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November 2025

# municipalities

Official Publication of the New Jersey State League of Municipalities



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## New Jersey Municipalities Magazine

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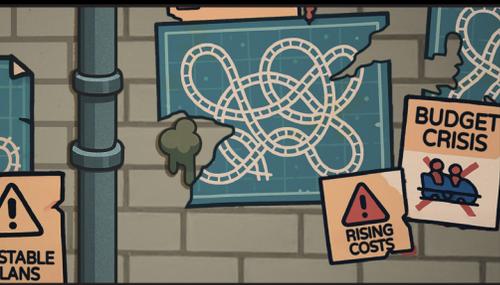
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# From 222 West State

Michael F. Cerra, League Executive Director



## A Gathering of Leaders: Conference 2025

**A**t press time, the League's staff is hard at work wrapping up the final details for what promises to be a Conference that will provide you with tools for the rest of the year. We are serving up opportunities for education, networking, and inspiration for 2026.

We appreciate your participation and input throughout the year. Hopefully you'll be seeing session topics and exhibitors that you've been meaning to learn more about and take your opportunities to develop your peer and professional relationships. We also appreciate the participation of our 20 affiliates, these specialized professional groups schedule important sessions and events that create a wider local government community for three busy days in Atlantic City.

There are a few events we'll be bringing back thanks to popular demand, including the League's Orientation session on Tuesday at 10:45, the headshot station at the League's booth in the area between the entrances to Halls C and D, and the Pathways to Public Service with the Department of Community Affairs. The young attendees of the Tuesday morning event will be exploring the sessions and Exhibit Hall in the afternoon and we hope you will welcome them and share your positive experiences in local government professions.

Each year, the League's Officers, Executive Board Members, and staff strive to create sessions that answer the most pressing questions, attract the most innovative and cooperative vendors and service partners to the Exhibit Hall, and meet your professional needs for future success. Please look for white ribbons on badges—they are League staff members, who are ready to help you get where you're going and also hear suggestions to continue making the Conference better every year.

At the Conference, the League conducts its very important annual business. On Tuesday at 3:00 in room 418, our Resolutions Committee reviews Conference Resolutions sent in by our members. The resolutions that make it through committee review are then voted on Thursday at 3 p.m. in the Crown Ballroom at the Sheraton. We also go through the nomination and election of new Officers and Executive Board Members.

We owe a debt of gratitude to these community leaders who add state-level work to their already busy lives as Mayors and Council Members. To those exiting office, we appreciate your selfless work and give you our thanks. To those just beginning their municipal government journey, we hope the Conference is a warm welcome.

See you in Atlantic City! 🇺🇸

*Michael Cerra*

**To those exiting office, we appreciate your selfless work and give you our thanks. To those just beginning their municipal government journey, we hope the Conference is a warm welcome.**



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# Creating a Civility Policy

Avalon protects residents and public officials with standards for interactions

Barbara Juzaitis, *Council President, Avalon Borough; Executive Board Member, NJLM;*  
and Scott Wahl, *Business Administrator, Avalon Borough*



**A** taxpayer walks into the office of the assistant to the business administrator and promptly tells this new employee that she doesn't know how to do her job, will report her alleged deficiencies to the mayor and governing body, and reminds her that she pays her salary. The tone was nasty, condescending, and inappropriate, even for a public sector work environment where the expectation is dissatisfied people will complain on a daily, if not hourly, basis. The business administrator quickly intervened, set the record straight on the taxpayer's complaint, and insisted that the tone and behavior is unwelcome, unacceptable, and will not be tolerated as the incident demonstrated an act of unnecessary bullying. The incident was so unwelcome, the employee was reduced to tears.

Elected and appointed public officials are held to a very high standard, and they should be. Individuals choose to enter public service for many reasons, including future political aspirations, good pay, health benefits, pensions, and other reasons.

However, we must remind ourselves that public employment and public service has a primary goal: We must advance the public's interests. Not our own, but those of the people we serve. To effectively do so, we must continually rise above a very high standard of treating people with kindness and respect even in cases when they are running a fever on any issue, from a streetlight being out to a beach path being temporarily closed. In Avalon, staff is continually trained and re-trained to achieve a high level of courteous public service.

