



2021

Achievement Awards  
Main Street Inspiration Awards

**MASC** Municipal Association  
of South Carolina<sup>SM</sup>



# 2021 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.

This year, 27 municipalities entered the Achievement Awards program. Videos highlighting this year's winners are available on the Association's website at [www.masc.sc](http://www.masc.sc) (keyword: achievement).

## Population 1 – 1,000 Category | Town of Lowrys Giving in a Small Town

In need of a permanent location to conduct its business that would be free of scheduling conflicts, the Town of Lowrys transformed a former doctor's office that it already owned to create a new town hall and meeting space. It renovated the structure, dating to 1949, leveraging a Hometown Economic Development Grant from the Municipal Association.

The facility, once used for storage, now has office and meeting space, as well as rotating art installations in its lobby. It also features dedicated display space for artifacts from the town's history, including items from the town's former school, post office and train depot. The renovations added new parking and landscaping. While the town hall provides a central location for handling rentals of the town's community center and organization for the iconic Lowrys Christmas Parade, it is also a meeting location for other small groups. Since moving council meetings to the facility, public engagement has increased substantially.

The town hall comes alongside other valuable upgrades to the local government's services, including a part-time assistant to answer questions and maintain the town website. Other recent improvements include a successful grant application to improve handicapped accessibility at its community building and approval for a park project funded by a capital project sales tax.

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## Population 1,001 – 5,000 Category | Town of Surfside Beach 3rd Avenue South Promenade Project

3rd Avenue South serves as part of Surfside Beach's commercial district, but it has historically not received the same attention given to the more-traveled Surfside Drive. With fewer customers and inadequate parking, the street experienced heavy business turnover. The town, seeking to create a destination on the street for shopping and dining, decided to pursue infrastructure upgrades to make new commercial activity more feasible. It completed an overhaul of the block including drainage, improved parking, handicapped access, wider sidewalks, underground utilities, decorative streetlights and street resurfacing.

The town began by successfully petitioning the SC Department of Transportation to transfer ownership of the street to the town, engaging with the utility provider on the feasibility of relocating utilities underground and presenting the project to the public. Surfside Beach obtained nearly full funding for the project from Horry County “C” funds, the SC Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism and utility franchise funds. The town’s grounds personnel completed the landscaping. The town collaborated with contractors, engineers and business stakeholders to complete the extensive transformation. This partnership avoided complaints of lost business as the work unfolded.

As the storefronts fill with new patrons, including a sidewalk cafe, the town aims to bolster a heightened sense of belonging and purpose for the long-neglected area.

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## Population 5,001 – 10,000 Category | City of Hartsville Youth Professional Development - Neptune Island Waterpark

The City of Hartsville’s Neptune Island waterpark, which welcomed nearly 200,000 guests in its first three seasons, employs about 200 seasonal staff members each year. Nearly all of these workers are high school or college students, making the park one of the region’s largest employers of this age group. The city recognized it as a unique opportunity to enhance leadership and teamwork skills in the community’s young people, building job experience in its local workforce.

After using a local staffing agency for the waterpark’s first season, the city switched to handling human resources for the park internally. The Neptune Island team then developed new training efforts based on its own experiences and guidance from companies respected for their customer service, such as Disney and Chick-fil-A. The team built strategic partnerships with local school districts to engage with students. They also created employee incentive programs and model leadership opportunities.

Neptune Island’s staff members have benefitted from the job skills learned at the attraction as they have transitioned into their professional lives, making the park an investment in Hartsville’s future workforce. In 2021, Neptune Island will introduce an Employee Advisory Committee to give employees more opportunities to improve the guest experience at the park. It will also grow the leadership program with additional training offerings, and will feature professional development activities like interview training, professional communications and resume-building workshops.

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## Population 10,001 – 20,000 Category | Town of Bluffton Wright Family Park: Honoring the Town’s natural resources, history and culture

With the expansion of its park offering as a goal of its Old Town Master Plan, the Town of Bluffton had long sought to buy the Wright family property to make it a park. The property, vacant since the 1990s, is located on the May River and features the Squire Pope Carriage House, a structure with more than 150 years of history.

