

UPTOWN

a publication of the Municipal Association of South Carolina

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Cover Photo: The Gaffney Visitors
Center and Art Gallery operates out of
a historic, restored post office in the
city's downtown. Photo: City of Gaffney.

2026 Hometown Legislative Action Day, MEO Institute Coming in January

The Municipal Association's Hometown Legislative Action Day will take place January 20, 2026, and at a new location than past events—the Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center.

HLAD serves as a time for municipal officials from around the state to gather in Columbia for updates on current legislative issues, to visit their local legislators at the State House and to connect with legislators at the Association's legislative reception.

The Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government and Advanced Institute take place the next day, January 21, which makes attending both sessions convenient for participants.

Here are the dates attendees will need to know to register by the deadline:

Registration brochure available on Municipal Association website

Monday, November 17

Hotel reservations deadline

Saturday, December 20

For the Hilton Columbia Center, make hotel reservations online or by calling 1.803.744.7800 and ask for the Municipal Association of SC HLAD rate of \$204 plus taxes and fees. Use the group code "C-94C." For the Hampton Inn Downtown Historic District, make hotel reservations online or by calling 1.803.231.2000 and ask for the Municipal Association of SC HLAD rate of \$184 plus taxes fees. Use group code "C-91R."

Registration deadline for HLAD and MEO Institute

Thursday, January 8

Hometown Legislative Action Day

Tuesday, January 20 | Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center

Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government, Advanced Institute and Advanced Continuing Education

Wednesday, January 21 | Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center

For more information, visit www.masc.sc (keyword: HLAD).



Hometown Legislative Action Day

Tuesday, January 20, 2026
Columbia Metropolitan
Convention Center

Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government

Wednesday, January 21, 2026
Columbia Metropolitan
Convention Center



NEWS BRIEFS

The Municipal Technology Association of SC elected its 2025 – 26 board of directors. These are President **Leo Larkin**, IT manager, Town of Summerville; First Vice President **Travis Simpson**, network administrator, Laurens CPW; and Second Vice President **Tommy Sunday**, director of technology and innovation, Town of Hilton Head Island. The members at large are **Janet Broome**, network administrator, City of Tega Cay; **Robert Popenhagen**, IT director, City of Aiken; and **Noah Vega**, chief information officer, City of Clinton. The past president is **Jim Ridgill**, IT manager, City of Greer.

Leadership South Carolina announced its Class of 2026, including numerous members with municipal connections. These are **Charlie Barrineau**, senior field services manager, Municipal Association of SC; **Chris Forster**, assistant town manager, Town of Bluffton; **Kristine Githara**, finance director, City of Columbia; **Joshua Holzheimer**, deputy fire chief, City of Greer; **Chaquez McCall**, councilmember, City of Florence; **Brandon Smith**, mayor, City of Greenwood; **Tamika Williams-Obeng**, councilmember, City of Georgetown; and **Nathan Woods**, assistant city administrator, City of Clemson.

Several municipal clerks have recently earned certifications from the International Institute of Municipal Clerks. Both **Sheri Medina**, Town of Surfside Beach; and **Lakesha Shannon**, City of Marion; have earned the Certified Municipal Clerk designation. **Erika Hammond** of the City of Columbia, who is the past president of the SC Municipal Officers, Clerks and Treasurers Association, earned the Master Municipal Clerk designation.

08:15



Annexation X

l.masc.sc/AnnexInfoHub



Annexation Information Hub Now Available on Municipal Association Website

Annexation is often among the most talked-about issues that a municipality can face. It can be a complex issue as well, affecting a city government's finances, infrastructure development and emergency services planning, among other impacts.

To help explain how annexation works under state law, the Municipal Association of SC has launched a new "Annexation in South Carolina" information hub on its website, found at l.masc.sc/AnnexInfoHub. It offers materials such as a one-page summary of annexation processes in South Carolina that can help municipal officials and legislators understand annexation.

It includes a podcast and video series in which the Association's advocacy team explain how annexation works in South Carolina, as well as common misconceptions about the process. These also delve into the technical aspects of the three annexation methods in South Carolina — the 100% freeholder petition annexation method, the 75% petition annexation method, and the 25% petition and election annexation method. The overwhelming majority of annexations in South Carolina use the 100% method, which involves individual property owners requesting annexation of their property.

For South Carolina cities and towns who have municipality-specific annexation webpages they would like included in the Association's resources, or for those who have a story to share about why annexation is important to their community's development, contact Erica Wright at ewright@masc.sc.





Municipal Clerks and Treasurers Institute Recognizes Graduates

The SC Municipal Clerks and Treasurers Institute has nine new graduates after its most recent session — MCTI Year 1, Session A — in September.

The newest graduates are Amy Craig, municipal clerk, City of York; Cecilia Newman, records management administrator, City of Sumter; Donna Steed, town clerk/treasurer, Town of Awendaw; Emily Lollis, finance manager, City of Easley; Jennifer Bradley, HR director/city clerk, City of Easley; Kelly Tarlton, town clerk, Town of Pageland; Levanie Summerville, assistant city clerk, City of Columbia; Regina Ashba, town clerk, Town of Blackville; and Sharon Durst, municipal clerk, Town of Blythewood.

The Municipal Clerks and Treasurers Institute is designed to provide municipal clerks and treasurers with the skills critical to their respective professions. MCTI is approved for certification credit by the International Institute for Municipal Clerks and

the Association of Public Treasurers of the United States and Canada. The Institute is offered in a series of six half-week sessions. Two sessions are offered every year.

