

UPTOWN



a publication of the Municipal Association of South Carolina

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Cover Photo: Falls Park on the Reedy is one of Greenville's parks established along the Reedy River, alongside Cleveland Park and Unity Park. Many of the major development projects in Greenville's downtown in recent decades have appeared close to Falls Park. Photo: City of Greenville.

Annual Meeting Concurrent Sessions to Tackle Risk Reduction, Council Meeting Management

The Municipal Association of SC 2026 Annual Meeting is taking place July 15 to 19 at the Hyatt Regency Greenville. Friday and Saturday will feature concurrent sessions, with attendees selecting sessions on specific topics relevant to their communities.

Here are the concurrent session offerings:

Friday, July 17

1:30 p.m. sessions

- **Are You Smarter Than a Lobbyist?** – In this trivia game, participants can test their knowledge on how legislation works in South Carolina with the Municipal Association's advocacy team. Win prizes and bragging rights with fellow local leaders in this session of questions and answers on lobbying at the State House.
- **The \$50,000 Facebook Comment** – What is the real cost of reaction-driven communication? Join Sam Toles, founder of CiviSocial, to uncover how a single online comment can drain staff time and divert vital municipal resources. Learn how to identify the hidden fiscal and operational costs of reactive social media, understand the "vocal minority" versus the "silent majority" in digital spaces, and discover strategies to build trust with residents.

2:30 p.m. sessions

- **The Municipality as an Employer** – Managing a municipal workforce requires navigating a complex web of state and federal regulations. Fred Williams of the Bettis Law Group will provide a practical framework for handling day-to-day personnel issues lawfully and consistently.
- **Under Attack: How Cities Can Defend Against Cyber Threats** – Ryan Truskey, chief information security officer with the SC Law Enforcement Division, will explain the growing cyberattack threats faced by municipalities and offer practical steps to reduce vulnerabilities and protect critical systems.

3:30 p.m. sessions

- **Shared Challenges, Shared Solutions: Round Table Discussions by Population Size** – The sessions will split into three groups:
 - one for cities and towns with populations below 3,000;
 - one for populations 3,000 to 10,000; and
 - one for populations above 10,000.

Saturday, July 18

9:00 a.m. sessions

- **Data Centers 101: Benefits, Risks, and Realities for Local Leaders** – This session will provide local leaders with a plain language overview of data center development, what data centers are and why communities are seeing increased interest in them. Cathie Vick, strategic negotiator with Google, as well as John Truluck, director for Dorchester County Economic Development, will discuss the potential benefits and the risks local governments should understand when considering data center projects.
- **Breaking Up with Robert's Rules: Alternate Parliamentary Procedures** – Municipalities often find that Robert's Rules of Order are not well suited to their council meetings. Learn about alternative rules of procedure drafted by the Municipal Association's Legal department which cities can adopt.

10:00 a.m. sessions

- **Does the Form of Government Really Matter?** – Whether a municipality operates under a council, mayor-council or council-manager form of government, the critical feature of a well-functioning city remains the same: effective communication. While each of South Carolina's three legal structures offers a different roadmap for administration, none can succeed without a foundation of clarity and collaboration among council members. Elgin Mayor Melissa Emmons, Sumter Mayor David Merchant and Manning Mayor Julia Nelson will join the panel to discuss how to build trust, no matter the form of government.
- **The Do's and Don'ts of FOIA for Elected Officials** – South Carolina's Freedom of Information Act plays a central role in municipal governance. This session will equip elected officials to maintain compliance with the SC Freedom of Information Act, confidently navigate public records requests and foster a culture of openness that strengthens public trust.

The full agenda for the Annual Meeting is available at www.masc.sc (keyword: Annual Meeting) and on the Association's app.

The app allows users to plan out which sessions they will attend, and connects them with information on speakers, exhibitors, sponsors and attendees. Download it from either the App Store or Google Play by searching for "Municipal Association of SC."



Scan this QR code on a smartphone to download the Association app.

NEWS BRIEFS

The SC Community Development Association elected its 2026 – 2027 board of directors. They are President **Jessi Shuler**, Town of Summerville; Vice President **Kim Ethridge**, Pee Dee Council of Governments; **Kimberly Varn**, community and economic development deputy director, Lowcountry Council of Governments; Members at Large **Nate Foutch**, SC Rural Infrastructure Authority; **Sydney Kinard**, Lower Savannah Council of Governments; **Charlene Carter**, City of Simpsonville; **Kirk Wilson**, Town of Blythewood; **Brenda Kelley**, City of Hartsville; **Jill Francisco**, Appalachian Council of Governments; **Jack Suber**, SC Housing Trust Fund SC State Housing Finance and Development Authority; and Past President **Angela Kirkpatrick**, Catawba Regional Council of Governments.

The National Recreation and Park Association awarded its 2026 Innovation in Park Design Award to the **City of Columbia** for Finlay Park. Columbia reopened the park in November 2025 after two years of construction and \$25 million of revitalization work.

The **USA TODAY** 10Best Readers' Choice Awards named the **City of Greenville's** Falls Park on the Reedy the No. 8 Best City Park in the nation. Falls Park is home to the Liberty Bridge, a pedestrian bridge offering views the waterfall on the Reedy River which was concealed below a vehicle bridge prior to the park's 2004 opening, as well as public art installations.

