

2025

Achievement Awards

Main Street Inspiration Awards



Municipal Association
of South Carolina





2025 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 best public service ideas in South Carolina.

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

Population 1 – 1,000: Town of Clio Clio's Community Park

For years, Clio's residents wanted spaces for outdoor recreation and community gatherings, but the town lacked the funding to make this happen. A \$75,000 fundraising goal was set in 2023 for a town park. Grant awards and town fundraising events greatly exceeded this, raising more than \$130,000. After announcing the project at the town's 2023 Cotton Festival, the town officially opened the park during the 2024 Cotton Festival.

Located in Clio's downtown between its town hall and post office, the park features modern playground equipment, a gazebo and LED lighting. Grants came from Marlboro County and the Municipal Association's Hometown Economic Development Grant. In-kind donations from local businesses included picnic tables and the gazebo's concrete foundation, while volunteer hours from residents helped the construction of the park to stay within its budget. The community also contributed to every step of the planning process, helping to make design choices for issues like layout and colors — an approach that fostered community-wide support for the project.

The town planned the park with future expansions in mind. Future development plans include a walking path, a concert stage, a dog park and electric connections for food trucks, which will help the park host Clio's Food Truck Fridays.

Contact Mayor Adam Pate at mayor@cliosc.com.

Population 1,001 – 5,000: City of Barnwell Station 1, Barnwell Fire Department

In recent years, the City of Barnwell addressed many of its facility upgrade needs for water and wastewater infrastructure, or parks and the police department, but a persistent concern remained with its fire department headquarters, an inefficient and outmoded building dating to 1954. The city addressed this critical need with a new fire station, designed not only to house equipment but to accommodate career and volunteer firefighter staff, featuring recreation space, classrooms and physical training space as well as a center for fire service heritage and life safety education.

While planning, the city carefully researched legal requirements and professional best practices, visiting recently constructed fire department stations in other communities. Barnwell also modernized its procurement code to allow for a construction-manager-at-risk project methodology. The city paid for the \$5 million station cost using American Rescue Plan Act funds, a portion of the city's U.S. Department of Energy settlement funds, state grants and a general obligation bond to be paid off with the city's portion of the Barnwell County capital projects sales tax.

Opened in 2024, the station has five drive-through apparatus bays that can be double loaded, providing space for current and future equipment. It has decontamination facilities and provides space for potential staffing or trainee expansions, as well as dormitory space for male and female volunteers. The station can also serve as an emergency management center for hurricane evacuations.

Contact Tony Dicks at tdicks@cityofbarnwell.com or 803.259.3266.

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

Walterboro Wastewater Treatment Plant Expansion Project

In keeping with Walterboro's location in a region experiencing explosive residential and commercial growth, its expanded wastewater treatment plant allows service to new developments along Interstate 95 and Colleton Mega Site on South Carolina Highway 64, making the region much more competitive for industrial development. The plant has more than doubled its capacity, moving from 2.64 million gallons per day to 5.625.

Aimed at keeping the headwaters of the Ashepoo, Combahee, and Edisto rivers basin safe, the state-of-the-art expansion includes new sequencing-batch reactors, a new grit removal system, new influent pumping station and new tertiary filter basins. The \$38.4 million cost involved is vastly greater than the City of Walterboro's entire general fund and enterprise fund budgets. As the projected costs grew, the city partnered with the Lowcountry Council of Governments to seek grants from the U.S. Economic Development Administration, with city councilmembers advocating for the funding needs in Washington, D.C. The city also coordinated with the Colleton County Economic Alliance and the SC Regional Development Alliance on forthcoming industrial projects. Funding included \$25.7 million in EDA grants and \$12.7 million in city funds from water and sewer revenue bonds.

Further steps in the expansion will include a new emergency generator for the plant, as well as new solar sludge drying beds.

Contact Jeffrey Molinari at jmolinari@walterborosc.org or 843.782.1011.

