

UPTOWN



a publication of the Municipal Association of South Carolina

COMPREHENSIVE PLANS SHAPE CITIES' FUTURES

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Cover Photo: As with many cities, North Charleston's evolution is guided by a comprehensive plan. The city established its current plan in 2020 and reviewed it in 2025. Photo: City of North Charleston.

City and Town Input Strengthens the Municipal Association's Advocacy Work

As the landscape of local government policy grows and becomes more complex, the Municipal Association of South Carolina's work to engage in structured polling of South Carolina's 271 municipalities has emerged as an indispensable tool for making sure that the Association's advocacy strategies remain grounded in up-to-date and statewide municipal experience.

South Carolina's cities and towns operate in environments as varied as the state's geography. Rural communities managing essential services with limited staff capacity, rapidly growing municipalities navigating development pressures, and mid-sized and larger cities balancing rising demands for public amenities with the costs of aging infrastructure. Polling provides a way to capture all of these realities.

In recent years, the Association has increasingly incorporated surveys sent out to municipal officials throughout the state, including 15 in 2025, as a critical data gathering tool. The surveys identify emerging concerns, quantify service pressures and document administrative or fiscal challenges shared across regions and population tiers. This has allowed the Association to develop a more complete, data-driven assessment of municipal needs for state and federal lawmakers.

Strengthening the credibility of municipal advocacy

Increasingly, South Carolina's legislators have sought empirical data to support policy proposals, funding requests and statutory changes. Whether providing Fiscal Impact Statements to the SC Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office or responding to direct legislative inquiries that the Municipal Association receives, polling has enabled it to present municipal perspectives with clarity, authority and a unified, evidence-based voice.

During the 2025 legislative session, municipal water and sewer utilities responded to the Association's request with compelling information on the fiscal and operational impact of these systems. The feedback indicated that the fecal coliform from septic tanks had been observed to seriously damage sensitive coastal ecosystems, up to the point of forcing temporary or permanent closure of oyster beds for harvesting. That input equipped the Association's advocacy team to successfully oppose proposals in the General Assembly that would have undermined utility operations, and ultimately undermined public and environmental health.

Municipalities also provided critical feedback on issues ranging from juvenile detention and backyard fowl to vinyl siding regulation.

By reporting statewide patterns of city government information — whether on audit compliance, infrastructure funding, public safety recruitment or utility-rate pressures — the Association has been able to demonstrate that its positions reflect broadly shared municipal experience, not simply isolated concerns.

Ensuring representation across all municipalities

One of the Municipal Association's core responsibilities is ensuring that all of the state's cities and towns — regardless of size, geography or staffing — are represented in

statewide policy discussions. Polling provides an accessible way for every city and town to contribute, helping ensure legislative strategies reflect the full breadth of municipal perspectives and avoiding unintended consequences for smaller communities.

A foundation for long-term engagement

Polling fosters an ongoing dialogue between the Municipal Association and its members. It also helps identify municipality training needs, professional development priorities and technical assistance demands, and helps inform the development of the Association's conferences and publications. By regularly seeking input from city staff and elected officials, the Association reinforces its commitment to accurate, transparent representation.

Throughout the legislative session and the rest of the year, municipal officials can help by completing requests for information— helping ensure that municipal voices shape the policies that impact South Carolina's cities and towns.

During the legislative session, subscribe to the weekly legislative email From the Dome to Your Home and listen to the From the Dome to Your Home podcast for more updates. Both are available at www.masc.sc (keyword: Dome).

Auto Accident Root-cause Analysis Helps Prevent Future Losses



Each quarter, the SC Municipal Insurance and Risk Financing Fund and SC Municipal Insurance Trust receive reports of hundreds of auto losses from their members. When a vehicle accident occurs, it's tempting to handle the repairs, address any injuries, file the paperwork and move on. Doing so, however, can cause municipal staff to miss a critical opportunity to prevent the accident from happening again.

Typically, an auto insurance claim is a symptom of an underlying cause — something that is reducing the safety of regular vehicle operations. Revealing these causes can require a structured review of the accident, known as an incident review or root-cause analysis. Understanding the cause can help prevent the kind of repeated accidents that, over time, lead to higher workers' compensation costs, more property damage and greater liability risks.

A good review process not only investigates what happened, but also why it happened and what actions can be implemented to prevent a similar loss from happening in the future.

An incident review should consider a range of factors.

- **Driver behavior and training** – Was the employee adequately trained for the assignment, conditions and vehicle type? If another driver caused the wreck, did the employee attempt to use defensive driving techniques to avoid the collision?
- **Vehicle maintenance** – Could a mechanical issue have contributed to the loss? Were safety inspections completed for the vehicle each time it was in use?
- **Policies and procedures** – Did employees follow seat belt rules? Was the driver's motor vehicle report, or MVR, checked within the last year to ensure that the driver was in good standing? Was the vehicle operated according to policy?
- **Work conditions** – Was fatigue, distraction or timing pressures a factor?

Some municipalities implement accident review boards, which are small panels that examine each incident, determine preventability and recommend

NEWS BRIEFS

The SC Municipal Human Resources Association elected its 2026 board of directors. They are President **Mark Putnam**, human resources director, City of Mauldin; First Vice President **Patrice L. Mattison**, human resources manager, City of Anderson; Second Vice President **Deana Keever**, human resources director, City of Rock Hill; Member at Large **Ashley Clark**, human resources director/city clerk, City of Simpsonville; and Past President **Lynn Smith**, human resources director, City of Conway.

Page Cheeks-Belton, business license coordinator with the City of Abbeville, received the Master in Business Licensing designation from the Business Licensing Officials Training Institute.

Town of Holly Hill Police Chief **Joshua Detter** was named the new president of the SC Police Chiefs Association.

corrective action. These boards foster accountability and consistency in accident evaluations, and they ensure that lessons learned are shared across all departments within the municipality.

Regularly reviewing employee motor vehicle records is a valuable prevention tool. MVRs can reveal patterns, such as speeding violations or at-fault accidents, that might indicate a need for additional training. Conducting MVR checks during the hiring process and at least annually helps ensure that drivers remain qualified and safe behind the wheel.

Collisions should always be viewed in a holistic manner. No vehicle incident should go without investigation, even if it is very minor. These events are an opportunity to review and strengthen the municipality's policies and procedures, and promote a safer work environment.

For questions about incident investigation or root-cause analysis, contact the Risk Management Services Loss Control staff at losscontrol@masc.sc.

