

UPTOWN

a publication of the Municipal Association of South Carolina

2025 ANNUAL MEETING HIGHLIGHTS COMMUNITY BUILDING, CIVILITY

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President :
Mayor Brandy Amidon, Travelers Rest

Executive Director :
Todd Glover tglover@masc.sc

Managing Editor :
Meredith Houck mhouck@masc.sc

Editor :
Russell Cox rcox@masc.sc

Editorial Assistant :
Onye Kelly okelly@masc.sc

Contributing writers : **Megan Sexton**

**Cover Photo: Former South Carolina
Gov. David Beasley addresses the
Municipal Association's 2025 Annual
Meeting on Hilton Head Island.**

Amidon Elected Municipal Association President

Travelers Rest Mayor Brandy Amidon began her address at the Municipal Association of SC 2025 Annual Meeting by expressing great excitement. Delegates from cities and towns across the state elected Amidon as the president at the conference.

When first asked to join the Association's board, she said she agreed to the opportunity, "and the main reason why is because the [Association] has been so helpful to me over the years. I cannot tell you how many times I've had a '911 moment' where I was just in dire need of information — and the Municipal Association team, they're so helpful and comforting."

In the City of Travelers Rest in northern Greenville County, Amidon has served on city council since 2010, and was elected mayor in 2018. She has served on the Municipal Association's board since 2020, and is a graduate of the Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government as well as the Advanced MEO Institute.

Amidon said she had undertaken a project to discuss the Association's work with mayors around the state to get a better sense of their concerns, worries and points of pride, ultimately talking to about 60 mayors. Many common themes emerged from these conversations: first, that local elected officials are among a small group of people dedicated to better their municipalities, even when it means "we can't go to the grocery store without hearing about the pothole on Main Street."

"Every mayor I talk to genuinely cares about their city or town. They genuinely care about their team of councilmembers and how they work together, whether it's the hometown they grew up in, or maybe they moved in a few years ago — they truly want the best for their residents and communities."

She also found that "what's top of mind for our South Carolina mayors is also top of mind for the Municipal Association," whether it be promoting civility among city councils and the larger public, or advocating among state lawmakers to maintain cities' ability to make the best decisions for their communities.

In asking her fellow mayors what they appreciated about the Municipal Association, Amidon said "overwhelmingly, education and advocacy were themes over and over again. They stood out as clear attributes of the organization. We really need to give our Field Services representatives some capes, because they got mentioned in almost every call — 'We have them on speed dial, and they come running when we call them.'"

She said she felt honored to be representing the state's 271 cities and towns in her new role, and invited officials to continue talking to her.

"We really do have hard jobs, and we need to take advantage of each other's experiences to work through those hard times together, because the rewards of seeing our cities and towns do their best are so worth it," she said.

The Municipal Association's 2025 – 2026 Board of Directors

The board of directors, composed of both elected and appointed officials, sets policy for the Municipal Association of South Carolina, and is elected by the Association's membership during the Annual Meeting.

The Municipal Association voted to approve changes to its bylaws during the 2025 Annual Meeting. It changed the total number of board members from 19 to 17. It also moved from a model where board members represent each of the councils of governments areas in the state to one where the members represent one of the three Field Services territories in South Carolina used by the Municipal Association.

New officers

The officers, or members of the executive committee, are elected to one-year terms that expire in July 2026.

President: Mayor Brandy Amidon,
Travelers Rest

Vice President: Mayor Brenda Bethune,
Myrtle Beach

Executive Committee Board Members:
Mayor Frank McClary, Andrews; and City
Manager Andy Merriman, Greer

Immediate Past President: Mayor Greg
Habib, Goose Creek

Newly elected members

Board members are elected for three-year terms.

Councilmember Will Brennan,
Columbia
Term expires: July 2026 (filling an
unexpired term)

Councilmember Colin Davis, Sumter
Term expires: July 2028

Councilmember Enterick Lee,
Blackville
Term expires: July 2026 (filling an
unexpired term)

Councilmember Brian Meadows,
Hartsville
Term expires: July 2028

City Manager Jeff Molinari, Walterboro
Term expires: July 2028

Mayor Crawford Moore, Edisto Beach
Term expires: July 2028

Councilmember Kevin Shealy,
Charleston
Term expires: July 2028

Councilmember Perry Sutton, Rock
Hill
Term expires: July 2026 (filling an
unexpired term)

Other current board members

Mayor Mike Fuesser, York
Term expires: July 2027

Mayor Kenneth Gist, Woodruff
Term expires: July 2026

Mayor Stellertean Jones, Gray Court
Term expires: July 2026

Mayor Nathan Senn, Laurens
Term expires: July 2027

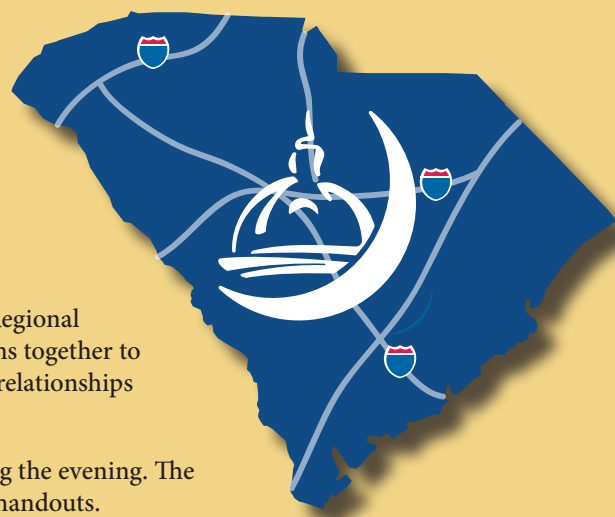
Regional Advocacy Meetings Taking Place This Fall

The Municipal Association's advocacy team is going on the road this fall with Regional Advocacy Meetings to bring together municipal officials and legislative delegations together to educate state lawmakers on key pieces of proposed legislation as well as building relationships and finding solutions for local issues.


Dates, times and locations are below. Note that two of these meetings are during the evening. The meetings are free, but registration for the meetings is necessary for the meal and handouts.

- **Tuesday, September 3**, 5:30 – 7:30 p.m.: Palmetto Terrace at the Municipal Building, 100 Georgia Ave., North Augusta
- **Tuesday, September 9**, 11 a.m. – 1 p.m.: Palmetto Collegiate Institute, 104 Hendrix St., Lexington
- **Wednesday, September 24**, 11 a.m. – 1 p.m.: Welcome Center at Unity Park, 320 S. Hudson St., Greenville
- **Thursday, September 25**, 11 a.m. – 1 p.m.: Florence Center, 3300 W. Radio Drive, Florence
- **Wednesday, October 1**, 5:30 – 7:30 p.m.: Operations Center, 757 S. Anderson Road, Rock Hill
- **Tuesday, October 14**, 11 a.m. – 1 p.m.: North Charleston Coliseum and Performing Arts Center, 5001 Coliseum Drive, North Charleston

Find registration details at www.masc.sc (keyword: Association events).



2025 Annual Meeting Highlights Community Building, Civility



Former Gov. David Beasley, center, speaks with audience members after his keynote address at the Municipal Association's Annual Meeting.

Municipal officials from across South Carolina came to Hilton Head Island in July for the 2025 Annual Meeting of the Municipal Association of SC. Its presenters discussed everything from building bridges across social and political divides to the need for passion and civility in local community improvement, and the Association announced new initiatives as well.

Former Gov. Beasley talks solutions for world hunger

David Beasley is familiar to many South Carolinians for his time in the SC House of Representatives and as governor in the 1990s. However, his most broadly influential work has come as his time as executive director of the United Nations World Food Program from 2017 to 2023, which received the Nobel Peace Prize for its work to reduce hunger and improve living conditions in regions suffering from war.

In his keynote address at the Annual Meeting, Beasley described the mounting challenges of addressing hunger for a growing group of hundreds of millions of people in an era where the COVID-19 pandemic had disrupted supply chains, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine had significantly disrupted agricultural production.

Officials might point to the need to use resources to solve domestic problems before they consider international issues, he said, but he countered that even those who do not want to address hunger “out of the goodness of your heart,” have other reasons to help as well — hunger contributes to the destabilization of nations and regions, and feeding hungry people only grows more expensive once those people become refugees.

In explaining the problem to Congress, Beasley said he likened it to deferred home maintenance.

“I said, it’s like you’ve got leaking waterlines in the ceiling, and it’s going to cost you \$1,000 and go up there and fix it, but you’re fighting over where to put the buckets. And six months from now, you’ve got to replace the carpet, the flooring, the sheetrock, the tables, the chairs — and that’s a \$50,000 fix. Get your head out in the sand, come together and solve these root-cause problems,” he said.

The United States has reached a point where many counterproductive arguments happen simply out of a desire for people to fight against the positions of their political opponents, Beasley said.

“When I was in the [South Carolina] House [of Representatives], my best friends were usually my biggest enemies on the floor,” he said. “We would fight it out, but we stood for what we believed in, always respectful to the other side. It was never personal. And then we’d go have dinner together, and people say, ‘how do you do that?’ I said, ‘well, this is America. This is where we respect other people’s views.’”

