

Milwaukee County Intergovernmental Cooperation Council, TMJ4, UW-Milwaukee: Announce statewide gubernatorial town hall debate

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The 19 mayors and village presidents of the Milwaukee County Intergovernmental Cooperation Council (ICC), in partnership with TMJ4 and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM), today announced plans to host a statewide Town Hall-style debate for candidates for Governor of Wisconsin in early October, ahead of the November general election.

This unprecedented collaboration brings together municipal leadership, statewide journalism, and higher education to elevate the issues that matter most to Wisconsin communities. The ICC represents 19 cities and villages in Milwaukee County, but the priorities of its mayors and village presidents—public safety, infrastructure, economic development, local government finance, housing, and education—are shared by municipalities in every corner of the state.

TMJ4, part of a statewide media network with reporters embedded in counties across much of Wisconsin, will provide broad access to voters statewide. UWM, as a leading public access and research university serving students from across Wisconsin, will host and support the forum, underscoring the importance of civic engagement and informed participation in our democracy. This event further demonstrates UWM's commitment to community engagement.

The debate will be conducted in a Town Hall format. TMJ4 Chief Political Reporter

Charles Benson, who is widely respected in Wisconsin journalism, will serve as the debate moderator. Questions will be organized by issue area and posed by representatives from counties across Wisconsin, ensuring that voices from urban, suburban, and rural communities alike are reflected. The goal is to provide voters with clear, substantive responses from candidates on the challenges facing local governments and the residents they serve.

The Republican and Democratic nominees for Governor will be invited to participate. In addition, any independent candidate who is polling at or above 15 percent statewide in the Marquette Law School Poll or other established nonpartisan pollster by September 1, 2026 will also be offered a place on the Town Hall stage.

“This partnership reflects the understanding that strong local government is foundational to a strong Wisconsin,” Hales Corners Village President Dan Besson said, on behalf of the ICC. He added, “By bringing together municipal leaders, trusted journalists, and a major public university, we are creating a forum focused squarely on the real-world issues affecting communities across our state.”

The Milwaukee County Intergovernmental Cooperation Council (ICC) was founded in 1968 as a formal body created under Wisconsin Statute 66.0301, comprising the leaders of all 19 municipalities in Milwaukee County. Established to foster regional cooperation, it meets monthly to share best practices, save taxpayer money through shared services, and advocate for common interests regarding state and federal law.

Additional details regarding debate details, broadcast information, and ticket availability will be announced in the coming months. The Town Hall style debate will be held October 8, 2026 at 6 PM at the Zelazo Center on the UWM campus. Logistics will be finalized once the August primaries have selected nominees for both parties.