Resilience Through Design
Partnerships Drive Drainage Solutions

Charleston's Director of Stormwater Management Matthew Fountain explains the city's Low Battery seawall repair project.

The water is rising in Charleston Harbor, just as it is in many other places because of climate change. But sea level rise is not the only thing that has threatened the City of Charleston's Low Battery seawall. Rain and storm surge events over the decades along with the simple aging of the early-20th-century infrastructure have created challenges and brought the seawall closer to structural failure.

The city responded to these threats with a multifaceted rebuilding project, addressing not only the structural needs but recreational opportunities and appearance concerns as well. The project became a showcase for a mobile tour during the Municipal Association of South Carolina's Annual Meeting in July. Charleston's Director of Stormwater Management Matthew Fountain presented alongside the Town of James Island's Public Works Director Mark Johnson about the stormwater drainage improvements their municipalities created after collaborating.

Standing on the new Low Battery, two feet higher than the old one, and with construction still advancing in the distance, Fountain described the challenges presented by the original seawall construction in the early 20th century, which created more buildable land from what had been a marsh.

"They built a wall, and they built the ground right up to the point [where] it wouldn't flood that day," he said.

Rebuilding the seawall opened up the potential for handling many issues holistically, so the city could "leverage more things out of a single project," Fountain said.

The project has gone far beyond addressing drainage capacity. It has also replaced water and sewer lines and rebuilt the street with traffic-calming devices. It expanded sidewalks, added handicapped accessibility, and even pursued new beautification with periodic bench-lined parklets. Fountain noted that the iconic Battery is part of a heavily-traveled recreation

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A portion of the City of Charleston's historic low battery seawall receives upgrades and an increase in height.

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corridor that connects the Cooper River Bridge to the place on the Ashley River where the city has been working on a pedestrian bridge.

"We tried to make this a very attractive project," he said.

The area's status as a tourism destination allowed for many millions of dollars of funding from accommodations and hospitality tax funding, but its importance to Charleston's image also created many concerns about whether raising the seawall would detract from the city's appearance. Fountain reported the project has been "incredibly well-received."

"It's one of the few projects I've ever worked on as a capital engineer that has almost no detractors," he said, adding that even people who don't live on the peninsula will still "run on it, bike on it, fish on it. People who live on the Battery are excited about how beautiful it looks."

The bus tour also brought Annual Meeting attendees to James Island Town Hall, where Mayor Bill Woolsey called the guests' attention to the native vegetation in the facility's retention pond and bioswales, which are depressions that take in and filter stormwater. At the town hall, James Island's Mark Johnson joined Michael Fountain in explaining the intergovernmental collaborations for drainage improvements.

In 2019, the City of Charleston joined with the Town of James Island and Charleston County for a wide-ranging drainage study, identifying drainage basins and prioritizing problem areas. Both municipalities updated their design standards manuals.

On James Island, the project's main objective was to protect older homes from the drainage issues created by newer construction — a major issue in a region that has become known for its extreme land development pressure.

Johnson noted that new homes built as infill development tend to be built up higher, "so all the water goes to the neighbors. Then I get phone calls, and I don't like getting phone calls like that."

The updated design standards required offsite drainage impacts to be identified and managed. They aim for developers to work with the existing landscape and natural systems rather than against them, preventing or at least slowing down runoff — in the effort to keep stormwater under control, every minute and every gallon counts.

"Green infrastructure," as Johnson noted, can be anything from rain gardens that retain water to filtration trenches or rain barrels.

"We're going to start having classes for residents here at town hall so they can learn how to do these things," he said. "We have most of the practices, right now, here that they can look at."

Fountain noted that sudden summer thunderstorms have grown more disruptive over time in the Charleston region, especially when they combine with offshore winds pushing water into drainage systems, or the exceptionally high tides known as King Tides. These growing challenges have created much more intergovernmental collaboration to create solutions.

"I think one of the really big takeaways is that the town, the city, the county and [the SC Department of Transportation] have all gotten together and collaboratively said, 'Let's resolve drainage.' Because water doesn't know what jurisdiction it's in. It crosses jurisdictions all the time," he said.

Find 2022 Annual Meeting presentation materials at www.masc.sc (keyword: Annual Meeting).

Firefighter Healthcare Benefit Plan Offers Cancer Assistance

In 2020, the General Assembly first passed legislation establishing the Firefighter Cancer Healthcare Benefit Plan, which was one of the Municipal Association's advocacy initiatives for that session. The plan created a supplemental insurance policy for both paid and unpaid firefighters who are South Carolina residents and who are diagnosed with cancer.

The plan was funded in the state's FY 2021-2022 budget, and it received funding of $3.5 million in the FY 2022-2023 budget.

The plan funds treatment for a variety of cancers related to the nervous system, respiratory tract, or bone and blood-related cancers, among others. Firefighters diagnosed with any of the covered types of cancers are entitled to several benefits:

- A one-time lump-sum benefit of $20,000 for the initial diagnosis.
- Annual reimbursements of out-of-pocket expenses for the cancer treatment in amounts up to $12,000.
- A $75,000 death benefit paid to the beneficiary of a firefighter who dies as a result of the cancer.

The State Fire division of the SC Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation has details on the program, including the full list of cancer types covered and how to start a claim. Find more information at www.scfirefighterscancer.com.

ASSOCIATION HIGHLIGHT

SC Community Development Association

Many municipal job positions have specific training and networking needs, and the Municipal Association of South Carolina's affiliate associations offer opportunities to meet those needs.

The South Carolina Community Development Association provides educational forums for its members to address economic and community development needs. Members include municipal, county, regional and state community development professionals as well as employees of private companies with an interest in community development, elected officials and volunteers.