Last Call for the 2026 Municipal Association Achievement Awards

Why submit an entry?	Categories to choose
<p>The Association's Achievement Awards help demonstrate the value that cities and towns bring to their residents.</p> <p>The awards highlight innovative projects for residents and other cities throughout South Carolina, and help share ideas among officials and staff.</p>	<p>Municipalities with populations of 20,000 or less can compete in their population category or a subject category.</p> <p>Municipalities with populations greater than 20,000 can compete in a subject category only:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Communications• Economic Development• Public Safety• Public Service• Public Works
What to submit	Deadlines and other dates
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Completed application form signed by the mayor• Completed responses to the 10 application questions• Supporting material• Three digital photos <p>Projects need to be substantially complete to be eligible. Submitted projects that do not win may be submitted only one additional time.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Submission deadline – Wednesday, February 4• Cities competing in subject categories will be assigned an oral presentation time on February 23 or 24• The Municipal Association will recognize award winners at its 2026 Annual Meeting in Greenville on July 18.

For more information and the awards application, visit www.masc.sc (keyword: achievement awards).

Risk Management Services to Launch New App for Updating SCMIT, SCMIRF Roles

This spring the Municipal Association of SC Risk Management Services is launching a new application for SC Municipal Insurance Trust and SC Municipal Insurance and Risk Financing Fund members to assign their primary and secondary contact information.

The app, RoleTrack, can be accessed by members when they log into the Member Home at www.masc.sc. It provides a simple but powerful way to close communication gaps and make sure that the correct people always get the information they need.

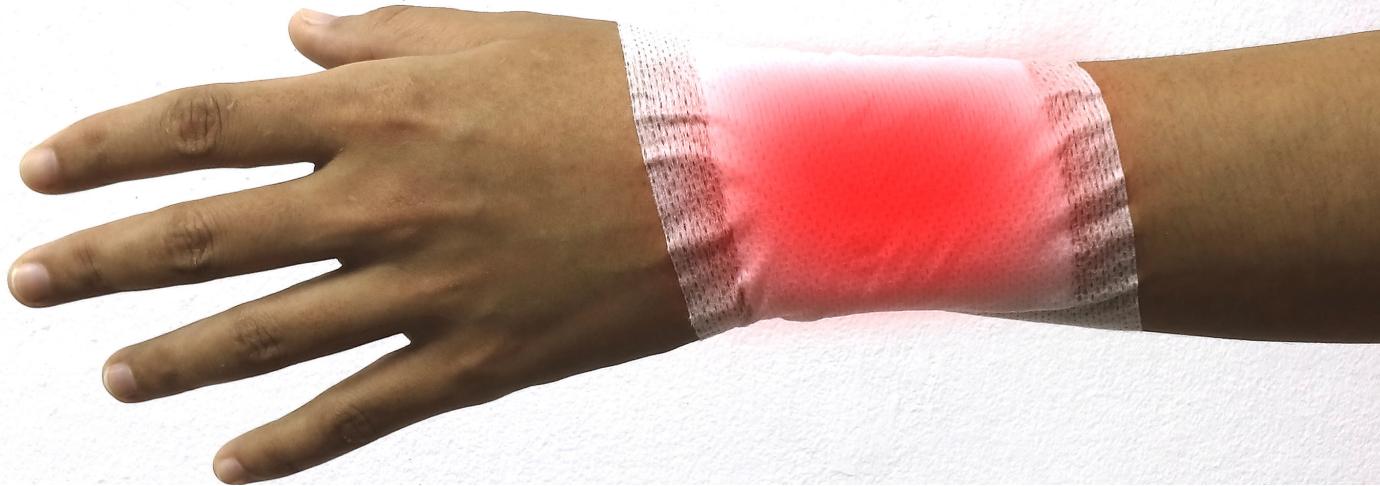
Having accurate contact information is essential for SCMIT and SCMIRF members to receive key information from Risk Management Services. Monthly reports, annual reviews, the quarterly *RiskLetter* covering risk management topics, training



opportunities, renewal information, invoices and many other electronic communications are all sent based on the SCMIT and SCMIRF roles assigned to municipal employees.

Members are encouraged to log into RoleTrack to review their existing roles to determine if any updates should be made. It lists any required roles that are vacant as well as basic contact information that should be updated. It also displays the municipal staff who are authorized to make updates, and includes functionality to add new employees and terminate employees who are no longer employed at the municipality.

Contact Amy Gillian at agillian@masc.sc or 803.354.4774 with any questions about updating contacts in RoleTrack.



Careful Management and Training Help Prevent Burn Injuries

Burn injuries are a serious and commonplace workplace risk in municipal environments, where staff regularly encounter heat sources, energized equipment, chemicals and industrial processes. Every year in the first week of February, National Burn Awareness Week provides an opportunity for municipal leaders to focus on these dangers and protect the employees serving the community every day.

Municipal employees face burn hazards in a variety of operational settings. Public works crews work with hot surfaces, heated equipment, steam, open flames, welding operations and asphalt work. Utility and electrical workers are exposed to energized systems and arc-flash hazards. Wastewater and water treatment workers handle chemicals and pressurized systems. Parks and recreation staff maintain grills, concession equipment and fuel-powered machinery. Even building maintenance teams face risks from boilers, water heaters and electrical panels.

All of these hazards are a part of everyday operations, which is why prevention needs to be built into everyday procedures to be effective — not just treated as an afterthought.

Train to prevent burns

Municipal leadership plays a direct role in reducing these risks. When leaders clearly prioritize safety through policies, training and accountability, employees are more likely to follow safe

practices. National Burn Awareness Week offers an ideal time for supervisors to conduct safety refreshers that address heat-related hazards, electrical safety, chemical handling and proper use of personal protective equipment. Regular reinforcement can help strengthen good safety habits, and reduce the potential for complacency.

Training for high-risk tasks is a key area for emphasis. Hot work such as welding, torch cutting, chemical handling, electrical work and roadway repairs need to follow written procedures. Supervisors should work to enforce lockout/tagout procedures for electrical and mechanical work to prevent unexpected equipment energization.

Employees need training not only on how to perform tasks safely, but also on how to recognize early warning signs of equipment failure or unsafe conditions. Encouraging staff to report near-misses without fear of blame allows leadership to address hazards before serious injuries occur.

Don't neglect maintenance and equipment

Ongoing maintenance of equipment and facilities is an equally critical precaution against burns. Burn injuries often occur not because the work taking place is inherently dangerous, but because equipment is outdated, damaged or improperly used.

Municipal leaders should ensure that departments have access to appropriate

protective gear such as flame-resistant clothing, insulated gloves, face shields and first aid supplies specifically designed for burn treatment. Supervisors should make sure that fire extinguishers, emergency showers, eyewash stations and spill kits are kept accessible and receive regular inspections. Mechanical rooms, electrical panels and boiler areas should remain clear of storage or clutter that could contribute to fires or delay emergency response.

