2017 Annual Meeting

Be distinctive, says national speaker

It was a Confederate printing plant in 1864. Today it's a Publix in downtown Columbia.

And that's a good thing. Ed McMahon urged Annual Meeting attendees to recognize the placemaking value of the busy grocery store in Columbia's Vista district and other reinventions of historic structures during his address to more than 600 municipal officials and guests.

"These are the places that physically connect us to the past. These are the places that tell us who we are and where we come from," said McMahon, a senior resident fellow for the Urban Land Institute in Washington, D.C., and the board chairman of the National Main Street Center. "Saving historic buildings in South Carolina is about saving the heart and soul of South Carolina. But it is also incredibly important to your economic wellbeing."

He described other examples of cities that helped give new life to historic structures — Sheboygan Falls, Wisconsin, restored an old firehouse, and the tenant, Firehouse Pizza, saw its business increase. In Boston, an old warehouse on the waterfront was turned into the Converse shoe company's world headquarters.

McMahon cited a real estate trends report by PwC and the Urban Land Institute that found restored industrial buildings are commanding higher rents than new Class A office spaces. The report quoted a life insurance company executive who said, "These are exciting times for acquiring older industrials with this potential. Such buildings are not being replaced, so there is a scarcity."

With South Carolina's rich past, historic buildings are a resource to be tapped.

The demand for repurposed historic structures has to do with the public's quest for authenticity and distinct character in their surroundings, particularly among younger residents.

"Let's talk about hospitality," McMahon said. "When young people talk about staying in hotels, they say that 'authenticity' and 'interesting' is more important than 'comfortable' and 'predictable.'"

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Special Inserts:

2017 Annual Meeting

The Confederate Printing Plant in Columbia was built in 1864 to print Confederate bonds, but today it houses residential units and a Publix grocery store.

Distinctive, *from page 1 >*

He said major hotel corporations are opening off-brand hotels, such as Hotel Indigo properties, which along with Holiday Inn, are part of IHG.

And just as hotel companies are adding boutique properties, cities and towns should also look to celebrate their individuality. In short, municipalities can make themselves competitive by accentuating their uniqueness instead of imitating other thriving places.

The Alabama native kept attendees' attention with his personable and frank delivery of examples of good and bad economic development strategies and practical ideas to draw residents, visitors and employers to a city.

These were among McMahon's points:

• Don't compete with other cities in a race to the bottom by giving large property tax abatements to big business.

"What we're really doing is pitting one community against another. We are moving economic development around," he said. "If somebody threatens to leave, then we'll pay them whatever they want until they get a better deal from somebody else. Taxpayers are spending billions of dollars subsidizing big business."

Look at doing things differently, McMahon said, and realize that small businesses are the ones creating the bulk of new jobs. "Maybe you might invest in creating a great place and creating

a skilled work force, which, of course, will create a lasting asset that will pay dividends far into the future. You will help existing businesses create a diverse, durable local economy." *(See page 5 for one way to invest in your city.)*

• "It's not about what you don't have," he said. "It's about what you do have." Quality of life is directly tied to a city's economic wellbeing. Don't join an "arms race" that only a few cities will actually win. For example, resist the urge to build the flashiest convention center, the biggest festival market place or some other trendy attraction, such as an aquarium.

• Green spaces are more than a nice extra. Treat parks and green spaces like the sources of vitality that they are. Green spaces add value to adjacent property. A multitude of studies back this up.

• Let demographic trends help inform decisions about the housing supply. McMahon said there is more single-family housing than needed to meet demand and not enough housing suitable for empty-nesters who have downsized, young people who postpone marriage and other growing groups.

• Preserving what is special about a community is good for business. McMahon pointed to a company called Brandywine Investment Fund. Its founder moved the company from Philadelphia to Jackson Hole, Wyoming, to take advantage of the outdoor recreation opportunities in

Wyoming. The lesson: Protecting an area's natural environment raises the quality of life and makes people — including employers — want to settle down there and even uproot from somewhere else. Increasingly young people now decide where they want to live, move there and then look for a job, he said. That's a reversal from past generations, when a job offer determined where someone moved.

• It's good to be discerning when it comes to deciding what businesses you want in your city. Don't be afraid to say no. "If you're afraid to say no to anything, you'll get the worst of everything," said McMahon. "Communities that set high standards compete for the top." As McMahon put it: Go for a "laser" recruitment strategy, not a "shotgun" one.

• Mixed-use developments offer an array of advantages. Apartments, offices, and any number of other establishments can be located on top of a downtown Walmart or Best Buy, for example. McMahon cited 2011 data from Fayetteville, Arkansas, that showed a mixed-use Waffle House outperformed a standalone Waffle House by 15 percent. The rise of e-commerce and the decline of suburban shopping malls should continue to factor into city planning.

• Beware of sameness. "If you can't differentiate your community from any place else, you have no competitive advantage."

• Companies are moving back to downtowns. "If you don't have a healthy downtown, you simply don't have a healthy town. The apple rots from the inside out," he said. "It's hard to be a suburb of nothing. … Investing in the downtown is about investing in the whole place."

2017-2018
BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Members at the Annual Meeting in July elected Municipal Association officers and board members. Officers serve a one-year term.

President
Mayor Elise Partin, Cayce

First Vice President
Councilmember Octavia Williams-Blake, Florence

Second Vice President
Mayor Dick Cronin,
Isle of Palms

Third Vice President
Mayor Dennis Raines,
Mauldin

Immediate Past President
Mayor Bill Young,
Walterboro

Members elected six municipal officials to serve three-year terms on the board of directors.

Councilmember Amy Brown, Chesterfield
Representing: Pee Dee Regional Council of Governments area
(Elected to finish a two-year term)

Mayor J.C. Cook, Clemson
Representing: Appalachian Regional Council of Governments area

Mayor Terrence Culbreath, Johnston
Representing: Upper Savannah Council of Governments area
(Elected to finish a one-year term)

Mayor Jackie Heyward, Hollywood
Representing: At large

Mayor Steve MacDougall, Lexington
Representing: Central Midlands Council of Governments area

Mayor Jason Stapleton of Williston
Representing: Lower Savannah Council of Governments area

Seven members continue to serve on the board.

Mayor Cornelius Huff, Inman
Representing: At large

Councilmember Mark Johnson, Surfside Beach
Representing: Waccamaw Regional Council of Governments area

Mayor Billy Keyserling, Beaufort
Representing: Lowcountry Council of Governments area

Mayor Michael Lockliear, Moncks Corner
Representing: Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Governments area

Mayor Wade McLeod, Paxville
Representing: Santee Lynches Council of Governments area

Councilmember Kathy Pender, Rock Hill
Representing: Catawba Regional Council of Governments area

City Administrator John Yow, Orangeburg
Representing: At large

The board is composed of the officers and officials representing each of the 10 councils of governments areas and three at large seats.

Partin ready to lead

Delegates at the Municipal Association of South Carolina's Annual Meeting unanimously elected Elise Partin, mayor of the City of Cayce, as the Association's president. She will serve a one-year term.

Elections took place on Friday, July 21, at the Association's Annual Meeting. When asked about her vision for South Carolina hometowns, here is what Mayor Partin had to say:

Elise Partin,
Mayor of the
City of Cayce

How are cities and towns influencing positive change in South Carolina?

Cities and towns are the economic engines of our state and our country. The elected leaders in our hometowns don't sit on the sidelines. They stand up for their city and town every day — creating great places to live, work and enjoy free time. They are on the front lines in attracting new investment to the state — from recruiting new industries that bring hundreds of jobs to city-owned industrial sites to recruiting small businesses to Main Street. The local level is where things get done.

Decisions made at the city level directly affect the quality of life of residents, visitors and business owners. It's up to municipal officials to keep residents safe, provide amenities that encourage a positive quality of life and deliver services like garbage pickup that are essential for daily living. By providing these essential services, officials in our cities and towns provide a solid foundation for South Carolina's future.

How is the delivery of city services related to a successful South Carolina?

The elected leaders in our cities and towns are on the ground level of delivering services, and they have to get the basics of government right. And they do it with accountability and efficiency to bring measurable results to their communities. Residents and businesses depend on their cities and towns for the basics, the foundation of what makes a great quality of life. For the frightened homeowner surprised by a fire, the fire department responds. For every child who deserves a safe place to play, our hometowns offer parks. For hard working taxpayers, elected city leaders cooperate and compromise to create a place to call home together. Because the residents we represent deserve efficiency and effectiveness, municipal leaders follow through.

In addition, cities and towns in South Carolina have withstood the test of time by adapting to change. Whether it's meeting the changing needs of residents and business owners or using new technologies to deliver services even more effectively and efficiently, cities and towns have adapted. The result — a South Carolina that is competitive with other states and countries in attracting new investment and industry and creating great places to live.

What do you see as the biggest challenges facing cities and towns?

In a day of shrinking resources and increasing demands and expectations, the elected leaders in our cities and towns must be innovators and problem solvers. Many years ago, cities and towns depended on the federal and state government for much of their funding through grants and direct financial assistance. Today those resources are no longer available. Thankfully, mayors and councilmembers are great conveners and catalyzers, champions of their communities.

Cities and towns don't have a safety net, so leaders are adept at problem solving and working together for every member of their community. Elected leaders in their hometowns find innovative ways to meet their responsibilities head on. And, the right tools and approaches are not always the same from city to city; therefore, municipal officials must be able to make the decisions that are right for their community. A "one size fits all" approach does not work. And our state is stronger for it!

Hometown Economic Development Grant entries due September 29

"Successful economic development is rarely about the one big thing. It's much more frequently about lots of small things working synergistically together off of a plan that makes sense for you and your community."

That's how Ed McMahon, senior resident fellow at the Urban Land Institute, described to Annual Meeting attendees how cities and towns can find their niche and create a lasting, high quality of life.

It's an idea that ties directly into the Association's Hometown Economic Development Grant program.

After all, said McMahon: "Why would anybody invest in a community that wouldn't invest in itself?"

The 2017 program will award grants up to $25,000 each to as many as 10 cities and towns that submit winning proposals for projects that will make a positive impact on quality of life. The grant program, which began last year, also promotes and recognizes innovation in economic development practices.

A key step in the application process is the council's passage of a resolution in support of the grant application. The deadline to apply for one of the Association's Hometown Economic Development grants is September 29.

The grants fund projects that can be replicated in other cities, will produce measurable results and can be maintained over time.

Cities and towns that receive a grant must provide matching funds. The amount of the match is determined by population. Those selected for grants are also required to submit reports about the progress and successes of each project and provide financial details about how the grant funds were spent.

Grant awards will be announced on or before October 31.

Don't forget!

- Eligible projects can take any form. A grant may fund professional services, such as assistance developing a master plan; assets, such as wayfinding signage or a publicly owned water or sewer project; or programs developed in partnership with others such as business incubators or downtown revitalization efforts.
- Depending on a city's population, the required matching amount ranges from 5 percent to 15 percent of the grant award. A match can include in-kind contributions or other grant funds.
- Remember that your town or city council must pass a resolution before submitting the applications, committing it to providing a local match for a Hometown Economic Development Grant.

For more information and to see a sample resolution, visit www.masc.sc (keyword: hometown grants).

NEWS BRIEFS

Members of the **SC Community Development Association** elected their 2017-2018 board of directors. President Carolet Thomas, City of Sumter; Vice President Shannon Munoz, Pee Dee Regional COG; Secretary Imma Nwobodu, Greenville County Redevelopment Authority. Members at Large Jeff Derwort, City of Sumter; Jessie Walker, Waccamaw Regional COG; Kimberly Herdon, Catawba COG; Martha Whitaker, S.C. Department of Commerce; Mauretta Dorsey, Town of Andrews; Emory Langston, City of Aiken; Shawn Bell, City of Lake City; Past President Allison Harvey, Town of Clover.

The **City of Charleston** was ranked No. 5 on Inc.com's list of the six best cities to start a business and No. 25 out of 35 in TechNet's "Next in Tech" metro startup economy index.

The **Town of Mount Pleasant** won several Hermes Creative Awards for communication projects, including its annual report and e-newsletter.

At the **2017 Municipal Association Annual Meeting**, Rock Hill Mayor Doug Echols received the Allison Farlow Award, the highest award given by the Municipal Association to honor a person within municipal government who has contributed significantly to the advancement of municipal government in South Carolina. Rep. Joe Daning (R - Goose Creek) was awarded the Association's Distinguished Service Award, presented to an individual outside municipal government who has contributed to the advancement of municipal government in South Carolina. Miriam Hair, the Association's executive director, was presented the Order of the Palmetto, the highest civilian honor awarded by the state of South Carolina.

True or False:
A municipality may offer publicly funded incentives in the form of grants or loans for any purpose.

Answer: False.

A municipality may offer publicly funded incentives in the form of grants or loans as long as the funds are used for a public purpose. In South Carolina, council can only spend public funds for a "public purpose." The S.C. Supreme Court defines public purpose as one that "has for its objective the promotion of the public health, safety, morals, general welfare, security, prosperity and contentment." Eligibility for incentives participation must not be arbitrary and must treat all members of the class of eligible business activities in a similar manner under similar circumstances.

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. Register for the September 26 courses, "Municipal Economic Development" and "Forms of Municipal Government," at www.masc.sc (keyword: MEO).

