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NUMBER 6

# TTC

TEXAS TOWN & CITY

**TEXAS MUNICIPAL LEAGUE  
ANNUAL CONFERENCE AND EXHIBITION**  
OCTOBER 29-31, FORT WORTH





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Mr. Bennett Sandlin has entered into an agreement with Publication Printers Corp. for the printing of *Texas Town & City* magazine. Mr. Sandlin represents the member cities of the Texas Municipal League.

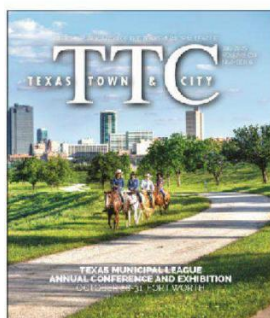


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### ABOUT THE COVER

Attendee registration and housing opens on Tuesday, July 29, at 10:00 a.m. central for the TML Annual Conference and Exhibition, October 29-31 in Fort Worth.

# ABOUT ★ TML

The **Texas Municipal League** exists solely to provide services to Texas cities. Since its formation in 1913, the League's mission has remained the same: to serve the needs and advocate the interests of its members. Membership in the League is voluntary and is open to any city in Texas. From the original 14 members, TML's membership has grown to more than 1,150 cities. Over 16,000 mayors, councilmembers, city managers, city attorneys, and department heads are member officials of the League by virtue of their cities' participation.

The League provides a variety of services to its member cities. One of the principal purposes of the League is to advocate municipal interests at the state and federal levels. Among the thousands of bills introduced during each session of the Texas Legislature are hundreds of bills that would affect cities. The League, working through its Legislative Services Department, attempts to defeat detrimental city-related bills and to facilitate the passage of legislation designed to improve the ability of municipal governments to operate effectively.

The League employs full-time attorneys who are available to provide member cities with information on municipal legal matters. On a daily basis, the legal staff responds to member cities' written and oral questions on a wide variety of legal matters. The League annually conducts a variety of conferences and training seminars to enhance the knowledge and skills of municipal officials in the state. In addition, the League also publishes a variety of printed materials to assist member cities in performing their duties. The best known of these is the League's magazine, *Texas Town & City*. Each issue focuses on a variety of contemporary municipal issues, including survey results to respond to member inquiries.

For additional information on any of these services, contact the **Texas Municipal League** at 512-231-7400 or visit our website, [www.tml.org](http://www.tml.org).

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**Harlan Jefferson**, Deputy City Manager, Burleson



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## MESSAGE ★ FROM THE PRESIDENT

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**ALLISON HEYWARD, CMO**

Mayor Pro Tem, Schertz  
TML President

Dear Texas City Official,

I'm excited about this month's magazine because it's themed around leadership. When you think about it, all city officials are in the leadership business - guiding our state's cities, towns, and villages to be the best places they can possibly be. I sincerely hope you find something useful in these great articles that makes you a better leader to your residents.

Speaking of leadership, I continue to be impressed by the involvement of our Texas city officials at the Capitol this recent regular session. From a special Ad Hoc legislative committee to our hugely successful Legislative Action Day, and numerous other regional meetings, I don't think I've ever seen the TML grassroots so fully engaged. I salute each of you as local leaders in keeping our voice heard in Austin.

Finally, this issue contains some preliminary information about the upcoming Annual Conference in Fort Worth in October. It's hard to believe how fast this year is moving, and I'm starting to get excited about all the great information we'll learn and the contacts we'll make that week. I'm looking forward to checking in with you in Fort Worth!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Allison Heyward".

Allison Heyward, CMO  
Mayor Pro Tem, Schertz  
TML President





**Inspiration. Innovation. Impact.**

## **Join Us at the 2025 TML Annual Conference and Exhibition**

The Texas Municipal League and the City of Fort Worth proudly invite you to the most anticipated gathering of city leaders in Texas. Make plans to meet us October 29-31 at the Fort Worth Convention Center for an unforgettable experience. Connect with over 3,000 city officials and staff, discover solutions from 350 exhibitors, and engage with the ideas, challenges, and breakthroughs that are shaping the future of Texas communities. Whether you're looking to spark innovation, build lasting relationships, or gain new insight, this is where leadership comes to grow.

Attendee conference registration and housing will open on **Tuesday, July 29**, at 10:00 a.m. central and can be accessed at <https://tmlconference.org>. Learn about the steps you

will take to register for the conference and reserve a hotel room on pages 34-35.

The preliminary conference program, featured on pages 32-33 of this issue, is online at <https://tmlconference.org>. Check the website regularly for up-to-date conference information.

Be inspired. Stay informed. Get connected. It all happens in Fort Worth this October and we can't wait to see you there!

## **Congratulations to the 2025 TML Leadership Fellows**



Meet the 2025 TML Leadership Academy graduates who completed more than 30 hours of training over two months to earn the TML Leadership Fellow designation. At the May 9 awards ceremony in Round Rock, TML President Allison Heyward, CMO, and Executive Director Bennett Sandlin recognized 83 city officials and staff for their commitment to leadership development.

The 2025 class studied the principles and characteristics of ethical leadership, learned to build trust and community, explored ways to improve team building and communication, and practiced negotiating for strategic influence. They discussed local issues in the broad



leadership context with the goal of applying learnings to their public service role – to benefit their communities and residents. Congratulations to our 2025 Leadership Fellows!

**2025 TML Land Use Essentials Conference: Shape the Future of Your City**

City planning isn't just policy—it's the foundation of your community's future. Join fellow mayors, councilmembers, city managers, and other city leaders for the 2025 TML Land Use Essentials Conference, a dynamic one-and-a-half-day event designed for municipal leaders navigating today's complex land use landscape. You'll gain practical strategies for managing annexation, zoning, platting, and development financing; tools to ensure compliance with the latest legislative changes; and expert insight into balancing growth with community priorities.

You will leave with a solid foundation in land use regulation, prepared to apply these principles effectively in your own city. Learn more at <https://tmllanduseconference.org>.

**Core Competency Training for Newly Elected Officials**

TML is offering two summer workshops for new mayors and councilmembers that will provide essential tools and training for a successful term. The Newly Elected City Officials' Orientation, taking place July 17-18 in San Antonio and August 7-8 in Round Rock, will teach about parliamentary procedure, budget and tax rate setting, city regulations, ethics for elected officials, revenue sources, open meetings, the Public Information Act, and more. The orientation is also a great refresher for experienced city officials. For detailed information and to register, visit <https://newlyelectedofficials.org>. ★

**TML Training Calendar**  
July-August 2025

**July 17-18**

TML Newly Elected City Officials' Orientation  
San Antonio

**July 17**

Basic Legal Requirements for Budget and Tax Rate  
Setting  
Webinar

**August 5-8**

BOAT Annual Conference  
Montgomery

**August 7**

Making Your City a Great Place to Work  
Webinar

**August 7-8**

TML Newly Elected City Officials' Orientation  
Waco

**August 21-22**

TML Land Use Essentials Conference  
Round Rock



# LEAD WITH PURPOSE: THE CERTIFIED MUNICIPAL OFFICIAL PROGRAM

Public service is more than a title – it's a commitment to lead with knowledge, vision, and heart. That's why the Texas Municipal League (TML) invites elected member city officials to take the next step in their leadership journey through the Certified Municipal Official (CMO) Program.

This voluntary program isn't just about earning a title. It's about embracing a deeper understanding of local government, building the skills to lead with confidence, and demonstrating a lasting commitment to the community you serve.

## A Pathway for Every Leader

Whether you're stepping into public office for the first time or bringing years of experience to your city council seat, the CMO Program is designed with *you* in mind. It meets you where you are and inspires you to go further. Participants come away with:

- Broader knowledge of local governance
- Practical leadership tools
- A powerful network of peers
- The pride of earning a respected credential rooted in service and excellence

## How Do I Earn the CMO Designation?

To earn your CMO certification, you must complete 60 continuing education units (CEUs) over the course of two consecutive calendar years. Of those, at least 30 CEUs must come from in-person training events. The program also requires participants to complete at least one CEU in each of the five core competency areas: ethics, finance, governance, open meetings, and public information.

Only training provided by TML or a TML affiliate is eligible for CEU credit. Training offered by outside organizations and participation in city council, board, membership, or committee meetings do not qualify for CEU credit.

## What Happens After I Earn the Designation?

Once you complete your continuing education units and meet all program requirements, you will be awarded the

Certified Municipal Official designation. As part of this recognition, you will receive a formal certificate, a CMO pin, and a sample press release to use in sharing your achievement with your community.

This designation not only celebrates your dedication, it inspires trust and confidence from the people you represent.

## How Do I Maintain My CMO Designation?

Leadership is a lifelong journey. To maintain your CMO designation, you must continue to hold elected office and complete 15 CEUs each calendar year. This annual requirement must include at least eight CEUs earned through in-person training, along with a minimum of one CEU each in the areas of ethics, open meetings, and public information.

## Honoring Excellence in Service

TML proudly celebrates consistent dedication through two special honors:

- **Award of Excellence** – For elected officials who received recognition in one of the above categories for five consecutive years
- **Award of Leadership** – For cities with elected officials who earned certificates for five consecutive years

These awards continue to celebrate the outstanding commitment and achievements of city officials, now under the updated framework of the new CMO Program.

## How Do I Track My CEUs?

Staying on top of your CEUs is simple:

- Submit your CEU form within 30 days of your training
- For in-person affiliate events, attach the agenda
- Submit by email or in person
- Check your progress anytime at [www.tml.org](http://www.tml.org). Click "Certified Municipal Official (CMO) Program" under the Education tab, then click "CMO Participants."

## Step Forward. Stand Out. Serve Better.

Every city in Texas deserves leaders who are informed, prepared, and passionate about making a difference. The CMO Program is your opportunity to be that kind of leader – and to inspire others along the way.

Learn more at [www.tml.org](http://www.tml.org) or email us at [cmo@tml.org](mailto:cmo@tml.org). ★



# Ten Ways to Get More from TML

1. EXPAND Your Knowledge
2. BUILD Relationships
3. ADVOCATE for Your City
4. IMPROVE Communications
5. Lower EXPENSES
6. OPTIMIZE Revenue
7. Exchange IDEAS
8. GROW Your Network
9. Find RESOURCES [www.tml.org](http://www.tml.org)
10. ASK questions 512-231-7400







*Empowering Texas cities to serve their citizens*

## NOMINATIONS OPEN FOR REGIONAL SEATS ON THE TML BOARD OF DIRECTORS

It's time for nominations to fill eight regional director positions on the TML Board of Directors (Regions 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, and 15 for a two-year term; Region 14 for a one-year term). Previously, these elections were held at regional meetings. Now, after a recent change to the TML Constitution, they will be administered centrally by TML.

**Open Positions:** The Board is comprised of 54 voting members, and 15 positions represent each TML region.

During odd-numbered years, the odd-numbered regions are up for election. Terms are two years, and there are no term limits. The new terms will begin on October 31, 2025, upon adjournment of the TML Annual Conference, and end on October 15, 2027, upon adjournment of the TML Annual Conference.

In addition to the odd-numbered regions, there is a vacancy in Region 14 that needs to be filled. This partial term will begin on October 31, 2025, upon adjournment of the TML Annual Conference and end on November 13, 2026, upon adjournment of the TML Annual Conference.

To view the current Board roster, visit <https://www.tml.org/306/Board-of-Directors>.

**Eligibility:** A candidate must be a mayor, councilmember, city commission member, alderperson, or other member

of an elected municipal governing body in a TML member city located in the region where the candidate is seeking a position for. An individual from a city eligible for an at-large director position (a city over 300,000 in population) is not eligible to run or serve as a regional director. To find out what region you are in, visit [www.tml.org/234/Map-Officers](http://www.tml.org/234/Map-Officers).

**Nominations Deadline:** Nominations must be received by TML staff at the email or mailing address below by 11:59 p.m. on Tuesday, September 2, 2025.

**How to Nominate Yourself:** Nominations must be sent to TML staff, as outlined below, with a short biographical sketch of no more than 300 words and a headshot by 11:59 p.m. on Tuesday, September 2, 2025:

Email: Rachael Pitts ([rpitts@tml.org](mailto:rpitts@tml.org))

or

Mail: Rachael Pitts, Texas Municipal League, 1821  
Rutherford Lane, Suite 400, Austin, TX 78754

TML staff will mail a ballot to each member city in each region holding an election by September 11, 2025.

