



Small Cities Council

Meeting Summary

Wednesday, August 27, 2025, | 9:00 AM
Pulaski County Regional Center | Little Rock
Draft

Meeting PowerPoint slides available at www.metroplan.org/small-cities-council

SCC Members Attending

1. Mayor Mike Kemp, Chair	City of Shannon Hills
2. Mayor Charles Gastineau, Vice Chair	City of Ward
3. Mr. Keith Keck	Hot Springs Village
4. Mr. Brady Zweifel	City of Vilonia

Additional Attendees

1. Mr. Jamie Collins	Neil-Schafer
2. Mr. Mark Stodola	Arkansas Municipal League
3. Mr. Samuel Kreimeyer	Jacobs
4. Mr. Mike Watson	Half
5. Mr. James Walden	Garver

Metroplan Staff

1. Mr. Casey Covington	Executive Director
2. Ms. Bernadette Rhodes	Deputy Director
3. Mr. Jonathan Lupton	Senior Planner for Publications/Economist

I. Call to Order

Mayor Kemp called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. He welcomed participants and asked participants to introduce themselves.

2. Introductions & Announcements

All the council members and guests introduced themselves. Mr. Covington noted that there will not be a Small Cities Council meeting in September.

3. Summary of Previous Meeting

Mr. Keck made a motion to approve the summary of the July 23, 2025, meeting. Mr. Zweifel seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

4. Council Discussion:

Ms. Rhodes announced that Mayor Gastineau was instrumental in bringing forth the three topics of this section. These have been issues that the city of Ward has been facing. Ms. Rhodes added that other cities could also benefit from understanding the steps that Ward took to address these issues. Mayor Gastineau led this section. The three topics discussed are as follows

- *Fire District Funding Outside City Limits:*

Addressing the members present on that day Mayor Gastineau noted that this might be an issue specific to cities from Lonoke County only, but other counties may face it on a later date. He added that a legislation was passed last year which let organized (volunteer) fire departments to charge for fire dues. There was no mechanism for municipal fire departments to charge the same. The legislation was supposed to get an ordinance which makes it legal for all types of fire departments to collect fire dues, but when it was signed, it still said only volunteer departments can collect dues. Thus Ward has decided to charge for combating fire outside of its city limits. The law while doesn't allow to collect dues otherwise, lets you charge for combating the fire. Although the law states that fire departments can't charge individuals the money for combating fire, they can charge the county for the same. The Mayor stated that he is trying to increase the revenue for Ward's fire department, with working with the county, city council, and other bodies so that they can generate more revenue for the city. They have considered adding a lien on property or charging a certain fee for fire distress calls outside their city limits. The city is just looking for reimbursement of the funds needed to operate the fire calls outside city limits. He mentioned that other counties might have a different way to handle this and that this is specific to Lonoke.

Mayor Kemp asked how does the City of Ward receive its Act 333 money, to which Mayor Gastineau replied that they receive it themselves directly and not through the county. He mentioned again that this legislature only affect first class cities. Mayor Kemp suggested that Shannon Hills covers some parts of Little Rock as a part of their fire district. He also mentioned that October 25th is a chilli cook-off competition which is open for all to visit in Shannon Hills. It is hosted by the fire department of the city. Also, they have a multi-generational car show.

- *Regulating Subdivisions in Former Extraterritorial Jurisdiction (ETJ) Areas:*

Ms. Rhodes introduced the topic and reminded the council about the repealing of ETJ earlier this year. Cities can no longer regulate the ETJ areas that they had say over regarding construction standards, road development, etc. Mayor Gastineau has implemented a few things that could help other members of the council as well. Mayor Gastineau mentioned that they have an ordinance which says that if the development happens on parcels which are attached to the city limits, the owners have to get annexed into the city before they submit the preliminary plat. If the owners of the parcels don't do these steps, the city shall refuse to provide any of its services to them. If the parcels are not attached to the current city limits and the owners want to city's services, they have to sign a pre-annexation document which makes the contractor-builder build the structures according to Ward's standards. Mayor Gastineau also added that there is some question about the legality of this and is in contact with the Municipal League. The city will tweak this ordinance in the next session and make it easier to follow and understand. Mayor Kemp seconded this approach and mentioned that Shannon Hills is doing the same with parcels attached to their city limits. When Mr. Zweifel was asked if Viloria has a similar approach, he mentioned that there is not much discussion about this in the city. He mentioned that Act 935 mentions that there can not be any packaged sewer systems within 5 miles from the city limits. If the parcel owners want a packaged water system, they need to get approved from ADEQ first. Ms. Rhodes mentioned that this puts some pressure on the parcel owners to tie in with the municipal services.