Year 1, Session A, covers forms of municipal government, the role of a municipal clerk, meeting administration; financial management, business license administration, procurement and records management. Presenters for this September's session included City of Columbia Clerk Erika Hammond discussing how clerks can manage the needs of a city council and the municipality's staff. It also featured SC Department of Archives and History Local Government Records Analyst Chris Condon explaining the SC Public Records Act and the resources that SCDAH has to help local officials with records maintenance and compliance.

Learn more about the program at www.masc.sc (keyword: MCTI).

Complete the Compensation Survey in January

Every year, the Municipal Association of SC compiles information from cities and towns to create a report of wages paid to municipal employees and elected officials across the state. The data available in this compensation survey is at its most value when as many municipalities as possible contribute to it, and the next survey collection period is coming up in January.

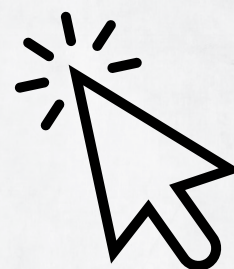
Because municipal governments must compete for job candidates with the private sector as well as state- and county-level agencies, they often aim to provide competitive pay as a way to attract and retain employees. Current data on salary

ranges can help them make sure that they are setting their pay at levels that will attract valuable candidates.

The Association makes the data from its compensation survey available through its website, www.masc.sc. Cities and towns can use this online tool to make sure that their compensation scales are on par with other municipalities with comparable populations and budgets. The report is helpful when looking at one-off comparisons or between formal salary studies, but it does not provide all the data of a full class and compensation study.

Participating in the survey is optional, but the Association encourages all municipalities to complete it every year to maximize its usefulness. The 2026 survey will be available for data entry from January 2 to February 27.

For more information, visit www.masc.sc (keyword: compensation survey), and for questions, contact Lea Ann Mitchell at lmitchell@masc.sc or 803.933.1254.



Virtual Training for Newly Elected Officials Offered in December

New mayors and councilmembers will have a chance to learn about some of the critical aspects of their new roles through the Municipal Association of SC training session, “You’ve Been Elected, Now What?” taking place virtually on the morning of Wednesday, December 3.

This webinar has no registration or cost.

The individual sessions are led by the Association’s Field Services managers, who travel to assigned regions in the state to offer training as well as hands-on technical assistance to help

local officials with their specific challenges. The agenda will delve into the specific programs and resources of the Municipal Association, as well as how city councils can conduct meetings effectively. It also addresses two South Carolina laws that greatly impact municipal government operations — the SC Freedom of Information Act and the SC Ethics Act.

Learn more and find the meeting link at www.masc.sc (keyword: You’ve Been Elected, Now What?).

Municipal Association Needs Updated City Contact Information

Each year, the Municipal Association of SC asks every city and town to review, verify and update the information that appears in the municipal directory found on the Association’s website.

The designated official from each municipality may update their information using the Municipal Information Dashboard found at www.masc.sc. The deadline for doing so is Tuesday, November 18.

Maintaining current information, both during this annual drive and at other times of year, helps the Association keep all of the state’s municipalities informed of many key current events:

- Legislative activity at the State House that can affect local government operations
- Professional development opportunities at meetings and conferences, such as the Municipal Association of SC Annual Meeting, Hometown Legislative Action Day at the beginning of the legislative session, or the Association’s Small Cities Summit
- Training opportunities from the Association’s affiliate organizations and Risk Management Services

The Municipal Online Directory, found at www.masc.sc/publications/municipal-online-directory, provides details and contact information for all 271 of South Carolina’s municipalities. It lists the form of government used in each, as well as the regular schedule of city or town council meetings, as well as the names of all elected officials and key staff positions.

The online directory allows users to search for municipalities by county, by population or by which state representatives and state senators serve it.

The Association allows only one person from each municipality to handle the annual update — either the municipal clerk or the clerk’s designee — to help maintain the accuracy of the information. For assistance, or to designate a new person responsible for the update, contact Meredith Houck, communications manager, at mhouck@masc.sc or 803.933.1215.

The screenshot shows the 'Municipal Information Dashboard: Town of Springdale' interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links: Member Home, Log Out, About, Advocacy & Legislation, Education & Events, Risk Management Services, Programs, and Resources. The main heading is 'Municipal Information Dashboard: Town of Springdale' with a 'change' link. Below this, a paragraph states: 'Throughout the year, update information about your city, elected officials and key personnel. At certain times during the year such as after an election, the application will require you to review and verify all of the information for your city.' It then says 'The Municipal Association uses the information you provide to' followed by a bulleted list: 'communicate with your municipal officials on issues important to cities and towns', 'display real-time information about your city on this website, and', and 'print information about your city in the South Carolina Municipal Officials and Legislative Directory.' A note at the bottom says 'Need help? Call 803.933.1297 during normal business hours.' At the bottom of the dashboard, there are five tiles: 'Municipal Contact Information', 'Municipal Demographics', 'Elected Officials', 'Key Municipal Personnel', and 'Other Personnel'. Each tile has a 'certified on 11/06/2024 by Leann Kelly' status.

Tuesday, November 18

Deadline for clerks or designees to update their information on the Municipal Association Dashboard

Field Services' Top 10 Tips From the Road

The Municipal Association of SC Field Services team includes Senior Field Services Manager Charlie Barrineau, Field Services Manager Desirée Fragoso, and the recently joined manager covering the Upstate region, Rob Wolfe.