The town partnered with Beaufort County to purchase the property for \$1.5 million, with an agreement that makes the town the park’s operating partner. Funding for the park’s construction came from hospitality and accommodations taxes along with a SC Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism grant. At the same time, the town expanded the historic Calhoun Street Regional Dock, which is adjacent to the property.





Archaeological digs by the Historic Bluffton Foundation yielded dozens of artifacts at the site. Town staff worked with the Wright family and preservation experts to incorporate the family's and town's history into the park's signs, elements and landscaping. Moving forward, the town will use a matching grant from the SC Department of Archives and History to stabilize and rehabilitate the Squire Pope House for public use.

As developed, the Wright Family Park gives all residents and visitors a better opportunity to experience the ecology, culture and identity of one of the South's last historical river villages.

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## Communications Category | City of Greenville

### City of Greenville Video Week-in-Review

Although the City of Greenville spends tens of millions of dollars every year on services and projects, those efforts can often remain unknown to residents. This can be especially true when the work is on a scale that falls outside the scope of traditional news coverage — for example, tree plantings, playground reopenings or electric vehicle charging stations. To more effectively communicate and engage with its residents, the city created the Week-in-Review videos to tell its own stories in a fun, conversational way and to increase transparency.

Greenville's Department of Communications and Neighborhood Relations publishes the two-to-three-minute videos each Friday. The videos highlight how city staff is accomplishing council priorities in such areas as valuable growth, environmental sustainability, public transportation, recreation and events.

The videos are an outgrowth of a written Week-in-Review, originally used only for an audience of city staff. The communications department developed a form for managers to submit news, and hired a multimedia communications specialist to develop stories and create external digital content.

Stakeholders around Greenville and news outlets regularly share the videos, and staff has received feedback from new residents that the videos are helping them understand what is happening in the city. The videos have received more than 153,000 views across the city's online platforms. Because the project began during the COVID-19 pandemic, it has also helped create connections even in the absence of normal engagement efforts and meetings. The city is now exploring how it can expand the audience for the videos.

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## Economic Development Category | City of Newberry

### Fiber to the Home Project — Where Opportunity Intersects With Need

Inadequate internet infrastructure meant that Newberry was an underserved community for high-speed internet — a liability that made the area less attractive for businesses and residents. The City of Newberry found that existing providers would not improve service speeds, and so it decided to build its own network. It became South Carolina's first municipality to complete and operate a fiber-optic network that serves all residents and businesses.

The city partnered with telecommunications company WCFiber to light the fiber. Careful legal research found that the city partnering with an end-user provider prevented it from competing with private industry. Newberry used gross revenue fund savings to build the network, to be reimbursed from fiber-optic lease revenue. As the city already operated an electric utility, it could use its existing poles for the network, allowing for a swift and cost-effective build.

The city planned for a three-year construction project, but decided to accelerate construction once the COVID-19 pandemic spurred a need to connect customers with a better option for virtual schooling and remote work. The city's utilities department oversaw the construction firm's project and will continue to provide maintenance to the network. WCFiber created an in-town office for customer service.

The original conservative estimate that 25% of possible customers would use the service was far exceeded within the first year. By intentionally overbuilding the network, Newberry can more easily extend the system as growth occurs, so that the network can provide internet to new areas with a level of service that customers would see in a larger community.

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## Public Safety Category | City of Hanahan COVID-19 Relief

When the COVID-19 pandemic began, the Hanahan Fire Department leapt into action to fight the spread of the disease and reduce its impacts. The department worked to provide virus testing in the community, including testing at nursing homes, schools and industrial sites. It partnered with the Berkeley County Emergency Management Division to supply rapid testing and after-hours testing for essential staff.

The fire department's staff has a wealth of emergency management training, and began its efforts by studying and planning to ensure that its staff was equipped and trained for pandemic response. It advised city leaders, and worked with the SC Department of Health and Environmental Control to fill testing staff needs statewide. The department's staff worked with community leaders to advocate for testing and mask usage.

Funding for the efforts initially came from the city's budget, with careful tracking of expenses using Federal Emergency Management Agency forms. The Emergency Operations Center was able to reimburse the city through Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act funding. The city also contracted with DHEC to pay for testing and for testing staff.

