

UPTOWN

a publication of the Municipal Association of South Carolina

HISTORIC PRESERVATION BRINGS TANGIBLE COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC BENEFITS *page 9*

MANNING CITY HALL

29 WEST BOYCE STREET

***It's Almost Time to Register for the
2026 Annual Meeting*** *page 2*

***Growing Populations Need
Growing Sidewalk Networks*** *page 12*

***Water Rates Need Regular Review,
Should be 'Reasonable'*** *page 15*

Community-building Expert to Deliver 2026 Annual Meeting Keynote..... 3

SC RFA Provides Guidance on Audit Threshold Increase, FY 2026 Millage Cap 4

Why Serve in Local Government? 5

Passing a Budget Comes With Several Legal Requirements 6

Municipal Compensation Survey Data for 2026 Is Now Available 7

Business Licensing Officials Association Training Institute Graduates 15 8

Municipal Clerks and Treasurers Institute Recognizes Newest Graduates 8

Historic Preservation Brings Tangible Community and Economic Benefits 9

Economic Incentives Help Make Rehabilitation Projects Possible..... 11

Special Section: Infrastructure and Public Works

Growing Populations Need Growing Sidewalk Networks 12

New Program, New Possibilities: Helping Utilities Thrive..... 14

Water Rates Need Regular Review, Should be 'Reasonable' 15

It's Almost Time to Register for the 2026 Annual Meeting

The 2026 Annual Meeting of the Municipal Association of SC will take place July 15 – 19 at the Hyatt Regency Greenville.

The Municipal Association’s registration process, which helps ensure that municipal officials have priority for reservations and ticketed events, will get underway in May.

Registration drawing

Each year, the Association draws city names to randomly determine the order of registration appointments for cities and towns, providing a fair process for all those interested in attending. The deadline to enter the drawing is Friday, May 29.

Important dates

- **May 20** – Agenda and registration information posted online. Registration brochures mailed out.
- **May 29** – Deadline to enter registration appointment drawing.
- **June 1** – Registration appointment times are announced.
- **June 15 through 17** – Cities with a phone appointment register on one of these days. During the appointment, an Association staff member will call the city representative to start the online registration/reservation process. The city’s representative needs to have completed registration forms in hand, including housing and meal ticket requests, for each person to be registered during the city’s call. During the online process, the city representative will use a Visa or MasterCard to make hotel reservations and register municipal attendees for the meeting. It’s important to make sure the credit card has a sufficient credit limit and per-transaction limit for the registration.
- **July 2** – Deadline to register for Annual Meeting.
- **July 15 – 19** – 2026 Annual Meeting at the Hyatt Regency Greenville.

President :
Mayor Brandy Amidon, Travelers Rest

Executive Director :
Todd Glover tglover@masc.sc

Managing Editor :
Meredith Houck mhouck@masc.sc

Editor :
Russell Cox rcox@masc.sc

Editorial Assistant :
Onye Kelly okelly@masc.sc

Contributing writers : *Page Ivey, Megan Sexton, Sara Weathers*

Cover Photo: *Manning City Hall operates out of a preserved and renovated storefront in the downtown. One of the oldest buildings in Manning, at least part of the structure dates to 1891. Photo: City of Manning.*

Community- building Expert to Deliver 2026 Annual Meeting Keynote



Doug Griffiths, author of *13 Ways to Kill Your Community*, will share his perspectives on community-building as the keynote speaker during the 2026 Annual Meeting. The conference will take place July 15 through 19 at the Hyatt Regency Greenville.

Griffiths is a former member of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Alberta, Canada, having served as minister of municipal affairs and minister of Service Alberta.

After retiring from politics in 2015 after 13 years, he has focused his efforts on building communities and helping them find their pathways to economic success and long-term growth.

He holds an Executive Masters in Business Administration, Honors Bachelor of Arts Philosophy Degree and Bachelor of Education, all from the University of Alberta, where he has taught community and municipal leadership courses.

Griffith's 2016 book *13 Ways to Kill Your Community* has two best-selling editions, and addresses the types of actions that make doing business in a city more difficult and that drive away jobs and residents.

Beginning May 20, find more information on 2026 Annual Meeting sessions at www.masc.sc (keyword: Annual Meeting). The deadline to enter the registration appointment drawing is May 29 and the deadline to register for the meeting itself is July 2. Find full registration details on page 2.

Learn more about Doug Griffiths at www.13waysinc.com.

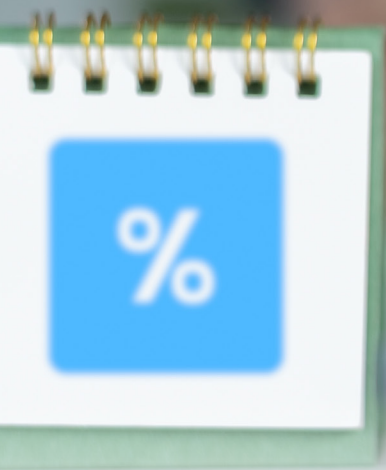
NEWS BRIEFS

Two new officials from around the state earned their Master of Business Licensing designation from the SC Business Licensing Association. They are **Kristy Carge**, Town of Bluffton; and **Stacey Freeman**, City of Folly Beach.

