



UPTOWN

a publication of the municipal association of south carolina

Consensus Building and Civil Discourse

Annual Meeting to Focus on Effective Public Communication

In recent years, the polarization, anger and communication breakdowns seen in the national political landscape have grown more apparent at the local level. Public meetings have in some cases become the sites of emotionally charged accusations, working relationships between some elected officials have deteriorated to the point of dysfunction, and social media outlets have become places for animosity and falsehoods.

Responding to this difficult environment, the Municipal Association of SC board of directors identified the promotion of civility as a key goal for 2022 and beyond. During Hometown Legislative Action Day in February, the Association invited Matt Lehrman, co-founder and managing director of Social Prosperity Partners, to talk about how to pursue the difficult public conversations that can defuse conflict.

Lehrman will return to the Association’s Annual Meeting in Charleston. He will lead group exercises during a preconference session on July 14, and on July 15, he will deliver the keynote address, exploring ways for leaders to gather consensus around their town’s and city’s highest aspirations and how an openness to opportunity serves as the foundation for community pride, civility and prosperity.

Earlier this year, Lehrman joined the Association’s *City Quick Connect* podcast for a wide-ranging talk on the increasingly pervasive problem of incivility in public spheres.

Civility, he noted, “starts with basic courtesy, basic respect for other people,” and also involves maintaining a focus on agreed-upon community values, like collaboration or responsiveness. He added that well-developed personal skills provide a backbone for civility, such as the willingness and ability to have meaningful conversations about problems, despite the common temptation to provide one-way communication about how the city will fix a problem.



Doing so, he said, “doesn’t force us into an us-versus-them relationship, where people come in and they want to yell at the mayor and the councilmembers because they feel unheard, they feel disrespected. We have an adversarial form of government. We are allowed to petition our government, and we are allowed to be angry if our government is not listening to us ... But there are structures that we can put in place where it’s not an us-versus-them, it’s where we ... bring residents together to talk amongst themselves, to share ideas, to share aspirations.”

Lehrman routinely hosts community discussion sessions.

“In all of my facilitation,” he said, “I have never found a group of people that couldn’t find something to agree on. It might be one word or one concept out of everything, but if we can find the

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President:

Councilmember Kathy Pender,
Rock Hill

Executive Director:

Todd Glover tglover@masc.sc

Managing Editor:

Meredith Houck mhouck@masc.sc

Editor:

Russell Cox rcox@masc.sc

Editorial Assistant:

TJ Lundeen TLundeen@masc.sc

Contributing Writers:

**Jenny Boulware, John Ciesielski,
Page Ivey, Megan Sexton,
Erica Wright**



Matt Lehrman of Social Prosperity partners will return to South Carolina for the Municipal Association’s Annual Meeting to discuss conflict reduction.

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one thing that we agree on, we can build on that.”

Find the full podcast episode, “Civility and Local Government: S4 Ep5,” at www.masc.sc (keyword: podcast).

Additional Annual Meeting preconference opportunities

The 2022 Annual Meeting will take place July 13 – 17 at the Charleston Place Hotel. Attendees can find the full agenda at www.masc.sc (keyword: Annual Meeting). The preconference sessions on July 14 all require preregistration. Here are the other preconference sessions:

Storytelling with Storyville Social

– Downtown development technical assistance program Main Street South Carolina has partnered with Storyville Social to create training on how economic development programs can build engaging social media content that puts a human face on local businesses. This session will discuss the training’s processes and results.

Sustainability and resilience mobile

tour – At a time when many local governments are confronting rising sea levels, flooding and other consequences of climate

change, the City of Charleston and the Town of James Island are working to address the threats. Learn about some of these projects.

First-timers lunch – Designed for municipal officials and staff, this program provides helpful information so that first-time attendees can get the most out of their Annual Meeting experience.

Registering for the Annual Meeting

All cities and towns will use the Municipal Association’s online registration process for reserving spots at the meeting and booking hotel rooms. The Association’s drawing on May 9 will establish a registration appointment time for each city and town who registered for the drawing. During these half-hour appointments, which will take place from Tuesday, June 7 – Thursday, June 9, Association staff will assist the designated representative of each municipality in registering all attending officials from that city. June 13 will be the deadline for all hotel reservations, and July 1 will be the deadline for registering for the Annual Meeting itself.

Learn more at www.masc.sc (keyword: Annual Meeting).

2022 Compensation Survey Results Now Available

The Municipal Association of SC online compensation survey provides cities and towns an easy way to compare their employee compensation with pay from other municipalities around South Carolina.

With this tool, municipal leaders can save time when researching pay data while making decisions on how to set their compensation levels competitively. This reference tool should supplement, not substitute for, those situations where a city or town needs to commission a full class and compensation study.

The results of the 2022 compensation survey are now available online and can be searched to generate specific reports. For example, users can create reports for municipalities of a particular population range or specific job positions. Reports can also include the number of full-time employees or the annual payroll of a particular city or town. Other search functions include salary ranges, merit raise minimums or maximums, or the range of a cost-of-living adjustment. Users can also export all of the compensation survey data into Excel spreadsheets and they can download the entire compensation survey report as a PDF.

Responding to the survey is voluntary for municipalities, but higher response rates increase the usefulness of the data. The Association requests survey participation from cities and towns at the beginning of each calendar year. Find the survey at www.masc.sc (keyword: compensation survey). For more information, contact Sara Whitaker at swhitaker@masc.sc or 803.933.1240.