Population 10,001 – 20,000: City of Forest Acres

Gills Creek Memorial Park

With limited land available for parks in the mostly developed 5 square miles of Forest Acres, the city transformed a half-acre of condemned and flood-prone property along Gills Creek into a vibrant memorial park, fulfilling a vision the city pursued for decades. Catalyzed by the destruction experienced in the October 2015 floods, the project involved numerous steps. The city negotiated with multiple property owners, gaining development consent and land donations. It also obtained a public roadway easement, added 45 parking spaces, and expedited the replacement of a damaged bridge in partnership with the SC Department of Transportation.

The park overlooks Gills Creek and the spillway of Forest Lake. Having repurposed underutilized land into a public greenspace while also cleaning up environmental hazards, the park features a small event space, a memorial garden for fallen Forest Acres police officers, a boardwalk and fishing dock extending over the water to maximize space, a splash pad and a walking path. The city also upgraded stormwater infrastructure as well as street curbs. Funding for Gills Creek Memorial Park came from hospitality tax funds and \$3 million in American Rescue Act funds. The state allocated \$1 million toward the bridge replacement, while Richland County contributed \$600,000 towards more sustainable traffic flow on Forest Drive. An onsite planning event involved the community in the park's development.

Events at the park include a farmer's market, the monthly concert series Picnic in the Park, Town Theatre children's shows, the Richland Library Children's Storytime and other uses by local businesses.

Contact Shaun Greenwood at sgreenwood@forestacres.net or 803.917.7001.

Communications: City of Goose Creek

The Joseph S. Daning Amphitheater

Historically, Goose Creek carried the reputation of a bedroom community lacking a downtown district or other community draws. Since the 1990s, the city had planned an amphitheater in its municipal complex to bring in entertainment and events. In 2024 with the help of national music acts, it opened the Joseph S. Daning Amphitheater, named for the former councilmember and state representative who secured \$1.5 million in state funds for the \$4 million project. The city's communications team promoted the new offering with a variety of print, digital and broadcast marketing materials — everything from carefully branded swag bags to

social media content featuring drone footage and photos of the construction process. Local news stations and podcasts covered the story behind the venue's development, while the Charleston Radio Group provided in-kind promotional services through radio ads for an audience that the city had not previously reached.

The opening concert sold more than 5,000 tickets, while the city's social media content for the opening garnered more than 200,000 views. Goose Creek residents have embraced the amphitheater's tagline, #MeetMeAtTheDaning, using it as a gathering place for everything from concertgoers to remote workers. As the city continues to spread the word on its new gathering spot, it is also looking to make the municipal complex even more of a community hub, surrounding it with mixed-use housing and a conference center.

Contact Adam Kelly at akelly@cityofgoosecreek.com or 843.937.1581.

Economic Development – Joseph P. Riley Jr. Award: City of Mauldin

BridgeWay Station: An Urban Development in a Suburban Area

Although Mauldin has grown substantially in recent years, it lacked a traditional downtown. The city wanted to cultivate a definable sense of space and community that could attract businesses and residents. It partnered with Hughes Investments to develop the pedestrian-focused, mixed-used Bridgeway Station, an attention-grabbing project offering new apartments, offices, shops and restaurants, all with a purposely cultivated Italianate design sensibility. Its namesake pedestrian bridge secured SC Department of Transportation approval to cross Interstate 385 and eventually connect to the popular Swamp Rabbit Trail network.

The city established a new form-based zoning district to overcome the project's regulatory obstacles, much of it focused on walkability. The effort leveraged a Multi-County Industrial Park for infrastructure funding, supported by Greenville County and the Greenville County School District. Hughes Investments secured more than \$100 million in private investment, which provided critical infrastructure such as roads, sidewalks and wastewater utilities, as well as parks and public art. Mauldin also used a revenue bond for the roughly \$5 million pedestrian bridge.

