



UPTOWN

a publication of the municipal association of south carolina

Residents and Businesses as Customers

Cities Build Better Relationships With Transaction Improvements



Whether it's offering a one-stop shop for business licensing or streamlining billing for utility customers, cities and towns are putting a greater focus on customer service for residents and businesses, particularly in the areas of utility billing and business licensing.

The City of Sumter has drastically changed its utility billing processes over the past few years to include shorter wait times for customers and implemented electronic metering to improve the accuracy of bills. The key, said Candi Quiroz, utility business director for the City of Sumter, has been to take a "get to know your customer" approach, and one that takes into account the presence of Shaw Air Force Base in the community.

"Sumter is a military town, so over the years, we realized a lot of military personnel will call and try to set up their account before they get to town," Quiroz said. "But it was hard for us to do, because they had to mail stuff in or we had to email back and forth."

Now the process is entirely online and new customers can set up an account without ever having to go to the office.

A second automation tool that the city uses is to call customers when a bill is past due.

"As long as we have updated phone numbers, we will send out a reminder call to make a payment, and customers have really responded well to that," Quiroz said.

[Customers, page 2 >](#)

In This Issue

Pipelining the Municipal Workforce of the Future

Page 4

First Responder PTSD Assistance

Page 7

Special Section: Public Safety

Controlling Crowds During City Events

Page 8

Follow the Law on Volunteer Firefighter Compensation

Page 11

In this ISSUE

15 Graduate From Risk Management Institute..... 3

Understanding Opportunity Zones 3

Pipelining the Municipal Workforce of the Future 4

HLAD 2020 Final Reminders 6

Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government Monthly Quiz 6

Association Highlight: Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government 7

First Responder PTSD Assistance 7

Special section: Public Safety

Controlling Crowds During City Events..... 8

Follow the Law on Volunteer Firefighter Compensation 11

A Day in the Life of a Codes Enforcement Officer 12

Keeping Officers Safe on the Road 14

Red Flag Fire Alerts and Red Flag Warnings 15

Dual Role Causes Problem 15

President:

Mayor Cornelius Huff, *Inman*

Executive Director:

Todd Glover tglover@masc.sc

Managing Editor:

Meredith Houck mhouck@masc.sc

Editor:

Russell Cox rcox@masc.sc

Editorial Assistant:

Ashleigh Hair ahair@masc.sc

Contributing Writers:

Urica Floyd, Melissa Harrill, Page Ivey and Megan Sexton



(Left) From left: The City of Forest Acres' David Parnell, code enforcement officer/commercial inspector; Keith Lindler, city engineer/building official; and Roy McBee, code enforcement officer. Photo: City of Forest Acres. (Top right) Sumter opened its purpose-built Utility Billing Department in 2019. Photo: City of Sumter. (Bottom right) Sumter's utility billing office replaced a cramped space in the Sumter Opera House. Photo: City of Sumter.



Customers, from page 1 >

Automation is also used when customers take a trip to the office to turn on service. Documents such as lease agreements and photo IDs are scanned into the computer system and originals are returned to the customer. There are no files of photocopied or handwritten items spilling out of folders anymore — it's all electronic.

In March 2019, the City of Sumter moved utility billing out of the back of the Sumter Opera House, where a retrofitted space was too small for the traffic it received, and into a new purpose-built office with plenty of space.

Another major change made in the city was a new focus on certain metrics of customer service. Wait times, both in person and on the phone, are recorded, as are instances of customers who either leave or hang up before completing their business. The city reviews how long it takes to complete a service for a customer. Those numbers are reviewed with employees each month and with management each quarter.

"What gets measured gets improved," Quiroz said. "I think it helps employees feel informed. It makes them feel like a part of everything that's going on. They see what value they can bring to the table."

Getting city workers on board as a way to improve service has also proved critical for the City of Forest Acres as well. This is especially true in the business licensing

department of the small city with robust economic development.

Shaun Greenwood, city administrator for Forest Acres, cross trains his city employees so they can handle basic tasks outside of their purview.

"We're fairly small, but basically what we've done is we've tried to make a one-stop shop when people come in to do any business," Greenwood said. "Whether it's code enforcement, business licensing, everyone can answer basic questions and we can help someone immediately."

Everyone in the office can help fill out an application, get the proper code for the type of business and get the applicant out the door in 15 minutes with a license.

The city handles about 1,500 licenses a year with a staff of eight, including Greenwood, who also serves as president of the South Carolina Business Licensing Officials Association.

Greenwood noted the importance of not only thinking about not what people are experiencing when they are working with the City of Forest Acres, but also what they're experiencing when they work with other jurisdictions as well.

"A lot of the frustration that businesses have is when they go from city to city and have things done differently," Greenwood said. "We're trying to consolidate and standardize everything as best we can. We're looking at our processes to make sure they are fair and that we are interpreting things in the same way that other cities are."



15 Graduate From Risk Management Institute

The Risk Management Institute, a program of the South Carolina Municipal Insurance Trust and South Carolina Municipal Insurance and Risk Financing Fund, recently graduated 15 municipal officials.

