



# UPTOWN

a publication of the municipal association of south carolina



## Advocacy Initiatives Update for 2022



In the fall of 2020, the Municipal Association legislative committee and board of directors approved a list of Advocacy Initiatives for the start of the SC General Assembly’s 2021 – 2022 legislative session covering numerous facets of local governing and decision making. In the 2021 session, several of these initiatives had bills passed and enacted into law. Some issues only saw bills introduced, while others saw positive movement without legislation. With the start of the second half of the 2021 – 2022 legislative session on January 11, the bills introduced last year are still active and could see forward motion this year.

In 2021, the Municipal Association legislative committee and board of directors approved continuing with the Advocacy Initiatives that were adopted in 2020 and completing the list of proactive issues for cities and towns during the 2022 legislative session.

Here is the latest on the 2021 – 2022 Advocacy Initiatives:

### Broadband expansion

Amending the newly adopted broadband expansion law to allow cities and towns to not only lay fiber, but also light the fiber or partner with a third party to light it.

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**Status:** With the distribution of American Rescue Plan dollars from the federal level, opportunities for cities and towns to expand broadband are now more widely available.

## Enclave annexation

Allowing cities and towns to close doughnut holes, or enclaves, in their municipal limits through a local annexation process.

**Status:** H3198, introduced by Rep. Marvin Pendarvis, was referred to the House Judiciary Committee. The Local Government Efficiency Act would allow cities and towns to annex parcels by ordinance with certain restrictions.

## Law enforcement reform

Supporting reform measures to aspects of law enforcement training and duties.

**Status:** In process. H3050 was introduced by Rep. Dennis Moss and amended to include language from H3791. Included in the bill is language related to failure to intervene, chokeholds, minimum standards for local agencies and compliance. The House of Representatives passed the amended bill, which is currently in the Senate Judiciary Committee.

## Code enforcement

Requiring code enforcement liens be billed and collected similar to property taxes.

**Status:** Municipal Association staff are continuing to work with local officials and legislators to find solutions for municipalities to remove and rehabilitate abandoned and dilapidated buildings.

## Abandoned buildings tax credits

Extending the current abandoned buildings tax credit until 2026.

**Status:** Passed and enacted into law. S271 was introduced by Sen. Scott Talley to extend the current credit until the end of 2025.

## Local Government Fund

Supporting the Local Government Fund to be funded in accordance with current law.

**Status:** Funded. The Local Government Fund was funded according to state law in the FY2021-2022 state budget. The new funding formula passed during the 2019 legislative session.

## Firefighter Healthcare Benefit Plan

Supporting money to be included in the state budget to fund the Firefighter Healthcare Benefit Plan.

**Status:** Funded. \$3.7 million was allocated for a supplemental insurance policy for firefighters diagnosed with cancer.

## Initiative: PTSD funding

Supporting money to be included in the state budget to fund the post-traumatic stress disorder programs for first responders.

**Status:** Funded. \$500,000 in recurring funding was included in the FY2021-2022 state budget to fund PTSD programs for first responders.

## Zero millage

Allowing cities and towns with no property tax millage to impose a millage with certain limitations.

**Status:** S710 was introduced by Sen. Mike Gambrell on March 30, 2021, and referred to the Senate Finance Committee. This bill allows cities and towns without an operating millage to impose one.

## Municipal Capital Projects Penny

Creating a Municipal Capital Projects penny tax for municipal residents to approve for capital projects within city limits.

**Status:** Legislators are unlikely to support the expansion of the capital projects penny to cities and towns because of American Rescue Plan funding cities and towns have received from the federal level. This is an initiative that can be continued and worked on in future years.

## Expansion of naloxone

Expanding the availability of naloxone, the medication used to revive individuals suffering from drug overdoses, to fire and emergency medical services first responders.

**Status:** Municipal Association staff assembled a group of stakeholders to

discuss a cooperative agreement that fire departments could use to purchase naloxone. Association staff also testified in support of the SC Department of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Services grant programs, the Reducing Opioid Loss of Life program, and Law Enforcement Officer Naloxone program, that provide naloxone to fire and police departments.

### Textiles Communities Revitalization Act

Amending the Textiles Communities Revitalization Act to include as one site those parts of abandoned mill properties that are separated by way of an

intervening connector such as a railroad or waterway.

**Status:** Passed and enacted into law. S271 was introduced by Sen. Scott Talley to extend the current abandoned buildings tax credit until the end of 2025. This bill was amended to include language amending the Textiles Communities Revitalization Act.

*For more information on the Advocacy Initiatives, visit [www.masc.sc](http://www.masc.sc) (keyword: advocacy). During the session, subscribe to From the Dome to Your Home (keyword: Dome) and listen to the City Quick Connect podcast (keyword: podcast) for more updates.*

# NEWS BRIEFS

The SC Association of Stormwater Managers recently elected its new board of directors. Its members are **Scottie Ferguson**, Pickens County; **Mark Johnson**, Town of James Island; Secretary/Treasurer **Angela Jordan**, City of Rock Hill; Member at Large **Lisa Wells**, WK Dickson and Company, Inc., and Immediate Past President **Bonnie Miley**, Town of Summerville.

**City of Laurens Police Chief Chrissie Latimore** was named president of the SC Police Chiefs Association.

The SC Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism announced 2021 grant recipients for Land and Water Conservation Fund grants. Municipalities and their supported projects include the **Town of Bluffton**, New Riverside Barn Park; the **Town of Cheraw**, Arrowhead Park Sports Lighting Retrofit; the **City of Lake City**, Blanding Street Park; the **City of Myrtle Beach**, Expansion of Withers Swash Park; and the **City of Newberry**, Wise Street Park Renovation.