Now home to many businesses and a massive schedule of events, BridgeWay Station serves residential, commercial and recreational purposes. Estimated tax revenues will reach approximately \$2.5 million at project completion, with an expected 2,000 jobs created and an eventual 2 million square feet of development. Future plans include a 10,000-seat stadium for the Greenville Triumph soccer team, as well as events and concerts.

Contact Gregory Saxton at gsaxton@mauldincitysc.com or 864.914.0711.

Public Safety: City of Wellford

Community Blessing Boxes

Aiming to serve critical needs in its fast-growing Spartanburg County community while also engaging with residents in positive ways beyond the ordinary scope of law enforcement operations, the Wellford Police Department manages a group of five "blessing boxes" positioned throughout the community. These boxes enable residents in need to retrieve nonperishable food, hygiene items, socks and even cold weather kits. As the boxes are stocked entirely with donations, the police department collaborates with local groups to stock the needed items, including schools like the Global Academy of South Carolina and the Wellford Academy, the Breaking Bread Soup Kitchen, as well as local businesses and churches.

Because first responders gain firsthand insight into the problems faced by residents, they can identify pressing needs that the blessing box initiative can address. For example, local firefighters who were providing a resident with home installation of a carbon monoxide detector had observed that the resident was lacking in groceries. They alerted Wellford police, who immediately connected the resident with supplies of donated items.

After four years of operations, the department intends to continue growing the number of blessing boxes, highlighting the helpful and engaged role that the police department plays in the community. The blessing boxes have strengthened the ties between officers and the residents and organizations of Wellford.

Contact David Green at dgreen@wellfordpd.com or 864.431.5285.

Public Service: City of North Charleston

Park Circle Reimagined

North Charleston's Park Circle has long been the home of playgrounds, summer programs and after-school activities, but it has now become the site of a transformative redevelopment as well. As the city evaluated the park's aging facilities for replacement, it noted that children with mobility challenges could not fully participate in outdoor recreation. After years of careful research and planning in collaboration with experts in playground design and disability needs, the city moved to reimagine Park Circle as a fully accessible space that takes down barriers and improves lives.

Park Circle now offers the world's largest inclusive playground, an inclusive baseball field and a multi-use community facility where parkgoers of all capabilities can play and enjoy the space together. Hospital-grade changing tables in restrooms provide dignity and support for families and caregivers. The park's green spaces, including a nature garden and walking trails, and its farmers' market pavilion are designed for easier accessibility. With a total cost of \$20 million, the project made use of funds from a preexisting tax increment financing district, as well as private investment from partners such as Boeing and Roper St. Francis Hospital.

The park received more than 500,000 visitors in its first six months. Building on this accessibility focus, the city is expanding programming through its new Therapeutic Recreation Division. The department oversees the adaptive sports leagues using the new baseball field, schedules sensory-friendly events and performing arts programs as well as supports community education initiatives for accessibility.

Contact Mandi Mills at mthompson@northcharleston.org or 843.568.7356.

Public Works: City of Aiken

Debris Management Site Enhancements

After Hurricane Helene cut a path of destruction across the City of Aiken, the city experienced vast amounts of fallen tree debris to be managed, and at great expense. Since the Federal Emergency Management Agency has stringent documentation requirements for its cleanup reimbursements, Aiken needed to measure the volume of debris collected accurately.

At its debris management site, which was the first to be established within the larger hurricane-struck region, the city looked for a more efficient and safer way to calculate debris. Rather than the traditional and time-consuming method of a worker photographing truckloads from an elevated lift, city staff used a repurposed traffic camera to record debris volume on every incoming truck — an efficient process that greatly streamlines documentation for the reimbursement process. Twice-weekly drone photography confirmed the measurements.

An effort that involved collaboration among the Public Services, Information & Technology and Engineering & Utilities departments, the project was funded through Aiken's general fund. Aiken already had the camera system as well as the drone used to calculate the total cubic yards of debris at the site, which showed that the initial measurements were correct to an error range of less than 1%. The city purchased volume calculation software for \$3,000. The effort minimized expenses, improved the effective use of staff time, and created easily auditable records lacking in human error, and it received positive feedback from FEMA and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Contact Lex Kirkland at lkirkland@cityofaikensc.gov or 803.642.7701.