Study past experience

Data-driven safety management further strengthens prevention efforts. Leaders should review workers' compensation claims and incident reports related to burn injuries or near-misses. Patterns can reveal gaps in training, supervision or equipment. When leadership uses real data to drive improvements, safety initiatives become targeted, effective and measurable.

Keep safety in focus

Ultimately, burn prevention in local government is about more than compliance. It is about protecting the people who maintain streets, deliver utilities, respond to emergencies and keep public facilities operational. When leaders invest in training, enforce standards and model safety-first behavior, they reduce injuries, control costs and preserve workforce stability. Strong leadership can save lives, prevents injuries and ensures that employees return home safely at the end of every shift.

The Main Street Advantage

Driving Vibrant, Resilient Downtowns Through National Standards

by Jenny Boulware, Main Street South Carolina Manager

Ongoing improvements in downtown Florence include major housing additions as well as the restoration of the historic Carolina Theatre. Photo: City of Florence.

South Carolina's historic downtowns are more than commercial districts. Their walkable streets, unique buildings and lively gathering spots reflect each community's character. Preserving that character while fostering economic growth requires vision, collaboration and strategy — qualities nurtured through Main Street South Carolina. Through training, resources and a statewide peer network, Main Street SC equips communities with tools to strengthen and sustain their downtowns.

For towns ready to elevate revitalization initiatives, national accreditation from Main Street America offers more than recognition. It provides credibility and a roadmap for lasting impact. It's a mark of national distinction, honoring communities building comprehensive, sustainable efforts that deliver measurable economic and cultural impact.

A framework for excellence

Accredited programs demonstrate that they have the leadership, partnerships and systems to guide downtown revitalization with purpose. National standards emphasize six specific areas:

- broad-based engagement
- inclusive leadership
- diversified funding
- preservation-focused economic development
- strategy-driven programming
- measurable results

These six benchmarks validate progress while providing a clear path forward, ensuring revitalization is intentional, community-driven and sustainable.

Communities leading with purpose

South Carolina is home to five nationally accredited Main Street communities, each demonstrating how accreditation strengthens local momentum through preserved structures, improved systems and stronger partnerships.

Greenwood

In Uptown Greenwood, streetscape improvements on Waller Avenue, the redevelopment of Oregon Station and cultural projects like the Arts Center renovation and Lander University's investments have illustrated the alignment of public and private partners.

"The number of projects and the dollars being invested in Uptown are proof that partners share a unified vision," said Uptown Manager Gibson Hill.

Accreditation has opened doors to competitive funding, including a Hometown Economic Development Grant supporting the program's new office and visitor center.

Hill emphasized that "these projects are essential investments in community vitality, business longevity and overall economic resilience. Accreditation also signals credibility to communities visiting Greenwood, reinforcing that we operate with professionalism, consistency and long-term strategy."

Aiken

In Aiken, accreditation has helped the program refine internal systems, expand partnerships and energize downtown through seasonal events and enhanced merchant engagement.

"We focused on deepening our systems, improving internal processes and elevating our approach to downtown management. This year felt like a turning point where the foundation we've been building truly came together," said Executive Director EmmaLee Sams.

Accreditation guides planning, ensures transparency and strengthens trust with residents, businesses and volunteers. Main Street SC training and peer support have helped Aiken refine committees, improve volunteer coordination, and evaluate successes — reinforcing stability and professionalism.

"Accreditation signals that downtown revitalization in Aiken is guided by best practices and a commitment to long-term success," Sams added.

Florence

Florence illustrates how accreditation supports fast-growing communities with structure and long-term focus. A new business accelerator is underway to support entrepreneurs, expanding the district's business pipeline, while the Carolina Theatre's long-awaited restoration further revitalizes Dargan Street as a cultural anchor.

Partnerships with Francis Marion University provided walkability assessments and public health insights, while nearly 200 new housing units create intentionally cultivated "gentle density" in its urban fabric, supporting a vibrant live-work downtown.

Hannah Davis, Florence Main Street Director, noted that "accreditation shows our community that downtown revitalization is guided by national best practices, long-term strategy, and organizational integrity."

Florence's program also leverages peer networks and statewide initiatives like WeShopSC, an e-commerce marketplace, to expand visibility and support for local businesses.

Hartsville

In Hartsville, accreditation brings discipline and clarity to daily work. With the storefront occupancy rate at about 96%, the program uses data to guide decisions and demonstrate tangible impact.

"The accreditation process brings us back to our core strategies and helps us refocus when distractions pop up," said Michelle Byers Brown, the program's executive director.

Strategic attention to buildings on the district's edge, proactive property engagement and relationships with realtors all reflect the forward-thinking approach encouraged by accreditation. Training, peer collaboration and adherence to national standards have helped Hartsville maintain governance, operational systems and credibility, ensuring long-term community trust.

Laurens

For Laurens, accreditation has provided stability during leadership transitions.

"Being part of the network has helped me tremendously — especially understanding the economic impact of our work and how other communities address challenges," Brad Abercrombie, the program's new executive director, said.



Uptown Greenwood is home to specialty shops and boutiques as well as dining, cultural institutions like the Arts Center of Greenwood, as well as major events like the SC Festival of Discovery and SC Festival of Flowers. Photo: Uptown Greenwood.

Board training and strong volunteer engagement has maintained momentum, while accreditation reinforced a culture of high performance and continuous improvement.

"Accreditation demonstrates a commitment by our board and community partners to function at a higher level," Abercrombie said. "It lends credibility to the program's work while guiding us toward long-term success."

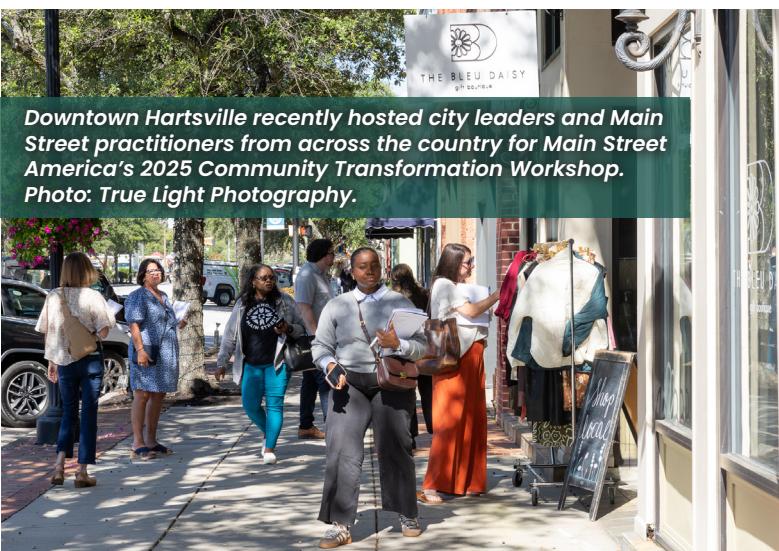
The power of connection

Accredited communities benefit from a statewide network of resources: quarterly trainings, professional development, peer connections and mentorship. Nationally, Main Street accreditation opens doors to grants, advanced certifications and leadership opportunities. These connections foster learning and sustain momentum across downtown initiatives.

