

## A Message From the MCMA Board

If there is one word that seems to define this moment for Minnesota cities, it is *uncertainty*.

Across our communities, local government leaders — and Minnesotans as a whole — are responding to a series of challenges and recent tragedies that have left many residents feeling fearful, unsettled, and questioning the reliability of institutions they have long depended on. None of this is abstract. We see it in local and national news; at restaurants and businesses in our communities; in council chambers; at service counters; in conversations with staff; and in the faces of residents who are asking — sometimes directly, sometimes quietly — whether their local government can still be counted on.

Many of the forces contributing to today's turbulence are far beyond the authority or control of local government. But our responsibility remains profound. As professional local government leaders, we are entrusted to uphold the dignity and value of public service; to lead with clarity, compassion, and integrity; to ensure residents feel safe; to support our employees; and to keep essential services reliable and responsive — especially when uncertainty feels overwhelming.

In an increasingly polarized environment, this work is not easy. Our profession is guided by a commitment to political neutrality, recognizing that public confidence depends on our ability to serve the entire community fairly and without partisanship. That commitment can place us in difficult positions, yet it is precisely this professionalism — paired with empathy, transparency, and

ethical conduct — that allows local government to remain a trusted and steady presence in people's lives.

Community members may not always agree with every decision, but they expect — and deserve — leaders who act with integrity, listen respectfully, communicate honestly, and show up consistently. Leadership in these moments often looks less like sweeping solutions and more like steady presence: keeping doors open, answering questions with patience, supporting staff who shoulder the weight of public service, and creating space for residents to feel seen and heard.

There is quiet strength in that work.

Across Minnesota, local government leaders are demonstrating — through both words and actions — the highest standards of professionalism and public service, even while navigating the same uncertainty our residents are feeling. This commitment to ethical leadership and public trust is reinforced every day through steady decisions, clear communication, and a deep sense of responsibility to the communities we serve.

MCMA exists not only to support that work, but also to support you. The relationships we build with one another are often just as essential as the work we do in our cities. We encourage you to stay connected with colleagues and friends — no one understands the complexity of leading cities and counties during this moment better than those managing through it alongside you. Reach out, start the conversation, and allow yourselves to lean on each other during the difficult stretches.

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Thank you to our members for the steady leadership you provide — often without recognition and always with purpose. At the core of our profession is a shared commitment to serve with dignity, integrity, and respect for the public trust, and in times of uncertainty, these values guide our words, our actions, and our decisions. By remaining ethical, impartial, and deeply committed to the communities we serve, local government leaders can help restore confidence and provide the steady presence residents need most. And as we navigate these challenges together, staying connected with one another strengthens our resilience and reinforces the values we uphold.

*MCMA is a state affiliate of the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) and proudly supports and adheres to the ICMA Code of Ethics, reflecting our shared commitment to integrity, accountability, and excellence in local government leadership. ○*

## MCMA Board Meeting Recap

*By: Madison Hagenau, MCMA Secretariat*

The MCMA Board met on Oct. 10 and Dec. 12. Highlights from the meetings were:

- Approved 2026 budget
- Discussed MCMA dues structure
- Discussed plans for the 2026 MCMA Winter Workshop
- Discussed plans for the 2026 MCMA Annual Conference
- Approved updated MCMA Annual Conference Scholarship
- Approved LinkedIn page policy and service agreement

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**Your senior advisors are here to help!**

# The President's Column

By: Jackie Schulze, MCMA President, Waconia Assistant City Administrator

New Year's resolutions have never been my favorite tradition. They often feel a bit like something we're supposed to have once January arrives, even if they don't always reflect real life. Still, there's value in the pause that comes with a new year — a chance to reset and be honest about what we want to carry forward and what we might do differently. This year, rather than setting lofty goals (like last year's attempt to make my bed every day, which didn't last long), I've been focusing on practical, intentional changes that make sense for this stage of both life and work.