By early 2021, the department handled more than 10,000 tests and worked at 149 other testing sites around the state. Staff continues to publish incident action plans, provide contact tracing and give safety updates. The department also set itself up as a vaccination site equipped with vaccine freezers. While continuing to provide its regular services, the fire department's initiative, fiscal responsibility and community leadership during the pandemic have gone well beyond its ordinary responsibilities and helped to save lives.

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## Public Service Category | City of Conway Conway Playground Reinvention Project

After some of the City of Conway's playgrounds were severely damaged by the floodwaters of Hurricane Florence in 2018, the city decided to significantly improve its playground offerings as part of its rebuilding efforts. At the same time, it moved to create a new fully-accessible playground.

The previous facilities at Riverfront Playground, Sherwood Park and the recreation center playground were typical of decades-old equipment: mostly plastic climbing and sliding structures. They also lacked accessibility for children with disabilities. A committee of Conway's staff from multiple departments oversaw the redevelopment of Sherwood and Riverfront parks. The nonprofit group Conway Cares led the effort to establish the handicapped-accessible Ladybug Park at the Recreation Center.



The city undertook the new projects using a mix of Federal Emergency Management Agency, state and private funds. Each playground was bid through a competitive bid process and overseen by a full committee of staff, followed by approval from city council. The new playgrounds are also made of fully flood-resistant material.

Riverfront Playground and Ladybug Park at the recreation center provide two new options for children of all capabilities. The playgrounds also connect directly to the history and character of Conway. The Riverfront Playground, which previously had a generic pirate theme, now has a steamboat play feature, representing the steamboat's role in the city's history. The completed parks contribute to the city's efforts to provide more valuable services to a rapidly growing population.

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## Public Works Category | Town of Hilton Head Island Rehabilitation of Storm Water Pump Stations

Stormwater pump stations serve as a vital part of flood control for barrier island communities such as Hilton Head Island that have low-lying watersheds influenced by tides. The town's Jarvis Creek and Lawton Canal pump stations, the town's two oldest stations, needed major system upgrades as evidence by service failures, including during Hurricane Matthew, and mounting repair costs. The town undertook a more than \$4.2 million rehabilitation of the stations, replacing electrical control systems, installing new and refurbished generators, overhauling submersible pumps, and upgrading remote monitoring, among other upgrades.

After identifying the stations' deficiencies, staff worked with the original pump manufacturer and a contractor to create a cost-effective improvement plan to improve reliability and protect against flooding from storms. Upgrades to the power systems, gates, debris screens and sediment dredging also aimed to reduce the risk of failure. Funding for the \$4.2-million effort came entirely from property-based stormwater utility fees. The Jarvis Creek project reduces the potential for flood losses for more than 1,700 properties in its watershed, while the Lawton Creek project does the same for 1,800 properties in its watershed.

The projects are vital to the town's strategic plans and efforts to protect the community from rising sea levels. The upgrades help protect more than 3,500 properties, providing long-term, efficient flood control and stormwater management. The town also implemented a new web-based asset management program that will help efficiently document maintenance work that will help it manage and plan for ongoing costs.

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# Other Entries

## City of Anderson Anderson Strong Promise

When the COVID-19 pandemic began, the City of Anderson took note of the lack of centralized information on reducing virus spread, especially in terms of facemask messaging. It launched the “Anderson Strong Promise,” the most extensive communications campaign in the city’s history, to promote social distancing and save lives.

The campaign featured events to give away masks, T-shirts and education materials. It included six major events drawing in thousands of people and another 27 events staged by community partners. It led to the distribution of more than 18,000 masks. Funding came from the General Fund, the event promotions budget, federal reimbursement and hospitality tax revenue.

With print materials blanketing the city, the mayor and others appearing in broadcast, print and social media, and a Spanish-language component as well, the campaign generated earned media exposure from the effort amounts to more than 1 million impressions.

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## City of Atlantic Beach Atlantic Beach Neighborhood Community Watch Initiative

Aiming to reduce crime and provide more security for residents, the Atlantic Beach Police Department created a neighborhood watch program. Through it, officers take initiative to check on homes while their owners are away. The department also expanded its efforts to combat driving under the influence as well as underage drinking.