Across the state, accredited programs share one common thread: revitalization is strongest when it is intentional, measured and rooted in community partnership. Accreditation provides the structure and the credibility that builds trust.

With national standards guiding their work and a statewide network reinforcing their efforts, South Carolina's accredited Main Street communities are not just preserving the past — they are shaping vibrant, resilient downtowns for the future. By aligning local initiatives with Main Street America's rigorous standards, these towns ensure revitalization is purposeful, impactful and sustainable.

Learn more about Main Street SC at www.masc.sc (keyword: Main Street). Explore how national accreditation can guide a community's downtown revitalization and learn about the six community evaluation standards at www.mainstreet.org.



Downtown Hartsville recently hosted city leaders and Main Street practitioners from across the country for Main Street America's 2025 Community Transformation Workshop. Photo: True Light Photography.

Parliamentary Procedure Can Keep Councils on Track

Working through a council meeting agenda, a city council might find itself facing a flurry of motions to amend, reconsider or table its agenda items, making everyone involved disoriented.

Other times, councilmembers might find themselves in agreement on the desired action they want to take, but they are struggling to put the motion into words.

This kind of confusion or uncertainty in council meetings is common, and councils should navigate these issues by relying on their established parliamentary procedures. This can be easier said than done, however — parliamentary procedures are often complex.

At the 2025 Annual Meeting and Continuing Legal Education session of the SC Municipal Attorneys Association, Ben Mount, the senior assistant general counsel of the North Carolina League of Municipalities, offered an overview of parliamentary procedures in local government and how to use them.

What is parliamentary procedure?

Originating in the Parliament of the United Kingdom, parliamentary procedures are a public body's framework for administering meetings and making decisions.

These procedures are designed to help groups resolve their issues effectively and efficiently. They also help public bodies maintain decorum, determine the will of the majority and ensure the orderly transaction of business. Typically, they establish rules on a range of topics including the setting of agendas, effecting a reading, procedural motions or executing ordinances.

South Carolina state law does not establish a definitive set of parliamentary procedures. Instead, SC Code Section 5-7-250 provides that "council shall determine its own rules and order of business," giving municipalities freedom to establish and adopt the procedures that best suit their needs — so long as they do not conflict with state law.

Robert's Rules and beyond

Most municipalities have either adopted *Robert's Rules of Order* or procedures generally based off of these rules. Although South Carolina municipalities may feel a natural connection to *Robert's Rules of Order* given that its author, Henry Martyn Robert, was born in the state, these rules are complex and not always the best option for municipalities.

Many municipalities may be better served by adopting their own rules that are less complex and more tailored to the needs. For those who decide to draft their own parliamentary procedures, Mount recommended seven core principles to consider, based on guidance from the University of North Carolina School of Government:

- The council's authority is defined by state law.
- The council must act as a body.
- A quorum is necessary for the council to act.
- Every member has an equal right to participate.
- There must be an opportunity for debate.
- The council must act by the majority vote.
- Meetings should be characterized by fairness and good faith.

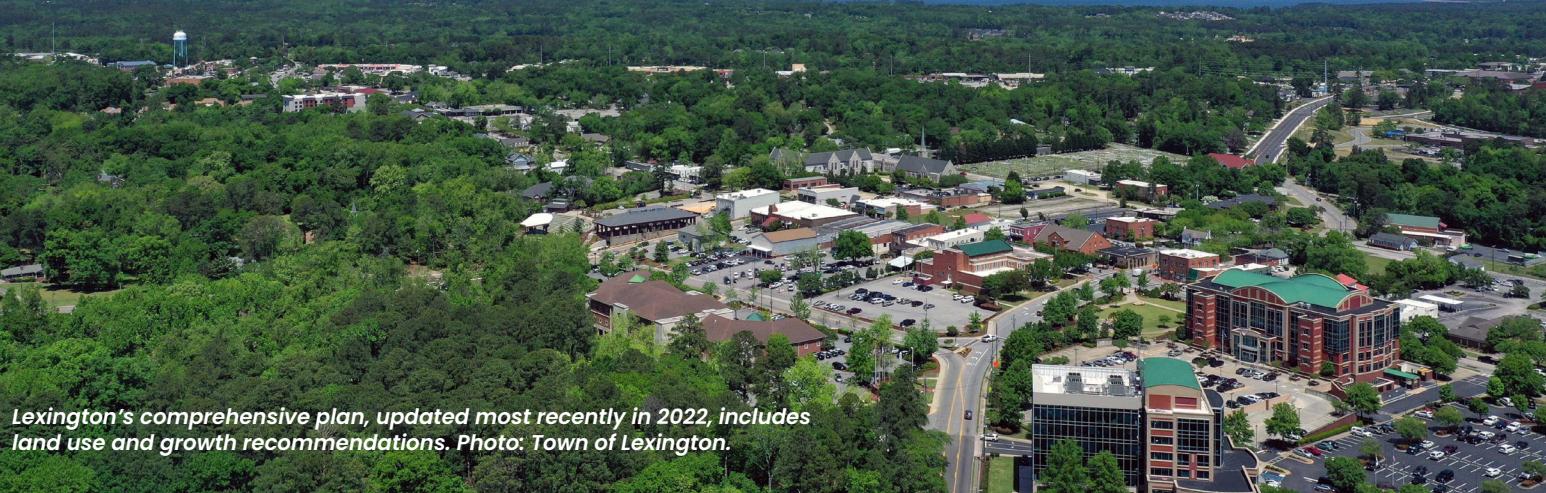
By keeping these core principles in mind, municipalities can draft clear and effective parliamentary procedures that memorialize historical practices and encourage efficiency.

Once rules are adopted, they should be made available publicly, such as adding them to the city's website. This transparency helps residents understand how decisions are made and what to expect during meetings. Demystifying the procedures of the public body can lead to increased engagement and remove barriers of entry for those interested in participating.

Model rules

The Municipal Association of SC is in the process of drafting model rules for parliamentary procedure. These rules will be made available to all members upon completion. To request a copy once it becomes available, contact Associate General Counsel Sara Weathers at sweathers@masc.sc.

