

# UPTOWN



a publication of the Municipal Association of South Carolina

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# 2026 Annual Meeting to Feature Forms of Government Panel

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**Cover Photo: Crews install stormwater system improvements on Pennsylvania Street in Florence. The City of Florence completed and adopted its stormwater master plan in December. Photo: City of Florence.**

The municipal governments of South Carolina operate under one of three forms of government, each with its own roadmap for how administration operates under the city or town’s mayor, its council and its city manager, if any. State law sets the differences between the three in how governmental roles and responsibilities are structured.

The forms of government are an enduring source of questions among municipal officials. Who is responsible for preparing the city’s budget? Who can call special meetings? Who places items on meeting agendas?

Each of the three forms can be effective, especially when the members of council focus on effective and clear communication and collaboration. Changes between them can only be made by voters through a referendum.

At the 2026 Municipal Association of SC Annual Meeting, a session on Saturday, July 18, “Does the Form of Government Really Matter?” will bring together a panel of experienced municipal leaders to discuss their form of government and how to overcome structural barriers to foster a culture of professional trust.

The panel will feature

- Mayor Melissa Emmons, Town of Elgin – Mayor-council form
- Mayor David Merchant, City of Sumter – Council-manager form
- Mayor Julia Nelson, City of Manning – Council form

## The three forms of government

All three forms have some points in common. Regardless of form, all legislative and policymaking authority rests with the full council, including adopting the budget.

- **Council form** – In this form, the mayor has no additional authority compared to other councilmembers. The council has administrative power and can hire an administrator to assist it. The mayor performs administrative duties only if authorized by council. The full council also appoints the clerk, attorney and judge.
- **Mayor-council form** – Mayors in this form serve as chief executive officer, supervising departments, as well as appointing and removing employees in accordance with personnel rules adopted by council. The mayor also prepares and submits the budget and capital program to council, and makes the annual financial report to the public and to council. The full council appoints the clerk, attorney and judge. The council can hire an administrator to assist the mayor.

- **Council-manager form** – This form includes a city or town manager who serves as chief executive and head of the administrative branch, appointing and removing employees, including the clerk, and setting salaries. The manager also prepares and administers the annual budget and makes financial reports.

A summary of all the differences as defined by South Carolina law can be found in the *Forms and Powers of Municipal Government* handbook, available at [www.masc.sc](http://www.masc.sc) (keyword: forms of government).

## How many municipalities use each form?

The chosen form of government varies among South Carolina's 271 municipalities:

- **Council form** – 103, including 36 with populations under 1,000, and three with populations over 25,000
- **Mayor-council form** – 133, with 85 below a 1,000 population and three above 25,000
- **Council-manager form** – 35, with one below a 1,000 population and 11 above 25,000

## Learn about the 2026 Annual Meeting

The 2026 Annual Meeting will take place July 15 – 19 at the Hyatt Regency Greenville, with sessions on everything from community and downtown development to gubernatorial candidates, legislative advocacy, employment law, public records requests and social media strategy.

*Find full details and agenda information at [www.masc.sc](http://www.masc.sc) (keyword: Annual Meeting) and by downloading the Association's app from the App Store or Google Play by searching for "Municipal Association of SC." All meeting registrations must be complete by July 2.*



# Small Cities Summit Coming on August 12

**S**ince 2023, the Municipal Association of SC has hosted the Small Cities Summit as a time for officials from municipalities with smaller populations to discuss the issues most critical to their cities and towns.

The 2026 Small Cities Summit will take place on Wednesday, August 12, at the Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center, located at 1101 Lincoln St. in Columbia. The event is a one-day gathering with small-city-specific conference sessions and a lunch.

The Association gives registration preference for this event to those municipalities with a population of fewer than 3,000 residents. Registration for the meeting will open on June 25, with the registration deadline coming on July 31.

*Find all of the details, including meeting brochures and hotel options, at [www.masc.sc](http://www.masc.sc) (keyword: Small Cities Summit).*

The National Civic League named the **City of Conway** and the **City of North Charleston** among the 20 nationwide finalists for the All-America City Award. For 2026, the NCL has recognized finalists for their efforts to strengthen civic health and trust.

Several law enforcement agencies in South Carolina recently received accreditation or reaccreditation through the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies. The **Lancaster Police Department** received law enforcement accreditation, while the **Mauldin Police Department** received law enforcement reaccreditation. The **Aiken Department of Public Safety**, **Greenville Police Department**, **Lexington Police Department** and **Orangeburg Department of Public Safety** all received law enforcement advanced reaccreditation.

*Southern Living* magazine's 2026 list of the South's best college towns included two from South Carolina. The **City of Charleston** ranked Number 3, and is home to the College of Charleston; The Citadel, The Military College of South Carolina; and the Medical University of South Carolina, among others. The **City of Clemson**, home to Clemson University, ranked at Number 6. The list of top cities in the South overall included **Charleston** in the Number 1 spot, and the **City of Greenville** at Number 9.

# General Assembly Passes SCDOT Bill

**A**fter the conclusion of the 2025 legislative session, Speaker Murrell Smith (R-Sumter) appointed a SC House Ad Hoc Transportation Modernization Committee to study the SC Department of Transportation and its functions to determine outcomes that could help the agency run more efficiently.

Two versions of the modernization bill were introduced in the House and the Senate, but ultimately S831 was sent to a conference committee where the conference report was adopted by both chambers, ratified and signed into law by the governor.