SCCDA typically holds a multi-day Annual Meeting in May and a one-day Fall Meeting, which will take place this year on October 6, in Columbia. The 2022 Fall Meeting will cover impact fees, planning for downtown streetscape improvements, festival planning and the community impacts of commercial kitchens.

Learn more about SCCDA at www. masc.sc (keyword: SCCDA).

What Police Departments Need to Know About Act 218

After much input from the law enforcement community and others, the South Carolina General Assembly passed Act 218, or H3050, in May. This legislation codified many law enforcement standards statewide and has become part of an ongoing effort in recent years to improve upon best practices and address the risk management needs of police departments.

Here are key points of the law that city and town officials need to know:

Certified officers

Effective July 1, 2022, recruits who have not yet attained certification from the SC Criminal Justice Academy cannot work as law enforcement officers unless accompanied by a certified officer at all times. Communication by radio or phone is not sufficient to fulfill this requirement. Many departments had already required officers to become certified before working to help ensure that police work is conducted in a safe and legally sound way, but the law had previously allowed officers to work as an officer independently for up to a year after their hiring.

In recent years, the SCCJA has reduced wait times for officers to enter the academy to less than two weeks, making the process of getting new recruits certified easier.

Failure to intervene and misconduct reporting

The law added to the definitions of officer misconduct, found at SC Code Section 23-23-150, "the willful failure to intervene" when observing an officer abusing someone, and "the willful and knowing failure to promptly report another officer" for abusing someone. These sections of the law seek to reduce officer abuse and hold them accountable in instances of misconduct.

The law also requires agencies to report officer misconduct to the SCCJA within 15 days of the final agency or department action resulting from an internal investigation. This change in the law attempts to ensure officers' misconduct is not swept under the rug by their agency.

Chokeholds and carotid holds

SC Code Section 23-1-250 now states that the use of a chokehold restricting airflow or a carotid hold restricting blood flow is allowed only in cases where the use of deadly force is justified, such as when a person's life is in danger. This section also directs the Law Enforcement Training Council to develop training and standards for chokeholds and carotid holds.

Minimum standards and policies

Act 218 updated and mandates a set of minimum standards for law enforcement agencies. The new standards take effect January 1, 2023. These minimum standards, focusing on areas identified by the General Assembly, are developed by the SC Law Enforcement Training Council. Departments may establish additional standards that are more restrictive, however they may not use standards that are less restrictive. The minimum standards involve these points:

- Use of force and response to resistance.
- Uniform vehicle pursuit standards.
- An officer's duty to intervene in the actions of other observed officers.
- Hiring and terminating practices.
- Mandatory and uniform post-basic academy field training.
- The use of body-worn cameras.
- Use of "no-knock" warrants.
- Systems and processes for filing and investigating complaints.
- An early-warning system for at-risk officer behavior.

As the Training Council developed the policies, it sought input from numerous law enforcement agencies, organizations and the Municipal Association, with a final version released by SCCJA in September.

Compliance

The law calls for the Law Enforcement Training Council to establish a compliance division to review the minimum standards every three years and make sure that departments are complying with them.

The enforcement mechanisms created by the law for noncompliant departments are significant. Penalties include fines of up to $1,000 per violation per day. The Training Council may also "hold in abeyance," or temporarily suspend, the certification of every officer working for a department. This would functionally block the department's ability to enforce the law until the compliance issue is resolved.

Jackie Swindler, director of the SC Criminal Justice Academy, joined the Municipal Association's City Quick Connect *podcast to discuss how Act 218 was developed and how it will affect law enforcement policies and procedures. Find the episode at www.masc.sc (keyword: podcast).*

Stay Safe With These Fourth-Quarter Risk Management Tips

There are numerous actions for municipal risk management staff to take throughout the year as part of a consistent and proactive effort to reduce liability for the local government.

Here are some key things for risk managers to address in the final quarter of the year:

October

Implement a workplace substance abuse program.

- Establish a written substance abuse program to address the safety, health and liability exposures to the municipality that can result from employee substance abuse in the workplace.
- Include the five standard components of a comprehensive workplace substance abuse program, which are a written policy statement, periodic supervisor training taking place every three years, periodic employee education and awareness, an employee assistance program for those who need help, and drug and alcohol testing.

- Once the program is planned, consult with an attorney to ensure that it is fair, accurate and legally defensible.

November

Review certificates of insurance — the documents that establish that there is an active insurance policy in force at a particular moment in time, the lines of insurance coverage and the limits of those coverages.

- Review certificates frequently, paying attention to the individual situations and scope of the work covered.

Review safety policies and procedures — for example: safety policies, accident reporting procedures and seat belt policies.

- Make sure that policies and procedures are written and available to everyone.
- Make sure there is documentation of policy and procedure enforcement.

December

Establish a safety and wellness committee.

- Have the committee develop, implement and maintain the municipality's risk management and wellness program.
- Ensure the committee has written duties and responsibilities.

Create a schedule for the upcoming year's safety and wellness committee meetings.

- Have the committee meet at least quarterly.
- Document the attendance at the meetings, and the meeting minutes.

Review loss information and identify trends.

- Use the loss history to identify risk exposures for the municipality.
- Determine what loss prevention techniques should be used to reduce the frequency or the severity of the losses identified by the information or the trends.

MEO — Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government

QUIZ

True or False?

In the mayor-council form of government, the mayor does not need approval from the entire council to hire a city or town administrator.

Answer: False

In the mayor-council form, the mayor acts as the chief administrative officer, appointing and removing employees subject to personnel policies adopted by council. Furthermore, SC Code Section 5-9-40 states that the "mayor and council may employ an administrator to assist the mayor in his office." Because the two are listed together — "mayor and council" — the language has been interpreted to mean that the consent of the governing body is required to employ or remove an administrator.

The Municipal Association's handbook, *Forms and Powers of Municipal Government,* explains more. Find it at www.masc.sc

(keyword: forms and powers).

The Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government offers in-person and online courses. Elected officials who complete all of the required coursework graduate from the institute and are eligible to participate in the Advanced Institute. The next session is the Advanced MEO Institute's Advanced Continuing Education Fall Session, taking place October 19 at the Marriott Columbia. The session will cover civility in local government and municipal court operations. Learn more at www.masc.sc (keyword: MEO).

Avoid the Pitfalls of Elected Official Social Media

With social media now a key channel public officials can use to communicate, questions on how to best use it in compliance with the law have become commonplace. At the Municipal Association's Annual Meeting, Association General Counsel Eric Shytle and Field Services Manager Charlie Barrineau led a session on social media problems that officials should avoid.

The key legal issue in governmental social media lies in the freedom of speech guarantee of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, and whether a social media account has become a "public forum."

Shytle explained the 2019 case, *Davison v. Randall*, in which the federal Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals held that a county councilmember's personal Facebook page created a public forum, since the page was a "government official" page that gave her official contact information and invited feedback on local issues.

Most of her posts related to her work and position as a member of the council. One post invited any resident to express feelings on any topic. Because the page was a public forum, the First Amendment applied to it, and the court concluded that the councilmember violated the First Amendment when she deleted comments based on their viewpoint.

A more recent Sixth Circuit case from 2022, *Lindke v. Freed*, found that a city manager, James Freed, did not create a public forum with his Facebook account. Freed's profile description, for example, emphasized the personal nature of the account first and

> Ask "what will persuade people in this room," not "what will make a great tweet."
>
> **MASC** Municipal Association of South Carolina™   **Civility. Respect. Solutions.**

his status as an official second, reading, "Daddy to Lucy, Husband to Jessie and City Manager, Chief Administrative Officer for the citizens of Port Huron, Michigan." On the account, he shared things like photos of his daughter's birthday, visits to local community events and his family's weekend picnics, although he posted about some of his administrative directives and his city's policies.

"It's wise to keep your personal social media separate from your elected official social media," Shytle said.

In the same session, Barrineau took a look at social media habits elected officials should practice, like thinking carefully before posting, liking or sharing, and remembering their status as an official when they are doing so. He also encouraged officials to always work as a community cheerleader when using social media, and direct readers to the municipal website and other resources as appropriate.

For those whose city and town have a public information officer or a communications team, Barrineau stressed the importance of trusting the work they are doing, and to always follow communication policies and plans when they have been developed.

He also pointed to things to avoid — establishing a social media account and then not using it, getting into discussions of items that either will be or could be on a public meeting agenda, and engaging in attacks on other officials involved in the local government.

"Jabs at your fellow elected officials, municipal staff, appointed officials or even other agencies make you look bad," Barrineau said.

Handling the Oaths of Office Correctly

Elections arrive for many municipalities in November, and both newly elected officials and reelected officials need to handle their oaths of office so they can get to work. Here are several key points to consider during this process.

The effective date of office

A common question after an election concerns the exact moment that an elected official's term of office begins. State law does not name an exact moment. Determining the effective date, therefore, falls to the municipality, so cities and towns should enact an ordinance to clarify the date on which the term begins.

Who should take the oath?

The South Carolina Constitution requires all municipal officers to take an oath of office. This is not limited to just elected officials — nonelected officials in public offices need to take the oath as well. Court cases and opinions from the South Carolina Attorney General's office consider a "public office" to exist if the position
- is created by statute or ordinance;
- has duties that involve the exercise of the state's sovereign power, including the exercise of discretionary powers; and
- has duties that are ongoing and continuing.

Oath for all officers

Article VI, Section 5 of the South Carolina Constitution specifies the exact wording of the oath required of all officers:

"I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I am duly qualified, according to the constitution of this state, to exercise the duties of the office to which I have been elected (appointed), and that I will, to the best of my ability, discharge the duties thereof, and preserve, protect, and defend the constitution of this state and of the United States. So help me God."

Additional oath for elected mayors and councilmembers

This second oath comes from SC Code Section 5-15-150:

"As mayor (councilmember) of the municipality of _____, I will equally, fairly, and impartially, to the best of my ability and skill, exercise the trust reposed in me, and I will use my best endeavors to preserve the peace and carry into effect according to law the purposes for which I have been elected. So help me God."

Administering the oaths

Language in the state constitution and state law mentions that officers "take and subscribe" the oaths. "Subscribing" in this context refers to signing a printed copy.

The Municipal Association recommends that a judge or notary public read the oaths in the presence of the official. The official should verbally acknowledge acceptance of the oaths and sign and date a written copy of them.

The municipality should have the signed oaths notarized and filed as a permanent record. It should also ensure the signed oaths are retained for at least two years, according to the *SC General Records Retention Schedules for Municipal Records*. The Municipal Association recommends keeping documentation for at least the length of each official's current term. Documentation can help to prevent legal challenges to the actions of a governing body.

Requiring an official to publicly repeat the oaths, or conducting a swearing-in at a public meeting or a ceremony, may be part of an optional practice. It is not required, unless directed by local ordinance or rules of procedure.

Newly elected officials and board or commission members should take the required oath or oaths before performing any official duties. Other municipal officers should take the oath on or before their first day of employment.

Neither the state constitution nor state law specifies a method for taking the oath, such as placing a hand over a religious text or raising one hand.

Learn more in the Municipal Association's Handbook for Municipal Officials in South Carolina *at www.masc.sc (keyword: officials handbook).*

Are You Cleaning Your Firefighter PPE Effectively?

The dangers of firefighting require many specialized pieces of equipment, but perhaps the most important items are the personal protective equipment that protect firefighters from extreme heat and smoke. These items, known as PPE, can include everything from heat-resistant coats, pants and other clothes that they wear, known as turnout gear, to the helmets and breathing apparatuses that provide them with clean air.

