



UPTOWN

a publication of the municipal association of south carolina

How cities can help heirs' property owners

One of the main challenges of owning heirs' property is that without clear title — which occurs through a legal process that replaces the deceased person's name from the deed with the names of his living heirs — a family is unable to secure a mortgage or access financial assistance or benefit from government programs to improve their property.

Often the result is that family members pay taxes on land and property that they are unable to improve. Without access to financial assistance to renovate or rehabilitate the property, the land can become neglected and viewed as a neighborhood blight.

Equally challenging is the fact that every heir has the right to full use, benefit and enjoyment of their family land. Therefore, the decision of one heir impacts all of the heirs, including the ownership status of all.



In the Lowcountry, this type of land is often owned by African American families whose tradition was to orally pass down their possessions, including their land.

“Resolving heirs' property issues is a complex and rigorous process, which would be daunting for any family to undertake,” said Tish Lynn, director of communications at the Center for Heirs' Property Preservation, a nonprofit organization that serves 15 Lowcountry counties, providing legal education and direct legal services to resolve heirs' property title issues.

What role do cities and towns play? And how can they help?

“Municipal officials can help heirs' property families by fully understanding the rights, risks and responsibilities of owning heirs' property and by valuing the unique and historic legacy that

[Heirs, page 2 >](#)

In This Issue

New roads come with costs

Page 4

A quest to certify more inspectors

Page 6

Special Section: Sustainability

How trees improve cities

Page 10

Cities warm up to solar

Page 14

In this ISSUE

Engineers Practice Act reverts to 2016 standard.....	3
Prep for May Annual Meeting registration appointment	3
New roads come with costs	4
Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government monthly quiz	5
A quest to certify more inspectors.....	6
How the new tax law affects cities	8
Special Section: Sustainability	
How trees improve cities	10
Certifications help cities go green.....	12
What to consider about switching to alternative fuels	13
Cities warm up to solar.....	14

President: **Mayor Elise Partin**
Cayce

Executive Director: **Wayne George**
wgeorge@masc.sc

Managing Editor: **Reba Campbell**
rcampbell@masc.sc

Editor: **Sarita Chourey**
schourey@masc.sc

Associate Editor: **Meredith Houck**
mhouck@masc.sc

Editorial Assistant: **Ashleigh Hair**
ahair@masc.sc

Contributing Writers:
**Urica Floyd, Megan Sexton
and Scott Slatton**

Heirs, from page 1 >

these properties represent,” said Lynn.

Since the Center for Heirs’ Property Preservation began in 2005, city and county officials in South Carolina have made many heirs’ property referrals. The center’s early calls for help frequently came from property owners who were seeking city or county financial assistance to rehabilitate their homes — only to find out that they didn’t qualify because they owned heirs’ property.

Summerville Planning Director Jessi Shuler could recall about half a dozen instances when town officials suggested residents contact the center.

“Sometimes it’s not that they have to go through a process with us,” she said. “They just don’t know who else to call.”

The public has misconceptions, too — that heirs’ property owners often lose their property because they don’t pay their taxes.

“Although that may be true for some, we have found that there is almost always one responsible family member who continues to pay the taxes, whether they live on the land or not,” said Lynn.

The only way to resolve heirs’ property title issues is through a legal process.

“Once the title is cleared, these families can begin to realize the asset — rather than the liability — of landownership,” said Jennie Stephens, executive director of the center.

“With a clear title, they can obtain a mortgage or a loan to improve their property or, perhaps, start a small business. This is not only important to their financial health and future, but to their community as a whole.”

Learn more about heirs’ property at the SC Community Development Association’s annual meeting on May 18 at the Marriott in North Charleston.

When residents need expert help

For one Summerville woman, the quest for a clear property title began with an accidental fire.

After the blaze destroyed her mobile home, the resident sought to start over on the same small piece of land. She went to Summerville Town Hall to request a variance because the lot was too small to meet setback requirements for a new structure.

“In our ordinance, only a property owner can request a variance,” said Summerville Planning Director Jessi Shuler.

That’s when things got a little more difficult.

The deed to the land only listed the woman’s grandfather’s name, Shuler recalled. So the resident needed the title “cleared” through a legal process replacing her deceased relative’s name with her own.

“We did some further research with the county and probate,” said Shuler. “And we figured out it was heirs’ property, and she was one of multiple property owners.”

The Summerville woman’s case was complicated. About a dozen relatives owned a percentage of the land.

Heirs’ property is property that has been passed down without a will or when an estate was not legally probated through the court system, according to the Center for Heirs’ Property Preservation in Charleston. Multiple family members then share common ownership.

“It wasn’t just a simple, ‘Let me get in touch with my three brothers,’” said Shuler. So she referred the woman to the center.

Some five months later, the Summerville resident had a clear title to the property.

“Their center’s lawyers helped her,” said Shuler. “She was able to submit for the variance and got her mobile home and is on the site living there now. It all worked out, fortunately. That was definitely a nice ending. She was thankful to us and, of course, to the Center for Heirs’ Property Preservation.”



Prep for May Annual Meeting registration appointment

It's only April, but there's plenty to do to get ready for this year's Annual Meeting.

The Municipal Association's Annual Meeting, July 19 – 22 at the Marriott Hilton Head Island, will follow the same registration/housing reservation process as before to ensure municipal officials receive priority for hotel reservations and ticketed Annual Meeting events.

The Association drew city names in March to determine the order of appointments for cities and towns to make hotel reservations and register local officials. This guaranteed a fair process for all interested in attending the Annual Meeting.