The SC Research Authority launched a statewide network of "Information Hubs" to serve as central locations for resource sharing and support for startup tech companies, with grant funding available for entrepreneurial support. The SCRA's Information Hubs are located in the cities of **Aiken, Charleston, Columbia, Florence, Greenville** and **Rock Hill**.

Learn About AI, Cybersecurity and Legal Compliance at the Annual Meeting Tech Talks

The Municipal Association of SC and its technology partner, VC3, will offer Tech Talks throughout the 2026 Annual Meeting — 15-minute sessions covering municipal technology issues. Here are the sessions to be covered.

Find the full meeting agenda at www.masc.sc (keyword: Annual Meeting) and on the Municipal Association of SC app, available through the App Store or Google Play.

Where Do I Begin? Building a Strong Data Backup Strategy, Step by Step

In this practical, no jargon session, learn about the most common backup myths and risks facing municipalities, how to identify critical data, evaluate current backups and understand disaster recovery timelines.

Cybersecurity Readiness and Dark Web Exposure

See how stolen credentials, often sold on the dark web, are a leading cause of ransomware and service disruptions in local government. The session will explain what the dark web is, how usernames and passwords end up there, and why many breaches go undetected.

A Guide to Municipal IT Budget Planning

Detailed IT budgets help uncover inefficiencies, save money and execute goals. Learn about the components of an IT budget, essential cybersecurity and disaster recovery line items, budgeting to replace end-of-life hardware, and AI budgeting questions.

CJIS 101: What Every Municipality Should Know

Criminal justice data is among the most sensitive assets that municipalities handle, and mishandling it can lead to severe penalties and can damage trust and operations. CJIS sets rules for how this information must be stored, accessed and shared. This presentation will outline the areas where officials might be responsible for non-technical work — and why managed IT services or a skilled IT resource can only get a city about 20% to 30% of the way toward CJIS compliance.

ADA Website Compliance: What You Need to Know (and What to Do Next)

Achieving website compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act can feel complex. This session will provide a roadmap for identifying accessibility gaps and implementing improvements. Learn how accessibility barriers like poor color contrast, missing alt text, and lack of keyboard navigation impact users, along with how WCAG 2.1 standards guide compliance efforts.

The End of Windows Server 2016 Support: What's Happening, Why It's Important and What to Do Next

Windows Server 2016 will reach end of life on January 12, 2027. Learn what “end of life” means, the business, security and compliance risks of staying on an unsupported server, upgrade options, and how to start planning now to avoid costly decisions later.

From Hassle to Habit: What Municipal Leaders Miss About Cybersecurity

Municipalities may think they're all set with cybersecurity when they have

multi-factor authentication, scheduled backups and insurance. Unfortunately, threats have evolved. This session will cover cybersecurity must-haves and how to implement protections without overwhelming staffers and budgets.

The Workhorse in the Room: How Robotic Process Automation Is Powering Municipal Government

Robotic process automation isn't artificial intelligence. RPA follows rules, doesn't learn, infer or make judgment calls. It moves data between systems, completes forms, generates reports, and processes transactions with speed and consistency that humans can't match at volume. Learn why AI and RPA are more complementary than competitive.

A Managed IT Services Foundation for Cities and Towns

Smaller municipalities often feel left behind with information technology. With constrained budgets, they can struggle to maintain computers, internet connectivity, Wi-Fi and email. This session will discuss the benefits of a technology partnership with an IT vendor.

AI at Work in Local Government: What Assistants and Agents Are Doing for Municipalities Today

The conversation around AI in the public sector has been loud, but the real story is happening quietly inside permitting offices, public works departments and finance teams. AI assistants are answering resident questions, drafting communications and summarizing long documents. Learn about AI use cases for municipalities, what's working and where friction appears.



Explore City Connect Market Purchasing Contracts at the Annual Meeting

Attendees at the 2026 Annual Meeting in Greenville will have opportunities to learn about many of the contracts available through its City Connect Market program.

The program, which enables South Carolina cities and towns to take advantage of volume discounts for many of their purchases, exists as a partnership between the Association and HGACBuy, as well as the recent addition of CarolinaBUY. HGACBuy is a nationwide government procurement service offering contracts on a large variety of products and services, with a focus on capital-intensive purchases. CarolinaBUY, based in North Carolina and South Carolinas, offers its services to public agencies and nonprofits nationally and regionally. Many of its purchasing contracts cover the areas including cybersecurity; office supplies; athletic and playground facilities; heating, ventilation and air conditioning; vehicles; and signage.

Here are the brief sessions from each of the purchasing cooperatives, which will take place throughout the Annual Meeting:

HGACBuy sessions

- **Our Power Portfolio: Your One Stop Source for Smarter Public Purchasing** – Discover a streamlined path to the goods and services that cities and towns need. See how one contract portfolio can simplify purchasing and amplify impact.
- **AI on Demand: Your New Contract for Automation and Efficiency** – Unlock real time tools that reduce workload and speed up decision making. Learn how AI contracts can modernize municipal operations today.
- **Life saving Lineup: EMS Equipment Essentials for Today's Teams** – Explore trusted, ready to use EMS solutions designed for rapid response. Equip EMS teams with the tools that protect lives when seconds count.
- **The Big Fix: Procurement Solutions for Every Public Works Challenge** – From maintenance to major

infrastructure, find contracts that keep projects moving. Get practical solutions that save time, money and stress.