Business Licensing Essentials: How to Handle Appeals and Delinquents

Every month in 2022, the Municipal Association's Local Revenue Services is hosting "Business Licensing Essentials," a series of virtual training sessions on the processes needed to administer business licenses correctly, efficiently and in a way that makes life easier for those doing business inside a city or town. The session on processing delinquencies and appeals will take place Wednesday, May 11, 10 to 11:30 a.m. Learn more at www.masc.sc (keyword: business licensing essentials).

Act 176, which standardized business licensing practices across the state, established a standard business license tax due date. After April 30, local governments may charge the penalty rates included in their business license ordinance to businesses operating without a license. The new law also outlines a standard appeals process which includes deadlines for appeals and responses.

Find the recordings of past meetings online at www.masc.sc (keyword: business licensing essentials).



NEWS BRIEFS

Downtown Florence was named as a semifinalist for the 2022 Great America Main Street Award through Main Street America. Florence is one of the 32 communities participating in Main Street South Carolina, a technical assistance program that empowers communities as they revitalize their historic downtowns.

The first four South Carolina Cultural Districts, designated by the SC Arts Commission in 2015, have earned recertification. The four districts are the Congaree Vista in **Columbia**, and the downtowns of **Lancaster, Rock Hill** and **Spartanburg**. The state's SC Cultural District program aims to attract new artistic and cultural businesses, encourage economic development and celebrate local identity. Additional SC Cultural Districts have been designated in Beaufort, Bluffton, Camden, Florence and Greenwood.

Fodor's Travel named **Beaufort, Greenville** and **Hilton Head Island** among its top travel destinations in the U.S. in its 2022 Go List.

FAQs for Budgeting American Rescue Plan Funds

As cities and towns make decisions on how to use the funds from the Local Fiscal Recovery Fund of the American Rescue Plan, officials must follow the U.S. Department of Treasury's Final Rule governing the funds, as well as state law. Here are points to consider when budgeting a municipality's allocation.

Do cities and towns have to make a formal appropriation of funds for the ARP allocation?

South Carolina law requires city and town councils to appropriate funds from the Local Fiscal Recovery Fund, even though the Department of Treasury does not require this. "Appropriate" in this case means councils should budget their ARP funds as a part of their annual budget or through a separate ordinance.

The SC Constitution, in Article 10, Sections 7 and 8, states that municipalities cannot spend funds until they are first appropriated. SC Section 5-7-260 requires the adoption of budgets by ordinance, and Section 6-1-80 requires a public hearing to take place before council adopts the budget.

Councils have to either pass a stand-alone ordinance or amend their annual budgets to appropriate their ARP funds. Cities may appropriate ARP dollars within an existing fund, or appropriate them into a dedicated special revenue fund exclusively for ARP.

When will cities receive the last of the ARP money?

The American Rescue Plan Act requires the Department of Treasury to distribute payments from the Local Fiscal Recovery Fund in two payments, with the second payment being released 12 months after the first. The majority of South Carolina cities and towns received their first payments in 2021 and can expect the second payment of the same amount in 2022.

Cities and towns will receive the second payment, or tranche, in the same

manner as the first payment. The smaller municipalities, considered nonentitlement units of local government for ARP purposes, will receive the second tranche from the SC Department of Administration.

How long do cities have to spend ARP money?

Funds must be obligated to be spent for an intended purpose by December 31, 2024, and spent by December 31, 2026.

How can cities' ARP money work in conjunction with ARP money received by the state?

Both the SC House of Representatives and Senate are proposing to allocate the state's ARP dollars using similar priorities:

- Funding for the SC Department of Transportation to accelerate the projects of the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program
- Funding for the SC Office of Regulatory Staff to expand broadband infrastructure to unserved and underserved communities
- Funding for the SC Rural Infrastructure Authority to administer three competitive grant programs to provide for improvements in water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure

While it can be tempting for cities to immediately seek out potential uses for their ARP allocations, they may be able to create a greater impact by taking a slower approach and finding ways to leverage their ARP money by coordinating it with the RIA grant programs.

Here are the current details of the proposed grants:

Infrastructure grant

- The maximum grant amount will be \$10 million per project or application.
- Large utilities will be required to provide a 25% match.
- Small utilities will be required to provide a 15% match.

Regional solutions grant

- This grant is designed for regional partnerships among large and small systems, including consolidation.
- The maximum grant amount is \$10 million per project or application.
- A 15% match will be required.

Planning grant

- The maximum grant amount is \$1 million per project or application.
- This grant is designed for very small systems that serve populations of 3,300 or less.
- No match is required.

See page 14 for an article from the Rural Infrastructure Authority about ARP dollars.

Find the Municipal Association's ARP resources at www.masc.sc (keyword: ARP). For questions, contact Legislative and Public Policy Advocate Erica Wright at 803.354.4793 or ewright@masc.sc.

ASSOCIATION HIGHLIGHT

SC Association of Stormwater Managers

Many municipal job functions have unique training and networking needs, and the Municipal Association of South Carolina's affiliate associations offer opportunities to meet those needs. The SC Association of Stormwater Managers offers quarterly training on stormwater management policies and best practices. The SC State Board of Registration for Professional Engineers and Surveyors recognizes these training sessions for continuing education credits. SCASM also provides networking opportunities to municipal, county and regional stormwater professionals as well as a listserv for information-sharing.