Beasley advocated for ignoring cultural, political and religious differences when helping people, keeping the private sector and faith communities engaged, and communicating as openly as possible with other parts of their community.

“I would ask every one of you here to go break with some bread this coming week with somebody of a different political [orientation], ethnicity, color, party — [someone] different than you,” he said. “Don’t talk politics, just go break bread together, get to know each other.”

Thompson receives Farlow Award

Longtime City of Anderson councilmember and educator Dr. Beatrice Thompson received the Municipal Association’s E. Allison Farlow Award. The highest honor bestowed by the

Municipal Association and not awarded every year, the Farlow Award recognizes those who have contributed significantly to the advancement of municipal government in South Carolina.

Thompson's election in 1976 made her Anderson's first Black councilmember. In 1987, she became both the first councilmember and the first Black elected official to serve as president of the Municipal Association. In her decades of service for Anderson, she has advanced such projects as the Westside Community Center, Church Street Heritage Plaza and Anderson's Dream Team, building up the relationship that its police department has with the community.

President Habib completes term

The Annual Meeting marked the completion of Goose Creek Mayor Greg Habib's term as Municipal Association president.

Reflecting on the past year, Habib said that he was "more convinced now than ever, that the lasting strength of our state lies most, and is dependent most, on the strength of our cities and towns ... Indeed, as I said one year ago, cities and towns are where inspirational ideas are dreamt, and I have seen them made into reality across our state."

He also called on mayors and councilmembers to work harder to achieve civility with each other and with their managers and administrators.

"Be humble in your service, it's not who you are. If you do that, civility will prevail, not only within your council, but within your community. You might even find you get more accomplished, because civility isn't just how you behave during a council meeting, it's how you set aside your differences to accomplish the things where you agree, and you find the commonalities where you disagree," he said.

Executive Director Todd Glover announces IMPACT fund

Municipal Association Executive Director Todd Glover walked attendees through the Association's many accomplishments listed in the 2025 Annual Report — see page 7 — ranging from the thousands of questions that its field services managers answered, to the hundreds of Hurricane Helene-related claims that Risk Management Services processed, or the dozens of education and training conferences hosted by the Association and its affiliates.

He also called attention to the newly announced IMPACT Fund offered by the Association, an evolution of the existing Hometown Economic Development Grant program. It includes the Big Idea Grant, which will award two grants of up to \$100,000 each for creative and problem-solving ideas, as well as the Problem Solver Grant — eight grants of \$25,000 for smaller improvements. This year's grant deadline is September 26. Learn more at www.masc.sc (keyword: IMPACT Fund).

Glover challenged his audience to return to their cities and towns while thinking, "What is it that I know needs to be changed that I have not put my attention to? Is it a development code that may be impeding growth in your city or town? Is it too strict? Is it not strict enough? What you're not changing, you're choosing."

Annual Meeting recordings and presentations available online

Many Annual Meeting sessions have presentations and recordings now available on the Association's website. Find the materials at www.masc.sc (keyword: Annual Meeting). The Municipal Association's Achievement Award videos, which debuted during the meeting, are available by searching the keyword "Achievement Awards."



Anderson Councilmember Dr. Beatrice Thompson, center, is recognized as the newest recipient of the E. Allison Farlow Award by Association President Greg Habib, left, and Association Executive Director Todd Glover.

MEO Institute of Government Recognizes New Graduates

The Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government, along with the Advanced MEO Institute, together graduated 86 officials during the Municipal Association's Annual Meeting on Hilton Head Island.

The newest 67 graduates of the MEO Institute have completed the required 25 hours of instruction available through the Institute and are now eligible to participate in the Advanced MEO Institute.

The next Advanced MEO Institute sessions will take place October 15 in Columbia. Participants may choose one of two courses: "Advanced Budgeting and Finance" or "Advanced Leadership and Governance." The Advanced Continuing Education course will take place the same day.

The MEO Institute also tracks those city and town councils on which all sitting members are MEO graduates. The current MEO Honor Roll cities are these:

- Beaufort
- Greer
- Inman
- Jonesville
- Moncks Corner
- Orangeburg
- Port Royal
- Prosperity
- Reidville
- Santee
- Simpsonville
- Travelers Rest
- Walterboro
- York

Learn more about the institute at www.masc.sc (keyword: MEO).



Advanced MEO graduates



MEO graduates



Municipal Association
of South Carolina

2025 Annual Report



Municipal Association
of South Carolina

Letter from the Executive Director



B. Todd Glover
Executive Director

As another year turns the page, we're reminded just how important local leadership is to the health and heart of our communities. From Main Street beautification to emergency services, it's your steady hands and thoughtful decisions that keep South Carolina's towns and cities running strong. We are extremely proud to work alongside you.

But let's be completely honest for a moment. This past year has tested more than our infrastructure and budgets — it's tested our resolve. The recent and tragic shooting of a political leader in Minnesota was a stark reminder of what happens when anger outweighs respect, and fear replaces dialogue. Politics doesn't have to be dirty or violent; it should be a conversation. A hard one sometimes, sure. Things may not always go the way we would want them to, and even may be contrary to our most strongly held beliefs. But these conversations should always be civil.

Here in South Carolina, we pride ourselves on being neighborly — waving at folks we pass, listening before we speak, and finding common ground even when we disagree. That spirit is what binds our towns together and it's what we must protect.

This report celebrates achievements made possible by you and our wonderful Association staff over the past year. It's a testament to what's possible when we lead with grit, grace, and a deep love for our communities. It is what will disappear if we fail to model civility to our future generations.

Thank you for the work you do, but most of all, thank you for leading.

Civility. Respect. Solutions.



Municipal Association
of South Carolina

For the past several years, the Municipal Association of SC has promoted a civility initiative for city and town officials to serve as an example of how to treat others with patience, tolerance and respect. The Association partnered with the SC School Boards Association to extend this effort into school boards as well.

Association staff have promoted civility heavily in the years since through training and resources. Executive Director Todd Glover spoke as part of the first-ever online Global Civility Summit in October 2024, aimed at finding ways for civic leaders to tackle toxicity and nurturing civility in their communities.

A key part of the initiative is the civility resolution, which cities and towns have passed to demonstrate their support for civil discourse at the local level. They can also use the Association's civility pledge during their meetings:

I pledge to build a stronger and more prosperous community by advocating for civil engagement, respecting others and their viewpoints, and finding solutions for the betterment of my city or town.

Here are cities and towns that have either adopted the civility resolution or have used the civility pledge since 2021. The map may not be comprehensive.





Voices

Cities and towns created the Municipal Association of SC in part because officials knew collaboration would greatly amplify and strengthen their messages at the State House.

Advocacy efforts

In the 2025 session, the SC General Assembly passed bills of importance to cities and towns. Legislators passed Act 42 to help reduce liquor liability costs for bars and restaurants, as significant premium hikes in recent years had threatened their operations. The Association named resolving this growing liability burden for small businesses as one of its Advocacy Initiatives, as many municipalities had experienced restaurant closures because of it, reducing the business mix in their downtowns. In addition to reforms in joint and several liability, the law provides ways for restaurants and bars to lower insurance costs through server training and other steps, and lowers the amount of liquor liability insurance required for one-day festivals.

Act 24, the military tax increment financing district bill, also passed this session. It includes affordable housing as an allowable project in a TIF district, extends the bonding period for projects in a military TIF, and gives local governing bodies greater flexibility when using TIF funds outside of the TIF boundary. In the City of North Charleston, this law will help in the redevelopment of its former Naval Base.

“The passage of this bill marks a major step forward for North Charleston and communities like ours across the state,” said Ryan Johnson, North Charleston’s director of administration. “This legislation gives us the tools to responsibly fund redevelopment of former military sites at the local level, support national defense and invest in affordable housing and infrastructure. This is a win for smart growth, strong communities and a more secure South Carolina.”

Research assistance

In 2023, the Association improved its ability to serve as a valuable source of data to South Carolina municipalities and to the General Assembly alike by adding a research and legislative analyst to the advocacy staff. A key part of the position’s responsibilities is to respond to the SC Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office’s weekly Fiscal Impact Statement requests on behalf of cities and towns, helping legislators understand the potential financial impacts of proposed legislation for municipalities throughout the state.

New Legislative Tracking System

In 2025, the Association launched a new Legislative Tracking System on its website, replacing one dating to 2007. For every bill identified as one that could impact South Carolina municipalities, the tracking system summarizes the bill’s significance and lists its sponsors. It also provides updates on legislative action from subcommittees, committees, floor debate and passage. A critical upgrade for the new system is the ability to search bills by keyword.

The system tracked 290 bills in the 2025 session, covering topics ranging from municipal election processes to allowing municipalities without an operating millage to impose one, boat taxes, underground facility damage prevention, and many others. The system integrates into the Association’s weekly *From the Dome to Your Home* legislative report.