What's next

April 9 – Agenda and registration information posted online. Registration brochures with meeting agenda mailed.

May 29, 30 and 31 – Cities with a phone appointment register on one of these days. During the appointments

(order determined by March drawing), 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. (Tip: Make sure the credit card has a sufficient credit limit and per-transaction limit.)

June 1 – Online meeting registration opens for cities without appointments and nonmunicipal officials.

June 19 – Deadline to make hotel reservations.

July 5 – Deadline to register for Annual Meeting.

July 19 – 22 – Annual Meeting.

The South Carolina Municipal Insurance Trust and the South Carolina Municipal Insurance Risk Financing Fund boards of directors recognized members that reduced their total costs and kept employees safe while delivering better public services. The 2017 Risk Management Services award winners were **Town of Varnville, City of Walhalla and City of Spartanburg** (SCMIT members), and **Town of Heath Springs, City of Walhalla and City of Cayce** (SCMIRF members).

The S.C. Department of Disabilities and Special Needs presented its Silver Palmetto Award to the **City of Georgetown** at the Municipal Association's 2018 Hometown Legislative Action Day. This award thanks municipal governments for their leadership and actions that support people with disabilities and special needs.

Audubon International certified the **Town of Hilton Head Island** as South Carolina's first public Audubon Sustainable Community. Certification was a multiyear, three-stage effort demonstrating outstanding achievements and dedication to planning for a sustainable future.

Engineers Practice Act reverts to 2016 standard

The construction industry will encounter a lot less paperwork and spend considerably less time and money, thanks to a change in state law.

In March, Gov. Henry McMaster signed H3649, which clarifies in the Engineers Practice Act when construction documents must be stamped with an engineer's seal. When required by building codes or law, sealed documents assure construction customers and building officials a building is engineered and designed appropriately.

The effect: The law regarding nonresidential structures as it existed before 2016

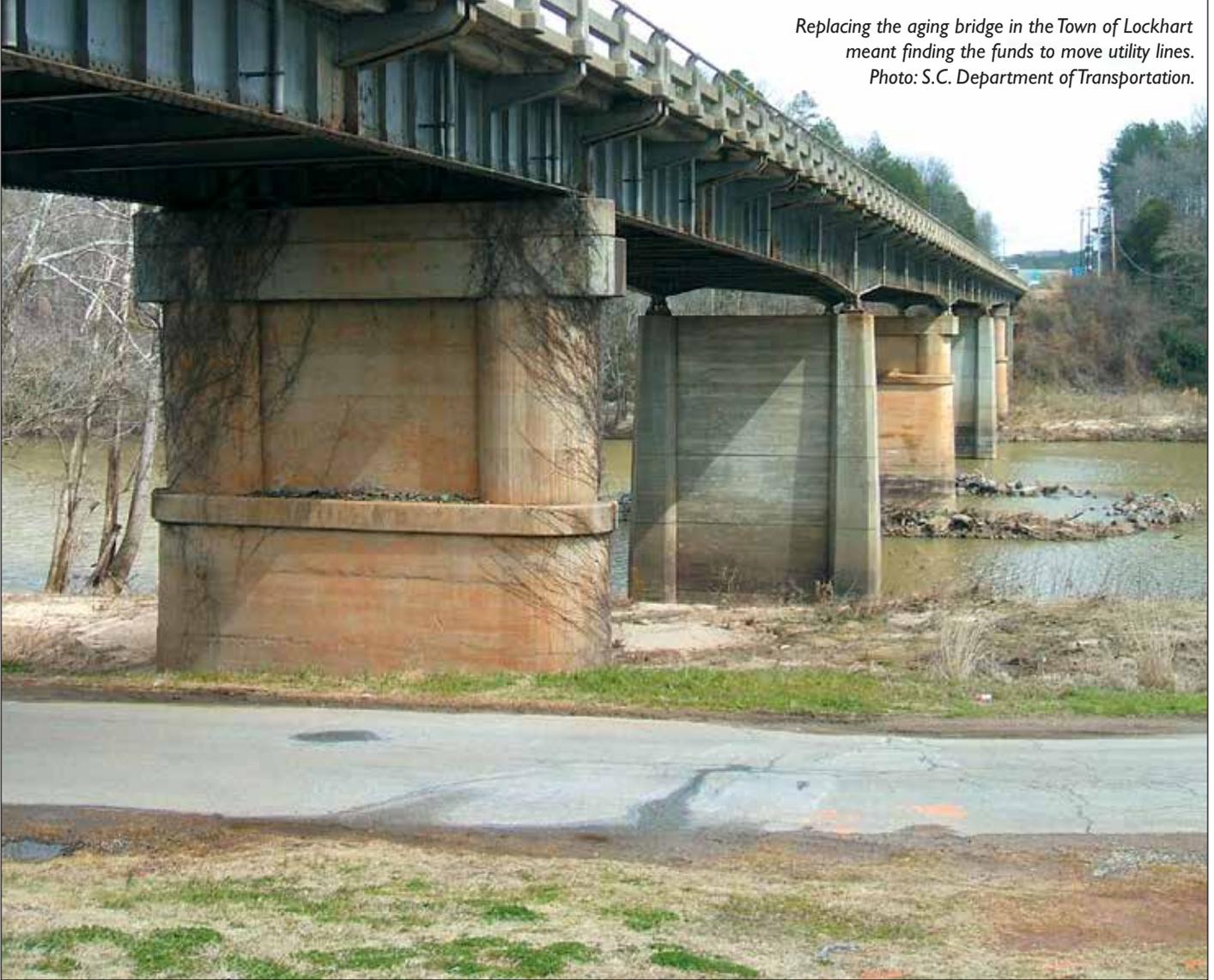
has been restored and is effective immediately. Municipal and county building officials should return to requiring engineer stamps for nonresidential structures as they did before 2016.

