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UPTOWN

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Cover photo: The Newberry Arts
Center is a division of the city's Parks,
Recreation and Tourism Department,
and is now housed in a refurbished
building that was once a grocery store
and later a newspaper office.
Photo: Oswaldo Tapia.

2027 Hometown Legislative Action Day Coming in February, Annual Meeting in August

In 2027, the Municipal Association's Hometown Legislative Action Day will take place February 10 at the Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center.

While this follows the timeline that HLAD often uses, local officials filling out their calendars for 2027 should note that the Municipal Association's Annual Meeting, which typically takes place in July, will take place at a later-than-usual date next year: August 18 – 22 at the Sheraton Myrtle Beach.

At the beginning of the legislative session, HLAD provides a time for municipal officials from around the state to come together in Columbia for updates on current legislative issues, to visit their legislators at the State House and to connect with legislators at the Association's legislative reception. Coming the day after HLAD, the Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government will take place February 11, also at the Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center.

Here are the important dates attendees will need to know for HLAD and the MEO:

Registration brochure available on Municipal Association website

- Tuesday, December 8

Hotel reservations deadline

- Sunday, January 10

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 \$209 plus taxes and fees. Use the group code "969." 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 \$194 plus taxes and fees. Use group code "92Z."

Registration deadline for HLAD and MEO Institute

- Monday, January 25

Hometown Legislative Action Day

- Wednesday, February 10 | Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center

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

- Thursday, February 11 | Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center

Registration details for the Annual Meeting will be available in 2027. Find more Municipal Association meeting dates for 2027 at www.masc.sc (keyword: calendar).

Five Officials Graduate From Municipal Clerks and Treasurers Institute

The SC Municipal Clerks and Treasurers Institute recognized five new graduates after its most recent session — MCTI Year 2, Session A — in September.

The newest graduates are Amanda Garris, clerk/treasurer, Town of Lake View; Angela Westmoreland, assistant city clerk, City of North Myrtle Beach; Fiona Buchanan, deputy city clerk, City of Greenville; Linda McDaniel, executive admin assistant/city clerk, City of Orangeburg; and Zella Major, clerk, Town of Stuckey.

The Municipal Clerks and Treasurers Institute provides 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 2, Session A, covers human resource management, workplace technology, election administration, accounting and written communication. Presenters for this September's session included City of Goose Creek Marketing Manager Adam Kelly discussing social media and electronic communication, and VC3 Senior Business Development Executive Kevin Benson discussed the importance of keeping website information compatible with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Two of the Municipal Association of SC Field Services managers, Desirée Fragoso and Rob Wolfe, discussed election administration, including special elections and referenda.

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

NEWS BRIEFS

The Municipal Technology Association of SC has elected its 2026 – 27 board of directors. These are President **Travis Simpson**, network administrator, Laurens CPW; First Vice President **Noah Vega**, chief information officer, City of Clinton; and Second Vice President **Robert Popenhagen**, IT director, City of Aiken. The members at large are **Janet Broome**, network administrator, City of Tega Cay; **Ivan Torres**, interim chief information officer, City of Charleston; and **Bryan Garrett**, IT director, City of Myrtle Beach. The past president is **Leo Larkin**, IT manager, Town of Summerville.

CNN Travel's 2026 Best Towns to Visit list included the **City of Greenville** in the No. 3 slot, following Sarasota, Fla., at No. 1 and New Haven, Conn., at No. 2. The accolade called out Falls Park on the Reedy, the city's pedestrian and bicycle paths, and a "vibrant downtown energy that other cities crave."



The Case for Property Taxes

By B. Todd Glover, Executive Director, Municipal Association of South Carolina



In my 30 years working in and around local government, I have never met anyone who loves paying taxes. Yet, I have met countless residents who do express their love of community and gratitude for public safety and the other services provided to them by local governments. Every day our residents evaluate the value of what they pay for these services against the quality of the services. They have direct input with city council, the closest form of government to the people, and through the election process.

We often hear that “property taxes are like renting your home from the government. Once you pay for your home, you should no longer have to pay property taxes.” This is one of the leading misconceptions in society about local government. Paying off a home and paying property taxes are not tied in any way. Paying off your home is fulfilling a financial obligation to a lending institution. Paying your property taxes is fulfilling an obligation to your local government for the services provided to you like infrastructure, police, fire, and parks and recreation.

While income taxes fund state government, the state legislature established property taxes as the chief mechanism to fund local governments.

Police and Fire Protection

Few responsibilities are more important than protecting people and property.

Public safety is often the largest portion of a municipal budget, and for good reason. Police officers, firefighters and code enforcement personnel are on the front lines of making communities safer and more secure. Lives literally hang in the balance.

Strong public safety services also help protect property values. Effective fire protection contributes to lower insurance costs and better fire ratings. Law enforcement helps maintain safe neighborhoods and business districts. Code enforcement helps ensure properties are safe and well maintained, protecting both residents and surrounding investments. In most of our larger cities with robust police and fire operations, property taxes do not even generate enough revenue to cover their costs alone.

