

December 2025

UPTOWN

a publication of the Municipal Association of South Carolina

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Graduates, Award Winners Named at RMS Annual Members Meeting

Twelve new graduates of the Risk Management Institute, as well as six cities receiving awards for their risk management efforts, all received recognition at the Risk Management Services Annual Members Meeting in November.

The Risk Management Institute is open to members of the SC Municipal Insurance Trust and the SC Insurance and Risk Financing Fund at no charge. SCMIT provides self-funded workers' compensation coverage to its member cities, while SCMIRF provides all lines of property and casualty coverage, including tort liability and automobile coverage for its members. The Municipal Association of SC sponsors both programs.

Risk Management Institute graduates

The Risk Management Institute serves as a continuing education program for municipal staff who have risk management responsibilities and work for cities and towns that are SCMIT and SCMIRF members.

Here are the new graduates:

- **Sherry Bodden**, purchasing and grant writing coordinator, City of Goose Creek
- **Rick Bryan**, director of utilities & public works, Town of Chapin
- **Charles Cribb**, fire chief, City of Georgetown
- **Aaron Isaiah Dobbs**, captain, City of Aiken
- **Randy Driggers**, fire chief, City of Lake City
- **Drew Godwin**, human resources director, Town of Kingstree
- **Tanya Eckard**, payroll/accounts payable clerk, Easley Combined Utilities
- **Ronald Fair**, captain, City of West Columbia
- **Lara B. Hudson**, human resources director, City of Greenwood
- **Sarah Ramirez**, capital program manager, City of York
- **Lindsey Reynolds**, administrative coordinator, City of Cayce
- **Chassidy Sistrunk**, senior underwriter, Municipal Association of SC

Risk Management Services awards

The annual RMS Awards recognize those SCMIT and SCMIRF members who keep employees safe and reduce their total costs. RMS determines the winners using each member's record of loss experience over the previous three years.

There are three winners each for SCMIT and SCMIRF, based on population divisions. The award winners receive a plaque and a \$2,500 award.

The 2025 winners for SCMIT are Greenwood CPW, the Town of Hickory Grove and the City of Manning. The 2025 SCMIRF winners are the Town of Cheraw, the Town of North and the Town of Williamston.

Learn more about these programs at www.masc.sc (keywords: RMS).



Time to Prepare for 2026 Achievement Award Entries

Applications for the Municipal Association of SC Achievement Awards will be open through February 4.

The awards program recognizes innovative projects in South Carolina's cities and towns. It helps share these projects with other municipalities and demonstrate the value of the state's local governments.

Each award submission requires a completed application along with supporting material and three photos, and a signature from the mayor.

Important dates

- **February 4:** Submission deadline.
- **February 23 or 24:** Cities competing in subject categories will have an oral presentation time assigned on one of these dates.
- **July 18:** Award winners will be recognized during the Association's 2026 Annual Meeting in Greenville.

Competition categories

Municipalities with populations of 20,000 or fewer can compete in a population category or a subject category. There are four population categories:

- **1 – 1,000**
- **1,001 – 5,000**
- **5,001 – 10,000**
- **10,001 – 20,000**

Municipalities with populations greater than 20,000 can compete in a subject category only:

- **Communications**
- **Economic Development**
- **Public Safety**
- **Public Service**
- **Public Works**

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

NEWS BRIEFS

The SC Business Licensing Officials Association elected its 2025 – 2026 board of directors. They are President **Kathy Teague**, business license supervisor, City of Union; Vice President **Andrew Ridout**, business licensing administrator, City of Aiken; and Secretary/Treasurer **Angie Wilson**, business license specialist, City of Anderson. The members at-large are **Randie Evans**, permitting & licensing coordinator, City of Florence; **Sonya Lee**, business license coordinator, Town of Lexington; and **Kelly Smith**, business license administrator, City of Columbia. The past president is **Cynthia Oliver**, city clerk, City of Hardeeville.

The SC Municipal Finance Officers, Clerks and Treasurers Association also elected its 2025 – 2026 board of directors. They are President **Laura Snelling**, chief financial officer, City of Abbeville; Vice President **Amber Barnes**, assistant town administrator, Town of Pendleton; and Secretary/Treasurer **Bert O'Rear**, town administrator, Town of Olar. Other board directors are **Paula Payton**, town clerk and administrator, Town of Pelzer; **Laura Hembree**, finance director, City of Union; **Shannon Bowers**, municipal clerk, Town of Chapin; and **Lynda Williamson**, finance director, City of North Augusta. The past president is **Erika D. Moore Hammond**, city clerk, City of Columbia.

PalmettoPride named 18 organizations as recipients of its 2026 Tree Grant program — receiving a total of 1,503 trees to help with issues including the aftermath of Hurricane Helene, which destroyed an estimated 1% – 4% of the state's tree canopy coverage. Municipalities receiving trees include **Batesburg-Leesville**, **Bluffton**, **Estill**, **Holly Hill**, **Neeses**, **North Charleston** and **Westminster**.



