

UPTOWN

This is not the deal you think it is!

By Howard Duvall, MASC Executive Director

On November 7, South Carolinians will have the chance to vote on a state constitutional amendment concerning capping property tax value.

“Wow,” the voter will say. “I have an opportunity to limit my property taxes! I had better vote ‘Yes’ on this amendment!”

Well, this may not be the deal you think it is!

The official explanation for Ballot Question 4 reads like this:

This amendment will limit increases in the value of a parcel of real property for purposes of imposing the property tax to no more than fifteen percent every five years after the current value of the property has been adjusted: (1) to reflect improvements made to the parcel; (2) to reflect a decline in the value of the parcel; and (3) to reflect the value of the

parcel when ownership of the property changes as the General Assembly by law defines such changes.

Note that this amendment caps the tax “value” – not the tax!

Several studies warn capping the appraised value of property to an increase of 15 percent over five years will result in higher taxes for most taxpayers. This artificial cap causes a tax liability shift from rapidly increasing properties to those that do not increase in value as fast.

In plain language, the burden will shift from the higher income taxpayer to the lower income taxpayer. This means two out of every three taxpayers could actually end up with higher taxes if this amendment passes. A home owner won’t even see the benefit of this break unless his home is worth more than

\$200,000. Renters won’t see any benefit at all. In fact, rent will likely go up because landlords will pass on the increased tax burden to renters.

A study by Miley, Gallo and Associates completed in March 2006 shows \$11.2 billion in taxable value will be shifted in Beaufort, Berkeley, Florence and Richland counties alone. A study by the Strom Thurmond Institute on a 15 percent cap in Beaufort County states, “The higher rollback millage after capped reassessment means that many property owners will see a higher tax bill than they would have after conventional reassessment.” The chairman of the Greenville County Council says 62 percent of the properties in Greenville County will see an increase caused by the reassessment cap.

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Echols elected to SMC board



MASC President Doug Echols, mayor of Rock Hill, was elected vice chairman of the Southern Municipal Conference (SMC). The Southern Municipal Conference is an association of municipal leagues from 14 Southern states. The SMC meets twice a year to discuss legislation and innovative programs of interest to the member state associations and their members. Echols will serve a one-year term.

September/October 2006

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MASC Annual Meeting inspired attendees with fresh ideas

The 66th Annual Meeting offered an agenda filled with educational sessions touching on topics as diverse as blogging and disaster response. Attendees said the sessions left them informed, entertained and inspired to bring fresh ideas back to their hometowns.

Blythewood Mayor Pete Amoth attended the first timers' welcome and orientation session, which is designed to help new attendees get the most out of their Annual Meeting experience.

"It was one of the best-run conferences and most informative conferences I've ever attended," he said.

In the middle of one session, Amoth received a phone call from someone trying to check in with him. The mayor

said he told the caller he would get back to him later. "I didn't want to miss anything," he added.

Amoth and other city officials expressed strong interest in the session called "Planning for Successful Cities: The Story from Jasper County."

The population of Jasper County is expected to explode from 30,000 to 200,000 in 20 years. This has led City officials in Hardeeville and Ridgeland to work with county officials to guide this growth in a positive way. This unique joint planning effort is getting the attention of the rest of the state.

"What they've done down there took a lot of cooperation," Amoth said, adding he would like to see Blythewood develop

a stronger working relationship with Richland County. The cooperative effort established consistent development regulations to bring "smart growth" to the area.

The three local governments have designated planning districts with joint representation, established uniform requirements and procedures for development review and fees, and focused development near municipalities where infrastructure exists. "Jasper County has come together as a whole and decided how it wants its future to be," said Hardeeville Mayor Rodney Cannon.

The Jasper County session on dealing with growth also left an impression on Lancaster City Administrator Steve Willis. "That's one thing we're facing in Lancaster, too," he said.

The northern part of Lancaster County has seen astronomical growth, especially with the Sun City Carolina Lakes planned development just south of Charlotte, NC. Some 7,000 building permits have been issued for the area, Willis added.

The City is working with the local chamber of commerce to set up a visit with the Jasper County chamber to study more in depth how officials are handling the issue, Willis said.

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Greenville is "the" place to be

Attendees of MASC's 2006 Annual Meeting know firsthand how educational and helpful the sessions and networking opportunities at the Annual Meeting are. Plans are already in the works for another powerful educational experience in 2007. As the host of the July 12-15 meeting, Greenville is a

thriving municipality with many lessons to share.

In the coming months, be on the lookout for *Uptown* articles and additional information on the MASC Web site (www.masc.sc) about the 67th Annual Meeting in Greenville, July 12-15, 2007.



Classifieds

■ The Town of Lexington is accepting applications for the position of assistant finance director. Applications are available from the Town Hall at 111 Maiden Lane. Submit application and resume to: Jim Duckett, Town Administrator, PO Box 397, Lexington, SC 29071, fax 803.359.4460 or e-mail lwieder@lexsc.com.