The team presented on a variety of governance topics at the 2025 Small Cities Summit in Columbia, and developed a countdown-style list of things that municipal councilmembers everywhere should consider. These are some of the top issues that Field Services have seen arise throughout their travels among South Carolina cities and towns, and can help councilmembers work together effectively.

Many of these are connected to the Association's ongoing civility initiative aimed at improving communication and collaboration among elected officials. Learn more about the effort at www.masc.sc (keyword: Civility Initiative).

10. Share the same info with everyone

Make sure council and staff all get the same documents and updates. No secrets.

9. Don't surprise anyone at a meeting

If it's important, bring it up ahead of time. Meetings aren't the place for ambushes.

8. Stay in touch with staff contacts

Keep the lines of communication open with your clerk, administrator or manager. It helps everyone stay on the same page.

7. Avoid engaging in debates on social media

It rarely ends well. Stay professional and keep discussions in the right setting.

6. Understand the city's finances

Before making any financial decisions, make sure you have a clear picture of the budget and financial health.

5. Build trust with fellow councilmembers

Take time to get to know each other outside of meetings. Grab coffee, talk, connect.

4. Actually, read the agenda packet

Seriously — don't just skim it. Be prepared so the meeting runs smoothly.

3. Obtain your agenda packet early

Don't wait until the last minute. Review the materials ahead of time and ask questions before the meeting.

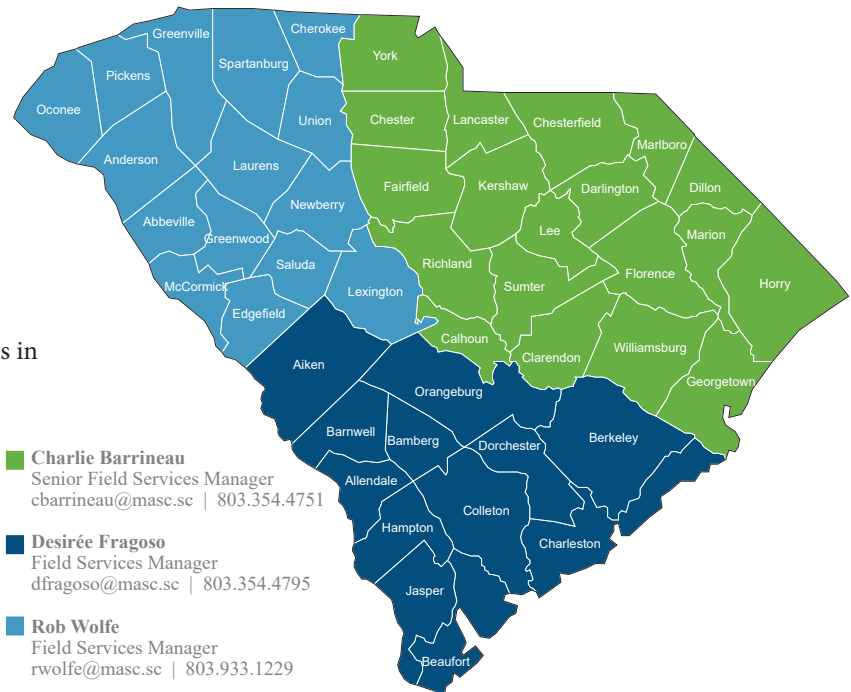
2. Remember: You're part of a team


Respect different viewpoints. Listen more than you speak. Lead with collaboration.

1. Celebrate the wins

Share good news and accomplishments with your community. People appreciate knowing progress is being made.

The Field Services team assists with the cities and towns found within their territories. The territories are arranged by counties, and each covers approximately one-third of the state.





When Is a Forensic Audit the Right Choice?

When difficult questions arise about how a municipality is spending public dollars, calls for a forensic audit are sure to follow. The term carries weight — conjuring images of investigators combing through crumpled receipts and shredded invoices to uncover any possible fraud and its source.

Although the idea of a forensic audit can seem reassuringly in-depth and rigorous, it is generally not the most practical or cost-effective solution for local governments that have misgivings about financial matters. It's important to consider the characteristics of both traditional audits and forensic audits.

What an audit does — and does not — do

A routine financial audit generally aims to provide reasonable assurance that the financial statements of the entity are free from material misstatement. Usually, an audit will assess whether the financial statements conform with generally accepted accounting principles. It may also evaluate compliance with applicable laws and regulations, though it will typically not provide an opinion on overall compliance.

To make their determination, auditors may test records such as accounts payable and receivable, invoices, general ledgers, contracts and even meeting minutes to ensure balances and processes are consistent and that decision-making is properly documented.

In law and accounting, not all misstatements are considered “material.” A misstatement is deemed material

only if it is significant enough to influence the evaluation of a reasonable person. In practice, this means that a municipality's cash balances could be off by several thousands of dollars before rising to a level of materiality. Although a discrepancy of thousands of dollars could certainly raise eyebrows, it does not necessarily indicate fraud or malfeasance.

Even so, an audit report that finds no material misstatements doesn't guarantee the absence of fraud. Fraud might exist at a level too minor to be considered material, align with the entity's practices to avoid detection, or occur outside the audit's scope.

Forensic audits: Precision at a price

A forensic audit is a specialized and far more detailed process. Unlike a standard audit, it is designed to detect and document fraud or misconduct.

Forensic auditors dive deeply into transactions, tracing money across accounts, testing for irregularities and sometimes reconstructing records. A forensic audit examines all aspects of a municipality's finances across multiple disciplines and funds. It might entail an examination of everything from police fines to water bill late fees and credit card usage.