PPE helps protect firefighters from immediate injury as they protect others, but it also helps protect them from long-term health risks like inhaling carcinogens. For PPE to work effectively, however, firefighters need to be able to keep it clean.

Contamination risks

Equipment contamination can come in many forms

- toxic chemicals;
- hydrocarbons; or
- biological pathogens; among others.

Once contaminants are present, those who come into contact with the equipment can unknowingly inhale, ingest or absorb the contaminants, leading to serious and sometimes fatal illness.

Cleaning PPE

The correct way to clean PPE can depend on the type and amount of contamination, and sometimes PPE needs to be taken out of service entirely for cleaning, decontamination or repair.

One key issue for turnout gear is the importance of never washing it in the same washing machine that firefighters use for their home laundry, which can

lead to contaminants showing up on their off-duty clothes or the clothes of their families. This makes a washing machine at the fire station a critical purchase. Maintaining two full sets of PPE for each firefighter can also help departments ensure that their employees always have access to uncontaminated equipment.

Firefighters need to clean their PPE in accordance with their departments' operating procedures, the manufacturer's instructions and NFPA 1851, a standard published by the National Fire Protection Association, most recently in 2020.

Beyond the cleaning that always takes place at the fire station, many stations now pursue a "clean cab" concept, in which firefighters decontaminate equipment while still on a scene. They clean PPE and wipe down the surfaces in the firetruck's cab where contaminants may have settled, then store all PPE and other gear outside the cab.

A 2018 study published in the *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Hygiene* surveyed hundreds of firefighters in South Florida. It found that while firefighters had overwhelmingly favorable attitudes about PPE cleaning, their rates of actually cleaning the equipment were lower. While 64% of the respondents reported showering after each fire, 10% never or rarely showered after a fire.

Assistance for equipment

The Federal Emergency Management Agency maintains an Assistance to Fire-fighter Grants program to help departments obtain the equipment, protective gear, training and other resources they need, with washing machines as a priority for the grants. So far the program has made 2,200 awards totaling $710 million. Learn more at www.fema.gov/grants/preparedness/firefighters/assistance-grants.

The SC Municipal Insurance Trust offers its members a SCMIT Fire Service Grant to help departments purchase personal protective equipment. Members can apply for reimbursement of as much as 50% of the cost of purchased equipment, not to exceed a maximum benefit of $2,000 per member per year. The funds are available on a first-come, first-served basis until depleted. For more information, contact Jennifer Gray at 803.933.1237 or rmsgrants@masc.sc.

V-SAFE grants help Volunteer Fire Departments

For years now, the Volunteer Strategic Assistance and Fire Equipment grant program, known as V-SAFE, has been getting equipment funding into the hands of fire departments that are partially or completely staffed by volunteers.

The grants, administered through the Office of State Fire Marshal, are available in amounts as much as $30,000 with no requirement for matching or in-kind funding. The 2022 grant cycle awarded more than $2 million in grants to a total of 70 fire departments among 29 South Carolina counties.

Eligibility rules require the department to be chartered — sponsored by a public or governmental organization and provide at least a Class 9 rating from the Insurance Services Office. A minimum of 50% of the fire departments staffing must be volunteers — uncompensated or paid on a per-call basis.

Funding is available for numerous types of equipment, including these:
- Fire suppression equipment, rescue equipment and medical equipment
- Safety equipment, including protective clothing, self-contained breathing apparatus, portable air refilling systems and decontamination equipment
- Equipment for detecting hazardous materials, as well as repair and recovery equipment
- Vehicles, including incident command vehicles and special operations vehicles
- Training

Learn more about the grant program, including how to apply, at the Office of State Fire Marshal website, statefire.llr.sc.gov/osfm.

Cities Work to Nurture a Tech-friendly Economy

Officials gather for the ribbon cutting of the HTC Aspire Hub, a space where entrepreneurs can lease office space and have meetings. Photo: City of Myrtle Beach.

As technology-related jobs and opportunities to work remotely continue to expand, cities and towns around the state are looking for ways to make themselves attractive to the growing pool of tech workers.

That can mean providing meeting space options, offering coworking space where people from different companies can work, organizing training sessions or meet-up sessions for entrepreneurs or making sure the city has a dependable wireless network.

In Myrtle Beach, the push to bring life and energy to the downtown and create opportunities for year-round residents led to the creation of an arts and innovation district. The idea was to be intentional about diversifying the tourist city's economy and job base, said Brian Tucker, Myrtle Beach's assistant city manager.

The city created a Technology Advisory Group to help Myrtle Beach look both internally at the city's ability to leverage technology and externally for ways to "create a more innovation-based ecosystem," Tucker said.

At the same time, vacant, dilapidated and underutilized buildings in the city's center were purchased by the City of Myrtle Beach. The timing was perfect to use one of those buildings to create the HTC Aspire Hub, a building where local entrepreneurs can lease desk space and have rooms for meetings and networking. There also are programs and activities that offer information on building networks and skillsets.

The city partnered with Horry Telephone Cooperative in creating the space, and leased it to eMYRge, a nonprofit that manages the space.

"It's important because we're in this period where jobs are more mobile and companies are mobile. Building an economy around the manufacturing industry is great and fine, but it ignores that so many jobs are mobile," Tucker said. "So,

we're carving out a space to say, 'This is for you; we realize the value of having you in our community.'"

Myrtle Beach has the ocean itself as a major draw for residents, but a city can't solely rely on its geography.

"People like to vacation at the beach, but a lot of folks don't want to live in a purely tourist space. So, we are working to create places for permanent residents — a performing arts center, other amenities that you want next to you," he said.

