



# *Cities Mean* **BUSINESS**

A PUBLICATION OF THE MUNICIPAL ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH CAROLINA

ISSUE 1 | 2020

## **The Main Events**

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By Megan Sexton



**Cover Photo:**  
Show cars line South Main Street in Lancaster for the Red Rose Festival.  
Photo: Grey Hoodie Photo.

## Cities Mean BUSINESS

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**Todd Glover**  
*Executive Director,  
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Association of SC*

**Cities and towns must adapt and improve over time if they are going to thrive.**

This issue of *Cities Mean Business* takes a look at what carefully planned innovations can do for South Carolina municipalities.

We've long known that well-managed cultural events have a significant economic impact on a region. Take a look at where places like the City of Seneca's street concerts have rekindled life in its downtown. In Columbia, the Soda City Market is an explosively popular draw, while Lancaster has cultivated events like concerts and the Red Rose Festival in its downtown. For cities and towns, and especially for the core business districts, visible signs of investment can have a transformative impact. Also, learn how something as simple as mural-painting projects adds value to downtowns across the state.

Healthy cities and towns also need to be able to handle the challenges and changes that come their way. After a number of devastating storm events in several years, most recently Hurricane Florence in 2018, one of those major challenges has been floodwater. Find out how several waterfront communities have taken their long-term recovery efforts as an opportunity to make themselves more resilient in the future.

Technology is another overarching change for local governments, as residents and businesses have come to expect services and communication to be delivered online. Explore how some cities have worked to engage with their constituents through mobile apps.

A great value of local leaders is that they're in the best place to understand local needs and respond to them through new programs and outreach. When cities and towns aggressively push for positive changes, local leaders can achieve powerful results for all residents and businesses in South Carolina.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "B. Todd Glover".

**B. Todd Glover**

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The Soda City Market operates on Main Street in Columbia every Saturday year-round and averages 150 vendors each week.



# Arts and Economic Development

## *CULTURAL ACTIVITIES SUPPORT REGIONAL ECONOMIES*

By Megan Sexton

Ask Riley Johnson, Seneca's events coordinator, about the impact cultural and recreational events can have on a region's economy, and he will tell you about a conversation he had with a real estate agent in town.

Johnson was attending an accommodations tax committee board meeting, and he began talking about a 5K and half-marathon race held in Seneca. The real estate agent sitting next to him told him about a man from Indiana who came to Seneca to run the race and, while he was in town, he looked around the region. The result? The man fell in love

with the area and bought a \$1.5 million house on Lake Keowee.

"That's just one story from one [real estate agent], but you can read the accommodations tax numbers. You can see that restaurant sales have increased, that hotels stays have increased," Johnson said. "We've built two new hotels in the last three years."

Johnson's point is echoed by downtown development directors, cultural event planners and industry recruiters around the state: draw people into your town for cultural programming or recreational events, and the entire region will reap the benefits

in tourism, new residents, tax dollars and economic development.

Since 2010, Seneca has gone from hosting three events each year to about 70. The result? Accommodations tax revenue has increased from about \$25,000 a month to close to \$60,000, Johnson said.

"Our job is to introduce people to the area, and it doesn't take long for them to get out, cruise around the county and they'll fall in love with it. We're surrounded by water with Lake Hartwell and Lake Keowee, and we are just 30 minutes from the mountains," Johnson said. "This is a melting pot. You go

## FEATURE STORY

to Jazz on the Alley and you'll see 500 to 800 people, many who are from all over the country who have moved here."

Jazz on the Alley is Seneca's largest cultural event, taking place downtown on Ram Cat Alley every Thursday from April to October.

In the state's capital city, there are hundreds of events each year. The Soda City Market each Saturday on Main Street, the SC State Museum, Riverbanks Zoo and Garden and the Columbia Museum of Art are just a few of the attractions that draw people to the Midlands.