**If you have questions,** contact Rachael Pitts at 512-231-7472 or [rpitts@tml.org](mailto:rpitts@tml.org). ★





INTRODUCING

DEBBIE MUÑOZ

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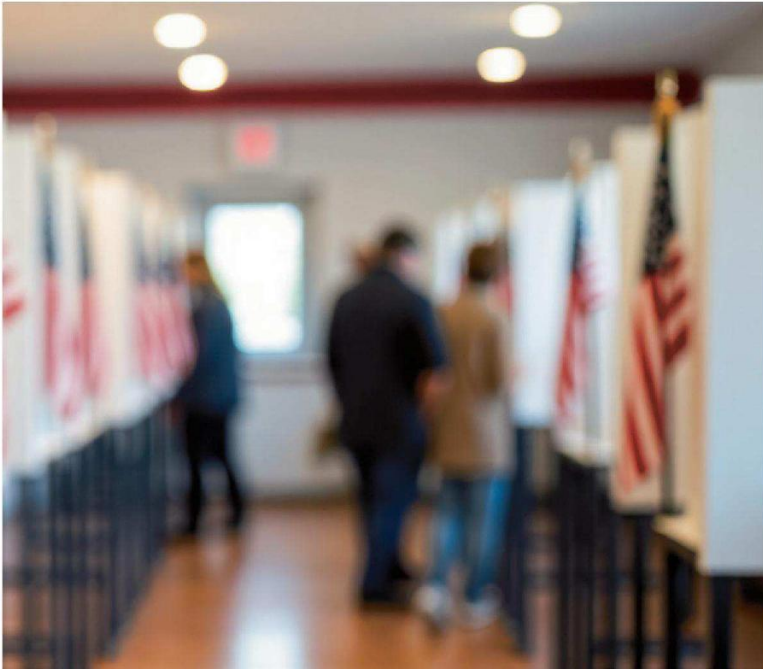
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## TEXAS MUNICIPAL LEAGUE PRESIDENT AND PRESIDENT-ELECT ELECTION PROCEDURES NOTICE

Editor's Note: *The following information describes the election procedures for TML president and president-elect. Both current and former TML board members are eligible to run for TML president-elect. In accordance with those procedures, this information must be published in the July issue of Texas Town & City magazine.*

### Formation of the Nominating Committee

The TML President shall appoint a TML Nominating Committee to be made up of nine members of the TML Board of Directors in accordance with Article IX of the TML Constitution.

The most immediate TML Past President shall chair the Nominating Committee, and at least two other Past Presidents shall be appointed to the Committee.

The TML President shall attempt to make appointments in a way that balances the Nominating Committee with regard to gender, ethnicity, geographic regions, city size, and other

relevant factors. A person is ineligible to serve on the Nominating Committee if the person is from the same city as a candidate.

Following the June meeting of the TML Board of Directors, all Board members and all member cities shall be notified of the composition of the Nominating Committee and of the procedures to be used by the Committee. Specifically, such information shall be printed in the issue of *Texas Town & City* magazine that is published in July.

City officials are hereby informed that the 2024-2025 TML Nominating Committee is made up of the following TML Board members:

Immediate Past President David Rutledge, CMO,  
Mayor, Bridge City (Chair)

Past President Martha Castex-Tatum,  
Mayor Pro Tem, Houston

Past President Mary M. Dennis, CMO,  
Mayor, Live Oak

Affiliate Director Libby Holtmann,  
Library Director, Plano

Region 4 Director Jack Ladd,  
Councilmember, Midland

Affiliate Director Rolandrea Russell,  
Planning Supervisor, Frisco

Region 11 Director Cathy Skurow, CMO,  
Mayor, Portland

Region 9 Director Geary Smith,  
Mayor, Mexia

Affiliate Director Eddie Wilson,  
Police Chief, Copperas Cove

### Procedures of the Nominating Committee

A candidate for TML President-Elect must be: (1) an elected official of a member city; (2) a current or former member of the TML Board of Directors; and (3) shall declare his or her candidacy by emailing or mailing the completed Candidate Data Form, city council resolution of support, and other attachments to:

---

## Nominating Committee

c/o Bennett Sandlin, Executive Director

bennett@tml.org

or

Texas Municipal League

1821 Rutherford Lane, Suite 400

Austin, Texas 78754-5101

Candidate Data Forms may be obtained from the TML Executive Director.

A candidate for TML President-Elect must submit the Candidate Data Form along with any attachments to that form. That material must be emailed or mailed and must be received by September 1. The TML Executive Director shall distribute the submittal materials to Committee Members.

The Candidate Data Form submitted by a candidate for TML President-Elect must include a copy of a resolution of support from the candidate's municipal governing body and may include a biography or resume.

If there are two or more candidates for the position of TML President-Elect, the Nominating Committee shall interview the candidates no sooner than September 1 and no later than the day on which the Nominating Committee makes its report to the TML Board of Directors during the TML Annual Conference. The specific times and places for such interviews shall be coordinated by the TML Executive Director. The TML Executive Director shall not be present during deliberations except at the unanimous request of the Nominating Committee members present.

Members of the Nominating Committee may seek candidates for TML President-Elect prior to September 1.

All persons who are eligible to run for TML President-Elect shall be informed that the TML Nominating Committee will base its decision on the candidates' qualifications and interviews, and not on the basis of campaigning directed to the Nominating Committee, the TML Board of Directors, other city officials, or member cities.

If, at the time of the February/March or June meeting of the TML Board of Directors, the position of President-Elect is vacant, the timing of the Nominating Committee procedures can be accelerated to elect a President-Elect.

If, at the time of the February/March or June meeting of the TML Board of Directors, the position of President and President-Elect are vacant, the timing of the Nominating Committee procedures can be accelerated and shall govern the President and President-Elect selection.

## Report of the Nominating Committee

The Nominating Committee shall make a written report to the TML President prior to the time the Committee will make its oral report to the TML Board of Directors at the TML Annual Conference. That meeting shall be an open meeting and shall be listed in the Annual Conference Program.

The Nominating Committee shall nominate one Board member for TML President and one Board member for TML President-Elect.

## Action on the Nominating Committee Report

Following the oral report of the Nominating Committee, the position of TML President shall be considered first and separate from the position of TML President-Elect.

Nominations from the floor shall be allowed. Three TML Board members must second any nomination from the floor for either TML President or TML President-Elect. A TML Board member may nominate himself or herself or may second his or her nomination. A nomination from the floor does not require the suspension of any rules of procedure.

If an election is contested, each candidate may address the TML Board of Directors for no more than three minutes. No other person may speak on behalf of a candidate.

If an election is uncontested, the vote shall be by voice vote.

If an election is contested, the vote shall be by written ballot. In that case, the TML President shall appoint two disinterested persons from the TML Board or staff to act as tellers to count the ballots.

If an election is contested by three or more candidates, the candidate who receives the most votes shall be declared the winner. There shall be no run-off, except in the case of a tie for the most votes. ★



# TXShare

**Your Public Procurement Solutions Center**

## TXSHARE: A RISING FORCE IN COOPERATIVE PURCHASING FOR TEXAS AND BEYOND

TXShare, the cooperative procurement program of the North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG), has entered a transformative phase—powered by expanded staffing, integrated procurement tools, and continuing our strategic partnership with Sourcwell. In addition, TXShare is actively collaborating with the Alliance for Innovation (AFI), the Technology Foresight Council (TFC), and Civic Marketplace. Together, these efforts are driving TXShare’s mission to make public procurement smarter, faster, and more accessible to public sector agencies across Texas and the nation.

### FY24 Highlights: Building the Foundation

FY24 proved pivotal for TXShare’s operational evolution. A full staffing contingent—most notably, the addition of another dedicated procurement agent—enabled the launch of new contracts and the streamlining of internal processes. Among the notable contracts:

**Automated Meter Infrastructure (AMI) Systems, AI Solutions for the Public Sector and AI Consultancy Services**, all of which reflect TXShare’s increasing alignment with emerging technologies and smart city solutions. Through these contracts TXShare is helping public agencies modernize operations. These agreements support cost-effective, scalable solutions to improve efficiency, effectiveness, and service delivery.

### AMI Modernization:

TXShare awarded multiple vendors to provide flexible, scalable AMI solutions—ranging from cellular and fixed network deployments to Metering-as-a-Service (MaaS). The contracts include meter replacements, repair parts, and integration services tailored to diverse utility needs. This initiative enhances data accuracy, leak detection, and customer service while reducing manual fieldwork.

### AI Consultancy and Solutions:

To facilitate responsible AI adoption, TXShare offers consultancy services to help public agencies identify high-impact use cases and implement secure, ethical AI strategies. Pre-vetted AI tools now available to members include multilingual chatbots, workflow automation, document and workforce management systems, and real-time translation tools—tailored specifically for the public sector.

Together, these contracts provide compliant, cost-efficient pathways to innovation, helping agencies of all sizes adopt future-ready technologies and improve outcomes for their communities.

The team introduced a standardized RFP lifecycle process that incorporates member participation in specification drafting, evaluation, and award recommendations—while TXShare manages the “heavy lift” of full-cycle procurement. These collaborative processes enhance contract relevance while reducing member agency burden.

TXShare’s outreach also expanded, with active engagements in major Texas metro areas and participation in key events like the TXPPA, GFOAT, ISMRGV, and Oklahoma Purchasing conferences. We continue to lean into regional advisory committees to ensure we are aligning our members’ needs with our strategic roadmap. Through these collaborations, TXShare’s number of active contract categories grew from 24 in FY23–24 to 49 in FY24–25, providing more solutions to fit our members’ needs.

### The TXShare Team: Driving Strategic Vision and Member Value

At the core of TXShare’s progress is a highly collaborative and skilled team of procurement professionals, consultants, and marketing/outreach specialists. Their unified focus is on operational excellence and user-centered service delivery.

The team led or participated in:

- In-person training sessions, webinars, and workshops (reaching over 400 participants);
- Live demonstrations of the Civic Marketplace platform;
- Strategic advisory committee meetings to align future solicitations with real-world agency needs;

- Newsletter campaigns, customized outreach, and promotional content; and,
- Working alongside cities and counties across Texas, including Austin, Frisco, Plano, and Harris County, to name a few.

*The success of TXShare's collaborative procurement is reflected in the experience of the City of Fairview Public Works team:*

*"The TXShare Program was instrumental in guiding us through the RFP process, especially given our lack of a dedicated purchasing department. The process was seamless, well-structured, and allowed our staff to actively participate in developing system requirements and evaluating bidders. The clarity and organization of the RFP, along with the variety of vetted vendor options, made it easier for us to select a solution that best fits our needs, ultimately saving us time and resources."*

*"We are deeply grateful for the TXShare Program's support and expertise. The collaborative approach not only simplified a complex procurement but also ensured our team was fully engaged, resulting in a successful outcome. We look forward to future opportunities to work with TXShare and leverage your program's benefits."*

### **FY25 Objectives: Serving Current and Prospective Members**

As TXShare scales up in 2025, the team continues to center its work around key strategic objectives that define its service model and support its membership growth:

- **Strategic Outreach and Member Engagement**  
Proactively engage local and regional public entities through events, communications, and one-on-one discussions to increase program visibility and participation.
- **Educational Initiatives**  
Offer high-quality procurement training and development opportunities tailored to the evolving needs of public procurement professionals.
- **Advocacy for Cooperative Contracts**  
Promote cooperative purchasing as a streamlined, cost-effective procurement solution—especially beneficial for small and medium-sized agencies.

- **Thought Leadership and Policy Support**

Share best practices, provide strategic consultation, and support procurement innovation through partnerships, articles, and conference contributions.

### **FY25 Outlook: Scaling for Growth**

With a strong operational base and strategic tools in place—TXShare is poised for accelerated growth. Six projects have already closed in early 2025, and are focused on continually expanding our contract categories, with a long-term goal of growing our offerings to better meet the evolving needs of our member entities.

Technology-forward initiatives—like the use of AI to analyze municipal check registers and council resolutions—will further support data-driven decision-making and tailored outreach. Planning is also underway for a TXShare podcast series: *Beyond the Bid* – A New Podcast for Procurement Pros.

Join Diane Palmer-Boeck, CPPO, PPMC, and Tim Slifka, CPPO, CPPB, for the premiere episode of *Beyond the Bid*—your new go-to podcast for public procurement insights. In Episode 1 on August 15, 10:00-11:30 a.m. central, we're unpacking the latest Texas legislative changes impacting procurement—and answering the first round of call-in and write-in questions.

Have a question you'd like us to cover? Let us know at the Procurement Lifeline: Q & A with Diane & Tim <https://txshare.org/>

### **Conclusion: A Smart Future for Public Procurement**

TXShare's collaborative, tech-driven, and member-centered approach is strengthening the value and accessibility of cooperative purchasing for public agencies across Texas and beyond. With a unified team and strong partnerships, the program is well-positioned to support the evolving needs of government procurement—enabling agencies to accomplish more with greater efficiency, flexibility, and confidence.

Want to learn more about training or how to join, have an idea for a procurement or how to leverage an existing TXShare-awarded contract? Reach out at [TXShare@nctcog.org](mailto:TXShare@nctcog.org).





