

**MINUTES
 BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING
 UPPER SAVANNAH COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS
 DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION
 430 HELIX ROAD
 GREENWOOD, SOUTH CAROLINA
 FEBRUARY 23, 2026**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Johanna Bishop, Jackie Brown, Matthew Brownlee, John Calhoun, Jeff Carroll, Jim Coleman, Frank Daniel, Ken Durham, Qwen Etheredge, Charles Goodwin, Otis Grier Jr., Tiffani Ireland, Shirley Jenkins, Charles Jennings, Sen. Floyd Nicholson, Willie Norman, David Sawyer, Ernie Segars, Brandon Smith, Roy Smith Jr., Albert Talbert, Faye Thomas, and Anita Williams.

MEMBERS ABSENT: Charlie Henry, Justin Lane, Theo Lane, Sen. Shane Massey, Miliken Matthews, Wes McAllister, Marian Miller, Matthew Miller, Dayne Pruitt, Don Smoak, and Sen. Danny Verdin.

STAFF PRESENT: Patricia Hartung, Sam Leaman, Sandra Moore, Melissa Phillips, Rick Green, Keith Smith, Peggy Merritt, Kal Kunkel, Christy Cannon, Langley Richardson, and David Hays.

GUESTS PRESENT: Rep. William Hixon; Clint Scoville, SCDOT Project Manager; Amy Hearing, SCDOT Assistant Program Manager; Susan Jackson, Office of U.S. Rep. Sheri Biggs; Ryan Syrbe, Office of U.S. Senator Tim Scott; Kevin McLaughlin, SCDOT District 2 Administrator; Jerre Threatt, Laurens County Administrator.

Call to Order	The meeting was held in person with the option to attend via Zoom. Willie Norman gave the invocation and Chairman Charles Jennings called the meeting to order. The minutes from the October 27, 2025, meeting were approved unanimously upon motion by Jim Coleman and properly seconded. Jennings introduced new Greenwood County Board member Johanna Bishop. Another new Greenwood County Board member Dayne Pruitt was unable to attend. Several guests were introduced, including Rep. William Hixon, who represents Edgefield and Aiken counties.
Guest Presentation: The 250th Anniversary of the American Revolution – SC Highlights	<p>Board member and Chairman of the Laurens County 250 Committee Ernie Segars introduced Historian and Battlefield Preservationist Durant Ashmore, who gave report on how South Carolina is commemorating the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution.</p> <p>The caretaker of several Upstate battlefields, Ashmore specializes in Revolutionary War history in the Ninety-Six District. He said there are more than 100 battlefield sites in the Upstate, including 45 in the Upper Savannah Region.</p> <p>Durant said the Cherokees ceded land to the British Crown in 1755 through 1777, adding that the Upstate was considered at that time the new frontier. Revolutionary War skirmishes first hit SC in June 1775 with the battle at Fort Charlotte in present day McCormick County and raged on several years. Durant said his top resource for information is the book Parker’s Guide to the Revolutionary War in South Carolina, written in 2012 by the late Jack Parker.</p> <p>Ashmore presented slides showing where there were battles in each of Upper Savannah’s six counties. He said there were 10 Revolutionary War events in Abbeville</p>