As another outreach channel, the department created a partnership with Chick-fil-A for sponsoring community events. The program’s event schedule includes a Christmas party with gifts for every child as well as a back-to-school event to distribute school supplies.

The program has helped to build trust and new relationships between officers and the residents they serve, and has increased the department’s call volume. Atlantic Beach has also experienced a crime decrease, increase in property values and property sales, and new house construction.

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## City of Camden Weaving the Thin, Blue Line through the Fabric of the Community

Wanting to engage its residents through non-enforcement interactions and build trust, the Camden Police Department created the Community Oriented Policing Services division. The COPS team’s officers work to creatively address concerns beyond criminal activity, helping find community resources such as food, shelter and mental health treatment. They also visit schools, handle business walkthroughs and join in community events.

The efforts began with a successful grant application with the Department of Justice Community Oriented Police Services Hiring Program. The department also partnered with the nonprofit Serve and Connect, which focuses on improving police relationships and helping underserved neighborhoods. The city also budgets for some program needs.

COPS has created new community collaboration, with businesses and organizations donating goods for its events. The police department received another three-year round of funding, and has expanded it from two to three full-time officers, all in a department of 34 sworn officers.

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## City of Cayce Cayce River Arts District Development

For years, Cayce struggled to find a way to build revitalization energy in its original central business district, a place of boarded-up buildings suffering from crime and depressed property values. The city achieved redevelopment traction using “previtalization,” a concept introduced to the city by the Mayors’ Institute of City Design, to highlight the district’s potential.

The effort included strategic public art installations, with the city helping to initiate the Cayce Arts Guild. Projects included murals, sculptures, an “art lot” with a stage, wayfinding signage and window wraps. The city also updated zoning and created the “Soiree on State” street party, which asked property owners to clean out their buildings so they could host artists.

Using the momentum of these efforts, the city hosted meetings with owners and artists to address ways to attract development. Derelict, underutilized buildings now house new businesses. Property values have increased, along with safety.

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## Town of Chapin Town of Chapin Wastewater Treatment Plant

Chapin faced capacity challenges at its aerated wastewater lagoon, as well as stronger state-imposed discharge limits it would have difficulty meeting. The town established a new activated

sludge wastewater facility to meet the new state regulations while adding capacity.

The environmentally friendly project aimed to reduce pollution by creating clear, clean effluent discharge. The new system reduces suspended solids and oxygen-consuming material to undetectable levels. The town funded the \$14 million project with a State Revolving Fund loan, adding some town funds and keeping change orders limited to manage costs.

The system can expand to accommodate the substantial growth happening in the town’s service area as well. The system can easily double its existing capacity of 2.4 million gallons per day.

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## City of Clemson ClemsonNext: Public Input on the City of Clemson’s Strategic Plan

The City of Clemson has grown rapidly in recent years from factors including Clemson University’s growth. Its residents were concerned about the substantial development of high-density and student-focused housing, as well as growing traffic. City council established a six-month moratorium on large multifamily developments so that a steering committee and consultant could create a new strategic plan with public input.

The COVID-19 pandemic created new challenges as the ClemsonNext work began and all communication efforts became fully remote, including meetings, presentations and surveys. Even so, the project staged 14 roundtable focus group interviews, brought

in more than 7,000 unique visitors to its website and drew engagement through email updates, social media, a virtual town hall and a final strategy survey.

The project brought together the consultant with city staff, university graduate students and other local groups. The final report will be integral in city council’s future development decisions.

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## City of Denmark New City Hall Building

Denmark’s former city hall, a converted bank building, faced structural deficiencies, inefficient heating and cooling and a lack of designated parking. Seeking to replace it, city council visited new city halls elsewhere, hired an architect and sought public input, which led to the addition of a drive-thru for bill payments. The project also included a generator to allow city hall to serve as an emergency shelter.

The city funded the project with general fund savings, and a US Department of Agriculture Rural Development grant used for furniture. City council remained engaged through the design and construction process.

The completed facility serves as a new addition to a downtown that also has a recently completed streetscaping project. The city also plans to remodel its former city hall as a new police department.