Public Works

Many of the most important local government services operate quietly in the background, often unnoticed until something goes wrong.

Water systems provide the safe, reliable drinking water that homes and businesses depend on every day. Wastewater and stormwater systems protect public health and help communities manage flooding risks. Sanitation services keep neighborhoods clean, while streetlights contribute to safety and visibility after dark. While many of these services are paid for through utility fees, it is the overall structure of government funded by property taxes that support these functions.

Whether its roads, sidewalks or walking trails, property-tax-funded infrastructure is critical to the health and vitality of cities and towns. They help preserve the quality of life residents expect and support the economic vitality communities need to thrive.



Parks and Recreation

When people think about local government services, parks and recreation may not come to mind as quickly as police, fire or infrastructure. Yet many communities have discovered that investments in parks, trails, athletic facilities, gathering spaces and cultural amenities can have a transformative impact.

These amenities improve quality of life, create opportunities for recreation and community engagement, and help attract residents, visitors and businesses. In many communities, they have become important economic development assets as well.

What Happens When Revenue Is Lost?

Property taxes provide a stable source of revenue that allows local governments to plan, maintain infrastructure and deliver essential services. Residents see that return on investment every day through safer neighborhoods, reliable utilities, maintained public spaces and responsive emergency services.

The challenge is that these services do not become less expensive over time. When property tax revenue is reduced without a replacement funding source, local governments are often forced to delay maintenance, postpone capital improvements or reduce services. While those decisions may not be immediately visible, their effects tend to compound over time, making future challenges more difficult and more costly to address.

Property Taxes Build the Foundation

While you may have paid off your home, the services keeping your home and family safe still have to be funded. That is why it is important for residents to understand what their property taxes support. Property taxes are not simply a bill to be paid. They are an investment in the services, infrastructure and amenities that contribute to the quality of life we enjoy and the value of the communities we call home.

Whether in a growing urban center or a small rural town, property taxes help provide the foundation for safe, prosperous and vibrant communities across South Carolina.

Tech Tip: Stay Safe on Public Wi-Fi



Free public Wi-Fi may be convenient, but it's also risky.

Hackers can use it to intercept data or trick users into connecting to fake networks that look legitimate. This can expose a municipality's emails, sensitive and confidential data, and even login credentials to hackers.

When city officials and staff find themselves at an airport, coffee shop,

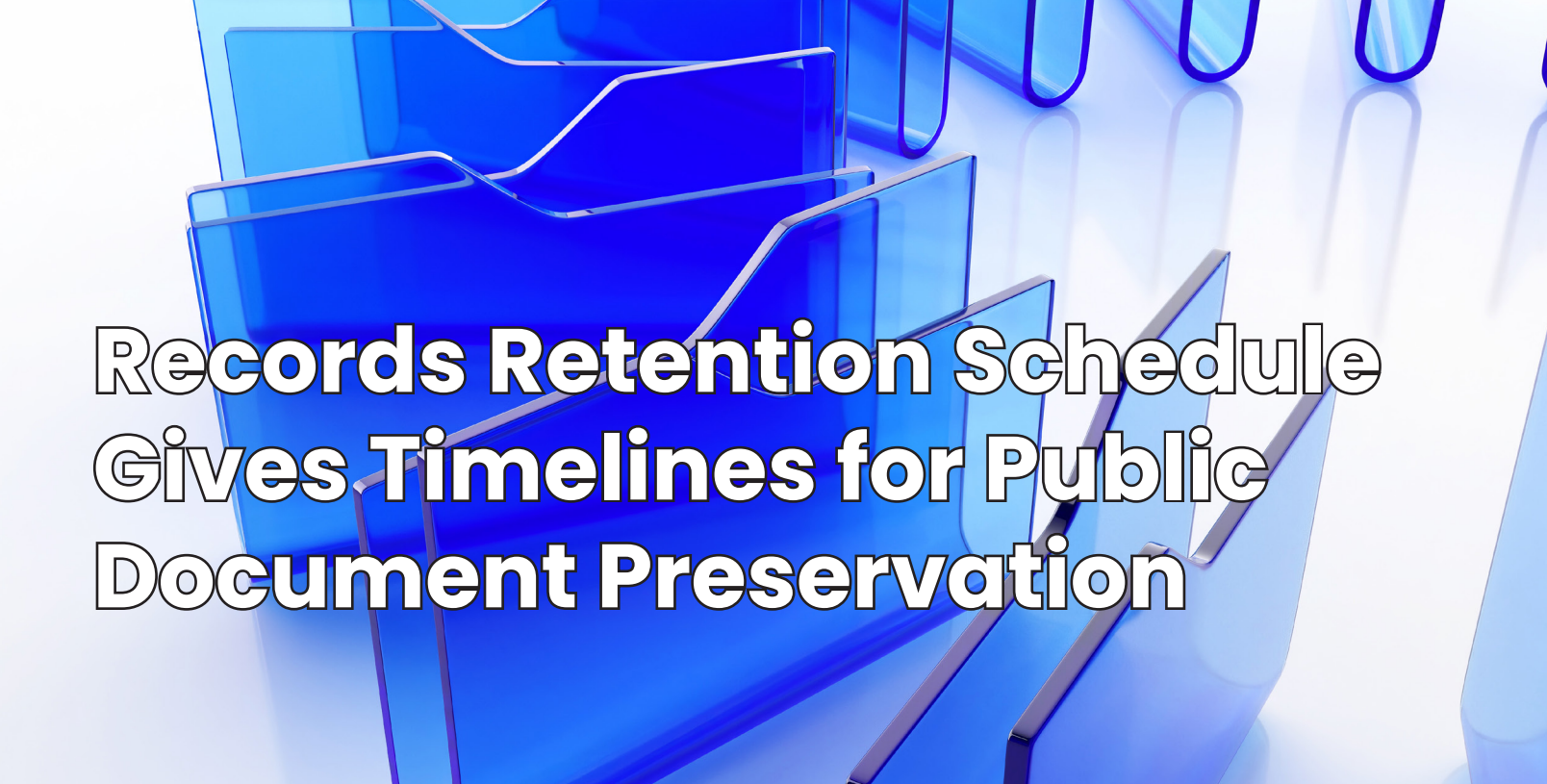
hotel or other place with public Wi-Fi, keep the following in mind:

- Avoid using public Wi-Fi for work whenever possible.
- For those who must connect, use a Virtual Private Network, or VPN, to encrypt data or use a personal hotspot for a more secure connection.
- Be cautious of pop-ups asking for login information.

- Never access sensitive systems — such as financial or HR platforms — on unsecured networks.

A little extra caution while traveling or working remotely can go a long way toward protecting a municipality's data.

These tips are provided by VC3, the technology partner of the Municipal Association of SC.



Records Retention Schedule Gives Timelines for Public Document Preservation

Maintaining public records for the appropriate length of time is a critical concern for cities and towns. Doing so helps them manage legal risk — even beyond concerns of litigation, the SC Public Records Act establishes penalties for destroying public records. Maintaining records securely and efficiently is also simply critical for a city’s ability to operate.

The SC Department of Archives and History offers general record retention schedules found on its website, www.scdah.sc.gov, which municipalities can use unless they opt to establish specific schedules themselves. In May 2026, SCDAH revised its General Records Retention Schedule for Municipal Records — an extensive policy document that can help municipalities manage their costs of storing information, enhance their data management and ensure legal compliance.

Permanent

Some records, according to the schedule, must be maintained in perpetuity. It calls for these types of records to be transferred to an archival repository for permanent retention.

It notes that “permanent paper records that have been microfilmed or digitized must also have a secure back-up copy.”

There are numerous records that cities should retain permanently, including

- Public meeting agendas, agenda packets, minutes
- Ordinances, resolutions, municipal budgets, audit reports
- Map files, annexation files, right-of-way files, subdivision maps or plats
- Deeds of municipality-owned properties and easements
- Governmental and public building project maps and blueprints
- Building permits, certificates of occupancy, encroachment permits
- Cemetery records

“X” years, destroy

The retention schedule names records that are to be destroyed a given number of years after their creation, provided that any administrative, legal and fiscal retention requirements have been met.

For example, the schedule calls for audio, video or digital recordings of public meetings — the type of documents used to prepare minutes — to be retained for two years and then destroyed, so long as the written versions of the minutes have been produced. Contract documents, meanwhile, are to be retained for three years after the expiration of the contract, then destroyed.

The schedule calls for municipalities to periodically complete a Report on Records Destroyed Form to submit to the SCDAH Records Management Division.

Until no longer needed for reference

The records defined this way are to be maintained until the municipality finds that they are no longer of use by municipal officials and staff. They are then destroyed. The schedule applies this to “general housekeeping files,” which could be anything from a list of assigned parking spaces to notices of holidays, a list of animal trapping requests, or maps of construction projects.

January is Compensation Survey Time

Every year, the Municipal Association of SC asks cities and towns to submit data on the wages they pay to municipal employees as well as elected officials, allowing it to create a report of statewide compensation information. Participating in the survey is optional, but when many municipalities contribute to this survey, it makes the data more valuable. The next survey collection period is coming up in January.

Since municipal governments 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 good candidates.

The Association makes the data from its compensation survey available at 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.

The 2027 survey will be available for data entry from January 4 to February 26. For more information, visit www.masc.sc (keyword: compensation survey). For questions, contact Lea Ann Mitchell at lmitchell@masc.sc or 803.933.1254.

Complete the Association's Compensation Survey between January 4 and February 26.

The screenshot shows the 'Municipal Compensation Survey' form on the website of the Municipal Association of South Carolina. The form includes dropdown menus for 'Survey Year' (set to 2026), 'Municipality' (with options like Anderson, Barnwell, Batesburg-Leesville), 'Population Range' (with options like Less Than 1,000, 1,000 - 5,000, 5,001 - 10,000), and 'Position Group' (with options like Administration, Elected and Appointed Officials, Engineering). A 'Run Report' button is visible at the bottom right of the form area.