Membership is available at two levels: active membership for someone employed in stormwater management by a municipal, county or regional government in South Carolina, as well as associate membership for private company employees interested in the field.

The Second Quarter Meeting will take place Thursday, June 2 at the Cooperative Conference Center in Columbia. Topics for the meeting will include communicating about stormwater issues using easy-to-understand terminology as well as updates from the SC Department of Health and Environmental Control. Learn more at www.masc.sc (keyword: SCASM).



True or False?

Establishing clear, easy-to-understand rules of procedure can allow a council to conduct its meetings more efficiently and effectively.

Answer: True



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

The state law found in SC Code Sections 5-7-250 and 5-7-270 requires municipalities to adopt rules of procedure 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 both in-person and online courses. Elected officials who complete all of the required coursework can then graduate from the institute. Register for the May 17 courses "Municipal Governance and Policy" and "Freedom of Information Act in South Carolina" at www.masc.sc (keyword: MEO).



This rendering illustrates the potential of the Railroad Corner redevelopment, which would transform a space between Orangeburg’s downtown and SC State University and Claflin University with housing and retail. Photo: Perkins & Will.

Investing in Downtown’s Vibrancy: More Than Design

Lighting, landscaping, sidewalks and benches — each design element can improve the appearance and function of South Carolina’s downtown public spaces. Effective downtown design, paired with thoughtful historic preservation practices, can help a community stand out among its peers and serve as a potent draw for residents and businesses.

Communities like Dillon, Manning, and Orangeburg have adopted comprehensive revitalization plans that pay careful attention to maintaining a good mix of retail businesses and an inventory of historic buildings. These plans also focus on the partnerships and programming that can catalyze new historic commercial district investments.

Dillon

A county seat in the Pee Dee region, Dillon is known for its transportation modes. From early railroad development to today’s Amtrak station and inland port, Dillon serves as a major transit hub along Interstate 95.

Like many rural communities across the state, the City of Dillon invested heavily in downtown streetscaping to spur additional economic activity.

“Twenty years ago, we set aside significant funding to revitalize downtown’s infrastructure,” said Dillon’s Mayor Pro Tem Phil Wallace. “We thought that other investments would follow.”

However, disinvestment in Dillon’s downtown continued.

“After leaving for Arizona and California, I would come back to visit,” said Lisa Moody, Dillon’s downtown development coordinator. “Every time I walked downtown, I noticed there were two more stores gone. Then the larger businesses had moved ... Eventually, we just stopped coming downtown altogether.”

The City of Dillon recently committed to supporting a Main Street program to refocus downtown initiatives. After receiving a Municipal Association of SC Hometown Economic Development Grant to solidify a downtown master plan, the city pursued several projects including a new police station, a visitor center, a conference area and space for a farmers market and performing arts stage. The city is also actively working to remove barriers for housing developments.

“We have the right jobs in Dillon,” said Mayor Pro Tem Wallace, “but housing is limited.”

Dillon has plenty of untapped potential. Its downtown historic district encompasses more than 60 commercial buildings, all full of redevelopment possibilities. To uncork the commercial district’s potential, the City of Dillon — in partnership with the nonprofit Dillon Community Alliance — is tackling stabilization and preservation initiatives to restore the historic storefronts. Plans include completing a downtown building inventory and establishing a formal process for evaluating buildings that are not meeting Dillon’s maintenance standards. The groups are also planning a preservation-focused campaign to highlight the history of the buildings.

“Once we have multiple rentable, usable spaces, downtown is going to explode,” said Stephanie Mitchell, president of the Dillon Community Alliance. “There’s a real commitment to move the revitalization process forward. It is daunting, but there’s a lot of energy. There’s money to be made in downtown Dillon.”

Manning

Like Dillon, Manning’s proximity to I-95 brings industry and tourism to the region. Revolutionary War history, abundant shorelines on Lake Marion and

a position on the SC Coastal BBQ Trail make Manning unique.

Manning's growth has occurred both within the downtown district and along the I-95 gateway. While national retailers are locating along the interstate — Chick-fil-A is on the way — 11 new businesses have opened downtown. This mix creates a healthy balance of retail and dining, while maintaining Manning's authentic historic courthouse square.

"There's a renewed grassroots momentum downtown. Business owners are working together to host retail events," said Main Street Manning Director Carrie Trebil.

Manning has also created a business-friendly environment where businesses are expanding. One of Manning's newest food trucks is transitioning to a brick-and-mortar restaurant that will offer brunch all day. Also, a long-established Manning business is in the process of expanding into larger square footage.

A significant investment downtown includes Provalus, an IT company bringing 45 jobs, with as many as 300 more jobs expected. Preferring small cities and historic commercial districts, Provalus invested in a 100-year-old, 14,000 square foot building that was on the verge of collapse.

For communities and leaders working on a similar revitalization journey, Trebil offers this advice: "Trust the process. Fourteen years ago I didn't envision a large company investing in our downtown. And here we are — with more investments on the way."

Orangeburg

Home to Edisto Gardens, two historically Black universities and more than 25 notable historic buildings and historic districts, Orangeburg is on the rise.

"Orangeburg is a powder keg of potential. It is a place to grow and prosper," said City Administrator Sidney Evinger. "We have leadership across the city and county working in one accord to revitalize downtown."