H3649 reverses the changes that were made to the Engineers Practice Act in 2016, which had caused confusion among building officials and the construction industry. This confusion led to building officials sometimes requiring sealed documents unnecessarily.

The unneeded step often added red tape to a project, hindering its progress

and pushing back its completion date, according to Rep. Heather Crawford, R – Myrtle Beach, the law's primary sponsor.

"This is a big win for building officials and the construction industry because clarity has been restored on when to require stamps," said Buddy Skinner, building official for the City of Greenville and president of the Building Officials Association of SC.



New roads come with costs

The Town of Lockhart had a dilemma: An aging, potentially dangerous bridge had to be replaced. But to do so, the state transportation department required the town of about 500 to pay for water and sewer lines to be relocated to accommodate the project.

“We didn’t have the money to pay for it,” said Lockhart Mayor Ailene Ashe. “We do not even have a tax base.”

The town was able to secure \$100,000 in “C” funds from Union County. Then, with the help of their local lawmaker, Rep. Mike Anthony, D – Union, approximately \$250,000 was allocated in the state budget in 2016.

“Because of the fact we’re such a poor town, and we don’t have that kind of money, they passed it,” said Ashe. “So we did not have to pay to move the utilities.

And normally you would — but then normally, you don’t have a town like this.”

The Lockhart situation illustrates a puzzle: Transportation infrastructure, such as bridges and roads, is a crucial piece of a town’s economic development viability. But small towns with a scant or nonexistent tax base scramble to shoulder the expense of moving utility lines, a required step before roads and bridges can be upgraded. Adequate roads and bridges are part of what potential businesses require in order to locate there and ultimately support a local tax base.

The Town of Hickory Grove was fortunate to receive \$203,000 from York County’s Pennies for Progress capital projects sales and use tax programs, which was used to move 1,500 feet of water lines

in order to accommodate the addition of shoulders to S.C. 97, a scenic highway.

“This was major for us,” said William Rhodes, clerk/treasurer for Hickory Grove.

When widening roads, engineers prefer moving water and sewer lines during construction to avoid having to rip up a newly widened road to fix an ailing pipe underneath it later.

“It’s not a heavily traveled road,” said Patrick Hamilton, program manager for Pennies for Progress, referring to S.C. 97, which connects the towns of Hickory Grove and Smyrna and is the major access road to the interstate. “It’s very rural, but it is very important for the people who live there.”

County voters approved the fourth 1-cent tax for roadway improvements in

November of last year. Years earlier, the York County Council decided to include utility relocation in the list of work the penny-tax revenue would pay for.

“Folks came to County Council and said, ‘All these projects are great, but we literally can’t pay for them,’” said Hamilton, adding that the towns of York and Clover have also received funding from the county to relocate utility infrastructure ahead of road projects.

Some relief may be coming.

This legislative session, Sen. Paul Campbell, R – Goose Creek, introduced S932, and Rep. Dwight Loftis, R – Greenville, introduced H3739, which would shift the cost of relocating water and sewer lines from public utilities to road project owners like the S.C. Department

“These road projects are great for everyone living there, but it’s tough for municipalities to come up with the funding.”

- Patrick Hamilton,
Program Manager for
Pennies for Progress

of Transportation. The project owner would reimburse public utilities for expenditures related to relocating water and sewer lines including right of way acquisition. The amount the utility could recoup would depend on the size of the utility, with small utilities eligible for full reimbursement.

Hamilton said the legislation, if passed into law, would not affect York County’s cities and towns since the county foots the expense through its capital sales and use tax. But he said it would help with the challenge of moving utility lines for areas that do not have the tax.

“These road projects are great for everyone living there, but it’s tough for municipalities to come up with the funding.”



Test yourself monthly quiz



- a. Appoints a municipal attorney and judge(s) of the municipal court
- b. Elects a mayor pro tempore from its membership
- c. Appoints the municipal clerk
- d. Exercises sole authority to adopt laws and policies

Want to learn more? The Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government offers in-person and online courses. Elected officials who complete all of the required coursework graduate from the institute and are eligible to participate in the Advanced Institute. The next

in-person Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government session will be held May 22. The registration deadline is May 17. For more information, visit www.masc.sc (keyword: MEOI). See answers on back cover

The three forms of municipal government approved for use in South Carolina have plenty of differences. But they also have overlapping powers. Choose three statutory duties and powers of

council that are common under all three forms of municipal government — the mayor-council form (strong mayor), the council form (weak mayor) and the council-manager form.



A quest to certify more inspectors

After a hurricane or other disaster, that single-family house or building may look untouched at first. But closer scrutiny may reveal that it's been knocked off its foundation or suffered damage to its load-bearing walls. Other cases of structural damage in the wake of a catastrophe are much more obvious.

Evaluating the safety of hidden damage, obvious damage and everything in between is a crucial step toward restoring residents' wellbeing and securing

Federal Emergency Management Agency assistance.

South Carolina urgently needs more certified building inspectors, architects and engineers to volunteer to inspect damaged properties in disaster-stricken areas of the state. The state has nearly 400 such professionals who are certified under the state's Safety Assessment Program, a standard that began in California in the 1980s to address earthquake damage. The assistance of SAP-certified professionals

represents a key element of the recovery process with FEMA aid.

