



Cities Mean **BUSINESS**

A PUBLICATION OF THE MUNICIPAL ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH CAROLINA

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walk
the walk**
(and bike the path)

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By Sarita Chourey



Cover photo: The Swamp Rabbit Trail has become an economic boon for Greenville and Travelers Rest.

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Letter from the **EDITOR**



Reba Hull Campbell
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It's summertime, and our thoughts turn to fun and outdoor activities. Cities of all sizes are using their natural assets to bring people together in the summertime to enhance residents' quality of life and encourage community engagement.

Walking and bicycling are not just good for our health and well-being. These activities are also big boosters for economic development. Cities of all sizes are making sure their long-range planning processes take into consideration bike lanes, sidewalks and other alternative forms of transportation. Find out what Columbia, Cayce, Blythewood, West Columbia and York are doing to encourage more walking and biking.

Summertime also means gardening, and several cities are getting in on the action to help strengthen community connections through strategic use of food. City-supported community gardens and food incubators are helping boost tourism and bring jobs. Learn about projects in Landrum, Walterboro and Mauldin that meet the dual goals of providing food to those who need it and encouraging community engagement.

Who doesn't want to be around water in the summertime? South Carolina is blessed with a multitude of rivers, ponds, lakes and streams. Cities are making the most of what these waterways offer to residents, visitors and the local quality of life. Read about how North Augusta, Pacolet, Calhoun Falls and Ware Shoals are making the best possible use of their natural waterways.

We always say it's the people who make our communities strong – they are the greatest natural asset all our cities and towns have to offer. Three South Carolina cities are finding success in using the power of their own people to encourage personal interaction and strengthen community connections. Take a look at how projects in Mount Pleasant, Travelers Rest and Columbia are educating residents and encouraging acts of kindness.

So it's summertime. Take off for the river, putter in a garden or hop on a bike. I think I'll head for the Swamp Rabbit Trail.

Reba Hull Campbell

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Editor

WHEN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT RUNS ON PEOPLE POWER

By Sarita Chourey



The personal touch, some TLC, a patient explanation and a campaign to pay it forward.

These are all ways that some cities and towns are seeing community development successes through direct interactions between municipal staff members and residents.

In the Town of Mount Pleasant, the pace of growth brought frequent public debates and questions over

zoning and development decisions. So the Department of Planning and Development created the biannual Planning College, a two-semester program that familiarized residents with the land use planning, zoning, development and permitting process. The Planning College helped residents make sense of the rules, procedures and roles of various boards, and ultimately act as ambassadors for the town. *continued on page 6*





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The department also began holding Meet and Greet events that involved building inspectors and staff to inform residents about town facilities and services and generate interest in the Planning College.

One of the initial purposes of their public outreach program was for town residents to be able to put a face with a name and meet town staff members in person, said Christiane Farrell, director of Mount Pleasant’s planning and development department.

“With so much communication now being through emails and other digital

means, we have limited opportunities to speak with and meet people in person. Meet and Greet allows our residents to meet staff and to spend time asking questions and learning more about our role in the community,” she said.

“Planning College is another opportunity where residents can participate and where they can learn more about planning processes directly from staff over the course of about 10 weeks. In building these personal relationships and also by helping citizens build knowledge and understanding of the process, we can build a sense of

community and encourage greater civic engagement.”

In the City of Columbia, community development staff held a four-hour home-buyer workshop to help residents navigate and understand the home buying process, money management skills, barriers to credit and how to obtain a mortgage loan. The city holds workshops several times a year to educate the public about the benefits of owning a home.

“The City of Columbia’s Community Development Department understands that home ownership is still one of the best ways families can build generational



(left) “The Kindness Diaries” host Leon Logothetis conducted a kindness workshop at Travelers Rest City Hall. (above) The Department of Planning and Development for the Town of Mount Pleasant created Planning College for residents to learn about land use, zoning, permitting and other topics.

wealth,” said Gloria Saeed, the city’s director of community development.