A study of retiree moving patterns in 2025 by the moving service website Hire a Helper found that South Carolina ranked first among all states in net growth of residents age 65 and older. The state had a net gain of 5,427 residents in this age group, coming in slightly ahead of Texas at a net gain of 5,156. The retirees coming to South Carolina largely came from North Carolina, Florida, New York, Georgia and Pennsylvania. Of the top 200 cities for retiree growth, South Carolina had four: **Myrtle Beach**, **Greenville**, **Summerville**, **Columbia** and **Charleston**.

Travel + Leisure magazine's most recent rankings of the top 15 beach towns to live in year-round included the **Town of Hilton Head Island** at No. 1. The list included the **City of Charleston** at No. 10, noting the presence of beach downs in its greater metropolitan areas such as the **City of Folly Beach**, **City of Isle of Palms** and **Town of Sullivan's Island**. The publication's list places the South Carolina cities in the company of such cities as Malibu and Laguna Beach in California, Naples and Vero Beach in Florida and Newport, Rhode Island.

SC RFA Provides Guidance on Audit Threshold Increase, FY 2026 Millage Cap



Each year, the SC Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office releases updated figures to direct municipal audit requirements and millage rate increases allowable under state law.

Audit thresholds

South Carolina law, under SC Code Section 5-7-240, historically required all municipalities to submit audits to the state treasurer after each financial year. Acknowledging the costs associated with audits, the General Assembly passed Act 71 in 2023, allowing certain cities and towns with revenues below a set amount the option of providing a compilation of financial statements instead of a full audit.

To be eligible to do this, the municipality's total recurring revenues must fall below a threshold established in the Act and updated annually by the SC RFA. RFA adjusts the threshold each year based on the consumer price index. **For fiscal years beginning after January 1, 2026, RFA has determined that the threshold will increase to \$528,292.** Municipalities with recurring revenues above this threshold are required by law to submit a full audit.

Additional information about required financial reporting is available on the Municipal Association's webpage, "*Municipal Audits: Understanding Act 71*," at www.masc.sc (keyword: municipal audits), as well as on the State Treasurer's Office website at www.treasurer.sc.gov.

Millage rate increases

Under Act 388 of 2006, municipalities may raise their millage rate only according to the consumer price index and the municipality's increase in population, if any.

The millage rate increase limitation for FY 2026–27 includes a **2.63% inflation factor**, which will be used in calculating allowable millage increases. Final limits for all municipalities will be published by RFA following the release of updated population data, anticipated in May 2026. The calculated municipal millage caps will then be published on the Municipal Association's website at www.masc.sc (keyword: millage caps).

Those with questions about audit thresholds or millage rate increases should contact their Municipal Association Field Services manager. Find details at www.masc.sc (keyword: Field Services).

Why Serve in Local Government?

This series highlights people from around South Carolina who are well experienced in municipal government, and what they see as the value of local government to their community.

Chief Brian Trail



With 36 years of service, **Brian Trail** serves as chief of police for the **City of York**.

Q. Why do you serve in municipal government?

A. I knew at an early age that I wanted to become a police officer. I was raised around a West Virginia state trooper who became both my role model and mentor. Watching the way he spoke to people, treated them with respect, and genuinely helped those in need had a lasting impact on me. He was highly respected in the community, and that is exactly how I wanted to be viewed when I became an officer.

There is a common answer many officers give when asked why they chose this profession: "I want to help people." While it may sound simple, it is absolutely true for me. I genuinely want to help people, and I take great pride in doing so. I love being able to serve the community, build trust and make a positive difference in someone's life.

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

A. I am extremely proud of the relationship our department has built with the community. I organized the City of York's first National Night Out, which has since grown into the largest event of its kind in the area. What started as a simple effort to bring the community and police department together has become a signature event that strengthens trust and partnership each year. My personal proudest moment came on June 7, 2022. The West Virginia state trooper who inspired me at a young age was present at my swearing-in ceremony and I had the honor of him pinning the eagles on my shoulders when I became chief of police. I never imagined that I would one day serve as chief of the very department where I dedicated 34 years of my career.

Q. What does your town contribute to the community?

A. As far as what the city does to allow the Police Department to contribute to the community, the answer is simple: support. The city fully supports the Police Department in all of the events we host for the community. The mayor, city council, and city manager not only attend many of our events but often actively participate, demonstrating unified leadership and a shared commitment to community engagement. The City of York has also recently supported the downtown business district in developing Main Street York. This initiative provides support to local businesses, encourages entrepreneurship, strengthens the local economy, and preserves the historic charm of our downtown area.

Passing a Budget Comes With Several Legal Requirements



Every municipality in South Carolina is required to adopt balanced budgets “which provide for sufficient income to meet its estimated expenses for each year,” according to the SC Constitution’s Article X, Section 7(B). State law also governs the process for city councils passing their new budgets.

Forecasting and planning the budget

Creating a forecast of revenue, the first step in a budgeting process, does not come with specific timeline requirements in the law. Even so, having an accurate understanding of revenue will help the city in its operations, and can help reduce the potential need for budget amendments.

Comparing past revenues and expenses, such as across a three to five-year period, can improve the council’s ability to anticipate the coming fiscal year. Waiting as late as possible to finalize revenue projections can reduce surprises as well. For example, a city with a July 1 fiscal year start date may want to have a budget work session in May,

and then two readings of the budget ordinance in June.

