



January 2026

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Official Publication of the New Jersey State League of Municipalities



“Our residents depend on us to be ready, adaptable, and forward-thinking. By understanding how risks affect our towns and taking proactive steps to manage them, we can build stronger, more resilient communities.”

–NJLM President Sean Elwell
Mayor, Elsinboro



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New Jersey Municipalities Magazine

Volume 103 | Issue 1

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NEW JERSEY MUNICIPALITIES (ISSN 0028-5846) is published monthly (except July, August and September) by the **New Jersey State League of Municipalities, 222 West State St., Trenton, NJ 08608. PHONE: 609-695-3481, FAX: 609-695-0151, WEBSITE: www.njlm.org, EMAIL: njm@njlm.org.** Periodicals postage paid at Trenton, NJ 08608. Postmaster send address changes to NEW JERSEY MUNICIPALITIES, 222 West State St., Trenton, NJ 08608. Print subscription rates (nine months) \$30.00; League members \$25.00; foreign \$47.00. Single copies: League member officials, \$6.00; others, \$8.00; foreign, \$27.00. For additional subscription information visit www.njlm.org/subscriptions. Publication No. 380460. © 2026.

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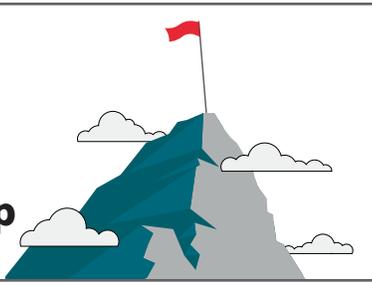
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From 222 West State

Michael F. Cerra, League Executive Director



New Year, New Opportunities

For 100-plus years the League has worked with local government officials—we’ve been through so many experiences together. One thing that hasn’t changed is the nature of our membership of dedicated public servants. Whether it’s the desire to make a difference in one’s hometown, our home state, or our nation, there are different motivations that attract individuals to public service. But the leaders we work with every day all want to make their communities better places to live and thrive.

This month we will say goodbye to Governor Phil Murphy after eight eventful years in office perhaps best remembered for the Covid pandemic, which changed so much for so many.

As the Governor noted in his final speech at the League Conference, “Whether we have mobilized in response to a natural disaster, or seized historic opportunities like next year’s World Cup, we have worked together, at every stage of our Administration. From the pandemic to the launch of New Jersey’s Commemoration of America’s 250th birthday. And, no matter the challenge: we have never allowed the smallness of politics to stand in the way of getting big things done for the people we serve.”

There are many big things on the

horizon for 2026, challenges including fixing the State Health Benefits Plan and recovering energy tax receipts and opportunities including a new Governor’s administration and the massive celebrations of the 250th and FIFA World Cup. The opportunities to lead will be numerous and pressing.

And we hope to work with you, continuing to represent local government needs in Trenton and Washington under the leadership of our new president, Mayor Sean Elwell of Elsinboro.

As he noted in his Q&A this month, “My goals are to strengthen partnerships—among municipalities and with state leaders—so we can meet challenges collaboratively. I aim to expand access to resources and training so every local official, regardless of town size, has the tools to lead effectively. I will also continue advocating for policies that respect home rule and empower municipalities to best serve their residents.”

President Elwell has an ambitious and admirable list of priorities for 2026 (see page 38). Reaching those goals will require knowledge and cooperation. We hope to provide you with tools for success in the pages of this magazine, through the work of our legislative and conference teams, and during the many education seminars and sessions held through the year. We look forward to the opportunities 2026 brings us all. 🇺🇸

Michael Cerra

“
There are many big things on the horizon for 2026, challenges including fixing the State Health Benefits Plan and recovering energy tax receipts and opportunities including a new Governor’s administration and the massive celebrations of the 250th and FIFA World Cup.
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Building Stronger, More Resilient Communities



Our residents depend on us to be ready, adaptable, and forward-thinking. By understanding how risks affect our towns and taking proactive steps to manage them, we can build stronger, more resilient communities.

1. What led you to get involved in local government?

From a young age, I knew I wanted to make a meaningful difference in my community. Having been born and raised here in Elsinboro, I always envisioned building my life in this wonderful place. My grandfather served as Mayor, and my family has a long history of civic engagement, which greatly influenced my path. My involvement in local government began early, but it has always been rooted in one thing: a desire to serve and strengthen the community I love.

2. What are the greatest strengths of local government in New Jersey?

One of New Jersey's greatest strengths is the high level of accessibility residents have to their elected officials. Our municipalities truly represent our communities at every level. In small towns like Elsinboro Township, our residents aren't just constituents—they are our neighbors, and that closeness strengthens trust, collaboration, and responsive government.

3. What do citizens expect from their municipal officials, and how has that changed over the years?

Residents expect their municipal officials to be responsive, transparent, and committed to meeting community needs while providing essential services. Over time, expectations for transparency and timeliness have increased significantly. With the growth of the internet and social media, residents have more access to information and expect faster, clearer communication from their local government.

