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A UNIFYING FORCE
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Updated MEO Institute On-Demand Courses

Now Available

Joining the panel discussion for the MEO Institute on-demand session of "Municipal Economic Development" are, from left, Carolyn Sawyer, moderator; Jenny Boulware, Main Street South Carolina Manager, Conway Mayor Barbara Blain-Bellamy; Travelers Rest Mayor Brandy Amidon; and Parker Poe Attorney Ray Jones.

The Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government helps provide city and town leaders the knowledge to fulfill their responsibilities, and now MEO participants have access to updated versions of the institute's online, on-demand sessions. In the new version of the courses, participants will hear from city and town officials and numerous Municipal Association staff members. Those officials who completed the older version of the courses do not need to take the new versions.

The online MEO Institute courses cover several of the key areas of municipal governance. While participants can take these courses online, they also have the opportunity to take the courses in person at select regional councils of governments locations each year. Whether the courses are taken online or in person, they count toward the requirements to become an MEO graduate.

Learn more about the online and in-person courses at www.masc.sc (keyword: MEO).

The on-demand courses are these:

Basic Budgeting and Municipal Finance – This course covers the important steps in the budget process from preparation to implementation and council monitoring of the budget.

Forms of Municipal Government – This addresses the three forms of municipal government in South Carolina: council, mayor-council and council-manager.

Freedom of Information Act in South Carolina – Learn about the state's FOIA requirements such as what documents governments must release and how to give appropriate notice of public meetings.

Municipal Governance and Policy – Learn how municipal authority works under South Carolina law and how to implement effective municipal policies.

Municipal Economic Development – Understand how to take advantage of a community's economic assets and available financing tools.

The Five Basics of Effective Governing — This course is optional, has no charge and is not for credit.

Managing Cyber Insurance for Cities

Hackers who employ ransomware attacks target municipal governments more than they do any other group or industry even more than schools or healthcare organizations, and for good reason — municipalities are often poorly-equipped to handle these kinds of attacks. Many municipalities do not have basic cybersecurity measures in place, such as multifactor authentication, also known as MFA; endpoint detection and response, or EDR; and data backup.

Because municipalities are vulnerable to cyberattacks, like ransomware attacks, insurers take steps to protect themselves such as raising premiums on municipalities to a very high level. They may also tie lower premiums to a municipality's implementation of cybersecurity best practices.

Here are questions and tips for municipal officials to consider when navigating the cyber insurance environment.

How can municipalities make sure they can acquire cyber insurance as affordably as possible?

In order to be considered for cyber insurance, municipalities should proactively assess their cyber controls and mitigate any vulnerabilities. At a minimum, cyber carriers expect cities to take these steps:

- Have multifactor authentication in place.
- Use Microsoft Office 365 as well as Office 365 Advanced Threat Protection.
- Pre-screen emails for malicious attachments and links.
- Back up key servers and data at least monthly.
- Use isolated backups that aren't connected to the city's network.
- Regularly test restoring data and information backups.
- Conduct regular phishing training.

If a municipality doesn't have those controls in place, they may be ineligible for coverage or they may face higher premiums and deductibles.

How is the Municipal Association of SC helping members with cyber insurance?

Members of the Municipal Association of South Carolina's property and liability program, the **South Carolina Municipal Insurance and Risk Financing Fund**, receive a limited amount of cyber coverage directly through SCMIRF. If a SCMIRF member city applies and is approved, then SCMIRF will pay the cost of a commercial cyber liability policy that provides higher limits and coverage for first-party losses which are losses experienced by the insured city. This covers things like data breach forensics, identity monitoring, breach coaching, data or systems restoration and business interruption.

The coverage also provides for third-party coverage for those who are not the policyholder but who experience losses. This covers items like damages, judgements and settlements.

Members of the SC Municipal Insurance and Risk Financing Fund have access to the eRiskHub as a resource for innovative cyber risk management solutions. Learn more at www.masc.sc (keyword: SCMIRF).

QUIZ

TRUE OR FALSE:

In the three forms of municipal government authorized in South Carolina law, the city or town council retains sole authority for both legislative and administrative functions.

FALSE Legislative authority refers to the power to make, alter and repeal local laws and establish policy for the municipality. In all forms of municipal government, legislative power rests in the collective judgment and discretion of the full council.

Council cannot delegate the power to decide legislative matters to any other group or person, such as an individual councilmember, a municipal officer or employee, or in any kind of committee, including committees composed of councilmembers.

