

Colorado Municipalities

Vol. 101, No. 2, April 2025

Back to Basics

BY THE PEOPLE, FOR THE PEOPLE

Embracing the fundamentals
of municipal law

CML 2025 PRESIDENT'S INITIATIVE

Reconnect with the core principles
of municipal government

REMEMBER WHO YOU REPRESENT

Tips on leadership from
a longtime public servant





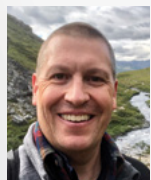
Back to Basics is about building trust, fostering connections, and creating communities where everyone feels heard and valued.

ABOUT SOME OF OUR CONTRIBUTORS

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JAMES BAIRD BEGAN HIS LAW ENFORCEMENT CAREER IN ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN, WHERE HE SPENT 25 YEARS. HE HAS HELD ASSIGNMENTS IN PATROL, SURVEILLANCE, PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS, SWAT, AND MULTIPLE INSTRUCTOR ROLES. HE WAS PROMOTED TO DEPUTY CHIEF OF OPERATIONS IN 2013 AND APPOINTED POLICE CHIEF IN 2016. HE RETIRED FROM ANN ARBOR IN 2018 TO TAKE OVER HIS CURRENT ROLE AS POLICE CHIEF IN BRECKENRIDGE. HE IS THE CURRENT PRESIDENT OF THE COLORADO ASSOCIATION OF CHIEFS OF POLICE, CHAIR OF THE COLORADO HUMAN TRAFFICKING COUNCIL, AND SERVES ON THE COLORADO COLD CASE TASK FORCE.



KEVIN BOMMER IS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE COLORADO MUNICIPAL LEAGUE. HE IS RESPONSIBLE TO CML'S 21-MEMBER EXECUTIVE BOARD FOR EXECUTING THE POLICIES AND PROGRAMS OF THE LEAGUE. HE IS RESPONSIBLE FOR PROFESSIONAL, EXECUTIVE, AND MANAGERIAL OVERSIGHT OF CML'S STAFF, ACTIVITY MANAGEMENT AND COORDINATION, MEMBER SERVICE OPERATIONS, ORGANIZATIONAL POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS, LEAGUE POLICY AND LEGAL PROGRAMS, AND FISCAL CONTROL. PRIOR TO BEING APPOINTED EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR IN APRIL 2019, KEVIN SERVED AS THE LEAGUE'S DEPUTY DIRECTOR FROM 2012 TO MAY 2019 AND WAS A FULL-TIME LOBBYIST FROM 2001 TO MAY 2019. KEVIN JOINED THE LEAGUE IN 1999.



KAREN GOLDMAN, MMC, HAS BEEN ASSISTING MUNICIPAL CLERKS IN COLORADO THROUGH HER ELECTION TRAININGS DURING HER ALMOST 20 YEARS AS A MUNICIPAL CLERK IN COLORADO AND BEYOND. SHE IS A THREE-TIME RECIPIENT OF THE AWARD FOR OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION TO THE COLORADO MUNICIPAL CLERKS ASSOCIATION (CMCA) AND HAS RECEIVED THE CMCA CLERK OF THE YEAR AWARD. HER LATEST AND ONGOING ASSIGNMENT IS AS AN ADVISOR FOR THE MUNICIPAL CLERKS ADVISOR PROGRAM, A COLLABORATIVE EFFORT OF CML, CMCA, AND CIRSA. KAREN HAS SERVED AS SECRETARY OF THE COLORADO SENATE AND HAS BEEN DESCRIBED BY FRIENDS AND COLLEAGUES AS THE BUSIEST RETIRED PERSON EVER. ASSISTING MUNICIPAL CLERKS IS ONE OF HER GREAT PASSIONS.



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WYNETTA MASSEY IS PRESIDENT OF THE CML EXECUTIVE BOARD. SHE HAS BEEN A MEMBER OF THE COLORADO SPRINGS CITY ATTORNEY'S OFFICE SINCE 1990 AND WAS APPOINTED CITY ATTORNEY/CHIEF LEGAL OFFICER IN 2014. SHE HOLDS BACHELOR'S DEGREES FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI IN SPEECH COMMUNICATION (WITH HONORS) AND POLITICAL SCIENCE, AND GRADUATED FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS SCHOOL OF LAW IN 1989. WYNETTA IS A NATIONAL SPEAKER ON A VARIETY OF MUNICIPAL LAW TOPICS, INCLUDING ETHICS, LAND USE, MARIJUANA REGULATION, AND THE COUNCIL-MAYOR FORM OF GOVERNMENT. SHE CHAIRED THE CML BUDGET, AUDIT, AND MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE AS SECRETARY-TREASURER, SERVED ON THE CML POLICY COMMITTEE, AND CHAIRED CML'S AMICUS COMMITTEE AND ATTORNEYS SECTION. WYNETTA ALSO SERVES ON THE INTERNATIONAL MUNICIPAL LAWYERS ASSOCIATION BOARD OF DIRECTORS, IS AN INTERNATIONAL MUNICIPAL LAWYERS ASSOCIATION (IMLA) LOCAL GOVERNMENT FELLOW, HAS CONTRIBUTED TO IMLA'S LEGAL ADVOCACY PROGRAM, AND IS A 2022 RECIPIENT OF THE EPPS AWARD FOR LONGEVITY IN SERVICE TO A COMMUNITY.



KELLY OHLSON WAS FIRST ELECTED TO FORT COLLINS CITY COUNCIL IN 1983 AT THE AGE OF 32, AND HE WILL RETIRE FROM FORT COLLINS CITY COUNCIL IN EARLY 2026 AT AGE 75. HE SERVED ON CITY COUNCIL THROUGH THREE DIFFERENT TIME PERIODS, SERVING AS MAYOR ONCE AND MAYOR PRO TEM THREE TIMES. BETWEEN TERMS, HE WAS A LEADER OF EIGHT OPEN SPACE AND NATURAL AREAS CAMPAIGNS THAT HAVE PROTECTED OVER 75,000 ACRES AND COUNTING, AND HE SERVED THREE TERMS AS LARIMER COUNTY PUBLIC TRUSTEE. HE HAS RECEIVED NUMEROUS AWARDS AND RECOGNITION FOR HIS LEADERSHIP AND PUBLIC SERVICE AND FOR PROTECTION OF OPEN SPACE, HISTORIC PRESERVATION, RECYCLING, AND ENVIRONMENTAL ADVOCACY.