Sens. Larry Grooms (R-Berkeley), Sean Bennett (R-Dorchester) and Overture Walker (R-Richland); and Reps. Bruce Bannister (R-Greenville), Shannon Erickson (R-Beaufort) and Gary Brewer (R-Charleston) served as conference committee members.

The new law includes these points:

- The secretary of SCDOT will be appointed by the governor with advice and consent from the Senate. The current Secretary of Transportation, Justin Powell, will continue serving.
- The SCDOT Commission is abolished, effective January 1, 2027. The duties, powers and responsibilities will be devolved onto the secretary.
- The Coordinating Council for Transportation and Mobility that was initially included in S831 has been removed.
- The state auditor is required to employ an independent firm to conduct an audit of SCDOT every four years.
- The law removes the previous legal requirement that C-funds be spent on state roads.
- The law clarifies that the SCDOT is responsible for preparing the statewide long-range transportation plan in coordination with local governments.
- Municipalities are required to provide written disapproval of SCDOT work at least 180 days before right-of-way acquisition takes place, or the work will be considered approved. If work is disapproved, the project will be canceled unless it is deemed in the state's best interest.
- County councils are prohibited from serving as a County Transportation Committee. Legislative delegations representing a county are allowed to appoint CTC members. All members of a CTC must be residents of the county, and CTC membership lists must be published online. This section is effective 90 days after the effective date of the bill, which is July 1, 2027.

## Full Municipal Association of SC legislative report

The Municipal Association of SC will provide its full year-end legislative report, recapping all of action taken by the General Assembly during the 2026 session that will impact cities and towns, at the 2026 Annual Meeting in July. It will then make it available at [www.masc.sc](http://www.masc.sc).

Find the Association's week-by-week *From the Dome to Your Home* legislative reports from the 2026 session at [www.masc.sc](http://www.masc.sc) (keyword: Dome).

# Why Serve in Local Government?

*This series highlights people from around South Carolina who are well experienced in municipal government, and what they see as the value of local government to their community. To nominate someone who has served a municipality for years in an elected or staff role to be highlighted in this series, email Russell Cox at [rcox@masc.sc](mailto:rcox@masc.sc).*

## Penny Daley



With **45 years** of service, **Penny Daley** serves as the town clerk for the **Town of Ridgeland**.

### Q. Why do you serve in municipal government?

**A.** I started working for the Town of Ridgeland in 1981 during my senior year of high school as a part-time employee. Upon graduation, that part-time role quickly turned into a full-time role. My first roles were assistant water clerk and assistant municipal court clerk. Eventually, I took on the role of clerk/treasurer, and I am currently the assistant town administrator and the clerk/treasurer.

Serving in municipal government has provided me with the opportunity to contribute, both tangibly and intangibly, to the community I call home. Whether that was helping a new business owner apply for a business license, fielding concerns of citizens and seeing that those concerns are addressed, or simply being a welcoming face at town hall, I hope in my 45 years as a municipal employee that I have made a positive difference in Ridgeland and the lives of its citizens.

A career in municipal government has not only provided me with the pleasure of working in and for the community I call home, but has provided intangible benefits — stable employment, health insurance and state retirement. Additionally, the town and its employees are like a second family to me, and we have a culture that fosters and supports that sentiment.


### Q. What has been your proudest achievement in public service?

**A.** My proudest achievement is realizing my passion to provide Ridgeland's citizens with spaces and events that they can enjoy and make memories with their families. I have always been supportive in maintaining and updating Ridgeland's various park and recreation areas, specifically the revitalization of Harold Turpin Park in the mid-1990s to the most recent playground updates at the park.

Christmas is my favorite time of the year, and I have always been a champion of making it a special time in Ridgeland. The town sponsors a lighted Christmas trail complete with festive displays and music. Additionally, we host a nighttime Christmas parade, which is unique in our area, that is always a highlight of everyone's holiday calendar.

### Q. What does your town contribute to the community?

**A.** The Town of Ridgeland's mission statement is to provide high-quality services to its citizens and promote a safe, active and healthy environment. One of our favorite sayings in the office is that the Town of Ridgeland does a lot with a little. We currently have 49 employees servicing nearly 4,000 residents. Our employees work hard every day to achieve and further our mission statement. Our goal is to manage our anticipated growth while maintaining our authentic Lowcountry community.



# Small-scale Producers Gain Momentum Through Main Street SC Accelerator

*Clemson University has produced blue cheese since 1940, first as a research effort and now as an operational business. Photo: Clemson University.*

**A**cross South Carolina, small-scale producers are doing more than making products. They are building local identity, supporting jobs and strengthening the economic and cultural fabric of their communities.

Through the Small-scale Producer Growth Accelerator, a program led by Main Street South Carolina in partnership with Main Street America and funded in part by the Appalachian Regional Commission, entrepreneurs received targeted support to grow and strengthen their role in local economies.

The program serves as a hands-on support model to meet businesses where they are, helping them grow and succeed locally. Participants in the program received technical assistance, one-on-one coaching and peer learning opportunities to help them improve operations, reach more customers and build long-term stability.

The program utilized resources available through the Main Street America Small Business Hub, which provides tools to support business retention, startup growth and local entrepreneurship. Because of the ARC grant, eligibility for the program was open to those businesses located in one of South Carolina's ARC-designated counties, all located in the Upstate.