Farther down the coast, Beaufort followed a model in Charleston to diversify the city's economic base by attracting, nurturing and promoting high-wage tech jobs and companies as a way to attract and retain young people.

This led to the Beaufort Digital Corridor, a city-sponsored nonprofit, that provides office space for tech startups and desks for remote workers.

"Collaboration breeds more success than competition. When you view

The Beaufort Digital Corridor provides office space for tech startups and remote workers. Photo: Beaufort Digital Corridor.

someone as a competitor, there is a take-down mentality that closes doors and opportunities. The opposite happens when you view every interaction as a chance to learn and grow," said Jess O'Brien, executive director of the Beaufort Digital Corridor.

The Beaufort Digital Corridor came from a collaboration among the City of Beaufort, the county's Economic Development Association, the Beaufort Regional Chamber of Commerce, the University of South Carolina Beaufort and the Technical College of the Lowcountry. The city received one of the first Municipal Association of SC Hometown Economic Development Grants in 2016 that helped fund the Corridor's startup costs.

The nonprofit invites public and business owners to free monthly networking events — whether they are in the tech field or work outside the industry.

"These interactions encourage outside-of-the-box thinking to everyday challenges," O'Brien said.

Last year, the Beaufort Digital Corridor hosted the area's first Startup Weekend. This year it is building a pitch program to provide a podium for tech entrepreneurs to practice and get feedback to help refine their pitches to investors.

In the Midlands, Columbia has focused on nurturing technology, talent and innovation, with the city and the University of South Carolina working together to make Columbia attractive to entrepreneurs. The USC Technology Incubator, for example, has been in place for about 20 years.

Ryan Coleman is the director of Columbia Economic Development, the agency that serves as a catalyst for businesses, developers, investors and partners focused on growing an innovation economy. He said economic development recruitment in cities is different from counties: cities typically aren't building industrial parks and recruiting manufacturing jobs. Rather, cities often seek office jobs that feed the knowledge economy.

"Technology jobs are a little more conducive to what you find in an urban environment — office space, incubators, a walkable environment with restaurants and retail," Coleman said.

Coleman noted technology firms are difficult to recruit in today's environment, since many tech workers are performing remote and hybrid work.

"What you see here is the focus has shifted to growing what's in our backyard. Focus on what's here," he said.

And Columbia has benefitted from having local tech company founders and boosters already in the city.

"It needs to be a founder-led effort. You have to bring these people together. They need to be champions themselves," he said. "It's the businesses that lead the charge, and we're there to support them."

Sometimes, it's about making sure the infrastructure is in place to allow people to use the technology. That's what happened in Newberry, where a lack of high-speed internet access made the area less attractive for businesses and residents. The need for fast internet became especially important during the pandemic, when so many workers and students pivoted to remote work and schooling.

The city decided to create its own network, becoming the state's first municipality to build and run a fiber-optic network to serve residents and businesses.

"It has helped to attract new business. Additionally, it has attracted new community development investments and allowed for more families to consider Newberry as a viable work-from-home option, where prior it was not due to slow internet speeds," said Matt DeWitt, Newberry's city manager.

Tim Baker, Newberry's utility director, said the original business plan was modeled with a "take rate" for fiber services of 15%. It is now higher than 35% and continues to grow.

"Owning and operating a municipal electric system made our project much easier and our build out much faster. If you do not operate your electric system, I would recommend coordinating with your local electric utility provider before starting the project to see if there are any areas where you can collaborate and work together," Baker said.

DeWitt credits Newberry's partnership with WC Fiber as one of the reasons the project was so successful.

"There are very few municipal projects I have seen that don't receive a great deal of public criticism, and honestly, I can say I have never heard a bad word spoken about the city's efforts in building and partnering to light the fiber network," DeWitt said. "Since lighting the network, I think more business and families are seeing Newberry as a viable, and even preferred, option. We feel like we are creating the perfect mix of small Southern charm with the amenities you have come to expect from a much larger city."

Whether it's the technological changes brought about by the pandemic or simply the growing need to lure tech jobs, the technology field is an increasingly powerful way for cities to bolster their economy, and many are finding ways to make it happen.

The City of Newberry built a fiber-optic network and partnered with telecommunications company WCFiber to light the fiber. Photo: City of Newberry.

Information Technology

Goose Creek has now livestreamed its city council meetings for several years. Photo: City of Goose Creek.

Online Engagement Brings City Government to the Residents

The pandemic led to many social distancing measures for city and town council meetings, with many councils pursuing their first-ever virtual meetings to keep local government accessible even when people were not gathering in person.

From a wider perspective, though, the pandemic's legacy for public meetings might be simply an acceleration of a trend that began even before 2020, with more cities offering ways for their residents to connect to what is going on with their local governing bodies. Web-based technologies are not simply allowing residents to see what's happening at their local government meetings, they are fostering engagements and new connections between city government and its constituents.

Livestreaming meetings in Goose Creek

The City of Goose Creek has been livestreaming its council meetings for more than three years now.

"Once the meetings are over, that stream ends, the videos get uploaded, and people can go to our website and bring up [videos] of any of the council meetings," said Frank Johnson, Goose Greek public information officer.

The city also disseminates the links to the videos to residents across the city's social media platforms, encouraging more engagement.

"During the height of the pandemic, there were several months where we went to virtual meetings and, of course, we let everyone know how to watch it virtually," said Johnson. "We encouraged people who wanted to submit questions to contact our city clerk and let her know if they wanted to make a comment or ask a question."

Although in-person meetings resumed, the city still encourages the public to submit comments by email or mail, in addition to the in-person public comment period.

All of the livestreamed videos are embedded into and saved on the City of Goose Creek's website using the software system

Granicus. This allows residents to watch earlier meetings or revisit meetings they have already attended at any time, as well as view the agendas on the city's website.

