

UPTOWN



a publication of the Municipal Association of South Carolina

UNLOCKING MAIN STREET'S POTENTIAL **THREE APPROACHES TO ACHIEVING DOWNTOWN SUCCESS** *Page 9*

Municipal Association Establishes List of Hate Crimes Ordinances *page 5*

Keep Collaboration in the Annexation Discussion *page 7*

Clean Water Needs a Clear Plan: Investments Maintain Water, Wastewater Systems *page 14*

2024 Annual Meeting Registration Starts in June 3

Business Licensing Officials Association Training Institute Graduates 27 4

7 Graduate From Municipal Clerks and Treasurers Institute 4

2024 Compensation Survey Results Now Available 5

Municipal Association Establishes List of Hate Crimes Ordinances 5

Planning and Adopting a Budget 6

Keep Collaboration in the Annexation Discussion 7

Proper Hiring Procedures Help Reduce Police Liability 8

Unlocking Main Street's Potential: Three Approaches to Achieving Downtown Success 9

Special Section: Infrastructure and Public Works

Infrastructure Investment Spending By the Numbers 11

Association Highlight: SC Association of Municipal Power Systems 11

Investing in a Healthy and Prosperous State: SCIIIP's Impact on South Carolina 12

Prevention and Planning Help Reduce Sewer Backup Risks 13

Clean Water Needs a Clear Plan: Investments Maintain Water, Wastewater Systems 14

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Cover Photo : Since its closure to vehicle traffic, The Alley in Aiken has become a place for gatherings and events like Amp the Alley. Photo: City of Aiken.

Annual Meeting to Highlight Mental Health Outreach

The Municipal Association of SC 2024 Advocacy Initiatives — the list of specific goals that it pursues with the General Assembly to benefit cities and towns — includes support for additional funding through the state budget and other resources for mental health services for residents. The 2024 Annual Meeting in Greenville will address the topic as well, with a session covering the services offered through the SC Department of Mental Health and its regional offices.

Mental health as an Advocacy Initiative came about because many city and town officials across South Carolina have firsthand knowledge of the negative impacts that insufficient mental health care has in their communities. The National Alliance on Mental Health has estimated more than 700,000 South Carolina residents suffer from mental illness, and nearly half of them have not sought treatment because of the cost.

The negative effects of mental health challenges can be felt in many parts of a community's well-being. Mental health conditions impact rates of crime and violence, as well as rates of substance abuse and homelessness. Untreated mental health issues can often burden emergency services, with law enforcement often having to respond to mental health emergencies that they aren't trained to address. When responding to a call, officers may be uncertain of what steps they should take in a situation where they know that arrest is not an ideal course of action. When mental health issues appear in a homeless population, it can lead to fears and concerns among other residents using public places as well.

Some local law enforcement agencies have already explored creative ways to address these issues. The West Columbia Police Department, for example, has partnered

with the University of South Carolina College of Social Work for an outreach initiative focused on everything from de-escalation to follow-up in cases where mental health is a concern. The Camden Police Department has used the Community Oriented Policing Services division to connect people with everything from food and shelter to mental health treatment, and the Bluffton Police Department's outreach efforts have included the addition of an in-house mental health advocate position.

Annual Meeting breakout session

The SC Department of Mental Health has a host of services, including licensed mental health providers that accompany officers to the scene of a disturbance. This is information cities and towns need to know about. One breakout session at the Annual Meeting will introduce elected officials to the SC Department of Mental Health, and walk them through the services available to them through the department's 16 regional offices.

Speakers for the session will include Deborah Blalock, the deputy director who manages the Division of Community Mental Health Services, the statewide network of outpatient clinics. It will also feature Peter Camelo, executive director of one of these facilities, the Greater Greenville Mental Health Center, which has clinics in Greenville, Greer and Simpsonville.

Find more information on the Annual Meeting at www.masc.sc (keyword: Annual Meeting). The Association will use its regular registration process to make sure that municipal officials have priority for the limited available reservations and ticketed events. It will draw city and town names June 17, 18 and 20 to determine the order of registration appointments. The deadline to sign up for the drawing is May 31.





2024 Annual Meeting Registration Starts in June

The registration process for the Municipal Association of South Carolina's 2024 Annual Meeting will begin June 17.

This year's meeting will take place July 18 – 21 at the Hyatt Regency Greenville. The Association's registration process, which helps ensure that municipal officials have priority for reservations and ticketed events, will get started in May.

Registration drawing

The Municipal Association will draw city names to determine the order of registration appointments for cities and towns, providing a fair process for all those interested in attending. The deadline to enter for the drawing is Friday, May 31.

Key dates

- **May 27** – Agenda and registration information posted online. Registration brochures mailed.
- **May 31** – Deadline to enter registration appointment drawing
- **June 4** – Registration appointment times are announced
- **June 17, 18 and 20** – Cities with a phone appointment register on one of these days. During the appointment, an Association staff member will call the city representative to start the online registration/reservation process. A city's representative must have completed registration forms in hand, including housing and meal ticket requests, for each person to be registered during the city's call. During the online process, the city representative will use a Visa or MasterCard to make hotel reservations and register municipal attendees for the meeting. Make sure the credit card has a sufficient credit limit and per-transaction limit.
- **June 26** – Deadline to make hotel reservations
- **July 5** – Deadline to register for Annual Meeting
- **July 18 – 21** – Annual Meeting at the Hyatt Regency Greenville

NEWS BRIEFS

Southern Living magazine named the **City of Spartanburg** as number 3 on its list of the "South's Best Cities on the Rise 2024," drawing attention to its growth, its new comprehensive plan and its coming Minor League Baseball stadium. It also named the **City of Columbia** as number 5, citing the value of University of South Carolina students to its development and upcoming projects like the Blossom Street Bridge Renovation. The magazine again placed South Carolina cities on its list of the "South's Best Cities," including the **City of Charleston** at the top of the list and the **City of Greenville** at 6. It also listed the **City of Beaufort** as the best small town in South Carolina.

