



The Official Publication of the New Jersey Urban Mayors Association

# Urban Mayors Press

WINTER, 2025 | VOL. 13



**2024 New Jersey  
League Of  
Municipalities  
Highlights  
& More**

Winter 2025



# ABOUT THE NEW JERSEY URBAN MAYORS ASSOCIATION

The New Jersey Urban Mayors Association (NJUMA) is housed in the New Jersey Urban Mayors Policy Center at the John S. Watson Institute for Urban Policy and Research at Kean University. The New Jersey Urban Mayors Policy Center coordinates all activities of the NJUMA and provides policy and legislative analysis. Established in 1991, the New Jersey Urban Mayors Association is dedicated to working with state and federal lawmakers and officials to develop appropriate and effective public policy measures that benefit the state's urban centers and to help lawmakers understand how public policy affects New Jersey's municipalities.

As an organization, NJUMA is comprised of 32 New Jersey urban and rural municipalities. NJUMA serves its members through meetings, policy retreats and annual conferences which keep them informed on issues affecting their ability to provide adequate services to their residents. NJUMA also assists its members in interpreting legislation and state policy and works with the Governor's Office to assist in defining an urban policy agenda.

It uses a 7-Point Plan for Strengthening Cities, Families and Communities as a guide for addressing the critical issues of its member cities. This plan is designed to aggressively address the areas of crime and public safety; education and positive youth development; environment and public health; family and community welfare; housing and economic development; tax reform and intergovernmental relations, and unfunded mandates.

NJUMA is a proactive organization that pursues opportunities from the government and the private sector to advance the interests of members. We are consistently exploring opportunities which will strengthen our communities and ultimately the state of New Jersey.



## MESSAGE FROM THE EDITORS

As we reflect on the holiday season, we express our deep gratitude for the opportunity to enter a new year, bringing with it another edition of the Urban Mayors Press. This publication highlights the important contributions of the New Jersey Urban Mayors Association (NJUMA) members and provides valuable resources for municipalities across the state.

Looking back on our recent Annual New Jersey League of Municipalities (NJLM) sessions, we recall the excellent opportunity to connect, engage in meaningful dialogue, and address the unique challenges facing our urban centers. These moments have allowed us to learn important lessons and remain motivated as we work together to build vibrant, thriving communities. We hope you enjoy the spotlights shared in this edition and appreciate your continued support. We look forward to an exciting year ahead, filled with hope, new opportunities, and the realization of dreams for our cities and their residents.

Submissions to the Urban Mayors Press are edited and distributed by the John S. Watson Institute for Urban Policy and Research at Kean University.

**A Big Thank you to all our Contributors!**



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# President's Corner

As We Embrace Another Year, I Extend Heartfelt Gratitude To Each Of You For Your Unwavering Dedication To Your Communities And To Our Shared Mission Of Fostering Progress And Opportunity In New Jersey's Urban Municipalities. It Is My Privilege To Address You In This Final Newsletter Of The Year, Reflecting On The Milestones We've Achieved Together And Looking Ahead With Optimism To The New Year.

365 new days,  
365 new chances.

This November, the NJ League of Municipalities Annual Conference once again provided an invaluable forum for us to come together as leaders and administrators, united in our commitment to serve the people of New Jersey. The League's Annual Conference remains a cornerstone for municipal governance, offering us opportunities to share insights, forge connections, and advocate for the unique needs of our cities.

One of the most significant benefits of the conference is the ability to network with fellow leaders and administrators from across the state. These interactions remind us that we are not alone in facing the challenges of urban governance. By exchanging ideas and best practices, we strengthen our collective ability to tackle issues such as affordable housing, equitable development, public safety, and infrastructure renewal. This spirit of collaboration is a powerful testament to what we can accomplish when we work together.

The League's commitment to professional development is another vital aspect of its mission. This year's conference featured a robust selection of workshops, seminars, and certification programs that equipped municipal staff and administrators with the tools and knowledge needed to excel. The ability to earn professional credits during these sessions underscores the League's dedication to fostering excellence and innovation in municipal management. These opportunities not only enhance individual growth but also ensure that our municipalities are led by informed and capable teams.

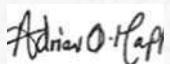
Reflecting on the past year, we have faced daunting challenges, but we have also demonstrated incredible resilience. From navigating the ongoing impacts of economic uncertainties, tackling tough issues like homelessness, and the statewide housing shortage, to addressing the pressing everyday needs of our residents, we have risen to the occasion time and again. Your leadership has been the driving force behind these successes, and I could not be prouder to stand alongside you in this work.

As we begin a new year, let us take a moment to reflect on all that we have accomplished together and the countless lives we have touched through our efforts. This is an opportunity to appreciate the strength of our communities and the partnerships that make our work possible. In addition, it is a time to recharge and renew our commitment to the goals we have set for the future. Looking ahead, I am filled with hope and determination for the new year.

We will continue to advocate for the needs of our urban municipalities, champion policies that promote equity and opportunity, and strive to build thriving, sustainable communities. Together, we can address the challenges before us and seize the opportunities that lie ahead.

On behalf of the New Jersey Urban Mayors Association, I wish you and your families a happy, healthy, and prosperous New Year. Let us move forward with renewed purpose, inspired by the work we have done and motivated by the promise of what we can achieve together.

Yours in service,



Adrian O. Mapp

President, New Jersey Urban Mayors Association  
Mayor, City of Plainfield





# THANK YOU | MAYOR RAS J. BARAKA

## The Newark, NJ Civilian Complaint Review Board (CCRB) is Moving Forward By R.H. Robinson III, Manager (Newark, NJ CCRB)

"For over 50 years ago, the citizens of Newark, NJ have been calling for a Civilian Complaint Review Board (CCRB) to address the countless complaints of Police Brutality and the numerous acts of Misconduct. In 1992, renowned poet, educator and activist, Newark's very own Amiri Baraka spearheaded an organized citizen's response with other groups to again, call for a CCRB to address police shootings resulting in deaths and countless injuries. Today, thanks to his son, Newark, NJ Mayor Ras J. Baraka, we now have a CCRB moving in the right direction, with effectiveness, efficiency and meaningful growth in Newark.