## THIRTY TIPS FOR NEWLY ELECTED MAYORS AND COUNCILMEMBERS

*"Management is doing things right. Leadership is doing the right things."*  
- Warren Bennis

1. Commit the time needed to excel in your public service role. While attending council meetings is your primary duty, true effectiveness requires more – thorough research, study, active discussion, and staying well informed on the issues.
2. Pace yourself. Prioritize the meetings you attend. Recognize the need to spend time with your family and achieve a healthy work and life balance.
3. Deliver on your promises. Most major decisions and actions require the approval of the governing body which takes a majority vote.
4. Treat your colleagues, residents, and city staff with fairness and respect. People come to you with concerns that are important to them. Do what you can to resolve their issues or suggest other resources who can help.
5. Allow your city staff to do their work and handle operations. Your primary role is to set policy and direction for the city. For example, instead of spending time reviewing invoices, make sure you have a good purchasing practice in place for generating invoices.
6. Take your budget preparation role seriously. The budget is your policy development tool and road map. It determines what your city does or doesn't do in the coming year. When budget cutbacks are necessary, ensure adequate funding for activities that are vital to city operations.
7. Be aware of the little things. While the little things can go unnoticed, it's often those tiny details that require the most attention.
8. Establish policy statements. Written policy statements let the public and city staff know where they stand and help the governing body govern. Written policy statements also provide a process to develop consensus.
9. Maintain the infrastructure. Make certain you are keeping up with what you have before taking on new projects. Deferring maintenance costs to the future burdens the next generation of leaders.
10. Be comfortable telling people that you don't know the answer to their question. It's better to tell residents that you need to research an issue rather than provide inaccurate information.
11. Always keep the long-term interests of your city top of mind. Don't be hurried into action or misled by the demands of special interest groups who want it done their way, right now.

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12. Be open and honest with your colleagues. It's unwise to spring surprises on your fellow councilmembers or city staff, especially at formal meetings. If a matter is worth discussing, it should be placed on the agenda. Surprises can cause embarrassment, create distrust, and erode the team approach to governance.
  13. Respect and don't bypass the system. If you have a city manager or other chief administrative official, follow policy and avoid personal involvement in day-to-day operations.
  14. Don't let others bypass the system. Insist that people — such as bond dealers or equipment suppliers — work with your city staff first. If direct contact with councilmembers is necessary, ensure it happens with the council as a whole and not on a one-on-one basis.
  15. Formalize your personnel rules and regulations. Make sure they're clear. For example, if you don't pay for unused sick leave when an employee is terminated, put it in writing. Once the rules are established, councilmembers should stay out of personnel matters.
  16. Familiarize yourself with the Texas Open Meetings Act and the Public Information Act and complete the state-mandated training. Respect the letter and intent of both acts.
  17. Keep your constituents informed through social media, a regular editorial in the local newspaper, radio interviews, or news releases. Be friendly in your interactions with the news media. Effective communication keeps citizens engaged and fosters civic pride.
  18. Keep your city staff informed, particularly those on the front line who have frequent contact with the public or are in a decision-making role.
  19. Appoint citizen advisory committees as needed and be prepared to follow their advice. Appointing your opposition to a desired committee helps them work for you, instead of against you.
  20. Hire the best people you can and give them as much responsibility as they can handle. Support and inspire them to succeed.
  21. Encourage your employees to look for new ideas and better ways of doing things. Listen to what they have to say.
  22. Invite your city attorney to attend council meetings, but don't expect him or her to have all the answers. Give your attorney time to research key issues and come back with an opinion.
  23. Ask your city attorney "how can we legally accomplish this objective?" instead of asking whether you can do something.
  24. Remember that if yours is a typical city, your city attorney will not be an expert on every issue. City government is too complex. You may occasionally need outside counsel which can be a good use of public funds.
  25. Make sure your city has a solid financial accounting and reporting system in place. Some cities have had financial troubles because more money was spent than was available and it went unnoticed.
  26. Remember that your city does not operate in a vacuum. You must work within the intergovernmental system to be effective. Keep in contact with school, county, state, and federal officials. Use the Texas Municipal League as a resource.
  27. Sometimes, hiring a consultant can be a good way to get the expertise you are missing. However, it is important to maintain a leadership role with consultants, ensuring they stay on course and act in your city's interest.
  28. Keep your eye on state and federal legislation that can negatively affect your city through unfunded mandates or by eroding your ability to make decisions locally. Read the *Legislative Update* in the weekly *TML Exchange* for updates on key legislation and regulations.
  29. Budget money for your city officials and employees to attend TML workshops and conferences. TML provides excellent learning opportunities and personal contacts who can be valuable to you, your city staff, and elected officials.
  30. Finally, know that you are in the public eye, and your words and actions affect your city and residents. Follow your conscience, and act as a steward for your city's good governance. ★



# BE ACTIVE IN TML

Whether you are new to city government or a veteran, the Texas Municipal League (TML) is here to help you succeed in your leadership role. Since its formation in 1913 by 14 cities, the League exists to serve the needs and advocate the interests of member cities.

Your city is a member. Now what? It's time to get involved!

## Sharpen Your Leadership Skills Through TML Training

TML conducts a variety of conferences, workshops, and webinars to enhance your governance and leadership skills. These events connect you to solutions, innovation, and inspiration. And in between presentations and panels, you will have many opportunities to network with peers.

The TML Annual Conference and Exhibition is one of the nation's largest gatherings of city officials. Held in October, the conference includes keynote sessions, workshops, the annual business meeting, and an impressive exhibit hall with more than 350 companies representing products and services that benefit Texas cities.

The League also offers a variety of other training opportunities throughout the year, including the Midyear Conference (March), Leadership Academy (April and May), Small Town Conference (May), Newly Elected Officials' Orientations (July and August), Land Use Conference (August), Economic Development Conference (November), Small Cities' Problem-Solving Clinics (several times a year), Public Funds Investment Act Training (December), Budget and Tax Rate Workshops (even-numbered years), Legislative Webinars and Workshop (odd-numbered years), as well as twice monthly webinars throughout the year.

View the full calendar of training opportunities at [tml.org](http://tml.org) by clicking on "Upcoming Events" at [www.tml.org](http://www.tml.org).

## Make Important Connections: Attend a TML Region Meeting

TML has 15 regions that were formed in 1958 and are the League's grassroots. Regions work to foster the exchange of information among cities and help the TML Board develop policy that represents the state's diverse interests. Each region elects officers, including a representative who serves on the TML Board, and conducts meetings at least twice each year.

## Focus Your Training: Get Involved in a TML Affiliate

The League also has 21 affiliate organizations that represent specific professional disciplines in municipal government. Each affiliate group has its own membership criteria and fee structure that is separate from the League's and offers a variety of professional development and networking opportunities throughout the year. For a listing of all TML affiliates, visit [www.tml.org/35/Affiliates](http://www.tml.org/35/Affiliates).

## Represent Your Community: Advocate for Your City

One of the principal purposes of the League is to advance and represent the interests of Texas cities at the state and federal levels.

At the state level, more than 25 percent of the thousands of bills filed each session would affect cities in some substantial way. The League makes every effort to assure that bad-for-city bills are

defeated and bills that help cities operate more effectively are passed. Your voice before, during, and after a legislative session is a critical part of that effort.

In addition to communicating with your state leaders, TML encourages you to engage in the League's policy development process. That process begins a full year before the regular legislative session convenes. In non-legislative years, the TML president appoints delegates to a two-day Legislative Policy Summit, where attendees deliberate and make policy recommendations. The final report of the policy summit and any resolutions submitted by the general membership are then considered by the TML general membership at the annual business meeting held during the annual conference. Finally, the TML Board adopts a legislative program based on these approved resolutions.

At the federal level, TML and city officials coordinate efforts through the National League of Cities, the Southern Municipal Conference, and other similar organizations, to ensure Texas cities have a voice in Washington, D.C.

## Lead with Confidence: Reach out to the TML Legal Team

The League employs full-time attorneys who are available to provide legal information on municipal issues to member cities, as well as example documents to assist cities in drafting ordinances and other required legal notices. You can reach out to a TML attorney at 512-231-7400 or [legalinfo@tml.org](mailto:legalinfo@tml.org).

## Keep Up with Municipal Information and Trends: Publications and Communications

Members receive timely and pertinent information through the TML website ([www.tml.org](http://www.tml.org)), the *Texas Town & City* magazine and other publications, the Friday TML Exchange email that includes a legislative update, social media posts, and other emails. The League also offers the Connect News service, a daily email of newspaper clippings of interest across the state.

If there is something that you need but aren't sure where to look, contact TML staff at 512-231-7400 or [members@tml.org](mailto:members@tml.org).

## Discover Solutions: Connect to Private Sector Solutions and Resources

Through the League's Business Development Department, TML connects cities with private sector products and services. You can connect to these solutions in the exhibit hall and sponsor wall at the TML Annual Conference and Exhibition and the Municipal Marketplace on the TML website.

## Certified Municipal Official Program

Calling all elected officials: The Certified Municipal Official (CMO) program is a voluntary certification program that recognizes and rewards elected officials who commit to continuing their professional development. This recognition encourages elected officials to learn about their governance roles and city government through a variety of educational opportunities offered by TML and TML affiliate organizations.

## TML Board and Committees

Consider service on the TML Board or a committee to guide the League's important mission to *Empower Texas cities to better serve their citizens*. TML has a rich history of exemplary service to Texas cities, and that tradition begins with the talents and vision of its extraordinary members.

## Surveys

Participate in TML surveys. TML conducts several annual surveys that collect information on salaries, water and wastewater rates, taxation and debt levels, and general fiscal conditions.

## Municipal Excellence Awards

Share your city's success stories and apply for a TML Municipal Excellence Award. These best practice awards celebrate the best of city innovation in public works, public safety, communications, management, and city spirit. Applications open at the beginning of each year and close in early June.

## Small Cities Advisory Council

Did you know that 84 percent of Texas cities have populations below 15,000? The Small Cities Advisory Council (SCAC) is made up of dedicated city elected officials and staff who are committed to spending TML's limited resources in ways that help small cities. Current programs include training scholarships, Small Cities' Problem-Solving Clinics, and training sessions at other TML events.

## Youth Advisory Commission Summit

In February, TML sponsors a summit of youth advisory commissions, providing an opportunity for youth to network, celebrate, and learn. The summit is also open to city officials who are curious about starting a program in their communities.

## TML Financial Boot Camps

TML's City Financial Services Department is ready to help your city. When your city enrolls in a Finance Boot Camp, we send a wrangler (an experienced financial professional) to work with your team to improve financial processes. Each Boot Camp is tailored to fit your city's needs and typically last one to three weeks.

## Career Center

TML hosts a job board on its website, and member cities can post for free.

## Directories

TML maintains online directories of city officials, associate (business) members, and exhibitors and sponsors at tml.org.

## TML Risk Pool

For more than 50 years, the TML Risk Pool has provided Texas cities with quality coverage specifically designed to meet municipal needs. The Risk Pool is a separate entity but maintains a close working relationship with TML.

The TML Risk Pool works to reduce the cost of workers' compensation, property, and liability risks in Texas cities. In addition to providing a stable risk financing system, the Pool offers education to its members to avoid and reduce risks, control losses, and stay informed on other aspects of risk management.

If you have questions about the opportunities described in this article, visit tml.org, call 512-231-7400, or email members@tml.org

## TML Affiliate Organizations

Texas Municipal Clerks Association, Inc. (TMCA)  
Texas Municipal Human Resources Association (TMHRA)  
Texas Municipal Library Directors Association (TMLDA)  
Texas Municipal Utilities Association (TMUA)  
Texas Police Chiefs Association (TPCA)  
Texas Public Purchasing Association (TxPPA)  
Texas Recreation and Park Society (TRAPS)  
American Planning Association Texas Chapter (APATX)  
Association of Hispanic Municipal Officials (AHMO)  
Building Officials Association of Texas (BOAT)  
Government Finance Officers Association of Texas (GFOAT)  
Texas Association of Black City Council Members (TABCCM)  
Texas Association of Governmental Information Technology Managers (TAGITM)  
Texas Association of Mayors, Councilmembers and Commissioners (TAMCC)  
Texas Association of Municipal Health Officials (TAMHO)  
Texas Association of Municipal Information Officers (TAMIO)  
Texas Chapter of American Public Works Association (Texas Chapter of APWA)  
Texas City Attorneys Association (TCAA)  
Texas City Management Association (TCMA)  
Texas Court Clerks Association (TCCA)  
Texas Fire Chiefs Association (TFCA)

## TML Regions

Region 2 Amarillo Area  
Region 3 Caprock – Lubbock Area  
Region 4 Permian Basin Region – Odessa Area  
Region 5 Red River Valley – Wichita Falls Area  
Region 6 Hub of Texas – Abilene Area  
Region 7 Alamo Region – San Antonio Area  
Region 8 Where the West Begins – Fort Worth Area  
Region 9 Heart of Texas Region – Waco Area  
Region 10 Highland Lakes Region – Austin Area  
Region 11 Coastal Bend Region – Corpus Christi Area  
Region 12 Lower Rio Grande Valley – Rio Grande Valley Area  
Region 13 North Central Texas Region – Dallas Area  
Region 14 San Jacinto Region – Houston Area  
Region 15 Tyler-Longview Area  
Region 16 Golden Pine and Oil Region – Beaumont-Lufkin Area



## Cyber Corner: You Are the Key to Our Cybersecurity

By **Ryan Burns**, Cyber Risk Services Manager, and  
**Mike Bell**, Senior Cybersecurity Advisor, TML Risk Pool



Check out Risky the Armadillo's YouTube Cyber Save Video –  
Visit @TMLRiskPool today!