The SC Arts Commission announced its 10th SC Cultural District in the **City of Hartsville** in February, and its 11th SC Cultural District in the **City of Georgetown** in March.

Business Licensing Officials Association Training Institute Graduates 27

Twenty-seven officials representing cities, towns and counties graduated from the SC Business Licensing Officials Association Training Institute during BLOA's spring meeting.

The Institute helps improve the professional and administrative skills of business licensing officials. Its three sessions include topics on general licensing, problem areas and personal development.

The graduates can earn the Accreditation in Business Licensing designation after passing a comprehensive written exam.

These are the newest BLOA Training Institute graduates:

- Christy Allen, Town of Hampton
- Burnie Britt, Horry County
- Shana Carothers, City of Tega Cay
- Rakenia Collier, Orangeburg County
- Michael Costa, Beaufort County
- Kira DeLoache, City of Fountain Inn
- Tyler Dempsey, City of Hanahan
- Debra Edwards, Horry County
- Audrey Evans, Town of Winnsboro
- Angela Fesler, City of Hanahan
- Brooke Garcia, Town of Summerville
- Tami Groff, Town of Hilton Head Island
- Lorie Hamrick, Town of Lyman
- Jolie Householder, Horry County
- Kyle Hughes, Richland County
- Justine Lovell, Town of Moncks Corner
- Tiffany Mailand, City of Goose Creek
- Kenna McLarty, City of Greer
- Kelsey Medaglia, City of Beaufort
- Patricia Moore, City of Rock Hill
- Valerie Puntillo, Town of Mount Pleasant
- Rochelle Smith, City of Cayce
- Britany Smoak, City of Cayce
- Heather Towner, City of Greer
- Kristine Wasilewski, Town of Hilton Head Island
- Lynda Williamson, City of North Augusta
- Angie Wilson, City of Anderson

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



7 Graduate From Municipal Clerks and Treasurers Institute

The SC Municipal Clerks and Treasurers Institute gained seven new graduates in its March 2024 session. MCTI is a three-year program that provides municipal clerks and treasurers with critical skills for their profession.

The 2024 graduates are

- Tiffany Albert, executive secretary/clerk to council, City of Greenwood;
- Jennifer Edwards, human resources director, Town of Winnsboro;
- Patti Davis, city clerk and assistant to the town manager, Town of Winnsboro;
- Traci Guldner, city clerk, City of Beaufort;
- LaToya Miller, administrative assistant, City of Lake City;
- Bridget Welch, town clerk, Town of Sullivan's Island; and
- Jeff Wicker, assistant city manager, City of Newberry.

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

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

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



2024 Compensation Survey Results Now Available

The Municipal Association of SC gives cities and towns an easy way to compare their employee compensation with pay from other municipalities across the state through its online compensation survey.

City and town leaders use this tool to save time when studying pay data to help inform decisions on how to set their compensation levels competitively. As a reference tool, the survey should only supplement those situations where a city or town needs to commission a full class and compensation study, and should not be a substitute for a study.

Users can now find the data from the 2024 Compensation Survey on the Association's website, and can use it to generate customized reports, like narrowing the full survey results down to information for municipalities of a particular population

range or specific job positions. Reports can also include the number of full-time employees or the annual payroll of a particular city or town. Other search functions include salary ranges, merit raise minimums or maximums, or the range of a cost-of-living adjustment. Users can also export all of the compensation survey data into Excel spreadsheets, or download the entire compensation survey report as a PDF.

Responding to the survey is voluntary for municipalities, but higher response rates increase the usefulness of the data. The Association requests survey participation from cities and towns at the beginning of each calendar year.

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

Municipal Association Establishes List of Hate Crimes Ordinances

Several cities and towns in South Carolina have responded to the General Assembly's lack of action in passing hate crimes legislation by passing their own hate crimes ordinances, which the Municipal Association of SC has begun compiling into a resource list.

The list, available at www.masc.sc (keyword: hate crimes) currently features the ordinances of Bluffton, Charleston, Chester, Clemson, Greenville, Florence and Mount Pleasant. These ordinances typically establish the offense of "hate intimidation," defining it as action intended to intimidate, harass, assault or otherwise harm another person based on that person's race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, disability or other identity. Additional municipalities that have enacted hate crimes ordinances should notify Municipal Association Legislative and Public Policy Advocate Erica Wright at ewright@masc.sc.

South Carolina and Wyoming are the only two states to have not enacted statewide hate crimes laws. This has caused cities and towns to miss out on economic opportunities as some civic, cultural and sporting organizations have decided to host events or tournaments in other states as a result. Some cities and towns have passed resolutions urging the General Assembly to pass hate crimes legislation.

The Municipal Association included support of statewide hate crimes legislation as one of its Advocacy Initiatives in 2023 and 2024. The SC House of Representatives has passed such legislation repeatedly, but the SC Senate has not considered the legislation. H3014, the most recent version of the Clementa C. Pinckney Hate Crimes Act, would create additional penalties for those who commit certain crimes while selecting victims based on identity. The bill is currently contested in the Senate, preventing debate on it.



