



UPTOWN

a publication of the municipal association of south carolina

Hometown Legislative Action Day
 February 1, 2017 | Columbia Marriott



Hometown Legislative Action Day features tax and law enforcement experts

The first regular session of the 122nd South Carolina General Assembly starts this month, as does the new Congress and a new presidential administration. With so much change underway, this year's Hometown Legislative Action Day on February 1 will bring elected leaders and experts together to lay out what the new dynamics could mean for South Carolina's cities and towns.

At the state level, two legislative panels will address priority issues for the new session.

The first panel will focus on the work of the House Tax Policy Review Committee. House Speaker Jay Lucas commissioned the committee to look at the three major sources of tax revenue in the state — income, sales and property taxes — and making *Action Day, page 2 >*

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recommendations to members about how to spread the tax burden more fairly.

The committee's chairman, Rep. Tommy Pope, along with other members, Reps. Todd Atwater, Mandy Powers Norrell, Joe Daning and Chandra Dillard, will share their thoughts about the work of the committee and possible changes to the state's tax system.

Committee members have heard from state tax experts, municipalities and counties, the business community and residents voicing their perspectives on taxes. The members have discussed eliminating certain sales tax exemptions, making changes to Act 388 and decreasing the state income tax.

A central discussion among committee members has been the unintended consequences of Act 388, the 2006 legislation that shifted the burden of property taxes to 6 percent properties and capped cities' and towns' ability to increase millage rates beyond a specific calculation.

Following the tax policy review panel during the opening session, Sens. Luke Rankin and Shane Massey will provide a legislative outlook, giving their perspectives on priorities of cities and towns for the 2017 session. Rankin is the new chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee and Massey is the Senate majority leader.

Secretary of Transportation Christy Hall will brief attendees on the status of the S.C. Department of Transportation and the outlook for road funding in the new legislative year.



S.C. Department of Transportation Secretary Christy Hall will speak at the 2017 Hometown Legislative Action Day.

HLAD speakers will also address law enforcement trends and proposals. Serving on the panel are Criminal Justice Academy Director Jackie Swindler, S.C. Department of Social Services Law Enforcement Liaison Larry McNeil and Ryan Alphin, executive director of the S.C. Law Enforcement Officers' Association and the S.C. Police Chiefs Association.

To bring a federal perspective, Clarence Anthony, executive director of the National League of Cities, will explain what a new president and changes in the makeup of the U.S. House and Senate will mean for issues important to local governments.

The deadline to register for HLAD and the Municipal Elected Officials Institute Sessions A and B is Wednesday, January 18. Make hotel reservations at the Marriott Columbia by January 5, and ask for the Municipal Association of SC HLAD rate of \$149 plus taxes.

Get the HLAD app



Connect with colleagues and get up-to-the-minute meeting information on your Android or Apple smartphones and tablets. Download the mobile HLAD app by searching for MuniAssnSC in the App Store or Google Play. The web version of the app is at mobileapp.masc.sc.



Achievement Awards deadline: February 15, 2017

It's now easier than ever to enter the Achievement Awards. Entrants may submit the awards application, photos and supporting materials completely online.

Visit www.masc.sc (keyword: achievement award) to find the awards application. Complete the application and upload supporting materials and photos online using the prompts on the screen.

Municipalities may compete in either the population category or subject category. Cities and towns with a population of 20,001 or more must compete in a subject category. The population

categories are judged on the written entry only. The subject categories are judged on the written entry and an oral presentation.

Cities entering a subject category, judges will evaluate a written entry and an oral presentation, scheduled for March 6 and 7. Municipalities may enter only one category.

The application questions directly correlate to the judging criteria. The fill-in-the-blank form provides a simple format to highlight a project's key points. Each answer is limited to 100 words.

Cities and towns must submit their entries electronically or hand deliver them

by 5 p.m. on February 15. Entries sent through the U.S. Postal Service must be postmarked by February 15.

After receiving the entry, the Municipal Association will send an email confirmation to the main contact person listed on the application. If the main contact does not receive a receipt by February 22, contact Ashleigh Hair at 803.933.1288 or ahair@masc.sc.

For more information about the 2017 Achievement Awards, contact Meredith Houck at 803.933.1215 or mhouck@masc.sc.

NEWS BRIEFS

The **South Carolina Municipal Human Resources Association** elected 2017-18 board members: President Robin Entekin, director of risk management and human resources, City of Clinton; First Vice President Dora Perry, human resources director, City of Tega Cay; Second Vice President Barbara Denny, treasurer, Town of Clover; Member at

Large Rebecca Mejia-Ward, human resources manager, City of Hartsville; Past President Donna Kazia, personnel director, City of Anderson.

Sara O'Dell, assistant finance director for the City of Greenwood, received the 2016 MHRA Scholarship, which was awarded at the MHRA Annual Meeting in November.

The American Public Works Association selected **Samantha Yager**, recycling coordinator, City of Columbia, and **Angela Jordan**, engineering tech II – stormwater, City of Rock Hill, among 16 public works professionals from the United States and Canada for its year-long Emerging Leaders Academy Program for 2016-2017.