Other Entries

City of Beaufort **Investing in Our Future:** **Youth Initiatives for a Safe** **and Vibrant Community**

In 2023, the City of Beaufort analyzed its “shots fired” incidents and found that many of them concentrated around multifamily apartment complexes. Aiming to reduce these incidents, the city’s police department, fire department, and capital projects team worked together on an initiative to reengage residents, especially youth, through special events hosted by each department. The Future Guardians Initiative hosted by Beaufort police fostered leadership and community service; the fire department’s Sparking Embers program encourages civic involvement of girls in grades 7 to 12, and the capital projects team developed Southside Park, an inclusive city park and playground, where most of the events took place.

Funding came from strategic budget allocations as well as community partner grant funds secured by the police department. The Southside Park Phase I Project received funding through a hospitality and tourism bond, as well as from SC Parks and Recreation Development Fund grants.

Contact Ashley Brandon at abrandon@cityofbeaufort.org or 843.941.0997.

Town of Bluffton **The Squire Pope Carriage** **House: A 200-year Witness** **to Bluffton’s History,** **Rehabilitated Into the** **Town’s Welcome Center**

Dating to 1850, the iconic but deteriorated Squire Pope Carriage

House, located just off the May River faced the prospect of demolition in 2017, when the Town of Bluffton purchased it to preserve the structure and use it as a new Welcome Center.

Funding came from hospitality and local accommodations taxes, a grant from the SC Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism, and a matching grant from the SC Department of Archives & History. The town worked with contractors and partners such as the Savannah College of Art and Design SCADPro Program and local volunteers to design the Welcome Center. Along with opening the restored home in 2025, the town further developed the adjacent public greenspace known as Wright Family Park, allowing greater access to the May River. The efforts helped preserve a key piece of Bluffton’s history where residents and tourists can experience its unique cultural heritage.

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

City of Columbia **Planning and Development** **Outreach and Engagement**

Columbia’s city council tasked city staff with providing greater transparency in the sometimes-overwhelming development approval process. Working to provide accurate and timely information to the public, the city streamlined its communications by publishing monthly and annual reports and e-newsletters highlighting development trends, board appointments, new ordinances, planning processes, and other updates in an easily digestible format. The city also established a Development Deep

Dive presentation series held biannually to provide helpful information in an in-person session. Recorded sessions are posted online to reach a larger audience.

This multi-departmental initiative involved Planning and Development Services working with the Public Relations team to create videos, maintain the city’s website and distribute information. Marketing materials followed the graphic templates established in Columbia’s Comprehensive Planning process as well as the city’s new branding, creating clarity and consistency.

Contact Krista Hampton at krista.hampton@columbiasc.gov or 803.545.3425.

City of Florence **Overcoming** **Communications** **Challenges One** **Conversation at a Time**

Aiming to bring more transparency and understanding of local government to its residents while reducing misinformation, the City of Florence launched City University in 2023. This civics academy offers two courses annually covering municipal operations. Florence’s marketing and communications department worked closely with other departments to help provide factual information that would facilitate dialogue among constituents. City University offers seven sessions of 90 minutes each, capped at 25 participants. Off-site classes also take place, along with a city-organized bus tour to highlight current projects.

With a minimal budget, the program is fully funded through existing budgets, by creative use of city staff, resources and interdepartmental collaboration.

The city successfully achieved its goals of fostering transparency, educating residents of city operations and building trust while furthering civil engagement. As the program continues, the city will proactively invite residents who have expressed frustration and distrust through social media and other channels.

Contact Amanda Pope at apope@cityofflorence.com or 843.665.3113.

