

2026

Achievement Awards
Main Street Inspiration Awards



Municipal Association
of South Carolina

2026 Achievement Awards

Started in 1986, the Achievement Awards program gives cities and towns deserved recognition for superior and innovative efforts in local government. The program also provides a forum for sharing the local government projects in South Carolina.

Videos highlighting this year's winners are available on the Association's website at www.masc.sc (keyword: achievement).

Population 1,001 – 5,000: Town of Seabrook Island Disaster Recovery Council

The Town of Seabrook Island's coastal location makes it vulnerable to hurricanes, flooding and power outages. Because of these threats, and the challenges that individual community organizations face when collaborating with one another to respond to an emergency, the town decided to establish the Disaster Recovery Council as a way to strengthen its community preparedness. The council engages in yearly training exercises based on real emergencies facilitated by emergency management professionals. These experiences help the council identify potential issues and recommend improvements to Seabrook Island's Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan.

The council takes advantage of town staff expertise and facilities as well as volunteer participation, which helps keep its funding needs to a minimum. It partners with municipal departments, local utilities, homeowners associations, the Seabrook Island Community Emergency Response Team, the Charleston County Sheriff's Office and St. Johns Fire District in its efforts. Future plans include using training scenarios that address emerging risks such as climate-related impacts and infrastructure disruptions, as well as finding more ways to enhance resident preparedness education.

By incorporating the lessons learned from ongoing scenario-based, partnership-driven emergency training, the council places the town in a position to handle future emergencies with clear communication and strong partnerships — all helping to build a more resilient community.

Contact Abigail Grooms at agrooms@townofseabrookisland.org or 843.768.9121.

Population 5,001 – 10,000: City of Hardeeville

Harvey Place: Hardeeville's "Collaboration Model" for New Attainable Housing

As one of the fastest-growing cities in South Carolina and the nation, Hardeeville faced a severe housing shortage. Housing prices had grown unaffordable for some critical workers like teachers, law enforcement and service industry staff — critical employees for the local community and economy — who become unable to purchase their own home rather than rent their housing. Because traditional market forces could not bridge this gap and develop new housing for low-to-moderate-income families, the city formed an Attainable Housing Task Force that brought together real estate agents, builders and nonprofits.

After analyzing land availability, construction costs and demographics, the group planned and developed the Harvey Place Project, a set of 10 townhouses on Hardeeville's Main Street, a walkable environment with easy grocery access, to serve as a proof-of-concept model for attainable housing in the region. The downtown location's high visibility illustrates that these developments can be a valuable addition to a neighborhood.

The public/private partnership aimed to use funds in the most efficient and effective way possible. Forino Co. built the houses at cost for well below market rate, totaling \$2.25 million for all 10 units. Habitat for Humanity of the Lowcountry offered volunteer labor and its specialized mortgage model, while the Beaufort Jasper Housing Trust granted \$9,000 per home for closing costs. The members of the partnership are now refining this attainable housing template for greater funding efficiency in future projects.

Contact Neil Parsons at nparsons@hardeevillesc.gov or 843.784.2231.

Population 10,001 – 20,000: City of Newberry

Newberry Arts Center Complex

The success and popularity of the Newberry Arts Center's programs meant that participation had grown, and so the NAC needed to expand into a larger physical location. The City of Newberry, aiming to revitalize a former grocery store and later the home of *The Newberry Observer* on its Main Street, decided to spend \$3.3 million to turn the 13,700-square-foot property into a vibrant, architecturally distinct new home for the NAC. The property offered adequate parking and accessibility, sufficient space for multipurpose layouts, and the ability to host the South Carolina Clay Conference and other meetings.

Funding for the complex came from accommodations and hospitality taxes, the city's economic development set-aside funds, the city's general fund and a state appropriation. Private donations made an outdoor plaza possible. The city made use of in-house expertise and minimal redesigns to the building to keep costs low. CREATE Newberry, a nonprofit promoting community arts access, also advocated for the effort and raised funds for its development. CREATE Newberry helped fund the purchase of art furnishings, equipment and audio/visual technology for the facility.

The finished product expands on recent investments in the downtown, including the renovation of the historic Newberry Opera House, the creation of the Edward Kyzer Newberry Firehouse Conference Center, as well as infrastructure improvements and private development. With its new and larger space, the NAC aims to further diversify its programs and build more arts organization partnerships.

Contact Jason Taylor at jtaylor@cityofnewberry.com or 803.321.1000.

Communications: Town of Summerville

Good Morning, Summerville!