■ The City of Hardeeville is accepting applications for the position of principal planner. Submit cover letter and resume highlighting experience and salary history to City of Hardeeville, Attention: Planning Director, PO Box 609, Hardeeville, SC 29927, fax 843.784.6384 or e-mail snowden@cityofhardeeville.com.

■ The Town of Perry is accepting applications for the position of police chief. Submit a resume to the Town of Perry, 1062 East Railroad Avenue North, Perry, SC 29137.

■ The Loris Police Department is accepting applications and resumes for the position of certified police officer. For more information, visit www.lorispolice.com Apply in person at 3951 Walnut Street, Loris, SC 29569, or fax resume to 843.756.6788.

For the most up-to-date job listings, visit www.masc.sc.

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Throughout the meeting, Willis said he picked up several other good ideas, including ones on neighborhood revitalization and an online city newsletter. He also praised a session titled "Safeguarding Your Police Department from Liability."

"We're already looking at making some changes in policy and procedure," he added.

Mardi McKinnon, West Columbia city clerk, praised the "Communications Sampler" session. "I was very impressed with the panel. The discussion was very enlightening. I got some very good ideas, especially about the electronic newsletter."

Numerous technology sessions were offered, including demonstrations on the latest technology available to municipalities. Attendees could stop by the MASC Technology Center to try out new gadgets like the iPod or the Treo700w, or simply check their e-mail. Fifteen-minute demonstrations were offered by MASC's technology partner, VC3, on such topics as wireless technology, Web updates and spyware and virus protection.

Susan Schneider, public information officer for the City of Spartanburg, said she was "greatly influenced" by the wireless demonstration. "I went out the following week and bought a wireless laptop," she added.



Outgoing MASC President and Clemson councilmember Elouise James urged attendees to form partnerships with local leaders to raise awareness of the value that cities bring to the state.

One significant announcement at the Annual Meeting was the launch of the *Hometown, SC* initiative. This program is a long-range and sustainable initiative designed to build relationships to raise hometown voices to a new level of influence. The goal of the initiative is to demonstrate the value of South Carolina's cities and towns to their residents and illustrate to policy makers the important role cities and towns play in the state's economic prosperity.

This fall, MASC will present a series of eight regional *Hometown, SC* Road Shows. These training sessions will be offered at various times and locations to encourage attendance by numerous

municipal officials. For more information, see the article on page 5.

"This training and outreach tells me we have a well-organized plan in place," Schneider said. "We're well aware of the challenges ahead of us. We have work to do, but we have an excellent structure in place."

The *Hometown, SC* platform will be a significant tool to inform residents and leaders at every level about the good work going on in cities, said Rock Hill Mayor Doug Echols, who is also the new MASC president.

"This is a critical time for cities and towns," he added. "The work we're doing through *Hometown, SC* is very exciting. We have a great year ahead."



During his Executive Director's Report, Howard Duvall talked about the work done to build the foundation for *Hometown, SC*, which was unveiled during the opening general session.

Not the deal continued from cover

Why do these studies show that two out of three property owners will pay more taxes under the proposed 15 percent capped reassessment? Local governments are required by current state law to roll back their tax rates after each reassessment so that they collect the same amount of revenue to provide services. Protecting higher valued properties from an increase in tax value will result in a higher than necessary tax rate on all other properties.

In addition to homes, this includes automobiles, motorcycles, pickups and all other forms of personal property.

Compounding the problem, business owners and renters will be hit with a double whammy – higher property taxes and higher sales taxes without the benefit of any rollback in school taxes. These costs will be passed to the consumer in the form of higher prices for goods and services.

So before you go to the polls on November 7, think about your personal tax situation. Are you the one taxpayer out of three who will benefit from this amendment, or will you be like most South Carolina taxpayers and end up picking up the slack?

MASC Executive Director Howard Duvall will participate in a debate on this issue on ETV on Sunday, October 29, at 1 p.m.

Cable franchising undergoes substantial change

The new Competitive Cable Services law makes substantial changes to the traditional way a local government grants approval and issues cable service franchise agreements. Existing franchise agreements stay in place until they expire or a competitor is granted a statewide Certificate of Franchise Authority (COFA) and begins offering service in the existing service provider's area. At that time, the incumbent cable service provider can apply for a COFA through the secretary of state.

The law says the franchise fee rate must be set by ordinance and be the same rate for providers with a COFA and existing providers. The rate may not exceed 5 percent of gross revenues. "If a municipality wants to increase its current franchise fee to 5 percent, council should adopt an ordinance increasing the rate before receiving a notice of application for a COFA," explained Gary Cannon, MASC's director of intergovernmental relations. MASC has a model ordinance on its Web site at www.masc.sc. "If the council decides to increase the franchise fee after a COFA has been issued, the new rate can go into effect 45 days after the secretary of state notifies the COFA holders of the rate change."