Who prepares the budget?

Municipalities operating in the council form of government may designate the person or people responsible for preparing the budget for consideration.

In the other two forms of municipal government in South Carolina, state law sets the person who prepares the budget. In the mayor-council form, the mayor is charged with preparing the budget for the council’s consideration. In the council-manager form, the city or town manager prepares the budget.

Adjusting the millage cap

Act 388 of 2006 constrains municipalities’ ability to increase property tax millage. Under the law, cities are allowed to increase millage for general operating purposes in one year by the previous calendar year’s average consumer price index increase, and the percentage increase in the municipality’s population as provided by the SC Revenue and

Fiscal Affairs Office. The Municipal Association makes the calculated municipal millage caps from the RFA available in a list at www.masc.sc (keyword: millage caps).

The law allows a “look-back” period of three years. City councils that did not impose the millage increase allowed by Act 388 during the previous three years may impose that increase in addition to their current-year allowance.

In property tax reassessment years, municipalities must adjust the millage rate to account for the change in the assessed value after reassessment, excluding the increase in value associated with new construction, the renovation of existing structures and the resale of a property to produce no more property tax revenue than the previous year. This is known as the “rollback millage calculation.”

Adopting the budget

As with passing other ordinances, a city council must use public meetings for consideration of their budget ordinances — meetings that are subject to the posting and 24-hour-

notification requirements of the SC Freedom of Information Act.

The budget ordinance, however, has the additional requirement of a public hearing, as outlined in SC Code Section 6-1-80. The municipality must advertise this public hearing at least 15 days in advance “in at least one South Carolina newspaper of general circulation in the area.” There are even requirements for its size on the newspaper page, as it must be “a minimum of two columns with a bold headline.”

This requirement means that the city must consider newspaper publication schedules when setting up the timeline for budget adoption ahead of the new fiscal year. While some local newspapers publish seven days a week, others publish only on

select days out of the week, or publish weekly, bi-monthly or monthly. The SC Press Association maintains a list of South Carolina newspapers at www.scpres.org/newspapers.

Completing the budget before the new fiscal year

The State of South Carolina operates on a July 1 to June 30 fiscal year. At times, the General Assembly, having not passed its budget by July 1, will instead pass a continuing budget resolution that temporarily maintains funding at previous levels. Under the SC Constitution, municipalities most likely do not have the authority to use a continuing budget resolution, and should avoid allowing the beginning of the fiscal year to arrive without a newly passed budget.

In a case where a budget has not passed for the new fiscal year, the city council should at least adopt a provisional budget using the previous year’s revenue and expenses. Later, the council could amend the provisional budget as new information on revenues and expenditures arrives, but would still need to have the two readings and public hearings when doing so.

Learn about the budget process in the Handbook for Municipal Officials in South Carolina, found at www.masc.sc (keyword: municipal officials handbook). The handbook discusses estimating expenditures as well as the process for executing a budget during a fiscal year, using financial controls and a reporting system to stay on budget.

Municipal Compensation Survey Data for 2026 Is Now Available

When municipal officials are working to make sure that their government is an attractive place for prospective employees to work, one of the most critical questions is what job seekers could earn at another municipality. The Municipal Association of SC offers a Municipal Compensation Survey to help cities and towns compare their compensation to other municipalities around South Carolina, and the newest data report is now available online.

Each year, the Association seeks salary data from municipalities to include in the report. The data covers numerous job categories, from administration to elected officials, engineering, fire and police, parks and recreation, and public works and utilities. While the survey is a valuable reference tool, it should not substitute for a full class and compensation study commissioned by a city.

Website users can generate customized reports through the survey, like narrowing the survey results down to information for municipalities of a particular population range or specific job positions. Reports can also include the number of full-time employees of a particular city or its annual payroll. Other search functions include salary ranges, merit-raise minimums or maximums, or the range of a cost-of-living adjustment. Users can also export all of the compensation survey data into Microsoft Excel spreadsheets, or download the entire compensation survey report as a PDF.

Find the survey on the Municipal Association’s website at www.masc.sc (keyword: Municipal Compensation Survey).

Business Licensing Officials Association Training Institute Graduates 15

The SC Business Licensing Officials Association Training Institute counted 15 new graduates during the BLOA spring meeting.

The Institute helps improve the professional and administrative skills of business licensing officials. It is comprised of three sessions which cover topics on general licensing, problem areas and personal development.

The graduates can earn the Accreditation in Business Licensing designation when they pass a comprehensive written exam.

These are the newest BLOA Training Institute graduates:

- Brett Combs, business license inspector, City of Clemson
- Kathryn Compton, business license coordinator, City of Rock Hill
- Alex Coon, business license coordinator, City of Greer
- Amanda Etheredge, business license clerk, Town of Batesburg-Leesville
- Tracey Frazier, business license technician, Town of Mount Pleasant
- Sandra Hanner, licensing & permitting tech, City of Florence
- Stephanie Polite, business license technician, Town of Mount Pleasant
- William Sanders, compliance officer, City of Rock Hill

- William Sapp, code enforcement officer, City of Forest Acres
- Amanda Schutz, treasury coordinator, Town of Bluffton
- Elizabeth Sealy, customer service lead, City of Rock Hill
- Mattison Shirley, Customer Service Clerk, City of Greenwood
- Carmen Silvester, assistant manager – Business License Department, City of Sumter
- Lauren Smith, assistant chief financial officer, City of Abbeville
- Kimberly Vinson, finance director, Town of North

Learn more about the BLOA Training Institute at www.masc.sc (keyword: BLOA).