When most people think about cybersecurity, they picture firewalls, antivirus software, and high-tech systems catching hackers in the act. While technology has come a long way to keep us safe, the simple truth is this: it's not enough on its own.

Cybercriminals know this. That's why, in addition to trying to outsmart our tools, they are targeting something much easier — YOU.

Today, most cyber threats focus on the "human layer" of defense, not just systems and software. Clicking a bad link, opening a shady attachment, or sharing sensitive information by mistake can create serious problems. In fact, 85 percent of cyber incidents involve human factors, whether intentional or not.

Here's the bottom line: every single one of us is part of our cybersecurity defense and has a responsibility to keep our data and systems safe. Whether you're in finance, IT, city management, public safety, or any other department, your daily actions help protect (or accidentally expose) your entity's data.

Even the most advanced security tools might not be able to help if we aren't careful. That's why it's so important to stay alert:

- Think before clicking links or downloading files.
- Question anything and everything that looks suspicious — even if it seems to come from someone you know.
- When in doubt, pick up the phone and verify an unsolicited email with the sender, before taking any other action. Or contact IT for an extra set of eyes.

Cybersecurity isn't just an "IT thing." It's everyone's responsibility — and it's easier to build strong habits than fix the damage after something goes wrong.

By staying aware and diligent, we create a strong culture of security where every employee is a defender. Together, we can make sure our technology and our people work hand-in-hand to keep our organization safe.

Contact Ryan Burns or Mike Bell, the TML Risk Pool's "Cyber Squad" at [cybersquad@tmlrp.org](mailto:cybersquad@tmlrp.org) or check out the Pool's cyber resources at [www.tmlrp.org](http://www.tmlrp.org) under the Risk Services drop down menu. Also be sure to explore the Pool's YouTube channel (@TMLRiskPool) and cyber subchannel for more information. ★

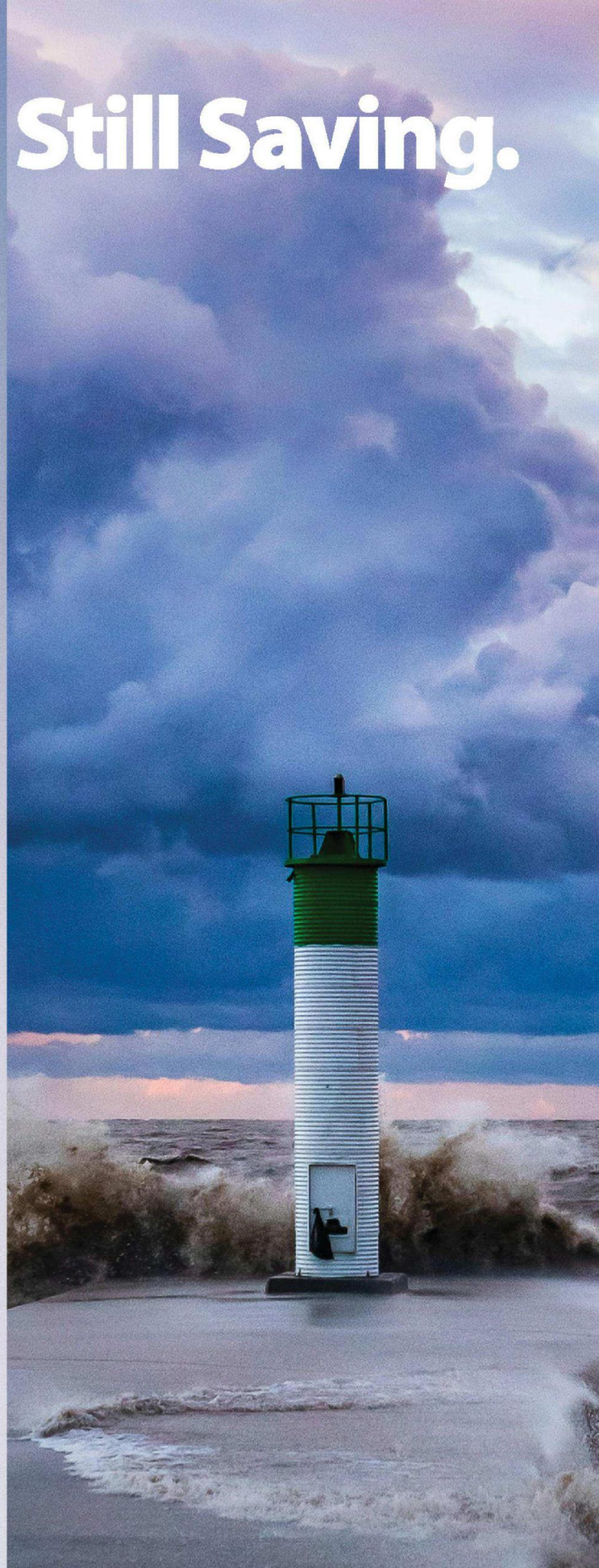


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## Population Growth Reported Across Cities and Towns in All United States Regions

By **United States Census Bureau**

Cities of all sizes grew on average from 2023 to 2024 with southern and western cities experiencing accelerated growth. Topping the list of fastest-growing cities was Princeton, Texas with a remarkable 30.6 percent growth rate, according to the United States Census Bureau's Vintage 2024 estimates. New York City, Houston, and Los Angeles saw the greatest numeric gains during this time and some cities in the Northeast and Midwest marked their first population increase in recent years.

"Many population growth rates reversed or saw major changes between 2023 and 2024," said Crystal Delbé, a statistician in the Census Bureau's Population Division. "Cities in the Northeast that had experienced population declines in 2023 are now experiencing significant population growth, on average. In fact, cities of all sizes, in all regions, showed faster growth and larger gains than in 2023, except for small cities in the South, whose average population growth rate remained the same."

### Population Growth in Regions

The South experienced the highest average population growth of any region. Cities and towns in the South with populations between 5,000 and 9,999 residents experienced the highest average increase of 1.6 percent. Those with populations ranging from 10,000 to 49,999 also saw an average growth rate at 1.6 percent. In contrast, places with population below 5,000 recorded a much lower average growth of 0.6 percent.

The West also showed population growth, where cities and towns with fewer than 5,000 people saw a modest average increase of 0.5 percent, while larger cities and towns with populations between 10,000 and 49,999 recorded an average growth rate of 1.0 percent — the same rate observed in places with 50,000 or more residents.

In 2024, the Northeast experienced population growth after years of steady decline, with rates ranging from an average growth of 0.1 percent in cities and towns with fewer than

5,000 people (a shift from the 0.3 percent average decline in 2023) to 1.0 percent average growth in cities with populations of 50,000 or more — five times higher than their growth rate during 2023.

The Midwest showed modest population growth, with average rates varying by population size. Places with fewer than 5,000 residents saw an average growth of 0.1 percent. Those with populations between 5,000 and 9,999 recorded a 0.6 percent average increase, while cities and towns with 10,000 to 49,999 residents grew by an average of 0.7 percent — the same rate observed in places with populations of 50,000 or more.

### Key Takeaways on Population Change

Across the nation, cities with populations fewer than 5,000 grew by 0.3 percent on average, compared with average growth rates of 1.0 percent for those with populations of 5,000 to 9,999; 1.1 percent for those with populations of 10,000 to 49,999; and 1.0 percent for those with populations of 50,000 or more.

- Princeton, Texas, near Dallas, was the fastest-growing city in 2024. Princeton increased its population by nearly one-third in just one year and has more than doubled it since 2020, from roughly 17,000 to 37,000.
- Two cities crossed the one million-population threshold between 2023 and 2024 — Jacksonville, Florida (1,009,833), and Fort Worth, Texas (1,008,106).
- The United States continues to be a nation of small towns. In 2024, 75 percent of its 19,479 incorporated places — 14,603 cities — had populations under 5,000. Only 4.2 percent (817 cities) had populations of 50,000 or more, and 1.8 percent (342 cities) had populations of 100,000 or more.

### Snapshot of City Growth

- Twelve of the 15 cities with the largest numeric population gains between 2023 and 2024 were in the South or the West, but the Northeast's New York, New York, tops the list with an increase of

87,184 residents between 2023 and 2024. Rounding out the top five numeric gainers were: Houston, Texas (43,217); Los Angeles, California (31,276); San Antonio, Texas (23,945); and Fort Worth, Texas (23,442).

- Seven cities crossed the 100,000-population threshold, with five of them in the South: Deltona, Florida (100,513); Plantation, Florida (100,694); Sunrise, Florida (100,128); Georgetown, Texas (101,344); and San Angelo, Texas (100,159). The two others are in the West: Tracy, California (100,136), and Federal Way, Washington (100,252).
- Between 2023 and 2024, 22 cities and towns in 16 states crossed the 20,000-population threshold. Thirteen were in the South, four in the Midwest, three in the West, and two in the Northeast.

Nation and State-Level Housing Stocks

The nation's housing stock grew by about 1.4 million units between 2023 and 2024, reaching a total of 146.8 million. The 1.0 percent increase was slightly lower than the 1.1 percent increase between 2022 and 2023.

- California had the largest number of housing units (14.9 million), followed by Texas (12.6 million) and Florida (10.6 million), while Wyoming (282,000) and Alaska (330,000) had the fewest housing units. All five states saw an increase in housing units relative to their housing stock in 2023.
- Idaho experienced the nation's fastest growth in housing units, with an increase of 2.2 percent between 2023 and 2024, followed by Utah at 2.0 percent and North Carolina at 1.9 percent.
- Hawaii (0.1 percent), Alaska (0.2 percent) and Rhode Island (0.2 percent) had the slowest rates of housing growth.

County-Level Housing Stocks: Growth Versus Decline

- The largest numeric gains in housing units between 2023 and 2024 were in: Maricopa County, Arizona (38,000); Los Angeles County, California (32,000); Harris County, Texas (32,000); Travis County, Texas (22,000); and Collin County, Texas (18,000).

- Jasper County, South Carolina, was the nation's fastest-growing county in terms of housing units: its housing stock increased by 8.4 percent between 2023 and 2024, followed by Brunswick County, North Carolina (6.4 percent); Burnet County, Texas (6.3 percent); Caldwell County, Texas (5.7 percent); and Custer County, South Dakota (5.4 percent).
- Maui County, Hawaii, experienced the largest percentage decrease (2.9 percent) in housing units between 2023 and 2024, followed by Adair County, Iowa (1.2 percent) and Terrell County, Texas (0.5 percent). ★

The 15 Fastest-Growing Cities and Towns Between July 1, 2023, and July 1, 2024, with Populations of 20,000 or more as of July 1, 2023

Rank	Area Name	State Name	Percent Increase	2024 Total Population
1	Princeton	Texas	30.6	37,019
2	Fulshear	Texas	26.9	54,629
3	Leesburg	Florida	18.5	37,815
4	Celina	Texas	18.2	51,661
5	Anna	Texas	14.6	31,986
6	Haines City	Florida	12.1	42,073
7	Foley	Alabama	12.0	28,043
8	Fate	Texas	11.4	27,467
9	Rosemount	Minnesota	10.6	30,581
10	Garner	North Carolina	10.4	39,345
11	Melissa	Texas	10.0	26,194
12	Sugar Hill	Georgia	9.5	28,598
13	Hutto	Texas	9.4	42,661
14	Leland	North Carolina	9.4	34,451
15	Erie	Colorado	9.2	38,594

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Vintage 2024 Population Estimates



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## SMALL CITIES' ★ CORNER

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**Public Service Spotlight: Sonny Campbell**, City Manager, City of Anson

**Interviewed by Jacqueline Redin**, Assistant Director of Member Services, Texas Municipal League

Sonny Campbell is the city manager and proud resident of Anson, a city with just over 2,300 residents and the county seat of Jones County. Since 2019, he has also been an active member of the TML Small Cities Advisory Council (SCAC), currently serving as its chair. A long-time public servant and advocate for small cities, Campbell's commitment to service is reflected in his ongoing work with Anson, TML, and other small cities across Texas.

**Jacqueline Redin: How long have you been involved in city government? And how long have you been with the City of Anson?**

**Sonny Campbell:** I began my career in municipal service in 1978, working part-time as a meter reader for my hometown right after graduating from high school. I continued my education and earned my water and wastewater licenses shortly thereafter. That was 43 years ago. Since then, I have held management roles in various capacities for over 30 years. I have proudly served the City of Anson for the past 12 years.

**JR: What influenced you to get involved in local government?**

**SC:** Early in my career, I witnessed firsthand how unresolved issues could significantly impact a community. I realized that if you want to see meaningful change and progress, you must be willing to get involved and help guide those decisions. That lesson has stayed with me throughout my career and continues to influence my service today.

**JR: What are some of the best things about your city?**

**SC:** One of the best things about Anson is the strong sense of community. People here are genuinely friendly, supportive, and always willing to help one another in any way they can. Although Anson is a rural city with all the benefits of small-town life, we are just a short drive from larger cities, offering the best of both worlds. I can say the same for many of the other cities in our region — strong communities built on trust, hard work, and neighborly spirit.

