2026 LEGISLATIVE PREVIEW

Colorado Municipalities

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About CML

The Colorado Municipal League is a nonprofit association organized and operated by Colorado municipalities to provide support services to member cities and towns. The League has two main objectives: 1) to represent cities and towns collectively in matters before the state and federal government and 2) to provide a wide range of information services to help municipal officials manage their governments.

MISSION

Colorado Municipalities is published to inform, educate, and advise appointed and elected municipal officials about new programs, services, trends, and information to help them perform their jobs and better serve their citizens and communities.

Letters to the editor

Have thoughts about an article that you read in *Colorado Municipalities*?

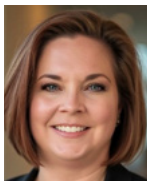
Want to share those thoughts with your colleagues across the state?

CML welcomes thought-provoking letters to the editor! Send comments to CML Engagement & Communications Manager Denise White at *dwhite@cml.org*.

Advertise

Each issue of *Colorado Municipalities* reaches 4,000 municipal officials and decision makers. To reach those who lead Colorado cities and towns, contact CML Engagement & Communications Manager Denise White, *dwhite@cml.org*.

ABOUT SOME OF OUR CONTRIBUTORS



KIM BOYD, A28-YEAR RESIDENT OF COLORADO, HAS SERVED AS THE TOWN ADMINISTRATOR FOR KIOWA SINCE 2021. SHE HOLDS A BACHELOR'S DEGREE IN SOCIOLOGY FROM COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY PUEBLO AND A MASTER'S IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO AT COLORADO SPRINGS. DEDICATED TO STRENGTHENING THE BOND BETWEEN LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND RESIDENTS, KIM IS A PASSIONATE ADVOCATE FOR SMALL-TOWN VITALITY. THROUGH HER LEADERSHIP IN THE KIOWA MAIN STREETS PROGRAM, SHE WORKS TO PRESERVE KIOWA'S HISTORIC CHARM WHILE SUPPORTING SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY GROWTH. KIM ALSO REPRESENTS SMALL MUNICIPALITIES STATEWIDE AS A MEMBER OF THE COLORADO MUNICIPAL LEAGUE EXECUTIVE BOARD AND SERVES ON THE EASTERN TRANSPORTATION PLANNING REGION COUNCIL. HER WORK REFLECTS A DEEP COMMITMENT TO ENSURING THAT COLORADO'S RURAL COMMUNITIES HAVE A STRONG VOICE IN STATE POLICY. BELIEVING THAT SMALL TOWNS ARE THE HEART OF COLORADO, KIM CHAMPIONS THEIR RESILIENCE, INDEPENDENCE, AND ENDURING SENSE OF COMMUNITY.

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SETH HOFFMAN IS PRESIDENT OF THE COLORADO MUNICIPAL LEAGUE EXECUTIVE BOARD. SETH IS CITY MANAGER OF THE CITY OF LONE TREE AND HAS SERVED IN VARIOUS ROLES AT THE CITY SINCE 2005, INCLUDING DEPUTY CITY MANAGER AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR. DURING THIS TIME, HE CONDUCTED SUCCESSFUL EXPANSION, RETENTION AND RELOCATION NEGOTIATIONS ON A LARGE NUMBER OF HIGH-PROFILE PROJECTS, AND HE FACILITATES THE WORK OF THE CITY COUNCIL BY IMPLEMENTING ALL ELEMENTS OF ITS GOALS AND POLICIES. PRIOR TO JOINING LONE TREE, HOFFMAN WORKED AT THE CITY OF GRAND JUNCTION.

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ABOUT SOME OF OUR CONTRIBUTORS

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Join CML

For associate membership information, contact CML Marketing & Communications Specialist Kharyl Jackson at *kjackson@cml.org*.

President's Corner

State Capitol needs local voices

BY SETH HOFFMAN, CML EXECUTIVE BOARD PRESIDENT

Last month, at the National League of Cities conference in Salt Lake City, I joined meetings with other state league presidents and executive directors from around the country. One after another, they shared stories that sounded uncomfortably familiar: legislatures proposing statewide land use mandates, preempting local decision-making, or limiting the tools cities rely on to manage growth, public safety, housing, and infrastructure. It was a reminder that we're not alone. The pressures on local control aren't unique to Colorado — they're part of a national trend. (Fun fact! There are 49 municipal leagues. Only Hawaii doesn't have one.)

What also stood out, though, was how effective municipal advocacy can be when cities and towns stay engaged. As we head into the 2026 legislative session, your voice matters more than ever. Local leaders are the ones who live with the outcomes of legislative decisions, and we're often the only ones who can explain how a bill will actually play out on the ground.

Colorado voting delegates at the NLC Annual Business Meeting are, from front to back, Commerce City Mayor Steve Douglas, Northglenn Mayor Pro Tem Shannon Lukeman-Hiromasa, Castle Pines Mayor Tracy Engerman, Edgewater Mayor Steve Conklin, Thornton Council Member Justin Martinez, Golden Mayor Laura Weinberg, and Brighton Mayor Greg Mills.

This issue of Colorado Municipalities looks ahead to the coming session — what to expect at the Capitol, how CML sets its legislative positions, the emerging issues likely to shape debate, and tools available to help you advocate for your community. Whether it's remote testimony, outreach to your delegation, or attending the Legislative Workshop, involvement from cities and towns is essential.

Many members ask how CML determines legislative positions. The answer is simple but important: through a deliberate, member-driven process. The Policy Committee meets throughout the year to review proposals, debate impacts, and recommend positions to the Executive Board. With municipalities of every size and geography, it's not easy work — but it's designed to reflect the full diversity of our communities. The more our members participate, the stronger the process becomes.

This session will bring familiar challenges. Issues around land use, housing, public safety, transportation, and local control continue to evolve, and cities need to be at the table early. The good news is that when municipal officials engage, it helps ground the conversation in realworld experience. Hearing directly from the people who implement policy gives legislators a clearer understanding of how a bill may play out in practice.

As you read this issue, I hope you'll see yourself as an active part of the work ahead. Reach out to your legislators before the session gets busy. Ask CML staff and board members questions. Make sure your community has a representative on the Policy Committee. And make plans to attend the Legislative Workshop — it's one of the best opportunities to connect directly with lawmakers and other municipal leaders.

Colorado's cities and towns are strongest when we advocate together. I'm grateful for your partnership, and I look forward to working with you as the 2026 session gets underway.

CML

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

FOR 2026

Unfunded mandates, land-use, federal funding top legislative agenda

By **BEVERLY STABLES**, CML legislative advocacy manager, and CML legislative and policy advocates **OWEN BRIGNER**, **EMMA DONAHUE**, and **ELIZABETH HASKELL**

As Colorado continues to face fiscal pressures, local governments find themselves at the front lines of service delivery — from fixing roads and maintaining water systems to ensuring public safety and planning for attainable housing. For the 2026 legislative session, CML will continue its commitment to "partnership, not preemption," urging state and federal lawmakers to respect local autonomy and to provide adequate funding for any mandates rather than shifting costs to cities and towns. In light of a projected state budget shortfall of approximately $850 million, CML's advocacy team will emphasize protecting municipalities from unfunded mandates, reinforcing local land-use and zoning authority, and preparing for potentially adverse shifts in federal support that could further strain local budgets.

In recent years, many municipalities reported financial strain due to unfunded state mandates, especially around technology accessibility, body-worn cameras for law enforcement, and wastewater-quality mandates. CML's 2026 State of Our Cities and Towns (SOOCAT) highlights the fiscal constraints of municipal budgets. (*tinyurl.com/SOOCATreport*). At the same time, the state will be entering yet another painful budget year where lawmakers will be searching under the proverbial couch cushions of the state budget to plug the substantial deficit. These factors increase the risk that municipalities might again be told by the state to absorb the cost of state-driven policies or compliance requirements. On the national level, ongoing political and budgetary uncertainty could lead to changes in federal–state funding flows (or conditionality), which in turn could pressure state and municipal budgets, particularly for infrastructure, housing, public safety, and social services.