Municipal Clerks and Treasurers Institute Recognizes Newest Graduates

The SC Municipal Clerks and Treasurers Institute recorded four graduates in its February 2026 session. MCTI is a three-year program that provides municipal clerks and treasurers with critical skills for their profession.

These are the most recent graduates:

- Kerry Guzman, assistant town clerk, Town of Bluffton
- Lisa Graham, town clerk, Town of Port Royal
- Jeremiah Jackson, city clerk, City of Clemson
- Mikayla White, clerk/receptionist, Town of Ravenel

Graduation from the institute requires participants to complete more than 120 hours of classroom instruction on topics such as records management, accounting and municipal law.

Completion of MCTI satisfies the education requirements for the certifications offered by the

International Institute of Municipal Clerks as well as the Association of Public Treasurers of the United States and Canada. Those seeking IIMC's Certified Municipal Clerk designation also need to complete a capstone project. Participants can begin the program at any point and are encouraged to attend sessions consecutively.

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



Historic Preservation Brings Tangible Community and Economic Benefits



The building at 29 S. Mill St. in Manning originally housed the Coffey-Rigby Livery Stables until 1926, and later a carbonated beverage company and liquor store. It reached a ruined state by the 1980s before its restoration. Photo: Anna Surette.

Whether it's in a large city with numerous blocks of significant structures or a small town with a deeply rooted history, promoting a distinctive and historic downtown district makes a lot of sense.

Historic preservation helps cultivate a sense of community pride, draws visitors, celebrates history — and often comes with strong economic benefits.

“Historic downtowns, in towns large and small, are gathering places and centers of economic and social activity,” said Supervisor of Registration, Grants and Local Government Assistance Brad Sauls with the State Historic Preservation Office. SHPO is a part of the SC Department of Archives and History. “They are places where people connect with each other, locals and visitors alike. Historically, downtowns were centers for business, shopping, dining and the home of our governmental and cultural institutions. Many aspects of community life overlapped in historic downtowns and that is continued where historic downtowns are maintained or revitalized.”

Sauls said that before cities can start the preservation process, leaders must take an inventory of historic resources, with the understanding that

residents may have differing opinions on what in a downtown should be preserved, and how. Part of that process includes seeking public input about what is considered significant and worthy of protection, and the reasons why those resources are considered important.

“Without understanding and broad support from the public about the need and value of preserving historic resources in the community, efforts by leadership to establish a preservation program are less likely to be successful,” he said.

Sauls said many large and small municipalities around the state found success in historic preservation efforts. For example, he said Columbia has succeeded in cultivating a successful downtown that includes historic architecture and spaces where people want to work, live, shop, dine out and make social connections.

“The historic commercial zones along Main Street, Gervais Street and the Five Points district provide the places where people like to go for entertainment and culture, and many historic buildings are utilized to provide those opportunities,” he said. “The city’s adoption of the special property tax assessment for rehabilitation of historic buildings, in combination with available federal

and state preservation tax incentives, have helped make it possible for historic buildings to be repurposed for compatible new ventures that contribute to a thriving city center.”

Smaller towns throughout the state also have seen success in community development through preservation, often anchored by public-private partnerships such as art venues in historic buildings. Some of Sauls’ examples: Newberry, Abbeville and Sumter opera houses continue to be performance spaces for local productions and touring shows; Fountain Inn repurposed a historic school for use as a theater; Greenwood’s art museum is located inside the historic former post office; and historic movie theaters in Conway, Hampton, Cheraw and Dillon now host live performances.

“These historic buildings provide the setting for community enrichment and help attract business for neighboring merchants and restaurants,” Sauls said.

That has certainly been the case in Anderson, where historic preservation plays a central role in the long-term vision for downtown and the surrounding neighborhoods of the city, which was founded in 1826.

“Preserving downtown Anderson helps maintain the character, identity



The Beaux Arts-style historic post office in Anderson dates to 1909. Its later use as a funeral home significantly changed its interior, but a restoration beginning in 2021 uncovered many original elements. Photo: City of Anderson.

and sense of place that define the community,” said Mary Haley Thompson, Anderson’s director of strategic projects. “Historic downtowns offer something that newer developments often cannot replicate — authentic architecture, walkable streets and buildings that tell the story of how a city grew over time.”

Thompson said the renovations help the local economy, with restored commercial spaces having new life as restaurants, boutiques, offices and small businesses.

“Their character and charm help attract visitors, support tourism and encourage continued private investment in the downtown area,” she said. “At the same time, preservation supports smart growth. Reusing historic buildings allows cities to build on existing infrastructure while maintaining the scale and character that make downtown environments vibrant and walkable.”

Several areas of Anderson are designated historic districts, with some listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The city uses a combination of planning tools, preservation incentives and long-term planning strategies to support property owners who want to restore and maintain historic buildings, while ensuring that redevelopment remains compatible with the character of the surrounding districts.