The new Risk Management Institute graduates are Shawn Bell, City of Fountain Inn; Kenneth Booker, City of Spartanburg; J. Marion Boyce III, City of West Columbia; Davy Broom, Town of Fort Mill; Lynn Dooley, City of Cayce; Kayla Ferguson, City of North Augusta; Cammie Hayes, City of North Augusta; Lisa E. Holden, City of Anderson; James D. Hook, City of West Columbia; Andre Massey, Town of Port Royal; Philip Mostowski, City of Mullins; Frank Nigro, Town of Summerville; Greg Shaffer, City of North Augusta; Ronald Wekenmann, Town of Port Royal; and Scott Williams, Town of Fort Mill.

The institute is open to municipal staff whose employers are members of either SCMIT or SCMIRF, and whose jobs include risk management responsibilities. The program helps these employees

become more knowledgeable and skilled in risk management while also expanding their network of professional peers and familiarizing themselves with the resources that can help them solve local challenges.

SCMIT provides self-funded workers' compensation coverage to its member cities. SCMIRF provides all lines of property and casualty coverage, including tort liability and automobile coverage for its members. The Municipal Association sponsors both programs.

To complete the institute, participants must take a total of eight classes. Throughout the year, the institute offers courses at various locations around the state covering defensive driving, crisis communications, employment liability, risk management basics, public works risk management and leadership. Because of the complexity of topics, the coursework features a mix of half-day seminars along with full-day workshops.

There is no fee for members to participate in the institute. Register online at www.masc.sc (keyword: Risk Management Institute).

NEWS BRIEFS

The **City of Lancaster** Fire Chief Justin McLellan was recognized at the 2019 annual convention of the SC Fire Chief's Association as the top fire chief in the state.

The 2019 – 2020 **SC Municipal Human Resources Association** board of directors are President Rebecca Mejia-Ward, City of Hartsville; First Vice President Lynn Dooley, City of Cayce; Second Vice President Terri Hooper, City of Columbia; Member at Large Leonard Lowery, Town of Kingstree; and Past President Dora Perry, City of Tega Cay.

Members of the **SC Municipal Attorneys Association** recently elected their 2019 – 2020 board of directors. They are President Julia Copeland, Hinchey Murray & Pagliarini; Vice President Dana Marie Thye, City of Columbia; Secretary/Treasurer Prina Maines, City of Hardeeville; and Past President Michael Pitts, City of Greenville.

Understanding Opportunity Zones

"Opportunity zones" are part of a federal community development program established by Congress in the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 and introduced by SC Sen. Tim Scott.

They are a form of tax incentive in which taxpayers may reinvest unrealized capital gains into qualified opportunity funds with taxes deferred. These funds can be used to invest in low-income opportunity zones for things like developing workforce, constructing affordable housing, building new infrastructure, investing in startup businesses or upgrading underused assets already in the opportunity zone. The

capital gains deferral can last until 2026 at the latest, and capital gains taxes can be either reduced or exempted depending on how long the investor remains invested.

As part of the legislation, governors in each state designated census tracts as opportunity zones. In South Carolina, there are 135 such zones spread around the state and in each county, making up a quarter of all eligible census tracts.

Several South Carolina municipalities have built pages on their websites with detailed information about their opportunity zones. Both Columbia and West Columbia have posted details about

their zones including economic data, key economic strengths of the region, as well as highlights of particular properties and suggestions on potential uses for them. The Grand Strand has a regional opportunity zone website created from a partnership among Horry County, the cities of Myrtle Beach and Conway, the Myrtle Beach Regional Economic Development Corporation and the Myrtle Beach Area Chamber of Commerce.

Learn more about opportunity zones and find a map illustrating the location of all the tracts in South Carolina at www.scopportunityzone.com.



The Next Up internship program connects students with possible careers throughout the community, including the City of Lake City. Photo: Greater Lake City Community Outreach Center.



Pipelining the Municipal Workforce of the Future

Neither Dennis Turner nor Ariel Cathcart needs convincing of the importance of programs that introduce young people to careers in municipal government — both of them are living examples.

Cathcart interned as a Mayor’s Fellow in Columbia soon after she graduated from college. Now, she’s the full-time director of special projects in Mayor Steve Benjamin’s office. Turner became interested in a career in law enforcement after joining an Explorer Post when he was a teenager; now he’s the chief of police in Hanahan.

They are just two illustrations of the importance of introducing young people to the possibilities of careers in local government from law enforcement to developing policy. Often, people who choose to work for a municipality do so because of a passion for public service, so helping them understand the range and types of careers is a critical concern for local leaders. Educating people about municipal career possibilities can happen in many ways, often when young people are figuring out their interests and passions.

That’s what happened for Turner, who joined an Explorer Post while he was in high school. Explorers allow young people, typically between 14 and 21 years old, to

learn about working in the field of law enforcement.

“When I was 16 years old, I went to an Explorer Post meeting in Charleston. From that point on I was hooked. I did it until I was 21, when I was at the College of Charleston,” Turner said. “Most kids were going to parties on Friday nights. I was riding in a squad car.”