“Home ownership contributes toward building strong communities and neighborhoods by providing tax revenues that are used to improve our schools, maintain roads and infrastructure and deliver basic service needs, such as police and fire protection.”

‘Kindness is explosive’

In May, employees of the City of Travelers Rest and the police department collected \$150 among themselves to pay the power bill of a resident who had been

arrested for allegedly trying to exchange stolen goods at a retail store for cash.

However, in the course of the arrest, the officer realized the woman needed help. She said her ex-boyfriend had assaulted her and her 6-year-old child, and she had to quit her job because she had no one at home to take care of her children. She said her electricity was about to be shut off, because she could not pay her bill.

The officer’s actions were part of something larger, however. In Travelers Rest, the police department has taken the lead on a new community building initiative.

Just a few days before the arrest, the police officer, who asked not to be named, attended a workshop at the police department put on by Leon Logothetis, a motivational speaker who hosts “The Kindness Diaries” TV show on Netflix and is promoting the concept of kindness worldwide.

“I thought of Leon and his speech (during the arrest),” recalled the officer. But he said he would have helped the woman regardless of the workshop,

because helping someone in need is human nature.

Travelers Rest Police Capt. Randy Fisher coordinated the workshop with Logothetis and has led the department’s own kindness campaign, which includes passing out cards that encourage recipients to commit an act of kindness and then pass the card along to someone else.

“If they email us, we’ll ask where the kindness took place, so we can map them and see how far they went,” said Fisher, who has created a website: thekindness-factor.com/.

He detailed possible future plans, including a Kindness Square and Kindness Café and Bicycle Emporium. The square is envisioned to be a landscaped sitting area with benches and tables where residents may play chess or use it as a gathering space. The café would function similar to a police substation, where young people could learn how to repair bikes and those in need might receive refurbished bikes.

“Kindness is explosive, and connecting with the community we serve should be our first priority,” Fisher said.

“The rest will fall in place from there.” ●



Colleton Commercial
Kitchen trainees/
Walterboro

CITIES USE FOOD TO BUILD COMMUNITY

By Sarita Chourey

It all started with a piece of land that nobody knew what to do with.

City of Landrum officials were hoping someone would build a house on the awkward, rectangular acre, even though there was a bog on it that flowed with water in the summertime.

But when a prospective buyer offered a very low bid, Landrum officials decided to change course and find a better use for it. Early this year, Landrum City Administrator Rich Caplan approached the local school district superintendent with the offer of letting students use it as a vegetable garden.

“He said, “Terrific,”” Caplan recalled. And so for \$1 per month, the city began leasing the land to the school district for its Landrum High School agriculture students.

The students are expected to design and build raised garden boxes in the

fall. They haven’t decided what to do with the vegetables they’ll harvest, but options include selling the produce at the Landrum Farmers Market, serving it in the school cafeteria to encourage healthy eating or donating the produce to local food banks. Meanwhile, a local florist found out about the city’s plans with the high school and wanted to get involved.

“He said, ‘What’s going to happen there?’” said Caplan. “I could maybe contribute a greenhouse.”

The florist wanted the students to grow flowers that he could then buy to sell in his shop, further linking the students to their community and local economy.

“I could have hugged him,” said Caplan. “We didn’t advertise that.”

The City of Landrum, which is close to the North Carolina border,

has applied for a grant to supply the students with gardening tools and a shed from a community foundation that serves the city but is located in Polk County, N.C.

With its one acre of land and a creative plan, Landrum leaders are in a position to build connections among city government, the public schools, a local business and its customers, and potentially even a local food bank and its clientele, if those programs receive some of the students’ fresh vegetables.

Learning to cook with local produce

Landrum is not the only city that has found a way to strengthen community bonds through its strategic use of food.

In the City of Mauldin, mobile cooking demonstrations by an area restaurant will show visitors to the city farmers

market how to turn the fresh, local produce for sale there into healthy meals.