Finding that government updates through channels like press releases and social media had grown less effective in reaching residents, the Town of Summerville created “Good Morning, Summerville,” a short-form video series which runs on a consistent weekday schedule. Each episode is less than two minutes long, providing friendly, personable and easy-to-watch updates that cover town initiatives and services, all in a style geared toward mobile devices and social media. The videos highlight the staff working in local government as well as local businesses, groups and community members — aiming to make local government feel open and accountable.

Keeping the process simple and affordable, the production involves only the town’s public information officer — who has become an increasingly recognizable face in the community — and his smartphone. With thousands of views on most videos and frequent positive feedback, engagement grew to a level that more than doubled its past records. Some videos, like emergency updates, business highlights or other Summerville-specific things, achieved viral levels of audience reach. A “birthday celebration” of Mason, the world’s largest sweet tea jar, reached 172,000 views, while a highlight of the downtown Talucci’s Italian Bakery found 159,000 views — numbers far greater than the town’s population of 51,000. Future plans include special miniseries to cover particular town projects.

Contact Christopher Makowski at cmakowski@summervillesc.gov or 843.897.4477.

Economic Development: City of Sumter

Philip L. Edwards Tennis Complex

With its existing 24 hard-surfaced courts at the Palmetto Tennis Center, the City of Sumter had a positive reputation in the tennis-playing world, but it did not offer clay tennis courts. These surfaces, which are vital for professional, collegiate and elite junior play, are rarely found in the United States, and are unheard of in cities of Sumter’s size. Through careful research, including evaluation of European clay facilities as well as maintenance practices and tournament operation, the city developed and opened the Philip L. Edwards Tennis Complex in 2024. It features eight authentic, tournament-grade German clay courts built to the international standards usually found only at elite private clubs or professional venues.

The \$4 million public/private project received funding from the Williams Brice Edwards Trust, while the city obtained state grants for infrastructure. In 2025, Sumter hosted the International Tennis Federation Women’s World Tennis Tour W15 championships, bringing players from around the world to Sumter. It and two other tournaments — the Iris Junior Championships and the U.S. Tennis Association state league championship — generated about \$530,000 in total economic impact over five months, as visitors contributed to Sumter’s hospitality industry. The city plans to further solidify its status as a major destination with more high-profile tennis events.

Contact Shelley Hartley at skile@sumtersc.gov or 803.795.2463.

Public Safety: City of Florence

Technology, Teamwork and Trust: Florence's Innovative Approach to Public Safety

Like many law enforcement agencies in recent years, the Florence Police Department faced significant staffing shortages, all while Florence's population and police call volume have continued to rise. Aiming to enhance public safety while avoiding burnout among overextended officers, the city researched and implemented the Keeping Florence Safe Initiative.

The initiative combines a Real Time Crime Center with a drone first responder program, enabling in-house operators to launch drones and gather critical information on the scene of a call and relay it to responding officers. The cameras help serve as a multiplier for police presence, such as by alerting the department of crowd situations where they may want a patrolling officer to observe in person. The initiative makes use of three dock-mounted drones, more than 45 stationary license plate readers, eight live-view cameras and access to more than 300 community cameras, including those found at local businesses and Florence Housing Authority properties.

In the first six months of camera usage, the technology helped in more than 100 investigations, and assisted in 55 arrests, the recovery of 36 stolen vehicles and 30 stolen license plates, as well as the location of seven missing people. Initial support for the cameras came from state funding, after which the city approved funding for the initiative's expansion, including the drones. Future plans include hiring additional staff for the crime center, encouraging community camera participation and potentially investing in gunshot detection technology.

Contact Amanda Pope at apope@cityofflorencesc.gov or 843.665.3113.

Public Service: City of Goose Creek

Goose Creek Therapeutic Recreation Division

Many adults with disabilities face decreasing opportunities for recreation, socialization and community after they age out of youth services. The City of Goose Creek established its Therapeutic Recreation Division as a dedicated branch of the Recreation Department to address this gap, building on the work of the Social Squad, an existing, volunteer-led club. In two years, the city's allocation of staff and facilities allowed the division to nearly quadruple its programming, allowing participants of all ages and abilities to be welcomed and celebrated.

Because no two participants or programs are the same, staff rely on ongoing input from those with disabilities as well as educators, parents and caregivers to drive the program's direction. City funding allowed for the hiring of a therapeutic recreation coordinator and the delivery of consistent, valuable programming, while the city has kept registration costs low to ensure accessibility. Sponsorships and local business partnerships have supported the program as it has grown, while collaborations with schools and volunteers have helped build meaningful relationships between the disability community and the broader public.

The city encourages and supports neighboring municipalities with similar efforts through mentorship and resources. It promotes inclusive employment through job opportunities within the division, with plans to expand to other departments. Inspired by the city's "Creek Rising" slogan, staff created a "We All Rise" campaign, alongside its development of Central Creek Park — Berkeley County's first fully accessible and inclusive park — to highlight the culture of recognizing and embracing community members of all abilities.