"While we don't curate or organize events, we certainly use existing events to heighten awareness of things to do in the destination and entice visitors to come to the Columbia region for overnight stays, to visit our attractions, eat in our restaurants and experience everything that Columbia has to offer," said Charlene Slaughter, director of communications for Experience Columbia SC. "Numerous festivals like St. Pat's in Five Points, Columbia Food and Wine, Hip Hop Family Day and the Main Street Latin Festival give visitors a taste of Columbia's vibe and a chance to interact with our neighborhood districts and locals."

One of Experience Columbia's goals is to increase the number of visitors to the region, including overnight and multnight stays in the area for leisure, group and convention travel, Slaughter said. In 2018, there were 14.8 million annual visitors resulting in a \$2.3 billion direct impact, \$256 million spending on lodging services and \$119 million in contributions to local and state taxes, she said.

One of the keys to attracting visitors and businesses to an area is expertly promoting and marketing what the region has to offer. Experience Columbia applies for accommodations tax grants and shares data about the groups it books, including an annual report shared with stakeholders and community leaders.



*Top: Seneca's Jazz on the Alley takes place weekly on Thursday nights from April to October. Photo: City of Seneca.*

*Right: Lancaster's Finally Friday concerts take place the last Friday of each month from June to September. Photo: City of Lancaster.*

*Bottom: Lancaster's Finally Friday concerts, previously staged on a side street, moved to Main Street in 2019. Photo: City of Lancaster.*





Lancaster's Red Rose Festival takes place each year in May. Photo: Grey Hoodie Photo.



In the last decade, Seneca's number of annual events has jumped from three to about 70, with monthly accommodations tax revenue more than doubling to nearly \$60,000. Photo: City of Seneca.

“We also report marketing and advertising campaigns that run in travel media outlets such as Southern Living, Garden and Gun, the Food Network and Travel Channel as well as earned media to showcase examples of how we are investing accommodations tax dollars in marketing,” Slaughter said. “The fact that the number of visitors coming to the area is growing indicates that it is working, and we are doing the right things to draw visitors to the area to stay in our hotels, visit our restaurants and attractions and solidify Columbia as a destination.”

Attracting visitors and locals to downtown Lancaster restaurants and shops is the goal

of Joe Timmons, the events and promotions manager for See Lancaster. The organization works to provide cultural opportunities and special events along with business incentives and assistance. Lancaster is one of the SC Arts Commission's cultural districts, a city chosen for having walkable areas and a concentration of cultural, artistic and economic activities. Lancaster has a cultural arts center that draws people to concerts, a community playhouse and an outdoor amphitheater.

See Lancaster has worked to draw visitors to the region through everything from banners on its street lamps to its signature event, the Red Rose Festival, which draws

about 20,000 people to Lancaster each May, Timmons said. It also has started its popular Finally Friday concert series.

“We moved [the Friday concert series] to Main Street last year; it had been on a side street. It has blown out of the water and brought a lot of people downtown,” Timmons said. “People come and eat downtown and go out. The businesses can't get enough of it.”

Businesses were running out of food and beer the first Friday night, not expecting the size of the crowds. “Now they're used to it, and they've asked me to do more events on the green space,” he said. “It's good for business.” ●



Conway's Riverfront Park experienced major flooding after Hurricane Florence. Photo: City of Conway.

# BUILDING RESILIENCY

## *CITIES ADDRESS LONG-TERM IMPACTS OF HURRICANES*

By Russell Cox

**N**ichols Town Administrator Sandee Rogers now keeps snake boots, and even waders, ready to go in her car.

This wasn't always the case, but the repeated, devastating flooding the town has experienced — first from Hurricane Matthew in 2016, then Hurricane Florence in 2018 — has spurred significant changes in her daily life. Rogers' job often takes her outdoors to wherever the town is working on drainage systems.