Due to COVID-19, the CCRB lost some very important people in leadership due to sudden deaths, severe illnesses and the mere obligation to care for love ones who battled this awful virus. The sheer loss of Administrative Director, Ms. Pretar Passe and one of our esteem Board Members, Dr. Solomon F. Caudle proved to be paralyzing. Also, Board Members started resigning for personal reasons and the CCRB had to be restored.

Although we suffered some losses, we managed to bounce back and have some bright spots as well. Our first CCRB General Counsel (GC), Juliana E. Blackburn, Esq. became an Essex County Superior Court Judge, which we are extremely proud of. Right after her departure, we were fortunate to acquire Mr. Darryl Scipio, Esq. as our next GC and we have not missed a step, involving our purpose. Lastly, my mayoral appointment as Manager by Mayor Baraka was the final piece to getting matters in order, such as restoring the board and stimulating business operations. As a matter of full disclosure, I served as the Chairman of the CCRB since its inception in 2016, so I was familiar with all the parties, such as Federal Judge Madeline Cox Arleo, the Federal Monitor, the Department of Justice (DOJ), the United State Attorney's Office for New Jersey (USAO), the Newark Law Department and the Newark Police Department (NPD).

In 2024, we have assembled a great staff, our mayoral appointed committed Board Members, we resume departmental operations and we partnered with notable pillars in our community to ensure complainants receive quality efforts. Our partnerships include the Essex County Prosecutor's Office, the Newark Police Department (NPD), Leadership Newark (Board Training), the Newark Clergy Alliance, the NYC Civilian Complaint Review Board (CCRB), the Newark Public Library and the office of NJ Senator Angela V. McKnight (D-Hudson/District 31st), who sponsored the current CCRB Bill (A-1515).

**Therefore, the Newark, NJ CCRB extends its gratitude to Mayor Ras J. Baraka! We salute him for his vision and please know our 2025 calendar will be robust, involving growth and purpose to adequately serve our residents.**





# Housing & Equity

## Rent Stabilization In Passaic

By Honorable Hector C. Lora, Mayor of the City of Passaic

Affordable housing has become an increasingly urgent issue across New Jersey. With a deficit of over 200,000 affordable housing units, statewide and local action is essential to meet growing demand for affordable rental homes. The COVID-19 pandemic has further intensified rent increases and strained landlord-tenant relations. Many residents, especially in Passaic, where over half of renters (52.5%) are rent-burdened, now find themselves choosing between rent and basic necessities.

Recognizing the urgency of these challenges, I, with the support of the Passaic City Council, have taken decisive action to address the housing crisis. Under my administration, we have developed initiatives to tackle the issue, including a Rent Stabilization Ordinance that balances the needs of landlords, investors, and tenants. This proposed legislation aims to protect renters while fostering a stable and collaborative housing market.

### Key Provisions of the Rent Stabilization Ordinance

The ordinance introduces several critical measures:

- 1. Rental Limits for Post-1999 Rentals:** Landlords will be restricted from demanding, receiving, or collecting rental increases more than once in a twelve-month period. Additionally, rent increases will be capped at a maximum of 6% annually.
- 2. HUD Alignment for rents under low rental limits:** Landlords may increase rent by up to 20% year-on-year until reaching the effective HUD “Low Home Rent Limit” applicable to the time period in question.

To balance landlord and tenant needs, the ordinance will provide for the following measures:

- 1. Hardship Rental Increases:** A property owner whose current rentals are insufficient to provide a fair return may apply to the Rent Leveling Board for a hardship increase.
- 2. Capital Improvement and Service Surcharge:** A property owner may request a surcharge for any eligible capital improvement or rental increase for any substantial increase in services rendered to the tenant that is not a repair or replacement, that increases the present value of the dwelling unit, that renders a benefit to the living conditions of the tenant and that, if a capital improvement, is deemed a depreciable asset under the Internal Revenue Code.

In tandem with Passaic’s Mandatory Affordable Set-Aside and Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) ordinances passed in 2024, this Rent Stabilization measure strengthens efforts to ease rent burdens and expand affordable housing. The Mandatory Affordable Set-Aside Ordinance requires new residential developments of five units or more to designate 15% of rental units and 20% of sale units as affordable, ensuring equity and preventing displacement.

The Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) Ordinance allows homeowners to create affordable accessory dwelling units in one- and two-family homes. Through our partnership with the HOME Investment Partnership Program, eligible owners can receive up to \$40,000 to build or convert ADUs, which must remain affordable for 20 years. This preserves neighborhood character, broadens lower-cost housing, and provides extra income for homeowners—all while keeping families closer together across generations.

Together, these three measures collectively reaffirm my commitment to building a thriving and inclusive community. Additionally, they underscore my vision of fostering a stable, sustainable, and equitable housing market that meets the needs of current and future generations.



Passaic  
*New Jersey*



**Mayor Reed Gusciora**  
City of Trenton

# Building The Future, Preserving The Past

By Honorable Reed Gusciora, Mayor, City of Trenton

The City of Trenton moved into an exciting new phase of revitalization with the issuance of a request for proposals for Roebing Block II – 7.5 acres of historic real estate that is ripe for development as both market-rate housing and a commercial growth center.



Roebing 20Block II

Bounded by South Clinton Avenue, Mott Street, and Hudson Street, Roebing Block II is in the Roebing Complex Redevelopment Area in the heart of Trenton. Uniquely accessible by highway or mass transit, the site consists of expansive open space and seven buildings that played marquee roles in the storied saga of Trenton's industrial past. The goal of the RFP is to attract developers and investors who can help Trenton transform the area into a bustling center of modern businesses and urban dwellings.