In Hanahan, where Turner is in his fourth year as police chief, the Explorer program builds bridges with the young people in the community by teaching both police work and the importance of making sound decisions. It also is a good recruiting tool, he said.

“One person who did the program with me is now an officer out of state. One individual started at 12 palling around with us; he became a dispatcher and now he’s a police officer with us.”

Because Hanahan isn’t a large municipality, the police department has partnered with the fire department to make the Explorer Post cover both public safety and first responder duties. Students attend meetings, get instructional materials and learn about search warrants, traffic stops and other parts of the job. “It’s as close to the real-life version of ‘cops and robbers’ that you can do without being on the job,” Turner said. “I firmly

believe in it. It gets young people immersed in what we do, and helps them decide, ‘Yes, I want to do this,’ or ‘No, I want to do something else.’ It gives them a close and personal view of what we do.”

That close, personal view is something the City of Columbia does with its Mayor’s Fellows program, which recruits undergraduate and master’s level students and provides first-hand knowledge of how a local government operates. The three-month program operates in the fall, spring and summer, offering eight students at a time the chance to understand the possibilities of working in city government. Students come from schools around the city, the state and other states, and they earn college or internship credit for the unpaid internships.

Ariel Cathcart began her stint as a Mayor’s Fellow in January 2015, just after she graduated from the University of South Carolina.

“I had no idea yet what I was going to do, and I ended up falling in love with the work. So I ended up staying, first in a part-time job [supervising] the fellows and then a full-time job as director of special projects.”

The program participants learn about all areas of city government, sitting in on meetings with the mayor, taking notes, writing letters and proclamations, and

learning about how to develop policy. Each Mayor's Fellow researches a project while participating in the program, including one that helped develop a youth commission for the city. Cathcart said the city builds relationships with the fellows, helping steer them toward projects and careers where they show an interest.

"It's cool to see everything that happens at a local level. A lot of time we think that Washington, D.C. is the only one making decisions. But at a local level, we're the ones putting our hands in the dirt and getting things done. At a local level, you have more relationships with the people you're affecting. You have an impact on policy and programming," Cathcart said.

Some of the fellows go on to law school or graduate programs, others start careers in public relations, media, business, public administration or criminal justice. Some discover their interest in project management, while a few hope to eventually run for office, she said. The city helps the Mayor's Fellows network and find their paths.

"It's an opportunity for them, but also for us to have them here. If I can make sure they use what they learn through our network, then I feel the program is successful," she said.

In Lake City, the training starts even earlier with the Next Up summer internship program for students who have finished at least two years of high school. The internship program was started at the direction of financier and philanthropist Darla Moore, who is a native of Lake City.

"In the summer of 2018, and with the funding of the Darla Moore Foundation, the Next Up summer internship was birthed as a youth-driven, paid summer internship program that aimed to provide a safe space for youth to discover their strengths and abilities, to develop soft skills, or skills that help them work more effectively and cooperatively, and to explore opportunities, such as how to communicate and greet others and how to dress appropriately for a job, for success through community engagement, active participation and positive youth development as they train to be the next generation of leaders in Greater Lake City," said Ericka A. Bennett-Bell, director of the Greater Lake City Community Outreach Center, which administers the program.



Hananah's Explorer program works with both the police and fire departments. Photo: City of Hanahan.



Columbia's Mayor's Fellows program provides firsthand municipal government experience to undergraduate, graduate and professional students. Photo: City of Columbia.

"Through partnerships with the community, the internship was able to give all participating students a behind-the-scenes look at their community, thus enabling them to develop a deeper appreciation for their small town."

In their positions with various city, civic and community-based agencies, the students, typically high school juniors and seniors, learn collaboration and employability skills and become engaged in their community. The participants work 12 – 15 hours each week for eight weeks at various sites around Lake City, with classes on soft skills held at least once each week. The interns also are required to volunteer in the community and keep weekly logs and journals.

The internship sites include the City of Lake City, the Greater Lake City Chamber of Commerce, Community Development Office, the Community Resource Center, the Darla Moore Foundation, the Pee Dee Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Assault, the Lynches Lake Historical Society,

Lake City ArtFields Collective and Visit Lake City.

"In order for any community to be successful, it's imperative to rally the support of the youth, for they are next in line to lead the community — if they return. The only way they will return after graduation is if they love their community. They can't love their community if they don't understand it and know how it works, or if they are nonparticipants in decision making," she said.

Along with helping students learn skills, the program also has allowed students from all socioeconomic backgrounds to get to know each other and work together. Many students have also become volunteers for nonprofit organizations, such as the Lake City Creative Alliance.

"Most importantly, it's amazing to see the unlikely friendships formed by the group. Many would have never crossed paths in life if it weren't for this program," Bennett-Bell said. "But now, they can't stay apart."

HLAD 2020 Final Reminders



The Municipal Association's Hometown Legislative Action Day will take place Tuesday, February 4 at

the Columbia Marriott, followed by the Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government on Wednesday, February 5.



HLAD app

Download the HLAD app to have a copy of the meeting agenda handy, connect with speakers and other attendees, receive meeting updates and post comments about the sessions. Find the app at the App Store or Google Play by searching for Muni-AssnSC. The app is also available at l.masc.sc/2020HLADapp.