Given these pressures, 2026 is not just another legislative session. It may set crucial precedents for the balance of power and the financial viability of Colorado's cities and towns for years to come.

SHIELDING MUNICIPALITIES FROM UNFUNDED MANDATES

One of CML's longstanding policy positions — opposition to unfunded mandates — will likely take center stage in 2026. The CML Advocacy Team will be working hard at the Capitol to advocate for state funding of any new mandates and reject any unfunded mandates. Local governments cannot and should not shoulder the financial burden of state policies and priorities, especially after seeing broad sweeps to local government funding in last year's state budget. CML's policy statement calls on the Colorado General Assembly to meet the statutory requirement to prevent unfunded mandates and calls for clearer fiscal notes on the cost burdens that proposed

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laws could place on municipalities. With shrinking state revenues, the risk is high that lawmakers may impose additional regulatory burdens on local governments, expecting municipalities to absorb the costs.

Given the track record where municipalities have already had to divert funds from other priorities or delay services because of compliance costs, the CML advocacy team will be on high alert for any attempts to make municipalities into unfunded arms of the state.

DEFENDING LOCAL LAND-USE AUTHORITY

A second foundational CML priority for 2026 will be defending the principle of local control over land use, zoning, and planning. Over the years, CML has repeatedly opposed efforts to preempt local authority and impose state-wide zoning mandates or uniform land-use codes. One-size-fits-all housing and land use requirements are extremely problematic in a state with such diversity of municipalities as Colorado, and CML will continue to oppose new legislation that undermines home-rule and local land use authority. Further, the League encourages state lawmakers to consider ways to partner with local governments to address housing affordability in our state. Whether that means advancing CML-initiated legislation to enable statutory municipalities to raise revenue for workforce housing or collaborating on updates to Proposition 123 funding to help local governments maintain eligibility, the state should prioritize "partnership, not preemption."

CML members are well positioned to help educate state lawmakers on the true impacts of unfunded mandates and preemptions.

Given the state's focus on land use preemption over the last several years, the League will continue to ensure local voices — from small mountain towns to large Front Range cities to the Eastern plains — are uplifted. This will involve resisting new legislative preemptions, pushing back on executive orders that tie funding to compliance, and supporting municipalities in defending home-rule authority.

FEDERAL-LEVEL FUNDING SHIFTS AFFECTING LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Beyond state-level pressure, next year may bring changes on the federal front that have ripple effects for municipalities. Whether it's shifts in federal grant programs, infrastructure funding, or broader budget-cutting trends, local governments stand to be affected, especially given the fragile financial state of many municipal budgets.

Thus, CML will work to prevent the state from passing financial burdens related to any loss of federal funding onto local governments and will strongly advocate for the state to work toward consistency with local government funds that are necessary to support infrastructure, affordable housing, public safety, climate resilience, and other municipal services. CML's policy statement calls on state and federal governments to honor their funding obligations when mandates are imposed.

Municipalities often operate with tight budgets, limited bonding capacity, and narrow tax bases. In times of fiscal uncertainty at the state or federal level, predictability becomes even more critical. Further, CML will guard against conditional funding that undermines local autonomy. The League has already criticized situations where state or federal funds are redirected or conditioned on compliance with state policy in areas such as land use. The League will continue to push back against similar conditional funding proposals, defending the principle that municipalities should not have to surrender local control to receive grants.

Through state advocacy, CML aims to protect Colorado municipalities from being caught off-guard by shifting rules, disappearing revenues, or funding that comes with strings attached.

HOW LOCAL OFFICIALS CAN HELP

CML members are well positioned to help educate state lawmakers on the true impacts of these unfunded mandates and preemptions. When possible, quantifying the impact of a preemption or unfunded mandate at the local level encourages state legislators to consider impacts in terms of implementation rather than lofty policy goals.

Compliance with new laws can involve updating infrastructure, adhering to various environmental or accessibility standards, or adopting other requirements, and often costs money. There are real-world impacts for municipalities when required to shift resources to state priorities rather than local needs. And of course, zoning, land-use, development standards, and permitting shape a municipality's character, density, affordability, and environmental footprint. These considerations can be overlooked at the Capitol but have a significant impact on the local level. Thus, grassroots advocacy matters for both fairness and long-term sustainability of municipal government. By voicing support for "no money, no mandates," municipal officials

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can send a powerful message to state lawmakers that local governments should not be treated as unfunded policy implementers.

For local officials, now is the time to create a clear record: track past mandates and associated costs as well as expected future costs and share them with CML and state lawmakers to demonstrate how unfunded mandates have real-world impacts.

A 2026 AGENDA ROOTED IN FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY AND LOCAL AUTONOMY

As the 2026 legislative session approaches, the Colorado Municipal League will draw on its longstanding principles of home rule, fiscal responsibility, and local autonomy to confront mounting fiscal and governance challenges. With the state budget woes, growing pressure for statewide solutions, and uncertain federal funding trends, CML's agenda is more relevant than ever.

By prioritizing protection from unfunded mandates, defending local land-use authority, and advocating for stable federal-state–local funding relationships, CML aims to preserve both the financial viability of Colorado's municipalities and the democratic principle that local communities are best positioned to decide their own future and to meet the needs of their residents.

If state lawmakers work with municipalities in genuine partnership rather than through top-down mandates, Colorado may emerge from next legislative session with stronger, more resilient communities. But the coming year also presents a crossroads: whether the future of local governance will be shaped by sweeping mandates — or respect for municipal authority.

SPOTLIGHT

How CML takes positions on legislation

By **BEVERLY STABLES**, CML legislative advocacy manager

Prior to the start of each legislative session, CML begins its policy development process. This process guides our legislative priorities when the Colorado General Assembly meets in January. Below is an overview of CML's policy development process. The League's Policy Committee is informed by CML's member-approved annual policy statement, and all members are encouraged to take advantage of the opportunity to be represented. This committee is highly influential in policy development, and participating is an important way to make sure your municipality's unique needs and challenges are considered in state legislation.

Each member municipality of CML is entitled to designate one representative and one alternate to the Policy Committee (cities over 100,000 in population are entitled to designate two representatives and one alternate.) In addition, CML section chairs are automatically appointed as non-voting members of the committee. The chair of the Policy Committee is appointed by CML's Executive Board president.

The Policy Committee has significant policy development responsibilities. It is responsible for:

- Considering requests from member municipalities for CML-initiated legislation and recommending specific positions to the CML Executive Board.
- Reviewing known or potential legislative issues or bills, considering staff recommendations, and recommending specific positions to the Executive Board.
- Reviewing the League's annual policy statement that guides League positions on policy issues affecting municipalities and proposing revisions, if necessary. At the time of this writing, League staff are currently undertaking an effort to modernize the Policy Statement. All recommended changes are voted on by CML members at the Annual Business Meeting that takes place as part of CML's Annual Conference.

The CML Policy Committee met in October and December of 2025 and will meet again in January, February, and March of 2025. All recommendations of the Policy Committee are reviewed and approved by the CML Executive Board.

To learn more about the Policy Committee's Roles and Responsibilities, check out our recent Policy Committee webinar at *www.cml.org*.

STEP 1

Member municipalities and CML staff make requests for CML-initiated legislation and suggest changes to the CML Policy Statement. CML staff also make recommendations for positions on other legislation.

STEP 2

The CML Policy Committee votes on recommendations to the Executive Board for CML-initiated legislation and other legislation before the General Assembly.

STEP 3

CML Executive Board reviews Policy Committee recommendations and votes on whether to approve CML-initiated legislation requests and positions on other legislation.

STEP 4

CML legislative advocacy team lobbies for approved policy positions and moves forward CML-initiated legislation at the state Capitol.

SPOTLIGHT

Advocate for your community!