Planning and Adopting a BUDGET

2024 2025

The South Carolina Constitution, in Article X, Section 7(b), requires municipalities to adopt a balanced budget each year, with revenues equaling expenditures.

The key to a good budget process that complies with state law is an organized budget plan, executed by a council and staff working together as a team.

Forecasting the budget

City staff can help with budget forecasting by maintaining records on revenue and expenditures in a format that can be compared across at least three to five years.

Councils can avoid unexpected problems by studying and adjusting prior-year revenues and expenditures to account for unique situations. On the revenue side, this could be one-time dollars budgeted the previous year, like grants, collection of past-due revenues, insurance settlements, and opening or closing of businesses or industries. Health insurance premiums, state retirement contributions, utility rate increases and one-time payments are examples of items to double-check on the expenditure side for increases.

Councils may want to wait as late as possible when finalizing revenue projections. A city with a July 1 fiscal year start date may want to consider a budget work session in May, followed by two readings of the budget ordinance in June.

Adopting the budget

As cities and towns craft their budget ordinances, they must use public meetings, and the SC Freedom of Information Act sets the requirements for giving notice of all public meetings. This includes posting an agenda at the meeting site at least 24 hours in advance and notifying the press and anyone else who has requested notice at that time as well. Cities and towns must also post the agenda on their websites, if one exists.

Under SC Code Section 6-1-80, councils must conduct a public hearing on the budget, giving at least a 15-day public notice in a newspaper of general circulation in the area.

For municipalities using the council form of government, the council should designate the people responsible for preparing the budget. For the other two forms of municipal government, state law designates who is responsible for budget preparation. In the mayor-council form, the mayor is charged with preparing the budget for the council's consideration. In the council-manager form, the city or town manager prepares the budget.

Under the SC Constitution, municipalities most likely do not have the authority to operate under a continuing budget resolution rather than a properly-adopted budget. If a budget cannot be adopted by the end of a city's fiscal year, council should at least adopt a provisional budget using the previous year's revenue and

expenses. Later, the council could amend the provisional budget as new information on revenues and expenditures arrives, but would still need to have the two readings and public hearings when doing so.

Adjusting the millage cap

Municipalities seeking to increase a property tax millage rate are constrained by Act 388 of 2006. They may increase millage for general operating purposes in one year by the previous calendar year's average consumer price index increase and the percentage increase in the municipality's previous year population as provided by the SC Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office.

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

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

Learn about the budget process in the Handbook for Municipal Officials in South Carolina, found at www.masc.sc (keyword: municipal officials handbook).



Keep Collaboration in the Annexation Discussion

South Carolina is growing very quickly, and that growth comes with emerging friction among residents already here and those that are arriving.

The state grew by 1.7% in FY 2023, the fastest percentage growth in the nation, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, reaching 5.37 million residents by mid-2023. For the regions where this growth is concentrated, cities are experiencing unprecedented pressure to regulate and guide land usage.

As cities and towns address their growth by annexing areas where new development demands municipal services, municipal officials should be sure to coordinate as much as possible with the other affected entities in the area: county governments, school districts, public service districts and others. The same growth that affects the municipality affects all other levels of government as well, and municipalities collaborating with their neighbors can help reduce the potential for conflicts around local planning and zoning.

Coordination as part of the priority investment element

South Carolina's Comprehensive Planning Enabling Act requires that municipalities who choose to adopt planning and zoning regulations must establish a local planning commission and adopt a comprehensive plan every 10 years. This comprehensive plan must include 10 specific elements described in the law, including the priority investment element.

The priority investment element promotes collaboration among different levels of government. As stated in SC Code Section 6-29-510(B), it "analyzes the likely federal, state and local funds available for public infrastructure and facilities" over the next decade. The law states that the comprehensive plan should then make recommendations for how funding should be spent during this time for such infrastructure as water, sewer, roads and schools. The plan's recommendations must be made in coordination with numerous other entities:

- Counties
- School districts
- Public and private utilities
- Transportation agencies
- Any other public entities that are affected by or have planning authority over the project

Best practices

Some cities have formalized collaboration with their county counterparts by creating joint planning bodies. Sumter is home to a Sumter City-County Planning Commission and a Sumter City-County Board of Zoning Appeals, with members appointed by both Sumter city council and Sumter county council. Similarly, Greenwood has the City/County Joint Planning Commission, a Greenwood City/County Joint Board of Zoning Appeals, and a Greenwood Board of Architectural Review established entirely by the city. *The Comprehensive Planning Guide for Local Governments*, available at www.masc.sc (keyword: planning guide), details this and other such formalized coordination efforts.

In some communities, municipal elected officials and staff may be hesitant about any perception that they have yielded authority to the county government, or granted veto power over potential developments to county representatives. When facing these concerns, cities should still seek opportunities for regular, proactive engagement with the county on potential annexations.

For example, the Town of Summerville established a technical review committee that invites representatives of utility providers, its school district and the two counties where the town is mostly located to participate in reviewing larger developments. Staff shares committee meeting agendas with these external stakeholders so they will be aware of potential developments that may seek annexation.

The City of Columbia sends email notices of pending annexations to county staff and other interested organizations. Because of the ever-evolving nature of proposed developments, staff keeps their communications high-level, providing basic property information, including maps, current and proposed uses and zoning, and the reason for annexation. They also provide the timeline for the planning commission's review of the proposed annexation.

As municipal and county governments throughout the state share their concerns over annexation with one another, the Municipal Association is compiling best practices to share with cities and towns. Municipalities that have implemented pre-annexation coordination efforts with their counties should share these with Municipal Association Research and Legislative Analyst Mary Catherine Lawton at mlawton@masc.sc or 803.933.1244.