Contact Hannah Miller at hmiller@goosecreeksc.gov or 843.569.4242 x5286.

Public Works: City of Aiken

Shaws Creek Preserve: Using Conservation Partnerships to Protect City Water Supply

As with many cities in a fast-growing state, Aiken has faced development that puts pressure on its infrastructure and its existing community character. Through a partnership with the Aiken Land Conservancy, the city purchased 2,657 acres around Aiken's Mason Branch Reservoir, placing it under a conservation easement and permanently protecting this critical drinking water source from development.

When the property, known as the Brunswick Tract, was listed for sale and was under consideration for private development — including commercial space and 4,300 housing units — the city decided to purchase it for \$5.25 million. It used fund reserves and engaged in some inter-fund borrowing to be paid off over 10 years to do this. Initially, city council expected some limited development to occur on the tract. However, with a \$1.9 million grant to help manage the land from the SC Conservation Bank, the city was able to preserve the property in its entirety.

By protecting a water source, the project contributes to Aiken's focus on water infrastructure resiliency — an effort that also recently included a new \$70 million water treatment plant, and upgrades to aging downtown water infrastructure. By protecting the land from development, the city is able to promote forest health, offer passive recreation access, provide groundwater recharge benefits to four aquifers and protect wildlife habitat. The city is working with the ALC on several grant projects to improve songbird habitat and reforest native longleaf pines.

Contact Mary Tilton at mtilton@cityofaikensc.gov or 803.642.7640.

Other Entries

City of Abbeville

Seeking to elevate the holiday experience for its residents and visitors, the City of Abbeville embellished its existing Christmas programming by adding “The Light of Christmas” to its roster of seasonal citywide events. The inaugural event launched in December 2025 as an addition to the three-year-old “Christmas in Abbeville” experience. Using a collaborative approach orchestrated by city leadership, staff, and small business and community partners such as the Abbeville County Chamber of Commerce, the Catalyst Community Development Corporation and Cold Springs Mennonite Church, the season-long events drew a 42% increase in downtown traffic from the start of the programming in 2023, and a downtown holiday sales increase of 129%.

Funding came from hospitality tax dollars, and an initial investment of \$147,000 by the city in the festival’s first year. Because of its economic impact, the efforts generated an estimated \$5 to \$7 were generated for every \$1 spent.

Contact Mike Clary at mclary@abbevillecitysc.com or 864.366.1800.

City of Bamberg

With limited municipal resources available, the City of Bamberg struggled to consistently deliver communitywide sanitation services. The city council adopted the Sanitation Captains Initiative to provide additional community-driven sanitation services by way of resident volunteers. Three “sanitation captains” in each district routinely provide information to the Sanitation Department during their daily commutes, which allows for greater monitoring of the community’s sanitation needs, while also providing volunteers with a structured framework for their operations, with minimal time commitments and little disruption to their personal schedules.

Support for the initiative came through existing sanitation resources, Keep Bamberg Beautiful

and other community partnerships. By creating a sustainable working model, the city plans to enhance the initiative with more thorough sanitation issue reporting and communications tools, and by adding an incentive-based program for resident reporting of sanitation concerns.

Contact Corey Ramsey at councilmanclramsey@yahoo.com or 803.308.3990.

Town of Batesburg-Leesville

The Town of Batesburg-Leesville recently became a wholesale water customer of the Joint Municipal Water and Sewer Commission through a \$35 million, two-phase infrastructure connection project, after closing its nearly 90-year-old plant. In 2019, the town contracted the engineering firm Hazen and Sawyer in 2019 to study potential solutions for addressing water capacity concerns, and town council ultimately decided to link the existing system with that of the JMWSC.

The town initially funded the engineering study through its enterprise fund. It also leveraged a \$10 million SC Infrastructure Investment Program/American Rescue Plan Act grant through the Rural Infrastructure Authority, as well as a \$4.25 million grant from the Emerging Contaminants fund through the State Revolving Fund. The town also contributed \$228,466 in matching funds. The project opens the possibility to providing water services to unincorporated portions of western Lexington County through the Town of Batesburg-Leesville or through JMWSC.

Contact Jay Hendrix at jhendrix@batesburg-leesville.org or 803.413.7934.

City of Bennettsville

In efforts to combat the retail leakage of residents purchasing goods outside of town, and vacant downtown storefronts, the City of Bennettsville created a retail cooperative, spearheaded by Main Street Bennettsville and the city’s Department of Tourism, Parks and

Recreation. By revitalizing an underutilized former police substation, the city fashioned a storefront, gallery space and event venue for local vendors to showcase their wares and host book signings as well as other gatherings.