By **ELIZABETH HASKELL**, CML legislative & policy advocate

Providing real-world stories about the impacts of state policy on municipalities is an effective way to advocate for your community. When mayors, councilmembers, and staff participate in bill hearings, whether in person, remotely, or via email, they bring firsthand knowledge of community needs, challenges, and successes. Their testimony helps bridge the gap between policy ideas and practical outcomes, which helps legislators understand the implications of their policies as well as the possible unintended consequences. Follow these three easy steps to participate in remote testimony.

STEP 1

ADVANCE REGISTRATION REQUIRED

Identify bill and committee meeting time from the CML Statehouse Report, CML advocacy staff directly, or the General Assembly website. Sign up before the bill hearing begins. Navigate to the General Assembly website, click on the Committees icon near the top of the page, select Public Testimony Options, choose Remotely via Zoom, and respond to prompts, such as bill number (hearing item), name, and position on bill. Watch for email with a Zoom link and contact information for technical assistance. Notify CML staff when you know you plan to testify.

STEP 2

PREPARE

Plan testimony ahead of time. Clearly state how the bill will impact, benefit, or hinder your municipality. Testimony is usually limited to three minutes and is sometimes reduced to two minutes if there are many witnesses.

STEP 3

JOIN MEETING & TESTIFY

Log in. Join the meeting at the designated time. Wait for your name to be called. The chair decides the order of testimony, often alternating between opponents and proponents. When you name is called, accept the prompt to be promoted to panelist. Turn on your camera. When it's your turn to speak, turn on your microphone. State your name and representation. Present testimony. Questions happen, so be prepared!

ADDITIONAL ADVOCACY TOOLS

EMAIL LEGISLATORS

Send your thoughts directly to your legislators and committee members.

WRITTEN TESTIMONY

Submit your testimony in writing via the General Assembly website to be included in the official meeting record.

Emerging issues

State budget, public safety, and land use shaping up to be hot topics for Colorado General Assembly

Colorado's budget crisis deepens

Joint Budget Committee faces another $1 billion gap

By **Elizabeth Haskell**, CML legislative & policy advocate

As Colorado's Joint Budget Committee (JBC) began hearings in November to craft the state's FY2026-27 budget, Gov. Jared Polis presented his budget proposal, and Medicaid spending was front and center in the conversation. The discussion highlighted the fact that the JBC was once again confronting budget deficits approaching $1 billion, with no end in sight. Colorado's annual budget is approximately $44 billion.

The JBC faces an estimated $850 million shortfall for FY2026-27, which follows the $1.2 billion gap in FY 2025-26 and a projected $1 billion deficit for FY2027-28. Colorado's budget problems are rooted in a persistent imbalance, as revenue lags behind the rising cost of maintaining existing state programs and services. While most departments have seen appropriations roughly keep pace with inflation, according to JBC staff analysis, Medicaid expenses have grown by 43% (about $1.7 billion) since FY2018-19, a growth rate that far exceeds inflation.

Polis' plan calls for limiting Medicaid spending, cutting higher education funding, and redirecting about $105 million in affordable housing funding, while preserving K-12 education funding. Some JBC members disagree with his approach to cut Medicaid services, citing the impact cuts will have on vulnerable populations. But the governor pointed out that Medicaid cuts are necessary as this spending is limiting the ability to provide other public services, such as road construction and repairs and public safety.

The JBC's challenge extends beyond identifying where to cut. It's about whether Colorado can sustain its current level of government services under constitutional constraints that limit revenue growth. Under the Taxpayer's Bill of Rights (TABOR), Colorado's spending growth is capped, forcing the JBC to reallocate funds from lower-priority programs to meet urgent needs. This is simply a short-term solution. A long-term option that JBC members may consider is to raise more revenue, which would require either modifying TABOR or passing new taxes, both of which require voter approval. As the JBC explores ways to balance the FY2026-27 budget, there will surely be winners and losers.

One likely loser will be local governments that depend on direct disbursements and Energy/Mineral Impact Assistance Fund grants, both funded by severance tax revenues. Severance taxes are levied on the extraction of oil, gas, coal, and minerals. These revenues have historically been a dedicated source of funding to replace depleted resources and support impacted communities. However, the administration's current budget proposal is an all too familiar maneuver that has frustrated local governments

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and the Colorado Municipal League for decades — sweeping severance tax revenue.

According to JBC staff, the legislature has made several recent transfers from the Local Government Severance Tax Fund to the General Fund. In the past two budget cycles, the legislature has swept a total of $82 million from the Local Government Severance Tax Fund. These funds were transferred to the General Fund, the Digital Trunk Radio program, and the Community Schoolyard Grant program. The proposed sweep for FY2026-27 adds a $10 million sweep to the ongoing funding for the Digital Trunk Radio and the Community Schoolyard Grant programs ($17 million in FY 2026-27). This totals a $109 million sweep of severance tax revenues from local governments in three years. These repeated diversions of severance tax funds underscore the JBC's reliance on short-term fixes to address deeper fiscal challenges.

As the months-long process of drafting the FY2026-27 state budget continues, the JBC will be searching for additional resources to balance the budget. They will most likely not solve the underlying problem: balancing a constitutional mandate with skyrocketing healthcare costs, limited revenue growth, and competing demands from education, transportation, public safety, and every other state function. It appears they will face similar choices next year, and the year after that. Unless federal Medicaid rules shift or voters authorize new revenue streams, Colorado may need to rethink the scope of services it can realistically sustain.

Public safety reform

Navigating privacy, transparency, and trust

By **Owen Brigner**, CML legislative & policy advocate

When the Second Regular Session of the 75th Colorado General Assembly begins Jan. 14, public safety will continue to be an area of significant focus — particularly on issues involving municipal courts, data-sharing, and privacy.

CML again expects to defend against unfunded mandates and preemption restricting judicial discretion in municipal courts. Last year, the governor vetoed HB24-1147 following requests from CML and numerous municipalities. The bill would have prohibited municipalities from having higher penalties than the state penalties for comparable offenses, capped municipal penalties for all other offenses at the petty offense level, required live streaming of all proceedings involving in-custody defendants, and clarified defendants' access to indigent defense counsel in municipal court.

CML again expects to defend against unfunded mandates and preemption restricting judicial discretion in municipal courts.

In 2026, the bill sponsors are returning with a different version of last year's proposal. This new version would create an unfunded mandate by requiring the live streaming of all municipal court proceedings where jail is a possible penalty, regardless of staffing levels or technology, and prohibit judges from issuing blanket orders on livestreaming. It would also eliminate flat-fee arrangements for indigent defense counsel in municipal courts, prohibit courts not of record from sentencing defendants to jail, and include the provisions clarifying a defendant's right to indigent defense counsel. While CML is hopeful it can reach an agreement on the right to counsel piece, the remaining provisions raise serious concerns about the burden on municipal resources and the implications for public safety.

At the time of publication, two pending cases before the Colorado Supreme Court — *City of Westminster v. Camp* and *City of Aurora v. Simons* — will ostensibly shed light on whether municipalities may impose tougher penalties than the state when a comparable state crime exists. Those rulings may impact whether the sentencing parity portion of HB24-1147 returns in some form.

Illustration by Adobe Stock

Another revised municipal court bill concept is likely to return this year. Last year's CML-initiated measure sought to strengthen judicial discretion by expanding exceptions to PR-bond requirements for low-level offenses, allowing cash or surety bonds when individuals repeatedly fail to appear in court. That proposal stalled due to limited support and the need for further discussion about the best solution, but some legislators are interested in reviving it this year even though CML is not initiating it.

Another topic not without controversy is data-sharing of technology used by law enforcement agencies. CML anticipates two bills in this realm. One would undercut Fourth Amendment law by prohibiting a law enforcement agency's ability to access commercially available data purchased from third parties while another bill will likely address the sharing of data from license plate reader technology with federal law enforcement. CML also expects legislation to limit the release of body-worn camera footage from mass-casualty events as a result of footage from these tragedies disturbingly being sold online. CML will work with sponsors to prevent circumvention of existing constitutional law and preserve critical investigative tools without unnecessary or overly restrictive legislation.