ALI RHODES, MPA, IS BOULDER'S PARKS AND RECREATION DIRECTOR. ALI'S TWO KEY RESPONSIBILITIES ARE TO SET VISION FOR THE ORGANIZATION AND SUPPORT BPR'S TEAMMATES IN OPERATING A WORLD-CLASS PARKS AND RECREATION SYSTEM. BEGINNING HER PROFESSIONAL CAREER IN FINANCE, ALI SOON REALIZED THAT MUNICIPAL PARKS AND RECREATION ALIGNED WITH HER DEDICATION TO COMMUNITY AND COMMITMENT TO CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT AND HEALTH EQUITY — SHE JOINED THE CITY IN 2002 AND HAS NEVER LOOKED BACK. ALI HOLDS A BACHELOR'S DEGREE IN HISTORY (CUM LAUDE) AND SPANISH FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO AT BOULDER AND A MASTER'S IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO AT DENVER. WHEN NOT HAVING FUN AT WORK, ALI LIKES TO RUN, HIKE, WALK THE DOG, READ, AND WHEN THE LOCATION ALLOWS, SIT IN THE HOT SUN BY SOME WATER AND DO NOTHING. ALI AND HER HUSBAND TREVOR HAVE TWO KIDS AND ONE VERY HIGH MAINTENANCE DOG.



JOHN SHAVER HAS BEEN A MEMBER OF THE GRAND JUNCTION CITY ATTORNEY'S OFFICE SINCE 1990 AND WAS APPOINTED CITY ATTORNEY/CHIEF LEGAL OFFICER IN 2004. HE HAS UNDERGRADUATE DEGREES IN POLITICAL SCIENCE AND BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION, AND IS A GRADUATE OF CREIGHTON UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW. JOHN HAS A PASSION FOR ALL THINGS LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND IS DEVOTED TO THE PRINCIPLES AND ACTIVE PRACTICE OF SERVANT-LEADERSHIP.



COLLEEN WHITLOW HAS BEEN A DEDICATED RESIDENT OF MEAD FOR OVER TWO DECADES, ESTABLISHING HERSELF AS A PROMINENT SMALL BUSINESS OWNER AND ENTREPRENEUR. WITH A DISTINGUISHED 10-YEAR MILITARY CAREER, COLLEEN SERVED AT CLARK AIR FORCE BASE AND LANGLEY AIR FORCE BASE, CONTRIBUTING TO OPERATION DESERT SHIELD/STORM. CURRENTLY IN HER SECOND TERM AS MAYOR OF MEAD, COLLEEN HAS BEEN ACTIVELY INVOLVED IN VARIOUS LEADERSHIP ROLES SINCE 2014, INCLUDING SERVING AS A TRUSTEE FOR THE TOWN OF MEAD AND CHAIR OF THE MEAD URBAN RENEWAL AUTHORITY. HER EXTENSIVE SERVICE INCLUDES ROLES ON THE CML POLICY COMMITTEE, THE DENVER REGIONAL COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS, AND SEVERAL TRANSPORTATION COALITIONS ACROSS COLORADO. HER UNWAVERING DEDICATION TO HER COMMUNITY AND STATE REFLECTS HER LIFELONG COMMITMENT TO PUBLIC SERVICE AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT.

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About CML

The Colorado Municipal League is a nonprofit association organized and operated by Colorado municipalities to provide support services to member cities and towns. The League has two main objectives: 1) to represent cities and towns collectively in matters before the state and federal government; and 2) to provide a wide range of information services to help municipal officials manage their governments.

MISSION

Colorado Municipalities is published to inform, educate, and advise appointed and elected municipal officials about new programs, services, trends, and information to help them perform their jobs and better serve their citizens and communities.

Letters to the editor

Have thoughts about an article that you read in *Colorado Municipalities*?

Want to share those thoughts with your colleagues across the state?

CML welcomes thought-provoking letters to the editor! Send comments to CML Engagement & Communications Manager Denise White at dwhite@cml.org.

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Each issue of *Colorado Municipalities* reaches 5,000 municipal officials and decision makers. To reach those who lead Colorado cities and towns, contact CML Engagement & Communications Manager Denise White, dwhite@cml.org.

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President's Corner

Good governance isn't complicated

BY WYNETTA MASSEY, CML EXECUTIVE BOARD PRESIDENT

Let's be honest, serving in local government means wearing a lot of hats. Some days, you're solving real issues — like land use, budgets, or public safety. Other days, you're answering a five-page public records request about something someone read on Facebook. The reality is, our roles have never been simple, but lately, it feels like we've drifted away from the fundamentals. That's exactly why I chose *Back to Basics* as my initiative during my term as CML executive board president.

Throughout this issue of *Colorado Municipalities*, you'll hear from your colleagues across the state about the fundamentals of their roles in municipal government and what drives them to serve. I'd like to share my own "why" — I was very lucky to have a law school classmate who introduced me to municipal law and to the absolute beauty of Colorado home rule. Being a city attorney was the only career option I considered. During my 35 years with Colorado Springs, I've had a seat at the table and contributed to innumerable projects and programs that have had a direct and beneficial impact on my community. I have also been privileged to serve my fellow municipal attorneys through participation in CML's Attorney Section, the Metro City Attorneys Association, and the International Municipal Lawyers Association

THE BASICS MATTER MORE THAN EVER

It's no secret that tensions are high in local government right now. Decision-making feels more personal, debates more intense, and sometimes we lose sight of why we're here in the first place. But the job isn't about scoring

points. It's about effective, responsible leadership — and that means focusing on the core responsibilities that keep our cities and towns running.

I've seen what happens when we don't. Government essentially runs on trust. When that trust is questioned or broken, it is most likely due to a breakdown in basic processes and procedures. Failure to make land use decisions based on review criteria may create the impression that decisions are made because of who the applicant is. Failure to follow procurement rules and regulations may create the impression that contracts only go to political donors. Failure to recognize a certain board member during a meeting may create the impression that the chair is trying to silence that member or ram through their preferred result. None of these scenarios build trust, but trust can be built and strengthened by simply following the rules and sticking to the basics. Staying grounded

in good governance brings stability, trust, and progress — even in uncertain times.

LET'S GET BACK TO WHAT WORKS

Back to Basics isn't about avoiding progress — it's about ensuring that, as things evolve, we stay grounded in the fundamentals of good governance. The best municipal leaders aren't the loudest in the room — they're the ones who stay focused, make informed decisions, and never forget who they're serving.

So, let's strip away the distractions and focus on doing the work that matters. And if we get it right, we won't just be leading our communities — we'll be setting them up for success long after our time in office is done.



2025 CML PRESIDENT'S INITIATIVE

Reconnecting with the core of municipal governance

By **WYNETTA MASSEY**, CML Executive Board president

In an era of rapid technological advancements, shifting demographics, and increasingly complex societal challenges, it's easy for municipal governments to lose sight of their foundational purpose. Local elected officials and municipal staff spend their days deep in the details — budget planning, policy discussions, community concerns — often without remembering to step back and reflect on the bigger picture.