Member vendors pay a nominal rent and sell their goods in a low-cost, cashless environment. They also manage the co-op themselves, which saves the city on staffing. With its roster of 18 current vendors, the co-op features many locally produced products and services, from home decor and personal care items to honey and handcrafted goods. Funding for Bennettsville & Co. comes from a combination of city resources and programming funds from Main Street Bennettsville and the Department of Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

Contact William Simon at william.simon@bennettsvillesc.com or 843.439.3879.

Town of Bluffton

Using research data and experience to identify the need for greater civic knowledge at the local level and the need to combat misinformation, the Town of Bluffton published the *Bluffton Resident Resource Guide* to help residents understand how their municipality and its services work. The 24-page guide breaks down barriers by providing valuable civic information, which level of government is responsible for what, and what the town can and cannot do. The printed guide was mailed to every household in 2025, and is also hand-distributed by realtors, property owners associations and chambers of commerce. By getting a printed guide into residents' hands, the town shared accurate, useful information rather than simply telling them to source it themselves online.

Funding for the guide came from the town's general fund. The town used its staff and a contractor to write, design and translate the final work — saving on production costs. Bluffton integrates the guide into its other communications, and will update and mail out the guide every two years.

Contact Debbie Szpanka at dszpanka@townofbluffton.com or 843.540.2274.

Town of Clio

After identifying gaps in the Town of Clio's communication with residents, its mayor, who holds a graphic design degree, met with council and residents to discuss creating a new branding package to boost the town's image. The town developed and adopted a new town logo and seal, and then launched its first official website and social media platforms. To further boost communications, the also established a CodeRED emergency alert system, and a new festival to the events calendar.

Clio's marketing, branding, and communications campaign was able to integrate the needs of the town council while revitalizing the town's image. The in-house approach saved the town from any costs associated with outside vendors. With its new branding and information sources, the town's new "Ribs & Rods Festival," launched in 2023, has brought in growing numbers of visitors, some from more than three hours away, and received almost 900,000 views on social media in 2025.

Contact Adam Pate at mayor@cliosc.com or 843.506.0204.

City of Conway

Aiming to revitalize an underused alleyway off of 2nd Avenue, the City of Conway — increasingly known for its holiday celebrations — reconceptualized the space as "Holiday Alley." This fully accessible destination, adored with seasonal decorations and lights throughout the year, links to the city's Town Green; the Terrace, a public gathering place; and the Riverwalk. A signature arch carries revolving, holiday-specific signage, like "Lover's Lane" for Valentine's Day, "Bunny Trail" for Easter, the "Tunnel of Bones" for Halloween, and "Merry & Bright" for Christmas.

This citywide collaboration included input from various departments, and utilized city staff and labor. Funding came from the city's hospitality funds and from Tree City USA. With its first goal of realizing a safe way to connect the downtown area and keep the merriment going all year-round, the plan's second phase will extend the alley toward the riverfront, adding landscaping, a digital kiosk and a rotating public art display.

Contact Mary Catherine Hyman at mhyman@conwaysc.gov or 843.248.1780.

City of Dillon

What was once a vacant lot in downtown Dillon recently transformed into the city's Festival Marketplace, a multi-use outdoor pavilion that serves as a farmer's market venue and gathering place. Without a permanent home to support Dillon's farmers markets and community events, the city sought to create a marketplace while revitalizing existing vacant land. After securing funding through a combination of grants, legislative funds, and private donations, the \$952,020 project was realized using input from vendors, community leaders, city staff and regional partners. Through the Festival Marketplace, the city realized its goal of increasing its annual market days, vendor participation and foot traffic.

The City of Dillon partnered with the Pee Dee Regional Council of Governments, its state representative, Dillon County Chamber of Commerce, Dillon County Health Initiative, and the Dillon Community Alliance to open the Festival Marketplace opened in fall 2025, fostering greater community engagement and driving economic growth.

Contact Tally McColl at nicholas.t.mccoll@gmail.com or 843.309.4577.

City of Folly Beach

Seeking a solution to chronic roadway flooding, especially for problematic points along East Arctic Avenue, the City of Folly Beach launched a multi-phased Dune Infiltration System Program. Working with partner WK Dickson, an Ardurra Company, the city developed a sustainability-focused solution that recognized its unique needs as a coastal community. The engineering firm conducted a feasibility study was conducted in 2022 in collaboration with the city stormwater and public works staff.

The study found that a dune infiltration system would be a sustainable option for Folly Beach's flood-prone areas, diverting stormwater in an environmentally sensitive away. The city designed such a system for 10th Street, which will serve as a model to replicate in other targeted areas along East Arctic Avenue. The initial feasibility study was funded through the city's established stormwater budget, while engineering designs are funded through the city's capital stormwater program budget.

