

Joseph Wetmore
Town Board Member Report
March 2026

Conference Report — New York Association of Towns 2026 Annual Meeting & Training School

February 15 – 17, 2026, New York Marriott Marquis, New York, NY

I attended a series of sessions at the 2026 Annual Meeting & Training School hosted by the New York Association of Towns (NYAOT). The conference theme was *Legacy in Motion: From Strong Foundations to Bold Futures*, celebrating 250 years of local leadership and providing practical training for municipal officials.

Fiscal Oversight Responsibilities of the Governing Board

Presenter: William D. Naylor, CIA, Auditor 2, Office of the NYS Comptroller, LGSA Division
William D. Naylor provided an in-depth overview of the governing board’s fiscal oversight responsibilities. He discussed budget development and monitoring, interim financial reporting, audit of claims procedures, and annual audit requirements. Mr. Naylor emphasized the board’s duty to ensure transparency, accountability, and compliance with state law. He also highlighted resources available through the Office of the State Comptroller to support municipalities in maintaining strong internal controls and sound financial practices.

Heroes & Villains of Local Government: A Field Guide for the Front Lines

Presenters: Sarah Brancatella, Deputy Director; Katie Hodgdon, Chief Counsel; Lori Mithen-Demasi, Association Counsel, New York Association of Towns

Sarah Brancatella, Katie Hodgdon, and Lori Mithen-Demasi delivered an engaging and practical session examining the day-to-day realities of local government operations. Through humor and real-world examples, they highlighted the “heroes” of municipal government—clerks, assessors, attorneys, and budget officers—while also addressing common challenges such as frequent FOIL requesters, difficult board dynamics, and last-minute submissions. The presenters offered actionable strategies to strengthen governance, improve communication, and effectively manage challenging situations.

How Towns Can Get the Most Out of an Energy Project (Crafting Good CBAs and HCAs)

Presenters: Michael Richardson, former Albany County Legislator and Energy Consultant; Shawn Grasby, Town of Mount Morris Code Officer; Kevin Campbell, EDF Renewables; Cheyenne Steria, formerly of Naturally Lewis; MRB Group

This panel provided practical guidance on navigating large-scale renewable energy projects. Michael Richardson discussed the realities municipalities face when considering energy proposals and the implications of approving or denying such projects. Shawn Grasby shared the Town of Mount Morris’s experience leveraging the Morris Ridge Solar Project for significant community benefit. Kevin Campbell offered insight from the developer perspective, and Cheyenne Steria highlighted lessons learned from wind and solar siting efforts in Lewis County. The presenters emphasized the importance of well-structured Community Benefit Agreements (CBAs) and Host Community Agreements (HCAs) to secure long-term financial and infrastructure gains for municipalities.

Red, White, and Risk Management: Planning Safe and Successful Public Events

Presenters: Peter Baynes, Executive Director, New York Municipal Insurance Reciprocal; Sarah Brancatella, Deputy Director, New York Association of Towns; Susan O’Rorke, Director of Marketing and Member Services, New York Municipal Insurance Reciprocal

Peter Baynes, Sarah Brancatella, and Susan O’Rorke outlined municipal responsibilities when planning public celebrations such as parades, festivals, and commemorative events. The presenters addressed permitting, insurance requirements, vendor and performer agreements, emergency preparedness, and liability exposure. With towns preparing for America’s 250th anniversary, the session stressed proactive planning and strong risk management practices to ensure events are safe, compliant, and successful.

The Economic Power of Parks: A Case Study from Schenectady

Presenters: Jackson LaSaro, AICP, Community Planner; Dan Shearer, PE, LEED AP, Senior Principal and Senior Environmental Engineer, Saratoga Associates

Jackson LaSaro and Dan Shearer presented a data-driven case study demonstrating how strategic park investment can produce measurable economic and environmental returns. Using the City of Schenectady as an example, they detailed how park improvements generated significant annual economic impact and an 8.6x return on investment. The presenters explained methods used to quantify these impacts, including property value analysis, visitor data tracking, input-output modeling, and tax revenue estimates. They emphasized that similar methodologies can be replicated in small- and mid-sized towns to justify park funding and strategic planning initiatives.

How Your Town’s History Can Help Shape Its Future

Presenter: Bob Provost, President & CEO, New York State Tourism Industry Association

Bob Provost discussed heritage tourism as a growing economic driver and a strategic tool for community revitalization. He explained that local history can serve as a powerful asset, fostering civic pride while generating economic activity. Mr. Provost outlined factors contributing to the growth of heritage tourism, including cultural preservation efforts, digital marketing expansion, sustainable travel trends, and increased global interest in authentic experiences. He encouraged municipalities to view historical assets not as static relics, but as catalysts for economic and community development.

Drinking Water Source Protection Program (DWSP2)

Presenters: Alyssa Bement, Environmental Analyst, NEIWPC; Tyler Bobko, Environmental Analyst, NYSDEC; Colleen Bradley, Environmental Analyst, NYSDOH Drinking Water Specialist

Alyssa Bement, Tyler Bobko, and Colleen Bradley provided an overview of the Drinking Water Source Protection Program (DWSP2). They explained that this voluntary, state-supported program offers municipalities 100 percent free technical assistance to develop and implement customized watershed protection plans. The presenters emphasized proactive protection of drinking water sources to safeguard public health, reduce future infrastructure costs, and protect environmental resources.