**Condé Nast Traveler** named the **City of Charleston** and **City of Greenville** among its best cities in the U.S. for 2021. It also named the Town of Hilton Head Island and the Town of Kiawah Island to its list of top islands in the U.S. for 2021. **Reader's Digest** named the **City of Lake City** as one of the finalists for its "Top Nicest Places in America" list for 2021.

## Apply for the 2022 Achievement Awards

The work performed by cities and towns to create a valuable place to live and work often does not attract notice. The Municipal Association's Achievement Awards provide a way to showcase the hard-to-see projects that local governments undertake to make their operations run smoothly and that enhance their communities. The awards recognize excellence in local government programs and help share ideas among municipal officials and staff.

### Categories and requirements

The Association accepts award submissions each year in either a population category or one of five subject categories: communications, economic development, public safety, public service and public works. Municipalities with a population of 20,000 or less, as counted in the 2020 census data, can compete in either a population or subject category. Municipalities with a population greater than 20,000 can compete only in one of the five subject categories.

Projects need to be substantially complete to be eligible and can be submitted only one more time if they do not win.

### Brainstorming entries

When considering ways to identify promising award submissions, municipal leaders may want to ask all departments to list out their completed projects that have had the greatest impact for residents

and businesses. Also, taking a look at the videos and descriptions of past Achievement Award winners can help with brainstorming.

Information about past winners and the award application can be found at [www.masc.sc](http://www.masc.sc) (keyword: Achievement Awards).

### Applying

The 2022 submission deadline is February 9. The designated contact person for each entry will receive a receipt confirmation email by February 16. Cities submitting in the subject categories must make a virtual, oral presentation at an assigned time on February 28 or March 1. The Association will recognize award winners at the Annual Meeting on July 16.

*For more information on the Achievement Awards, contact Meredith Houck at 803.933.1215 or [mhouck@masc.sc](mailto:mhouck@masc.sc).*



# Building Relationships in Washington



The Municipal Association of SC has expanded its focus on advocating for the interests of South Carolina's cities and towns at the federal level, and already the effort has improved engagement with the state's congressional delegation.

A key part of this effort has been the establishment of a dedicated congressional liaison — a role assigned to Erica Wright, who joined the Association's staff as a legislative and public policy advocate in April 2020. She has since nurtured relationships with the staffs of both of South Carolina's senators and each of its seven representatives.

"Having these direct relationships positions us to have a front-row seat and direct involvement in legislation that impacts cities and towns, and we already seeing this happen," Wright said. "For example, Congressman Clyburn's legislative team has welcomed our partnership in efforts to establish equitable broadband in all rural, underserved communities. The bottom line is that these relationships allow us to serve our members better."

## Outreach with municipalities

The passage of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, or CARES Act, in March 2020 highlighted the need for strong federal relationships when many cities and towns brought questions about reimbursable expenses to the Association.



Association representatives met with House Majority Whip Jim Clyburn, center, among others in Washington, D.C.

In March 2021, Congress passed the American Rescue Plan, a massive emergency relief bill that provides \$65.1 billion to municipal governments nationwide to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Municipal Association worked to help cities and towns understand the parameters that the law creates for using the funds, and it helped the SC Department of Administration obtain needed information from the municipalities designated as nonentitlement cities under the law so they could draw their funds from the state.

In May, the Association partnered with the White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs to host an infrastructure briefing and listening session with South Carolina cities and towns. That session provided an opportunity for the state's local leaders to learn about the American Jobs Plans, and share their local infrastructure needs and priorities with White House staff.

## Outreach with the congressional delegation

In September, Aiken Mayor Rick Osbon, first vice president of the Municipal Association, the Association's Executive Director Todd Glover and members of the Association's advocacy staff traveled to Washington, D.C., for meetings with members of the congressional delegation. Association staff shared the Municipal Association's purpose and its desire to serve as a resource and partner with legislators as they explore legislation impacting local government. The Association delegation met with House Majority Whip Jim Clyburn, Sen. Tim Scott, Rep. Joe Wilson as well as staffers from other members' offices.

In 2022, the Association is planning quarterly meetings with the congressional delegation and it will host opportunities in each home congressional district for city and town officials to engage more directly with their senators and representatives.

## Hometown Legislative Action Day

The Association's Hometown Legislative Action Day, taking place February 1 in Columbia, will feature congressional delegation staff members joining in a panel discussion on federal advocacy. Learn more about all HLAD sessions and register at [www.masc.sc](http://www.masc.sc) (keyword: HLAD).

# Business Licensing Essentials: Sending Out Renewals

Every month in 2022, the Municipal Association's Local Revenue Services is hosting "Business Licensing Essentials," a series of virtual sessions on the specifics of the business licensing process. The first session on renewal notices takes place Wednesday, January 12 from 10 – 11:30 a.m. Learn more at [www.masc.sc](http://www.masc.sc) (keyword: training calendar).

The need to handle the renewal notice process at the beginning of the year comes about because Act 176 created a new statewide standard business license year



beginning May 1 and ending the following April 30. For the first year under this new schedule, cities and towns should, as a best practice, aim to send out renewal notices in January or February 2022. The notice should feature explanations

of the new law, including how it works as a solution to longstanding business concerns about the licensing process, how it standardizes many of the practices, and how it established the online Local Business License Renewal Center. The notice should also include the locally determined penalty date and penalty amount for business that do not renew their licenses on time.

Learn more about the renewal notice process at [www.masc.sc](http://www.masc.sc) (keyword: standardization).

# Laying the Groundwork for Civility

Governing is often a process of building consensus that requires the fostering of relationships between the individual members of a city council. Elected officials also need to maintain relationships with the residents they serve and the partner organizations that help them pursue projects.

Breakdowns in civil discourse can damage the reputation of local government and erode the democratic process. Failure to keep a dialogue respectful can lead to heated exchanges among council members at a meeting, or even confrontations outside of council chambers or on social media.