Roebing 20 Block 2011

The area and the name itself hold deep historical significance, dating back to the 19th century when it was a thriving hub for manufacturing and commerce. The Roebing Company, famous for the cables it made for the Brooklyn Bridge, once had major operations in the city.

The City seeks to identify qualified developers or redevelopment teams with the ability and capacity to acquire, design, permit, and commence the redevelopment of Block II. It encompasses Block 15704, Lots 1, 1.01, 1.02, 1.03, 1.04, 1.05, and 1.08.



Mayor Reed Gusciora at  
Roebing 20Block 2011

The goal is to transform this site into a mixed-use destination. This includes, but is not limited to, the adaptive reuse of historic industrial structures and additional land available on-site for new construction. The anticipated uses for Block II include residential (market-rate housing), commercial, light industrial, research and development, innovation labs, and, with specific regard to Lot 1.03, industrial artisans, hospitality, and cultural/performance arts.

The RFP outlines clear criteria for what the City is looking for: Proposals that not only honor the historical significance of the area but also integrate modern innovations that will support community engagement and economic growth.

Over the last few years, Trenton has been undergoing a period of revitalization, and this effort is set to be a central part of that transformation. This project has the potential to increase job opportunities, bring new investments to the region, attract new businesses, and create a space where residents and visitors can come together.

Roebing Block II will be more than just another development opportunity; it will signal the progress and innovative solutions that will be part of Trenton's future.



For more information, please visit our website <https://www.trentonnj.org/> 7



**The majority of mayors from New Jersey's largest cities face a unique dilemma, myself included. While the quality of education in our public schools directly impacts the property values and reputations of our cities, we have no control over our school boards, the leadership they choose, the money they spend, or the effectiveness of the education they provide.**

# **Beyond the Classroom: How Mayors Can Reshape Urban Education for the Future**

**By Honorable Ras Baraka,  
Mayor, City of Newark**

In Newark, the school budget for this academic year is \$1.52 billion, up \$187,000 from the year before, compared to our municipal budget of \$916 million, and despite state aid, 31 percent of Newark's property taxes go to the schools. The 10 largest municipalities in the state pay an average of 39 percent, with Woodbridge and Edison paying the highest at 56 percent and Elizabeth the lowest at 20 percent.

Among those cities, only Trenton is a Type I district, meaning the school board is appointed by the mayor and the same is true for smaller cities such as Montclair, East Orange, Union City, Harrison and East Newark.

But Newark, Jersey City, Paterson, Elizabeth and New Jersey's other largest cities are Type II districts with elected school boards that function independently from municipal governments. That said, Type II mayors can still help make our considerable investment in our children and schools pay off by creating educational enhancement programs that are independent of the schools but complement learning. This is crucial because quality education impacts every other societal measuring stick in our cities, from employment to public safety to civic involvement.

Here in Newark, we have either launched new programs or bolstered existing ones dedicated to educating our students and preparing them for real-world experiences. Newark Summer Youth Employment Program enrolls about 3,000 students with the help of our business and philanthropic partners to teach our young people about financial empowerment, career exploration and workplace readiness training, while giving them paid work experiences and access to year-round mentoring and coaching.

We created a Guaranteed Education Program through our Office of Violence Prevention and Trauma Recovery to send 40 at-risk students to St. Elizabeth's University for free last year and another 13 to Rutgers-Newark this year. These are just two education-related outreach programs our city employs. Many are geared to teenagers, the age when they become disaffected by school or drop-out altogether.

Our latest emphasis is directed at younger students, preschool children and even the unborn. Our 10 Point Plan to Increase Literacy, begun in 2023, is based on convincing evidence that a child with low third-grade literacy proficiency has a much greater chance of never completing high school than those children with higher reading scores. The facts are eye-opening: children not proficient in reading by third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school and students with lower grade-level proficiency have a six times greater chance of not finishing their high school education. No city can endure such dismal academic performances.

So, our program strongly emphasizes reading skills from kindergarten to third grade, which are the years children learn the bulk of their reading skills. By fourth grade reading is essential for students to comprehend the school curriculum. According to The Children's Reading Foundation, 85 percent of the curriculum is learned through reading.





The art of storytelling is making a comeback in higher education circles, and many colleges look for entrance essays where a student tells their story rather than lists their accomplishments. Reading at an early age teaches children how to create such narratives.

The New Jersey Department of Education's results from the 2022 New Jersey Student Learning Assessment (NJSLA), gave our cities low marks. In my own city, only 19 percent of third graders passed the NJSLA literacy test. This was a crisis that required an immediate response. We put together a "brain trust" that included Ketlen Alsbrook, of director of health and human resources, and Newark Public Schools

Superintendent Roger Leone who worked with grassroots community groups to develop a workable strategy to improve our reading levels.

We asked the schools to develop high-dosage, one-on-one tutoring, select books that reflect the cultural and ethnic background of the school makeup, and incorporate more writing to improve reading comprehension.

On the home front, we strongly advised parents to enroll their children in free pre-K3 and pre-K4 programs or Head Start Programs and reading aloud to children to build vocabulary, improve comprehension and active listening. Studies show that young children whose parents read one book daily expose their children to 296,660 more words before they enter kindergarten than those who don't.

Our literacy program encourages women to get good prenatal care and read to unborn children, because research shows that literacy starts before birth. Studies show that parents who read to developing infants as early as 18 weeks builds healthy brain development in the baby and lay an important literacy foundation for the child.

Once born, parents should constantly talk directly face-to-face with the baby and read to the baby daily. For women to have healthy pregnancies with good prenatal care, and for families to have the means to send their children to preschool and make literacy a priority, we mayors must fight for our residents and lobby to expand both federal and state child tax credits.

For our nonprofits and other community partners, we should mandate that all funding would go to programs and sports that incorporate some level of reading or literacy component. Also, community partners should implement reading tutoring or programs with components embedded in them.