When a SAP-certified professional arrives on the scene of an area struggling in the aftermath of a disaster, the first step is for the local inspector to swear the individual in. Local jurisdiction swears the SAP-trained person in as a deputy building inspector to enforce the building codes of the local jurisdiction. Otherwise, the person cannot enforce the local building codes.

“We are ramping up the local officials’ manpower rapidly,” said Lt. Col. Marguerite McClam, PE, commanding officer of the South Carolina State Guard’s Engineering Command, which serves in a support role for the National Guard, law enforcement, and other state, county and municipal agencies before and after emergencies. “We triage the place and get out as quickly as possible.”

Because Hurricane Matthew brought damage to the entire region, not just South Carolina, relying solely on FEMA to deploy help from a pool of employees and contract employees would have prolonged the state’s recovery. South Carolina’s economy will be better positioned to weather disasters if more engineers, building inspectors and other professionals become SAP-certified volunteers. These volunteers can help displaced residents and business owners re-enter their homes and businesses sooner.

SAP-certified individuals, whose information is entered into a database, could be called to volunteer in other states. After Hurricane Maria, McClam was called to help conduct damage assessments in Key Largo, Florida, and in Puerto Rico but remained in South Carolina to attend to local needs. In such cases, she and other volunteers commonly spent nights on end sleeping on cots in high school gyms and living out of luggage.

“If we can get people back in their homes quickly, then you recover more quickly emotionally, financially and physically,” she said.

The work of these volunteers has direct implications on federal disaster aid, too.

For every hour the SAP-certified engineers and architects are on the site of a natural disaster volunteering their services, the state can then multiply those volunteer hours by an approved rate — typically about \$150 per hour — based on what it would have cost to hire an outside company to do the job. That dollar amount may then be used to secure matching FEMA recovery money, said McClam.

“The money stays local,” McClam said. “It doesn’t go out to another entity.”

Saving time is also central to the volunteers’ mission.



After Hurricane Joaquin, McClam sent engineers to inspect bridges in Newberry. A week later, a FEMA official showed up and approved the inspections. The federal official said that if Newberry residents had been forced to wait for FEMA engineers to travel to Newberry to perform the bridge inspections, it would have taken an extra six weeks. This would have pushed out the completion of repairs by several more months.

McClam and Greg Beste, RA, will present a session about post-disaster safety evaluations at the annual meeting of the Building Officials Association of SC on May 9. Attendees who complete the day-long training will be SAP certified.

Register online at www.masc.sc (keyword: BOASC). The deadline to register for the BOASC annual meeting is Friday, April 20. For more information about SAP certification, visit l.masc.sc/SAPrecoveryinfo.



How the new tax law affects cities

The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act that Congress passed in December of last year changes how cities and towns operate but may also bring ripple effects.

Here are three perspectives:

Ray Jones, Partner, and Emily Zackon, Associate, Parker Poe

The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act enacted on December 22, 2017, had several immediate impacts that affect municipalities.

The first impact is a restriction on the ability to refinance outstanding bonds. Prior to the passage of the act, municipalities could generally issue tax-exempt bonds for the purpose of refinancing prior bonds at any time rates were favorable and savings could be achieved. Even though most municipal bonds carry a fixed “redemption date” (i.e. the first date on which they can be prepaid), the prior regulations permitted a refinancing more than 90 days prior to the redemption date

so long as certain rules were met — an “advance refunding.” The prior regulations also permitted a refinancing within 90 days of the redemption date under a slightly less complicated set of rules — a “current refunding.”

Unfortunately, as of December 31, 2017, the act prohibits advance refundings (current refundings are still allowed). Market participants are seeking alternatives to this prohibition. However, with most market participants expecting interest rates to rise, the ability to achieve savings through bond refinancing will be reduced.

The second impact of the act is a wave of upward interest rate adjustments on bank-held bonds. Because the act reduced corporate income tax rates, banks assign less economic value to tax-exempt bonds and, if they reserved the right to do so, are increasing rates on municipal bonds in an attempt to regain the expected level of economic value.

Finally, lower tax rates diminish the value to all investors holding tax-exempt bonds. Accordingly, investors are requiring a higher return (meaning higher borrowing costs for municipalities).

In response to the act, municipalities should work with their municipal advisors to craft alternative borrowing strategies to address these impacts.

Irma Esparza Diggs, Director of Federal Advocacy for the National League of Cities

While we saw some setbacks in the final tax bill, there’s no ignoring the fact that the advocacy efforts of hundreds of local leaders were instrumental in moving the needle and making a bad bill better. More than 40 South Carolina mayors helped advocate on behalf of cities by signing a delegation letter last fall.

Local advocacy efforts successfully thwarted attempts to eliminate qualified private activity bonds, key tax credits for

city development, and the state and local tax deduction, commonly called SALT.

From the get-go, we prevented the tax exemption for municipal bonds from ever being on the chopping block and helped push for the partial preservation of the SALT deduction. Still, the bill targets local governments' flexibility to raise revenues and may pose challenges for cities in the future.

In addition to the loss of the advance refunding bond, another challenge is the new \$10,000 cap on the SALT deduction. While its usage varies per community, the SALT deduction softens the impact felt by families from state and local tax rate increases. Capping the deduction will likely make it more politically challenging for states and cities to raise local tax rates.

We are also continuing to monitor how reductions to the corporate tax rate may impact the favorability of tax-exempt debt, such as municipal bonds. Individual tax rates were modestly reduced, so we haven't seen major shifts in the markets, but the topic continues to generate buzz.

Moving forward, cities and towns should be on the lookout for how their state legislatures will react to federal tax reform. Many statehouses will take this opportunity to make adjustments to their own tax codes, and cities and towns need to be a part of those discussions.