“The local aspect of it is when you show people that it’s really easy to cook with fresh ingredients, and they find out at the market that those ingredients are extremely accessible — you can grab ‘em and make (meal) plans for the weekend and week — it connects them with those farmers,” said Keira Kitchings, director of Mauldin Cultural Center, which is part of city government.

Last year the owner of a restaurant and catering business in nearby Greenville brought his mobile burners and equipment to the market and gave demonstrations.

“They go around and look at what vendors are selling that day and come up with recipes on the fly,” said Kitchings.

“Last year, they created this really easy and really healthy dish that people could do themselves. It shows people, ‘Hey, find some local ingredients and find 10 minutes of time and you’ve got dinner.’”

Bon Secours St. Francis Health System sponsors the BeWell market, but the city operates it. The market runs for three months starting in June and will also offer small-group fitness classes in the amphitheater and sell local produce, dairy, eggs, honey, baked goods and gifts.

Homegrown food entrepreneurs

In the City of Walterboro, the Colleton Commercial Kitchen operates a culinary incubator where several area entrepreneurs have honed their skills with the help of kitchen infrastructure and training. They then sell their goods onsite with the goal of opening a storefront in the city.

“We’re one of those small towns overrun with fast food options and few local options,” said Matt Mardell, kitchen program manager.



Landrum Farmers Market/Landrum

“This helps us add more local options to the market, and as we say in Walterboro, ‘We like to keep our bucks in the ‘boro,’ to ensure that the money that we spend here stays in this economy.”

Mardell said that, in addition to strengthening the local economy, the growth of unique, local businesses shapes the city’s identity.

Others are noticing. The Colleton Commercial Kitchen, which is part of Colleton County government, draws entrepreneurs from the region and attracts tour groups sometimes as large as 80 people, along with officials from other South Carolina cities and towns who want to learn how the incubator works.

“Quite often tour groups will call (the Walterboro tourism office) and then arrange to come to our facility for a tour, get lunch, visit our museum and marketplace,” he said.

“We are one big connected facility with the Colleton Museum and Farmers Market, so it’s a very popular spot with tourists.

The city welcome center also helps advertise the incubator.

“When big events come to town, quite often we are the first two organizations involved in coming together on a planning committee, and we are sought

out for our event space, food producers, storage and tourist attractions,” said Mardell.

He said the city tourism staff also works with the kitchen staff on local boards, such as the Eat Smart Move More board.

“The city is excited to feature and partner with the Colleton Commercial Kitchen when approached by potential new events hoping to come to Walterboro,” said Michelle Strickland, Walterboro’s tourism director.

In this respect, the commercial kitchen advances community development by driving commerce, crowds and festivity to the city’s downtown.

The event space, capacity for food delivery, storage and preparation, and general logistics are major benefits to any event held in the city, Strickland said.

An example was the FestiVELO event. It brought more than 300 bicyclists to Walterboro for five days and four nights in November 2016 and is returning again this November with even bigger plans for the greater Historic Downtown District and potentially larger attendance.

“The Colleton Commercial Kitchen is a key piece in moving Walterboro forward,” said Hank Amundson, Walterboro’s assistant city manager. ●

Savannah River/
North Augusta



CITIES EMBRACE, ENHANCE THEIR BLUEWAYS

By Amy Edgar

From moving sewer lines to adding trails, South Carolina cities and towns are recognizing — and maximizing — the appeal of their rivers.

That means taking any number of steps, such as adding a boat launch, rerouting infrastructure or securing an easement to open up public access and attract residents and visitors.

The City of North Augusta has worked for years to take advantage of the Savannah River. In the 1990s, the city did

a study on riverfront development and adopted the tag line “South Carolina’s Riverfront,” according to Lark Jones, who recently retired as the city’s mayor.

In the mid-1990s, a private developer built a golf club and riverfront homes, which sold for up to \$1 million. This was the catalyst that began to bring people into North Augusta and cultivate an identity for the city as something other than a bedroom community of Augusta, Ga., which sits across the river, Jones said.