Town of Fort Mill **Fort Mill Connections** **E-Newsletter**

As local newspapers and media coverage of municipal government has declined, the Town of Fort Mill addressed the need for stronger communication of the town's projects, meetings and events. To achieve this goal, the town's communications and marketing manager created the Fort Mill Connections newsletter with input from the town manager and every town department. The monthly publication includes business and town news, event recaps, stories about Fort Mill residents and businesses, and links to town information and social media.

With an initial subscriber list of 265, the newsletter has grown its audience to 2,180 in three years. An email blast service allows the town to distribute the e-newsletter at minimal cost, with the only expense being the work hours put in by city staff. With the proven success of the e-newsletter, Fort Mill is looking to include more video content and surveys, and to expand its reach to the greater community.

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

City of Greenville **Black History Bus Tour**

Wanting to ensure that its local Black history is preserved and shared with younger generations, the City of Greenville's Communications and Engagement Department developed a Black History Tour through research and interviews. It launched in February 2024.

The bus tour, made possible through a partnership with Greenlink, included 14 stops along the bus route, highlighting landmarks that played a role in the history of segregation and the civil rights movement. Guests received a map, guide and folder with historical descriptions in a branded tote bag. The city also made the tour's materials available through a website and videos. The tour event sold out within a few days, attracting visitors from across the Carolinas. VisitGreenvilleSC funded and printed the self-guided tours booklets. With the success of the 2024 tours, the city is offering three tours in 2025.

Contact Beth Brotherton at bbrotherton@greenvilleesc.gov or 864.270.5545.

City of Greer **ForGreer**

As the City of Greer prepared for several major capital projects for public safety, recreation and downtown accessibility, all costing \$100 million, it knew it wanted to communicate about them effectively and transparently. Using in-house resources, its economic development and communications teams worked together on the ForGreer branding initiative — four projects breaking ground in four years. The campaign has its own logo, style guide, website, print materials and branded "swag," establishing a recognizable brand and inviting public involvement and collaboration in the efforts.

Using multiple tactics to spread the word about the project goals, the ForGreer initiative also set up media events and in-person community gatherings with city leadership and made use of social media platforms. The first project broke ground in February 2025, and the initiative will continue through the completion of the last project.

Contact Ayla Fitzpatrick at afitzpatrick@cityofgreer.org or 864.423.8004.

Town of Irmo **Rawls Creek Park: Where** **Innovation Meets Recreation**

With Rawls Creek Park, the Town of Irmo transformed an unused nine-acre tennis court site into a vibrant community greenspace. The new facility includes dog parks for small and large breeds, a community garden, a skate park and a walking trail. The town allocated almost \$2 million over three years from its hospitality and general fund reserves to fund the project, as well as a grant secured from the SC Park and Recreation Development Fund.

Both the town and the Richland County Recreation Commission collaborated with residents to identify needs that could be filled by the park.

The community-driven creation of Rawls Creek Park incorporates the town's strategic goals of enhancing the quality of life for its residents, stimulating local economic growth, fostering a strong sense of community, and promoting environmental sustainability. The park will host several upcoming community events and is planned to add an inclusive playground.

Contact Danielle McNaughton at dmcnaughton@townofirmosc.com or 803.781.7050 x109.

Town of Lexington **The Reimagining of Virginia Hylton Park**

Although the Town of Lexington kept Virginia Hylton Park well-maintained and a centerpiece of downtown since its opening in 1991, it nonetheless wanted to expand the park with a more inclusive design. After breaking ground on renovations in 2022, it has since doubled the park in size, adding walking paths, a new entrance and updated playground equipment. The new version of the park also boasts a splash pad, performance pavilion and a GaGa Ball pit. The carefully designed renovations also modernized the park's features to meet Americans with Disabilities Act standards.

The project's planning process sought the input of many community stakeholders, ranging from children to caregivers of children with special needs to community groups and public meeting participants. Funding was made possible through the procurement of federal grants, bond proceeds, impact fees and donations. The town is now considering the addition of public art, workout equipment and trail connections.