To avoid these pitfalls, councilmembers and other officials must employ deliberate strategies to build the kind of courteous working relationships that can prevent conflicts before they become a problem.

## Communicate thoughtfully

An ongoing emphasis on communication can often prevent conflict. Communication breakdowns can take the form of a mayor or other councilmember withholding meaningful information from the other members of council on policy items, events, or messages that the city is sending out. A councilmember attempting to act on behalf of the city without the knowledge of the full council can cause conflict. Communication on councils, committees, boards and commissions should be a shared responsibility among their members and always aim to demonstrate mutual respect and a willingness to be inclusive and collaborative.

## Focus on the long-term trajectory of relationships

At the local level, conflict can often focus on a disagreement of how to handle a specific issue. Many times, councilmembers who find themselves at odds on one issue may find themselves needing to partner on another. Because progress on overall municipal goals resembles a marathon rather than a sprint, officials need to focus on cultivating long-term

relationships. Every needlessly aggressive exchange depletes the credibility of officials in the eyes of those they work with, and those reserves can be difficult to rebuild.

## Beware of the divisive potential of social media

A couple of decades after social media became widespread, its ability to promote division and anger has become better understood. With its tendency to separate

people into like-minded groups, social media can create a temptation for people to engage in antagonistic, bullying or otherwise counterproductive behavior.

Officials using social media should be mindful of these pitfalls. They need to remember that their behavior online reflects on the city and they should aim to keep communication in this sphere professional. This can help stop conflict before it begins and make the work of municipal governance easier.

## Lehrman to Discuss Conflict Reduction at Hometown Legislative Action Day

Matt Lehrman, the co-founder and managing director of Social Prosperity Partners, will discuss the process of moving from conflict to a productive conversation during Hometown Legislative Action Day, taking place February 1 in Columbia.

In a career spanning more than three decades, Lehrman has helped policy boards, councils, management teams and other groups improve their collaborative abilities.

Noting that disagreement is often not “only natural, it’s necessary,” Lehrman has said that “it should always be possible to address sensitive and complex issues in ways that strengthen communitywide feelings of inclusion and trust.”

Beyond facilitating planning meetings and public input sessions, Lehrman also hosts the *Tell Me More* podcast, which brings together guests who disagree on difficult political and social topics to ask questions and engage in a meaningful dialogue.

After Hometown Legislative Action Day on February 1, the Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government will take place on February 2 at the Marriott Columbia, offering Sessions A and B. The preregistration deadline for HLAD and the MEO Institute is Friday, January 21. Learn more and register at [www.masc.sc](http://www.masc.sc) (keywords: HLAD, MEO).



# Transforming Main Streets

The Municipal Association of SC offers a hands-on, proven approach to revitalizing downtown commercial districts through its Main Street South Carolina technical assistance program. As the state coordinating program of Main Street America, Main Street SC helps local revitalization programs implement the nationally recognized Main Street Four-Point Approach, which focuses on leveraging local assets, from cultural and architectural heritage to local initiatives and community pride.

Currently, 32 communities participate in the Main Street SC network. Among these programs, \$49 million was invested from the public and private sector in 17 Main Street communities during 2020 despite COVID-19 disruptions.

Several communities have advanced to new levels in the network. Fountain Inn is now part of the Aspiring level, where they will receive three years of hands-on guidance to help build a strong downtown organization with a focus on diversifying the downtown's economic base. Being selected as an Aspiring member is a competitive process with a limited number of spots available each year.

“Home to the region’s most comprehensive array of outdoor amenities and a reimagined downtown, the transformative spirit of Fountain Inn has become contagious. As one of South Carolina’s fastest-growing cities, it is essential we empower economic growth through the success of our downtown,” said Kate Kizito, Fountain Inn public relations manager. “Having the support of Main Street South Carolina will ensure that we have the structural and organizational tools needed to ensure smart growth that preserves the character of our city.”

Clover is also advancing to the Aspiring level. Over the last two decades, Clover completed two streetscape projects and redeveloped a major railroad bed in the center of Main Street.

“After years of discussions about how the Town of Clover can improve economic development, we finally landed on the Main Street SC program as being the best way to accomplish all our goals: support and attract local business while improving the quality of life of our community and preserving the very fabric which makes our Main Street so special,” said Allison Harvey, Clover’s town administrator.

“One of the major initiatives for Clover includes greater engagement with its downtown small business community. This is where Main Street programs excel. We provide communication strategies for quality connections between all partners, specifically small businesses,” said Jenny Boulware, Main Street SC Manager.

Downtown Florence, another Main Street SC community, has also demonstrated its effectiveness recently, having received national accreditation during an annual review process. Florence affirmed its successes, addressed its challenges and highlighted its future downtown economic development plans.

“We could not have accomplished this goal without the help our team, partners, investors, business owners, community



*The Town of Clover has advanced to the Aspiring level of the Main Street South Carolina network.*

leaders, citizens, volunteers, and comprehensive planning process,” said Hannah Davis, Florence’s development manager. “The Main Street Approach is a powerful holistic tool for transforming places, and this accomplishment isn’t just for Downtown Florence — it’s for the whole city. The ripple effect generated from targeted investment in the downtown redevelopment district is felt community-wide, through industry moving in and creating jobs, expansion of our medical and education facilities, quality of life for our residents, and generation of tourism revenue from visitors.”

Boulware noted that “Main Street SC equips our communities with the tools they need to revitalize their historic districts and make them the economic and cultural heart of their community. Florence has defined successful revitalization in the Pee Dee region.”

As South Carolina charts its economic development future, the Main Street Approach can help create new jobs, expand businesses, complete redevelopment projects, and catalyze public and private investment in South Carolina’s historic downtowns.