Since Goose Creek was already livestreaming its council meetings before the pandemic, switching to virtual meetings was much easier than for others.

"I think our residents understood the situation," said Johnson, adding that there was good participation at the virtual meetings. "We wanted to open it back up as soon as we could, to get the public here and to make it as accessible as possible."

Even though many prefer in-person meetings, livestreaming can help with engagement. Johnson said that the number of people watching often depend on topics covered at the meeting.

"Even if the numbers aren't very high, I think it's a healthy thing to have and for folks to be able to access — we want to be as transparent and open as possible," he said.

Using social media to leverage the visibility of the live streamed city council meetings, Johnson schedules reminder posts for the morning of the meetings to remind residents of the event. He includes a link to where users can watch the meetings live. In accordance with the SC Freedom of Information Act, the city preserves all the documents involved. Just

as cities will retain agendas and minutes, staff will save the videos and the social media comments.

"Luckily, we haven't had to do those virtual meetings again yet, but that's always an option if we need them," Johnson said.

Meeting alerts in Fort Mill

Recorded and streamed council meetings are nothing short of the norm for the Town of Fort Mill. When the pandemic forced the municipality to switch to a virtual format, the town live streamed its meetings using GoToMeeting.

"There were a lot of learning curves," said Christopher Sardelli, public relations manager.

The town offered the option of submitting comments ahead of time. Video of the meetings was available live, and then the town would post the recorded videos on its YouTube channel.

Virtual meetings turned out better than anticipated, as they provided a great way for the public to engage, Sardelli said. But now that in-person meetings have resumed and the virtual component has phased out, the town still promotes the live meetings ahead of time and records them. All links to agendas, minutes and recorded council meetings are available on the town's website.

"We've actually seen a little bit fewer people live than there was virtually," he said. "I think people enjoyed the convenience of being able to be where they were and still engage with us, and so there are a lot more people watching the recorded video later than there are people attending the live meetings."

The town monitors all comments received on the recorded videos, as well as all social media posts.

One feature that was in the planning stages before the pandemic was the town's implementation of the Notify Me alerts system by CivicEngage.

"They had a great platform," Sardelli said. "It was actually in the works before COVID ever happened and so we ended up launching this website from our homes."

The Notify Me feature on the town's website allows residents to sign up with an
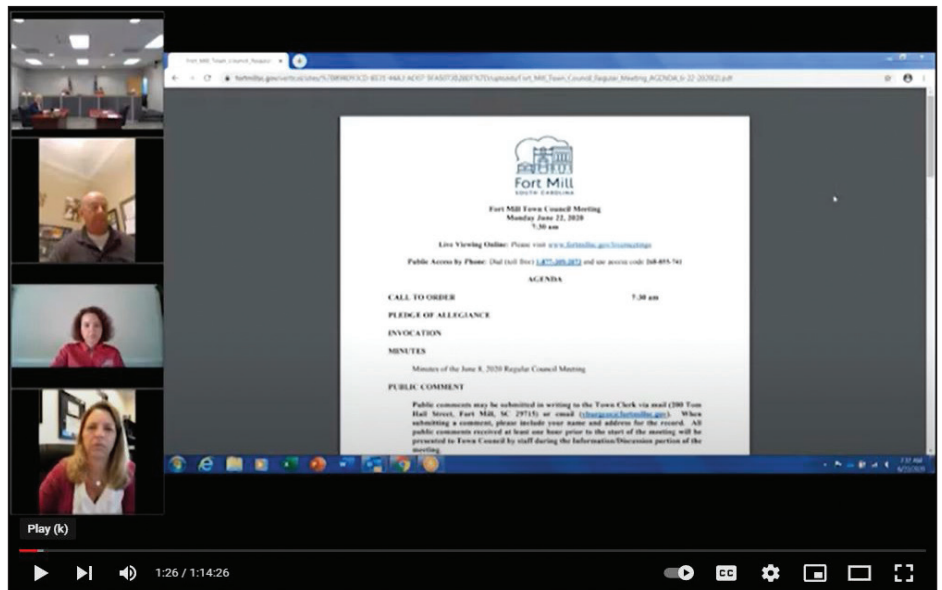
During the early pandemic-related shutdowns, Fort Mill used completely remote town council meetings.
Photo: Town of Fort Mill.

email address and select from a list of over 30 alerts to receive and the method in which they wish to receive them, including by email or text.

"Notify Me was just a neat feature that we wanted for alerts, but it turned into a great tool," Sardelli said.

Charleston's Public Meeting Engagement Portal

The City of Charleston is home to the second-oldest continuously-used council chambers in the nation. While these chambers are historic, the space proved to be too small for social distancing once the COVID-19 pandemic began. After the city began using virtual meetings, the Mayor's Office of Innovation created a unique system to encourage public engagement digitally: a Public Meeting Engagement Portal. The platform allows residents to sign up to address public meetings, submit comments in advance, and see the previous comments and participant lists. It also allows for advanced engagement tracking and monitoring by city staff. The effort won the city one of the Municipal Association's 2022 Achievement Awards.