Administrative authority is the power to implement laws and policies. Council's level of administrative authority varies based on which of the forms of government the city or town has adopted.

In both the mayor-council form and the council-manager form, state law names a chief administrative officer. In the mayor-council form, it is the mayor, and in the council-manager form, it is the city manager. This person is responsible to the council for the administration of municipal affairs. The council form of government differs from the other two. Under it, state law vests council with administrative powers. Council can either retain this authority, or it can delegate some or all of these powers to an administrator through an ordinance.

A summary of the differences between the three forms can be found in the *Forms and Powers of Municipal Government* handbook, found at www.masc.sc (keyword: forms of government).

The Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government offers in-person and online courses. Learn more at www.masc.sc (keyword: MEO).

Association Highlight:
SC Association of Stormwater Managers

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

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

SCASM's Fourth Quarter Meeting will take place Thursday, November 2 at the Cooperative Conference Center in Columbia. Topics include the history of SCASM, keeping stormwater programs interesting and relevant for customers and staff, and the annual exhibitor showcase. *Learn more at www.masc.sc (keyword: SCASM).*
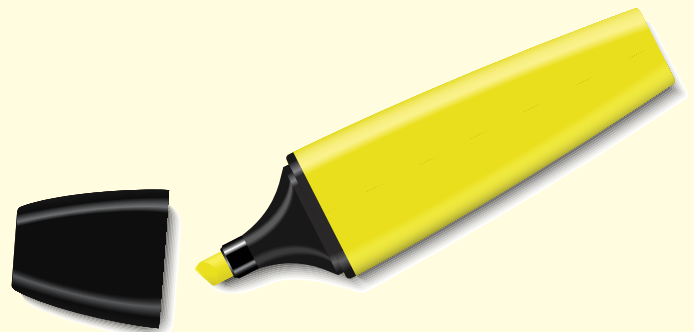
What to Know About Council Meeting Public Comment Sessions

Public comment sessions during city council meetings can be a valuable way for residents to engage with their local government and elected leaders, but times set aside for public comment can also easily become a source of conflict. There are a number of best practices for how councils can run public comment periods, and the SC Attorney General has issued opinions on the matter as well.

Best practices

City and town councils should have formal rules in place for public comment periods, and ensure that speakers know the rules. Rules can cover everything from when during the meeting members of the public can speak, whether speakers can comment only on agenda items or on any topic of their choosing, whether speakers must sign up in advance of the meeting, and whether time limits exist for each speaker.

Sometimes, rules and preparations are not enough to maintain order in a charged situation — for example, a large number of people attending a meeting to express anger over a specific issue. To prevent public comment sessions from derailing or overly extending meetings, some municipalities have adopted rules authorizing the presiding officer to stop public comments that either the chair or a majority of council determine to be uncivil, contentious or disruptive.

In a difficult situation, managing the meeting can mean giving warnings that if speakers do not follow the rules, the council will end public comment.

Recent Attorney General opinions

A 2019 opinion issued by the SC Attorney General recognized that the SC Freedom of Information Act does not establish a right for the public to speak during public meetings, and that the public body's own policies will often determine when and how speakers may participate.

One item to consider here is that a public comment period is not the same thing as a public hearing, which is required in some circumstances by state law. SC Code Section 6-1-80, for example, requires a public hearing before the council adopts an annual budget, while SC Code Section 6-1-330 requires a public hearing before adopting a new service or user fee. Public comment periods, on the other hand, are optional for councils, not mandatory.

Most recently, the Attorney General released an opinion on public comments on June 5, which examined several aspects of the public comment rules that public bodies may use. The opinion considered several issues:

- **A "relevancy requirement" is legal**. For example, a council could require that speakers during a public comment period confine their comments to matters that are within the scope of the municipality's business.

- **Reasonable time limits for speakers are legal.** The opinion examined public comment rules that allowed three minutes per speaker, but noted that "[t]his Office cannot definitively state when the amount of time permitted is so short a court would find it unreasonable."

- **Rules prohibiting speakers from yielding or ceding their available speaking time are legal.** The opinion noted that the Attorney General's Office was unaware of a court case on this issue, but it found a rule against "stacking" time for a single speaker acceptable because it was "content neutral and appears reasonably related to maintaining the order and fair progress of a meeting."

