



UPTOWN

a publication of the municipal association of south carolina



Hometown Legislative Action Day Tuesday, February 6, 2018



Hometown Legislative Action Day targets opioid abuse

“There wasn’t a crack problem until there was a crack supply.” That somber statement led off a State Law Enforcement Division official’s presentation at the Municipal Association’s fall forum for city managers and administrators. The official, Frank O’Neal, spent 30 years working in the state agency’s narcotics enforcement unit.

“Price, availability and tolerance have increased prescription drug use,” he said.

Statistics from the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control illustrate South Carolina’s growing epidemic.

- In 2016, 550 people died from a drug overdose with prescription opioid drugs listed on the death certificate, up 7 percent from 2015 and up 18 percent from 2014.
- Fatal overdoses involving heroin increased by 67 percent from 2014 to 2015.

- In 2015, the number of deaths from heroin and opioid overdoses in South Carolina surpassed the number of homicides.
- In 2016, more than 5 million opioid prescriptions were dispensed statewide. South Carolina has a total population of 4.9 million people.

O’Neal’s presentation highlighted many of the issues law enforcement faces when working to combat this epidemic:

- Users take advantage of “pizza style” delivery of heroin, in which a buyer calls a dealer, and the drug is dispatched for delivery as easily as ordering a pizza.
- It’s impossible for law enforcement and policy makers to stay on top of all the variations of new drugs flooding the market.
- Gathering data about where the drug incidents are occurring is critical because law enforcement can’t deploy resources

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President: **Mayor Elise Partin**
Cayce

Executive Director: **Wayne George**
wgeorge@masc.sc

Managing Editor: **Reba Campbell**
rcampbell@masc.sc

Editor: **Sarita Chourey**
schourey@masc.sc

Associate Editor: **Meredith Houck**
mhouck@masc.sc

Editorial Assistant: **Ashleigh Hair**
ahair@masc.sc

Contributing Writers:
**Eric Budds, Urica Floyd
and Scott Slatton**



Wayne George to serve as executive director

The board of the Municipal Association of South Carolina has selected Wayne George to be the sixth executive director of the organization.

George is the former mayor of the City of Mullins where he also served on council and was the Municipal Association board president in 1996. He was on the staff of the Municipal Association for six years and later served in the S.C. House of Representatives for two terms.

“I am extremely excited by the opportunity to lead the Municipal Association of SC. It is humbling to be selected by the board of directors. The Association has such a great reputation providing excellent education, advocacy and programs for its members,” said George.

“In cities and towns, you will find some of the strongest leaders. Municipal workers and elected officials are the backbone of our communities, and we look forward to working with them to improve the quality of life for all citizens of our state. In addition, you can expect us to build and grow our partnership with state and national elected officials.”

George succeeds Miriam Hair, who announced her retirement in June, as the executive director of the Association. Hair retired at the end of 2017 with more than 32 years with the organization, the last nine as executive director.

In June, then-Board President Bill Young, mayor of Walterboro, appointed a search committee consisting of the board's executive committee, including Cayce Mayor Elise Partin, Florence Councilmember Octavia Williams-Blake, Mauldin Mayor Dennis Raines and Isle of Palms Mayor Dick Cronin; two past board presidents, Anderson Mayor Terence Roberts and Sumter Mayor Joe McElveen; and Orangeburg City Administrator John Yow, who serves on the Association's board.

“The search committee was fortunate to have a pool of very qualified candidates. It was important that the Association continue the established tradition of strong leadership in the executive director's position,” said Yow.

“Wayne George's vast experience, proven track record and leadership skills will mesh well with the talented staff at the Association.”

George began his new role on January 2.

“Please join us in welcoming Wayne back to the Association in his new role as the executive director,” said Board President and Mayor of Cayce Elise Partin. “His dedication to the strength of local government, which increases the strength of our state, will further the positive difference the Association already makes.”



NEWS BRIEFS

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without knowing exactly where the problems are.

- This is a lucrative business. \$6,000 - \$7,000 worth of heroin can yield \$80,000 when sold.
- Ninety-two percent of heroin users first used marijuana.
- Fifty-seven percent of people who use heroin first used opioids.
- Eighty percent of new heroin abusers were prescription drug users.
- Availability of heroin is increasing because of a reliable low-cost supply coming from Mexico.

“The No.1 thing we can do to combat this epidemic is educate our kids,” O’Neal stressed at the end of his presentation. “If we are quiet, this epidemic won’t go away.”

One tool law enforcement is using to combat this growing problem is the opioid antidote called naloxone (the generic name for NARCAN®). Naloxone almost immediately halts the effects of an overdose in progress.

DHEC’s Bureau of Emergency Medical Services has regulated and monitored paramedic usage of naloxone since the 1970s. The bureau recently authorized first responders to carry and use naloxone.