**JR: What are some proud moments you've experienced serving your city?**

**SC:** One of my proudest moments was helping facilitate the establishment of the detention center in Anson. I was fortunate to be in a position where I could help bring key people together and move the project forward. The facility created jobs and generated significant revenue, providing real benefits to the city and its residents. While it was part of my responsibility, I took great pride in seeing it succeed. It was an even greater honor to be recognized by the facility as their "Man of the Year" for my role in making it happen.

**JR: What are some of your favorite TML events or memories over the years, and why?**

**SC:** I have been attending TML events for several years, and each one has been a valuable experience. The events held in San Antonio stand out as some of my most memorable. The City's great atmosphere, rich history, the River Walk, and the outstanding food all made the experience both enjoyable and meaningful. Beyond the setting, the opportunity to learn, network, and bring new ideas back to Anson has always made attending TML events a highlight of my service.

**JR: How has serving on the SCAC benefited you and your city?**

**SC:** Serving on the SCAC has been extremely beneficial both personally and for the City of Anson. The camaraderie among the members and the shared

knowledge have been invaluable. Learning from the experiences and insights of fellow members has helped me grow in my role as city manager, and in turn, the information and ideas I bring back directly benefit our city by helping us make more informed and effective decisions.

**JR: What big issues are facing small cities?**

**SC:** One of the biggest challenges facing small cities is the 3.5 percent cap on property tax revenue growth. Rural cities often lack the large sales tax base that bigger cities rely on, meaning we are heavily dependent on property taxes to fund essential services like law enforcement and general city operations. This cap places a significant strain on our budgets and limits our ability to maintain and improve critical services for our residents.

**JR: What are some important lessons you have learned about public service?**

**SC:** One of the most important lessons I've learned is that while the saying "the customer is always right" is often true in business, it doesn't always apply to public service. In city government, our responsibility is to serve the best interests of the entire community, not just a few individuals with the loudest voices. Public service requires balancing many different needs and making decisions that benefit the city, even when those decisions may not please everyone.

**JR: What advice do you have for city leaders in small communities?**

**SC:** My advice is to work with the entire council as collaboratively as possible. It's important to remember that it's okay to agree to disagree at times as long as you maintain mutual respect. Stay focused on the administration and operation of the city and avoid becoming political — that role belongs to the city council and the mayor. As a city leader, your job is to support the council's decisions and ensure the city's day-to-day needs are met effectively and professionally.

**JR: How do you like to spend your time outside of work?**

**SC:** After a stressful day, I enjoy heading to my woodshop, where I make bowls or craft ink pens — sometimes to give away, sometimes to sell. It's a relaxing and creative outlet for me. I also have a deep love for music and have been fortunate to perform on some larger stages over the years. These days, I play bass guitar in a couple of country bands just for fun, and it's a great way to take my mind off the day-to-day responsibilities of work. ★

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By **Amber McKeon-Mueller**, Director of Legal Services, TML

**Q** What are the differences between the terms “peddler,” “solicitor,” and “canvasser”?

**A** A peddler, sometimes known as an “itinerant vendor,” is a commercial dealer who goes to a public place for a temporary period, or to people’s homes or places of business, to sell or promote a product or service. *See Ex parte Hogg*, 70 Tex. Crim. 161, 164, 156 S.W. 931, 932 (1913). Solicitors are usually noncommercial and include charities, political advocates, or other organizations that ask for money on city streets, public areas, or at private residences and businesses. *Watchtower Bible & Tract Soc’y of New York, Inc. v. Vill. of Stratton*, 536 U.S. 150, 157–58 (2002). Finally, canvassers are generally persons who promote a political or religious idea or political candidate, but who do not actively ask for donations. *Id.* at 154.

**Q** Are cities authorized to regulate peddlers, solicitors, or canvassers?

**A** It depends. Cities generally regulate peddlers, who sell products and services, and solicitors, who ask for donations, to protect privacy and prevent fraud and crime. *See Watchtower*, 536 U.S. at 164–65. Express statutory authority for most general law cities to “license, tax, suppress, prevent, or otherwise regulate” peddlers is found in Section 215.031 of the Local Government Code. Home rule cities are not expressly forbidden from regulating peddlers and may do so pursuant to their broad powers of self-government. Loc. Gov’t Code § 51.073.

However, cities may not generally regulate canvassers who promote political or religious ideas through handbills or other means but do not ask for donations. *Watchtower*, 536 U.S. at 165–66. Cities also must be careful of First Amendment violations if their ordinances prohibit charitable

solicitations. *Vill. of Schaumburg v. Citizens for a Better Env’t*, 444 U.S. 620, 621 (1980). In *Village of Schaumburg*, the United States Supreme Court held that a village’s ordinance, which prohibited solicitation by charitable organizations that did not use at least 75% of their receipts for charitable purposes on the grounds that it prevented fraud, was unconstitutionally overbroad in violation of the First and Fourteenth Amendments. *Id.* at 636–38.

**Q** May a city bar all or certain peddlers and solicitors from transacting business in the city?

**A** The state has given general law cities the authority to regulate peddlers and solicitors but has not granted the authority to completely prohibit them. *See Ex parte Faulkner*, 158 S.W.2d 525, 527 (Tex. Crim. App. 1942) Even home rule cities, with their broad powers of self-government, arguably do not have the authority to outright prohibit all commercial peddlers or solicitors. And cities clearly may not prohibit non-commercial canvassers who do not request donations. *See Watchtower*, 536 U.S. at 165–66.

**Q** What are some limitations regarding how a city may regulate commercial peddlers?

**A** The main issue in regulating commercial peddlers is unlawful discrimination. A city may not treat in-state and out-of-state vendors differently or substantially burden interstate commerce, otherwise it runs the risk of violating the Commerce Clause of the United States Constitution. For example, the United States Supreme Court found that Tennessee’s two-year durational-residency requirement for initial retail liquor store license applicants violates the Commerce Clause. *Tennessee Wine & Spirits Retailers Ass’n v. Thomas*, 588 U.S. 504, 510 (2019). In another example, the United States Supreme Court held that a state license

tax imposed on a business selling sewing machines in the state was an unconstitutional interference with interstate commerce when the tax applied to the sale of a single machine shipped into the state by a nonresident manufacturing corporation. *Norfolk & W. Ry. Co. v. Sims*, 191 U.S. 441, 449 (1903).

Likewise, a city must treat all vendors who are selling similar goods alike to comport with the equal protection provisions of the Texas and United States Constitutions. *Faulkner*, 158 S.W.2d at 527. A city may classify peddlers according to their business and may apply different rules to different kinds of businesses, so long as the differences are reasonably related to the city's permissible purposes in its regulations. For example, in *City of New Orleans v. Dukes*, the ordinance in question only allowed food vendors who had been in the city for a certain amount of time and prohibited all new food vendors. *City of New Orleans v. Dukes*, 427 U.S. 297, 298–99 (1976) (per curiam). The Supreme Court validated the ordinance's distinction between new food vendors and established food vendors because the city's purpose in promoting the appearance

and culture of the French Quarter was permissible, and the distinction within the ordinance could reasonably achieve the city's permissible purpose. *Id.* at 304; see also *Hixon v. State*, 523 S.W.2d 711, 713 (Tex. Crim. App. 1975).

In contrast, Houston's ordinance prohibiting the sale of newspapers on city streets, while allowing the sale of ice cream and flowers, was struck down partly because the distinction was unlawfully discriminatory. *Houston Chron. Pub. Co. v. City of Houston*, 620 S.W.2d 833, 838 (Tex. Civ. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1981). The city claimed that the purpose of the regulation was to promote traffic safety. *Id.* at 836. However, the court struck down the ordinance because prohibiting the sale of newspapers, an activity that implicates the First Amendment right of freedom of the press, while allowing the purely commercial activity of selling ice cream and flowers, is not a reasonable distinction. *Id.* at 838.

Cities also should not charge a license fee that functionally prohibits a peddler from operating in the city. See *Houston Credit Sales Co. v. City of Trinity*, 269 S.W.2d 579, 581 (Tex.



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App.—Waco 1954, writ ref'd n.r.e.). In *City of Trinity*, the city's fee was \$10 per day or \$100 per month. *Id.* The peddler, who sold dry goods, household goods, dishes and kitchen utensils from house to house, averaged an income of \$22 per week. *Id.* The appellate court found that the city's fee was so high that it was unconstitutional. *Id.*

The regulation of certain peddlers also invokes fundamental personal rights, such as freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and equal protection. If an ordinance restricts these rights, the city must show that the regulation is necessary to promote a compelling city interest, and that there is no less restrictive means of achieving the city's regulatory purpose. See *Houston Chron. Pub. Co. v. City of League City*, 488 F.3d 613, 621–22 (5th Cir. 2007); *City of Houston*, *supra*, 620 S.W.2d at 838; but see *John v. City of San Antonio*, 336 F. App'x 411, 413 (5th Cir. 2009) (finding no constitutional violation on commercial speech in San Antonio's ordinance restricting vendors on the river walk).

Cities should work closely with their city attorneys in drafting and enforcing a peddler ordinance.

## **Q What are some limitations regarding how a city may regulate solicitors and canvassers?**

**A** A city's ability to regulate canvassers who do not ask for donations is extremely limited. *Watchtower*, 536 U.S. at 166. The limited ability to regulate solicitors who request donations comes from the fact that the solicitation of charitable funds has historically involved fraudulent activity, the prevention of which is the most common purpose in peddler regulation. *Id.* at 164–65. Unfortunately, because of the nature of religious and political speech, attempts to license or otherwise regulate solicitors and canvassers will often lead to litigation. On the other hand, limited time, place, and manner regulation (such as reasonable hours of approaching people or limiting the intersections where solicitation or canvassing may occur) may be permissible. *City of League City*, 488 F.3d at 622–23.

## **Q What regulations do city ordinances typically contain?**

**A** Ordinances typically provide for the granting and issuing of licenses, direct how the licenses are issued and registered, and set the fees to be paid for licenses for commercial peddlers and noncommercial solicitors who ask for donations. City ordinances usually provide for the expiration of licenses or permits, and permit durations vary from one day to one year. Under statute, most general law cities may not issue a license for a period of more than one year, and a license may not be assigned except as permitted by the governing body of the city. Tex. Loc. Gov't Code § 255.033. The licensing fees also vary according to duration, usually with a one-year license costing \$100 or more, but a shorter license costing as little as \$5 per day. By statute, most general law cities may charge an amount reasonably necessary to cover their administrative and regulatory costs or costs reasonably related to their legitimate licensing objective. See *id.*; Op. Tex. Att'y. Gen. No. JC-0145 (1999). Cities can deny or revoke a license based on their investigation or other factors. However, for most general law cities, the license can be suspended or revoked only through the municipal court based on ordinance violations. Tex. Loc. Gov't Code § 215.034.

Ordinances frequently require reasonable hours that a peddler may approach private residences or work in city streets or public areas (for example, from sunrise to sunset). See *City of League City*, 488 F.3d at 621–23. An ordinance may also regulate which city streets and public property vendors and solicitors may or may not use for their business, so long as there are adequate alternate places for solicitation. See *id.*; Op. Tex. Att'y. Gen. No. JC-0145. However, a city may not completely prohibit peddlers from approaching private residences. *Faulkner*, 158 S.W.2d at 526; Op. Tex. Atty. Gen. No. JC-0145 (1999). A city may also compile a "no solicitations" list that residents may sign, and the city can give this list to potential peddlers. The peddlers and solicitors can be required to comply with "no solicitor" signs, and if they are licensed, they could have their license revoked if they ignore the list. See, e.g., Tex. Loc. Gov't Code §§ 215.031; 215.033.

## **Q What is the relationship between state law and municipal regulation of peddlers who sell alarm services?**



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**A** Alarm companies have claimed that they are exempt from all license or permitting fees charged by Texas cities, including fees and permits under a municipal peddler ordinance. Alarm installation companies are considered “security services contractors” under the Texas Occupations Code. Tex. Occ. Code §§ 1702.002(22); 1702.102. Therefore, they are licensed by the Department of Public Safety (DPS). *Id.* § 1702.004. Alarm companies doing business in Texas must have a physical address in Texas, and that information must be provided to the DPS. *Id.* § 1702.110(b). In addition, alarm companies are now required to maintain personnel records and provide those records to the DPS. *Id.* § 1702.127.

Because alarm companies are regulated by the State of Texas, they are not required to pay a “local permit or licensing fee” to a city to perform their services. *Id.* § 1702.134(a). However, it is unclear whether the exemption was meant to prohibit municipal licensing requirements under a city’s peddler ordinance.

**Q Could a city impose licensing requirements on an alarm installation company pursuant to a peddler ordinance?**

**A** Section 1702.134 of the Occupations Code exempts an alarm company that holds a state license from certain city regulations. The statute can be read to exempt an alarm company from any licensing requirements, regardless of how they are imposed. Additionally, a city cannot require a license or license fee for a peddler who is already licensed by the state, such as an insurance salesman. *Combined Am. Ins. Co. v. City of Hillsboro*, 421 S.W.2d 488, 491 (Tex. Civ. App.—Waco 1967).