2025 CML PRESIDENT'S INITIATIVE

The Colorado Municipal League is reinforcing the core foundations of effective governance through the 2025 CML President's Initiative — *Back to Basics* — a call to reset, refocus, and reconnect with the core principles of municipal governance.

Back to Basics isn't just a reminder — it's a roadmap. It's for elected officials, municipal staff, and even those considering public service. It's about demystifying local government, fostering civility, and ensuring that everyone — from seasoned leaders to newly elected officials and engaged citizens — understands the “why” and “how” of municipal governance. By refocusing on the fundamentals, this initiative strengthens our shared commitment to serving our communities with clarity, purpose, and integrity.

WHAT DOES BACK TO BASICS MEAN?

At its heart, *Back to Basics* is about reinforcing the essential responsibilities of effective local government. It's a commitment to ensuring that the services residents rely on — clean water, safe streets and parks, economic vibrancy, and responsive public safety — are delivered consistently and effectively. It's about prioritizing transparency, accountability, and fiscal responsibility while fostering a culture of leadership that listens to and engages with the community.

It's also about reconnecting with the *why* of public service. Why do people run for office? Why do municipal staff dedicate their careers to local government? The answer lies in a shared commitment to public service — one that transcends personal interests or political noise and centers on making a real difference in people's lives.

This initiative reminds us that public service is not just a job or a title — it's a calling and a responsibility. It's about building trust, fostering connections, and creating communities where everyone feels heard and valued.

BRINGING BACK THE FUNDAMENTALS

Back to Basics is not just a reflection; it has real-world applications for elected officials, municipal staff, and engaged residents. Here's how this initiative will take shape.

- **Empowering Elected Officials:** Elected officials are the backbone of municipal government. This initiative equips them with knowledge and tools to govern effectively, avoid common pitfalls, and lead with integrity.
- **Preparing Future Leaders:** Running for office is a serious commitment. and those considering public

Let's strengthen our commitment to ethical governance, ensure that municipal operations remain clear and accessible, and build communities that reflect our shared values.

2025 CML PRESIDENT'S INITIATIVE

service should do so with a clear understanding of the role's demands. *Back to Basics* offers potential candidates resources — such as pamphlets and videos — to ensure they understand the role's demands before stepping into public service. By catching people before they decide to run, we can ensure they enter public service with their eyes wide open and their priorities aligned with the community's needs.

- **Supporting Municipal Staff:** Municipal staff are the engine that keeps local government running. Their role is essential, yet often overlooked in discussions about governance. This initiative ensures that staff members understand their place in the larger structure, equipping them with resources to collaborate effectively with elected officials and serve their communities with clarity and confidence.
- **Promoting Civility in Governance:** Respect and collaboration are essential to effective leadership. Building on initiatives like *Civility Starts Here*, this effort reinforces the importance of civil discourse in decision-making.

A CALL TO ACTION: LET'S GET BACK TO BASICS

The *Back to Basics* initiative is more than a refresher — it is a reinvigoration of the principles that make local government work. No matter how complex the challenges, the mission remains the same: to serve with integrity, transparency, and dedication.

To our elected officials, staff, and engaged citizens: let's embrace this opportunity to reset and refocus. Let's strengthen our commitment to ethical governance, ensure that municipal operations remain clear and accessible, and build communities that reflect our shared values.

By returning to the fundamentals of governance, we reaffirm our purpose and set the stage for a stronger, more connected future. Together, we can ensure that local government remains a trusted, effective, and inspiring force for good in our communities.



BACK TO BASICS



Future of home rule belongs to Colorado's cities & towns

By **KEVIN BOMMER**, CML executive director

Much like the U.S. constitution represents the power of an idea that people should choose their own leaders and govern themselves, home rule in Colorado represents “self-governance,” guaranteeing municipal rather than state control over the organization and operation of municipal activities.

In Colorado, municipal home rule derives its authority directly from the

Colorado constitution. It guarantees citizens of cities and towns the ability to adopt a local charter that affords both freedom from the need for state enabling legislation and from state interference on matters of “local and municipal concern.” These freedoms cannot be abridged by the legislative or executive branch, no matter any lack of regard or understanding.

HISTORY ROOTED IN CONFLICT

Home rule in Colorado was part of a national movement that began in the late 1800s and picked up steam in the Progressive Era, including Colorado’s voter-approved constitutional amendment in 1902 that was clarified and expanded ten years later. The amendment was largely a product of the General

Assembly’s treatment of Denver’s territorial charter as a “political football” starting with statehood.

Denver’s experience with the state nearly led to armed conflict in 1894 but ultimately was settled at the ballot box in 1902. Later amendments and the “Municipal Home Rule Act of 1971” shaped home rule as we know it today. From 1902-1922, voters in ten municipalities adopted home rule charters:

- Denver (1904)
- Colorado Springs (1909)
- Grand Junction (1909)
- Pueblo (1911)
- Durango (1912)
- Delta (1912)
- Fort Collins (1913)
- Montrose (1914)
- Boulder (1917)
- Monte Vista (1922)

Only Cañon City (1945) was added to the list from 1922-1950, but the years since then have seen steady growth, with 108 municipalities adopting a home rule charter as of December 2024.

MODERN CONFLICT

In an era of political expediency that would cast aside home rule authority in the blink of an eye via legislation (if it could be done) there has possibly never been a more important time for residents and municipal leaders in statutory cities and towns to contemplate a layer of insulation from unpredictable political winds coming from the Colorado State Capitol. While many bills over the years seek to declare issues as “matters of statewide concern,” simply saying so does not make it true.

Because home rule in Colorado is constitutional, only the court of legal



opinion can affirm or reject such legislative declarations from the court of political opinion. That has always been true. However, a growing and pervasive fundamental lack of understanding in the statehouse of the immense authority the constitution gives to residents of home rule municipalities to self-govern is troublesome.

In recent years, the Colorado General Assembly has frequently legislated in areas reserved for home rule municipalities — municipal courts, sales tax, and land use in particular. In the case of municipal court operations, the last five years have seen significant legislation aimed at lumping the activities of municipal courts into statutes that govern state and county courts. Municipalities have largely complied.

In 2023, legislation passed that purported to preempt the sales and use tax authority of all home rule municipalities over a certain type of use tax. Five municipalities sued the state and won at the district court level.

Finally, the last three years resulted in a number of bills that intend to impact

the land use authority of home rule municipalities in the name of housing affordability, density, and increased transit usage. While many municipalities share the goals of the bills, it is not yet clear how home rule municipalities will respond to the preemptions.

BEYOND THE CONFLICT

Ultimately, the responsibility to respond to unconstitutional preemptions — or to defend local actions others deem beyond the authority of a home rule municipality to take — falls upon leaders in each home rule city and town. This can be challenging when local leaders may agree with some or all the goals of state legislative policy, making it harder to oppose infringement on “local and municipal matters.”