Public safety will remain a complex and highly legislated issue in 2026. As municipalities navigate fiscal constraints and evolving expectations around privacy and transparency, CML will continue to advocate for balanced, workable reforms that maintain public trust and protect against unfunded mandates and state preemption.

Yet again, land use preemptions

CML continues to advocate for balanced policies that recognize local needs

By **Bev Stables**, CML legislative advocacy manager

Land use policy has stood at the center of Colorado's most persistent debates between state and local authority, and the 2026 legislative session will likely be no different. Each legislative session brings renewed conversations about how — and by whom — Colorado's growth should be shaped. What has emerged is a perennial tension: the state's desire to address housing challenges with one-size-fits-all solutions intersecting with municipalities' need to tailor land use decisions to local resources, capacity, and community priorities. As Colorado continues to grapple with housing affordability and infrastructure demands, land use preemptions have become a defining feature of the General Assembly's annual legislative agenda.

At the heart of the issue is Colorado's strong tradition of local control. Municipalities have long held substantial authority over zoning, development review, annexations, and growth strategies. These tools enable communities to respond to on-the-ground realities — from water availability and transportation capacity to workforce needs and public engagement. Yet state lawmakers increasingly view land use policy as a lever to address statewide challenges that transcend municipal boundaries. Housing shortages, rising transportation emissions, and wildfire risk, legislators argue, require coordinated, state-level solutions.

This clash of perspectives has resulted in repeated legislative proposals aimed at reshaping local land use authority. For the upcoming session, expect to see attempts at preemption of municipal zoning for residential development on land owned by schools, higher education institutions, housing non-profits, and public housing authorities (the HOME Act). There will also likely be attempts by state lawmakers to interfere with minimum lot sizes and prohibitions on lot splitting. Further, with severe budget constraints, there may be efforts to place new requirements or even statewide preemptions on permitting and siting of renewable energy projects. These top-down proposals would have significant impacts on local governments' budgets, staff capacity, infrastructure, comprehensive planning, and more.

Illustration by Adobe Stock

The result is an annual cycle familiar to municipal leaders. Each winter, bills emerge that test the balance between statewide policy goals and local governance. Municipalities mobilize to analyze impacts, engage in negotiations, and offer alternatives that preserve some degree of local flexibility. Even when compromise is reached, as has been the case with some targeted preemptions, the broader philosophical debate remains unresolved. The legislature's ongoing interest in land use reform ensures that this conversation returns year after year.

From the municipal perspective, the challenge is not opposition to statewide goals, but ensuring solutions are workable, equitable, and mindful of community diversity. A mountain town facing limited buildable land and high wildfire risk cannot be regulated in the same manner as a Front Range suburb with expanding transit corridors. Local governments continue to urge collaborative approaches that combine state support such as infrastructure funding, incentives, and technical assistance with locally calibrated land use planning.

As Colorado looks toward another legislative session, land use preemptions are poised to surface once again. The pressures driving the issue — housing supply, growth management, climate resilience — are not fading. For CML and its member municipalities, the task ahead remains clear: advocate for balanced policy that recognizes local needs, protects community voices, and enables the state and its cities and towns to work together toward shared goals of providing attainable housing for Coloradans.

SPOTLIGHT

No surprises, please!

Unwanted state intervention risks upending the well-laid plans of Colorado communities

By **Laura Weinberg**, Golden mayor & CML Executive Board vice president

Cities plan.

With the input of community members and professional planners, we develop comprehensive plans, neighborhood plans, annexation plans, and on and on. We do this for many reasons including the need to plan for and manage change. People are more likely to invest in their community if they understand what is allowed and where change may occur in the future.

Other governments also plan. When their properties exist within cities, it benefits everyone for those plans to align. The possible future of federal, state, and special district properties is just as important for understanding change in a municipality as privately held properties.

The entire community benefits when governments partner together. We deeply understand this dynamic in the City of Golden. For more than 150 years, Golden and the Colorado School of Mines have grown together. The heart of the campus exists within the historic neighborhoods of the city. The tension this can create when redevelopment occurs has required strong collaboration.

The city and college have jointly agreed to a process for future development. The agreement recognizes that the school periodically updates its master plan and respects the public desire to engage in that planning. This collaboration has evolved over time to meet the unique needs of the campus and redevelopment in the city.

This city-state collaboration that is working for the residents of Golden may be under attack in the 2026 legislature. Potential legislation would not respect the city's authority to plan for future development with regard to properties owned by the state or special districts. It takes away the incentive of collaboration and ignores community member input for the future of those properties. Allowing publicly owned land to be developed without regard for municipal plans and codes breaks the trust of community members.

The state should be encouraging innovation in collaboration between municipalities and state and district landowners. There are opportunities for specialized land use processes that respect the public voice and municipal plans. Everyone's goal should be streamlined development in alignment with community expectations. We should all be concerned about the possibility of home rule authority being stripped away in favor of unknown development standards by the state and special districts.

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BUILDING BRIDGES

How municipal leaders can shape state policy

By **Heather Stauffer**, Boulder intergovernmental affairs officer

Each year, municipal leaders across Colorado have a unique opportunity to influence and shape policies debated at the Colorado General Assembly. The outcomes of these policies often have direct impacts on our communities and on how local governments provide essential services-from transportation funding and housing policy to public safety regulations and tax structures. Therefore, your voice in this space is essential to ensuring positive outcomes for your community and should be viewed as an important part of your duties as a local elected official.

LAY THE FOUNDATION

To advocate effectively, begin building relationships long before the legislative session starts. Develop effective and mutually respectful relationships with your state legislators. Invite them to tour city projects and learn about important initiatives. Host them at community events, introduce them to city staff and local stakeholders, and create opportunities for informal conversations beyond policy discussions. Celebrate successes together and keep them informed of the challenges your municipality faces. When your legislators feel connected to your community, they will better understand and appreciate how policies impact it.

STAY INFORMED

Monitor legislation through CML and other resources, particularly bills your legislators are sponsoring. If legislation may impact your city, ask to be involved. Offer to provide feedback and offer thoughts on implementation. Consider providing written testimony, data from your community, or real- world examples of how proposed legislation would affect your residents and businesses. Knowing which committees your legislators serve on can help determine when it's most appropriate to reach out. For example, they may be just one vote among 35 or 65 on the floor, but they could be the deciding vote in a 5-person committee.

BUILD COALITIONS

Remember that you're not alone in this work. Coordinate with neighboring municipalities, regional partners, and other local officials. A unified message from multiple communities often carries more weight than individual voices. CML's advocacy team can help you to understand which issues have broad support across Colorado municipalities and where your advocacy efforts can be most effective.

KEEP IT RESPECTFUL

While it's okay (and sometimes necessary) to apply pressure, maintain respectful interactions. Everyone is working toward what they believe is best for their communities. Remember to prioritize the long-term relationship. Make sure to acknowledge and say thank you when your legislator takes a vote that benefits your community. It's also important to let them know when a piece of legislation may be creating challenges for your community, as long as it's done in a respectful way.

Remember that your advocacy matters. The relationships you build and the perspectives you share help ensure that state policies reflect the real-world needs of your community. By staying engaged throughout the year — not just during legislative sessions — you become a trusted resource for your legislators and a more effective advocate for your constituents.

RURAL VOICES

Listening to Colorado's small communities

By **Kim Boyd**, Kiowa town administrator

Across Colorado, small towns and rural communities form the heart of our state's identity — places where neighbors still look out for one another, where main streets tell stories of resilience, and where the challenges of limited resources meet the power of local determination. Yet these communities face growing pressures that demand meaningful partnership from state government — not the loss of the limited funding they already depend on.