In 2015, emergency personnel in South Carolina administered naloxone

4,600 times. That number increased 39 percent in 2016.

After the South Carolina Overdose Prevention Act became law in 2015, DHEC, in collaboration with the Fifth Circuit Solicitor’s Office and the S.C. Department of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Services, created the Law Enforcement Officer Naloxone program. The program’s goal is to provide comprehensive training to law enforcement agencies that focuses on identification, treatment and reporting of overdoses attributed to opioids. It is important to train law enforcement officers because they are frequently the first emergency responders to arrive on the scene when response time is critical to saving lives.

Learn more about what South Carolina is doing to combat the opioid epidemic on Tuesday, February 6, at 3:15 p.m., at the Municipal Association’s 2018 Hometown Legislative Action Day.

The preregistration deadline for HLAD on February 6 and Municipal Elected Officials Institute on February 7 is Tuesday, January 23. For more information, visit www.masc.sc (keyword: HLAD).

The deadline to make hotel reservations at the Columbia Marriott is January 10. Call 1.800.593.6465 or 803.771.7000 and ask for the Municipal Association of SC HLAD rate of \$153 plus taxes.

David Seifert, chief financial officer for the **City of Greer**, received this year’s Professional Achievement Award from the SC Municipal Finance Officers, Clerks and Treasurers Association.

The American Planning Association named **Uptown Greenwood** one of 15 Great Places in America, an honor recognizing “exemplary planning that has resulted in stronger, healthier and more just communities.”

The **Charleston Fire Department** earned a favorable rating on its annual compliance report from the Center for Public Safety Excellence, affirming its status as an internationally accredited fire department. It is one of 22 departments in the country to be accredited and rated ISO Class 1.

The cities of **Charleston** and **Greenville** took the No. 1 and No. 3 spot, respectively, in Condé Nast Traveler’s 2017 Readers’ Choice Awards survey, “The Best Small Cities in the U.S.”

Deadline to enter Achievement Awards is February 14

The Municipal Association of South Carolina’s Achievement Awards program recognizes excellence in local government programs, shares ideas among peers, and reminds residents and businesses of the value they derive from their city or town.

The awards entry form is available at www.masc.sc. The submission deadline for the 2018 awards program is February 14. The city-designated contact person for each entry will

receive a receipt-confirmation email by February 21.

Municipalities with a population of 20,000 or less can choose to compete in either a population or subject category. Municipalities with a population greater than 20,000 may only compete in one of the five subject categories.

As part of the competition, cities participating in the subject categories must make an oral presentation to the judges on March 5 or 6 in Columbia

at the Municipal Association’s office. Association staff will assign presentation times after receiving all entries.

The Association will recognize award winners at the Annual Meeting Awards Breakfast held in Hilton Head on July 21, 2018.

For more information about the 2018 Achievement Awards, visit www.masc.sc (keyword: achievement awards) or contact Meredith Houck at 803.933.1215 or mhouck@masc.sc.



Lessons from Charlottesville: **PUBLIC PROTESTS**

Adapted from an article by Elise F. Crosby, president, South Carolina Municipal Attorneys Association, city attorney, City of Georgetown, and Thomas E. Ellenburg, city attorney, City of Myrtle Beach.

If local governments prepare, plan and train, perhaps we can avoid another Charlottesville.

In the wake of the deadly protests in Charlottesville, Virginia — in which a white supremacist allegedly drove his car into the crowd and killed a counter protester— does your town have the tools to manage unrest? Myrtle Beach, Georgetown and Greenville are among cities that have considered or are poised to consider amendments to special events policies and related city ordinances.

Cities have the duty to secure freedom of speech and protect public safety. Neither happened in Charlottesville.

The right to protest: fundamental, not absolute

People have the right peaceably to assemble. But First Amendment rights are not absolute, and government can act when there is a clear and present danger of riot, interference with traffic, or other immediate threat to public peace. State and local criminal codes are not suspended because the crime occurs during a protest. Police are

not required to turn a blind eye to crimes committed.

The city's two duties

The Duty to Protect Free Speech — Cities should keep the focus on public property. One cannot claim a First Amendment right to protest on private property belonging to someone else, even if generally open to the public, like a shopping center. The traditional public forum includes places historically associated with free expression, such as streets, sidewalks and parks. Protests can be peaceful and popular or hateful and loathsome.

The Duty to Protect Public Safety — What might be a reasonable restriction on free speech in the interest of public safety? A restrictive ordinance must be narrowly tailored to time, place and manner. It will be subject to strict judicial scrutiny to ensure it is no broader than necessary to serve the city's compelling interest and does not end up restricting speech based on content.

