



NYAOT
Celebrating America's 250th Birthday

New York Association of Towns' Legislative Conference
Local Voices, State Impact
September 22-23rd
Tentative Agenda

Tuesday, September 22

Time	Topic	Speaker
7:30	Registration opens	
8:00-9:00	Breakfast (Topic Tables)	
9:00-9:30	Opening Remarks	Chris Koetzle, Executive Director, NYAOT
9:30-11am	New York State Legislative Landscape: An Update from State Legislators	
11-11:20am	Coffee Break	
11:20-12:30	Water Infrastructure Policy for Towns: Funding, Mandates, and Legislative Priorities	
	The Future of EMS: State Policy, Local Costs, and Town Responsibilities	
	Effective Advocacy for Town Officials: Relationships, Messaging, and Results	
12:30-2pm	Lunch	
2pm-3:20pm	The Future of the Town Workforce: Staffing, Skills, and State Support	

Employee Benefits, Local Budgets, and State Policy: Addressing Rising Health Insurance Costs

State Housing Policy: Local Impacts and Town Perspectives

3:20-3:30 Break

3:30-4:30 Growing the Local Economy: Economic Development Tools for Towns

Towns and Counties: Building Effective Intergovernmental Relationships

4:30-5:30 Reception (TBD)

Day 2: September 23

8am-8:45am Breakfast

8:45-10am From Local Government to State Representative

10am-10:15 Break

10:15-12pm Setting Legislative Priorities

Class Descriptions

9:30-11am

New York State Legislative Landscape: An Update from State Legislators (Plenary)

State legislators join us to look back on the 2026 session and ahead to what's coming next. Panelists will walk through the bills, budget decisions, and policy debates that mattered most for towns this year, what passed, what stalled, and what it means for local officials heading into the fall and the 2027 session. They'll share what they're hearing from their own districts, where town priorities gained traction in Albany, and which issues are likely to return when lawmakers reconvene in January. Expect a candid conversation about the wins, the missed opportunities, and where towns have the most leverage to shape what comes next.

Concurrent Classes: 11:20-12:30pm

Water Infrastructure Policy for Towns: Funding, Mandates, and Legislative Priorities

Towns across New York are staring down aging water and sewer systems, rising construction costs, and federal and state mandates that don't come with enough funding attached. For years, local officials have pointed to CHIPS as proof that a dedicated, formula-based funding stream can make a real difference for town infrastructure—and have asked why water and sewer don't have the same. The Safe Water Action Program (SWAP) is designed to fill that gap: a dedicated fund modeled on CHIPS that would give towns reliable, predictable resources to invest in the pipes, plants, and systems their residents depend on. This panel brings together advocates, state officials, and town leaders to discuss where SWAP stands, what it would mean for town budgets if fully funded, and how local officials can make the case for water infrastructure investment alongside the other pressures on Albany. Panelists will also share practical guidance on navigating existing funding sources—WIIA, EFC, and federal programs—while the push for a dedicated stream continues.

The Future of EMS: State Policy, Local Costs, and Town Responsibilities

Emergency medical services are in a moment of real strain across New York. Call volumes are up, volunteer rosters are thinning, and towns that once relied on a local squad showing up without a line item in the budget are finding that model harder to sustain every year. At the same time, EMS isn't classified as an essential service under state law, which leaves towns navigating a patchwork of funding, mutual aid agreements, and regional arrangements to make sure someone answers the call. This panel brings together EMS leaders, town officials, and state policy voices for a broad conversation about where things stand and what towns can actually do about it. Panelists will discuss the push to designate EMS as an essential service and what that would mean for local budgets, the recruitment and retention challenges facing volunteer squads, and the regional and shared-service models some communities are turning to as a path forward.

Effective Advocacy and Working with Your Representatives

Town officials have a story to tell in Albany and Washington, but telling it well is a skill. The towns that consistently get heard are the ones that build relationships with their state and federal representatives long before they need something, know how to frame a local issue in terms a legislator can act on, and show up at the right moments with the right ask. This panel brings together experienced local advocates to walk through what effective advocacy actually looks like from a town official's perspective. Panelists will discuss how to build lasting relationships with your representatives and their staff, when a phone call beats an email and when it's the other way around, how to make the case for a town priority in a crowded legislative environment, and how to work with statewide associations to amplify your voice.