*To learn more about Main Street South Carolina, visit [www.masc.sc](http://www.masc.sc) (keyword: Main Street).*

# Leveraging Funds With Multiple Sources

Expensive infrastructure projects can become more feasible when cities carefully stack together numerous funding sources. Officials from state agencies that frequently handle grant awards and loans recently explained their programs at a meeting of the SC Community Development Association.

## Community Development Block Grants

South Carolina's Community Development Block Grant program is administered through the SC Department of Commerce using U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development funds. CDBG funding awards must always benefit low- and moderate-income individuals making 80% or less of the county's median income.

Regional Grant Manager Stefanie Smith-Derwort explained the types of projects possible through CDBG. The community enrichment category can include police or fire substations, demolitions, brownfields cleanup or downtown streetscapes, among others. Grant opportunities are also available for neighborhood revitalization; water, sewer or drainage infrastructure; and certain special projects like preservation, energy conservation or parks.

Infrastructure grant applications have a spring deadline, with the deadline for other types of projects coming in the fall. Smith-Derwort encouraged those interested to review selection criteria and scoring rubrics at the program's website, [www.cdbgsc.com](http://www.cdbgsc.com).

All CDBG projects required a 10% match of the total request, which she said could come from any source. It could be the U.S. Department of Agriculture funds, U.S. Economic Development Administration, Transportation Alternatives



*Greenwood Metropolitan District used SC Rural Infrastructure Authority grant funds for a sewer trunk line to accommodate new industry. Photo: SC RIA.*

Program, SC Rural Infrastructural Authority, SC Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism or private funds.

"As long as it doesn't come from the South Carolina Department of Commerce, you can use it as a match," she said.

## SC Rural Infrastructure Authority programs

South Carolina's State Revolving Fund Program, jointly administered by the SC Department of Health and Environmental Control and the SC Rural Infrastructure Authority, provides loans for building or repairing drinking water, wastewater and stormwater systems. Its benefits include below-market interest rates, fixed-rate financing and low closing costs.

RIA also handles basic infrastructure and economic infrastructure grants, which currently have \$30 million available in two rounds of competitive funding each year. For basic infrastructure, this program focuses on projects that create regional solutions, addressing problems like consent orders and unsatisfactory ratings. Economic infrastructure funding,

meanwhile, focuses on projects that can create jobs or build system capacity to support economic development. The application deadlines come in September and March, with the next deadline coming March 14, 2022.

SC RIA Senior Program Manager Liz Rosinski noted that between the grants and loans in the 2021 fiscal year, the RIA programs provided \$77 million for 65 projects statewide.

"We're pretty proud of that widespread impact," she said.

Case studies of projects can be found at [www.ria.sc.gov](http://www.ria.sc.gov).

## Town of Carlisle case study

Angela Kirkpatrick, community development planner for the Catawba Regional Council of Governments, provided an explanation of multiple funding sources working together in the Town of Carlisle. The town asked for help upgrading its failing pump stations. This led to CDBG funds contributing to engineering costs and some construction costs while the SC RIA also helped with construction costs. Union County helped with environmental review and administrative costs, while the City of Union helped with cost estimates and construction oversight.

Carlisle soon faced another problem: the closure of a textile plant that had for decades provided wastewater services at no cost for the less than 300 wastewater users in the town. The collaborative effort to find solutions led to Union County hiring an engineer for a wastewater feasibility study. Instead of building a new plant, the town worked on a new sewage line to connect to the City of Union, with help from the CDBG, RIA and State Revolving Fund.

"You really have to be flexible, you have to persevere and just work with everybody," Kirkpatrick said.

## Risk Management Tips



There are numerous actions for municipal risk management staff to take every year as part of a consistent and proactive effort to reduce liability for the local government. Here are some key items for risk managers to address in the first quarter of the calendar year:

### January

#### Establish a procedure for checking motor vehicle records.

- For all existing and future employees who operate motor vehicles on business, check their motor vehicle records, whether they are in a municipal vehicle or personal vehicle.
- Be sure to check employees' motor vehicle records before hiring them, and at least annually after that. SC Department of Motor Vehicles Request for Driver Information Form MV-70 can be used to request records.

#### Make sure documentation of all drivers' motor vehicle records reviews are on file.

- Maintain the records in personnel files.
- Documented criteria should exist for

the suspension of a worker's on-duty driving privileges if there are three or more moving violations — a violation of traffic law by a vehicle in motion — in a three-year period.

### February

#### Post the Occupational Safety and Health Administration Form 300A.

- Public entities must complete and post OSHA Form 300A, the Summary of Work-Related Injuries and Illnesses, each year from February 1 to April 30 in an area visible to employees. Even if there were no recordable injuries or illnesses, employers must post the form with zeros on the total line.
- These entities must also post OSHA Form 300, the Log of Work-related Injuries and Illnesses, throughout the year.

#### Complete a risk assessment of the municipality.

- Use a risk assessment to identify opportunities to improve policies and procedures. Assessments also aid in

identifying existing hazards in the workplace. This can lead to decreased injuries and claims which can help reduce insurance premiums.

- Correct the identified hazards to prevent losses.

### March

#### Review and update personnel, law enforcement and fire service policies.

- Have policies reviewed and updated periodically by an attorney to comply with local, state and federal regulations and laws.
- Make sure there is a conspicuous disclaimer on the first page of the employee manual stating the document is not an employment contract.