Collision-avoidance: a permit ordinance that works

All South Carolina towns canvassed by these authors have permit requirements for parades, assemblies or other special events. The state Supreme Court has found parades

and pickets may be subject to reasonable nondiscriminatory permit requirements related to traffic control and public convenience. Protected: distributing leaflets on sidewalks. Not protected: blocking pedestrians or harassing people. This may be regulated under the city's duty to protect the public.

Type of event

Cities cannot base ordinances on speech content, but municipal ordinances have historically been reasonably tied to the type of event. Specificity is usually helpful, but cities must be careful not to make decisions based on content.

Crowd size

When one person or a small group protests in a park or on a sidewalk in a way that does not burden anyone else, the First Amendment probably bars enforcement of a permit requirement. On the other hand, cities can require a permit for a preplanned assembly on public property that will have an impact.

Time for application

A due date on an application for a protest or assembly is a governmental time restraint on free speech that must be narrowly tailored to a compelling governmental need, such as lining up police protection.

Fees

The cities canvassed all charge application fees for special event permits. There are limits on financial burdens a town can impose on the exercise of First Amendment rights. Charges cannot exceed the actual cost of the public safety needs to accommodate the speech, and the city cannot increase the charge to include services anticipated to control opponents (“heckler’s veto”).

Counter protests

When one group assembles to protest the message of another, the First Amendment protects both. Police must not silence either but instead function in the dual role of protecting the freedoms and safety of both groups, as well as the public. Police cannot arrest a protester for provoking a hostile audience reaction, without some other crime.

Distance

Strategies should include separating opposing groups. But opponents must be allowed to protest in the same general vicinity. Cities can pre-plan for hostile-party separation via ordinance and training. Cities considering amendments to their ordinance will need to consider resource availability and street layout, so the distance is reasonably related to identifiable safety interests.

Traffic flow

The public has a right to freedom of movement that police must protect. This includes pedestrian and vehicle traffic. A city is well within its rights to tailor a special events policy to minimize disruption for a road race or festival. Protesters have the same freedom as anyone else to use a sidewalk, such as pickets at a factory, business or politician’s office.

Caution light: illegal speech

The Supreme Court has carved out three classes of speech that may be criminalized. “Hate speech” is not one of those. Unprotected speech falls into three categories: incitement, true threats and fighting words, which are uttered face to face to provoke violence. Cities can — and should — regulate these.

To read the full article by Crosby and Ellenburg, visit masc.sc (keyword: protests).



Happy New Year! (HOW'S YOUR BUDGET?)

For cities and towns that begin their fiscal year on July 1, January marks the midpoint of their budget year. That means January is the right time to conduct a thorough budget review.

A mid-fiscal year review alerts city officials of any budget adjustments:

- Council gets the chance to assess the accuracy of the revenue projections and expenditure estimates that were included in the budget.
- Officials are able to evaluate if adequate resources are provided in the budget to reach the council’s goals.
- Council has the opportunity to make adjustments to the budget if needed.

In most cases, council should expect that half (or less than half) of budgeted regular and fixed expenditures have been made at the midpoint. The same for regularly collected revenue, such as utility payments and hospitality taxes. Expect revenues for property taxes, business license taxes and other major sources of revenue to be low at midyear, because payments are due in the third and fourth quarter of a fiscal year that begins on July 1.

The midpoint of the fiscal year typically provides council with enough

data to identify trends that may call for adjustments. For example, a change in the cost of energy or the price of fuel for one month may not reveal a trend. But six months of increases or decreases may help inform budget modifications.

A midyear budget review also gives council a chance to evaluate the city’s finances. Is the budget allowing the city to reach its goals? Can those goals still be met by the year’s end?

What if the midyear review signals the need for spending changes?

Council must adopt a revised budget ordinance in order to amend the annual budget. That ordinance must be read no less than twice, with each reading separated by at least six days. If a city has established a procedure for adopting ordinances that requires additional readings, then council should follow this procedure.

Council should conduct a public hearing on the revised budget ordinance before adoption. The city should advertise the hearing the same way that notice was provided for the budget public hearing, as required by S.C. Code of Law Section 6-1-80.



Electric linemen from the City of Rock Hill, one of the state's 21 "electric cities" belonging to the South Carolina Association of Municipal Power Systems, assisted linemen in Florida after receiving help in South Carolina from other utilities' linemen after Hurricane Matthew in 2016. Photos: Mike Jolly.

SCAMPS members return the favor

South Carolinians dodged significant damage from Hurricane Irma in September. Georgia and Florida were not as lucky.

That meant that members of the South Carolina Association of Municipal Power Systems had the opportunity to return the favor of mutual aid assistance that they received a year earlier in the aftermath of Hurricane Matthew. Mutual aid is the rapid and reliable mobilizing of manpower, equipment and materials by unaffected municipal electric utilities to help affected utilities recover from the impacts of severe weather events. In short, mutual aid is an essential component of a disaster recovery plan.

