

Cities Mean **BUSINESS**

A PUBLICATION OF THE MUNICIPAL ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH CAROLINA | ISSUE 2 | 2012



**Gathering
places**

Public spaces made beautiful

School matters

Cities partner with educators

You see a police car...



We see a police officer who works closely with fire departments and EMS, who knows every business owner downtown, who can name every city street and who buys 12 snow cones on Saturdays even though his T-ball team has never won a game.

CITIES MEAN BUSINESS

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MASC Municipal Association
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If a space is made appealing,
people will come — and private
development often follows.

By Amy Geier Edgar

*Cover: Waterfront Park, Charleston.
(Photo/Leslie Burden)*



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Cities Mean BUSINESS

*A publication of Municipal
Association of South Carolina*

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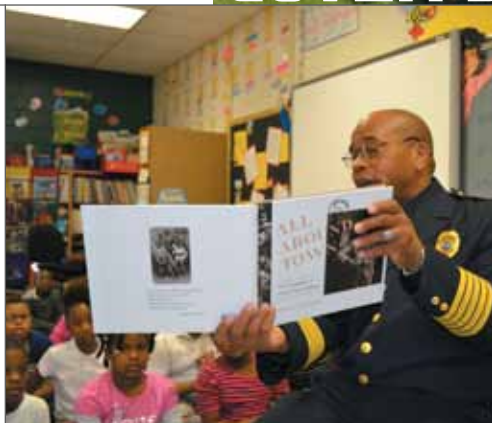
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Published by

www.scbiznews.com
SC BIZ  NEWS



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Letter from the
EDITOR

South Carolina cities and towns are gathering places, hubs of economic growth and centers for innovation. In this issue of *Cities Mean Business*, we focus on three issues that allow our hometowns to grow and prosper. We also hear from the leadership of the state's business community reinforcing the importance of a strong working relationship between the state's cities and the businesses located in them.

Public spaces draw people together and are one of the important quality of life elements that make our cities and towns special. Read about several very different types of public spaces in hometowns of varying sizes around the state and learn how they benefit residents and the local economy.

Funding education may not be a city responsibility in South Carolina, but that doesn't mean mayors and councilmembers don't have a stake in the quality of education for their young people. Follow local leaders who make supporting their hometown schools a priority.

A critical component of bringing new jobs to any community is making sure government processes don't impede a business's ability to operate efficiently. Read about several South Carolina cities and towns that have put new processes in place to ensure their business licensing procedure is as streamlined as possible.



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Editor

Businesses and Cities Build Partnerships

By Jim Reynolds



Jim Reynolds

In South Carolina and all across the nation, there are strong working relationships between cities and businesses. In fact, the goals of cities and businesses are often closely aligned. Companies want to grow their businesses, which results in job creation for citizens. In order to create these jobs, companies need a strong education system to meet their workforce needs. Companies also depend on a vibrant quality of life to attract and retain talented staff, and they need a stable tax system and sound infrastructure so their costs are reasonable and predictable.

Since cities and businesses share so many of the same goals, it makes sense for them to work together as partners and build trust and understanding before there is a crisis. As chair of the South Carolina Chamber of Commerce, I see examples every day of businesses working closely with the cities they are located in to achieve common goals. Whether it's enabling employees to volunteer at local schools or serve on planning committees, South Carolina businesses are building strong partnerships with the cities they operate in.

The South Carolina Chamber's mission is to advocate for an environment where businesses can flourish and prosperity for all citizens can be heightened. The Chamber's *Competitiveness Agenda* highlights the issues that must be addressed for South Carolina's economy to flourish over the next 10 years. These legislative priorities will also ensure that our cities can continue to prosper.

From an education standpoint, businesses and cities will benefit from an increased pipeline of K-12 graduates who are college and career ready. Higher education is increasingly aligned with businesses and regional economic development strategies. In

addition, our state must work to connect adults to training and jobs through WorkKeys, QuickJobs, Apprenticeship Carolina and the S.C. Technical College System's readySC program.

Comprehensive tax reform is also a priority that will mutually benefit cities and businesses. We need a system with stability and predictability in funding programs and services. Other important components of comprehensive reform include a balanced tax base and competitive rates, certainty and adequacy of revenue, enhanced funding for infrastructure, and promotion of economic development and job creation.