The rigor of a forensic audit makes it a powerful tool, but also a costly one. Fees can quickly rise into the six-figure range, and the process can stretch over many months or years. For many municipalities, the investment of time and taxpayer dollars may be disproportionate to

the problem at hand and beyond what is necessary for a municipality with financial irregularities. Because it serves a different purpose than a routine financial audit, a forensic audit does not count toward South Carolina's requirement of annual audits for municipalities.

For these reasons, a forensic audit is usually appropriate only when there is strong reason to suspect fraud or in connection with a civil or criminal case against a public official.

An agreeable alternative

A forensic audit is not the only option when irregularities are identified or concerns are raised. An agreed-upon procedures engagement may be a more appropriate undertaking for municipalities.

With this engagement, a narrow set of transactions are identified for a detailed review and testing. If a municipality is able to identify a specific area of concern, such as court fines or credit card transactions, an auditor can be engaged to look at the specified area rather than all of municipality's financial records. If a forensic audit can be considered as both a mile wide and a mile deep, an agreed-upon procedures engagement can be thought of as being an inch wide and a mile deep.

For local leaders, this middle ground can balance the demand for accountability with the need to safeguard limited resources.



Main Street Market Analysis A Powerful Tool for Downtown Transformation

by Hannah Davis, Development Manager, City of Florence

Hannah Davis, development manager with the City of Florence, leads a Transformation Strategies tabletop session for Main Street directors in Dillon.

Our historic Main Streets aren't simply gathering places for special events — they are vital centers of commerce, culture and quality of life for our communities. But successful downtown revitalization doesn't happen by chance. It requires vision, strategy and data, specifically understanding local market conditions. One of the most powerful tools small towns and cities can use to help guide transformation efforts is a market analysis. This research-based tool becomes a road map for economic vitality efforts, helping local leaders understand existing customers, the types of businesses a district could support, and how to position downtown as a thriving business ecosystem.

A market analysis is a comprehensive study that examines a community's existing economic, demographic, psychographic and retail conditions. In the context of Main Street revitalization, this tool helps identify the types of businesses that are in demand, how much consumers are spending, and where there might be opportunities for growth. Rather than relying solely on assumptions or qualitative data from community surveys, a market analysis provides hard data and actionable insights to inform decisions about business recruitment, property development and investment.

For Main Street programs, local governments and economic developers, a market analysis is more than just purchased research to sit on a shelf. It's a decision-making tool that can help communities identify strategies that target the right-fit businesses to fill retail or service gaps and vacant buildings, support entrepreneurs with real data on customer segments, strengthen grant applications with evidence of need, align district stakeholders around a shared understanding of local conditions, and make smart investments in infrastructure and incentives.

A well-executed market analysis typically includes a few key components:

- **Demographic and psychographic data** – Who lives, works and shops in the defined area already? What are their lifestyles and spending habits?
- **Trade area definition** – Where do customers come from and who makes up the consumer base?
- **Consumer spending patterns** – Where does money spent go? Are residents spending outside of the community to meet their needs? Does the community have dispensable income?
- **Community input** – Feedback from the community through surveys is helpful for validating hard data and identifying any niche opportunities for small businesses.
- **Real estate and existing business assessment** – Beyond a building inventory, what spaces are currently available and what is their suitability for new uses? What businesses already exist and what products or services do they offer?
- **Retail gap analysis** – What types of businesses are in demand, but not currently available? What is the supportable square footage for missing business types?

Together, these components provide a comprehensive scope of a downtown's current market and its future potential.

Recently, the Downtown Florence Main Street Program engaged a firm to study hard-to-fill spaces in our Downtown Redevelopment District and deliver a market analysis and sample *pro formas* to share with developer teams and real estate partners. This process included third-party data analysis, a community tour, property tours and a community visioning

session leading to the creation of a Real Estate Development Strategy, which prioritizes properties for redevelopment and identifies targets of opportunity for future uses. Since starting the process, one of the studied properties has been slated for redevelopment.

In Dillon, Main Street South Carolina recently held a quarterly training focused on identifying Transformation Strategies, utilizing market data and community surveys as inputs for economic strategy development. Attendees at the training explored market data shared about Dillon, examined community survey results deployed prior to the meeting, and participated in community engagement exercises with Dillon's downtown stakeholders and users. They explored the district's assets, and practiced utilizing market research to develop sample strategies to move Downtown Dillon's revitalization efforts forward. This training, a first-time offering from Main Street SC, provided more than 40 attendees with the skills needed to deploy these tools in their own communities.

Market analysis is more than a report. It's a strategic tool that can help unlock the full potential of Main Street efforts. Whether you're working in a small rural town like Dillon, or a growing regional hub like Florence, understanding local market conditions is a meaningful step in comprehensive downtown revitalization. Communities that invest in this process are better equipped to attract businesses, support local entrepreneurs, and create vibrant places for all.

Main Street South Carolina is a technical assistance program for communities seeking to revitalize their historic downtown commercial districts. Main Street SC offers several community membership levels ranging in cost and requirements. Downtown Florence is an Accredited-level Main Street Community, meeting the accreditation standards of the National Main Street Center. Learn more at www.masc.sc (keyword: Main Street).

Preparation, Planning Make Cyber Breach Recovery Easier

A cybersecurity breach is a tough scenario for any city manager.

Imagine receiving a call early in the morning to learn that in one of the city's departments, a large number of computer files — items necessary for the day-to-day operations of that department, if not the overall city — are now encrypted by an unknown party and inaccessible.

IT staff and leadership are now working to determine the extent of the cybersecurity breach. Potentially, hackers are already anonymously communicating with the city, seeking a ransom payment in exchange for releasing the systems and files.