Contact Rachelle Gleaton at rgleaton@lexsc.gov or 803.917.0689.

Town of Mount Pleasant **Rooted in Resilience: Sustainable Solutions for Stormwater Challenges**

Mount Pleasant faced growing challenges from stormwater runoff, straining infrastructure and impacting water quality and the natural environment. The Town of Mount Pleasant conceptualized sustainable solutions and partnerships to address all of these issues. It adopted a Low-

Impact Development program to incentivize sustainable development. It also established a Take Root tree-planting initiative as well as water quality improvement programs, helping it build resilience with its existing and future stormwater infrastructure in mind. The effort distributed more than 5,000 trees to help with stormwater absorption while increasing the tree canopy.

The town leveraged strategies that had no cost, such as citizen-driven ordinance adoption and volunteer-based initiatives. Public-private partnerships made the Take Root program possible and the LID program is a self-sustaining incentive-based program benefiting developers who maintain the ordinances' standards. Town-led efforts such as wetland critical-line buffers, oyster reef rebuilding and a plastics and environmentally acceptable packaging ordinance have all helped improve water quality.

Contact Eric LaFontaine at elafontaine@tompsc.com or 843.901.1649.

Town of Pendleton **Village Hills Redevelopment TIF District**

When a developer proposed a revitalization of a blighted historic area, the Town of Pendleton enacted its Village Hills Small Area Plan, conceptualizing the redevelopment of a Tax Increment Financing district to include a mixed-use plan of residential, commercial and recreational spaces.

The TIF district makes funds available for upgraded infrastructure such as water, sewer and electrical services. It also made a new fire station possible, improving public safety response time. The district also received repaved roads and new sidewalk construction for greater walkability.

Partnerships with stakeholders, the input of town council, town staff, developers, a steering committee and the planning commission all contributed to the launch of the TIF district. The next phase of the plan includes a design ordinance that will further enhance the town's vision for its overall architecture while preserving its historic integrity.

Contact Steve Miller at stevem@townofpendleton.org or 864.502.4485.

City of Simpsonville **Simpsonville Municipal Complex**

As the City of Simpsonville grew, it faced outdated and overcrowded buildings for its police and fire departments, and its city hall. In 2021, the city envisioned a new municipal complex adjoining the existing City Park. It would build new police and fire stations, a new city hall, consolidate the Simpsonville Municipal Court with the South Greenville Summary Court, sell the former city hall site on Main Street for future development, and update the aging City Park.

This new Simpsonville Municipal Complex was funded in part through Installment Purchase Revenue Bonds and Hospitality and Accommodations Tax Revenue Bonds, American Rescue Plan Act funding, the city's Capital Improvement Fund, and city fund balance. City council hired design firms to work alongside it and city staff to design the proposed buildings and to enhance existing sites. The funds were allocated efficiently, establishing a single campus where the public can access all city services.

Contact Tee Coker at tee@simpsonville.com or 864.967.5404.

City of Spartanburg Hello Family Spartanburg

Launched in 2021, Hello Family Spartanburg addresses barriers to early childhood development, focusing on health, wellbeing and education. Developed with the understanding that two out of five Spartanburg children live in poverty, this program identifies the needs that many families face and work strategically with community partners to overcome those challenges.

The City of Spartanburg partnered with the Institute for Child Success to identify 12 services needed to improve outcomes. This was refined to four through a feasibility study funded by the Social Innovation Fund to find the services most suitable for a “Pay for Success” financing plan. Through innovative partnerships with stakeholders, the city generated over \$50 million in new investments for the effort.

Goals included reducing avoidable emergency room visits, increasing school readiness, decreasing maltreatment cases and reducing low birth weights. This innovative approach aligns with the city’s mission to improve education and greater overall quality of life for residents.

Contact Kaitlin Watts at kwatts@instituteforchildsuccess.org or 864.867.1336 x820.