Finally, cities and stakeholders should continue to monitor how the Internal Revenue Service proceeds in fully interpreting these changes. Passing the law was one thing, implementing it is another.

Renee Kuhlman, Director of Policy Outreach, National Trust for Historic Preservation

The National Trust for Historic Preservation and our preservation partners are very pleased the Historic Tax Credit was retained in the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. Without the HTC, hundreds of rehabilitation projects around the country would not be financially feasible and moving forward.

Widespread agreement that the Historic Tax Credit should be retained among those working to revitalize towns across South Carolina led to a strong advocacy push across the state.

For example, the Municipal Association of South Carolina worked with 27 mayors to send a letter to the South Carolina congressional delegation requesting that they keep the credit.

Both Senators Tim Scott and Lindsey Graham showed great leadership in their support of the historic tax credit and historic preservation generally during the tax reform debate. For example, Sen. Scott, along with four other members of the Senate Finance Committee, amended the bill to include the Historic Tax Credit at 20 percent.

Now for the second time in 30 years, Congress has reaffirmed that reviving older and historic buildings is sound federal policy and good for the nation. For the foreseeable future, the Historic Tax Credit will remain a permanent part of the tax code, where it will continue to create jobs and fuel the revitalization of downtowns, neighborhoods and Main Streets across America.

Despite successful advocacy, the HTC was not retained in its original form. The historic credit must now be taken over a five year period, and that lessens its value. So the National Trust is encouraging preservationists to review their state historic tax credits as well as other state and local funding opportunities to see if opportunities exist to help make up for that lost value.

We are also encouraging members of Congress to co-sponsor the Historic Tax Credit Improvement Act, (S425/HR1158) which has enjoyed strong bipartisan support during this Congress. One provision calls for reducing the basis adjustment requirements which would add value to the credit. Under current law, the basis — or the costs associated with the building — must be reduced by the full amount of the historic tax credits received. One way to increase investor interest in historic tax credits is to eliminate the requirement that the basis be reduced by the amount of the credit.

We are grateful that Congress retained the Historic Tax Credit, and through this incentive, we expect to see continued reinvestment back into the hearts of our communities.



South Carolina stats

Between 2002 and 2016, the Historic Tax Credit helped finance the rehabilitation of 107 commercial properties in South Carolina, leveraging more than \$358 million in total investment.

Incentives driven by the use of the federal Historic Tax Credit have increased historic rehabilitation redevelopment across the state.

South Carolina projects that relied on the HTC include the following:

- the Hotel **Florence**, which catalyzed the redevelopment of downtown and brought businesses back to town as a result;
- the Bleachery in **Rock Hill**, where a former textile mill is being renovated for office, retail and recreation use;
- the Trolley Barn in **Charleston**, which now houses the American College of the Building Arts;
- the former General Asbestos and Rubber Co. in **North Charleston**, which will be transformed for office and restaurant use; and
- new housing that has been created in Brandon Mill (1899 – 1918) in **Greenville**, Apalache Mill (1888 – 1946) in **Spartanburg**, and the Palmetto Compress building (1917 – 1924) in **Columbia**.



How trees improve cities

By Frances Waite, Coastal Region Urban Forester, S.C. Forestry Commission

How do trees help cities and towns conserve on air conditioning? How does shade from trees assist in energy conservation?

Trees properly placed around buildings can reduce air conditioning needs by 30 percent and can save 20 – 50 percent in energy used for heating according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service. Cities can be 2 to 10 degrees warmer than rural surroundings due to what's often called the urban heat island effect. Planting more trees keeps urban spaces cooler and more livable.

What kinds of trees help reduce erosion and other flood concerns?

All mature trees can help reduce erosion due to their wide-reaching fibrous and woody root systems. In addition, tree

canopy captures and slows rainfall, which reduces impact to the soil.

Baldcypress is an urban-friendly tree for flood-prone areas; black gum (*Nyssa sylvatica*) is also a good option. Live oaks are good for the coast, as they are tolerant of salt spray.

Evergreen species uptake the most water in the canopy annually, since the abundant needles capture more water and stay on the tree all year. Larger trees, whether deciduous or evergreen, hold water in the canopy until saturation is reached. Water also flows down the trunk and into the roots.

Having adequate soil volume in the planting area is important to also hold water and make sure water reaches roots. Examples of evergreen trees to consider that can also tolerate occasional 'wet feet' include American holly, Eastern red cedar, magnolia and live oak.

What trees would be appropriate for high-traffic areas?

Typically, high-traffic areas are urban sites with little to no pervious area. The most important thing for healthy, attractive urban trees is the adequate rooting space which is critical for health and survival. In general, small maturing trees need less below-ground space, therefore, may be better suited for high-traffic areas.

Examples include Eastern or Oklahoma redbud, Chinese fringetree, and *Osmanthus* species (tea olive), and also are trees that have a nice fragrance. Upright, narrow canopy trees, such as 'Slender silhouette' sweetgum and 'Fastigata' European hornbeam, may also be an option for tight spaces.

Be mindful that the more impervious surface the greater the reflective heat from buildings, streets, and parking lots. Sun scald may become an issue during

the summer. Trees to consider avoiding include: Bradford pear, due to poor branch structure and unpleasant smelling flowers, and female ginkos, which have a bad odor when fruiting.

Which trees have roots that won't break sidewalks and extend too far away from the tree?