Comprehensive Plans Shape Cities' Futures



Lexington's comprehensive plan, updated most recently in 2022, includes land use and growth recommendations. Photo: Town of Lexington.

South Carolina law requires those municipalities with planning and zoning authority to create comprehensive plans that address specific land-use elements, but these plans aren't just created to sit on a shelf. For planning officers, they are consulted often while making decisions about how a city grows and changes.

"It's kind of a road map, so to speak, to guide us in the direction we'd like to take," said Tim Macholl, North Charleston's director of planning and zoning. "We use it as guiding document and for foundational information daily, or we try to use it daily, especially for anything that relates to development and the environment."

Doug Polen, Irmo's deputy town administrator, said comprehensive plans prompt towns to spend quality time thinking about where they are in terms of development and where they want to be. They use that information to determine the daily and longer-term workings of their planners.

"Sometimes we get so caught up in the day-to-day that we don't really think about five or 10 years from now," Polen said.

Like many municipalities in a fast-growing state, Irmo is part of a larger region facing the issues of how to handle growth.

"There are large lots adjacent to town and the Midlands as a whole is growing considerably," Polen said. "Commercial and residential developers are constantly reaching out to build new restaurants, retail centers, senior living or general residential neighborhoods," he said. "The town needs a plan to deal with that."

For Irmo, planners face the questions of both "Do we want to grow?" and "Do we have the capacity to grow?"

Those are particularly important since the town doesn't levy property taxes, and each additional home will require police, parks and planning services.

"We have decided, through the comprehensive plan that we want to grow and that growth is worth the additional cost," he said.

Polen said he understands that people can be wary of growth, so when the town put out the request for proposals for comprehensive planning services, it looked for firms that had a track record of strong public outreach. When asked what type of development people wanted to see in Irmo, respondents overwhelmingly chose walkable mixed-use development and small-scale retail. That gave the council the information it needed to be comfortable working to expand the town in both annexation and infill development, he said.

So how does the work go from the plan into practice?

"The big example for us is the Water Walk development," he said. "I don't know if this would have passed prior to the comp plan."

The property was already in town, but was rezoned to accommodate up to a 550-residential unit, 150,000-square-foot commercial development. The current plan shows 456 residential units and 90,000 square feet of commercial. Polen said they currently are seeking to annex an additional 21.8 acres across the street from the primary development to build 78 townhouses and an additional 20,000 square feet of commercial development.

"There has been some opposition to the development, but this is mixed-use development with small-scale retail — exactly what the plan said our respondents want," he said.

In North Charleston, PRIME North Charleston — the city's comprehensive plan, adopted in 2020 — is just finishing its five-year review, checking on the progress made on some of its identified projects and recommendations.

"Whenever there is a rezoning or other various things that face the city on a day-to-day basis, it grounds us in a plan to make informed decisions," Macholl said.



North Charleston was among the entities to participate in the Reality Check 2.0 planning partnership of the Urban Land Institute South Carolina and the Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Governments.
Photo: City of North Charleston.

He stressed the importance of knowing the local audience and seeking public input as part of the development of a comprehensive plan, adding that finding ways to engage with the public helps guide good policy-making for the council, the mayor and staff.

“We need to make a robust engagement program as part of these larger plan initiatives, so that we’re addressing the concerns of the residents of the city and not just making goals and plans that don’t tie in with the needs of the community,” he said.

Some projects and recommendations from the original PRIME plan have been met, while others are on track for approval.

“We broke it down into a couple different distinct categories — livability and quality of life. ‘What are things that the city can do to affect livability and quality of life?’ There’s a considerable list of items,” he said.

Among those available actions are new creating age-in-place communities and allowing for a wider range of residential and established neighborhoods. That means instead of having single-use districts, the city could adopt a wider range of housing types permitted throughout all zoning districts. While North Charleston has not yet expanded the types of housing units permitted in its base district, it is something that remains on the table to look at in the near term, Macholl said.

The PRIME plan is also being used to help with the large task of updating the city’s zoning ordinance, first adopted in the mid-1970s. Other parts of the plan guide decisions about identified cultural resources. For example, the plan helps determine what historic neighborhoods

or locations merit preservation.

The updated plan also added a resiliency section, which considers not just the initial impact of a development, but how the area could recover from disasters or other unforeseen circumstances. Given North Charleston’s coastal location, major storms are an issue, but the city is also near an earthquake fault.

“There’s the potential for any number of natural disasters [that could be] exacerbated by the decisions that we make, or that can be alleviated by planning and making good decisions based on [the plan’s] recommendations,” he said.

The Town of Lexington maintains both a comprehensive plan and a vision plan, the latter of which aims to prioritize and leverage public resources that will attract private-sector investment. When the town updated its comprehensive plan in 2022, leaders emphasized the importance of ensuring the plan aligned with and supported the vision plan.

“This created a unified and intentional framework for managing future land use, development and growth,” Jessica Lybrand, director of planning and building, said.

Since completing the update to both the comprehensive plan and the land development and zoning ordinances, council, the planning commission and staff have used the future land-use elements of the comprehensive plan as the “playbook” for how Lexington grows.

“When developments, annexation requests or rezoning proposals come

forward, the future land-use map and the character area descriptions are essential tools for determining whether a project aligns with the town’s goals and guiding principles,” Lybrand said. “These planning documents have also helped guide and support major initiatives such as the Greenways and Trails Master Plan, Safe Streets for All and the Long-Range Transportation Improvement Plan 2.0.”

Lybrand said a major focus of the 2022 plan update was modernizing the land-use element, and in turn, the town’s land-use and zoning ordinances. Ensuring that the vision plan’s guiding principles continued to shape Lexington’s long-term future was critical, she said.

Updates included the establishment of phasing requirements for subdivisions, which Lybrand said helps ensure “that infrastructure is built proportionately as each phase is developed.”

Other changes included clarifying and increasing the number of ingress points required based on project size, and strengthening interconnectivity standards between multiple developments. The town also created guidelines and authority to request traffic impact studies, and enhanced requirements for sidewalks and multi-use paths, as well as connections to the town’s existing trail network.

The legal requirements for comprehensive plans are found in SC Code Title 6, Chapter 29. Learn more in the Municipal Association’s Comprehensive Planning Guide for Local Governments at www.masc.sc (keyword: comprehensive planning).



The planned Water Walk development in Irmo includes both residential and commercial spaces.
Photo: Town of Irmo.

Naming, Laying Out and Closing Municipal Streets

Under state law, cities and towns in South Carolina generally control the naming, layout and permanent closure of streets and roads within their limits.