2025 – 2026 Legislative Session Continues in January

The second session of the 126th General Assembly begins in January, with several changes and new faces coming to Columbia.

Because the Municipal Association of SC board of directors adopted Advocacy Initiatives for the two-year session last year, those priorities — along with other legislation introduced during the session — are still effective.

Advocacy Initiatives

Several of the Municipal Association's 12 Advocacy Initiatives for the 2025 – 2026 legislative session are highlighted here. The rest can be found on the Municipal Association's website at www.masc.sc (keyword: Advocacy Initiatives).

- **Allow cities and towns with no property tax millage to impose a millage with certain limitations.**

Millage is the property tax rate cities and towns use to generate revenue for emergency services, police departments, infrastructure, parks and community programs. This legislation would clarify that cities and towns without an operating millage may impose a millage within certain limitations.

S102 passed the Senate in 2025, and is now in the House Ways and Means Committee for consideration.

- **Protect the authority of cities and towns to regulate short-term rentals within municipal boundaries.**

Local leaders, working with residents, neighborhoods and businesses, know best how to regulate and manage the challenges presented by short-term rentals. A one-size-fits-all statewide

approach to managing short-term rentals in diverse South Carolina cities and towns is not the solution. Regulation of these properties is critical for public health and safety, as well as revenue generation for local governments and the general viability of neighborhoods.

S442 was introduced in the Senate that would allow local governments to regulate short term rentals.

- **Support efforts to help solve the liquor liability insurance burden on small businesses.**

The rising cost of liquor liability insurance in South Carolina is negatively impacting small businesses and forcing businesses to close. Locally owned restaurants are a vital part of cities, offering residents a place to gather, and serving as destinations for visitors.

The General Assembly passed H3430 in 2025, a bill that makes changes to current liquor liability insurance laws. The bill provides for a joint and several liability change and provides ways for restaurants and bars to lower insurance coverage through server training and other opportunities. This bill also lowers the amount of liquor liability insurance required for one-day festivals.

Introduction of legislation, pending legislation

Since this is the second year of a two-year session, all bills that were introduced in 2025 and did not pass are still eligible for debate. Legislators can also continue to introduce new bills during the prefiling period and during the regular session. When

the 2026 session is over, any bill that did not pass is dead and would need to be introduced during the 2027 legislative session.

The Municipal Association is tracking several bills that are currently in the House and Senate awaiting action. In addition to S102, the zero-millage bill; as well as S442, the short-term rentals bill, there are also bills pending in the General Assembly that would impact the SC Freedom of Information Act, wells and septic tanks and annexation.

Broader issues like local elections, property tax reform, infrastructure and road ownership and maintenance are expected to be a topic of discussion at the State House, along with social issues making an appearance again.

The Municipal Association's Legislative Tracking System follows all bills related to municipal government along with updates from daily subcommittee and committee action. Find it at www.masc.sc (keyword: Legislative Tracking System).

State budget

Legislators in the budget-writing subcommittees in the House Ways and Means Committee and the Senate Finance Committee are already working on the upcoming budget for fiscal year 2026-2027.

Cities and towns that have a special request for a local project should begin talking with members of the local legislative delegation about the funding request and the project. Now is the time to show legislators what these state budget dollars mean to local services and infrastructure.

New legislators

During the months after the 2025 session adjourned, several lawmakers resigned their seat for varying reasons. Sen. Roger Nutt, Rep. Bobby Cox, Rep. Chris Murphy and Rep. RJ May all resigned their seats effective immediately. Special elections are scheduled to be held in December.

These legislators held seats on committees in each chamber and their resignations cause other lawmakers to be moved creating a shift of committee membership.

More new faces are expected to join incumbent legislators after the 2026 elections for the House of Representatives. Senators are not up for reelection until 2028. Both House members and all state constitutional officers are also up for reelection.

Keep in touch

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

Legislation to be debated in 2026 and the Municipal Association's Advocacy Initiatives will all be discussed during Hometown Legislative Action Day, January 20 at the Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center. Find the full agenda and details at www.masc.sc (keyword: HLAD).

WeShopSC by the Numbers



WESHOPSC.COM



South Carolina's Small Business Marketplace

WeShopSC.com is a statewide e-commerce marketplace created by the Municipal Association of South Carolina to advance small business storefront technology, training and marketing support. The platform has become a digital Main Street, allowing local entrepreneurs to compete with larger retailers while keeping dollars circulating locally.

WeShopSC is proving what's possible when small businesses have access to digital tools, training and resources.



730+

Businesses
Onboarded



1.2 million

Digital
Impressions
(and counting)



4,000+

Small Business
Goods and
Services



96

Towns and Cities
Represented

Visit WeShopSC.com to join the community and support small businesses in South Carolina.