It is legal to remove a person who violates rules from a public meeting, but councils should exercise caution when doing this. Councils, for example, need to do everything they can to avoid infringing on First Amendment rights when doing this.

Learn more about conducting meetings in the Municipal Association's How to Conduct Effective Meetings *handbook, found at www.masc.sc (keyword: effective meeting handbook).*

A Unifying Force
Greenville Highlights Unity Park, Downtown Development

Crowds come up to Greenville's Unity Park on its opening day, May 19, 2022. Photo: City of Greenville.

In the late 1930s, the Rev. Elias Brown Holloway, a leader in Greenville's Southernside neighborhood, lobbied the city government forcefully for a park to serve the area's Black residents. He had reason to complain.

A decade earlier, the city had established Mayberry Park, a recreational spot for Black children who in an age of segregation were not allowed to play in the city's other parks. Although that park became a key asset to the community, the city had taken a portion of the land for a police department shooting range, and took more land still for a stadium for an all-white minor league baseball team.

Holloway pushed hard, rallying city leaders and publishing newspaper letters, and ultimately secured a commitment from Greenville City Council for a new park.

A new park didn't happen.

What emerged in its place were more out-of-the-way city functions — a stockade, a dog pound, dilapidated public works buildings, and cast-off trucks and police cruisers.

"The highway running through the middle of it, empty warehouses, all blighted, you never came down here," Greenville Mayor Knox White said.

White led a tour of municipal officials through Greenville's downtown and Unity Park — the area recently developed which includes the historic Mayberry Park — during the Municipal Association of SC 2023 Annual Meeting.

Unity Park

The change that would turn the area into Unity Park came when the City of Greenville sought to develop that section of the Reedy River, just upstream from the iconic Falls Park, and hosted meetings to present plan concepts to the neighborhoods.

Mary Duckett, president of Southernside Neighborhoods in Action, as White explained, "famously stood up and said, 'you know, we've always wanted a park adjacent to our neighborhood.' And this is her famous quote, circa 2010 — 'the city has for 100 years put all its junk in our backyard.'"

With the reminder that the city had long ago promised the area a park, the city "took the plans for the park and ripped them in two. We said this park is going to be done completely differently. It's going to be a neighborhood-driven park project," White said. "Neighborhood leadership was absolutely involved in every iota of this park."

Today, the headline-grabbing, wildly popular Unity Park comprises 60 acres and is home to a splash pad — neighborhood children involved in planning insisted on this inclusion — as well as basketball and baseball facilities, and a connection to the 23-mile Swamp Rabbit Trail. The city also set aside 8 acres of land near the park for workforce and senior housing development.

One surprise in the park's development came for a row of existing warehouses situated along the Swamp Rabbit Trail. While the city was trying to buy them up, they found that

another group had purchased many of the others — ultimately filling them with a food court, brewery and offices. The warehouse space closest to the heart of the park has become the city's Prisma Health Welcome Center, which White described as an increasingly popular location for public meetings of boards and commissions.

"People are just nicer when they come out here," he said.

Outside the Welcome Center, a mural features Elias Holloway and his wife, Hattie — a lasting reminder of their work to establish a park that could suit its community more than 80 years before it would happen.

Downtown Greenville

In recent years, Greenville's downtown often helps place it on many best-of lists — *Southern Living* has it as the Number 7 best city in the South for 2023, and *Condé Nast Traveler* has it at Number 6 on its most recent list of best small cities in the U.S. But not long ago, Greenville's downtown was known as a challenged and largely vacant place.

White recounted a time when the downtown was known for little other than the Hyatt Regency hotel, and the iconic waterfall in what is now Falls Park was largely covered by a four-lane bridge, so most residents didn't even know of it.

The transformation, White said, has required a focus on residential development, initially working block by block from the Hyatt to the river. The process was challenging and slow at first.

"All the second floors are residential, that was our early effort to get mixed-use downtown in the 1990s and 2000s — six units here, five units here," he said. "About 15 years later, we graduated to 100 units, 200 units, 300 units."

Portions of the City of Greenville tour highlighted specific accomplishments, like the recent construction of the Grand Bohemian Hotel along Falls Park; Fluor Field, home of the Greenville Drive minor league baseball team, or any of Greenville's many pieces of public art. One such highlight was the colossal mural painted on the Canvas Tower building, commemorating school desegregation and featuring retired educator Pearlie Harris.

New developments in downtown Greenville, like the Falls Tower office building of the Camperdown development, are visible beyond Reedy River Falls from the Liberty Bridge.