Parking

The parking garage behind the Marriott, with entrances on Hampton and Sumter streets, will have limited

availability. Meeting attendees and hotel guests may not park above level 4-A in this garage, or the vehicle will be towed.

Additional parking will be available at the parking garage located at 1200 Taylor St., which is one block from the hotel. The City of Columbia parking fees will apply.



Test yourself monthly quiz

True or False: Clear, easy to understand rules of procedure form a solid foundation for efficient and effective council meetings.

Answer: True

Officials should review their city's rules of procedure and amend them as needed for clarity and simplicity.

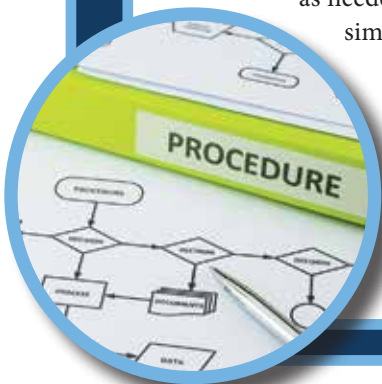
SC Code Sections 5-7-250 and 5-7-270 require municipalities to adopt such rules by

ordinance. While councils often adopt Robert's Rules of Order to supplement local rules, this can create confusion about multiple levels of rules. They should always apply relevant state laws first before applying their local rules, and then Robert's Rules of Order, if adopted and if needed. The Municipal Association's *How to Conduct Effective Meetings* handbook offers sample

rules of procedure that cities and towns can adopt.

The Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government offers in-person and online courses. The next in-person courses will take place February 5, the day after Hometown Legislative Action Day, in Columbia, and then March 24 at the regional councils of governments locations.

Learn more at www.masc.sc (keyword: MEOI).



Association Highlight:

Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government

Elected officials in cities and towns can find that the skills needed to govern responsibly, efficiently and effectively are not the same as the skills needed to win an election. The Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government can help them learn how to fulfill their responsibility to govern well.

The MEO Institute graduated its first officials in 1988. The Advanced Municipal Elected Officials Institute launched in

2014 to provide more training to institute graduates, and the Advanced Continuing Education program began in 2019 to provide an optional self-directed track for Advanced Institute graduates.

After the courses in Columbia on February 5, the next course for the MEO Institute will be “Basic Budgeting and Municipal Finance” at the regional councils of governments locations on March 24. Some MEO Institute on-demand courses

are also available for registrants online at any time. For Advanced MEO Institute, the next courses will be “Advanced Municipal Economic Development” and “Public Safety and Administration,” on October 14 in Columbia. The next courses for Advanced Continuing Education will include “Best Practices for Code Enforcement,” also on October 14 in Columbia.

Find registration information and learn more at www.masc.sc (keyword: MEOI).



Every year since 2016, the South Carolina General Assembly has appropriated \$500,000 to fund a groundbreaking program assisting first responders suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder.

Post-traumatic stress disorder issues can significantly affect firefighters’ and police officers’ mental well being, whether they have witnessed horrific accidents or disturbing crimes, and the costs associated with the treatment of PTSD can be overwhelming.

The state-funded PTSD program provides an insurance policy for first

responders that reimburses out-of-pocket treatment expenses, so officers and firefighters can focus on getting well without worrying about their healthcare bills.

The total funding appropriated is evenly split between the SC Law Enforcement Assistance Program and the SC State Firefighters Association. This is a valuable plan, considering many health insurance policies cover mental health benefits at a lower rate than regular medical benefits.

With the PTSD program, firefighters and police officers can get the medical services needed to allow them to get back to their jobs. Connecting those whose

jobs put them in contact with mental trauma with all available resources can help them so they can get back to a healthy life.

For anyone looking to connect first responders with this assistance, the best place to start is to contact the city’s benefits coordinator or find out more about assistance for firefighters by contacting Zorrina Harmon of the SC State Firefighters Association at 803.454.1802. Learn more about assistance for police officers by contacting Eric Skidmore of the SC Law Enforcement Assistance Program at 803.252.2664.



Controlling Crowds During City Events

Famously Hot New Year has brought thousands to Columbia's Main Street each New Year's Eve since 2011. Photo: Tim Huebel.

Special events like festivals, parades and outdoor concerts can present a bit of a balancing act for local officials.

The focus is on having fun and drawing large crowds of residents and visitors to the city, offering a chance to show off what makes a municipality special. At the same time, the city's top priority is ensuring the safety of everyone, which can be a little tricky when bringing together large numbers of people at the same time.

The key to pulling it off? Plan early, make sure the right players are involved and don't be afraid to make adjustments if needed.

"We do our best to make it as safe as possible where everybody can have a good time," said Columbia Police Capt. E.M. Marsh, who oversees special operations for the department, including the police department's role in the Famously Hot

New Year celebration. "And if we do it seamlessly, most people don't notice what goes into it."