Home rule has proven to be a valuable tool for strengthening local control, which even statutory municipalities often benefit from. It will continue to evolve depending on how it is changed by the courts, by any future constitutional changes, and the commitment of municipalities to defend keeping local control local and home rule at home.

BACK TO BASICS

Successful mayors focus on core principles of leadership

By **COLEEN WHITLOW**, Mead mayor

Being mayor is a role that carries tremendous responsibility, and it offers the opportunity to shape the future of our communities.

My approach to the role is grounded in a commitment to ethical leadership, clear direction, and genuine engagement with the people I serve. The responsibilities of a mayor extend far beyond implementing local ordinances and policies — at the heart of the role is ensuring the community thrives through effective leadership and thoughtful management.

ETHICAL LEADERSHIP

The cornerstone of any great mayor is ethical leadership. You must lead by example, making commitments you can fulfill and ensuring the entire leadership team upholds the highest ethical standards. It's not just about intentions — it's about understanding that the decisions you make affect multiple stakeholders. Overpromising on issues beyond your control can lead to disillusionment, so it's essential to set realistic expectations and be transparent with the community. Integrity must be

the foundation upon which all decisions are made.

CLEAR VISION AND DIRECTION

Effective leadership is built on clear vision and direction. As mayor, your role goes beyond management — it's about guiding your community toward a bright and sustainable future. This means having a forward-thinking vision for which you can communicate and rally support. Visionary mayors know how to inspire others, negotiate, and collaborate with diverse groups to implement

An exceptional mayor is an effective communicator and an attentive listener

policies that promote growth, safety, and prosperity. You must recognize the critical importance of economic development, embrace innovation, and stay informed about local and regional factors shaping the economy.

STRONG COMMUNICATION AND LISTENING SKILLS

An exceptional mayor is an effective communicator and an attentive listener. Understanding the complexities of public policy, public safety, and finances is essential, but listening to the community's needs and concerns is equally important. Your ability to unite people

around a shared vision requires understanding diverse perspectives and fostering collaboration. A mayor doesn't just speak for the community; they make sure the community's voices are heard and valued. Advocating for your residents means working with passion, intelligence, and empathy.

MAKING TOUGH DECISIONS

One of the most challenging aspects of being mayor is making difficult decisions. Avoiding tough issues is easy, but authentic leadership means addressing them head-on. Sometimes, these decisions won't be popular, but real prog-

ress requires facing challenges, even when it's uncomfortable. A great mayor takes on these tough decisions with courage and commitment, knowing that doing the right thing can lead to long-term benefits for the community.

The mayor's role may come with challenges, but it's also one of the most rewarding positions in local government. By focusing on these core principles — ethical leadership, clear direction, communication, and tough decision-making — you can steer your community toward growth, success, and a stronger future.



BACK TO BASICS

Reflections on serving on city council

Empathy and kindness are integral to the work we do

By **KELLY OHLSON**, Fort Collins councilmember

This year marks my last as a city council member. I have served in elected or appointed positions for 43 of the last 44 years, including a stint as mayor of Fort Collins. I have served with at least 27 different city council members and mayors, and I think I've learned a few things on this journey (some the hard way) that may benefit those currently serving.

As I say an early goodbye, here are a few parting thoughts and reflections of what I've learned about being an effective local leader.

Set your goals and workplan every one or two years, individually and collectively, and adjust as needed. Otherwise, you will get lost on the day-to-day hamster wheel and forget what's most important or impactful. Political time moves faster than normal time, and your term is over before you know it.

Work hard. Spend countless hours reading, studying, and thinking. Then show up for your many committee meetings, work sessions, and formal meetings prepared and ready to listen and participate, contributing to the final direction or outcome. There's no magic to it.

Courage and tenacity are two of my most admired qualities in elected officials, but they aren't that common. Be fearless, stand up for what you believe, and fight for it as long as possible or until success is achieved.

Learn about the history of your community and area, including the political history. Not only is it interesting, it will serve you well in your decision-making and relationships with those who came before you. You might also avoid some pitfalls of the past.

Speak for the voiceless, disenfran-

chised, and marginalized among us — those for whatever reasons cannot stand up for themselves. Everyone matters or no one matters. Empathy and kindness are integral to the work we do. This includes the nonhuman among us — the animals both domestic and wild. Often-times they need us the most.

A personal favorite is authenticity. Don't try to act like or be someone you aren't. People like, respect, and trust someone who isn't pretending to be something they aren't. Authenticity works, even for example, if you are a casually dressed, opinionated, and somewhat annoying policy wonk.

Integrity is a cornerstone of governance. Speak the truth; say what you mean and mean what you say. Don't say what you think people want to hear if it differs from your own viewpoint. People are very forgiving, even for elected local officials, but they want to be able



to trust and believe in you. Don't let them down.

Accessibility and responsiveness to constituent questions and concerns is fundamental. Make it easy for constituents to find and communicate with you. It is basic to what we do. People are often surprised and grateful that you responded to them. I've enjoyed countless coffees with local residents, and I've never had a meeting end poorly.

Serve the people in your community before the organization. Sometimes a large bureaucracy has its own notion of what's important, but it was not elected. You were. They're there to carry out, in partnership, the direction of the

“MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT ROCKS!”