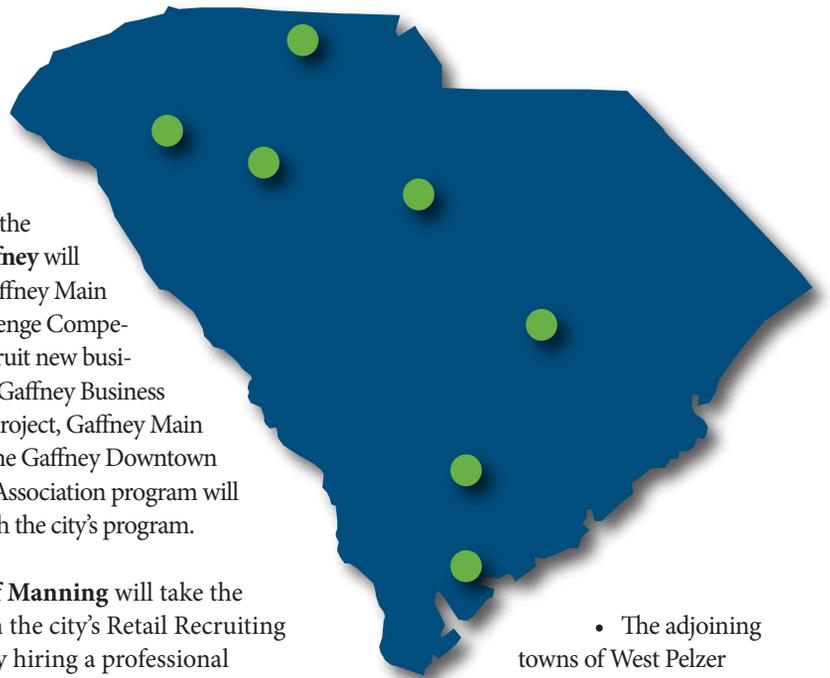
Grant winners have big plans

Eight cities and towns across the state received \$25,000 Hometown Economic Development Grants from the Municipal Association. The grants will allow the cities to implement projects that will make a positive impact on the quality of life in their communities.

An awards committee comprised of former local government and state agency professionals evaluated the 76 grant applications. Cities and towns receiving a grant are required to provide matching funds, submit reports about the progress and successes of each project, and provide financial details of how the grant funds were used.

- The **City of Beaufort's** award will support a new public-private partnership to establish and manage the Beaufort Digital Corridor, described as "a community-sourced initiative to attract, nurture and promote the region's tech economy." In conjunction with the Charleston Digital Corridor, Beaufort's corridor will serve as a recruiter for high-tech companies, facilitate education and training for professionals, and help guide students and entrepreneurs seeking a career in technology.
- The **City of Clinton** will hire an architectural firm to create a professional master plan and strategic vision for the Industrial Supply Company warehouse complex, which occupies an entire city block in downtown Clinton. Because the city owns a portion of the site, future development will involve public-private partnerships.

- Following the success of similar projects in other cities, the **City of Gaffney** will fund the Gaffney Main Street Challenge Competition to recruit new businesses. The Gaffney Business Generator project, Gaffney Main Street and the Gaffney Downtown Merchants Association program will all assist with the city's program.
- The **City of Manning** will take the next step in the city's Retail Recruiting Initiative by hiring a professional services firm to help the city develop a retail recruitment strategy, marketing data and trade brochures for use at retail recruiting conferences.
- The **Town of Ridgeway** intends to "Paint the Town Red with Revitalization" and restore and repair iconic structures in the town, including the World's Smallest Police Station, its famous telephone booth and Ridgeway Arch, which anchors the proposed Ridgeway Park.
- Known as the gateway to the ACE Basin, the Walterboro Wildlife Sanctuary is the second-largest municipal park in the United States. The **City of Walterboro** will use its grant funds to develop a city-owned building to use as an interpretive Wildlife Sanctuary Discovery Center.



- The adjoining towns of West Pelzer and Pelzer will use their grant funds in partnership to develop a Main Street Corridor Master Plan and Economic Impact Analysis for both towns. The towns will use the plan as a tool to recruit business to their downtowns.
- The "Best Look, Best Talent Project" in the **City of Williamston** will support a façade-improvement grant program and the Mustang Alley feasibility study in support of the creation of an event-oriented alleyway. Envision Williamston, the Palmetto Business Association and the SC National Heritage Corridor will also provide resources or in-kind assistance to support the city's grant.

The details of the 2017 grant program will be announced in May.



Clockwise from left: City of Clinton linemen help out in Bennettsville after the storm. Credit/Clinton; Linemen crews from various mutual aid cities mobilize at the Orangeburg Department of Public Utilities Warehouse. Credit/Mike Jolly; City of Rock Hill linemen assist in the City of Orangeburg. Credit/Mike Jolly; Storm damage in Bennettsville called for a mutual aid response. Credit/Clinton

Municipal electric systems met the challenge of Hurricane Matthew

The state's 21 "electric cities" sprang into action in the face of significant power outages caused by Hurricane Matthew. These utilities, which are all members of the South Carolina Association of Municipal Power Systems, activated their mutual aid network, allowing them to deploy manpower, equipment, and materials to help restore power to the hardest hit systems.