- **Cooperative Purchasing: Less Red Tape, More Results** – Learn how partnership-powered procurement accelerates progress. Cut complexity, increase efficiency and deliver faster wins for the community.

CarolinaBUY sessions

- **Who is the CarolinaBUY Cooperative?** – CarolinaBUY is a nonprofit cooperative that helps public agencies in the Carolinas purchase more efficiently through competitively awarded contracts. This session looks at how its contracts work and the value agencies gain from compliant, cost-saving procurement.
- **HVAC – the Four-letter Word You Love and Hate in Your Facility** – CarolinaBUY has a streamlined cooperative contract offering HVAC equipment, parts, controls and technical services, through which cities can access compliant purchasing, expert support, and regional service for maintenance, repairs and system upgrades.
- **Signage and Graphics for the Built Environment** – This session will give a concise overview of the Takeform cooperative contract, offering public agencies a streamlined path to procure architectural signage, wayfinding systems, environmental graphics and branded visual elements. The contract supports compliant purchasing while giving municipalities access to customizable and durable solutions that enhance navigation and elevate the built environment.
- **The Dirt on Winning Fields: Infield Soil Strategies** – The session will highlight the Partac Peat Beam Clay contract as a fast, compliant path to professional-grade infield materials. Beam Clay's mixes, conditioners and mound clays can offer the consistency, moisture control and durability needed for safer, better-performing fields.

Find more details on the City Connect Market at www.masc.sc (keyword: City Connect Market). The full Annual Meeting schedule is available in the Association's app.

2026 Small Cities Summit to Address Financial Management, Ethics



The Municipal Association of South Carolina's Small Cities Summit will return Wednesday, August 13, at the Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center, examining many of the key issues and challenges faced by small municipalities in South Carolina.

The one-day meeting includes conference sessions and a lunch. Because of the meeting's focus, the Association gives registration preference to those cities and towns with populations of fewer than 3,000 residents.

Here's some of what's in store for the day:

- **Procurement and ethics** – Handling procurement efficiently and ethically is a critical enough issue that SC Code Section 11-35-5320 requires all cities and towns to “adopt ordinances or procedures embodying sound principles of appropriately competitive procurement.” This session will explore ethics pitfalls, such as what to do when a vendor is owned by a municipal official, staff member, or a family member of elected officials or staff.
- **Money mistakes** – Avoiding fraud can involve security steps like callback procedures for invoices as well as dual-authorization requirements for payments. This session will cover how to avoid common risks and problems.
- **Budgeting and audits** – This session will consider financial reporting processes required by the state, as well as important

practices such as providing monthly financial statements to the city or town council. It will also address forensic audits, and how to weigh their practicality and cost effectiveness against those of a traditional audit.

- **Agency resource hall** – Learn about resources that can benefit smaller municipalities, such as those from the SC Department of Administration's Office of Digital Government Services, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development or the U.S. Small Business Administration.

The registration deadline for the Small Cities Summit is Friday, July 31. Find all details at www.masc.sc (keyword: Small Cities Summit).

Regional Advocacy Meetings Coming in September and October

In its 2026 legislative session, the General Assembly took action on everything from modifying the regulations for local governments investing their funds to establishing new rules for municipal elections, creating new legal protections for monuments and memorials, and many other topics. In January, it will again take up many issues affecting cities and towns at the beginning of the new two-year 2027 – 28 session.

The Municipal Association will again offer its Regional Advocacy Meetings at six locations around the state this fall.

In these meetings, the Association's advocacy team will go on the road to

facilitate discussions with municipal officials and listen to local concerns that could turn into statewide legislation.

All of these meetings will take place from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., with dates and locations listed below. The meetings are free for municipal officials, but meeting registration is necessary for lunch and handouts.

- **Tuesday, September 15** – North Augusta
Municipal Building – 100 Georgia Ave., North Augusta
- **Thursday, September 17** – Mauldin
Mauldin Cultural Center – 101 E. Butler Road, Mauldin

- **Wednesday, September 30** – Columbia
Municipal Association of SC – 1411 Gervais St., Columbia
- **Tuesday, October 6** – Conway
5th and Main – 428 Main St., Conway
- **Tuesday, October 13** – York
Yorkville Agricultural and Education Society – 234 Kings Mountain St., York
- **Tuesday, October 22** – Summerville
Rollins Edwards Community Center – 301 N. Hickory St., Summerville

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

What Does It Mean to 'Bind' a Future Council?



A city or town council cannot deprive its successor councils of their legislative discretion.

As the South Carolina Supreme Court has explained in the 1948 case *Newman v. McCullough*, “the power conferred upon municipal councils to exercise legislative or governmental functions is conferred to be exercised as often as may be found needful or politic, and the council presently holding such powers is vested with no discretion to circumscribe or limit or diminish their efficiency, but must transmit them unimpaired to their successors.”

In some ways, the point is obvious: if a prior council has passed a law by ordinance, for example, latter councils could amend or even repeal the ordinance. After all, councilmembers are elected to represent their constituents, and this representation cannot be constrained by actions taken by prior councils.

But what about contracts entered into by prior councils, where the timeframe of the contract extends beyond the existence of that council? Here, the question gets interesting.

Governmental versus proprietary functions

The general rule for contracts is determined by the subject matter of the contract. If a contract involves the municipality’s proprietary or business powers, it may bind successors so long as it was fair, reasonable and advantageous when made. If it involves governmental or legislative powers, it may not.