16 graduate from MEO Institute

Advanced Institute courses to cover public safety, economic development

Sixteen elected officials graduated from the Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government during the Municipal Association's Annual Meeting in July. These officials are now eligible to participate in the Advanced MEO Institute. The advanced program graduated its second class in February at Hometown Legislative Action Day. There were 70 Advanced Institute MEO graduates at HLAD and 48 MEO Institute graduates.

The next Advanced Institute sessions will be offered on October 25. Officials may choose to take one of the two courses offered.

Experienced municipal economic development professionals and consultants will use case studies to illustrate successful strategies in "Advanced Municipal Economic Development." The course will show attendees how to identify and promote a municipality's distinct assets,

form partnerships, and use available tools and incentives to encourage private sector investment and job creation.

The other course offered in October, "Public Safety Policy and Administration," will detail the elected official's leadership role and responsibilities related to public safety. Experienced public safety and municipal court professionals will discuss police, fire and municipal court policies; best practices and operations.

Officials must first graduate from the Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government to participate in the Advanced Institute.

The Advanced Institute courses will be held at the Columbia Marriott on October 25. The Association will offer two additional sessions on February 7, the day after the 2018 HLAD. For more information, visit www.masc.sc (keyword: advanced MEO).

July graduates of the MEO Institute include Councilmember Jerry Ashmore of Port Royal, Councilmember R. Trevor Bedell of West Columbia, Councilmember Mona Dukes of Johnsonville, Councilmember Jeff George of Travelers Rest, Mayor Tim Grimsley of Cottageville, Councilmember William Budda Killian of Chester, Councilmember David W. McGhee of North Augusta, Councilmember Garrett Milliken of James Island, Councilmember Dorothy Mills of Lynchburg, Mayor Rick N. Osbon of Aiken, Councilmember Wayne O. Pless of Calhoun Falls, Councilmember Ray C. Rogers of Inman, Councilmember Eddie Scott of Hollywood, Councilmember Ashley Smith of Conway, Councilmember Michael Sweeney of Hardeeville and Councilmember Daniel Wood of Bluffton.

2017
Annual Report

MASC Municipal Association of South Carolina[SM]

1411 Gervais Street
Columbia SC, 29201

From the Executive Director

In 1924, a small group of mayors met informally to discuss challenges each of their cities faced. They shared possible solutions and explored the idea of creating an association of cities and towns. Why? Because they understood that cities and towns — large and small and in every part of the state — face similar challenges. And by working together, cities and towns can best meet these challenges.

While the tools have changed over the years, the mission of the Municipal Association has not. Today, city officials continue to work together through the Association to identify challenges and share knowledge and solutions to meet these challenges. With a shared voice, city officials convey these challenges to members of the S.C. General Assembly and Congress, so that new laws may reflect cities' needs.

This annual report highlights the Association's work during the past 12 months, as officials worked together to share their voices, knowledge and solutions to improve the quality of life in cities, towns and the state.

Miriam Hair

Miriam Hair
Executive Director
Municipal Association of
South Carolina

Highlights: Shared Voices

Legislative Activity

Business licensing legislation took center stage in the 2017 session of the General Assembly. This legislation was shaped by two years of conversations with business leaders and municipal officials interested in standardizing business license practices across cities and towns. The dynamics of the debate changed when House members introduced two bills that shifted the focus away from standardization. These bills moved the authority for administering the tax from city officials to state agencies, significantly reduced tax revenues to cities and towns, and increased taxes for small businesses while decreasing taxes for large businesses headquartered out of state. City officials were key in preventing the passage of these bills and moved the conversation back to standardization.

The Association also worked with a variety of other coalitions and partners on legislation impacting cities. Working with the S.C. Press Association, the Association supported legislation that makes substantial changes to the Freedom of Information Act. The new law benefits both the public and local governments.

Additionally, working with a coalition of business interests, city officials voiced their concerns over crumbling roads, and the General Assembly passed a bill to raise the state's gas tax to provide revenue to address the problem.

The General Assembly also raised the amount employers and employees are required to contribute to the S.C. Retirement System and the Police Officers Retirement System. The Legislature agreed to annually fund 1 percent of the 2-percent increase in the employers' contribution.

Complete details about the 2017 legislative session are included in the year-end legislative report.

Public Engagement

A new partnership with an upstate business magazine, *Business Black Box*, promoted the ways city amenities, initiatives and services improve quality of life and makes cities, towns and the state more attractive to investment. By adding this new partnership, a wider audience of decision makers heard the message that the state's future is dependent on the success of cities and towns.

The S.C. Press Association and the S.C. Broadcasters Association joined the Municipal Association to host a workshop for more than 30 reporters from TV stations and weekly and daily newspapers. They spent the day learning about municipal government and connecting with the Association's resources.

2017 Advocacy Initiatives

Encourage business growth and development
Action Item: Standardize business license tax collection across the state.

Provide quality services
Action Items: Increase funding for the Local Government Fund to the level required in state law. Increase options for municipalities to roll back property taxes and to raise revenue to support specific capital projects. Allow cities to annex certain enclaves by ordinance.

Increase law enforcement training
Action Items: Support reliable funding for the Criminal Justice Academy to allow for more training opportunities for law enforcement officers. Increase funding for body worn cameras.

Repair roads
Action Item: Support reliable funding sources for roads and increase municipal representation on County Transportation Committees.

Reduce blight
Action Item: Establish options for cities and towns to recover public funds spent to demolish or clean blighted property.

From the very start of the Association in the early 1930s, South Carolina municipal officials understood that only by working together could they communicate the needs and views of municipal government to state and federal lawmakers.

Lobbying the State Legislature and Congress

The Association advocated for changes in state law to address city challenges and testified against legislation that would harm cities. Partnerships and coalitions played an important part in the Association's advocacy efforts. The Association also monitored federal legislation through the National League of Cities. *Staff Contact: Reba Campbell*

Regional Advocacy Meetings

The Association hosted a series of Regional Advocacy Meetings during the fall of 2016. More than 300 municipal officials met at 10 locations to talk about the challenges facing cities and towns and how changes to state law could help meet these challenges. More than 20 state legislators also attended these meetings to hear the concerns of municipal officials and share their views on the issues they believed would be the priorities of the General Assembly in the 2017 legislative session. Based on these conversations, the legislative committee and board of directors set the Association's 2017 legislative initiatives. *Staff Contact: Casey Fields*

Legislative Tracking and Reports

During the 2017 South Carolina legislative session, the Association actively monitored 310 bills impacting cities and towns. Updated daily during the session, the online tracking system helped municipal leaders follow subcommittee, committee and floor action.

Each Friday during the legislative session, more than 4,000 municipal officials received *From the Dome to Your Home*, which recapped the week's major legislative events and previewed the upcoming week's activities. It was also posted on the Association's website and shared with more than 5,000 social media followers.

At the end of the legislative session, the Association produced its annual legislative report recapping work on the advocacy initiatives and legislative action on major bills of municipal interest. *Staff Contact: Casey Fields*

Hometown Legislative Action Day

Hometown Legislative Action Day brought more than 520 local officials from 150 cities to Columbia in February to get updates on current legislative issues and visit their legislators at the State House. They heard from Senators Shane Massey and Luke Rankin and House members serving on the Tax Policy Review Committee. Secretary of Transportation Christy Hall discussed her long-term vision for the department, while law enforcement leaders discussed hiring and training trends. Officials also got briefings about new ethics reporting requirements, changes to the state retirement system and code enforcement issues. *Staff Contact: Ken Ivey*

Public Engagement

Legislators, business leaders, the news media and key influencers learned about successes in cities and towns through online and print resources.

Social Media Channels

The Association's Twitter (@MuniAssnSC) and Facebook (CitiesMeanBusiness) pages provided up-to-the-minute information on State House activity and shared good news stories about cities and towns. A regular schedule of social media posts highlighting *Uptown* stories increased traffic to the online version of the monthly newsletter and to the Association's website. The Association's Twitter followers increased 15 percent this year. *Staff Contact: Reba Campbell*

Publication Partnerships

Several successful publication partnerships spotlight ways strong cities underpin the state's economic development success. A new quarterly column in the upstate *Business Black Box* magazine showcased various cities' vision for economic growth.

The Association continued its partnership with *Columbia Bushiness Monthly* by providing a quarterly column highlighting business friendly practices in the Midlands. The ongoing partnership with *SC Biz* magazine to publish the Association's biannual *Cities Mean Business* magazine highlights how city amenities, initiatives and services improve residents' quality of life, which helps attract investment.

Through these partnerships, the message of the value of cities to the state's economic health reaches a wider audience of decision makers. *Staff Contact: Reba Campbell*

City Connect Blog and *City Quick Connect* Podcast

The *City Connect* blog offered short, weekly updates on a variety of issues. The *City Quick Connect* podcast featured short interviews with Association staff, leaders of partner organizations and experts on topics ranging from public speaking to placemaking. The blog and podcast packaged information in a format that was useful not only to local officials but also to the news media, legislators and the public. Topics were often related to court cases and issues being considered at the State House or on Capitol Hill. Subscriptions to the blog increased 40 percent over last year. *Staff Contact: Reba Campbell*

The number of Twitter followers increased by 15 percent to 5,000.

Subscriptions to the Association's blog, *City Connect*, increased by 40 percent.

Highlights: Shared Knowledge

Building Officials Association of South Carolina

After discussing mutual interests with the Building Officials Association of South Carolina, the Municipal Association brought the 66-year-old organization on board as its 12th affiliate. As a result of this new affiliation, the BOASC membership doubled to 224, and the 2017 annual meeting drew an all-time high attendance of 160 building officials. In addition to providing quality training programs, BOASC worked closely with the Municipal Association's advocacy staff on legislation affecting construction.

Business Licensing Officials Association of South Carolina

In 2016, the Business Licensing Officials Association of SC celebrated its 30th anniversary of service to cities. Through the Business License Task Force, BLOA members worked closely with the Municipal Association to improve business licensing bills that were introduced in the General Assembly. For the first time, BLOA awarded scholarships to three members to attend the three-year BLOA Training Institute.

Association of South Carolina Mayors

The Association of South Carolina Mayors held its first weekend conference, where mayors from cities of all sizes networked, traded ideas and solutions, discussed pending legislation and learned about crisis communication.

Main Street South Carolina

The cities of Clinton and Camden were selected to join the three-year Main Street Boot Camp, a technical assistance and training program designed to revitalize downtowns. Hartsville, Gaffney and Williamston completed the boot camp requirements.

Clerks On-demand Training Program

The Municipal Association rolled out the first two on-demand training courses for municipal clerks. While the training is targeted to all clerks, it is particularly useful for small town clerks who often find it difficult to be away from town hall to attend training.

Field Services

The Association's field services managers received an increase in the number of calls from municipal officials requesting guidance on municipal procedures and issues. The two Association staff members facilitated 47 strategic planning meetings, budget workshops and specialized training sessions.

The Association plays an important role in developing the knowledge of municipal elected officials and employees through a wide range of training programs, publications, and meetings that encourage the most efficient and effective municipal government operations.

Affiliate Associations

The Municipal Association supported 12 affiliate organizations by providing training and networking for a variety of local government positions with specialized training needs. These 12 affiliates had a combined membership exceeding 2,200 and offered 36 meetings/events, providing approximately 385 hours of training to more than 2,100 participants.

In addition to traditional face-to-face training and networking opportunities, the affiliate associations offered listserves for members to share best practices and to pose specific questions related to their local government responsibilities. *Staff Contact: Eric Budds*

Association of South Carolina Mayors

The Association of South Carolina Mayors provided opportunities for its 108 members to more fully engage in advocating for issues that affect cities and towns, to network, to take part in educational activities, and to share ideas and best practices. Its winter membership meeting, held at the Criminal Justice Academy, allowed mayors to see where their law enforcement officers train.

ASCM hosted its inaugural mayors' weekend conference in Columbia. Mayors had a chance to network, offer a three-minute snapshot about a successful project in their city and experience a law enforcement training simulator. *Staff Contact: Casey Fields*

Building Officials Association of SC

The Building Officials Association of SC is a professional development organization of building and code enforcement officials. Members are dedicated to safeguarding life, health and property through the uniform application, interpretation, and enforcement of building codes and related ordinances adopted by local governments. BOASC offered education and training opportunities to its members, promoted the importance of building codes and their enforcement, monitored issues before the S.C. Building Codes Council and the General Assembly, and provided technical assistance to local government officials. Membership more than doubled to 224. *Staff Contact: Scott Slatton*

Municipal Court Administration Association of SC

The Municipal Court Administration Association of South Carolina had 291 members. MCAA offered training at two workshops to court administrators, clerks of court, municipal judges and other municipal employees involved in court administration. The Supreme Court of South Carolina Commission on CLE and Specialization and the Office of Victims Services recognized these workshops for continuing education credits. The Association also provided opportunities for members to share ideas to make court administration more efficient. *Staff Contact: Bill Taylor*

Affiliate memberships exceeded 2,200.

36 affiliate meetings/events offered 385 hours of training.