#### Review and update job descriptions.

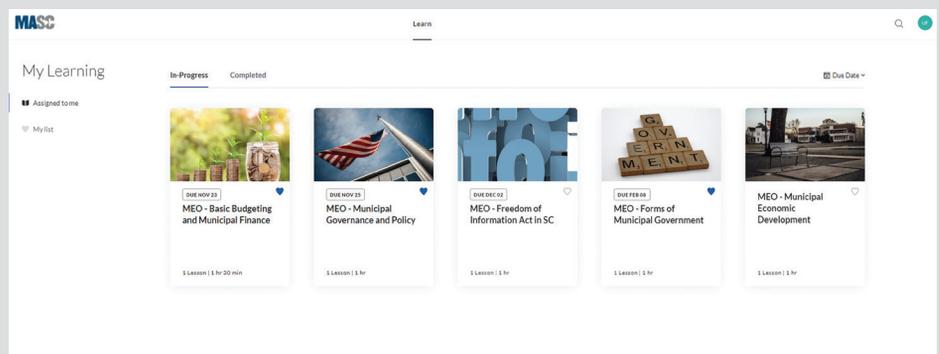
- Include safety responsibilities in job descriptions to promote accountability and to make safety part of the annual evaluation process.
- Make sure employees are aware of their expected safety tasks, and know to prioritize them.

## New Tracking System for MEO Institute On-Demand Courses

A new interactive dashboard for the Municipal Association's Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government provides a new way for elected officials to keep track of their online course progress and course registrations.

This on-demand dashboard is active only when a user is logged in and registered for active, on-demand courses with a future due date. It displays the length of time needed to complete a course as well as the due date, or course expiration date. Once the user completes a course, that course credit will be immediately uploaded to the user's transcript. Once all courses are complete, the dashboard will no longer be visible.

The online MEO Institute courses available are primarily required courses that are also offered once a year at select regional councils of governments locations. The courses are these:



- Basic Budgeting and Municipal Finance
- Forms of Municipal Government
- Freedom of Information Act in South Carolina
- Municipal Governance and Policy
- Municipal Economic Development
- The Five Basics of Effective Governing — this course is optional, has no charge and is not for credit. It will not appear in the dashboard.

Elected officials who need the on-demand courses for graduation during the 2022 Hometown Legislative Action Day on February 1 in Columbia must complete the courses by Tuesday, January 18.

For more information and to access the on-demand courses, visit [www.masc.sc](http://www.masc.sc) (keyword: MEO).



**D**igital photography has countless uses for documenting local government projects and enhancing communications. While powerful smartphone cameras have become ubiquitous, they come with many pitfalls that can greatly reduce the clarity or the professionalism of the images they capture. These tips can help users take better photos with their phones.

### Composing and focusing the photo

- Avoid placing the photo's subject the direct center. Instead use the "rule of thirds" to achieve a better image composition, with the subject located one-third of the way across the image. Most smartphones cameras have a grid view which, when enabled, will draw four lines across the image — two horizontal and two vertical. This divides the frame into nine equal parts. The subject should fall on one of the lines, preferably where these lines intersect.

- Be aware of the background of the photo. If the photo has people as the subject, make sure that no background items appear to be sticking out of their heads.
- Avoid harsh lighting and shooting into the light.
- Once the photo is framed with the subject placed at the desired location in the image, use the selective focusing or refocusing feature to select the object intended to be in focus. Tap the screen where you wish the focus to be in the final photo.

### Using HDR

- Use the High Dynamic Range mode, or HDR mode, on the smartphone when shooting photos. HDR adds more "dynamic range" to photographs — a concept referring to the ratio of light to dark in a photograph. Instead of just taking one photo, HDR takes three photos at different exposures and combines them.

### Managing resolution

High-resolution images create visual appeal and professionalism in print documents and online. Low-resolution images tend to appear grainy and pixelated. While high-resolution images can always be compressed if they are too large, low-resolution images cannot have their resolution increased. Be sure to shoot images at the highest resolution available and retain files large enough to use.

- Make sure the camera settings are at the highest available resolution.
- When emailing or uploading an image, make sure to use the original size of the image, without any reduction to the size of the image file.
- Avoid texting an image intended to be used at full size, as texting will compress the file size.
- Avoid copying an image the city or town has posted to social media for use in other applications. Social media platforms will generally compress the size of the images posted.

# Communicating With Every Tool in the Box

**M**unicipalities have no shortage of ways to communicate with the public. The key is matching the message with the right platform in a way that reaches the most residents.

In Rock Hill, for example, the list of tools used by the Office of Strategy Management is a long one. It includes media pitches, the city's website, social media channels, digital signage, the City Channel with informational slides and video, paid advertising, community presentations, print material, an eBulletin system, vehicle graphics and videos including a regular series with the mayor and a news show called *Rock Hill Update*. The city also recently restarted its *CityCast* podcast to offer a deeper dive into some topics.

Katie Quinn, Rock Hill's communications and marketing manager, said having a variety of options offers a better chance to find the right match for different constituents.

"Social media, websites, email newsletters and most video productions have to be tailored to offer bite-size pieces of information, since most audiences are quickly scanning and choosing what they want more details about," Quinn said. "Due to the nature of podcasts and the audiences who listen, we can take 30 to 40 minutes to hear from city staff and community members in more detail."

Last fall, all of Rock Hill's communications and marketing efforts were consolidated under a new Office of Strategy Management. The change has helped ensure consistency of the city's brand, messaging and voice, Quinn said. It also allowed the consolidated office to be more strategic, take down barriers between departments and operate in the best interest of the entire city.

"Don't be afraid to try new tools, but also don't count it as a failure if you have to shift direction or nix something



Rock Hill Public Works Director Terrence Nealy, left, joins as a guest on the city's podcast with the communications & marketing coordinators who host the show: Ashley Studebaker, center, and Matthew Kreh. Photo: City of Rock Hill.

altogether. It's worth the time to draft marketing plans for more long-range initiatives to serve as the blueprint on how to move forward," she said. "When Rock Hill started the community vaccination clinic in January, we worked from a fact sheet and updated it as needed. Communications staff have to be empowered to offer guidance on the best ways to effectively promote the needs of the organization. Sometimes it's hard for departments to hear 'no,' but we try to frame it to say, 'That won't work for what you want, but these other tools will.'"