Association Highlight: *SC Utility Billing Association*

Many municipal job positions have specific professional development needs, and the Municipal Association of South Carolina's affiliate associations offer numerous training opportunities to meet those needs.

The SC Utility Billing Association provides training and networking opportunities for billing clerks, meter readers and utility department managers. SCUBA's meetings cover many topics ranging from customer service, safety in the workplace and technologies that can increase the efficiency of utility billing.

Most recently, SCUBA hosted a Customer Service Training and Networking Luncheon in October. The upcoming SCUBA Annual Meeting will take place March 8 – 10, 2027, at the Hilton Myrtle Beach Resort.

Learn more at www.masc.sc (keyword: SCUBA).

RoleTrack Helps SCMIT, SCMIRF Members Update Contacts

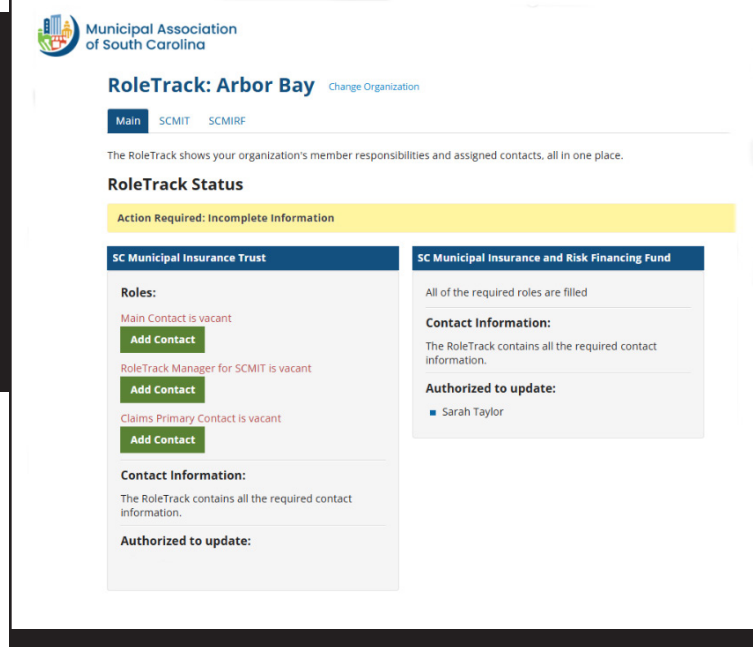
This year, the Municipal Association of SC Risk Management Services launched a new application for SC Municipal Insurance Trust and SC Municipal Insurance and Risk Financing Fund members, allowing them to easily assign their primary and secondary contact information with RMS.

The application, RoleTrack, helps SCMIT and SCMIRF members close communication gaps and ensure that the necessary people in their cities and towns receive the information they need.

Why RoleTrack matters

Maintaining accurate and up-to-date contact information allows the appropriate personnel among SCMIT and SCMIRF members to receive key information and communications from RMS, which can take many forms:

- Monthly reports and annual reviews of the member's coverage and loss data
- Training announcements
- Coverage renewals and invoices



Making updates

SCMIT and SCMIRF members can access RoleTrack on the Association's website, www.masc.sc, through the member login. On the Member Home page, the RoleTrack link appears below "Training Programs." RoleTrack managers, main and secondary contacts can add, edit and remove contacts. All other contacts have view-only access.

RoleTrack lists any required roles that are vacant as well as basic contact information that should be updated. It also displays the municipal staff who are authorized to make updates, and includes functionality to add new employees and terminate employees who are no longer employed at the municipality.

Contact Amy Gillian at agillian@masc.sc or 803.354.4774 with any questions about updating contacts in RoleTrack.

'You've Been Elected, Now What?' Training Coming December 9

Newly elected mayors and councilmembers can learn about many of the critical aspects of their new roles through the virtual Municipal Association of SC training session, "You've Been Elected, Now What?" taking place on Wednesday, December 9, from 9 a.m. to noon. This webinar has no registration or cost.

The individual sessions in the training will be 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 includes a highlight of the programs and resources of the Municipal Association, as well as how city and town councils can conduct meetings effectively.

It also addresses two South Carolina laws that greatly impact municipal government operations, including the SC Freedom of Information Act. This law, commonly known, as FOIA, creates many transparency-related requirements for municipal governments, ranging from how they post and distribute public meeting agendas to how they conduct executive sessions as part of a public meeting,

how they make meeting minutes available, and how they manage and respond to requests for public information in accordance with the deadline requirements set in law. The training will also cover the SC Ethics Act. Ethics laws in South Carolina require regular submissions of the Statement of Economic Interests form, as well as rules to prevent self-dealing, use of confidential information for their economic interests, or influence peddling.

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



Arts Centers Craft Community Vibrancy and Opportunity

In addition to its gallery space, the Arts Center of Greenwood is also home to artist studios and classrooms. Photo: Arts Center of Greenwood.