Hometown Legislative Action Day

A Critical Time to Focus on Legislator Relationships

The Municipal Association of SC Hometown Legislative Action Day will take place Tuesday, January 20, 2026. This year, it will take place at a new venue — the Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center at 1101 Lincoln St.

A key part of HLAD is the opportunity for city and town leaders to meet with their elected delegation, both at the State House and during the Legislative Reception. Even so, it's not the only time that mayors and councilmembers should be working to connect with their delegation in Columbia. Building those relationships is an ongoing process, which municipal leaders should be involved in throughout the year.

Here are some key points to consider when keeping the channels open with their state representatives and senators:

Long before asking for anything, establish the working relationship.

Municipal officials represent some of the same residents that the local elected delegation represents, but it's important to remember that legislators may not have extensive knowledge of everything happening in a particular city or town.

Municipal officials should aim to provide periodic updates to their delegation about specific city projects, strategies and challenges. This can help the delegation better understand the city council's decisions, can also help them identify possible funding opportunities or other resources. Follow up on meetings with additional information and thanks as quickly as possible.

Keep representatives and senators involved in municipal activities whenever possible.

City councils can extend invitations to their legislators to join them at council meetings, giving them an opportunity to speak about their State House priorities and learn about the council's work. Inviting them to attend the city's ribbon cuttings and special events can help establish valuable relationships as well.

Always thank legislators for their work.

Whenever legislators bring state-level results that help out the operations of a municipality, it's valuable to extend a thank-you note, and also to give them credit publicly through the city's regular communication channels — including thanking them at council meetings.

Keep up with the State House activity that will impact the city.

Throughout the legislative session, the Municipal Association produces the *From the Dome to Your Home* legislative report and podcast, found at www.masc.sc (keyword: Dome). It gives weekly updates from the Association's advocacy staff about the bills and other legislative developments that matter the most to municipalities.

When city officials follow along throughout the session, it can help them understand the processes involved, and it can help them offer accurate and consistent messages to their legislators about how to help cities and towns, all at the right moment in time.

HLAD to Address Civility, Funding

The agenda for Hometown Legislative Action Day will address several issues critical to cities and towns, including these:

- **Agreeing to Disagree With Antjuan Seawright and Dave Wilson** – Dave Wilson, chief strategist for McAlister Communications, and Antjuan Seawright, founder and CEO of Blueprint Strategy, LLC, will discuss upcoming elections and how to be civil even through disagreement.
- **Navigating the Federal Earmark Process** – In 2021, Congress reinstituted Congressionally Directed Spending, often referred to as Community Project Funding or earmarks, in federal appropriation bills. Learn about how this process can work for the federal dollars that are available to municipalities.
- **Working With the SCDOT** – SC Transportation Secretary Justin Powell will share his perspective on the SC Department of Transportation with local leaders, and how cities and towns can work together to strengthen the state's infrastructure.

Find the full agenda and details for Hometown Legislative Action Day at www.masc.sc (keyword: HLAD).



Municipal Association
of South Carolina
**IMPACT
FUND**

2025 Recipients Announced

The Municipal Association of South Carolina has awarded the 2025 IMPACT Fund grants — supported by VC3, the Association's strategic partner for technology services — to 10 cities and towns for the 2025 grant cycle.

The fund's name is an acronym for "Innovative Municipal Projects for Advancing Change and Transformation." Grant awards are available in two types:

- Big Idea Grants of \$100,000 each, designed to fund bold, creative and forward-thinking ideas, and
- Problem Solver Grants of \$25,000 each, designed to fund smaller, more routine municipal projects and practical fixes for common problems.

Big Idea Grants

City of Greenville – Nicholtown Resiliency Hub

Greenville will transform the Nicholtown Community Center into South Carolina's first Resiliency Hub, a dual-purpose facility that supports daily community life and emergency preparedness. Prompted by Hurricane Helene's widespread impact, the hub will feature backup power, emergency supplies, reliable Wi-Fi, charging stations and year-round programming to equip residents with disaster readiness skills. Located in a historically underserved neighborhood, the hub will serve as a refuge during crises and a model for replication.

City of North Augusta – Saving Seconds, Saving Lives

North Augusta will institute a citywide emergency response program to reduce

deaths from sudden cardiac arrest by deploying connected AEDs and training resident responders. Using a data-driven model that incorporated 160 cardiac events recorded in the city between 2022 – 2025, the city will place smart defibrillators in high-risk neighborhoods and link them to 911 dispatch. Volunteer Cardiac Arrest Rapid Engagement Teams will be activated to respond before EMS arrives, improving survival odds and community resilience.