One stop on the tour in particular, the Camperdown development, shows what mixed-use development in Greenville now looks like. The circa-2020 project along Main Street counts 150,000 square feet of office space, more than 5,500 square feet of retail space so far, 196 hotel rooms and 241 apartments.

Combining all these functions together, White said, makes locals and tourists alike want to be downtown, and they come in such numbers that he said an ordinary day will sometimes be mistaken for a major festival.

"Close proximity equals vibrancy on the street. This place just rocks and rolls all the time," he said. "Biggest crowds in downtown Greenville, consistently — Sunday at 3 o'clock [p.m.]. It looks like an event going on, thousands of people downtown."

Municipal officials pose outside the Unity Park sign during the Association's Annual Meeting.

Disclosing Information on Job Finalist Pools

In 2003, Spartanburg School District 7 undertook a search process for a new school superintendent. From about 30 applicants, the school district cut the pool to five semifinalists, and then again cut the pool to two finalists before making a final decision.

The Spartanburg *Herald-Journal* newspaper then sent the school district a request under the **South Carolina Freedom of Information Act** for materials "relating to not fewer than the final three applicants." The language of the request mirrored **SC Code Section 30-4-40(a)(13)**, which allows public bodies to exempt from disclosure "All materials, regardless of form, gathered by a public body during a search to fill an employment position ..., " except for materials relating to "not fewer" than three finalists.

The school district, noting that there were only two finalists, offered materials relating only to those two candidates. The newspaper argued that this response did not comply with FOIA and sued the school district. The case went to the South Carolina Supreme Court, where the newspaper won.

In the 2007 decision, *New York Times Co. v. Spartanburg County Sch. Dist. No. 7*, the Supreme Court reasoned that "the term 'final' ... refers to the last group of applicants, with at least three members, from which the employment selection is made."

Because of this ruling, the school district had to provide materials relating to all candidates in the earlier and larger pool of five semifinalists, despite having assured those candidates that only the finalists — which the district considered to be the smaller group of two people — would be publicly identified. The unsuccessful applicants would most likely have preferred to remain anonymous because of potential implications for their jobs with their current employers.

The outcome of this case can create some surprises for public bodies. For example, if a city council conducts only one round of interviews with eight candidates and selects from that pool, then all eight candidates are "finalists," for the purposes of FOIA, and the city must disclose materials for all eight. On the other hand, if city council interviews eight candidates and calls four of them back for second interviews, the "finalists" for the position are the four candidates who were interviewed a second time.

But consider in that second scenario — four candidates who are interviewed twice — what would happen if two drop out before the final decision, leaving only two people in the group. In that case, council would have to disclose materials either on the four candidates who interviewed twice, including the two withdrawn candidates, or on all eight candidates. Council cannot disclose information on only the two remaining candidates.

There are practices that municipalities can adopt to limit these surprises. Most importantly, high-profile searches, especially for top positions like city manager that are likely to attract FOIA requests, should have at least one cut to a pool of no less than three candidates, who received notice that their names may be disclosed. Otherwise, council may have to disclose materials on the entire pool. Making high-profile hires is a consequential process for cities and towns and not just because of the performance and leadership of the new hire.

The degree of professionalism shown in the process itself can impact the municipality's reputation, and handling the announcement of finalists appropriately is an important part of that.

LAW ENFORCEMENT POLICIES

INTERNAL AFFAIRS AND CITIZEN COMPLAINTS

Act 218 took effect in 2023, requiring all law enforcement agencies to adopt and implement a set of minimum operational standards. The law allows departments to establish additional standards that are more restrictive.

The Municipal Association's Risk Management Services drafted model policies for each of the standards, available for use by all cities and towns at www.masc.sc (keyword: law enforcement model policies). Departments that are not SC Municipal Insurance Trust or SC Municipal Insurance and Risk Financing Fund members should reach out to the SC Criminal Justice Academy for policy questions.

The eighth model policy addresses internal affairs and citizen complaints. It covers how departments can handle investigations of an officer following complaints of misconduct. Under the policy, misconduct can include everything from a conviction of a felony, guilty plea or no-contest plea to a felony, to unlawful use of a controlled substance or dangerous practices involving firearms, weapons or vehicles. It can also involve cases of repeated excessive force, psychological abuse, failure or report another officer involved in misconduct, or making false or misleading statements to law enforcement officials or courts.