The statute provides that a state-licensed alarm company is exempt from local requirements to obtain a permit from a city “to engage in business or perform a service under this chapter.” Tex. Occ. Code § 1702.134(a). Many city attorneys have interpreted this section to only exempt alarm companies from city-issued licenses to engage in business in the city limits. Under that interpretation of the statute, the alarm companies would not be exempt from licensing requirements imposed on a peddler for door-to-

door sales. Because of the public safety interest in keeping individuals from posing as alarm salespersons and going door to door to evaluate the security capabilities of homes within the city limits, many believe that the legislative intent behind this statute does not limit the application of local peddler ordinances.

Further complicating the matter, in 2023, the Texas Legislature passed H.B. 2127, which added Occupations Code Section 1.004 to the general provisions of the Occupations Code. Section 1.004 provides:

Unless expressly authorized by another statute, a municipality or county may not adopt, enforce, or maintain an ordinance, order, or rule regulating conduct in a field of regulation that is occupied by a provision of this code. An ordinance, order, or rule that violates this section is void, unenforceable, and inconsistent with this code.

Whether Section 1702.134 is sufficient for the state to occupy the field, thus preventing a city from enforcing a peddler ordinance against an alarm installation company, is unclear. In order to challenge a city’s ordinance under H.B. 2127, a person or entity would have to provide at least three months’ notice of their claim to the city, including reasonably describing the actual or threatened injury claimed and the ordinance or rule that is the cause of the injury. Tex. Civ. Prac. & Rem. Code § 102A.005. If the city does not repeal the ordinance, then that person or entity can sue the city by seeking an order declaring that the challenged ordinance is preempted by state law and barring the city from being able to enforce it. *Id.* § 102A.002.

Municipal regulation of peddlers is a complex area of the law. Each city should consult with local legal counsel prior to enforcing an ordinance against alarm company salespersons. ★



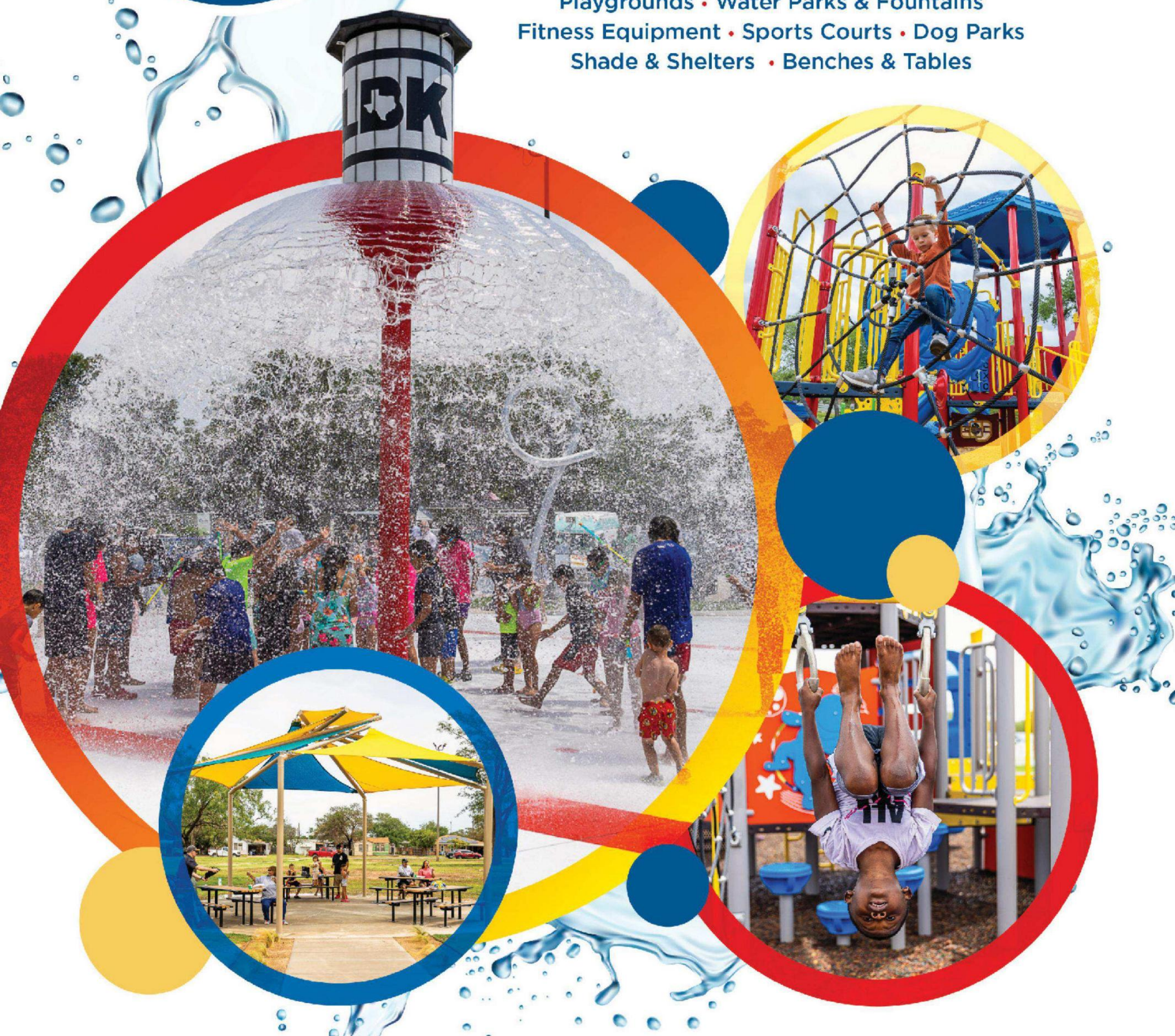


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# PRELIMINARY AGENDA FOR THE 113TH TML ANNUAL CONFERENCE AND EXHIBITION

All conference events will be held at the Fort Worth Convention Center located at 1201 Houston St, Fort Worth, TX 76102, unless otherwise noted. Conference information will be updated as program details are added. Check the conference website often for the most current information at <https://tmlconference.org>.

## Tuesday, October 28

1:00-5:00 p.m.  
**Registration**

2:00 p.m.  
**TML Board of Directors Meeting**

## Wednesday, October 29

7:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m.  
**Attendee Registration**

10:30 a.m.-Noon  
**Opening General Session and Presentation of Awards**  
**ON FIRE: Ignite a Radically Inspired Life**  
**John O'Leary,**  
Best-Selling Author and Speaker



11:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.  
**Affiliates' Board, Business, or Educational Sessions**

Noon-5:00 p.m.  
**Exhibit Hall Grand Opening**

1:45-3:00 p.m.  
**Concurrent Sessions**

3:30-4:45 p.m.  
**Concurrent Sessions**

## Thursday, October 30

7:30-8:45 a.m.  
**TML Risk Pool Breakfast** (separate ticketed event at no charge)

7:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m.  
**Attendee Registration**

8:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.  
**Exhibit Hall Open**

8:30-9:30 a.m.  
**Continental Breakfast in the Exhibit Hall**

8:00-11:45 a.m.  
**Affiliates' Board, Business, or Educational Sessions**

9:15-10:30 a.m.  
**Concurrent Sessions**

10:45-11:55 a.m.  
**Concurrent Sessions**

Noon-1:30 p.m.  
**Luncheon and Keynote Speaker** (separate ticketed event)  
**From Leadership to Leadering: The Shift We Need for the Future We Want**  
**Nancy Giordano**,  
Futurist and Strategist



1:45-3:00 p.m.  
**Concurrent Sessions**

2:00-5:00 p.m.  
**Affiliates' Board, Business, or Educational Sessions**

3:30-4:45 p.m.  
**Concurrent Sessions**

3:30 p.m.  
**TML Business Meeting**

## Friday, October 31

7:30-10:30 a.m.  
**Attendee Registration**

8:00-10:00 a.m.  
**Exhibit Hall Open**

9:00-10:15 a.m.  
**Concurrent Sessions**

9:15 a.m.  
**TML Board of Directors Meeting**

10:30-Noon  
**Closing Brunch and Keynote Speaker** (separate ticketed event)  
**Leading with Heart, Acting with Honor**  
**Frank B. Ashley III**,  
University Leader, Educator, and Coach







## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### ABOUT THE TML ANNUAL CONFERENCE AND EXHIBITION

#### When and where is the TML Annual Conference?

The TML Annual Conference and Exhibition will take place October 29-31 at the Fort Worth Convention Center. The Center is located at 1201 Houston Street, Fort Worth, Texas 76102.

#### When will program information be available?

It's online now! View the preliminary TML Annual Conference program at <https://tmlconference.org>. Check the website often for the most current information. You can also follow us on X and like us on Facebook for news and updates.

#### What is the attendee cancellation policy for the conference registration?

If you are registered and cannot attend, we encourage you to send a substitute. If you cannot send a substitute, TML will provide a refund, minus a \$75 cancellation fee, upon receipt of your written cancellation notice. Please send your cancellation notice via email to [acct@tml.org](mailto:acct@tml.org) by September 9. No refunds will be honored after September 9, no exceptions will be made, and meal tickets are nonrefundable.

**Important Note:** Canceling your conference registration does *not* automatically cancel your hotel reservations. You must cancel hotel reservations

separately. Submit hotel cancellation requests to [kbhousing@keybookings.org](mailto:kbhousing@keybookings.org) no later than September 9 to avoid penalty. **Cancellations received after September 9, will be assessed a \$75 cancellation fee by the housing bureau.** Cancellations received after October 7, are also subject to an additional one night's room and tax penalty by your confirmed hotel.

#### What if I can only attend one day?

TML offers a one-day conference registration. Register online or via the mail-in registration form.

#### Will speaker handouts be available?

Concurrent session handouts received by TML prior to the conference will be posted to the conference website and conference app as they are received.

#### Where should I park?

There are two garages near the Fort Worth Convention Center: Houston Street Garage (1200 Houston Street) and Commerce Street Garage (1301 Commerce Street). If you are planning to drive, we encourage you to learn more about these lots and other nearby options at <https://www.fortworthtexas.gov/departments/tpw/parking/downtown>.

### Will TML provide shuttle buses from the conference hotels to the convention center?

TML shuttle service will be provided to and from *some* conference hotels. To view specific information for each conference hotel, visit <https://tmlconference.org/hotels>. Service to and from the Fort Worth Convention Center will be available during the following days and times:

**Tuesday, October 28**  
12:30-5:30 p.m.

**Wednesday, October 29**  
7:00 a.m.-5:30 p.m.

**Thursday, October 30**  
7:00 a.m.-5:30 p.m.

**Friday, October 31**  
7:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.

### Are there other transportation options?

You bet! Fort Worth offers multiple transportation options to get around easily including TEXRail, taxis, and ride sharing. For information, visit <https://ridetrinitymetro.org>.

### Can I earn CMO credits for attending the conference?

If you are an elected city official participating in the Certified Municipal Official (CMO) program, you can earn Continuing Education Units (CEUs) for attending the TML Annual Conference and Exhibition. A link to the electronic CEU form will be posted on the speaker materials page. *Forms will not be provided onsite.* If you have questions about the CMO program, please email [cmo@tml.org](mailto:cmo@tml.org).

### How can I become a sponsor?

To learn more about sponsorship and exhibit opportunities, visit: [www.tml Exhibits.org](http://www.tml Exhibits.org).

### Special Accommodations

If you require assistance of any kind, including dietary restrictions (such as allergies or sensitivities to particular ingredients), mobility, audio, or visual aids,

please contact TML at [training@tml.org](mailto:training@tml.org) no later than September 29. Please note that individuals with special dietary needs will be responsible for the actual cost of the restricted meal if it exceeds the ticketed meal cost.

### Resolutions

Resolutions for consideration by TML member cities at the TML Business Meeting on Thursday, October 30, will be available on the TML website well in advance of the meeting.

In accordance with the TML Constitution, no resolution shall be eligible to be considered at the Business Meeting unless: (1) the same has been submitted at least 45 full calendar days prior to the first day of the Annual Conference; or (2) there is a two-thirds vote of the cities represented at the business meeting in favor of suspending the timely submission rule. ★

### Registration and Housing for the TML Annual Conference

Attendee registration and housing will open on Tuesday, July 29 at 10:00 a.m. central at <https://tmlconference.org>.

Follow these simple steps to register for the conference and reserve your sleeping room:

- Find your member ID at <https://members.tml.org/web/Online/MemberIDSearch.aspx>.
- From the TML Annual Conference and Exhibition website, go to the registration tab.
- Using your member ID, register as a conference attendee.
- Once you register, you will see a housing link next to each registered attendee. Use the link to toggle from the conference registration page to the hotel reservation page. When reserving rooms for multiple people keep the registration tab open as you register and secure rooms for each person on your list.

