

2026 STC Regional Leadership Conference

Course Descriptions

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A Paradigm for Flood Safe Land Use

(Planning Track 1, 1 PB/ZBA credit)

Although Southern Tier communities regulate development in the flood zones mapped by FEMA, this is not enough to ensure flood safety. Flooding and flood-related erosion often occur outside of mapped flood hazard areas. And elevating development above the anticipated flood height is not always the best flood protection strategy. Sometimes it is wiser not to build or to prohibit some uses in the highest risk locations. Zoning and other regulations can be used to manage future development so that it is safer during the floods and flash floods. This presentation will present ideas for using municipal land use authorities to enhance public health, safety, and welfare.

Presented by:

- Janet Thigpen, Flood Mitigation Specialist, Southern Tier Central Regional Planning & Development Board

Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) 101

(Planning Track 2, 1 PB/ZBA credit)

This session will break down Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) in clear, practical terms. We'll explore what BESS are, how they work, and why they're becoming essential to building a reliable, resilient electric grid. We'll also address common concerns, the work of the Inter-Agency Fire Safety Working Group and review ways to permit these facilities. Whether you're curious, skeptical, or simply want the facts, this session will give you the knowledge and confidence to understand the conversation and participate in it.

Presented by:

- Camille Warner, Senior Project Manager, Clean Energy Siting, NYSERDA

Beyond the Rule Book: Navigating Ethical Dilemmas

(Board Development, 1 PB/ZBA Credit)

Planning and zoning board members face ethical challenges that go beyond simply following procedures—from managing conflicts of interest and ex parte communications to balancing community pressure with impartial decision-making. This interactive session uses real-world, anonymized case studies from planning and zoning boards across New York to explore the gray areas where legal compliance meets ethical responsibility. We will examine best practices through actual scenarios involving: competing stakeholder interests, appearance of impropriety, social media engagement with applicants, personal relationships in small communities, and the tension between representing constituents and serving as quasi-judicial decision-makers. The session includes "what would you do?" interactive scenarios where attendees will discuss how they would handle challenging situations before learning how the actual boards navigated them—and the outcomes that followed. Whether you're a seasoned board member, a new appointee, or municipal planning or zoning supporting boards, you'll leave with practical frameworks for identifying ethical pitfalls, making defensible decisions, and fostering a culture of integrity on your board.

Presented by:

- David Plante, Director, Energy & Environment Practice, Fisher Associates

Building Outdoor Recreation from the Ground Up: A Practical Toolkit for Rural Communities

(Special Sessions & Small Group, 1 PB/ZBA credit)

Rural communities don't need deep pockets to create meaningful outdoor recreation opportunities — they need the right tools, the right partners, and a little inspiration. This session with Trust for Public Land, a national organization whose mission is to connect everyone to the outdoors, offers a practical, no-intimidation toolkit for communities ready to explore rail trails, community forests, mountain biking, and more, with real examples of how small towns have led the way. You'll leave with concrete next steps — from getting outdoor rec into your comprehensive plan to tapping philanthropy and thinking about long-term stewardship support. And if you are interested, a network of peers and resources to help you go further.

Presented by:

- J.T. Horn, Senior Director, Trails Initiative, Trust for Public Land
- Tamar Renaud, New York State Director, Trust for Public Land

Disaster Preparedness for the Building Code Official / Floodplain Administrator

(Code Enforcement, 3 CEO/PB/ZBA credits)

The Disaster Preparedness for the Building Code Official/Floodplain Administrator class is a 3-hour course that will prepare participants for all phases of disaster – preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation. The course offers a Disaster Preparedness Handbook to be used to summarize the roles and responsibilities of the Building Code Official/Floodplain Administrator in all phases. The handbook also includes convenient checklists, suggested inspection forms, placards, and public information suggestions. This course will enable you to understand floodplains, regulations, and disaster and offers suggestions to work on to make your job easier before, during and after disaster strikes.

Presented by:

- Colleen Flynn, Emergency Manager, Schoharie County Office of Emergency Services

Fiscal Oversight Responsibilities of the Governing Board

(Mayors, Supervisors & Clerks, 1 PB/ZBA credit)

The governing board's oversight role can touch virtually every aspect of a local government's operations. This session will discuss some key functions including budget responsibilities, interim reporting, the audit of claims, and the annual audit requirements. We will also provide resources available to assist in these oversight activities.