The City of Hardeeville has a similar list of tools that its three-person staff uses

to communicate, including government access television, which has been operating for more than 20 years, mobile push alerts, a website and a host of social media outlets. Municipal meetings are broadcast several times each day, and other programming features events that take place around the city and in nearby communities, said Juan Singleton, Hardeeville's media director.

"We also have programming that helps to inform the citizens of upcoming events and safety measures. During the recent pandemic we ran several stories on how to stay safe by using masks and social distancing. Recently we have featured

vaccination clinic sites and testing sites,” he said. “A cooking show that featured our fire marshal and a councilmember highlighted safety in the kitchen and allowed for some fun moments as well.”

Every program that airs on the TV station is also linked to the town’s Facebook and Twitter accounts, and council meetings are streamed live on Facebook.

“We have different channels because we realize that not everyone uses the same social media. We have a youth council in the city. We understand that their age group is probably more into Instagram over Facebook. We have found out that Nextdoor is a great tool for some of the gated communities,” Singleton said.

In Sumter, the three full-time employees in the communications department often team with staff in various departments to expand their reach, said Shelley Kile, Sumter’s communications and tourism director.

“With a small staff in the communications department that serves over 30 departments, we can’t be everywhere all the time, so we coordinate messaging and photos to be taken by department staff on site to help document project progress,” Kile said.

The City of Sumter uses various tools, including traditional media, social media, direct mail, e-news, videos and more. It also has the capability of mass calling customers to report widespread issues through its utility billing software, but reserves that service for emergencies.

“It’s important to break issues down so everyone, internally and externally, can understand and feel as if they can contribute to the development of our community. We utilize all staff and elected officials in the city as communications ambassadors to share what’s happening,” she said. “Working with the mayor’s office, we have created a series called ‘Mayor’s Minute’ that reports stories about council business, city services and community programs and provide those notes to media, employees, public officials and the public, via online and in print. Each month highlights upcoming community



Above: Sumter’s “Mayor’s Minute” series highlights city operations and programs.

Left: Williamston Police Chief Tony Taylor uses social media videos to talk to the community. Photo: Town of Williamston.



events, as well as provides details on projects that are approved or are in progress. That series is ever changing and is currently growing into the video and podcast markets.”

In Williamston, Police Chief Tony Taylor uses social media videos to communicate with the public – and improve the morale of his department. On Facebook, viewers can see everything from Taylor getting soaked in a festival dunking booth to the chief sharing information about an arrest in a bank robbery case.

“There are two sides that people need to see. We have a human side and we like to have fun. But I also want educate the public, so I went out riding with one of our officers and posted a Facebook video,” Taylor said. “It’s important that we not only develop trust, but that we have that personal touch. People need to have a sense of knowing the people that they hire to protect them.”

With the pandemic curtailing the amount of time Taylor could spend meeting people face-to-face, social media and videos allowed him to have that dialogue with the community. Those conversations include videos that offer shout-outs and praise, for everyone from his officers to a group of children who sent thank-you notes after visiting the police department.

“We discipline in private and we praise in public. When you can tell your officers they’re doing a great job and it’s coming from the chief, that helps with the morale of the officers,” he said.

Taylor has been the chief since 2013 over the department with 21 full-time and five part-time officers.

“It helps with morale when you can brag on your guys. Not just a picture, but a video when you talk about your officers and how much they mean to the agency,” Taylor said.

# Building Web Presence for Residents and Visitors

Municipalities large and small use their websites to keep residents and visitors up to date on governmental services, public meetings, events and other news. The complexity of those websites tends to mirror the size and needs of the city or town, and its audience.

In the Town of Lowrys, for example, the primary needs are to show visitors how they can reserve the town's 110-year-old schoolhouse event venue, or how they can participate in the Christmas parade. A vastly different website audience exists on Hilton Head Island, where the local population tends to be older and tourists come from every country in the world.

As they develop their websites, many municipalities have to balance providing easy-to-use information with the cost of creating and maintaining a robust digital presence.

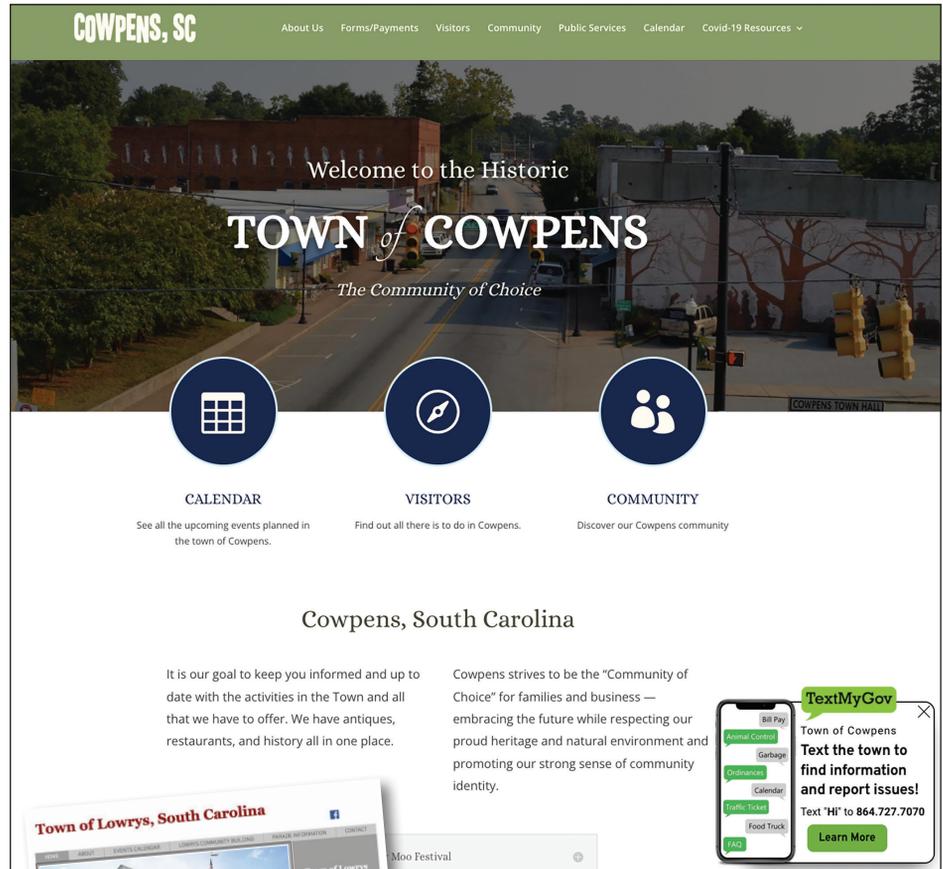
Whether the community's needs are large or small, one thing remains true: "The website is never done," said Ren e Phillips, Hilton Head Island's website developer.