In the 1995 case *Piedmont Public Service Dist. v. Cowart*, the South Carolina Court of Appeals explained that the “[t]he true test is whether the contract itself deprives a governing body, or its successor, of a discretion which public policy demands should be left unimpaired.”

The tricky part is to apply this rule: how is a council to determine whether a given function is proprietary or governmental? Some contracts may be readily classified as one or the other. Bond issues, ordinary commercial leases, equipment purchases and service contracts are almost invariably considered proprietary. On the other hand, requiring approval of a private party before a government may provide sewer service to any “commercial establishment, townhouses, apartments, or condominiums” clearly implicates a governmental function, as seen in the 1980 SC Supreme Court decision *G. Curtis Martin Inv. Tr. v. Clay*.

The South Carolina courts have considered a handful of other, more difficult questions. In 1997, in *City of Beaufort v. Beaufort-Jasper County Water & Sewer Auth.*, the SC Supreme Court held that a contract requiring municipal approval before a special purpose district could provide retail water service impaired a governmental function. The courts have also consistently held that employment contracts for managers or administrators involve a governmental function and cannot bind future councils.

Unfortunately, there are many unanswered questions here. When in doubt, councils should consult their municipal attorney or the Municipal Association of SC.

Statutory exceptions

The South Carolina General Assembly can override the rule by clear statutory authorization. The classic example of this is the Local Government Development Agreement Act, which authorizes a council to enter into a binding agreement with a property owner that locks in the zoning and land use regulations applicable to a qualifying parcel for the term of the agreement. Outside of an express statutory grant, however, the default rule governs.

What counts as a “future council”?

The courts have not definitively stated what, exactly, is a “future council.” Because most South Carolina municipalities use staggered elections, the question arises of whether a future council is one in which every member has changed, a majority of members have changed, or a single member has changed.

It seems likely that the courts, if required to squarely address the question, would rule that a future council arises after each municipal general election, whether or not a majority of the council is on the ballot, and even if all of the incumbents win reelection. But, from an abundance of caution, councils should also consider the possibility that a future council might exist even if only a single seat could change hands — including, for example, a special election that fills a vacant seat.

Settlement agreements are not exempt

Recently, the South Carolina Court of Appeals answered a question that has long perplexed municipal lawyers: does the rule against binding future councils apply to court-approved settlement agreements? In the 2026 case *Town of Sullivan’s Island v. Bluestein*, a court-approved settlement agreement required the town to provide periodic clearing and maintenance of a town-owned parcel of accreted land.

The court conceded that “[t]here is a public interest in the finality of settlement agreements,” but nonetheless held that it “still must view this settlement agreement as a contract between the Town and Property Owners.”

Because the underlying activity — clearing vegetation on a publicly owned parcel — served to protect the public health and safety, the subject matter was governmental. As a result, the agreement was unenforceable against successor councils.

Questions to consider

Before signing a contract, there are several points to consider.

- Does the contract extend beyond the current council’s term?
- If so, does the contract’s subject matter impair a governmental or legislative function?
- If so, is there a clear statutory authorization that permits the binding obligation?

If the first two answers are “yes” and the third is “no,” the agreement is at risk, no matter how carefully it was drafted. Again, when in doubt, officials should call their municipal attorney.

Some Smaller Cities Showed Strong Growth in 2025

South Carolina’s population growth continued in the newest U.S. Census Bureau estimates, with the state overall growing by 1.5% from an estimated 5,490,316 in July 2024 to 5,570,274 in July 2025.

For the municipalities, many of the fastest percentage increases are coming outside of the largest cities. For example, the state’s largest municipality, Charleston, increased by 4.0% during this time, ending at 159,423, while the second largest, Columbia, increased by 2.0% to 147,035. Many smaller cities and towns grew at a faster rate than these in 2025.

Here are the largest percentage increases from 2024 to 2025, with the municipality’s estimated population as of July 1, 2025:

10 fastest-growing municipalities, population above 3,000

1. City of Woodruff – 16.8%, 6,026 pop.
2. City of Hardeeville – 16.1%, 16,459 pop.
3. Town of Moncks Corner – 11.5%, 20,612 pop.
4. City of Beaufort – 8.7%, 15,775 pop.
5. City of York – 8.0%, 10,620 pop.
6. Town of Blythewood – 7.6%, 7,233 pop.
7. City of Greer – 7.3%, 50,007 pop.
8. Town of Fort Mill – 6.8%, 38,673 pop.
9. City of Fountain Inn – 6.5%, 14,722 pop.
10. City of Mauldin – 5.2%, 31,464 pop.

10 fastest-growing municipalities, population below 3,000

1. Town of Atlantic Beach – 12.4%, 472 pop.
2. Town of Springdale – 4.1%, 2,877 pop.
3. City of Loris, 3.5% – 2,935 pop.
4. Town of Waterloo – 3.3%, 159 pop.
5. Town of Briarcliffe Acres – 3.2%, 585 pop.
6. Town of Van Wyck – 3.1%, 1,065 pop.
7. Town of Pacolet – 2.9%, 2,644 pop.
8. Town of Reidville – 2.8%, 1,905 pop.
9. City of Chesnee – 2.8%, 958 pop.
10. City of Landrum – 2.8%, 2,865 pop.

Driving Economic Development With Creativity, Vision

The City of Greenville formed the Greenville City Economic Development Corporation to lead its economic development efforts. Photo: City of Greenville.