"[The portal] was a good opportunity to give people another way to communicate with us," said Tracy McKee, Chief Innovation Officer. "It really just started as us creating a way for people to submit

comments for city council meetings so we could continue the business of the city."
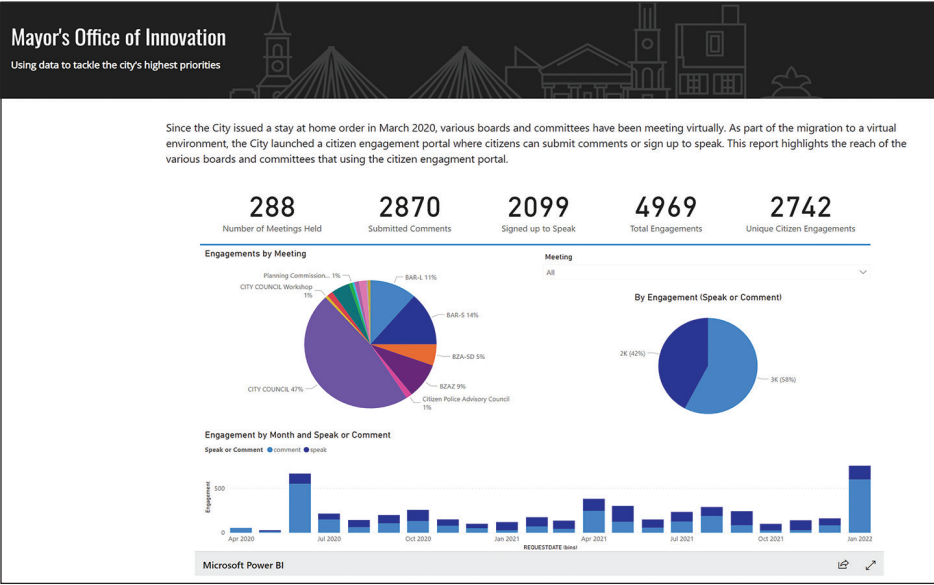
The portal has opened up a new world of public engagement for the municipal government. City council is on track this year to have six times the amount of participation compared to 2019, according to McKee. In 2019, the city council received a monthly average of about 27 comments in person. That monthly average is now in the hundreds.

"It's pretty significant," she added.

The portal has worked so well to drive engagement that other committees and functions of the city started to take note and have started using it as well. So far, 19 committees are currently using the portal.

As for tracking, a live dashboard provides updates every night with the number of engagements, including the number of people that have signed up to leave comments and the number that have signed up to speak. In compliance with the SC Freedom of Information Act, everything that is posted to or received via the portal is archived in a database format.

The plan is to share this knowledge with other municipalities throughout the state and nationwide. McKee noted that there are multiple ways of doing this, including by making some of the program code available.

Mayor's Office of Innovation
Using data to tackle the city's highest priorities

Since the City issued a stay at home order in March 2020, various boards and committees have been meeting virtually. As part of the migration to a virtual environment, the City launched a citizen engagement portal where citizens can submit comments or sign up to speak. This report highlights the reach of the various boards and committees that using the citizen engagment portal.

288	2870	2099	4969	2742
Number of Meetings Held	Submitted Comments	Signed up to Speak	Total Engagements	Unique Citizen Engagements

Microsoft Power BI

"Being able to provide citizens with a voice in a way that's convenient for them is a big win, because they never really had that before the pandemic," McKee said.

As new innovations continue to evolve the traditional meeting format, web-based technologies have proven their effectiveness in raising public engagement with local governments.

Charleston's Public Meeting Engagement Portal has allowed greater resident involvement in the public meetings of city council as well as boards and commissions. Photo: City of Charleston.

Why Multi-Factor Authentication Is Essential

Information Technology

How can municipalities better protect sensitive information like their employees' computer login data? Deciding where to focus information security efforts for the most protection and the best return on investment can be a challenge. Multi-factor authentication is an excellent place to start.

What is multi-factor authentication?

Multi-factor authentication is a method of verifying computer system users' identities before granting them access to a system. As the name implies, multi-factor authentication uses two or more different factors to verify a user's identity before allowing them access to a given system, location or account.

These factors can include several things:

- **Something the user knows,** such as a password or a personal identification number, or PIN.
- **Something the user is,** such as facial recognition or a fingerprint.
- **Somewhere the user is located,** such as only accessing specific information or systems while on-premise at a given location.

Why implement multi-factor authentication?

If people can gain access to a municipality's systems with a password alone, that system is highly susceptible to common cyberattacks. Too many users also reuse their passwords across multiple logins.

However, when a city implements multi-factor authentication, a password is only one of multiple components needed to gain access. Multi-factor authentication provides built-in barriers to entry that require relatively little investment of time and resources. It is often a requirement to purchase cyber liability insurance.

Which systems should you prioritize for multi-factor authentication?

Not all systems require multi-factor authentication. Here are some recommendations for top priorities:

1. **Any internet-facing service** such as email; virtual private networks, or VPNs; and cloud-based systems.
2. **Systems housing sensitive data,** such as personal health information, or PHI; financial information or other proprietary data and information.

3. **Critical Infrastructure** such as firewalls, switches, servers and other critical infrastructure.
4. **Administrative accounts.**
5. **Workstations.**

Implementing multi-factor authentication is one of the most cost-efficient methods to protect a municipality against cyberattacks. Even if the city requires users to update their passwords regularly, those passwords may already be compromised and available on the dark web. Adding layers of authentication reduces your risk and could save thousands of dollars in the long term.

Responding to Emails and Texts Appropriately

Email and texting have become critical parts of many jobs, so users need to use them carefully. Here are some tips on how to ensure communication through these tools remain professional and helpful.

For email

- **Proofread.** All forms of communication, email included, reflect on the sender and the city overall. Misspellings, grammatical errors and formatting problems are easy ways for an email to undermine credibility. Read over an email for mistakes before sending.
- **State the purpose clearly and concisely.** This includes a short subject line and a to-the-point email body. Senders should clearly identify themselves as needed.
- **Use professional language.** A respectful tone and carefully-considered language can help prevent misunderstandings, even as more casual email language has become the norm. Municipal officials and staff need to remember that work emails and texts count as public records according to the SC Freedom of Information Act. Messages are disclosable following a FOIA request, with some narrowly drawn limitations.
- **Pay attention to formatting.** Stick to commonplace fonts like Arial or Calibri, rather than unusual or distracting fonts. Avoid using background colors, textures or images. Don't use excessive bolding or italics, and avoid writing in all capital letters.
- **Use appropriate greetings and closers.** Senders should make the greeting appropriate for their relationship with the recipients. A "Dear Mr./Ms. … " construction will often be too formal, and a more simple "Hello" or "Hi" may be more applicable. Appropriate email closers can be "Thanks," "Regards," or something similar followed by the sender's name. Standardizing automatic email signatures municipality-wide with a name, title, contact information and possibly the city logo can boost professionalism.