Concurrent Classes 2pm -3:20pm

Housing Policy and the Pressure on Towns

Housing has become one of the most contested policy fights in Albany, and towns are squarely in the middle of it. From the Governor's push for statewide housing targets to ongoing debates over ADU legislation, zoning preemption, and transit-oriented development mandates, state policymakers are increasingly looking at local land use as the lever to address New York's housing shortage. For town officials, that raises hard questions about the balance between state goals and local control, and about what towns can actually do to meet the moment on their own terms. This panel brings together housing policy experts to walk through where housing legislation stands heading into the 2027 session, what proposals are likely to return, and how towns can shape the conversation rather than simply react to it. Panelists will discuss the practical implications of recent and pending state action, the funding and incentive programs available to towns that want to expand housing supply, and how local officials can make the case for approaches that work in their communities.

The Future of the Town Workforce: Staffing, Skills, and State Support

Workforce policy is shaped as much in Albany as it is on the ground, and the decisions legislators make about apprenticeships, training funds, prevailing wage, childcare, and education pipelines all land squarely on towns trying to grow their local economies. This panel brings together state legislators and workforce development leaders to discuss the bills and budget items driving workforce policy in New York, what passed this session, what's still in play, and what towns should be watching heading into 2027. Panelists will talk through how recent state investments are reaching (or not reaching) municipalities, where the gaps remain between state programs and local needs, and how town officials can weigh in as workforce legislation takes shape. Expect a practical conversation about how state policy translates into real opportunities for town employers, residents, and the next generation of the local workforce.

Employee Benefits, Local Budgets, and State Policy: Addressing Rising Health Insurance Costs

Health insurance is one of the fastest growing lines in nearly every town budget, and the pressure isn't letting up. Double-digit renewal quotes, rising prescription drug costs, and federal policy shifts are all landing on town boards at the same time, often with little room to absorb them under the property tax cap. This panel brings together benefits experts, municipal officials, and policy voices to walk through what's driving the increases and what towns can actually do about them. Panelists will discuss the tradeoffs between NYSHIP, municipal cooperatives, and self-insured pools, share cost-containment strategies that have worked for other towns, and talk candidly about how to navigate collective bargaining when benefits are on the table.

Concurrent Classes 3:30pm -4:30pm

Towns and Counties: Building Effective Intergovernmental Relationships

Towns and counties share residents, roads, and no shortage of responsibilities—but the working relationship between them isn't always as smooth as it could be. Sales tax distribution, shared services, road maintenance agreements, social services, emergency response, and economic development all sit at the intersection of town and county government, and how well those conversations go often comes down to relationships, timing, and knowing how to ask. This class brings together town and county officials to share what actually makes the partnership work. Discussions will be had on how to build productive lines of communication with county leadership, how to navigate disagreements without burning bridges, how towns can make sure their priorities are heard at the county level, and how towns and counties and work together for effective regional advocacy?

Growing the Local Economy: Partnerships, Tools, and Strategies for Towns

Economic development does not happen in a vacuum. For many towns, the key to supporting local growth is knowing how to build the right partnerships. This session will examine how towns can work with counties, neighboring municipalities, regional councils, IDAs, chambers of commerce, and state agencies to address workforce, tourism, infrastructure, and community development needs.

Day 2

8:45-10am

From Local Government to State Representative (Plenary)

Many state legislators got their start at the local government level - learning to read a budget, hold a public hearing, and build a coalition long before they ran for Albany. But the jump from local to state office is a real shift in scale, pace, and political culture. This panel brings together current state representatives who made that leap to discuss what local government taught them, what they had to unlearn, and how their early work still shapes the way they legislate today.

Speaker Ideas:

10:15am-12pm

Delegates can vote on what to include in NYAOT's 2027 Legislative Priorities