The definition of gross revenues used in calculating the franchise fee is similar to the definition in franchise agreements approved in recent years. It encompasses all revenues received from subscribers for providing cable services, including franchise fees and all revenues received from non-subscriber services for advertising and home shopping services.

Notice of application for Certificate of Franchise Authority (COFA)

Once a cable service provider submits a notice of application for a

COFA, the secretary of state has five days to notify the municipality of the application. The notice asks the local government to provide the following information: (1) the franchise fee rate in effect as of the COFA application date; (2) the number of public, educational and governmental (PEG) channels currently activated under the incumbent's franchise agreement as of the date of the application; and (3) approval or disapproval of the COFA by the municipality. Although the statute requires the municipality to respond to the secretary of state within 65 days, a recent opinion issued by the attorney general's office affirms the municipality's authority to deny consent. If the municipality fails to respond within 65 days, the secretary of state is required to deny the application.

Public, Educational and Governmental (PEG) access channels

The cable service provider is required to provide up to three PEG access channels. The notice of application for a COFA asks the municipality for the number of PEG access channels activated under the incumbent's franchise agreement as of the date of the application. If the municipality's existing franchise agreement does not require PEG channels, the COFA holder must provide up to three channels. One may be used by the municipality without restrictions to repeat programming. The other two channels must be used at least eight hours per day for programming by the local government, or the COFA may use them for commercial purposes.

Consent

The notice asks if the municipality consents to allow the COFA applicant to operate within its streets and rights of way. "If consent is denied, you must provide an explanation of the reasons for

the denial," said Cannon. If the application is denied, the service provider has the right to sue the municipality in state or federal court.

Encroachment permits

The franchise fee is charged in lieu of a permit fee, encroachment fee, degradation fee or other assessed fees. This does not prohibit the municipality from requiring the COFA applicant to obtain an encroachment permit for construction, maintenance or repair of its system in the public right of way. However, the municipality may not charge a fee for this permit.

Consumer complaints

The local government no longer has the responsibility for responding to consumer complaints for cable services. The SC Department of Consumer Affairs will handle all consumer complaints.

Technical assistance

MASC has a strategic partnership with Local Government Services Inc. to provide technical assistance for responding to the notice of application. Contact Greg Fender at Local Government Services Inc., 127 Laurelwood Lane, Dahlonega, GA 30533, 706.482.9933 or ghfender@alltel.net.

For additional information, contact:

Gary Cannon, MASC director of intergovernmental relations

803.933.1203

gcannon@masc.sc

Secretary of State

803.734.0367

SC Department of Consumer Affairs

803.734.4200

Hometown, SC hits the road

When Rock Hill Mayor Doug Echols took over as president of the Municipal Association during the July Annual Meeting, he had one goal on his mind for the year – raising the awareness of the value of cities and towns through the newly introduced *Hometown, SC* initiative.

The launch of the *Hometown, SC* initiative was a big success that gave everyone attending the meeting a good sense of the overall plans going forward, Echols said.

As he noted in his remarks during the opening general session that launched *Hometown, SC*, “This brand and these words tell our story, outline our challenge and define our responsibility for tomorrow. This is the story written in every community, in every hometown in South Carolina. The stories of our cities and towns must be told so that our collective voice can chart the future of our great state.”

After the successful launch, the next step to telling this story is providing municipal leaders with the resources they need to localize the initiative in their communities. “We want to illustrate to our key influencers – those in leadership and decision making positions – the many examples of community building that we all see and create every day in our hometowns,” Echols said.

To do this, *Hometown, SC* is hitting the road in September and October with a series of eight regional Road Show training sessions for municipal officials. Municipal Association staff will be traveling the state to bring localized toolkits and information about using *Hometown, SC* resources to these regional meetings.

All mayors and managers received information about the Road Shows in early September. “We are hoping for a large turnout of municipal officials at

these meetings so they can learn more about how to make *Hometown, SC* work in their own hometowns,” Echols said. “Also, we are encouraging mayors and managers to bring interested councilmembers and staff with them to the meetings.”

The two-hour sessions will include a meal, a briefing about the goals of *Hometown, SC* and training about how to localize the toolkit. Road Show sessions will take place in eight regions of the state. Half are lunch meetings, and half are dinner meetings.

There is no cost to attend these sessions, but an RSVP is requested to get a count for the meals and to have enough toolkits for everyone attending. Contact Michelle Willm at 803.933.1259 or mwillm@masc.sc to respond. Details and directions to each Road Show location are available in the “Featured Links” section of the MASC Web site, www.masc.sc.



Hometown, SC Road Show schedule

Date	Time	Location	City
September 19	11:30 a.m.	MASC Office, 1411 Gervais Street	Columbia
September 21	5:30 p.m.	Municipal Conference Center, 214 Park Avenue SW	Aiken
September 26	11:30 a.m.	Hilton, 45 W. Orchard Park Drive	Greenville
September 27	11:30 a.m.	City Club, 140 E. Main Street	Rock Hill
October 4	5:30 p.m.	Coastal Carolina University, 755 Highway 544	Conway
October 5	11:30 a.m.	Embassy Suites, 5055 International Boulevard	North Charleston
October 9	5:30 p.m.	Hilton Garden Inn, 2671 Hospitality Boulevard	Florence
October 19	5:30 p.m.	Lowcountry COG Office, 634 Campground Road	Point South

Are you prepared for GASB 45?

