

UPTOWN

a publication of the Municipal Association of South Carolina

FIRE ENGINE PROCUREMENT REQUIRES ATTENTION TO TIMING, SAFETY NEEDS

page 11

**New Municipal Governance Handbook, Model
Parliamentary Procedures Now Available**

page 4

**Five Risk Trends Every Local Government
Should Address in 2027**

page 5

**Animal Control Officers Give Cities Faster
Responses, Closer Community Ties**

page 14

New Municipal Governance Handbook, Model Parliamentary Procedures Now Available4

Five Risk Trends Every Local Government Should Address in 2027.....5

Social Media Civility Requires Discretion and Patience7

When Does the Dual-office-holding Prohibition Apply?8

Act 224 Expands South Carolina Heritage Act Requirements9

Why Serve in Local Government?10

Special Section: Public Safety

Fire Engine Procurement Requires Attention to Timing, Safety Needs11

City Connect Market Offers Cooperative Purchasing Opportunities13

Animal Control Officers Give Cities Faster Responses, Closer Community14

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Cover Photo: As with many cities and towns, Travelers Rest applies a large amount of planning and preparation to the major financial decisions involved in fire engine procurement. Photo: City of Travelers Rest.

Procurement Codes Prevent Purchasing Headaches

The decisions that city and town councilmembers make as they purchase goods and services is at the heart of how these elected officials steward public funds and public trust — and they can easily become the source of an ethics complaint, a bid dispute, a loss of grant funding or a loss of confidence from residents.

Addressing some of these challenges, the Municipal Association's General Counsel Eric Shytle and Associate General Counsel Sara Weathers led a presentation on procurement and ethics at the Small Cities Summit in August. They covered six overall areas to consider to keep purchases legally sound and ethically appropriate.

Adopting a simple procurement code

SC Code Section 11-35-5320 requires all municipalities to adopt ordinances or procedures providing "sound principals of appropriately competitive procurement," which helps ensure that taxpayer money is used as effectively as possible.

"If there are multiple sources of what you're buying, and there almost always are, you have to compete. That's the core idea. That's what I want you to go away from here today with: is you should have a procurement ordinance, and it should require competition," Shytle said. "You want to be able to tell the judge if you have a protest, and you

want to be able to tell the public that elected you, or the public that elected your bosses, 'We got the best price we could under the circumstances.'"

Shytle noted that although the procurement code for state agencies is available for cities to copy, it is in many cases more complicated than what municipalities need. The adopted code should be appropriate for the city's size and staffing level, Shytle said, and its particular purchasing needs, but should in all cases require the city to use real competition to select vendors in cases where competition is reasonably appropriate.

Follow the code's dollar thresholds and exceptions

The code can be broken into multiple levels, with the dollar amounts set by the city's purchasing needs and experience.

- **Small purchases below an authorized limit:** approved employees can make purchases. At this level, requiring bids would be inefficient, but Shytle cautioned against practices like breaking a purchase into multiple invoices for the purpose of keeping it below a dollar threshold.
- **Intermediate-level purchases:** employees must obtain and document multiple quotes.

- **Larger purchases:** require formal competitive bids, or proposals, giving public notice of the request. The code can require city council approval for the very largest purchases. Shytle noted cases where a city would want the most suitable professional rather than the lowest builder — new buildings, or a fire engine — where the city would use a set scoring rubric taking into account professional experience, cost and how well the proposal fits the city's needs.

Document purchases as well as emergency and exemption decisions

Allowable exemptions are an important part of a procurement code, Shytle said, and should be written into the code ahead of time, with all claimed exceptions documented at the time of the purchase. Exceptions can include things such as emergency purchases under unforeseeable circumstances, or purchases in the rare case where there is truly only a single vendor that could provide the item.

Purchases that can financially benefit the official or their family require recusal

Weathers covered South Carolina's Ethics, Government Accountability and Campaign Reform Act, which prohibits officials from using of a public office or employment to obtain an economic interest for themselves, their family members, or other associated people or businesses. The definition of "family member" under the law is quite broad, including spouses, parents, siblings, in-laws, grandparents and grandchildren.

A perfectly valid procurement process can still create an ethics

violation if the wrong person participates in the process, she said.

"If money can flow to you or anyone around you, you need to be really thoughtful in your decision-making process. Not because you are potentially doing anything nefarious, but because you can run afoul of these rules and you can create a whole mess of problems for yourself, your municipality, and those with whom you are associated," she said.

The law also prohibits participating in or attempting to influence a governmental decision affecting those economic interests. Elected officials facing a conflict of interest must recuse themselves with a written statement describing the conflict entered into the minutes, and refrain from voting, deliberating or taking any action to influence the decision. Leaving the room during the process can help eliminate the possibility of having affected the decision.

Weathers gave an example of a town needing a roofing contractor in a situation where a councilmember's brother owns a roofing company.

"The councilmember cannot be involved in drafting or reviewing the bids," she said. "He or she cannot be involved in any part of it, not just the up-or-down, yes-or-no votes."

SC Code Section 8-13-775 specifically addresses a public official, public member or public employee who has an economic interest in a government contract. These are situations that require legal analysis before the procurement process begins.

Find presentations from the Small Cities Summit at www.masc.sc (keyword: Small Cities Summit).