Cybersecurity processes can help prevent these scenarios — antivirus software, two-factor authentication, strong and frequently changed passwords, and regularly scheduled, air-gapped system backups. Staff training can help as well. Even so, cybersecurity breaches are common enough that a threat is likely to get past the defenses eventually.

This is the moment when the municipality's processes and leadership will be put to the test to determine the scope of the problem, what's going to be done next and how anyone whose data was breached may be notified. Leadership must also figure out how the city will restore its systems — a process which can easily take months — and how to maintain operations in the meantime.

Desirée Fragoso, now a Field Services manager with the Municipal Association of SC, as well as Allison Gantte, deputy city manager for the City of Clemson, have both experienced the process of navigating a cyberattack. They shared their experiences during the Association's first-ever Risk Management Services Conference in August.

In her Field Services work, Fragoso said she has emphasized to cities that no matter their size and computer sophistication, they need to dedicate time and resources to cyberattack preparations.

"There are very simple solutions that folks really should think about, because you never think it's going to happen to you. It happens so frequently nowadays. They're [cyber criminals] getting very sophisticated, and it's pretty scary, she said.

Given that her expertise isn't in IT, she spoke of the importance of working with a cybersecurity firm to manage a breach.

"I found that so incredibly helpful, finding somebody that can speak that language in a way that you can understand and explain it, made us feel very secure, you know, 'here's what we're going to do,'" she said.

Gantte emphasized that leaders need to communicate to their staff why security measures like password requirements, internet restrictions and ongoing training are in place, and the negative outcomes they help prevent.

With computer systems disrupted, "our water and sewer systems can go down, and people can't flush their toilets. Our officers won't be able to get into their systems," she said. "Really understanding the impact that it can make will hopefully make them think twice before they click a [possibly malicious] link."

The City of Clemson requires "every employee to bring in their laptop at least once a week, to connect to our network to obtain the updates and security," she said. "And we don't allow any outside devices to connect to our internal network. If you come present before council, you have to bring your own hotspot. We are not allowed to connect any of our devices to any [unknown] networks."

The SC Law Enforcement Division's SC Critical Infrastructure Cyberreality initiative has built resources for cyber threat intelligence and cybersecurity practices, found at www.sccic.sc.gov. Its offerings include IT security assessments, cyber threat intelligence, and security training and awareness exercises for governmental services. It also provides these entities a means of reporting cyber incidents to SLED and the SC CIC Task Force.

The SC Municipal Insurance and Risk Financing Fund offers the eRiskHub as a member resource for cybersecurity training and ransomware resources. Members can access it at www.masc.sc (keyword: eRiskHub).

Control Measures Reduce Workplace Lung Dangers



Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer deaths among adults in the United States, with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reporting that about 209,000 people in the nation receiving a lung cancer diagnosis, and about 132,000 dying from the disease. The American Lung Association observes November as Lung Cancer Awareness Month to highlight both the risk factors of the disease and the measures that can be taken to prevent it.

There are a variety of occupational exposures in municipal government jobs that can contribute to lung cancer and other respiratory diseases, although control measures, training and monitoring can help reduce their dangers.

Silica dust exposure

Construction-type activities can expose workers to silica dust — things like sawing, grinding, sanding or drilling concrete, brick or stone. When the crystalline silica particles created by these activities are small enough, workers can breathe them in. This can lead to numerous serious health risks — lung cancer, silicosis, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and kidney disease.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration has established standards for protecting construction and general industry workers from respirable silica. These are aimed at reducing exposures through control plans, not only through

personal protective equipment like respirators, but also controlling and limiting access to high-exposure areas, ongoing medical exams, and even methods of reducing dust at its source. Applying water to blades, or using water-integrated tools, can reduce the amount of dust created in the first place, and vacuums can help remove it as well.

Asbestos exposure

The properties of asbestos that make it heat- and corrosion-resistant once made asbestos a widely used construction material for insulation. However, its dangers of causing lung cancer and other diseases means that it has been heavily regulated since the 1970s, and it now often arises in the context of older buildings that have not undergone asbestos remediation. As with silica dust, OSHA has established standards for construction and industry workers that include monitoring exposure risk, hazard awareness training, PPE and potential medical monitoring.

Diesel exhaust exposures

Used across a wide variety of heavy equipment operations, diesel engines produce diesel particulate matter that can lead to respiratory disease and lung cancer. Diesel engines are also long-lived, and so many older and dirtier engines remain in operation. The Environmental Protection Agency offers resources for improved operational strategies,

maintenance, retrofit devices and replacement at www.epa.gov/dera.

Firefighters and lung cancer

Fires of all types create toxic gases, particulates and liquids, including carcinogens. Because of the health risks they can face, fire departments have in recent years placed a growing focus on decontamination procedures for their personal protective gear, including an initial cleaning while still at the scene, changing gear before returning to the station, showering soon after a call, and decontamination facilities for equipment at the station. Many departments have also adopted a “clean-cab” concept for their fire engines, aiming to prevent contamination by keeping contaminated equipment out of the cab, using non-absorbent materials in the cab’s construction, as well as filtered ventilation systems.

In recent years, South Carolina has also developed a Firefighter Cancer Healthcare Benefit Plan covering firefighters for a variety of types of cancer. Its benefits include a one-time benefit of \$20,000, annual out-of-pocket expenses reimbursements of up to \$12,000, and a death benefit. Learn more about the program at www.scfirefighterscancer.com.