Arts can enhance a city in many ways — from fueling the local economy and cultural scene to offering an outlet for creativity to simply improving the quality of life for residents.

Just ask Newberry, which began its arts program in 2014 in a small space — basically a hallway and one classroom building. The community response was tremendous, and the Newberry Arts Center has now expanded repeatedly to meet the growing demand.

“The City of Newberry not only saw the popularity of the arts program, but also saw how it served the community in many positive ways,” said Marquerite F. Palmer, director of the Newberry Arts Center. “Engaging in the arts brings people together who would not have otherwise met. This helps to grow a stronger community, as people learn about others who are from different backgrounds.”

The NAC grew first to a larger spot in downtown, where it stayed for several years as it added programs. But as the interest grew, the city looked for a permanent home where programs could flourish. It found it in a Main Street property, built in the late 1950s, which served as a grocery store and later a newspaper office.

That expansion moved NAC programming from 3,000 to 16,000 square feet, Palmer said.

“Finally, NAC could offer larger classes so we did not have to turn people away. We can also offer many classes at the same time, something we only dreamed of doing before,” she said.

Once the city purchased and refurbished the building, Palmer said it was “reborn like a chrysalis into a butterfly ... Once the old facade was peeled away it transformed into a modern and beautifully inviting place where many more people could take part in creating, learning and growing through the arts. Our city manager, Jason Taylor, says that ‘this building once fed our bodies, then it fed our minds and now it feeds our souls.’”

The center offers classes and workshops in many art mediums: drawing, oil, pottery, sewing, quilting and



With a focus on arts experiences for all interested residents and support for working artists, the Newberry Arts Center aims to provide arts programming for all ages. Photo: City of Newberry.



In 2025, the Mauldin Theatre Company staged "Rent" at the Mauldin Cultural Center. Photo: City of Mauldin.

watercolor. There are free community art activities along with art classes and summer camps led by professional artists. The center hosts the three-day South Carolina Clay Conference each February, featuring nationally recognized clay artists.

Since moving to the new building in January 2026, program participation is on track to more than double by the end of this year.

Funding came from accommodations and hospitality taxes, the city's economic development set-aside funds, its general fund and a state appropriation. The center also is helped through CREATE Newberry, a 501(c)3 formed in 2020 to raise funds for scholarships to NAC classes and programs. As the art programs grew, CREATE began providing funds to pay for guest artists and to offset the cost of more expensive classes.

During renovations of the new building, Palmer said, "it became clear that CREATE would need to provide the funds to purchase all the art furniture, equipment, chairs, stage and many other items needed in the building. In September 2025, CREATE began a capital campaign with a goal to raise \$712,000 to provide everything needed inside the building as well as create an engaging plaza area with sculptures and seating in front of the building. A mural will soon be going up on the building, also provided through the capital campaign."

The Arts Center of Greenwood also found its home by renovating and reusing an old building. Greenwood's Federal Building was constructed around 1909 – 1911, and was originally used as a post office and federal courthouse.

Various tenants used it in the late 20th century. In 2006, after a community-driven major capital campaign, the historic building reopened with 25,000 square feet of space for the arts.

The center includes gallery space, a ceramics studio, resident artist studios, classrooms, a courtyard garden and a visitor center. It offers seasonal art classes, camps, workshops, lectures and tours.

For Sylvia Martin, executive director of the Arts Center of Greenwood, the center helps create a strong sense of identity and pride while helping make Greenwood "a vibrant place to live, work and visit."

"Having grown up in Greenwood and spent years creating and leading programs at the Arts Center, I've had the privilege of seeing how deeply the arts can touch people's lives," Martin said. "Our arts center is more than a place for art. It is a gathering place where neighbors come together, young people discover their creativity, local artists find a voice, and our community celebrates diverse people and stories."

Greenwood also was helped by its selection as one of the state's 12 cultural districts by the SC Arts Commission. The designation gave Greenwood an opportunity to build on what it had created, while partnerships between local businesses and artists have flourished.

Martin said the renovation of the Arts Center became a catalyst for revitalization throughout Greenwood.

"Once we made that investment, it helped build momentum for the renovation of [Greenwood's] museum and [community] theater, and eventually the

improvements to our Uptown streetscape,” she said. “Today, you can really see the impact.”

In Mauldin, a cultural center was the first step toward creating a true city center, said Gina McAtee, the city’s cultural and tourism manager. Although well located near major highways, Mauldin has historically lacked a traditional downtown.

In 2003, the city purchased a building that had housed both Mauldin High and Mauldin Elementary schools, with plans to develop the Mauldin Cultural Center. It became the hub for the city, she said.