What "goes into it" is crowd-control planning that includes the thousands of people that fill the capital city's streets for the December 31 celebration, the families who turn out for summer movie nights in the Greer City Park Amphitheater or the residents and tourists who party at the Sea and Sand Festival in Folly Beach. It can mean screening festivalgoers, setting up hard barriers around the event area, monitoring alcohol sales and making sure plenty of staff is on hand. And it involves a cross-section of city departments, particularly police, fire and EMS.

In Columbia, where tens of thousands show up to ring in the new year with live music, street dancing and the state's largest New Year's Eve fireworks display, planning begins at least six months out.

"Obviously our main goal is to create a safe environment for all attendees.

We start pretty early in planning. And then we have meetings scheduled with the police department, fire, EMS and all emergency services closer to the event. We're all in the same room to review the footprint and review the event timeline," said Linda Toro, the Famously Hot New Year project manager.

Hamilton Grant, the co-chair of Famously Hot New Year, said monthly meetings are key to pulling off the party each year.

"That's why these monthly advisory meetings are so crucial; it brings all those heads together so we're all on the same page. We can all ask questions so everybody knows what to expect the day before and the night of," Grant said. "There are a lot of balls in the air, but everything is amazingly organized."

Planning and organization helps the city festival to be open and inviting, but also secure.

“In years gone by we’ve just had gates up around the streets, but if you notice here lately we provide exterior barriers [to protect against] any type of vehicle attacks that could come up. We pay attention to any nationwide threats prior to the event, and we run that through [the State Law Enforcement Division],” Marsh said.

Marsh said Columbia police work to make sure they don’t trade security for convenience. For example, this year the city imposed a clear bag policy for entry into the event, something that has been done for a few years at other large events in Columbia.

Along with catering to local residents, the City of Folly Beach has the responsibility of a large number of tourists in the mix for events such as the city-sponsored Christmas parade and Easter promenade. There are also large events put on by the business association in cooperation with the city, such as Taste of Folly and the Sea and Sand Festival.

Some of the events “draw upwards of 10,000 people. We have a lot of plates spinning on all of those,” said Spencer Wetmore, Folly Beach’s city administrator.

All of the events follow the same planning format, she said, with a planning committee that includes the city administrator, community coordinator, police and fire chiefs, and public works and facilities heads all working together. Over time, a valuable routine has developed, Wetmore said.

“It’s going to take every department to pull together everything from the barricades to the port-a-potties. So six months out we get in a room together,” she said.

Fire trucks block the roads that are closed to vehicle traffic, serving as both a security measure and practical easy barricade.

“In this day and age we have to take terrorism threats seriously. These are hard-barricaded events with entry gates. You can’t just stream in anymore,” Wetmore said. “And we try to be as careful as we can be about alcohol consumption.”



(Top) Lt. Matthew Hlavac, left, and Dept. Chief Rocky Burke provide support for the Folly Beach Christmas Parade. Photo: Bonnes Eyes Photography.

(Left) The Folly Beach Sea & Sand Festival will celebrate its 30th year in 2020. Photo: City of Folly Beach.

She said the idea of a hard barricade was not popular at first, and was an adjustment for festivalgoers accustomed to the easygoing, funky atmosphere of the beach town.

“But from a security perspective, it enabled us to keep the event secure, be

able to check IDs and have wristbands. By charging a small fee, it lets the business association bring in enough security,” Wetmore said. “It was an adjustment from an open concept, but as we grew, we needed these entrance gates and ID checks.”

Columbia's Famously Hot New Year, which culminates with fireworks behind the State House, involves planning with police, fire and EMS services ahead of the event. Photo: Jeff Blake.



Greer's Moonlight Movies run from June to August. Photo: City of Greer.

While crowd control is an obvious necessity at large public events, smaller gatherings such as town movie nights in the park also need attention and monitoring.

For example, the City of Greer hosts eight movie nights on Thursdays from June to August, drawing about 800 people each week to the Greer City Park Amphitheater. The events start at 5 p.m., and feature inflatables, crafts, music, dancing and a raffle. Food and drinks from local food vendors are available to purchase throughout the night.

"We request four [police] officers to be onsite during the movie. We do place our officers at the entrance areas to the amphitheater to help deter bad behavior," said Robbie Davis, the city's events supervisor. "We have a park rule that states children under the age of 16 are to be accompanied by a parent or guardian. The last few years, we have noticed that parents are dropping off children under the age of 16. Our officers are located in these areas to help deter this."

Leaders from cities large and small stress the importance of evaluating what worked and what didn't and using that information to make changes in future festivals and events. In Columbia, Hamilton Grant described improvements made for Famously Hot New Year.



The Moonlight Movies series in the Greer City Park Amphitheater include preshow events like crafts and dances. Photo: City of Greer.

"A big part of that is coming back after the new year in our February meeting to see what things went right and what we can improve on," he said. "Over the years, we've done things like relocate the stage to create a safer environment for everybody. We've also made a clearing lane in front of the stage. People will be on the right side and the left side in front of the stage, but you'll have a lane that makes it safe for EMS and law enforcement to get through in case there's an emergency."

And, for events large and small, organizers say it makes sense to take advantage of the chance to bring people together.