Find the OSHA standards for respirable crystalline silica and asbestos, as well as resources for evaluating and controlling exposure, at www.osha.gov.

Cultivating Creativity

City Departments and Boards Help Organize Arts Programming



The annual Hilton Head Island Lantern Parade travels from Lowcountry Celebration Park along the beach at dusk in November. Photo: Town of Hilton Head Island.

Many city leaders agree on the important role that cultural offerings can play in improving the quality of life of their residents, and the perception that visitors have of their city. The municipalities around the state that decide to cultivate arts and culture programming take a variety of approaches — from standalone city departments to appointed boards.

Al Joseph, director of the Main Street Georgetown program, previously served two terms on Georgetown City Council, where he saw the need to create an umbrella organization for arts programs. While on council, he worked with the former city manager to establish the Georgetown Arts and Cultural Commission.

This nine-member appointed board, established by the city council, includes two commission members — the director of the Main Street program and the board chair of the Winyah Auditorium — who are placed on the board by ordinance, while the others are chosen by the same application process as other city boards and commissions.

“We’re the third oldest city in South Carolina, so history is our No. 1. But we also had a thriving arts community. We had events that were going on in our city that were either tied to or had an artistic or cultural component, and we realized that was something we needed to build on,” Joseph said.

And it was something the community not only needed, but wanted. From the start, there were multiple people who wanted to become members of the commission, including artists and teachers.

The board’s biggest accomplishment so far, which took more than a year, was a successful application to the South Carolina Arts Commission to be designated as an official South Carolina Cultural District. These districts are geographic areas of municipalities that have a concentration of artistic assets, cultural facilities and creative businesses. Georgetown was designated in February 2024, the ninth city in the state to do so.

“Being a cultural arts district takes us up to another level,” Joseph said. “That designation opens us up for grant opportunities, and the networking and collaboration we have with other cultural arts

districts just elevates us to a point where we’re more noticeable and viable.”

The designation helps residents and visitors see and experience the full breadth of the city’s cultural assets. But a successful cultural organization takes a lot of time, work and commitment.

“It’s not something [where] you can just stick X number of people onto a commission, whether it’s run through a nonprofit or run through a municipality, like we are as a city board,” he said. “It’s going to take dedicated people. We are a working board. It’s not getting together and meeting once a month and talking. If that’s what you’re going to do, it’s not worth your time to go through this.”

For example, Georgetown’s commission spearheaded a project that uses original, local art to wrap the electrical transformers throughout the historic business district. The first one was outside the Gullah Museum, using artwork from the museum’s founder. Another shows shrimp boats, a nod to the industry that was once thriving in the city.

On Hilton Head Island, the town’s Office of Cultural Affairs is less than a decade old, spurred into creation by a group of arts and cultural organizations that encouraged the council to provide more formal support of the arts community, said Natalie Harvey, the town’s director of cultural affairs.



The Transformer Transformation project of the Georgetown Arts and Cultural Commission wrapped electrical transformers with local artwork. Photo: City of Georgetown.

“There are so many activities and things happening around Hilton Head in the arts and cultural world, there was a lot of overlapping and some perceived competition on dates,” Harvey said, adding that the office created an arts and cultural calendar to help keep track of offerings, which include everything from visual and performing arts to festivals and museum shows.

“We have a lot of small not-for-profits that are all volunteer, and then we have the larger professionally staffed ones,” Harvey said. “I think where this office has been really important in the community is helping to connect a lot of those organizations and make sure that we’re highlighting Hilton Head Island’s offerings to our visitors and to our residents.”

“So having one person whose job it is to say, ‘Oh, I heard this group is doing this. Have you talked to them?’ Just looking for those connections has been really helpful in building community amongst our organizations,” she said.

The Office of Cultural Affairs also acts as an umbrella over the Crescendo Celebration in the fall, with a lineup of more than 100 arts and cultural programs. There is also the hugely popular Hilton Head Island Lantern Parade, in November which brings hundreds to the beach and Lowcountry Celebration Park.

Harvey stressed the importance of having a broad definition of arts and culture — it’s not just a museum exhibit or symphony performance; it can be an outdoor festival or a walk along the poetry trail or a program highlighting the town’s history and environment.

Hilton Head Island is also starting the application process to be designated as a South Carolina Cultural District, with a committee formed to assemble the necessary research.

In Greer, the city’s Cultural Arts Division offers programming, festivals, art shows, classes and productions, while the separate, nonprofit Greer Cultural Arts Council is a city partner that provides programs such as the Greer Children’s Theater.

“The council and our mayor have always been really good about listening to the residents and our residents were asking for more cultural arts programs,” said Robin Byouk, the cultural arts supervisor for the City of Greer.

The city acquired the Edward R. Driggers Center for the Arts, a 1955 building that underwent a \$2.5 million renovation before opening in 2019.

“We have a very large art gallery here, we have seven artist-in-residence spaces, we have a ceramics classroom and an arts classroom. And then on the performing arts side, we have a lobby, auditorium and stage and a green room,” she said.



Classrooms at the Edward R. Driggers Center for the Arts includes space for pottery instruction. Photo: City of Greer.

Greer offers a wide variety of programming, including art exhibits, the Holiday Arts Fair, Day of the Dead Festival, a gingerbread house jamboree, an international festival and plenty of music.

Byouk said it’s important for city cultural arts leaders to talk with other municipalities and organizations to learn more about their structures.

“We took components from both the private sector and the public sector to make this work,” she said. “We visited other municipalities to see their cultural arts centers and museums. We went to private arts organizations and talked with them. And it’s an ongoing process. Every year we go to different facilities, meet with people. We’re always learning to try to better what we’ve got going on.”