**Citizens are stressed more than ever due to a turbulent political climate and new economic and social issues that are difficult for many to navigate.**

Citizens are stressed more than ever due to a turbulent political climate and new economic and social issues that are difficult for many to navigate. However, this does not give individuals unfettered access to public employees for the singular purpose of bullying and harassment. Simple kindness and courtesy matter.

**Civility Policy Adopted**

As a result of the experience noted above, and others, Avalon drafted and

approved a civility policy pertaining to public interactions with employees.

The resolution reinforces the Borough's expectation that public officials treat our customers with courtesy and respect. And it also creates the expectation for the public that interactions do not interfere with the employees' rights to a work environment that is free from intolerance,

harassment, and all types of bullying.

This policy was drafted carefully with the recognition that freedom of speech and expression by the public continues to be maintained and protected. The policy states intolerable acts, including threat of harm in any way, use of loud or offensive language, any disruption to municipal operations, and other related matters.



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## A Resolution Adopting a Civility Policy Pertaining To Public Interactions With Borough Employees

**WHEREAS**, the Borough of Avalon is committed to maintaining a work environment free from intolerance, harassment and all types of bullying; and

**WHEREAS**, existing policies in the Borough address how employees interact with one another and the public; however, no policy has been memorialized which outlines the expectations of how the public should interact with Borough employees; and

**WHEREAS**, the Borough is committed to maintaining orderly interactions between the Borough and the public and recognizes that many public employees are in positions that must interface with members of the public in a variety of ways to assist and provide appropriate levels of service to them; and

**WHEREAS**, the Borough desires to establish, maintain and enforce policies related to civility within the workplaces of Borough employees, particularly as they relate to interactions between Borough employees and members of the public so that this interaction does not interfere with the employee's right to a work environment free from intolerance, harassment and all types of bullying; and

**WHEREAS**, it is also understood that the Borough in no way intends that this policy be interpreted to deprive any person of their right to freedom of speech or expression.

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE BOROUGH COUNCIL, THE GOVERNING BODY OF THE BOROUGH OF AVALON, IN THE COUNTY OF CAPE MAY AND STATE OF NEW JERSEY** wishes to memorialize a Civility Policy which would be applicable to interactions between Borough employees and members of the public as follows:

1. The preamble is hereby incorporated and made a part of this policy.

2. When interacting with members of the Borough's staff, the public shall refrain from:

- a. Threats of harm in any way, verbal or physical.
- b. Use of loud and/or offensive language.
- c. Disrupting or threatening to disrupt Borough operations.
- d. Being verbally or physically intimidating so that a reasonable person would be so intimidated.
- e. Harass and/or intimidate Borough employees through repeated telephone calls, emails and/or confrontations.
- f. Unauthorized entry onto Borough property or entry into a restricted area.

3. Borough employees experiencing this type of behavior should:

- a. Calmly and politely request the individual desist the offending behavior.
- b. Enlist the assistance of a Supervisor or Administrator to attempt to restore civility.
- i. Upon being notified of the situation, the Supervisor and/or Administrator may direct the individual to leave public property.
- c. If no Supervisor or Administrator is available, and a request to return to civility has been made, the employee may direct the individual to leave public property.
- d. In the discretion of the employee, and absent a Supervisor or Administrator, the employee may also notify a law enforcement officer if order is not restored or the individual refuses to leave when requested.
- e. Employees who are the target of or witness to uncivil behavior shall promptly report the incident to a Supervisor or Administrator. The incident shall be documented in writing by the employee and any witnesses.

4. Individuals who continue to violate this policy or show a pattern of uncivil behavior may be subject to further action, such as prohibition from certain Borough properties, or areas of Borough properties, at the discretion of the Administrator.

**Case In Point**

*A citizen opens the door and enters the office of a top administrative official. He raises his voice very loudly; the entire municipal building could hear it. Language was extremely offensive and filled with profanity and directed at a senior member of staff with uncontrollable rage and personally disparaging comments. The individual attempted to bully the senior employee, and police were called as the citizen began to make personal threats to the employee. Police were called to restore order and remove the individual from the public building due to outrageous, threatening behavior.*

This event occurred a few years before the most recent event. Under Avalon’s new civility policy, a pattern of this behavior may result in consideration by the business administrator to exclude visitation for this individual. Additionally, the policy addresses individuals who repeatedly use electronic communications (telephone calls, email) to intimidate and harass officials.