All trees have roots that extend out a long way as they grow and mature, and sidewalk maintenance will be a factor when trees are planted adjacent to sidewalks. Just make sure to follow the minimum planting dimensions (see table). Vase-shaped trees like Princeton elm or Japanese zelkova would be better from an above ground aspect. It's important to match up the right tree characteristics with the site limitations.

Of course, some cities and towns have areas that are natural gathering spots or downtowns that are highly urbanized. So space can be at a premium with streets, sidewalks, parking, shops and restaurants.

Designers and arborists can help municipalities ensure there is enough room for tree canopy, roots, and soil to perform environmental functions by putting in infrastructure beneath the pavement. Trenches can be dug to create room for tree roots under pavement, and structural soils, suspended sidewalks, or structural cells are strategies when space is minimal. Since this is an expensive endeavor, priority areas must be chosen in cities and towns.

Which trees would require little time and labor to maintain?

All trees require time and labor to maintain, but the right trees in the right locations are the easiest to maintain. For example, if you are planting trees in a sidewalk setting, make sure you have at least minimum planting dimensions.

If you don't have adequate root space, eventually you will likely have a buckling sidewalk. In areas where space is tight, structural soils or plastic cells can be used to help create room for tree roots under paved areas. Also, know that over time,



maintenance like root pruning will be needed even if the minimum planting dimensions are followed.

Low maintenance really begins with proper planting. Even if you purchase a well-formed tree, if it's planted too deep, too shallow, with the burlap and straps left on it, or without enough water, it will be an unhealthy tree prone to disease or pests problems because of stress and will be short-lived.

Choosing trees with good form from the nursery is also key for minimizing maintenance.

When looking at quality trees in a nursery setting, arborists are looking at trunk, branch structure, crown, leaf and root characteristics. Generally, the form that arborists like to choose in high-use areas are single trunk with a single leader. Trees with encircling roots (those that have been in containers too long) will not grow well and likely die after a few years.

Trees that survive into maturity with girdling roots will likely be unstable and subject to windthrow, when trees

are uprooted. An arborist can help in selecting quality trees.

Also, look what is overhead, and imagine how the tree is going to impact the vertical space. For example, if there are power lines, make sure to plant a small-maturing tree to minimize future conflicts.

From an environmental perspective, are there trees that help cities reduce air pollution?

Trees are efficient air filters, trapping particulate pollutants in the leaves and bark, and also absorb volatile compounds (air pollutants) through the leaves. They also cool the air, and this reduces the volume of evaporated pollutants. Even a few degrees of reduction through shading can reduce air pollution.

The larger trees are going to give cities the most value over time. Larger trees can hold more particulate matter, and they have longer life spans. Plant the largest tree that can fit in the planting area and also keep in mind what is overhead (i.e. electric lines).

Minimum planting dimensions for large, medium and small maturing trees
(with usable soil depth of 1 foot):

Tree size	Height in Feet	Total square foot planting area	Minimum planting strip size in feet	Placement from pavement or wall in feet
Large	>50	200	7	7
Medium	25-50	100-200	4-7	4
Small	<25	<100	4	2

Certifications help cities go green



From planting the right greenery to adding bike lanes and upgrading city building insulation to preserving green space, local officials have countless ways make their cities greener and local government operations more environmentally friendly. An array of organizations offer certifications, designations and programs to help.

Tree City USA

Cities with Tree City USA status meet four standards established by the Arbor Day Foundation and the National Association of State Foresters: “maintaining a tree board or department, having a community tree ordinance, spending at least \$2 per capita on urban forestry and celebrating Arbor Day.” www.arborday.org/programs/treecityusa

Audubon International Sustainable Community Certification

“Through education, technical assistance, certification and recognition, Audubon International facilitates the implementation of environmental management practices that ensure natural resources are sustainably used and conserved.” www.auduboninternational.org

Bicycle Friendly Community from the League of American Bicyclists

“The Bicycle Friendly Community program provides a roadmap to improving conditions for bicycling and guidance to help make your community’s vision for a better, bikeable community a reality.” www.bikeleague.org/community

International Living Future Institute

The Living Community Challenge “is a framework for master planning, design and construction. It is a tool to create a symbiotic relationship between people and all aspects of the built environment. The program is a call to action to governments, campuses, planners, developers and neighborhood groups to create communities that are as connected and beautiful as a forest.” www.living-future.org

Bee City USA

The Bee City USA program endorses a set of commitments, defined in a resolution, for creating sustainable habitats for pollinators, which are vital to feeding the planet. www.beecityusa.org

Palmetto Clean Fuels Coalition

This initiative of the Office of Regulatory Staff – Energy Office supports the use of alternative fuels and advanced vehicle technologies in South Carolina. PCF, part of the Clean Cities program, promotes fuel economy measures, bicycle and pedestrian efforts, and reductions in vehicle miles traveled and vehicle idling. (See page 14 for more information.) www.palmettocleanfuels.org

Keep South Carolina Beautiful

Keep South Carolina Beautiful, the state affiliate of Keep America Beautiful, works with corporations, government and civic entities, educational institutions, nonprofits and other organizations to address complex challenges on a local and national scale and “helps turn public

spaces into beautiful places, helping to drive positive social, environmental and economic change.” www.kab.org

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities

The program “provides quick, targeted technical assistance to selected communities using a variety of tools that have demonstrated results and widespread application. The purpose of delivering these tools is to stimulate a discussion about growth and development and strengthen local capacity to implement sustainable approaches.” www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/building-blocks-sustainable-communities

Green Building Council’s STAR Communities Program

“The STAR Community Rating System is the nation’s leading comprehensive framework and certification program for evaluating local sustainability, encompassing economic, environmental and social performance measures. Local leaders use the rating system’s evaluation measures to assess their current level of sustainability, set targets for moving ahead, and measure progress along the way.” www.starcommunities.org

Has your city, town, utility or public safety department earned any certifications or designations or participated in any sustainability programs? Share your “go green” stories on our Facebook page (@MuniAssnSC.CitiesMeanBusiness) or on Twitter (@MuniAssnSC).

