



Forest Grove City Council Newsletter

Special Report: National League of Cities 2025 Conference

From Councilor Donna Gustafson

📍 Washington, D.C. | March 8–12, 2025

🖨️ <https://donnagustafsonforcitycouncil.com>

Why I Attended

Representing Forest Grove at the 2025 National League of Cities (NLC) Congressional City Conference was a responsibility I approached with intention. As both a councilor and the president of the City Club, I serve in a unique position that connects policy to people. This dual role—often questioned—is not a conflict. It is a bridge. National League of Cities leaders and peers from across the country echoed this sentiment: local leadership is strongest when grounded in community and dual leadership roles can be a connection. In a time when even good intentions can be politicized, I'm reminded that whisper campaigns fade, but results speak for themselves. This newsletter shares what I learned, why it matters for Forest Grove, and how we move forward—together.

🏠 Housing That Works for Forest Grove

Sessions: Supporting Small-Scale Housing Development, America's Housing Comeback

- Tools like the NLC Housing Supply Accelerator and pre-approved building plans (used in Ohio) can streamline local development.
 - Small-scale housing (duplexes, ADUs, fourplexes) helps maintain neighborhood character while addressing affordability.
 - We could explore incentives for using local contractors and track permitting timelines to ensure transparency.
 - Partnerships with nonprofits and local programs (like Viking House) build equity and community.
- Affordable, local, and smart housing solutions help retain our talent, support seniors, and keep Forest Grove livable for all.

🛒 Retail & Economic Resilience

Session: Economic Impact of Retail & Restaurant Investment

- Retail is more than commerce—it's community. It brings jobs, energy, and local revenue.
 - NLC and Retail Strategies provide playbooks to help cities like ours recruit and retain businesses.
 - Some cities implement an internet tax to support local infrastructure—a model worth exploring.
- Investing in local retail supports both fiscal health and community life, without relying solely on residential growth.



Leading with Transparency & Innovation

Session: Governing for Transformation, Engagement & Collaboration

- Sherwood, Oregon shared successful strategies: public broadband phased rollouts, monthly lobbyist check-ins, and franchise fee structures.
 - Empowering all council members to add agenda items promotes fairness.
 - Budget flexibility can allow us to shift resources quickly in response to need.
- Good governance builds trust—across party lines and across the community.

Safe Communities, Real Solutions

Session: Safe Communities: A 360-Degree Perspective

- Safety includes transportation, housing, mental health, and emergency response.
 - Some cities use smart traffic systems and small response vehicles to get help to people faster.
 - Long-term safety includes addressing root causes through equity and prevention.
- Safety is not a one-size-fits-all issue. These innovative approaches can serve Forest Grove holistically.

Civic Voice & Inclusion

Conversations & Takeaways

- Community polling tools can help residents shape city decisions.
 - Outreach efforts must reflect our whole community—including Latino and Native neighbors.
 - A small local idea: a downtown banner that says “Revitalization Powered by the City Club of Forest Grove.”
- True community means everyone is heard—and has the chance to lead.

Final Word

I promised to make this trip count—and I did. The solutions I’m bringing home aren’t red or blue—they’re Forest Grove solutions. Every city has challenges. The ones that thrive are the ones willing to listen, adapt, and lead.

Thank you for the honor of serving as your councilor and City Club president. Let’s keep building bridges.

With appreciation,

Donna Gustafson
Councilor, Forest Grove City Council
President, City Club of Forest Grove

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