"Play to your strengths. In a time when we see rhetoric that's so divisive, let's focus on what we agree on," Grant said. "The more our municipalities hold events that bring people together, to where they don't have to focus on what's different, it gives us an opportunity to engage in dialogue. The more you focus on those things, the more you see how much you have in common. It gives people the opportunity to meet their neighbors. You'd be surprised at how many people who would go out of town on New Year's in the past, now stay in town because of this event."

Follow the Law on Volunteer Firefighter Compensation

Volunteer firefighters are an incredibly important part of many firefighting operations. The International Fire Chiefs Association counts three quarters of all fire departments in the United States as dependent on the work of volunteers.

Volunteer firefighters are a dedicated group of people considering the difficult and dangerous work they do and the irregular hours they work. Municipalities often seek to find ways, other than an hourly wage, to compensate their volunteer firefighters, but they must be careful when doing so because of the rules of the Fair Labor Standards Act.

The FLSA is a federal statute that sets rules on minimum wage and overtime pay. It also sets the definition of volunteers, and if volunteer firefighters no longer meet that definition, then the FLSA's wage and overtime rules will begin to apply to them.

Volunteer firefighters can never receive hourly pay because of the FLSA, but this rule is not the same as a complete ban on payments to volunteers. For example, a city or town can provide a nominal fee for the service of volunteer firefighters.

The fees paid to volunteer firefighters cannot be tied to productivity, but they can be paid on a per-call basis, and they can be paid as a monthly or annual stipend. The FLSA states that fees to volunteers cannot be paid in an amount that would be greater than 20% of the total compensation that the city or town would pay to a full-time firefighter.

The municipality can also reimburse expenses and provide reasonable benefits. In the case of all of these payment types, the payment is considered taxable income.

Paid firefighters cannot volunteer their off-duty time to serve in their employer's fire department. However, city employees who are not paid firefighters can volunteer as firefighters because that volunteer work is not the same service for which they are employed.

Volunteers may be eligible for participation in either the South Carolina Retirement System or Police Officers Retirement System as a result of their volunteer work. If they have an existing retirement system account, then volunteers would be required to participate if they are eligible. Otherwise, they can either choose to participate and contribute to the system

for which they are eligible, or not participate. The SC Public Employee Benefit Authority can answer questions about whether a firefighter is allowed to waive participation.

This information is partially taken from Managing Volunteer Firefighters for FLSA Compliance: A Guide for Fire Chiefs and Community Leaders, a publication of the International Association of Fire Chiefs. Find the publication at www.iafc.org.





A Day in the Life of a

Codes Enforcement Officer

Public Safety



Christopher Morgan is the codes and licensing officer for the City of Hartsville. Photo: City of Hartsville.

There really is no typical day in the life of a codes enforcement officer. Some who fulfill the position are sworn law enforcement officers. Some await complaints from neighbors; others patrol, looking for violations and trouble spots. All of them need to know the applicable codes adopted by their city or town, with codes covering things like fire and safety, as well as appearance. They also have to know what is and is not allowed in special areas, such as a historic downtown district.

“A really good, productive day is when I come in and have a complaint via email or phone message and I go out and find an actual violation — a warranted complaint — and I can speak with the property owner and they agree to take care of the issue and everybody’s happy at the end,”

said Ben Loughner, codes enforcement officer for the City of Abbeville.

Loughner is a sworn law enforcement officer and a former firefighter.

He said the biggest pushback he gets is from people who don’t think he should be allowed to tell them what to do with their property.

“Some people don’t understand that it’s a criminal offense, not a civil offense,” Loughner said. “We run into noncompliance more often than you think.”

Some of Loughner’s “tips” come from firefighters or the city building inspector who will notice a code violation during an inspection and find that the owner is unwilling to make fixes.

The bulk of his reports, however, come from neighbors of the offending property.

“They report anything that would depreciate the value of a neighborhood,” Loughner said, adding that the complaints are often about rental properties or vacant properties. “We do get a lot of complaints on property that is in the city, but the property owner doesn’t live there. It’s either a rental or vacant.”

Loughner says most of the complaints he investigates are about a property owner’s failure to maintain the yard or clean up trash and clutter. As a part of his work, he will inspect the property, look up the owner in the city’s database and send a letter explaining the violation and give the owner time to make corrections.

If the owner doesn’t correct the violation, Loughner says the city can hire a contractor or use the city’s public works

crew for the work. The city then sends a bill for the work to the property owner.

“Some people try to get the city involved in personal squabbles,” he said. “Sometimes complaints aren’t necessarily founded. They don’t think their neighbor’s property looks good, but it’s a matter of personal taste.”

He said the key to being a good code enforcement officer is to be fair and consistent.

“I love it,” he said. “It’s something different every day. You never know when you come in what you are going to be dealing with that day.”

Some code enforcement officers, like Christopher Morgan in Hartsville, don’t wait for complaints: they patrol their territory.

“On a weekly basis, I go out and patrol,” he said. “I have self-initiated files. I believe in being proactive and not waiting on complaints.”

In addition to code enforcement work, Morgan is also in charge of the city’s building permitting. He works within the city’s Business Navigator office, which also includes planning and zoning functions. Morgan was a pastor and welder in Sumter, traveling from his home in Hartsville, before he decided to give up the commute and joined the city about three years ago.