NEWS BRIEFS

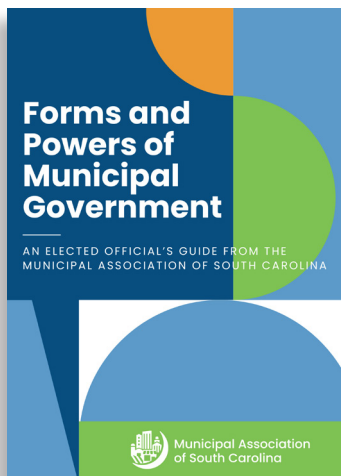
Five municipal officials earned their Accreditation in Business Licensing designation from the Business Licensing Officials Training Institute in August. They are **Alex Coon**, business office supervisor, City of Greer; **Tracey Frazier**, business license technician, Town of Mount Pleasant; **Stephanie Polite**, business license technician, Town of Mount Pleasant; **Brittany Rambo**, accounting specialist, City of Greenwood; and **Lauren Smith**, assistant chief financial officer, City of Abbeville. Three officials earned their Master in Business Licensing designation — **Rakenia Chantel Collier**, business license administrator, Orangeburg County; **Michael Costa**, business license specialist, Beaufort County; and **Debra S. Edwards**, supervisor, Horry County.

The Municipal Court Association of SC elected its 2027 board of directors. They include President **Courtney Boughton**, clerk of court, Town of Moncks Corner; Vice President **Lisa Cunningham**, clerk of court, Town of Bluffton; Second Vice President **Rudi A. Summers**, court services specialist, City of Greenville; members at large **Brittany Burns**, clerk of court, Town of Pine Ridge; **Ariel L. Brannen**, assistant clerk of court, ministerial recorder, City of Simpsonville; **Angela E. Cartrette**, court administrator, City of North Charleston; **Amanda T. Phillips**, clerk of court, Town of Kingstree; and Past President **Brenda Armstrong**, court specialist, City of Charleston.

The employment-focused social media network LinkedIn named two South Carolina cities in its "2026 Cities on the Rise" list, identifying U.S. metro areas with strong job growth and talent recruitment, according to its labor market data. It named **Charleston** as the city with the sixth fastest-growing city for job opportunities, making note of its port economy, advanced manufacturing and culture. The list highlighted **Myrtle Beach** as the 16th fastest-growing city, calling attention to its tourism, growing healthcare sectors and one of the country's quickest-growing populations of retirees.

New Municipal Governance Handbook, Model Parliamentary Procedures Now Available

At the 2026 Annual Meeting, the Municipal Association of SC unveiled two new resources to help municipalities operate. The updated *Forms and Powers of Municipal Government* handbook can help municipal officials better understand executive or administrative powers, while the model parliamentary procedure rules can help councils run their meetings more smoothly.



Updated *Forms and Powers of Municipal Government* handbook

South Carolina law requires all municipalities to structure themselves using one of these forms as defined in state law: the council form, the mayor-council form or the council-manager form. The legislative functions of city and town councils work the same across all three forms, but executive and administrative functions differ significantly.

This handbook describes the powers given by state law to mayors, councils and managers or administrators under the different forms. It also discusses who performs administrative duties under the three structures, who supervises departments and appoints and removes employees, who is responsible for preparing a municipality's budget, who can call special

meetings, as well as how municipalities may change the form of government through a referendum.

Not every question about delineation of responsibility has a clear answer in state law. The new version of the handbook describes some of these areas where the council can help reduce potential conflict through communication and thoughtfully established rules. This can include how the city establishes agendas for council meetings, purchasing powers and regular access to information.

Find the new version of the handbook at www.masc.sc (keyword: Forms and Powers).

Rules of parliamentary procedure

Robert's Rules of Order, created by the South Carolina-born Gen. Henry Martyn Robert, is a famous manual of parliamentary procedure, first published in 1876 and built on the rules of the United States Congress. Despite its widespread use, some municipalities have found that it is not ideally suited to municipal meetings. The Municipal Association drafted a much shorter 10-page set of rules that city and town councils can adopt by ordinance.

The rules cover areas including agenda preparation, presiding officers, quorums, meeting conduct, voting procedures, as well as the processes for making and considering different types of motions.

Find the model rules at www.masc.sc (keyword: parliamentary procedure).



Five Risk Trends Local Governments Should Address in 2027

Local government risks are changing.

Municipalities continue to face familiar challenges: vehicle collisions, injuries, severe weather, staffing pressures and aging infrastructure. But those risks increasingly overlap with evolving threats involving employee resilience, interconnected technology and cybersecurity.

Preparing for 2027 means thinking beyond traditional safety programs, and asking whether employees can safely perform their jobs, whether essential services can continue during a disaster, and whether a technology failure can become a public-safety problem.

Five areas deserve particular attention.

1. Fleet Accidents

Municipal fleets — police cars, fire apparatus, public works trucks, utility vehicles, sanitation vehicles, inspectors' vehicles and passenger cars — are constantly on the move, making fleet safety both an employee-safety issue and a public safety issue. Collisions can produce injuries, vehicle damage, workers' compensation costs, liability claims and lost productivity. They can also remove an essential vehicle from service.

The National Safety Council emphasizes that employees who drive for work should be considered fleet drivers, even if driving is not their primary job. Its fleet-training resources address vehicle-specific risks, safe backing, vehicle dynamics, pre- and post-trip inspections and driver decision-making.

A parks employee driving a pickup truck, a city clerk traveling between locations or a public works employee backing a utility vehicle may not think of themselves as professional drivers. From a municipal risk perspective, however, they are.