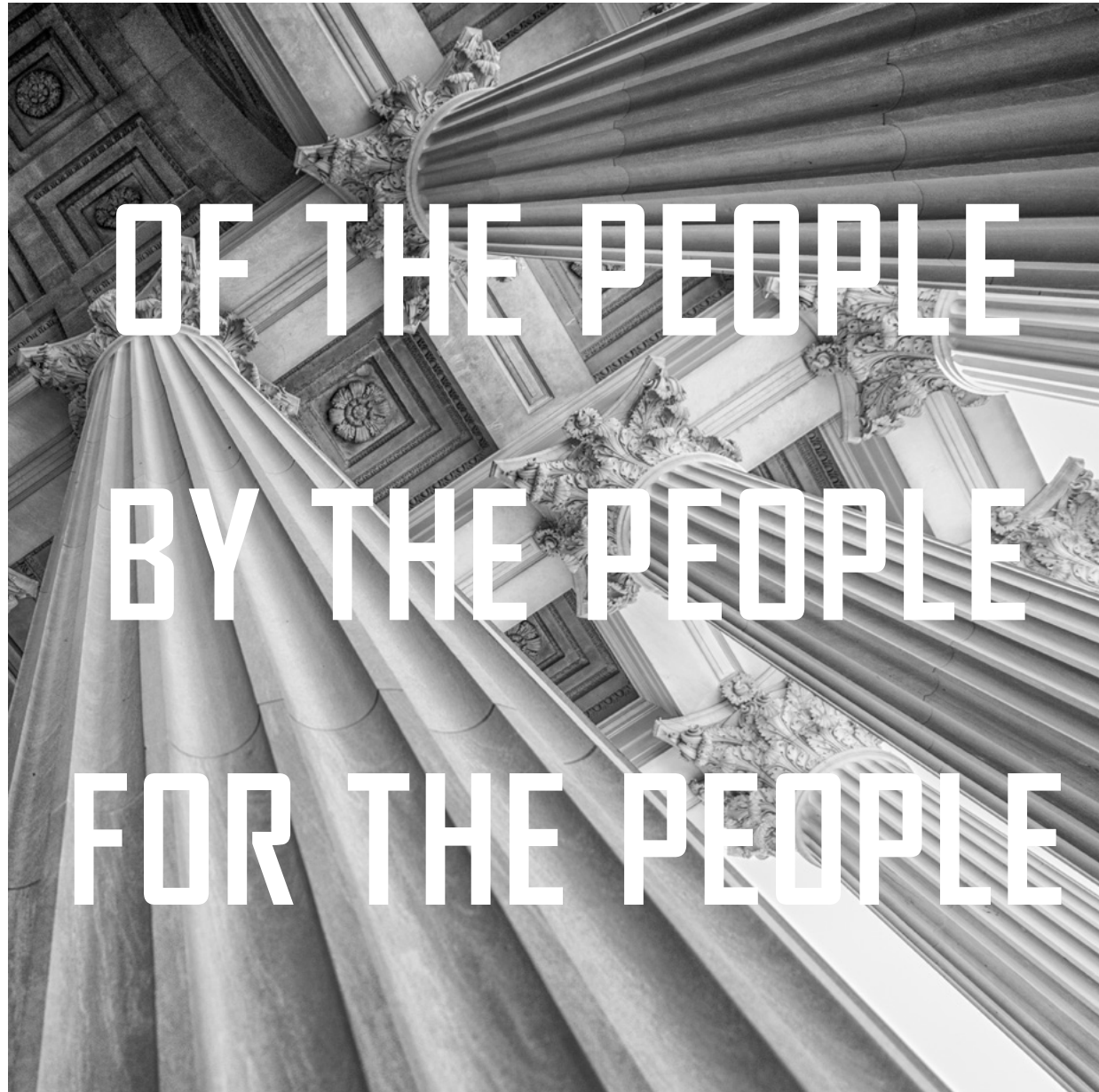
elected body. Don't allow yourself to be spoon-fed the organization's preferred outcome. Some friction and value differences are inevitable and often lead to better decisions. Sometimes things will get uncomfortable; that's OK.

I better not forget this one: take advantage of what the Colorado Municipal League has to offer to make you a

better informed and effective elected official. What they do and make available for us would take up an entire article. Thank you, CML.

I believe the highest form of government — that which is closest to the people — is municipal government. Municipal government rocks! That is you. I wish you all the best as you continue to do this important and challenging work. You make a very positive difference in the lives of your local residents, and it has been an honor and a privilege to be one among you. It's been a wild and wonderful ride.

All my best, Kelly.



OF THE PEOPLE
BY THE PEOPLE
FOR THE PEOPLE

FUNDAMENTALS OF MUNICIPAL LAW

By **JOHN SHAVER**, Grand Junction city attorney

“... MUNICIPAL ATTORNEYS MUST EMBRACE THE IMPORTANCE TO THE PEOPLE THAT WE SERVE OF THE BASICS — THINGS LIKE OPEN MEETINGS, OPEN RECORDS, AND HAVING ETHICAL ELECTED OFFICIALS AND STAFF.”

For the past 35 years I have had the privilege of being a municipal attorney with and for Grand Junction. Over those years, I have come to know that municipal attorneys are critical to the wellbeing of the cities and towns they represent. I am privileged to have been asked to offer a few thoughts in light of CML Executive Board President Wynetta Massey’s *Back to Basics* initiative on how, why, and what municipal attorneys do matters for our residents, our communities, and good government.

In our council candidate orientation, it is not uncommon that I refer to Lincoln’s iconic phrase “government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.” While the importance of the phrase far exceeds the simplicity of my reference to it in the orientation, the phrase frames principles fundamental to our work, and to the importance of the *Back to Basics* initiative. Those principles — that government represents and works in the best interest of, and that it be accountable to the people it serves — are simple enough to articulate but difficult to deliver. Having just completed a candidate orientation and talked about good government, my singular proposition (being limited to 500

words) regarding the initiative is as municipal attorneys we are uniquely tasked with assisting our municipalities and their people — both internal and external — to be accountable to the people our municipalities serve.

In our daily work we assist our organizations through attending meetings, drafting and interpreting policies, contracts, ordinances, resolutions, defending our municipalities, and prosecuting offenses in all manner of judicial and administrative matters. Implicit in each of those tasks is accountability. Day in and day out accountability begins, and possibly ends, with us — with our interpretation, advice, and application of complex and less complex laws. Practicing municipal law and advising our clients, often in public, is complicated; however, it is important to remember that most elected and appointed officials and municipal employees are not attorneys. As such, and to encourage accountability in furtherance of the collective effort to deliver good government, municipal attorneys must embrace the importance to the people that we serve of the basics — things like open meetings, open records, and having ethical elected officials and staff.

As practitioners, more routine things like the Open Meetings Law, Colorado

Open Records Act, and conflict questions may be regarded as routine and therefore less important; however, the *Back to Basics* initiative serves as a reminder that topics we regularly deal with are complex to folks who don’t have our training and experience, and that they are important to furthering Lincoln’s principles. While all of what we do is significant, certain outward facing laws and applications of the law have a special significance because the *why* of the law is possibly more important to delivering accountable good government as the *what* of the law.

As municipal attorneys we diligently strive to know and properly apply the *what* of the law; however, as a basic matter we must work equally hard at knowing, articulating, and understanding the *why* and that those concepts are important to the people and the maintenance of strong, accountable government people and processes.

The *Back to Basics* initiative reminds us of the unique function municipal attorneys have in keeping people and processes accountable for and on behalf of good government and the people we serve. Our commitment to the fundamentals will engender the people’s trust in the good government that we are all striving to deliver.

BACK TO BASICS

The ABCs of parks & rec

By **ALISON RHODES**, Boulder Parks & Recreation director

We've known for centuries what research now proves: public parks and recreation make communities better. While trends have evolved in the two centuries our profession has existed, the fundamentals of parks and recreation have stood the test of time: access, benefits, and community.