Contact Eric Lutz at elutz@follybeach.gov or 843.708.9982.

Town of Fort Mill

With local newspapers and other news sources in decline in the Fort Mill area, the town wanted to find a way to keep its residents informed of town projects, meetings and events. In 2021, it established a monthly electronic newsletter, the *Fort Mill Connections* e-newsletter. Produced in-house, primarily by the communications and marketing manager with input from every department, the newsletter allows for direct communication with constituents, covering municipal projects, offerings and department spotlights. The publication strives to deliver a variety of content through multiple voices throughout the town, including business news, event updates and anecdotal stories from residents. This multimedia newsletter also offers videos, surveys and helpful links.

As of December 2025, the newsletter had a subscriber base of 2,661, and consistently receives a 70% open rate. Costs associated with the project are minimal as it is produced using staff resources and minimal subscriptions services.

Contact Christopher Sardelli at csardelli@fortmillsc.gov or 803.992.0021.

City of Greenwood

Waller Avenue in Uptown Greenwood needed an infrastructure overhaul. Decades of utility repairs had left of patchwork of misaligned concrete and asphalt, reducing accessibility and creating tripping hazards. Through a multi-agency collaboration between city leadership, local businesses and engineering consultant Davis & Floyd, the city was able to fulfill part of its Vision Greenwood 2035 Comprehensive Master Plan by revitalizing Waller Avenue. Using a "dig-once" model, the infrastructure along the street was replaced to provide an accessible surface and streetscape, while at the same time, underground utilities were updated.

The total project investment of \$1.2 million was primarily funding through a Community Development Block Grant, paired with its hospitality tax dollars. With the construction phase complete, the current focus is on sustainable economic growth tied in with the objectives of the master plan — create a cohesive, park-like feel for Uptown, encourage private investment and integrate streets with future pedestrian and bike paths.

Contact Becca Bowyer at rebecca.bowyer@gwdcity.com or 864.942.8417.

Town of Hilton Head Island

In an ongoing effort to maintain its shoreline and protect against erosion, Hilton Head Island completes a beach renourishment program approximately every eight to 10 years. For the 2025-2026 project, the town devised a public information program to keep information flowing to constituents through public presentations, media interviews, press releases, in-person meetings, mass mailings, newsletters, e-newsletters, a website and social media. Multiple town departments contributed to the project, as did stakeholder and community input.

The information program sought to create greater public awareness and to share information timely through each phase of renourishment. The minimal funding costs were sourced from the town's communications budget, while staff and partners created the content. For the greater Beach Renourishment Project, replacing 2.2 million cubic yards of beach-compatible sand, the \$47.5 million budget is funded primarily using tourism dollars through the Beach Preservation Fee.

Contact Heather Woolwine at heatherw@hiltonheadislandsc.gov or 843.341.4604.

City of Laurens

In 2026, the City of Laurens' Capitol Theatre celebrates its 100th anniversary, and the city aimed to responsibly maintain this historic structure. It established a revitalization plan to transform the theatre into a mixed-use space that celebrates the performing and visual arts, civic engagement and economic growth. The multi-phased project included restoring several architectural elements to preserve their historic character while also modernizing the facility to meet current safety standards and functionality. Updates included a new audiovisual system, upgraded seating and reinforced stage infrastructure.

Funding for the project was made possible in part by a \$200,000 Growing Rural Communities Grant through the SC Department of Commerce. The City of Laurens and is working on the next phase of the project by expanding its programming and special events, including a film festival, more live music across additional genres, and continued free movie nights.

Contact Lisa Canada at lcanda@cityoflaurens.sc.com or 864.908.9874.

Town of Lexington

When Lexington Town Council identified communications as among their top three priorities for 2024, the town reorganized its public relations team to include an economic developer, public information officer, digital media coordinator, marketing coordinator and special events manager. A communications survey provided feedback from residents that informed a new marketing communications plan.

With social media determined as the primary way that residents received information, the strategic plan outlined which social media channels were the most effective, as well as how to strategically post messages at a frequency that allows for maximum engagement. Planning also pointed to video content as critical. In 2025, the department produced 151 videos, nearly tripling the amount produced in 2022. No outside funding was needed as the project and its deliverables were managed completely in-house. Since communications enhancements began, the town saw a major increase in social media engagement — 7.5 million Facebook views and 2.4 million Instagram views.

Contact Laurin Barnes at lbarnes@lexsc.gov or 803.600.2533.

