

2025



WTa

Convention

Kalahari Resort

1305 Kalahari Drive, Wisconsin Dells

October 12 - 14, 2025

Looking for an opportunity to gain more in-depth knowledge about your role as a municipal official? Our annual convention is filled with exciting opportunities to network with your peers, learn from experienced educators, become acquainted with state agency staff, and enjoy some time away. Mark your calendar and come spend some quality time with us this October!

Sunday October 12th

Registration will be open from 1:00 p.m. until 6:00 p.m. The exhibitor area will open at 1:00 p.m. Come meet, learn from, and build relationships with vendors and companies that provide products and services of interest to towns. Highlights of the afternoon will include projection of the Green Bay Packer game on the big screen in the Exhibitor Area along with complimentary beer, soda, and snacks during the game. If you are lucky, you might even win a prize at half-time! Dinner is on your own Sunday evening.

Sunday Evening

Curious about Clerk College? WTA Clerk Specialist Melissa Kono will be meeting with the current Clerk College participants and anyone interested in learning more about Clerk College and educational options for Town Clerks.

Monday October 13th

Breakfast will be served in the General Assembly Area from 6:45 a.m. to 7:45 a.m. for those attendees who pre-registered for the buffet on their convention registration form. **The cost for breakfast is \$33.00 per person and is not included in the general convention registration fee.** Breakfast will include fresh cut fruit, muffins, breakfast breads, fruit-filled Danish, scrambled eggs, smoked bacon, turkey sausage links, breakfast potatoes, orange juice, apple juice, coffee, and tea.

There will be a general assembly from 8:30 a.m. to 10:45 a.m. We'll be having two keynote speakers this year! First, Sam Toles, former Chief Content Officer of Bleacher Report and a former City Council Member, will present, **"From Chaos to Connection: Transforming Social Media In Your Town"**. This special presentation will transform the way you think about social media. Discover the secrets behind the data to unlocking a more positive, proactive communications approach. Learn how to handle your STPs—the "same ten or twenty people" who often stir up chaos for Towns like yours in the comments and community groups. Next, Paul Mellor, a Communications graduate of Western Carolina University, will present, **"Memory Power"**.

Continued...

In today's business world, having the ability to remember names and faces, beat absent-mindedness, and recall facts and figures puts you at the head of the pack. In this interactive session you'll learn time-tested techniques for recalling names, speaking without notes, and gaining control of your day without the fear of forgetting. When you're skilled in memory all your other skills get better. This program shows how!

Workshops will begin at 11:00 a.m. and run through 4:45 p.m. Join us for lunch at noon while we enjoy roasted pork loin, green beans, carrots and onions, new potatoes, and rolls.

Monday Afternoon Exhibitor Reception

There will be a reception in the exhibitor area with complimentary beer, soda, and snacks for all registered attendees. Note that the exhibitors will close down at the end of the day Monday and they will **not** be present on Tuesday. Be sure to visit the exhibitors on Sunday and Monday to complete the Scavenger Hunt game card which you will need in order to enter the prize drawings to be held on Monday night. Deposit your completed game card into one of the designated boxes in the Exhibitor Area by 5:00 p.m. Winners will be announced after the awards banquet.

Monday Evening Banquet

The annual banquet and awards ceremony will be held on Monday night of the convention with doors opening at 6:00 p.m.

Long-standing town officers will be recognized for their service. To receive this recognition, please mark your registration form accordingly and indicate you will be attending the banquet. We will also be awarding the WTA, Scott Construction, and Rural Mutual Insurance Scholarships to the essay contest winners.

The banquet is an optional event which will feature a buffet dinner at a cost of \$45 per person and this cost is not included in the general registration fee. The dinner buffet will feature roasted chicken and pot roast, salad, rolls, chef's vegetable, starch, and mini dessert buffet. (Spouses and guests are also welcome to attend the banquet at a cost of **\$45 per person**).