The original purpose of SCAMPS when it was created in the 1980s was to serve as a vehicle for mutual aid during emergencies. Today SCAMPS, as an affiliate of the Municipal Association, also provides training for its members and advocacy related to utility issues that are before the Legislature.

Municipal-run electric utilities were established to provide a nonprofit, community-owned and locally controlled source of reliable electric power. Governance by an elected council or utility commission allows utilities to tailor their policies and any decisions affecting electric rates and system operations to meet the specific needs and priorities of the local community.

A hallmark of public power is system reliability. Having locally based utility

employees allows for utility linemen to respond fast to resolve most power outages. When the magnitude of an outage exceeds local resources, SCAMPS utilities rely on a mutual aid assistance compact. The compact is a three-tier system consisting of a state and regional network coordinated by SCAMPS and a national mutual aid response system, which the American Public Power Association offers.

Six municipal utilities reported a combined total of approximately 25,000 customer outages in the wake of Hurricane Matthew. Three of the six affected utilities — Bennettsville, Georgetown and Orangeburg — requested assistance to restore power. Orangeburg was hit hardest, suffering approximately 15,000 outages.

The network activated all three levels to respond to widespread impact along the southeast coast. The SCAMPS mutual aid response involved approximately 140 people, including member-utility employees, private utility or tree company employees, and more than 50 public power employees from utilities in Alabama, Florida, North Carolina

and Nebraska. About 120 people were deployed to Orangeburg, while the rest helped in Bennettsville and Georgetown.

Mutual aid workers are some of the least-recognized heroes of catastrophic weather events, including Hurricane Matthew. The majority of these crews worked for a week away from home, enduring 16–18 hour days, difficult working conditions and less than ideal accommodations.

In addition to Matthew, South Carolina's ice storms in 2014 and 2015 triggered limited in-state mutual aid responses. SCAMPS also participated in a national mutual aid deployment in support of the Superstorm Sandy recovery effort in 2012 along the northeastern U.S.

Until tested by an actual event, it is often difficult to know if plans will work. The deployment for Matthew proved that the three-tier system was up to the challenge. SCAMPS had a 100 percent response by the utilities that employed more than five linemen and weren't seriously affected by the storm. Regional and national network resources readily supplemented in-state resources.

Cities tap State Revolving Fund for water infrastructure needs

Many South Carolina cities and towns are positioning themselves for future growth by upgrading their aged or inadequate water and sewer infrastructure.

A key part of that, however, is finding ways to pay for significant water and sewer infrastructure improvements, which will have long-term benefits to city residents and businesses as well as the environment.

Such infrastructure projects typically come with significant upfront costs, and conventional financing can be difficult for some cities and towns to afford. For those projects that qualify, the S.C. State Revolving Fund offers several advantages, such as low-cost loan financing for extended terms of up to 30 years and low closing costs.

The Grand Strand Water and Sewer Authority secured a SRF loan to connect two surface water treatment plants, Bull Creek and Myrtle Beach. This inter-connection provides the system with a back-up water source should there be an emergency need and further builds capacity for supplemental demand as growth continues in the unincorporated areas.

“The SRF Loan program gives us financial opportunities to construct critical capital projects while providing affordable, sustainable water service to our customers,” said Fred Richardson, chief executive officer of the Grand Strand Water and Sewer Authority.

The project, which is still under construction, will serve more than



The Grand Strand Water and Sewer Authority is connecting two surface water treatment plants with the help of a State Revolving Fund loan. Credit/Grand Strand Water and Sewer Authority

235,000 customers and is estimated to cost about \$5.9 million.

The City of Dillon identified a different need from that of the Grand Strand authority but one that was also critical to Dillon's future development.

A Department of Transportation bridge replacement project required the city to seek funding to relocate a large sewer force main that ran parallel to the Little Pee Dee River Bridge. With an estimated cost of \$491,000, Dillon secured a SRF loan to manage the unanticipated expense that comes with utility relocation.

The S.C. Rural Infrastructure Authority, in partnership with the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control, will offer a one-day workshop to inform potential applicants of the technical and financial aspects of the Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Funds. It will be held at 9 a.m.,

February 9, at the Saluda Shoals Park – River Center in Columbia.

To register, visit: www.ria.sc.gov/index.php/workshops-webinars/.

The benefits of a State Revolving Fund loan include:

- Interest rates of 1.9 percent
- Fixed-rate financing for up to 30 years
- Low 0.35 percent closing cost
- Up to 100 percent financing of all eligible costs
- Deferral of principal and interest through construction
- Option to capitalize interest at the end of deferred period
- No debt service reserve fund for borrowers with at least an “A” credit rating
- Financial advisor not required

Learn more at: www.ria.sc.gov/index.php/financing-terms.



Midyear financial review provides early warning

For many cities and towns, July 1 marks the beginning of a new fiscal year, which means January is the midpoint of their budget year.

All cities — no matter the size or budget complexity — should conduct a thorough review of their budget halfway through the fiscal year.