Municipal Technology Association of SC

With 98 members, the Municipal Technology Association of SC promoted municipalities' effective use of technology through two training sessions. MTASC exposed its members to a broad range of technology systems, platforms and solutions, from GIS to police in-car technology to cloud storage to cybersecurity. The training served IT staff and those with GIS responsibilities, in addition to employees who work in other departments but have technology-related duties. *Staff Contact: Sara Johnson*

SC Association of Municipal Power Systems

All of the 21 municipal electric utilities are members of the SC Association of Municipal Power Systems. There are 54 associate members that support the organization. Originally, SCAMPS existed solely to help one another during times of disaster. The importance of this role was re-enforced in October 2016 when SCAMPS organized a mutual aid response to assist three member-utilities hit hard by Hurricane Matthew. This effort involved approximately 140 people representing member-utilities, private utilities, tree companies and public power utilities from Alabama, Florida, North Carolina and Nebraska.

Although mutual aid is still the backbone of SCAMPS, its scope also included legislative initiatives and training for electrical personnel.

The annual lineman training event drew 148 participants and 10 exhibitors. Training sessions emphasized the effective, efficient, reliable and safe operation of municipal electric systems. The group's annual meeting drew 152 meeting registrants and exhibitors, representing 19 municipal utilities and 41 associate members.

A SCAMPS representative participated on the committee that developed the proposed State Energy Plan. The group changed its legislative event from an evening reception to a legislative breakfast co-hosted with the Piedmont Municipal Power Agency. *Staff Contact: Eric Budds*

SC Association of Stormwater Managers

The SC Association of Stormwater Managers offered its 180 members quarterly training on stormwater management policies and best practices. Each meeting included updates and information from the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control. This year, one meeting included an exhibitor showcase that hosted vendors from around the country with goods or services of value to the membership. The S.C. Board of Professional Engineers and Land Surveyors recognized the quarterly training sessions for continuing education credits. *Staff Contact: Sara Johnson*

SC Business Licensing Officials Association

The South Carolina Business Licensing Officials Association promoted best practices for administering and enforcing the local business and professional license tax to its 337 members. Through rigorous training sessions, members learned skills and practices that make licensing in their cities and towns more efficient and business friendly.

The professional designation programs of Accreditation in Business Licensing and Masters in Business Licensing reflected members' dedication to continuing education. Nine members earned an Accreditation in Business Licensing and three completed the Masters in Business Licensing program. *Staff Contact: Scott Slatton*

SCAMPS organized 140 people from five states to help member-utilities after Hurricane Matthew.

BLOA membership increased to 337 members, a 14 percent increase over 2016.

SC Community Development Association

The South Carolina Community Development Association provided educational forums for its 153 members to address economic and community development needs. Members included municipal, county, regional and state community development professionals; employees of private companies with an interest in community development; elected officials and volunteers. SCCDA hosted a mobile tour where attendees visited Greenwood and Anderson to learn about successful community development projects, including neighborhood revitalizations and downtown improvements. *Staff Contact: Sara Johnson*

SC Municipal Attorneys Association

The South Carolina Municipal Attorneys Association's meeting covered issues important to municipal attorneys, whether working as municipal staff or as a municipality's outside counsel. The Supreme Court of South Carolina Commission on CLE and Specialization approved this training session for continuing education credits. This year, municipal attorneys gathered for an evening networking event before the conference. *Staff Contact: Tigerron Wells*

SC Municipal Finance Officers, Clerks and Treasurers Association

The South Carolina Municipal Finance Officers, Clerks and Treasurers Association offered training programs covering diverse responsibilities of its 252 members from 133 cities and towns. All of these training sessions qualified for a combination of continuing education credits for certified municipal clerks, certified public accountants and certified public treasurers. MFOCTA sponsors the Municipal Clerks and Treasurers Institute with the Municipal Association and the College of Charleston's Joseph P. Riley Jr. Center for Livable Communities. *Staff Contact: Jeff Shacker*

SC Municipal Human Resources Association

The South Carolina Municipal Human Resources Association promoted sound human resources administration and encouraged the use of innovative programs. Through its training programs, MHRA provided information and the opportunity to exchange ideas among its 234 members. The national Human Resources Certification Institute and the Society for Human Resources Management recognized this training for continuing education credits. *Staff Contact: Sara Johnson*

SC Utility Billing Association

The South Carolina Utility Billing Association provided training and networking opportunities for its 219 members, including billing clerks, meter readers and managers. SCUBA's meetings encompass a variety of topics focused on customer service, safety in the workplace, and new technologies to increase the efficiencies of utility billing and collections. *Staff Contact: Ken Ivey*

South Carolina Community Development Association membership increased 11 percent.

Seventy percent of municipalities participated in the online compensation survey, the highest percentage since 2006.

Nearly 300 elected officials attended the Advanced Municipal Elected Officials Institute courses.

Training Institutes

Educational opportunities were available to municipal officials through four training institutes.

SC Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government

The SC Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government offered specialized training for elected officials to increase their understanding of local government operations. Elected officials take seven required courses to complete the Institute. The required courses consist of two day-long sessions held each February in Columbia in conjunction with the Hometown Legislative Action Day and five additional classes, held yearly at the 10 councils of governments' locations or on-demand from the Association's website. Fifty-six mayors and councilmembers graduated. *Staff Contact: Urica Floyd*

SC Advanced Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government

Offered exclusively for graduates of the MEO Institute, the Advanced Institute gives elected officials the opportunity to continue their education. To complete the Advanced Institute, participants must take four of the six offered courses that explore in greater depth topics included in the MEO Institute and other topics critical for effective municipal operations. Enrollment for advanced courses reached 300. The graduating class of 70 was the largest to date. *Staff Contact: Urica Floyd*

Business Licensing Training Institute

The Business Licensing Training Institute offered specialized training to municipal and county officials in the basics of administering a business licensing program. To complete the institute, officials must take three classes, which are offered across three years. Ninety officials attended the Training Institute, including 15 who graduated. The SC Business Licensing Officials Association sponsors the institute. *Staff Contact: Scott Slatton*

Municipal Clerks and Treasurers Institute

The Municipal Clerks and Treasurers Institute offered instruction in several areas, including forms of government, financial management, the role of the municipal clerk and business licensing. The Association sponsors MCTI in partnership with the SC Municipal Finance Officers, Clerks and Treasurers Association and the College of Charleston's Joseph P. Riley Jr. Center for Livable Communities. Sixty-two municipal employees attended the semiannual sessions, including 12 who completed the institute. *Staff Contact: Jeff Shacker*

Orientation Training for Local Government Planning and Zoning Officials

State law requires training for all appointees and staff involved in local planning and zoning. These individuals must complete, within the first year of service, a six-hour orientation course approved by the State Advisory Committee on Educational Requirements. The Association offered an approved orientation course and awarded certificates to 99 individuals who completed the training. *Staff Contact: Lea Ann Mitchell*

Annual Meeting

The Association's 2016 Annual Meeting drew the highest municipal official attendance since 2008. Municipal officials representing 128 cities convened in Charleston. Double keynote speeches from Curt Steinhorst and Peter Kageyama focused on how millennials and seniors have more in common every day and how successful communities convert technology trends into opportunities to engage residents. *Staff Contact: Ken Ivey*

Technical Assistance
Field Services

The Association's two field services managers traveled the state to offer hands-on technical assistance, training and consultation to help municipalities address challenges. The field services managers made more than 1,000 in-person contacts with municipal officials and staff through one-on-one visits, council meetings and retreats. *Staff Contacts: Jeff Shacker and Bill Taylor*

Main Street South Carolina

Main Street SC helps its members revitalize their downtowns into vibrant centers of commerce and community by using the National Main Street Center's "Main Street Approach," which emphasizes organization, promotion, design and economic vitality.

The boot camp program is a three-year intensive technical assistance and training program for cities and towns, competitively selected. Upon completion, participants become full Main Street SC members. Gaffney, Hartsville and Williamston completed the boot camp program, while Camden and Clinton entered the program. The current membership is 17, six members in boot camp and 11 full members.

Main Street SC presented four training sessions, each one highlighting a Main Street member, and presented five Inspiration Awards for exceptional member accomplishments. The City of Sumter won the Excellence on Main Street award, which recognizes the most outstanding project of the Main Street Inspiration Awards. *Staff Contact: Beppie LeGrand*

Information Resources

The Association's print and online resources address hundreds of topics related to municipal government.

Publications

The Association publishes a variety of manuals and handbooks on topics of municipal interest.

- *Annexation Handbook*
- *Comprehensive Planning Guide for Local Governments*
- *Election Handbook*
- *Forms and Powers of Municipal Government*
- *Handbook for Municipal Officials in South Carolina* (updated in 2017)
- *The Municipal Association of South Carolina 1930-2015: A History of Shared Voices, Shared Knowledge, Shared Solutions*
- *How to Conduct Effective Meetings* (updated in 2017)
- *Incorporation Handbook*
- *Model Employee Handbook for SC Municipalities*
- *Municipal Officials and Legislative Directory*
- *Public Official's Guide to Compliance with the Freedom of Information Act* (published by the S.C. Press Association)
- *Raising Hometown Voices to a New Level of Influence, an advocacy guide*
- *SC Business Licensing Handbook*
- *Tips for Hometown Media Success*

Staff Contact: Eric Budds

The Association's 2016 Annual Meeting in Charleston drew the highest municipal official attendance since 2008.

Association staff met with 47 municipal councils to train on municipal topics or facilitate a goal-setting session.

The Association's website had more than 1.3 million page views, an increase of 27 percent over last year, and 126,000 unique visitors, an increase of 9 percent over last year.

Website

The Municipal Association's website, www.masc.sc, offered more than 2,000 pages; 1,500 documents, presentations and links to external resources; and more than 770 in-state municipal job postings. With a responsive design to fit the needs and formats of mobile and desktop devices, the site includes a powerful search engine and information center to help users navigate to specific resources of interest.

The Association's site was recognized for site structure and navigability by the South Carolina Press Association, the South Carolina Society of Association Executives and the South Carolina chapter of the Public Relations Society of America. *Staff Contact: Meredith Houck*

Uptown

The monthly newsletter in print and electronic formats featured articles on a variety of topics important to municipal officials. Each issue's special section looked in depth at a topic central to local government. This year's sections focused on social services, infrastructure, water, law enforcement, sustainability, community development, communications, open government and planning/land use.

At more than 400, the number of subscribers to the online edition of *Uptown* increased by 27 percent from last year. A weekly e-newsletter, *Uptown Update*, informed municipal officials about a variety of timely opportunities, including meeting registrations, training events and grants. A new feature, "In Case You Missed It," gave *Uptown Update* readers a second look at an *Uptown* article from a past issue.
Staff Contact: Sarita Chourey

Daily News

Daily News provides links to news stories about the state's smallest rural towns and largest cities. The articles highlighted how local governments deliver services. This year, the number of subscribers exceeded 620. *Staff Contact: Sarita Chourey*

Achievement Awards

Thirty-two cities and towns entered the annual awards program. Since its creation in 1987, 865 municipal projects have vied for the awards, which recognize successful and innovative projects that improve the quality of life for residents and add value to communities. The program also encourages sharing ideas among municipal officials.

The 2017 population category winners were Ridgeway (1 - 1,000), Saluda (1,001 - 5,000), Hartsville (5,001 - 10,000) and Lexington (10,001 - 20,000). The subject category winners were Hilton Head Island (communication), Florence (economic development), Camden (public safety), Mount Pleasant (public service) and Cheraw (public works). *Staff Contact: Meredith Houck*

Timely Training Topics

The Association sponsored more than 60 training events covering a range of topics of interest to municipal officials.

- **Association of SC Mayors:** active-shooter response, crisis communication, public speaking and building trust through proactive police-community relations
- **Building Officials Association of SC:** International Building Codes topics on building access, construction and design, and training on personal communication
- **Municipal Court Administration Association of SC:** court financials, bond estreatments, bond hearings, jury trials, pretrial intervention and conditional discharges
- **Municipal Technology Association of SC:** GIS for emergency management, Smart City technology, maximizing the IT budget, cybersecurity updates, data storage options, cyber risk assessment, GIS data applications and police car technology
- **SC Association of Municipal Power Systems:** cybersecurity, customer service, managing a utility's financial and ethical risks, disaster recovery and cost-efficient LED street lighting
- **SC Association of Stormwater Managers:** stormwater review plans, construction and post-construction best management practices, importance of stormwater controls on redevelopment projects, Adopt-a-Stream in S.C., MS4 audits and permit requirements
- **SC Business Licensing Officials Association:** food truck ordinances, conversion from SIC to NAICS, business license auditing and enforcement, the sharing economy and coin-operated machines
- **SC Community Development Association:** tax increment finance districts, craft breweries and tourism, small business development resources and Rural Infrastructure Authority grants
- **SC Municipal Attorneys Association:** the Freedom of Information Act and digital communications, redistricting, regulating adult novelty stores, and updates on state legislation and state and federal case law
- **SC Municipal Finance Officers, Clerks and Treasurers Association:** the sharing economy, business license incentives, sovereign citizens, the Freedom of Information Act's notice and agenda requirements, selecting an auditor, municipal services in a tourism destination, standardizing municipal business licensing, flood recovery, fund balance and enterprise fund transfer policies
- **SC Municipal Human Resources Association:** employee retention, workplace crises, transgender issues in the workplace, emotional intelligence, law enforcement recruitment and retention, mental health awareness, public retirement and health insurance benefits
- **SC Utility Billing Association:** customer service, workplace safety, delinquent debt collection, cybersecurity and generational diversity in the workplace
- **Main Street SC:** value of parks and parklets for downtown greenspace, abandoned and dilapidated buildings, community branding, board development and effective meetings, and updates from the National Main Street Center
- **Municipal Association Annual Meeting:** downtown development, parliamentary procedure, strategic planning, trends in public recreation, the role of municipal leaders in public health crises and law enforcement recruiting
- **Hometown Legislative Action Day:** building code enforcement, new income disclosure requirements for Statement of Economic Interest, and updates from the S.C. Retirement System and S.C. Department of Transportation
- **Insurance and Risk Management Services:** defensive driving, law enforcement liability, emergency management, employment liability, law enforcement leadership, and trenching and excavation safety standards

Highlights: Shared Solutions

Insurance and Risk Management Services

The Association offers two self-funded insurance programs to South Carolina's local governments. The SC Municipal Insurance Risk and Financing Fund provides all lines of property and casualty coverage, while the SC Municipal Insurance Trust provides workers' compensation insurance.