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## City of Fountain Inn Emanuel Sullivan Sports Complex

Fountain Inn's sports park, built decades ago when the city's population was less than half of its current size, no longer met the community's needs. After a redesign and renovation of a 14-acre project area, the facility includes three new baseball fields, a new multipurpose field, a T-ball field, batting cages and a new playground. The project's goals focused on expanding parking, regrading fields to improve drainage, and building a centralized location for restrooms, concessions and a press box.

To fund the \$4.3-million effort, the city created the Fountain Inn facilities Corporation to issue Installment Purchase Revenue Bonds. Even with upgrades and some change orders, the project came in under budget.

The renovation of the complex helps fulfill a critical need for the fast-growing city. Before the city completed the project, it had begun to lose local young people to the recreation programs in neighboring communities.

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## City of Georgetown Port Tank Rehabilitation

Georgetown's 500,000-gallon Port Tank serves residential, commercial and industrial customers. Built in 1973 and featuring a paint job at least 15 years old, it suffered from severe deterioration given its proximity to water and mill operations.

The city decided to completely overhaul it by removing all paint down to the bare metal before painting its interior and exterior. Because of the tank's age, the city first tested for lead paint, and used an abatement procedure for the traces of lead it discovered. The project also included the replacement of corroded parts and the installation of the city's logos.

The project cost nearly \$494,000. A Rural Infrastructure Authority grant covered 75% of this, with the remainder paid by the city's water fund balance. The restoration has provided for adequate water storage for its entire community. The tank directly benefits 1,600 customers and helps maintain the water pressure needed for fire protection.

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## City of Hardeeville Making a Difference With Workforce Training Program

As one of the fastest-growing municipalities in the state, Hardeeville is expecting new jobs in its region, especially industrial opportunities, given the city's position along major highways and near the growing Port of Savannah. Recognizing the need to enhance its workforce and attract higher-paying jobs, the city established the Workforce Training Program.

Taking place at the city's public works building and using instruction from Palmetto Training, the initiative provides a 10-week course in welding, Occupational Safety and Health Administration and forklift certification, as well as a Class A commercial driver's license

program. A \$350,000 grant from EJP Philanthropies helped modify the building, purchase machinery and cover the \$5,500 instruction costs.

So far, 20 students have graduated from the welding course and five from the CDL program, with graduates finding new, higher-paying jobs. The city is exploring partnerships to provide funding that can potentially expand the program.

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## Town of James Island New Town Hall

Recognizing that the expensive rents of commercial space on James Island were not sustainable for the town's government, James Island looked to invest in its future with a municipal-owned Town Hall. The complex, built with community input, features an administrative building and separate council chambers. It can also withstand hurricanes and serve as a Municipal Operations Center, and has space for planned expansions.

The selected site faced challenges. The heirs that owned some parcels could not afford the cost of clearing the title, and so the town worked to pay those costs. Since a portion of the site fell inside the City of Charleston's boundaries, the Town of James Island worked with Charleston to have the latter remove the parcel from its jurisdiction. The town funded the project with a lease-purchase revenue bond, paid with local option sales tax funding. As the town has paid its first-ever bond issue, it has solidified its future borrowing power for further projects.

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## City of Johnsonville Construction of New Municipal Complex on Broadway Street

In need of a larger municipal complex, Johnsonville decided it could also work to build new interest in its downtown for businesses by locating the new city hall downtown. Projects that had moved the post office and county library branch away from downtown had decreased traffic in the area.

The city decided to acquire and demolish a grocery store with structural issues to provide for the new facility's construction. The project used city funds with some donations for site development and design, with the new building's mortgage financed with Installment Purchase Revenue Bonds. The new 7,236-square-foot complex has offices for administrative staff, water and sewer department directors and the mayor. IT also houses an Emergency Operations Center and a much larger city council chambers that doubles as a municipal courtroom.

The complex, planned to be used for decades to come, offers room for growth and serves a highly visible new piece of the downtown streetscape.

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## Town of Lexington One-Way Pair and Downtown Beautification

Lexington's rapid growth in recent years had greatly increased traffic density, with plenty of growth projected for the next decade. To help manage these changes, the town created a one-way pair

project, converting parallel streets into one-way roads moving either north or south. The effort drastically improved downtown traffic and provided greater accessibility for Main Street visitors. It also provided beautification improvements and increased pedestrian safety, significantly changing Lexington's downtown experience.