A mid-fiscal year review serves as an early warning system and is valuable for several reasons:

- Council gets the chance to assess the accuracy of the revenue projections and expenditure estimates that were included in the budget.
- Officials are able to evaluate if adequate resources are provided in the budget to reach the council's goals.
- Council has the opportunity to make adjustments to the budget if needed.

In most cases, council should expect that half (or less than half) of budgeted regular and fixed expenditures have been spent at the midpoint. The same principle holds true for revenue that is collected on a regular basis, such as utility payments

and hospitality taxes. Conversely, major sources of revenue, such as property taxes and business license taxes, will be low at midyear, because payments are due in the third and fourth quarter of a fiscal year beginning on July 1.

In addition to staying abreast of budget-to-actual results, officials should determine why any variances occurred and whether these variances are expected to be temporary or longer term.

The midpoint of the fiscal year typically supplies council with enough data to identify trends that may call for adjustments. For example, a change in the cost of energy or the price of fuel for one month may not reveal a trend. But six months of increases or decreases may offer a better guide for modifications to the budget.

A midyear budget review also gives council a chance to evaluate itself and the city. Is the budget allowing the city to reach its goals? Can those goals still be met by the year's end? Will projects be completed on time with no cost overruns?

Council must adopt a revised budget ordinance in order to amend the annual budget. That ordinance must be read no less than twice, with each reading separated by at least six days. If a city has established a procedure for adopting ordinances that requires additional readings, then council should follow this procedure.

To operate transparently, council should conduct a public hearing on the revised budget ordinance before adoption and advertise the hearing the same way that notice was provided for the budget public hearing, as required by S.C. Code of Law Section 6-1-80.

Cities and towns of all sizes benefit from good budget planning at the start of the fiscal year. But the process doesn't end there. A mid-fiscal year check-in provides prudent follow-through and gives council the chance to improve its spending plan as it is executed throughout the fiscal year.

For more information on municipal budgeting, visit www.masc.sc (keyword: municipal budget).



What to know about emergencies and executive orders

During the preparations for Hurricane Matthew in October, Gov. Nikki Haley issued Executive Order 2016-29, which ordered state, county and municipal offices in certain parts of the state to close, so those areas could evacuate.

However, some city officials did not see a written copy of the order that provided local officials the authority to determine which city employees and services would remain in place during the evacuation. As a result, some city officials were confused about exactly what the order meant for them as they prepared for the storm and whether all city officials were being asked to stay home.

South Carolina Code of Laws Section 25-1-440 (A)(6) allows the governor to “compel performance by elected and appointed state, county, and municipal officials and employees of the emergency duties and functions assigned them in the State Emergency Plan or by Executive Order.” This means that, to the extent municipal officials have a role to play

during an emergency, the governor has the authority to order those officials to carry out that role.

In performing their duties during an emergency, emergency personnel are expected to remain on duty to protect the public, as long as it is safe to do so. Haley’s executive order during Hurricane Matthew accounted for this by stating, “This order affects all employees except for those emergency, governmental or essential personnel whose presence the director of said . . . municipal government office deems necessary.”

Therefore, the governor’s order provided local officials the discretion to determine which employees were to report for duty before, during and after the emergency. Municipal leaders should coordinate with their county and state-level counterparts in making decisions about staffing levels and facility availability.

Municipal officials have critical roles to play within the state’s Emergency Operations Plan.

Planning, coordination and execution of the plan with county and state officials is critical during an emergency. In determining which municipal employees will remain on duty during an emergency, local officials should consider several questions:

- What is the city’s expected role in the state and local emergency management plan during the event?
- Will conditions allow the city to carry out its role?
- What assets will the city need before, during and after the emergency?
- Will the city be able to execute its role without undue risk to its personnel?

Natural and man-made disasters will always be a threat to South Carolina. Cities and towns must be prepared to play an important part in dealing with them. Therefore, local officials should periodically review the roles of state, county and municipal officials and their authority so as to avoid confusion during an emergency.

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

Don't be the last to know

Connect
with the
Association
in 2017

It's easy to be inundated with information. Cut right to the good stuff with these sources of timely information on topics specific to the cities and towns of South Carolina.

The Association offers a variety of ways for municipal staff and elected officials to stay connected and informed.

- **City Connect Blog** The *City Connect* blog provides weekly posts about legislative activity, court cases, commentary from guest bloggers and city success stories. The posts are short with links to deeper information on each topic.

- **City Quick Connect Podcast** *City Quick Connect* is an extension of the *City Connect* blog, giving listeners yet another way to get timely information. (Receive the latest episode of *City Quick Connect* podcast by visiting www.masc.sc (keyword: City Quick Connect) or subscribing in the iTunes Store.)

- **From the Dome to Your Home** The weekly legislative report is emailed to elected officials and city staff every Friday during the legislative session. It recaps the week's activity on bills affecting cities and towns, suggests action steps for local officials and previews the upcoming week in the General Assembly.

- **Daily News** The *Daily News* is an at-a-glance email available by subscription that offers a list of the most relevant news articles about municipal government from newspapers throughout the state.

- **Uptown Update** Every Monday, local elected leaders and staff receive this weekly e-newsletter. In addition to general meeting updates and other timely

information, this email includes a link to the most recent edition of *From the Dome to Your Home* and *City Connect* blog post.