4. What are your goals as League President?

My goals are to strengthen partnerships—among municipalities and with state leaders—so we can meet challenges collaboratively. I aim to expand access to resources and



training so every local official, regardless of town size, has the tools to lead effectively. I will also continue advocating for policies that respect home rule and empower municipalities to best serve their residents.

5. What advice would you give to someone just elected to local office for the first time?

Never forget why you chose to run for public office. Your motivation should ground you in every decision you make. Put your residents first, even when decisions are difficult, and focus on doing the most good for the greatest number of people. Keep communication open—both sharing information and actively listening—because trust erodes quickly without it. And surround yourself with people who challenge you to think differently, work harder, and grow as a leader.

6. How would you describe your leadership style?

I believe effective leaders adapt their approach to the situation at hand. At my core, I am a servant leader who always prioritizes the needs of my community. My continued service in emergency response reflects that commitment. I am driven, hold myself to high standards, and strive to learn and improve every day. Leadership is a lifelong journey, and

I believe we are always taking new steps forward.

7. What motivates you as a leader?

As I mentioned earlier, it's essential to remember why you first chose to serve. I ran for office to advocate for others and support my community, and that continues to motivate me today. I love our community, our county, our state, and our country. I believe that together we can achieve great things. The trust my residents have placed in me—as a township committee member and as mayor—means everything to me, and I will never take that responsibility lightly.

8. How can local governments build better resilience in their operations and community?

Every community is different, but all can benefit from strengthening infrastructure and improving emergency planning. We also face new and evolving risks—from cybersecurity threats to rising costs to challenges we may not yet anticipate. Our residents depend on us to be ready, adaptable, and forward-thinking. By understanding how risks affect our towns and taking proactive steps to manage them, we can build stronger, more resilient communities. 📌

Acceptance Remarks

The following are the acceptance remarks made by Mayor Sean Elwell at his swearing in as President during the League's November 20 Business Meeting



Good afternoon, everyone.

Standing before you today as the newly elected President of the New Jersey League of Municipalities is one of the greatest honors of my public service career. I am deeply humbled by the trust you have placed in me, and I accept this responsibility on behalf of all of New Jersey's mayors, council members, and local officials who work every day to make their communities stronger.

I want to begin by expressing my sincere thanks to our outgoing President, Mayor Paul Tomasko, for your leadership, guidance, and steadfast dedication to New Jersey's municipalities. You've set a high bar, and I'm grateful for the foundation you've built. I want to acknowledge a few specific items during your term, which include:

- Working to ensure ongoing Title 59 reforms in government insurance,
- Enactment by municipalities of affordable housing,
- Working to solve the State Health Benefits Program cost challenges; and
- Representing us in DC with both the New Jersey Chamber of Commerce and the National League of Cities.

Thank you Mayor Tomasko. I appreciate your dedication to the League and your friendship.

To the League staff and Executive Board—thank you for your tireless work. You are the heartbeat of this organization, ensuring that local government has the support, the advocacy, and the information it needs to succeed.

And to my friends and colleagues from Elsinboro Township—thank you for reminding me every day why this work matters. Elsinboro may be small in population, but like so many of New Jersey's towns, it's rich in heart, history, and a deep sense of community. It's where I learned that good government isn't about size—it's about service.

For those that don't know me, I am the Mayor of Elsinboro Township, a Salem County community, finishing my 19th year as an elected official, including 15 as Mayor. My roots in the community run deep, as I was raised in this amazing community. Public service is extremely important to me. It is why I began volunteering as an EMT and firefighter at the age of 16 and maintain one of the highest active percentages in our volunteer organization today. My community service roots led me to my career in healthcare, where I am a pediatric emergency nurse, currently in a leadership role.

For the last 11 years I have served on the League's

Executive Board and am honored that my colleagues throughout this great state have placed their confidence in me to represent this organization. What better way to start a term than at the conclusion of a conference that continues to grow and provide the support that all of our municipalities need.

This year specifically, we've exceeded all previous parameters—from attendees, exhibitors—including expanding the exhibit floor that added dozens of additional exhibitors, to programming—both educational as well as new sessions for collaboration. I'd like to take a moment to acknowledge the new programs at this year's conference:

- For now the second year in a row, a municipal job fair—the Pathway to Public Service—where we partnered with colleges and universities through New Jersey, the Department of Community Affairs, and our affiliate groups so college students can learn from municipal experts and see what career paths in local government look like and how rewarding they can be.
- We also continued the ICS 402 Emergency Training for Elected Officials and added a new town training "Film Ready," just in time as New Jersey strives to become the Hollywood of the East Coast.
- On Monday, as the exhibitors were setting up for the conference, the Division of Local Government Services held the state exam for the Qualified Purchasing Agents, Certified Tax Collectors, and Certified Municipal Finance Officers. Hopefully the test takers pass the exam and attend the conference next year as certified municipal professionals.
- Earlier today NJ/PBS taped a segment with Governor-elect Mikie Sherrill
- For the second year, conference attendees could get a free digital head shot.
- And lastly, we heard from Governor Murphy for the ninth year in a row,

Of course, that's on top of the dozens of sessions over three days in the Convention Center and throughout Atlantic City.