He said his first contact with someone who is the subject of a complaint is all about education.

“Normally, I try to meet face to face with people and explain the violation and what they need to do to rectify it,” he said. “A lot of times, people go ahead and do it then. They appreciate you taking the time to talk to them.”

But sometimes he said, the “education” has to flow back to the complaining resident.

“When someone calls and makes a complaint, they want to see something happen now,” Morgan said. “It doesn’t work that way.”

Cities and towns must in fact follow the notification and due process procedures provided for in state law and



municipal ordinances, which allow the violator time to make corrections.

Morgan said his experience as a pastor comes in handy when dealing with neighborhood disputes.

“People know me in this community. I treat people with respect and I can diffuse situations,” he said. “That’s not to say I don’t have a problem communicating with people, but the goal is to dial it down.”

Many times, he runs into property owners without the financial means to make repairs, such as a damaged roof or fire damage that goes unrepaired for an extended period. At those times, the corrective action plan requires a little more patience.

“I do run into people who are not very compassionate and not understanding about their neighbors’ situation,” Morgan said. “If they see their neighbor needs help, maybe they can offer to help.”

Neighbors helping each other out is the rule rather than the exception in Loris, said Brandon Harrelson, the city’s code enforcement officer and public works director.

“We have really good people and they take care of their neighbors and they look out for each other,” said Harrelson, who has been doing code enforcement for two years. “I don’t really run into neighbors

complaining on their neighbors.”

He also patrols for issues and relies on police officers to let him know about problems.

Like Morgan, he said face-to-face contact is his best way of solving problems.

“I’m going to give you some time,” he said. “For me, tickets would be last resort, the end of the line. I try to resolve things in a more diplomatic manner.”

His most difficult cases are folks who can’t afford to bring their homes up to code.

“The roof’s caved in or a window’s busted out,” he said. “We had a house that burned down a year ago and still nothing’s been done to it.”

“That is one of our most difficult things — dilapidated structures.”

The biggest complaints he hears are from property owners who disagree with the applicable regulations.

“You get a lot of ‘I’ve done this my whole life’ or ‘it’s my property, I can do what I want with it,’” he said.

That leads to more explaining and patience.

“It’s a lot of communication between the residents and me with questions, zoning and building information,” Harrelson said. “The majority of my day is spent in interaction with residents.”

Keeping Officers Safe on the Road

There are many potential causes of death and serious injury in police work that are under the officer's control: driving, failing to use safety equipment, situational awareness and decision making.

For this reason, the SC Municipal Insurance Trust and the SC Municipal Insurance and Risk Financing Fund have hosted training sessions like the Below 100 initiative, a program aimed at reducing the number of law enforcement deaths nationwide in a single year to fewer than 100 — something that has not happened since 1943.

The Below 100 program stresses five core tenets for officers: wearing seatbelts, wearing soft body armor vests, watching speed, constantly reevaluating to determine what's important for safety while on duty, and remembering that complacency can kill.

Vehicle safety

Several of the Below 100 tips involve the basics of safely operating vehicles, which is reflective of the major role vehicle accidents play in occupational deaths. Below are a few vehicle operations training program tips that can be used for roll call training, remedial training or individual officer training.

- Conduct a pre-shift inspection, checking such things as tire pressure and tread wear, fluids, lights, emergency equipment and whether windows are properly clean. Properly set the mirrors and seat. Always be aware of the vehicle's blind spots.



- Drive defensively by recognizing hazards, understanding how to prevent hazards from becoming a collision and choosing the safest driving maneuver to prevent a collision.
- Avoid distracted driving. Beware of manual, visual and cognitive distractions.
- Avoid fatigued and impaired driving. Officers should always read the labels on any prescriptions they are taking and consult with a pharmacist or physician before operating a vehicle. Follow local policy and notify supervisors when taking certain prescription medications.
- Back in to parking spaces when tactically acceptable. Backing in upon arrival, especially in parking lots, will greatly reduce vehicle collisions. Park in a position to avoid backing up when leaving.
- Position hands on the wheel at 8 o'clock and 4 o'clock, or otherwise 9 o'clock and 3 o'clock for better control. This will also reduce airbag injuries during a collision.
- Always wear seatbelts. Also, conduct training on ways to exit a vehicle quickly and draw duty weapons from a seat-belted position.
- Operate vehicles within appropriate speed limits for the road and weather conditions present with the due regard to the safety of others. Avoid the four fatal driving behaviors: speeding, right of way violations, driving left of center and following too closely.
- Nighttime driving reduces visibility. Slow down and avoid "overdriving" the headlights, with too much speed to stop in front of an obstruction suddenly appearing in the light.
- Use back-up cameras or sensors to reduce backing collisions.
- Tactically position vehicles out of the travel portion of the roadway on traffic stops. Use all emergency and hazard lights and remember to wear retro-reflective vest for increased visibility when appropriate for the job task.
- Secure items inside the vehicle. Unsecured items can become a projectile and injure occupants.
- Conduct annual vehicle operation training on policy and vehicle operations. The Municipal Association's Risk Management Services recommends officers drive a road course annually.
Learn about the Below 100 initiative at www.below100.org.