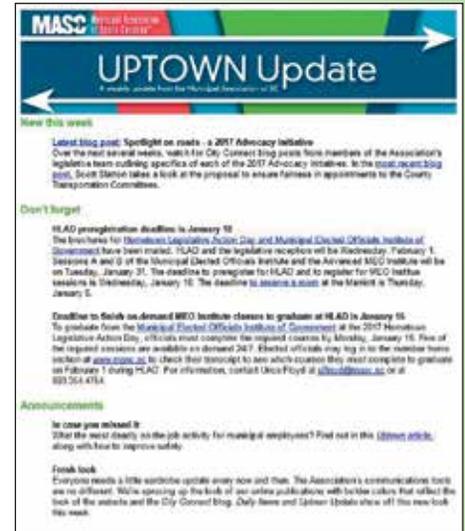
- **Electronic version of Uptown** Subscribers can opt out of the mailed version of *Uptown* and receive an email when the online version is available online.

- **Listserve** Members of the Association's affiliate organizations have access to listserve that allow them to network online with other members. There is also a listserve for city managers and another for public information officers. Subscribe to the listserve at www.masc.sc (keyword: listserve).

Manage subscriptions

Elected officials and city staff can choose the subscriptions most useful to them by accessing their record in the Association's database. From the Association's website, click on the Member Login link in the upper right corner. Individuals who do not already have a profile will see directions on the login screen to gain access. Once in their profile, individuals can update their title and contact information, indicate their preferred mailing address and phone number, and provide their email address and social media account names.

From the My Profile section, individuals can manage their subscriptions to all e-newsletters and mobile alerts. All elected officials and city staff with specific roles automatically receive the monthly *Uptown*, weekly *Uptown Update* and *From the Dome to Your Home*. Other online resources from the Municipal Association are available by subscription.



Tips for communicating in a crisis



When a crisis hits, it's not enough just to know logistics, such as how evacuation routes flow, where shelters are located or where supplies are stored. City officials must also be prepared to share information quickly and accurately with both residents and the news media.

South Carolina cities have endured crises of many kinds in just the past several years, ranging from police incidents to weather events. It's not a luxury to plan for communicating in a crisis; it's a must.

- **Anticipate problems.** In many cases, a situation becomes an emergency only because it wasn't anticipated. While it may seem like a waste of time to try to anticipate anything bad that can happen, investing this time will pay off in the long run. Many cities run "table top" scenarios to get officials thinking about all the possibilities of what could happen in a particular situation.

- **Select the right spokesman/media contact.** This person should be readily accessible, well-spoken, knowledgeable and already trusted by the media. Ideally the city's chosen spokesman is not someone, such as the fire or police chief, who would have another major role if disaster strikes.

- **Keep it centralized.** When reporters call during a crisis, they want accurate, factual information from a person who

knows what's going on. In the midst of a crisis, a city may have many experts who need to weigh in on the situation. Asking all media calls to flow through a central contact person ensures all inquiries are taken care of quickly and accurately. This is especially true during crisis situations when it's chaotic and media deadlines are looming. All city officials should know who the designated spokesman is and refer any media calls.

- **Assemble and organize resources.** In a crisis, city officials need up-to-date and accessible information. Resource information may include a current list of crisis team members and alternates with work, cell and home telephone numbers; updated media lists; lists of emergency services such as fire, police, hospital and ambulance; and website and social media passwords. A previously designed stand-alone crisis response page on the city's website is an easy way to quickly get out timely information. It's also important to have this page duplicated on a server away from city hall in case power goes down or city hall becomes inaccessible.

- **Communicate with employees.** The best policy is to get information to city staff and council before, or at least at the same time as, it's released to news media. If the situation warrants, city leaders should call a staff meeting/conference call to provide appropriate information on the circumstances of the situation.

- **Don't immediately accept blame or make promises.** If residents or businesses are calling for immediate remedies to a situation in the form of government actions or compensation, do not respond with any affirmative statements. Any liability over an incident will take time to determine. City officials, including elected officials, should not immediately promise to fix problems, especially since the city may not even be the responsible party.

- **Communicate with the media.** Be proactive. In general, it is good to release information as quickly as possible. Comments should be of a general nature until all the facts are in, but then it is far better to get the full story out early. Sometimes reporters will be on the scene. In other situations, city officials will need to initiate contact. This should be done as soon as the basic facts are in hand.

- **Give a statement.** A formal statement or press conference should follow the initial contact, including any updated information and plans for investigating the incident or tracking the natural disaster. Reporters expect complete, honest information; background material; some indication of how the organization intends to proceed; information about the impact on residents; regular updates and post-crisis follow-up. If the national media has come to town, give the local media outlets the same information at the same time.



• **Be forthright and avoid the use of “no comment” whenever possible.** When the public reads or hears “no comment,” the natural assumption is that the entity the spokesman represents has something to hide. Having some comment, even if the whole story isn’t available yet, keeps lines of communication open and maintains trust. The following may help avoid “no comment” during the process of information gathering:

- “We’ve just learned about the situation and are trying to get more complete information now.”
- “All our efforts are directed at bringing the situation under control, so I’m not going to speculate on the cause of the incident.”
- “I’m not the authority on that subject. Let me have our Mr. Jones call you right back.”
- “We’re preparing a statement on that now. Can I email it to you in about two hours?”