A strong municipal fleet program should include documented driver expectations, appropriate training, vehicle inspections, preventive maintenance, accident review and consistent supervision. Municipalities should examine distracted driving, speeding, backing incidents, fatigue and unfamiliar vehicles.

2. Poor Safety Culture

A municipality can have policies, training manuals and safety posters and still have a weak safety culture. Culture is revealed by behavior.

Do supervisors stop unsafe work when they see it? Do employees feel comfortable reporting a hazard? Are corrective actions completed? If employees believe that reporting a problem will get someone in trouble or that nothing will happen after a report is made, important information disappears.

A municipal safety culture should encourage employees to report hazards and near misses without fear of retaliation. Supervisors should be expected to respond. Management should track corrective actions and periodically review whether recurring problems are actually being addressed.

The goal is to move from a reactive model where a safety committee only investigates accidents and injuries after they happen to include a preventive model that looks for leading indicators.

Municipal leaders should consider tracking training completion, workplace inspections, vehicle inspections, near misses, reported hazards and outstanding corrective actions alongside traditional injury statistics.

3. Slips, Trips, Falls and Strains

Not every municipal risk is dramatic. Some begin with a wet floor, an uneven surface, clutter in a work area or an employee lifting something awkwardly. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration identifies slips, trips and falls as workplace hazards that can result in injuries ranging from sprains and strains to fractures and other serious outcomes.

For municipalities, these hazards can exist in almost every department: public works shops, wastewater facilities, parks, administrative buildings, recreation centers, fire stations and police facilities.

Musculoskeletal injuries deserve similar attention. Employees routinely lift equipment, move materials, climb in and out of vehicles, use hand tools, shovel, perform maintenance and work in awkward positions.

Municipalities should examine how the work is performed and determine whether hazards can be eliminated or reduced through housekeeping, equipment changes, engineering controls, work practices or better planning.

4. Mental Health and Resilience

Municipal employees work under pressure from staffing shortages, high workloads, a growing list of required training, public expectations, emergency response and exposure to difficult events. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health recommends comprehensive approaches to support the mental health of public safety workers. Municipal leaders should consider mental health as part of workforce resilience rather than treating it as an individual issue.

That can include supervisor education, peer-support programs, confidential assistance resources, critical-incident support, reasonable workload management and clear procedures for employees who need help. The objective is to build an organization in which employees have the resources, leadership and support necessary to recover from difficult periods and continue performing safely.

5. Severe Weather Preparedness

In South Carolina, severe weather preparedness cannot just be an annual checklist. The state faces hurricanes, tornadoes, flooding, severe thunderstorms, extreme heat, winter weather, wildfires and other hazards throughout every season. The SC Emergency Management Division identifies hazards as part of the state's all-hazards preparedness approach.

SCEMD coordinates the statewide emergency-management program and works with county emergency-management offices to support preparation, response and recovery. SCEMD also maintains the South Carolina Emergency Operations Plan, which is structured around mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery.

For municipalities, the question should be whether local plans connect effectively with those broader emergency-management resources.

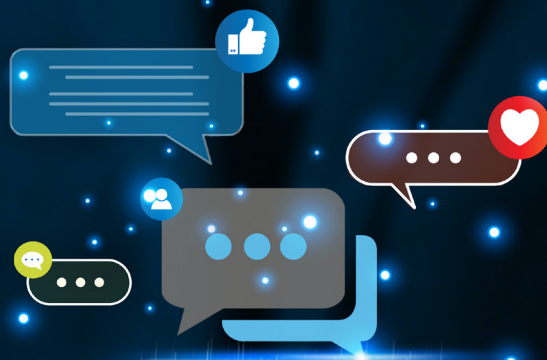
That means identifying essential services, establishing lines of authority, protecting critical facilities, planning for employee availability, maintaining communications and determining how operations will continue if a facility becomes inaccessible.

In June 2026, South Carolina officials and SCEMD conducted a hurricane tabletop exercise involving more than a dozen state, county and federal agencies. The exercise was designed to identify planning and capability gaps before an actual storm occurred.

A tabletop exercise can reveal problems that are nearly impossible to see on paper: Who has the keys? Who has the authority to make the decision? What happens if the person responsible is unavailable? Where do employees report? How are residents notified? What happens when communications fail? Those questions are much easier to answer during an exercise than during an emergency.



Social Media Civility Requires Discretion and Patience



Social media channels provide officials with powerful tools for connecting with residents and engaging with fellow officials. These tools capture community engagement and provide opportunities for dialogue across cities and towns. They can also present challenges, however — when not used conscientiously, they can lead to misunderstandings and create conflict.

Social media has become a space where users can feel empowered to express unfiltered opinions about others or about sensitive topics — damaging public discourse and relationships. A 2019 study in the *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization* found that uncivil online interactions can significantly reduce trust and weaken constructive engagement online.

Practicing civility online isn't just about being polite — it is a core part of how elected officials form trust, govern effectively and uphold community standards. Research published in *Human Communication Research* in 2022 found that political incivility reduces public trust in governing institutions, suggesting that leaders' use of social media directly influences public confidence and civic engagement.

The online messages that officials communicate through social media set the tone for leadership and public engagement in several important ways:

- They demonstrate the level of respect that elected officials have for one another and their residents.

- They influence future collaboration among colleagues and community partners.
- They reflect the level of respect held for the elected office and the community it represents.
- They shape how residents engage, encouraging either respectful discussion or division.