Along with learning what other groups are doing, the Cultural Arts Division also talks to constituents and surveys what might be missing in the area.

“We looked around at what was in the Greenville area,” Byouk said. “There was a lot of art, there was a lot of theater, a lot of art classes, but not so much in the clay area. We invested in the equipment for our successful clay ceramics program, and we now have classes every day but Friday and Sunday.”

She added that it is important to have a relationship with the nonprofit Greer Cultural Arts Council that works with the city.

“The arts council has a wide range of volunteers that help the city, like at the Day of the Dead Festival, the volunteers will come in and help,” she said. “They do a lot behind the scenes at the International Festival. And then the city turns around and supports the arts council by providing space when needed. So it’s a very nice working relationship between the two agencies.”

All Special Events Need a Public Safety Plan

The City of Columbia is among those to now use moveable road barriers for street events.

All events that draw crowds come with numerous out-of-the-ordinary risk exposures for the municipalities that plan them. These are some of the key safety points to consider for city-produced festivals and celebrations.

Level of city involvement

It's important to understand if the city is managing the event. If the city has primary control over staff or event services contractors, it must take necessary safety and planning measures. If the city is merely a sponsor, that arrangement should be clearly communicated in the contract.

Event venue security

All events need a security plan that is specific to the type of event, and the location where it is taking place. Law enforcement or other security staff need training on the approved version of this plan.

An increasingly common concern for outdoor events is using movable barriers that can provide a shield against vehicular threats — ramming or out-of-control vehicles. While specially designed barriers can be used for this, large, parked city vehicles can also serve as barriers.

Firearms are an important consideration as well. The SC Attorney General's office interpretation of the Open Carry with Training Act found that local governments may restrict open carrying of firearms on public property — other than in a building — only during permitted events. They may not restrict concealed carrying during such events.

Medical services

The event's time of year is an important factor. For example, summertime event attendees may be in danger of heat-related illness and could need cooling stations.

Consider where medical service facilities or first aid stations, may be needed and where emergency access and exit points can be established. Coordination with the fire department can cover minor first aid issues, while arrangements with local EMS might be used for more advanced event needs.

Event staff training

Many large-scale events use volunteer staffing to make them run smoothly. Municipalities should properly screen, train and supervise these volunteers to reduce the risk of negligence claims. They should conduct criminal history checks for volunteers who are in contact with children or handling money.

Alcohol and food

Never allow participants to bring their own alcohol to an event. Organizers can reduce risk by contracting with experienced third-party groups that already have the necessary permits, licenses, liquor liability and coverage and trained servers. The contract should include a hold-harmless and indemnity agreement, as well as a certificate of liquor liability insurance with the city named as an additional insured, as well as auto liability and workers' compensation coverage.

Organizers should require food vendors to have appropriate permits from the SC Department of Agriculture, as well as insurance coverage that includes products-completed operations.

Parade considerations

Parades come with a number of unique risks that cities need to manage. They involve moving vehicles and floats with large numbers of passengers and potentially animals. The parade planning process should consider the staging areas and route of the parade, determining where traffic barriers and street closings are necessary, as well as how to handle any railroad crossings.

Planners also need to develop rules for all parade participants, included along with a waiver of liability in the application and enforced by the parade coordinator. In the parade rules, consider prohibiting participants from throwing any items. Instead, require candy and other items to be handed to the crowd at the curb to prevent spectators from running into the roadway. Prohibit participants from smoking and consuming alcoholic beverages as well.

Know the city's insurance policy exclusions

Typically excluded items in a city's insurance policy include trampolines and rebounding equipment, like inflatable devices; temporary mechanical amusement devices; traveling carnivals, circuses, rodeos or zoos; concerts promoted by outside parties; motor vehicle racing or stunting; fireworks displays, aircraft; bungee jumping or parachuting.

To discuss special event public safety, contact the Municipal Association of SC Risk Management Services Loss Control staff at losscontrol@masc.sc.



Visitors Centers Boost Tourism Potential

The Sumter Visitors Center is a repurposed pavilion located at Swan Lake Iris Gardens. Photo: City of Sumter.

When the Town of Bluffton opened the Bluffton Welcome Center in February inside the restored Squire Pope Carriage House, it joined a growing list of South Carolina municipalities turning historic properties into destinations of their own. Once a historically significant, but collapsing, structure teetering on the edge of demolition, the house is now the front door for Bluffton, a hub for visitors, and a living testament to the town's creative partnerships.

From such places as Bluffton, Gaffney and Sumter, local governments have found that a visitor center can be more than just a desk stacked with brochures. They can preserve history, repurpose underused spaces and offer residents as well as visitors a wayfinding point for navigating the community they are visiting. They also require collaborations among city leaders, preservationists, universities, arts groups and volunteers to breathe new life into old spaces.

For Bluffton, even the staunchest preservationists had their doubts the Squire Pope Carriage House, dating to 1850, could be saved.

"We had a building that had been left abandoned for about 10 years. In historic preservation world, we call it demolition by neglect," said Glen Umberger, the town's historic preservationist and a graduate of the Savannah College of Art and Design with a background in architectural history. "I had some serious concerns [on whether] we were able to save the building."

Two years and \$2.7 million later, the residence that had been pieced together over generations from several outbuildings was rehabilitated to its new use.

Beaufort County partnered with the town in purchasing the land, while preservation architects from Charleston and contractors specializing in historic buildings did the technical work. SCAD students, through the school's SCADpro program, designed the welcome center's interior layout.