Recognizing pent-up demand for new amenities, the city is making several improvements, including maintenance updates to Edisto Gardens. Nearby, it



Above: Dillon's Celebrate Main Street Festival features concerts, cook-offs, street dances and a car show. Photo: City of Dillon. At right: Manning has focused on building its balance of retail and dining in the downtown. Photo: City of Manning.



plans to add a skatepark, pickleball courts and a playground. It's also stabilizing several historic buildings to make them more attractive and useful. Noting the Newberry Opera House's impact on downtown Newberry, Evinger is looking to rehabilitate Orangeburg's underutilized Stevenson Auditorium, a 600-seat theater.

Railroad Corner may become the city's most transformative project. This proposed mixed-use site would include student housing and retail space, and would be a \$20 to \$25 million investment.

To encourage private investment alongside these public investments, the city has increased its facade grant program significantly — from \$50,000 to \$250,000. Simpler activities also help reestablish confidence in downtown.

Applying fresh mulch, power washing the sidewalks, and leaving up holiday lights all year "signifies pride in Orangeburg," said Evinger. "We stepped up our code enforcement to address dilapidated buildings and weedy lots. We didn't want developers and prospects seeing rundown buildings and dirty streets."

The city partners with its nonprofit Main Street program, the Downtown Orangeburg Revitalization Association, to coordinate and program after-hours activities downtown. Many activities now use the new Downtown Market Pavilion, a 6,200 square-foot open-air facility, funded in part by a Hometown Economic Development

Grant. Built to fill a vacant lot and give a permanent home for the farmers market, the pavilion also hosts events like Spring Fest and Orangeburg's Street Dance.

"The process to raise the funds for the pavilion was a statement to investors — that our community wants downtown to be the best it possibly can be," said Candice Roberson, executive director of DORA. "With donations from large industries, small businesses, residents, the state and local governments, the pavilion has become an asset not just for downtown, but the larger Orangeburg community as well."

Maximizing investments

Evidence of previous investments can be seen across South Carolina's downtowns in underground lighting, landscaping and sidewalk improvements.

Even so, "the notion of 'build it and they will come' is not enough. Design is just one aspect of a healthy downtown," said Jenny Boulware, manager of Main Street South Carolina. "Implementing an annual action plan that addresses partners, vacancies and marketing maximizes public infrastructure investments."

Main Street South Carolina is a technical assistance program of the Municipal Association of SC. It offers several community membership levels ranging in cost and requirements. Learn more at www.masc.sc (keyword: Main Street).

12 Graduate From BLOA Training Institute

Twelve officials representing cities, towns, counties and the Municipal Association of SC graduated from the SC Business Licensing Officials Association Training Institute during BLOA's spring meeting.

The Institute improves the professional and administrative skills of business licensing officials. Its three sessions include topics on general licensing, problem areas and personal development.

The graduates can earn the Accreditation in Business Licensing designation after passing a comprehensive written exam.

These are the newest BLOA Training Institute graduates:

- Rita Bruce, city clerk/treasurer, City of Landrum
- Daniel Cabral, assistant finance director, Town of Summerville
- Laura Culler, director of finance and administration support, Town of Chapin
- Yolima Earle, administrative clerk, City of Greer
- Brandi Hussmann, business licensing, Beaufort County
- Sherry Kempster, town clerk, Town of Clover
- Amy Knox, clerk trainee, City of Union
- Scott McDonald, business license official, Town of Summerville
- Paula Payton, municipal clerk, Town of West Pelzer
- Lonna Sodemann, revenue services specialist, Town of Hilton Head Island



- Kaylee Summerton, revenue analyst, Municipal Association of SC
 - Dorota Szubert, finance director, Town of Kiawah Island
- Additionally, Catrina Woodruff, deputy city administrator for the Town of Surfside Beach, received the Master in Business Licensing designation. The MBL is available to those who have earned their ABL designation and also achieved 50 experience points within the program during a seven-year period.

Learn more about the BLOA Training Institute at www.masc.sc (keyword: Accreditation in Business Licensing).

MCTI Graduates Eight Officials

The South Carolina Municipal Clerks and Treasurers Institute gained eight new graduates in 2022. MCTI is a three-year program providing municipal clerks and treasurers with skills critical to their profession.

Graduation from the program requires participants to complete more than 120 hours of classroom instruction on topics such as business license management, accounting and municipal law.

Completion of MCTI satisfies the education requirements for the certifications offered by the International Institute of Municipal Clerks as well as the Association of Public Treasurers of the United States and Canada. Those seeking IIMC's Certified Municipal Clerk designation also need to complete a capstone project. MCTI is scheduled as six sessions, each taking place over two and a half days. Participants can begin the program at any point and are encouraged to attend sessions consecutively.

Here are the program's most recent graduates:

- Jennifer Adkins, city clerk, City of Myrtle Beach
- Brandi Allen, clerk/treasurer, Town of Stuckey
- Julie Burgess, administrative assistant, City of Greer
- Elizabeth Krajewski, clerk/treasurer, Town of Arcadia Lakes



- Lindsey M. Newton, community and economic development coordinator, City of Clemson
- Rebekka Jean Phillips, city clerk, City of Woodruff
- EmmaLee Salvo, deputy clerk/treasurer, Town of Jackson
- Dorota Szubert, finance director, Town of Kiawah Island

Learn more about the program at www.masc.sc (keyword: MCTI).