Presented by:

- William Naylor, Auditor, NYS Comptroller's Office

Freedom of Information Law (FOIL)

(Board Development, 1 PB/ZBA Credit)

This program will provide an overview and update regarding agency obligations under the Freedom of Information Law and access to agency records. This program will be interactive with significant opportunity for questions and answers.

Presented by:

- Kristin Bergin, Deputy Director and Counsel, NY Department of State, Committee on Open Government

Grant Writing 101

(Board Development, 1 PB/ZBA Credit)

This course will provide an overview of the first steps toward developing a new proposal and turning those ideas into a grant. Review key components of a strong grant application: data sources to make the case, aligning budget with scope, performance measures and partners. Participants will discuss how collaboration can be used as a framework for project development and brainstorm funding, match, and leveraging opportunities.

Presented by:

- Victoria Ehlen, Economic Development Coordinator, Southern Tier Central Regional Planning & Development Board
- Dot Richter, Grant Administrator, Southern Tier Central Regional Planning & Development Board

Grant Writing Small Group: 1-on-1 Support

(Special Sessions & Small Group, 1 PB/ZBA credit)

Have you hit a roadblock in your project development? Attend this session with your project partners to discuss limiting factors and next steps toward success. STC's Grant Administrator, Dot Richter, will provide guidance on how best to navigate reporting and challenges for small projects. STC's Economic Development Coordinator, Victoria Ehlen, can discuss development of project ideas and grant application timelines.

Presented by:

- Victoria Ehlen, Economic Development Coordinator, Southern Tier Central Regional Planning & Development Board
- Dot Richter, Grant Administrator, Southern Tier Central Regional Planning & Development Board

Historic Preservation 101: How to put preservation to work in your downtown

(Planning Track 2, 1 PB/ZBA credit)

Older buildings form the core of our downtowns. They serve as the physical, economic, social, and cultural hubs of our communities, holding local businesses and municipal services, often providing housing, and serving as community gathering spaces. This "Preservation 101" session will explain how historic preservation programs and principles can help older buildings and downtowns thrive. Learn what preservation is really all about; why it matters; how it supports economic growth and healthy communities; what programs, financial incentives, and other resources are available to local governments and property owners to help repair and reuse older buildings; and why investing in your downtown's past is essential for its future. Walk away with practical next steps your community can take to begin exploring preservation's many benefits.

Presented by:

- Caitlin Meives, Director of Preservation, Preservation League of NYS

Improving the Effectiveness of Your Claims Auditing Process

(Board Development, 1 PB/ZBA credit)

This session will assist local officials in learning how to establish an effective and efficient claims processing system. A well-designed system ensures proper use of municipal resources, provides local officials with useful information and complies with all applicable laws and regulations.

Presented by:

- William Naylor, Auditor, NYS Comptroller's Office

Introduction to Records Management

(Mayors, Supervisors & Clerks, 1 PB/ZBA credit)

It does not matter if you are new to records management or a season veteran who is looking for a quick reminder. In this presentation we will discuss the basic principles of records management and its importance including activities such as retention, access, and preservation, as well as the role of a records management officer.

Presented by:

- Michael Martin, Records Advisory Officer, NYS Archives

Keynote Panel: Leading Local: Lessons from Veteran Town & Village Leaders

(All education tracks, .5 PB/ZBA credit)

This keynote panel brings together experienced town and village officials for an insightful conversation about effective local leadership. Panelists will share practical insights and advice for mayors, supervisors, and board members navigating today's municipal challenges. Attendees will leave with fresh perspectives, peer-driven strategies, and a stronger sense of connection across local governments.

Panelists:

- Justin Boyette, Supervisor, Town of Hector
- Margaret Smith, Mayor, Village of Elmira Heights
- Michael Volino, Supervisor, Town of Thurston

Let the Sunshine In: Solar Energy Siting, Policy and Best Practices

(Planning Track 2, 1 PB/ZBA credit)

This session will provide an overview of environmental considerations and regulations (wetlands, forests, agricultural lands, SEQRA, etc.) as it relates to solar, review the Model Solar Law and summarize the recently updated Solar Guidebook. It will provide best practices on siting, permitting, and iron out some common misconceptions.

Presented by:

- Camille Warner, Senior Project Manager, Clean Energy Siting, NYSERDA

NYS Department of State Funding Opportunities: Empowering Sustainable Communities & Resilient Downtowns

(Planning Track 1, 1 PB/ZBA credit)

This session provides an overview of key State funding programs, including DRI, NY Forward, LWRP, Brownfield Opportunity Areas, and Smart Growth. These programs support local planning efforts and targeted investments in communities across New York State. The presentation focuses on how to navigate these programs in practice, what's required, what makes an application competitive, and how communities are successfully using these funding sources to advance local priorities. Case studies will highlight real-world examples of planning and program implementation.