What to consider about switching to alternative fuels

From the S.C. Energy Office



Transportation fuel and vehicle maintenance can put a significant strain on a municipal budget. With cities and towns of all sizes throughout South Carolina on a permanent quest to trim expenditures, many are considering using alternative fuels but aren't sure where to start.

Here are some suggestions:

More than a dozen alternative fuels are in production or under development for use in alternative-fuel and advanced-technology vehicles. The U.S. Department of Energy recognizes alternative fuels as biodiesel (B20 and above), hydrogen, ethanol (E85), liquefied petroleum gas (propane), compressed and liquefied natural gas, and electricity. Using alternative fuels instead of conventional gasoline or diesel helps reduce dependence on imported oil, can lower vehicle emissions and even lower fuel costs.

1. Do a fleet audit – Are you maximizing the value of your current vehicles?

Fleet managers should look at mileage data for each vehicle in the fleet. Fleet inventories often grow over time to include vehicles that are highly specialized, rarely used or unsuitable for current applications. Before considering alternative fuels, first optimize the city's fleet size and composition to conserve fuel, reduce emissions, and save money on fuel

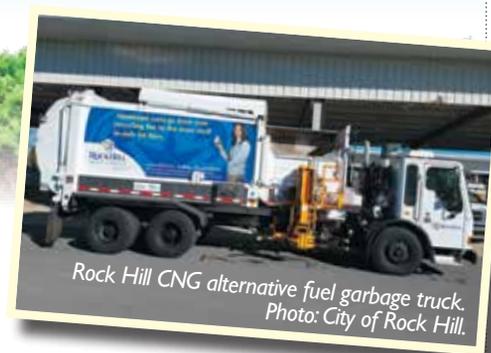
and maintenance. DOE offers several free tools to help fleet managers quantify the environmental and economic impacts of their current fleet footprint and encourage increased efficiency.

2. Don't reinvent the wheel – What kind of vehicles are you looking to convert/replace?

Often certain alternative fuels are more useful for specific vehicle types and classes. Examples include propane cut-a-way transit buses used by the Santee Wateree Regional Transportation Authority and the City of Rock Hill's use of compressed natural gas refuse trucks. When looking at options, cities should consider what works well for their specific vehicle class.

3. Consider infrastructure – How is the city going to fuel the vehicles?

Alternative fuel vehicles need specific stations to refuel. Some fleets choose to install infrastructure on-site, while others use publicly available infrastructure. Work with utilities, natural gas and propane companies, and original equipment manufacturers. Many times it only takes one fleet for an infrastructure provider to invest in a public station. Make sure to check out the DOE Alternative Fueling Station Locator at bit.ly/AlternativeFuelStations for an interactive map of all the public, private and planned alternative fueling stations.



Rock Hill CNG alternative fuel garbage truck.
Photo: City of Rock Hill.

4. Consider the payback/ ROI – Is the cost right?

Alternative fuel vehicles can sometimes be more expensive to purchase. However, factor in lower fuel costs and maintenance over the life of the vehicle, and they can be cost effective. It is important to look at each fuel and vehicle in your fleet closely. Analyze the options to see how quickly potential investments in alternative fuel vehicles will pay for themselves.

Palmetto Clean Fuels, an initiative of the Office of Regulatory Staff – Energy Office, is one of nearly 100 designated DOE Clean Cities coalitions in the U.S. Palmetto Clean Fuels has access to and experience in using DOE tools and can provide technical assistance. Palmetto Clean Fuels can also connect municipal officials with industry resources and other sources of assistance when considering the switch to alternative fuels.

For more information, contact Landon Masters or Maeve Mason, Palmetto Clean Fuels Co-coordinators, palmettocleanfuels@regstaff.sc.gov

To see a list of other programs, see page 12.



The Town of Saluda received a ConserFund loan to assist with installing solar panels, making it one of the first cities in the state to use solar energy. Photo: Town of Saluda.

Cities warm up to solar

Saluda Town Administrator Tom Brooks says he has just one regret about the decision to install solar panels to power town hall — He didn't go far enough.

“We stuck our toe in the water to see how it feels. We should have signed up all our buildings at the time,” Brooks says. “It's expensive, but the payback is there.”

Saluda was one of the state's first cities to install solar panels, tapping into the buzz around solar energy and its potential savings.

“We realized power bills were always going to go up,” said Brooks. “We started talking to the (state) Energy Office. They had some great programs, and SCE&G had some good programs for government agencies. The timing was right. And when we looked at the numbers, it was a no-brainer.”

Through the Energy Office, the town received a ConserFund loan, allowing Saluda to borrow money at a low interest rate to put in solar panels and retrofit Town Hall with energy-efficient light bulbs. The town also worked closely with SCE&G and the company's renewable energy team.

Saluda now receives a credit on each electric bill for the energy it puts back on the power grid. The town has a 10-year

contract to sell power generated at Saluda Town Hall to SCE&G. The project is expected to pay for itself after 3½ years, so the town will be making money for 6½ years.

“We were pleasantly surprised. We were hoping it would be a quick payback, and in a year it has proven itself,” said Brooks.

“It’s weather dependent, so on cloudy days, you are not making as much money,” he added. “You have months that are good and months that are not so good. But looking at the charts, the only month that we were down in generation from expected was December. Every other month we met or exceeded the (power) generation,” he said.