Small communities often operate with lean budgets and limited staff. In Kiowa, for example, the town's modest $1 million annual budget relies on 50 percent grant funding. With a population of just 744 residents, Kiowa collects on average only about $260,000 in sales tax, $14,000 in use tax, and $180,000 in property tax each year. That level of revenue barely covers basic operations, leaving little room for capital improvements or infrastructure repairs without outside assistance. For towns like ours, state and federal grants aren't bonuses — they're the only way to keep up with maintenance, invest in growth, and meet community needs.

Rigid funding formulas and match requirements often unintentionally exclude smaller municipalities from major programs. The state can help by offering scaled matches, simplified grant processes, and dedicated technical assistance so that rural towns can compete on a level playing field.

Equally important, the state must not redirect or repurpose rural-designated funds to balance the state budget. Those dollars are a lifeline — the only mechanism many small towns have to maintain essential services, improve infrastructure, and prepare for the future. When these funds are diverted, small communities lose ground that they may never recover.

Affordable housing remains one of rural Colorado's greatest challenges. Towns struggle to retain teachers, first responders, and healthcare providers who simply can't find housing. State-backed incentives, flexible land-use policies, and partnerships with developers can open the door for attainable homes in the places that need them most. When working families can live where they work, communities thrive.

Access to education and healthcare is equally vital. For many rural families, the nearest hospital or higher-education opportunity can be hours away. Expanding telehealth services, rural healthcare recruitment, and equitable school funding ensure small towns aren't left behind in essential services.

Small towns also want a voice — not a mandate. State agencies should engage local leaders before setting policies that affect them, recognizing that what works in Denver may not fit in Kiowa, Limon, or Akron. Collaboration leads to smarter, more lasting solutions that reflect the realities of rural life.

Finally, investment in modern infrastructure — from reliable broadband to Main Street revitalization — is the foundation for rural prosperity. When the state invests in these communities, it strengthens Colorado's overall culture and future. Protecting rural funding isn't a political decision; it's a moral one — a commitment to keeping Colorado's small communities alive, vibrant, and competitive.

Colorado's small towns don't ask for special treatment — they ask for a fair chance to succeed. With thoughtful state partnerships, respect for local voices, and protection of the funding streams meant for them, these communities will continue to be the lifeblood of Colorado's economy and spirit.

State of Our Cities & Towns

By **MAEVE McHUGH**
CML municipal
research analyst

Colorado communities adapt as state, federal funding dry up

The Colorado Municipal League's annual State of Our Cities and Towns (SOOCAT) survey takes a magnifying glass to issues and trends taking place in municipalities across our state. For this year's survey, we examined municipal budgeting.

During CML's district meetings and community events throughout 2025, a common point of discussion among our members was economic outlook amidst changes in state and federal funding, tax revenue forecasts, and ballooning expenses. To answer our questions about how Colorado municipalities are meeting economic challenges, 108 CML members responded to our survey. Their answers detailed general revenue trends, state and federal funding expectations, budgeting and financial planning, and how local governments are adapting to challenges.

These findings are compiled and presented in CML's annual State of our Cities and Towns Report, which will be published on CML's website in January. The results also serve to inform CML's policy priorities and positions on upcoming legislation.

GENERAL MUNICIPAL REVENUE

When asked about overall feelings about the economy in 2025 compared to 2024, nearly half (48%) of responding municipalities indicated that they feel it is the same, while just over one third of municipalities reported that their overall economy was somewhat or much worse this year compared to last (31% and 4%, respectively). Alternatively, 17% of respondents feel the economy is somewhat better, and no municipalities felt their economy was much better this year.

Large municipalities reported a worse overall economic outlook, compared to medium and small municipalities, where revenue was reported to be about the same than better or worse than last year. Western Slope and Mountain communities were more likely to report feeling better about their economies this year.

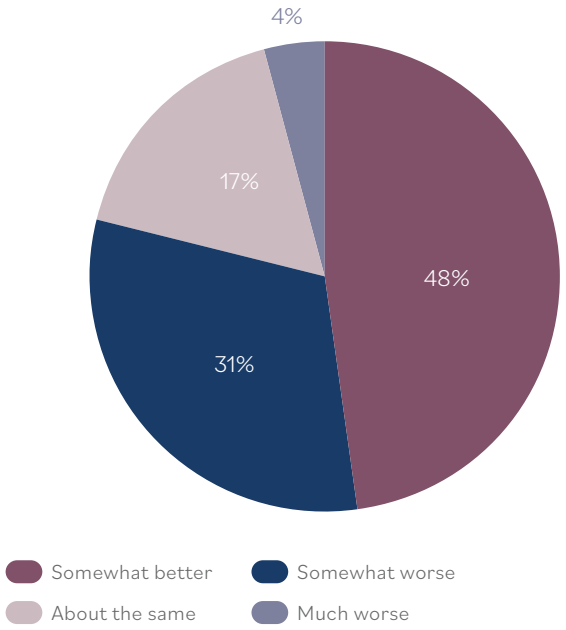
Data about revenues were mixed. Nearly half (48%) of respondents indicated their revenue was about the same in 2025 compared to 2024, while 26% of respondents felt it was somewhat or much better, while an equal share indicated feelings of somewhat or much worse revenues. While this is an even distribution of positive and negative outlooks, in some cases, where revenues are about the same, they may not be keeping up with the rising cost of service delivery.

Considering changes in municipal revenue, over two-fifths of municipalities reported increases in sales, use, and excise taxes and/or property taxes. Of the survey's respondents, municipalities with populations under 2,000 were least likely to report increases in revenues from sales, use, and excise taxes. Alternatively, the greatest reported decrease in revenues is attributed to loss of state funding.

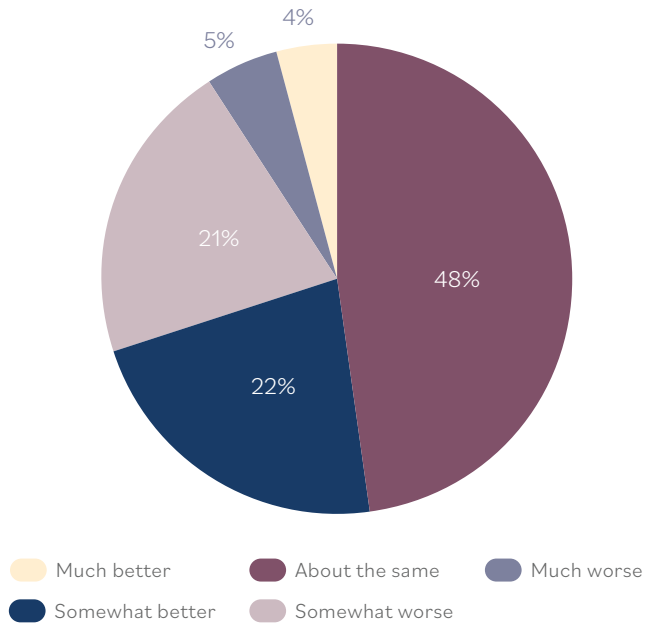
While this data indicates that certain revenue sources are increasing, qualitative data and commentary from respondents indicate that the rising cost of service delivery tends to outpace revenue gains. Qualitative data also indicates that changes in state funding have further burdened municipalities by reducing their share of funds, generating uncertainty as cities and towns plan their budgets.