As developments grew, the city retained access to the riverfront because city leaders believed public access would be key for future successful development.

“The philosophy of the city has always been to provide public access to the river,” Jones said. “It’s part of the public realm that our residents own. When we develop these things, we want the residents to feel ownership.”

The city had a greenway from a rails-to-trails project and then added a 1-mile

spur to the riverfront. The spur circles the Brick Pond Park, which is a 40-acre restored wetland, water treatment system and public nature park.

Significant developments continue at the riverfront. Project Jackson is a mixed-used development that includes a new minor-league ballpark for the Augusta GreenJackets. A hotel, restaurants, shops, homes and condominiums all are underway near the riverfront.

Other towns are investing in their riverfronts, as well. The Town of Ware Shoals succeeded in having its project to reroute a 40-year-old sewer line along the Saluda River included on the Greenwood County Penny Sales Tax Commission's list of projects funded by the penny sales tax, which voters approved in 2016.

This project addresses the dangers of possible pollution and contamination that come from having waste running through sewage pipes along the river, said Town Administrator Heather Fields.

In addition, the town is working to improve Pitts Park, which lies along the shoals and offers access to the river. Fields said the town would like to clean up the park, add trash cans and restrooms, and make it handicapped accessible.

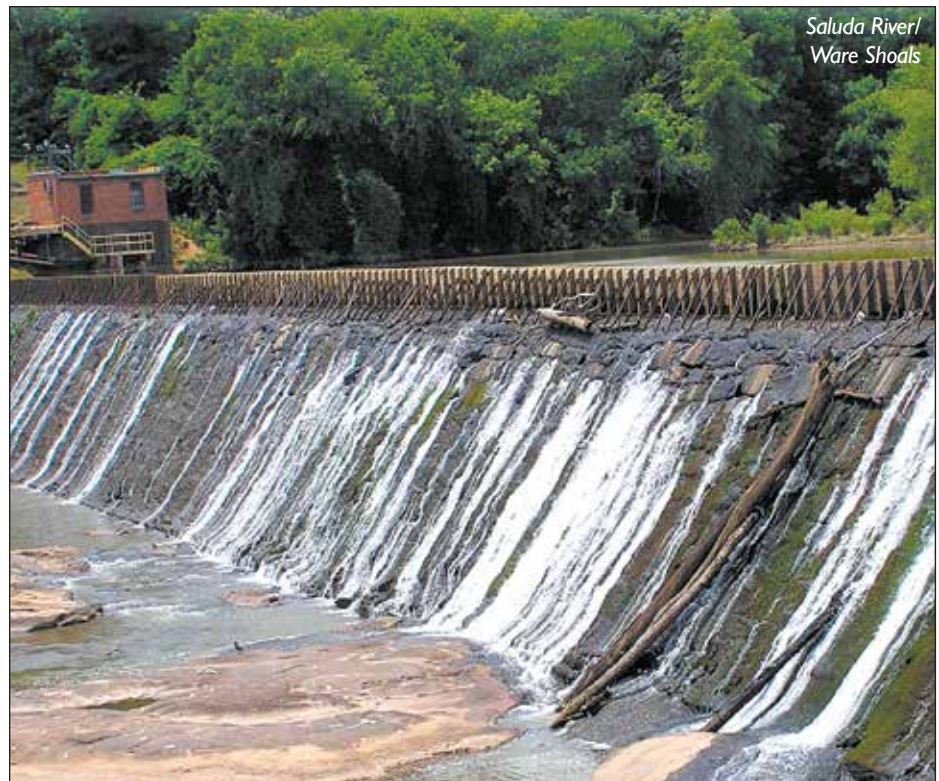
The river is part of the Heritage Corridor, and signage there points to the kayak launch and access to fishing, Fields said. The park is a true gem of the community, she said.

"On any given day, we have hundreds of people in the park," she said.

Reaching an agreement

Scores of people visit the Pacolet River Paddling Trail, and the Town of Pacolet has been working on other improvements to draw visitors to the riverfront area, according to Mayor Michael Meissner.