Download the New Municipal Association of SC App

Technology is ever-changing, but the Municipal Association's dedication to the principle of its founding members is steadfast — to offer the services, programs and tools that give municipal officials the knowledge they need to efficiently and effectively operate their cities and towns. The newly launched Association app provides a mobile-friendly way to interact with the Association and connect to educational and legislative resources.

With the new app, users can view the Association's training calendar, and access the municipal directory, staff listing and job openings. The app can also serve as a helpful tool during meetings, trainings and conferences for agendas, attendee lists and event information.

The Annual Meeting and Hometown Legislative Action Day apps, which were previously standalone event apps, are now a part of the more comprehensive Association app. Anyone who still has the older version of the event app, which was named "MuniAssnSC," on their phones should delete it and download the new app. Attendees can read about each session and create a personalized schedule. They can access contact information and communicate directly with speakers, exhibitors and sponsors.

Download the app from either the App Store or Google Play by searching for "Municipal Association of SC." To learn more about the app, contact Russell Cox at 803.933.1206 or rcox@masc.sc.



Scan this QR code on your smartphone to download the Association app.



NLC Report Addresses Harassment Directed at Municipal Officials

Personal attacks against elected officials and staff — delivered in the council chambers, at city hall or online — have grown more common. Public servants, facing hostility directed at themselves or even their families, have grown less willing to serve their communities.

This is one of the conclusions in a report from the National League of Cities in late 2021, *On the Frontlines of Today's Cities: Trauma, Challenges and Solutions*, examining causes and potential responses to this challenge.

In his introduction, NLC CEO and Executive Director Clarence Anthony spoke of conflict as an inevitable part of government work, but one which has taken a destructive turn.

"While disagreement and debate are a healthy part of a functioning democracy, civil discourse in America has been increasingly in decline — we see it in the

media and more frequently, we're seeing it more in our own communities," he wrote.

The report traces these causes of incivility:

- **Polarization** – Nationally, the divide between conservatives and liberals has grown wider and deeper, with more people willing to resort to violence to advance political goals.
- **Pushback against inclusive political participation** – The report describes this as a response to the growing diversification of those participating in the political sphere, whether it's in terms of religion, gender, race, ethnicity or sexual identity.
- **Online spread of misinformation and disinformation** – All falsehoods are misinformation, and "disinformation" are the falsehoods spread by those who intend to deceive others. As the report notes, social media has

not just diversified the viewpoints that can easily be heard, it has also provided a powerful way for harmful messages and ideologies to spread, and for media consumers to reinforce their existing biases.

The report identifies actions that cities can take:

- **Securing physical safety** – This can be developing security plans and providing de-escalation training.
- **Promoting mental health** – This can be connecting staff and officials with mental health resources, and establishing a trauma management strategy.
- **Improving civil discourse** – Work to get leaders to serve as models of good discourse and community engagement; and create codes of conduct and social media guidelines.

Find the full report at www.nlc.org.



In September 2021, the SC Office of Resilience marked the completion of the final house of the 2015 Flood Housing Recovery Program, which repaired or replaced 1,830 homes. Photo: SC Office of Resilience.

Building a Resilient Future

Cities Advance Flood Management, Sustainability Projects

Located on the Pee Dee River, the Town of Cheraw is no stranger to flooding. But the flooding damage that followed Hurricane Florence made clear — more so than any previous event — that something needed to be done to proactively manage stormwater and mitigate future events.

While federal programs are available to cover much of the cost of a stormwater management plan, it still can be difficult for smaller towns and cities to fund their share. That's where the SC Office of Resilience stepped in — to use its mitigation federal funds match program to pay Cheraw's cost. The stormwater master plan was the first step in a process that led to funding for buyouts of property in flood zones and infrastructure updates.

As South Carolina faces more severe weather events, sustainability projects have moved to the top of the priority list for many municipalities. Stormwater studies, with funding help from state and

federal agencies, have taken place around the state, while some cities hire sustainability managers and work to figure out how to prepare for — and mitigate — the effects of a changing climate.

Ben Duncan, the state's chief resilience officer, said the SC Office of Resilience first started as a disaster recovery office, working on everything from housing recovery to resilience planning, it also now works on infrastructure projects and home and property buyouts.

All of this is part of the path "to become a more resilient state," Duncan said.

The office, using U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development community development block grants, provided assistance in rehabilitating or replacing more than 3,000 homes that were damaged by the 2015 flood, Hurricane Matthew in 2016 and Hurricane Florence in 2018.

The SCOR mitigation program allows municipalities to apply for assistance with the development of a mitigation/resilience plan or study for their area, or apply for a grant to cover the required local matching funds for a federally funded mitigation projects. The municipalities use the planning documents to apply for money for infrastructure to reduce flood risks or home buyout projects to relocate residents out of flood-prone areas.

In Cheraw, an area around a park that flooded in Hurricane Florence is downstream from an Environmental Protection Agency Superfund site, where dangerous chemicals leached into the ground from an old production facility. The town purchased a few properties around the park, but needed another source of funding to continue the project. The state is buying out nine homes.

"So they're [the nine homes] going to be out of harm's way, they'll be out

of the floodplain, and the land has to be permanent green space in a buyout program,” said Eric Fosmire, chief of staff and general counsel for the Office of Resilience. “We will buy it in the name of the local government, and then it’s theirs. They can undertake a wholesale approach which Cheraw is going to do to expand the park there in that area and make sure it’s all clean.”