December 15 begins the phase-in of a new financial reporting requirement that will affect many municipalities. The Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB) issued Statement 45, "Accounting and Financial Reporting by Employers for Post-Employment Benefits Other Than Pensions," which will change the way municipalities report employees' retirement earnings.

Municipalities already have to report pension obligations, but GASB 45 requires employers to report other post-employment benefits (OPEB). Employer-provided OPEBs include retiree health, dental and vision insurance, prescription, long-term-care insurance, life insurance and other benefits.

Why is GASB 45 important?

Currently, most municipalities fund OPEB on a "pay-as-you-go" basis. GASB 45 requires employers recognize OPEB earned during the time the employees were actually employed. The OPEB costs must also be associated with the accounting periods the benefits were earned, rather than when the benefits will be provided.

Many municipalities do not pay retiree health care premiums. Even though retirees purchase their own insurance at the employer's group rate, the municipality subsidizes the retiree's premium because a retiree would generally pay a higher premium due to age. The difference between the higher age-based premium and the group rate is considered an "implicit rate subsidy" and would have an OPEB impact.

What are the requirements of the statement?

GASB 45's major requirement is to use actuarial or another acceptable method to determine the OPEB cost.

If the municipality has more than 100 employees, an actuarial valuation should be prepared to determine the employer's annual required contribution (ARC), unfunded actuarial accrued liability (UAAL), actuarial value of assets and other pertinent information.

Municipalities with 100 employees or fewer can use an alternate calculation method. Municipalities with more than 200 employees must perform valuations every two years. Those with fewer than 200 employees must perform the valuations every three years.

A major determinant of the actuarial valuation is the actuarial and economic assumptions used, including the investment returns expected to be earned on assets available to fund the benefits. The investment returns are restricted to yields projected to be earned on investments currently deemed as permissible to municipalities (see SC Code Sections 6-5-10, 6-6-30 and 11-1-60).

What steps should be taken?

Once an actuarial valuation has been conducted, the municipality will be faced with many decisions. In most cases, the UAAL and ARC will be significantly greater than anticipated and much greater than the current "pay-as-you-go" costs.

Council needs to determine if, when and/or how to fund this liability. One method used to fund the ARC is transferring assets into an irrevocable trust. If a municipality opts to continue paying for benefits on a "pay-as-you-go" basis rather than funding the ARC into an irrevocable trust, the municipality will generally have to report a liability in its government-wide, proprietary and fiduciary fund financial statements.

Many rating agencies have indicated that if funding deferrals (i.e., differences between the ARC and pay-as-you-go costs) are not addressed, the municipality's credit rating might drop. It is critical for council to review the statement, identify its impact on the financial statements and decide whether to fund this liability. Based on the results of the valuation, the municipality should determine what plan changes, if any, may be needed to reduce future liabilities.

This topic will be addressed during the Municipal Finance Officers, Clerks and Treasurers Association's Annual Meeting, October 25-27 in Hilton Head Island.

Visit MASC's Web site at www.masc.sc for more information.

Implementation dates

The deadline for implementing GASB 45 depends on the municipality's total revenue as of June 30, 1999:

Effective dates	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
For first fiscal year ending after 6/15/1999	Revenue over \$100 million	Revenue \$10 million - \$100 million	Revenue under \$10 million
Statement 45 effective for fiscal years beginning after:	12/31/2007	12/31/2008	12/31/2009

How can I sue thee? Let me count the ways ...

When government officials see Gedney Howe, he's usually sitting on the other side of a courtroom. But at the MASC Annual Meeting in July, the respected trial attorney shared his methods for suing municipalities, corporations and other entities in an effort to teach attendees how to protect themselves from legal action.

Most lawsuits involving municipalities deal with active negligence, Howe said. If someone trips on the cobblestone streets of Charleston and decides to sue, there's not much of a case, he added. However, if someone trips and falls because a worker failed to replace a man-hole cover, then there is a case, he said.

As long as public officials properly do their duties, they are probably immune from lawsuits, Howe explained. For example, the Highway Department has a program in place that calls for employees to review a site if five accidents occur there over a year. These employees will investigate whether changes need to be made, such as the addition of a traffic light or a stop sign. In some cases, they may decide no action is necessary. This is the exercise of discretion, Howe added.

Suppose another accident occurs in the same spot. That person could decide

to sue, but the case won't go anywhere as long as the Highway Department had investigated the site and exercised discretion, Howe said. On the other hand, if department officials had not investigated the site and a sixth accident occurred, then a plaintiff has a chance of winning a lawsuit, he added. In this case, the department had been negligent in its duties.