Problem Solver Grants

Town of Campobello – Municipal Facilities Master Plan

Currently, the Town of Campobello is operating out of a temporary residential space, following the demolition of its former town hall after years of issues involving mold and deterioration. Campobello will now will develop a master plan for its municipal facilities, including administration, police, fire, court and recreation. The plan will guide long-term investments to meet current and future needs. Ultimately, the new facilities project will improve service delivery, employee productivity and community quality of life, all while preserving the town's character.

City of Chesnee – CADA Park Upgrades

CADA Park in Chesnee is named for the Chesnee Area Development Association. The city will wire this park and install new electrical outlets to support seasonal decorations, food trucks and festival amusements without relying on generators. The upgrades will enhance community events and support small businesses by improving infrastructure for vendor markets and gatherings.

Town of Heath Springs – Town Park, Phase Three

Heath Springs will install additional playground equipment in its Town Park, including a swing set for older children and accessory play structures for all age groups. The park has already undergone significant upgrades, but it lacks play equipment aimed at older children. The project will enhance recreational opportunities, promote healthy lifestyles, and support community gathering in its only public park.

City of Manning – Enhancing Commerce Through Improved Walkability

Deteriorating infrastructure in Manning's historic downtown poses safety risks and hinders economic activity. The city will now hire engineering consultants to assess and design sidewalk improvements in the area. The project will support a competitive application for a Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside A grant of more than \$500,000 from the SC Department of Transportation, enabling large-scale pedestrian upgrades. The project will improve Americans with Disabilities Act accessibility, reduce liability and revitalize its central business district.

Town of Pacolet – Historic Amphitheater Renovation

Pacolet is planning to restore its Depression-era stone amphitheater, a long-vacant cultural landmark. The project will fund structural evaluations and construction-ready plans, enabling the town to pursue larger grants for full renovation. This is the first step in a larger plan to revive the structure that once hosted Tracy Lawrence and Tim

McGraw back into a safe, vibrant space for concerts, community events and tourism.

Town of Pageland – CTE Marketplace

Pageland plans to rehabilitate a downtown building to launch the CTE Marketplace, a student-run retail and training space for Chesterfield County high school students in Career and Technology Education programs. The facility will offer hands-on experience in production, sales and customer service while revitalizing a vacant property and boosting downtown activity. The project includes roof repairs, cosmetic upgrades and electrical improvements. A formal partnership with the school district ensures long-term sustainability and educational alignment.

Town of Ruby – Building 261 Repair

Ruby plans to repair the town-owned building at 261 Market St., which houses its only restaurant, Sno-N-Go Freeze Shack. The town proactively sought out the restaurant and leased space to it to serve its residents, as no other full-service restaurants exist within several miles of the town. The project includes constructing a new exterior wall, sealing the interior wall damaged by moisture and replacing a failing HVAC system.

Town of Salley – Preservation and Repair of Historic Town Hall

The historic Salley Town Hall houses essential municipal services and is showing signs of structural deterioration. The town will use its funding to restore

the property. The project includes replacing damaged wood, installing vinyl siding, repairing soffits, and applying protective sealant to preserve the building's integrity and reduce long-term maintenance. The goal is to safeguard a vital civic hub, maintain its historical character, and ensure continued service delivery in a safe, welcoming environment.

Learn more about the IMPACT Fund at www.masc.sc (keyword: IMPACT Fund).

Association Highlight:

Subscribing to Municipal Association Content

City and town officials have access to numerous emails through the Municipal Association of SC to help them keep up with training opportunities and current events in local government.

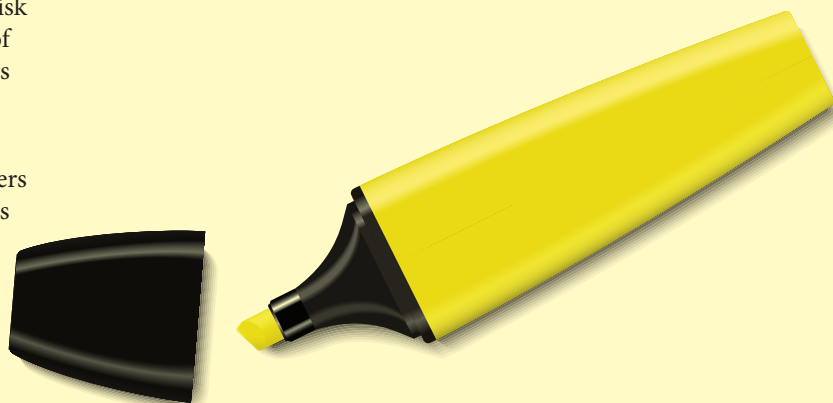
- *The City Connect* blog – The Municipal Association's blog offers short, timely updates on South Carolina municipal issues.
- *From the Dome to Your Home* – This legislative report and podcast, sent every Friday during the state legislative session, recaps the week's activity on bills affecting cities and towns, suggests actions for local officials and previews the upcoming week.
- *Daily News* – This email provides news clippings about city government happenings from around the state.
- *RiskLetter* – A quarterly publication of the Association's Risk Management Services, *RiskLetter* examines a wide range of risk management topics. The email is available to members of the SC Municipal Insurance Trust and SC Municipal Insurance and Risk Financing Fund.
- *The Uplift* – This email, sent every Wednesday to subscribers in place of the *Daily News*, showcases South Carolina cities and towns at their best.
- *Uptown* by email – This monthly email highlights the content also available in the print edition of *Uptown*.