City of Mauldin

The City of Mauldin transformed a vacant elementary school cafeteria and gymnasium into the Mauldin Cultural Center for theatre, activities, youth programming, and community arts over a 10-year span, with recent renovations in 2019 and 2020. The Mauldin Theatre Company, funded primarily by the city as public service initiative, operates in the cultural center and has historically focused on youth programs. As it grew in popularity, it became evident that the city needed to expand its offerings to allow for great access and participation from a broader range of constituents.

In addition to city support, the theatre company also receives funding from corporate sponsors, private donors, the Greenville County Council and the Mauldin Chamber of Commerce, and is backed by the work of many volunteers. As it has grown, the Mauldin Theatre Company has increased its attendance averages to an estimated 10,000 in 2025. Participation has increased from 75 performers in 2023 to 460 in 2025.

Contact Gregory Saxton at gsaxton@mauldin.citysc.com or 864.914.0711.

Town of Mount Pleasant

Through feedback from its biannual Employee Engagement Survey, the Town of Mount Pleasant found that its employees were not immune to stress and burnout, and they needed greater career development and cross-departmental connection. The town therefore created an employee wellness and engagement program, tailored to employee feedback, with the goal of fostering improved organizational culture, wellbeing, engagement opportunities and retention. Partnering with the consultant Gallagher to conduct the biannual surveys, the town fully funds the project through its operation budget.

With insight provided by Human Resources, the employee relations committee and other municipal departments, the town has enacted initiatives including mentoring programs, engagement and wellness activities, and group outings, fostering greater employee satisfaction and retention. The next survey will take place in 2026. Future plans include expanding leadership development, refining wellness programming, as well as adding new cross-departmental outings and engagement opportunities.

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City of North Myrtle Beach

Since opening in 2014, the City of North Myrtle Beach's Park and Sports Complex has received 8 million visitors, generating \$270 million in direct economic impact. A thriving, multifaceted complex focused on community recreation and sports tourism, it has 25 athletic fields, 6 miles of trails, five playgrounds, two dog parks, 12 picnic areas and an outdoor amphitheater.

In its most recent facility expansion, city leadership and staff met with residents and other stakeholders to assess major priorities. They developed a plan for generating more year-round use, especially in the off-peak months. The complex now receives 1 million visitors a year, generating an estimated \$28 million annually in economic impact.

The complex was financed through an eight-year general obligation bond leveraged through a temporary millage rate increase. Operating costs are mostly sustained through the complex's

revenue, with minimal reliance on the city's general fund. Phase II of the project completed in early 2026.

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City of Orangeburg

As the former Orangeburg City Hall, which served the community for more than 100 years, had become outdated, city leadership sought to transform another existing building into a state-of-the-art 18,000-square-foot facility. Large enough to accommodate key municipal departments under one roof, the new city hall is located in downtown Orangeburg, helping to drive the district's economic growth and development.

Through a \$2.5 million state grant, a \$50,000 USDA Community Facilities Program Grant and a \$7 million installment purchase revenue bond, the city realized its project goals of establishing a modern, fully accessible facility, on time and on budget. By collaborating with local stakeholders and contractors, the city cut the ribbon on its new headquarters in August 2025. Future upgrades will include an expansion of the city hall's technology offerings to include digital kiosks, virtual meeting capabilities and updated cybersecurity, and the city also plans to add energy-efficient systems.

Contact Tonya Lott at tonya.lott@orangeburg.sc.us or 803.533.5923.

Town of Pacolet

After a decade-long hiatus, Paddle the Pacolet returned in 2024 to fulfill objectives from the town's comprehensive plan and master plan, including the expansion of outdoor recreation, river access and community events. This community-focused event leverages partnerships among businesses and local nonprofits, as well as volunteer and town resources to create a guided Pacolet River paddling experience. Thirty-five paddlers participated in 2024, and more than 100 paddlers participated in 2025.

Funding for the annual event is primarily sourced through event sponsors, with a small participation fee, as well as through grants including a \$5,000 Elevate Upstate grant and a \$30,000 Park and Recreation Development Fund program grant. Riverbend Aggregates also deeded a portion of land to the town for the creation of a new river access point. Planned enhancements

for the event include education on Cherokee and Catawba history, soapstone use, native wildlife, and the river's role in powering the historic mill and shaping the community.

Contact Patrick Kay at pkay@townofpacolet.com or 864.474.9504.

Town of Pendleton

Proposed by Anderson School District 4, a Sensory Friendly Santa activity complimented the Town of Pendleton's holiday offerings during its annual Christkindlmarkt on the Square. Working in collaboration with the school district's physical therapist and occupational therapist, the town used its staff to create an low-stimulation, all-inclusive, sensory-friendly experience providing photos with Santa. The event uses reduced noise and lighting, minimal crowds and a relaxed atmosphere to help every child feel comfortable and included.