Businesses need to efficiently transport materials and products in and out of the state, while citizens and tourists alike must have reliable transportation routes to get to and from our cities. Funding for infrastructure maintenance and improvements is vital to keep our roads, railways and bridges safe.

Also, many of the businesses located in our state depend on South Carolina's port system to import and export goods. When the Panama Canal expansion is completed in 2014, larger ships will be looking for places to dock on the East Coast. In order to stay competitive with other states, South Carolina must secure funding to dredge Charleston Harbor to 50 feet so these larger ships can access our port system.

As the business community continues to work towards these goals, we will rely on our cities for support. Through strong partnerships, we can make our state an even better place to work and live. ●

Jim Reynolds is CEO of Total Comfort Solutions and the 2011-12 Chair of the South Carolina Chamber of Commerce.



Camden Mayor Jeffrey Graham (center) is joined by local dignitaries to officially open the Town Green. (Photo/City of Camden)

PUBLIC SPACES,

Beautiful Places

By Amy Geier Edgar

The City of Camden has a vision. Visitors and residents already love the small-town charm, the historic sites and old homes. City leaders want to see Camden improve and grow, to be a place that invites both new residents and new businesses.

A few years ago, a trip downtown led visitors to several businesses -- and a large, no-frills parking lot that was filled with potholes and stormwater issues. In 2009, city officials hired consultants to transform

the sea of pavement into a beautiful, usable space. They created the Town Green, a public space circled with large oak trees and wired for electrical service to make space available for concerts and festivals. As an added bonus, the Town Green also gives visitors a few extra parking spots to choose from when visiting downtown.

"This is part of a larger vision of where Camden is moving," said Mayor Jeffrey Graham. "We want to let businesses know, we want you to be here, to locate to Camden."

Work continues in Camden. Downtown property owners are restoring building facades to preserve their historic architecture, and future plans include creating a more pedestrian-friendly downtown area by reducing traffic and creating wider sidewalks.

As a downtown businesswoman, Karen Eckford, a senior vice president of NBSC Bank, sees positive changes happening.

"The Town Green shows that the city is taking care of its assets, looking to improve the infrastructure, and making downtown

aesthetically pleasing, practical and up-to-date,” said Eckford, part of a private sector economic development group for Kershaw County that raises funds for economic development. “It creates an environment where businesses feel good about locating here.”

The new public space already is serving as a catalyst for private development, said Dennis Stuber, a senior vice president at First Citizens Bank and member of the Kershaw County Chamber of Commerce. After the Town Green was constructed, a downtown restaurant decided to invest in an outdoor dining area.

“This is the type of impact you see,” Stuber said. “When the public sector makes improvements, the private sector does too.”

All public space — whether it is green spaces, streets or sidewalks — is an important investment by a city, said Irene Dumas Tyson, director of planning with the Boudreaux Group, who has worked with cities on designing public space. These spaces connect neighbors and people to special places in downtown. They also create appealing environments that attract economic development, Tyson said.

“If you think about cities that we love to visit — places like New York City; Washington, D.C.; Savannah — every one of them has fabulous public gardens and vibrant streets,” Tyson said.

Green spaces, the well-designed civic realm, benefit residents and the local economy, Tyson said. They provide a central spot for people to gather, and the properties around those green spaces are typically the most valuable and most profitable, she said.

Years ago, many opposed the City of Charleston’s Waterfront Park, preferring private development such as townhomes and hotels right on the water, Tyson said. However, Mayor Joe Riley argued that the most beautiful places in a city need to be given over to the residents. Today, because of that

BEFORE



AFTER



(Photos/City of Camden)

CAMDEN: THE SPACE IN ACTION

Where most people saw a large, crumbling parking lot in downtown Camden, city officials saw a Town Green. In 2009, the city hired consultants to design a beautiful, useful space to meld with the charm of Camden’s historic downtown. Encircled with oak trees and wired for sound, the space is available for concerts and festivals. It’s the kind of gathering place that was common before everyone traveled by car. And, just as planners hoped, the public improvement has inspired private development. A downtown restaurant has already invested in adding an outdoor dining area.