Misunderstandings often occur on social media because a person's tone and intent cannot be conveyed purely online. While social media provides a direct platform to share opinions, some topics and discussions are best shared in person. When online, keep conversations constructive as people share ideas and opinions.

Beginning in 2021, the Municipal Association of SC pursued an initiative promoting civility in local government, emphasizing patience, tolerance and respect among leaders. This initiative challenges officials to lead with respect and professionalism in all interactions.

The focus on civility does not end when the meeting adjourns, instead, it becomes even more important. By practicing respect and thoughtfulness on social media, elected officials can strengthen public trust, foster meaningful relationships, and model the kind of dialogue that empowers the community.

Find civility initiative resources, including a sample resolution, a civility pledge and the Municipal Association's Pillars of Civility, at www.masc.sc/civility-initiative.

When Does the Dual-office-holding Prohibition Apply?

In South Carolina, both the state constitution and the state code of laws prohibit a person from holding two offices simultaneously. Exactly what does and doesn't constitute a case of dual office holding, however, can be a complicated question.

The South Carolina Constitution states this prohibition in two sections — Article VI, Section 3, as well as Article XVII, Section 1A. They both use the same language: “No person may hold two offices of honor or profit at the same time.”

SC Code Section 5-7-180 prohibits dual office holding for municipalities specifically: “no mayor or councilman shall hold any other municipal office or municipal employment while serving the term for which he was elected.”

The challenge lies in defining what an “office of honor or profit” is, because not every appointed or senior governmental position counts as one.

In the 2013 SC Supreme Court case *Alexander v. Houston*, the Court found that “for purposes of the dual office holding provision, it must be demonstrated that the power of appointment comes from the state, the authority is derived from the law, and the duties are exercised for the benefit of the public [and are] defined, directly or impliedly, by the legislature or through legislative authority.”

As officials work to figure these issues out, they frequently place questions about dual office holding before the Office of the Attorney

General. A January 2026 attorney general opinion concluded that serving as executive director of a joint regional sewer authority and as a member of a city planning commission would not be dual office holding, as the executive director position is an employee position and not an “office.” An August 2025 opinion stated that simultaneous service on a county hospital board and county elections commission would be dual office holding.

Offices covered by the prohibition

- **Elected offices** – any publicly elected position is an office of honor or profit.
- **Appointed seats** – Seats on boards or commissions that are created by state law usually count as offices of honor or profit. For example, appointed positions on planning commissions, boards of zoning appeals, and housing authorities are among these offices.
- **Specific employment positions created by state law** – Positions such as municipal clerks, managers and clerks of court count among these offices.
- **Positions involving significant governmental power under state law** – In particular, positions with law enforcement powers, such as police officers, sheriffs or deputy sheriffs, generally constitute positions of honor or profit.

Exceptions to the dual-office-holding rule

Ex-officio positions, which allow service in a second office that exists “by virtue of or because of” service in the first office, create an important exception to the prohibition. The SC Supreme Court affirmed this in the 2013 case *SC Public Interest Foundation v. SC Transportation Infrastructure Bank*, which considered whether members of the General Assembly could serve on the infrastructure bank’s board.

One example of an ex-officio position is the South Carolina governor serving on boards and commissions by virtue of election to the office of governor. State law also exempts service as a board member on a council of governments from being an office for dual-office-holding purposes.

Enforcement of the rule

The courts enforce the dual office rule by holding that a person who accepts a second office automatically vacates the prior office. For example, if a person who has an appointment to a planning commission is later elected to a school board, then the courts deem the person to have resigned from the planning commission upon the election.

Learn more about dual office holding in the Municipal Association’s Handbook for Municipal Officials in South Carolina, found at www.masc.sc (keyword: municipal officials handbook).

Act 224 Expands South Carolina Heritage Act Requirements

In 2000, the SC General Assembly passed the SC Heritage Act, prohibiting the removal or alteration of historic monuments on public property, as well as the rededication of public areas or structures named for historic persons or events.

Last May, the General Assembly passed Act 224. Found at SC Code Section 10-1-165, it amends and restates the text of the Heritage Act with similar, but expanded, requirements.

Expanded applicability

The Heritage Act in 2000 covered monuments related to specified wars throughout United States history, from the Revolutionary War to the Persian Gulf War, and monuments addressing Native American or African-American history.

Act 224 widens the list of protected monuments, adding “colonial war,” such as those that occurred before the American Revolution; “any armed conflict involving South Carolinians” and “other historic monuments or memorials erected on public property.”

It also adds “installations” and “nameplates” to the list of items that cannot be renamed or rededicated — joining streets, bridges, structures, parks and others. The law also added “historic groups of people” and “commemorated events” to the scope of protection.

Any municipal-owned monument, memorial or named public area of an arguably historic character is likely to be covered by the law.

Prohibition on contextualization

The Act 224 prohibits the installation of plaques, markers or electronic message devices near a monument that were not part of the original installation. This restriction applies to contextualizing plaques and markers as well as to “anything that facilitates the transmission of messages through digital or electronic means,” which would include, for example, QR codes directing smartphone users to additional material involving the monument’s subject.

Making changes to monuments

The law adds a means of authorizing changes to a covered monument or memorial. The General Assembly, by joint resolution, may approve a change.