"The DPU felt fortunate to be able to assist the citizens of the state of Florida in their hour of need after Hurricane Irma," said Wade Holmes electric division director of the Orangeburg Department of

Public Utilities. "Our city sustained heavy damage during Hurricane Matthew in 2016. Were it not for the dedicated professionals from the state of Florida and other mutual aid participants, our customers would have sustained significantly longer outages. The opportunity to return the favor means a lot to team DPU and our line workers."

Within days of Irma's landfall, SCAMPS quickly organized and sent a mutual aid response consisting of approximately 66 electric utility employees and equipment to Georgia and Florida.

The bulk of the team, approximately 59 employees, responded to assist the Jacksonville (Florida) Energy Authority restore power in the wake of hurricane-force winds and severe storm surge.

The crews in Florida endured long work hours, difficult working conditions

and temporary housing for approximately one week while helping affected utilities. The effort of the SCAMPS crews did not go unappreciated.

"Thanks to your guy's (sic) hard work, my family has power again in Jacksonville. Thank you so much," Florida resident Will Lomax tweeted on September 15. The balance of the SCAMPS team traveled to central Georgia assisting the cities of Sandersville and Conyers in repairing their systems.

As a benefit for its members, SCAMPS coordinates an in-state mutual aid assistance network made up of its 21 municipal electric utilities. SCAMPS also participates as a member of the South-eastern States Compact and a national mutual aid program, coordinated by the American Public Power Association, to ensure its readiness to recover from natural disasters.

The City of Rock Hill's electric linemen joined other members of SCAMPS in the mutual aid effort in Jacksonville, Florida, after Hurricane Irma in September. Photo: Mike Jolly.

Severe weather the past few years has triggered an unusually high number of mutual aid activations.

In October 2016, Hurricane Matthew severely damaged the utility systems of several SCAMPS members, resulting in assistance from approximately 140 employees of in-state and out-of-state public power utilities. The out-of-state assistance included crews from Alabama, Florida, North Carolina and Nebraska. Much to the relief of the customers of impacted utilities, the additional resources allowed customers to have their power restored in less than a week's time.

Mutual aid, in reality, is all about neighboring utilities helping each other in time of need and understanding the adage that "the person who receives the most favors is the one who knows how to return them."



Test yourself monthly quiz

True or False: The City of Sumter was the first municipality in the United States to adopt the council-manager form of government.



Answer: True

The City of Sumter adopted the council-manager form in 1912 before any other local governing bodies. The form was born out of the U.S. progressive reform movement at the turn of the 20th century.

The council-manager form of government is one of three forms of municipal

government. Under this form, the mayor and council members are forbidden by law from interfering with the operation of the departments, offices and agencies under the direction of the manager. The other two are the mayor-council form (strong mayor) and the council form (weak mayor). The major difference is where the executive and administrative powers and responsibilities of the local government are vested. The legislative function remains with the council under all three forms of municipal government. About 12 percent of South Carolina cities and towns operate under the council-manager form, while most use the mayor-council form of government.

Want to learn more? The Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government offers in-person and online courses. Elected officials who complete all of the required coursework graduate from the institute and are eligible to participate in the Advanced Institute. The next in-person sessions, to be held February 7, will be Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government Sessions A and B and Advanced Institute. The Advanced MEO Institute courses offered will be "Municipal Utility Policy and Administration" and "Advanced Advocacy and Intergovernmental Relations." For more information, visit www.masc.sc (keyword: MEO).



The first Municipal Elected Officials Institute class graduated in 1988.

Thirty years of MEO Institute graduates

It was July of 1988 — Michael Jackson’s “Dirty Diana” was the No. 1 song. George H. W. Bush was about to become president. Women’s blazers came with shoulder pads. And that year, the Tigers beat the Gamecocks 29 – 10.

Also notable at the time? The Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government graduated its first class with 47 mayors and councilmembers.

In 2018, the Association will be celebrating 30 years of MEO Institute graduates at both Hometown Legislative Action Day on February 6 and at the Annual Meeting in July. In January of 1986 — 32 years ago — the Association launched the MEO Institute using satellite technology that was state of the art at the time to provide newly elected officials with training.

“There is a great need to get training to newly elected officials as soon as possible

after their election,” said Howard Duvall, the Association’s executive director at the time.

In 1986, the training was designed for elected officials to complete their training in three years. Currently, elected officials may complete their training in only one year.

Over the past 32 years, training elected officials has evolved to not only include the option to complete the training in one year but also to include online classes. Plus, elected officials can get continuing education through the Advanced MEO Institute.

“It has evolved over the years because it has been responsive to current issues in the local communities,” said Ray Anderson, a class of 1990 MEO Institute graduate and former councilmember who now serves as special assistant to the mayor in North Charleston.