SCMIRF convened a member law enforcement advisory committee to focus on improving officer safety while also reducing law enforcement incidents and liability claims. As a result, the Association, in coordination with police chiefs from SCMIRF member-cities, developed a formal law enforcement review process to confirm that each member-department's training and operating procedures meet industry standards and current law. Also, SCMIRF and SCMIT purchased a law enforcement training simulator. It trains police officers to comply with the new policy of the International Association of Chiefs of Police, which emphasizes de-escalation, observation skills and making decisions between deadly force and less lethal force.

For the first time, SCMIT and SCMIRF members used an online underwriting portal to renew their policies. SCMIT members also began filing insurance claims online, joining SCMIRF members, which have been doing so since 2011. In addition, Association staff transitioned to a paperless system for processing SCMIT and SCMIRF claims. These systems saved time and money and ensured claims processing and renewals can continue even if disaster strikes.

Collection Programs

The Association continued to leverage new technology to streamline its collection programs and ensure an effective disaster recovery plan. The Setoff Debt Collection program is now 100 percent paperless. All participants now upload required documents rather than mailing or faxing documents to the Association.

The Association created an online portal for cities participating in the insurance, brokers and telecommunications tax collection programs. While insurance and telecommunication companies already had access to a portal for reporting and paying business license taxes online, cities now have 24/7 easy and secure access to their current and past collection program documents through this new portal. This provides convenience to the cities and reduces printing and mailing costs.

Hometown Economic Development Grants

The Association awarded $200,000 in economic development grants to eight cities and towns in 2016, the inaugural year of the grant program. The total award increases to $250,000 in 2017.

Cities and towns face many of the same challenges and can find solutions by pooling resources and ideas through the Association.

Collection Programs

Municipalities contract with the Association to collect delinquent debts and certain business license taxes on their behalf. These programs provide centralized and efficient collections for participating municipalities and streamline the tax payment process for businesses. The Association collected more than $177 million in 2016 on behalf of cities and towns.

Brokers Tax Collection Program

The S.C. Department of Insurance collects the municipal brokers premium tax, and cities and towns contract with the Municipal Association to disburse the tax. During the 2016 license year, the Association disbursed $12.5 million to 269 participating municipalities. *Staff Contacts: Melissa Brown, Caitlin Cothran, Brenda Kyzer*

Insurance Tax Collection Program

The Municipal Association collected $155 million in municipal business license taxes due from insurance companies and distributed the taxes to 269 municipalities.

The Association notified all 1,500 insurance companies of the payment process, used industry data to confirm all companies paid according to municipal ordinances, and provided a portal for the reporting and payment of the tax. Cities saved time and money by contracting with the Association for these services rather than all duplicating the same processes. Insurance companies saved time and money by reporting to and paying one entity rather than multiple cities and towns. Many paid the tax through the Association's portal. *Staff Contacts: Brenda Kyzer, Caitlin Cothran, Melissa Brown, Susan Gainey*

Setoff Debt Collection Program

In cooperation with the S.C. Department of Revenue, the Association collected $2.5 million in delinquent debts, such as utility bills, taxes and court fines, from 13,179 debtors. These payments were remitted to 174 participating entities to whom the debts were owed. The Association provided software to all participating entities to streamline their program administration and ensure compliance with state regulations. *Staff Contacts: Melissa Brown, Brenda Kyzer*

Telecommunications Tax Collection Program

The Association collected $7.8 million in business license taxes owed to 268 participating municipalities from 388 telecommunication companies.

Cities and towns contracted with the Association to collect the tax as provided for in state law. The contract streamlines the payment process for telecommunications companies. It also saves cities and towns time and money by eliminating the need for each to perform the same processes. *Staff Contacts: Susan Gainey, Brenda Kyzer*

Risk Management Services

The two self-funded insurance programs administered by the Association's Risk Management Services staff are prime examples of strength and efficiency through combined efforts of member cities. Each program operates under the direction of a board of trustees composed of representatives from its membership.

The SC Municipal Insurance and Risk Financing Fund, which has 112 members, provides all lines of property and casualty coverage, including tort liability, law enforcement liability, public officials' liability, and property and automobile coverage, with total insured values of $3.4 billion.

City participation reached 100 percent for both Brokers Tax and Insurance Tax collection programs.

SCMIT provided workers' compensation coverage for more than 16,700 municipal employees, representing an annual payroll of $520 million.

SCMIRF insured property valued at $3.4 billion.

SCMIT distributed a new Workers Compensation Toolkit to members.

SCMIRF offered enhanced cyber liability coverage.

1,022 city employees attended 29 customized risk management training sessions conducted at member locations.

519 city employees attended five regional risk management training sessions.

The SC Municipal Insurance Trust, which has 119 members, provided workers' compensation coverage for more than 16,700 municipal employees, representing an annual payroll of $520 million.

RMS processed approximately 2,500 new claims this year and provided grants, attorney hotlines, employee training and loss control services to members. These services helped members improve risk management efforts, prevent claims and reduce the cost of insurance. *Staff contact: Heather Ricard*

Training

RMS members have access to both online and in-person training at no charge.

- Customized, on-site training: RMS provided training for members in their hometowns, allowing city employees to attend sessions together. RMS staff conducted 16 on-site classes on topics including defensive driving, incident investigation, mindfulness in safety and Risk Management 101.

- Online training: Participation in online training continued to grow with members taking more than 11,000 courses this year. The online training opportunities included a variety of risk management, human resources, safety and law enforcement topics, including use of force and pursuit driving.

- Statewide and regional training: SCMIT and SCMIRF offered members regional training sessions on topics such as law enforcement liability, OSHA confined space training, risk management 101 and defensive driving.

- Risk Management Institute: RMI offered participants from SCMIT and SCMIRF-member organizations specialized training in the role of risk manager and safety coordinator. Nine graduated from the institute.

- *RiskLetter:* The quarterly e-newsletter provided information on a wide range of risk management topics. Special sections focused on workplace violence, active shooter training, risk leadership, public officials' liability and the workers' compensation process, with an emphasis on employee safety and minimizing employer costs.

Loss Control/Technical Assistance

RMS helped its members build effective safety and loss control programs.

- Model policies and procedures manuals for law enforcement and fire services: SCMIRF members received updated law enforcement policies, including updated policies reflecting the U.S. Supreme Court decision regarding restrictions on TASER use.

- One-on-one technical assistance visits: The loss control staff met with member organizations to evaluate their claims experience.

- Legal hotlines: SCMIRF members had access to up to 10 hours of free legal advice on each legal hotline for labor and liability issues.

- Education tools: SCMIRF members had access to cyber protection services through the online tool, eRisk Hub, in addition to specialized toolkits, including parks and recreation liability, public official liability, sewer backups, special events liability and workers' compensation.

Grants

The RMS grant program helped RMS members purchase products or equipment to reduce the frequency and severity of claims.

- The Law Enforcement Liability Reduction Grant Program divided $100,000 among member law enforcement agencies to purchase stun guns or Tasers, Taser cameras, body cameras and equipment.

- SCMIT provided a total of $205,000 to member law enforcement, fire and public works departments to purchase work-zone safety equipment, soft body armor and other protective gear.

South Carolina Other Retirement Benefits Employer Trust

The South Carolina Other Retirement Benefits Employer Trust allows cities to set aside funds for non-pension benefits, such as retiree healthcare, as required by the Governmental Accounting Standards Board's Statement 45. Each member shares in the Trust's administrative and investment related expenses, lowering the overall cost of compliance to each local government. Forty-three local governments are members. *Staff Contact: Heather Ricard*

Hometown Economic Development Grants

The Municipal Association's Hometown Economic Development Grants provided cities and towns with funds to implement economic development projects that will make a positive impact on the quality of life in their communities. The Hometown Economic Development Grants are awarded annually.

Introduced in 2016, grants of $25,000 each were awarded to eight cities and towns. Interest in the program was high with 76 cities applying. The eight winners were Beaufort, Clinton, Gaffney, Manning, Ridgeway, Walterboro, West Pelzer/ Pelzer and Williamston. Winning projects included development of a digital corridor for small businesses, downtown economic development and master plans, retail recruitment strategy development, a Main Street challenge for small businesses, and development of a visitor and nature center. *Staff Contact: Scott Slatton*

Technology Services

The Association, in partnership with VC3, provided affordable technology services to cities and towns. VC3, an information technology company headquartered in Columbia, designs and hosts municipal websites; designs and implements computer networks; and provides disaster recovery, strategic technology planning and voice communication services. Through VC3's private cloud, cities and towns can limit their investment in hardware and software while providing employees full access to applications and data from any computer linked to the internet. The cloud also gives cities and towns access to disaster recovery and online backup services. *Staff Contact: Miriam Hair*

Cable Franchise Assistance and Telecommunication Infrastructure Siting Program

The Association continued to partner with Local Government Services, LLC, to assist members with cable franchises, pole attachment agreements, and cellular and small cell antenna leases and ordinances. This gives local governments access to the expertise required to negotiate benefits and services with reasonable terms. *Staff Contact: Eric Budds*

76 cities applied for eight Hometown Economic Development Grants.

Internal Services

History is important to all organizations. The Association implemented a digital system to archive its historical photographs.

To comply with new credit card security regulations and to reduce costs associated with compliance of the regulations, the Association implemented new processes and systems for accepting credit cards.

Visitors to the Association's website used more than 20 new online forms to submit information. These new forms replaced paper versions and streamlined data collection for members and staff.

A new automated process helps staff easily schedule web pages and documents for review keeping the Association's website fresh and content up to date.

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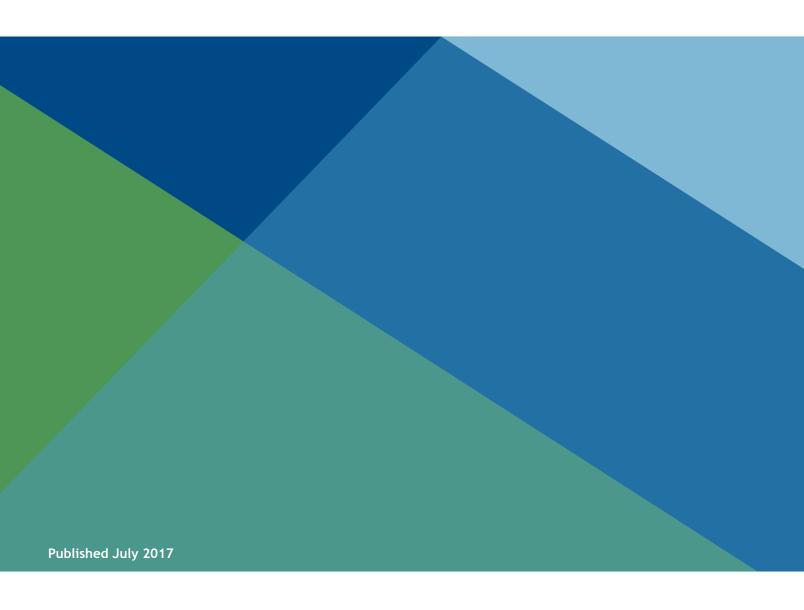Senior Adjuster – SCMIRF

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MASC

Municipal AssociationSM
of South Carolina

2017

Achievement Awards
Main Street SC Inspiration Awards

2017 Achievement Awards

Started in 1986, the Achievement Awards program gives cities and towns deserved recognition for superior and innovative efforts in local government. The program also provides a forum for sharing the best public service ideas in South Carolina.

This year, 32 municipalities entered the Achievement Awards program. A video highlighting this year's winners is available on the Association's website at www.masc.sc (keyword: achievement).

Population 1 - 1,000 Category | Town of Ridgeway
The Arts: A Picture is Worth More than 1,000 Words in Ridgeway

Several years ago, the Town of Ridgeway identified tourism as a key economic driver, so town leaders created a marketing campaign to showcase local art and history. The campaign showcases Ridgeway's gallery space, art depicting historic Ridgeway and the restoration of the town's most photographed structures.

Town Council and residents first laid out the ideas for "The Arts: A Picture is Worth More than 1,000 Words in Ridgeway" in the town's strategic plan and then developed these ideas through the work and collaboration of town committees and county and state organizations.