ACCESS

At its core, public parks and recreation is about giving everyone access to green spaces and the opportunity to move. The profession started in the 1800s amidst the Industrial Revolution when urbanization led to crowded cities. Our smart predecessors created parks as a place to find clean air and calm amidst city life. We saw that need filled in spades during the COVID-19 pandemic when park visitation skyrocketed. For those who don't have a private backyard, our parks are places to play, rest, connect, and more. Our recreation centers are the Swiss Army knife of your community — kids learn to swim, teens land their first jobs, and our oldest community members can stay strong so they can age in place.

A 2023 survey by the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA)

found that two-thirds of adults living in the west say access to parks and recreation is crucial to living a healthy life. An investment in parks is an investment in a healthier, happier community.

BENEFITS

Not only are parks good for the body, mind and soul, they're good for the wallet — and the environment! The health benefits are more obvious, but did you know that parks boost property values and economic vitality? A recent study by HR&A Advisors Inc. showed a 7 to 1 return on every dollar invested in downtown parks in Dallas. If parks were a stock, they'd be the one you want to buy. For the eco-conscious, parks and public green assets are proven places for detaining stormwater, sequestering carbon, protecting biodiversity, and cooling our cities.

Here in Boulder, we're excited about a partnership with CSU that's training field technicians to better understand how parks keep our environment healthy — and how to keep them that way.

COMMUNITY

We're all hearing about issues with loneliness, incivility, and social unrest. People are struggling to find a sense of community, but guess what? Your local park can be the antidote.

Parks bring people together in a way nothing else can. Volunteer programs where neighbors can meet each other? Check. Events that bring out the best in us? Check. If you need romantic inspiration, check this out: one of our very own elected officials met his wife playing volleyball in a Boulder Parks and Recreation league! "She went from being that competitive gal on the other side of the net to my wife," says Council Member Matt Benjamin.

Knowing my audience, I'll end with one more statistic from NRPA: 62% of U.S. adults — across ages, income levels, and political affiliation — are more likely to vote for politicians who make park and recreation funding a priority. Armed with these fundamentals, you can be your community's best parks and recreation advocate.



RURAL VOICES

‘n Boer Maak ‘n Plan ...

Where there's a will there's a way

By **GILLIAN LAYCOCK**, Akron town manager

For those of you who don't speak Afrikaans, *'n Boer maak 'n plan* is a traditional Afrikaans phrase I grew up with in South Africa that we said often, which directly translates to “a farmer makes a plan.” It's used to describe a creative solution, often innovative and low-cost. It's also used to describe the can-do attitude of people in places where resources are limited. I feel this epitomizes being in municipal government in a small rural community.

Making things happen in a small town isn't for the faint hearted —

resources are limited, staff are always stretched thin, and budgets don't have room for mistakes. But if rural communities like ours have proven anything, it's that we know how to get things done with what we have. It just takes creativity, collaboration, and a willingness to roll up our sleeves, and often make unpopular decisions that serve the best for the community as a whole (because everyone has an opinion!).

Small towns operate with a unique set of challenges. Unlike larger cities with dedicated departments for every

function, rural communities rely on people wearing multiple hats. Town managers step in as grant writers and human resources managers, Public works staff double as snow plow drivers, and community volunteers fill in the gaps. This level of resourcefulness is what keeps things running despite limited funding and workforce shortages. However, it requires more than just hard work — it takes strategic thinking, careful prioritization, and a commitment to finding solutions, with all of this rooted and driven by passion.

Many of us grew up with the acronym K.I.S.S. And who doesn't love a good kiss? Getting *Back to Basics* means taking action when something isn't working. Cut what's ineffective, tap into your network, and ask for personal referrals. Leverage partnerships, and if they aren't in place, take the initiative to build them.

One of the biggest challenges is keeping your foot on the gas. Too often, past generations in small towns have thought, we got those water lines installed — no need to worry about them again. Then, many years go by without a rate increase, and suddenly there's no money for maintenance, let alone system expansion. It's essential to stay proactive, always thinking ahead. A strong Capital Improvement Plan requires a mindset that constantly juggles priorities — keeping infrastructure, finances, and future growth in focus all at once.

Leveraging state agency support is essential for achieving the best outcomes for our towns. Grants are critical for rural communities to complete major proj-

ects, but chasing funding without a clear strategy can lead to wasted effort. Finding the right grants is a priority. I always start with the end in mind — focusing on grants that align with specific needs and projects, while considering staff capacity. Large grants can be tempting, but they often come with administrative burdens we may not be able to sustain. In Akron, we seek opportunities that fit within our staffing and financial means, such as the Department of Local Affairs Energy Impact Mineral Fund, or Colorado Department of Transportation Revitalizing Main Streets grant for downtown improvements, and workforce development grants that invest in staff training to strengthen our organization long term.

Creativity is a cornerstone of rural small-town success. With limited funding, traditional solutions are not always an option, so communities must think outside the box. Whether it's repurposing an underutilized building, securing grant funding for a much-needed infrastructure project, or partnering with

local businesses to stretch resources further, innovation is key. Rural towns often lead the way in problem-solving because they have to — there's no alternative but to make things work.

Collaboration and leveraging our local network is another essential ingredient. No one person or organization can do it all, but when local government, businesses, nonprofits, and residents come together, they can achieve incredible results. Partnerships allow small towns to tackle big projects. When people love their place, incredible things happen. Whether it's a regional agency helping secure funding, a local contractor donating materials, or volunteers stepping up to support community events, collaboration amplifies impact. It's about building relationships and working toward a shared vision, knowing that success in a small town is always a collective effort.

There's really nothing basic about it, besides basic human connection to make it happen.



BACK TO BASICS

A police chief's true north

By **JAMES BAIRD**, Breckenridge police chief

What we ask of a police officer today is exponentially more than what was asked of me when I entered this profession 32 years ago. This increase in expectations has impacted who we recruit, who we hire, and ultimately which officers are successful in one of the most honorable careers I know.

As a result, more is naturally asked of our police chiefs. A police chief is expected to seamlessly navigate between the often-competing needs of their teams, their community, as well as both their elected and appointed leaders. When a high-profile incident occurs anywhere in the country, it is observed by members of each of our communities. Due to the 24-hour news cycle and social media, this event will be seen repeatedly. When such an incident portrays law enforcement in a negative light, whether justified or not — it will impact our profession as a whole. Some effects will be minor and some more significant.



These incidents will, and have, outraged community members and compelled law makers to act. This has placed additional expectations and requirements on our already overburdened public servants. Common are changes to training trends. Implicit bias, deescalation, cultural competen-

cy, trauma-informed interviewing are all well intended to make our profession more professional. Current issues such as federal immigration enforcement add to a police chief's list of considerations. Bad outcomes do occur in law enforcement. These can occur when an officer makes a mistake, when

the officer does everything correctly, and sometimes, in rare instances, due to misconduct.