Proper Hiring Procedures Help Reduce Police Liability



Liability comes in many forms for law enforcement agencies, including the risk of police officers harming others in the course of their duties. This makes careful and appropriate hiring a critical task for police departments, even in an era where officer recruitment has grown more difficult. After an officer is hired, proper and thorough training plays a key role in preventing dangerous situations and liability.

In a case where a police officer has injured a person, a court could find that the law enforcement agency knew, or should have known, specifics about the officer's background that would indicate the officer had a dangerous or untrustworthy character. A court can use this finding to hold the employing municipality liable.

Act 218 took effect in 2023, requiring all law enforcement agencies to adopt and implement a set of minimum operating standards, including standards for hiring practices. The Municipal Association's Risk Management Services drafted model policies for each of the legally-required standards.

The model policy for hiring addresses these points:

Qualifications – This includes a high school diploma or its equivalent, and documentation that the candidate is at least 21 years old, as required by state law.

A successful fitness test – This would use standards set by the department and administered by a certified fitness instructor, and would be followed by obtaining a medical history and a medical exam.

Background check items – As part of the application, this policy requires an affidavit indicating whether the candidate has ever been the subject of a domestic restraining or protective order, and whether they have ever been convicted of a domestic-

violence-related offense. The policy requires that the candidate has never been convicted of a felony or convicted of a criminal offense that involves moral turpitude. The background check would also determine whether the candidate is “of good character” and has a good credit history. The candidate's fingerprints would be checked against the records of the FBI and the SC Law Enforcement Division. The check would also include contacting law enforcement agencies in places the candidate has lived, a database search to determine whether the officer has ever been decertified, and a call to the SC Criminal Justice Academy. The process would include an interview of past employers when possible.

A polygraph test – This policy specifies that a polygraph test would be conducted by a licensed examiner.

An objective interview – This would use standardized questions.

The policy states that any evidence obtained at any point showing that “the candidate has a propensity to engage in conduct that could harm a member of the public” would be considered disqualifying.

While strong department policies and procedures can help to guard against bad policing outcomes, there can be no replacement for careful training of officers and tests to make sure they have a full comprehension of the law and what is expected of them. A police department facing an excessive force allegation should be able to show documentation of the date that an officer received training.

The Municipal Association's Risk Management Services provides a law enforcement hiring process and other policies and training resources for its member departments. Find more information at www.masc.sc (keywords: SCMIT, SCMIRF).

Unlocking Main Street's Potential

Three Approaches to Achieving Downtown Success

Across the state, cities and towns have guided significant transformation of their downtown districts. Among these success stories are Aiken, Georgetown and Bishopville, each with distinctive leadership styles and strategies.

Aiken



Signage, like these signs at Laurens Street and Park Avenue, point the way to destinations throughout Aiken's downtown. Photo: City of Aiken.

With a population exceeding 32,000 residents, Aiken curates an award-winning downtown with more than 170 tree-line parkways and an abundance of public art installations. Renowned for its equestrian facilities and one of the nation's largest urban forests, Aiken attracts visitors locally and even internationally. The downtown's vibrant mix of boutique shops, art galleries, and gourmet restaurants also appeals to arts and culture enthusiasts.

At the forefront of the downtown revitalization efforts is the Aiken Downtown Development Association, dedicated to preserving the city's historic charm while guiding economic growth

and vibrancy. Through strategic planning and community engagement, ADDA plays a pivotal role in revitalizing Aiken's historic downtown district, focusing on small business support and citywide partnerships.

"ADDA is blessed to have two paid staff, but we could not do what we do without our volunteers," ADDA Executive Director EmmaLee Sams said. "Our 20-member board plays a huge role in regularly connecting with our community members. Our board members represent the banking and [real estate] sectors as well as business owners; we also have representation from the city, USC Aiken, and the Chamber of Commerce. We talk weekly with our executive board and we meet with the whole board once a month, focusing on prioritized initiatives. Our volunteers genuinely want to help in any way; they want to know what we're doing and how they can participate in moving initiatives forward."

In 2023, ADDA recorded a total of 1,470 volunteer hours dedicated to completing numerous downtown projects.

By providing support and resources to small businesses, including marketing assistance and promotional events, ADDA catalyzes positive change, ensuring that downtown thrives as a hub of commerce, culture and community.

Sams described relationship building as a key strength for ADDA.

"We host quarterly merchant meetings to get to know the business owners and community members and to share ways to support one another," she said. "These meetings also reveal local business needs that we can respond to with developing and providing specific resources and connections."

The significance of Aiken's historic downtown resonates throughout the community, among businesses,

building owners, city leaders and civic organizations.

"As a community, we share a common goal — to help ensure that Aiken's downtown is prosperous and welcoming to all," Sams said.

Georgetown



Georgetown's Harborwalk has a connection to the Joseph H. Rainey Park. Photo: City of Georgetown.

The City of Georgetown, situated on the coast with a harborwalk and plenty of historic architecture, has experienced a remarkable downtown transformation. With a population of over 8,400 residents, its collaborative efforts with community organizations, private developers and residents have inspired investments.

This past year, the city achieved significant milestones, including its designation as the state's 11th Cultural District through the SC Arts Commission, the revival of the farmers market, the opening of three new restaurants as well as seven new shops and boutiques, and the debut of a 56-room boutique hotel. A historic bank building is being renovated into a brewery/distillery, a \$4 million project that will reactivate over a quarter of a city block.

The City of Georgetown's Main Street Director Al Joseph stressed the importance of having dedicated staff who are focused on the downtown district.