Act 224 also allows the addition to a monument of the names of members of a class “who were not known to be or had not qualified as a member of the class at the time that the monument or memorial was first erected.” This could include the names of additional people determined to have died in a memorialized event.

Monument disruptions

Act 224 addresses situations in which the property containing a monument or memorial would be sold, demolished or temporarily disrupted by utility projects. It requires that the monument or be restored to its original location, or to “property of equal or greater prominence and visibility.”

In cases where a demolished building is not replaced with a new one, this requirement applies to “plaques, markers, or other tangible items removed from the demolished structure.”

Litigation

The law now grants standing to organizations to sue for injunctive or declaratory relief in cases involving monuments. If the monument has already been damaged or destroyed, they may sue for restoration damages. A prevailing plaintiff is entitled to attorneys’ fees.

The eligible groups are these:

- **Affinity organizations** – nonprofits established to honor a particular event, people or time period
- **Monument preservation organizations** – nonprofits established to preserve or protect a monument

Before filing suit, an affinity organization must give 90 days’ written notice and an opportunity for the organization to repair a damaged monument, or replace a destroyed monument.

When protections are applied

The protections in Act 224 are attached to the monument immediately at the time it is dedicated or named. A city government that names or dedicates a monument, a memorial, a street, a building or some similar item within the coverage of the law immediately places permanent protection over the name and other features of the monument, memorial, name, or dedication.

Cities and towns should be careful to treat any naming or dedication as final and unchangeable. As a best practice, officials can adopt a formal naming policy so that these decisions are taken up by the full governing body.

Why Serve in Local Government?

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



Rhonda Jerome

With 22 years of service, **Rhonda Jerome** serves as a councilmember for the **City of North Charleston**, and is currently the longest serving member of council.

Q. Why do you serve in municipal government?

A. Serving as a city councilmember is a rewarding experience. I am able to help citizens of North Charleston by problem-solving their issues and trying to bring closure to them. Municipal government affects daily life more than the higher levels of government. Local government is “where the rubber meets the road.” I address potholes, noise complaints or whatever is bothering the citizen at any particular time. I love serving people. I believe in my 22 years, I have honestly addressed any situation that was brought before me and was able to bring satisfaction to the person who was having the complaint or concern. City councilmembers are elected to be the voice of their constituents. I am that voice for them!

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

A. It is hard to pick just one achievement because I am proud of each one of them. I guess the greatest achievement would be getting a state-of-the-art simulator in our police department, opening it up for citizens to be put in the shoes of a police officer so they understand the split-second decisions our officers have to make on a daily basis. Seeing citizens take the time to participate in this makes all the fighting to get it, worth it! Currently, I am working with staff to comprise a “shopping cart” ordinance, clearing the way to remove the tremendous amount of shopping carts left on our streets. I want our city to be a place where people want to visit and enjoy themselves!

Q. What does your city contribute to the community?

A. North Charleston strives to make our city a safe place to live, work and play! We have our nationally recognized inclusive playground, opening new community centers and playgrounds, redeveloping blighted areas, and investing in our infrastructure. My city is a hub for aerospace, manufacturing, logistics, aviation, defense and technology industries. Our convention center, coliseum and performing arts center are centrally located within our city and strives to have concerts, events and conferences readily available. Our Riverfront Park and surrounding areas give our residents access to the Cooper River which was not possible until the creation of this park. Our city believes in our people and are constantly looking for ways to improve.



Fire Engine Procurement Requires Attention to Timing, Safety Needs

*The acquisitions of new fire engines are frequently marked with dedication ceremonies and media attention.
Photo: City of Cayce.*

Cities and towns from South Carolina's Lowcountry to its Upstate, Midlands, and everywhere in between, work hard to prioritize public safety, including the fire departments within their jurisdictions. Maintaining a well-organized fleet is paramount, which is why the procurement and ordering of new fire trucks and engines takes a considerable amount of time, resources and expertise. Some cities leading by example in this area include North Augusta, Travelers Rest and Cayce.

With a combined police and fire service in its Department of Public Safety, the City of North Augusta is expanding its fire protection with the addition of a fourth station and the allotment of \$5.5 million to fund two new fire trucks to supplement its most recent service truck procurement.

In prioritizing the ordering of new trucks, Chief Junior Johnson said a key early part of the process is meeting with City Administrator Jim Clifford.

"We came up with a plan based on industry standards and practices

across the board," Chief Johnson said. "We want to replace our first-out engines every 15 years, our aerial apparatuses every 18 years, and the goal is to replace all the ancillary trucks — like the tanker, the brush truck, the service trucks — every 20 years," he continued.

Funding for the procurement of new trucks is provided through Aiken County's 1-cent Capital Projects Sales Tax, he explained.

"When we were developing the list of things we wanted in our next group, we looked at what is the age of the trucks, and when [they] are due for replacement; the ones that were due for replacement are in this cycle of this term of Capital Projects Sales Tax, and so we wanted to go ahead and order them at the beginning of the collection period because it takes time for them to manufacture those trucks. That way we are not waiting until the day that we need them to order them, as there is still a three- to four-year wait," he said.

Johnson, who has dedicated more than 25 years of service with the North Augusta Department of Public Safety, said that the department

uses custom-built trucks to ensure symmetry across all of its stations.

"Firefighters will have to fill in for other firefighters at other stations, and it makes the training easier if you are sticking with the same platforms," he said.

The city allocated \$5.5 million to secure a pumper truck and two ladders, along with the addition of more modern equipment. The department currently has four total engines and two ladder trucks, and procured a service truck manufactured last year.