Municipalities often differ in terms of how economic development efforts are structured within, or outside of, their organizations, but one common theme is that for a state growing as fast as South Carolina has grown, economic development is not simply an afterthought. It is a critical arm and function of growth to strategic planning for long-term sustainability.

Two cities revolutionizing how they prioritize economic development are the City of Greenville, with its own nonprofit organization, the Greenville City Economic Development Corporation, and the nearby City of Mauldin, which handles its economic development projects internally through its Business and Services Development Department.

“I’ve been with the City of Mauldin over nine years now and [the department] has been here for at least that long,” said David Dyrhaug, Director of Business & Development, who has served in the Business and Services Development Department for the last seven. “Economic development in the city has been handled in various ways over the years. When I first came to the city, I

was part of a two-man team housed under Administration,” he said.

The city later restructured how it handled economic activities.

“Today, the city administrator [Seth Duncan] and I work together on leading the city’s economic development efforts and initiatives.”

Although economic development has always been a function of the local government, as Mauldin continues to experience unprecedented growth, major projects like BridgeWay Station and GE Vernova Park soccer stadium, as well as smaller-scale commercial projects, continue to support that growth, keeping economic development at the forefront.

“One of our top priorities continues to be redevelopment in the center of town. We have identified an area known as City Center. It’s been moving forward a piece at a time,” Dyrhaug said. “We still have large pieces that we are focused on moving forward in the City Center.”

He highlighted some recent projects, including the Bohemian Bull restaurant, The Pickle Yard, Maverick Yard townhomes and Summer Moon Coffee.

“There are still other properties in and around that area that we’re trying to help move forward towards redevelopment. This has been one of our top focuses recently,” he said.

In other developments, Dyrhaug explained that residential endeavors gave way to more commercial projects.

“That’s the one thing that we’ve been open to over the last decade — helping to bring more residential communities to the city. We’ve had a lot of success with that, and in turn, been seeing some of the commercial opportunities follow, which we are grateful for,” he said. “Our shift has certainly focused on more lately the commercial opportunities and development over the residential. The commercial has certainly come as a result of the residential growth we’ve experienced.”

As for large-scale commercial and mixed-use development, Mauldin’s large-scale BridgeWay Station project is the pièce de résistance.

“I have been fortunate to be here for the life of [BridgeWay Station],” Dyrhaug said. “The vision for this land evolved over decades. Around



A town-center-style development, BridgeWay Station is home to such events as concerts, farmers markets and community yoga. Photo: City of Mauldin.

the time I came to the city, the owner of this land had a new vision for his property and how to develop it. I got to come on board and be part of the team to offer solutions to help the owner's vision become a reality; we have put in place particular economic development tools, including establishing a multi-county industrial park development.”

Some of the assistance has involved regulatory changes to make the project possible.

“I think one of the things we’ve done here, largely over the last 10 years, is move our culture to be more solution oriented, get to ‘yes,’ and help development projects succeed. That certainly has played a role in helping BridgeWay Station come about,” he said. “All that to say that I can’t minimize the great vision and capacity that the owner of that property has had to make that project come to be and come alive – Hughes Investments, led by Mr. Phil Hughes, has certainly been one of the most instrumental figures in moving that project forward.”

In terms of economic development on a day-to-day basis, Dyrhaug

explained that his role functions more as an orchestrator of projects.

“I see everything that I do as an important piece that contributes to economic development largely as it is about the culture that we have established in our department, as well as the relationships that we formed with different people inside — and outside — of our community,” he said. “Whether it is direct or indirect, everything I do has some impact and plays a role in the economic development that we experience in the City.”

Also in the Upstate, the City of Greenville formed its own 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation, the Greenville City Economic Development Corporation, to support its economic development initiatives.

“About three years ago, our city council got really serious — along with the mayor and the city manager’s support — in saying that Greenville is going through unprecedented growth and we want to approach economic development differently and more innovatively, in a less traditional way,” said Sam Konduros, President & CEO of the Greenville City EDC.

With more than 30 years of experience in the private sector, and with a background in real estate development, project management and international business consulting, Konduros, who also holds a law degree, has a more corporation-minded approach to spearheading the nonprofit he leads along with nine directors. He recently marked his two-year anniversary with the EDC.

“We don’t consider ourselves a traditional city; we try to be very leading edge and I think they wanted an economic development machine, you could call it, that could reflect the growing sophistication of the city, and the different needs that we have,” he said.

Konduros added that the city is pursuing more tech-driven entities which will further fuel its economic development.

“I think it’s fair to say, a city like Greenville is now really pursuing what we would call more ‘next-generation, tech-based’ economic development — it is more urban, it is denser, it is more complex. It is literally more vertical in a smaller but denser core footprint, and it means that we work a wide variety of projects,” he said,

The various business segments could range from the likes of corporate headquarters on a global, national or regional, to financial services, technology and research and development. Life sciences and healthcare innovation have also become major areas of emphasis, Konduros said.

In addition to tech and advanced manufacturing, he said that the city is simultaneously emphasizing intentional placemaking.

“So that’s one side of it, but then there’s this other half for us, which is all tied to intentional placemaking in a city like Greenville that has a mayor, [Knox White,] who is iconic — 30-plus years in — who’s been the visionary behind a lot of major projects, supported by an equally ambitious city council. We have a city manager, [Shannon Lavrin,] who is an urban planner, which is really unique and cool. She has a lot of expertise and really cares about the aesthetics of the city, and that translates to our approach to economic development,” he said.