## Supporting longstanding local industry

One Accelerator participant, Clemson Blue Cheese, is an example of a business with deep local roots. It began in 1940 when Clemson College researchers explored using Stumphouse Tunnel, located in the mountains above Walhalla, to age cheese. Over time, that research became a working business that still operates today under Master Cheesemaker Anthony Pounders.

Business Manager Rebecca Lee said the Small-scale Producer

Growth Accelerator program helped her team strengthen internal systems and clarify priorities within a small, high-turnover workforce “by identifying weaknesses in our business strategies. We’ve been limited in implementing best practices, but this experience helped us focus on key priorities and connect with the right resources. We’re now moving forward with greater confidence.”

The business has since strengthened its branding and digital presence while also working through challenges related to packaging costs, shipping and facility limitations. As a regional producer, Clemson Blue Cheese also supports other small businesses through supply relationships and collaboration.

## Growing a farm-based business

Harvest Moon Farm and Flower shows how small farms can grow into strong local businesses. Owner



*Harvest Moon Farm and Flower operates a specialty cut flower farm in Pelzer. Photo: Harvest Moon Farm and Flower.*

Jessica Gates started with vegetable farming and later shifted to growing cut flowers after training in organic farming.

Through the Small-scale Producer Growth Accelerator program, she implemented clearer systems and more efficient practices to improve how the business runs. These changes have allowed her to focus more on growing the business, including marketing, sales and developing a farm stand. Like many small business owners, she continues to balance daily work with long-term growth.

“The biggest challenge is wearing all the hats,” Gates said. “I’m looking at hiring support for marketing and administrative work so I can focus more on growth.”

### **Expanding creative and culinary entrepreneurship**

Bake Your Mark, owned by Stufona Latta, represents a growing type of

small business that blends product, storytelling and customer experience.

Latta described her work as a way to “humanize business transactions” by using desserts to create connection and encourage interaction between businesses and their customers.

Through the program, she refined her business systems and shifted her outreach approach to focus more on building relationships.

“The program helped me refine the systems already in place so they can support growth more effectively,” Latta said. “It also helped shift my outreach strategy toward curiosity, conversation and relationships.”

Bake Your Mark is now strengthening its digital presence and expanding into hospitality and corporate markets, including its 86Mores product line, which features South Carolina-sourced ingredients.

### **A municipal and regional economic strategy**

For local governments, these businesses highlight a powerful opportunity to strengthen local economies by supporting a diverse mix of entrepreneurs alongside traditional retail. Small-scale producers can bring energy to underused spaces, create local supply chain connections and help keep investment circulating within the region.

“These partnerships matter because they are built on relationships between communities, local leaders and the makers who are shaping the identity of our communities and our state,” said Jenny Boulware, Manager of Main Street South Carolina.

As communities continue to grow and change, programs like the Small-scale Producer Growth Accelerator show how focused support can make a real difference. When small businesses succeed, they help create stronger local economies and greater future opportunities.

Main Street South Carolina is a technical assistance program that empowers communities as they revitalize their historic downtowns, encouraging economic development and historic preservation. Learn more at [www.masc.sc](http://www.masc.sc) (keyword: Main Street).



*The Greer-based Bake Your Mark is a boutique dessert consulting company creating custom desserts for nationwide shipping. Photo: Bake Your Mark.*



# Training and Work Culture Help Prevent Distracted Driving

**D**istracted driving remains one of the most persistent and preventable threats on the nation's roadways. Preliminary analysis from the National Safety Council estimates that 44,680 people died in preventable traffic crashes in the United States in 2024 — virtually unchanged from 44,762 deaths in 2023. While the numbers may be statistically flat, they represent thousands of families and communities permanently altered by roadway tragedies.

“There is still critical work needed to make our roadways safer,” said Mark Chung, executive vice president of safety leadership and advocacy at NSC. “Without significant changes, potential danger will continue to pose ongoing risks to the millions of Americans who rely on our roads daily. We must make new commitments to support safer conditions for all road users to ensure everyone makes it home safely.”

Among the most pervasive risk factors behind these fatalities is distracted driving. The proliferation of smartphones, in-vehicle infotainment systems and constant digital connectivity has fundamentally changed driver behavior. Visual, manual and cognitive distractions all impair reaction time, situational awareness and hazard perception — critical requirements for safe vehicle operation. Even a few seconds of inattention at highway speeds can translate into the length of a football field traveled blindly.

In South Carolina, policymakers have taken steps to address this risk. The recently enacted South Carolina Hands-Free and Distracted Driving Act prohibits drivers from holding or manually using a mobile device while operating a motor vehicle. The law reflects growing recognition that voluntary compliance alone is insufficient to curb risky behavior. By shifting to a primary enforcement model and clarifying prohibited conduct, the law strengthens the state's legal framework for deterrence and accountability.

Still, legislation alone cannot resolve the problem. Risk mitigation requires a layered strategy that includes enforcement, education, engineering controls and organizational culture change, especially within public-sector fleets.

A recent analysis by the Municipal Association of SC Risk Management Services carried a critical insight: most police vehicle losses do not occur during high-

speed pursuits or during emergency response. Instead, they arise during routine driving operations — ordinary patrol, administrative travel or non-emergency calls. These findings challenge the common perception that lights-and-sirens scenarios alone create risk exposure. In reality, complacency, distraction and everyday driving conditions often present the greater cumulative risk.

For municipalities, this knowledge is instructive. Fleet-related losses drive workers' compensation claims, property damage costs, liability exposure and reputational risk. Distracted driving, whether involving a smartphone, mobile data terminal or simple in-vehicle multitasking, compounds those exposures.