For texting

The rules for professional texting have some similarity to the rules for professional emailing — the texts need to be clear, concise and state the purpose plainly, especially since misunderstandings are even easier with texting than email channels.

- **Keep texts extremely short.** If the message cannot be short, it should probably be an email or a phone call.
- **Make it time-sensitive.** Texts work best for things like updating others on the time or place of a meeting, or conveying information so important that it could not wait until the next time that recipients are at their computer.
- **Send texts only to established contacts.** In most cases, texting should be reserved for those with whom the sender has an existing business relationship.
- **Pay attention to timing.** Generally, if the hour would be inappropriate for a phone call, it would be inappropriate for a text as well.
- **Avoid texting during meetings**.

Posting on the Municipal Association's Listserves Correctly

The Municipal Association of SC offers listserves for different officials and staff members, with specific listserves for all the affiliate associations, and others for planning and zoning officials, city managers and administrators, and public information officers. Through them, users can connect with colleagues across the state, asking questions and learning about best practices. They can also search through past discussion threads, set up poll questions and share documents.

Listserve etiquette is similar to email etiquette – be concise, use a descriptive subject line. There are some communication elements unique to the listserves, however. Users should keep in mind that those posting will have different degrees of knowledge and experience, and users shouldn't always assume that professional jargon and acronyms will be familiar to their audience. Also, the listserve platform does not automatically specify each user's municipality, so setting up a listserve signature with a name and municipality is important.

Learn more at www.masc.sc (keyword: listserves).
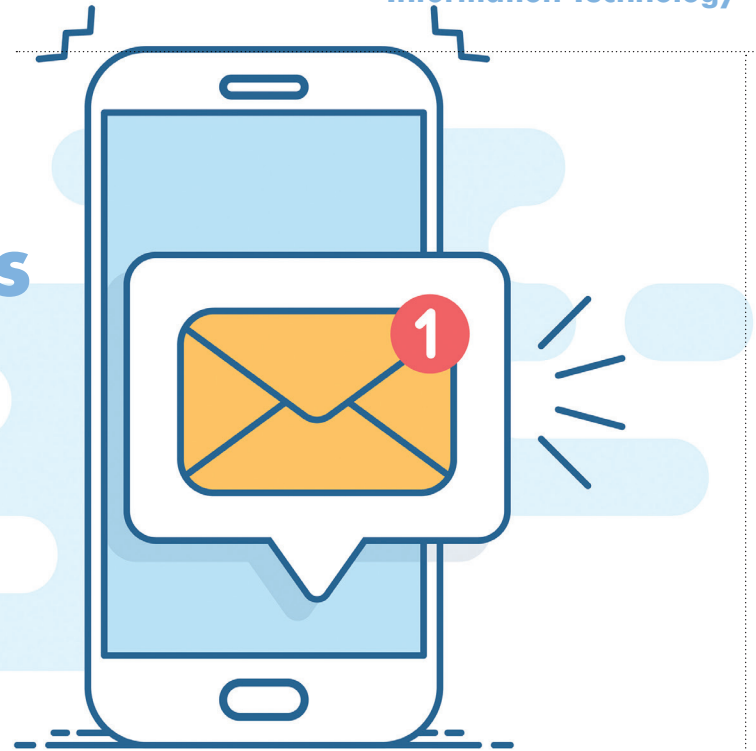
Information Technology

Calendar

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

OCTOBER

3 – 4 Municipal Court Administration Association 101 – Session B. Hilton Columbia Center. Topics include dispositions, finalization and an introduction to court financials.

5 SC Utility Billing Association Fall Meeting. Cooperative Conference Center, Columbia. Topics include customer service training and civility in local government.

6 SC Community Development Association Fall Meeting. Cooperative Conference Center, Columbia. Topics include planning for downtown streetscape improvements, festival planning, affordable housing and commercial kitchens.

11 Regional Advocacy Meeting – Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Regional Council of Governments area. Rollins Edwards Community Center, Summerville.

12 Regional Advocacy Meeting – Appalachian Regional Council of Governments area. C.C. Woodson Recreation Center, Spartanburg.

13 Regional Advocacy Meeting – Waccamaw Regional Council of Governments area. Conway Building and Development Office.

19 Advanced Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government. Marriott, Columbia. Sessions include "Advanced Budgeting and Finance" and "Advanced Leadership and Governance."

19 Advanced MEO Institute – Advanced Continuing Education: Fall Session. Marriott, Columbia. Topics include ethics and civility as well as municipal court.

19 Regional Advocacy Meeting – Central Midlands Regional Council of Governments area. Cayce City Hall.

20 Regional Advocacy Meeting – Lower Savannah Regional Council of Governments Area. Lessie B. Price Aiken Senior & Youth Center.

25 – 28 SC Municipal Finance Officers, Clerks and Treasurers Association and SC Business Licensing Officials Association Joint Academy. Crowne Plaza, North Augusta. Topics include business licensing legal updates, local accommodations and hospitality taxes, communication skills, verbal self-defense, the State Ethics Act, economic development options and the opioid crisis.

NOVEMBER

1 Communications Workshop. Municipal Association of SC, Columbia. Topics include podcasting, crisis communication, city branding and social media engagement.

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

9 Business Licensing Essentials – Local Renewal Center Walkthrough. Virtual.

10 Risk Management Services Annual Member Meeting. Cooperative Conference Center, Columbia.