Mayor Kemp talked about the House Bill 1503 (ADU bill) which is now Act 313. He mentioned that some people are reading into the act as if the cities can not regulate anything about making duplexes on the same parcels. He shared the information that he received from valuable sources that suggest that duplexes were never the idea for the bill. The bill talks only about having an Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) which is also called a "mother-in-law unit" on the same plot as a single-family house. Mayor Gastineau mentioned that there was another bill which talked specifically about the allowance of constructing duplexes and triplexes, on single-family parcels which did not pass. Ms. Rhodes asked for the guidance of Mr. James Walden who was present for the meeting as a guest. She asked if he could help in understanding the difference between duplexes and ADUs. Mr. Walden said that the cities don't need to accept the proposal for the construction of an ADU and the primary structure at the same time. Cities can ask to have at least half of the primary structure be built before the start of the ADU so that it tackles the notion of having a duplex instead of a single-family house with ADU. Also he mentioned that the Act suggests that both the structures need their own entrance doors. The ADUs need to be in the same setback as the house. Ms. Rhodes mentioned that Metroplan has also updated the UDO to match the new Act.

- *First Ammendmenmt Auditors:*

Ms. Rhodes mentioned that the Arkansas Municipal League has had a few trainings on this topic and that some cities have faced some issues regarding the same. Mayor Gastineau faced this as well and was asked by Ms. Rhodes to help other cities understand how to respond in such cases. The mayor mentioned that Ward has taken steps such as posting signs for limited personnel access on specific doors, like the Mayor's office and other areas that they want limited interaction with other at. The auditors are allowed to film in the offices, and the staff have been given instructions to allow them to do the same. The mayor intended to bring forth an ordinance next year and codify this policy of allowing restricted access to certain areas. Ms. Rhodes asked Mayor Gastineau if he could share the ordinance he has typed out with other member cities and he agreed for the same. Ms. Rhodes mentioned that Metroplan does not have any official advice to share, and supports the Municipal League's advice on this topic.

5. Upcoming Grants & Capital Improvement Opportunities:

Ms. Rhodes mentioned to the council that cities should start working on their projects for 2026 as Metroplan will be opening the floor for call for projects soon for the Energy and Environment Innovation (EEI) grant opportunities for green networks, E.V. fleet and charger rebates, and streetlight conversion to LED. Special attention to green networks and trails section of this funding opportunity as these are supposed to be allocated to projects that are either under design or are shovel ready by late winter, early spring. Mayor Kemp asked if cities could apply if they already received one to which, Ms. Rhodes answered that cities could indeed apply for it. Mr. Covington added to this conversation that Metroplan will be starting its call for projects for the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) in November – December this year after ArDOT announces their awards. This will be for a portion of 2026 and some of 2027. Other opportunities are as follows:

- The Rural Services Block Grant (RSBGP): Provides funding support for community and economic development projects in small towns and rural communities across Arkansas. Eligible applicants include incorporated towns and rural areas with populations under 3,000, where at least 51% of residents are low to moderate income. The program offers up to \$100,000 in funding with a 10% local match that can be met through cash, labor, materials, or land contributions. Eligible projects include the construction or renovation of public facilities such as community centers, fire stations, and multi-purpose buildings, as well as the purchase of essential fire equipment like pumper, tankers, and service trucks. Applications are due by October 17, 2025. More information is available at <https://www.arkansasedc.com/Rural-Services/division/grants/rural-services-block-grant>
- The AARP Walk & Bike Audit Opportunity: It offers grant funding to support projects that assess and improve the walkability and bikeability of communities, particularly for residents aged 50 and older. Funded through AARP's flagship, demonstration, and capacity-building microgrants, awards range from \$2,500 to \$25,000, depending on project scope. The Capacity-Building Microgrants specifically support Walk and Bike Audits, using the AARP Walk Audit Toolkit (in partnership with America Walks) and the AARP Bike Audit Toolkit (in partnership with the League of American Bicyclists). These grants help communities evaluate safety and accessibility while promoting age-friendly transportation options. Eligible applicants include nonprofits (501(c)(3), (c)(4), (c)(6)), government

entities, and other organizations reviewed on a case-by-case basis. More details can be found at tinyurl.com/AARPGrant.

- The Arkansas Community & Economic Development Alliance (ACEDA): It is led by the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture Cooperative Extension Service. It is an informal network that connects local governments, nonprofits, and businesses across Arkansas to resources, funding, and technical support. Membership is free and open to any organization serving Arkansas communities. ACEDA hosts quarterly meetings for networking and collaboration, shares updates and opportunities among members, and partners on community projects statewide. Interested groups can attend meetings or join collaborative efforts to strengthen local impact. Learn more at tinyurl.com/ACEDALinfo.
- Training Sessions: The Arkansas Municipal League is offering upcoming training sessions for city officials and staff. On Thursday, September 18 at 2 PM, the .Gov Follow-Up Training will provide guidance on Act 929 of 2025, which requires municipalities to transition to a .gov domain, covering setup, hosting options, and potential costs. On Thursday, September 25 at 10 AM, the Navigating AI Basics + Policy Training will review Act 848 of 2025, outlining requirements for cities to adopt AI policies and complete AI-related training. Mayor Kemp mentioned that if there are any issues for the same, cities should ask for help from the state as they own the Ar.gov handles for URL.

6. Preview of Upcoming Meetings

- Wed, Oct 22nd, 2025
 - 9:00 am: Small Cities Council Meeting
 - 10:00 am: Board of Directors Meeting

7. Adjourn

Mayor Gastineau made a motion to adjourn, Mr. Zweifel seconded it, Mayor Kemp adjourned the Small Cities Council meeting at 9:55 AM.