"Having someone in this position that is able to promote Georgetown, spread Georgetown's story, work with our marketing team and with the Georgetown Business Association – that's why we're seeing such a resurgence," he said.

Joseph noted that Georgetown's "biggest focus in the past 20 months has been promotion of the city – internally and externally. During our annual business owners meeting we share what's happening at a city level and then it's open discussion by the business owners. These moments of sharing are invaluable. This position [the City of Georgetown's Main Street Director] is the point of contact for building owners to help identify new tenants and to welcome new businesses."

A key aspect of Georgetown's downtown revival has been its waterfront development. The city's harbor, once a hub of maritime activity, has been transformed into a vibrant waterfront destination.

After a seven-year effort, dredging of Georgetown's channel to a depth of 12 feet is "going to open us up to an entirely different demographic for tourism by providing access to larger pleasure boats and yachts," Joseph said. "Georgetown is the only place on the Eastern Seaboard that has a confluence of five rivers, a bay and the ocean only 10 miles away."

Bishopville



Widely known for Pearl Fryar's Topiary Garden, Bishopville is home to more than 3,000 residents. The municipal initiatives for Bishopville's downtown are led by councilmembers who serve on committees dedicated to managing special projects for the city. The committee that oversees Bishopville's Main Street program, the three-member Commercial Affairs Committee, includes Gloria Lewis.

"With councilmembers serving as committee chairs and committee members, we get to be closer to the work. Because of this, we don't think of it as a job but view as giving back to our communities, especially since many of us are also business owners and active community members outside of the council," Lewis said.

Understanding the value of coordinating and focusing economic development efforts, the City of Bishopville is in the final stages of approving its downtown master plan, to provide a clear long-term vision.

"Having a strategic plan helps determine how to use resources, land, and funding appropriately, helping us to stay on track with planning for the city," Lewis said. "Even when a transfer of mayor and council occurs, the strategic plan serves as a north star for both current and incoming leaders. It helps us remain on task to complete ongoing projects, keeps the needs of our city and residents at the forefront of what we do by prioritizing high-priority projects before moving forward to other projects, and provides us with checks and balances to keep us from going astray."

One significant revitalization effort includes the renovation of the historic railroad depot. The goal of this \$1.4 million project is to remove several dilapidated buildings from the railroad line located at the center of the city. The city will remodel the historic brick depot building and install a parking lot, sidewalks, lighting and flowers to encourage more downtown pedestrian traffic. Once completed, this space will be a home for community activities, a potential farmer's market, recreational green space for outdoor activities, live music, festivals, and a private event venue.

Community engagement has also played a vital role in Bishopville's downtown revival. Through workshops and outreach, residents have had a voice in shaping their community's future. This collaborative approach has fostered a sense of ownership and pride among Bishopville's residents, driving further investment and participation in the revitalization efforts.

Connecting and collaborating

At the heart of South Carolina's thriving communities are the residents, small business owners, and city leaders who collectively shape and guide their downtown revitalization efforts. Aiken, Georgetown and Bishopville exemplify successful approaches to historic downtown district revitalization, showcasing the power of collaboration and community engagement.

Main Street South Carolina is a technical assistance program of the Municipal Association of SC. It offers several community membership levels ranging in cost and requirements. Learn more at www.masc.sc (keyword: Main Street).

Bishopville's leaders are developing a master plan for the development of its historic downtown.

Infrastructure Investment Spending By the Numbers

More than \$725 million in water, wastewater and stormwater system revenue was collected in FY 2022, used to maintain existing infrastructure and expand access to clean water, stormwater and sanitary sewer systems.

This amount comes from the SC Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office's Local Government Finance Report, which had 160 cities and towns responding as of December 2023. Failure to submit this annual report by the March 15 deadline may result in a 10% withholding of distributions from the State Treasurer's Office,

such as Local Government Fund and state accommodations tax funding, until the municipality submits the required information.

The report's information is used to prepare fiscal impact statements on proposed legislation as requested by state legislators and to analyze financial trends. Learn more and find the data at <https://rfa.sc.gov/data-research/local-government/report-submit>.

Association Highlight:

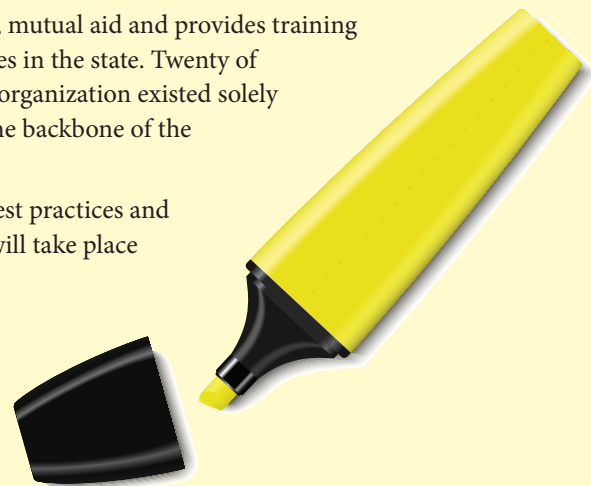
SC Association of Municipal Power Systems

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

The SC Association of Municipal Power Systems focuses on legislative initiatives, mutual aid and provides training for elected officials, management staff and operational personnel of the electric cities in the state. Twenty of South Carolina's municipal electric utilities are SCAMPS members. Originally, the organization existed solely for its members to help one another during times of disaster. Mutual aid remains the backbone of the organization even as its scope has grown to include training and advocacy.