The newly created Fairfield County Arts Gallery in downtown Ridgeway showcases and sells pieces created by local artists. A second-story gallery space will be used for art classes and events. Selling posters, cards, calendars and a coloring book depicting historic Ridgeway provides funds to preserve the iconic structures of Ridgeway — the World's Smallest Police Station, the School Arch and the telephone booth, which has a phone that still works for just 25 cents.

Additional funding for preserving Ridgeway's iconic structures came from the Town of Ridgeway, the Fairfield County Arts Council, the Arts on the Ridge Committee, the Ridgeway Merchants Association, Ridgeway event sponsors and a Hometown Economic Development Grant awarded by the Municipal Association.

Volunteers on town committees were a central part of the effort, so the town highlighted their work in it's newsletter and website.

Ridgeway isn't stopping there. Future plans include additional art gallery events, finishing the restoration of the iconic town structures, and a pictorial Ridgeway book sold to the public that highlights the history and people of the community.

Contact Mayor Charlene Herring at charleneherring@gmail.com or 803.337.3316.

Population 1,001 - 5,000 Category | Town of Saluda
Solar Saluda

Saluda officials knew electric rates would keep going up, so they decided to undergo an energy audit and take control of their future power bills by installing solar panels. In fact, the town installed enough panels to completely offset energy consumption at Town Hall.

Officials got started on the project by first seeking guidance from the S.C. Energy Office. Through the Energy Office, the town received a ConserFund loan to pay for the project. This loan allowed the town to borrow at a very low interest rate to install the panels and to retrofit Town Hall with energy-efficient light bulbs. The town also worked closely with SCE&G and the company's renewable energy team.

The results have been rewarding. The town, one of the first municipalities in South Carolina to install solar panels, now receives a credit on each power bill for the energy it puts back on the power grid.

At the end of the year, the power company sends the town a check for any power it generated in excess of what it consumed. The town has a 10-year contract to sell power generated at Saluda Town Hall to SCE&G. But since the project will pay for itself after 3 ½ years, town officials expect to be making money for 6 ½ years.

Looking to the future, Saluda officials plan to monitor funds generated by the project and decide whether to install additional solar panels at the police department and other town facilities.

Several businesses in Saluda are watching the town's solar success to see if they, too, should install solar panels. And town officials are working with schools to teach students about the benefits of alternative energy.

Contact Tom Brooks at brooks@townofsaluda.com or 864.554.5088.

Population 5,001 - 10,000 Category | City of Hartsville
Downtown Revitalization

Four years ago, leading employers in the City of Hartsvillle threatened to leave because the atmosphere of the city made it difficult to recruit workers. Hartsville lacked shopping, entertainment and general liveliness downtown. That's when city officials, private investors and other stakeholders decided to tackle the problem.

In the beginning of the effort, officials moved Hartsville City Hall operations from an outlying site to a beautiful, but empty, downtown building. Other actions were set in motion. The city and non-profit Community Foundation for a Better Hartsville established and funded Startsville, a business incubator that provides mentoring, funding and other assistance to new businesses. Main Street Hartsville, which previously operated as an entity separate from the city, became a city department that focuses on improving the downtown through economic restructuring, promotions and beautification. This move better aligned Main Street's work with the vision of the city.

Together Main Street Hartsville and Startsville began the StartUp Hartsville competition. Funded by a grant from the S.C. Department of Commerce, the program offers entrepreneurs a chance to win a forgivable $12,000 loan to occupy an empty downtown space. The city has also created a new department called Business Navigator to provide a central location for businesses to get information about permitting, licensing, building codes and business incentives.

The efforts worked, and now officials from other cities and towns are visiting Hartsville to pick up revitalization lessons.

Since the beginning of the project, more than 40 new businesses, including the Hampton Inn and the Mantissa Executives Suites and Spa, have opened downtown. Hartsville leaders are now eying an expansion of the downtown, because nearly all formerly empty storefronts are occupied. Properties one block from the downtown will be developed into retail and housing, showing that by improving the city's core, success will ripple to other areas of the city.

Contact Rebecca Edwards at rebecca.edwards@hartsvillesc.gov or at 843.917.0602.

Population 10,001 - 20,000 Category | Town of Lexington
Icehouse Amphitheater

Rapid growth posed a dilemma in the Town of Lexington. In 2010, the fourth-fastest growing municipality in South Carolina had already grown 83 percent since 2000 and was projected to grow another 80 percent in the coming decade. Town leaders implemented a Vision Plan in 2012 to preserve Lexington's small-town charm and quality of life.

The Vision Plan proposed improvements to the town intended to attract newcomers, foster new economic development and improve quality of life for current residents. One of the primary goals in the Vision Plan was to create an outdoor entertainment venue.

The town reached its goal with the opening of the 900-seat Icehouse Amphitheater in the heart of Lexington. The venue's first free concert, featuring the Root Doctors, was held in October of 2016. This came after a groundbreaking ceremony in September of 2015 just weeks before the state's historic flood, a natural disaster that resulted in some construction delays.

The amphitheater's completion reflected an 18-month process that gathered the input of more than 400 community members, including town committees, the chamber of commerce, school district, state environmental regulators, faith-based organizations, homeowner associations, young professionals, downtown merchants and the general public.

The town used its general fund to purchase, clear and grade the property and created a downtown tax increment financing district to pay for the construction of the amphitheater.

The TIF district consists of seven local taxing jurisdictions, including the Town of Lexington, Lexington County, Lexington School District One, Lexington County Recreation and Aging Commission, Midlands Technical College, the Riverbanks Zoo and Lexington County Community Mental Health Center.

The new venue is building community by encouraging "feet on the street" and connecting traffic to Lexington Square Park, Virginia Hylton Park, the Lexington Municipal Complex and the Palmetto Collegiate Institute. Amphitheater events give residents a centralized meeting place, while providing a safe, family-fun environment.

Contact Jennifer Dowden at jdowden@lexsc.com or 803.356.8238.

Communications Category | Town of Hilton Head Island
2016 Beach Renourishment Public Information Program

In June of 2016, the Town of Hilton Head was scheduled to embark on its third large-scale beach renourishment project, a project that recognized the town's beaches as a vital asset to residents and the economy. It was crucial to give residents, visitors, prospective visitors and businesses real-time information about what was happening where and for how long on Hilton Head's famous beaches. About 1,000 feet of beach access per day were restricted by operations.

Officials were keenly sensitive to how much the project, with its noise, pipes and equipment, could disrupt the public's enjoyment of the beach. For instance, Hilton Head officials knew they had to keep local restaurants in the loop, just as they had to update that bride in Ohio who was planning a beach wedding.

Teaming up with the Hilton Head Island-Bluffton Chamber of Commerce, the town met with representatives of hotels, resorts, home and villa rental companies, and affected property owner associations to present an overview. They formed a beach renourishment communications task force to develop a toolkit for local businesses that included talking points, FAQs, email confirmation verbiage, social media messages, newsletter/blog verbiage, a project timeline map, project brochure and video.

In 2016, the renourishment project section of the town's website drew 91,063 visitors accounting for nearly 127,000 page views. There were nearly 3,000 subscribers to the town's e-subscription "2016 Beach Renourishment Project" topic. By the end of the project, more than 11,500 "likes" to the town's Facebook page extended the social media reach of project notifications to nearly 200,000 people.

The town and its chamber partner produced a project video that was distributed to hotels and other stakeholders. Plus, they printed and distributed 30,000 brochures, which were passed out around the community.

Contact René Phillips at renep@hiltonheadislandsc.gov or 843.341.4792.

Economic Development Category | City of Florence
Joseph P. Riley Jr Award

Downtown Florence: What a Comeback!

The City of Florence once had a downtown that some had described as "a drunk too far gone to be saved" and others considered too risky for private investment. Three failed attempts to revitalize the city's downtown led to a wakeup call when a perceived lack of amenities and vibrancy contributed to the city's inability to attract two large industrial prospects. Making things worse, two major healthcare facilities struggled to recruit personnel and physicians for the same reasons.

Simply put, the city needed an inviting downtown to attract a workforce and could no longer expect cosmetic improvements to the downtown to make a lasting difference.

The solution: a Downtown Master Plan, adopted in 2011 with a five-year implementation timeline that started in 2013. City leaders drew on information from community focus groups, interviews and a citizens' delegation to help inform the plan. Other planning efforts were expanded to include housing, public spaces, employment, mobility, infrastructure and economic development. Goals addressed socioeconomic, physical and cultural aspects of revitalization.

"Small win" landmarks acted as catalysts, spurring a change in public perception and inviting additional investment. Restauranteurs, hoteliers, small business owners and cultural entities then sought opportunities in the city's downtown.

Because downtown development never truly stops, the city's updated master plan will prioritize a new geographic area for redevelopment and identify private sector investors. The next steps will include making streetscape enhancements, adding parking, recruiting niche retail, creating more housing, developing a food/artisan overlay district and establishing the downtown as a tourism destination. Ultimately, the downtown will link to the city's existing trail system to encourage pedestrian traffic.

Contact Drew Griffin at dgriffin@cityofflorence.com or 843.665.3113.

Public Safety Category | City of Camden
Clowning Around and Saving Lives: Sometimes Safety is a Laughing Matter

After a slight increase in residential fires, the Camden Fire Department wanted to expand its focus from responding to fires to preventing fires. So the department's leadership created the FIRE PALS Characterization Program, complete with puppets, music, large props and, of course, clowns. That's where Nozzle, Snorkel and Flame, three firefighters with wigs, face paint, suspenders, audience-participation skits and magic tricks, came in.

The trio, along with two other staff members, have been bringing safety lessons to schools in Kershaw and neighboring counties, daycares, churches, and even senior citizen communities and adult daycares. The clown troop emphasizes the importance of a home escape plan, staying low to avoid heat and smoke, convening at a meeting place away from the fire, never returning to a burning building and the importance of working, up-to-date smoke alarms.

While highly entertaining, the presentations also ensure the message of fire prevention falls on attentive ears, making a serious impact on children in a state that loses 80 - 100 people every year to fire.

After school presentations, Nozzle, Snorkel and Flame sometimes stay and have lunch with the children. The clowns are mobbed like rock stars, with students jostling to sit next to the firefighters who stay in character. Presentations are customized to other safety incidents a school has experienced, such as bicycle safety if one of the students' classmates has gotten hurt, and computer safety.

At least one family has been helped. A 13-year-old girl was home with her brother and an 83-year-old relative. The elderly relative turned the stove on to light a cigarette, but the stove ended up igniting a pan of grease. The teen got everyone out of the home and to a central meeting place, actions she said she learned from the clowns who visited her school.

Contact Caitlin Young at cyoung@camdensc.org or 803.425.6154.

Public Service Category | Town of Mount Pleasant
The Planning Public Outreach and Engagement Program

The planning process can be confusing to residents of any city or town, no matter the size. But for the Town of Mount Pleasant, one of the fastest-growing cities east of the Mississippi River, officials fielded frequent questions about regulations, procedures and how land-use decisions are made.

To address residents' confusion, the Department of Planning and Development created three programs aimed at strengthening relationships between residents and town employees and providing more transparency to all. One was the Meet and Greet, informational sessions that got residents interested in town services. They are held after business hours and feature different locations throughout the town.

The second program was a two-semester Planning College. Town staff presented an overview of planning principles in the first semester. The residents applied these principles during the second semester as they guided a simulated project through the review process.

Lastly, town leaders created Code for Lunch to engage the professional design and development community. During a brown-bag lunch, staff explained changes to regulations. Town staff also used Code for Lunch to receive feedback on implementation of regulations and codes.

The town involved community partners in various ways. To produce the Annual Report and Planning Calendar, both of which were debuted at a Meet and Greet, the planning department partnered with schools and civic organizations. A local restaurant provided meals for the lunch event.

Feedback from surveys and correspondence from participants continues to help the town refine its programs. In 2017, local middle school students will submit artwork for the Annual Report and Planning Calendar, while the Meet and Greet events, which average more than 100 attendees, will be held in a new location that caters to the town's older neighborhoods.

Contact Martine Wolfe-Miller at mwolfe@tompsc.com or 843.884.8517.

Public Works Category | Town of Cheraw
New Public Works Facility

Since 2007, the Town of Cheraw had been setting aside money each year to pay for a new public works facility. The aging, run-down public works building had been built in phases over the last 50 years. The structure had a leaky roof, frequent flooding, poor internet and phone service, blown-in insulation — which made it difficult to heat and cool the space — and no central air conditioning.

A new building that would fulfill the town's needs was estimated to cost $1.7 million and have 15,000 square feet. Saving up money on a tight budget was a slow process. Then came a solution. In 2015, the local National Guard Armory offered to donate its vacant property and building to the town.

The facility, which was in the perfect location, became a blank canvas for the town's new public works facility. The public works staff worked closely with an architecture firm on the interior layout, making sure all town requirements and guidelines were fulfilled and tailoring the building for the town's needs.

While Cheraw had the unique good fortune of receiving a building as a gift, the town's decision to repurpose an old structure instead of demolishing it or leaving it abandoned has proven fiscally wise. With the funds originally set aside for a new public works facility, town officials renovated the armory to accommodate the town's public works department and parks and grounds department.

Cheraw officials aren't sitting still. There are future plans to make improvements to the grounds. Uneven terrain, if backfilled and leveled, could provide additional space for growth in the future. Trees, shrubs and other landscaping features will help to enhance the exterior.

Contact Dale Davis at ddavis@cheraw.com or 843.537.8425.