The city’s Board of Architectural Review considers proposed exterior changes to buildings located within designated historic districts and helps ensure that renovations, new construction and building improvements are compatible with the area. The city also uses incentive programs to encourage rehab and reinvestment, particularly the Bailey Bill, a state-authorized property tax incentive that encourages the rehabilitation of historic properties by freezing property taxes at the pre-rehabilitation value for a period of time.

The city’s Business Assistance Program offers grants to help property owners maintain and improve historic downtown buildings, with help for projects including historic preservation, facade improvement and design assistance.

Thomson said the city regularly works with property owners, developers, historians and community organizations in ways that encourage adaptive reuse and integrate historic interpretation into public spaces and projects.

Financial incentives help, too. Programs that can offset some of the cost of restoration — such as tax incentives, facade grants and rehabilitation funding — can make

preservation projects more feasible for property owners and small businesses, she said.

“One of the most important lessons we’ve learned is that successful historic preservation efforts require collaboration and long-term commitment,” she said. “Cities benefit greatly when preservation is supported by a strong network that includes local government, preservation boards, property owners, developers, historians and community organizations.”

While preservation is always the preferred outcome when it comes to historic buildings, Thompson said in some cases structures deteriorate to a point where restoration is no longer feasible. That happened with the long-vacant old Anderson Hotel site on South Main Street. While the city worked for years with property owners and developers to consider redevelopment opportunities, the building was too deteriorated to save.

The city eventually purchased the property and demolished it, and the site is now being positioned for redevelopment in line with Anderson’s downtown master plan, “Shock This Block,” which focuses on revitalizing underutilized downtown areas and encouraging new investment while maintaining the district’s historic character, Thompson said.

In the City of Manning, the biggest ongoing historic preservation effort is the facade grant program that has been in place since 2008, said Carrie Trebil, special projects coordinator



In December 2025, the City of Anderson hosted a drop-in to preview plans for the second phase of its Church Street Heritage Plaza, aimed at improving the pedestrian connection to Main Street. Photo: City of Anderson.

for Main Street Manning. To date, 15 facade projects have been completed using the competitive grants that reimburse building owners for rehabilitation of the building.

Manning's design committee oversees the facade grant program, and its insight has played a vital role in keeping the program going. "The facade grant program is one of the first things our Main Street program took on," she said.

"For other communities looking to implement facade grant programs, think through all the details first and have very clear instructions for a timeline of completing and reimbursing the funds," she said.

Trebil said Manning City Hall is one of the city's revitalization success stories. One of the oldest buildings in town, at least part of the building dates to 1891 and was home to everything from a hotel to a fabric shop to a furniture store, along with

other businesses. A 2007 wind storm caused substantial roof and window damage to the building, which was painted, repaired and renovated. It opened in 2010 as Manning City Hall.

"Many of our downtown buildings are on the National Register of Historic Places, and we feel it is important to preserve that history because buildings just aren't built like that anymore — the windows, the columns, you don't see that in new construction," Trebil said.

Economic Incentives Help Make Rehabilitation Projects Possible



In South Carolina, developers have several federal and state economic development incentives available that can help make rehabilitation of historic properties more viable.

- **Federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit** – This credit is available for those costs that an investor incurs when rehabilitating a historic building for income-producing uses. It is equal to 20% of Qualified Rehabilitation Expenses, and can be used to offset a corporate investor's federal income tax liability. The QRE cannot include the costs of acquiring the land and building. The property must be listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and must not be tax exempt.
- **SC State Historic Tax Credit** – This credit can be added onto the federal historic tax credit for the purpose of qualifying projects, defining QREs and calculating the credit amount. Generally, it is used to offset the state corporate income tax.
- **Federal New Markets Tax Credit** – This is available to investors in Community Development Entities for qualifying investments made in businesses located in low-income communities.

- **SC State Abandoned Building Credit** – This incentive provides either an income tax credit or a property tax credit for a renovation or redevelopment of abandoned building sites operated for income-producing credits. The site must have been certified by the local governing body as at least 66% abandoned, in that it must have been closed to business or nonoperational for five years. There is also a qualifying threshold of expenses based on the population of the municipality or community the project is located in. For example, in a city of 25,000 or more residents, there is a required expense of \$250,000.
- **Bailey Bill Property Tax Incentive** – The governing body of a county or municipality may grant by ordinance certain special property tax assessments to real property qualifying as "rehabilitated historic property" or as "low and moderate income rental property."

More information on tax credits can be found in the Main Street South Carolina Economic Incentives Toolkit and economic development incentives video at www.masc.sc (keyword: Main Street SC).

Growing Populations Need Growing Sidewalk Networks

In Mount Pleasant, the major thoroughfare of Coleman Boulevard is a focus for both pedestrian and cycling improvements. Photo: Town of Mount Pleasant.

As many communities across South Carolina grow, local governments seek to improve pedestrian infrastructure and help residents travel without relying solely on cars. Sidewalk expansions, multiuse paths and other pedestrian improvements are becoming a key part of transportation planning, often connecting neighborhoods with schools, parks, jobs and commercial areas.

Few places have been as enthusiastic about addressing the transportation challenges that come with substantial population growth as the Town of Mount Pleasant, where sidewalk projects are part of a broader strategy to connect neighborhoods with other parts of the community.

