



# Small Cities Council Meeting Summary

Wednesday, March 25, 2026, | 9:00 AM  
Pulaski County Regional Center | Little Rock  
*Draft*

Meeting PowerPoint slides available at [www.metroplan.org/small-cities-council](http://www.metroplan.org/small-cities-council)

## SCC Members Attending

- |  |                      |
|--|----------------------|
| 1. Mayor Charles Gastineau, Vice Chair | City of Ward         |
| 2. Mayor Bernadette Chamberlain        | City of Austin       |
| 3. Mayor Crystal Herrmann              | City of Alexander    |
| 4. Mayor Derrick Rainey                | City of Wrightsville |

## Additional Attendees

- |                     |                           |
|---------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Mr. Truett Smith | Crafton Tull              |
| 2. Mr. Mark Stodola | Arkansas Municipal League |
| 3. Mr. Mike Watson  | Halff                     |
| 4. Mr. John Miller  | Garver                    |

## Metroplan Staff

- |                          |                                  |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Mr. Casey Covington   | Executive Director               |
| 2. Ms. Bernadette Rhodes | Deputy Director                  |
| 3. Ms. Sydney Dozier     | Public Engagement Planner        |
| 4. Ms. Amy Thomas        | Executive Operations Coordinator |
| 5. Mr. Paritosh Jambhale | Community Planner                |

## 1. **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. Ms. Amy Thomas was introduced as the new team member of Metroplan. Ms. Thomas is the new Executive Operations Coordinator. Mayor Gastineau mentioned that he will be not running for another term, and that the current term will be his last term as a Mayor for City of Ward. When asked about the energy savings performance contracting experience, Mayor Gastineau mentioned to the council that the City of Ward was awarded \$200,000 from the Arkansas Energy Office and \$236,000 from Metroplan to update the HVAC and lighting (LED) in all of Ward's city owned facilities. The city invested about \$35,000 of its own funds in the project. Their performance will be tracked for a few years to come. Mayor Gastineau added that the cost to the city (\$35,000) was quite less in comparison to the \$436,000 cost of new equipment. He also added that the city will also be updating its thermostats, which will help in reducing the electricity bills. He thanked Metroplan staff, especially Ms. Brittany Nichols, for helping the City of Ward in the Energy Savings Performance Contracting process.

Mayor Herrmann updated the council about the City of Alexander. She mentioned that the city has completed the streetlight upgrade. They are also looking forward to the opportunity to update HVAC equipment. Ms. Rhodes mentioned that Metroplan is in the process of developing a second ESPC cohort, which will be lead by Ms. Brittany Nichols. City/county leaders and staff working on building-related topics are invited to participate. The cohort will serve as a platform for receiving building efficiency guidance from Ms. Nichols and becoming eligible to apply for stipends for upgrades. City of Alexander is also completing a flood study for the Pulaski County side of Alexander and has completed their hazard mitigation grant with FEMA. City staff is pleased with the results it has had for the city. The flood study is also funded (75%) by the same grant. Central Arkansas Planning and Development District (CAPDD) helped the City of Alexander with the grant application process. The city has also submitted brownfield application for the old hospital site (Thomas C. McRae Memorial Sanatorium), which will be announced in June. Mayor Herrmann asked the council about the street overlay funding. She mentioned that the City of Alexander was not awarded the funding during the current three-year cycle and if it was a common occurrence. Mayor Gastineau mentioned that the current skip in funding might suggest that Alexander is a priority in the next cycle.