Streets and the city's official map

Before the Comprehensive Planning Act of 1994, the SC Code of Law's Title 6, Chapter 7, contained South Carolina's basic planning laws. Although most of that chapter was repealed, some provisions survived, including the authorization for municipalities to establish an official map. Under SC Code Section 6-7-1210, an official map is "a map or maps showing the location of existing or proposed public street, highway, and public utility rights-of-way ...".

The Comprehensive Planning Act contains a related provision on streets. It authorizes a planning commission to prepare and recommend "an official map and appropriate revision on it showing the exact location of existing or proposed public street, highway, and utility rights-of-way, and public building sites ...".

Because of these two provisions, a municipality's official map reflects, among other things, the layout and naming of the entire municipal street network. Once a street is recognized and named on the official map, it can be changed only through action by the planning commission and the city or town council.

Naming and renaming streets

Under SC Code Section 6-29-1200, a planning commission must approve and authorize the name of any new street before it appears on a plat, deed or sign.

The same statute gives the planning commission the authority, after reasonable notice, to rename streets "to avoid confusion or duplication," or "for any other good and just reason." An important aspect of the process not directly addressed by the law is for the planning commission to review proposed road names with E911 to make sure that the name is not a duplicate or phonetically similar to another name inside the E911 response area. This could involve checking with other cities or the county government. When the planning commission approves a name or name change, it must issue a certificate memorializing the action and record that certificate in the office of the register of deeds, or the clerk of court. Upon recording of the certificate, the name becomes the legal name of the street.

Municipal councils may adopt ordinances that establish internal naming procedures, but approval by the planning commission is the official mechanism for adopting or changing a street name.

Municipalities sometimes designate an honorary or ceremonial name for a portion of a street without changing the street's legal name. When the intent is solely commemorative and does not alter the official street name for purposes of plats, deeds or addressing, such designations may be adopted by either resolution or ordinance.

Closing physical or "paper" streets

South Carolina law provides two separate methods for closing a street, whether it is physically open, or is a "paper" street that has not been opened and exists only on a recorded plat. Consulting with E911 helps ensure that there are no safety issues with closures.

- **Municipal closure by ordinance, SC Code Section 5-27-150**
 - This statute authorizes municipalities with more than 5,000 residents to "open, close, widen, or alter streets" when council determines it is "necessary for the improvement of the city." This is a legislative act and can be done by ordinance after any notice or hearing required by local policy. Upon adoption of the ordinance, the street is formally closed. Note that this method does not resolve any underlying real property issues and does not foreclose claims that other parties may have an interest in the street. These could include neighboring landowners or the entity — whether the state or the county — that owns and maintains the street. As such, this method is appropriate only for uncontested closings of municipally owned streets.
- **Judicial closure, SC Code Section 57-9-10 through -30** – For more complicated situations, any "interested person," including a municipality or abutting landowner, may petition the circuit court to close a street, "whether opened or not." The petitioner, before filing the petition, must publish notice in a newspaper once a week for three consecutive weeks, and mail notice to all abutting owners. If the court orders closure, it may also resolve any underlying real property issues, and declare what person or entity owns the underlying property.

The judicial procedure is especially useful for paper streets, old subdivision plats or real property with an unclear title.

The South Carolina Supreme Court has held that municipal authority and judicial authority in street closure matters are concurrent, not exclusive. In the 1992 case *First Baptist Church of Mauldin v. City of Mauldin*, the Court confirmed that a city may close a street by ordinance, but a court may also close the same street under Section 57-9-10 and must determine title under Section 57-9-20.

Because the judicial route resolves property interests and provides formal notice to all affected owners, it's often the safer

option when there is any doubt about ownership or access rights.

Follow the rules and ask questions

When naming or renaming a street, remember that planning commission approval is required to make the name official.

Before closing a street, ask whether anyone else may have an interest in the right-of-way. If the answer is uncertain, the judicial process is usually the safer path because it clears up notice and ownership issues. Using the right tool at the right time helps avoid disputes and keeps the community's street network accurately documented.



Planning Boards Have Open Meetings, Education Requirements

The South Carolina Freedom of Information Act has open-meetings requirements that apply to city and town councils, but these rules also apply to a variety of public bodies listed in SC Code Section 30-4-15 — including planning commissions, boards of architectural review and boards of zoning appeals.

Here's several key legal requirements for planning boards to follow:

Annual notices and meeting notices

Each year, public bodies must give written notice of their regularly scheduled meetings, including the date, time and location. The notice must appear on a bulletin board in a publicly accessible place at the meeting space, as well as the municipality's website, if any.

For individual meeting agendas, the public body must provide it to all those individuals, news outlets and organizations who request that the public body send the agendas to them, at least 24 hours before the meeting. These agendas must also be posted in a publicly accessible place at the meeting site, and on the website, if one is available.

Executive sessions

SC Code Section 30-4-70 narrowly defines the instances in which a public body may enter executive session. Not all of the allowable reasons are circumstances that are likely to apply to a planning board, but the list includes receipt of legal advice, which occurs with planning boards.

Before entering executive session, the public body must vote to do so, stating the purpose as specifically as possible along with the FOIA code section allowing it. The public body may not take action during the executive session, except to return to public session or adjourn.

Education requirements

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 recently updated their policies on continuing

education, allowing planning staff to obtain certifications to host trainings without prior approval from the advisory committee.

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 CE training resources that a municipal staff member 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)

If the officials on planning boards do not complete these requirements, they may be removed from office. Similarly, professional employees engaged in planning activities who do not complete these education requirements may be removed from their positions.

Learn more about FOIA in The Public Official's Guide to Compliance with the Freedom of Information Act at www.masc.sc (keyword: publications).

Association Highlight:

SC Community Development Association

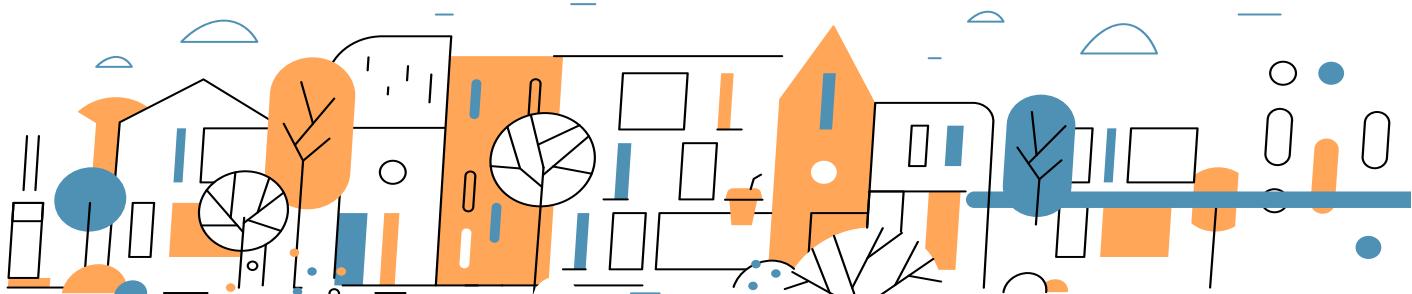
Many municipal job positions have specific training and networking needs, and the Municipal Association of South Carolina's affiliate associations offer opportunities to meet those needs.

