

Another defining trend is the growing importance of collaboration. Many of the most pressing challenges facing communities—such as housing affordability, economic mobility, and public health—cannot be addressed by a single organization. For North Carolina managers, this often means working across municipal, county, and regional lines, as well as partnering with nonprofits and the private sector. Effective collaboration requires leaders to serve as

conveners, aligning stakeholders around shared goals and integrating resources across traditional boundaries.

Finally, these dynamics place increased importance on decision-making under uncertainty. Public administrators must balance competing priorities, limited resources, and diverse stakeholder expectations while operating in highly visible environments. This is particularly true in North Carolina, where rapid population growth in some areas and fiscal constraints in others require managers to make difficult choices. Leaders must be prepared to make decisions without perfect information and adjust as conditions evolve.

Taken together, these trends point to a broader transformation in local government leadership. Success will depend on the ability to invest in people, embrace change thoughtfully, and lead with clarity and purpose. By focusing on workforce resilience, strategic use of technology, collaboration, and adaptive decision-making, North Carolina's local governments can continue

to deliver high-quality services and meet the evolving needs of their communities.

- *MissionSquare Research Institute. (2023). State and local government workforce survey results. National League of Cities.*
- *MissionSquare Research Institute. (2025). State and Local Government Workforce Survey Report.*
- *Oracle. (2024, August 7). Using AI in Local Government: 10 Use Cases.*
- *PayIt Government. (2026). AI in State and Local Government: Use Cases, Risks, and Best Practices.*
- *ICMA. (2021). The Deputy/Assistant Manager Position of Today.*
- *Urban Institute. (2026). Building Cross-Sector Partnerships Can Advance Local Housing Affordability and Accessibility.*
- *National Civic League. (2025). Communities Collaborating to Reduce Homelessness.*
- *PolSci Institute. (2025). Decision Making in Public Administration: Strategies and Challenges.*

ICMA ANNOUNCES FUTURE LOCATIONS

2026 Annual Conference registration now open.

Registration is now open for the 2026 ICMA

Annual Conference, providing local government professionals another opportunity to connect with peers from across the United States and around the world while exploring innovative ideas, emerging trends, and practical solutions to today's management challenges.

The 112th ICMA Annual Conference will be held October 17–21, 2026, in Long Beach/Los Angeles County, California. As ICMA's premier educational event, the conference features hundreds of educational sessions, mobile workshops, networking opportunities, and exhibits designed to help local government professionals strengthen their leadership skills and enhance the services they provide to their communities. Educational programming aligns with ICMA's 14 Practices for Effective Local Government

Management and Leadership, offering content for professionals at every stage of their careers.

In addition to opening registration for this year's conference, ICMA has announced several future conference locations that will allow members to plan ahead. Of particular interest to NCCCMA members, the 2027 ICMA Annual Conference will now be held in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, September 25–29, 2027. Philadelphia replaces the previously announced host city of Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Looking further ahead, ICMA has also announced that the 2028 Annual Conference will be held in Atlanta/Fulton County, Georgia, followed by San Antonio/Bexar County, Texas, in 2029 and St. Louis, Missouri, in 2030.

The move of the 2027 conference from Toronto to Philadelphia offers several advantages for many NCCCMA members. Philadelphia is more accessible from North Carolina, with numerous direct flight options, reduced travel time, and fewer logistical considerations associated with international travel. The location change may also make it easier for local governments to budget for conference attendance while providing greater opportunities for participation by emerging leaders and first-time attendees.

ICMA has also continued expanding its Local Government Reimagined Conferences, formerly known as the ICMA Regional Conferences. These focused conferences provide in-depth learning experiences centered on a single, timely topic facing local governments. Building on their success, ICMA has announced two 2027 Local Government Reimagined Conferences: Columbus, Ohio (April 7–9) and Houston, Texas (May 5–7). Each conference will feature a distinct educational theme designed to equip local government leaders with practical tools and strategies that can be implemented immediately in their organizations.