Red Flag Fire Alerts and Red Flag Warnings

Extreme heat and droughts can trigger public notifications from the SC Forestry Commission as well as the National Weather Service. Both types are known as “red flag” notifications, and the similarity in the names can cause confusion.

SC Forestry Commission’s red flag fire alerts

The SC Forestry Commission’s alerts indicate that the danger of wildfire outbreaks are increasing, and the Forestry Commission is asking people to avoid outdoor burnings voluntarily. Although the alerts do not themselves function as bans, the alerts can trigger bans locally in places where municipal or county

governments have passed ordinances prohibiting burning while an alert is in effect.

Burning bans are possible at the state level, declared either by the governor or by the director of the Forestry Commission. However, both of these types of bans, when active, do not apply inside the boundaries of municipalities (SC Code Sections 48-35-30 and 48-31-30).

Current information on red flag alerts often appears in news media, but the information can also be found on the Forestry Commission’s Facebook and Twitter accounts.

The Forestry Commission’s website, www.state.sc.us/forest, gives information on current fire conditions around

the state, including an interactive map showing wildfire activity and another map showing controlled burn notifications.

National Weather Service’s red flag warnings

The National Weather Service’s warnings indicate the presence of warm temperatures, very low humidity and stronger winds — critical conditions for the spread of wildfire. The warnings come with the recommendation from the NWS to take typical precautions such as covering burn barrels and extinguishing all fires properly. The NWS website, www.weather.gov, can indicate whether a warning is in effect for a given location.

Dual Role Causes Problem

In many small South Carolina towns, it can be common for a municipal court clerk to also serve as records clerk for the police department, but this dual role is improper and can lead to legal problems, according to one legal opinion.

The opinion by Danny Crowe, attorney with Crowe LaFave, LLC, found that formal relationships between officials in the municipal court and law enforcement “are strongly disfavored in our state as creating an appearance to the public of possible bias or partiality by the court in favor of law enforcement.”

Crowe reviewed opinions by the State Supreme Court’s Advisory Committee on Standards of Judicial Conduct and opinions by the SC Attorney General’s Office. One of those opinions, Advisory Committee Opinion 08-2002, determined “a municipal police chief should not supervise the municipal court.” This is based on Canon 2 of the Code of Judicial Conduct, which requires a judge to

remain impartial and avoid even the appearance of impropriety.

“The concern ... is the public would perceive an improper influence on judicial decisions when law enforcement has both a formal supervisory role in administration of the municipal court and is the prosecuting agency in the municipal court,” Crowe wrote.

Another opinion, Advisory Committee Opinion 19-2001, also cited the code of conduct when determining that a clerk of the municipal court should not also serve as a records clerk for the police department.

Opinions by the state attorney general’s office back that up. A December 1996 opinion found that “it would not



be appropriate for an individual to work simultaneously for the Police Department and the Municipal Court,” as the two should be “separate and distinct.” Other similar opinions determined that the clerk of court serves as an arm of the municipal court and “must maintain the appearance of neutrality” and avoid any potential conflicts of interest.



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

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

Calendar

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

FEBRUARY

4 Hometown Legislative Action Day. Columbia Marriott (see Page 6).

5 Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government Sessions A and B, Advanced Institute and Advanced Continuing Education. Columbia Marriott. Topics for Session A include an overview of local government planning and zoning; conducting public meetings; and strategic planning. Topics for Session B include municipal annexation; business license tax administration; and ethics and public accountability. Advanced Institute Courses are “Advanced Budgeting and Finance” and “Advanced Leadership and Governance.” Advanced Continuing Education topics include a more in-depth overview of municipal elections and harassment prevention.

12 South Carolina Other Retirement Benefits Employer Trust Annual Members Meeting. Municipal Association of SC, Columbia.

18 SC Municipal Insurance Trust and SC Municipal Insurance and Risk Financing Fund Active Assailant Training. The Phillips Market Center, West Columbia.

19 – 20 Municipal Court Administration Association 101 – Session A. Municipal Association of SC, Columbia. Topics include an introduction to court administration, charges, bonds and court basics.

20 SC Association of Municipal Power Systems Associate Member Lunch. Seawell’s, Columbia.

25 Main Street South Carolina New Director Orientation. Municipal Association of SC, Columbia.

26 – 28 Municipal Clerks and Treasurers Institute – Year 2, Session A. Hyatt Place Columbia/Downtown/The Vista. Topics include technology in the workplace, interpersonal skills, payroll administration, risk management, time management, grants administration, notary public and roundtable sessions.

MARCH

4 You’ve Been Elected, Now What? Municipal Association of SC, Columbia. Topics include an overview of conducting effective meetings; complying with laws governing public service and state laws such as the SC Freedom of Information Act and the SC Ethics Act; and programs and services provided by the Municipal Association.

5 SC Association of Stormwater Managers First Quarter Meeting. Seawell’s, Columbia. Topics include stormwater legal issues, an update from the SC Department of Health and Environmental Control and advocating for stormwater programs.