Greenville places a deliberate focus on how people experience it, Konduros said.

“We think that the experiential side of Greenville — whether you’re a visitor, a resident, there on business, or whatever — has a lot to do with the allure of our city; how people feel when they’re walking up and down the streets of the city and the cityscape — all those things matter a lot,” he said.

Intentional placemaking coupled with more tech-based recruitment is ushering in a new wave of development for this city.

“From one end of the spectrum, it could be large corporate headquarters, to the other end of the spectrum, a major mixed-use real estate development, but this goes all the way granular, to a retailer on Main Street. We even engaged a professional retail consultant to work with our team because we are always cognizant about the importance of curating high-quality retail in our central business district as well as on our corridors, that give the city the kind of vibrancy that you want,” he said.

From plans for a Falls Park Conference District to upgrades of the Bon Secours Wellness Arena to a major renovation of its City Hall, Greenville has not shied away from development, large or small. All of the efforts, however, stem from the visionary GVL2040 strategic plan and its seven core pillars, which Konduros says acts like a guiding ‘North Star’ for the city.

“This plays back directly into why the Greenville City EDC was formed,” he said. “It was recognized [by council] that business, industry, and economic development have always been Greenville’s ‘special sauce,’ our DNA, the way public-private partnerships work, so before I was hired and before I was recruited, the city wanted to make sure that the strategic plan for economic development was created.”

South Carolina is growing, and the new opportunities rising up have many municipalities thinking creatively of how to reposition their economic development functions in order to maximize opportunities, both large and small.



The newly constructed GE Vernova Park stadium at BridgeWay Station is now the home of the Greenville Triumph SC professional soccer team. Photo: City of Mauldin.

Partnerships and Innovation Promote Workforce Housing



In Bluffton, The May is an in-development project of 12 affordable workforce housing units Photo: Town of Bluffton.

South Carolina towns and cities, particularly along the fast-growing coast, are taking a proactive approach to helping workers and moderate-income residents find affordable housing. These efforts include building affordable units for sale and rent on city-owned property, and encouraging developers to include lower-cost options in their planning.

For Bluffton's leaders, the answer has been a mix of new construction, redevelopment, homeowner assistance and resident outreach. The city has offered incentives like density bonuses, faster local permitting and town-owned land to entice builders into workforce housing projects.

"We tell developers, we are in need of anything that you can give us, whether it's 10, whether it's five, we will take it," said Victoria Smalls, the town's affordable housing director.

Smalls, who has worked for the town for nearly eight years and was promoted into her expanded affordable housing role earlier this year, said recent successes included a 12-unit development set to open in the fall that will provide two- and three-bedroom, owner-occupied townhomes for residents earning 60% to 100% of the area median income.

Earlier efforts included the Wharf Street Home Redevelopment Project, which replaced two vacant structures in Bluffton's Historic District with six affordable green cottages for owner-occupied, low- and moderate-income housing, as well as private apartment complexes that set aside units for lower-income residents.

Bluffton also is helping residents keep their homes updated through the Neighborhood Assistance Program. It helps longtime families — including many with deep Gullah roots — remain in place by providing up to \$20,000 per home for repairs, including roofs, flooring, plumbing and electrical work, at no cost to income-qualified homeowners. In FY 2026, Bluffton budgeted \$400,000 for the effort and supplemented it with a \$50,000 grant from the Beaufort Jasper Housing Trust Fund, resulting in about 40 completed projects for homeowners.

"We love to help those that are already established, those that have been here, stay in their homes," Smalls said.

In nearby Hardeeville, city leaders are using public-private partnerships and innovative financing strategies to help residents find affordable housing.

"We have the same issue that a lot of other communities have, which is the cost of housing in our community and surrounding areas has increased exponentially over the last 10 years," said City Manager Josh Gruber.

Gruber said Hardeeville's average home price of \$400,000 is significantly lower than Hilton Head Island and Bluffton, but still a stretch for working residents.

To help close that gap, Hardeeville created an attainable housing task force in 2019 including real estate agents, lenders, nonprofits and developers. One project to emerge from it is Harvey Place — a 10-unit townhouse development on Main Street, from which residents can walk to shops and downtown offices. The city provided the necessary land, while Forino Homes agreed to build the townhouses at cost. Habitat for Humanity of the Lowcountry qualified buyers and helped oversee the homeownership process, and the Beaufort Jasper Housing Trust contributed support. This collaboration meant the townhomes that would typically sell for \$350,000 were sold for about \$250,000.

"The most successful tool that we've seen in a lot of cases is public-private partnerships," Gruber said. "Everybody brings something to the table, and by combining all those resources, the cumulative impact is that you can reduce those per-unit costs and make them more affordable."

The development is fully occupied, and Hardeeville has started planning a second phase of 18 units on about 4 acres it owns nearby. Funding for this project partially came from newer development agreements allowing developers to either build affordable units directly or contribute funding toward workforce housing elsewhere in the city.

“We’re never going to be able to come up with 2,000 affordable units, but if we can get 10, 12 here and there, every couple of years, we will continue to make strides and be able to make a difference,” Gruber said.