**Civility Is Not a Sign of Weakness**

President John F. Kennedy said it best: “So let us begin anew—remembering on both sides that civility is not a sign of weakness, and sincerity is always subject to proof. Let us never negotiate out of fear but let us never fear to negotiate. Let both sides explore what problems unite us instead of belaboring those problems which divide us.”

Nearly every person who reads this article has lived through similar experiences in the public sector. Every municipality wants to conduct business in a professional, adult manner. After all, the public sector is the epitome of customer service. We train and expect our politicians and employees to represent themselves, and the communities they serve, with ethics, honor, and respect for others.

A civility policy will not cure uncivil behavior. But a civility policy will remind employees to act respectfully

and demonstrate to employees that even though they must take tempers and angry customers, they do not have to do so when they feel bullied, intimidated, threatened, or harassed.

Kindness and respect matters. And it is fair, just, and reasonable to expect that from elected and appointed public officials, and the public they have the privilege to serve. 🚚

**Conference Spotlight**  
**Keeping the Civil in Engagement**  
**Wednesday, November 19,**  
**10:45 a.m., 308/309, ACCC**  
 Join in an open discussion with Senators Bramnick and Cryan on civility. Discussion will include what local leaders can do to keep the civil in civil engagement.

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## NJLM on the Move

The League's executives and legislative team were around the state this month working with affiliate groups.

### Gloucester County Clerks' Association Conference

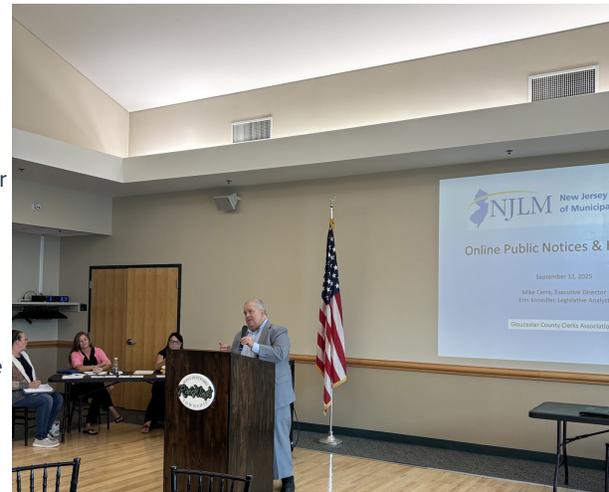
The Gloucester County Clerks' Association recently held its Gloucester County Clerks Association Conference. League Executive Director Mike Cerra and Legislative Analyst Erin Knoedler made a presentation on Online Public Notices and Hot Topics to the audience of attendees from around the county.

### Cape May County Municipal Clerks' Association 2025 Mini-Conference

The Cape May County Clerks' Association recently held the Cape May County Municipal Clerks' Association 2025 Mini-Conference in Avalon sessions included Cape May County Board of Elections Helping Poll Workers Thrive on Election Day, Ethics in Procurement and OPRA Redactions.

The New Jersey League of Municipalities spoke on Public Meetings – Noticing & Civility. The League's Deputy Executive Director Lori Buckelew was on hand to present to the group. In addition, Legislative Analyst Erin Knoedler also attended the event, taking queries and meeting local officials to discuss legislative issues. 📌

Right: NJLM Executive Director Michael Cerra in Gloucester County.



Below: NJLM Deputy Executive Director Lori Buckelew in Cape May County.



## DuRant-Brown Joins League



Sadayah DuRant-Brown, Esq., joined the New Jersey State League of Municipalities in July 2025 as Legislative Counsel and serves as a legislative agent, advocating for policies that benefit municipalities. As Legislative Counsel she collaborates with other legal professionals and government officials in legislative and regulatory matters.

Prior to joining the League, DuRant-Brown worked in private practice as an Associate Attorney, representing clients on various matters in the areas of labor and employment law. DuRant-Brown also worked as an Associate Attorney for the Township of Hamilton where she gained experience at the local government level. She completed a judicial clerkship with the Honorable Verna G. Leath, J.S.C. in the Criminal Division of the Superior Court of New Jersey, Essex County, where she also served as a certified New Jersey Judiciary Mediator.

DuRant-Brown is an admitted member of the bar in the state of New Jersey, the state of New York, and the United District Court of New Jersey.

DuRant-Brown received her Juris Doctor degree from Rutgers Law School and has a B.A. in Political Science and Criminal Justice. 📌

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SEMINAR - MARCH

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