“Any information that you can provide to newly elected officials is important so that they understand what their role is in their government,” he said.

The next opportunity for elected officials to participate in MEO Institute training will be at the Association’s winter meeting in February. On February 7, the day after Hometown Legislative Action Day, elected officials can participate in Sessions A or B or in one of the two Advanced Institute courses to be offered. Session A is open to all elected officials; Session B is limited to elected officials who have already completed Session A. The Advanced Institute is available only to graduates of the Elected Officials Institute.

Elected officials should refer to their institute transcript to determine which course they are eligible to take. Transcripts are available at www.masc.sc (keyword: MEOI).

The city's role in permitting a new building

Several bills were introduced in the General Assembly in 2017 that would affect building, zoning and business licensing in cities. Those bills will continue through the legislative process in 2018. Here's a look at the role cities play in permitting a new building and the points in the process where legislation might affect it.

PLAN REVIEW

- Zoning compliance: Is the proposed use allowed in that part of the city? Does it comply with the city's appearance standards?
- Site compliance: Will the building physically fit on the site? Does it comply with flood, environmental and traffic requirements?
- Engineering compliance: Have certified professionals designed it and properly sealed their design?
- Architectural: Does it meet the requirements for design and life safety?

S346 and H4162 allow cities to offer incentives to developers to include affordable housing within their developments.

H3649 clarifies when an engineer or architect's seal is required on building plans.

BUSINESS LICENSE

- General/subcontractors: Are contractors and other companies involved licensed to do business in the city?

H3650 and H3651 make changes to the way cities collect business license taxes.

PERMITTING

Each of these elements must be permitted and inspected during construction:

- Building/residential code
- Electrical code
- Fire code
- Plumbing code
- Mechanical code
- Fuel/gas code
- Energy code

S579 changes the process for updating building codes, including lengthening the code review cycle and restricting the S.C. Building Code Council's options when considering changes to building codes.

PERMITS MAY BE NEEDED:

- Erosion control
- Signage
- Flood

INSPECTIONS

- Inspections are conducted to ensure compliance with state and local laws.
- All of the above, if applicable



Pick the right spokesperson — and other tips

Want to know a secret? Members of the media and the government employees who work with them typically have a good relationship.

That was one insight that came out of a panel discussion by veteran reporter John Monk, who writes for *The State* newspaper; Lexington County Sheriff's Office Public Information Officer Adam Myrick; and City of North Charleston Public Relations Director Ryan Johnson.

About that 'no comment'

Just don't do it.

Johnson said it's appropriate to take the reporter's question and tell him you'll

get back to him with an answer as soon as you can.

"When the TV camera is staring you in the face, what's going to make it on TV is going to be a 30-second or 15-second clip," said Johnson. "I guarantee they're not to going air the piece where you say, 'We'll get back to you later.'"

He called the "no comment" issue "a false elephant in the room," and that he's never felt the need to say it.

"If you're the one who's designated to talk to reporters, you're usually the most knowledgeable one," he said. "And you do have the information, and you do have comments."

Myrick advised against even uttering the words "no comment," since they might lead a reporter to think an agency is hiding something. He suggested going beyond "no comment" to avoid even saying the word "comment." He said it's best to try to be transparent. But if the topic of press inquiries is one that pertains to a lawsuit, for example, he said it's better for an agency spokesperson to simply say the agency's practice is not to "discuss" pending litigation, if that's the case.

As for Monk, he also saw no useful purpose in the words "no comment."

"You can serve yourself better in a lot of unfolding situations like crises, fires or

Reporters interview Capt. Adam Myrick, public information officer for the Lexington County Sheriff's Department. Photo: Colby Gallagher, LCSD.

hostages, by saying ‘We’ve got an evolving situation here,’” said Monk.

“And then you say anything that can help the public because you’re not just speaking to a reporter. You’re speaking to 10,000 people or 100,000 people, or as in Houston (where catastrophic flooding occurred in August due to Hurricane Harvey), maybe millions of people. So you say, ‘We’ve got an evolving situation, and what can help the public is this: They should stay away from the northern part of Houston. It’s all under water.’ Anything nuts and bolts you can say.”

As for reporters who call an agency seeking a comment on a lawsuit the agency is facing, Monk said the media has an obligation to make contact if they are publishing an article about it.

How to choose a spokesperson

A poor agency spokesperson can miss an opportunity to get critical information to the public. The wrong person fielding press inquiries can also create a debacle that fuels the public’s fears and unrest — sometimes even distracting from the event or topic with his own unprofessionalism.

When a spokesperson is poorly trained, the facts of the situation can become murky, the agency’s control of events can slip, and the agency’s image in the public’s opinion can suffer.

“Get someone who can fully be that spokesperson for the duration of the event,” said Myrick. “That spokesperson should be very much involved in everything that’s developing in terms of the event.”