- *Uptown Update* – This weekly newsletter highlights a variety of time-sensitive information about training opportunities, available grants and other alerts.

Elected officials and city staff can choose the subscriptions most useful to them by accessing their profile on the Association's website at www.masc.sc.

Select the "Member Home" link in the upper-right corner. Those without a profile will see directions on the login screen to gain access. Once they are logged into their profile, they can update their title and contact information and provide an email address. The Association never sells or shares email addresses.

In the "My Profile" section at the right, users can select "Update Now," then select "manage subscriptions" at the right to select which emails to receive.



How Main Street Is Driving Lasting Downtown Transformation

How Main Street Is Driving Lasting Downtown Transformation



“Main Street work is never finished, it grows with our community,” Byers Brown said. “The workshop reminded us that transformation isn’t an endpoint; it’s part of our everyday rhythm in Hartsville.”

Food Access Takes Many Forms



Columbia Mayor Daniel Rickenmann speaks at the Hyatt Park press conference announcing the Toms Creek Family Farms Mobile Market project in 2024. Photo: City of Columbia

It can be a challenge to recruit — and sustain — full-service grocery stores in some rural and urban areas. Those barriers to fresh, nutritious food can be challenging for city leaders, who are working to find new or different ways to offer healthy food access for residents. Groceries can get to people in many ways, from dedicated delivery programs to simple farmers markets and donation initiatives.

In the City of Columbia, after a few grocery stores failed, the city council and the mayor began thinking about other ways to serve the so-called food deserts with healthy food choices.

“That’s what led them to get a little more creative with a couple of initiatives the past few years,” said Payton Lang, policy and programs advisor to Columbia’s mayor. “They took two approaches, and I like to think of it as taking the groceries to the people, versus taking the store to the people.”

One of those initiatives is the Grocery Access Pilot program, a public-private partnership with Instacart to provide free grocery delivery through a complimentary Instacart+ membership along with a monthly Instacart Health Fresh Funds stipend to help cover fees.

To qualify, residents must be located in a designated food desert, meaning their home is at least a mile from a full-service grocery store, and they must be on some type of assistance, such as Social Security,

Medicare, Medicaid or the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. Once people apply and qualify, they receive a code for a year of free grocery delivery. The food access program has touched more than 200 households, with an average of five people in each home, Lang said.

At the same time, the city bought and upfitted an 18-wheeler to make a mobile market that is now operated by a local farm. Toms Creek Family Farms Mobile Market visits six locations through the week, bringing fresh produce to neighborhoods with limited access to grocery stores. It also accepts SNAP benefits and participates in the Senior Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program, allowing qualifying seniors to use vouchers at any of the mobile market’s stops.

Lang said city leaders understand the importance of bringing food access to all parts of Columbia — and the city’s role in that.

“No. 1 is that it’s a public-private partnership. Our whole city council has been big on the idea that everyone needs to have skin in the game. For example, we got Tom’s Mobile Market started. We were the initiator, but they are the sustainer,” she said. “I think the lesson learned is just listen to the community,” she said. “Everyone has their own preferences. Be mindful of that. So don’t just do one approach, try multiple things at one time.”

Lang said the city is also continuing to work to provide information to grocery stores to show that communities need and would support stores, using data and patterns that show where groceries are being delivered in the community.

In the Spartanburg County City of Wellford, blessing boxes — standalone structures filled with nonperishable food and other items — are set up to serve people in need. The idea started with a councilmember years ago, and the police department has taken over the responsibility of keeping up with the boxes.

“We saw the need in the community, so we started filling them and keeping them filled on a weekly basis to try to make sure people had access to food all the time,” Wellford Police Chief David Green said.

The police department collects food from donations around the community. The largest source is a local school, which last year collected almost 11,000 canned goods at its food drive.

“It was pretty amazing,” he said. “And then throughout the year, the officers and people in the community will give toward the blessing box program. We also work alongside a local soup kitchen, and if they have more than they need they give it to us to put in the blessing boxes. It’s kind of a collective of the community.”

And the community has been willing to step up to help. A recent plea on Facebook saying the blessing boxes were nearly

empty resulted in people quickly showing up with food and money to refill them, he said.

The city's ongoing involvement in the effort led to its recognition by the Municipal Association of SC for a 2025 Achievement Award in the Public Safety category.

Green said the need is great in his small but growing community, where housing rental costs have skyrocketed in recent years.