The minimal funding needed to create the experience was provided through the town's general fund. Anderson School District 4 also provided staffing and sensory friendly toys for participants. After the success of its launch, the town plans to partner with the school district again to host the event in 2026. The town will also continue to work with the district's physical therapists and occupational therapist to evaluate and improve upon community events and programs.

Contact Lindsey Watley at lindseyw@townofpendleton.org or 864.502.4491.

Town of Timmons ville

With more than half of Timmons ville's population made up of residents age 55 and older, the town wanted to foster more social connection as well as health and wellness options for its seniors. It hosted a planning seminar with key stakeholders, city leadership and the Pee Dee Council of Governments, before devising a working plan to improve access to senior health and wellness amenities, while also driving economic vitality to historic Main Street. The town then transformed an unused, municipal-owned building into a full-fledged senior center to support engagement, health and wellbeing.

The project made use of American Rescue Plan Act funds and supplemental state funds. Working in partnership with Florence County Senior

Citizens Association, the town's state legislative delegation and Florence County Council, the town successfully created a dedicated place for seniors, all while revitalizing an unused facility and encouraging greater activity on Timmons ville's Main Street.

Contact Thomas McFadden at thomasm@timmons ville.org or 843.319.7115.

City of York

The Liberty Street corridor in York's historic district needed an overhaul of its aging water infrastructure, and so the city pursued a plan to replace approximately 1.6 miles of 80-year-old waterlines with modern, 12-inch high-capacity water mains, capable of meeting projected needs for the next 50 years. After thoroughly evaluating existing utilities as part of York's capital improvement program, city leadership devised a plan to not only upgrade this waterline, but also to pave Liberty Street, working in conjunction with the SC Department of Transportation. The city also engaged with affected residents and business owners through public meetings, and maintained ongoing project updates through its website and social media.

The city secured 62% of total project costs through external sources, including \$5 million in grants from the SC Infrastructure Investment Program and through state appropriations. Additional local funding came from capacity fees and the city's fund balance.

Contact Sarah Ramirez at sramirez@yorksc.gov or 803.818.0089.



Main Street South Carolina Inspiration Awards

Main Street South Carolina empowers residents, business owners and local officials with the knowledge, skills, tools and organizational structure necessary to revitalize downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts into vibrant centers of commerce and community.

Main Street South Carolina is a service of the Municipal Association of SC and is a Coordinating Program of Main Street America™. Main Street SC follows the Four Point Approach to economic development which focuses holistically on design, organization, promotion and economic vitality. Each year, Main Street South Carolina recognizes members' achievements and successes in downtown revitalization.

Excellence on Main Street Award

Downtown Florence – Pine Street Townhomes

Florence's restoration of its historic core has seen the recruitment of valuable commercial tenants, but its aim of achieving 18 hours of daily foot traffic required greater focus on housing. The Downtown Florence 2030 Master Plan set a goal of 1,000 new housing units within a decade, including quality affordable, missing middle and market-rate housing at multiple price points and types. The Pine Street Townhomes, which contribute to this goal, help anchor the downtown's eastern boundary providing housing for working professionals, especially targeted to district healthcare employees; and serving as a bridge to neighborhoods in the east targeted for further revitalization.

The developer Urban Development Services led the project, spending \$2 million with support from the SC Community Loan Fund. The City of Florence helped assemble the necessary land parcels over several years and provided a conditional grant of \$200,000, reimbursed upon completion of construction. The Downtown Florence Main Street program provided promotional support, and the City of Florence provided downpayment assistance for first-time homebuyers through its Community Services program.

The units have a scale and appearance appropriate for its location among surrounding historic neighborhoods. The project will be the first phase of a master-planned development of townhomes and duplex properties, including owner-occupied units and rental units. When completed, the overall development will have 35 new housing units and a value of more than \$10 million. Because the project serves as a proof of concept, it has helped attract other small-scale developers to the market.

Contact Hannah Davis at hdavis@cityofflorencesc.gov or 843.678.5912.

Inspiration Awards

Gaines Jontz Rehabilitation

Downtown Lancaster – The Marshall Building

The eight-unit, 7,500-square-foot building at 123 S. White St. in Lancaster — dating to 1950 — housed mostly service businesses throughout its history, and had fallen into disrepair. It was mostly vacant by 2021 when Greg Gregory bought it for revitalization.

Gregory employed architects to establish a unifying theme to the haphazardly modified storefronts of the building, and had the building gutted, with all-new plumbing, electrical, air and interiors. Renovations cost \$765,000 in addition to the \$135,000 property cost. He also commissioned a mural by artist Lance Turner. This artwork specifies that the correct pronunciation of the city's name is "Lank KISS stir" — a point of pride among native residents.

