Fall 2025 *On Common Ground*

Article teasers/summaries of various lengths for use in distribution. Each contains a link to the full article

Municipal Finance Challenges and Potential Solutions

PARAGRAPH:

Municipalities are struggling to fund essential services and infrastructure as costs rise and federal support declines, prompting the adoption of creative revenue strategies like public-private partnerships, special districts, and land value capture. Experts emphasize the need for states to grant cities more fiscal flexibility and for local governments to coordinate economic development with sustainable land-use policies. Leadership programs are equipping future officials to make informed decisions about growth, infrastructure, and fiscal policy to better serve their communities. Click HERE to read the full article.

MINI:

Municipal finance faces mounting challenges, but innovative funding mechanisms and leadership development are helping cities adapt and sustain community growth. Click HERE to read the full article.

It's Not Easy Going Green

PARAGRAPH SUMMARY:

Municipalities across the U.S. are facing increased costs and greater need for resilient infrastructure due to more frequent and severe natural disasters, while federal funding is declining. To address these challenges, cities and counties are adopting creative funding solutions such as resilience authorities, public-private partnerships, bonds, revolving loan funds, and leveraging cost-saving green initiatives on public land. Successful examples include Maryland's Resilience Authority, Miami Beach's billion-dollar resiliency investments, and Fairfax County's self-funding energy efficiency projects, all aimed at protecting communities and promoting sustainability. Click HERE to read the full article.

MINI SUMMARY:

Municipalities are innovating with new funding models and green initiatives to build resilient infrastructure and address climate challenges amid shrinking federal support. Click HERE to read the full article.

Planning for Growth

PARAGRAPH SUMMARY:

Communities across the United States are facing fiscal challenges as aging infrastructure and sprawling development patterns strain local budgets, with traditional sources of revenue declining. Research and case studies show that compact, mixed-use development generates significantly more tax revenue per acre and costs less to maintain than spread-out, car-dependent sprawl, prompting cities like Eugene, Annapolis, and Rancho Cucamonga to reconsider their growth strategies. By analyzing the fiscal impact of land-use choices, local governments are increasingly prioritizing denser, walkable development to achieve financial resiliency and sustainable growth. Click HERE to read the full article.

MINI SUMMARY:
Proper land-use planning that favors compact, mixed-use development helps communities shore up budgets and maintain infrastructure more sustainably than sprawling growth patterns. Click HERE to read the full article.

Tax Increment Financing (TIF)
PARAGRAPH SUMMARY:
Tax Increment Financing (TIF) is being used by cities across the U.S. to fund affordable housing, downtown revitalization, transit, and walkable urban development, with notable successes in places like Muskegon, Milwaukee, Carmel, and Washington, D.C.. While TIF can spur economic growth and community improvements, its use for large-scale projects like data centers has drawn criticism for potential risks, lack of transparency, and questionable public benefit. When applied responsibly, TIF and related value capture tools can transform blighted areas, support mixed-use development, and generate lasting fiscal benefits for municipalities. Click HERE to read the full article.

MINI SUMMARY:
TIF is a powerful but sometimes controversial tool that, when used wisely, enables cities to finance affordable housing and vibrant urban spaces while boosting long-term economic and community growth. Click HERE to read the full article.

Funding Public Transit When Budgets Are Tight
PARAGRAPH SUMMARY:
Local governments are funding public transit through a mix of strategies, including public-private partnerships, sales tax increases, congestion pricing, and federal programs like Tax Increment Financing, with cities such as Cleveland, Columbus, Nashville, Denver, and New York implementing innovative solutions to upgrade and expand transit systems. These investments have led to increased ridership, significant economic development, and improved mobility options, while also highlighting the importance of community engagement, persistent coalition-building, and careful planning to ensure long-term success. Despite challenges like budget constraints and scope creep, cities are finding that dedicated funding and multimodal approaches can transform transit and make neighborhoods safer and more accessible. Click HERE to read the full article.

MINI SUMMARY:
Cities are using creative funding mechanisms and collaborative approaches to expand and improve public transit, resulting in greater ridership, economic growth, and safer, more connected communities. Click HERE to read the full article.