## Being Present in the Moment

One commitment I'm carrying into this year is spending less time on my phone and being more present with my family. About a month ago, one of my three-year-old twins looked at me and said, "Mommy, stop looking at your phone." Honestly, the comment made me stop in my tracks and ask myself: Is this the example I want to set for my kids?

Our phones are essential tools in our profession — we're expected to be responsive, informed, and connected — but it's easy for "just checking one thing" to quietly turn into mindless scrolling. This year, I'm trying to be more intentional about putting my phone down, saving screen time for early mornings or a short window after my kids are in bed, and being fully present when I'm with my family.

That moment last month was a reminder that presence isn't just a parenting lesson — it's a leadership skill. The people we serve and the teams we lead can tell when our attention is divided. Showing up fully, even in small moments, builds trust, strengthens relationships, and brings more clarity to our work.

## Finding Ways to Recharge

Another intention I'm carrying into the new year is to keep reading. Last year, I read 31 books — something I felt pretty good about — until I realized that 30 of them were finished before Q4. And that's probably not surprising. The last quarter of the year is busy for all of us: budget season, elections in some communities, year-end deadlines, and the added pace of the holidays. All meaningful and important, but also a lot.

What I noticed was that when reading fell away, my stress level climbed. As an introvert, reading is one of the ways I recharge. It was a good reminder that the small habits that help us decompress really matter. In our profession, we talk a lot about being resilient, but sustainability matters just as much. When I neglect the habits that help me recharge, I don't show up as effectively as a leader. Making space for renewal — whether that looks like reading, exercising, attending sporting events, or even binging your favorite TV show — is essential for staying engaged, energized, and effective over the long term, both personally and professionally.

## Strengthening Connections

My third commitment for 2026 is to focus on intentional, meaningful connections — with friends, family, and colleagues. At this stage of life, everything feels fast and full. Between full-time work, parenting young kids, and family commitments, friendships can easily fall to the bottom of the list simply because it's the easiest thing to let slide. This year, I want to be more intentional about slowing down and investing in the relationships that matter.

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That intention extends to our professional connections as well. The relationships we build with one another through MCMA are not secondary to our work — they are foundational to it. In local government, our most important infrastructure isn't always visible. Relationships — with colleagues, peers, and mentors — help us navigate difficult decisions, political challenges, and moments of uncertainty, and they are also there to be our biggest cheerleaders when we experience success.

That's why I'm especially looking forward to the Winter Workshop and Spring Conference. These gatherings are more than just dates on a calendar; they are opportunities to connect, learn, and strengthen one another's practice. I encourage you to engage fully — bring your questions, share your experiences, and make space for meaningful conversations. Our association is strongest when we invest in each other, both professionally and personally.

### **Leading with Intention**

As we begin this new year, I hope you find moments of intention amid the busyness. Our work is demanding, but it is also deeply meaningful, and we do it best when we take care of ourselves and one another. As managers and assistants, we set the tone for our organizations. When we model balance, intentionality, and connection, we create space for our teams to do the same and ultimately build healthier, more effective organizations.

In local government, we are often measured by budgets balanced, projects completed, and challenges managed. But the way we lead — through presence, sustainability, and meaningful connection — matters just as much. My hope for 2026 is that we continue to lead with intention, support one another through the demanding seasons of this work, and remember that strong communities are built by leaders who take care of themselves and each other.

Wishing you a thoughtful and fulfilling start to 2026. ◻

– *Contact Schulze at [jschulze@waconia.org](mailto:jschulze@waconia.org)*

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## **Appointments and Other Professional News**

- **Laila Imihy**, special projects and initiatives manager, Hopkins, has been hired as deputy city manager, Mound.
- **Mark Larson**, city administrator, Glencoe, has retired.