Recognizing the need for proactive intervention, the boards of the SC Municipal Insurance Trust and the SC Municipal Insurance and Risk Financing Fund recently approved a scholarship initiative to expand the number of certified driver trainers in South Carolina. This investment reflects a prevention-focused philosophy: build internal capacity, standardize defensive driving instruction and embed safe driving principles into organizational culture.

Certified driver trainers provide more than skill refreshers. They reinforce policy compliance, coach behavioral change and model accountability. In high-turnover environments or agencies with decentralized operations, trained instructors serve as force multipliers — ensuring consistent, evidence-based instruction reaches new hires and veteran personnel alike.

The plateau in national fatality data signals that incremental progress is not enough. Sustained reduction in roadway deaths will require coordinated action — stronger laws, disciplined enforcement, targeted training and leadership commitment at every level of government. Distracted driving is preventable, but only if organizations and individuals treat it as a systemic risk rather than an isolated bad decision.

Every trip, whether across town or across the state, carries with it some risk. Through legislative reform, data-driven risk management and investment in driver education among municipalities, South Carolina is taking meaningful steps toward a safer transportation environment — one where everyone, as NSC urges, makes it home safely.

# Association Highlight:

## SC Business Licensing Officials Association

**M**any 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.

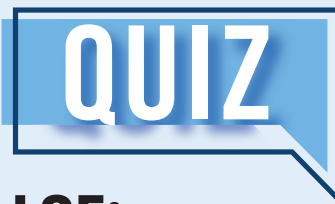
The SC Business Licensing Officials Association helps its members handle the challenges and issues involved in administering and enforcing the local business and professional license ordinances. BLOA offers the BLOA Training Institute and Advanced Academy, which improve the professional and administrative skills of business licensing officials.

The most recent sessions focused on the assessment process, the South Carolina Business License Tax Standardization Act, and updates on legislative action and court cases impacting business licenses.

Graduates of the institute who pass an exam receive the Accreditation in Business Licensing designation. Those with this designation may then pursue a Master in Business Licensing designation by completing BLOA's Advanced Academy.

BLOA also hosts a Joint Academy with the SC Municipal Finance Officers, Clerks and Treasurers Association to explore topics relevant to both groups. This year's Joint Academy will take place October 27 – 30 at the Hilton Garden Inn Summerville.

*Learn more about the SC Business Licensing Officials Association at [www.masc.sc](http://www.masc.sc) (keyword: BLOA).*



### TRUE OR FALSE:

Economic development is always a long-term process.

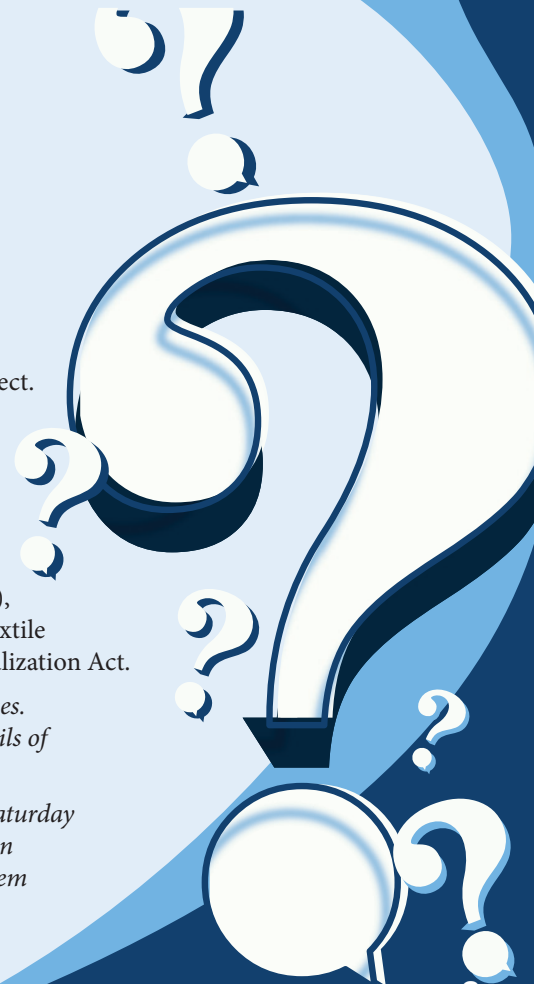
**TRUE** When cities and towns pursue an economic development strategy, they cannot expect a short-term process or to have all of their hopes fulfilled through a one-time project.

Leaders should instead expect a continuous process, and should drive it with a sound, formalized economic development plan. Such plans provide a comprehensive overview of the local economy, sets policy direction for economic growth, and identifies strategies, programs and projects to improve the local economy.

Several economic development topics are covered in the *Handbook for Municipal Officials in South Carolina* found at [www.masc.sc](http://www.masc.sc) (keyword: municipal official handbook), such as grants available through the Rural Infrastructure Fund, incentives through the Textile Communities Revitalization Act and incentives through the Abandoned Buildings Revitalization Act.