Other Entries

Town of Bluffton

Soon after the creation of a 94-acre multi-county industrial park in 2008, the Great Recession hit, affecting the Town of Bluffton's plans.

The historic slump frustrated Bluffton's efforts to attract a master developer and other knowledge-based companies to the park, even though healthcare benefits manager eviCore had relocated its headquarters to the site in 2005. But with tenacity and regional partnerships, the industrial park came into being. Town, county, state and federal funding assisted with the project, along with private investment and tax credits.

But there's more to come for the mixed-use town center project. The town anticipates the completion of the publicly funded infrastructure, including the remaining roads, sewer, IT and a public park. Next, the developer will transfer the public park and the new permanent home of the Don Ryan Center for Innovation — the hub for regional economic development — to the Town of Bluffton, and eviCore will expand its corporate campus.

Contact Debbie Szpanka at dszpanka@ townofbluffton.com or 843.706.4534.

City of Cayce

Before the City of Cayce's new public safety director arrived, the Cayce Department of Public Safety had little resident engagement and no social media presence, operated in a separate silo from the city and reacted to incidents instead of proactively building community relationships. But in the summer of 2016, the appointment of a new DPS director ushered in some welcome cultural changes — both internally with staff and externally with residents.

The director gathered community feedback from more than 20 community meetings with church groups, neighborhood associations and watch groups in his first three months. With the help of a U.S. Department of Justice grant and the department's general fund, the department then created a community response unit, hired three new community outreach officers, started social media accounts and held a contest for elementary school students to name the department's new K-9 officer.

Not surprisingly, morale within the department has improved and turnover has dropped. In fact, the city has had to turn away certified officer applicants.

Contact Rachelle Moody at rmoody@ cityofcayce-sc.gov or 803.550.9506.

City of Chester

When school gets out for the summer, the 4,000 children in the city and county of Chester who rely on free or reduced lunch still need to eat. That's why since 2013, the City of Chester has sponsored the Summer Feeding Service Program. The program, administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the S.C. Department of Education, reimburses sponsors $2.09 for each breakfast and $3.69 for each lunch or dinner served.

Chester's SFSP bridges nutritional gaps and offers free meals at approved sites during the summer in areas with high concentrations of low-income children. When the program launched in 2013, meals were provided at six sites. The number of sites increased more than tenfold in 2016, allowing the program to serve more than 2,100 youths per day. Chester took it further, generating support from local foundations, public and private partnerships, and area businesses. City officials are now planning to bridge the learning gap that occurs when school is out by providing educational and enrichment activities to prepare kids to start school again in the fall.

Contact Peggy Johnson at pjohnson@ chester.sc.gov or 803.235.3063.

City of Columbia

Public outcry over blighted commercial buildings contributed to the City of Columbia's Vacant/Abandoned Building Incentive Loan Program, an initiative that encourages property owners and tenants to purchase, reuse or improve abandoned property.

The Columbia Empowerment Zone, a non-profit corporation that promotes job creation, offered funds to start the program. The loans range from $1,000 to $20,000 and cannot exceed more than 10 percent of the project cost. The forgivable loans issued on a reimbursable basis for expenses allow recipients to make

improvements to permanent structures of their business, such as windows, doors and signage.

To date, small businesses now occupy 11 buildings that have been renovated and improved. The city and CEZ promoted last year's Economic Development Week May 8-12 and the launch of the Vacant/Abandoned Building Incentive Loan Program via brochures, flyers, print and digital media, and TV.

Contact Chris Segars at cmsegars@ columbiasc.net or 803.545.4143.

City of Denmark

The City of Denmark had a problem intersection that was hard to maneuver. Freight trucks struggling to turn would damage trees, run into light poles or graze the corner of a building. Sections of sidewalk were uplifted by tree roots, and pedestrian crossings lacked clear markings. Something had to be done.

Town officials encouraged the public to participate in two public hearings in the initial design phase and attend meetings of the Denmark Planning and Zoning Commission and City Council.

With a Community Development Block Grant, the city converted the intersection into a wider, two-lane road with a greater turning radius, plantings, drainage with grates, stamped sidewalks with the city's dogwood tree logo, benches, trash receptacles, bike racks and sidewalks uniquely designed to accommodate large trees. The city installed an irrigation system to maintain the plants and hopes to extend the improvement project for an additional block. The improvements made it easier and safer to shop in downtown Denmark.

Contact Heyward Robinson at hrobi13901@aol.com or 803.793.3734.

City of Easley

While police departments nationwide struggled to maintain positive relationships with residents amid officer-involved shootings and use-of-force controversies, officials in the City of Easley decided to proactively build bridges with residents to avoid the strife seen so often in the news media. The department started by attending community events, bringing candy and popcorn machines to movie and concert series, and greeting attendees with a smile at the events.

But then officials thought of another way to combat fear of police: Education. They wanted the public to know about the day-to-day activities of an officer. As a result, the Easley Citizens Police Academy was born.

The eight-week academy led by officers has been so popular that Easley officials are discussing the creation of an explorer class for children, intended to foster trust between police and youths and to inspire young people to join the profession.

Contact Lindsay Cunningham at lcunningham@cityofeasley.com or 864.855.7900.

Town of Edisto Beach

The coastline in Edisto Beach is affected by waves, tides, storm surges and other forces that cause sand to accrete or erode. Changes are compounded by development activity to accommodate the desire of residents and visitors to be as close to the ocean as possible.

So in 2017, the town restored approximately 835,000 cubic yards of sand to the eroded beach and lengthened 26 groins. The technically complex, multi-million dollar project received funds from local tourism taxes and fees, including Colleton County's capital project sales tax, and grants from the S.C. Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism and the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

The town partnered with Edisto Beach State Park to renourish its beach at the same time as the town. This created cost savings to both. The town contributed 16 percent of the total project cost, thanks to town officials' success in convincing other partners of the project's merits.

Contact Iris Hill at ihill@townofedistobeach. com or 843.869.2505.

Town of Fort Mill and City of Tega Cay

The Town of Fort Mill and City of Tega Cay are separated by about half a mile, both situated near the North Carolina border and both experiencing rapid growth. In 2014, officials decided to cooperate on a shared challenge. Officials in both municipalities agreed to create a new joint training program, which allows their planning and zoning officials to fulfill their state-mandated training requirements.

Before, there were few options available to officials of Tega Cay and Fort Mill to get their training. Day-long and multi-day sessions offered by other organizations meant travelling expenses for 21 appointed officials from Fort Mill and 14 from Tega Cay, a costly endeavor. Now the new joint training program is growing. Starting this year, training sessions opened to appointed officials and staff from the City of Rock Hill and Lancaster and York counties.

Future plans may include offering an academy for interested residents and extending the reach of the training by broadcasting it on YouTube and local cable access channels.

Contact Joe Cronin at jcronin@fortmillsc. gov or 803.547.2034 ext. 257 or Susan Britt at sbritt@tegacaysc.gov or 803.548.3513.

City of Greenville

It's not easy to change the way 16,000 households have been recycling for 13 years. But the City of Greenville had a plan. Officials informed residents that a "Big Blue" 95-gallon roll cart would arrive on their curb, and that the process was changing from dual-stream to single-stream with new categories of plastics accepted. What's more, residents would no longer be able to recycle glass.

Greenville officials used a teaser billboard and advertised on garbage trucks and other equipment that had public exposure, updated their website with the news and produced a video skit featuring city councilmembers. The city captured video messages from city coun-cilmembers and even one official accompanying a 100-year-old resident to the curb with his bin. The outreach was so successful that city officials may now expand the campaign to include an incentive program called "It Pays to Recycle in the City of Greenville," a spinoff of the original campaign, aimed at attracting non-recyclers.

Contact Allison Brockman at abrockman@ greenvillesc.gov or 864.467.8300.

City of Greenwood

The Greenwood Chamber of Commerce started the city's Festival of Flowers in 1968. But in the mid-2000s, there was no centralized focus on Uptown Greenwood, and attendance was declining. In 2007, a pivotal trip to Epcot Center inspired festival volunteers and the horticulture coordinator at Piedmont Technical College to create 13 topiaries.

The Self Family Foundation provided the initial money for topiary frames. Staff of the city, chamber and technical college worked together on the topiaries with help from Lakelands Master Gardeners volunteers. The program was growing. In 2011, the city began managing the program, which now includes four city employees, a greenhouse, and 42 topiaries arranged on the square in Uptown Greenwood in June and July as part of the Festival of Flowers.

Consider the numbers — Greenwood's hospitality tax revenue in the Uptown Greenwood Special Tax District increased from 2008 to 2016 by 253 percent for the month of June and 337 percent for July. Business licenses have also grown for the Uptown Square by nearly 18 percent from 2008 to 2016.

Contact Charlie Barrineau at charlie. barrineau@gwdcity.com or 864.942.8410.

City of Greer

The Greer Police Department worked with a local TV station, WYFF, on a campaign to show law enforcement in a positive light in 2016. The campaign also offered safety tips to residents about the "100 deadly days of summer," a period when teen drivers have a higher rate of automobile-crash fatalities.

The series, which continued in 2017 as WYFF's "4 Your Safety," aired 36 segments, which were about a minute long. They covered topics such as the importance of yielding the right of way while driving, how to spray a fire extinguisher and how to clean out a lint trap in a dryer to prevent fires. While the Greer Police Department received positive feedback, WYFF's viewers began calling and emailing with segment ideas. WYFF also shared stories on Facebook Live, garnering thousands of views. The results? Labor Day passed with zero traffic deaths in the city.

Contact Steve Owens at sowens@ cityofgreer.org or 864.416.0121.

Town of Hollywood

After the devastating shooting at the Emanuel AME Church in Charleston in 2015, residents of Hollywood, which had connections to three of the victims, were stricken.

So town officials decided to create a place for healing and reflection where the community could gather to remember the victims. The resulting project: Serenity Garden, which overlooks the Stono River. It features a brick path leading to a bubbling water statue, a swing overlooking the river and nine glass hummingbirds, one for each of the shooting victims. Town leaders plan to hold a yearly activity at the garden; formalize a list of enhancements to the site, such as restrooms; and establish a stakeholder committee tasked with maintaining the memorial and surrounding gardens.

The garden was funded half by the town and half by donations. It came together with the help of 20 volunteers, 10 businesses and seven churches. More than 200 people attended the dedication in 2016.

Contact Jacquelyn Heyward at mayorheyward@aol.com or 843.889.3222.

Town of James Island

Some of James Island's neediest residents live in their homes and pay taxes but have no clear record of ownership, which makes it difficult for the residents to receive aid for home improvements.

Town officials decided to help. To assist with critical home repairs, the Town of James Island and Sea Island Habitat for Humanity teamed up to repair four homes each in 2015 and 2016. Repairs included handicap ramps, roofs, window replacements and other improvements.

Public involvement was key. Town officials advertised the program in local churches and spread the word through community events and neighborhood council leaders. The outreach helped attract volunteers and connected those in need — including residents who hoped to "age in place" in a structurally sound home — with available assistance. After this success, the town plans to expand its home-repair partners to include Operation Home and Homeworks.

Improving the housing stock protects against blight and also generates tax revenue that can be reinvested into the community.

Contact Ashley Kellahan at akellahan@jamesislandsc.us or 843.795.4141.

City of Manning

The City of Manning, like most rural cities and towns, struggled to attract retail businesses, which are important for a broad tax base and a source of jobs for residents. Determined to be proactive, Manning officials attended trade shows of the International Council of Shopping Centers and used a retail marketing consultant's custom demographic research, gap analysis and marketing guide to target specific retailers and retail concepts that have succeeded in similar markets.

Funding to pay for consulting fees and staff training and travel to trade shows came from the City of Manning and a Hometown Economic Development Grant from the Municipal Association. Since announcing the initiative, three new retailers have been announced. Manning officials are not stopping there.

They are receiving additional training and will update the city's marketing information and prospects list, while studying regional and national retail trends.

Contact Scott Tanner at stanner@cityofmanning.org or 803.825.9008.

City of Marion

In 2011, a fire in the City of Marion consumed several downtown buildings, damaged others and displaced businesses. But city leaders were determined not to give up on the area, leading them to ask residents and organizations what they should do with three empty lots on Main Street. The property owners sold two lots to the Historic Marion Revitalization Association. Proceeds from the sale of one donated building helped create a new downtown venue.

From the gaping space left by the fire, emerged the Main Street Commons, an outdoor gathering place with electricity and elevated stage for music entertainment, health fairs, farmers' markets and other events.

Reflecting the broad-based community involvement in the project, a host of different organizations supplied funding. They included the Marion County Healthcare Foundation, Historic Marion Revitalization Association, the city and others. Future plans for the site include acquiring an adjacent vacant lot and building public restrooms, an arbor and a dining space.

Contact Alan Ammons at aammons@ marionsc.gov or 843.423.5961.

City of Mullins

When the City of Mullins lost its finance director, city officials recognized they had an opportunity to look for a new and potentially better way of doing things. Rather than hiring and training someone new and then risk losing the individual to another employer, city officials decided to outsource the majority of its accounting and financial services to a certified public accounting firm.