• **Use restraint.** On the other side of the issue, however, a city spokesperson should never tell a reporter anything he is unwilling to see in print. “Off the record” may mean different things to different publications, so don’t rely on it.

• **Report your own bad news.** Don’t allow another source to inform the media first or start rumors. Monitoring social media is a critical part of maintaining control of the situation to ensure

the city is the sole source of information regarding the incident or disaster. If someone airs concerns publicly on social media, respond promptly through the medium through which messages were received, keeping in mind that all comments can be shared and widely viewed.

• **Keep a log of media calls, and return calls as promptly as possible.**

A log can help in tracking issues being raised by reporters. It will also give city officials a record of which reporters closely followed the story in case of the need for follow-up.

• **Do the right thing.** In any emergency situation, city leaders must always put the public interest first. The safety and well-being of the people involved is the top priority. Once safety has been restored, face the public and face the facts. Never try to minimize a serious problem or “smooth it over” in the hopes that no one will notice. Conversely, it’s important to avoid blowing minor incidents out of proportion or allowing others to do so.

• **Debrief.** After the crisis, city officials should make sure the communications efforts are part of any debriefing activity. Assess whether your primary spokesperson was available and prepared. Is there a better process for returning media calls? Were the channels of communication with the public adequate?

A word about lawyers and reporters in crisis situations:

• Reporters and the editors they work for don’t like mistakes. They build their reputations on being accurate and fair. In most news organizations, there’s a lengthy process and a fair amount of paperwork involved when a reporter makes a mistake. If a reporter gets something factually wrong, ask for a correction.

• Lawyers may sometimes insist on “no comment” as the immediate response, since legal issues often are involved in crises. City leaders must be able to balance legal issues with the public’s right to know what’s going on. The long-term health of the city or town depends not only on a legal resolution of a specific issue, but also on the effective resolution of a crisis in the court of public opinion.

“There has to be a fine balance between public opinion and liability,” said Heather Ricard, director of Risk Management Services at the Municipal Association. “However, what that balance is will depend on the claim situation.”



Edit yourself before others do

Communications

"Putting down on paper what you have to say is an important part of writing," said Maya Angelou, one of the world's most famous writers. "But the words and ideas have to be shaped and cleaned, cleaned as severely as a dog cleans a bone, cleaned until there's not a shred of anything superfluous."

While writing comes naturally to many people, it's torturous for others. Rules about punctuation, grammar and spelling often get lost in the years between English classes and today's workplace. But clear, concise writing is a skill necessary in any job in any profession. Just remember, while grammar, punctuation and spelling may not be important to everyone, readers may immediately discount the writer's message if errors pop off the page.

Here are 10 frequently confused usage rules in grammar:

• **Accept/except** — **Accept** is to receive; **except** is to exclude.

- *I will accept the award.*
- *He eats everything except apples.*

• **Affect/effect** — **Affect** as a verb means to influence (avoid use as a noun). **Effect** as a noun means result.

- *Wind affects weather.*
- *The effect of wind is downed signs.*

• **Among/between** — **Between** is for two items, **among** is for three or more.

- *The contest is between you and me.*
- *You must choose among cookies, cake or nuts.*

• **Annual** — An event cannot be described as **annual** until it has been held at least two consecutive years.

• **Ensure/insure** — Use **ensure** when the meaning is to guarantee; **insure** only references insurance.

- *He will ensure they get there on time.*
- *The policy insures his life.*

• **Fewer/less** — In general, use **fewer** for how many, **less** for how much.

- *Fewer than 10 people called.*
- *I had less than \$50 in my pocket.*

• **Its/their** — **Its** is singular, **their** is plural.

- *The city approved its sign ordinance.*
- *The cities approved their sign ordinances.*

• **Me/I** — **Me** is an object; **I** is a subject. "I" never follows a preposition.

- *Joan is going with Herman and me. (Hint: Removing "Herman and" and using the wrong pronoun reveals an incorrect sentence: "Joan is going with I.")*
- *Joan and I are going with Herman.*

• **That/who** — **That** is impersonal and refers to an object. **Who** is personal and refers to a person.

- *This is a city that gets a lot of rain.*
- *This is a man who likes rain.*

• **Your/you're** — Use **your** as a pronoun; **you're** is a contraction of "you are."

- *Hang up your clothes.*
- *You're going to the bank.*

Keep it simple

Overly flowery words can distract readers. Try substituting the word or phrase on the right for one on the left.

Utilize ----- Use
In order to ----- To
Compensate ----- Pay for
As a result of ----- Because
At this point in time ----- Now
It is our understanding that -- We believe
With respect to ----- About
For the purpose of ----- For/To

In the event of ----- If
In view of the fact that ----- Because
Obtain ----- Get
Ascertain ----- Find out
Disseminate ----- Send out
Optimum ----- Best
It would appear that ----- Apparently

Cities set own rules for public input during council meetings



Cities and towns each operate under their own policies regarding public input at council meetings.