*The Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government offers in-person and online courses. "Municipal Economic Development" will next be offered in-person at several regional councils of governments locations on September 22. Learn more at [www.masc.sc](http://www.masc.sc) (keyword: MEO).*

*Economic development is on the agenda for the 2026 Annual Meeting in July as well. A Saturday morning session on July 18, "From Vision to Viability: A Practical Framework for Downtown Redevelopment," will focus on how cities get downtown projects started and how to make them financially feasible.*





# Why Safety Professionals Matter Behind the Scenes of Safer Cities

by Naomi Reed, Director of Risk Management Services, Municipal Association of SC

In cities and towns, the responsibility of keeping employees safe may fall to a dedicated safety manager in a larger municipality, a city clerk or HR director who carries safety alongside many other responsibilities, a department head championing safety in the field, or a safety committee. The structure varies, but the commitment is the same: protecting the employees who keep city services running.

For many municipalities, the question isn't whether to have a safety function — it's how to ensure the work receives consistent attention and support. A city clerk who stays current on training and builds strong relationships with department heads can make a meaningful difference. A safety committee that meets regularly, identifies hazards and follows through on solutions can do so as well. What matters most is clear ownership, engaged leadership, and steady, proactive effort — not a particular title.

A strong first step for any city is a loss control evaluation. For members of the SC Municipal Insurance Trust and SC Municipal Insurance Risk and Financing Fund, the Municipal Association of South Carolina's Loss Control Division works with municipalities to assess exposure areas and equip leaders with the information they need to decide how their local safety function should be structured.

Every community is different. The right approach for a larger city like

Greer may look very different from what works in a small town like Blackville where one administrator handles multiple operational responsibilities. The goal is to help each municipality understand its environment and prioritize efforts that will make the greatest impact to safety.

One of the clearest patterns in municipal safety is the influence of leadership. When city administrators emphasize safety in planning and budgeting, when elected officials ask about safety performance and when department heads hold supervisors accountable, the entire organization takes safety more seriously. Programs with visible leadership support tend to be more proactive, better resourced and more effective.

Regardless of how the role is structured, municipal safety responsibilities typically include conducting site walkthroughs to identify hazards, coordinating training for frontline employees, updating policies after incidents or near-misses, supporting supervisors with safety resources, and advocating internally for safety improvements. Larger organizations may have a professional dedicated to this work full time, while smaller communities may distribute these responsibilities across roles — but with the right support, both approaches can be effective.

For SCMIT and SCMIRF members, the Municipal Association of South Carolina's Risk Management Services offers tools and expertise

that help municipalities of all sizes strengthen their safety programs. The Loss Control Division provides risk assessments, model policies and procedures, targeted safety training, on-site consultation, and specialized tools such as law enforcement decision-making simulators. Artificial-intelligence-powered dashboards also help identify emerging patterns and potential areas of concern. These resources do not replace local responsibility, but they reinforce it.

The importance of municipal safety programs is reflected in national data on injuries from preventable hazards. In 2023 and 2024, there were an estimated 479,480 nonfatal cases involving days away from work due to falls, slips and trips, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Municipal employees — from public works crews to parks staff to police officers — face these risks daily. Communities where safety programs are active, visible and consistently supported see fewer disruptions, fewer injuries and stronger service delivery.

While safety structures may vary widely, one truth remains constant: safety does not happen by chance. It requires commitment and leadership that treats prevention as an essential part of municipal operations.

*For questions about safety efforts, contact the Risk Management Services Loss Control Division at [losscontrol@masc.sc](mailto:losscontrol@masc.sc).*

# Weathering the Storm

## Stormwater Master Plans Tackle Flooding and Runoff Management

*Street flooding occurs on Atlantic Avenue just west of the Sullivan's Island Lighthouse. The town has pursued grant funding to help with stormwater system repairs and planning. Photo: Town of Sullivan's Island.*

**F**rom the Upstate to the coast, flooding and stormwater management serve as a challenge nearly all municipalities in South Carolina experience; and stormwater runoff is considered the greatest threat to the nation's water supply, according to the Clemson University Cooperative Extension.

Many cities and towns around the state are drafting or refreshing their existing stormwater master plans. Two such communities taking the next step forward with their stormwater master plans are the City of Florence and the Town of Sullivan's Island.

Florence completed and adopted its stormwater master plan in December 2025.

"We took it a little bit further than just your standard master plan," said Clint Moore, Florence assistant city manager, noting that the city partnered with the SC Office of Resilience to assist in funding the planning process.

"We looked at the overall area, our growth area, where we expect to grow over the next 20 years, but then we expanded it to include a hydrological study to confirm our 'boots-on-the-ground' observations, where we have

stormwater issues, and it helped us identify some of the areas that we weren't entirely aware of," he said.

What elevated the plan, Moore said, was making water quality an important component, leading not just to "recommendations of projects, but also policy changes that we can make in the future, to one — not only handle our stormwater runoff as development increases and some of the strategies with addressing that, and two — how we can better improve the overall water quality that is so often impacted by stormwater runoff within our area."

While the Florence area watersheds feed into the Lynches and Great Pee Dee rivers, the city aims to make sure that the water flowing into them is as clean as possible.

With the previous master plan dating to the 1970s, the city took about two years to complete its new plan, including rounds of surveying, the hydrological study, and asset management work. The city hosted public meetings to garner community input and buy in, as well as meetings with community organizations.

"It is very important to work with your residents, because they're dealing

with this every day," Moore said. "They are our eyes and ears out there; we can't have city staff everywhere all the time."

Identifying responsible parties was another key part of the master planning process. The city made a point of assembling all of the entities involved in stormwater to illustrate how complex even a single project can be.

"Unlike most utilities, dry or wet, stormwater is a system that knows no boundary; it is not really clear who's responsible for it," he said. "It goes where it wants to naturally go. With that, you have so many entities that it affects and are responsible for different infrastructure and watersheds."