Edisto Beach's Bay Creek Park draws residents and tourists alike. (Photo/Town of Edisto Beach)

decision, the private development that has built up around the park is more valuable and desirable because of the public park, Tyson said.

Each year, visitors flock to another coastal community, Edisto Beach. They are drawn by its unfettered shoreline and quiet way of life. Yet the town had no central spot for tourists or residents to gather for festivals, community events or the S.C. Governor's Cup Bill-fishing Series, which draws large crowds each year, said Mayor Burley Lyons.

In 2006, the Town of Edisto Beach purchased 247 feet of frontage property along Big Bay Creek. The town had to overcome challenges such as contamination in the tidal wetlands, but was eventually able to transform the site into a public space with a dock for fishing and crabbing, boardwalk, market building, picnic tables, benches and a vast open area. The town dedicated the park and its market building, the Heritage Building, to honor Edisto Beach's shrimping industry.

The public space has boosted Edisto Beach's tourism industry by providing additional venues for recreation and public access to Big Bay Creek's marshes and bays.

The park can be rented for private events and also is used by vendors to sell products



Ridgeland's Veterans Memorial Park is part of a larger streetscaping and beautification effort. (Photo/Town of Ridgeland)

such as vegetables and woven baskets, Lyons said.

"We now have a place to accommodate activities for the community," Lyons said. "It's hard to promote and have activities when you don't have the necessary facilities. Now we have a beautiful park for visitors and local folks to enjoy."

Just as Edisto Beach focused on its shrimping heritage, other municipalities can draw on their own history to create a public space that celebrates their uniqueness.

Ridgeland town leaders decided to honor their military history and many distinguished veterans by turning a neglected piece of land into the Ridgeland Veterans Memorial Park.

For several years, the government centers in Ridgeland were connected by an "unused island" of land, said Town Administrator Jason Taylor. Town officials decided to give the property new life as part of a larger streetscaping and beautification effort. The park now serves as a pedestrian connector between the Jasper County Courthouse and the Ridgeland Town Hall, creating a public space that is both functional and visually appealing, Taylor said.

The memorial park also taps into Ridgeland's distinctive identity. As part of the

fundraising effort, donors could purchase bricks with the names of veterans or community members etched into the surface. "It adds another level of meaning and ownership of the park for our citizens," Taylor said.

Community members were deeply involved in the park's creation. The town sought input and assistance from veterans throughout the entire project, and all of the work was done by local and regional artists and landscapers, Taylor said.

More than 500 people attended the park's dedication last year, including representatives from all four branches of military service.

"Any time you can beautify an area, make it more attractive, it makes people want to live and work there," Taylor said.

Parks, beautiful streets, sidewalks and trails draw residents and development to cities and towns, said planner Tyson. Not only is it vital for cities to invest in creating these public spaces, but it is also important to maintain them to ensure the public can continue to use and enjoy the space, she said.

"It really is all about the spirit of the place," Tyson said, adding that public spaces are becoming more important, because they provide places for neighbors to unplug from technology and reconnect face-to-face. ●