While some larger cities have staff and the capacity to write grants and undertake projects, part of the state office’s goal is to provide technical assistance for smaller communities. For cities and towns in the state’s 17 counties in particular peril, the office works to mitigate future disasters.

“We can do a plan or study on their flooding risks at no cost for them. We’ll pay for it,” Fosmire said. “We are trying to encourage small communities to come forward and tell us what their problems are.”

In October 2015, Forest Acres was hard hit by the heavy rains that brought a historic flood and caused dams to fail on the lakes and streams that run through the city’s neighborhoods.

In the years that followed, the city worked closely with Richland County and the SC Department of Natural Resources. It adopted Richland County’s stream buffer requirement. The SC Department of Health and Environmental Control improved permitting and oversight of many of the area’s dams, said Keith Lindler, the city engineer and building official for the City of Forest Acres.

“The county has updated regulations and so have we, because we are part of their permitting,” he said.

Lindler said Forest Acres is better prepared now to respond to flooding events, while updated standards are expected to protect new construction from rising waters.

He cited a housing development built around 2010 when flood standards for residential structures were already in place, causing the property to be built 2 feet above the flooding baseline. The homes were built on land that flooded heavily in 2015, and while they had



The SC Office of Resilience’s mitigation program hosts a town hall session in Bennettsville. The program provides help with resilience plans and studies, and applying for matching grants. Photo: SC Office of Resilience.

water in their yards, the living space was unaffected.

“The standards worked,” Lindler said. “The same creek had older houses that were built in the 1950s and 60s with no standards. Several of those houses had 80 to 90% damage to the point where they had to be elevated 6 to 8 feet.”

He said other small cities faced with water and weather events should remember they are not alone.

“Call around. Make contacts with your state agencies involved in the flooding side of things. Maintain a good working relationship with your county or state partners,” he said. “We’re a small municipality. It makes sense for us to be covered under the broad permit Richland County has.”

The City of Columbia is a leader in addressing climate change issues, with its city council supporting the U.S. Conference of Mayors Climate Action Plan and forming a Climate Protection Action Committee in 2007. Columbia brought together more than 50 community leaders to examine the climate issue, leading to a plan that council adopted in 2008.

“Sustainability means meeting our own needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. In addition to natural resources, we also need social and economic resources,” said Mary Pat Baldauf, the city’s sustainability facilitator. “Our efforts today will help make America energy-independent, clean our air and water, improve fuel-efficiency of our vehicles, kick-start 21st

century industries, and make our cities safer and more livable now and for future generations.”

The city’s sustainability program has enjoyed many successes in the past few years, including a 3-STAR Community Rating for national leadership in sustainability by the nonprofit STAR [Sustainability Tools for Assessing and Rating] Communities.

“At the time, STAR was the nation’s leading framework and certification program for evaluating local sustainability, encompassing social, economic and environmental performance measures,” she said. “STAR Communities has since been brought under the umbrella of the U.S. Green Building Council’s new LEED [Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design] for Cities program, which we hope to pursue soon. We were and still are the only South Carolina city to attain STAR certification.”

Baldauf’s advice for municipalities interested in starting or improving sustainability programs is to not reinvent the wheel, and to call on organizations that are available to assist cities in creating a program, including ICLEI-Local Governments for Sustainability and the Southeast Sustainability Directors Network.

“Be diligent and patient. A wise colleague once told me that sustainability is new to most people, and that change isn’t always easy to accomplish,” Baldauf said. “Continue to look at the big picture and celebrate even small successes.”

Cities Drive Charge for Vehicle Electrification



Infrastructure and Public Works

Electric vehicles are becoming more popular in the United States as a way for drivers to save money on gas and long-term maintenance while reducing carbon emissions.

While the mileage range of electric cars and trucks is improving, the vehicles still need frequent charging, and charging stations, unlike gas stations, are not yet in plentiful supply.

That's where cities and towns are stepping in to offer residents and visitors places to charge up — usually for free. Cities are also using these charging stations themselves as they look to replace older vehicles with newer electric models.

In Greenville, drivers can find three dozen charging stations scattered throughout the city's parking garages, said Michael Frixen, assistant to the city manager and sustainability coordinator for Greenville. The garages provide parking to shoppers, visitors, downtown office workers and residents in downtown apartments. Once drivers pay for access to the garage, charging is free.

Frixen said the city paid to install the charging stations, and the electricity used is included in the total bill for each garage. The city installed several of the stations in the past few years. There are some private charging stations available in the city as well, including a hotel that offers Tesla superchargers located off Interstate 85.

Greenville's push into vehicle electrification isn't just charging the cars of residents and visitors. The city also has a fleet of six hybrid Ford Escapes, powered by electricity and gasoline, and five electric motorcycles, used mostly by police to patrol the greenways.

The city's bus fleet includes four Proterra electric buses, with plans to add six more electric buses in the coming year. The city's electric bus fleet is refueled overnight by charging stations next to its Greenlink maintenance facility and plans are underway for a new maintenance facility.

"We are starting to add more electric vehicles to our fleets," Frixen said. "We

are adding them as we start to replace and update some of our older vehicles."

Even so, the city is not yet able to go all-electric.

"We don't have the charging infrastructure, and we don't have the mechanics," he said. "There would need to be some redesign for garage workspaces and bays. It's a different class of maintenance and mechanics we would have to find or train."