Whether attending the Annual Conference or one of the Local Government Reimagined Conferences, NCCCMA members have access to some of the profession's best opportunities for continuing education, networking, and professional growth. These events bring together city and county managers, assistant managers, department directors, and other local government professionals to exchange ideas, share best practices, and strengthen the profession through collaboration.

NCCCMA encourages members to take advantage of these opportunities by registering early, exploring educational sessions that align with their professional goals, and considering submitting proposals to present at future conferences. Participation not only benefits individual professional development but also showcases the innovative work taking place in North Carolina's local governments on a national stage.

Additional information, registration details, and conference updates are available through ICMA's conference website.

Key Dates at a Glance

Event	Dates	Location
ICMA Annual Conference	October 17–21, 2026	Long Beach, CA
Local Government Reimagined	April 7–9, 2027	Columbus, OH
Local Government Reimagined	May 5–7, 2027	Houston, TX
ICMA Annual Conference	September 25–29, 2027	Philadelphia, PA

2026 | ANNUAL ICMA | CONFERENCE

OCTOBER 17–21 | LONG BEACH | LOS ANGELES COUNTY, CALIFORNIA
LONG BEACH CONVENTION & ENTERTAINMENT CENTER

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: HANK PERKINS

*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 **Hank Perkins**, NCCMA Senior Advisor.*

Birthplace? **I was born in Newport, Rhode Island.**

Any siblings? **I have a deceased brother. I was the older brother. We were less than three years apart in age and were very close. We both went into local government service. He was the Planning Director for Zebulon, NC, when he passed away from cancer.**

Favorite food? **Thai and Chinese.**

Favorite vacation spot? **Anywhere in the mountains of western North Carolina. I’m also fond of Ocracoke Island.**

Favorite hobby/pastime? **Hiking and backpacking.**

Childhood dream job? **I wanted to be a Police Officer or a Pilot.**

Favorite Movie? **My favorite movie is ‘The Big Lebowski.’**

First local government job? **Part-time Recycling Coordinator for the Town of Smithfield, NC, after serving as an intern in the Town Manager’s office in Clayton, NC, for a year.**

Western or Eastern BBQ? **Eastern, of course! But Western will do in a pinch.**

Mountains, beach or Piedmont? **Mountains.**

Favorite Role Model? **My father.**

Favorite local government hero? **Dr. Matt Williamson, (AKA Doc Williamson), who was an advisor and mentor of mine at Appalachian State as an undergrad. While he was not a government employee, he certainly influenced me. He introduced me to the Town Management profession, guided my studies at ASU as a TACCM, and helped me get my first internship in Clayton, NC.**

Describe your town/city/county in 10 words or less. **I’m retired now. My last position was Manager of Lake Lure, NC. I retired in April of 2024. It’s a beautiful place that’s been through a lot. I now serve as a Senior Advisor for the Association and ICMA servicing Western NC.**

What is one thing most people KNOW about you or would say about you? **I’m a friendly guy who will do whatever I can to help someone out.**

What is one thing most people would be surprised to learn about you? **That I’ve backpacked over 85% of the Appalachian Trail (going South to North).**



DEMONSTRATING LEADERSHIP THROUGH SERVICE

Morrisville's Rodriguez-Villanueva shows leadership through hands-on leadership.

The North Carolina local government profession continues to be defined by dedicated leaders who combine technical expertise with a deep commitment to service. One recent example is Morrisville Deputy Town Manager Giselle Rodriguez-Villanueva, whose career achievements and leadership style reflect the evolving expectations of assistant and deputy managers across the state.

Rodriguez-Villanueva was recently appointed to serve as a Commissioner on the Commission on Fire Accreditation International (CFAI)—a national body that advances excellence and continuous improvement in fire and emergency service organizations. This appointment represents not only a personal milestone in her nearly two-decade career, but also highlights the growing role local government professionals play in shaping national standards and best practices.

With approximately 18 years of experience in local government, Rodriguez-Villanueva has built a career rooted in operational excellence, strategic leadership, and collaboration. In her current role, she provides executive oversight for a wide range of departments, including Fire-Rescue, Planning, Engineering, Inspections, and Economic Development—illustrating the increasingly broad scope of responsibility carried by today's deputy and assistant managers.