## Simple needs

Marilyn Pressley, who works part-time as Lowrys' administrative assistant, said it takes her a couple of hours each month to keep the town's website updated with information about meetings and events. The website came about more than two years ago, and it can be easier than the old, informal way of communicating.

"The website is a good way of getting information out," Pressley said. "It's a good way for people to know our basic contact information. Before, if folks needed something, they might call the mayor at his business."

Pressley serves as the town's only employee, and she works part-time. She



Above: Cowpens used an outside vendor to produce and maintain its website. Photo:Town of Cowpens.

Left: Administrative Assistant Marilyn Pressley updates the Town of Lowrys' website. Photo:Town of Lowrys.

noted that getting information to those interested in renting the schoolhouse event venue would be difficult without the website.

"Having a place on our website that is dedicated to, 'here's how you rent the building, here's some pictures to help you see what we have, here's the rental

agreement,' [it] gives people a starting point," she said.

Maintenance of the website, which is built on the WIX platform, is fairly easy most of the time, requiring just a few hours a month. Pressley's workload does increase in the months leading up to the Christmas parade, which brings more

than 7,500 visitors each year to the town of 200 full-time residents.

“We usually have several hundred entries between horses, tractors and walkers,” Pressley said.

Plans for future website enhancements include adding a section on the town’s history, she said.

### A variety of tools

The Town of Cowpens’ extensive history — dating back to the American Revolution — is quite visible on its website. The outside vendor Comporium of Rock Hill produced the site and maintains it.

“When I got here seven years ago, the website was pretty new and thrown together,” said Town Administrator Steve Bolin. “I think an intern had done a do-it-yourself website.”

Bolin said the town interviewed about a half-dozen companies before settling on Comporium, which also posts updates to the site as Bolin provides them.

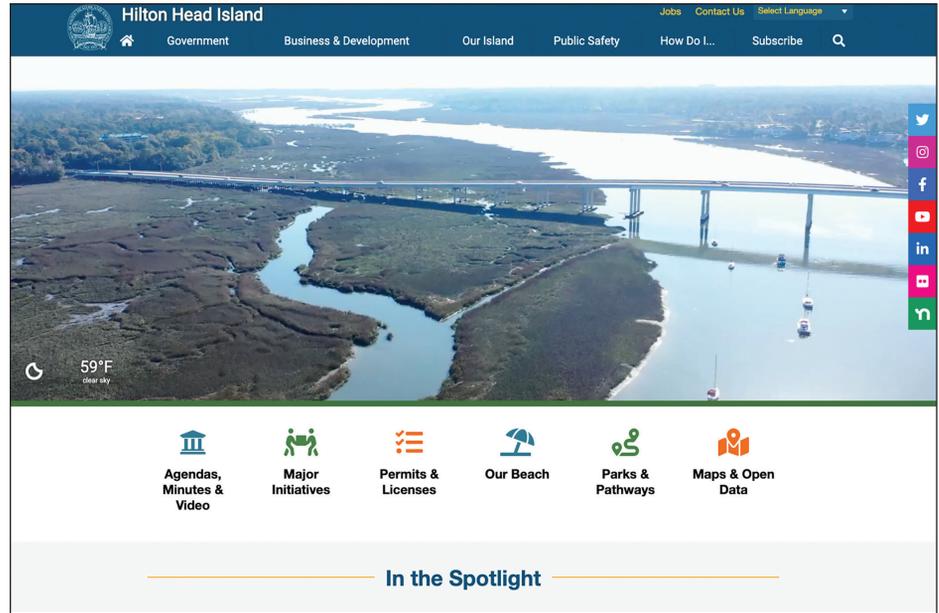
“The content is still pretty much yours to write,” he said. “But they help us adapt as things change, like integrating social media.”

The website also includes an option for residents to sign up for TextMyGov, a service that allows users to send or receive text messages from the town. The texts can include information about bad weather or council meetings. About 300 of the town’s 2,000 residents have signed up for the service.

Residents also can text questions to the town and get an automated response, which is a link to the page on the website that might be able to answer their question based on certain keywords, or get forwarded to Bolin or one of the two other town employees, who will follow up with a phone call. All responses usually come within 24 hours, he said.

Residents also can text photos of potholes that need fixing or potential ordinance violations. He said he gets one or two texts a day needing his attention.

“We’re trying to make sure we do 100% response, we don’t want to leave anything hanging,” Bolin said.



Hilton Head Island’s website, handled by the town’s Website Developer René Phillips, received a complete overhaul in 2021. Photo:Town of Hilton Head Island.

The website is more for permanent information while social media and texting is for quick turnaround items, according to Bolin.

“The website is like your tool shed,” he said. “And Facebook and texting are like your drawers in the kitchen.”

### A complete overhaul

With hundreds of thousands of visitors every year as well as nearly 40,000 full-time residents, the Town of Hilton Head Island’s website is essential to communicating with a range of audiences, Website Developer René Phillips said.