The policy requires departments to develop a brochure explaining how community members can make a complaint of misconduct. Beyond complaints coming from individuals, the policy notes that departments must receive complaints from agencies and news media reports and evaluate them for possible investigations.

Investigations

Under the policy, a superior may relieve an employee of duty temporarily in a case where the supervisor has received reliable information alleging serious misconduct. In cases of a complaint, or circumstances likely to lead to a complaint or an administrative investigation, the supervisor begins a preliminary investigation immediately, making sure that evidence is collected and documented properly.

For allegations serious enough to potentially result in suspension, demotion or termination of the employee, the policy requires an internal affairs unit or person to investigate, and generally complete the investigation within 45 days. Investigators must also keep complainants informed throughout the process, including informing them of the results. Investigators must also provide similar updates to the employee.

The investigation results then move to a designated adjudicator who recommends action to take in response to the investigation, and then to the chief of police or the chief's designee for a final decision. Investigators who find potential criminal violations must advise the chief of police of this as soon as possible during an investigation, according to the policy.

Reporting

The policy requires police chiefs to report conduct they believe to be misconduct to the SC Criminal Justice Academy using its standardized form, which is a requirement of state law. This report must take place within 15 days of the police department's final action resulting from its internal investigation. In cases where the department decides not to prosecute the employee, the department must provide a written report stating its decision not to prosecute.

Find more information about all law enforcement policies at www.masc.sc (keyword: Act 218).

Building Better Police Presence Through Technology

One of Cheraw's license plate-reading cameras is installed along Market Street close to Town Hall. Photo: Town of Cheraw.

From cameras that capture pictures of license plates to technology that can pinpoint where gunshots are fired, advancements in technology are part of law enforcement in every corner of South Carolina.

While law enforcement has historically relied on mutual aid agreements with other cities and counties as a way to amplify a police department's effectiveness, technology is now offering a new opportunity to expand a department's reach.

"Technology has emerged in the last 10 years as a force multiplier for law enforcement," said City of Columbia Police Chief W.H. "Skip" Holbrook. "It comes with an expense, but it's been a reliable force multiplier."

In Cheraw, for example, the town grappled with ways to deal with increasing property crimes in a rural area with limited resources. The solution? Solar-operated cameras are strategically placed at intersections in town to capture the license plate of every car that passes through.

Officers can get a sense of what vehicles were in the area when a crime occurred, narrowing down possible suspects. The information from the cameras also goes to the National Crime Information Center database, which checks license plates against any known active warrants, missing persons or other issues.

Any time someone has a warrant or a car is stolen, the cameras send a "ping" to all of the patrol officers with a time, description and location. In the two years since the program began, the cameras have helped the town recover multiple stolen vehicles and license plates, find three missing persons and assist in at least one homicide investigation, said Rob Wolfe, Cheraw's town manager.

He also described the system as a police "force multiplier" — one "that allows us to better track and catch criminals."

Originally, several of these cameras were installed in a neighborhood as part of a Community Development Block Grant Neighborhood Revitalization Program. Because they had a noticeable impact on crime rates, Cheraw expanded the program to cover the entire town.

"In this scenario, these cameras are the equivalent of having a police officer stationed at every strategic intersection in town, and that officer [being able] to run every license plate that goes past them," Wolfe said.

Even in a small town like Cheraw, the most active street in town has about 18,000 vehicles go by daily.

"As you can imagine, rural communities across the country are struggling with recruitment of police officers, costs are skyrocketing beyond the ability of tax revenue to keep up, and in many places, the population is shrinking," he said. "All of this combined means that we have to be strategic in how we utilize limited financial resources."

The cost of Cheraw's 48 cameras is about $2,500 per camera per year, with the money coming from city's general fund. The system's total cost is about the same as funding 1.5 police officers, when factoring in salary and benefits.

"I believe the important takeaway from our camera system is that it demonstrates the power of adapting technology to city services, and that any municipality should be willing to experiment with new technologies to increase effectiveness of services — be it public safety, utilities, public works, planning or finance," Wolfe said. "Smart cities are coming, and I am

a firm believer that cities must adapt to changing times and circumstances. I see our camera system as a prime example of how we can overcome challenges in our rural community by adopting new technologies."

In Columbia, the police department had a robust camera surveillance system paired with analytic capabilities when it started looking deeper at some of the capital city's emerging threats, particularly violent crime, said Chief Holbrook.