"If you have to spend money on rent or food, the choices are hard," he said. "Especially for families, a couple extra hundred dollars a month goes a long way."

The city has four blessing boxes that it fills an average of three times a week. Green noted the importance of putting the boxes in locations where families can easily access them, especially those without a reliable means of transportation. It's an honor system, so people take what they need and leave the rest for the next person.

Green, who has been with the department since 2012 and chief since 2016, said his focus has always been about community interaction.

"One of the rebranding things we did was take on part ownership of this blessing box program so that it showed the community that we do more than just write tickets," he said. "That's not why we're here. We're here to serve the community in all capacities, and one of those is making sure our members are fed."

The Town of Moncks Corner is one of many across the state to operate its own farmers market. The market here not only offers residents the chance to access fresh fruits and vegetables, it also helps strengthen the community, said Susan Gilmore, the town's special events and farmers market manager.

The roots of the market started about 15 years on a gravel lot behind the school district where folks sold their produce. In 2015, the city opened the Market Pavilion at the Moncks Corner Regional Recreation Complex as a dedicated space.



Moncks Corner hosts a weekly farmers market from April through November at the Moncks Corner Regional Recreation Complex. Photo: Town of Moncks Corner.

The pavilion has covered spaces for vendors along with a grassy area where additional sellers set up tents. The farmers market is open from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. every Thursday from April through November.

She said the city has put out rocking chairs and umbrella tables to encourage people to enjoy being outdoors with their neighbors and purchase a meal from the food truck that comes to the market each week.

"Our market is just a happy place to be on Thursdays," Gilmore said. "My goal, when I came on and took over the market, was that I wanted it to be a place for community. I kind of wanted a Cracker Barrel feel, because I want people to come and stay."

The market offers fresh fruits and vegetables along with fresh eggs, honey and meat.

"It's just a great place to stock up on healthy, good things," she said. "For example, we have a local strawberry [grower]. She picks her strawberries fresh that morning, and there's a major difference in taste. In mid-October, we have lettuce and radishes. And just beautiful, fresh fruit."

Gilmore said Moncks Corner has tried to be a resource for other areas looking at opening farmers markets, and she recommended other communities take advantage of the wealth of information available from the South Carolina Farmers Market Association.

"It's not a competition. We're all in it together," she said.



The City of Wellford regularly stocks four blessing boxes throughout its community. Photo: City of Wellford.

What Happens if Council Doesn't Meet in a Given Month?

South Carolina law requires that municipal councils meet at least once in every month, under SC Code Section 5-7-250(A).

Additionally, the SC Freedom of Information Act, under SC Code Section 30-4-80(A), requires each municipality to provide written public notice at the beginning of each calendar year of the dates, times, and places of its regular meetings.

Taken together, these provisions establish both an obligation to adopt a regular meeting calendar and a duty to ensure that the council convenes no less often than once each month.

Some municipalities schedule two regular meetings each month. Many municipalities schedule only one regular meeting per month, which can create a risk of noncompliance if the meeting is canceled for lack of a quorum, severe weather or other unusual circumstances. In such cases, the most prudent approach in light of the monthly meeting requirement is to formally cancel the

regular meeting and to schedule a special meeting within the same calendar month. South Carolina law authorizes either the mayor or a majority of council to call a special meeting.

State law does not set direct consequences or penalties if a council fails to meet in a given month. The principal legal risk is that a resident might seek declaratory or injunctive relief to compel compliance. More practically, the failure to meet may result in delayed consideration of ordinances, contracts or other matters requiring timely action, and may also affect public confidence in the council's adherence to its statutory duties.

The monthly meeting requirement is a clear statutory obligation. Municipal councils should therefore adopt calendars that provide sufficient opportunities to meet each month, and should use the statutory authority to call special meetings when a regular meeting must be canceled.



QUIZ

TRUE OR FALSE:

A quorum of a public body can only happen if all members of council are physically at the meeting.

FALSE A public meeting occurs when a quorum of the council, whether in person or by using electronic equipment, convenes to discuss or act upon public business. This definition comes from the SC Freedom of Information Act, SC Code Section 30-4-20(d)). A quorum, unless otherwise defined by applicable law, means a simple majority of the council. Most public bodies have an odd number of members. For an even number, the requirement of a majority means that bodies cannot establish a quorum with only half of the members in attendance. For an eight-person body, then, at least five members must be present to constitute a quorum.

Vacancies generally do not affect the quorum requirement, meaning that they do not lessen the total number of members needed to meet the quorum. A member who is physically present but who abstains or fails to vote counts in establishing a quorum.

The Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government offers in-person and online courses. On January 21, 2026, the day after Hometown Legislative Action Day, it will offer in-person versions of MEO sessions A and B. Session A covers the city as an employer, conducting public meetings, ethics and public accountability, and vision, strategic planning and goal setting. Session B covers business license tax administration, intergovernmental relations, the liability of municipalities and their elected officials, and municipal courts. Learn more at www.masc.sc (keyword: MEOI).