For the first time since 2021, lack of affordable housing was not the most reported challenge for municipalities. Unfunded street and road maintenance and improvements was identified as the most common challenge municipalities are facing, followed closely by lack of affordable housing, increased health and liability insurance costs, and state-mandated expenditures. The intensity of these challenges vary depending on municipality, size, and region. For example, affordable housing was a more common concern in Western Slope and Mountain communities,

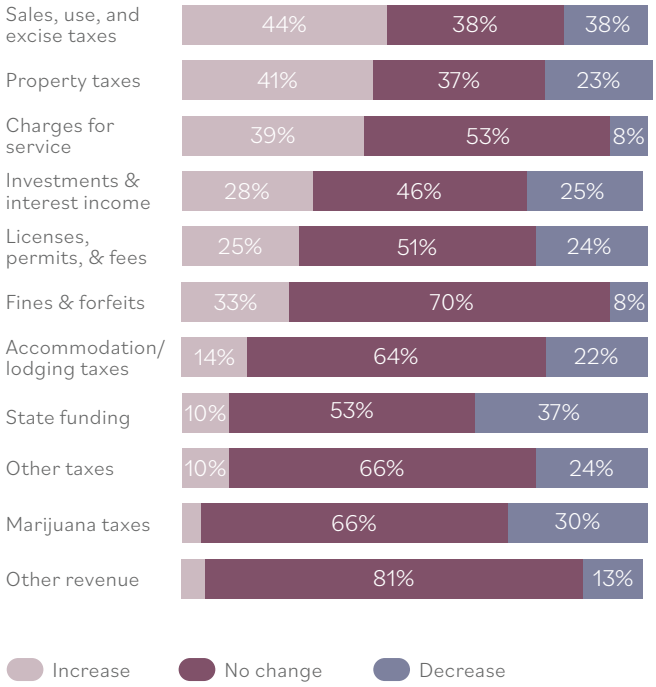
Municipal economy in FY 2025 compared to FY 2024



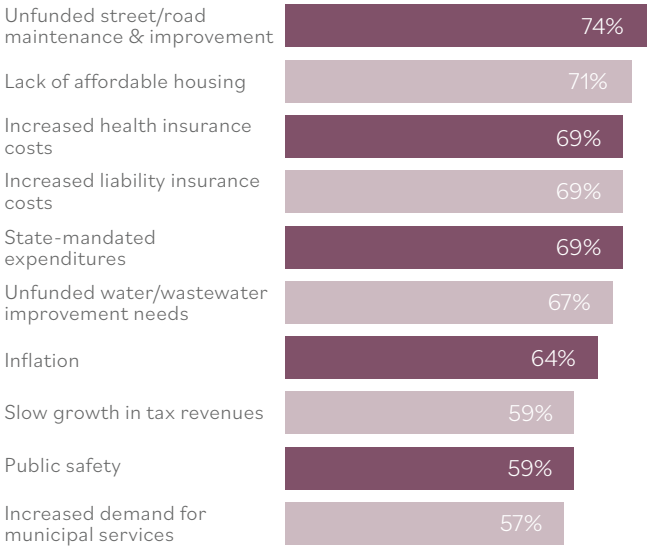
Municipal revenue in FY 2025 compared to FY 2024



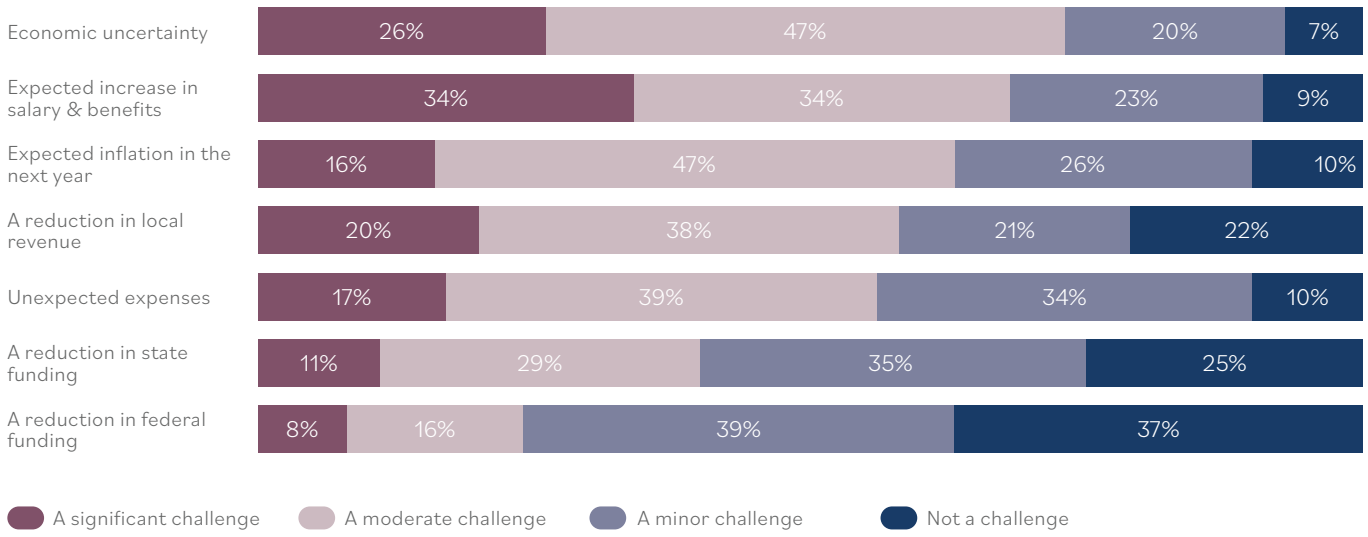
Changes in sources of revenue since FY 2024



Challenges looking ahead to 2026



Challenges municipalities face in creating this year's budget



while state-mandated expenses and increased liability insurance costs were more prevalent on the Eastern Plains.

STATE & FEDERAL FUNDING

Of the responding municipalities, 87% reported seeking state funding in at least one area since January 2024. The average funding success rate for all project types reported was 71%. The most common area for which municipalities sought state funding in the last two years was water, wastewater, and stormwater projects, an area where Eastern Plains communities pursued funding at a higher rate. In general, large municipalities were more likely to seek state funding for projects, with law enforcement being the most common type of funding support pursued by larger municipalities.

Since January 2024, federal funding was pursued at a much lower rate than state funding. The difference in state and federal funding sought is due to the different types of funding available at the federal level, and that federal funds are often distributed by the state. Of the types of projects that sought federal funding, two of the three most common categories included road infrastructure and maintenance (35%) and pedestrian or cyclist safety (34%), with water infrastructure ranking highly again (34%). The award rate for federal funding was generally lower than it was for state funding at 54%.

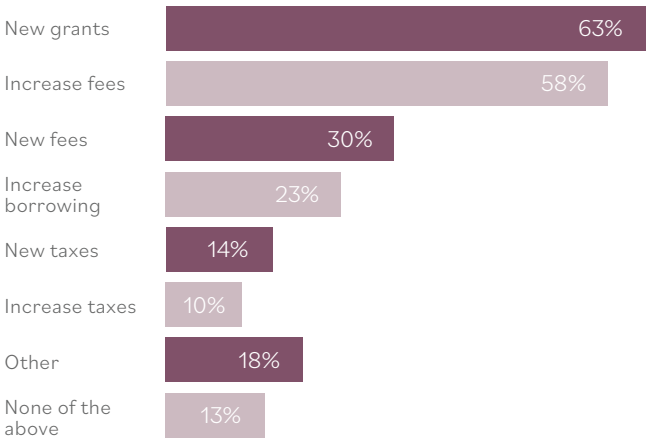
For projects that aren't grant-based, municipalities were forced to adjust to reduced funding allocations. About one in six municipalities canceled a project or service due to reductions in state and federal funding. Eastern Plains communities and Western Slope and Mountain towns viewed water as the most important area in which they receive state funding, while the Front Range declared road construction or maintenance as the most important area for state funding.

BUDGETING & PLANNING PROCESS

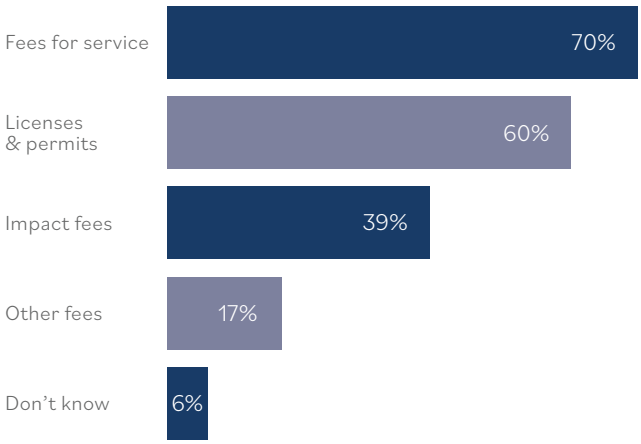
The budgeting process has largely remained the same for municipalities this year, while 65% of responding municipalities reported that the budgeting process was a little more or much more challenging this year.