After years of making tweaks to an aging website, the town decided to perform a redesign and launched a complete overhaul of its site in July 2021. The driving force behind the redesign was to make the site mobile-friendly, but the key to its success was that everything was redone.

“Not only did we redo the design, we rewrote all our content, restructured everything,” said Phillips, who has worked with the town’s website for 20 years. “We started from scratch to the point of ‘don’t even look at what was there, we’re not

going to amend that anymore, we’re going to start over.”

It took a couple of years to get the site’s architecture built and the content rewritten. The website was built and is managed in-house, but Phillips said she created a content management system of sorts that lets her “subject-matter experts” enter their own updates.

“Staff can upload their own news releases or other information,” she said. “It gives me a little more flexibility. They need to be able to update when I am not here.”

As part of the site’s long-term maintenance, every page in the site has an owner who is responsible for reviewing content and making it sure it is up to date.

“Some departments assigned someone once a month to go through and check every page and then with other departments. It was part sales pitch to convince them to keep their information up to date,” she said. “The more information that you have and that is correct, this is your best tool to communicate with the public.”

Phillips noted that the website had 2.9 million visitors last year.

“Imagine if all those people had to come to the door,” she said.

# Tips for Professional Email Communication



For many jobs, emails are a critical part of everyday communication. The process of writing and sending them creates numerous opportunities to fail to meet professional standards, which can damage the perception of a public official or staff member, or even the reputation of the entire municipality.

These steps can help keep emails professional and effective:

## Proofread carefully

As with all forms of communication, the emails of municipal officials or staff members stand as a reflection of both the person and the city overall. Misspellings, grammatical errors and formatting problems provide the easiest way for an email to undermine credibility.

Beyond relying on spellcheck, be sure to read over an email for mistakes before sending it. Reading the message aloud can help identify errors. Always check to see that the message uses the recipient's correct name, spelled correctly, especially when responding to an existing message.

## State the purpose clearly

Every message needs to explain the purpose of the email as clearly and concisely as possible. This includes a short subject line and a to-the-point email body. Employing words, sentences and entire emails that are all as short as possible makes emails easy to understand and demonstrates respect for the recipient's time.

## Use professional language

Without body language and immediate feedback, written communication is inherently more vulnerable to misunderstandings. A respectful tone and carefully considered language can help, even as more casual language has emerged as the norm for emails.

Municipal officials and staff need to remember that emails count as public records according to the SC Freedom of Information Act. The emails are disclosable following a FOIA request, with some narrowly drawn limitations. Senders should keep in mind that their messages could ultimately appear in a news story when they are considering the content and language of their message.

For more information, see the *Public Official's Guide to Compliance with the S.C. Freedom of Information Act*, available at [www.scpres.org](http://www.scpres.org).

## Keep formatting professional

Stick to commonplace fonts like Arial or Calibri, rather than unusual or distracting fonts. Avoid using background colors, textures or images.

## Use appropriate greetings

Senders should craft the greeting to be appropriate for their relationship with the recipients. A "Dear Mr./Ms. ..." construction will often be too formal, and a more simple "Hello" or "Hi" can be more applicable in some instances.

## Use appropriate closers and signatures

Appropriate closers can be "Thanks," "Regards," or something similar followed by the sender's name.

Automatic email signatures are a common challenge for email professionalism, especially when they contain things like quotations or other personal, off-topic messages, distracting fonts, personalized images or in the worst instances, animations. These can all significantly reduce the professionalism of the email, and can cause a spam filter to stop the message from reaching the intended recipient.

Signatures should include such elements as the sender's name, title, contact information, possibly the logo of their employer, and generally little else. The signature should occupy relatively little space on the screen.

Standardizing the signatures city-wide helps foster professionalism. Cities can institute this either through a management directive or by having IT staff set up all users' signatures.

## Handle follow-ups correctly

When receiving emails, aim to respond within at most a couple of business days, except in cases such as spam emails or unsolicited sales emails. When sending emails, a kindly worded follow-up email can be appropriate after a couple of business days. Making sure to use updated out-of-office messages helps senders know when they can expect a response.





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# Calendar

*Scheduled in-person meetings are subject to change based on the Municipal Association's COVID-19 restrictions in place at the time of the meeting. Information about events and how members can access the virtual events will be updated on the Association's website.*

## JANUARY

**12 Business License Essentials – Sending Out Renewals.** Virtual. See page 4 for more information.

**27 Retail Recruitment Training: Sessions 1 and 2.** Municipal Association of SC, Columbia.

## FEBRUARY

**1 Hometown Legislative Action Day. Marriott, Columbia.**

Topics include law enforcement reform, federal advocacy, the political outlook for the 2022 session, first responder assistance programs, census data, governmental

civility and others. See page 5 for more information.

**2 Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government.** Marriott, Columbia.

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 MEO Institute courses are “Advanced Municipal Economic Development” and “Advanced Advocacy and Intergovernmental Relations.” Advanced Continuing Education topics include a movie screening and discussion about municipal fraud and a session on strategic planning and goal setting.

**9 Business License Essentials – Manufacturers.** Virtual.

**24 Retail Recruitment Training: Sessions 5 and 6.** Municipal Association of SC, Columbia.

## MARCH

**2 SC Business Licensing Officials Association Spring Training and Advanced Academy.** Cooperative Conference Center, Columbia.

**3 SC Association of Stormwater Managers First Quarter Meeting.** Cooperative Conference Center, Columbia.

**9 Business License Essentials – How to Calculate Business License & Declining Rates.** Virtual.

**14 – 16 SC Utility Billing Association Annual Meeting.** SpringHill Suites Greenville Downtown.

**24 Municipal Technology Association of SC Spring Meeting.** Cooperative Conference Center, Columbia.

**31 Retail Recruitment Training: Sessions 3 and 4.** Municipal Association of SC, Columbia.