Town of St. Matthews Renovation of Old National Guard Armory Into a New Fire Station

As the Town of St. Matthews has grown, it developed a need for a larger, modernized fire station to serve its community efficiently. It decided to pursue a major renovation project to repurpose the former National Guard Armory Motor Pool into a building housing its fire department.

Included in the plan were new living quarters, gathering spaces and training rooms. To secure funding for the project, the town secured \$750,000 in state appropriated funds for the project. Through careful planning and a reevaluation at the design process to align with the existing budget, the first phase was completed. The town plans to expand the training site to incorporate firefighting props, enhancing the fire department’s overall skills training.

Contact Rosyl Warren at warrenr@townofstmatthews.com or 803.874.2405.

City of Sumter Keep Sumter Clean – 2024 Junk Removal

As the City of Sumter sought to reduce illegal dumping, it found that many residents lacked the means to transport bulky junk items to local landfills. It established the Keep Sumter Clean Curbside Junk Removal Program, a one-time service that helped residents dispose of any bulky household items like mattresses, furniture and appliances.

Sumter’s Communications Department facilitated a robust community outreach campaign for the effort using radio, newspaper, text messaging, social media, email and print mail. A dedicated landing page on the city’s website with a custom URL, www.KeepSumterClean.com, further marketed the event. Contingency funds were used so no outside funding was necessary.

Because of the program’s success, the city extended the service for an additional week, removing a total of 1.2 million pounds of debris. The city plans to provide an annual “Junk Removal Week” to continue to promote clean community spaces for all to enjoy.

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

City of York York Connected: Fostering Community Through Transparency and Engagement

The City of York worked to revamp its communication efforts after community surveys revealed the need for greater transparency. It developed a strategic communication plan outlining clear goals and objectives, including the creation of a quarterly newsletter, updated annual reporting of city goals, budgets and crime statistics, the launch of a Civic Academy Pilot Program and greater leveraging of media platforms.

Project goals included improving access to information, building trust and increasing community engagement. City staff and leadership worked together to collect data, gather reports and partner with local media to continue its reach. The city also collaborated with CivicsEDU Academy, which allowed residents an outlet to share insights directly with York City Council. The city’s budget report received a Government Finance Officers Association award for its clarity and transparency.

These strategic partnerships not only strengthened the city’s communications efforts but also allowed for building trust through more transparency and fostering greater civic engagement.

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

Main Street Fountain Inn – Restoration and Preservation of the Historic Ellison Flour Mill

Fountain Inn's population has grown dramatically, increasing by 25% from 2020 to 2023. This has opened many new development possibilities for its downtown, and developer Bryan Beal decided to renovate several dilapidated mill buildings into new businesses, all while preserving and repurposing as much of the building's materials as possible.

The large three-story building, a mill that opened in 1940 and fell out of use in the 1970s, has become the home of Fountain Inn Brewing, with a 16-tap bar and pizza kitchen. It retains its historic roller mill and other equipment, as well as its exterior tin siding. A second building, once an auction house, is now the Clubhouse, a common area that accesses a fenced-in outdoor greenspace and event space. The final building to be restored, which served as an auto repair shop, is now a food hall offering options from local restaurants. Investor-driven funding for the project took advantage of federal and state historic tax credits, as well as SC Abandoned Buildings Revitalization Act tax credits.

The project's event space has enabled cross-promotion of onsite events and other downtown events, and its operations have greatly enhanced foot traffic in the area.

Contact Amberly Steele at amberly.steele@fountaininn.org or 864.714.2663.

Inspiration Awards

Outstanding Promotion

Main Street Walterboro – “We Are Walterboro” Campaign

Aiming to showcase the business owners of downtown Walterboro and boost community pride, Main Street Walterboro crafted a social media series sharing the stories of the people behind the businesses. It brought in professional storyteller Phil Eich for photo and interview sessions with 12 downtown merchants and community members, and developed the material gathered into feature stories. This technical assistance opportunity was funded through Main Street SC's Southeast Crescent Regional Commission grant award to support South Carolina's local entrepreneurs.