The top sources of challenges this year are economic uncertainty and expected increases in salary and benefits costs, which accounted for the largest share of municipalities indicating it as a significant challenge. These challenges were followed by expected inflation, unexpected expenses, and reduction in local revenues, outlining the challenges municipalities are facing when it comes to keeping up with rising costs.

Other methods municipalities might use to increase revenue this year



Fees to be increased by municipalities



Respondents said increasing costs were a common barrier to safeguarding their budgets into the future. Many noted that higher costs for service delivery, paired with flat or volatile revenue, makes unfunded mandates and offering competitive wages and benefits more difficult to navigate.

IMPACTS & ADAPTATION

In the face of uncertainty, nearly a quarter of municipalities with reserve funds will tap into them to meet their needs, with another quarter undecided at the time of their response. To further bolster their budgets, nearly two thirds of respondents indicated they would pursue new grants to increase revenue. The next most common method is a popular option in Colorado where TABOR limits municipalities' ability to levy and retain taxes; nearly 60% plan to increase existing fees, and 30% of municipalities plan to add new fees.

Many municipalities reported growing economic uncertainty and worries about ever-increasing expenses, 51% report they plan to make targeted cuts, meanwhile, 44% indicated that they are not making cuts to their budgets. Some solutions to increasing revenue include bolstering aid to local businesses to help sales tax revenues, adjusting utility billing structures, and revisiting growth projections to better plan what revenue is needed.

The most common approaches to saving money include increasing partnerships with other local governments and contracting out services. Western Slope and Mountain communities are more likely to increase working in partnership, while Front Range municipalities were more likely to incorporate automation to provide services.

Despite reported economic uncertainty, more municipalities indicated they plan to increase or make no changes to budgets for departments and services.

The most common planned increase is police department budgets, where 44% of municipalities project increases, and utilities with 41% reporting planned increases. To balance these increases, respondents commented that limiting capital and special projects and deferring maintenance would help to balance increases elsewhere in their budgets.

The full State of our Cities and Towns report dives deeper into the survey results with additional analysis by municipality size and region. The report will feature more stories and qualitative data from members, highlighting their experiences with municipal budgeting. CML thanks all of the municipalities who took the time to respond to this year's SOOCAT survey

CML supports cities & towns in state courts

By **Robert Sheesley**, CML general counsel

When a court case could broadly affect Colorado's municipalities, the Colorado Municipal League may appear in the case as an *amicus curiae* ("friend of the court") to explain broader significance of the issues or to highlight certain municipal themes. A committee of experienced municipal attorneys advise the CML Executive Board regarding requests for participation, and legal briefs are drafted by CML's legal team. More information the CML's amicus program and a library of briefs dating back to 1950 can be found at *www.cml.org/home/advocacy-legal/Amicus-curiae*.

In 2025, CML filed seven briefs in Colorado's appellate courts in support of cities and towns across the state. Subject matters included the constitutional power of initiative, noise ordinances, regulation of municipal property to prevent camping, municipal costs for redacting body worn camera videos, municipal penalties, and governmental immunity.

KAVANAUGH V. TELLURIDE LOCALS COALITION PETITIONERS' COMMITTEE

No. 2024SC522

In a suit arising from a developer's attempt to circumvent the Town of Telluride's land use regulations, the Colorado Supreme Court is reviewing whether: (1) the amendment of a planned unit development (PUD) plan is subject to the power of initiative under *Vagneur v. City of Aspen*, 295 P.3d 493 (Colo. 2013), which held government decisions subject to complex or specialized expertise are not ordinarily subject to the power of citizen initiatives; and (2) whether Colorado's Planned Unit Development Act of 1972, C.R.S. 24 67- 101 to -108 can be overridden by the power of initiative. CML's brief in support of the town urged the Court to hold that site-specific zoning actions should not be subject to the initiative power.

MOSTELLAR V. CITY OF COLORADO SPRINGS

No. 2024SC761

After a personal injury claimant failed to send timely notice of a claim to a municipality led to the dismissal of her claim, the Colorado Supreme Court granted certiorari to review whether: (1) the time to provide a notice of claim under the Colorado Governmental Immunity Act (CGIA) did not begin to run until a city informed the claimant that another entity was potentially liable; and (2) whether the CGIA requires strict compliance when such compliance is "impossible" based on a public entity's failure to inform

Photo by Adobe Stock

claimant of the potential liability of another public entity. CML's brief in support of Colorado Springs advised the Court to uphold the strict notice requirement to maintain CGIA's careful balance between remedying injuries and protecting the public treasury.

HOBBS V. CITY OF SALIDA

No. 2024SC216

A resident challenged a permit that Salida issued to a local restaurant to have live music on its patio. Relying on its view of the statute's language, the Colorado Supreme Court ultimately determined that the state Noise Abatement Act, C.R.S. §§ 25-12-101 et seq., did not grant a broad exception for statutory municipalities to issue permits to exceed the statute's limits on sound. A CML brief in support of the city highlighted the tradition of regulating noise as a nuisance in municipalities to show why construing the statute to allow for local permitting would be consistent with the remainder of the law.

IN RE SIMONS V. CITY OF AURORA

Colorado Supreme Court, Case Nos. 2024SA000308, 2024SA000309.

The Colorado Supreme Court is reviewing whether penalties for municipal ordinance violations that are different from state penalties for similar state offenses violated the Equal Protection clause of the Colorado Constitution or are preempted by state law. The City of Aurora penalizes trespass and motor vehicle trespass with longer potential jail times and fines that the state provides for violations of similar statutory offenses. At the Court's invitation, CML filed briefs discussing the beneficial role of municipal courts in the state court system and the critical need for municipalities to address localized crime.

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FEET FORWARD V. CITY OF BOULDER

No. 2025CA110

In 2024, the U.S. Supreme Court rejected a theory that the "cruel and unusual punishment" prohibition in the Federal Constitution invalidated a town's camping ban. The Colorado Court of Appeals is reviewing whether the City of Boulder's ordinances prohibiting camping on public property: (1) violate a similar "cruel and unusual punishment" provision in the Colorado Constitution; (2) violate individuals' substantive due process rights in violation of Article II, Section 25 of the Colorado Constitution by creating a "state-created danger;" and (3) violate an asserted right to occupy or use public space under Article II, Section 3 of the Colorado Constitution. CML's brief in support of the city focused on the need for local elected bodies to reasonably regulate public spaces, control budgets, and identify appropriate local solutions to homelessness.

YELLOW SCENE MAGAZINE V. CITY OF BOULDER

No. 2025CA26

When the General Assembly passed SB20-217, the Law Enforcement Integrity Act, new statutory requirements for the release of body worn camera recordings did not address the cost to municipalities for providing those recordings. The Colorado Court of Appeals is reviewing whether law enforcement agencies may charge Colorado Criminal Justice Record Act fees for body worn camera recording requests made pursuant to C.R.S. § 24-31-902(2)(a), which is part of the LEIA. The Court may also consider whether C.R.S. § 24-31-902(2)(a) implicates Colorado's "unfunded mandate" statute at C.R.S. § 29-1-304.5. CML's brief in support of the City of Boulder emphasized the need for municipalities to impose reasonable fees to defray the significant costs of the law's mandates.

Don't miss CML Legislative Workshop

By **Denise White**, CML engagement & communications manager

With the 2026 legislative session convening Jan. 14, municipal officials across Colorado are already preparing for a year expected to bring significant policy debates, tight fiscal conditions, and evolving conversations about local authority. To help cities and towns navigate what lies ahead, Colorado Municipal League's annual Legislative Workshop returns Feb.19 at History Colorado in Denver. This timely event offers an essential opportunity to understand the political realities of the General Assembly — and how municipalities can influence outcomes that matter most to their communities.