There are at least three key facts to remember, according to longtime municipal attorney and former president of the South Carolina Municipal Attorneys Association Danny Crowe:

- A public hearing is different from a time set aside for public comment.
- A council meeting (except when it conducts a public hearing) is a business meeting of the council.
- State law gives councils the authority to set their own rules of procedure, as long as those rules don't conflict with state law.

Is a public hearing ever required?

Yes, in specific cases the law does require public hearings before a municipal council can take certain formal actions, said Crowe.

For example, there must be a public hearing by the council before council adopts an annual budget (S.C. Code Section 6-1-80) or before the adoption of a "new service or user fee" (S.C. Code Section 6-1-330).

No blanket right to speak

State law does not require there to be a public comment period at council meetings, and there is no guaranteed right for the public to address the council at the council's business meetings, said Crowe.

"Any requirement for public comment periods arises from the council's own rules of procedure or from the municipality's own ordinances," he said. "These local rules and municipal ordinances, of course, are subject to amendment by the council."

Usually councils that provide for public comment periods allow them at a point in the meeting before council's consideration of ordinances and resolutions, said Crowe.

"This recognizes the concept that public input may be beneficial to the council's considerations and may impact council actions," he said.

Bottom line: Council meetings are business meetings of the council.

Five minutes, balanced arguments

"There may be concerns that some members of the public may be long-winded or may get out of hand," said Crowe.

"For these types of reasons, a number of councils have adopted rules or ordinances that formalize the ability and discretion of the meeting's presiding officer under standard parliamentary rules to limit the time, number and conduct of speakers."

Councils commonly limit comments to two to five minutes or limit the number of speakers on a particular side of an issue, so that a specific argument is not aired over and over again.

To encourage civility in public discourse, some municipalities have adopted rules or ordinances that specifically authorize the presiding officer to stop public presentations that the chair or a majority of council determine are uncivil, contentious or disruptive, according to Crowe.

'We use a timer'

Some towns, such as the Town of Port Royal, regularly give residents set opportunities to be heard.

The town offers two scheduled periods per council meeting for members of the public to speak. The first one is for anyone who wants to speak about an agenda item. The second period, held at the end of the meeting, is for anyone who wants to speak about any subject. A member of the public may choose to speak during both periods.

Each speaker is limited to two minutes, and speakers sign in on a comment sheet, which asks for their name and address and a short sentence about what they wish to speak about. Forms are provided and once completed are passed on to the mayor before the meeting.

"We use a timer and usually everyone respects their time limit," said Tanya Payne, municipal clerk for Port Royal. "Occasionally someone will go over the limit. If it gets to the point of abuse, the mayor will ask them to close their statement. This has always worked well for us."

Other cities and towns adjust their meeting policies to fit their communities. In some cases, council may require residents to first try to resolve their concern with city staff. Sometimes those concerns do not fall under local government purview but are more appropriately brought to a different level of government or agency.

Another way some municipalities keep proceedings orderly and prevent surprises at meetings is by requiring residents who wish to address council to submit a summary of their comments to city staff before the meeting. The mayor and city council members would then receive a memo that includes the residents' names and their concerns before those individuals speak.

Regardless of the process a city chooses to follow, it should be outlined in the council's rules of procedure.

Social media played major role during hurricane

As Hurricane Matthew approached the South Carolina coast in October, Bluffton Mayor Lisa Sulka appeared on a Facebook video imploring residents to evacuate. Over the coming days, she, the town manager and police chief continued to post videos to social media updating residents about the storm.

"Social media was really our lifeline," said Joy Nelson, community relations manager for the Bluffton Police Department. "Knowing how the public keeps track of social media on their phones, we were able to constantly update the public on where to go, what to do and what type of damage was done to Bluffton afterwards."

In addition to using social media, Bluffton officials used a free phone application called MYPD, which allows users to receive text alerts about important information, Nelson said. During the storm, the police and town websites were continually updated with information. The town also used Nextdoor, which started out as a neighborhood networking site and has expanded to government agencies. Whenever Nelson posted information on Facebook and Twitter, she also posted to Nextdoor.

The Town of Mount Pleasant used Nextdoor, Twitter, Facebook, its blog, and its smartphone app as the main outlets for

information, according to Chip Googe, police inspector, public information officer and social media manager for the Mount Pleasant Police Department.

"Each of these platforms was crucial in helping us communicate with our community," Googe said.

One popular post was a Facebook Live video that the chief of police recorded as he drove around town looking for damage and flooding. The video received more than 70,000 views. Town Administrator Eric Demoura delivered a message of thanks on YouTube to all who assisted the community during the storm. The International City/County Management Association featured his video on its website and tweeted it to the organization's nearly 13,000 Twitter followers.

Straight from the source

Disseminating accurate information quickly is crucial when it comes to keeping a community informed during a critical event such as Hurricane Matthew, said Marquel Coaxum, multimedia coordinator for the Town of Mount Pleasant. Social media allowed the town to provide the community with accurate information straight from the source.

A primary downside to social media, however, is the same as its upside, Coaxum said. Just as accurate information can be

disseminated quickly, so too can inaccurate information. Without an immediate correction, this can create a barrier to effective communication between local government and the community.