He said the spokesperson should be included in executive-level meetings to stay fully abreast of developments.

“They can’t be just briefed 15 minutes before they are to go out and step in front of the cameras or step in front of their own camera for purposes of a social



media video that you’re producing,” said Myrick. “The chief is going to have to be the chief throughout the event,” he added. “Other members of the leadership team, they’re going to have to be doing what they do.”

About that relationship

Myrick and Johnson both noted that increasingly it is young people who are filling the ranks of the news media, especially in TV stations.

He said 20 years ago, a TV reporter would work up to a job in the Columbia media market as the reporter’s third or fourth job.

“Now it’s stop 1,” said Myrick. “People are being hired right out of college.”

That means an agency may develop a relationship with a reporter that ends after only two years, when the reporter moves away for a new job. Johnson recommended that government officials who work with the media should form a trusting relationship with a TV station’s assignment editor, who, in contrast to a reporter, may stay in the

post for years and will have greater editorial authority to determine which segments air.

What if ... ?

Suppose there is an accident. A garbage truck strikes a child. What do you do if a TV station crew arrives at the scene and puts the garbage truck driver on camera, ambushing the driver in an interview?

“A good reporter is going to try to talk to anybody,” said Monk.

“But a good reporter will also know the garbage truck driver is not going to be the sole source of the story. ... Theoretically, a responsible reporter will go talk to more people and go to the officials and then put it all together. I’m very careful with what people tell me.”

The panel discussion was part of Risk Management Services’ Crisis Communications Workshop, held last fall in Columbia. More than 130 officials from RMS member cities attended. For more information and to learn about upcoming RMS training, contact Venyke Harley at vharley@masc.sc or 803.933.1210.



A steady voice in horror's aftermath



Communications

On a mid-December day in 2012, reporters were calling Paul Vance with increasingly urgent, specific questions about a possible school shooting.

Vance, then a lieutenant and chief public information officer for the Connecticut State Police, checked his agency sources, was told there was no knowledge of an incident and relayed it to the reporters. A few calls later, however, his agency would inform him that there was an active shooter at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut. That day, the world would learn that a gunman had murdered 20 school children and six educators. Media from as far away as Japan would arrive in the town of 28,000.

Vance, the official designated spokesman for the tragedy, was the only one authorized to speak about it in the immediate aftermath. He recently shared

his experiences and lessons during a joint training session of the Municipal Association and the Public Relations Society of America's South Carolina chapter.

These are among the lessons he shared:

Keep a steady demeanor

As a public official, be aware that your facial expression can be photographed or filmed at any moment during or after a public event and then published out of context. That means joking, laughing and smiling at the site of the tragedy and public events — even just three minutes out of a 14-hour day of grimness — may be captured and disseminated, sending a damaging message.

During press conferences, Vance emphasized “consistency, timeliness and accuracy” as his goals. “You don’t want to change any voice inflection or descriptive adjectives or anything to cause the media or the press to try to get a different (sound) bite on the situation,” he said.

Work with the media

Establish a respectful, professional relationship with reporters, and work proactively to do so before any tragedy occurs.

“I can’t stress how important that was,” said Vance, who retired in 2017 after serving in the Connecticut State Police for 42 years. “Did I love them? No, I didn’t. Did I make sure I got along with them all? Yes. Did I make sure I treated them all equally? Always.”

If there has been a mass-casualty event, set rules to shield the families

Vance said all 26 victims’ families said that they did not want to be interviewed by the media, so he conveyed their wishes to the reporters.

“We thought we’d have to keep the press away. The press really didn’t bother (families),” said Vance, adding that there was only one notable exception

— a photographer went against Vance’s instructions and approached a house where one child had been killed and the child’s sibling had survived.

Manage the elected officials

Organize the politicians. To make the most efficient use of time, let them know it’s unnecessary for each elected official to step to the podium to echo the previous one’s sentiments. Vance arranged the elected officials in a semicircle for a public show of support, while the governor and the town’s first selectman, the town’s chief executive official, addressed the public.

“It made no sense for every single one of them to say the same thing,” said Vance. “They were appreciative.”

Expect a curveball

In Newtown, that curveball was a presidential visit. President Barack Obama was coming to Newtown to comfort the victims’ families and support the first responders.

“To meet them was the most important thing, and I saw the man hugging little kids, sitting on the floor with little kids, talking to families and spending as much time as they wanted to spend with the president of the United States,” said Vance.

But the visit from the commander in chief created new security and communication concerns, said Vance. Newtown already had investigators, detectives and state troopers at the scene who were

working around the clock. Officials then had to coordinate with the Secret Service, starting with securely transporting the president to Newton from the Hartford airport 40 minutes away.