We have a "Mayor's Book Club," where I distribute books to students and we meet to discuss what they learned, we have a "Reading Under the Stars" family event where popular children's authors come to talk about their books, "Thousand Books Before Kindergarten Literacy Fair," and other community-based programs.

As urban mayors, we need to take these steps to augment the education our schools offer. The responsibility of educating the future generation of residents for the betterment of our cities lies not only with the schools, but with all of us.





Strong collaborations have been key to Mayor Green's success in helping to move East Orange forward. Here, Mayor Green meets with Mike Lydon of Street Plans; Adrienne McCall of the East Orange Department of Policy, Planning, and Development; Lillian Cho, community organizer and creative placekeeping advocate; and Chris Mobley, Orange Township Deputy Director of Planning, to discuss upcoming plans for the Thriving Communities Grant Program, which was awarded to the two cities of East Orange and Orange to explore ways to implement improvements along heavily-trafficked Freeway Drive.

# East Orange: A City of Opportunity and Growth

By Honorable Ted Green, Mayor, City of East Orange

When you think of East Orange, what comes to your mind? For those of us who live, work, and raise families here, we know our city is a vibrant, diverse community rich in history and full of promise. Today, we are proud to add another accolade to that legacy: East Orange was recently recognized as one of the top 10 U.S. cities with the fastest income growth between 2022 and 2023, with the median household income rising 29.3% compared to the national average of 4%.

This acknowledgement is not just a statistic—rather it is evidence of the hard work, resilience, and determination of my administration and our residents. It is proof that when a city invests in its people, they rise. For years, East Orange has been re-building an infrastructure of opportunity. From creating pathways for economic mobility to championing local businesses, our city has prioritized initiatives that create jobs, empower entrepreneurs, and attract investment.

This recognition reflects those efforts. But let's be clear: this achievement isn't about numbers. It's about people. It's about families who deserve a better quality of life. It's about young professionals who see East Orange as a city where they can thrive. It's about seniors who can enjoy the fruits of their labor in a community that respects and cares for them.

Our income growth speaks to the power of collaboration. It's the result of partnerships between our government, local businesses, community organizations, and residents. Together, we are rewriting the story of what's possible for urban communities like ours. East Orange's growth didn't happen by coincidence. We are intentional about crafting policies and programs that lift up everyone. From job training initiatives to affordable housing developments, we are dedicated to ensuring that growth is equitable and inclusive.

As we celebrate this milestone, we must also recognize the work that lies ahead. Growth must be sustainable and must address the needs of every resident, from our students striving for academic excellence to our seniors looking for secure retirement options.

To our residents, I say thank you. Thank you for believing in East Orange and for being the heartbeat of our city. This recognition belongs to all of us, and together, we will continue to make East Orange a model of progress and prosperity. The best is yet to come!



**Mayor Ted Green**  
City of East Orange

Nine new officers were recently sworn in as the latest recruits to join the East Orange Police Department, one of the leading community-oriented police agencies in the nation. Under Mayor Green's leadership, crime has continued to decline with overall crime down an additional 20% since 2018. Pictured here is one of our newest officers, Felix Cabrera, Jr., proudly following in the footsteps of his father, Detective Felix Cabrera, Sr.







# A CITY OF CHAMPIONS

By Mayor Andre Sayegh, City of Paterson

There are plenty of positive people in Paterson and so many success stories in our city that need to be told. My mission as Mayor is make sure to tell them.

Within the last month, our city has made historic and heartwarming headlines. Paterson has been in the news for noteworthy achievements in education, sports, and community development. All inspiring stories that help put our city back on the map and stories I am eager and elated to share in the subsequent paragraphs.

## SHADASIA GREEN

Shadasia Green graduated from the famed Eastside High School and received a whole host of full scholarship offers from a number of colleges. She ultimately selected Old Dominion University where she played basketball and earned a Bachelor's degree in Science. Although she excelled in basketball, Shadasia started boxing to diversify and intensify her training regimen. A few weeks ago on the undercard of the Mike Tyson-Jake Paul fight, Shadasia Green won the WBO Super Middleweight Champion. Consequently, she became the first woman from Paterson and from New Jersey to win a world title in the history of boxing.

## NANCY CASTRO

Nancy Castro started her educational career in 1992. She has been a substitute teacher, instructional assistant, classroom teacher, substance abuse coordinator, vice principal, and she is currently the principal of the number one elementary school and grammar school in New Jersey according to U.S. News and World Report. This is the second time that the school has earned this remarkable distinction under her leadership.

## RODNEY ADDISON

Rodney Addison is a renaissance man. He is an entrepreneur, civic leader, nutritionist, and bodybuilder. He plays a pivotal role in helping us save lives through our RealFix program which was designed to address drug addiction in Paterson. Moreover, he is the founder of Deliberate Nutriti, a sports supplement company focused on holistic health and peak athletic performance. Just recently, Rodney won the prestigious "Mr. America" bodybuilding championship and became the first Patersonian to win the award in the 85 year history of the national competition.

## BOB GUARASCI

Bob Guarasci was not born in Paterson but he has quickly become one of our city's favorite adopted sons. 30 years ago, he founded the New Jersey Community Development Corporation (NJCDC) and chose Paterson as the place to serve as his organization's home. NJCDC's mission has been to create opportunities to transform lives. Since 1994, the non-profit organization has built affordable housing for individuals with chronic medical conditions, developmental disabilities, and children who age out of foster care. Moreover, NJCDC has built 10 playgrounds and created five community gardens. Earlier this month, Bob Guarasci was inducted into the New Jersey Hall of Fame for doing God's work in Paterson.