"We determined that [violent crime] is geographic-centric here, and very offender-specific. We thought that we can work on the offenders, but we really need to think differently in knowing where it's occurring," he said. "What technology can we leverage to help us?"

The department looked into various tools, studied other cities and decided in 2019 to implement ShotSpotter, a gunshot detection technology that uses acoustic sensors to pinpoint where gunfire occurs. The system triangulates the sound of gunfire and within 45 seconds gives that information directly to police officers to respond.

When the city looked at where it wanted to deploy the technology, Holbrook stressed that the decision had to be data-driven. The city first used ShotSpotter in 6 square miles of what the city considers to be locations with elevated risk of gunfire and people hit by gunfire. It has since added an additional square mile.

"This is a really important part of this — you also have the trust and legitimacy part of policing. The areas we felt would benefit the most from ShotSpotter just happened to be the areas where there is the greatest lack of trust in law enforcement," he said.

Columbia Police Chief Skip Holbrook presents the capabilities of the ShotSpotter technology. Photo: City of Columbia.

The Columbia Police Department ShotSpotter dashboard, showing data collected from the system, is available at https://columbiapd.net/shotspotter. Photo: City of Columbia. Photo: City of Columbia.

As Columbia was preparing to implement the system, ShotSpotter representatives told the police department that 75 to 80% of gunfire typically goes unreported.

"I thought to myself, 'That is absolutely impossible.' Because I knew how many calls for service we had to gunfire and to people being hit," he said. "Fast forward to when we flipped the switch and turned the system on, we saw exactly what they said we would see."

Once ShotSpotter alerted officers to gunfire, the department would wait for a corresponding citizen to report gunshots in their neighborhood.

"And we would not get that call. It was about 75 to 80% of calls we were self-initiating based on the technology. I was like, 'Wow. Why are we not getting calls? Is it they don't trust us? That they think we don't care? Do they think somebody else is calling? Do they just chalk it up as part of where they live?' All the answers to those questions are bad answers in my opinion," Holbrook said.

The department set a protocol to go to 100% of the ShotSpotter alerts, where they would find shell casings and other evidence showing that it was not a false alert. Officers would canvass the area and put out door hangers telling residents there had been a shooting reported in the area and asking for help.

The attention worked. Now, most ShotSpotter alerts are accompanied by a call for service from citizens, he said. And along with community input, the commitment to ShotSpotter has also resulted in more grant funding for the city.

"It also has opened additional doors for acquiring technology and being competitive for grant technology for innovative policing tactics," he said.

Holbrook said Columbia has taken all of its technology, bundled it and set up a real-time crime center in the city's emergency operations center.

"It looks like something you'd see at NASA. It's a whole wall of video, that has the map of the city, shows where our officers are, shows where calls for service are, shows shots fired, shows cameras and license plate readers," he said. "Officers sit there and monitor that. They quarterback what's going on in the city in real time."

"We are using people, canines, cameras, gunshot technology and all the analytics that come with it," he said. "All of that is part of our initiative to reduce violent crime in Columbia."

Cheraw's camera system won the town a 2023 Municipal Association Achievement Award. See a video explaining the project at www.masc.sc (keyword: Achievement Awards).

Rethinking the Police Recruitment Process

The City of Fountain Inn's efforts to streamline and improve police recruitment efforts have included market adjustments as well as greater collaboration among leadership, the police department and human resources. Photos: City of Fountain Inn.

In an era where policing issues — like use of force or the need to intervene in officer misconduct — have repeatedly become national news stories, recruiting and retaining police officers has grown into a larger challenge. Departments have experienced declining numbers of job applicants and growing numbers of officers leaving the profession. And at a time when costs of living continue to rise, several municipalities are addressing their recruitment and retention efforts head on with innovative solutions coupled with time-tested methods.

The challenges facing law enforcement recruitment have come to be well understood.

On request of Gov. Henry McMaster in early 2022, the Division of State Human Resources embarked on a compensation analysis of statewide law enforcement positions, partnering with state agencies to shed light on the difficulties facing employers regarding the recruitment and retention of officers. The DSHR report concluded that the threat to law enforcement recruitment and retention was threefold: a smaller pool of applicants, officers leaving their roles or the profession entirely, and an increase in officers eligible for retirement.