On a smaller scale, the City of Union has been working on its support for electric vehicles for more than a decade, installing its first charging stations in 2010 as part of the Plug-In Carolina initiative, said City Administrator Joe Nichols.



*Newberry's charging station serves as a draw to downtown shops and events.
Photo: City of Newberry.*





The Greenlink Transit fleet has four electric buses with plans to add six more in the coming year. Photo: City of Greenville.

The city now has eight charging stations — two each at city hall, the University of South Carolina Union campus, Spartanburg Community College and a softball-baseball sports complex. The charging stations are free for drivers to use, and the electricity costs the city about \$60 a month.

“As the years went by and more people started buying electric vehicles, people who work at banks, the courthouse, were plugging in,” Nichols said. “Then the university started using them. People charge their car while they walk at the sports complex. In four or five years, I’d say usage has doubled.”

The charging stations are marked on internet listings, and also show up on GPS maps for travelers.

While Union does not yet have an electric vehicle in its fleet, Nichols says it is a goal of his to get one. The city had hybrid electric vehicles in the past, but efforts to use them were hampered by mileage limitations. Nichols thinks an electric vehicle could help the city save money on employee travel to conferences and other out-of-town locations.

“They have become much more efficient,” he said. “Travel times between

charging is up to 300 to 400 miles. The battery life and range has improved.”

Nichols added that residents have been supportive of the city’s efforts, which could include adding electric bicycles that people could use to ride across town.

“Most people now are pretty much energy conscious,” he said. “They want to be green.”

The City of Newberry is just dipping its toe into the electric vehicle world, installing one city-owned free charging station in March 2021.

From October 2021 through February 2022, the city had fewer than 50 charging sessions that averaged about four hours each and that used less than 500 kilowatt hours, for a total cost of roughly \$60, said Tim Baker, Newberry’s utility director.

“Our software estimates that it saved the equivalent of 95 gallons of gasoline,” Baker said.

Part of the goal of the charging station, which is located in the Newberry County Public Library parking lot, is to offer a perk to people coming downtown.

“We chose that location because of walkability to downtown shops,” said Elyssa Haven, public relations coordinator

for the city. “It’s a public parking lot and the city has the needed infrastructure nearby.”

It’s also part of the reason a medium-speed charger was selected.

“We want people to spend that two to three hours while their car is charging in downtown Newberry, shopping or seeing a show at the Opera House,” Haven said.

With the possible exception of students at Newberry College, Haven said folks stopping at the charging stations rarely are there for a “fill-up.” More often, they are simply “topping off” their charge while running errands or shopping.

The city is looking into grant funding for future charging stations, which would also be located in strategic areas to encourage visitors.

Newberry also plans to test a city-owned electric vehicle, purchasing a car to be used by the city’s information technology team, which has to drive all over the city to handle IT issues.

“Newberry has always been viewed as progressive while maintaining our small-town Southern charm,” said City Manager Matt DeWitt.





Unprecedented Funding Available to Address Infrastructure Needs

By Liz Rosinski, senior program manager, SC Rural Infrastructure Authority

Last September, the American Society of Civil Engineers unveiled the 2021 infrastructure report cards for the nation and the states. In South Carolina the categories analyzed were drinking water, which received a D+, and wastewater, which received a D. The ASCE attributed these low grades to “decades of underinvestment, along with increased demand stemming from a booming population.”

It’s hard to estimate the total need for infrastructure investment in South Carolina. The ASCE report noted that some of the state’s infrastructure has recently undergone significant improvements that are not yet reflected in published data. However, the available indicators make it clear that the needs far outpace the available funds.

The Environmental Protection Agency conducted needs surveys in South Carolina in 2008 for sewer, and in 2015 for water. The estimated 20-year water and wastewater infrastructure needs in these surveys total over \$7.7 billion in today’s dollars. This is widely considered to be an underestimate. In fact, the SC Rural Infrastructure Authority gathered current information on needs by surveying South Carolina water and wastewater utilities in 2021. Five-year capital needs, reported by only 20% of the systems in the state, totaled \$1.8 billion.

Still, there is good news: the large and growing need for investment in infrastructure is taking center stage.

Two federal laws passed in 2021, the American Rescue Plan Act, or ARP; and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, also known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, or BIL; both direct large sums to state and local governments for use on water infrastructure, among other purposes. Many cities and towns have already started planning upgrade and improvement projects using local ARP funds for water, wastewater and stormwater improvements. This funding presents a generational opportunity to address aging pipes, tanks, treatment plants and other infrastructure.

Currently, the BIL includes significant funding increases for both the Drinking Water and Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan programs, totaling about \$120 million annually over the next five years. RIA and the SC Department of Health and Environmental Control jointly administer the SRF loan program. These funds are available for disadvantaged communities, as well as situations with emerging contaminants and lead service lines.

The state’s ARP allocation is estimated to be between \$800 million and \$900 million for competitive water, sewer and stormwater grants. The grant programs include capital improvement projects, regional solutions and planning grants for small systems. These programs will be

administered by RIA, and final details will be announced by the agency on its website and email lists.

It’s important for water and sewer systems to get ready to access these funds for their community’s needs. The first step is to create, or update, a capital improvement plan that prioritizes funding needs. Think about how grant-funded improvements will be maintained over the long term. Consider transformational projects that will address critical long-term needs or lead to a more sustainable business model for utility services. Be sure to prepare up-to-date cost estimates, timelines and maps for key projects that reflect current pricing, potential material delays and any necessary right-of-way or easement acquisition. One important deadline to remember when planning: ARP funds must be expended by December 31, 2026.