This success would not be possible without the tireless work of the entire League staff, our affiliate groups, and our officers and board. Thank you, we are proud of you, and you should be proud of yourselves for executing a great conference.

As I take on this role, I'm guided by one simple belief:

local government is where democracy truly lives. It's in our council or committee meetings, our volunteer firehouses, our local schools, and our small businesses that the promise of public service becomes real.

We see our residents face to face.

We hear their concerns directly.

And we work every day to make a difference—one street, one park, one family at a time.

The League of Municipalities has always been our collective voice—a voice that brings together all 564 municipalities, from the largest city to the smallest township, united by a common purpose: to make New Jersey's communities thrive.

Looking ahead, we face real challenges—rising costs, infrastructure needs, evolving state mandates, and the ongoing demand for innovation and transparency.

But we also see opportunities. Opportunities for shared services, for sustainable growth, for regional collaboration, and for stronger advocacy in Trenton and Washington. Thank you in advance for your help and engagement.

As President, my priorities will be clear:

- To build on the work of my predecessors to strengthen our partnerships—among municipalities and with state leaders—so we can meet challenges together.
- To expand access to resources and training, ensuring that every local official—regardless of town size—has the tools to lead effectively.
- And to keep pushing for policies that respect local decision-making and empower municipalities to serve their residents best.

Because in New Jersey, home rule isn't just a phrase—it's a principle. It's what allows our towns to reflect the character, values, and priorities of the people who live there.

I've learned in Elsinboro that when neighbors work together, there's no problem too big to solve. And I know that same spirit lives in every community represented here today.

So let us move forward—united in

purpose, confident in our ability, and committed to ensuring that every corner of New Jersey has a strong, responsive, and resilient local government.

Together, we will continue the League's proud legacy—standing up for our municipalities, strengthening our state, and proving that when local leaders lead with integrity and

collaboration, great things happen.

Thank you for this incredible honor, for your trust, and for your partnership.

I am proud to serve as your President—and I look forward to working alongside each of you in the year ahead.

Thank you—and let's get to work for New Jersey. 🇯🇵



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New League Officers, Executive Board Members Sworn In at Reorganization Meeting

At the League's December 10 reorganization meeting, new Vice Presidents and Executive Board Members were sworn in.

In a ceremony conducted during the Board Meeting by League President Sean Elwell of Elsinboro, then-Deputy Mayor Guy Piserchia of Long Hill was sworn in as 2nd Vice President.

In addition, new Executive Board members took their oath of service. President Elwell also swore in Mayor Jen Blumenstock of the Borough of Garwood, Plainfield Mayor Adrian Mapp, Pleasantville Mayor Judy Ward, Mount Arlington Mayor Michael Stanzilis, and Deptford Mayor Paul Medany. 🇺🇸



Shown above right: League 2nd Vice President Mayor Guy Piserchia of Long Hill and President Mayor Sean Elwell of Elsinboro Township at the League Reorganization Meeting held in December. **Above:** President Elwell swears in Executive Board Members from Left: Garwood Mayor Jen Blumenstock, Plainfield Mayor Adrian Mapp, Pleasantville Mayor Judy Ward, Mt. Arlington Mayor Mike Stanzilis, and Deptford Mayor Paul Medany.



Civic League Salutes America at 250 for 2026 All-America City Award

The 2026 All-America City Award will recognize communities that are bringing the ideals of the ongoing journey of 250 years since the nation's founding to fulfill the promise of a government by, for, and of the people founding ideals to life by ensuring that the power to shape the future resides with the people.

The award will spotlight communities across the country that are creatively engaging residents in collective efforts to create thriving and welcoming places where trust and belonging are abundant. Across the country, Americans of all backgrounds and political perspectives are expressing growing frustration with a system that feels unresponsive, untrustworthy, and ineffective. Civic trust is declining, polarization is deepening, and many people feel disconnected from the decisions that shape their lives. Fortunately, democracy has never been static—it is a living system that can be renewed and reshaped through collective effort.

The 2026 award will honor communities that are reinventing how they come together to make decisions and solve problems. These communities are engaging



residents, businesses, and public institutions in civic dialogue, collaboration, and community-building efforts that not only strengthen civic health and rebuild trust but also address pressing challenges and lay the foundation for a better future.

Some topics of inspiration for applications include:

- Collaborative efforts to address any combination of local challenges.
- Community-building programs like block party months and neighborhood mini-grants.

Continued on page 12.



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