The town, located near the confluence of the Little Pee Dee and Lumber rivers, experienced a failure of drainage systems after these storms, contributing to the floods. The major floods — two in three years — devastated homes, businesses and residents' lives in Nichols. Thanks to cleanup assistance that has come in from multiple corners of the state, Nichols is becoming more resilient.

Cleanup help has come from the state — from Gov. Henry McMaster, from the SC Department of Transportation and the

SC Floodwater Commission, which staged quarterly meetings in Nichols. A cleanup day earlier last year brought together more than 300 volunteers. Rogers said the town has been grateful for the help, and it also assembled enough funding for a trackhoe for an employee of the street department to operate.

"Within three weeks, he had cleaned over 6,000 linear feet of ditching, and cleaned it to the point of having the sides clear so that the bush hog and the sidearm could get in there and get it maintained. Doing a beautiful job," Rogers said.

Today, the town has a new three-bay fire station to replace the one it lost in Matthew. It's applied for grants for home elevation and demolition of damaged housing, and it has even worked with Clemson University for a study on natural resources and redevelopment.

Small towns, Rogers said, can be incredibly tenacious.

"The small town does not have a lot of backing, it doesn't have deep pockets, it doesn't have a lot of investors who are wanting to jump in," she said. "So you have to work hard, you have to look for what's out there, and boy, have we had a crash course in that. But, through the small town, you can make these things work. It can happen, it's just not going to happen overnight."

In the City of Conway last October, the Waccamaw River swelled to flood stage for weeks after Hurricane Florence dumped a tremendous volume of rain upstream. Some irretrievably damaged waterfront structures, like the Fireman's Clubhouse, were demolished. Even so, the city has been on a path to rebuild and improve others, like the ruined Riverfront Tennis Center. The United States Tennis Association provided a design grant for the city, and it's looking to both elevate the facility and add another clay court to the new version to help with tournaments, City Administrator Adam Emrick said.



Workers plant new landscaping along the waterfront after Hurricane Florence.  
Photo: City of Conway.



The city also replaced the deck for the Conway Riverwalk using copper-treated lumber, with many of its departments contributing to the reconstruction. The old deck was showing signs of distress and creating trip hazards after multiple inundations from the 2015 flood onward. The new deck is designed to be replaced more easily.

“Just about everybody who could be mobilized to assist was mobilized, and we nailed it. The rebuild looks better than it did originally,” Emrick said.

The city is also replacing flooded playgrounds at Riverfront Park and Sherwood Park. To put the riverfront in a better position to recover from floods, Emrick said the city requires new playground equipment be more flood-resistant, with a number of removable hollow plastic parts that can be removed ahead of storms. The new park electrical systems are also intended for disconnection when needed.

“The key takeaway that we’ve tried to express to our residents is that we need to expect a flood every year, and not do things the way we always have,” Emrick said. “Prepare for the worst, and be ready to accept it, because we’ve had the worst three years out of four.”

Conway city staff are also replanting destroyed landscaping at the waterfront. An Arbor Day Foundation grant has allowed for the planting of weeping willows to draw up as much water as possible, and for tree giveaways during Conway Strong Day. In

celebration of the city’s resilience, last year’s Conway Strong Day commemorated the one-year anniversary of the end of a four-week period of flood status.

In the Town of Cheraw, the difficulty Hurricane Florence brought was the flooding of the Cheraw Community Center, a vital facility that’s home to recreation programming, weddings and family reunions. After storm drains reached their capacity, about a foot of water flooded into the building.

In describing the water creeping up and into the center that night, Town Administrator Mike Smith noted that while he had seen many storms before, “Hurricane Florence was the worst. I’ll take wind anytime over water.”

In the time since, the town has refurbished much of the facility including fixtures, walls and the destroyed wooden gymnasium floor. New flood prevention measures were added such as flood panels that can be rapidly installed in an emergency. In addition, Smith said the town has applied for a Federal Emergency Management Agency grant for a town-wide storm drainage study.