"It's exciting to be piloting a new age of communication where we take more value in the two-way street of communication with our community over the one-way street of information dissemination without feedback," Coaxum said. "We encourage our community to use social media to communicate with us. We take pride in involving and engaging our community through social media, because public service matters and community matters to the Town of Mount Pleasant."

One of the benefits of social media during emergency situations is the ability for recipients to retweet or share, said Isle of Palms City Administrator Linda Tucker. This is true of both residents sharing with one another, and with news media outlets retweeting and sharing. It's an efficient way to reach large numbers of people, Tucker said.

Facebook has become an invaluable tool to get information to residents, property owners and visitors, said Town of Edisto Beach Municipal Clerk Deborah Hargis, who is in charge of social media.

Hargis said she started posting weather forecasts about the looming





hurricane on October 3. As the storm got closer, she began updating more frequently. Once the storm hit on October 8 and pictures became available, she posted remotely from her evacuation site. When residents were allowed back and streets began to open, she also posted those updates along with information from FEMA and recovery videos from the National Guard.

Triple the 'likes'

It's clear that social media had an impact, Hargis said. The town reached almost 700,000 people during three weeks in October. The town's Facebook page "likes" went from 2,000 to 6,000 during the same time frame, she said.

"It has been a time consuming process, but if it helps our residents and absentee property owners feel better about their property, and it keeps everyone safe, I'm all for it," Hargis said.

Edisto Beach Mayor Jane Darby also used Facebook to share the plight of another city hit hard by the hurricane. Her heartfelt post on her personal Facebook page brought attention to the

small inland town of Nichols and the devastation that occurred there.

"I knew flooding had occurred in other parts of our state, but I had been so involved in our recovery that I was ignorant of the depth of loss of some rural towns," she posted shortly after the storm. "I talked with the mayor of Nichols tonight and almost could not talk for choking back the tears."

The City of North Charleston works hard to be proactive on social media, said Ryan Johnson, public relations and economic development coordinator.

Twitter is most effective because it gets the message out immediately, plus members of the media uses Twitter heavily, Johnson said. Facebook is good, he said, but because of its algorithms, people may not always see these posts immediately.

During the storm, city officials were in the municipal emergency operations center around the clock and any information that had to get out immediately was pushed on Twitter. After the storm, they blasted tweets about debris pickup and damage.

One tweet that grabbed a lot of attention was a photo of an overflowing sanitary sewer with the caption, "Look at

all the poo! Don't play in flood waters." The tweet came about when Johnson was out surveying the effects of the storm. He thought the image of the sewer offered the perfect illustration of the dangers but also presented an opportunity for some humor.

"Municipal accounts can be so dry and boring, and nobody pays attention," Johnson said. "It helps to be a real person, add some GIFs (animated image or short video) and images."

Often in municipalities, there is a desire to control the message from the top down. Social media is a different animal, he said.

"There's got to be a certain level of trust and efficiency in a social media manager," he said. "You have to be nimble and react in an appropriate manner without a vast amount of oversight."

Johnson worked to put out a daily digest every day on Facebook. It offered helpful information that people saw and reshared, he said. Whenever possible, he linked the messages to high quality imagery like pictures of crews collecting debris.

"You're doing more than getting out information," Johnson said.

"You're telling a story."



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Calendar

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JANUARY

19 SCMIT and SCMIRF Joint Training Session – Walking the Narrow Road of Leadership: Leadership Principles for Public Safety Personnel and Managers. Greer Cannon Center, 204 Cannon St., Greer.

31 Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government Sessions A and B and Advanced Institute. Columbia Marriott.

FEBRUARY

1 Hometown Legislative Action Day. Columbia Marriott. (See p. 1)

23 SC Association of Municipal Power Systems Associate Member Lunch. Columbia Marriott.

MARCH

5-7 SC Utility Billing Association Annual Meeting. Sonesta Resort, Hilton Head Island. Topics include cybersecurity, generational diversity and set-off debt programs.

14 Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government. Councils of Government offices. Course offered: "Basic Budgeting and Municipal Finance." This course is also offered on demand from the Association's website at www.masc.sc (keyword: MEO).

15-17 Municipal Clerks and Treasurers Institute Spring Session – Year 2, Session A. Hyatt Place Hotel, Columbia. Topics include social media, special elections and auditing.

23 Municipal Technology Association of SC Spring Meeting. Columbia Conference Center. Topics include risk management/cyber liability insurance, utility technology, GIS and in-car technology for police vehicles.

30 SC Municipal Finance Officers, Clerks and Treasurers Association Spring Academy. Columbia Conference Center.

APRIL

7 Municipal Court Administration Association of SC Spring Meeting. Columbia Conference Center.

19 SC Business Licensing Officials Association Spring Academy. Columbia Conference Center.

20 SC Municipal Human Resources Association Spring Meeting. Columbia Conference Center.

26 SC Association of Municipal Power Systems Linemen Training (repeated on April 27) SCE&G Pine Island, Columbia.

27 SC Association of Municipal Power Systems Linemen Training (repeated on April 26) SCE&G Pine Island, Columbia.