Three Forms of Government

Divide Responsibilities Differently

South Carolina law allows municipalities to organize under one of three forms of government. It also allows municipalities to change the form of government by referendum.

Although each of the forms outlined in SC Code Section 5-5-10 have unique structures, some things remain the same in all instances. For example, in all three forms, all legislative and policy making authority rests with the full council. All councils must meet at least one time per month — see page 12 for more information — and comply with the notice and agenda requirements in the SC Freedom of Information Act. In all cases, the mayor, or a majority of council, can call special meetings.

Mayor-council form

The council

- has four or more councilmembers, plus the mayor.
- holds all legislative and policy power.
- can hire an administrator to assist the mayor.
- appoints the municipal clerk, attorney and judge.
- adopts the balanced budget, which is prepared for council by the mayor.

The mayor

- votes as a member of council and presides over council meetings.
- serves as chief executive officer, supervising departments, as well as appointing and removing employees in accordance with personnel rules adopted by council.
- prepares and submits the budget and capital program to council, and makes the annual financial report to the public and to council.

Council form

The council

- has either five, seven or nine councilmembers, including the mayor.
- holds all legislative, policy and administrative power.
- can hire an administrator to assist council, and can appoint an officer of the city other than a councilmember to administer departments with the direction of council.
- appoints the municipal clerk, attorney and judge.
- prepares and adopts a balanced budget.

The mayor

- has no other additional authority compared to other councilmembers.
- performs administrative duties only if authorized to do so by council.
- presides at council meetings by tradition, not statutory authority.
- may exercise informal authority as leader of council and staff as spokesperson for the council.

Council-manager form

The council

- has either four, six or eight councilmembers, plus the mayor.
- holds all legislative and policy power.
- employs a manager, attorney and judge.
- adopts a balanced budget, which is prepared for council by the manager.

The mayor

- has no additional power compared to other councilmembers.
- has no administrative responsibilities.
- presides at council meetings by tradition, not statutory authority.
- may exercise informal authority as leader of council as spokesperson for the council.

The manager

- serves as chief executive and head of the administrative branch, appointing and removing employees, including the clerk, and setting salaries.
- prepares and administers the annual budget and makes financial reports.
- Advises council on departments and appointments.

A summary of all the differences as defined by South Carolina law can be found in the *Forms and Powers of Municipal Government* handbook, and the online, on-demand Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government course “Forms of Municipal Government,” both available at www.masc.sc (keyword: forms of government).

Fund Balances Help Bridge the Gap

The fund balance of a city or town government is not unlike the working capital that a business would use for its ongoing operations. It is defined simply as the sum of the municipality's current net assets, subtracted by its current liabilities. Municipal leaders will sometimes debate the fund balance level that their city should target.

While fund balances are sometimes criticized as an unnecessary accumulation of money that should be put to use, but they serve as a valuable protection against financial uncertainties and risks.

What does a fund balance accomplish?

A fund balance can help mitigate the challenges of irregular cash flow from the city's revenue cycles.

As a city provides its services regularly, it faces recurring costs — everything from payroll to utilities, fuel, maintenance and other regular operating expenses. However, many of the city's revenue sources, things like property taxes or business license taxes, will have annual payment cycles that do not match with the timing of the city's expenses. A fund balance helps the city to have cash available at the time it is needed.

Fund balances can also provide an alternative to tax anticipation notes, which are short-term debt securities that cities sometimes use to raise funds for a project, but which come with financing expenses.

Balances also impact the municipality's credit rating. Banks and credit rating agencies have historically relied heavily on the size of a city's fund balance level when making decisions about loans to the city.

Revenue shortages, resulting from economic downturns or from natural disasters, can bring a city into financial danger — sometimes quickly — and fund balances can help the city weather the financial storm. Disaster response will often require a city to spend its own funds before insurance reimbursements or state and federal aid can arrive. Cities responding to disasters can easily expend 20% or 25% of their annual budget before assistance becomes available.

Under SC Code Section 6-5-10, municipalities may invest money under their control, including fund balances, into certain investment vehicles. South Carolina's Local Government Investment Pool provides one option for political subdivisions.

How much fund balance should the city keep?

Deciding on where to set a fund balance requires reviewing the city's financial goals and risk tolerance, as well as local public opinion about funding. Other items to consider are the timing of the beginning of the fiscal year relative to major expenses and revenues, volatility of expenses and revenues, natural disaster vulnerability, the prospect of taking loans, and local economic conditions.

The Government Finance Officers Association publishes "Fund Balance Guidelines for the General Fund," available at www.gfoa.org.

The guidelines recommend, "at a minimum, that general-purpose governments, regardless of size, maintain unrestricted budgetary fund balance in their general fund of no less than two months of regular general fund operating revenues or regular general fund operating expenditures."