“Tragedies and disasters bring people closer together,” Smith said, reflecting on occasions that Cheraw has sent public work crews to help with disaster recovery elsewhere, and times when help has come to Cheraw.

“I can’t tell you how proud I am of my fellow municipal brothers and sisters

throughout the state who would call and ask if they could do anything,” he said. “That touches your heart, knowing that people would do anything to help you.” ●



After Hurricane Florence, the Conway Riverwalk had its decking replaced. Photos: City of Conway.

*The City of Aiken Explorer app's features include bill payments, notifications and issue reporting. Photo: City of Aiken.*



# CITY SERVICES FOR THE SMARTPHONE AGE

## *MUNICIPAL APPS DRIVE ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION*

*By Megan Sexton*

When the City of Columbia changed its curbside recycling program in 2015, leaders understood the importance of communicating with residents about the switch from bins to large roll carts. They also sensed a change in expectations — residents now wanted immediate access to information about recycling in the palm of their hands.

Columbia introduced the Waste Wizard, a digital tool designed to answer residents' questions and make garbage and recycling collection easier. With the app, users can use a smartphone or tablet to find out when, where and what to recycle. They can have a little fun with it too, as the app offers a waste-sorting game.

"The tool is a notification system, search box, help center and game all wrapped into

one," said Samantha H. Yager, Columbia's assistant superintendent of public works and solid waste. "With the app, we hoped to accomplish more engagement with the Solid



Waste Division rather than people only engaging when there was an issue."

Columbia is not alone. The digital age has opened up a new frontier of communication

tools for municipalities. Now there are apps allowing residents to do everything from reporting potholes and code violations to tracking down parks and recreation facilities.

In the City of Aiken, the Explorer app features an interactive map of parks, a way to read the latest notices from the city, a method to pay bills and a place to report water and sewer problems.

"Our app gives our residents and visitors another way to connect with our city. Whether you are interested in weekend events, wish to report a problem or directly contact staff, the app offers one seamless way to do that," said City Manager Stuart Bedenbaugh.

In the City of Conway, the Citizen Problem Reporter is a GIS-based app allowing users to share nonemergency problems, submit reports, and review and comment on reports submit-

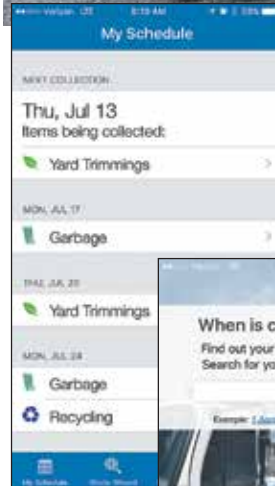
ted by other users. City staff members use the report to triage and manage problems reported by the general public, according to Taylor Newell, Conway's public information officer.

"We wanted a platform to reach our residents so that we could be the first to hear their problems and address them. If we're able to quickly address any concerns that are reported on the app, we're able to curb any negative comments in public input and to our councilmembers. This can also be an alternative to people putting their complaints on social media," Newell said. "The target audience is the young adult and teenage population. Our older population will call City Hall to voice concerns."

Cities have found various ways to pay for app startup and maintenance costs, including using grant money and relying on the expertise of city staff.

When Columbia changed to recycling roll carts, it received grant funding for its app from The Recycling Partnership, a national nonprofit, and the SC Department of Health and Environmental Control's Office of Recycling and Solid Waste Reduction. Since then, internal funding has covered the app's annual renewal fee. Two staff members help maintain the app, one handling submitted customer service requests and the assistant superintendent handling calendar updates, campaigns and service alerts, Yager said. About 14% of residents are registered on the app.

"There is always that initial fear and thought of, 'Will people actually use it?' That was the biggest challenge five years ago when we were introducing a lot of program changes. The Solid Waste Division built a strong relationship with our IT and GIS departments because it took all three departments to make this app a success," Yager said. "We needed strong address data from our GIS department to make sure users were getting the most accurate information. We also needed to make sure the app would integrate smoothly with our website."