Up the coast in Charleston, the problem of affordable housing has been around for almost as long as the city has existed. But the city is taking a more aggressive approach these days, including public-private partnerships, city-led development strategies and a sweeping initiative known as Project 3500 to rethink how local government can help essential workers continue living in the community they serve.

“We have been focused for many years on ensuring that there is an availability of housing in our community,” said Geona Shaw Johnson, who has overseen Charleston’s housing and community development efforts. “Unless we put some fire behind mitigating the need for housing, it’s not going to happen. It’s not going to fall out of the sky.”

The city worked with consultants from Bloomberg Philanthropies for nearly two years to evaluate housing programs and identify ways to streamline development. That led to six major housing goals, including the creation of 3,500 net new affordable and workforce housing units.

The goal is to tackle housing issues at several income levels — from helping people out of homelessness to finding affordable options for households earning between 80% and 120% of area median income — including teachers, nurses, firefighters, police officers and hospitality workers. Johnson says her department is directly involved in developing more than 1,000 of the planned units through collaborations with regional organizations.



The City of Charleston’s major housing initiative, Project 3500, aims to create 3,500 new affordable and workforce housing units. Photo: City of Charleston.



Hardeeville’s Harvey Place project, a public-private collaboration, brought 10 townhouse units to its Main Street. Photo: City of Hardeeville.

One partnership is with 180 Place, which recently completed a 70-unit development for people transitioning out of homelessness. Another project includes 72 housing units aimed at workers in Charleston’s hospitality industry.

The remaining 2,500 units under Project 3500 involve a newer approach. Instead of waiting for developers to navigate Charleston’s permitting process, the city is preparing sites in advance — handling engineering reviews, permitting coordination and development approvals — before selecting a development partner through a request-for-proposals process.

“We are handing a development partner a fully vetted plan that has gone through the various processes to ensure that the project is not delayed,” Johnson said. “What we found is if that is done upfront, it certainly helps to minimize time and sometimes reduce the amount of capital that you have to put out later on.”

The city also is working with housing authorities to redevelop existing public housing properties.

“In many cases, we have not maximized to its full potential the land and the parcels that we own,” Johnson said. “Even with housing authority properties, they might have 60 units where you could possibly get 90 units if you designed it differently and you’re building it differently.”

Charleston also invests in homeownership opportunities aimed at helping residents build long-term wealth. Through the city’s Homeownership Initiative, it has developed more than 133 affordable homes for first-time buyers.

“We do recognize that for-sale products and housing that people can own also help to build wealth, help to build stability in a community,” Johnson said. “It’s hard work, and it’s slightly different from what we have been accustomed to, but it’s so important because of the need that we see not only in the Charleston community and region, but across our nation.”

The Retail Site Selector Test Would You Choose Your Own Community?

By Charles Parker, Vice President, The Retail Coach

Every community wants new retail investment. Cities regularly discuss recruiting restaurants, grocery stores and new shopping centers. But before a retailer ever signs a lease or a developer purchases land, there is a much simpler question local leadership should ask:

If you were the retailer, would you choose your own community?

That question is at the heart of what site selectors evaluate every day. While demographics and traffic counts matter, many retail decisions are ultimately shaped by what a community communicates through its appearance, planning practices and growth trajectory.

The good news is that many of the factors that retailers evaluate are things local governments can directly influence.

Visible signs of investment

First impressions matter in retail site selection.

When a retailer tours a community, they are not just evaluating a single parcel of land. They are evaluating the overall environment surrounding that site and whether the city appears to be moving forward or standing still.

Communities that attract investment often demonstrate visible pride and ongoing reinvestment. Well-maintained roadways, landscaping, lighting, signage, clean medians and updated infrastructure all help communicate momentum and stability. Even relatively small details like maintained sidewalks, attractive entry corridors, consistent code enforcement and modern wayfinding signage can shape perception.

The opposite is also true.

Deferred maintenance, deteriorating shopping centers, excessive vacancies, neglected frontage roads and inconsistent property upkeep can create concern for retailers and developers. Many national brands view these conditions as indicators of future risk, even when the underlying demographics support investment.

This is one reason why code enforcement and corridor maintenance are economic development tools. Retailers want to invest in communities that appear committed to protecting and improving their commercial environment.

Is the community planned for retail success?

Retailers also pay close attention to how communities approach planning and development.

In many cases, communities unintentionally make retail recruitment more difficult through zoning decisions or site design requirements that limit usability.

Today's retailers are increasingly selective about site functionality. Many restaurants require drive-thru lanes with sufficient stacking capacity. Grocery stores and anchor tenants often prioritize convenient access, adequate parking and visibility from major corridors. If sites cannot physically accommodate those operational needs, retailers may move on to another market.

Communities must also balance flexibility with quality design standards. Retailers appreciate clear expectations and predictable development processes. Cities that maintain reasonable

standards while understanding market realities often position themselves more competitively than communities that are either overly restrictive or entirely unstructured.

Retail follows rooftops

New roofs are a big indicator to site selectors, but not all residential growth is viewed equally. Retailers carefully study where growth is occurring, what type of housing is being developed, and whether growth appears sustainable.

Are new subdivisions actively under construction? Is the community adding rooftops at a meaningful pace? Are higher-income households entering the market? Is residential growth concentrated near future commercial corridors?

In many cases, retailers are willing to enter communities before the population fully matures if they can clearly see future growth in the pipeline. Planned residential development, expanding utility infrastructure and new housing permits often help validate long-term opportunity.