The South Carolina Community Development Association provides educational forums for its members to address economic and community development needs, including workshops and seminars.

SCCDA offers active memberships for those with professional responsibility for community development in a municipality, county, state or federal agency, regional council of governments or nonprofit agency. It offers additional active memberships for further participants from the same entity who are interested in community development. Private companies or vendors can obtain associate memberships as well.

The SCCDA Annual Meeting will take place May 6 to 8 at the Hyatt Place Florence Downtown and will feature a mobile tour of Florence, while the Fall Meeting will take place October 8 at the Hilton Garden Inn Columbia Airport.

Learn more about SCCDA at www.masc.sc (keyword: SCCDA).



Annexation Information Hub Explains Complexities

When considering how city governments evolve and how they address their needs for infrastructure, public safety and other services, it's critical to understand municipal annexation.

To help explain how the process works under South Carolina law, the Municipal Association of SC offers an "Annexation in South Carolina" information hub on its website, found at l.masc.sc/AnnexInfoHub.

This resource contains materials such as a one-page summary of annexation processes that can help municipal officials and legislators understand annexation. It includes a podcast and video series in which the Association's advocacy team explain how annexation works in South Carolina, as well as common misconceptions about the process.

The materials also delve into the technical aspects of the three annexation methods in South Carolina — the 100% freeholder petition annexation method, the 75% petition annexation

method, and the 25% petition and election annexation method. Most annexations in the state use the 100% method, which involves individual property owners requesting annexation of their property.

The information hub includes links to the annexation webpages of a number of South Carolina cities and towns. These municipalities have developed materials to explain commercial and residential annexation in their areas, including the specific services they offer to residents, how to get a petition to annex started and calculators to illustrate the financial considerations of annexing into a city.

l.masc.sc/AnnexInfoHub

Architectural Review Boards, Design Review Boards Blend Old With New



With histories dating back as far as 1900, the storefronts at 911 to 919 Gervais Street in Columbia are planned for such uses as restaurants, retail and residential space, while pursuing a renovated design that honors the buildings' pasts. Photo: City of Columbia.



Preserving historical integrity is top of mind for many in the Palmetto State, with valuable architectural legacies found in countless communities. Many cities and towns utilize architectural or design review boards to uphold specific zoning ordinances.

Two such cities that have made a strong commitment to improving and maintaining historic preservation are the City of Camden, with its council-appointed Historic Landmarks Commission, and the City of Columbia, which has operated a Design/Development and Review Commission.

“Our historic Landmarks Commission was established to try to preserve some of the historic structures in town,” said Shawn Putnam, Camden’s director of planning and development. “All of our jurisdictional area is located within the City of Camden National Register [of Historic Places] historic district, so it was already established as a historic area. At that time, city council felt the need to put [the commission] in place to help protect the mostly residential buildings downtown.”

He explained that the commission has jurisdiction over a list of addresses in the historic district, and any proposed projects that would alter the exteriors of those properties must be reviewed for adherence to Camden’s design guidelines.

“If it’s a project that can be seen from the street and is not general maintenance, it has to be approved by the commission — otherwise it can be approved at the staff level,” he added.

In his role as the liaison to the commission, Putnam works with the five council-appointed members to ensure project applications meet the design guidelines.

“We have a set of design guidelines that address renovation work to existing buildings,” he said. “There are also separate sections for rehabilitation of residential structures and commercial structures; then there are sections on new construction within historic districts.”

Camden City Council first established the design guidelines in the 1990s, and they received a later update in 2014.

“The way our commission is set up is, anything that falls under the jurisdiction of that ordinance is reviewed by the commission,” Putnam said.

He added that a property owner of a non-designated property can apply to have their property designated historic, in which case the application is reviewed by the commission and then it is forwarded to city council with a recommendation, although this has only been done a few times.

One of the more recent commercial projects reviewed by the commission is the property that was first built as Camden’s opera house in the 19th century, but which was demolished almost entirely in the 1960s.

“The only part that remained was the 20-foot by 20-foot clock tower part of the building, and then another building was rebuilt [around it],” Putnam said. “The city ended up owning the building and we worked with a development group in order from them to purchase it from us and convert it into a boutique hotel.”

Putnam said that the hotel project is currently under construction and is expected to be completed by late 2026.

Over in the City of Columbia, a design commission has been established for decades, according to Principal Planner Amy Moore, who has been doing preservation work for the city for more than 22 years.

Historically, the board has been the Design Development and Review Commission, also known as the D/DRC, with nine members appointed by city council.

It has had some of its positions filled by people in particular fields, which include a lawyer, a planner, a real estate professional

and architects. In addition to the set positions, there are a few community positions available for those interested in preservation or urban design.

The design review board has reviewed urban projects as well as preservation projects, but under a splitting of duties recently approved by city council, there will be one board just for urban design, and another for preservation projects.

The City of Columbia has 15 historic districts, Moore said, of which all but one is residential.

"I feel like our residential districts are very strong in terms of maintaining the visual character and the feeling of the area when it was built. It brings a unique character to the city — all of those individual neighborhoods, which have had restrained change — not no change, but planned change; they've maintained their character I think that the demand for housing in those areas is high because people love how they look and how they feel," she said.

"So, it's not just the visual character that the neighborhood maintained, but also the sense of community I think can also happen as a result of that — people just want to stay — and then they form these tight communities, if you will," Moore said.

As for downtown Columbia, she noted that the commercial historic district known as the Congaree Vista, or more commonly, simply the Vista, is flourishing with development.

"People want to be there because it's not like any other place; the potential to draw people in, to draw in business, to draw people downtown, is great," she said.

Other projects of note include those along Main Street.