Columbia's Waste Wizard app explains pickup schedules and how to dispose of items. Photos: City of Columbia.



Conway created its app in-house about two years ago with no additional funding necessary. The app has logged about 110 complaints and requests for service from residents, and the city plans to promote it more.

The app, Newell said, "took very little figuring on our part."

"Our IT department sets up all the email notifications, and then those emails are funneled to the appropriate department head to address the concern," Newell said. "On the IT side of the app, the biggest challenge was to

get the email notifications up and running. We also have people send us complaints for Conway, Arkansas, from time to time."

Aiken researched its needs for a mobile app and aligned those needs with its budget.

"Since the launch of the app we have about 3,000-plus registered accounts. App analytics help us see date ranges of app sessions, visits, device types, downloads, average time in app," said Gary Meadows, City of Aiken media specialist. "Technically the app is performing as expected. Visitor-wise, we are averaging over 1,000 visits a month."

As with all technology, it's important for cities to stay current and explore new ways to connect and use apps.

The goals for Columbia's app have changed since its introduction. While it still informs residents of their service days for trash and recycling, its new goals "revolve around lowering contamination and end 'wishful' recycling," Yager said. "The Waste Wizard and education campaigns are used to make sure residents are only recycling what we accept and managing our waste properly."

Information from Columbia's app is compiled each month, offering analytics on all sorts of topics, such as the number of app downloads and the number of addresses that were searched.

Aiken has planned an update in early 2020 to perfect its geo-fencing for push notifications, which will allow the city to narrow notifications to a .05-square-mile radius, Meadows said.

"There are a million apps out there that can do a million different things. My best advice is do your research. When looking at apps or similar projects, make sure the app meets your goals and needs. Call references, download other cities' apps and play around. If you don't understand how to use the app, your residents probably won't either," Yager said. "My second piece of advice is to make sure that all departments involved are on board and understand what you are trying to accomplish. Teamwork makes the dream work." ●



# MURALS ILLUSTRATE 'THE ART OF WHAT IS POSSIBLE'

*A push for new murals in downtown Myrtle Beach has come at the same time that the city has established an arts and innovation district in its downtown. Photo: City of Myrtle Beach.*

By Megan Sexton

There's no question public art can be an essential tool to create a sense of community — and fun — in a city or town. And murals, where blank walls are transformed into vibrant canvasses, offer a special way to celebrate a town's history and promise.

"Art can be transformative and the impact of murals has value beyond the art on the walls. It is a form of expression that gives voice to what is important in our community. It creates a sense of place," Cayce Mayor Elise Partin said.

Throughout South Carolina, mural designs show everything from wildlife to city

symbols, vistas to historic gems. In Summerville, for example, walls of downtown businesses feature murals that depict a giant Mason jar and a red, white and blue peace sign, while the image of two American redstart birds brighten the wall of a town parking garage.

"Summerville is trying to add images that are relatable to the community. We're the birthplace of sweet tea and we're a patriotic town in a large military influenced area. I think when people come here they feel that sense of community," said Molly Willard, director of development for Summerville DREAM, the downtown revitalization organization.

In Cayce, the city is in the midst of implementing an arts district around State Street, the area that was the original downtown. Public art is seen as essential to that vision. Recently, a mural titled "Enjoy the Little Things" was created by a local artist and painted on the side of a State Street convenience store. The artist contacted the property owner, received permission for the mural and recruited local students and the general public to help paint it during the city's art festival, Soiree on State.

Cayce has made a call for artists, as the city looks to add more murals to the arts district. The proposals from the artists will

be reviewed by city staff, the selection committee and the participating property owners, City Manager Tracy Hegler said.

“The aim of the mural project is to bring art to public spaces by transforming empty walls into energetic and engaging spaces for the community,” Partin said.