The city and the contractor were able to customize the firm's services so that jobs were only restructured, not eliminated. Cost savings from the four-year contract allowed the city to put money into its fund balance and use it for other operations. The change also brought greater effectiveness. City Council now receives more accurate and timely monthly information. Audit findings and adjustments have been reduced due to better internal controls and audit preparations. Plus, there is greater continuity of service, since the CPA firm has several employees who can fill in for one another.

Contact David Hudspeth at dhudspeth@ mullinssc.us or 843.464.9583.

City of Newberry

With school art budget cuts and a lack of art classes offered, city officials wanted to create a well-rounded arts experience for residents. So the city invited local artists, art educators and local businesspeople to discuss how best to create visual arts programming and also contribute to economic development.

Undeterred by the prospect of starting a program from scratch with no budget, officials got to work, starting with youth art camps. They used money from the general fund and parks and recreation department, followed by donations from private businesses and

foundations. The result? Revenue exceeded expenditures in the second full year, the program twice had to move to a bigger facility and the S.C. Clay Conference was established, drawing participants from four states.

The program now includes a separate art and pottery studio in an iconic downtown location and offers a multidisciplinary visual arts experience to anyone in the community, regardless of age or ability to pay. City officials have their sights set on increasing the size of the clay classes for teens and expanding the traditional art classes for adults and children.

Contact Marguerite Palmer at mpalmer@ cityofnewberry.com or 803.321.1015.

City of Rock Hill

While sports tourism has shaped the City of Rock Hill's identity since 1985, in recent years, officials sought to diversify city offerings to attract new events and tourists. So in the past five years, Rock Hill developed mountain bike trails and two Olympic standard cycling facilities, earning the reputation of a cycling hub. The Giordana Velodrome for track cycling, opened in 2012, and the Novant Health BMX Supercross track, opened in 2014. They have drawn local, state, regional, national and international events.

Funding for the velodrome involved New Market Tax Credits, giving the city a 25 percent reduction on the total loan.

From its 1985 Cherry Park, offering baseball and softball tournaments, to its Rock Hill Tennis Center and Manchester Meadows soccer amenities, Rock Hill has consistently found ways to provide both recreation space and programming for residents and venues for local and international sporting events.

Contact John Taylor at john.taylor@ cityofrockhill.com or 803.329.5620.

City of Seneca

While Oconee County is known for its scenic foothills and lakes, the City of Seneca added a new attraction to the landscape by establishing the Bertha Lee Strickland Cultural Museum in 2016. It is the only institution in the county dedicated to preserving and sharing the complete history and culture of local African Americans. The admission-free museum

preserves and celebrates local African American history, while educating the public, inspiring future generations and honoring the past.

Since last year, the museum has had three exhibits and four major events, drawing 2,000 visitors. The city fully funded the museum with hospitality tax funds and the general city budget.

There's more to come: The museum plans to build its collections, improve its website and social media presence, and offer new dynamic programming, events and exhibits.

Contact Shelby Henderson at shenderson@ seneca.sc.us or 864.710.9994.

Town of Summerville

Now the seventh largest municipality in the state, the Town of Summerville sought to balance its growing size with a commitment to its small-town character. As part of its 2014 Vision Plan of what Summerville will look like in 2040, the town reimagined Hutchinson Square, the town's gateway, to preserve "the heart of Summerville," create a gathering place, and attract businesses and residents to the town.

Federal and private grants funded the master plan development and Phase I construction expenses. A kickoff meeting with stakeholders occurred in January of 2015 and was followed by two more public input sessions and a final public meeting. Officials carefully adhered to project goals of increasing safety, visibility and accessibility; integrating public art; providing event space; and protecting grand live oaks. To that end, the town proposed a replica of a historic archway; removed some trees and roots from walkways; installed sidewalks, streetlights and landscape lights; thinned the tree canopy; and proposed a depot-inspired pavilion.

Contact Doyle Best at dbest@ summervillesc.gov or 843.851.5211.

City of Sumter

City of Sumter officials decided to look at what they already had — tennis courts — and enhance that unique amenity. In the early 2000s, officials made sports tourism a priority. In 2004, the Palmetto Tennis Center opened with 14 courts and a pro shop. Accommodations tax revenues funded the $1 million construction project. In the last 10 years, the Palmetto Tennis Center has undergone two expansions.

Today, the Center has 24 lighted, DecoTurf hard courts, a full-service pro shop and locker rooms. It has garnered lots of recognition, including a top 10 facility designation by the *2016 Sports Planning Guide*. The Center's multi-million-dollar impact from visitor spending reflects a 50 percent jump from 2009. Every year 29,000 visitors and residents use the Center for clinics, lessons, school matches, tournaments and league play. The Center is also the home of the USC-Sumter Fire Ants Tennis Team.

Sumter isn't stopping there. Future plans include eight additional courts and space for single-practice, youth play and pickle ball, along with a new 3,500-square-foot operations center.

Contact Shelley Kile at skile@ sumter-sc.com or 803.795.2463.

Town of Williamston

Before the Town of Williamston hired a planning consultant to help promote the town's unique assets in 2015, issues were addressed in a piecemeal fashion with no master plan. To remedy this, an effort called Envision Williamston came into being. The town used community surveys, focus groups and public presentations to gather ideas on how to ensure Williamston's vibrancy, growth and sustainability.

The town also received a grant from the S.C. National Heritage Corridor and a Main Street Challenge grant from Innovate Anderson. The town funded way-finding signs, banners, an electronic message board and streetscapes. Events, such as a scarecrow contest, were funded by the town, nonprofits and corporate/private sponsors.

Williamston has more in store. Short-term steps include an electronic message board to promote its Adopt-a-Rest Stop project, a façade improvement grant program to enhance the aesthetics of town businesses, a Main Street Challenge Program to recruit new businesses, a cleanup day and a pocket park feasibility study.

Contact Debbie Chapman at dchapman@ williamstonsc.us or 864.847.7473.

Main Street South Carolina Inspiration Awards

Main Street South Carolina empowers residents, business owners and local officials with the knowledge, skills, tools and organizational structure necessary to revitalize downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts into vibrant centers of commerce and community.

Main Street South Carolina is a service of the Municipal Association of SC and is accredited by the National Main Street Center. The program follows National Main Street's Four Point Approach — economic vitality, design, promotion and organization. Each year, Main Street South Carolina recognizes members' achievements and successes in downtown revitalization.

Excellence on Main Street Award

Outstanding Promotion
Downtown Sumter's Pokémon GO Lure-A-Thon

Downtown promotion that encourages consumers and stakeholders to live, work, shop and invest in the Main Street area is one of the core principals of the National Main Street approach. Downtown Sumter's Pokémon GO Lure-A-Thon event illustrates an effective and creative approach to complement more traditional promotional strategies.

Downtown Sumter recognized the opportunity to capitalize on the national Pokémon craze to attract people downtown. In Pokémon GO, a location-based augmented reality game, players use a mobile device's GPS to locate, capture, battle and train virtual creatures that appear on the screen.

By strategically using the features of the game, including PokéStops, PokéBalls and lures, and complementing these features with attractions spread across the downtown, the event encouraged participants to walk all over the central business district. Offering more than 50 attractions throughout downtown, the event included face painting, door prizes, a photo booth with Pokémon props, cellphone charging station, Italian Ice, bottled water, and food and drink specials.

The event met its goal of using a trendy, family friendly event to attract a diverse mix of non-traditional visitors to downtown. Many of the estimated 2,000 visitors were exposed for the first time to the physical improvements and businesses added in recent years.

To promote the event, Downtown Sumter designed and printed marketing materials, including posters for the businesses and handouts for Pokémon players. Social media was a centerpiece in promotions. Organizers used the event Facebook page as well as the South Carolina Pokémon and Sumter Pokémon pages to spread the word, an effort that resulted in more than 1,000 shares.

Outstanding Public/Private Partnership
Main Street Hartsville and City of Hartsville

The City of Hartsville worked in concert with private developers to transform a parking lot into a retail corridor, complete with a boutique wine shop, upscale salon, frame shop and art gallery. The effort increased safety and downtown foot traffic, reinvigorated the downtown economy and expanded the tax base.

City officials turned an off-putting alleyway into a pocket park and entrance to the new retail corridor. Along the side of the newly developed space, East College Avenue – once known as rollercoaster alley – was repaired. The city also installed an archway across East College Avenue to welcome visitors to Coker College and the new shopping district.

An additional walking corridor connects the repaved parking lots to Carolina Avenue, the main thoroughfare to Coker College. The result: a downtown that is connected — not only on maps and in pictures, but also with partnerships among private developers, property and business owners, residents and city officials.

Downtown Service Award
Todd Touchberry, Sumter

Todd Touchberry has showed his longstanding support for the City of Sumter's downtown by preserving and promoting its rich past.

His appreciation for his hometown, and especially its downtown, is reflected in the period décor of Cut Rate Drug Store and Soda Fountain. For the last eight years, Touchberry has managed the soda fountain portion of the drug store. It has been located downtown since 1935 and features authentic pieces from that period and later decades.

In addition to displaying Sumter memorabilia, Touchberry maintains a collection of about 100 yearbooks from the local high school. His collection also includes signs, boxes, and items from current and past downtown Sumter merchants.

While Touchberry participates in the city's festivals and events, he also organizes antique car shows and drive-in movies as fundraisers for many causes, including the local military museum, the Shriners, and victims of the recent hurricanes and floods. The car shows and drive-in movies are held in the parking lots next to and behind Cut Rate.

Gaines Jontz Rehabilitation Award
Bobby Wilson, Alderman's 20 Stores in One, Manning

In 2012, the roof of the historic Alderman's 20 Stores in One building had collapsed, breaking the sprinkler line and flooding the building in downtown Manning.

The 14,750-square-foot structure was left vacant and deteriorating for two years before Bobby Wilson started renovating it. He returned the 1919 building to its former glory by using historical photographs and documents to guide restorations. Plus, he concealed modern building features to avoid compromising the structure's historic character.

By saving the building instead of razing it and starting over, Wilson's rehabilitation project serves as a success story to inspire the reuse of other buildings and promotes sustainability and economic development.

Master Merchant Award
Yvan Youssef, Laurens

The City of Laurens needed an inviting bar to help attract customers to its downtown. So, Yvan Youssef, a Kurd from Syria who grew up in France and came to the United States in 2001, decided to expand his downtown restaurant, ROMA, to include a bar.

The City of Laurens allocated $20,000 for Main Street Laurens to develop a restaurant-centered grant, a portion of which assisted in the ROMA expansion. And Youssef dedicated some matching funds toward the expansion and the purchase of new seating and supplies. He also redecorated the venue, updated the menu and named a dish after a longtime Main Street Laurens volunteer. But Youssef's support doesn't end there.

During Main Street Laurens events, he opens his restaurant, even if it falls at a time when he ordinarily is closed. He also offers special menus, outdoor seating and live music.

A $13,000 open meetings lesson

It's a basic and typically uncontroversial tenet of the South Carolina Freedom of Information Act: The meetings of public bodies must be open to the public.

But as usual, there are exceptions. Knowing what they are and adhering to the letter and the spirit of the law can help a city or town avoid legal challenges and maintain public trust.

Six reasons for entering an executive session are outlined in the Freedom of Information Act. Five of these apply to municipal government.

For instance, a city council may go into closed session when discussing an employee's work status, appointment, compensation, promotion, demotion, discipline or release. This applies not only to an employee but also to a student or a person the public body regulates or appoints. Another type of circumstance that would allow a public body to go into closed session is discussions that relate to security personnel or devices.

Before going into executive session, the public body's presiding officer must announce the specific purpose of the executive session according to the state's Freedom of Information Act.

However, two years ago, the South Carolina Supreme Court made it clear that the words "proposed contractual matter" do not satisfy the specific purpose requirement. In *Donohue v. City of North Augusta*, the North Augusta City Council was found to have violated FOIA when it invoked Section 30-4-70(a)(2) of the S.C. Code of Laws and stated that it was going into executive session to discuss a "contractual matter."

Now, just two years after the opinion, another public body has been admonished by a lower court for a similar violation. In a recently issued order out of the Newberry County Court of Common Pleas, Newberry County Council was found to have violated FOIA by holding closed meetings without sufficiently announcing the meetings' specific purpose.

According to the court's order, meeting minutes from one of these public meetings indicate that the announced purpose of the closed session was "the receipt of leg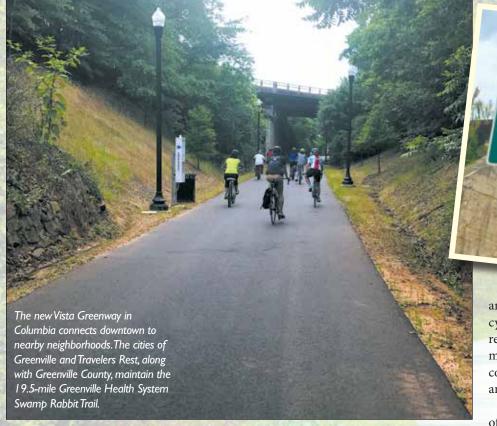al advice where the legal advice relates to a pending, threatened, or potential claim or other matters covered by the attorney-client privilege."

Noting first that this description amounts to a partial reciting of the exact language of Section 30-4-70(a)(2), the court concluded that reciting the applicable code section "in such a general way" constituted hiding the specific topic of the executive session. As a result, the court found the County Council denied the public its right to know what its members were discussing, and ordered $13,708 be paid in fees and costs.