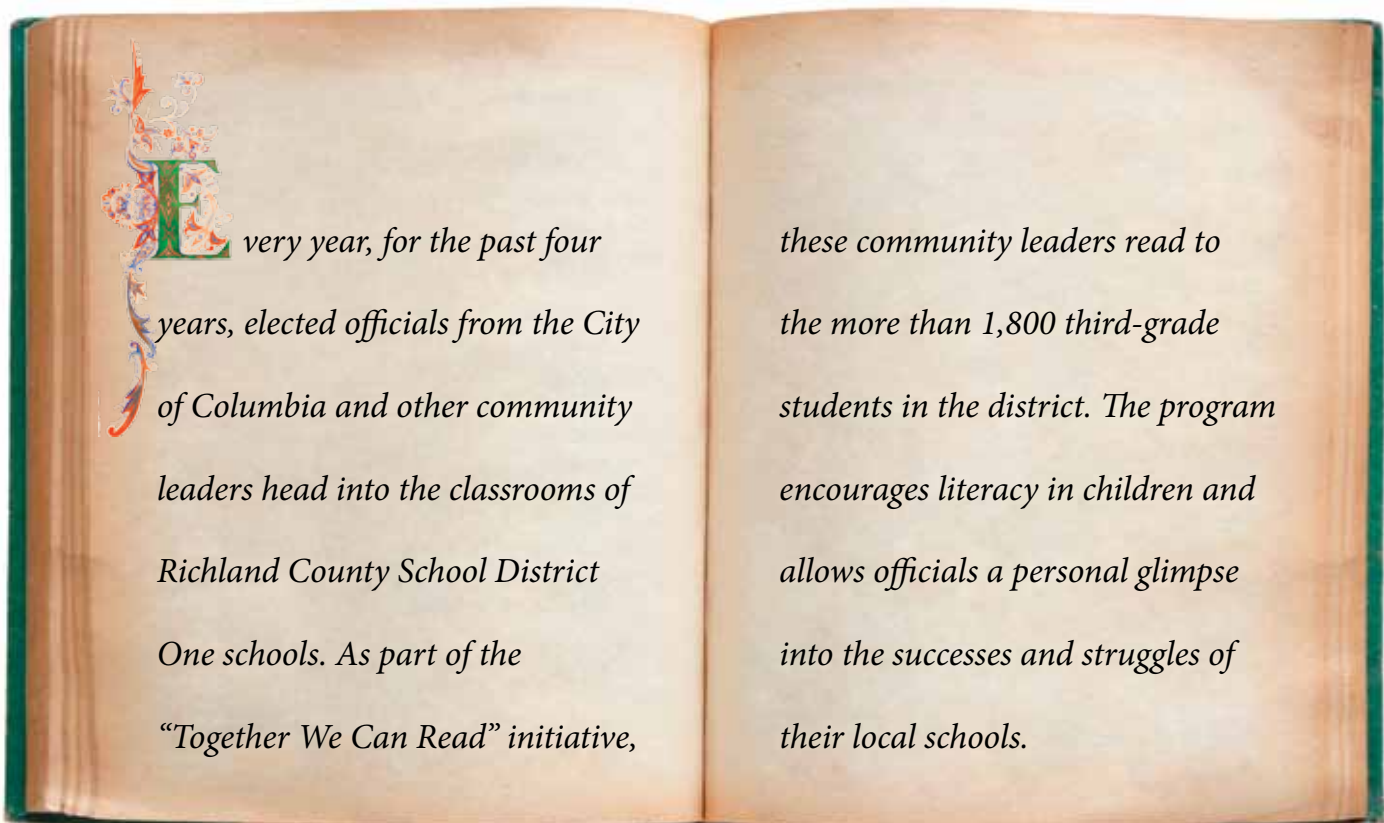
Together we can read

City leaders partner with local schools



By Amy Geier Edgar

*Columbia Mayor Steve Benjamin engages young readers
as part of the city's "Together We Can Read" program.
(Photo/City of Columbia)*



Every year, for the past four years, elected officials from the City of Columbia and other community leaders head into the classrooms of Richland County School District One schools. As part of the “Together We Can Read” initiative,

these community leaders read to the more than 1,800 third-grade students in the district. The program encourages literacy in children and allows officials a personal glimpse into the successes and struggles of their local schools.

While municipalities are not directly responsible for education in South Carolina, they do have a vested interest in the quality of education provided locally. A solid educational system is critical for a community looking to draw jobs and residents and to grow economically. As a result, numerous municipalities work with local school districts in partnerships that can prove to be beneficial to all involved.

Along with the reading initiative, City of Columbia officials participate in principal for a day programs with local schools, allowing city leaders to shadow principals, assist with duties and interact with students, parents, teachers and staff. The city’s Department of Parks and Recreation also allows Richland One to use its fields, tennis courts and recreation center for sports at no cost, according to city spokeswoman Leshia Utsey.

City Councilwoman Tameika Isaac Devine has participated in both the reading and principal for a day programs.

“We really see the big picture of how their budget affects them,” said Devine.

Devine said she spent time at her child’s school, which is in an area with some higher poverty rates. She learned that when kids act up in school or fall asleep in class, it’s often tied to trouble at home. Understanding the challenges in schools can allow city officials to step up law enforcement activity in the area.

“We can see from a community standpoint how all the pieces fit together,” she said.

It’s important for cities to be closely connected to schools for economic development reasons, she said.