“All of this comes down to safety and the ability for people to walk and bike and recreate in their own community,” said James Aton, the town’s deputy director of capital projects and transportation.

One major example is the Mathis Ferry Road project, which will extend safety improvements for pedestrians and cyclists from Eagle Street to U.S. Highway 17. The corridor, which serves a large residential population, is a key segment of the “Mount Pleasant Way,” a townwide network of shared-use paths. The project received federal funding through the SC Department of Transportation’s Safe Streets and Roads for All program.

“We do a comprehensive plan and update every five years and we go to the

citizenry and we ask them, ‘what do y’all want to see?’ Of course, the first thing that comes up is improvements in traffic. But closely behind that is the ability to walk and bike in the community,” Aton said. “So that really spurred this idea of the Mount Pleasant Way.”

Mount Pleasant also prioritized projects that improve access to schools and community facilities. In the Brickyard Plantation area, a sidewalk installation project will create safer routes for students walking to Laing Middle School and Jennie Moore Elementary School. The Ben Marino Way Micromobility Project will allow residents to safely walk or bike between the Carolina Park Recreation Facility and Oceanside Collegiate Academy, where activities often require walking between the two. Oceanside is providing part of the funding for the project.

Other planned large-scale projects include a shared-use path for the Isle of Palms Connector, replacing the existing sidewalk with a wider multiuse path and improved lighting.

On Coleman Boulevard, the town is adding more than 2,300 feet of dedicated bike lanes separating cyclists from pedestrians and vehicles. Beyond completing a bike lane along the boulevard’s entire length, the project will include specialized signals that detect approaching cyclists and give them their own dedicated green light — similar to pedestrian crossing signals,

but fully automated. Thermal cameras at intersections will detect cyclists in the bike lane and temporarily stop vehicle traffic to allow cyclists to proceed safely.

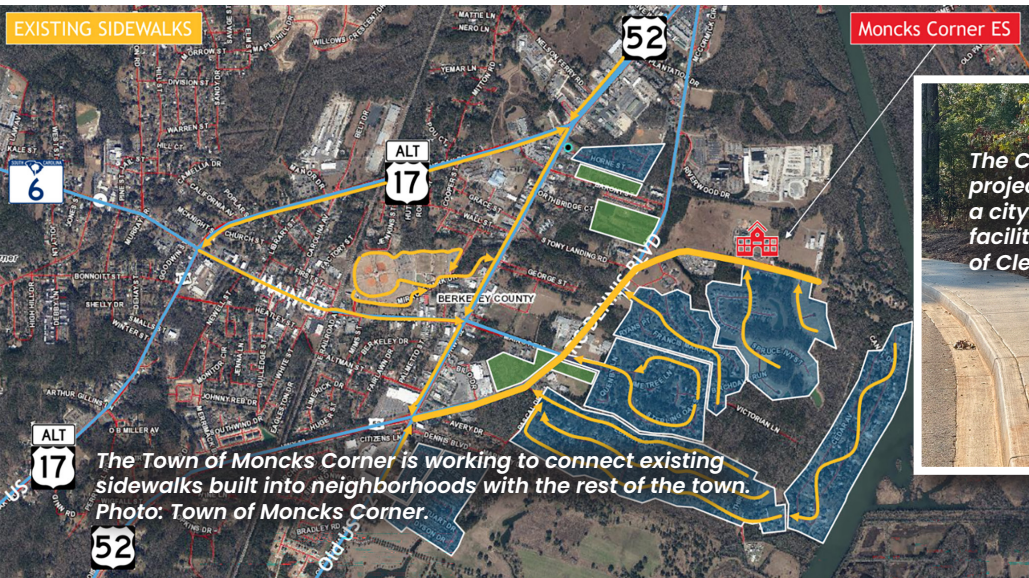
“We are also planning more mid-block crossings — those are those rectangular rapid flashing beacons that are pedestrian activated — that help incentivize [walking,]” Aton said.

These projects are supported by the Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Governments and the SCDOT, which have helped the town secure funding for several major improvements, including \$1.2 million for the Coleman Boulevard project and nearly \$500,000 for the Isle of Palms Connector path.

In nearby Moncks Corner, officials are preparing for one of their most significant pedestrian infrastructure efforts yet. The town recently secured more than \$1.2 million in funding from the SCDOT to build a new sidewalk corridor along R.C. Dennis Boulevard and Stony Landing Road. The project will add about 8,600 feet of 6-foot-wide sidewalk.

“There were four or five neighborhoods that were built with a sidewalk network, but their network didn’t connect to the rest of town,” Town Administrator Jeff Lord said.

Those disconnected systems created challenges for residents who wanted to walk to nearby destinations.



The Town of Moncks Corner is working to connect existing sidewalks built into neighborhoods with the rest of the town. Photo: Town of Moncks Corner.

“In the neighborhood closest to the elementary school, students couldn't walk to the school without stepping off the sidewalk,” Lord says.

The sidewalk will connect four residential neighborhoods — three within town limits and one just outside — to schools, parks and existing pedestrian infrastructure that leads into the downtown area.

“We really wanted to try to connect those neighborhoods, to the school and to the network that leads you into downtown,” Lord says. “So the sidewalks in these neighborhoods just weren't for people who wanted to walk within the neighborhood, they wanted to go somewhere.”