The master plan functions as a 20-year working plan for identified stormwater projects, and since its adoption, the City of Florence has received grant funding and taken out a bond to begin three of them.

In the Lowcountry, the Town of Sullivan's Island is no stranger to stormwater issues like flooding.

"The town really started focusing on in-house, town-managed stormwater management about five

years ago,” said Town Administrator Joe Henderson. “Council made the decision to pursue any grant funding possible to fix the stormwater system in the [SC Department of Transportation] right of way, and so that’s what we’ve done.”

Henderson said that the town pursued multiple grants to receive the necessary funding for not only the repairs to the system, but also for research studies in order to create the stormwater master plan and the town’s first resiliency plan. The town applied for Federal Emergency Management Agency Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities grants in the 2020 and 2021 cycles.

“Based on the recommendations from those plans, we have really mobilized and moved forward on the improvement work that is needed throughout the island,” he said.

“One of the things that came out of our stormwater master plan was a recommendation to fund and develop formally a stormwater division, a group of full-time employees that would have the equipment and the skillset to go out and actually clean out pipes, clean out ditches, use heavy equipment like vac trucks to be able to clean out these structures in the right of way.”

Once the 2020 FEMA BRIC grant was approved, the town contracted Seamon Whiteside & Associates as its project managers.

“Part of that project was a survey of the entire stormwater system, going through identifying what is in disrepair, what needed to be replaced,” Henderson said. “They provided recommendations for how we could go out and get grant monies, how we can use our reserves to fund some of the improvements, and what the town needs to do going forward in maintaining our inventory and inspection of all stormwater systems.”

Of the 18 project areas identified in the master plan, Henderson said that the approach will be incremental. One of the largest grants that the town received three years ago was from the SC Rural Infrastructure Authority: a SC Infrastructure Investment Program grant in the amount of \$10 million, which Henderson said is about 80% complete. With that funding, the town has embarked on repairing and replacing infrastructure at four different basins across the island: stations 31, 28.5, 25 and 16.

The town also received a FEMA Hazard Mitigation Assistance grant for projects around Sullivan’s Island Lighthouse at stations 18, 18.5 to 19, which have begun construction, Henderson said. A second FEMA HMA grant will fund improvements at stations 18.5 and 25, which Henderson said is in the planning phase.

In addition to state and federally funded grant projects, the town is

embarking on its own stormwater infrastructure improvements out of its operating budget and various reserves, notably at Stith Park next to Town Hall, where flooding frequently occurs. The town procured a contractor for the project, which will continue through late summer.

Yet another town-funded project is underway on the eastern side of the island.

“We’re making some improvements on the eastern side of the island on the marsh where we have lots of flooding impacts — not just storm surge but also tidal impacts,” Henderson said, sharing that the project entails re-digging a ditch that goes out to deep water, replacing the outfall and installing a new check valve.

“Some of the neighborhoods around Station 9.5 flood on a regular basis, so we’re hoping that that project will improve the situation over there. So really across the board, we’ve got projects going on and we’re trying to knock them out,” he said.

Stormwater management is undoubtedly a critical component to maintaining strong, resilient communities. Municipalities throughout South Carolina are investing in the research and the surveying needed to identify existing and potential problem areas, and to mitigate stormwater runoff and flooding as development continues to increase statewide.



*The City of Florence pursued a daylighting project in Timrod Park, restoring a stream previously moved into culverts, which has drainage and ecological benefits. Photo: City of Florence.*

# Environmental Advisory Councils Lead Sustainability Efforts

*Mount Pleasant's push to create pollinator gardens has included one along the Pitt Street Bridge. Photo: Town of Mount Pleasant.*



**M**any cities in South Carolina are working to protect their local environments and ecosystems as the challenges of everything from climate change to tree canopy loss to pollution are becoming more evident.

Creating policies for sustainable growth and natural resource protection is particularly urgent for the City of Isle of Palms, nestled on a sea island surrounded by the ocean and marsh. The city council created the Environmental Advisory Committee — a volunteer group including residents and two students — which meets monthly to address such issues as wildlife protection and finding ways to make the city a model of environmental stewardship for other coastal communities.

“I’ve always been a big proponent of taking care of the environment, taking care of our Earth,” said Laura Lovins, chair of the committee, who joined after working with the Turtle Team and the Audubon shorebird steward program. “This is all we have.”

Working with the Surfrider Foundation, the committee helped install cigarette butt disposal canisters at popular beach locations. Smoking-related litter dropped to about 16% of beach debris in 2023 from about 21% the year before. The city also partnered with local glass recyclers and created a food scrap collection program that yields compost for gardens while reducing landfill waste.

The city has supported grassroots efforts like the Isle of Palms Cleanup Crew’s No Toy Left Behind bin at Front Beach, which collects abandoned plastic toys before they wash out to sea. City leaders are exploring ways to expand the program with additional bins at beach access points.

Families leaving the beach can place their sand toys and buckets at drop points to be used by other visitors or recycled at the end of the season.

The committee has engaged in an information campaign to teach beachgoers about protecting nesting areas for sea turtles — particularly to fill in holes dug during the

day — and protecting habitats for other wildlife, including shorebirds.