SCAMPS offers an Annual Meeting for its members and a listserv for sharing best practices and connecting with colleagues around the state. The 2024 SCAMPS Annual Meeting will take place June 2 – 5 at the Embassy Suites Myrtle Beach.

Learn more about SCAMPS at www.masc.sc (keyword: SCAMPS).



Investing in a Healthy and Prosperous State SCIIP's Impact on South Carolina

By Kendra Wilkerson, Program Policy & Development Manager, SC Rural Infrastructure Authority

The City of Pickens used a SCIIP grant to replace water mains. Photo: SC Rural Infrastructure Authority.

This time last year, the South Carolina Rural Infrastructure Authority announced it had awarded more than \$1.4 billion in grant funding to communities across all 46 counties of the state through the South Carolina Infrastructure Investment Program. This one-time initiative is assisting with improvements for clean drinking water, sanitary sewer and stormwater resilience using federal funds allocated through the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021.

These project examples highlight the positive outcomes SCIIP grants are working towards in cities and towns across South Carolina.

City of Orangeburg

The City of Orangeburg's collaborative work with the Bull Swamp Rural Water Company exemplifies a key SCIIP objective to encourage greater sustainability through regional partnerships.

Facing serious staffing challenges that are common among small, rural utilities, the BSRWC turned to the neighboring City of Orangeburg's Department of Public Utilities for operational assistance. SCIIP grant funding for infrastructure upgrades and the construction of an interconnection has allowed the Orangeburg Department of Public Utilities to take ownership of the Bull Swamp system and avoid placing financial strain on existing customers.

City of Pickens

The City of Pickens received a SCIIP grant to address aging infrastructure and increase its capacity for future growth.

The project involves extensive replacement of outdated water mains with ductile iron pipe, along with the installation of fire hydrants, benefiting more than 200 customers in growing parts of the city's service area. Currently, the project is on budget and progressing rapidly, with completion expected this summer.

Town of Batesburg-Leesville

The Town of Batesburg-Leesville is using SCIIP funds to build a new water main and booster pump station that connects to Lexington County's Joint Municipal Water and Sewer Commission.

The collaboration, designed to provide a new and more reliable source of water for the town, addresses a consent order

issued by the SC Department of Health and Environmental Control.

Construction kicked off in early 2024 and is expected to continue for approximately two years. The project is under budget and on track for timely completion.

Latest updates

For SCIIP grant recipients to meet the tight federal deadlines, RIA established milestones to keep projects on track. All 219 recipients have met initial award conditions and received RIA's notice to proceed, with over one-quarter of the grants already under contract as of March 2024.

Grantees yet to advertise for bids should be finalizing plans and specifications as soon as possible to advertise no later than July 2024. All projects should be under contract by the fall to ensure construction completion by April 2026 and projects must be closed out by June 2026.

RIA closely monitors guidance from the U.S. Department of the Treasury and provides updates to SCIIP guidelines and procedures as needed. The following are the latest updates:

- The Department of the Treasury has proposed a rule that may impact RIA's ability to move funds from one SCIIP project to another after December 2024. RIA is considering options for ensuring that all SCIIP funds can be spent for their intended purpose and will keep grantees informed as new information becomes available.
- RIA developed a new Project Workforce Reporting Form for the three recipients of SCIIP grants over \$10 million. RIA is also required to report similar information for grants equal to \$10 million, but no additional information is needed from these grantees at this time.

This one-time funding program is making a significant impact in every county in South Carolina. RIA also continues to provide state-funded grants for water, wastewater and stormwater infrastructure and utility planning. For more information or assistance, visit ria.sc.gov.



South Carolina
Rural Infrastructure Authority
Creating water solutions.
Improving communities statewide.

Prevention and Planning Help Reduce Sewer Backup Risks



Sewer backups can become a memorable problem for a municipal government, and an expensive one for the responsible party. A sewage backup can damage or destroy a building's floors, walls, electrical systems and contents quickly.

Deciding who is liable for the cleanup and repairs means determining where the backup originated — potentially inside the city-owned sewer main, or in the sewer connection between the city's sewer main and the building, which falls under the property owner's responsibility. When backups happen, public works staff need to know what to do, and even what to say. They also need to know what steps to take in the first place to prevent backups.

Inspection and maintenance

Ongoing inspection and maintenance of a sewer system can help prevent backups, and documenting those efforts can help a city reduce its legal risks. Cities should develop a formal written plan for inspections, cleanings, repairs and customer calls, while considering that staff resources limit how frequently they can perform checks.

Consider, for example, a plan that requires inspecting 25% of the entire system each year, meaning that a system-wide inspection occurs every four years. From one inspection to the next, a problem can occur, but even if the city had not reached this line yet, or the

flaw was not there the last time it was inspected, having documentation would be better than having to testify in court that there was no inspection process in place.

Communicating before a backup

Municipalities can be proactive about backups with communication materials that explain the causes of sewer backups. This can be educational material that explains how sewer users should keep items that can clog systems — especially cooking grease — out of their drains.

Communicating after a backup

The communication efforts of city staff play a key role in whether a backup turns into a lawsuit. Cities can also risk accepting fault in a situation where they were not at fault, depending on how staff communicates about the issue.

Employees should be familiar with the city's recovery policies and procedures, and be able to answer questions about what steps the city will take after a problem. However, they should avoid premature discussions about who has liability in a particular case, since an insurance claims adjuster needs to investigate who has liability.

A good approach is for officials to encourage a property owner to work with a disaster restoration company, and indicate that the city's insurance provider will investigate the claim. The city should

not become involved in any aspect of the aftermath if the homeowner will not sign a non-waiver-of-defenses agreement. This puts in writing that the homeowner acknowledges any city assistance does not mean the city is admitting liability for the incident.