The aforementioned individuals are now a part of the pantheon of Patersonians who exemplify excellence. Our city boasts a champion in almost every sport. **Victor Cruz in football, Essence Carson in basketball, Kendall Holt in boxing, Derrick Ettiene, Jr. in soccer, and Larry Doby in baseball.** The recent achievements highlighted here in this column solidifies Paterson as a bona fide "City of Champions" and thankfully, there are more champions emerging in Paterson and more success stories that will continue to be told.

# Rolling Back into Action: Perth Amboy's Hometown Trolley Returns This Spring

By Lisett Lebron, Chief of Staff, City of Perth Amboy



Honorable Helmin Caba,  
Mayor, City of Perth Amboy

Perth Amboy's Hometown Trolley is returning this spring, providing free rides across the city. This convenient service offers residents and visitors an easy way to explore Perth Amboy's culture, scenic waterfront, and historic landmarks.

## Connecting the Community



With 18 stops throughout the city, the trolley connects key locations like the bustling Downtown District on Smith Street, the picturesque City Marina, and historic landmarks such as Perth Amboy City Hall, the oldest continuously operating city hall in New Jersey. Whether commuting or sightseeing, the trolley makes getting around simple and stress-free.

## A Comfortable Ride

The Hometown Trolley offers more than just transportation. With free Wi-Fi, cupholders, and phone charging ports, it provides a modern and comfortable experience for up to 28 passengers. It's perfect for individuals, families, and groups looking to explore Perth Amboy with ease.

## Supported by Urban Enterprise Zone Funding

This free service is funded through Perth Amboy's Urban Enterprise Zone (UEZ) program. Noelia Colon, OECD Deputy Director and UEZ Coordinator, shared her thoughts: "The Hometown Trolley is a big help for parking, brings in more tourists, and gives the local economy a boost. It really shows how welcoming and easy-to-get-around Perth Amboy can be."

## Mayor's Support

Mayor Helmin Caba expressed his enthusiasm for the service: "Perth Amboy is a city of rich history, diverse culture, and unmatched beauty. The Hometown Trolley provides a sustainable, convenient way to experience it all. I'm excited to see residents and visitors hopping on board this spring!"

## Reflecting on Success

Reflecting on Success  
After its successful launch in fall 2024, the trolley quickly became popular among residents and tourists. Running through December, it alleviated parking issues, supported local businesses, and encouraged tourism. Now, with its spring 2025 return, the trolley is set to continue enhancing accessibility and community connection.

## Plan your Ride

The Hometown Trolley operates in a continuous loop, making it easier than ever to navigate Perth Amboy. Whether you're heading downtown, visiting the waterfront, or exploring the city's historic sites, the trolley is your free and reliable transportation option.

**For more information, visit**  
<https://linktr.ee/cityofperthamboy>.

Don't miss out this spring—hop aboard the Hometown Trolley and experience all that Perth Amboy has to offer!







# STATE LEGISLATURE CONSIDERING EXPANSION OF POPULAR NEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION TOOL

By Matthew Hersh - Vice President of Policy and Advocacy (State Legislature)  
Considering Expansion of Popular Neighborhood Revitalization Tool

*New Jersey's Neighborhood Revitalization Tax Credit (NRTC) program is one of our most effective tools for fostering equitable community development in neighborhoods around the state. Conceived by the Housing and Community Development Network of NJ (the Network) in 2002 and administered by the NJ Department of Community Affairs (DCA), the program has proven to be a powerful means of driving investment from private sector entities into building vibrant communities. By offering a 100 percent tax credit, corporate partners are motivated to support projects that strengthen neighborhoods like community centers, parks, job and education programs and affordable homes.*

As one of the state's most successful public-private programs for community development and neighborhood change, NRTC leverages \$5-\$7 for every dollar invested. The program is so successful because it intentionally requires an approved neighborhood plan devised with community stakeholders. However, it is currently oversubscribed and underfunded, according to the DCA, and the current \$15 million program cap restricts its potential. It should be tripled just to match the applicant pool of pre-qualified applicants. Fortunately, Senator Troy Singleton (D-Burlington) has introduced legislation, S3170, to raise the investment cap to \$65 million, greatly increasing potential investment in community development efforts statewide.

NRTC's impact in the revitalization of NJ's cities has been undeniable. For example, The City of New Brunswick has two NRTC-designated neighborhoods, Unity Square and Esperanza, where revitalization efforts are led by nonprofit Network members Catholic Charities-Diocese of Metuchen and New Brunswick Tomorrow, respectively.

Using NRTC funding, Catholic Charities was able to partner with the city to transform a vacant firehouse into the Unity Square Community Center. The Center now serves as a social service hub, including New Brunswick's only Client Choice food pantry and the site of the city's Code Blue shelter.

In the Esperanza neighborhood, New Brunswick Tomorrow has used NRTC funding to advance the development of affordable homes for first-time, low-income homebuyers and formerly homeless individuals, as well as offer grants for local businesses to undertake storefront improvements.

Meanwhile in Camden, St. Joseph's Carpenter Society and Regional Plan Association have been bringing investments into the My East Camden Neighborhood Plan, allowing for the rehabilitation of vacant lots and preventing flooding and sewage issues. In the North Camden neighborhood, Camden Lutheran Housing Inc. is managing the My North Camden project, promoting homeownership and establishing a variety of supportive programs.

There are several exemplary projects in Newark as well, such as the Fairmount Neighborhood and Lincoln Park Action Plans, from the Urban League of Essex County and Lincoln Park Coast Cultural District respectively. Thanks to their work, these Newark neighborhoods are seeing new affordable housing developments, training initiatives, and needed support for local artists and cultural leaders.

With NJ's fourth round of fair share housing obligations announced, we need to make sure that all available tools to build affordable homes and thriving neighborhoods are well resourced and supported. We urge our state leaders to expand the NRTC without delay so that we can create healthy, affordable communities all over NJ.



# NJ League 2024 Overview

From the Editors



Thank you for attending and supporting NJUMA's events at the 2024 NJ State League of Municipalities Conference.