The city is seeking artists with a “strong point of view and the ability to create complex, engaging designs,” Hegler said. Artists can use Cayce’s history, environment and signature events for inspiration, but city leaders want the final designs to be more than a literal representation of an object or event.

The city has worked directly with the property owners where the murals will be painted, and those owners have the final say on the chosen artwork. The city has budgeted \$20,000 from hospitality tax money for the projects, Hegler said.

“We have a vision of creating an Arts District on State and Frink streets and murals are part of that vision,” Partin said. “The city has been actively engaged in revitalizing State Street, specifically through ‘previtalization’ efforts. The ‘previtalization’ process, appropriately described as ‘the art of what’s possible,’ has already led to the redevelopment of several derelict and underutilized properties into new and thriving businesses and has led to the formation of an active artist group and increased artists offerings. The goal of the Call for Artists is to provide public art that helps to make State Street a destination location in the city and brings more foot traffic into the area, which will positively impact the success of our businesses.”

In Myrtle Beach, the City Council has adopted a new master plan for the downtown area that creates an arts and innovation district. The private sector has also formed a group to push for more murals in the downtown Myrtle Beach area, with two new murals completed last summer, and four more are planned.

Cayce’s “Enjoy the Little Things,” painted on the side of a convenience store, came together with the help of local students and the general public.  
Photo: City of Cayce



The “Whaling Wall” mural at the Myrtle Beach Convention Center, dating to 1993, received a refresh in 2018.  
Photos: City of Myrtle Beach.



Painters created the “Enjoy the Little Things” mural during the Soiree on State festival in Cayce. Photos: City of Cayce.



The city has asked its Community Appearance Board to get involved with the regulation of murals, said Carol Coleman, the planning director for the City of Myrtle Beach.

“It’s public art, so anywhere you have a blank wall, it helps if you put something attractive on it. What’s attractive is subjective, so that’s where our Community Appearance Board comes in. They weigh in on things like the color, the subject, the size,” Coleman said.

The city has also put money into maintaining the murals that are already there, including work being done to freshen up the whale mural at the back of the city’s convention center.

“You need to maintain murals, or they could turn into visual clutter. Our goal is not to create visual clutter, it’s to create something that’s attractive and gives a new view to somewhere you might not have noticed before,” Coleman said.

In Summerville, downtown area murals tie into the town’s history and feel, Willard said. The bird mural on the parking garage, for example, is a stop on a bird walking tour that features sculptures nestled in downtown Summerville. The Mason jar painted on the rear of the chamber of commerce building was done by a local artist and is a nod to the town’s claim as the birthplace of sweet tea.

The town also has a handful of new murals, including one that displays a hand



Artists work on a mural at the intersection of Broadway Street and Fourth Avenue North in Myrtle Beach. Photo: City of Myrtle Beach.

displaying a peace sign with the flag wrapped around the forearm. At the other end of the building is a community-themed mural, with the work done by six local artists.

“Murals are making a resurgence,” Willard said. “We’ve identified some additional wall spaces where we as an organization would like to see something happen.”

And, once the murals are complete, they’re sure to attract visitors looking for

a splash of color or an eye-catching design. And they’re sharing the artwork with others.

“Murals are successful if they draw people to a location and bring them joy. Successful murals create a sense of place and community and make the area walkable,” Cayce’s Mayor Partin said. “Already people are taking their picture in front of the first mural, as can be seen on Instagram and other social media.” ●

# HOMETOWN SNAPSHOT



*Photo: City of Aiken.*

The Alley in downtown Aiken, located between Laurens Street and Newberry Street, received utility and beautification improvements in 2016. Aiken City Council then officially closed The Alley to vehicle traffic in 2017. As a pedestrian and event space, it is home to restaurants, a tap room and a live music series.

# You see a police car...



**We see a police officer who works** closely with fire departments and EMS, who knows every business owner downtown, who can name every city street and who buys 12 snow cones on Saturdays even though his T-ball team has never won a game.

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