998 total posts on the Municipal Association's Facebook, X and Instagram feeds.

The reach on Facebook posts from the last year in particular, amounting to 45,700 users, represented a 40.7% increase over the previous year.



15,600 listens for the Association's podcasts.

44 episodes in the past year have covered legislative action, award-winning municipal projects, conducting city council meetings effectively, risk management best practices, business licensing and the Main Street South Carolina WeShopSC.com program.

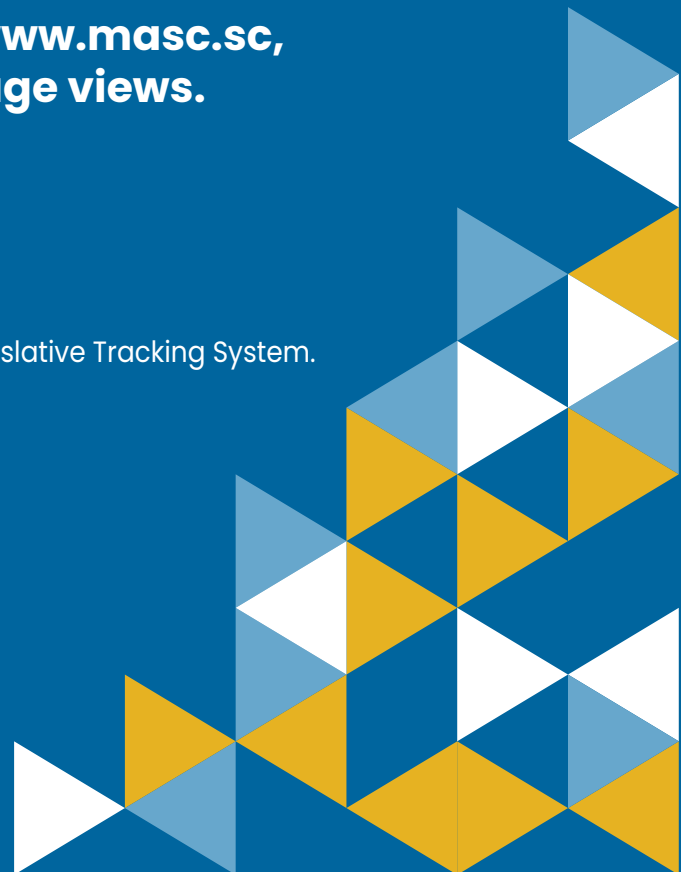


255,485 visitors to www.masc.sc, with 837,392 total page views.



290 bills tracked

in the Municipal Association's Legislative Tracking System.





Knowledge

Education is a core tenet of the Municipal Association, with multiple training opportunities available throughout many programs and services.

Risk management training

The Association's Risk Management Services provides municipal officials and staff the training and resources that can help keep people and property safe, and is even launching its first Risk Management Services conference in 2025. Efforts have included the RMS Worksmart program to help SC Municipal Insurance Trust and SC Municipal Insurance and Risk Financing Fund members enhance safety practices and reduce losses; and the development and promotion of training resources to reduce workplace traffic collisions.

RMS offers police departments the Ti Training "response to resistance simulator," which places officers in scenarios where they must decide on an appropriate level of force. It now offers this training — as well as law enforcement liability training — regionally, with one police department hosting others.

"The simulator has been utilized to complete 'performance improvement training' with our agency," said Lt. Robert Vazquez of the Goose Creek Police Department. "It has been used to reinforce de-escalation in addition to our other training during less lethal and defensive tactics trainings. I cannot speak enough about how useful the system is to use in these training issues."

Main Street South Carolina offerings

Main Street SC, the Association's technical assistance program for historic downtowns, has increased its training opportunities. It hosted quarterly training sessions and had 42 site visits among member communities. A grant from the SC State Historic Preservation Office helped bring historic preservation training to five communities, including Gaffney. "Architecture and historic preservation were relayed in a professional and interactive atmosphere where everyone was willing to engage, ask questions, and share experiences and stories related to their role on the Architectural Review Board," said Kelly Curtis, Gaffney's Main Street director.

Main Street SC has expanded the WeShopSC.com platform, South Carolina's only online marketplace made of small businesses. Launched in 2023, it has achieved 720% growth, now representing more than 700 businesses in 100 municipalities.

Market on Mill, a retailer operating out of historic downtown Inman and owned by Heather Moore, is one of those using the online platform. "Since joining WeShopSC, I've seen a lot of growth in my business," Moore said. "The mentorship program was especially helpful — it gave me a clearer vision and direction, connected me with experienced professionals in business and marketing, and a team to bounce ideas off of. Having an online presence through WeShopSC has been a great benefit, it allows me to reach people who might never walk through my doors. Even visitors who discover us while on vacation can continue to shop with us online after they've gone home."

Streamlining of planning continuing education requirements

The Association offers online training for local planning and zoning officials required by state law. Staff recently worked with the SC Planning Education Advisory Committee to develop three options for approving continuing education programs for planning officials. This flexible process allows continuing education approvals at the program sponsor, instructor and individual program levels.

- ▶ **694 municipal officials from 148 municipalities** attended the Municipal Association's 2024 Annual Meeting, with a total of 1,118 attendees.
- ▶ **154 municipal officials from 79 municipalities attended the 2024 Small Cities Summit.**
Also attending were 11 state agencies that provide services to South Carolina cities, including the SC Department of Agriculture; SC Department of Commerce; SC Department of Environmental Services; SC Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism; SC Office of Rural Health, SC Rural Infrastructure Authority; and SC State Guard.
- ▶ **32 total Main Street South Carolina communities** participating at four levels, including Aiken, Florence, Greenwood, Hartsville and Laurens as the five nationally accredited Main Street SC cities.
- ▶ **69 elected officials** completed their first Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government course in the past year.
- ▶ **1,949 MEO Institute graduates** since 1986, when the program began, and **396 Advanced MEO Institute graduates** since that program began in 2014.
- ▶ **199 municipalities** with at least one MEO graduate since the founding of the MEO Institute, representing **73% of all municipalities.**
The five newest municipalities added to this list are Bethune, Landrum, Mayesville, Pelzer and Scotia.
- ▶ **2,427 total attendees came to 28 events** of the Municipal Association's affiliate associations, 1,126 municipal employees, representing 167 cities and towns, attended at least one affiliate meeting.
- ▶ **16 new graduates** of the Municipal Court Administrators Association 101 training, and with a total of 62 graduates since it started. A new continuing education program, MCAA 2.0, has now **graduated 25 court officials.**
MCAA also created a mentoring program.
- ▶ The Association's Risk Management Services delivered **27 training sessions** for SC Municipal Insurance Trust and SC Municipal Insurance and Risk Financing Fund members, covering such topics as defensive driving and property inspections.
- ▶ **3,188 technical assistance requests** handled by the Association's field services managers, providing assistance to clerks, administrators and managers, mayors, councilmembers and others. There were 2,858 total municipal contacts made by the team.

Top 10 Requests for Technical Assistance

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| 1. Networking | 6. Budgets, audits and Local Government Fund reports |
| 2. American Rescue Plan Act funds | 7. Planning and zoning |
| 3. Finance | 8. Education and training |
| 4. Human resources | 9. Business licensing |
| 5. SC Freedom of Information Act | 10. Effective meetings and rules |



Solutions

Cities and towns from across South Carolina face common challenges, but municipal officials can find efficient solutions by working together through the Municipal Association.

Hurricane Helene mutual aid and insurance coverage

After Helene created widespread power loss through the state in September 2024, the SC Association of Municipal Power Systems, a Municipal Association affiliate whose name changed to Palmetto Power Cities in June 2025, went to work coordinating the mutual aid response. This is a core function of the organization that assists restoration efforts by coalescing crews and resources on a local, state and national level. As help arrived from around the country, many SCAMPS members worked to restore power in their own communities and the communities of fellow SCAMPS members. Abbeville Public Utilities was among the 14 members to have their staff bolstered at this critical time.

“The coordination provided by the SCAMPS mutual aid program and help from Santee Cooper provided an additional 50 linemen and needed resources to Abbeville that greatly expedited the effort. In short, a miracle was accomplished within the course of a week,” Tim Hall, director of Public Utilities, said.

Helene was a major insurance coverage event for Risk Management Services. It handled 498 storm-related claims, with net incurred costs of \$5.2 million in property claims and \$70,000 in liability claims.

Business licensing assistance

The Association’s Local Revenue Services continues help make business licensing practices among municipalities as legally compliant and well-run as possible. LRS launched a “Business License Bootcamp” course to bring new business licensing officials up to speed on procedures as quickly as possible. It developed a “Business Licensing in SC” resource on the Association’s website, consolidating all business licensing materials in one location.

The Association-developed Local Business License Renewal Center, which state law requires cities with business licensing to use, saw a 25% increase in usage in the last year. Many businesses have found it to provide a smooth renewal process, especially when handling licenses for businesses with multiple locations. For example, Skins Hot Dogs, which originated out of Anderson, now has 11 locations from Seneca to Greenville.