"Providing public access to the river gives community members and individuals something to do," Meissner said.



For years, there was no public access to the Pacolet River, due in part to industrial sites located there. The town reached an easement agreement with Lockhart Power, which provides hydropower along the river, to create trails and allow public access to the water, Meissner said.

The town has other projects in the works, including a new traffic circle in front of Pacolet Town Hall, and improvements, such as benches, to the park area and river walk. An old building known as the Cloth Room, which is a remnant of the textile mill, is undergoing renovations to become a community events center that will spur revitalization efforts by the river. Eventually, Meissner said, they hope to expand the trails, add a bridge, increase signage and expand a fishing pier.

'Get connected to nature'

The Town of Calhoun Falls, located in the Savannah River Basin, provides numerous recreational activities for residents and visitors. Calhoun Falls State Park and the Blue Hole Recreation Area

offer boat ramps, playgrounds, picnic areas, and canoeing and kayak areas.

The West Carolina Pavilion on Lake Russell hosts musical and outdoor events, said David Garner, Calhoun Falls town administrator. The town works closely with the Calhoun Falls Chamber of Commerce and the Lake Russell Recreation and Tourism Coalition to plan and organize events and draw people to the area, he said.

In the future, Garner said they hope to establish a rails-to-trails project accessible from downtown Calhoun Falls, to create a regional recreational trail linking the two counties of Abbeville and McCormick.

The activities around Lake Russell and the Savannah River Basin offer an oasis from the fast pace of daily life. When cities embrace and enhance the rivers and waterways that make them unique, they can increase economic development while providing healthy spaces for citizens to enjoy the outdoors.

"We want to get people disconnected from technology for a while and get connected to nature," Garner said. ●

CITIES WALK THE WALK

and bike the path

By Sarita Chourey

Trekking from the car to the canned food aisle of a big box superstore can actually be more of a hike than walking across a city's downtown.

A few years ago, Randy Wilson, president of Community Design Solutions in Columbia, worked on a master plan in the City of Conway and superimposed the outline of a Walmart Superstore and its parking lot over the city's downtown. The result: The drawing of the giant retailer covered almost the entire downtown core of Conway.

"There was almost no place in downtown Conway that would be farther to walk than an experience at a Walmart," said Wilson. "And yet, it feels like it's such an inconvenience to walk."

Travelers Rest Mayor Wayne McCall explained how the beloved Swamp Rabbit Trail, a multi-use greenway that connects Travelers Rest and Greenville, was a very divisive idea when it was first discussed about 10 years ago.

"It actually split the community almost in half — the folks that supported it and the folks that opposed it," McCall said, during a panel discussion at the Mayor's Bike & Walk Summit in Columbia in May. "The folks that opposed it, (said) 'Well, that has always been a railroad, and it might bring a railroad back. ... We don't want change.' Well, I can tell you about change — Change is going to happen. And it's up to us to make it happen in a positive way."

The Swamp Rabbit Trail runs almost 20 miles and now annually draws more than 500,000 users, who have easy access to shops and restaurants from the trail in both Greenville and Travelers Rest.

Cities and towns across South Carolina are laying the groundwork for streets and downtowns that invite walkers and cyclists. The objectives are clear: Improve

residents' quality of life, appeal to visitors, manage traffic and parking pressures that come with growth, and bolster the local and regional economy.

But encouraging walking and cycling often calls for more than just making physical changes to streets and infrastructure. Often it means changing people's perceptions and attitudes.

New mindset

"People are so accustomed to driving to the mall or Walmart and parking in this big open parking lot that they consider to be convenient, that they never calculate the fact the distance they walked from their car to the Walmart is equivalent of one or two city blocks," said Wilson.

Changing the public's mindset is part of the process.

"The burden is on us," said Wilson. Ideally, where someone parks should not be a major factor.

"It doesn't matter, because everything you pass going from B to A is intriguing and oftentimes leads to discovery — 'Wow, I had no idea that new bar, that new entertainment venue had opened.' Otherwise, we get really frustrated. Not only did we not park in front of where we're going to, but the walk there was unenjoyable."