Here are a few highlights & Photos:

## Policy Breakfast

The NJUMA Policy Breakfast is an exclusive, closed-door meeting for mayors, their staff, and invited guest speakers. Each year, this gathering provides a unique opportunity for guest speakers to engage directly with mayors, offering valuable resources and insights to enhance the quality of life for residents. This year, the event featured speakers from NJEDA, Popular Bank, and Alpha Drones, who delivered impactful presentations on economic development, financial empowerment, and cutting-edge drone technology to advance urban communities.

## League Session Highlights

The NJ League of Municipalities hosted two compelling sessions focusing on housing, infrastructure, and transportation, engaging municipal leaders and stakeholders in forward-thinking discussions. Over 300 NJLM Conference attendees contributed to these dynamic discussions and shared strategies for addressing urban challenges and innovative ways to foster collaboration on housing, transportation, and infrastructure initiatives. The NJUMA League Session, titled "Using Stranded Assets for Innovative Affordable Housing Solutions," focused on transforming underutilized brownfield sites into affordable housing developments. The session emphasized leveraging federal, state, and local resources and engaging communities to promote sustainable urban growth. Moderated by The Honorable Adrian O. Mapp, Mayor of Plainfield and NJUMA President, the panel featured: The Honorable Mayor Hector Lora, Vice President of NJUMA and Mayor of Passaic, Schenine Mitchell, Brownfield Coordinator at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Melanie Walter, Representative from the New Jersey Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency (NJHMFA). Discussions centered on innovative strategies to repurpose brownfields, addressing challenges such as environmental remediation, funding mechanisms, and community involvement to create equitable housing solutions.

**The Honorable Mayor Hector Lora, City of Passaic and Vice President of NJUMA**, skillfully moderated the NJLBC League Session titled "Connecting Infrastructure, Transportation, and Housing Redevelopment." This session delved into the critical intersection of infrastructure, transportation, and housing development, emphasizing strategies to enhance accessibility, sustainability, and equity in urban areas. The distinguished panel featured Assemblywoman Linda Carter (Legislative District 22), The Honorable Mayor Ras Baraka (City of Newark and NJUMA President Emeritus), Mayor Jody Veler (City of Salem), and Carly Foster (Arcadis Representative). Panelists shared insights on innovative approaches to integrating infrastructure improvements with housing redevelopment, fostering meaningful discussions on addressing urban challenges and creating more connected communities.

## Annual Reception

The 2024 Annual Reception took place at the Borgata Hotel Casino Event Center in Atlantic City, marking a new and exciting location for this prestigious gathering. The venue provided a vibrant setting for municipal leaders, policymakers, and experts from across New Jersey to connect, collaborate, and exchange innovative ideas. The evening reception served as an invaluable networking opportunity with discussions across sectors to drive urban progress and improve quality of life in New Jersey's urban areas.



# NJUMA Policy Breakfast







# NJLBC Session

Moderated by the Honorable Hector Lora, Mayor of Passaic







## The League Session

The Honorable Adrian O. Mapp, President, NJUMA and mayor of the great City of Plainfield served as the facilitator for the panel





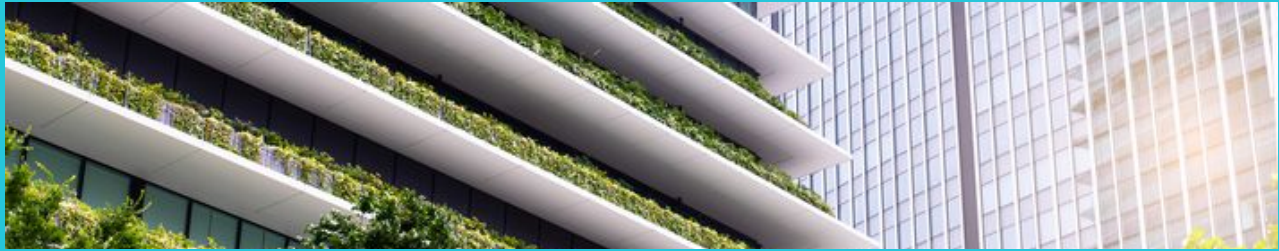
# Annual Reception











# “Cultivating Human Capital for the Built Environment”

By G. Lamont Blackstone, Past Board Chair, Project REAP

The year 2025 will bring the return of two pivotal programs cultivating talent (i.e., human capital) for the commercial real estate and economic development communities. **Project REAP** ([www.projectreap.org](http://www.projectreap.org)) is one of the oldest diversity initiatives addressing the historic lack of ethnic and gender diversity in the commercial real estate (CRE) industry. It will be relaunching its professional development academy in the spring. Interested applicants can visit the [academy website page](#) to learn more.

During its 25-year history, REAP has incubated talent that has advanced to prominent posts within multiple CRE operations—middle management and senior management roles at firms such as MetLife, Starbucks, Colliers, Amazon, Cushman & Wakefield, Nuveen, and affordable housing operators, to list a few. It was recently cited by Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton in the nation's *Congressional Record* for those same talent development efforts. Project REAP's programs are now being led by Taneshia Nash Laird, a REAP alum serving as its executive director. Previously, she was the CEO of Newark Symphony Hall and launched the restoration of that historic New Jersey performing arts center.

Similarly, the new year will bring the return of **Open Access**. This pioneering economic development internship program was the brainchild of two leading community development finance professionals: Jeff Monge and Gina Nisbeth. Project REAP was instrumental in helping to host that initiative during its early years, and Open Access has evolved into an independent program serving the economic development community. That includes for-profit and non-profit organizations administering alternative capital tools such as New Markets Tax Credits and other funding sources. Their 2025 Fellowship program is tentatively scheduled to run from May 1st to July 31st. Interested parties can visit their [website](#) for details.