But despite the extra safety concerns, securing highway exits and bridges and managing the already large media presence that had gathered in the small city, Vance said officials smoothly incorporated the presidential visit into the overall public response to the massacre.

Emphasizing that he was making no statement on politics, Vance said of President Obama: “I respect the man immensely for what he did to benefit those families.”

Connect with the Association in 2018

Stay in the loop

There are lots of ways for municipal staff and elected officials to stay connected and informed.

- **City Connect Blog** — The weekly blog gives a snapshot of activity in the S.C. Legislature and courts, city success stories, and commentary from guest bloggers.
- **From the Dome to Your Home** — Elected officials and city staff receive this legislative report every Friday during the legislative session. It recaps the week’s activity on bills affecting cities and towns, suggests actions for local officials and previews the upcoming week.
- **Daily News** — This morning email available to local officials provides links to relevant news articles about municipal government.
- **The Uplift** (New in 2018) — This collection of news articles is emailed every Wednesday to *Daily News* subscribers in place of Wednesday’s edition of the

Daily News email. *The Uplift* showcases South Carolina cities and towns at their best. *The Uplift* is available to the public by subscription at www.masc.com (keyword: uplift).

- **Uptown Update** — Local elected leaders and city staff receive this weekly e-newsletter with training opportunities, a link to the most recent edition of *From the Dome to Your Home* and the *City Connect* blog post, and other timely information.

Manage subscriptions

Elected officials and city staff choose the subscriptions most useful to them by accessing their profile in the Association’s database.

- From the Association’s website, click on the Member Login button in the upper right corner.
- Those without a profile will see directions on the login screen to gain access. Once in their profile, individuals can update their title and contact

information, indicate their preferred mailing address and phone number, and provide their email address and social media account names (the Association never sells or shares email addresses).

- From the My Profile section, users can manage subscriptions to all e-newsletters and mobile alerts.
- All elected officials and city staff with certain designated roles automatically receive emails containing the monthly *Uptown*, weekly *Uptown Update* and *From the Dome to Your Home*. Other online resources from the Municipal Association are available free by subscription.

Let’s get social

Follow the Association on Twitter at @MuniAssnSc and Facebook at @MuniAssnSC.CitiesMeanBusiness. To keep up with the Association’s work in the S.C. State House, follow the legislative team — @TigerMuniSC, @MelissaMuniSC and @ScottMuniSC.



Facts above the fray

“Don’t feed the trolls” goes the conventional advice. But not every critic is a troll determined to provoke and distract. What about residents on Facebook who genuinely want to communicate or reporters who must pose pointed questions to city officials?

Responding constructively is part of the privilege of serving the public. But sometimes that public criticism or speculation — whether posted on social media or presented during a city council meeting — isn’t grounded in facts. What then?

In the City of North Charleston, city staff sometimes has a public social media exchange with someone who’s looking to debate.

“I’ve gone back and forth if it’s needed,” said Ryan Johnson, the city’s public relations/economic development director. But it’s important to stay true to the goal of setting the public record straight instead of trying to best a particular individual.

“On the internet, you never change anyone’s mind. You can go post something on Facebook now, and you’ll have the same people disagree with it until the cows come home,” Johnson said during a recent Risk Management Service training event. “But I think you should address

it with accurate information, and other people will see it for what it is.”

The same goes for people who rise to speak during the public comment period of a North Charleston City Council meeting — sometimes toting graphs, percentages and unverified data.

“Nobody in this day and age is going to go fact check it if you’re just some guy giving a public comment,” said Johnson.

Well, nobody, that is, except the city.

“We’ve fact checked people giving public comments either at the next meeting or while they’re on the podium,” he said. Typically a staff member then gives the correct information instead of an elected official, whose comments may be perceived as political.

The debate climate is different at the Orangeburg Department of Public Utilities, where residents often defend the department on its own Facebook page to correct misinformation or address criticism posted by others.

“While there are those customers whose frustration sometimes get the best of them in the form of negative social media posts, DPU has found that our customers can be our best defenders,” said Randy Ethers, key accounts manager for the Orangeburg DPU.

Besides, he said, “We find that a protracted back and forth only serves to give a perceived credibility to the individual who is being negative.”

Preventing false information from spreading is also crucial after a tragedy.

For Paul Vance, who served as the official spokesperson after the mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012, rumor control helped protect the innocent, kept the public informed and preserved efforts to build a criminal case.

“The only way I know how to control it is by letting questions be asked,” said Vance during a joint training event put on by the Municipal Association and the Public Relations Society of America last fall. He recently retired from the Connecticut State Police.

“I needed to know what they (reporters) were looking at, what they were searching for, so I could do some rumor control,” he said.

During one press conference, a reporter raised his hand to ask Vance to confirm the name of the gunman.

“He thought he had the name of the shooter,” said Vance. The reporter announced the shooter’s brother’s name.