How a police chief leads his or her department is a byproduct of many things. That chief's experiences during their career, community sentiment, legislative requirements, political landscape, staff culture, budget resources, and countless other factors. When I was a new chief, this was difficult to navigate. Now that I'm in my 10th year in the role, this remains difficult to navigate.

In the days prior to GPS, navigation, at least at night, was possible using the north star. The idea that there was a fixed point — the north pole, allowed for navigating in any direction. Having a true north as a police chief ensures that we are keeping our priorities straight. The priorities of our staff will change from shift to shift, season to season, and officer to officer. The priorities of our individual communities will change based on local issues or even something occurring on the other side of the country. We as a profession need, and thankfully have, a true north. A fixed point that doesn't change. Even if we deviate briefly, necessary or not — we can always aim for our true north. In our profession, that must be "public safety."

Every decision we make within the walls of our police department, engaging with the community, and interacting with our leaders; every policy we implement, every procedure we change, and every law we advocate for or against; everything can be measured against public safety — our mission and our one and only true north.



BACK TO BASICS

From Middle Ages to today, role of municipal clerk always evolving

Clerks must keep up with new laws and technologies

By **KAREN GOLDMAN**, CML Municipal Clerk Advisor Program

The term “basic” is defined as fundamental, principal, key, and essential. For municipal clerk roles and responsibilities, what is basic varies from municipality to municipality and is often determined by factors such as status, size, number of staff, and relationship to other government entities. What is common among all municipalities is that the basic role of municipal clerks has changed over time.

Municipal clerks are the oldest governmental official. The title “clerk” as we know it developed from Latin. During the Middle Ages, clerk meant a scholar, one who could read and write, and thus serve as notary, secretary, accountant, and recorder. The term “clerk” is defined in state statutes as “the custodian of the official records of the municipality.”

Basic responsibilities of the municipal clerk include taking and transcribing minutes of the governing body, creating the agenda for meetings, posting/publishing legal notices, maintaining municipal records, conducting election, working with the public, liquor licensing, and responding to open records requests.

These basic tasks have become more complex over time. Taking and transcribing minutes of the governing body includes decisions about when and how to use artificial intelligence, creating the agenda means working with others to meet deadlines, posting/publishing legal notices means ensuring websites meet statutory accessibility requirements, maintaining



municipal records means following approved records retention schedules and policies, conducting elections means having familiarity with multiple election codes and changing laws, working with the public means having knowledge of municipal functions, liquor licensing means knowing the vast complex state rules and regulations, and responding to open records requests means ensuring the timeline for responses are met, records are correctly released, and no proprietary information is disclosed

Other basic responsibilities of today’s municipal clerks can depend on the type and size of the municipality as well as staff level in both the clerk’s of-

ice and municipality-wide. Staffing in the clerk’s office range from one person — the municipal clerk — to several, including those assigned to perform specific functions.

Clerks often oversee municipal court functions, staff a variety of boards and commissions, serve as human resource officers and treasurers — these tasks become part of the “basics.” For each additional role, it is the clerk’s responsibility to remain aware of legislation that would alter the way in which the responsibility is carried out as well as keeping apprised of technological improvements which would enhance their performance, adding to their basics.

In some municipalities, the basics

may also include licensing for marijuana and natural medicine businesses, food truck licensing, cemetery management, public relations, issuing passports, mailroom support, risk management, general research, and compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

The current role of the municipal clerk is anything but “basic.” Their responsibilities are varied and vast, require the ability to keep up to date with changes in the needs of their elected officials and their citizens, and adjust their work to reflect changes in statutes and regulations.

That’s a long way from the Middle Ages.

BACK TO BASICS

“Why I serve”

Whether they serve as mayors, town managers, or sit on a city council, every member of the CML Executive Board is a public servant. This month, the staff of *Colorado Municipalities* asked them what motivates them to serve.



Michelle Eddy
Blue River town manager/clerk

I have served in various roles for organizations often interacting with local, county, and state governments. I serve to be a bridge and liaison with the community. In my role as town manager/clerk, I'm able to work to amplify citizen voices to the trustees to establish common sense legislation for the benefit of the community. Mostly I serve to make a positive difference on the community.



Rachel Medina
Cortez mayor

I grew up in a family that welcomed others to their home whether it was a meal or some kind of assistance. This family culture led me to volunteer work and experience the joy and satisfaction in giving something beneficial back to my community. Serving on various city boards for years eventually motivated me to run for city council. My contentions were that I could contribute to our city through difficult times, as well as the good ones, and city council has truly been a fulfilling way to serve my community. I feel fortunate that I am hopefully making others' lives a little easier and their futures more prosperous.



Candy Meehan
Norwood mayor

I serve to build a sustainable, mindful, and collaborative future that strengthens rural communities and protects our resources for generations to come.



Seth Hoffman
Lone Tree city manager

I didn't always know I'd end up in local government, but looking back, it makes perfect sense. My mom was my first cub scout leader, my dad was a mayor and a planning commissioner, and my grandfathers served in the wartime army — public service was just part of the conversation growing up. At the University of Kansas, where public service was a key part of the curriculum, I saw how local government is where real change happens. Since then, I've spent my career focused on building strong, thriving communities. As city manager of Lone Tree, I work with our city council, businesses, and residents to create a city that fosters innovation and opportunity. Every day brings new challenges, whether it's attracting major employers, improving public spaces, or making sure everything runs efficiently behind the scenes. Serving on the CML Executive Board gives me the opportunity to support other municipalities across Colorado. I believe in the power of collaboration, and I know that when we work together, we can create lasting impact for the people and communities we serve.



Hollie Rogin
Lyons mayor

I choose public service because I fundamentally believe in our government being by the people, of the people, and for the people at every level, and especially locally. Being able to affect positive change for my constituents at the local level is immensely gratifying.



Liz Hensley
Alamosa mayor pro tem

I love to serve because I believe in giving back and making a positive impact in the lives of others. My community has shaped me in many ways, and I feel a deep responsibility to contribute to its growth and well-being. Service is more than just an action — it's an opportunity to connect, listen, and learn from others. I enjoy hearing people's stories, understanding their needs, and working together to find solutions. Every act of service, no matter how small, can create a ripple effect, and I take pride in knowing that my efforts can help inspire change. Making a difference, whether through leadership, mentorship, or simple acts of kindness, fuels my passion and strengthens my commitment to serving.



Dave Kerber
Greenwood Village mayor pro tem

I believe that we should all serve our fellow man in some way or another. An important area of service for me is how we live together in our cities, villages, and towns. As our neighbors struggle through their day to day lives, by creating a city that fixes their streets so they can easily travel, provides good police protection so they can feel safe, maintains a quality environment so they can enjoy the beauty of our state, and enforces zoning and manages development so their homes and greatest investments are protected, I feel, in a small way, we provide a service to our communities where our friends and neighbors can live in peace and harmony with minimal frustration, so that when they return to our community, they can relax and say ... *aahh*, I'm home.