He said the City of Columbia's parking garage off Main Street shows how creating attractive and well-designed spaces around the structure to connect the garage with where people are going appeals to the public.

"Sometimes we'll have parking garages, but we don't want to park there, because we have to walk through a scary, sketchy alley," said Wilson. "For lots of communities, the experience to walk between parking garages is incredibly uncomfortable."



Columbia Mayor Steve Benjamin led a community ride to celebrate Bike Month in May.

Columbia Mayor Steve Benjamin pointed to another example of how changes to existing city spaces may face skepticism initially but can ultimately prove their worth in terms of greater foot and bike traffic.

Benjamin said there were only a handful of people a few years ago who agreed the Lincoln Street Tunnel project — repurposing an old train tunnel downtown into a bike and pedestrian way — was a good idea.

"Who would want to go down into that tunnel? It's not safe, it's not clean," Benjamin recalled of the doubts that surfaced at the start of the effort.

But perseverance paid off with a "huge psychological win," when the high-visibility tunnel area in a vibrant entertainment district was transformed, said Benjamin during the mayor's summit panel discussion.



The new Vista Greenway in Columbia (above) connects downtown to nearby neighborhoods. The cities of Greenville and Travelers Rest, along with Greenville County, maintain the 19.5-mile Greenville Health System Swamp Rabbit Trail (right).



Map it out

Sometimes, things are already built and just need to be linked together conceptually for the pedestrian or cyclist. Officials in the City of York have increased walkability by highlighting existing places of interest and by encouraging and showing residents and visitors how to enjoy them on foot.

York officials recently created a downtown walking tour map that notes a dozen historical markers. It was created as part of the Eat Smart Move More York County program. The 2.5-mile loop also marks points of interest, such as the county library and York Bike Trail. Additionally, it offers safety tips for walkers and bikers, such as to make eye contact with automobile drivers, to carry a flashlight while out at night, and to avoid headphones and cell phone usage when in a crossing.

Eat Smart Move More York County awarded the City of York a \$1,400 grant from Blue Cross Blue Shield to design and print the walking map of the historic district.

Additional funding from ESMMYC has allowed the city to make other improvements downtown.

“These include painting and improving crosswalks and installing wayfinding and other directional signs that will help make York safer and more attractive for pedestrians,” said Carolyn Leake, York recreation director. “Hopefully we will be able to extend these improvements to other areas of the community in the future.”

A similar mission of boosting walking and cycling is taking shape among local government officials in all parts of the state. For a cluster of Midlands cities, the push made sense as a team effort.

The Central Midlands Council of Governments, the cities of West Columbia and Cayce and Town of Springdale are working together on the West Metro Bike and Pedestrian Master Plan to develop a comprehensive plan for active transportation.

The group is also undertaking a bike share feasibility study and adding a bike lane to a major thoroughfare in West Columbia, which was selected due to its sufficient right-of-way width for cyclists. The new lane will be funded by state and federal dollars, said Tara Greenwood, director of grants and special projects for the City of West Columbia. The city hopes the lane, to be designed and constructed by the S.C. Department of Transportation, will be ready to use by next year.

In the Town of Blythewood, officials are planning and building a pedestrian and bicyclist friendly city, Town Administrator Gary Parker said. It’s a central feature of the town’s master plan. The county penny tax project of widening Blythewood Road, which is currently being engineered, will feature a bike-pedestrian multi-use trail in the right of way.

“All this is now in its infancy,” said Parker. “But we hope to see it accomplished in the years ahead.” ●

HOMETOWN SNAPSHOT



Photo/Reba Campbell

It's hard to believe that the popular Swamp Rabbit Trail, which connects Greenville and Travelers Rest, was once a divisive issue. The plan split the town in half, said Travelers Rest Mayor Wayne McCall. No more — the trail is a boon to business and tourism, bringing 500,000 users annually.

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