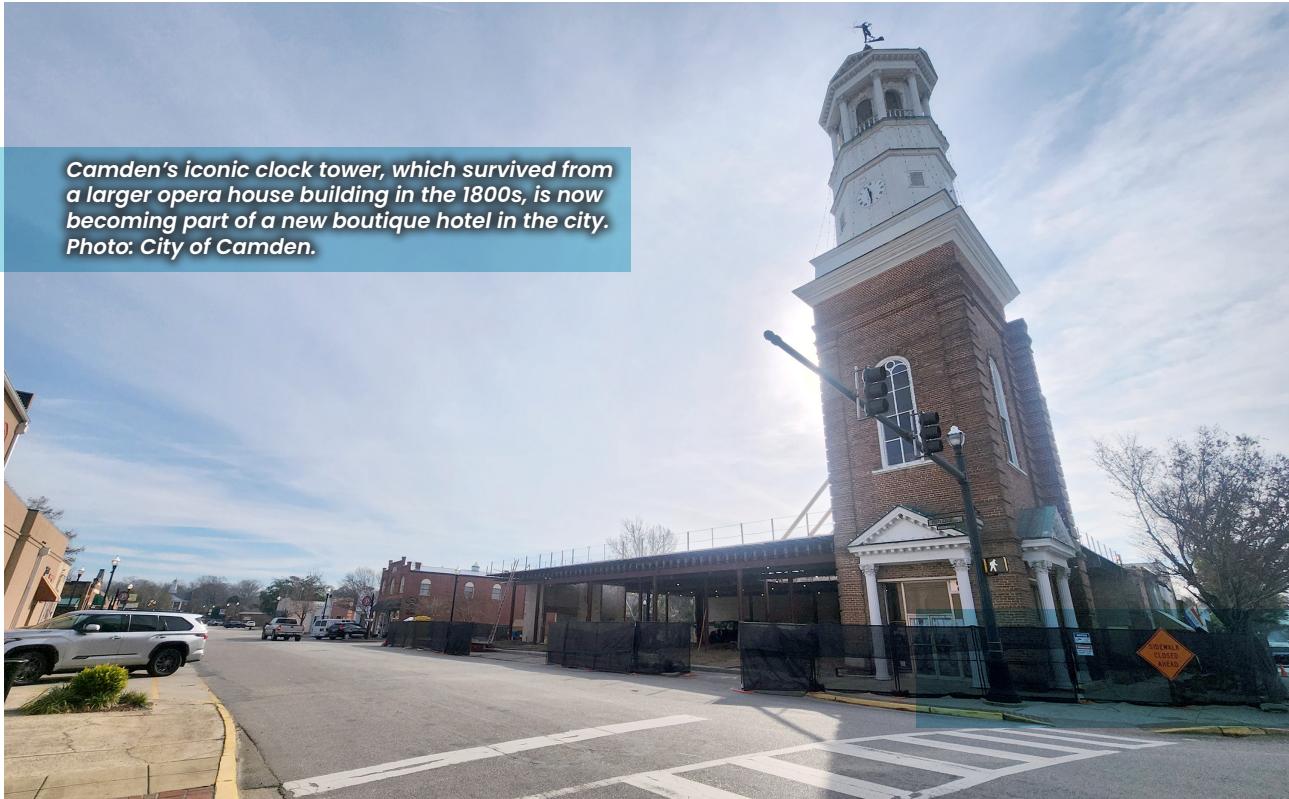
"We've used tax incentives to enable a lot of rehabilitations on our older buildings on Main Street, and that is having an enormous effect on the number of businesses who want to be there and the character of the area," said Moore. "The ability of preservation to stimulate business and to anchor it is huge, because people really do want that character, and they want that for their business."

Columbia has three urban design districts as well — the City Center, the North Main Corridor, and Five Points.

"There are guidelines for each of those districts, too, but they're not preservation guidelines. The urban design guidelines are really there to ensure that what gets built or what gets changed continues to emphasize the street and the pedestrian experience and engage passers-by on street level: storefronts, street furniture, sidewalks, things like that, because we want a vibrant city," she said. "It is so important to have great guidelines and to have those in place as things develop to make sure that we continue to provide that, and that is where preservation and urban design go hand in glove. Historic buildings naturally provide those kind of experiences."

Across South Carolina, cities and towns are using the guidance from architectural and design review boards to maintain historical integrity of existing structures, and to ensure architectural coherence of future development. Through the use of these practices, communities are benefiting from the architectural legacies which will ensure consistency for generations to come.

Camden's iconic clock tower, which survived from a larger opera house building in the 1800s, is now becoming part of a new boutique hotel in the city. Photo: City of Camden.



Calendar

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

FEBRUARY

3 Local Business License Renewal Center: Processing Renewals and Running Reports Webinar. Virtual.

4 Risk Management Services: SC Other Retirement Benefits Employer Trust Members Meeting. Municipal Association of SC, Columbia.

11 – 13 Municipal Clerks and Treasurers Institute, Year 1, Session B. Cambria Columbia Downtown the Vista.

17 Business Licensing Essentials Webinar. Virtual.

17 – 18 Municipal Court Administration Association 101 Session C. Municipal Association of SC, Columbia. Topics include court financials.

18 Main Street SC First Quarter Managers' Training. SC Department of Archives and History, Columbia. Topics include key concepts in historic preservation, evaluating

building conditions, identifying priority areas for maintenance and preservation, along with technical briefs.

18 Palmetto Power Cities Legislative Breakfast. Blatt Building on the State House Grounds, Columbia.

24 Risk Management Services: Auto Loss Prevention Training. Municipal Association of SC, Columbia. Topics include reviewing auto loss data and prevention, reducing employee auto accident injuries, monitoring driving behaviors and post-incident coaching.

MARCH

2 – 4 SC Utility Billing Association Annual Meeting. Beach House, Hilton Head Island.

4 SC Business Licensing Officials Association Spring Training and Advanced Academy. Seawell's, Columbia.

5 Business License Bootcamp. Municipal Association of SC, Columbia.

12 SC Association of Stormwater Managers First Quarter Meeting. Seawell's, Columbia.

17 Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government: Basic Budgeting and Municipal Finance. Regional Councils of Governments locations.

19 Municipal Technology Association of South Carolina Spring Meeting. Hilton Garden Inn Columbia Airport, West Columbia.

24 Palmetto Power Cities Association Member Lunch. CEEUS, West Columbia.

24 Risk Management Services: Defensive Driving Training. City of Mauldin Fire Department Headquarters.

26 Managers' and Administrators' Spring Forum. Hilton Garden Inn Airport West Columbia.

APRIL

9 SC Municipal Finance Officers, Clerks, and Treasurers Association Spring Academy. Hilton Garden Inn Columbia Airport, West Columbia.

10 Municipal Court Administration Association Spring Meeting. Hilton Garden Inn Columbia Airport, West Columbia.

16 Risk Management Services: Public Works Training. Hilton Garden Inn Columbia Airport, West Columbia.