Government is largely immune from lawsuits. This concept of sovereign immunity was first applied in England in 1788 and was implemented in the United States. South Carolina state, county and municipal governments are protected from lawsuits under the SC Tort Claims Act, which provides protections for governmental bodies by establishing a limit for damages and setting up a statute of limitations. The Act also establishes maximum loss amounts of \$300,000 per person for acts arising from a single occurrence. The total sum that can be recovered cannot exceed \$600,000, regardless of the number of claims of governmental entities involved.

In the case of *Hawkins v. City of Greenville*, a man sued the City for improperly designing and maintaining its municipal drainage system after his property flooded. But the SC Tort

Claims Act states that a municipality is not liable for loss resulting from legislative, judicial or quasi-judicial action or inaction. The court decided the duties of municipal officials in adopting a drainage plan and determining where sewers were built were of a quasi-judicial nature. The City was not found liable.

Still, there are exceptions to governments' legal immunity, such as for gross negligence, Howe said.

In one such case, *Steinke v. South Carolina Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation* (LLR), bungee jumpers died after the steel cage they were being lifted in crashed to the ground. Estate representatives and survivors sued LLR for wrongful death, alleging the department failed to investigate modifications made by the owners of the bungee business to the device that lifted the steel cage. The court found that LLR was grossly negligent.

The best way for municipalities to avoid lawsuits, Howe said, is for municipal employees to be educated and do their jobs proficiently. "It's not just about educating councilmembers. It's about educating the people on the ground," he added.

News Briefs



■ The Hilton Head Island/Beaufort area has been named one of the top places to live by bizjournals.com, the Internet presence of *American City Business Journals*. Hilton Head Island/Beaufort ranked 19th of the 577 small cities in the survey.

■ Applications for Main Street SC are now available online at www.masc.sc/MainStreet/msdescription.htm. Main Street SC helps municipalities revitalize their downtowns, neighborhood commercial districts and cities and towns into successful centers of commerce and community. Application deadline is October 2. For more information, contact: Beppie LeGrand, Main Street SC manager, at 803.933.1231 or blegrand@masc.sc.

■ The Lexington Conservation District recently recognized the Town of Irmo with its Environmental Stewardship Award. Irmo was recognized for its active beautification efforts, enactment and enforcement of the landscape ordinance, protection of streamside buffers and cooperation with the SC Department of Transportation to beautify major entrances into the town.

■ The Town of Mount Pleasant made *Money* magazine's "Top 100 Best Places to Live" list.

Achievement Awards program recognizes local government excellence

Each year, MASC honors outstanding local government projects in South Carolina. By establishing partnerships and building community support, these projects improve the quality of life for citizens and add value to the community. In 2006, 26 municipalities entered the Municipal Achievement Awards program. The nine winners (Aiken, Cheraw, Hardeeville, Lancaster, Myrtle Beach, Newberry, Orangeburg, Wagener and York) were featured in the August issue of Uptown. The following are descriptions of the additional 2006 entries.

City of Belton

The City of Belton was plagued by dilapidated vacant houses, which attracted vagrants and illegal drug activity. City officials decided it was time to take an aggressive approach to cleaning up Belton. Without a full-time building inspector, it was difficult to enforce any program to repair or remove vacant houses. City officials approached the county's building and codes department to handle inspections and codes enforcement. To set an example, City officials first demolished a piece of property it owned along the main artery in town. They identified 16 properties in need of substantial repair or demolition. Since the project began in 2004, nine buildings have been removed, six have been repaired, and four are pending. Council appropriated \$10,000 to remove buildings not torn down by property owners, but so far, the City has only had to pay for two demolitions.

Belton has received a Community Development Block Grant to continue its work. The project has led to other cleanup efforts, including participation in the Palmetto Pride anti-litter program and a downtown revitalization effort.

Contact: Alan Sims, 864.338.7495 or alansims@cityofbeltonsc.com

City of Bennettsville

After being named South Carolina's first GREAT Town in the late 1990s, Bennettsville took on the ambitious project of creating and implementing a downtown master plan. The plan focused on three projects: renovating a downtown building for the police department, creating downtown upper-story housing and creating a chamber of commerce to promote local businesses.

With the police department growing out of its building, City officials knew it was time to make a change. The former department building was constructed in 1972 and could only accommodate 15 police officers. To house the police department and a fitness center, City Council voted to lease a 6,000-square-foot downtown building with the option to purchase to house the police department and a fitness center. The building now has room for 41 law enforcement employees. As an added benefit, the fitness center, which is available to City employees and the public, aims to keep the community healthy and happy.

The City of Bennettsville also helped create 22 low- to moderate-income apartments in its historic downtown district. An innovative public-private partnership developed the Downtown Upper-Story Housing Project to provide residences on the second and third floors of commercial buildings that had previously been vacated. The project provided a jumpstart for rehabilitating other downtown properties.