“Columbia is not going to be looked at as a progressive place to be if we don’t have quality education,” Devine said.

Such partnerships and involvement by city officials indicate that education is a priority in the city, said Richland One Superintendent Dr. Percy Mack. The programs show leaders outside the school district that

the students are on track, and that tax dollars are being spent wisely, he said. Perhaps most importantly, he said, it has an impact on the children.

“Kids have great memories. They remember when individuals come into the schools and tell stories. After the chief of police came in, several kids said they wanted to become police officers,” Mack said. “This lets kids know they can do anything. They can grow up to become productive, contributing citizens.”

Community leaders from the Town of Clover are common visitors in the schools, through an annual reading program, a lunch buddy program, career days and assemblies. Local elementary schools are invited for tours of the police and fire departments. The fire department and drug dog team make presentations at the schools.

The school district and the town share sports fields, with the town providing maintenance and improvements.



Columbia's Police Chief Randy Scott reads to students as part of the "Together We Can Read" initiative. (Photo/City of Columbia)

The town also completed renovations last August on a building at one of its parks in a low-income area, said Town Administrator Allison Harvey. They partnered with the YMCA and the elementary school that serves the children in this neighborhood in providing an after-school tutoring program at the Stellie Jackson Enrichment Center. The town pays for the facility, the YMCA staffs the program, and the school refers students and monitors progress.

After only one year, there have been improvements in the test scores of the 15 students in the program, Harvey said.

"The town is very interested in the success of the schools," Harvey said. "Today's students are tomorrow's citizens, workforce, and entrepreneurs. The Clover School District enjoys a well deserved reputation for academic excellence. Its reputation is an economic development tool for us."

In some cases, the partnerships extend beyond academics.

The Town of Springdale is working with its local elementary school, Springdale Elementary, on an initiative to encourage more healthy and active lifestyles. Last year, the town initiated a phased project which began by renovating the school's park into a "healthy fitness zone," said Town Administrator Erica Barton.

The park will be shared by the school, town and county recreation commission. It includes a nine-hole disc golf course and new play areas for children. Future plans include the addition of a 300-seat outdoor amphitheater for entertainment, education, music, and arts programs for students and the community, as well as an outdoor trail and new lighting.

The town also hopes to spread the healthy living message throughout the community, with future summer fitness and nutrition camps, and a farm-to-school initiative aimed at improving community access to locally grown farm produce, Barton said.

Partnering with the school allows the town to promote education and civic engagement, to bring growth to the area, and to make better use of resources, Barton said.

"Municipalities and schools have similar goals -- to provide the services that their constituents desire. Whether the goal is to improve the quality of life or foster an environment where education can thrive, the desired outcome is the same -- a healthy and happy community," Barton said. "It's a known fact that families move to communities where there are good schools. Helping the school to become a model of quality education and good health helps bring families to Springdale."

The healthy initiative may have begun with the school, but its message benefits everyone in Springdale, Barton said.

"Eating healthy and being physically active in the community makes for happier people," she said. "Happy citizens make for a more friendly town." •

UNDER ONE

CITIES TAKE STEPS TO STREAMLINE BUSINESS LICENSING TO SAVE TIME, MONEY

By Amy Geier Edgar

As the economy soured, Nicole Combs, business license code enforcement officer for the City of Spartanburg, noticed more people inquiring about starting a small business or operating a business from home. Combs found herself answering the same questions repeatedly.

Combs then put together a complete “New Business Resource Guide for the City of Spartanburg” where potential business owners could find updated information about federal, state, county and city resources.

It’s part of a larger effort by the city to assist new businesses opening in the area. The communications and economic development departments also are working on more comprehensive guides for business recruitment and real estate development professionals, Combs said.

In addition, the city has created the position of project developer for economic development to serve as an internal liaison to assist projects, according to City Manager Ed Memmott.

The city wants to help potential investors and businesses navigate the process of start-

ing a business in Spartanburg, Memmott said.

“It’s part of an effort to be as accommodating as we can while still meeting our responsibility to enforce the development standards and codes that apply,” Memmott said.