“I thought the renewal portal was user-friendly, and it made it much easier to renew for several of our locations at one time,” said Michelle Deaton, office manager.

Risk Management Services accomplishments

The SC Municipal Insurance and Risk Financing Fund, which provides property and casualty insurance coverage, faced many of the same challenges experienced by others in the insurance industry. After several years of major reinsurance increases and growing claims costs, SCMIRF was able to reduce financial impacts in 2024, in part because of ongoing loss control efforts. Another change for SCMIRF is that all of its members now have a \$1 million limit for cyber claims.

Both the SC Municipal Insurance Trust and SCMIRF uses Risk Self-Assessments to help members enact policies to improve safety and prevent losses. RMS Loss Control staff created an updated version of this Law Enforcement Risk Self-Assessment to help police departments find ways to make safety improvements.

- ▶ **\$34.9 million in business license payments processed** through the Local Business License Renewal Center in the first four months of 2025, compared to \$23.8 million in all of 2024, \$11.9 million processed in 2023 and \$3.5 million in 2022.
- ▶ **22,395 business licenses renewed** through the LBLRC in the first four months of 2025, compared to 19,063 processed in all of 2024, and 10,756 processed in 2023. In the past year, the LBLRC recorded a more than 25% jump in usage.
- ▶ **\$32.4 million in purchases** made during calendar year 2024 through the City Connect Market, a cooperative purchasing partnership between HGACBuy and the Municipal Association launched in August 2021.
- ▶ **137 SC Municipal Insurance and Risk Financing Fund members.**
- ▶ **131 SC Municipal Insurance Trust members.**
- ▶ **21,552 employees and volunteers insured** through SCMIT.
- ▶ **\$6.7 billion in total value insured** through SCMIRF.
- ▶ **74 member-specific training sessions** hosted by Risk Management Services Loss Control.
- ▶ **432 member visits** conducted by Risk Management Services for SCMIT and SCMIRF members, addressing police and fire consultations, scheduled annual reviews and assessments.
- ▶ **498 claims submitted from Hurricane Helene, with net incurred costs of \$5.2 million in property claims and \$70K in liability claims.**
- ▶ **17,019 courses completed through LocalGovU,** the online training portal for the Association's Risk Management Services.
- ▶ **\$426,556 grant funds disbursed** through SCMIT and SCMIRF grants.
- ▶ **More than \$3.3 million collected** in subrogation and other recoveries on behalf of SCMIT and SCMIRF members.
- ▶ **\$300,000 in Hometown Economic Development Grant** funds awarded to 12 cities and towns. Created in 2016, the HEDG program will now become the IMPACT Fund, an acronym for "Innovative Municipal Projects for Advancing Change and Transformation." These are the 2024 recipients:

Belton Fountain Inn Greeleyville Greenwood Hanahan Honea Path	Johnston Kershaw Lexington North Augusta Olanta West Columbia
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Internal Services

The internal services of the Municipal Association, such as technology, finance and human resources, play a critical role in supporting staff so that the organization can deliver valuable services to South Carolina's cities and towns and continue to seek ways to improve its efficiency.

IT improvements

The Association made numerous IT system upgrades in the past year, including the replacement of a server that reached the end of its life, and the replacement of a secondary fiber circuit to minimize potential outages. The IT department also recently acquired KnowBe4, a security awareness program that provides email security training for employees and provides advanced spam email upgrades. They have also improved data collection tools, including the mutual aid update form used by the SC Association of Municipal Power Systems, and the Law Enforcement Self-Assessment used by Risk Management Services. The Association also started using a new e-learning software platform, and upgraded the enterprise content management software used by RMS.

Conference management responsiveness

Both the Municipal Association itself and its affiliate associations host and manage a huge number of conferences and meetings throughout the year. No amount of preparation or planning can prevent some circumstances from interfering with these meeting schedules, but Association staff work to address these challenges as they arise. A clear example of this came in January 2025, when an impending snowstorm on the planned date of Hometown Legislative Action Day in Columbia necessitated the cancellation of the meeting, as well as the Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government sessions the day afterward.

The Education and Training department immediately went to work to manage the cancellation of all registrations and ticket refunds, processing more than 700 requests efficiently. Even with this volume, communication and collaboration means that staff handled all transactions without significant issues, ensuring a smooth experience for affected attendees and upholding the Association's standard of service during emergencies.

Directory of Services

More than 90 years ago, a small group of local elected officials realized they had to work together to meet the challenges of the changing times. With this mission in mind, they organized the Municipal Association of South Carolina.

The Municipal Association is still dedicated to the principle of its founding members: to join together to pursue initiatives that cities and towns can carry out more efficiently and effectively when they work together through the Association, than they could by working individually.

A nonpartisan, nonprofit association representing all of the state's 271 incorporated cities and towns, the Municipal Association fulfills its mission through **shared voices, knowledge and solutions**.

Voices

From the very start of the Association in the early 1930s, South Carolina municipal officials understood that only by collaborating could they effectively communicate the needs and views of municipal government to state and federal lawmakers.

Lobbying the State Legislature and Congress

The Association advocates for changes in state law that enable local elected officials to address municipal challenges. Partnerships play an important part in the Association's advocacy efforts. The Association also monitors federal legislation through the National League of Cities and advocates on behalf of South Carolina cities and towns when federal issues affect the state. *Staff Contacts: Casey Fields, Daina Phillips, Erica Wright*

Legislative Tracking and Reports

During the South Carolina legislative session, the Association actively monitors bills impacting cities and towns and updates the Association's online tracking system to reflect relevant daily bill activity. The online tracking system gives municipal leaders another tool they can use to follow subcommittee, committee and floor action.

Each Friday during the legislative session, municipal officials receive *From the Dome to Your Home*, which recaps the week's major legislative events and previews the upcoming week's activities. The report is posted on the Association's website, emailed and shared with more than 5,000 social media followers. The legislative team expands on the report with additional information through regular episodes of the *From the Dome to Your Home* podcast during the legislative session.

At the end of the legislative session, the Association produces its annual legislative report recapping work on the Advocacy Initiatives and legislative action on major bills of municipal interest. *Staff Contact: Casey Fields*

Hometown Legislative Action Day

In February, Hometown Legislative Action Day draws local officials from all over the state to Columbia to get updates on current legislative issues, visit their local legislators at the State House and connect with legislators at the Association's annual legislative reception. *Staff Contacts: Ken Ivey*

Public Engagement

Legislators, business leaders, the news media and key influencers learn about successes in cities and towns through online and print resources.

Social Media Channels

The Association's X (@MuniAssnSC) and Facebook (MuniAssnSC.StrongSCcities) accounts provide up-to-the-minute information on State House activity and share good news stories about cities and towns. A regular schedule of social media posts highlighting *Uptown* stories amplifies the online version of the monthly newsletter and resources on the Association's website. The Association's Instagram account (StrongSCcities) highlights the strength and services of South Carolina's 271 cities and towns. *Staff Contact: Meredith Houck*



City Connect Blog and City Quick Connect Podcast

The *City Connect* blog offers short, timely updates on a variety of issues. The blog packages information in a format that is useful not only to local officials but also to the news media, legislators and the public. The *City Quick Connect* podcast gives listeners a chance to hear the latest from Municipal Association staff and others about the issues, the legislation and the support services impacting cities and towns. *Staff Contact: Russell Cox*


Municipal Association Mobile App

The Association app provides a mobile-friendly way to interact with the Association and connect to educational and legislative resources. Through the app, users can access the municipal directory, Association staff listing and municipal job openings, or view the calendar to see sessions and speakers at upcoming events. *Staff Contact: Russell Cox*

Research and Analysis

The Association conducts quantitative and qualitative research and compiles reports on topics related to municipal governance, operations and legislative issues affecting cities and towns. While this research activity primarily supports the work of the Association, it is also available to member cities and towns as they seek to develop new policies and positions on issues. *Staff Contact: Mary Catherine Lawton*

Knowledge



The Association plays an important role in developing municipal elected officials' and employees' knowledge and skills through a wide range of training programs, publications and meetings.

Affiliate Associations

The Municipal Association supports 11 affiliate organizations by providing training and networking for a variety of local government positions with specialized training needs.