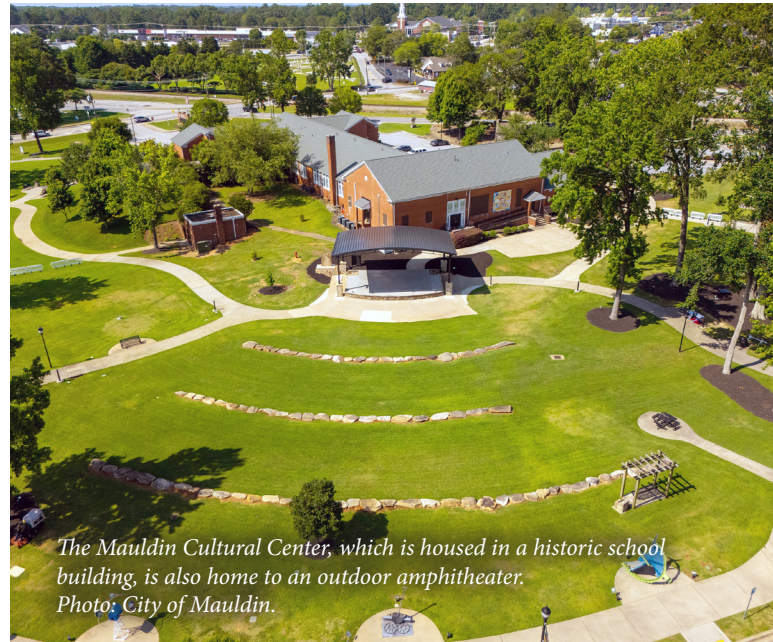
The center is home to community groups, arts education programming including classes in painting and pottery along with guitar, piano, ballroom dancing and voice. The center also houses the Public Art Trail, the Mauldin City Singers and the Mauldin Theatre Company. The city’s festivals and events take place at the amphitheater behind the building.

The cultural center is funded by the city, operating under the Community Development Department. A staff of four full-time and two part-time employees oversees the facility, events and theatre program, McAtee said.

Community partnerships are also key, with the center building relationships through festivals and theatre programs. Outside of sponsorships, ticket sales from theatre performances serve as a primary revenue source. Now in its 10th season, the Mauldin Theatre Company is producing six main-stage productions and additional performances each year.

The center works closely with the Greater Mauldin Chamber of Commerce, housed onsite, as well as many local businesses and organizations.

“We believe partnerships should be a two-way street. While collaborations help us grow our programming,



The Mauldin Cultural Center, which is housed in a historic school building, is also home to an outdoor amphitheater. Photo: City of Mauldin.

they also allow us to give back to the community we serve,” she said. “We donate theatre tickets and summer camp vouchers to local nonprofits and fundraisers, have partnered with local food banks to donate food and reduce waste following our annual BBQ Cook-Off, and collaborate on community-wide toy drives, clothing drives and other charitable efforts.”

McAtee said cities looking to start a city-sponsored arts center should seek input and listen to their community, even on something as simple as booking a band.

“We’ve booked new bands for our concert series just because our community suggested them and the response to that is overwhelming,” she said. “We then establish a great rapport with our residents and get to bring them something they enjoy. After all, everything we do is for the community.”



The Arts Center of Greenwood operates in Greenwood’s historic federal building, renovated with the help of a community-driven capital campaign. Photo: Arts Center of Greenwood.

Historic Preservation Guide Available Through Main Street SC



Historic preservation presents many challenges to cities and towns. Property owners and community leaders must navigate complex decisions about how to protect and maintain their historic structures, while misconceptions about preservation regulations can make those decisions more difficult. Still, historic buildings and places are often among a community's greatest assets — helping define its identity, strengthen its economy and support a sustainable downtown district.

To help communities navigate these issues, Main Street South Carolina, the downtown revitalization technical assistance program of the Municipal Association of SC, created the *Historic Preservation: A Main Street Leader's Guide*. Much of this new resource was created by Hannah Davis, development manager with the City of Florence, who leads the Downtown Florence Main Street program.

Davis described the guide, which includes practical tools, resources and workbook sections, as a resource created with the directors of the state's Main Street programs in mind, aimed at helping them advocate for the value of preservation, and promote the practices proven to help preserve properties and maintain a strong downtown business district.

"Sometimes, preservation gets lost in the shuffle and misunderstood because it's highly technical and requires a lot of skill and background," she said. "This really is intended to be something that anyone could pick up,

from a brand-new local practitioner to an elected official to a seasoned planner. They can have a toolkit, specifically geared toward South Carolina, that will help them make better decisions for their communities when it comes to asset protection or cultural resource navigation."

The guide helps readers understand what makes a property historically significant, including its age, its architectural integrity, its character-defining features and its connection to important historical events, people or patterns. Because understanding preservation means understanding its language, the guide covers the architectural elements of a historic storefront, from parapets and cornices to transoms, pilasters and bulkheads.

Preservation advocacy can involve everything from education and promotion to community partnership building. It can also help property owners identify tax credit programs and other resources so they can maintain and improve their buildings while maintaining historical integrity.