Her work with the Morrisville Fire-Rescue Department in particular underscores her focus on performance improvement and accountability. Over the past several years, she has worked closely with department leadership on strategic planning, community risk reduction, deployment model evaluation, mutual-aid coordination, and accreditation efforts.

One of the most compelling aspects of Rodriguez-Villanueva's leadership approach is her

commitment to gaining firsthand experience. Rather than relying solely on administrative oversight, she actively immersed herself in fire service operations—participating in live burn exercises, joining shifts with fire personnel, and completing physical training alongside recruits. This approach demonstrates a strong model for building organizational understanding and credibility.



Rodriguez-Villanueva's contributions have also been recognized within North Carolina. She was named the NCCCMA Assistant Manager of the Year for 2024, an award that honors outstanding performance and leadership among assistant managers statewide.

Her career reflects broader trends within local government management, where assistant and deputy managers are increasingly serving as strategic advisors, overseeing diverse service areas, leading organizational change, and representing their communities at the state and national levels.

Her example offers several practical lessons for local government professionals: pursue continuous learning, build credibility through engagement, embrace broader service opportunities, and invest in people. These principles remain central to effective leadership in today's local government environment. At its core, local government management is a profession grounded in service, accountability, and continuous improvement. Leaders like Rodriguez-Villanueva exemplify these values by combining technical expertise with a willingness to engage, learn, and lead from the front.

MEMBER MILESTONES

Welcome to a new 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:

- Jarred Goff appointed Administrator of Vass effective April 9, 2026.
- David Lambert appointed Assistant City Manager of Lexington, effective June 2026.
- Randy Martin appointed City Manager for Morehead City, effective May, 2026
- John Eller announced as County Manager of Cabarrus County effective June 2026.
- Phillip McDaniel appointed Town Manager Selma, effective June, 2026.
- Josh Mitchell appointed Assistant County Manager of Alexander County effective June, 2026.
- Austin Nantz appointed as Town Manager of Davidson, effective June 2026.
- Jonathan Allen appointed Manager of Spring Hope effective March 17, 2026.
- David Wise appointed Town Manager of Chadbourne effective June, 2026

Retirement Announcements:

- Kathryn Adams announced retirement from Oak Island, effective June 30.

Resignations:

- John Moses resigned as Town Manager of Ahoskie, effective June, 2026
- Dane Rideout resigned as Manager of Benson, effective May 2026.
- John Terziu resigned as Town Manager of Hamlet effective May 2026.
- Paylor Spruill released as City Manager of Henderson effective June 2026

New ICMA Credentialed Managers:

- Patrice Toney, Carrboro

THE ADMINISTRATOR

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

ETHICS IN ACTION

A Foundation for N.C. Local Government Managers

Ethics has long been the cornerstone of the local government management profession. For North Carolina's city and county managers, ethical leadership is not simply a professional expectation—it is essential to maintaining public trust and ensuring effective governance in communities of all sizes.

The ICMA Code of Ethics provides the foundation for professional conduct in local government management. First adopted in 1924 and updated regularly, the Code emphasizes principles such as integrity, transparency, political neutrality, and a commitment to serving the public interest. These principles guide managers in both routine operations and complex, high-stakes decisions. For members of the North Carolina City and County Management Association (NCCMA), the Code aligns closely with the values that shape the profession across the state.

At its core, ethical local government management is about trust. Managers are expected to demonstrate the highest standards of integrity in their relationships with elected officials, employees, and residents. This trust is particularly important in North Carolina, where many managers operate in highly visible roles within close-knit communities. Decisions related to land use, budgeting, and service delivery can have immediate and lasting impacts, making ethical clarity essential.

One of the most important ethical responsibilities is the obligation to serve the best interests of all community members. This includes promoting fairness in service delivery, ensuring equitable access to programs, and considering how policies affect different populations. In North Carolina, where communities vary widely in demographics, geography, and economic conditions, this responsibility requires thoughtful and inclusive decision-making. Managers must balance competing needs while maintaining a

commitment to equity and transparency.