The project to bring new life to White Street generated excitement, with all seven available spaces leased within a few weeks of becoming available. The building now houses preexisting businesses, new startups and a nonprofit.

Contact Steven "Flip" Hutfler at shutfler@lancastercitysc.com or 803.289.1453.

Master Merchant

Downtown Florence – Colton Cauthen, Jack's Books

In October 2024, Colton Cauthen opened Jack's Books — who identified a viable opportunity to fill a market gap and establish Florence's only independent bookstore — with assistance from the tenant upfit grant of the Downtown Florence Main Street program. Within a year, he made the shop to not only be a must-see local destination, but one that has national attention as well, with highlights in *USA Today* and state travel influencer blogs.

In addition to growing his foot traffic by 200% and establishing a robust e-commerce business, he worked to bolster the overall downtown economy as well. He has collaborated with other merchants, created engagement opportunities and events for customers, supported local organizations and developed a unique line of merchandise connecting the customer base to his brand and the downtown as a whole. Cauthen was also selected as the only South Carolina business to participate in Main Street America's virtual business accelerator.

Contact Hannah Davis at hdavis@cityofflorences.gov or 843.678.5912.

Outstanding Partnership

Main Street Manning – Manning Lions Club

On the 11 federal holidays taking place throughout the year, such as Memorial Day, Independence Day or Labor Day, Main Street Manning has placed United States flags on display along sidewalks in its downtown. As it doubled the number of flags, it sought a community partner to help with this, and the timing coincided with a push by the Manning Lions Club to find new ways to enhance its community engagement.

For several years now, the Lions Club has provided the labor to set out about 80 flags each holiday — a critical boost for the Main Street staff to make the patriotic displays possible. Main Street Manning provides the flags, flagpoles and storage space. The value of the Lions Club's volunteer hours in this project amounts to \$1,670 annually, and totaling about \$5,000 since the partnership's beginning.

Contact Carrie Trebil at ctrebil@cityofmanning.org or 803.433.5132.

Outstanding Promotion

Main Street Fountain Inn – Christmas INN Our Town

Christmas INN Our Town has brought horse-drawn carriage rides to the downtown for more than 35 years. The event has grown into a full month of business-supporting activities for residents and visitors. In 2025, the city and Main Street Fountain Inn sought to reimagine the program using a planning committee of longtime event partners, business owners and community members, to use cohesive seasonal promotion to help extend existing holiday visits and sustain foot traffic throughout December.

Working with many community partners and city departments, Main Street Fountain Inn hosted 17 events and marketed 71 activities under the Christmas INN Our Town umbrella, creating a shared brand and consistent messaging. Planning began in March, a teaser campaign began in July and full marketing efforts began in early November. Funding came from the city, sponsorships, in-kind support and event revenue, and the efforts ultimately attracted more than 129,000 visitors to downtown.

Contact Amanda Benfield at Amanda.benfield@fountaininn.org or 864.871.2405.

Outstanding Service

Main Street Manning – Jesse and Anna Surette

Manning natives who have chosen to stay in their hometown, Jesse and Anna Surette are early-career professionals who find many ways to give back to the community and support its development. Jesse is a downtown merchant, as a financial advisor with Edward Jones, and has provided financial workshops to small business owners and city employees; while Anna is the communications director for Laurence Manning Academy.

The couple often volunteers at or attends events in Manning. They offer their services as photographers to Main Street Manning, and Anna often shares her design talents for various logo designs. They served as committee members for the Farm to Table Dinner, where Anna prepared the tomato pies on the menu. In 2025 alone, they contributed 35 volunteer hours just to Main Street Manning, on top of their many hours volunteered with other community groups.

Contact Carrie Trebil at ctrebil@cityofmanning.org or 803.433.5132.

Outstanding Special Project

Downtown Florence – Reimagining Walkability

As Francis Marion University launched a new occupational therapy doctorate program, it sought out Florence's Main Street program for downtown engagement opportunities for these students. These groups joined with the SC Department of Public Health's Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity Prevention Section to study walkability and accessibility in the downtown district's corridors in an 18-month initiative.

After training, the students studied a 17-block area of the downtown. They created and presented tangible recommendations for pedestrian safety improvements, accessibility, vibrancy and connectivity — especially for vulnerable populations — to city and university leadership. Because the city has been planning its streetscape design projects, the walkability study and recommendations could meaningfully contribute to the community's built environment. The project has become a permanent part of the curriculum for the occupational therapy students, and has come at a time when more cities are focusing on inclusive urban design, quality of life and public health outcomes.

Contact Hannah Davis at hdavis@cityofflorences.gov or 843.678.5912.