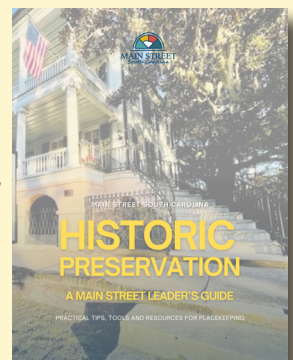
The guide explains steps that local governments can take to promote preservation — adopting local preservation ordinances, establishing community design standards and incorporating preservation into downtown master plans. They can also create Bailey Bill tax incentives, establish facade grant programs and participate in the SC Certified Local Government Program, which opens access to grant opportunities.

The guide covers steps that local leaders can take when first undertaking preservation efforts, as well as building inventories and performing building assessments. It also explains the frequently misunderstood role of a listing on the National Register of Historic Places, which qualifies a property for tax credits, but which does not restrict property rights or prevent demolitions.

The guide also addresses major challenges facing historic properties, including deferred maintenance, inappropriate building alterations and absentee property ownership. Seasonal property owner checklists explain how to prioritize maintenance issues in South Carolina's climate.

"Historic preservation provides communities a way to build on what they already have," said Jenny Boulware, Main Street SC Manager. "This guide gives local leaders practical tools to better understand those physical assets, communicate their value and make informed decisions about how to preserve and reinvest in them."

The historic preservation guide is one of the Main Street SC resources available online, joined by other items such as the Economic Incentives Toolkit and Design Review Training. Find them at www.masc.sc (keyword: Main Street).



For Outdoor Concerts, the Benefits Are Worth the Logistics Planning

On May 30 and 31, 2026, Finlay Park hosted the Songbird Music Festival, drawing in thousands of concertgoers not long after the revitalized park's grand reopening in November 2025. Photo: City of Columbia.

When the music starts at the City of Columbia's Finlay Park on a Friday evening, the scene can look deceptively simple. A band takes the stage, people spread blankets and lawn chairs across the grass, children play and food trucks serve dinner.

Behind that scene, however, is a carefully coordinated municipal operation involving musicians, sound equipment, park staff, police, fire officials, vendors and a budget that pays for considerably more than the performers.

Columbia's newly renovated Finlay Park offers a look at what it takes for a city to operate a regular outdoor concert series — and why officials say the investment is about more than entertainment.

"Activation is key," said John Katz, deputy director and program manager for Finlay Park. "And providing all these opportunities for the public to come enjoy this beautiful park is really what my job is."

The city launched its Finlay Fridays series in February after completing a \$25 million renovation at the 17.5-acre downtown park. Free concerts are scheduled most Fridays through spring, summer and fall with the lineup crossing genres, from jazz and R&B to rock and Americana.

"We work with a local promoter to help identify talent and book bands," Katz said. "We try and make sure that the genres are all over the board."

The variety is intentional.

"Our goal is to attract all walks of life," says Henry Simons, assistant city manager. "When you have a variety

of programming, that gives you the diversity that you're looking for."

The city has committed about \$2 million a year for maintenance and events at the park, with a goal that most events are free.

On a typical concert day, Katz said, audio equipment begins going into place around 2 p.m. The band generally arrives around 4 p.m. for a sound check, followed by event staff and police. The city rents a basic production system that handles most of its needs. Larger or specialized performances can require additional microphones and speakers.

Food and other vendors buy permits to sell at the concerts, and there is a designated beer seller for the free events. Patrons can bring in food and nonalcoholic beverages in soft-sided coolers and the park has a clear-bag policy like many large venues. The free events draw about 1,500 to 2,000 people, Katz said, depending on weather.

The city staged a ticketed event in May — the Songbird Music Festival, a two-day Americana and roots music festival — and it drew about 4,000 people. It featured nationally touring acts, including Old Crow Medicine Show and Sam Bush, and Katz said the city hopes to do it again.

The concerts also are designed so that people do not necessarily have to sit and watch the stage for the entire evening.

Finlay Park's 60,000-square-foot event lawn is surrounded by an asphalt walking loop. The playground, splash pad and other amenities remain part of the



*Travelers Rest's Trailblazer Park is home to free concerts on Saturday evenings in May, June and September.
Photo: City of Travelers Rest.*

experience, allowing families to use the park while music is playing.

Renovations also considered how the concerts interact with the park's neighbors, who were kept involved in the redevelopment. Simons said the stage was reoriented during the renovations so that sound projects away from its nearby residential area.

When the City of Travelers Rest built its public gathering space on the site of a former high school in 2014, city officials included an amphitheater specifically to host concerts.

"We didn't have a public gathering space — a big green space — for lots of community events," Programs and Communications Director Beth Sicignano said of the plan to create the complex that now includes city hall, the fire department, the police department and Trailblazer Park.

Events at Trailblazer Park started small, but have grown. For example, 6,000 attendees came to the 2026 concert and drone show celebrating the United States' 250th anniversary. Sicignano wrote the script for the drone show that incorporated local history and imagery, including references to local Revolutionary War figure Dicey Langston, the Swamp Rabbit Trail and Travelers Rest's high school mascot.

Over the years, the city's budget for the summer concert series has grown to about \$40,000 with some offset coming from sponsors and food truck permits.