The City provided funding to create a local chamber of commerce to sponsor events and bring community leaders together. The chamber is unique because it is the only one in South Carolina funded and operated by a municipality.

Contact: Angela Ward, 843.479.9001 extension 319 or awward@mecsc.net

City of Camden

Downtown merchants and visitors to Camden enjoy free wireless Internet access. The service is offered through a City-provided wi-fi mesh system covering much of the central business district. City officials decided to pursue the wi-fi project to improve the communications ability of the City's service departments and to provide valuable new services for residents. Based on conventional wi-fi technology, the system was designed for easy expansion. Officials hope to provide citywide coverage of the network so the police and fire departments can move a step closer to paperless administrative procedures. The public works department also hopes the network will lead to wireless Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) operations and remote power and water meter reading.

The City's electric line crews installed the equipment in just three weeks, and Camden has experienced no technical issues to date. Most importantly, residents have expressed pride they live in a city that would offer such a sophisticated service – and offer it without charge.

Contact: G. Frank Broom Jr., 803.432.2421 or gfbjr@camdensc.org

Town of Chapin

The Town of Chapin joined with the Crooked Creek Art League, the chamber of commerce and local businesses to showcase original art for the holiday season. Artists painted festive pictures on one side of large red banners. The reverse side displayed the new "Stop 'n Shop Chapin" logo. The banners were

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auctioned off during the annual Chapin Chamber of Commerce's awards dinner and auction, with proceeds divided between the chamber and the art league. The banners were hung throughout the town for the holiday season. In addition to giving the town a festive mood, the banners promoted local businesses and supported the arts community. The Town plans to work with the art league again when the Town's new logo is developed.

*Contact: Stanley E. Shealy,
803.345.1873 or MayorStan@sc.rr.com*

City of Chester

Residents in Chester have learned the ABCs of recreation. City leaders wanted to take steps to improve the quality of life for families in the area. The City's parks and recreation department created the ABCs Building Blocks of Recreation – "Advancing Opportunities, Building Relationships and Cultivating Minds." These steps allow the City to reach across age and economic barriers by providing various programs that cater to citizens' unique needs.

The parks and recreation department has senior programming that offers bingo games and various exercises. Children and teens have opportunities to learn and socialize through the "Building Relationships" project. Basketball leagues and summer day camps, in addition to special sessions on teen safety and health, are offered. The program also aims to cultivate the minds of both the young and old. With its partners, Teens United For the Future, a juvenile justice police officer and an aerobics instructor, the City sponsored a "girls' night out." The event educated girls of the dangers of being sexually active and the importance of being healthy.

Through its ABC program, Chester is enhancing its citizens' quality of life.

*Contact: David Linder, 803.581.7429 or
CCPR@Chestertel.com*

City of Easley

As in most cities, Easley citizens want to see growth and improvements to the place where they live. City officials and business leaders worked together to begin revitalizing downtown, improving quality of life and increasing business opportunities. The first step involved building a downtown parking lot for businesses and citizens. The only parking available had been behind stores, which was inconvenient and a safety hazard, as emergency vehicles could not gain access to the back of most of the stores. Work began with the demolition of three warehouses. Utilities were moved underground. As the nine-month project came to a close, the City hired a professional landscaping company to add an underground sprinkler system and plant grass, trees and flowers. What once was an eyesore to the downtown area has been changed to a beautiful, convenient parking lot that will serve citizens for years to come.

*Contact: Tommy R. Holcombe,
864.855.7908 or tholcombe@easley-sc.org*

City of Greenville

The public was tired of empty storefronts, vacant lots and increased crime in Greenville's West End community. City leaders came up with a re-development plan to facilitate major infrastructure improvements and growth. The master revitalization plan involved some big changes, such as removing Camperdown Bridge over Reedy River to erect the new Liberty Bridge. The plan also called for bringing in community police patrols to

deter crime and adding mixed-use development. Today, the West End is home to a number of new amenities, including the multimillion-dollar, state-of-the-art Greenville Drive Baseball Stadium. The West End also features the Peace Center for the Performing Arts, the Governor's School of the Arts, West End Market and dozens of restaurants, shops, offices and homes. The West End is now the most sought-after location in the City of Greenville.

*Contact: Wanda Stokes, 864.467.4470
or stokesw@greenergreenville.com*

City of Greer

The need for more fire and emergency services increased along with population growth in the City of Greer. Greer needed another fire substation, but the cost of building and staffing such a facility was not economically feasible. Fire department officials approached the Pelham-Batesville Fire Department about possible joint operations to cover the area where a substation was needed. The departments agreed that sharing a station would be beneficial to both. The arrangement saved taxpayers from paying for a new substation. Officials can also modify the agreement to utilize other Pelham-Batesville stations if needed.