"It has a cascade system, [which is] the ability to refill bottles as well as carry additional air packs and equipment that firefighters need on a structural fire scene," he said.

In Greenville County, the City of Travelers Rest prioritizes the procurement and ordering of new fire trucks, one of the biggest line items in the capital improvement budget, through a bidding process.

"In terms of identifying the funding, we utilize the master lease — the capital lease — where we go out and solicit through [request for proposal] invitations to participate



Travelers Rest handles the procurement of new fire trucks — among the largest items in the capital improvement budget — through a bidding process. Photo: City of Travelers Rest.

with us in the financing of the truck over a period of time,” said City Administrator Shannon Herman. “With a fire truck — because it is such a long-term expense — you look at pushing that financing across 10- to 15-years’ time and making the payments manageable in terms of your cash flow.”

Fire Chief James “Mac” McMakin described a fire truck purchase as “one of the largest and longest-term investments a municipality will make,” and one driven by safety requirements, rather than convenience and appearance.

“Every decision we make is centered on protecting our citizens and giving firefighters the safest, most effective equipment possible while being responsible stewards of taxpayer dollars,” he said.

Herman said that the city ordered a truck almost three years ago. The truck ordered is still in production, so they opted to customize a stock pumper truck to meet the community’s needs. The new truck is scheduled to arrive in September.

“When we went through the ordering of the ladder truck, which we plan to have in our fleet in the next four years, we actually put together employee committees to study the bells and whistles that are needed,” said Herman. “Our employee committees go and visit other entities, see how other trucks are set up, and we compare it to our current fleet. If it is replacing a piece, we think, what do we want to do differently on a piece to speed up performance and response times?” That has been really successful, getting the buy-in from the employees from the beginning.”

For the City of Cayce, prioritizing the procurement of new fire trucks begins at the city council level. “It starts with our city council,” said City Manager Michael Conley. “Our city council has prioritized the public’s safety and our first responders very high on their list ... We get that prioritization from our city council and it comes down to me, and [Fire] Chief [Steven] Bullard sitting down and having discussions way in advance.”

Around the time a truck has accumulated 10 to 15 years of service, the city begins looking at replacement options.

“Given the build times for those trucks — because they’re 100% customizable — they take anywhere from two to four years to build, so we have to get on it pretty early in the game so they can reserve a spot to build a truck,” said Bullard. “Those time limits are put in place by NFPA, which is the National Fire Protection Agency; they have a huge committee nationwide that sets standards for the fire service and what fire service is supposed to be doing with trucks, equipment and personnel.”

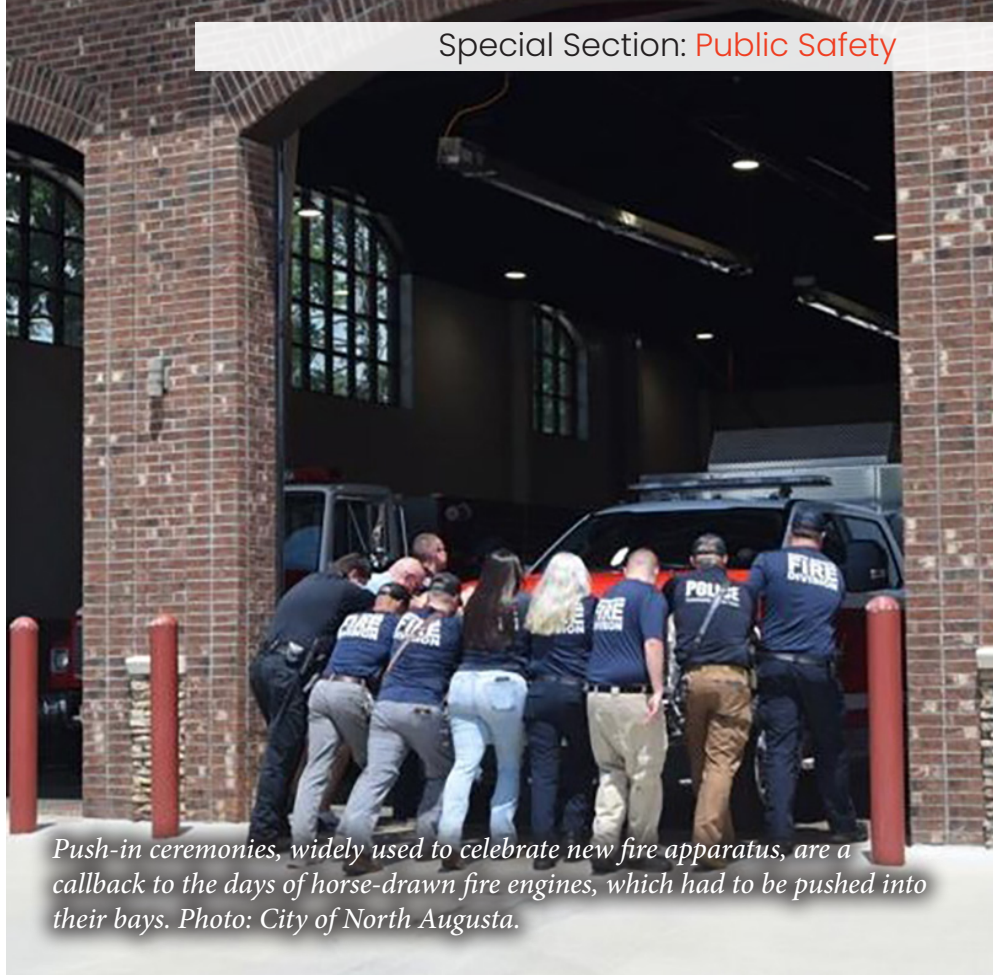
Last year, the department received a custom-built Pierce Enforcer.