The Code of Ethics also reinforces the importance of political neutrality. Under the council-manager form of government, which is widely used across North Carolina, elected officials establish policy while managers implement those decisions. Maintaining this balance requires managers to provide objective, professional advice while avoiding activities that could undermine public confidence in their impartiality. This separation is fundamental to effective governance and helps ensure that policy decisions remain in the hands of elected leaders.

Ethical leadership also extends to everyday organizational practices. Hiring, promotions, budgeting decisions, and interactions with employees all present opportunities to demonstrate fairness and professionalism. Managers are expected to base decisions on merit, avoid conflicts of interest, and ensure that public resources are used responsibly. In practice, this means creating organizational cultures where ethical behavior is not only expected but supported through training, policies, and leadership example.

For North Carolina managers, professional networks such as NCCMA play a critical role in supporting ethical leadership. Peer connections, mentorship, and professional development opportunities provide valuable resources for navigating complex situations. Sharing experiences and learning from colleagues can help managers address ethical challenges with confidence and consistency.

Ultimately, ethics in local government is not limited to formal rules or guidelines. It is reflected in daily actions, leadership decisions, and organizational culture. In an environment where public expectations continue to evolve, maintaining a strong ethical foundation ensures

that local governments remain responsive, accountable, and worthy of the public's trust.

For city and county managers across North Carolina, ethical leadership is both a responsibility and an opportunity. By consistently demonstrating integrity, fairness, and professionalism, managers strengthen not only their organizations but also the communities they serve.

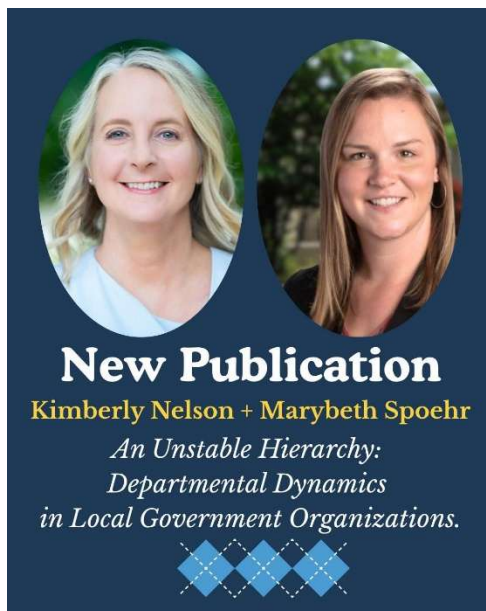
- *International City/County Management Association (ICMA). (2025). ICMA Code of Ethics.*

- *ICMA. (2025). ICMA Code of Ethics with Guidelines.*
- *ICMA. (2025). Ethics Matter! Local Government's Ethical Commitment to Serving the Needs of the Entire Community.*
- *ICMA. (1924/updated 2025). Declaration of Ideals.*
- *City of Corning (via ICMA). ICMA Code of Ethics (Tenets summary).*

AN UNSTABLE HIERARCHY

New article explores dynamic decision making.

Congratulations to UNC School of Government MPA faculty member Kimberly Nelson and MPA graduate Marybeth Spoehr on their recent article published in *Public Administration Review* which explores how departmental relationships and internal dynamics shape local government decision-making and organizational behavior.



From the Abstract:

Local governments offer untapped insights into public organizational change. Despite their large number and variety, internal departmental dynamics are poorly understood, with implications for information processing, service delivery, and democratic accessibility. Using data from 272 municipalities collected 5 years apart (2014–2019) analysis finds that 88% changed at least one department name and 69% experienced an increase or decrease in the total number of departments. To understand what contextual elements may lead to these changes, capacity and institutional triggers are explored. Findings indicate that turnover of executive leadership increases the likelihood of change, while population and employment change affect the scale of change. Other commonly discussed conditions such as changes in financial resources, the turnover in legislative bodies, and the independence of executives are not significantly associated. For public

administration, the consequences of continuous change in organizational hierarchies could affect assumptions of bureaucratic stability, democratic responsiveness, administrative burden, and organizational legibility.

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