Noted in the DSHR report which was published in February 2022, South Carolina saw 444 vacant positions as of the month prior, with an application pool down 25.6%. Furthermore, the analysis concluded that 15.63% of all officers were eligible to retire within the next five years. The analysis recommended that although there are several factors that influence law enforcement's ability to attract and retain recruits, providing adequate

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- •SOUTH CAROLINA POLICE OFFICER RETIREMENT

- •MULTIPLE ADVANCED TRAINING OPPURTUNITIES BEYOND INITIAL CERTIFICATION

Port Royal's police recruitment efforts include a banner outside the town's fire department, at top; as well as print materials listing benefits and including a QR code, above. Photos: Town of Port Royal.

compensation is the one variable that employers can ultimately control, urging agencies to consider offering competitive base salaries with a greater emphasis on the total compensation package in order to retain officers.

The Town of Port Royal capitalizes on social media to advertise its police officer openings, as well as by attending job fairs and various community events, according to Chief of Police Alan Beach.

With recruitment help from Detective Norman McCown, Beach said that the department maintains a presence by tabling at festivals and other community outreach events. The use of pamphlets and QR codes aid in the recruitment efforts.

"[Detective McCown] came up with idea of a card with a QR code on it for hiring so people can just scan it and it takes [them] right to our application and what we have to offer," said Beach.

Another strategy for hiring is using the town's website.

"We're doing everything we can," said Chief Beach, adding that the town advertises for the department in its weekly newsletter that is circulated to about 3,000 recipients.

Recently, the town began advertising police department openings with a banner outside of the town's fire department. Other out-of-the-box solutions include partnering with the Technical College of the Lowcountry and reaching out to local detention centers.

"We're trying to reach out to everybody," Beach said.

Regarding officer pay, Beach noted that Port Royal's is comparable with other agencies in the area, and that the town covers 100% of officers' health insurance, a gym membership to the YMCA, and a yearly subscription to a firing range. Word-of-mouth practices seemed to have offered a short-term solution to the hiring crisis.

"We'll talk to people when they come in the lobby to do their business, and we just put it out there and ask if they've ever thought of law enforcement?" Beach said.

In the City of Fountain Inn, Rebecca Mejia-Ward became human resources director in 2020. One of the first tasks she embarked on was an audit of the city's hiring process. Two years later, the need to streamline the police hiring process was apparent.

Working alongside command staff, Mejia-Ward initiated a social media presence to promote job openings and highlight department staff. Competing with the likes of larger cities such as Greenville, Simpsonville, and Mauldin, Mejia-Ward said that the city was challenged with having to put its best foot forward in terms of what it has to offer.

"Parental leave, city vehicles, education incentives … [we had to take] a good look at what other places are doing and putting it in front of our command staff and saying, how can we incorporate things like this?" she said, explaining that pay was the biggest incentives of them all.

"Even though we have amazing things to offer, [the biggest challenge] was really acknowledging how behind we were when it came to starting pay as it compared to surrounding cities but also as it compared to what our expected growth would be," Mejia-Ward said.

She added that having a mid-year market adjustment definitely helped, along with collaborative efforts between HR, the city administrator, the police chief, and command staff about what was trending elsewhere and how these trends could be applied locally.

"We're in constant, constant communication," she said.

One way of improving the hiring process was to automate it.

"We are very intentional on making sure that people have some kind of response to their application within five to seven business days," Mejia-Ward said. "We have consistent spaces in our schedules where … we're actually scheduling the components that we need to get people processed ahead of time, like empty slots, so to speak."

As candidate applications come in, the patrol lieutenant sees them in real time and has the ability to change a candidate's status if he believes they meet the minimum requirements, she explained, adding that she will then automatically get a notification alerting her to call that candidate and offer them a slot.

With a smaller applicant pool and hiring crisis, police departments across the state are using creative and innovative tactics to attract potential candidates while investing in their existing force through better training, pay, and other incentives in efforts to keep them.