*Contact: Christopher Harvey,
864.848.2165 or charvey@cityofgreer.org*

Town of Hilton Head Island

The Town of Hilton Head Island is steeped in military tradition. Parris Island Marine Training Facility, Beaufort Marine Corps Air Station and Savannah's Hunter Army Airfield are all within a short drive. The area is also home to a large number of active and retired servicemen and servicewomen. With such a deep military presence, Town leaders thought

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it was only fitting to find a way to honor veterans. Previous veterans' ceremonies had been scattered throughout the town. Yet Town leaders wanted a central location to gather the island's veterans. The idea of a veterans' memorial was born.

The Town decided on Shelter Cove Community Park for the site. The Town and coalition members worked on the design with a local architect, who donated his services.

The Hilton Head Island Veterans' Memorial was finished in time for the 2005 Veterans' Day Ceremony.

Contact: Mike Roan, 843.341.4688 or miker@hiltonheadislandsc.gov

City of Mauldin

A Mauldin businessman was inspired when he learned about the National Miracle League Program and decided to bring a Miracle League to Mauldin. One of the hallmarks of the Miracle League organization is a sports field with an injury-free surface. The National Miracle League has collaborated with an organization that designs, creates, manufactures and installs the fields using recycled tires. The special field allows players to roll, slide, run or even fall without getting hurt. The field would give children with almost any type of disability the chance to play ball. Mauldin's Sunset Park already had an asphalt softball field for wheelchair softball. Mauldin City Council approved resurfacing the asphalt field, and work began. Opening day ceremonies for the Mauldin Miracle League were held April 16, 2005. Donations of time and money came from local churches, civic organizations and businesses. The league is the first in the Upstate and the third in South Carolina (along with Myrtle Beach and Charleston). The Mauldin Miracle League provides a safe opportunity for disabled children to play

baseball, and it allows families to interact and build support networks.

Contact: Van Brannon, 864.288.4910 or mauldinrec@charter.net

Town of McCormick

The Town of McCormick was looking for ways to promote growth and enhance tourism. Officials struck gold when they decided to restore a piece of the town's rich mining heritage. In the 1850s, mines, mine tunnels and mining operations were scattered throughout the town. One of the richest strikes was the "Billy Dorn Mine," which yielded more than \$1 million in gold. In 2002, the Town bought the mine from the county. An engineering firm developed plans to turn the mine property into a safe park that would enhance heritage-based tourism. The Town created parking areas and sidewalks and constructed fencing, a covered concrete gold panning sluice, restrooms and a ticket/souvenir booth.

The grand opening for the Heritage Gold Mine Park was held May 14, 2005. Operated by volunteers, the park draws about 100 visitors monthly, who take guided tours, pan for gold and learn about McCormick's history of gold mining.

Contact: Bernard Welborn, 864.852.2225 extension 24 or bwelborn@nctv.com

Town of Mount Pleasant

Faced with skyrocketing growth, the Town of Mount Pleasant embarked on a unique growth management program. The Town's Building Permit Allocation Program (BPAP) limits the number of new residential building permits issued each year. Through the pro-rata program, the Town can maintain a 4 percent growth rate through December 31, 2010. This is significantly lower than its 2000

rate of 9 percent. The BPAP allows the Town time to complete its seven-year capital improvement plan, which was based on a 3 percent rate of growth. The BPAP is a way for the Town to control growth, keep taxes low, protect quality of life and provide for the health and safety of its residents.

Contact: Martine Wolfe, 843.884.8517 or publicinfo@townofmountpleasant.com

City of North Myrtle Beach

North Myrtle Beach residents wanted a place for their families to swim and exercise. The administration and City Council set out to create a facility that would not only meet the health and fitness needs of citizens, but would also become a place that brings the community together. In November 2005, the City completed the \$8.6 million, 64,000-square-foot North Myrtle Beach Aquatic and Fitness Center. The facility offers an indoor swimming pool, a therapy pool, fitness area, aerobics studios, racquetball courts, walking track and gymnasium. The fitness center was designed to be accessible to everyone in the community, including young families, older adults and the disabled. Equipment in the fitness room is specially designed to be used by individuals with disabilities. There are also special bikes that are easier for older people to use. A child watch area is available for the youngest members. The fitness center collaborates with Seacoast Medical Center to provide on-site health and wellness information and programs. The center operates solely on membership fees and facility rental revenues. In its first four months of operation, it enrolled 2,000 members.

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Town of Pendleton

In 2004, Pendleton was devastated by the accidental death of a local 12-year-old, Barrett Beck. Pendleton Pride in Motion, a group of concerned and involved citizens, approached Town officials about building a new playground in honor of the boy and calling it Barrett's Place Playground. Already aware of the deteriorating facilities at its existing park, Town leaders enthusiastically supported the project.

Pendleton Pride in Motion hired a company specializing in custom-designed, community-built playgrounds. The company designed the playground using ideas and suggestions from local children. Pendleton Pride in Motion raised more than \$180,000 to build the park, and more than 1,700 volunteers gathered to work on it over several days. The group was also able to present a \$5,000 check to Town officials to cover annual maintenance costs. In December, more than 400 children attended the park's dedication.