The stories ran weekly on social media, receiving substantial attention and positive feedback, and even helping to counter local social media communities' negative focus. Business owners reported customer growth from this positive coverage, a greater connection to the community and excitement for future development. Main Street Walterboro plans to extend the campaign with additional businesses in the downtown and throughout Colleton County.

Contact Patricia Utsey at putsey@walterborosc.org or 843.898.0840.

Gaines Jontz Rehabilitation Main Street Clover – Brick and Mortar Coffee and Mercantile

The historic storefront at 109 N. Main St. in Clover was used as a storage space and office before it was revitalized to become Brick and Mortar Coffee and Mercantile, a new business providing a much-needed hangout spot for the community.

The yearlong project undertaken by the business owner restored the building's facade, using Main Street Clover's facade grant to provide for elements including new signage and a new awning. The effort updated the interior for functionality, all while preserving the building's character and using locally reclaimed lumber and other materials. A new exterior patio and deck area adds to the business' charm.

With a newly enlivened storefront highlighting Clover's character and history, the business has bolstered downtown foot traffic and has spurred new interest in other downtown properties.

Contact Alicia Griffith at agriffith@cloversc.org or 803.982.1517.

Master Merchant Main Street Bennettsville – Cindy Ayers, Gifts & More

For nearly three decades, Cindy Ayers, owner of Gifts and More, has been the heart of downtown Bennettsville's retail scene. The owner of the city's only boutique retailer, Ayers has developed a reputation as an adaptable entrepreneur through changing business climates. She expanded her offerings over the years to include jewelry, boutique clothing, home decor, candles, collegiate wear, baby items, and even interactive shopping experiences like a hat bar and jewelry bar.

Ayers is also a community leader, participating in City of Bennettsville and Main Street Bennettsville events like community festivals and seasonal promotions, and by employing local youth. She is a champion of well-maintained storefronts, having renovated her two facades in 2024 with new awnings and with new flooring, ceilings and lighting in her recessed window displays.

Contact Brittany Jones at brittany.jones@bennettsville.com or 843.439.7209.

Outstanding Special Project Main Street Bennettsville – Pollinator Planters

Inspired by the importance of pollinators for ecosystems and Bennettsville's history of agriculture, Main Street Bennettsville Board Member Chelsea Carabo, a beekeeper, helped establish the downtown Bennettsville pollinator planter program. The planters promote downtown vibrancy and environmental stewardship, as they offer up flowers and other plants that maximize benefits to bees, butterflies and other essential pollinators. Gardening experts provided input on the best plants to use.

Funding came from a \$5,000 grant from Healthy People, Healthy Carolinas, a part of McLeod Health's Access Health program, as well as sponsoring businesses, organizations, and people whose sponsorships of individual planters helps the project's long-term sustainability. Volunteers installed the planters during a community cleanup day. The City of Bennettsville provided logistical assistance for installation, and the fire department maintains the planters' watering systems. A local sign shop provided signage for each planter.

Contact Brittany Jones at brittany.jones@bennettsville.com or 843.439.7209.

Outstanding Partnership Downtown Sumter – Rotary Centennial Plaza Renovation

In 2005, the Sumter Rotary Club, Rotary Club of Sumter-Palmetto and Rotary Club of Sumter Sunrise worked with the City of Sumter to establish the Rotary Centennial Plaza at Main and Liberty streets in downtown Sumter, creating a landmark that is frequently used for fundraising events and the summer Downtown Market. After nearly two decades, this same partnership of the city and Rotary groups refurbished the plaza in 2024 at a cost of \$750,000.

The project refurbished greenspaces, added sidewalks and updated the fountain surrounding the large street clock. It also re-bricked the area and added the Rotary International logo to the pavers surrounding the fountain. The improvements have led to greater use of the plaza and more interest in hosting events at the location.

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