Through *Donohue*, the S.C. Supreme Court pointed to an example of how not to go into executive session but stopped short of articulating precisely what form the statement of specific purpose should have taken.

"If this most recent case advances at least to the state Court of Appeals, it will be interesting to see if South Carolina's appellate courts seize this opportunity to give more concrete guidance," said Tiger Wells, government affairs liaison for the Municipal Association.

Cities walk the walk and bike the path

The new Vista Greenway in Columbia connects downtown to nearby neighborhoods. The cities of Greenville and Travelers Rest, along with Greenville County, maintain the 19.5-mile Greenville Health System Swamp Rabbit Trail.

Trekking from the car to the canned food aisle of a big box superstore can actually be more of a hike than walking across a city's downtown.

A few years ago, Randy Wilson, president of Community Design Solutions in Columbia, worked on a master plan in the City of Conway and superimposed the outline of a Walmart Superstore and its parking lot over the city's downtown. The result: The drawing of the giant retailer covered almost the entire downtown core of Conway.

"There was almost no place in downtown Conway that would be farther to walk than an experience at a Walmart," said Wilson. "And yet, it feels like it's such an inconvenience to walk."

Travelers Rest Mayor Wayne McCall explained how the beloved Swamp Rabbit Trail, a multiuse greenway that connects Travelers Rest and Greenville, was a very divisive idea when it was first discussed about 10 years ago.

"It actually split the community almost in half — the folks that supported it and the folks that opposed it," McCall said, during a panel discussion at the Mayor's Bike & Walk Summit in Columbia in May. "The folks that opposed it, (said) 'Well, that has always been a railroad, and it might bring a railroad back. … We don't want change.' Well, I can tell you about change — Change is going to happen. And it's up to us to make it happen in a positive way."

The Swamp Rabbit Trail runs almost 20 miles and now annually draws more than 500,000 users, who have easy access to shops and restaurants from the trail in both Greenville and Travelers Rest.

Cities and towns across South Carolina are laying the groundwork for streets and downtowns that invite walkers and cyclists. The objectives are clear: Improve residents' quality of life, appeal to visitors, manage traffic and parking pressures that come with growth, and bolster the local and regional economy.

But encouraging walking and cycling often calls for more than just making physical changes to streets and infrastructure. Often it means changing people's perceptions and attitudes.

New mindset

"People are so accustomed to driving to the mall or Walmart and parking in this big open parking lot that they consider to be convenient, that they never calculate the fact the distance they walked from their car to the Walmart is equivalent of one or two city blocks," said Wilson.

Changing the public's mindset is part of the process.

"The burden is on us," said Wilson. Ideally, where someone parks should not be a major factor.

"It doesn't matter, because everything you pass going from B to A is intriguing and oftentimes leads to discovery — 'Wow, I had no idea that new bar, that

new entertainment venue had opened.' Otherwise, we get really frustrated. Not only did we not park in front of where we're going to, but the walk there was unenjoyable."

He said the City of Columbia's parking garage off Main Street shows how creating attractive and well-designed spaces around the structure to connect the garage with where people are going appeals to the public.

"Sometimes we'll have parking garages, but we don't want to park there, because we have to walk through a scary, sketchy alley," said Wilson. "For lots of communities, the experience to walk between parking garages is incredibly uncomfortable."

Columbia Mayor Steve Benjamin pointed to another example of how changes to existing city spaces may face skepticism initially but can ultimately prove their worth in terms of greater foot and bike traffic.

Benjamin said there were only a handful of people a few years ago who agreed the Lincoln Street Tunnel project — repurposing an old train tunnel downtown into a bike and pedestrian way — was a good idea.

"'Who would want to go down into that tunnel? It's not safe, it's not clean,'" Benjamin recalled of the doubts that surfaced at the start of the effort.

But perseverance paid off with a "huge psychological win," when the high-visibility tunnel area in a vibrant entertainment district was transformed, said Benjamin during the mayor's summit panel discussion.

Map it out

Sometimes, things are already built and just need to be linked together conceptually for the pedestrian or cyclist. Officials in the City of York have increased walkability by highlighting existing places of interest and by encouraging and showing residents and visitors how to enjoy them on foot.

York officials recently created a downtown walking tour map that notes a dozen historical markers. It was created as part of the Eat Smart Move More York County program. The 2.5-mile loop also marks points of interest, such as the county library and York Bike Trail. Additionally,

Columbia Mayor Steve Benjamin led a community ride to celebrate Bike Month in May.

it offers safety tips for walkers and bikers, such as to make eye contact with automobile drivers, to carry a flashlight while out at night, and to avoid headphones and cell phone usage when in a crossing.

Eat Smart Move More York County awarded the City of York a $1,400 grant from Blue Cross Blue Shield to design and print the walking map of the historic district.

Additional funding from ESMMYC has allowed the city to make other improvements downtown.

"These include painting and improving crosswalks and installing wayfinding and other directional signs that will help make York safer and more attractive for pedestrians," said Carolyn Leake, York recreation director. "Hopefully we will be able to extend these improvements to other areas of the community in the future."

A similar mission of boosting walking and cycling is taking shape among local government officials in all parts of the state. For a cluster of Midlands cities, the push made sense as a team effort.

The Central Midlands Council of Governments, the cities of West Columbia and Cayce, and Town of Springdale are working together on the West Metro

Bike and Pedestrian Master Plan to develop a comprehensive plan for active transportation.

The group is also undertaking a bike share feasibility study and adding a bike lane to a major thoroughfare in West Columbia, which was selected due to its sufficient right-of-way width for cyclists. The new lane will be funded by state and federal dollars, said Tara Greenwood, director of grants and special projects for the City of West Columbia. The city hopes the lane, to be designed and constructed by the S.C. Department of Transportation, will be ready to use by next year.

In the Town of Blythewood, officials are planning and building a pedestrian and bicyclist friendly city, Town Administrator Gary Parker said. It's a central feature of the town's master plan. The county penny tax project of widening Blythewood Road, which is currently being engineered, will feature a bike-pedestrian multiuse trail in the right of way.

"All this is now in its infancy," said Parker. "But we hope to see it accomplished in the years ahead."

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In Florence, new homes in Vista Place support community development and downtown neighborhoods. Photo: City of Florence.

Housing helps drive community development

Offering a diverse mix of housing to welcome a diverse mix of residents is one way cities and towns across South Carolina are trying to foster community development.

From offering financial incentives that encourage home ownership in struggling neighborhoods to securing grants that help provide apartments for teachers, there are lots of ways to create more accessible housing opportunities.

It's more than just the right thing to do for residents. Affordable housing makes good economic sense for a community.

"Creating and maintaining housing that is safe, decent and affordable is an integral component of community development efforts. Affordable/workforce housing is the cornerstone for improving and developing neighborhoods and communities," said Erica Craft, director of the community development division in the City of Anderson.

"It creates opportunities for low to moderate income persons to have a desirable place to live, work and play."

She said affordable housing contributes to a city's tax base and can be a catalyst for spurring economic development in neighborhoods.

The key is finding the best way to make it happen.

In recent years, the City of Florence offered incentives to the central business district to encourage the flow of private money into a resurging downtown. But many of the historic areas near downtown were left behind, particularly some African-American neighborhoods where housing values had been in decline for decades.

About five years ago, Florence city officials held a series of public meetings to listen to the concerns of residents in the affected historic neighborhoods and hired an urban planning consultant. The result was the Florence Neighborhood Revitalization Plan, which focuses on four downtown neighborhoods.

Florence committed $3 million to construction and incentive costs and another $6 million to street and infrastructure improvements, including new sidewalks, curbing, pocket parks and bike lanes, Florence City Manager Drew Griffin said. So far, the city has purchased 30 abandoned and dilapidated houses, and is in the middle of building the first seven houses. City officials expect 20 to 50 new houses to be built over the next five years.

In a development called Vista Place, for example, the new houses will be in the same style and character of the historic neighborhood but will be priced above current market value as a way to reestablish the housing market there. Lending had been limited in some neighborhoods, because lenders had been hesitant to loan to potential home buyers due to appraisals and poor "comps," which reflect figures from recently sold, nearby properties.

The city is creating down payment and purchase incentives for qualified buyers that cover the gap between cost and market value.

The city also developed an incentive program for builders and developers to

finance construction loans, renovation loans and marketing expenses. Griffin said developing banking relationships has been one of the city's big successes, growing from an agreement with one community bank to a program that now includes three more banks.

Neighborhood groups were skeptical at first. Residents were wary of gentrification and concerned about the city's commitment to the project.

"Because we said things like this in prior times and never fulfilled it, this time when we stepped in, we had to be committed," Griffin said. "There was a feeling in the community that they'd heard it all before. You've got to be really honest. For us to bridge that gap, it took almost two years."

Griffin's advice for other cities? Be committed to the long haul before you start.

Living where they teach

Recruiting public school teachers to rural areas is already challenging. And then asking teachers to commute long distances to their school only makes the hiring environment tougher.

In the Town of Saluda, a need for housing for teachers in 2009 led the town to provide a matching grant to a developer who renovated an apartment building downtown. A community development block grant and a workforce housing grant from the S.C. State Housing Finance and Development Authority also helped the project become a reality. The apartment building became so popular that there was a waiting list. Some eight years later, that's still the case.

"There weren't any good rental units," said Tom Brooks, Saluda town administrator. "So you're trying to recruit young teachers to come into your community, and there's really no place nice to live other than renting a house out in the country."

Although it's still largely occupied by teachers, Brooks said a town employee and police officer have also moved into the apartment building. "It puts people living in your core business district," said Brooks.

He said it's hard to tell if there was a direct cause-and-effect correlation, but

The Town of Saluda worked with a downtown property owner to convert his building into residential units for teachers.

since the teacher apartments went in, several older buildings that were abandoned for years have come back to life, in part, because of a façade program the city initiated.

Diverse ages, groups seek affordable housing

In Mount Pleasant, the rapid growth and increase in the cost of housing has caused city planners to revisit ordinances and evaluate growth management issues. The city saw a 66 percent growth in population from 2000 to 2015.

The city created a task force last year to look at the issue of affordable housing. The task force learned that people who are unable to find affordable housing are not just those in the service industry or at the low end of the income spectrum. Growing numbers of seniors and middle income people also struggle to afford to live in Mount Pleasant.

Also, redevelopment of historic African-American neighborhoods is pricing out some of the residents who currently live there. Development pressures often increase land values and rents, which then affect existing residents, potentially destroying communities of historical and cultural importance.

The task force recommendations include: educating town residents about the need and importance of affordable housing; identifying areas for potential

development/redevelopment for affordable housing, giving consideration to access to public transportation and other essential services; and preserving the town's history and culture, including the historic African-American communities.

The committee also pushed for establishing a 501(c)3 nonprofit housing development corporation with a focus on affordable and mixed income housing developments, appointing a standing affordable housing committee and creating a staff position to work on affordable housing issues.

"A lot of the recommendations fit back with our comprehensive plan. They relate to the needs of an aging community and the impact growth has on people's ability to stay in their homes. There's an emphasis on the African-American community being able to stay in their homes," said Christiane Farrell, assistant town administrator for the town of Mount Pleasant.

"They also looked at transportation and how that can relate to affordable housing."

The planning staff will determine what can be accomplished now and what will be addressed as work begins this summer on the town's comprehensive plan, which is the basis for the zoning ordinance.

"We will definitely be moving forward with a lot of the recommendations," Farrell said.

Calendar

For a complete listing of training opportunities, visit www.masc.sc to view the calendar and use (keyword: RAM) to get the full schedule for the Regional Advocacy Meetings.

AUGUST

23 Regional Advocacy Meeting. Lower Savannah COG area. The Arts Center, Orangeburg.

24 Regional Advocacy Meeting. Pee Dee COG area. Lawton Park, Hartsville.

29 One of Many Hats - Communications Workshop. Municipal Association of SC. Topics include social media, media relations and crisis communication.

30 Building Officials Association of South Carolina Fall Training. Municipal Association of SC. Topics include inspections of manufactured homes and building code issues identified by the S.C. Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation.

30 - September 1 Municipal Court Administration Association Annual Meeting. Topics include the South Carolina Victims' Bill of Rights and victim notification requirements, workplace violence and updates to S.C. Department of Motor Vehicles regulations.

SEPTEMBER

7 SC Association of Stormwater Managers Third Quarter Meeting and Exhibitor Showcase. Columbia Conference Center. Topics include MS4 basics, delineating impervious areas using LiDAR and color infrared photography, source tracking and DNA testing.

11 Regional Advocacy Meeting. Santee-Lynches COG area. Swan Lake Visitor's Center, Sumter.

13 - 15 Municipal Clerks and Treasurers Institute Fall Session - Year 2, Session B. Hyatt Place Columbia. Topics include technology in the workplace, outsourcing payroll functions, risk management, government website design and grants administration.

14 Main Street Managers training. The Witherspoon Building, Laurens.

20 Regional Advocacy Meeting. Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester COG area. Coliseum Club North at North Charleston Coliseum and Performing Arts Center.

21 Regional Advocacy Meeting. Lowcountry COG area. Colleton Museum and Farmer's Market, Walterboro.

26 Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government. COG offices. Courses offered: "Municipal Economic Development" and "Forms of Municipal Government."