250 Years of Land Use Regulations – What We Lost

Presenters: Megan K. Dorritie, Esq., and Matthew A. Eldred, Esq., Harter Secrest & Emery LLP

Megan Dorritie and Matthew Eldred examined the historical development of land use regulations from colonial-era public safety laws to modern zoning practices. They discussed how regulations designed to meet mid-20th century standards may now conflict with evolving priorities such as sustainability, housing flexibility, and self-reliance. The presenters encouraged municipalities to reexamine longstanding regulations and consider reforms that better align with contemporary community values and environmental goals.

OSC's Special District Presentation

Presenter: Elissa Sheehan, Associate Attorney, Office of the NYS Comptroller, Legal Division
Elissa Sheehan outlined the procedural requirements for establishing town special districts under Articles 12 and 12-A of Town Law. She explained the Office of the State Comptroller's statutory approval role and reviewed common mistakes found in special district applications. The session provided practical recommendations to help municipalities avoid delays and ensure compliance prior to submission.

Q&A with the NYAOT Legal Staff

Presenters: Sarah Brancatella, Deputy Director; Lori Mithen-Demasi, Chief Counsel; Katie Hodgdon, Association Counsel; Dana Campbell, Counsel, New York Association of Towns; Dan Acquilano, Manager of Local Official Training, Office of the NYS Comptroller, LGSA Division
This interactive session allowed attendees to engage directly with experienced municipal attorneys and training officials. The panel addressed questions related to governance procedures, board authority, compliance obligations, and practical challenges faced by town officials. The discussion reinforced the importance of ongoing education, legal guidance, and collaboration to support effective local government operations.

Meet with Ruth and Shaun

Monday, February 23·3:00 – 4:00pm

Discussed revising the Fee Schedule Recommendations, as well as the Planning Department's procedural recommendations and the questionnaire for Planning Board comments.

Planning Board

Monday, February 23·6:30 – 8:30pm

Minor Subdivision – 372 Holden Road

The Board reviewed an application from Nolan Hatfield for a minor subdivision of the 2.68-acre parcel located at 372 Holden Road (TPN 4.-1-9.21) in the Agricultural Zoning District. The proposal divided the existing parcel into two lots: Parcel A (1.61 acres) and Parcel B (1.07 acres). The Board approved the subdivision.

Site Plan Review – Verizon Lane Storage Expansion

The Board also conducted a sketch plan review for a proposed expansion of the United Storage Complex near Verizon Lane (TPN 30.-1-16.32) in the Industrial/Research (IR) Zoning District. The project proposes the construction of a 40' x 70' (2,800-square-foot) cold storage building on a vacant quarter-acre lot located between existing storage buildings. The Planning Board scheduled a public hearing for March to gather public input on the proposal.

Other Business

During the Other Business portion of the meeting, Jerry Goodenough, representing TeraWulf, provided a general presentation on the company's plans for its Lansing property. The overview included discussion of the size of the site, infrastructure improvements, potential new buildings and solar facilities, leasing of parcels, building dimensions, landscaping and aesthetics, power and transmission infrastructure, broadband, battery storage, cooling systems, noise considerations, water use, and potential job creation and work shifts. No action was taken, as no application is currently before the Board.



Operations & Code Revision Committee Monthly Meeting Wednesday, February 25•10:00am – 12:00pm

The committee held a general discussion regarding local noise regulations and what types of activities and impacts such laws should address. Members discussed potential sources of noise, how such regulations might be structured, and considerations for enforcement and applicability within different zoning districts.

Monthly Check-In | Lansing Smart Growth Zoning Update Tuesday, March 3•10:00 – 11:00am

The committee discussed the current status of the grant and reviewed the various requirements associated with it. Members confirmed that responsibilities for completing the required tasks and reporting obligations were being addressed by the appropriate individuals. The Board also discussed upcoming public participation efforts related to the project and emphasized the importance of engaging the Zoning Advisory Committee more actively in the process.

Pacer AI Monday, March 9•12:00 – 1:00pm

I participated in a Zoom call with representatives from Pacer AI, who demonstrated the capabilities of their platform for analyzing patterns of movement and visitation within a community. The demonstration focused on Meyers Park and highlighted the types of data the program can generate regarding park usage.

The presentation included estimates of visitor volume, peak usage periods, the busiest days and hours, and the general geographic origins of visitors. Such information could help the Town better understand how Meyers Park is used and support future planning, management, and investment decisions related to the park.

Parks, Recreation, and Trails Working Group

Thursday, March 12·9:30 – 10:30am

The Working Group received an update on the Greenway Trail Comprehensive Plan, including discussion of potential connections between the Town and the Village. The Working Group also discussed next steps for the trail segment between the school and Meyers Park, including advancing the project from conception to the development of design drawings.