*Do you have a new appointment or other professional news to share?  
Contact the secretariat at the information listed.*

# YOU'RE INVITED:

## 2026 MCMA Annual Conference

By: Kevin Watson, MCMA Secretary-Treasurer, Vadnais Heights City Administrator

As Chair of the 2026 MCMA Annual Conference Planning Committee, the Committee and I are excited to invite city managers, county managers, assistants, and others to attend the 2026 MCMA Annual Conference — a time to connect with peers, reflect on our work, and gain insight into the issues shaping local government.

The conference will open with Mark Scharenbroich, whose keynote *Thrive Through Connection* focuses on how authentic relationships, recognition, and connection help leaders and organizations thrive, even as demands increase and resources tighten.

Another featured general session with Hannah Ubl, *Creating a Workplace That Doesn't Suck*, will explore practical ways to build healthy, people-centered workplaces that support recruitment, retention, and burnout prevention.

Economic conditions remain front and center for local leaders, and Elliot Eisenberg, Ph.D. will provide a clear and engaging outlook on the U.S. economy, covering labor markets, inflation, interest rates, and other trends impacting municipal decision-making.

The conference will also include a powerful general session featuring Burnsville City Manager Gregg Lindberg, who will share a city manager's perspective on navigating the tragic 2024 Burnsville incident and its aftermath.

The conference will conclude with Sarah Moe and her keynote *Rest, Recharge, Repeat*, highlighting the role sleep plays in leadership effectiveness, resilience, and long-term success.

We hope you'll plan to join colleagues from across Minnesota for the 2026 MCMA Annual Conference. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to reach out. ☐

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### MCMA Annual Conference Scholarship — Apply Now!

MCMA is offering two scholarships for first-time attendees of the MCMA Annual Conference! This opportunity supports students, interns, and early-career professionals interested in city/county management, covering conference registration and lodging. ☐

**Application deadline: Feb. 25, 2026.**

**Apply today and help spread the word!**

# Been There, Done That!

*Unsolicited Advice from Your Senior Advisors*

## Building Connections, Developing Trust

*By: Ed Shukle, Senior Advisor*

When I chose to enter the public administration profession, I realized immediately that the work was going to be challenging. One of the fundamentals of learning about local government was that elections occur every two years. As an administrative assistant, my first boss regularly reminded me to “save my boxes,” as city managers/administrators tend to change jobs frequently and are forced to move to another city or county suddenly.

In securing my first city manager job, the overall goal was to be able to lead the delivery of public services in the most efficient and cost-effective manner possible. Elected officials and residents do not always accept you right away, as they are afraid of change or making changes too rapidly.

From the very beginning, it is extremely important to understand the issues facing the city and the elected officials who make policy decisions. Preparation for interviews should include studying city council minutes, advisory commission minutes, newspaper articles, annual budget documents, financial audits, etc. Identify who the “movers and shakers” are in the town and what role they play. Speak with previous managers/administrators to get a feel for what they liked or disliked about the community. Meet with business owners to understand what their views are toward local government.

Upon being hired, spend time, one-on-one, with the mayor and each city council member to understand the reasons they chose to run for public office. The responses will range from getting involved because of a particular issue to overall betterment of the community. Single issues are always the favorite reason for a person to become interested in public office. There is no getting around that fact, but sometimes the people that get elected for a single purpose eventually turn around and realize that their issue is only one small aspect and begin to understand the “big picture.” Your ability to point these people in the right direction and identify the big picture will contribute to the overall success of your tenure as the chief executive officer of the city or county.

Meet with department heads, one-on-one, to gain an understanding of what was important to them and why they worked for the government organization. Stress that they were all hired to perform an essential function and that you will give them flexibility and latitude to perform their jobs with minimal interference. Letting them know that “the office door is always open” is very reassuring. You are giving them the opportunity to be heard and letting them know that their voice is important. Remember that it is possible that your department heads have been long-term employees who have a vast amount of knowledge about the city or county. Demonstrating your appreciation for them and being clear that you want to understand how things have been done in the past before considering changes will go a long way in gaining their trust and support as you begin your new job.