Such guidelines would amount to a balance of at least 17% to 20% of the general fund.

Setting a fund balance policy

Municipalities should set a formal fund balance policy in ordinance, which can help address possible criticism for maintaining a balance. Such a policy can specify

- a mandatory minimum level of funding,
- circumstances under which drawing on the fund balance is appropriate, and
- what budget items could be funded in cases where the fund balance exceeds the minimum set by council.

Ultimately, a fund balance can help a city by bridging cash flow when needed, avoiding interest costs from short-term borrowing, preserving a credit rating, and providing a buffer against revenue shortfalls or expenditure overruns.

The Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government addresses key aspects of local government finance in its on-demand course "Basic Budgeting and Municipal Finance." Learn more at www.masc.sc (keyword: MEO Institute).

How Does Releasing Personnel and Compensation Information Work Under FOIA?



A common request that cities and towns receive under the SC Freedom of Information Act is for some of their personnel files or salary information.

The FOIA law states that any person has the right to inspect or to copy any public record of a public body, unless an exception listed in the law applies. It also defines what a public record is very broadly, and so virtually all personnel records are included in the definition. Still, some exceptions exist.

Personnel files

SC Code Section 30-4-40(a), part of the FOIA law, states that a “public body may but is not required to exempt” certain information from disclosure. For personnel files, the exception is personal information where disclosure would be an “unreasonable invasion of personal privacy.”

Court cases have narrowly construed this exception while weighing the public’s interest against personal privacy.

In the 2004 SC Court of Appeals case *Burton v. York County Sheriff’s Department*, a newspaper made a FOIA request for employment records of deputies who had been suspended without pay. Balancing the employees’ privacy interest against the public’s interest in knowing about the alleged misconduct, the court found that the way that the Sheriff’s Department employees handles their duties “to be a large and vital public interest that outweighs their desire to remain out of the public eye.”

In the 2019 case *SC Lottery Commission v. Glassmeyer*, however, the Court of Appeals reached a different result. A private citizen made a FOIA request for personal information about winners of lottery prizes of more than \$1 million, including the winners’ names, addresses, phone numbers and prize amount. The court determined that, given the public’s limited interest in this information, the privacy interests prevailed. In 2021, the SC Supreme Court reversed this decision and remanded for further proceedings, and so the case was not concluded.

When a municipality receives a request for personnel files, it should balance privacy interests against the public’s interest in the files. In some instances, such as senior management or law enforcement officials, the public interest will likely prevail. In other cases, a public body may determine that information is sufficiently personal and private that, in the absence of a compelling public interest, it need not be produced.

There are other considerations as well:

- Health and medical information is protected from disclosure under federal and state law and should be separated from the overall personnel file and protected. Most other items in a personnel file are presumptively subject to disclosure under FOIA.
- SC Code Section 30-4-40(b) provides that even if part of the personnel file is exempt, the municipality should redact or omit the exempt information and provide the rest.

Salary information

SC Code Section 30-4-40(a)(6) requires a public body to provide “the exact compensation of each person or employee” earning \$50,000 or more. This requirement also applies to all part-time employees, all persons paid for special appearances or performances, and all employees at the level of agency or department head. This provision has been interpreted to require disclosure of the exact compensation of elected officials.

For employees earning between \$30,000 and \$50,000, the municipality must disclose compensation levels within a range of \$4,000. For employees earning less than \$30,000, the disclosure requirements depend on whether the employee is classified or unclassified under a system that establishes pay grades by job category.

- **Classified employees:** the public body must disclose the salary schedule showing the compensation range for that classification, including longevity steps.
- **Unclassified employees:** the public body must disclose the compensation levels within a range of \$4,000.

Although FOIA is not specific on the items that are included in “compensation,” the SC Attorney General’s Office has indicated that compensation includes all benefits, bonuses and allowances.



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Calendar

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

DECEMBER

3 "You've Been Elected, Now What?" Newly Elected Officials Orientation. Virtual. Topics include the services of the Municipal Association of SC, how cities work, effective meetings, finance and administration compliance, the SC Freedom of Information Act and the SC Ethics Act.

4 SC Municipal Attorneys Association Annual Meeting. Hilton Garden Inn Columbia Airport, West Columbia. Topics include a U.S. Supreme Court local government update, legal restraints on municipal councils, parliamentary procedure, code enforcement officers and uniform ordinance summons.

2026 JANUARY

20 Hometown Legislative Action Day. Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center. Topics include legislative updates, civility in local government, navigating the federal earmark process, and working with the SC Department of Transportation. See page 6.

21 Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government. Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center.

FEBRUARY

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

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

17 – 18 Municipal Court Administration Association 101 Session C. Municipal Association of SC, Columbia.

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

24 Risk Management Services: Auto Loss Prevention Training. Municipal Association of SC, Columbia.

MARCH

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

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

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

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

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

APRIL

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

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