The project became the first item to be funded by the town's 2% hospitality tax. The town used internal resources for the project, including its transportation department and parks department, handling everything from electrical work to brick pavers, guardrails, planters and traffic islands. The one-way pair, working with the town's installation of adaptive traffic signals, has created a 41% improvement in travel time in the Main Street area. Lexington is planning more traffic-flow projects, including another one-way pair and additional traffic signals.

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## Town of Patrick Town of Patrick Community Sign

The Town of Patrick's decades-old community sign, providing information on council and commission meetings as well as other messages, required a worker climbing a ladder to manually change messages. Over the years, the possibility that this work could lead to an injury and a lawsuit had become the town's foremost risk management concern. Aiming to replace the sign with modern LED signage, the mayor successfully obtained a \$10,000 donation from Sandhill Telephone Cooperative, with the town council setting aside the remaining \$12,516 for the project.

The completed LED sign draws attention to Patrick's businesses and community identity. The town also offers residents an opportunity to place personalized birthday wishes and other greetings on the sign for \$10 each. The proceeds from that offering enter into a sign operations account to help with future maintenance costs.

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## City of Simpsonville Public Engagement Initiative

Aiming to increase resident engagement, the City of Simpsonville invested in a community relations specialist position, which has helped it expand its social media presence, revamp its website and launch an e-newsletter. A branding initiative, meanwhile, replaced the city's outdated logo and tagline. The new "Simply Home" tagline allows for versatile social media hashtags like "#SimplyDelicious" and "#SimplyConnected."

The city also worked to keep the community engaged throughout the pandemic with free socially-distant events, such as concerts and movies with circles marked out 6 feet apart for visitors at Heritage Park, as well as COVID-19 response information and facemask communication spread through social media and the website.

Simpsonville's operating budget funded the community relations specialist position and website improvements. Accommodations taxes funded the branding project and a new, branded signage. Funding for the events and for gateway signage came from hospitality and accommodations taxes,

the operating budget and sponsorships.

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## City of Sumter Sumter Fire Department Training Facility

After the massive flood of October 2015 damaged the Sumter Fire Department's training location, the city partnered with Sumter County to build a new large-scale facility. The space can house more than 100 firefighters for certification training at one time.

Funding came from the City of Sumter and Sumter County with help from private partnerships, as well as federal resources. Beyond conference and classroom space, the complex has facilities for simulating fires and other emergencies, and spaces for testing pumps, ladders and hoses.

The department's training division and programs make use of internal instructors as well as those from the SC Fire Academy, the National Fire Academy, the University of Georgia and others. The department offers the facility for training to Sumter County Emergency Medical Services, the Shaw Air Force Base Fire Department, law enforcement and the SC Department of Corrections.

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## City of West Columbia West Columbia Outreach Program

When West Columbia observed that police calls involving mental health or substance use had increased to include about one-third of all calls, it decided to establish the West Columbia Outreach Program, a way to promote positive behavior change and reduce both service calls and crime rates. The program assists people with screenings, brief interventions and identification of priority needs so that it can refer people to appropriate services such as counseling, food banks, homeless shelters or other assistance.

Planning began with a data-driven needs assessment, and the program partnered with the University of South Carolina's College of Social Work. Its students, working through police records to identify ways to connect people to resources, can use the time to complete their required internship hours. The program also partnered with Lexington County and mental health advocacy groups.

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## City Wellford Community Safety With De-escalation Tools for Law Enforcement

The Wellford Police Department, seeking out new tools to keep its residents and its officers safe, decided after careful research to integrate the Vector police shield and its associated training into its policing.

Smaller and more mobile than ordinary shields used by law enforcement, Vector police shields are de-escalation tools that can create a barrier between officers and others in a dangerous situation while promoting the safety of both groups. The shields work to create space between the two parties while also reducing the visual focus on aggressive actions and weapons that can increase tension in a situation, and come with specialized training.

The department funded its adoption of the equipment using grants, and aims to eventually place it in every police vehicle.