The Moncks Corner project is funded through the Transportation Alternatives Program, which supports local projects that expand pedestrian and bicycle access. Town officials invested nearly \$120,000 into preparing for the project.

“Before we did the application for the grant, we completed all of the engineering, we got all the right-of-way easements, so that when we did the application, it was as ready to go as it could possibly be,” Lord said. “The TAP grant program is very, very competitive. Going in with engineering done, easements done, you're handing in a complete project. It positions you to be able to get the grant.”

Like many infrastructure projects, pedestrian improvements can involve partnerships with residents, property owners and developers.

In Moncks Corner, officials worked with neighborhood associations and developers to secure support and ensure connections between existing and future developments.

In the Upstate City of Clemson, it was residents who were behind one of the largest — and longest-coming — sidewalk projects, City Engineer Nathan Hinkle said of the Riggs Drive project.

The years spent bringing the project to fruition illustrate a critical issue in adding sidewalks to established neighborhoods — exactly where do they go, and on whose land? Disagreements among residents stalled the project many times, but it ultimately became the first project to successfully complete the city's sidewalk petition process, which requires a two-thirds favorability among residents.

The key, Hinkle said, was when petitioners who supported adding sidewalks went door-to-door asking neighbors to add their names to the petition. Once the petition met the required threshold, the project advanced through the city's planning process and was added to the capital improvement plan. The city combined the project with an American Rescue Plan Act-funded sewer project — reducing disruption and helping ensure improvements are completed in the proper order.

“We have a utilities-first program where we try to replace the utilities before we pave,” Hinkle said. “We had already done water work. We had already done sewer work, and we're getting ready to pave here later this year.”



The City of Clemson's recent Abel Road sidewalk project created a sidewalk connection between a city park and community center. Grant funding facilitated an expansion of the project. Photo: City of Clemson.

The Riggs Drive project also demonstrates how developer partnerships can help to expand pedestrian networks and reduce costs to the city.

“Part of our requirement for any development, any commercial development is that they are required to install sidewalks. We had the developer of this parcel, that's adjacent to the work that we were planning, execute that portion of the work on the behalf of the city,” Hinkle said. “It actually gave us the ability to extend the sidewalk up to city limits.”

The City of Clemson also pursued other pedestrian projects driven by safety concerns and community needs. The Abel Road and Raven Lane project, for example, grew from a simple observation by city staff.

“There's a community center that is about 900 feet from one of the city parks and they were walking students from the community center to the park in the middle of the road,” Hinkle said.

Initially, the city planned a short sidewalk segment connecting the facilities, but grant funding allowed it to expand the effort.

Clemson also uses data-driven planning to identify areas most in need of sidewalks. The city evaluates factors such as bus stops, buildings and other “pedestrian generators” to determine priorities as well as community input.

“We've worked with some of Clemson University's engineering students and developed a needs-based assessment,” Hinkle said. “I think it's really just listening to your residents and then explaining the benefits to everybody.”

New Program, New Possibilities Helping Utilities Thrive

By Kendra Wilkerson, SC Rural Infrastructure Authority

Municipal governments balance many competing needs and priorities every day. Those that run water and sewer systems have an added layer of considerations: regulatory compliance, public health, environmental protection, customer affordability and capacity for growth, to name a few. Sometimes, mounting challenges force utility leaders to focus on reacting to problems as they happen, with little time left to take a proactive approach to big-picture needs and plans. If this sounds familiar, keep reading to learn about the SC Rural Infrastructure Authority's new Viability Improvement Program, which offers a unique combination of technical assistance and grant funding designed to put utilities on a path to long-term success.

Who can participate?

The Viability Improvement Program is open to public water and sewer utilities serving no more than 10,000 people. Around two-thirds of South Carolina's utilities fall into that size category, and compared to larger utilities, they are more likely to struggle financially and to run into issues with SC Department of Environmental Services or Environmental Protection Agency compliance. A larger utility could be considered if it is located in a Tier III or IV county and can demonstrate significant challenges.

The program is designed for utilities that struggle with long-term viability concerns. Applicants of all sizes need to show at least one warning sign such as repeated regulatory compliance violations, inability to complete routine financial audits, unusually old infrastructure or socioeconomic challenges in the community served.

How it works

The VIP takes a progressive, three-step approach. First, a team of experts conducts a broad assessment of the utility's

technical, operational, financial and management needs and concerns. Then, the team drills down into the key issues identified to develop a plan of action with specific recommendations and workable solutions tailored specifically to the participant.

In the first two steps, the utility receives direct technical assistance led by an engineering consultant that RIA has already procured. In the final step, RIA will provide up to \$2 million in noncompetitive grant funding for the most critical capital improvement needs that will have the greatest impact on long-term viability.

The key to succeeding in the VIP is active participation from local leaders throughout the process. In fact, the council or utility board must pass a resolution supporting participation in the program. Before and during the initial assessment, participants will need to provide the information they have about the system, such as existing infrastructure, financials or compliance history. To remain in the program, utilities will have to show continuing commitment to improvement, including progress on the recommendations made by the consulting team.