*Been There, Done That! continued on page 7*

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Meet with business owners to understand what their views are towards the government. Local business owners can be strong allies or fierce opponents.

Positivity and optimism build connections and establish trust. The city must operate as a team on the same path or things will go awry quickly. You are the leader and the facilitator steering the organization in positive directions. Get involved in community service organizations such as the Rotary Club, Kiwanis, Lions, Chamber of Commerce, and other organizations whose primary purpose is to serve the community and its needs. Volunteering at events and being visible to the community demonstrates your sincere willingness and dedication to making the community better. If you felt like an “outsider” at the beginning of your tenure, it is likely that is no longer the case. You will have established trust with community members you perhaps did not think you had initially. Belonging to these groups is vitally important from both a professional and personal standpoint; friendships result that will last a lifetime.

You can also build connections professionally within your state organization – Minnesota City County Management Association (MCMA). Get involved in the workings of this organization by attending conferences and professional development seminars that will supplement your growth and development professionally. These meetings allow you to network with your colleagues and share stories, ideas, and concerns. Spend some time studying what MCMA’s committees are and what purpose each serves; consider becoming active. Those committees are Education and Outreach, Professional Development, Professional Conduct, Recognition and Membership, and Women in the Profession. The organization is dedicated to enhancing your professional growth and development. Consider expanding your horizons by becoming a member of the International City County Management Association (ICMA). This organization is international in scope but focuses on issues tailored to cities and counties across the United States. You and your organization will benefit immensely from membership in both organizations.

The importance of building connections across various groups in a community and involvement in professional development organizations will result in establishing trust and become key components in becoming a successful city or county manager/administrator.

As a final note, never isolate yourself or feel intimidated by asking for advice and assistance. Sometimes you can feel like you do not know where to turn or do not have anyone to talk to about issues or concerns. MCMA is always there, and Senior Advisors are available to assist. ◻

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## **STAY CONNECTED** with MCMA beyond the newsletter!

Follow our LinkedIn page for the latest updates, highlights, insights, and upcoming events. It’s the easiest way to see what’s happening across the MCMA community — and to join the conversation.

**Follow MCMA on LinkedIn and stay in the loop!** ◻

# Celebrate Excellence in Local Government — Nominations Now Open for ICMA Local Government Excellence Awards!

ICMA's Local Government Excellence Awards celebrate the value of professional management and honor creative contributions to professional local government leadership. These awards highlight public awareness of the value of professional management and its impact on the quality of life in our communities.


## Professional Awards are presented to individuals for:

- Career excellence
- Development of new talent
- Excellence in leadership as an assistant (regardless of title)
- Early career leadership
- Academic contributions to the profession
- Advocacy for the profession
- **NEW! Good Governance**

## Outstanding Local Government Programs are recognized in these areas:

- Community Equity and Inclusion
- Community Health and Safety
- Community Partnerships
- Community Sustainability
- Strategic Leadership and Governance

Award recipients receive year-round recognition, including a feature in ICMA's award-winning Public Management Magazine. Submitting a nomination ensures that outstanding peers and innovative programs receive the recognition they deserve.

Whether you've launched a groundbreaking initiative, advanced the profession, or helped your community thrive, ICMA wants to hear your story — one that can inspire local government professionals everywhere. 

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## MCMA Internship Stipend Recipients

Every year, the Education and Outreach Committee awards stipends for jurisdictions to provide a talented young person with real life experience working in local government management.

The Education and Outreach Committee of MCMA considers the following elements when selecting the recipients of the stipends:

- **MCMA membership status**
- **Quality of the proposed work tasks and exposure to public administration and local government management and the organization's MCMA member**
- **Program supervision**
- **Mentorship opportunities**

The 2026 stipends were awarded to the cities of Maplewood, Marshall, and Savage! 