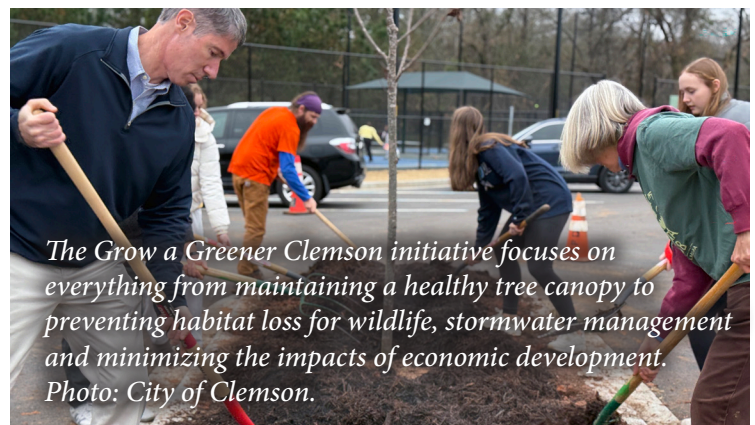
Beyond the beach, the city took steps to offset greenhouse gas emissions from its buildings by using a federal grant to add solar panels to its public works facility.

The advisory committee has taken on water testing to ensure that its residential septic tanks do not contaminate the ocean or other water. Lovins said several rounds of testing revealed that the biggest water quality offender was animal waste — both wildlife and pets. In response, the committee is installing dog waste stations on Waterway Boulevard.

Nearby, the Town of Mount Pleasant created the Green Space, Environment, Ecology and Natural Resources Commission, or GREEN Commission, in 2023 to deal with perennial coastal environmental issues like water quality, wildlife habitats and wetlands conservation.

What distinguishes Mount Pleasant’s approach is the commission’s expertise. At least five of the commission’s nine members are required to have some expertise in the fields of green space, environment, ecology or natural resources.

“The commission [has] environmental-thinking people that have expertise, vision and ideas that maybe staff



*The Grow a Greener Clemson initiative focuses on everything from maintaining a healthy tree canopy to preventing habitat loss for wildlife, stormwater management and minimizing the impacts of economic development. Photo: City of Clemson.*

doesn't have," said Christopher Lubert, senior planner for the town. "We have the ports here that employ engineers who are familiar with state regulations as far as wetlands, which has been crucial to us doing a wetlands ordinance ... I think we we're definitely blessed with our citizens being those experts in their professional lives."

Protecting wetlands, which serve as a natural buffer to flooding, help filter pollutants from water and provide wildlife habitat, is one of the town's most pressing issues, especially as federal protections have shifted in recent years.

In addition to helping develop a local wetlands ordinance, the GREEN Commission has played a major role in helping the town strengthen a countywide ban on plastic bags and create low-impact development guidelines.

"It's basically a low threshold where engineers just have to do some common sense, low-cost things to improve water runoff and flooding issues, put in more environmentally friendly architecture features and lighting, or you have meters that shut sprinklers off when it rains," Lubert said. "It's not a big drag on developers, but it has huge benefits to the environment."

The town is looking at similar guidelines for residential areas that wouldn't be regulations, but suggestions.

"How do we incentivize homeowners to put in rain gardens, to put in pollinator gardens?" he said.

Also on the residential side, the GREEN Commission has led tree plantings and created a "tree bank."

"Basically, if you remove a tree and you can't replant one, you pay us the cost of that tree and we'll plant it," Lubert said. "We've put in a lot of trees — palm trees, understory trees, any kind of tree we could — just with the purpose of shade."

On a commission recommendation, the town council now created a tree task force.

Trees are also a top issue for the Upstate City of Clemson, which is one of the fastest-growing cities in the state.

The city created the Sustainability Advisory Committee in 2024 to help with natural resource preservation, energy efficiency, waste reduction and sustainable development. Its members are residents and specialists appointed by the city council. Tapping into the expertise at nearby Clemson University allows the city to include specialists such as naturalists, horticulturists and landscape architects.

"We have a master naturalist that is on the committee. And that has been a wealth of resource for us," said

Tony Tidwell, Clemson's director of urban and park land management.

The committee spent much of its first years learning, with city departments and experts from the university making presentations.

"What we wanted to do is get our heads around what the city's actually doing, so we weren't trying to recommend things that were already in place," Tidwell said. "A lot of it is information gathering for them. And as they say now, they're drinking through the fire hose and just trying to get all the information they can, so they can make educated recommendations that are going to count."

Nowhere is the committee's influence more visible than in the city's Grow a Greener Clemson initiative, focused on the sustainability of the city's tree canopy, an environmental asset that helps manage stormwater, improves water quality, reduces heat and preserves wildlife habitat.

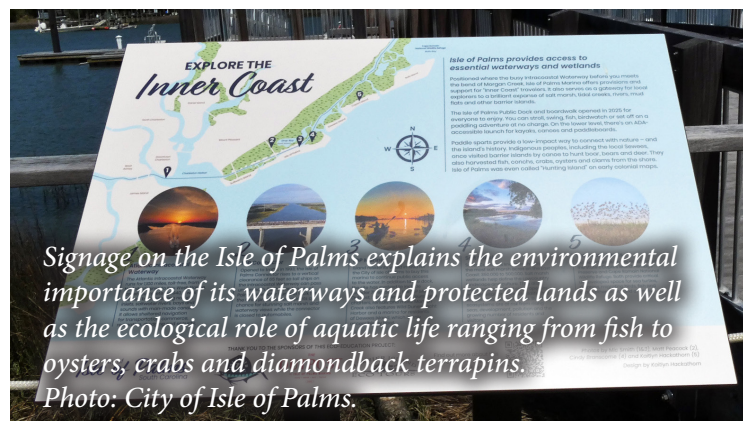
A grant from the SC Forestry Commission allowed the city to map its canopy — measuring about 48% coverage of land area. The city offers residents incentives for planting trees as well as planting them on public lands.