“It carries 750 gallons of water; it has a 1,000 [gallons per minute] pump on it, and can carry six people with equipment, hoses — all the good stuff,” explained Bullard.

In addition to the pumper truck last year, the department has received two additional vehicles.

“As Chief says, they’re going to the lifecycle of their vehicles,” Conley said. “Chief and his team are looking at what needs to be done, what are our next steps, where do we think we need to go, and then it is communicated between Chief and myself,” he said. “It’s doing long-term planning, and long-term budget prep as well. Also knowing so many years in advance that in 2027, we need to look at replacing the squad vehicle, or a ladder truck, or a rescue – or whatever it is ... We can start putting in that long term budgeting.”

Many factors play a role in how municipalities prioritize and order fire trucks. With advanced planning and a proper procurement funnel, departments are making public safety a priority by solidifying long-term investments in customized fire trucks that protect a community for years to come.



Push-in ceremonies, widely used to celebrate new fire apparatus, are a callback to the days of horse-drawn fire engines, which had to be pushed into their bays. Photo: City of North Augusta.

City Connect Market Offers Cooperative Purchasing Opportunities

City Connect MARKET



Fire engines and other fire apparatus are just a few of the procurement areas where South Carolina’s cities and towns can use the City Connect Market, a program of the Municipal Association of SC, to take advantage of volume discounts on purchases.

The program operates on the principle of cooperative purchasing, in which centralized staff obtains bids and coordinates purchases for local governments across the country, which results in better pricing and efficiency.

City Connect Market partners with two agencies for purchasing:

- **CarolinaBUY** offers purchasing contracts in areas including cybersecurity; office supplies; athletic and playground facilities; heating, ventilation and air conditioning; vehicles; and signage, among other areas.

- **HGACBuy** assists with purchasing products and services, primarily in the areas of public safety, public works, emergency services and communications.

The City Connect Market webpage, found at www.masc.sc (keyword: City Connect Market), connects users to product listings under all of the contract categories. Users can search through the available products or services, or can contact the Municipal Association with a specific request.

After the municipality receives and approves a quote, the Association works directly with HGACBuy or CarolinaBUY to place the order. The Association serves as a liaison that can assist the municipality throughout the purchasing process. Those cities and towns that wish to use this process should review their procurement ordinances to make sure that cooperative purchasing partnerships are an approved purchasing method.



Animal Control Officers Give Cities Faster Responses, Closer Community Ties

In Aiken, Dustin Green, environmental control officer for the Department of Public Safety, handles animal control. Photo: City of Aiken.

Several South Carolina municipalities are choosing not to rely on county animal control agencies and are operating their own programs in conjunction with their police departments. The arrangement gives cities direct oversight of animal-related complaints and streamlines animal cruelty investigations with police officers. Such programs also work with local animal welfare organizations to provide long-term care for pets taken into custody.

Typically, the officers work with dogs and some pet cats. But feral cats present their own issues, and most cities work with county and other organizations on trap-neuter-return programs, commonly known as TNR. Volunteers trap feral cats, which are then sterilized, vaccinated against rabies, ear-tipped for identification and returned to the location where they were found.

While residents often object to seeing cats returned to their neighborhoods, research shows that simply removing feral cats often fails to solve the problem.

“It creates a vacuum effect,” said Christina Morales, supervisor of Florence’s Jayne Boswell Animal Shelter. “Other cats will start moving in that aren’t spayed or neutered.”

Florence’s animal control officers

operate under the police department. The city-owned animal shelter handles daily care for animals and partners with the Florence Area Humane Society on veterinary care, fostering and adoption.

This structure was established about four years ago and gives officers greater authority to investigate cases of animal abuse and neglect. Residents report stray animals or welfare concerns to police, and an animal control officer investigates. If officers find evidence of neglect or abuse, they can remove the animal and transport it to the shelter for evaluation and care.

“Before, we just didn’t have that power,” Morales said.

Once a stray animal completes a required seven-day holding period to allow owners time to reclaim pets, ownership transfers to the nonprofit organization. The animals remain at the city shelter, but the Humane Society assumes responsibility for adoption decisions, rescue placements and veterinary services beyond what shelter staff can provide. The shelter is staffed by nine city employees who care for animals seven days a week, including holidays.

Beyond dogs and cats, the shelter occasionally handles more exotic animals, including snakes, iguanas, ferrets, guinea pigs, pet rats, birds and

fish. A group of nine snakes, including red-tailed boas, and a large iguana were eventually rehomed through a reptile specialist.

Wildlife cases remain limited. Animal control officers may occasionally respond to reports involving injured raccoons or possums, but larger wildlife issues, including alligators, are referred to state wildlife authorities.

For Morales, who has worked in animal welfare for nearly 15 years, the most rewarding outcome is when abused or neglected animals recover and find permanent homes.

“When animals come in, they are just so broken,” she said. “You watch that transition to becoming trusting



Red-tailed boas and an iguana are among the more unusual animals handled and rehomed through Florence’s animal shelter. Photo: City of Florence.

again and finding a new home. I can't imagine doing anything else."