**Only registered conference attendees can reserve guest rooms in conference hotels.**



# TAKING THE LEAD THROUGH STRATEGIC PLANNING

By **Jonathan B. Flores, EdD**, City Manager, **Melanie Cano**, Director, Office of Strategic Excellence, City of Pharr; and **Cindy Milrany, CPA**, Chief Strategy Officer, Freese and Nichols, Inc., Fort Worth

Transforming a city into a regional leader requires establishing a bold vision – and empowering city staff to execute it in collaboration with residents, businesses, and civic groups.

The City of Pharr has renewed its commitment to municipal excellence by adopting systematic strategic planning that embraces continuous improvement along with transparency about progress on actionable goals.

Pharr's journey started under the leadership of Mayor Ambrosio "Amos" Hernandez, M.D., who urged city management to adopt the framework of the Baldrige Performance Excellence Program. The program, which is run by the United States Commerce Department's National Institute of Standards and Technology, aims to help organizations bring out the best in themselves.

While the approach is most often followed by private businesses, cities are also finding that these models offer guidance for making municipal operations more efficient and responsive.

As a privately owned business that has applied the Baldrige framework to boost long-term success, Freese and Nichols shares the philosophy of our client the City of Pharr about the value of a well-executed strategic plan for driving improvement and building resilience.

It's important to recognize that cities face more challenges than a business in adopting organizational change, including multiple constituencies, budget constraints, more levels of decision makers, and intense public scrutiny. But adapting private-sector strategic planning to municipal considerations can result in better services for residents, more efficient management, financial stability, and a thriving, engaged community.

It starts at the leadership level and extends throughout the organization.

## Strategic Planning That Guides Continuous Improvement

For some cities, systematic strategic planning and a commitment to excellence at every level could require a culture change. Or it could be a more structured way of doing things that they're already doing.

Cities plan constantly so they can budget, determine what infrastructure projects to pursue, develop new programs and services, and continue basic operations. Increasingly, many cities now adopt comprehensive master plans to coordinate multiple targeted plans, such as for water, parks, streets, and capital improvements.

A strategic plan gives structure to those other plans by laying out an overarching set of goals and establishing markers, often called Key Performance Indicators, to monitor progress.

Using a business-informed approach, Pharr's 2022–2027 strategic plan is built around six key focus areas, each supported by measurable goals. In developing this structure, city leaders examined how high-performing private-sector organizations – such as Baldrige National Quality Award recipients – align strategy with operations. As an example, Freese and Nichols, an engineering consulting firm recognized twice with the Baldrige Award, demonstrates how a clearly defined focus on employees, clients, and innovation can translate into long-term success. Drawing inspiration from such models, Pharr tailored its plan to address municipal priorities, emphasizing service excellence, infrastructure investment, public safety, and economic vitality.

For illustration, under the Service Excellence focus, Pharr embraces goals such as "Support the City's culture of 'Excellence Every Day' by providing equitable access to efficient, effective, and culturally responsive services."

The Infrastructure focus includes specific services for residents, such as "Maintain and improve wastewater system" and "Develop and install the citywide broadband infrastructure."

Progress on goals within each key focus area is tracked throughout the year, with results posted publicly through an online dashboard. This targeted approach drives and nurtures continuous improvement and makes expectations clear.

## Alignment Top-to-Bottom That Builds Employee Buy-In

A strategic plan that clearly defines goals and helps employees see how they fit into the vision builds trust in leadership. Successful businesses find that employees who understand the direction of their organization are motivated to take greater responsibility and look for ways to improve their own performance. That, in turn, benefits the organization overall. This can work for cities too. Creating a ripple effect throughout the workforce leads to higher morale, efficiencies, and better services for the public.

Leaders can't implement a strategic plan on their own – it must be embraced by those doing the day-to-day work of the city. Getting commitment from staff at all levels requires that leaders immerse themselves, communicate effectively, and unify their teams around their plan's key objectives. When staff are engaged with a focus on improvement, residents will be able to see excellence whenever they interact with a city employee.

Pharr has followed this philosophy to increase employee engagement through multiple strategies:

- Creating a leadership development program to give staff opportunities for growth
- Developing a process that encourages employees from all levels of each department to "step up" to address a problem

- Celebrating short-term wins so employees see the impact of their problem-solving efforts toward longer-term objectives

### Data Use That Increases Efficiency and Effectiveness

Data-driven decision making can improve operations, saving money and staff time, and freeing up resources for other priorities. But too often, useful data isn't collected or doesn't inform decisions. The Baldrige style of deep data collection prompts organizations to recognize how much more they could be tracking – and then to apply the data to better inform decisions.

Pharr established an Office of Organizational and Strategic Excellence that collects and analyzes data to regularly review activity across multiple departments. This identifies what's working, what isn't, and what changes are needed to meet strategic plan goals.

How does data matter? Take Pharr's International Bridge, a vital business connector: Focusing on trends for the volume and types of crossings helps the City continue increasing revenue from bridge operations which is a key strategic plan goal.

Another example:

Public safety response times are also important strategic plan measures. The police and fire departments sought more personnel at budget time, but the data showed that response times were excellent. The question then became, "Are there more effective ways to use first responder resources?" The data-driven decision was to adopt a strategy of targeted enforcement. Those efforts reduced crime by 13 percent without increasing personnel costs.

The City has also looked for additional opportunities to collect data. This resulted in a regular budget priority survey of the community. Survey feedback now leads to allocations for programs and services that residents have requested. And data about those improvements show that amenities such as better parks and recreation services and a new after-school program have increased community engagement.

### Transparency That Demonstrates Public Accountability

Seeing transparency as a strength rather than a vulnerability can require a shift in mindset. But sharing information has an overall valuable impact. Giving the community the means to understand the City's progress on goals lets them see successes and how some of the biggest challenges are being tackled, not ignored.

Making information accessible can take several different forms:

- Livestreaming budget workshops
- Publishing annual reviews and year-end financial department reports
- Creating a public dashboard to track movement on strategic plan indicators
- Sharing information on social media

Pharr's dashboard on the City's "Strategic Framework" page shows where each strategic plan goal stands using four different indicators:

#### Status Legend:



To be forthcoming and maintain public trust, it's important to show the status of all the goals in the strategic plan, even when they are behind target.

### Leadership That Drives Continuous Improvement

For strategic planning to work as a tool for organizational excellence, leaders must demonstrate the behavior they want to see, emphasize clear expectations, and consistently explain and reinforce objectives. This approach applies to any organization.

A successful leadership system sets direction at the top and aligns the strategy so that it cascades to every employee level. Strong leadership helps staff see their role and understand they have the ability and tools to solve problems in ways that further long-term goals. This enables them to gain confidence – in themselves, in their leaders, and in the plan. For a city, unified effort leads to public benefits through improved services, cost-effective decisions, savings through efficiencies, and organizational resilience.

#### These are ways city leaders can use strategic planning to drive excellence throughout their organization:

1. Clearly set achievable goals and communicate expectations.
  2. Demonstrate consistency and transparency to city staff and the community.
  3. Show employees how their role fits within the plan and how they can make a difference.
  4. Use data to find improvements and overcome inertia.
  5. Collect community feedback and show how it's being acted on.
  6. Share progress on goals with the public and show efforts to improve, especially in areas of residents' greatest concerns.
- ★

*The City of Pharr was one of nine finalists nationally for the 2024 Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award sponsored by the United States Commerce Department's National Institute of Standards and Technology. Freese and Nichols, an engineering consulting firm that helps cities with water, wastewater and transportation infrastructure and planning, was one of the five Baldrige Award recipients in 2024; the firm also received the Baldrige award in 2010.*



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# GROWING TOMORROW'S LEADERS

## Civic Engagement in Action Across Texas Cities

By **Cailynn Friddle**, Digital Learning Coordinator,  
Texas Municipal League

Community involvement can lay the foundation for future leadership, and Texas cities are creating programs to nurture it. Across the state, local governments are launching hands-on initiatives that help residents learn how their cities operate. Whether the participants are students, professionals, or retirees, these programs instill confidence, build leadership skills, and inspire civic engagement. Although each program differs in focus and format, they all share the same goal – to empower residents to lead in their own communities. Here are eight programs that demonstrate that leadership can start at any age.

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### The Next Generation at Round Rock's Police Academy

<https://www.roundrocktexas.gov/news/experience-the-round-rock-junior-police-academy/>



Every summer, the City of Round Rock hosts a week-long summer camp designed to build trust and connection between the local youth and the Round Rock Police



Department. The Junior Policy Academy will host five week-long camp sessions throughout the months of June and July giving the campers an opportunity to learn law enforcement practices and the ins and outs of community safety.

At these camps, students between the ages of 8 and 14 will experience a day in the life of a police officer by participating in hands-on activities such as physical training, obstacle courses, marching, and rappelling. Campers will also tour patrol and SWAT vehicles, K-9 units, and a police helicopter. More than just activities, this program fosters a sense of responsibility and teamwork, helping local youth see themselves as active contributors to the community. And who knows, maybe they will be the next generation of law enforcement.

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### Citizens' Academy 101 in Horseshoe Bay

<https://www.horseshoe-bay-tx.gov/642/Citizens-Academy-HSB-101>

Looking to learn more about your community and connect with your city leaders? Each spring and fall, the City of Horseshoe Bay hosts the Dottie Anderson Citizens' Academy: HSB 101 where residents can learn how their city operates. Participants can ask their city leaders questions, learn what they do on a day-to-day basis, and have a direct impact on their community. The Citizens' Academy consists of nine weekly sessions held on Thursdays from 2:00-4:00 p.m. Each class offers residents an in-depth look at different city functions, including city council, elections, police, fire, and other key operations. By the end of the program, residents have a strong understanding of how their city runs and are encouraged to take an active role in shaping its future.



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### **Houston's Mini but Mighty City Council**

<https://www.houstontx.gov/myc/>

The City of Houston's Mayor's Youth Council (MYC) gives high school students a chance to experience civic leadership firsthand. After a competitive application and interview process, selected students attend monthly meetings and participate in service projects, mirroring the structure of the actual Houston City Council. Youth Council Members learn about city government, attend meetings, and participate in projects, activities, and events.

The MYC consists of five different positions. The chair leads the council, is the primary spokesperson, and helps plan meetings and events throughout the program. The vice chair assists the chair by helping with meeting and event coordination. The city secretary deals with attendance and meeting minutes. The historian records all activities performed. The district and council aides conduct research and help plan and implement projects and events.

The MYC program helps students develop leadership and citizenship skills, while offering a platform to voice ideas and make meaningful contributions to their community.

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### **Fighting Fires in Flower Mound**

<https://www.flowermound.gov/665/Citizens-Fire-Academy>

The Town of Flower Mound offers an eight-week Citizens Fire Academy each year. This allows residents who are at least 18 years old learn more about their fire department and train alongside them. Held on Thursday evenings from March through May, participants learn CPR, basic first aid, and fire behavior. They also take part in hands-on drills like live fire training and vehicle extrication, as well as explore fire investigations, EMS operations, and water rescue techniques. By educating residents about fire safety and emergency response, the Citizen Fire Academy builds stronger ties between the department and the community.

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### **Mesquite's Code Ambassadors on Patrol**

<https://www.cityofmesquite.com/1756/Code-Ambassadors>

In the City of Mesquite, residents can volunteer for a proactive civic role through the Code Ambassadors Program. These community volunteers help identify code violations in their neighborhoods such as overgrown vegetation, unauthorized signage, and unpermitted auto repairs. Ambassadors must complete training, background checks, and ride-alongs with code enforcement officers before



being cleared to monitor their own neighborhoods. Last year, code officers identified 16,674 violations and responded to another 4,381 violations reported by citizens. Not only does this program allow code inspectors to designate more time to pressing or more time-consuming issues, but it allows Mesquite residents to maintain the integrity of their neighborhoods while taking part in the City's daily operations.

### **Boerne's Citizens Law Enforcement Academy**

<https://www.ci.boerne.tx.us/734/Citizens-Law-Enforcement-Academy>

The Boerne Police Department, Fair Oaks Ranch Police Department, and the Kendall County Sheriff's Office all come together to host the Citizen's Law Enforcement Academy. Starting in March and ending in May, this 10-week course includes weekly evening sessions covering topics like patrol procedures, jail operations, criminal investigation, and scenario-based training. Residents are introduced to the officers who serve their community to learn about their duties and gain insight into law enforcement procedures. Through this bond, they gain a better understanding and deeper appreciation for the challenges facing their police departments. They're also able to provide their suggestions for helping to solve these issues. Graduates often go on to assist the different law enforcement agencies or become active community advocates, strengthening public trust and civic awareness.

### **Lubbock's Junior Ambassadors Go Global**

<https://ci.lubbock.tx.us/departments/junior-ambassadors/about-the-program>

The City of Lubbock's Junior Ambassadors Goodwill Program takes students from Texas to Japan. In 1986, Lubbock and Musashino, Japan, became sister cities to promote international exchange programs between their youth. The two cities take turn exchanging groups of students to serve as representatives of their community. These students will spend one week in Japan to experience leadership and explore the culture of Japan.

There is a competitive application to participate in this program. Participants must submit an application with references and then complete an interview. A total

of sixteen students in seventh, eighth, or ninth grade were selected in 2025 to represent Lubbock abroad. Those selected attended weekly meetings leading up to the trip in Japan to learn about the language, history, and culture and prepare for their talent presentations and performances for the host City of Musashino.