## 3. **Summary of Previous Meeting**

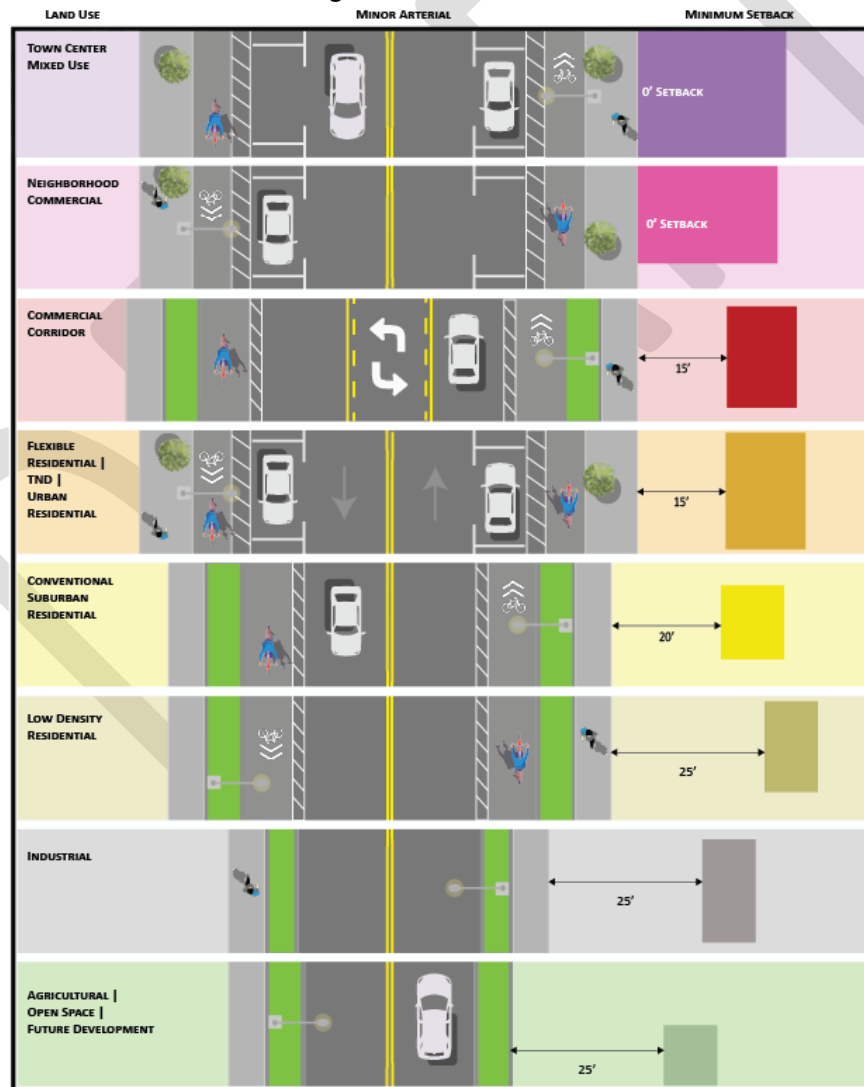
Mayor Herrmann made a motion to approve the summary of the August 27, 2025, meeting. Mayor Chamberlain seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

#### 4. Local Transportation Plan (LTP)

Ms. Rhodes conveyed to the council that this is a Master Street Plan template that Metroplan has been working on. It is specifically developed with small cities in mind. It can be used in conjunction with the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO), but can also be used by cities that have not adopted the UDO yet. Mr. Jambhale presented the work in progress and asked for feedback.

Mr. Jambhale mentioned that the LTP adopts the “plug and play” approach for city streets that the UDO uses for zoning and subdivision regulations. The idea of this plan is to make it easy for small cities to update their Master Street Plans in a unified manner across Central Arkansas. He introduced to the city the concept of “Context Sensitive Design” which is used throughout the LTP in order to design street sections that respond to their surrounding land use. He mentioned that often, a single road goes through multiple land uses, however its section does not change. This creates a lack of sense of place. It also makes it difficult to introduce a multi-modal approach of transportation to different parts of the city and makes access to structures difficult. Context Sensitive Design posits that roadway cross-sections should not be stagnant and should respond to the context around it.

Mr. Jambhale then showcased the following road sections for minor arterial streets.



Mr. Jambhale asked for the Council’s feedback. Mayor Herrmann said that many small cities, including Alexander, have ditches on the sides which makes it difficult for them to introduce sidewalks, and other street elements. Ms. Rhodes mentioned that this is meant for future developments and that just like the UDO, the LTP can be modified to what a particular city wishes to see on their future streets. This is a set of best practices and can be edited according to the city’s needs. Mayor Gastineau mentioned that it might be necessary to simplify the graphics for smaller cities. There was some input on the lack of easements assigned in smaller cities, which makes the available right of way difficult to measure. The council was supportive of the multi-modal approach for pedestrians and bicyclists, but more guidance is needed on how to provide multimodal facilities in conjunction with ditches in these road sections.