Aiken's animal control officer, Dustin Green, is not a police officer, but works as environmental control officer for the Department of Public Safety's Community Services Division. He also responds to litter complaints and is certified as both a firefighter and emergency medical responder, allowing him to assist other city divisions when needed.

"Some days, you might get a couple of calls. Some days, you might not get a break at all," Green said. "Every call and every day is different."

The city's animal control program is funded primarily through Aiken's general fund, but the city's pet registration program helps cover expenses while encouraging responsible pet ownership. Pet owners who have their animals microchipped and spayed or neutered can register them with the city free of charge. Others pay a fee that the city uses to pay for sheltering animals and providing veterinary care.

Aiken contracts with the local Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals to house animals picked up by the city. Animals remain in city custody during the legally required stray-hold period, with the city paying for their care. If an owner does not reclaim the pet, custody transfers to the SPCA and the animal can be placed for adoption.

Green said most of his workload involves responding to reports of stray animals rather than investigating abuse or neglect. Still, those investigations often leave the deepest impression. He recalled the day he found 14 dogs and cats living with an owner who could no longer care for them. In a case last year, four dogs and three cats were found malnourished and in unkempt conditions.

"As animals, they can't talk ... they can't tell you what they've been through or what they've seen or what's been done to them," Green said. "So



Rebekah Ward, animal control officer for the City of Fountain Inn, demonstrates safe animal handling techniques on a model dog. Photo: City of Fountain Inn.

I'm their voice. That's what I love about this job."

Green said he has noticed progress during his two years on the job.

"When I first started, it was back-to-back stray dogs everywhere," he said. "You still get dogs that get out of their yard or off the leash, but there's less than when I started."

In Fountain Inn, the city's dedicated animal control officer is a Class III Advanced officer, which gives her authority to enforce local and state animal ordinances and laws. Fountain Inn partners with Greenville County Animal Care for long-term housing of unclaimed strays.

Rebekah Ward, who became the city's first animal control officer in 2025, brought years of experience training and caring for animals to the position. She makes education and community outreach a significant part of her job, including demonstrating safe animal handling techniques and explaining what residents should do when they find a stray animal.

For Ward, a typical day includes cleaning kennels, transporting strays to the county shelter and answering calls for loose animals. She also conducts cruelty investigations and bite cases, which require coordination with veterinarians and state health officials.

Recently, while transporting a dog to the shelter, Ward spotted another stray sitting in the middle of the road. The call quickly shifted from animal control to child welfare after the dog wandered

to a home where two young children appeared to be alone.

"My day was detoured trying to figure out what was going on with these two little girls," she said. "At that point the dog isn't even the issue."

A patrol officer was called to the children before Ward resumed her original assignment.

"You think about it as just handling the animals, but it's really about the people, too," she said.

One difficult aspect of her job is dog bite investigations, which involve frightened victims and families whose beloved pets have seriously injured someone. Ward helps families understand veterinary requirements, explains public safety concerns and, in some cases, delivers the difficult recommendation that a dangerous dog be euthanized.

"You've got a family who loves their puppy," she said. "And all of a sudden, somebody's severely injured because of this puppy. They're not expecting something like this to ever happen, but it happened. You're supporting both sides, who may not see eye-to-eye."

Ward also advises residents about state laws governing rabies-vector animals and directs them to wildlife professionals or the SC Department of Natural Resources when appropriate.

"I think a lot of it comes down to education and resources," she said. "The more the public is educated, the less issues you have."



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Calendar

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

OCTOBER

6 Municipal Association of SC Regional Advocacy Meeting. 5th and Main, Conway.

7 SC Utility Billing Association Customer Service Training and Networking Luncheon. Hilton Garden Inn Airport, West Columbia. Topics include a customer service workshop, using AI safely and effectively and roundtable discussions on topics relating to utilities and billing.

8 SC Community Development Association Fall Meeting. Hilton Garden Inn Columbia Airport, West Columbia. Topics include partnering with resilience and energy, strengthening communities through the SC Housing Trust Fund, creating vibrant communities and showcasing community successes.

13 Municipal Association of SC Regional Advocacy Meeting. Yorkville Agricultural and Education Society, York.

14 Advanced Municipal Elected Officials Institute Fall Training. Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center. Topics include economic development, advocacy and intergovernmental relations and continuing education on municipal government.

22 Regional Advocacy Meeting. Rollins Edwards Community Center, Summerville.

27 Communications Workshop. Municipal Association of SC, Columbia. Topics include web accessibility, resident engagement, internal city communications and parks and recreation promotion.

27 Business License Bootcamp. Hilton Garden Inn Summerville/Lowcountry Conference Center. Topics include the basics of business license administration in South Carolina, as well as Act 176, the SC Business License Standardization Act, and the model business license ordinance.

27 – 30 SC Municipal Finance Officers, Clerks and Treasurers Association and SC Business Licensing Officials Association Joint Academy. Hilton Garden Inn, Summerville. Topics include nonprofit organizations, business licensing customer service, state and local agency resources and cybersecurity.

30 Fall Managers/Administrators' Forum. Hilton Garden Inn, Columbia Airport.

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. Seawell's, Columbia.

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.

17 Business Licensing Essentials Webinar. Virtual.

18 Main Street SC Fourth Quarter Managers Training. Gaffney's Crossroads, Gaffney.

DECEMBER

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