Applications

For those who think the VIP may be right for your utility, be sure to apply by July 1, 2026, and provide a map of your system if you have one. The council or board resolution must also be submitted with the application. Find the application and resolution template at ria.sc.gov/vip.

RIA continues to offer competitive grants for water, sewer and stormwater improvements. Program requirements and application deadlines for fiscal year 2026-27 will be published in July 2026. We encourage you to contact your regional grant manager for assistance in developing potential projects for grant funding. For contact information and program details, visit ria.sc.gov.

Water Rates Need Regular Review, Should Be 'Reasonable'

Municipal water systems are public assets operated for the benefit of current and future municipal residents. South Carolina law requires that municipal elected officials retain oversight and control of their water systems — including establishing appropriate charges and rates for water service. This responsibility cannot be delegated away.

Elected officials are entrusted with these decisions because they serve at the will of the people, and their decisions will be judged through democratic processes. Setting rates is a core municipal responsibility, and officials must make the decisions required to sustain the public asset.

Composition of water rates

Water system charges are more than the monthly bills customers receive. They may include fees for new development impacts, system connections, base service charges, volumetric usage and differentiated rates for in-city and out-of-city customers, among others.

Municipalities should establish these charges at rates to support ongoing maintenance and necessary system expansion. Rather than relying on subjective judgments, officials should base rates on objective data, measurements and formal analyses. To ensure accuracy and fairness, many municipalities engage professional consultants to conduct comprehensive rate studies that establish a clear, sustainable pricing framework.

Monitoring and adjusting

Municipalities should review and update water rates annually, allowing for

incremental adjustments to keep pace with inflation and the costs of system operation and maintenance. When officials shy away from annual increases, they can create the need for sudden and steep rate hikes later, which can be difficult for residents to absorb and for officials to justify. Updated water rates can be included in the annual budget ordinance, and should be posted online to ensure transparency.

From an accounting perspective, a municipal water system operates as a business within an “enterprise fund,” meaning it must remain financially self-supporting. Transfers from the enterprise fund to the general fund are constrained not only by financial best practices and credit rating agency expectations but also by legal precedent, including the decision in *Azar v. City of Columbia*, which underscores the importance of appropriate, defensible rate structures.

Keeping rates 'reasonable'

Unlike private systems, municipal water rates aren't subject to state-level regulation from the Public Service Commission or otherwise. SC Code Section 58-5-30 provides that the PSC does not have any power “to regulate or interfere with public utilities owned or operated by or on behalf of any municipality.” Instead, municipalities retain local control over rate-setting, subject to the legal requirement that rates be “reasonable,” under SC Code Section 5-31-670.

Municipalities must set rates that uniformly charge customers within defined customer classes. Unequal treatment among similarly situated users can be considered discriminatory

and may raise constitutional concerns about due process and equal protection.

However, it's well established that municipalities may charge higher rates to customers outside city limits. Many municipalities adopt out-of-city rates that are approximately double those charged to in-city users to reflect differences in tax support and service obligations.

Water rates and development

Municipalities may consider strategically using water rates as an economic development tool. Site selection for industrial and commercial users are often heavily influenced by the availability, capacity and cost of utilities.

In many cases, municipalities can establish a distinct rate classification for large-scale customers — reduced or incentivized rates can boost competitiveness for attracting businesses. This may result in lower short-term utility revenues, but the broader economic benefits — job creation, an increased tax base and long-term system utilization — can justify these decisions. Careful structuring and documentation are essential to ensure that these rates remain reasonable, non-discriminatory within the defined class and aligned with the municipality's long-term financial and policy goals.

Balancing the concerns

When managing municipal water systems, elected officials should balance financial sustainability with community priorities. A properly governed system can support both current residents and future growth — ensuring reliable service and long-term value for the municipality.



Municipal Association of South Carolina

1411 Gervais Street | PO Box 12109
Columbia, South Carolina 29211
803.799.9574
www.masc.sc

PRESORTED
STANDARD
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Columbia, S.C.
PERMIT NO. 31

Calendar

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

MAY

6 – 8 SC Community Development Association Annual Meeting. Hyatt Place, Florence Downtown. Topics include building the right team for funding success, a downtown Florence tour and an economic update.

12 Risk Management Services: Public Safety Training. Hilton Garden Inn Columbia Airport, West Columbia. Topics include probable cause and qualified immunity, the importance of a discipline policy, internal investigations, creating performance improvement plans and creating an investigation policy.

19 Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government Municipal Governance and Policy and Freedom of Information Act in SC. Located at the five regional Councils of Governments locations. Topics include municipal governance and policy, the Freedom of Information Act in SC and a

presentation about the services offered by the Council of Governments.

19 Business Licensing Essentials Webinar. Virtual.

JUNE

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

9 – 11 Main Street SC Second Quarter Managers' Training/Summer Retreat. The Greenwood Arts Center.

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

18 SC Association of Stormwater Managers Second Quarter Meeting. Seawell's, Columbia.

23 Business License Bootcamp. Mauldin Senior Center, Greenville.

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

JULY

15 – 19 Municipal Association Annual Meeting. Hyatt Regency, Greenville. For more information, see page 2.

AUGUST

4 Setoff Debt Program Annual Participation Training. Municipal Association of SC, Columbia.

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

12 Small Cities Summit. Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center.

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

18 Business Licensing Essentials Webinar. Virtual.

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