PTSD
Assistance Available
for First Responders
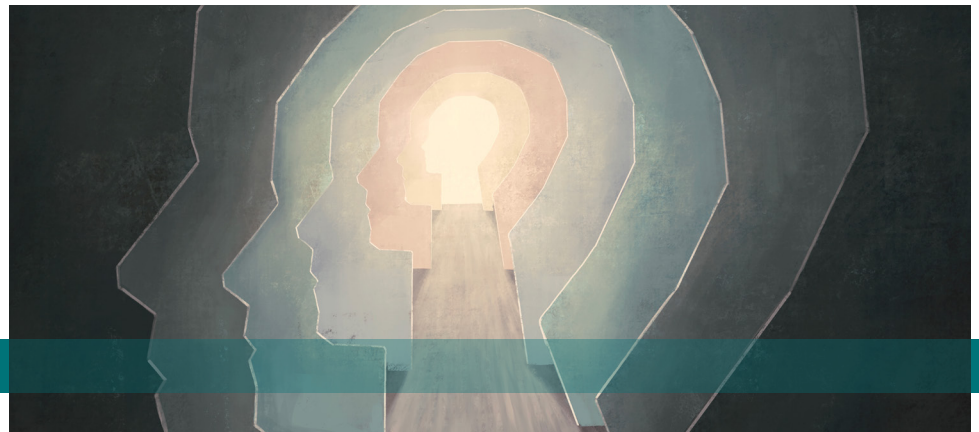
Every year since 2016, the South Carolina General Assembly has appropriated funding for a treatment program that assists first responders suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. Currently, a funding amount of $750,000 is evenly split between the SC Law Enforcement Assistance Program and the SC First Responder Assistance and Support Team.

Post-traumatic stress disorder issues can significantly affect firefighters' and police officers' mental well-being, whether they have witnessed horrific accidents or disturbing crimes, and the costs associated with the treatment of PTSD can be overwhelming.

The state-funded PTSD program provides an insurance policy for first responders that reimburses out-of-pocket treatment expenses, so officers and firefighters can focus on getting well without worrying about their healthcare bills. This is a valuable plan, considering many health insurance policies cover mental health benefits at a lower rate than regular medical benefits.

With the PTSD program, firefighters and police officers can get the medical services needed to allow them to get back to their jobs. Connecting those whose jobs put them in contact with mental trauma with all available resources can help them so they can get back to a healthy life.

For those looking to connect first responders with this assistance, the best place to start is to contact the city's benefits coordinator or find out more about assistance for firefighters by contacting Zorrina Harmon of the SC State Firefighters Association at 803.454.1802. Learn more about assistance for police officers by contacting Eric Skidmore of the SC Law Enforcement Assistance Program at 803.252.2664.

Calendar

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

OCTOBER

4 SC Utility Billing Association Customer Service Training and Networking Luncheon. Cooperative Conference Center, Columbia. Topics include handling difficult customers and civility.

5 SC Community Development Association Fall Meeting. Cooperative Conference Center, Columbia. Topics include electric vehicle infrastructure in South Carolina, a 2024 economic outlook, resilience planning, blight removal and funding sources.

10 – 11 Municipal Court Administration Association 101 Session B. Topics include dispositions, finalization and court financials.

12 Municipal Association Regional Advocacy Meeting – Rock Hill. Manchester Meadows Park, Rock Hill.

17 Municipal Association Regional Advocacy Meeting – Greenville. Unity Park Prisma Health Welcome Center, Greenville.

18 Municipal Association Regional Advocacy Meeting – Virtual.

19 Bringing Civility to Verbal Conflict Training. Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center.

24 – 25 SC Municipal Finance Officers, Clerks and Treasurers Association and SC Business Licensing Officials Association Joint Academy. Marina Inn at Grande Dunes, Myrtle Beach. Topics include fraud prevention, internal controls and practices, succession planning, council meeting management and First Amendment audits.

NOVEMBER

2 SC Association of Stormwater Managers Fourth Quarter Meeting. Cooperative Conference Center, Columbia. Topics include the history of SCASM, keeping stormwater programs interesting and relevant for customers and staff, and the annual exhibitor showcase.

9 Municipal Association of SC Risk Management Services Annual Members Meeting. Cooperative Conference Center, Columbia.

15 – 17 SC Municipal Human Resources Association Annual Meeting. SpringHill Suites, Greenville.

21 Business Licensing Essentials – The SC Freedom of Information Act. Virtual.

DECEMBER

8 SC Municipal Attorneys Association Annual Meeting and Continuing Legal Education Seminar. Hilton Columbia Center.

19 Business Licensing Essentials – H-Tax, A-Tax, Caterers, Personal Chefs, Food Trucks. Virtual.

2024

FEBRUARY

6 Hometown Legislative Action Day. Marriott Columbia.

7 Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government. Marriott Columbia.

MARCH

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

11 – 13 SC Utility Billing Association Annual Meeting. Marina Inn at Grande Dunes, Myrtle Beach.

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