"We give trees away, we do tree plantings, and there's a lot of public outreach in that," Tidwell said.

The city's maximum possible canopy coverage is 51%, he said, and that is the goal it wants to reach.

Wildlife conservation is another key focus. Clemson has been recognized as a Monarch City, pledging to plant milkweed throughout the community to support declining Monarch butterfly populations. The city is working toward certification as a wildlife habitat, an effort that aligns public spaces and private landscapes with the needs of native species.

"With a city that is developing like Clemson is, there is going to be displaced wildlife," Tidwell said. "So we are just calling on residents to pitch in and provide those places — a sustainable area for food, water and a place for them to raise their young."



# Get Insurance Coverage and Property Ready for Hurricane Season With a Storm Preparation Checklist

The 2025 Atlantic hurricane season did not bring a substantially damaging storm to South Carolina, as 2024 did when Hurricane Helene wrought a path of damage to the western part of the state.

Still, the last season provided plenty of reminders of the destruction that hurricanes and other tropical cyclones can cause. 2025 brought 13 named storms, including four major hurricanes, as well as \$503 million of damages inflicted nationwide, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Tropical cyclones are among the natural threats in South Carolina that can easily reduce a municipality's ability to maintain its critical services, and hurt its finances through major property damage.

The beginning of hurricane season is an excellent time for a city to review its insurance coverage and its operational preparations, helping it keep its residents safe. Here are some key items to check over:

## Insurance coverage

- Review the valuation of the city's covered property** – It's important to keep listed asset values up to date for any potential claims, including property damage and business interruption.
- Review the insurance coverage's contractual limits, deductibles and loss-reporting requirements** – These rules can be complex for catastrophic losses. For example, the SC Municipal Insurance and Risk Financing Fund coverage contract has limitations for properties that are eligible for coverage through the National Flood Insurance Program. SCMIRF also has deductibles that apply specifically in coastal counties when damage has been caused by a "named storm" — those storms intense enough for the National Hurricane Center to officially give a name.
- Review whether flood events are covered, and if exclusions for particular locations exist** – It's important to know how the contract defines "storm surge;" how it addresses business interruption costs, like revenue or extra expenses; whether it places restrictions on the timing and location of rebuilding; and if it has deadlines for filing proof of loss.

## Insurance claims preparedness

- Keep critical financial records at a site that is secure from flood or wind damage** – Additionally, when filing claims, it's important to maintain detailed tracking of all documentation requests, like what was requested, who requested it, who responded and when and to whom the information was sent.

## Emergency response and business continuity

- Review crisis management procedures and business continuity plans for any needed updates** – Consider potential impacts of both direct or indirect hits from a major storm for their residents, employees, and the vendors that would be involved in storm recovery. Establish coordinated response procedures with other local government agencies and emergency services, if none exist.

- Establish emergency notification contact lists and evacuation plans for employees.**
- Plan out work-from-home procedures when possible and appropriate for employees** – Plenty of first responders and other essential workers cannot work remotely in an emergency, and will need critical supplies — potable water, nonperishable food, first-aid kits, flashlights, handheld radios or cell phones.
- Examine backup resources for needed preventive maintenance** – Power generators, for example, need periodic maintenance.

## Securing property ahead of an approaching storm

- Relocate movable high-value assets away from low-lying, flood-prone areas** – This could be equipment like fire trucks, fleet vehicles or other heavy equipment.
- Clear rain gutters and downspouts and check drain pumps to reduce flooding potential.**
- Secure facility doors and board up windows to protect from flying debris** – It's also important to secure lightweight outdoor items to prevent them from becoming flying objects in high winds.

*For questions on hurricane planning, response and recovery issues, contact [losscontrol@masc.sc](mailto:losscontrol@masc.sc). Learn more in the South Carolina Hurricane Guide of the SC Emergency Management Division at [www.hurricane.sc](http://www.hurricane.sc)*



# Municipal Association of South Carolina

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## Calendar

For a complete listing of the Association's training opportunities, visit [www.masc.sc](http://www.masc.sc) to view the calendar.

### JUNE

**7 – 10 Palmetto Power Cities Annual Meeting.** Sonesta Resort, Hilton Head Island. Topics include customer communication, FEMA documentation, capital planning and debt management.

**9 – 11 Main Street SC Second Quarter Managers' Training/Summer Retreat.** The Greenwood Arts Center. Topics include economic development tools, social media, business startup assistance, small business support partners and historic preservation.

**16 Risk Management Services: Defensive Driving Training.** Hardeeville Recreation Center.

**18 SC Association of Stormwater Managers Second Quarter Meeting.** Seawell's, Columbia. Topics include artificial intelligence and total maximum daily loads in waterbodies, as well as updates from the SC Department of Environmental Services.

**23 Business License Bootcamp.** Mauldin Senior Center, Greenville. Topics will include the history of Business License Tax, Act 176, model business license ordinances, processing business licenses and appeals and assessments.

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

### 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.

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

**12 Small Cities Summit.** For more information about the Small Cities Summit, see page 3. Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center.

**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.

**16 Main Street SC Third Quarter Managers' Training.** Location to be determined.

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