"They bring in about 15 students from different disciplines to work on a project for a client, a real-world client," Umberger said.

The resulting 540-square-foot downstairs space is modest in size but ambitious in scope, serving as both a first stop for tourists and a programming venue for residents. The upstairs houses town offices.

"We've already surpassed 12,000 individual visitors since January," he said. "So that's a value that we have face time with people who are coming to Bluffton to visit ... One of the other values is we're able to do public programming at the welcome center. So back in May, which is National Historic Preservation Month, I was able to give a lecture series at lunchtime on Thursdays about historic preservation. So that's something we can offer our residents."

Umberger said it is appropriate that the town created something new out of something old to appeal to both residents and tourists.

"The Lowcountry is very special," he said. "Once you visit once, I think you're captivated."

The City of Sumter chose a different path for the Sumter Visitors Center, locating it within its most-visited location — Swan Lake Iris Gardens. The city-owned park, known for its eight species of swans and spectacular Japanese irises, was already a major draw. Positioning the visitor center there gave it instant visibility.

"In late spring, when the iris gardens are in full bloom, that is our busiest time of year, when we have literally hundreds of people coming through on a daily basis," said Colette Daniels, who has worked at the Sumter Visitors Center since it opened in 2002.

"They come into the visitors center, they are greeted, they are given an orientation of the park. They are provided information

on places to eat, other things to see and do in the area. We're just really trying to welcome them to the community and make sure that they have everything they need to enjoy their time here."

That public interaction was missing when the visitors center was located in a single room at the Chamber of Commerce.

"We really needed a space where visitors and residents and anyone who needed information or things to do needed to have a place that was accessible and comfortable for everyone," Daniels said.

To create the center, the city renovated a 1960s-era pavilion built by personnel from nearby Shaw Air Force Base. For decades, civic clubs had sold concessions from this space, and families gathered there for picnics.

In addition to providing directions and information on things to do in Sumter, the visitors center staff conducts a monthly community tour for in-processing personnel at Shaw, showing them area attractions and answering questions. The staff also handles facility rentals and manages a gift shop, which has grown so much that it will be getting a separate building near the visitors center.

The center's success comes both from its strategic location within in the city's biggest tourist draw, as well as having several operations under one roof.

"In smaller communities, often you do not have a sufficient amount of visitation to pay someone to sit here full time and greet visitors," Daniels said. "To justify the expense of a visitors center, I would recommend having other things happening there."

Gaffney is another city to have adapted an existing structure to use as a visitor center, and has used it as a launchpad for greater ambitions. LeighAnn Moon, who has worked with the city for three decades, recalled that when the first small visitor center opened in 2004, it quickly proved there was an audience for more.

"I spent the first year asking people why they were here," she said. "And 90-some percent of my true tourists were here for our national parks and genealogy and Revolutionary War history."

That insight shifted the city's strategy. In 2009, Gaffney acquired and restored its historic post office to serve as a larger visitor center and art gallery. It also meant that the city needed to partner with organizations around that visitor demand, including the National Park Service, local Revolutionary War reenactment groups and a local historian who has written dozens of books about the American Revolution.

In addition to providing services to about 18,000 visitors a year, the visitor center is a destination all its own with an art gallery curated by the Cherokee Alliance of Visual Artists and the "It Took Us All" exhibit exploring the stories of Upstate residents involved in the Revolutionary War.

While the visitor center serves as that gateway to the city, the Revolutionary War history will take center stage inside Gaffney's former Carnegie library with a \$7.3 million Carolina Rising history museum, set to open next year during the celebration of the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States. That museum will feature holograms, immersive galleries and even use artificial intelligence to let visitors interact with historical figures.

Moon called it "very 21st century," while being rooted in the town's rich history.

A Clemson University economic study projected that the museum could draw 124,000 visitors annually, and it grew out of the city listening to what their visitors were interested in and filling that demand with Gaffney's own stories.

"Every person, every place and everything has a story," Moon said. "So that's what I do. I dig into stories. I chase rabbits until they can't be chased anymore."



The restoration of the endangered Squire Pope Carriage House provided the home for the Town of Bluffton Welcome Center. Photo: Town of Bluffton.





Municipal Association of South Carolina

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Calendar

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

NOVEMBER

5 Risk Management Services: Annual Meeting. Hilton Garden Inn Columbia Downtown. Topics include distracted driving, updates on the Law Enforcement Betterment Bill, changing weather patterns in South Carolina, worker's compensation updates, public works policies and procedures, cybersecurity and performance management.

12 Main Street SC Fourth Quarter Managers' Training. North Augusta Forward, North Augusta. Topics include navigating public/private partnerships, creating a high-functioning board and artificial intelligence, asset and mapping.

12 – 14 SC Municipal Human Resources Association Annual Meeting. Sonesta Resort, Hilton Head Island. Topics include leadership, workforce excellence, resident satisfaction with local government,

boosting employee engagement, using AI, legal updates, roundtable discussions and building better handbooks and job descriptions.

12 SC Association of Stormwater Managers Fourth Quarter Meeting. DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Columbia.

14 SC Municipal Finance Officers, Clerks and Treasurers Association Athenian Dialogue. Virtual. Topics include diving into the novel *Death of the Public Servant* by Danie A. Rosemond.

18 Business Licensing Essentials. Virtual.

DECEMBER

3 “You've Been Elected, Now What?” Newly Elected Officials Orientation. Virtual. See page 5.

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. See page 2.

21 Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government. Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center. See page 2.

FEBRUARY

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.

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

MARCH

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.