In addition to traditional face-to-face training and networking opportunities, the affiliate associations offer online communities for members to share best practices and to pose specific questions related to their local government responsibilities. *Staff Contact: Ken Ivey*

Association of South Carolina Mayors

The Association of South Carolina Mayors provides opportunities for its members to more fully engage in advocating for issues that affect cities and towns, network, take part in educational activities, and share ideas and best practices. *Staff Contact: Casey Fields*

Municipal Court Administration Association of SC

The Municipal Court Administration Association of South Carolina offers training at two workshops for court administrators, clerks of court, municipal judges and other municipal employees involved in court administration. The Supreme Court of South Carolina Commission on CLE and Specialization and the Office of Victims Services recognize these workshops for continuing education credits. Additionally, the Association offers MCAA 101, a three-part training on the basics of Court Administration. *Staff Contact: Lea Ann Mitchell*

Municipal Technology Association of SC

The Municipal Technology Association of SC promotes municipalities' effective use of technology. MTASC exposes its members to a broad range of technology systems, platforms and solutions. The training serves IT staff and those with GIS responsibilities, in addition to employees who work in other departments but have technology-related duties. *Staff Contact: Lea Ann Mitchell*

Palmetto Power Cities

For years, municipal electric utility members have worked together as the South Carolina Association of Municipal Power Systems. With a continued focus on providing mutual aid, advocacy efforts, education and shared expertise, the organization is now Palmetto Power Cities. Twenty of the municipal electric utilities are members of the organization. *Staff Contact: Adam Hedden*

SC Association of Stormwater Managers

The SC Association of Stormwater Managers offers its members quarterly training on stormwater management policies and best practices. The SC Board of Professional Engineers and Land Surveyors recognizes the quarterly training sessions for continuing education credits. *Staff Contact: Elizabeth Copeland*

SC Business Licensing Officials Association

The South Carolina Business Licensing Officials Association promotes best practices for administering and enforcing the local business license tax. Through rigorous training sessions, members learn skills and practices that make licensing in their cities and towns more efficient and business-friendly.

The professional designation programs of Accreditation in Business Licensing and Masters in Business Licensing reflects members' dedication to continuing education. *Staff Contact: Elizabeth Copeland*

SC Community Development Association

The South Carolina Community Development Association provides educational forums for its members to address economic and community development needs. Members include municipal, county, regional and state community development professionals; employees of private companies with an interest in community development; elected officials; and volunteers. *Staff Contact: Lea Ann Mitchell*

SC Municipal Attorneys Association

The South Carolina Municipal Attorneys Association's annual meeting covers issues important to municipal attorneys, whether working as municipal staff or as a municipality's outside counsel. The Supreme Court of South Carolina Commission on CLE and Specialization approves this training session for continuing education credits. *Staff Contact: Eric Shytle*

SC Municipal Finance Officers, Clerks and Treasurers Association

The South Carolina Municipal Finance Officers, Clerks and Treasurers Association offers training programs covering the diverse responsibilities of its members. All of the training sessions qualify for a combination of continuing education credits for certified municipal clerks, certified public accountants and certified public treasurers. MFOCTA sponsors the Municipal Clerks and Treasurers Institute with the Municipal Association and the College of Charleston's Joseph P. Riley Jr. Center for Livable Communities. *Staff Contact: Elizabeth Copeland*

SC Municipal Human Resources Association

The South Carolina Municipal Human Resources Association promotes sound human resources administration and encourages innovative programs. Through its training programs, MHRA provides information and the opportunity to exchange ideas among its members. The Society for Human Resources Management recognizes this training for continuing education credits. *Staff Contact: Lea Ann Mitchell*

SC Utility Billing Association

The South Carolina Utility Billing Association provides training and networking opportunities for its members, including billing clerks, meter readers and department managers. SCUBA's meetings encompass a variety of topics focused on customer service, safety in the workplace, and new technologies to increase the efficiencies of utility billing and collections. *Staff Contact: Ken Ivey*

Training Institutes

Educational opportunities are available to municipal officials and staff through four training institutes.

SC Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government

The SC Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government trains elected officials to increase their understanding of local government operations. Elected officials take seven required courses to complete the institute. The required courses consist of two day-long sessions held each winter in Columbia the day after Hometown Legislative Action Day and five additional classes, held yearly at designated councils of governments' locations or online through an on-demand format found on the Association's website. *Staff Contact: Urica Floyd*



SC Advanced Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government

Offered exclusively for graduates of the MEO Institute, the Advanced Institute gives elected officials the opportunity to continue their education. To complete the Advanced Institute, participants must take four of the six offered courses that explore in greater depth topics included in the MEO Institute and other topics critical for effective municipal operations. Advanced Institute graduates also have the opportunity to participate in the Advanced Continuing Education program. *Staff Contact: Urica Floyd*

Business Licensing Training Institute

The Business Licensing Training Institute educates municipal and county officials on the basics of administering a business licensing program. To complete the institute, officials must complete three day-long training classes, which are offered across three years. Once they complete the training classes, officials may take an exam to earn the Accreditation in Business Licensing credential. The SC Business Licensing Officials Association sponsors the institute. *Staff Contact: Elizabeth Copeland*

Municipal Clerks and Treasurers Institute

The Municipal Clerks and Treasurers Institute offers instruction in several areas, including forms of government, financial management, the role of the municipal clerk and business licensing. The Association sponsors MCTI in partnership with the SC Municipal Finance Officers, Clerks and Treasurers Association and the College of Charleston's Joseph P. Riley Jr. Center for Livable Communities. *Staff Contact: Elizabeth Copeland*

Annual Meeting

Each summer, the Annual Meeting brings municipal officials together for training, networking and discussion of issues of common interest. Officials hear from state and nationally known speakers, participate in sessions, and learn about new technology and developments in local government. *Staff Contact: Ken Ivey*

Technical Assistance

Field Services

The Association's three field services managers travel the state to offer hands-on technical assistance, training and consultation to help municipalities address challenges. *Staff Contacts: Charlie Barrineau and Desirée Fragoso*

Main Street South Carolina

Main Street SC helps its members revitalize their downtowns into vibrant centers of commerce and community by using the National Main Street Center's Main Street Approach,TM which focuses on historic preservation and placemaking. Main Street SC provides member programs of varying levels of preparedness and resources with knowledge and tools to develop community-driven and comprehensive revitalization strategies. It provides on-site consultation and technical assistance to local programs that meet specific requirements. Quarterly workshops, networking sessions and on demand trainings also assist local Main Street programs in their efforts.

At the startup level, members build capacity for downtown revitalization. At the Aspiring Main Street level, participants receive three years of technical assistance and then transition into a Classic Main Street program. Members at the highest level meet national accreditation standards. Each year, Main Street SC honors exceptional member accomplishments through its Inspiration Awards. *Staff Contact: Jenny Boulware*

Information Resources

The Association's print and online resources address hundreds of topics related to municipal government.

Publications

- *Annexation Handbook*
- *Comprehensive Planning Guide for Local Governments*
- *Election Handbook*
- *Forms and Powers of Municipal Government*
- *Handbook for Municipal Officials in South Carolina*
- *The Municipal Association of South Carolina 1930 – 2015: A History of Shared Voices, Shared Knowledge, Shared Solutions*
- *How to Conduct Effective Meeting*
- *Incorporation Handbook*
- *Model Employee Handbook for SC Municipalities*
- *Municipal Officials and Legislative Directory*

- *Public Official's Guide to Compliance with the Freedom of Information Act* (published by the SC Press Association)
 - *South Carolina Business Licensing Handbook*
 - *Tips for Hometown Media Success*
- Staff Contact: Eric Budds*

Website

The Municipal Association's website, www.masc.sc, offers more than 2,000 pages and 2,000 documents, presentations and links to external resources. With a responsive design to fit the needs and formats of mobile and desktop devices, the site includes a powerful search engine and information center to help users navigate to specific resources of interest. *Staff Contact: Meredith Houck*

Uptown

The monthly newsletter in print and electronic formats features articles on a variety of topics important to municipal officials. Each issue's special section looks in depth at a topic central to local government.

A weekly e-newsletter, *Uptown Update*, informs municipal officials about a variety of timely opportunities, including meeting registrations, training events and grants. A regular feature, "In Case You Missed It," gives *Uptown Update* readers a second look at past articles and posts from the Association's publications. *Staff Contact: Russell Cox*

Daily News and The Uplift

Daily News provides links to news stories about the state's smallest rural towns to its largest cities. The articles highlight how local governments deliver services. *The Uplift* delivers a collection of news links every Wednesday showcasing South Carolina cities and towns at their best. *Staff Contact: Russell Cox*

Achievement Awards

The Achievement Awards recognize successful and innovative projects that improve the quality of life for residents and add value to communities. The program also encourages municipal officials to share ideas. *Staff Contact: Meredith Houck*

Solutions

Cities and towns face many of the same challenges and can find solutions by pooling resources and ideas through the Association.

Local Revenue Services

The Municipal Association works with cities and towns to improve efficiencies by offering centralized local revenue services for certain business license taxes and delinquent debts. The Association provides an online portal to participating cities in the insurance, brokers and telecommunications tax programs as well as the Setoff Debt Program, that allows them to securely access current and past program documents.

Brokers Tax Program

Insurance companies not licensed to directly sell policies in the state can provide coverage through South Carolina licensed brokers. Businesses pay the municipal brokers premium tax to the SC Department of Insurance, which then remits funds to the Association to distribute to cities and towns. *Staff Contacts: Caitlin Cothran, Kaylee Summerton*

Insurance Tax Program

The Association receives municipal business license tax payments from insurance companies and distributes the taxes owed to municipalities. The Insurance Tax Program consolidates the licensing procedures for insurance companies, saving time and money for municipalities and companies alike. Participating municipalities adopt a standard ordinance for these taxes.