This unprecedented funding also offers an opportunity to bundle and leverage the federal funds with local and other water and sewer financing programs to execute larger, more impactful projects. Navigating the various funding sources can be challenging. RIA is here to help local governments make the most of available federal and provide the technical assistance that South Carolina’s communities have come to expect from the agency.

Be sure to monitor ria.sc.gov for updates, and contact RIA at 803.737.0390 or info@ria.sc.gov with questions.

Don't Get Tripped Up on Sidewalk Issues

Like other types of municipal infrastructure, sidewalks tend to attract little notice, as long as nothing is wrong with them. Public works officials often see these concrete slabs differently. Any jagged or dislodged piece of sidewalk is a source of danger, something that can trip pedestrians or even cause injury, unless the sidewalk receives maintenance work.

Slips, trips and falls are some of the costliest tort liability insurance claims that cities and towns face, but there are proactive steps that can help reduce these claims.

When does the city have liability?

If the city has volunteered to repair or maintain the road or sidewalk, it may have assumed liability. If someone reports a sidewalk problem to a city that doesn't own or maintain it, the city may have a duty to inform the owner, which can be either the state or the county government.

Cities should maintain a form letter for reporting sidewalk problems to other entities, and to document that any repairs the city makes to a sidewalk did not create liability. The letter should contain several points:

- A description of the problem — trip hazards, potholes, downed trees or other issues.
- Location details — street names, addresses and other descriptions.

- A statement that describes the property owner's legal responsibility for the maintenance of the area and any actions needed to ensure public safety.
- An indication that the city's assistance on the property is a one-time event, and so the city does not accept ongoing liability. For example: "Please note that after repairs are made, the city does not intend to continue maintenance on this segment of the property owner's roadway/sidewalk."

Maintenance issues that can lead to claims

Dangerous sidewalk issues can be as simple as a drainage washout that has deposited sand or debris on the sidewalk, or broken or missing meter covers — a frequent source of trip-and-fall claims. Trees can present a more substantial challenge, since root growth under the sidewalk can push it up, creating the uneven slabs that can trip up passersby.

A sidewalk buckled by tree growth has several solutions. In a mild case with limited slab displacement, the city could buy or rent a scarifier to grind down the uneven surfaces. In a more serious case, workers can cut out the problematic parts of the sidewalk with a wet saw, remove the root structure, and replace the sidewalk. Members of the SC Municipal Insurance and Risk Financing Fund have access to a

grant that reimburses up to half the cost of buying or renting scarifiers, up to \$4,000, available on a first-come, first-served basis.

When making repairs, workers should use barricades and signage to close the section of sidewalk to foot traffic. Barricading is also advisable in situations where the tripping hazard cannot be fixed immediately.

Proactive steps

Since sidewalks often attract little attention, festering maintenance problems often go unnoticed as well. Staying on top of potential issues means having a regular inspection process of city sidewalks, and dedicated funding in the budget for sidewalk repairs. Many cities have a formalized process for accepting reports of maintenance issues including sidewalk problems. Municipal apps, for example, often allow users to give the location and a photo of the issue.

The best way to prevent buckling from tree roots is to have the right kind of trees — ones with roots that grow downward — around the sidewalk in the first place. The SC Department of Transportation offers a list, "Suggestions for Street Trees & Sidewalk Plantings," at www.scdot.org, ranging from Red Maples to Willow Oaks and Cabbage Palmettos.

For questions about sidewalk-related risk management, contact John Ciesielski, loss control consultant, at jciesielski@masc.sc.





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

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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.

MAY

11 Business Licensing Essentials – How to Handle Appeals and Delinquencies. Virtual. See page 3 for more information.

17 SCMIT/SCMIRF Law Enforcement Training. Fire Training Grounds Building, Sumter. Topics include a police chief panel discussion, legal briefings and law enforcement policy development.

17 Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government: Freedom of Information Act in SC and Municipal Governance and Policy. Appalachian COG: Greenville, Central Midlands COG: Columbia, Pee Dee Regional COG:

Florence, Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester COG: North Charleston, Waccamaw COG: Georgetown.

18 – 20 SC Community Development Association Annual Meeting. The Beaufort Inn, Beaufort. Topics include USDA Community Facilities funding, food trucks, historic preservation, city planning and community branding.

26 Managers/Administrators Spring Forum. DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel, Columbia.

JUNE

2 SC Association of Stormwater Managers Second Quarter Meeting. Cooperative Conference Center, Columbia. Topics include communicating about stormwater issues using easy-to-understand terminology as well as updates from the SC Department of Health and Environmental Control.

7 Accreditation in Business Licensing Exam. Municipal Association of SC, Columbia.

8 Business License Essentials – Records Retention. Virtual.

14 – 15 Municipal Court Administration Association 101 – Session A. Municipal Association of SC, Columbia. Topics include an introduction to court administration, charges, bonds and court basics.

19 – 22 SC Association of Municipal Power Systems Annual Meeting. Sonesta Resort, Hilton Head Island.

JULY

13 – 17 Municipal Association of SC Annual Meeting. Charleston Place Hotel, Charleston. See page 1 for more information.

13 Business License Essentials – NAICS Code Update. Virtual.

AUGUST

2 Accreditation in Business Licensing Exam. Municipal Association of SC, Columbia.