The ROI on Parks, Trails and Other Green Infrastructure Is Getting Much Clearer
PARAGRAPH SUMMARY:
Research and real-world examples increasingly show that parks, trails, and green infrastructure deliver substantial economic, health, and community benefits, including higher property values, new business creation, and reduced healthcare costs. High-quality bike and pedestrian infrastructure, especially when combined with greenery and traffic calming, boosts local economies and improves quality of life, while green stormwater infrastructure (GSI) helps communities manage flooding and environmental challenges. Cities like Philadelphia and Seattle demonstrate how well-planned green infrastructure can revitalize neighborhoods, support public health, and provide measurable returns on investment. Click HERE to read the full article.

MINI SUMMARY:
Investing in parks, trails, and green infrastructure yields clear economic, health, and environmental returns, making communities more resilient and vibrant. Click HERE to read the full article.

Affordable Housing Financing: Local Challenges Met with Local Solutions
PARAGRAPH SUMMARY:
The United States faces a severe shortage of affordable housing, with millions of households unable to find homes within their means, prompting the need for complex, multi-level financing solutions. Federal programs like Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC), local housing trust funds, land banks, and public-private partnerships are essential tools, but they must be combined with regulatory reforms and innovative local policies to fill persistent funding gaps and increase supply. REALTORS® and local governments play a crucial role in advocating for policy changes, connecting stakeholders, and leveraging resources to create and preserve affordable housing for diverse communities. Click HERE to read the full article.

MINI SUMMARY:
Addressing the affordable housing crisis requires coordinated federal, state, and local efforts, creative financing tools, and strong advocacy to expand and sustain housing options for those most in need. Click HERE to read the full article.

The Potential of Adaptive Reuse
PARAGRAPH SUMMARY:
Adaptive reuse—converting existing buildings like schools, factories, and offices into new uses such as housing or community centers—requires complex financing strategies, including historic tax credits, public incentives, and creative lending solutions. Successful projects often combine federal, state, and local support, such as tax increment financing, revolving loan funds, and regulatory relief, to overcome challenges and revitalize communities with affordable housing and economic development. Cities like Denver and Washington, D.C. are leading the way by streamlining regulations and offering tax abatements to encourage office-to-residential conversions, demonstrating adaptive reuse's potential to address housing shortages and urban revitalization. Click HERE to read the full article.

MINI SUMMARY:
Adaptive reuse leverages creative financing, public incentives, and regulatory reforms to transform underused buildings into vibrant community assets and affordable housing solutions. Click HERE to read the full article.

A Balancing Act: How cities are balancing budgets in time of declining revenues
PARAGRAPH SUMMARY:
Cities across the United States are grappling with declining revenues and the end of federal pandemic relief, forcing them to make tough choices such as cutting services, raising taxes, or seeking creative efficiencies. Experts emphasize the importance of fiscal resilience, efficient land use, and strategic audits to identify cost-saving opportunities, while highlighting the need for redevelopment and infill to maximize existing infrastructure investments. Case studies from cities like Syracuse, Madison, Midland, and Memphis illustrate a range of responses, from service cuts and tax increases to innovative planning and partnerships, all aimed at maintaining quality of life and long-term fiscal health. Click HERE to read the full article.

MINI SUMMARY:
Amid shrinking revenues and limited federal aid, cities are balancing budgets through service cuts, tax hikes, and creative strategies that prioritize efficient land use and redevelopment for fiscal sustainability. Click HERE to read the full article.

REALTORS® Take Action: Helping With Smart Growth and Financial Strategies
PARAGRAPH SUMMARY:
The East Tennessee REALTORS® (ETR) is responding to rapid regional growth by developing a proactive educational course for municipal officials, focusing on smart growth and sustainable financial strategies. ETR advocates for holistic solutions to housing and infrastructure challenges, emphasizing approaches that avoid regressive policies like impact fees and instead promote development agreements and special assessment

districts. By leveraging an NAR grant, ETR aims to equip local governments—especially smaller municipalities—with practical tools and technical assistance to support growth without burdening taxpayers or homebuyers. Click HERE to read the full article.

MINI SUMMARY:
East Tennessee REALTORS® is creating an educational toolkit to help local governments manage growth and infrastructure needs sustainably, prioritizing solutions that support affordable housing and avoid increasing costs for residents. Click HERE to read the full article.