The Association notifies all insurance companies of the payment process, uses industry data to confirm all companies paid according to municipal ordinances, and provides a portal for the reporting and payment of the tax. *Staff Contacts: Fran Adcock, Caitlin Cothran, Anita Lancaster, Rochelle Smith, Kaylee Summerton*



Local Business License Renewal Center

The Association developed a statewide online portal for business license renewals. The online portal is for renewals only. New business licenses will still be issued by the city or town. State law requires this system to be hosted by the SC Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office. To use this free software, municipalities must adopt the standard business license practices. *Staff Contacts: Fran Adcock, Caitlin Cothran, Rochelle Smith*

Setoff Debt Program

The SC Department of Revenue receives payments for delinquent debts, such as utility bills, taxes and court fines, by reducing state income tax refunds by the amount of the debt. The department forwards the debt payments it receives to the Association, which in turn forwards the amounts to the reporting municipality or claimant agency. The Association provides software to all participating entities to streamline their program administration and ensure compliance with state regulations. *Staff Contacts: Caitlin Cothran, Anita Lancaster*

Telecommunications Tax Program

The Association centralizes the business license tax due to municipalities from telecommunication companies. Each December, the Association sends a notice to all telecommunications companies for the municipalities participating in the program. By law, municipalities can assess this tax only on the voice portion of a phone bill. The system streamlines the payment process for telecommunications companies. It also saves cities and towns time and money by eliminating the need for each to perform the same processes. *Staff Contacts: Caitlin Cothran, Rochelle Smith, Kaylee Summerton*

Risk Management Services

The two self-funded insurance programs administered by the Association's Risk Management Services staff are prime examples of strength and efficiency through the combined efforts of member cities. Each program operates under the direction of a board of trustees composed of representatives from its membership.

The SC Municipal Insurance and Risk Financing Fund provides all lines of property and casualty coverage, including general liability, law enforcement liability, public officials' liability, cyber liability and property and automobile coverage. The SC Municipal Insurance Trust provides workers' compensation coverage for municipal employees.

RMS provides grants, attorney hotlines, employee training and loss control services to members. These services help members improve risk management efforts, prevent claims and reduce the cost of insurance. *Staff Contact: Naomi Reed*

Training

RMS members have access to online and in-person training at no charge.

- Customized, on-site training: RMS provides training for members in their hometowns, allowing city employees to attend sessions together.
- Online training: The online training opportunities include a variety of risk management, human resources, safety and law enforcement topics, including use of force and pursuit driving.
- Statewide and regional training: RMS offers members regional training sessions on topics such as law enforcement liability, OSHA training, risk management 101 and defensive driving.
- Risk Management Institute: RMI offers participants from SCMIT- and SCMIRF-member organizations specialized training in the role of risk manager and safety coordinator.
- *RiskLetter*: The quarterly e-newsletter provides information on a wide range of risk management topics.
- Law enforcement simulator: RMS offers members access to a law enforcement training simulator that allows officers to practice their decision-making skills and responses to resistance.

Loss Control/Technical Assistance

RMS helps its members build effective safety and loss control programs.

- Model policies and procedures manuals for law enforcement and fire services: SCMIT and SCMIRF members receive updated fire and law enforcement policies.
- One-on-one technical assistance visits: The loss control staff meet with member organizations to evaluate their safety and loss control programs.
- Legal hotlines: SCMIRF members can access up to 10 hours of free legal advice on each legal hotline for labor and liability issues.
- Education tools: SCMIRF members have access to cybersecurity services through the online tool, eRisk Hub, in addition to specialized toolkits, such as parks and recreation liability, public officials' liability, sewer backups, special events liability and workers' compensation.

Grants

The RMS grant program helps RMS members purchase products or equipment to reduce the frequency and severity of claims.

- SCMIRF awards the Law Enforcement Liability Reduction Grant Program grants to member law enforcement agencies to purchase stun guns or Tasers, Taser cameras, body cameras and other equipment.
- SCMIRF awards the Public Works Property and Liability Reduction Grant Program grants to member public works and utilities departments to purchase items to address the frequency and severity of claims, including back-up cameras, collision avoidance systems, concrete scarifiers, sewer cameras, meter locks and other equipment.
- SCMIT awards grants to member law enforcement, fire and public works departments to purchase work-zone safety equipment, soft body armor and other protective gear.

South Carolina Other Retirement Benefits Employer Trust

The South Carolina Other Retirement Benefits Employer Trust allows cities to set aside funds for nonpension benefits, such as retiree healthcare, as required by the Governmental Accounting Standards Board. Each member shares in the trust's administrative- and investment- related expenses, lowering the overall cost of compliance for each local government. *Staff Contact: Naomi Reed*

IMPACT Fund

After years of the Municipal Association of SC supporting local economic development initiatives through the Hometown Economic Development Grant program, a new and expanded grant program is taking its place — one updated to reflect the continuously evolving needs and ambitions of communities across the state. The Association introduced the IMPACT Fund, an acronym for "Innovative Municipal Projects for Advancing Change and Transformation." This newly structured program empowers municipalities with greater flexibility, increased funding opportunities and a renewed focus on innovation and problem-solving. *Staff Contact: Jake Broom*

Technology Services

The Association, in partnership with VC3, provides discounted technology services to cities and towns. VC3, an information technology company headquartered in Columbia, designs and hosts municipal websites; designs and implements computer networks; and provides security, disaster recovery, strategic technology planning and voice communication services. *Staff Contact: Jake Broom*

City Connect Market

City Connect Market, a cooperative purchasing partnership between the Municipal Association of SC and HGACBuy, allows South Carolina's cities and towns to take advantage of volume discounts when purchasing everything from fire trucks to roll carts to professional services. The partnership improves pricing and can help eliminate the need for each municipality to handle all details of each competitive bid process. *Staff Contact: Jake Broom*

Staff

Executive

Todd Glover
Executive Director

Eric Budds
Deputy Executive Director

Jake Broom
Chief Operating Officer

Advocacy and Communications

Russell Cox
Uptown Editor and Digital Production Manager

Casey Fields
Director of Advocacy

Meredith Houck
Communications Manager

Onye Kelly
Communications and Engagement Coordinator

Mary Catherine Lawton
Research and Legislative Analyst

Daina Phillips
Legislative and Public Policy Advocate

Erica Wright
Legislative and Public Policy Advocate

Education and Training

Jenny Boulware
Main Street South Carolina Manager

Elizabeth Copeland
Staff Associate for Affiliate Services

Dawn Dukes
Administrative Assistant

Urica Floyd
Staff Associate for Training and Learning Solutions

Adam Hedden
Palmetto Power Cities Manager

Jonathan Irick
Staff Associate for Main Street South Carolina

Ken Ivey
Manager of Member Services

Lea Ann Mitchell
Staff Associate for Affiliate Services

Christine Sumter
Administrative Assistant

Susan Walters
Administrative Assistant

Field Services

Charlie Barrineau
Senior Field Services Manager

Desirée Fragoso
Field Services Manager

Finance

Stephanie O'Cain
Chief Financial Officer

Fay Barlow
Accounts Receivable Coordinator

Elizabeth Floyd
Financial Manager

Lynn Miller
Accounts Payable Coordinator

Jodi Pendris
Financial and Technology Specialist

Information Technology

Virginia Butler
Business Systems Analyst

LaTasha Blair
Information Technology Manager

Devon Davis
Information Technology Support Specialist

Legal

Eric Shytle

General Counsel

Sara Weathers

Associate General Counsel

Local Revenue Services

Caitlin Cothran

Manager for Local Revenue Services

Fran Adcock

Revenue Analyst

Anita Lancaster

Revenue Analyst

Rochelle Smith

Revenue Analyst

Kaylee Summerton

Revenue Analyst

Operations

Summer Randall

Operations Manager

Donette Moore

*Human Resources Coordinator/
Executive Assistant*

Vernessa Pendergrass

Receptionist

Risk Management Services

Naomi Reed

Director of Risk Management Services

Krystal Bailey

Senior SCMIRF Claims Adjuster

Kailin Bethel

RMS Financial Specialist

Pam Bergen

Senior SCMIT Claims Adjuster

Robert Collins

Underwriting Manager

Tchnavia Davis

SCMIRF Claims Adjuster

Tony DesChamps

SCMIT Claims Manager

Amy Gillian

Administrative Assistant

Joy Gloster

Data and Training Analyst

Jennifer Gray

Financial Manager for RMS

Trevor Hall

*Public Safety Loss Control
Consultant*

Sharon Henry

Senior SCMIT Claims Adjuster

Hurisheo Jones

Claims Adjuster

Brenda Kegler

*SCMIT Associate Claims
Adjuster*

Stacy Lee

Senior SCMIRF Claims Adjuster

Amy Lindler

*Technology Operations
Manager*

Leslie Nash

SCMIRF Claims Adjuster

Kayde Niemira

Loss Control Consultant

Geneva Oliver

Senior SCMIT Claims Adjuster

Bethany Pendley

Loss Control Manager

Judy Phillips

Senior Claims Adjuster

Harriett Robinson

Senior SCMIT Claims Adjuster

Chassidy Sistrunk

Senior Underwriter

Johnna Smith

Senior SCMIRF Claims Adjuster

Sharon Turner

Underwriter

Mike Waslewski

SCMIRF Claims Manager

Rem Williams

Senior SCMIRF Claims Adjuster

Meiko Woods

SCMIRF Claims Adjuster





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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@greenvillesc.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.