CML photo by Alex Miller

Carol Saade, Breckenridge council member and CML Executive Board secretary/treasurer, asks a question at the 2025 CML Legislative Workshop at History Colorado in Denver.

This intensive, day-long program is specifically designed to translate statehouse dynamics into local action. It brings together municipal leaders, policy experts, and state and federal partners for an agenda focused on learning, discussion, and practical preparation. With state budget decisions poised to directly impact local services and projects, the workshop delivers clarity and actionable insights for the year ahead.

CML Legislative Advocacy Manager Bev Stables emphasizes the program's strategic value. "We're already seeing signs that 2026 is going to bring a mix of challenges and opportunities for municipalities, especially when it comes to local control and budget realities," she said. "This workshop is about empowering local officials by giving them the context, the tools, and the confidence to advocate effectively, especially in a year when decisions under the dome will directly shape what happens back home."

The agenda features a comprehensive review of the 2026 General Session, with CML's policy team breaking down key legislation and the political dynamics most likely to affect cities and towns. Attendees will also dig into what it means to legislate "in a year with no money," examining how strategy, creativity, and strong partnerships can drive meaningful progress even when fiscal resources are limited. Additional sessions will offer ideas on how to communicate the importance of local control and updates on federal policy, ensuring leaders come away with a full understanding of the forces shaping municipal governance in the year ahead.

The day concludes with a networking reception at History Colorado — an opportunity to connect with colleagues, compare insights, and strengthen advocacy networks statewide. Please note that state lawmakers will be invited to this reception.

Registration is now open. For the complete agenda, logistical details on discounted Denver hotel rates for travelers, and to secure your spot, visit *cml.org*.

Secure your spot today and join us as we navigate 2026 — together.

Illustrations by Adobe Stock

Home rule? Statutory?

Making sense of municipal government in Colorado

By **Elizabeth Haskell**,
CML legislative & policy advocate

Colorado municipalities, i.e., cities and towns, are established through incorporation, a process that creates formal governance structures for communities. The state is home to 273 municipalities, but they do not all operate under the same framework. Some are statutory municipalities governed by state statute, while others are home rule municipalities with broader authority under local charters adopted pursuant to the state constitution. For anyone involved in local government, understanding these distinctions is essential, as the method for determining a municipality's power to act differs significantly between statutory and home rule systems. Colorado recognizes three classifications of municipalities: statutory municipalities, home rule municipalities, and one unique case — the territorial charter municipality of Georgetown, which continues to operate under a charter granted by the territorial legislature prior to statehood.

STATUTORY MUNICIPALITIES

Statutory cities and towns derive their authority exclusively from state legislation. Except as specifically limited by state constitutional provisions, the state legislature has complete power over the creation, organization, and powers of statutory municipalities, with the courts typically interpreting these grants of authority narrowly. This means statutory municipalities can only exercise powers explicitly granted by the legislature. State law provides for the general organization and structure of cities and towns, with only a few differences existing between the substantive powers and operational structure of each.

The distinction between statutory cities and towns traditionally hinges on population: towns have 2,000 residents or fewer, while cities exceed that threshold. Communities that experience population shifts, however, do not automatically reorganize, making some exceptions to this rule. Additionally, there are differences in their governing structure. While most statutory cities and towns are organized under the "mayor-board" (towns) or "mayor-council" (cities) form of government, in which the mayor is elected by popular vote, statutory cities may choose an alternative council-manager form.

HOME RULE MUNICIPALITIES

Home rule municipalities enjoy significantly more autonomy than their statutory counterparts. Rather than deriving authority from state statutes, home rule cities and towns draw their powers directly from Section 6 of Article XX of the Colorado Constitution. This constitutional provision is considered "self-executing," meaning home rule municipalities possess every power the General Assembly holds regarding local and municipal mat-

ters. The powers of home rule municipalities may be limited, however, by their charters, federal law, the state constitution, and, at times, state legislation that the courts determine preempts local laws.

Home rule charters function as documents of limitation rather than authorization by limiting a municipality's power rather than granting it. Home rule municipalities can take action unless the charter specifically prohibits it. This gives home rule municipalities flexibility to address local needs. Further, in matters of purely local concern, home rule ordinances supersede conflicting state statutes. In areas of mixed state and local concern, both can coexist unless they conflict — in which case state law prevails. For matters of purely statewide concern, state legislation completely preempts municipal action.

Home rule does not translate to local control in all circumstances, and when disputes arise about whether home rule ordinances or state statutes control, courts apply the factors best summarized in *City and County of Denver v. State* (1990). These include the need for statewide uniformity, extraterritorial impacts, traditional governance patterns, and constitutional assignments of authority. Additionally, courts are not bound by the General Assembly's determination that specific legislation is a matter of statewide concern.

For all involved in state and municipal policymaking, understanding the distinctions between statutory and home rule municipalities matters because they determine what a municipality can and cannot do without seeking state approval. For statutory municipalities, success means working within the legislative framework while advocating for needed statutory changes. For home rule municipalities, the increased flexibility comes with the responsibility of crafting a charter and laws that protect citizens while enabling effective governance.

COLORADO MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENTS

BY THE NUMBERS

108

Home rule municipalities

162

Statutory municipalities

1

Territorial charter town: Georgetown (population 1,212)

4,109,643

People living in home rule municipalities

243,468

People living in statutory municipalities

Source: Colorado State Demography Office

NEW FACES AT THE

STATE CAPITOL

Ava Flanell

House District 14 | Republican

Rep. Ava Flanell, a Colorado Springs native, is a small-business owner, firearms instructor, and prominent Second Amendment advocate and influencer. She holds a bachelor's degree in English and communications from Fordham University and previously worked in legal and finance for the New York Yankees. Flanell has earned national recognition for her leadership and achievements. In 2025, she was honored as Female of the Year by Gun Owners of America Empowered 2A, received Charlie Kirk's Defender of Freedom Award from the Colorado State Shooting Association, and was named a Defender of Liberty by the Second Amendment Foundation. She is committed to protecting individual freedoms and strengthening local communities.

Scott Slaugh

House District 64 | Republican

Rep. Scott Slaugh is a fifth generation Coloradan and fourth generation veteran. He is a native of Johnstown and attended Brigham Young University. In addition to serving for more than 22 years as a U.S. Army Reserve Officer, Slaugh is a licensed residential general contractor and small business owner. His legislative priorities include reducing the burden on taxpayers, promoting housing for Coloradans, and supporting veterans.

Lynda Zamora Wilson

Senate District 9 | Republican

Sen. Lynda Zamora Wilson, who served in the Air Force for 25 years and retired as a lieutenant colonel, was selected by a vacancy committee to represent Senate District 9. During her time in the Air Force, she held 11 distinct roles including senior economist at the Pentagon and assistant professor in mathematics and economics at the United States Air Force Academy. Wilson holds a PhD in economics, master's in mathematics, master's in education, and master's in international trade. As a senator her priorities include advocating for small government, emphasizing fiscal responsibility, low taxes, and parental rights.

"I'm incredibly humbled and honored to have earned the trust of my district and represent them. Having served 25 years in the Air Force, encompassing senior economist at the Pentagon and assistant professor at the USAF Academy, I hope to bring unique experiences and fresh perspectives that deliver responsible results for Colorado."

TRIBUTE

Faith Winter

In memory of Faith Winter – a passionate, courageous, and far-sighted public servant whose commitment to justice, equity, and community defined her life and career. As a long-time legislator, former city council member, state representative, and state senator for Senate District 25, she used her influence to champion strong transportation policy, environmental protection, paid-family leave, and expanded opportunity for underrepresented voices. Faith's legacy extends beyond policy: she inspired many women to run for office and gave hope to those often overlooked. She balanced fearlessness with compassion, lifting up her community – and doing so with warmth and authenticity. We mourn her loss and offer our deepest condolences to her children, family, colleagues, and friends.

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