Dave Frank
Montrose mayor pro tem

I have always believed that our founding fathers envisioned average citizens serving their country, rather than lifelong legislators who lose touch with their neighbors. I serve on our city council because I want to make my city and the state of Colorado a better place for my grandchildren. I serve on the Colorado Municipal League board to ensure that smaller rural communities voices are not lost in the bustle and crowds of the large cities.



Carol Saade
Breckenridge councilmember

I serve because I care about my home and strive to give back to the community that has given me so much. It's an honor to represent my town and be in a position where neighbors, residents, workers, businesses, and visitors can share their experiences, ideas, and concerns with me — and after hearing them, I can take action. Local government can be more responsive to specific community needs and has a tremendous impact on our day-to-day lives. Additionally, I am inspired by the positive work already being accomplished locally by individuals, businesses, and organizations. All of this, along with my love for my community, motivates me to serve.



Amanda Sawyer
Denver councilmember

I serve because I love my neighborhoods and my community. In this role, I have the opportunity to change people's lives every day. Whether I'm working on issues related to community safety, traffic, housing, wages, economic development, or anything else, the decisions I make have a deep impact on the future of Denver. It is the honor of a lifetime to represent the residents of East Denver, and all residents of our beautiful city, on Denver City Council.



Jessica Sandgren
Thornton councilwoman

I serve because I believe in the power of collaboration to create lasting change. As a longtime Thornton resident, I have dedicated myself to building strong regional partnerships and working with nonprofits, local governments, and businesses to expand opportunities for those in need. My service on boards and committees — including Kids First Health Care, Maiker Housing Partners, and the Colorado Attorney General's Substance Abuse Trend & Response Task Force — reflects my commitment to tackling critical issues like healthcare access, affordable housing, and mental health. I know that by bringing together community organizations, public agencies, and private sector partners, we can develop real, sustainable solutions. Over the past eight years, I have worked to foster collaboration through public-private partnerships that address homelessness, improve transportation, and support individuals reentering society. As I complete my service, I remain committed to strengthening these partnerships to create lasting change and build a more connected, supportive community.



Dan Kramer
Estes Park town attorney

"These rights we hold to be alienable if not exercised frequently and expressly:

- To refrain from the pursuit of power,
building others up instead of tearing down;
- To enjoy the blessings of the earth,
without waste or desecration;
- To have sufficient space
for cultivating plants, animals, healthy families;
- To dispense munificence,
as a matter of the spirit not as an article of commerce;
- To generate art, energy, intellect,
working and playing with and for each;
- To love and be loved,
without abuse, joyously, unconditionally;
- To do our best to share
with feeling our magnificent constitutionality;

We demand nothing,
we command less,
praying for guidance
we contribute and receive."

— excerpt from the poem "Magnificent Constitutionality" by Justice Gregory J. Hobbs, Jr.



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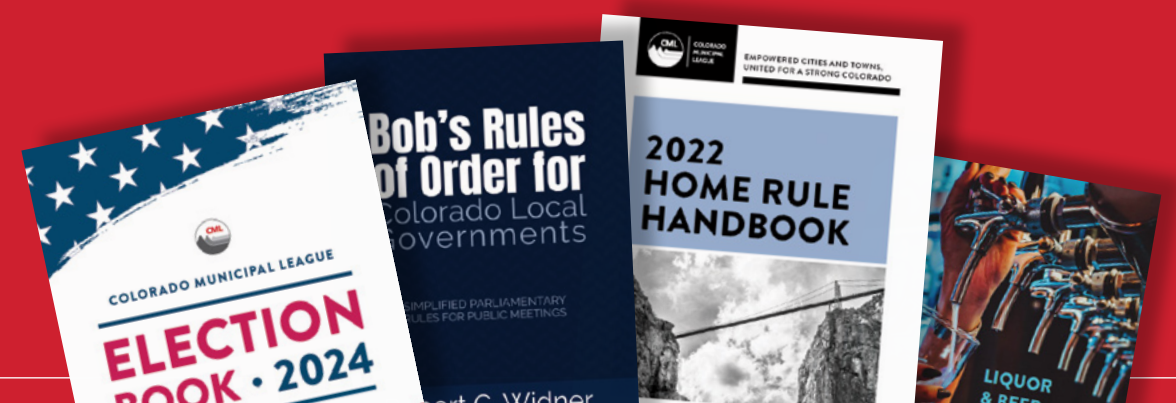
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District 3: Brighton, 5/14	District 10: Delta, 5/29
District 4: Woodland Park, 5/21	District 11: Fruita, 5/28
District 5: Flagler, 5/14	District 12: Steamboat Springs, 5/28
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COLORADO MUNICIPALITIES
 Denise White, editor
 Alex Miller, graphic design
 Mark Vanderbrook, circulation

Articles in *Colorado Municipalities* (ISSN 0010-1664) may not be reproduced unless permission is received from the editor and the reprinted article includes credit to the author, *Colorado Municipalities*, and the Colorado Municipal League. Viewpoints and opinions expressed by authors in any guest article are not necessarily those of the CML Executive Board, members, or staff of CML and do not represent official positions of the Colorado Municipal League.

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Manuscripts: Original articles on subjects of interest to Colorado municipal officials accepted. Contact the editor for guidelines. Subscription rate: \$25 an issue, \$100 a year. (Colorado residents, add sales tax: in Denver, 7.72%; all others in Regional Transportation District, 4.1%; all others in Colorado, 2.9%.)

Periodical postage paid at Denver, Colorado. Postal Information: *Colorado Municipalities* (USPS 123-140) is published January, April, July, and October by the Colorado Municipal League, 1144 Sherman St., Denver, CO 80203-2207, 303-831-6411 / 866-578-0936.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Mark Vanderbrook, Colorado Municipal League, 1144 Sherman St., Denver, CO 80203-2207; email: cml@cml.org.

Colorado Municipalities Online

AN E-VERSION OF *COLORADO MUNICIPALITIES* IS AVAILABLE ON **CML.ORG** ONCE THE ISSUE IS PUBLISHED. BETWEEN EDITIONS, KEEP UP WITH CML VIA FACEBOOK, X, OR LINKEDIN.

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COLORADO MUNICIPAL LEAGUE

Elevate your leadership skills at CML events!

Spring District Meetings May 2025

Each spring, CML staff and Executive Board members travel across the state to see our members face-to-face. These are opportunities for you to meet CML staff, learn about the municipal implications of the legislative session, and network with colleagues from neighboring communities. Learn more at cml.org.

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CML's Annual Conference is our signature event of the year. Don't miss this one-of-a-kind opportunity to connect with leaders from across the state and learn about critical municipal issues. Visit cml.org/conference.

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