Contact Leigh Newman at lnewman@sumtersc.gov or 803.436.2635.



50 Years of *Uptown*

By Russell Cox, Uptown Editor

In 1975, South Carolina's population, as recorded in the most recent census at the time, was 2.5 million — an amount that would grow and grow to more than 5.48 million people who live here now, according to the 2024 estimate.

Fifty years ago, the state was experiencing dramatic changes. The state's economy was diversifying. New South Carolina sections of interstate highways were coming into service — I-20, I-77 and I-95 — highways that would have a profound and lasting impact on the economic landscape.

And exactly 50 years ago, the Municipal Association of South Carolina reached a milestone of its own, when it published Volume 1, Issue 1, of *Uptown*.

It was not the Association's first periodical publication, since the quarterly magazine *South Carolina City* had launched in 1959. But *Uptown* was distributed on a monthly basis, in keeping with a growing Municipal Association which had only a few years earlier achieved 100% membership of all of the state's cities and towns.

Fittingly, the cover of that first issue marked a momentous occasion in South Carolina municipal history. It featured a photo of Gov. James B. Edwards signing the bill establishing Home Rule, which created the modern structure of county and municipal government, and required that "all laws concerning local government shall be liberally construed in their favor."

This was not the only big piece of news in the first issue — another article reported the establishment of the SC State Ethics Commission. Faces familiar to local governmental history can be seen throughout the issue — one photo has Municipal Association leadership meeting with Sen. Strom Thurmond to discuss Environmental Protection Agency regulations.

The August 1975 issue concluded with a note from the magazine's first editor, Mary E. Muthig. It described the new publication and the topics it would cover: legislation, training and professional development, and innovative municipal programs.

"With this first issue of *Uptown*, the Municipal Association of South Carolina is beginning what we hope will be a valuable medium for providing information and education to the state's elected and professional municipal officials," she wrote. "We hope that *Uptown* will be useful to these officials as they strive to improve local government around the state."

Today, the list of regular publications and communications coming from the Association is much longer than just *Uptown*. It encompasses everything from the *From the Dome to Your Home* weekly legislative reports to podcasts and social media.



AUGUST 75 VOL. 1, NO. 1 UPTOWN The Official Monthly Publication of the Municipal Association of South Carolina



Governor James B. Edwards (seated) signs the Home Rule bill as (from left to right) Rep. Jean St. Toal (D-Richland), Rep. Robert L. McFadden (D-York), Speaker of the House Rex L. Carter (D-Greenville) and Rep. Cecil L. Collins (R-Aiken) look on. Toal, McFadden and Collins were the House conferees for S.18.

Governor Signs Home Rule Bill

The two-year struggle for passage of a Home Rule bill came to an end on June 25, when Governor James B. Edwards signed S.18 into law. Now the work can begin on implementing one of the most significant pieces of legislation to come out of the South Carolina General Assembly in the past 25 years.

"The Justice Department is reviewing the ratified act with the Attorney General and other state officials and their comments will be essential to any implementation program," MASC Executive Vice President Don Wray said. "In the meantime," Wray continued, "our staff is studying the bill and is setting up appointments with the Attorney General, Secretary of State and State Election Commission to discuss questions concerning interpretation."

The MASC staff will prepare a manual on how to implement Home Rule. This manual will be distributed at the Regional Meetings to be held in November and the meetings this year will be devoted entirely to workshops on the implementation of Home Rule.

David Williams, MASC director of legal services, said, "The how-to manual will examine the municipal

government section of S.18 and outline and explain incorporation procedure; selection of forms of municipal government; general structure, organization, powers, duties, functions and responsibilities of all municipalities; the three forms of municipal governments and the powers and duties of the mayor, council and manager under each form; and nominations and elections for municipal offices."

Because the interpretation of many articles in the Home Rule bill are still unclear, Williams advises municipal officials to wait until after the Regional Meetings in November to take any action on the legislation. "We should have answers to most of the questions by that time," Williams said.

Municipalities have until September 25, 1976, to comply with the Home Rule bill.



Senator Walter J. Bristow, Jr. (D-Richland) and MASC staff member David Williams discuss provisions of the Home Rule bill.

Even so, for as much as the technology and communication channels have changed — and as much as South Carolina has changed — the mission of *Uptown* is the same as it was 50 years ago. It still covers innovative projects and initiatives that can help cities and towns deliver excellent services, no matter their size. It covers the legal requirements for operating a municipality, and new developments happening in state law. It spotlights ways that municipal leaders can protect their employees and other resources, and new professional development opportunities for officials and staff alike.

Uptown stopped counting its volume and issue numbers long ago. It's still aiming to make municipal government, the government closest to residents' everyday lives, the best that it can be. It will strive to do so for the upcoming chapters of South Carolina's story as well.

TRUE OR FALSE:

The person responsible for preparing a municipality's proposed budget is the city or town's finance officer, no matter the form of government.

FALSE

South Carolina state law, under SC Code Section 5-5-10, establishes the three forms of government under which municipalities may operate: the council form, the mayor council form, and the council-manager form. There are some features common to all three forms, especially the fact that full councils are the only entity in the municipality with the power to enact ordinances, adopt resolutions and establish policies, but there are otherwise some key differences between the three forms.

State law assigns the responsibility for preparing or overseeing the preparation of the annual budget to different persons or entities depending on the form of government. In the council form, the full council — the governing body that includes the mayor — is collectively responsible. In the mayor-council form, where the mayor acts as the chief administrative officer, the mayor prepares the budget. As the chief administrative officer in the council-manager form, the manager prepares the budget. In all three forms, the full council must hold hearings on the budget and consider it for adoption.

The Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government offers in-person and online courses. The next in-person sessions, "Forms of Municipal Government" and "Municipal Economic Development," will take place at select councils of government locations as well as the Municipal Association's office in Columbia on September 16. Learn more at www.masc.sc (keyword: MEOI).

State Creates New Ways to Get Continuing Education Credits for Planning and Zoning

South Carolina law requires every board, committee and commission appointee involved with local planning and zoning, as well as planning staff to complete a mandatory 6-hour orientation training session, as well as complete three hours of continuing education credit each year. The SC Planning Education Advisory Committee updated their policies on continuing education, allowing planning staff to obtain certifications to host trainings without prior approval from the advisory committee.

Here are the ways that a municipal planning staff can arrange continuing education training for their commissions, boards and professional employees involved in planning and zoning:

Use an approved sponsor

SCPEAC has a full list of approved continuing education programs at www.scstatehouse.gov/SCPEAC.

As an approved sponsor, the Municipal Association has a list of a CE training resources that a municipality can request access to for a group training session.

Learn more about the Municipal Association's trainings that can count toward the state's requirements at www.masc.sc (keyword: planning and zoning training).

Get approval as a Continuing Education Instructor

Those who apply for this designation with SCPEAC will need to fulfill at least one of the following qualifications, as well as a level of work experience:

- Certification by the American Institute of Certified Planners
- A master's or doctorate degree in planning from an accredited college or university

- A license to practice law in South Carolina

They will also need at least three years of experience, preferably at the level of a planning director. Review the full policy for all qualifications.

Get approval for an Individual Continuing Education Program

SCPEAC accepts applications from planning staff with minimum educational requirements of an undergraduate degree as well as five years of experience in the planning field.

Find qualification and application information for approval of an instructor or education program at www.scstatehouse.gov/SCPEAC.



Holiday Decor Gets Cities in the Spirit

The City of Camden marks the Christmas season with light strings running to the top of the downtown King Haigler clock tower. Photo: City of Camden.

Holiday decorations can bring people together and contribute to the local economy, but they also give a glimpse into a city's need to plan, strategize, budget and flex its creative muscle.

The City of Conway garnered some attention when the Hallmark movie "Christmas in Conway" debuted in 2013. There was just one problem — it was filmed in Wilmington, NC. That spurred Conway to up its Christmas decor, with a drive-through light show and more decorations added to the city. By 2020, city leaders felt their Christmas town belonged in *Southern Living*, and visited other cities featured in the magazine to see what it took to be considered.

"At some point, we realized that every city that is pretty successful celebrates

Christmas big, so it's very hard to stand out," said Adam Emrick, the city administrator. "So, we decided to pivot to Halloween, and we try to raise the bar on every holiday."

Each October, hundreds of plastic pumpkins hang from trees in downtown Conway, while a haunted pirate ship, skeletons and other decor fill the city's downtown. The Riverwalk becomes the "Shiverwalk." This year, the building department is carving an 8-foot-tall jack-o'-lantern out of plastic foam and using a computerized device to render a 4-foot-high face of the mayor as the Wizard of Oz. Movie scenes are being depicted around the city, and a 12-foot skeleton is being covered with tiny mirror tiles for a skeleton disco park that will bring in a DJ to play music for a party.