Low-interest loans

While local governments can’t take advantage of tax credits often available for solar projects in residential and commercial buildings, some utilities have special incentives for certain public sector customers. The S.C. Energy Office has a low-interest loan program (currently 1.5 percent interest rates) that can be used for solar projects by local governments and nonprofits, if the projected savings are high enough, according to Trish Jerman, manager of energy programs for the office.

Additionally, grants and loans to help pay for solar installations may be available for local governments in rural areas as part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Rural Energy for America Program.

Jerman warned of a proliferation of inaccurate information regarding solar energy. She suggests that municipalities interested in solar contact her office or check out websites including l.masc.sc/SCconserfund, l.masc.sc/SCsolargov, l.masc.sc/EErevolvingloan.

The Town of Hampton has also taken a step toward solar. Robert Poston, Hampton’s director of building and zoning, says the town took over a dilapidated mobile home park at the same time the local

regional water system was looking into solar power.

“The mobile home park was inside the town limits and was a nuisance to us,” Poston says. “It’s contiguous to the wastewater treatment plant. When this option came up, we put our heads together. We all came together and worked it out.”

“... SCE&G had some good programs for government agencies. The timing was right. And when we looked at the numbers, it was a no-brainer.”

- Tom Brooks,
Saluda Town Administrator

Located on about seven acres owned by the town, the solar farm is expected to produce about 2,106 megawatt hours of electricity a year, the equivalent of what it takes to power 147 homes.

Solar energy will now provide all power to the wastewater treatment plant, a savings of about \$25,000 a year in operating costs, Poston said. The town, Lowcountry Regional Water System and SCE&G all worked together on the project, with the solar farm participating in SCE&G’s Solar Energy Non-Residential Bill Credit Program.

“It’s got our folks in town interested in solar,” Poston said. “We want to start looking at powering other facilities as well — maybe Town Hall and the fire department.”

‘Do your homework’

Brooks of Saluda said towns looking to tap into solar energy should get in touch with the state’s Energy Office to see if it’s the right move and look into power usage

and how long it takes to pay back the investment.

“Make sure the program fits for you. You don’t want to invest in something that’s going to take too long to pay back,” he says. “We’ve seen a lot of big solar farms around Saluda. We didn’t influence those, but there are a lot of small businesses and agriculture businesses interested in solar. We thought, ‘Let us try at Town Hall and see how it works before a business jumps into the game.’ Hopefully we can be a model.”

Before venturing into solar energy, municipalities and energy leaders point out the importance of dealing with a reputable solar contractor with a proven work history. The cheapest option may not always be the best.

“Do your homework and make sure they have a track record,” Brooks said. “The last thing you want is to invest \$60,000 or \$70,000 on solar, and then the company goes out of business.”

Be skeptical

Keith Wood, the operations director for the Laurens Commission of Public Works, said customers should be skeptical about some solar company claims that power bills will drop immediately after solar panels are installed.

Laurens CPW puts in two meters in homes that convert to solar. One of the meters measures the energy the home is pulling in from the town and the excess energy the home is pushing back out. The second meter runs from the panels to the load center or breaker panel in the house, measuring when the solar panel produces energy.

“I want to be able to read both meters. Then we can say, ‘Here’s the power you use, and here’s the power your solar panel produces,’” Wood said. “We do it on peak and off peak times. This way they can know what they’re consuming in their house and can apply the retail rate to that, so they can see what they are avoiding.”



1411 Gervais Street | PO Box 12109
 Columbia, South Carolina 29211
 Tel: 803.799.9574 | Fax: 803.933.1299
 www.masc.sc

PRESORTED
 STANDARD
 U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
 Greenville, S.C.
 PERMIT NO. 305

Calendar

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

APRIL

13 Municipal Court Administration Association of SC Spring Meeting. Columbia Conference Center. Topics include bond estreatments, changes in the S.C. Freedom of Information Act and an update from the S.C. Department of Motor Vehicles.

13 Spring Managers Forum. Columbia Conference Center.

18 (repeated on April 19) SC Association of Municipal Power Systems Lineman Training. SCE&G Pine Island, Columbia.

19 Main Street South Carolina meeting. Greenwood. The Inn on the Square. Topics include historic architecture and the importance of historic preservation.

25 SC Municipal Human Resources Association Spring Meeting. Columbia Conference Center. Topics include effective internal investigations, ethics and an employer’s legal obligations when addressing harassment.

26 SC Municipal Insurance and Risk Financing Fund Cyber Security Resources Webinar.

MAY

6 – 9 Building Officials Association of SC Annual Meeting. Ocean Drive Beach and Golf Resort, North Myrtle Beach. Topics include controlling building air leakage, wall bracing, changes to the international building and residential codes, and how to be a resource for residents following a disaster.

8 Risk Management Services Defensive Drivers Training. Pickens.

9 Risk Management Services Defensive Drivers Training. Municipal Association of SC.

10 Risk Management Services Defensive Drivers Training. Hardeeville.

16 – 18 SC Community Development Association Annual Meeting. Marriott North Charleston. Topics include heirs’ properties, annexation case studies and overview, and funding options for creating parks.

22 Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government: Municipal Governance and Policy and Freedom of Information Act in South Carolina. Regional councils of governments’ locations.

JUNE

5 SC Business Licensing Officials Association ABL Exam. Municipal Association of SC.

Answer key for page 5: The answer that doesn’t overlap with all three forms of government is “c.” The city manager appoints the clerk in the council-manager form of government.