Tony Aku was one of those individuals who opened his first new business. Aku opened Best Link Communications, a prepaid cell phone business, in February. He didn’t realize he was in the city limits and was required to have a building permit or

Residential construction in the Brickhope Plantation development in Goose Creek. (Photo/Leslie Burden)

ROOF



permissions for his signs or alarms, Aku said. Combs came by and informed him of what his business was lacking and provided him with the necessary numbers to call and people to contact.

“I was actually scared that I was in big trouble,” said Aku. “She put me at ease. Just to know that Nicole and the city would work with new business owners -- it was like a breath of fresh air.”

A streamlined, efficient business licensing process is a good first impression for business owners and developers, said Greer Mayor Rick Danner.

“That’s often a first point of contact for business people and contractors from out of town,” Danner said. “That process speaks to the attitude and environment of the city for businesses. If your city is approachable and accessible, it demonstrates to them that you’re being proactive in terms of being a business-friendly city.”

In the Lowcountry, the City of Goose Creek offers an express business license process for new home construction that allows a contractor to pay a fee that covers subcontractors based on the number of houses built. This saves time for the builder, and doesn’t stall the construction project if one subcontractor has failed to get a business license, said Finance Director Ron Faretra.

Goose Creek officials also hold pre-construction meetings for new business construction. Departments such as planning, public works, police, fire and finance meet with the builder and go over all the procedures and rules, and provide necessary paperwork and checklists, Faretra said.

“The more information we’re able to convey early in the process saves us time down the road,” explained Assistant City Administrator Jeff Molinari.

The steps taken by the city to streamline the process set the tone that Goose Creek is



Beaufort business owners of Anytime Fitness found the city’s pre-application process worked well. (Photo/City of Beaufort)

efficient, customer friendly and welcoming to development, Molinari said.

“We’ve improved our processes over time, and we’ll continue to make improvements,” he said. “It’s beneficial to the business person and to our staff here.”

Christie Nyman, office manager for Lowcountry Roofing and Exteriors in Goose Creek, has found city officials to be “helpful and friendly.” She frequently requests permits for her company’s jobs replacing roofs, siding and windows. The process is very quick -- she usually is able to get permits the same day, Nyman said.

Like Goose Creek, the City of Beaufort also offers pre-application conferences where various projects are reviewed and discussed with the applicant, according to Al Johnson, business license officer. The applicants may include developers, construction companies or prospective new business owners. Some projects are large, like the current new construction of a Publix grocery store or Honda automobile dealership; and others are smaller, like salons, retail shops or home day cares, Johnson said.

The pre-application meeting not only helps for business license purposes, but it also allows new business owners to introduce their business model and construction plans and receive feedback from all department heads within the city, Johnson said. Local utilities and even the state Department of Transportation can participate. Local officials

inform applicants about zoning issues, building code requirements, fire department regulations, public works and business license ordinances.

“Since I have been involved in the weekly conferences, I observe many people leave the conference with an overall better understanding of what is required to start/finish their project and obtain the business license,” Johnson said.

Jode Kirk and his wife, Julia, opened their first business in South Carolina, Anytime Fitness, in February. Their pre-application meeting for the Beaufort business was very helpful, Jode Kirk said, and gave them an opportunity to have discussions with all the department officials who would be involved in the process. Kirk said he and his wife also went to the city’s website and found many of their questions answered online.

“It really was an easy process and fairly straightforward,” he said.

The City of Beaufort also was able to streamline its business license process simply by moving services under one roof, Johnson said. When the city moved to its new location, the building codes and business license departments were located next to each other, because many times they work together on projects. City personnel now have the ability to assist each other and perform similar tasks that in the past were handled by only one individual. Customers no longer have to visit different departments in separate buildings, Johnson said.

Helping to make clear the expectations for businesses is part of the larger comprehensive plan to encourage business development and grow the city, said Beaufort Mayor Billy Keyserling.

“We need more businesses and more people living in the core downtown to keep everybody’s taxes at bay and spread costs,” Keyserling said. ●

HOMETOWN SNAPSHOT



Photo/Town of Ridgeland

All branches of the military were represented at the dedication of Ridgeland's Veteran's Park.

You see a street...



We see a lifeline that is a hometown with planned traffic flow, fire stations, thousands of visitors each year, city parks and community centers for children of all ages. Our streets take us to our jobs, our churches, our fun places and even to grandma's house.

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