Urban development in the Garden State will require a cadre of professionals familiar with the workings of CRE markets and the markets for alternative funding sources—those sources typically necessary to cover project funding gaps. Although the nation faces headwinds questioning the value and legitimacy of talent diversity efforts, Project REAP and Open Access continue to serve the country and the state by training diverse talent and connecting those professionals to opportunities to serve the built environment.

*G. Lamont Blackstone, CRX, is a commercial real estate consultant and specialist in public-private partnerships. He is also the past board chair of Project REAP, a leading diversity initiative and talent incubator serving the CRE industry.*



G. Lamont Blackstone, CRX Principal



# Infrastructure as a Service:

## A Sustainable Infrastructure Solution for Urban Cities

By Lissa Jean Ferrell, President, LJF Consulting (Sustainable Infrastructure Funding as a Solution for Urban Cities)

Urban centers across the U.S. are grappling with a pressing challenge: aging and outdated infrastructure. From water and sewer systems to public facilities and schools, the need for maintenance and replacement is escalating. Traditional funding methods, like bonds, often leave municipalities struggling with insufficient resources to maintain infrastructure over time. As a result, deferred maintenance—estimated at \$4 trillion nationwide—continues to mount, creating an increasingly difficult problem to solve. Enter a promising new model: Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS), a debt-free solution that could transform the way cities finance, upgrade, and maintain essential infrastructure.

### What is Infrastructure as Service

Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS) is a model that enables cities to modernize and maintain critical infrastructure without incurring debt or facing substantial upfront costs. Unlike traditional methods like bond funding, which burden municipalities with long-term debt and offer no assurance of ongoing infrastructure performance, IaaS operates on a pay-as-you-go basis. Much like utility payments for water or electricity, cities pay a monthly fee based on infrastructure usage.

The process is straightforward: municipalities make regular payments for the infrastructure they need, while service providers—such as Sustainability Partners—handle design, deployment, and ongoing maintenance. This model shifts the responsibility for long-term infrastructure success from the city to the service provider, ensuring continued functionality and reliability over time.

### How IaaS Tackles the Deferred Maintenance Crisis

Traditional funding mechanisms, such as bonds, are disconnected from the performance and lifespan of the infrastructure they finance. Once a city secures bond funding, it must begin repayment, regardless of the project's long-term success or operational state. In many cases, municipalities are still paying for bonds tied to failed infrastructure projects from decades ago. These bonds are often refinanced, further extending financial obligations while offering no additional value. Moreover, bond funding rarely includes provisions for ongoing maintenance, leaving infrastructure to deteriorate once it's built.

IaaS addresses these issues by directly linking payments to the performance and longevity of the infrastructure. This eliminates the risk of deferred maintenance and guarantees that infrastructure remains safe, reliable, and operational. Cities no longer need to issue new bonds, raise taxes, or cut essential services to cover the costs of infrastructure projects. Instead, they pay based on usage, making IaaS a more flexible and scalable option for urban areas seeking to upgrade infrastructure without jeopardizing financial stability.

### Why IaaS is the Future of Urban Infrastructure

Infrastructure as a Service offers a forward-thinking solution to the growing infrastructure crisis. With flexible, utility-like payment models, IaaS provides cities with access to critical infrastructure while eliminating the burden of long-term debt. As urban areas continue to grapple with aging systems and deferred maintenance, IaaS presents a sustainable, long-term approach that benefits both municipalities and their residents.

By shifting the financial and operational responsibility to service providers, IaaS ensures that cities receive the infrastructure they need, maintained to the highest standards, without compromising their fiscal health. As cities face increasing infrastructure challenges, IaaS represents a transformative, cost-effective path to revitalizing urban infrastructure for future generations.



Lissa Jean Ferrell, President,  
LJF Consulting

For additional information,  
please contact Lissa Jean Ferrell at  
[Lissa@LJFConsulting.com](mailto:Lissa@LJFConsulting.com)



# A ROADMAP FOR GUIDING GROWTH IN NEW JERSEY MARKS A MAJOR MILESTONE

By **Melanie L. Willoughby**, Executive Director of the New Jersey Business Action Center (NJBAC), New Jersey Department of State

The high quality of life, diversity of people and places, and central location in the Northeast Corridor, among its many assets, make New Jersey an attractive place to live, work, play and age.

With a population of over nine million and a land area of 7,353 square miles, New Jersey is the 46th largest state in the nation and the most densely populated. As such, managing and guiding growth has always been at the forefront of seemingly intractable issues for the State's various constituencies. After extensive outreach, on December 4, 2024, the State Planning Commission approved the release of the Preliminary State Development and Redevelopment Plan ("State Plan"), which was drafted by the Office of Planning Advocacy (OPA) within the New Jersey Business Action Center (NJBAC).

As the first update in 23 years, the release of the State Plan marks a watershed moment in New Jersey's history of providing a state-wide framework to align planning and investment decisions at all levels of government. Two past attempts to finalize a State Development and Redevelopment Plan failed under two prior administrations. The Plan represents one of Governor Murphy's major agenda items, and he has said he wants a plan finalized before he leaves office at the end of 2025.

Starting February 12, 2025, an intensive two-month public comment period will feature meetings in every county. These hearings will continue through April 16, 2025, and initiate the Cross-Acceptance process, comparing municipal county, and state land use plans with the State Plan to achieve maximum consistency across all levels of government.

Intended to be a guide to inform the public and encourage state agencies, counties, and municipalities to align their land use policies with its vision, the State Plan promotes a balanced and inclusive strategy for managing and guiding growth across the state. It is centered on 10 key land use priorities, including: economic development; housing; infrastructure; revitalization and re-centering; climate change; natural and water resources; pollution and environmental cleanup; historic and scenic resources; equity; and comprehensive planning.

New Jersey expects and encourages economic and population growth and seeks to do so in ways that broaden economic prosperity and balance the benefits and impacts of growth. That is the central purpose of the State Plan – to outline a broad and equitable approach to facilitating and directing growth and investment in the state. The goals and policies in the Plan ultimately represent a consensus among all levels of government in the state.