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# 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 accredited by the National Main Street Center. The program follows National Main Street's Four Point Approach — economic vitality, design, promotion and organization. Each year, Main Street South Carolina recognizes members' achievements and successes in downtown revitalization.

## Excellence on Main Street Award

### City of Laurens' Back Street Park – Main Street Laurens

After the City of Laurens demolished a dilapidated building at the prominent downtown intersection of Main and Harper streets, it found that the property was too small for new development. The Main Street Laurens design team proposed using the site as a pocket park and worked with the city to install swings as well as tables that restaurants could use as outdoor seating.

The new park remained too exposed to the intersection, however, and initially received little use. The city upgraded the facility with fencing made of brick and wrought iron, enhanced its landscaping and added lamps. It also added new benches, many of which were donated, and a refurbished fountain, dating to 1911, which originally stood on the Laurens County courthouse grounds. The park has become a catalyst for further improvements in the area, as work is now underway at an adjacent parking lot to add trees, curbing, lighting, electric car charging stations and bike racks.

The park celebrates Back Street, a part of the downtown once filled with Black-owned businesses that has since disappeared. A city-established committee gathered the names of the historic business owners, which now appear on a marker at the park's entrance to honor their role in the history of Laurens.

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## Inspiration Awards

### Outstanding Partnership

#### Butterfly Project, Downtown Sumter

Aiming to add new public art projects —an element that was lacking in the growing downtown district — Downtown Sumter partnered with the Main Street Society, a City of Sumter committee, to beautify and promote downtown. They created the Butterfly project, a series of professionally created fiberglass sculptures, painted by local artists and placed around downtown.

The project chose butterflies as a symbol of growth and change — themes that connect to the revitalization that downtown Sumter has now experienced for two decades. The initial installation featured seven butterflies, with \$500 sponsorships that covered the cost of the sculptures and an artist stipend for each sculpture. The partnership sought out artists through an application process and invited children to join in the painting of a butterfly during a special event. The city had the sculptures professionally clear-coated before hanging them on light poles. When the city removes the sculptures for replacement, it will give those sculptures to their original sponsors.

The butterflies have drawn news media and social media attention, and have become an attraction drawing people downtown. The partnership behind the project hopes to create more butterfly installations and is working toward a mural project in 2021.

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## Outstanding Promotion

### Holiday Gift Guide 2020, Downtown Florence

After a year of pandemic-related revenue losses, Downtown Florence knew its businesses needed a successful holiday season in 2020. The office curated its first-ever digital Holiday Gift Guide, featuring the products and services available around downtown that would make excellent gifts. The guide aimed to connect shoppers with businesses while also inspiring businesses to get creative with holiday gift packages and experiences.

The project began in October. Each interested restaurant, retailer and service-based business received a free page in the guide as well as access to Downtown Florence staff to take photos, write descriptions and assemble prices. The development office then designed the guide in-house and before promoting it through social media and advertising campaigns, with a \$5,000 budget for promotion.

The guide launched just before Thanksgiving with just over 50% of downtown businesses participating, and it was well-received by businesses and customers alike. It categorized gifts by potential recipient, highlighted locally sourced gifts and gifts supporting charitable causes. It also included a page of stocking stuffers priced at \$15 or less helped address the perception that downtown businesses are too expensive. Downtown Florence now plans to recreate the guide in 2021.

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## Gaines Jontz Rehabilitation Midtown Building, Main Street Laurens

The newly renovated Midtown Building, a historic structure dating to no later than 1884, now hosts popup events, coworking space and private office space. The effort is the first complete building rehabilitation in downtown Laurens in more than two decades.

The project emerged with the property owner's longstanding desire to renovate a historic building on Laurens's courthouse square, giving attention to restoring the original integrity and charm of a building that has everything from a general store to a print shop, grocery store, ice cream parlor and paint store. The effort brought back the façade's original appearance from a more modern metal frame and restored wooden doors to the building. The property owner financed the \$175,000 restoration.

In addition to encouraging property improvements and investments elsewhere in the downtown, the project has drawn new activity. The offices and coworking space attract clients who eat and shop downtown. The popup restaurant events in the downstairs space, known as the Midtown Muster, have created new nightlife. Downtown Laurens saw more than \$1 million in reinvestment in 2020, and has four new revitalization projects beginning in 2021.

