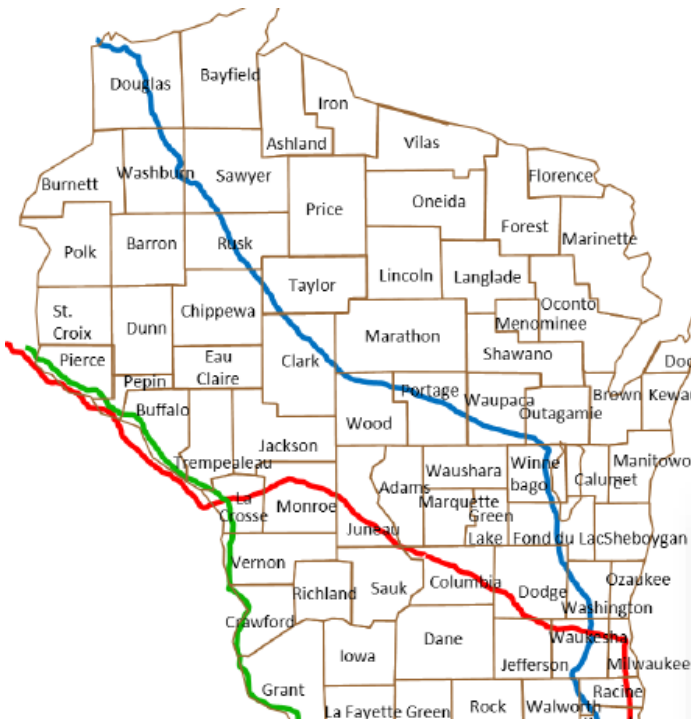


Highlights from League of Wisconsin Municipalities  
118th Annual Conference  
Milwaukee, WI  
Thursday October 29, 2015

**WI Emergency Management: Resilient Communities**

Brian Satula, the Administrator of WI Emergency Management (WEM) presented information about the role of the agency and support available to municipalities preparing for and recovering from a disaster. WEM conducts planning, training and exercises with local community responders to increase preparedness for events. They also facilitate resource coordination when extra funds are needed to support a community after an incident when a local state of emergency is declared. Resource requests for support are first sent to the County, next they are sent to the State and finally if they meet a financial threshold they are elevated to the Federal level. Wisconsin's major risks include natural disasters, technological accidents (train derailments) and human cause events (terrorism).

Dane County has the most recorded tornados of all Wisconsin counties. There are 68 tornados on record from 1844-2012 in Dane County. Floods are another major risk in south central Wisconsin, as the floods in Baraboo in 2008 demonstrated. Dane County faces minimal risk from derailment of trains carrying crude oil and petroleum products because the key rail lines do not cross into Dane County. Given recent rail disasters and the 7,000 registered WI organizations with hazardous chemicals, the immediacy of the issue is apparent.



Administrator Satula cited three key needs in any incident: operational coordination, communication, and public information. Resources and information are available at [readywisconsin.wi.gov](http://readywisconsin.wi.gov).

**The Role of the Professional Administrator**

Representatives from the City of Waupaca, City of Oshkosh and the Village of Slinger discussed the values of hiring a professional administrator to oversee the duties of city manager. Representatives for these municipalities recommended this management model for three key reasons. First, managers help establish continuity. Second, managers can free up elected officials to focus on the vision of the city, constituents and legislative issues. Finally, managers offer valuable administrative expertise.

Transitioning to a professional administrator model is often challenging including hiring the right person and the challenges of reorganization. Nevertheless the three municipality representatives said a

Crude Oil and Petroleum Rail Carloads in WI.

Credit: Brian Satula WEM Administrator.

Image captured from Oct 29, 2015 presentation to LWM (slide 15)

professional administrator can enhance a municipality's ability to better identify opportunities and plan for the future. For example, administrators are able to unearth grants, state payments and legal advantages that local elected officials may not have had the time or expertise to discover. These efforts can easily offset the cost of the salary of a manager. Learn more at this [Recruitment Guidelines for Selecting a Local Government Administrator](#).

### **Challenges in Assessment Impacting Your Tax Base**

Amy R. Seibel and Amie B. Trupke presented case studies concerning commercial industry's efforts to reduce the value of retail locations.

In Appleton, CVS had a property built (build to suit) for \$4.5 million, sold at \$4.5 million and bought by another entity at \$4.8 million. CVS pays rent to the owner of the building. CVS argues that the value is not real estate but business value. In 2008, the WI Supreme Court said that the rent being paid is above market rate. As such the lease cannot be taken into account. Now by extension any property sold with a lease (lease back) is not subject to purchase price consideration. Increasingly, corporations don't want to own the real estate for their stores, rather they construct it, then sell it and lease it back for use. The presenters argue that the WI Supreme Court needs to reexamine the basis for property assessments with these new real estate lease back strategies at the forefront.

#### Abandoned Store or "Dark Store" Method

*Throughout multiple communities in multiple states, several of the country's largest retailers and their tax attorneys have begun appealing their property assessments in an effort to pay a smaller portion of the property tax load. Large national retailers, through their tax attorneys, have argued that, unlike other properties, the values for their income producing properties, for tax purposes only, should be determined by comparing them not to comparable stores but to abandoned (or dark) stores.*

*While thus far this tax avoidance method or strategy has mainly been used by the nation's largest big box retailers, it is quickly gaining the attention of other large manufacturing and industrial property tax payers. Village Administrator Michael Pollocoff explained, "Lawsuits have recently been brought against the Village that we believe will create an unfair shift in the property tax burden for local businesses and residents here in Pleasant Prairie." [The Village October 2015](#)*

### **Municipal Roundtable**

Elected officials gathered at the end of the day in the municipal roundtable and exchanged questions and answers. Issues of note included: regional efforts to consolidate ambulance services (Cambridge), effective leaf collection strategies, and a mobile integrated health unit to visit chronic 911 users. In West Allis, Aurora Hospital pays the fire department to visit homes of these targeted folks to conduct wellness visits helping to reduce 911 calls and hospital costs.