Improvements continue to be made on the 24-acre park. Plans are in the works to build a new restroom facility and pavilion. A local family approached the Town about raising funds to create a nature trail in memory of its son, who died of cancer. What started out as a tragedy turned into a project that drew the community together with pride and enthusiasm.

Contact: Teri Perry-Sloan, 864.646.9022 or tperry@townofpendleton.org

City of Simpsonville

Citizens and City leaders wanted to provide a park that would offer a quality experience for children and their families. Working together, they created Heritage Park, a 90-acre recreational facility. Leaders wanted the family friendly park

to serve local baseball and softball leagues and strengthen the local economy by hosting regional tournaments.

The recreation complex includes six regulation-size baseball/softball fields, two score towers, paved and lighted walking trails, bike paths, picnic shelters, three football/soccer fields, two playgrounds and a fully operational miniature replica steam engine, which is open for rides. An activity center called the CentrePlex offers an arcade, food services, eating areas and a police substation. The park also has a practice facility for children featuring batting cages and a full-size infield.

The City plans to add a skate park, roller hockey rink, playground, additional walking trails and picnic shelters.

Contact: Russell Hawes, 864.967.9526 or rhawes@simpsonville.com

City of Sumter

While Sumter has long been pro-active in recruiting new industries, most of the industrial parks are located outside corporate limits and typically don't add to the City's tax base. City leaders began exploring the potential of increasing commercial development. City officials realized that Sumter needed to embrace retail as the cornerstone of its economic development strategy to grow its tax base. Many national retail chains have reached expansion capacity in large markets and are considering smaller markets like Sumter for their future projects. City officials didn't want to wait for the developers and national chains to find Sumter. They decided it was imperative to put their marketing message in front of retail prospects. City leaders expanded the downtown re-development office and created an office of growth and development. Sumter officials have

worked to create awareness of their market among national retailers and developers. Three large developers are competing for a "big box" development that could be as large as \$50 million. The growth and development department also has structured incentive packages to encourage smart growth to re-develop former Wal-Mart and Kroger sites.

Contact: Susan Wild, 803.436.2586 or swild@sumter-sc.com

Town of Trenton

The Town of Trenton is proud of its heritage and wanted to preserve its town square, which is listed as a site on the SC National Heritage Corridor. The town square has been the site of memorials, military recognitions and community festivals. Yet the mayor and Town Council agreed it needed improvements to be better used by residents and visitors. The SC National Heritage Corridor provided two signs for the square, one detailing Trenton's history and the other depicting additional regional sites in the corridor. Through a SC Department of Transportation grant, the Town made numerous improvements to the square, such as adding underground utilities, period lighting, a clock, benches and landscaping.

To further enhance the beauty and safety of the town, Trenton worked with the Edgefield County Transportation Committee to expand its sidewalks. More than 6,000 feet of sidewalks were built throughout town.

Contact: Bernard Welborn, 864.993.4335 or bwelborn@nctv.com

For more information about the annual Achievement Awards program, visit www.masc.sc or contact Christie Zeller at 803.933.1215 or czeller@masc.sc.



Educational Opportunities

Hometown, SC

■ **September and October**, will hold regional Road Shows. (See related article on page 5.)

SC Business Licensing Officials Association

■ **October 24-26**, will hold its Annual Meeting at the Hilton Hotel in Hilton Head Island. Topics include "Maintaining Your Ecosystem," "Roundtable Discussions: Auditing, Codes Enforcement, Contractors and Peddlers" and "Problem Areas."

Managers' Forum

■ **October 26**, will be held at the Clarion Town House Hotel in Columbia.

SC Municipal Finance Officers, Clerks and Treasurers Association

■ **October 25-27**, will hold its Annual Meeting at the Hilton Hotel in Hilton Head Island. Topics include "Retaining, Managing and Motivating Good People," "GASB 45," "When Disaster Strikes ... Are You Ready?" and "Fraud and Internal Controls for Clerks, Treasurers and Finance Directors." (See related article on page 6.)

SC Utility Billing Association

■ **November 3**, will hold its Fall Meeting at the Embassy Suites in Columbia.

SC Municipal Human Resources Association

■ **November 8-10**, will hold its Annual Meeting at Pawleys Plantation in Pawleys Island. Topics include "Hiring Packages, Exit Packages and Background Checks," "Handling Harassment Claims" and "Rising Healthcare Costs."

SC Community Development Association (SCCDA) and Main Street SC

■ **November 14-15**, will hold a joint Winter Meeting at the Columbia Convention Center in Columbia.

SC Association of Stormwater Managers

■ **November 17**, will hold its fourth Quarterly Meeting at the SC Hospital Association in Columbia.

SC Municipal Attorneys Association

■ **December 1**, will hold its Annual Meeting at the Embassy Suites Hotel in Columbia.

For more information about these meetings or other MASC meetings not listed, please call 803.799.9574, or visit our Web site at www.masc.sc.



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