Presented by:

- Allison Bodine, Revitalization Specialist, NYS Department of State, Office of Planning, Development & Community Infrastructure
- Stephen Yerly, Revitalization Specialist, NYS Department of State, Office of Planning, Development & Community Infrastructure

Open Meetings Law

(Planning Track 2, 1 PB/ZBA credit)

This program will provide an overview and update regarding public body obligations under the Open Meetings Law. This program will be interactive with significant opportunity for questions and answers.

Presented by:

- Kristin Bergin, Deputy Director and Counsel, NY Department of State, Committee on Open Government

Planning for Agriculture

(Planning Track 1, 1 PB/ZBA credit)

Is your town planning for agriculture? New York State has over 30,000 farms producing nearly \$9 billion of economic revenue each year. Emerging development pressures threaten the conversion of some of our best soils. Municipalities, through zoning and local laws can offset these pressures and accommodate farm operations through simple local actions. Code enforcement officers, planners and municipal officials will benefit from this broad discussion about agricultural protections and grants to help their town plan for agriculture.

Presented by:

- Jeff Kehoe, Associate Environmental Analyst, NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets

Planning That Wins Funding: Using Data to Compete for State and Federal Grants

(Mayors, Supervisors & Clerks, 1 PB/ZBA credit)

Securing funding for infrastructure, housing, and community development projects is more competitive than ever. This session will show how communities can use planning, data, and regional coordination to strengthen grant applications and move projects from concept to funding readiness. Participants will learn what funders are actually looking for, the common planning gaps that weaken applications, and practical steps local governments can take now to improve their competitiveness.

Presented by:

- Charlie Phillion, Program Director Community Development, NYS Homes & Community Renewal

Preserving Local Landscapes and Character

(Planning Track 1, 1 PB/ZBA credit)

In this adapted *Local Government Guide to the Chesapeake Bay* training module, you'll learn how to use land use planning and conservation strategies to support your community. We'll help you understand how your community can take collaborative, coordinated efforts to promote local economic development and prioritize public health, infrastructure resiliency, education, and emergency response, while protecting your environment and preserving the rural character you love. As a regional planning board, STC is here to support our municipalities in these efforts and will share realistic case studies to guide you in ***preserving your community's character and landscapes***.

Presented by:

- Liv Lovejoy, Planner, Southern Tier Central Regional Planning & Development Board

Preventing Errors: Creating the Code Checklist

(Code Enforcement, 1 CEO/PB/ZBA credit)

When an error occurs during a code enforcement inspection, the public is put at risk, fires can happen, building can collapse or somebody can die. On February 20th, 2003, the station nightclub fire could have been prevented by a code inspection using a checklist. As the code advances, the code enforcement professional cannot begin to know everything in the code. Preventing errors in creating the code checklist is an evidenced-based presentation about creating a checklist to prevent errors during a career as a code enforcement professional. Checklists are not recipes for the novice code enforcement professional. This presentation looks at the history of checklists, why errors happen, compares and contrasts ignorance versus ineptitude, comparing read-do and do-confirm to checklists. The presentation looks at the design of checklists, evidence-based fonts, breakpoints, validation, and implementation of checklists.

Presented by:

- Rich Nower, Lieutenant/Fire Marshall and Code Enforcement Officer and Fire Investigator, City of Utica Fire Department

Pro-Housing Communities

(Mayors, Supervisors & Clerks, 1 PB/ZBA credit)

New York State's Pro-Housing Communities Program is designed to recognize and support local governments that are actively working to increase housing supply. This class provides participants with a clear overview of the program's goals, certification requirements, and the actions communities can take to qualify as Pro-Housing. Participants will learn how certification can improve eligibility for certain state funding and discretionary programs, as well as how the initiative aligns with local planning, zoning, and development decisions. The course also highlights key considerations for implementation and best practices for demonstrating a community's commitment to housing growth.