Ultimately, the communities most successful in retail recruitment are usually the ones that honestly evaluate themselves through the eyes of the private sector.

The "Retail Site Selector Test" is not about being perfect. It's about understanding what signals your community is sending. Site selection is a competitive environment, and retailers are not just choosing sites. They are choosing communities.

Would you choose yours?

IMPACT Fund Grant Applications Open in July

North Augusta used its Big Idea Grant to improve AED deployment and training throughout the community. Photo: City of North Augusta.

Applications for the Municipal Association of SC IMPACT Fund grants will open on Monday, July 20.

The IMPACT Fund, an acronym for “Innovative Municipal Projects for Advancing Change and Transformation,” is supported by VC3, the Association’s strategic partner for technology services.

Two types of IMPACT grant funds are available to cities and towns, each with a requirement for a 5% funding match.

Big Idea Grants – Two grants of up to \$100,000 each

The program awards two of these each year. Designed to fund bold, creative and forward-thinking ideas, Big Idea Grant projects might include technology-driven service improvements, innovative uses of public space, community-wide initiatives or any other big idea that results in long-term impact.

In 2025, the first year of the IMPACT Fund, Big Idea Grant recipients included the City of Greenville, which would transform the Nicholtown Community Center into the state’s first Resiliency Hub, a dual-purpose facility that supports daily community life and emergency preparedness.

The City of North Augusta, meanwhile, used its Big Idea Grant funds to partner with automated external defibrillator manufacturer Avive Solutions to become Avive’s first 4-Minute Community Program in South Carolina, placing 50 AEDs with CPR-trained volunteers

North Augusta Assistant City Manager J.D. McCauley noted that the effort integrated the volunteers with the city’s 911 Emergency Communications Center. The city’s Public Safety Department collaborated across jurisdictional lines with regional emergency response partners within Aiken and Edgefield counties to implement the program.

“By reducing the time between cardiac arrest and lifesaving intervention, the program empowers trained community members to respond before emergency crews arrive,” McCauley said.

North Augusta Mayor Briton Williams also praised the program’s impact.

“As a city, we often talk about providing a great quality of life for our citizens,” he said. “By placing AEDs throughout the city and empowering residents to assist those in need, we are truly enhancing quality of life in a way never before seen in North Augusta.”

Problem Solver Grants – Eight grants of up to \$25,000 each

The Problem Solver Grants are designed to fund smaller, more routine municipal projects and practical fixes for common problems facing South Carolina municipalities. Grant judging criteria includes need to the municipality, and is generally focused on small-to-medium size cities and towns with financial challenges.

Some of projects to receive grants in 2025 included Campobello’s municipal facilities master plan, park upgrades in Chesnee and Heath Springs, pedestrian improvements in Manning and a town hall preservation effort in Salley.

Applications

Applications for both the Big Idea and Problem Solver grants are due Friday, September 25, at 5 p.m. For both grant applications, the city or town council must pass a resolution supporting the application.

Once the grant opens, find the application, as well as sample resolutions for both grant types, at www.masc.sc (keyword: IMPACT Fund). For information, contact Sara Whitaker at 803.933.1259 or swhitaker@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.

JULY

15 – 19 Municipal Association Annual Meeting. Hyatt Regency, Greenville. Topics include effective leadership, crisis communication, community development the municipality as an employer, cybersecurity, data centers, parliamentary procedures, forms of government, the SC Freedom of Information Act and downtown redevelopment. For more information about the Annual Meeting, see page 2.

AUGUST

4 Setoff Debt Program Annual Participation Training. Municipal Association of SC, Columbia. Attendees will see an explanation of the program and see an application demonstration.

6 Setoff Debt Program Interested Participants Training. Municipal Association of SC, Columbia. Attendees will

see an explanation of the program and see an application demonstration.

12 Small Cities Summit. Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center. Topics include procurement and ethics, budgeting and audits and an agency resource panel. Learn more about the Small Cities Summit on page 6.

13 Accreditation in Business Licensing Exam. Municipal Association of SC, Columbia.

18 Business Licensing Essentials Webinar. Virtual.

19 – 21 Municipal Court Administration Association Annual Meeting. Embassy Suites by Hilton Charleston Harbor, Mount Pleasant.

SEPTEMBER

3 SC Association of Stormwater Managers Third Quarter Meeting and Exhibitor Showcase. Seawell's, Columbia.

9 – 11 Municipal Clerks and Treasurers Institute, Year 2, Session A. Cambria Columbia Downtown the Vista.

15 Regional Advocacy Meeting – North Augusta. Municipal Building, North Augusta.

16 Main Street SC Third Quarter Managers' Training. Fountain Inn.

17 Regional Advocacy Meeting – Mauldin. Mauldin Cultural Center.

22 Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government Municipal Economic Development and Forms of Municipal Government. Located at the five regional Councils of Governments locations.

23 – 25 Municipal Technology Association of SC Annual Meeting. Embassy Suites, North Charleston.

29 Risk Management Services: Defensive Driving Training. City of West Columbia.

30 Regional Advocacy Meeting – Columbia. Municipal Association of SC, Columbia.

OCTOBER

6 Regional Advocacy Meeting – Conway. 5th and Main, Conway.

7 SC Utility Billing Association Customer Service Training and Networking Luncheon. Hilton Garden Inn Airport, West Columbia.

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