Cases where the city is likely liable

A court is likely to hold a city liability for damages in a case where its actions are believed to have caused the backup. For example, if public works staff used excess water pressure when cleaning a sewage line, a court could find that this action backed sewage up into a home, or if workers incorrectly installed the city's lines in a way that clogged them.

Other cases where the city is likely liable are those when it had notice that a problem existed, but did not correct it. For example, a resident could call to report a backup, but the city did not act in a timely manner, or an inspection identified a problem, but the city took no action. Documenting the issue, properly communicating about it, addressing it and documenting the steps the city took are all critical for minimizing liability.

For more information on managing sewer backups, contact Municipal Association of SC Risk Management Services loss control staff at losscontrol@masc.sc.

Clean Water Needs a Clear Plan

Investments Maintain Water, Wastewater Systems

As South Carolina grows, so does the need to provide water and wastewater treatment to all those new houses, businesses and industries.

Providing the necessary infrastructure to deliver clean water and treated wastewater is a costly, large undertaking — one that cities around the state are working to address.

Aiken City Manager Stuart Bedenbaugh described water and wastewater — along with police and fire service — as the four fundamental responsibilities of municipal government. In the growing Aiken area, that means planning and keeping up water and wastewater plant expansions to serve both residential and commercial expansions.

“We’ve done a lot and there’s still a lot to do,” Bedenbaugh said. “We’re no different from most communities that have water and wastewater utility systems. It requires constant maintenance and vigilance. And that does come with a cost. But we work very hard to do this as efficiently and inexpensively as possible.”

Bedenbaugh said Aiken and its surrounding utility area, like much of the state, has grown tremendously over the last few years.

“It started before COVID and it has accelerated,” he said. “Our planning and inspections offices have seen more applications for building permits and site reviews. Our engineering department has seen a lot of requests for plan reviews. So that made us look at our capacity issues.”

The city’s primary water treatment plant was nearly 70 years old and in need of an upgrade.

“We assessed whether we could do a renovation or whether it would be more cost-effective to build new, and we determined building new would be more effective,” he said.

Aiken also studied its existing water and wastewater line infrastructure, some of which dated to the early 20th century. Repairs and replacement of pipes in the ground, along with the installation of more valves in the water system, were needed to make the system more efficient.



Aiken looked to several areas to pay for the costly, necessary repairs. It increased its water and wastewater rates following a comprehensive study that showed its utility rates had not kept up with the cost of doing business. It also became more aggressive in seeking alternative funding.

That included money from the SC Rural Infrastructure Authority’s State Revolving Fund, which offers long-term, low-interest rate loans for public drinking water and wastewater facilities. Aiken also worked with U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham’s office, receiving appropriations in the last four federal budget cycles to help the city upgrade water and wastewater lines and increase capacity near industrial parks. Aiken received a South Carolina Infrastructure Investment Program grant to help pay for the water plant.

“We’ve availed ourselves of raising money locally through examination of our rates and targeted rate increases [along with] state funding, grants or low-interest loans, and federal funding through congressional directed spending,” Bedenbaugh said.

Aiken has completed the work on the water and wastewater lines, while groundbreaking on the water treatment plant is expected later this year. The new plant will have a capacity of 8 million gallons a day — a substantial increase over the existing plant.

The city also worked on a better way to treat wastewater odor by injecting oxygen into its wastewater system. Bedenbaugh said the chemicals that often are used to treat the smell can corrode and reduce the life expectancy of wastewater lines, and the byproducts can be hazardous in some cases. After studying utilities in Georgia and North Carolina that used oxygen to kill some of the odor-causing microbes without a hazardous

byproduct, Aiken started using the process, which he said has been successful.

William Hall, the city administrator in Lake City, said when he started his job with the city 18 years ago after working a few decades in the corporate world, he had no understanding of the importance of water and wastewater processes.

“I came on with Lake City in the finance department and working with numbers. I didn’t think anything about what happened to my sewage,” Hall said. “When I got here, I said, ‘Look how much do we spend on wastewater.’ And ‘what’s a wastewater treatment plant?’”

Hall called his first visit to a wastewater treatment plant “fascinating” as he watched the process where raw sewage comes into the plant and is transformed into clean, clear water. He also quickly understood the importance — and the expense — of maintaining water and wastewater systems to keep up with the area’s growth.

Lake City’s wastewater treatment plant dated to the 1980s and needed a substantial upgrade. Along with serving Lake City, the wastewater treatment plant takes care of the region that encompasses Olanta, Coward, Scranton, parts of Florence and Williamsburg counties and the new Medical University of South Carolina hospital in the area.

“We’re not just Lake City anymore,” Hall said. “The wastewater treatment plant services the region.”

And that takes money. Lake City recently spent \$15 million on a major upgrade to its Lake Swamp Wastewater Treatment Plant to replace aging equipment, provide additional biological treatment basins and improve the treatment of discharged wastewater.

The wastewater quality testing lab at the plant was more than 30 years old. While it had been passing all the necessary certifications, Hall said the city looked ahead and decided to complete a \$1.25 million upgrade to the lab at the same time as the treatment plant upgrades.

Along with the new plant, Lake City also has changed some of its practices. It formerly contracted with a company to haul away the sludge — the treated byproduct that accumulates at a wastewater plant. The city now handles that process itself. The upgraded wastewater treatment plant has also reduced the amount of sludge Lake City needs to haul away to the landfill.