### **Garland's Student Ambassador Internship Program**

<https://www.garlandtx.gov/3906/Student-Ambassador-Program>



The City of Garland offers students a paid opportunity to make a difference professionally and in their community. Participants work alongside over 2,000 city employees, gaining real-world experience in public service. Open to graduate students, undergraduate students, skilled trade, and select high school seniors, the program blends professional development with civic engagement. Students attend events, acquire new skills, and build a professional network all while learning what it means to serve their community with purpose. ★



# *Building for the Future:* **The Next 50 Years**

## **Promoting Excellence in Law Enforcement**

The TML Risk Pool is dedicated to its law enforcement partners. The Pool provides free risk management assistance through two law enforcement outreach consultants, conducts training for law enforcement leaders, and supports the Texas Police Chiefs Association. Reach out to **LawEnforcementOutreach@tmlirp.org** to schedule a visit or learn more.



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# THE ABCS OF A SUCCESSFUL FIRST TERM ON CITY COUNCIL

By **TML Legal Staff**

Congratulations on your election to city office! Here are the basics for a successful first term.

**A. ATTITUDE.** The right attitude goes a long way toward successful service in municipal office. As a member of the city council, a cooperative attitude will serve you well. It is always easy to criticize others' ideas. However, as a councilmember, your goal is to propose solutions and work toward a consensus rather than simply saying, "No, I don't like that idea."

**B. BUDGET.** Crafting, passing, and following a city budget are among the most important tasks you will perform as a councilmember. Cities cannot make expenditures except in strict accordance with a budget, and they can levy taxes only in accordance with the budget. TML legal staff prepares a budget and tax rate schedule each year that is available on

the League's website.

**C. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST.** As a councilmember, you are prohibited from voting or deliberating on agenda items that affect your own or your close relative's business, property, or financial interests. You'll be required to file an affidavit with the city secretary disclosing the details of the financial interests, and that affidavit becomes a public record. Further, you may have to disclose in writing the receipt of certain gifts or income of a certain amount from a vendor who does business with the city.

**D. DUAL OFFICEHOLDING.** Councilmembers cannot hold other paid public offices and, in many cases, cannot hold other unpaid public offices either. Furthermore, councilmembers can't take paid jobs with their own city, nor can they appoint themselves to other posts or positions. Finally, think twice about announcing to run for other public office while you're still a councilmember—you may automatically resign your council seat when you do. Check with your city attorney before considering any other position or job that might be a problem.

**E. EMPLOYMENT POLICIES.** Except in cities with the city manager form of government, the final authority over employment decisions typically rests with the council as a whole. As a member of the council, you should familiarize yourself with the city's employment policies and periodically consult with your city attorney to ensure they are kept updated.

**F. FREEDOM OF INFORMATION.** Taken together, the Texas Public Information Act and the Open Meetings Act require public access to city records and meetings. City officials are required by law to attend training in both Acts within 90 days of taking office. You should provide the certificate received for completing the training to your city secretary to keep on file.

**G. GIFTS.** Cities are prohibited by the Texas Constitution from giving money or anything of value to a private individual, association, or corporation.

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An exception to this prohibition arises when the city council determines that a donation/gift will serve a public purpose of the city. The decision as to what constitutes a public purpose is left to the discretion of the city council but may be overturned by a court.

**H. HOLDOVER.** The Texas Constitution includes a provision that allows an elected official who resigns from office to continue to serve until his or her place is filled by a qualified individual. This provision allows a city to continue to conduct business, even when it loses one or more councilmembers.

**I. INTERNET.** A wealth of information about serving in your new municipal office can be found on the Internet, including the Texas Municipal League website at [www.tml.org](http://www.tml.org), under "Legal Research" under the "Policy" heading; the Texas Attorney General website at [www.texasattorneygeneral.gov](http://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov); and the Texas Legislature Online website at [www.capitol.state.tx.us](http://www.capitol.state.tx.us).

**J. JARGON.** You will learn many new terms and acronyms in your role as a councilmember. Some examples are PIA (Public Information Act); OMA (Open Meetings Act); EDCs (economic development corporations); no-new-revenue tax rate, voter-approval tax rate; and 380 agreements, among many others. Don't hesitate to ask other councilmembers or city staff if you're unsure about a term – it's a great way to learn. You can also call the TML Legal Department to help you along the way.

**K. KNOWLEDGE.** New city councilmembers must use all available resources to develop their background knowledge about the diverse issues their constituents will expect them to resolve.

**L. LIABILITY.** Councilmembers will generally be held personally liable only for actions taken outside the scope of their duties and responsibilities as members of the governing body. However, the city itself will be potentially liable for actions taken by its councilmembers *within* the scope of their official duties. (See Tort Claims Act below.)

**M. MEETING.** Almost everyone intuitively knows what a meeting is. For example, a regular meeting of a city council, where agenda items are discussed and formal action is taken, is clearly a meeting. However, according to the Texas Open Meetings Act, many other gatherings or communications of the members of a governmental body may constitute a meeting. Generally, any time a quorum is present and city business is discussed, all the Open Meetings Act requirements must be followed, including posting a meeting notice and keeping minutes. Sometimes meeting in numbers less than a quorum may also result in a violation of the Open Meetings Act.

**N. NEPOTISM.** You may not hire your close relatives as employees of the city if you are on the city council. Personal recusal from the hiring decision is not enough; your close relatives are prohibited from working for the city. There are some exceptions. For example, if your relative worked for the city for at least six months before you took office and has maintained continuous employment with the city during that time, then that relative may continue to work in the position held. Also, a relative is always welcome to work as an uncompensated volunteer.

**O. OPEN.** The governing process must be open and transparent to be effective. This means refraining from conducting business behind closed doors unless specifically authorized by state law (for example, consultation with an attorney or discussion of the employment of a specific employee). Also, each member of the public has the right to address the city council on a matter on the agenda at an open meeting.

**P. PROACTIVE.** Be proactive in dealing with city issues. Don't wait for a problem to develop. By that point, it's often too late to take effective action. Always have an eye on the future and try to anticipate the needs of the city and your constituents.



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**Q. QUORUM.** A city council must have a quorum to call a meeting to order and conduct business. The number of councilmembers required to establish a quorum varies by city. A quorum in a general law city is determined by state law while a quorum in a home rule city is spelled out in the city's charter.

**R. RESPECT.** Mutual respect is the key to effective governing. City councilmembers should avoid personal attacks and focus on the issues at hand.

**S. SECURITY.** City officials are required by law to complete annual cybersecurity training. The training must be completed by August 31 each year. Details about how the city must track and report training compliance are available on the Texas Department of Information Resources website: <https://dir.texas.gov>.

**T. TORT CLAIMS ACT.** The Texas Tort Claims Act limits governmental liability and provides for damage caps for governmental entities. The Act provides that liability for engaging in 36 specifically enumerated "governmental functions" (such as provision of police and fire protection, maintaining city parks, and other activities one expects of a local government) is limited by statute. The Tort Claims Act does not generally provide for private causes of action against individual councilmembers for the actions of the city government.

**U. UNILATERAL.** Councils enact policies by acting as a whole. In most cases, individual councilmembers have no power to take unilateral action on behalf of the city.

**V. VOTES BY COUNCIL.** When a council votes on an ordinance or resolution, all that is typically needed to pass the item is a majority of those present and voting. While a quorum is the number needed to conduct a meeting, it is not necessary that a quorum actually vote on each agenda item. Local practices may vary from city to city.

**W. WORK TOGETHER.** Even if you disagree or don't get along with other members of the council, your first obligation is to solve issues and provide effective services to your local constituents. Try to put petty disagreements aside.

**X. EXCELLENCE.** (Hey, X is a tough letter!) Strive every day for excellence for your city. Voters elected you to your office, and they are depending on you to give your best every day.

**Y. YEAR.** Cities often operate on a fiscal year that is different from the calendar year. For a majority of cities, the fiscal year begins in October.

**Z. ZONING.** This is the ability of a city council to divide a city into districts and allow in each district only certain land uses, such as commercial, residential, or industrial. Zoning protects property values, promotes public safety, and is one of the main reasons cities incorporate in the first place.

It's time to get started! Keep these ABCs handy and remember that the League is just a phone call or email away. Best wishes in your new position! ★

# THE POWER OF LISTENING: A LEADERSHIP SUPERPOWER

By **Mary Kelly PhD**, United States Navy Commander Ret., CEO, Productive Leaders

I am not always a good listener. Listening to others is important and I am working on it, but frankly, I needed more help, so I did some research.

You might be like me. You know that one of the most underrated, yet transformative skills a leader can possess is the ability to listen. Listening is an active, intentional, and strategic tool that fosters trust, enhances collaboration, and drives innovation within teams, and yet, sometimes as leaders, we think we must have the answers, so we talk too much and listen too little.

Why is active listening so important?

### 1. Builds Trust

At its core, listening is an act of respect. When leaders take the time to truly listen to their team members, they send a powerful message: "I value your input." This simple act can significantly strengthen trust within an organization. Trust, in turn, is the foundation of any successful team. Without it, collaboration falters, morale declines, and productivity suffers.

Active listening demonstrates that leaders are present and engaged. This means putting away distractions, maintaining eye contact, and showing genuine interest in what is being shared. When team members feel that their voices are heard, they are more likely to communicate openly and honestly. This openness creates an environment

where ideas flow freely, and conflicts are resolved constructively.

### 2. Inspires Innovation

Listening is also a key to understanding and addressing the needs of your team. Empathy, a cornerstone of effective leadership, begins with listening. By understanding the concerns, challenges, and aspirations of team members, leaders can create strategies that align with their team's goals and motivations.

Consider this: how many innovative ideas are left unspoken because team members feel their voices will not be heard? By actively listening, leaders empower their teams to share their thoughts without fear of judgment. This boosts morale and unlocks a wealth of creativity and problem-solving potential within the team.

### 3. Strengthens Decision-Making

Effective decision-making relies on a clear and comprehensive understanding of the situation at hand. Leaders who actively listen to their teams gain insights that might otherwise be overlooked. Diverse perspectives offer a broader view of challenges and opportunities, leading to more informed and balanced decisions.

Listening also helps leaders identify potential issues before they escalate. For example, a team member might express concerns about a project's direction. A leader who listens can address these concerns early, avoiding costly mistakes and ensuring the project stays on track.

Furthermore, listening fosters a sense of ownership among team members. When they see that their input is valued and considered in decision-making, they are more likely to feel invested in the outcomes. This sense of ownership can drive higher levels of engagement and commitment.



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## 4. Fosters Ideas

Leadership is not just about giving directions, it is about creating an environment where everyone feels heard and valued. Open communication is the lifeblood of this environment. When leaders listen actively, they set the tone for the rest of the organization. Team members are more likely to emulate this behavior, resulting in a culture where communication flows freely at all levels.

This culture of open communication has far-reaching benefits. It breaks down silos, fosters collaboration, and ensures that everyone is working towards a shared vision. Additionally, it enhances the organization's ability to adapt to change. When team members feel comfortable sharing their ideas and concerns, leaders can quickly gather the insights needed to pivot and respond effectively.

### So, I asked myself, can I be a better listener?

Here are some practical actions we can take to enhance our listening abilities:

#### 1. Eliminate distractions

Give your full attention to the person speaking. Put away your phone, close your laptop, and focus on the conversation.

#### 2. Practice actively listening

Show that you are engaged by nodding, maintaining eye contact, and providing verbal affirmations such as "I see" or "Tell me more."

#### 3. Ask good questions

Encourage deeper discussion by asking open-ended questions. This not only shows interest but also helps clarify the speaker's points.

#### 4. Reflect and repeat

Repeat their words back to them to make sure that your brain is not misinterpreting what they are trying to tell you. For example, "If I understand correctly, you're saying..."

## 5. Be patient

Allow the speaker to express their thoughts fully without interruption. Resist the urge to jump in with solutions before they have finished.

## 6. Show empathy

Acknowledge the other person's emotions and perspectives. Phrases like "I can see why that's important to you" demonstrate that you care.

## 7. Follow up

Demonstrate that you value the conversation by taking appropriate action based on what you have heard. This could mean implementing a suggestion or simply checking back later to see how things are progressing.

Today I asked myself, "How often do I pause to truly listen to those around me? Do I create opportunities for open dialogue? Am I intentional about understanding the needs and concerns of my team?"

Incorporating active listening into your daily leadership practice is a simple yet powerful way to elevate your impact. It strengthens relationships, enhances decision-making, and creates a culture where everyone feels valued and empowered. Most importantly, it reminds your team that they matter.

It is so easy to prioritize action over reflection and speaking over listening. Yet, the most effective leaders understand that listening is a superpower. By mastering the art of listening, leaders can build stronger connections, inspire loyalty, and drive meaningful results. ★

*Mary Kelly is the CEO of Productive Leaders. Learn more at <https://productiveleaders.com> or email her at [mary@productiveleaders.com](mailto:mary@productiveleaders.com)*

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