Monday Night Entertainment

All registered convention attendees are invited to join us for the "**Neil Tribute and Nostalgia**" show featuring tribute artist, Eric Diamond, following the banquet. Eric has been wowing crowds not only with his spot-on vocal performance of Neil Diamond's biggest hits, but also his tributes to artists like Johnny Cash, John Cougar Mellencamp, and the nostalgic "one-hit-wonders" of the 60s and 70s. So, grab a drink, find a seat, and listen to your favorites. Enjoy complimentary beer, soda, and snacks. You won't want to miss out on the FUN!

Visit the exhibitors on Sunday and Monday to complete your Scavenger Hunt game card which you will need to enter the Monday night prize drawing. Before the music starts, we'll be announcing the winners. Good luck!

Tuesday October 14th

On Tuesday morning breakfast will be served from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 a.m. as an optional event for \$33.00 per person for those attendees who pre-registered on their convention registration form. The breakfast will consist of fresh-cut fruit, muffins, breakfast breads, fruit-filled Danish, orange juice, apple juice, coffee, tea, scrambled eggs, smoked bacon, turkey sausage links, and roasted red bliss potatoes. After you have enjoyed breakfast, get ready to learn with a variety of workshops that begin at 8:30 a.m. and conclude at 12:00 noon in time for a taco buffet lunch featuring chips and salsa, ground beef, soft tortillas, borrracho beans, shredded cheese, chopped tomatoes, lettuce, and sour cream.

Tuesday BINGO

Registered spouses and guests are invited to join us for BINGO at 10:00am. Cash prizes will be awarded.

Workshop Schedule and Topics

Please Note: There will be a three-hour long election training class provided by the Wisconsin Elections Commission on Tuesday. Please indicate on the registration form if you plan to attend the **Election Training** so that we can accurately gauge the number of attendees and plan accordingly.

Workshops are scheduled for both Monday and Tuesday. Many have one hour time slots and will be repeated a second time. Some of the workshops will be presented only once, as noted.

Monday: 11:00 a.m. - Noon (Repeated 1:15 p.m. - 2:15 p.m.)

1. Clerk Cracker Barrel: Join us for an informal question and answer session on clerk topics. Presented by WTA Clerk Specialist Melissa Kono and other WTA Staff.

2. Taking Action: Adopting and Enforcing Local Ordinances: Ordinances can be used for a variety of purposes, and it's important for local government officials to understand the steps necessary to ensure that the local regulations they adopt will be fully legal and enforceable. This session will answer common questions about when and how ordinances can be used, how to draft and format ordinances, procedures required to adopt various types of ordinances, how ordinances can be amended or repealed, notice requirements related to ordinances, and how to set up a system for ordinance enforcement. Presented by WTA Legal Counsel Lara Carlson.

3. 2% Fire Dues Self-Certification: In this session, clerks will learn what the fire dues certification is and receive a live start to finish demo of the complete 2% Fire Dues self-certification process. Presented by Sarah Brown, Operations Program Associate & NFIRS State Program Manager and Aaron Andre, District 2 Fire Coordinator, Fire Prevention/Safety and Health Program, Wisconsin Department of Safety and Professional Services.

4. Does your community need a RESET in Planning for Large-Scale Renewable Energy Installations?: Over the past five years, Wisconsin has seen large-scale renewable energy and battery storage projects built or approved in 22 counties, and it is projected that large-scale renewable energy will occupy approximately 3% of Wisconsin's harvested cropland by 2050.

RESET (Renewable Energy Siting & Engagement for Tomorrow) is a UW-Madison Extension program that helps local governments and communities plan for large-scale renewable energy projects. RESET offers tools and resources to help communities understand and engage in the siting process based on community priorities, and develop agreements and ordinances based on community input. Although the Public Service Commission has the permitting authority for projects of 100 megawatts or larger, local governments and communities can still provide input during the process. Large renewable energy projects also provide a significant revenue stream for local governments. Join this session to learn how RESET's education and engagement can benefit your community! Presented by Jessy Bradish, MA/MBA, Renewable Energy Specialist, University of Wisconsin, Division of Extension, Victoria Solomon, Associate Professor, Community Development for University of Wisconsin Madison Division of Extension - Green County and Diane Mayerfield, Sustainable Agriculture Coordinator, UW-Madison Extension.