“I stopped him in his tracks,” he recalled.



The elected official's easy guide to Facebook

By Eva Guidarini, Facebook outreach associate

Across the country, residents turn to social media to find, follow and connect with their elected officials. At the same time, local government officials use the internet to reach and engage with residents. Providing a platform that enables direct interactions between governments and residents is an important part of Facebook's mission to bring the world closer together.

Here are 10 tools, tips, and best practices to help local government officials connect with constituents on Facebook.

1. Create an official Facebook page

Go to facebook.com/pages/create and choose your category. Select "Government Official" for a government page; select "Politician" for a campaign page. If you already have a page, make sure it is in the right category.

2. Establish your identity

Make sure you have a great profile photo and cover photo. Give your Page a custom URL. Make sure the name of your page is either just your name ("Jane Doe" if a "Politician") or includes your title ("City Councilwoman Jane Doe" if a "Government Official").

3. Add the office you hold

Help constituents find you by entering in the office you hold. From a desktop computer, visit your Page; click About;

scroll down and select "current office" and enter the appropriate information.

4. Secure your accounts with two-factor authentication

Make sure everybody who can manage your page turns on two-factor authentication for their account. This will keep their Facebook presence — and your page — more secure.

5. Start building your fan base

Suggest your page to your email contacts, put your custom URL on business cards and in emails, and add social plugins to your website.

6. Find your constituents

Facebook makes it easier than ever to reach the right people with the information they need. Using Facebook ads, you can reach people who live in a specific zip code or have signed up for your email list. Make sure the people most likely to attend your events, engage with your posts, and watch your videos know what you're up to.

7. Be yourself, take supporters behind the scenes

People on Facebook want to see the real you. Use candid photos and videos to show supporters what life is like in your office, give people a glimpse into who you are as a person, and explain what you are doing to improve their lives.

8. Reply to comments and questions

Facebook is best when you use it to connect with people, not just to broadcast a message. So make a point to reply to comments on your posts and answer questions from fans. For many constituents, this might be their only chance to personally interact with you — make it a positive and informative one!

9. Post timely and informative content

People are talking about current events on Facebook, so provide your constituents and the media with timely, topical updates and engage people on the topics that matter both to you and them. Let your constituents know when votes pass, a road gets paved or a new park opens.

10. Go live with video

Live video on Facebook makes it fun and easy to interact with constituents in a more meaningful way. Whether you are answering questions from your Facebook fans, making an important announcement, broadcasting a city council meeting or simply showing what life is like in your office in real time — Facebook Live is an indispensable tool for elected officials.

Eva Guidarini is the government and politics outreach associate at Facebook. Reprinted with permission from the National League of Cities.



1411 Gervais Street | PO Box 12109
Columbia, South Carolina 29211
Tel: 803.799.9574 | Fax: 803.933.1299
www.masc.sc

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Calendar

For a complete listing of training opportunities, visit www.masc.sc to view the calendar.

FEBRUARY

6 Hometown Legislative Action Day. Marriott Columbia. Sessions include three legislative panels, a lunch address by Agriculture Commissioner Hugh Weathers, and a breakout sessions on opioids and law enforcement.

7 Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government Session A and B and Advanced Institute. Marriott Columbia. Advanced Institute courses are “Municipal Utility Policy and Administration” and “Advanced Advocacy and Intergovernmental Relations.” Topics for Session A include an overview of local government planning and zoning; conducting public meetings; and strategic planning. Topics for Session B include municipal annexation; intergovernmental relations; and ethics and public accountability.

15 SC Association of Municipal Power Systems Associate Member Lunch. Seawell’s in Columbia.

21 – 23 International Institute of Municipal Clerks Region III Meeting/ SC Municipal Finance Officers, Clerks and Treasurers Spring Academy. Hyatt Regency Greenville. Topics include regional economic development; impact on cities from universities and colleges; and preparing for future capital improvements.

22 Main Street South Carolina meeting. Manning City Hall. Topics include natural disaster/crisis communication and how to use the arts to promote community development.

MARCH

1 SC Association of Stormwater Managers First Quarter Meeting. Columbia Conference Center.

7 – 9 Municipal Clerks and Treasurers Institute Spring Session – Year 3, Session A. Hyatt Place Columbia. Topics include the basics of public speaking and media relations; ordinance preparation; employee evaluations and their importance; and human resources records management.

11 – 13 SC Utility Billing Association Annual Meeting. Hilton Myrtle Beach. Topics include workplace violence response and meter technology.

20 Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government: Basic Budgeting and Municipal Finance. Regional council of governments’ locations.

22 Municipal Technology Association of SC Spring Meeting. Columbia Conference Center. Topics include the U.S. Census and its IT implications; Enhanced 911 (E911) and a Criminal Justice Information Services Division update from State Law Enforcement Division.