“If you freeze prices today it will save the community almost \$2 million over a 10-year period,” Hall said. “That’s a substantial savings for us investing [in a container and trucks] and doing it ourselves.”

Funding for the improvements came from the Clean Water State Revolving Fund and is administered by the SC Department of Health and Environmental Control with joint funding from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the state of South Carolina.

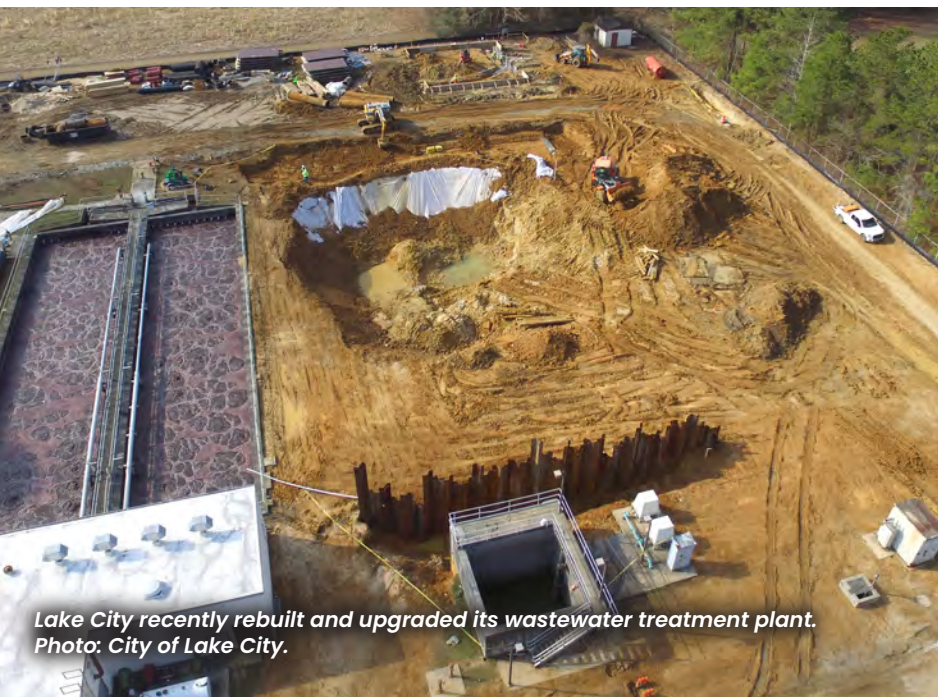
Hall said Lake City’s community partners are required to pay their share for water and wastewater, and the city is in the midst of negotiating contracts with towns and businesses. Lake City also had a rate increase last year, although it still has the second lowest rates in the area, he said.

“We’re not a rich community,” he said. “The bulk of our community is retired or elderly. It was a major undertaking to say we are going up on water and wastewater rates. But we had an aging water and wastewater system.”

As for the cost, Hall stressed the importance of investing in the people who run the plant.

“By DHEC’s rules and regulations, we have to have licensed people to operate that facility. These are highly sought-after people,” he said. “When you grab one, you better pay them because it’s better to keep them in place than have to go looking for them.”

Hall’s advice for other cities looking at how to plan for water and wastewater upgrades to address growth: “You need to know what you plan to do. You need to know how it will be financed. And you need to stick to your dates. You need an ending date.”



Lake City recently rebuilt and upgraded its wastewater treatment plant.
Photo: City of Lake City.



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Calendar

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

MAY

8 – 10 SC Community Development Association Annual Meeting. Cambria Rock Hill – University Center, Rock Hill. Topics include affordable housing resources and homelessness prevention, small-scale downtown events, public art and brownfields properties.

14 Risk Management Services: Recruiting and Hiring Law Enforcement Officers/ Distracted Driving for Law Enforcement Training. Cooperative Conference Center, Columbia.

21 Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government: Freedom of Information Act in SC and Municipal Governance Policy. Regional Councils of Governments locations.

21 Business Licensing Essentials Training. Virtual.

JUNE

2 – 5 SC Association of Municipal Power Systems Annual Meeting. Embassy Suites, Myrtle Beach.

6 SC Association of Stormwater Managers Second Quarter Meeting. Cooperative Conference Center, Columbia.

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

12 – 14 Main Street SC Managers' Summer Retreat. The DIY Place, Florence.

25 – 26 Municipal Count Administration Association of SC 101 Session A Training. Municipal Association of SC, Columbia.

JULY

17 – 21 Municipal Association of SC Annual Meeting. Hyatt Regency Greenville.

AUGUST

6 Risk Management Services: Defensive Driving Course. Gignilliat Community Center, Seneca.

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

14 – 16 Municipal Court Administration Association of SC Annual Meeting. Embassy Suites at Kingston Plantation, Myrtle Beach.

20 Business Licensing Essentials Training. Virtual.

22 Small Cities Summit. Hilton Columbia Center.

SEPTEMBER

5 SC Association of Stormwater Managers Third Quarter Meeting and Exhibitor Showcase. Cooperative Conference Center, Columbia.

11 – 13 Municipal Clerks and Treasurers Institute, Year 3, Session A. Hilton Garden Inn, Columbia.

17 Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government: Forms of Municipal Government and Municipal Economic Development. Regional Councils of Governments locations.

18 Main Street South Carolina 3rd Quarter Managers' Training. Location to be determined, Clover.

18 – 20 Municipal Technology Association of SC Annual Meeting. SpringHill Suites, Greenville.

24 Risk Management Services: Generational Diversity/Understanding the Impact of Impairment in the Workplace Training. Cooperative Conference Center, Columbia.