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## Outstanding New Construction Market Pavilion, Downtown Orangeburg Revitalization Association

Established in 2015, the Downtown Orangeburg Farmers Market aimed to reduce the impact of the loss of the downtown's last grocery store, to give local farmers a sales outlet and to increase the district's customer pace. After years of rapid growth using tents and tables in Orangeburg's Memorial Plaza— and periodic difficulty with rainy days — the Downtown Orangeburg Revitalization Association decided to invest in a permanent, multipurpose structure. The completed facility is a 6,000-square-foot, open-air, heavy timber frame structure with handicapped-accessible restrooms, office space and a storage area.

To develop the facility, DORA made use of a vacant, centrally located property it had received as a donation. To raise the necessary \$900,000 for the project, DORA collaborated with the City of Orangeburg, Orangeburg County, state Sen. John Matthews, local industries and many private groups and individuals. The city obtained a Hometown Economic Development Grant from the Municipal Association of SC to assist with the project.

Although the facility's first farmers market season began during the COVID-19 pandemic, the market still experienced an increase in vendors and customers. The facility also hosts community events like the St. Patrick's Day Festival and Holiday Market, and has served as a venue for events organized by nonprofits, schools and other groups.

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## Master Merchant Laura Bachinski, Uptown Greenwood

Laura Bachinski is the owner of Main & Maxwell art gallery and shop, a gallery offering affordable, handcrafted art from more than 50 local artists, consultations, art classes, demonstrations and live music. As a potter who applies her artistic experience to her work, Bachinski values healthy commerce in the larger Uptown Greenwood district. She often signs up for late shopping nights and committee work, and seeks out Greenwood-specific items, and has recently worked with Greenwood's Board of Architectural Review to create an interactive art installation of the side of the business's building.

Although Main & Maxwell had to shut down as the COVID-19 pandemic began, Bachinski was able to capitalize on its established social media presence, staying relevant with online demonstrations and other videos. She also energetically sought out grant and loan funding to maintain the business during the pandemic. For the 2020 holiday season, Bachinski and her one employee became one of the most enthusiastic promoters of Uptown Greenwood's holiday shopping events, and they posted one of their strongest holiday sales seasons ever.

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## Outstanding Business Development Program COVID-19 Response, Downtown Florence

When the COVID-19 pandemic began in spring 2020, Florence's downtown development immediately redirected a majority of its resources to assisting the district's businesses with the economic impacts. The office developed safety information and resource pages that it continuously updated, created curbside pickup zones, provided technical assistance for businesses starting e-commerce, and administering \$67,500 in COVID-19 recovery grants contributed by the City of Florence for 19 small businesses.

The office recreated \$10,000 in marketing funds, originally planned for events, to a downtown reopening campaign used as government-mandated closures came to an end. The Florence Downtown Development Corporation contributed \$10,000 and volunteer hours, while the Francis Marion University Kelley Center for Economic Development, Greater Florence Chamber of Commerce and Florence County Economic Partnership helped with programs, funding options and technical assistance.

The response helped prevent the permanent closure of businesses in the district as a result of the pandemic, and the district welcomed several new businesses during 2020. Downtown Florence now plans to offer additional technical training on planning for disasters and financial planning in 2021.

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## Outstanding Special Project Pride of the Piedmont Mural, Main Street Laurens

The first new mural to come to downtown Laurens since 2005, the Pride of the Piedmont mural focuses on what people love about the city — its river, trains, musical heritage, agriculture, outdoor activities and historic courthouse. Painted on a newly renovated building adjacent to Lauren's Food Truck Plaza, the postcard-style mural draws its name from a fondly remembered springtime festival that ran for decades in Laurens.

The Main Street Laurens economic development team sought out a location, collaborated with the mayor to identify an artist and used a public input session to develop the subject matter. Main Street Laurens obtained \$3,500 in city hospitality funds for the project, as well as a placemaking mini-grant from Main Street SC. The city supplied a bucket truck for the artist's work.

The mural now regularly turns up in visitor and resident social media posts. The Main Street Laurens design team is seeking a location for its next mural — one which will involve crowdsourced painting — and is planning a dedicated public art page for its website.

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