"City council, in our last comprehensive plan, identified arts and culture as one of their four core values," said Town Administrator Shannon Herman. "A lot of what we do in the programming is try to bring arts and culture to the community."

The free concert series runs on Saturdays in May and June, and the first three Saturdays in September. The 2026 lineup included local and regional acts spanning rock, country, R&B, Appalachian, Celtic and other genres. Food trucks arrive at 6 p.m., with music beginning at 7 p.m.

Sicignano said the town has gradually increased its programming budget, allowing it to book better-known regional performers whose followings extend into markets such as Atlanta and Charlotte. That planning also helps the town anticipate crowds. Sicignano tracks bands' social media followers and engagement to estimate attendance and determine the level of support an event will require. Larger events can require additional portable toilets and trash receptacles. Afterward, city employees clean the park and a contracted company collects the bagged trash.

Weather is another consideration with contracts that address cancellations and rescheduling.

“We had a band recently that was rained out in May,” Sicignano said. “They’re coming back and we’ve already paid them.”

For the City of Tega Cay, outdoor concerts in Runde Park have been a staple almost since the city was incorporated in 1982.

“The concerts bring community together,” said Caroline Hasty, Tega Cay’s events manager.

Typically, the city hosts four concerts, with most held at Runde Park, and two other festivals a year. The 2026 schedule included June, July, August and October concerts, with the July performance incorporated into the city’s Independence Day and anniversary celebration.

Because of its size and location on the shores of Lake Wylie, the city’s biggest logistical issue with concerts and events is parking. To accommodate as many as 500 attendees at a concert, the city provides free shuttle buses that run continuously during the event. Many attendees

also simply walk from their nearby homes, taking advantage of the city’s sidewalk network.

Most of the logistics of setup and cleanup are handled by city employees and volunteers, Hasty said. The bulk of the funding for concerts comes from the city’s operating budget, although some money does come from vendor permits and sponsorships, which include in-kind donations, such as hay bales for seating or golf carts for transporting guests.

Attendees are encouraged to bring their own chairs and blankets, but the city also offers a upgrade opportunity that includes seating and drink service.

Tega Cay’s concerts are intentionally focused on local and regional acts. Hasty said the city has plenty of musical talent of its own, and she likes to showcase musicians who live in or identify with Tega Cay. Concerts can also feature local veterans’ groups or school and music programs.

For Hasty, the measure of success is creating an experience people remember and want to repeat.

“We want to do it so great that they’ll come back and bring their friends,” she said.



The City of Tega Cay employs free shuttle service to concertgoers for its concert series. Photo: Cliff Nichols Photography.



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Calendar

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

NOVEMBER

4 – 6 Risk Management Services: Conference/Annual Members Meeting. Embassy Suites by Hilton Greenville Downtown Riverplace. Topics include root-cause investigations, cybersecurity, reducing workplace injuries and RMS program updates.

5 SC Association of Stormwater Managers Fourth Quarter Meeting. Seawall's, Columbia. Topics include legal updates and preserving South Carolina's sea turtle nesting habitat.

11 – 13 Municipal Human Resources Association Annual Meeting. Embassy Suites by Hilton Charleston Harbor, Mount Pleasant. Topics include preventing occupational burnout, AI and healthcare, anti-discrimination laws, engaging employees and residents, and HR relations with leadership.

13 SC Municipal Finance Officers, Clerks and Treasurers Association Athenian Dialogue. Virtual.

17 Business Licensing Essentials Webinar. Virtual.

18 Main Street SC Fourth Quarter Managers Training. Gaffney's Crossroads, Gaffney. Topics include market studies, the role of local government in downtown revitalization strategies, and a walking tour of downtown Gaffney

DECEMBER

3 SC Municipal Attorneys' Association Annual Meeting. Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center, Columbia.

9 Newly Elected Orientation: 'You've Been Elected, Now What?' Virtual.

2027

FEBRUARY

10 Hometown Legislative Action Day. Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center.

11 Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government. Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center. Session A topics include the city as an employer, conducting public meetings, ethics and public accountability, planning and zoning as well as strategic

planning and goal setting. Session B topics include business license tax administration, intergovernmental relations, municipality liability and municipal courts.

27 Risk Management Services: Employment Liability Training. Hilton Garden Inn, Columbia Airport.

MARCH

8 – 10 SC Utility Billing Association Annual Meeting. Hilton Myrtle Beach Resort.

18 Municipal Technology Association of SC Spring Meeting. Hilton Garden Inn, Columbia Airport.

APRIL

8 Palmetto Power Cities Legislative Breakfast. Blatt Building, State House grounds.

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

13 – 14 Risk Management Services: OSHA 10-Hour Training. Municipal Association of SC, Columbia.

22 Municipal Human Resources Association of SC Spring Meeting. Hilton Garden Inn, Columbia Airport.

A nonpartisan, nonprofit association representing all of South Carolina's 271 incorporated cities and towns, the Municipal Association of SC works to meet the needs of local governments through shared voices, knowledge and solutions.