



Small Cities Council

Meeting Summary

Wednesday, March 25, 2026, | 9:00 AM
Pulaski County Regional Center | Little Rock
Approved: 27 May 2026

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

SCC Members Attending

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| 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. Ms. Rhodes congratulated him on his retirement. 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 had invest about \$35,000 in this contractual process. Their performance will be tracked for a few years to come. Mayor Gastineau added that the cost the city bared (\$35,000) was quite less in comparison to the \$436,000 of new equipment. He also added that the city will also be updating its thermostat which will help in reducing the electricity bills of the city. He sincerely thanked Metroplan staff, especially Ms. Brittany Nichols, for helping the City of Ward in the application process for the same.

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 air conditioner upgrade. Ms. Rhodes mentioned along the same lines, that Metroplan is in the process of developing a cohort, which will be lead by Ms. Brittany Nichols. Ms. Nichols along with other city mayors and city staff working on building-related topics will be a part of this. It will serve as a platform for applying for grants and receiving guidance from Ms. Nichols. Mayor Herrmann continued that the City of Alexander is currently completing a flood study for the Pulaski County side of Alexander. They also completed their hazardous mitigation grant. The city staff is pleased with it and is appreciative of the grant and 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) also helped the City of Alexander with the grant application process. The hazardous mitigation grant is a FEMA grant. The city has also turned in the brownfield application for the old hospital site (Thomas C. McRae Memorial Sanatorium). City of Alexander will hear about the result for the same in June. Mayor Herrmann asked the council about the street overlay funding. She mentioned that the City of Alexander was not awarded the finding in the current three-year cycle and if it was a common feat. Mayor Gastineau answered this query by mentioning that the current skip in funding might suggest that Alexander is a priority in the next cycle.

3. **Summary of Previous Meeting**

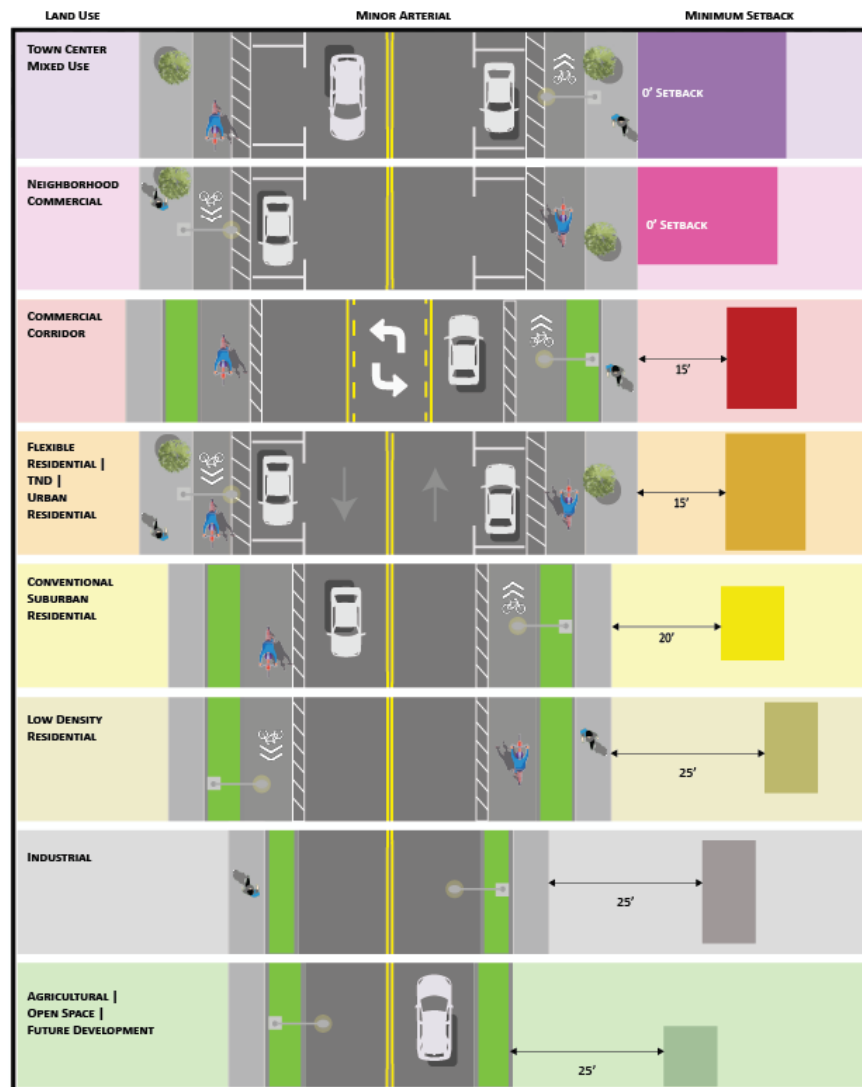
Mayor Herrmann made a motion to approve the summary of the August 27, 2025, meeting. Mayor Chamberlain seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

4. Local Transportation Plan (LTP)

Ms. Rhodes conveyed to the council that this is a Master Streets Plan project that Metroplan has been working on. It is specifically developed with small cities in mind. It can be used in conjunction with the Uniform Development Ordinance (UDO). It can also be used by cities that have not adopted the UDO yet. This was a brief display of the work in progress and Metroplan wanted some feedback on the work done and for the work that will follow. Mr. Jambhale led this section.

Mr. Jambhale mentioned that the LTP intends to adopt the “plug and play” approach that the UDO uses for character areas and subdivision regulations. It uses that approach on city streets. The idea of this plan is to make it easy for small cities to update their Master Streets Plan in a unified manner across the region of 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 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. It also makes access to structures difficult. This concept thrives on the idea of roadway cross-sections should not be stagnant and should respond to the context around it.

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



Mr. Jambhale asked for the Council’s opinion on it. In response Mayor Herrmann said that many of the small cities, including Alexander has 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, this can be modified to look like what a particular city wishes to see on their future streets. This is a set of best practices and all of can be edited according to the needs of the city. 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 make understanding the available right of way difficult to measure. The council was supportive of the multi-modal approach for pedestrians and bicyclists. But some work needs to be done on understanding how to include 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 he last full board meeting recorded \$5 million awarded to land restoration and tree planting projects. The trail projects on the agenda for the board meeting to follow would complete the green networks funding. Ms. Rhodes discussed that the council could still apply for free trees under the cooperative extension. The remaining finding brackets available are as follows:

Program	Individual Awards	Remaining Funding
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 can charge for providing the charger by the KWh. The City of Alexander were one of the cities that applied for the streetlight conversion to LED grant money. Mayor Herrmann was asked about her experience regarding the same. Mayor Herrmann discussed that the process was easy. Alexander is working with Entergy to update their streetlights to LED. They changed the lights already and it was a relatively easy process to kick start and implement. 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 such areas.

Ms. Rhodes mentioned to the Council about the new cohort which will be led by Ms. Brittany Nichols. It will launch in the spring season and its meetings will be held virtually most of the times. Some of them might be in-person to learn about the process of doing energy savings contracting with an Energy Savings Company. The purpose of the ESC is that the savings the city would make due to updating their building efficiency infrastructure will help them 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 grant funding opportunity to the council. The Hart Family Fund for Small Towns, administered by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, 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 to Mr. Covington's point, 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 the 6th and 7th of May.

7. Preview of Upcoming Meetings

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

8. Adjourn

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