5. DSPS Delegation Program for Residential and Commercial Construction: This presentation will provide an overview of the Department of Safety and Professional Services (DSPS) delegation program. We will discuss which permitting, plan review, and inspection responsibilities the municipality has by default, and which are delegated to the municipality by DSPS. The presentation will include a walk-through of the delegation request process, requirements and conditions of a delegated municipality, and offer time for Q&A. Presented by Etta Strey, Industry Services, WI DSPS.

Monday 2:30 p.m. - 3:30 p.m. (Repeated 3:45 p.m. - 4:45 p.m. except for Leveraging Generative AI which is a two-hour session and will not be repeated)

- 1. . Legal Cracker Barrel:** Join WTA legal staff for an informal question and answer session on any town topic. This is always a popular session with convention attendees and we encourage you to bring your questions!
- 2. Local Government and Social Media:** Social media's ability to efficiently communicate information to the public has prompted many towns and villages to create social media accounts. While this can make the work of local government easier, social media webpages can create many issues such as, public records retention, the creation of online public forums, etc. This session will explore these issues so that attendees will gain a better understanding of how to manage their social media pages. Towns and villages who are considering creating a social media page are encouraged to attend. Presented by: Jake Langenhahn, WTA Outreach Specialist.
- 3. Cemeteries Come to Life!:** Cemetery management has long been a challenge for Towns. It's a big responsibility. Not only are cemetery records often kept in old record books that may be falling apart or getting harder to read, but there are also questions such as how many burials are in a cemetery, who is buried where, or how many plots are still available for purchase? The use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) can assist in not only knowing where individual plots and grave sites are located but also help preserve records for years to come. This session will discuss and demonstrate the benefits of converting cemetery records into a GIS format and the capabilities that come with having an all-in-one system to search for records and help manage your Town's cemetery. Presented by Nicole Barbiaux, GIS Coordinator and Ken Jaworski, Director, Cedar Corporation.
- 4. Leveraging Generative AI (Artificial Intelligence) for Local Government—A Practical Introduction:** Economist Richard Baldwin, speaking at the 2023 World Economic Forum's Growth Summit, stated "AI won't take your job, it's somebody using AI that will take your job." This course will introduce government leaders and employees to practical uses of generative AI in their work to help them prepare for a future in which AI use is expected and integrated into our daily lives. We'll cover what generative AI is, how to use it responsibly, some common pitfalls to avoid, and gain hands-on experience using freely available commercial AI chatbots. This session will focus on the human-centered implications of AI, as articulated in the UW-Madison RISE AI initiative. This is a two-hour session. In the first hour (2:30 p.m.-3:30 p.m.) we will cover understanding AI and responsible use of the technology and in the second hour (3:45 p.m.-4:45 p.m.) we will cover practical applications and provide hands-on practice. Presented by educators from Extension's Local Government Education Program, Extension's Office of Digital Solutions and from U.W.-Madison's Data Sciences Institute.
- 5. Recycling Rule Revision--Changes for Responsible Units (RUs):** DNR staff have been working on revisions to the administrative code that oversees Responsible Units' (RUs) Effective Recycling Programs and other aspects of the Recycling program. After over three years of development, public comment and approvals, the rule revisions became effective on July 1, 2025. This session will go over changes for RUs as a result of the code revision including: RU education, collection requirements, recycling ordinance modifications/multi-family recycling, elimination of a pounds/person collection standard, changes for haulers and Material Recovery Facilities (MFRs) that affect RUs. Presented by Jennifer Semrau, Waste Reduction and Diversion Coordinator, WI DNR.