**5. Upcoming Grants & Capital Improvement Opportunities:**

Ms. Rhodes updated the council about the funds available in the Climate Pollution Reduction Grant award. She reminded the council that the last full board meeting approved \$5 million to land restoration and tree planting projects. The trail projects on the agenda for the upcoming board meeting would complete the green networks funding. Ms. Rhodes discussed that the council could still apply for free trees under the University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension’s grant program. The remaining funding available are as follows:

<b>Program</b>	<b>Individual Awards</b>	<b>Remaining Funding</b>
Fleet Electrification Rebate	\$10,000 rebate per car/SUV \$15,000 rebate per truck	\$350,000
EV Charger Rebate	\$7,250 rebate per charging port	\$357,000
Streetlight Conversion to LED		\$916,061
Building Efficiency	Up to \$500,000 stipend per org <i>New cohort launching this Spring</i>	\$3,266,502

Ms. Rhodes mentioned that the City of Keo and the City of England, both have used this opportunity to get Electric Vehicle (EV) chargers installed in their cities. The City of Alexander was one of the cities that applied for the streetlight conversion to LED funding. Mayor Herrmann was asked about her experience with the program. Mayor Herrmann shared that the process was easy. Alexander is working with Energy to update their streetlights to LED. Mayor Herrmann discussed a few dark spots in Alexander where lights are difficult to install due to the open ditches. She mentioned that they might look into solar operated streetlights for those areas.

Ms. Rhodes mentioned to the Council about the new Energy Savings Performance Contracting (ESPC) cohort which will be led by Ms. Brittany Nichols. It will launch in the spring season and its meetings will be held mostly virtually. The purpose of the ESPC is that the savings the city realizes from building efficiency upgrades will, over time, pay for the projects. The cohort is open for all the council members, and their staff irrespective of whether they have or will be applying for building efficiency funding.

- **Hart Family Fund for Small Town Grant:**

Mr. Jambhale presented The Hart Family Fund for Small Towns funding opportunity, administered by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, which provides seed funding to support historic preservation efforts in small communities with population under 10,000. With grant amounts typically ranging from \$2,500 to \$15,000 and a deadline of May 1, 2026, the program focuses on planning, education, and community engagement rather than construction. Eligible applicants include public agencies and 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations, and a dollar-for-dollar match is generally encouraged. The fund supports activities such as hiring preservation professionals, developing plans or design guidelines, and conducting outreach or educational programs that raise awareness about historic preservation. Overall, the program aims to stimulate public discussion, build local capacity, and encourage private investment in preserving community heritage. The link for it is as follows: <https://savingplaces.org/hart-family-fund>

- **Learning Opportunity: Arkansas Municipal League; ACE Program**

The Civilpedia Certification offers a foundational civic education program designed for individuals seeking to better understand local government operations. Available online for a \$50 fee, the certification provides 25 credits and covers key topics such as municipal government, municipal finance, human resources, planning and zoning, and FOIA laws. The program is intended to build practical knowledge and capacity for those involved in or interested in public service, equipping participants with a well-rounded understanding of how local governments function. Link for the same is as follows: <https://www.armunileague.org/resources-education/education-training-programs/>

## 6. Member Q&A

There was some discussion led by Mayor Rainey which talked about the importance of looking out for each other as a region of Central Arkansas and not just as individual cities. He mentioned that good communication is important for the growth of the region. Mayor Gastineau also agreed to working together as a region in decisions going forward.

Mr. Covington added to the conversation that the Transportation Summit organized by Metroplan in conjuncture with CAPDD will be a good forum to start regional conversations. It will be a good platform for all the bodies involved in Central Arkansas to discuss problems and their solutions. Ms. Dozier added that the summit will be a good platform to discuss issues with various stakeholders and regional development partners of Central Arkansas. The summit will be held at Lake DeGray on May 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>.

## 7. Preview of Upcoming Meetings

- Wed, May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2025
  - 9:00 am: Small Cities Council Meeting
  - 10:00 am: Board of Directors Meeting

## 8. Adjourn

Mayor Rainey made a motion to adjourn and Mayor Chamberlain seconded it. Mayor Gastineau adjourned the Small Cities Council meeting at 9:55 AM.