As we look ahead to 2050, the overarching goal of the updated State Development and Redevelopment Plan is that New Jerseyans will enjoy and benefit from pristine natural resources surrounding and within pedestrian-friendly, affordable, healthy, resilient, and sustainable communities, including housing which, for the most part, will be close and walkable to well-paying jobs, shops, schools, venues for arts and culture, accessible open space and trails, and high-quality transportation services. New Jersey's sustainable prosperity is key to these important aspects of life.



**Melanie L. Willoughby**, Executive Director of the New Jersey Business Action Center (NJBAC), New Jersey Department of State





# WHY JOIN THE NFBPA

URBAN MAYOR'S PRESS | WINTER 2025

Joining the NFBPA (National Forum for Black Public Administrators) is beneficial for individuals seeking to advance their careers in public service, particularly African American professionals, as it provides access to a robust network of Black public leaders, professional development opportunities, leadership training, and a platform to discuss critical issues impacting Black communities within the public sector.

[Click to Join Today!](#)



The Panel and some members of the Executive Committee of the NFBPA (NJ - chapter) at the Breakfast Event

## The NFBPA at the 2024 New Jersey League of Municipalities

The National Forum for Black Public Administrators (NFBPA) and Kean University held a very impactful event at the 109th Annual New Jersey League of Municipalities Conference! The Special Breakfast, featuring a panel discussion on public service perspectives in New Jersey municipalities, was a great opportunity for attendees to engage with key topics surrounding governance and administration. The inclusion of information on new Kean initiatives added another layer of value, fostering collaboration and education among the attendees.





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SJTPO is sponsoring two interactive training sessions covering all aspects of Complete Streets. Professionals and members of the public are invited to register for and attend one or both trainings using the two separate links below.

### ✔ TRAINING 1: WHAT ARE COMPLETE STREETS AND HOW TO CRAFT AND IMPLEMENT AN EFFECTIVE MUNICIPAL POLICY

THURSDAY, JANUARY 23, 2025, 12:00PM-1:30PM

ZOOM

During this online-only session learn how to create and adopt your own custom municipal Complete & Green Streets Policy!

Register: <https://go.rutgers.edu/CSTraining>

### ✔ TRAINING 2: COMPLETE STREETS DESIGN, FUNDING AND IMPLEMENTATION

THURSDAY, JANUARY 30, 2025, 1:00PM-4:00PM

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*These trainings are a collaborative effort by the South Jersey Transportation Planning Organization (SJTPO), the Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center at Rutgers University, Sustainable Jersey and Cross County Connection Transportation Management Association (CCCTMA).*



South Jersey  
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# COMPLETE STREETS TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

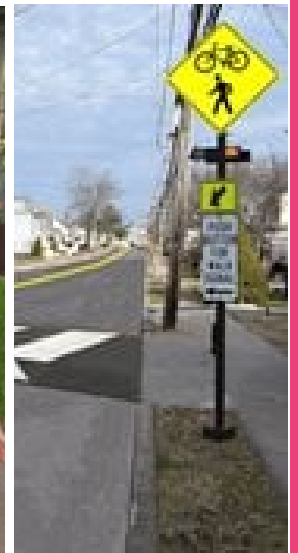
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Kean University Building Stronger Urban Communities



# Day with Ndaba Mandela

**By Peggy Thompson, Divisional Operations Manager, Transformational Learning & External Affairs**



Kean University Building Stronger (KUBS) Urban Communities program, in partnership with Kean Athletics, teamed up with Kean University's Human Rights Institute in November for a Sports for Social Change and Advocacy field day.

Over forty-five students from Harlem Lacrosse, a KUBS program community partner, made their way across the bridge to participate on Kean's Alumni Stadium field for an afternoon of Lacrosse drills and the spirit of community with Kean University's Human Rights Fellow Ndaba Mandela.

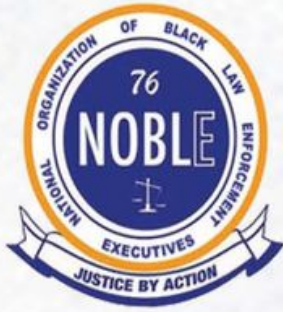
Ndaba Mandela, is the grandson of the late South African President Nelson Mandela. He is a vocal advocate for social justice, giving back to the community, and uses sports to unite people from all backgrounds. Mandela's advocacy is a part of his efforts to help create and maintain a more just future. Students had the unique opportunity to engage with Ndaba Mandela, run drills with Kean athletes, and interact with Sports Executives from national and international teams.

While offering words of encouragement and inspiring students on the field, Ndaba Mandela honored his grandfather by crediting him for being the foundation of his social justice advocacy for change and a better future. "Those who focus and take their time to listen become the best at what they do," said Ndaba Mandela, as he poured into every listening ear on the field. Ndaba's words set the stage for creating a lifetime and memorable experience for everyone who had the opportunity to be in the community of his presence. It was a distinct pleasure and humbling honor to gift Ndaba Mandela with a KUBS program t-shirt.

**To learn more about the KUBS Program, contact [pegthomp@kean.edu](mailto:pegthomp@kean.edu)**



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[kean.edu/new-jersey-urban-mayors-policy-center](http://kean.edu/new-jersey-urban-mayors-policy-center)

Submissions for the Spring Edition  
is due April 21st. Any Questions?  
Please Email [watson@kean.edu](mailto:watson@kean.edu)

Thank you for your contributions and continued support!

**Did  
You  
Know?**

The New Jersey Urban Mayors Association (NJUMA) represents 33 municipalities with a combined population of 2,339,866 based on the 2020 U.S. Census data! The municipalities in NJUMA are at the forefront of addressing critical urban issues shaping the future of New Jersey's urban communities. Stay connected as NJUMA continues to lead impactful discussions and innovative solutions for our cities and residents!

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