Monday 3:45 p.m. until conclusion

The Town Advocacy Council (TAC) will hold its Annual Meeting. Learn more about WTA's Town Advocacy Council and its efforts advocating for towns and villages in Madison. From listening sessions to Capitol Day, TAC has been essential in WTA's efforts to secure a plethora of recent legislative victories. The TAC annual meeting is your opportunity to engage with WTA's lobbying team and better understand how WTA navigates the legislative issues important to your community. TAC will also elect three board members to its Executive Board during this meeting. All town and village officials are welcome to attend the annual meeting, although voting will be limited to current TAC member towns and villages

Tuesday 8:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. Election Training (will not be repeated)

Elections 2026: Preparing for the Year Ahead: This session will be a high-level overview of things to keep in mind in a general election year. From the basics like Photo ID vs. Proof of Residence to the more complex like the new judicial privacy law processes, WEC staff will cover a wide range of pertinent information to help clerks and other election officials get back in the election mindset. This session will count for 3 hours of recertification training for clerks. Please note on the registration form that you plan to attend this session.

Tuesday 8:30 a.m. - 9:30 a.m. (Repeated 9:45 a.m. - 10:45 a.m.)

1. Frequently Asked Questions About Roads: Managing your highway infrastructure is a core responsibility for town officials. Learn the basics and nuances of town road creation, abandonment, speed limits, and more. Presented by Joe Ruth, WTA Government Affairs Director.

2. WISLR 101--A Brief Overview: WISLR is a useful tool for decision making and managing roads. WisDOT staff will cover helpful features in WISLR for local governments and answer questions along the way.

3. Improving Highway Safety at Railroad Crossings: Participants will learn about the Office of the Commissioner of Railroads processes related to improving railroad safety across Wisconsin. The presentation will provide an overview of general railroad safety principles, the OCR's role and decision-making processes, and how towns, railroads, and state agencies share responsibilities at public railroad crossings. Attendees will hear about the Top 5 safety issues inspectors find at railroad crossings while conducting routine inspections. Attendees will gain a better understanding of how to identify safety issues, navigate OCR processes, and collaborate effectively to improve crossings in their communities. Presented by staff from the Commissioner of Railroads office.

4. To Be Determined

Tuesday 11:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. (will not be repeated)

1. Simplify your PASER Ratings and Road Planning: Compiling PASER ratings and using the WISLR system can be an overwhelming task. This session will highlight what is important and how to simplify your job. We will focus on practical methods for decision making for road maintenance and how to maximize your road budgets. Presented by Jeff Delmore of Delmore Consulting LLC.

2. Innovation Grant Program: This session will provide information about the Innovation Grant (IG) program that was created under 2023 Wisconsin Act 12 and designed to provide funds to counties, municipalities, and tribes who completely transfer one or more of certain eligible services/duties to another county, municipality, tribe, nonprofit organization, or private entity to create cost savings. We will share IG stats, provide helpful IG filing tips, and explain the beneficial changes to the program that were included in the most recent state budget. Presented by Valeah Foy, State and Local Finance Administrator, WI Department of Revenue.

3. Highway to Harmony—Shared Roads to Shared Solutions: Through open dialogue and *shared responsibility*, farmers and officials are *paving the way* for rural road systems that work for everyone. Presented by a panel of guest speakers on behalf of Professional Dairy Producers of Wisconsin.

4. Slow the Flow: Opportunities to Increase Flood Resilience in Wisconsin Towns: This interactive session will highlight a collaboration between the Wisconsin Towns Association, WI Wetlands Association (WWA), and Trout Unlimited (TU) to help towns work proactively to reduce flood risks and damages to road infrastructure. Presenters will share examples of assessing the root causes of infrastructure risks and flood vulnerabilities and discuss natural flood management solutions that can be used by towns to protect and improve the resilience of culverts and bridges. This session will also highlight new programs and resources that can support assessment and implementation projects in your communities. Presented by Kyle Magyera, WWA; Atty. Larry Konopacki, Stafford Rosenbaum LLP; and Sara Strassman, TU (tentative).