Also, the city ceremonially changes its name to the "City of Halloween, South Carolina," by a proclamation each year.

"It's just grown and grown and grown and grown. And we started celebrating other holidays, too. Last year, we did Valentine's Day, and we had free gondola rides. We had signs all over town that say, 'kiss me,' 'hug me,' best friends,' 'single and looking.' And we did Easter, too," Emrick said. "We're now known for something other than being near Myrtle Beach. And we just love it like crazy."

The decorations appeal to families and tourists — even teenagers — who are spending time downtown taking photos, enjoying the holiday spirit and sharing their experiences through social media posts.



Conway staff prepare giant candy heart signage for display ahead of the Valentine's Day season. Photo: City of Conway.

"I think one of my favorite ones is, 'We just can't wait to see what Conway does next.' That's cool to have people anticipate what your next move is going to be," Emrick said.

The city stores its holiday decorations in 15 shipping containers, while the bay for the Grounds & Maintenance Department is occupied by skeletons, gondolas and trains. There are now three employees who do holiday construction, building arches and pirate ships and snowmen, along with a holiday coordinator at city hall.

"Those positions didn't exist before this year," Emrick said, adding that many decorations are purchased used or damaged, and city staff repairs them.

"A new, 30-foot tree for Christmas is like \$100,000. We have trees and a 20-foot walk-through ornament, a 20-foot snowman. We buy these things when they're pretty beat up, and then we rehab them in-house," Emrick said. "If we did not have a talented staff, we would not be able to do a fraction what we do."

The funding for holiday decor comes from the hospitality tax earned by Conway, but Emrick said the city returns more than it spends every year. And the events have paid dividends for downtown businesses, with October sales now topping December. Halloween activities bring people downtown from the third week in September through the first of November, with 235,000 visitors in October 2024 — 60,000 more than in December.

"Yesterday, I got two calls. People were making plane reservations for their relatives, and they wanted to make sure that all the decorations and everything would be ready by October 2," said Hillary Howard, executive director of Conway Downtown Alive.

For Emrick, the secret to the success has been identifying the city's goal, and no longer scheduling its fall festival around nearby small towns or events at Myrtle Beach.

"We said, 'We're not doing that anymore. We're not doing what everybody does. We're doing something completely different.' And that's how we ended up with Halloween. I really think now that we're trying to compete with Disney and we're trying to compete with Carowinds. And if you identify who you're actually competing with, you can elevate your game. Don't compete with those cities that are smaller than you. Don't compete with the cities that are next to you. Compete with the place that you want to be, whether they know it or not."

The City of Camden is another spot in South Carolina that goes all out for the holidays.

"Christmas in Camden is truly a big deal for our community. This special season brings together families,

neighbors, and visitors from across the region to celebrate our rich holiday traditions," Mayor Vincent Sheheen said. "It's a time when Camden's historic charm shines brightest, reminding us all why this season holds such a cherished place in our hearts and our community's identity."

Katharine Spadacenta, Camden's community development coordinator, noted that the city "is often described as such a 'Hallmark Channel town,' and Christmas is when we really take that concept over the top. The decorations are part of creating that charming, picturesque atmosphere that draws visitors."

Camden changed its Christmas tree in 2024, opting for a 34-foot artificial tree to replace the live tree damaged by Hurricane Helene, and moving it from the front of city hall to the heart of downtown. Camden also decorates with streamers that run from the city's iconic King Haigler clock tower and rooftop lights, and the lamp posts throughout downtown and the commercial districts are adorned with seasonal wreaths and banners.

The city also added whimsical elements, such as little knit scarves for all 12 bronze Boykin Spaniel statues around town, which became a hit on social media.

This year, Camden plans to make it snow downtown — by artificial means — every Friday in December, and downtown merchants are planning storefront window decorations, creating a coordinated, community-wide effort that enhances the visitor experience, she said.

The city has spent considerably more in the past two years to refresh its inventory and make major purchases, but expects to spend less over the next 5 - 10 years.

"Take your time, because holiday decorations are expensive and there is a large staff requirement. You can't go from zero to 100 in one year," Spadacenta said. "Build little by little — make one big purchase each year rather than trying to do everything at once. This allows you to gradually build your inventory while managing both budget and staff resources effectively."



Kingston Park is among the many locations throughout Conway to be festooned with spooky decor as the city undergoes its transformation into the "City of Halloween." Photo: City of Conway.

Camden's holiday decorating begins November 1 and requires hundreds of hours of staff time, with public works crews working every day for three weeks and the electric crew working overnight shifts to minimize traffic disruption. All of the lights and decorations are installed and ready before Camden "flips the switch" the day after Thanksgiving, she said.

When Alicia Griffith started as the Main Street director in Clover more than two years ago, responsibility for the town's Christmas decorations fell to her. The stock of decorations at that time was generally made up of items needing to be replaced or repaired, she said.

She decided to start with a master plan for decorations, and vetted the list through community stakeholders, asking what people would like to see. The overall goal was a new tree, new ornaments, poles and lights. These were big ideas – with a big price tag.

"I knew we needed to break it down into phases, because we're going to be spending a lot of money on Christmas decorations, so when these need to be replaced or things start breaking, we will then be replacing them in phases and not all at once."

The town started with a little splash in several parts of downtown, with an overhang of snowflakes over the square and a new tree. The 16-foot artificial tree purchased the first year will grow a foot or two this year as the town adds to its base, with plans to make it even larger. The plan also calls for downtown buildings to be outlined in lights, with poles decorated to connect the north and south ends of town. It also calls for Centennial Park, at the main intersection, to be revamped for the holidays.

She suggested towns looking to improve or add to their holiday decorations think about a master plan.

"Take away the cost factor and just say, 'What would you like to have in your town or in your city?' After you figure out everything that you want, break it down into reasonable sections to where you can one day master that master plan," Griffith said. "It's not just saying, 'Okay, I have \$50,000 this year. What can you do with that?' because then you start trying to spread the money instead of thinking about what you can do in a five-year plan. Treat it like a business would look at it and formulate a business plan."



Clover pursued a strategy of gradually building up its stock of Christmas decorations across multiple years. Photo: Town of Clover.



Municipal Association of South Carolina

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

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Calendar

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

SEPTEMBER

3 Regional Advocacy Meeting - North Augusta. Palmetto Terrace at the Municipal Building.

4 SC Association of Stormwater Managers Third Quarter Meeting and Exhibitor Showcase. DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel, Columbia. Topics include leadership and a panel discussion on plan review.

9 Regional Advocacy Meeting - Lexington. Palmetto Collegiate Institute.

16 MEO Institute: Forms of Government and Municipal Economic Development. Regional Council of Government locations. Topics include municipal economic development, a presentation about the council of government services, forms of municipal government and a virtual question and answer session.

17 Main Street SC Third Quarter Managers' Training. City of Dillon Visitors Center, Dillon. Topics include strategy development, community analysis, transformation strategies and implementation strategies.

17 - 19 Municipal Clerks and Treasurers Institute, Year 1, Session A. Cambria Hotel Downtown/The Vista, Columbia. Topics include forms of government, the role of the municipal clerk and parliamentary procedure.

17 - 19 Municipal Technology Association of South Carolina Annual Meeting. Beach House Resort, Hilton Head Island. Topics include cybersecurity preparedness, lessons from a ransomware attack, navigating data requests and multi-factor authentication.

23 Risk Management Services: Defensive Driving. Town of Mount Pleasant Municipal Complex.

24 Regional Advocacy Meeting - Greenville. Welcome Center at Unity Park.

25 Regional Advocacy Meeting - Florence. Florence Center.

OCTOBER

1 SC Utility Billing Association Fall Meeting. Hilton Garden Inn- Columbia Airport, West Columbia.

1 Regional Advocacy Meeting - Rock Hill. Operations Center.

2 SC Community Development Association Fall Meeting. Hilton Garden Inn - Columbia Airport, West Columbia.

7 - 10 SC Municipal Finance Officers, Clerks and Treasurers Association and SC Business Licensing Officials Association Joint Academy. Marina Inn at Grande Dunes, Myrtle Beach.

14 Regional Advocacy Meeting - North Charleston. North Charleston Coliseum and Performing Arts Center.

15 Advanced Municipal Elected Officials Institute Fall Training. Hilton Garden Inn, Columbia Downtown.

16 Managers' and Administrators' Fall Forum. Hilton Garden Inn- Columbia Airport, West Columbia.

21 - 22 Municipal Court Administration Association 101 Session B. Municipal Association of SC, Columbia.

28 Communications Workshop. Municipal Association of SC, Columbia. Topics include disaster response, seeking community buy-in and artificial intelligence.

NOVEMBER

5 Risk Management Services: Annual Meeting. Hilton Garden Inn Columbia Columbia Downtown.

12 Main Street SC Fourth Quarter Managers' Training. North Augusta Forward, North Augusta.