Presented by:

- Leonard Skrill, Assistant Commissioner, NYS Homes & Community Renewal

Public Lands, Open Spaces, and Outdoor Recreation Workshop: Bring Your Ideas

(Special Sessions & Small Group, 1 PB/ZBA credit)

Building on the foundational tools and examples from Trust for Public Land's introductory session, this hands-on workshop is designed for municipal officials, board members, and mayors ready to move from inspiration to action. Participants will dive deeper into public lands, open space, and outdoor recreation projects by bringing their own community ideas, questions, and challenges to the table. Through facilitated discussion and peer learning, attendees will explore how to refine concepts, identify partners, and align projects with local plans and priorities. The workshop emphasizes practical problem-solving, shared learning, and real-world next steps tailored to each community's capacity and goals.

Presented by:

- J.T. Horn, Senior Director, Trails Initiative, Trust for Public Land
- Tamar Renaud, New York State Director, Trust for Public Land

SEQRA – A Shared Responsibility

(Planning Track 2, 1 PB/ZBA credit)

The hard work associated with the SEQRA review process usually falls to a town's Planning Board or Zoning Board of Appeals. But those boards do not have to go it alone. In this program, we will discuss the different roles agencies may play in the SEQRA review process and how outsourcing some of the work to attorneys and engineers can lessen the burden for board members, shift review costs from the town to the applicant, and offer additional protection from litigation risks.

Presented by:

- Megan K. Dorritie, Esq., Harter Secrest & Emery LLP
- Noreena K. Chaudari, Esq., Harter Secrest & Emery LLP
- William C. Stone, Esq., Harter Secrest & Emery LLP

SEQRA In Action Workshop

(Special Sessions & Small Group, 1 PB/ZBA credit)

“Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn.” Benjamin Franklin. Join us for an interactive session in which we will work through mock SEQRA review scenarios based on recent court cases. Active participation is encouraged but not required.

Presented by:

- Megan K. Dorritie, Esq., Harter Secrest & Emery LLP
- Noreena K. Chaudari, Esq., Harter Secrest & Emery LLP
- William C. Stone, Esq., Harter Secrest & Emery LLP

Situational Awareness for the Code Enforcement Official

(Code Enforcement, 2 CEO/PB/ZBA credits)

Code enforcement officials face rising threats during inspections, including emotional outbursts and targeted violence. Situational awareness is critical to prevent injury or death in the line of duty. Cooper’s Color Code helps maintain the appropriate level of alertness, while the OODA Loop (Observe, Orient, Decide, Act) supports quick, informed decision-making. Officials must recognize the difference between criminal violence – impulsive and emotionally driven – and predatory violence, which is planned and deliberate. Understanding these threat types, along with identifying pre-incident indicators like aggressive behavior or surveillance, allows officials to respond proactively. Staying alert, reducing distractions, and thinking strategically enhances safety. Combining mental readiness, observation, and sound judgement ensures that code enforcement professionals are prepared for threats and better positioned to return home safely after each shift.

Presented by:

- Rich Nower, Lieutenant/Fire Marshall and Code Enforcement Officer and Fire Investigator, City of Utica Fire Department

Skills That Make Great Board Members

(Board Development, 1 PB/ZBA credit)

What makes a great land use board member? This course examines some of the necessary skills needed for new members and should serve as a refresher for more seasoned members alike. Topics include board procedures and applicable laws to more practical matters, including conducting site visits, working with consultants, avoiding ex-parte communications, and working with the public. How to build your technical knowledge and find assistance when needed, as well as utilizing the comprehensive plan for your decisions, will also be discussed.

Presented by:

- NY Department of State, Division of Local Government Services

Smart Solutions, Real Funding: A Conversation on Local Government Efficiency

(Mayors, Supervisors & Clerks, 1 PB/ZBA credit)

This one-hour training provides a high-level introduction to New York State's Local Government Efficiency (LGE) program, highlighting its goals, eligibility, and funding opportunities. Participants will learn how STC can support communities throughout the LGE process, from idea development to implementation. The session concludes with an interactive, open discussion to explore, refine, and vet potential LGE projects that may be suitable for funding.

Presented by:

- Chelsea Roberston, Executive Director, Southern Tier Central Regional Planning & Development Board
- Representative from NYS Department of State, Local Government Efficiency Program

Zoning Board of Appeals Overview

(Planning Track 1, 1 PB/ZBA credit)

This introductory course to the zoning board of appeals focuses on the statutory tests boards must follow to grant use and area variances and proper handling of zoning interpretations. Meeting procedures and notice requirements will also be discussed, along with the ZBA's relationship with enforcement officials and the planning board, and the importance of making good findings.

Presented by:

- NY Department of State, Division of Local Government Services