	<p>County and nine in Edgefield County. Although there were only two in Greenwood County, one was the famous Battle of Star Fort in Ninety Six and also White Hall Plantation. Laurens County has 17 battlefields including Musgrove Mill and Hammond's Store. McCormick County featured Fort Charlotte and also the Battle of Long Canes near the border with Greenwood County. Ashmore said many famous heroes fought in the Ninety-Six District including Andrew Williamson, Nathaniel Greene, Andrew Pickens, and George Washington's cousin William Washington. He also mentioned the Battle of Kettle Creek in Wilkes County, Georgia, just across the Savannah River as being an important battle.</p> <p>Ashmore said these stories about the War need to be told. He said Laurens County will celebrate Carolina Day on June 28 in honor of the Patriot victory in Charleston on that day in 1776. The Laurens County Museum will unveil a special Revolutionary War exhibit on June 28 and there will also be driving tours to War sites in the County.</p>
<p>Staff Reports and Updates: Government Services and Transportation</p>	<p>Government Services Director Rick Green provided a packet of information to Board members about various transportation projects in the Region.</p> <p>He said the public transportation feasibility study first draft for Abbeville, Laurens and Saluda counties is now available for public comment and posted on USCOG's website. Those three counties are among the last in the state to not have public transportation. The Western Transportation Institute in Montana developed the study and might report to the Board in April, Green said.</p> <p>Green discussed highway safety, indicating that the Region has begun the new year with several roadway fatalities. He said 55 percent of South Carolina's fatalities are from roadway departures, including more than 70 percent in the Upper Savannah Region. USCOG completed a Roadway Departure Safety Implementation Plan in 2024 to address roadway departure issues, including the addition of safety features such as rumble strips.</p> <p>Green said that SCDOT is federally required to consult with local elected officials about projects, which is why Upper Savannah has been involved in ranking highway projects since the late 1990s. One of the recommended projects is the intersection of U.S. 25 and Shortcut Road in Edgefield County. The traffic study has been completed and a public meeting about the future of the project will be held March 3 from 5-7 p.m. at nearby Fox Creek High School. Several other Region intersection projects are in traffic study phases. More intersection projects will be added to the Long-Range Plan soon including four in Laurens County and two in Saluda County, Green said.</p> <p>Green said the S.C. Department of Public Health (SCDPH) is encouraging more walking and biking. SCDPH will have a meeting at the Piedmont Technical College facility in Edgefield May 14. The facility is located near the Ten Governors Trail in Edgefield.</p> <p>Green said the Greenwood and McCormick County 250 Committees will reveal a painted rendition of the Revolutionary War Battle of Long Canes April 18 during a ceremony at Wisteria Park in the Town of Troy.</p> <p>Green said Upper Savannah completed a Brownfields Environmental Testing Site (BEST) project in the Promised Land Community, funding the removal of an</p>

	<p>underground 7,500-gallon heating oil tank at Promised Land School. BEST projects enable the possible redevelopment of properties that might have contaminants such as asbestos, lead-based paint, oil or other chemicals. Asbestos removal remains an obstacle as the Promised Land Community considers rehabilitating the old school into a community center or residential complex.</p> <p>There was much discussion about how traffic accidents are reported, what safety features can help prevent accidents, and if Greenwood County will expand public transportation beyond the four-mile radius of the Courthouse. SCDOT District 2 Administrator Kevin McLaughlin answered questions specifically from Anita Williams about accidents not being reported properly in Clinton and about the possibility of reflective rural roadway safety features asked by Tiffani Ireland. Green said public transportation expansion in Greenwood County would likely require more vehicles and drivers.</p> <p>Green reminded the Board that South Carolina has the fourth highest number of road miles to maintain in the country yet is ranked 30th in gas tax revenue, resulting in limited resources for roadway improvements.</p>
<p>Upper Savannah Area Agency on Aging Update</p>	<p>Director of Aging Programs Peggy Merritt gave an overview of Aging program funding, services and providers.</p> <p>She said funding comes from the federal level, gets distributed to each state, then to regional partners including Area Agencies on Aging, and finally to contracted providers for services. First, the SC Department on Aging (SCDOA) sends out notice of grant awards, providers deliver services and submit monthly invoices to the Upper Savannah AAA, the AAA reviews and approves invoices, the AAA submits payment request forms to SCDOA, and then SCDOA reimburses the AAA which in turn pays the providers.</p> <p>Merritt provided a detailed services list per funding source starting with Title II which funds the State Health Insurance Plan (SHIP) including Medicare counseling, Medicare Part C and D and Extra Help benefits counseling, and also funds the Senior Medicare Patrol fraud prevention program.</p> <p>Title III-B funds essential community-based support services including transportation, homemakers and personal care, information and referral services and general legal assistance.</p> <p>Title III-C1 funds congregate meals at each of the senior centers to reduce social isolation and promote healthy aging. Title III-C2 funds home-delivered meals, which provides food to homebound older adults and a wellness check during each meal delivery, supporting independence and reducing the risk of institutionalization.</p> <p>Title III-D funds health promotion and disease prevention through evidence-based programs, reducing healthcare costs and improving quality of life. Title III-E funds the Family Caregiver Support Program which assists unpaid family caregivers. The program provides respite care, caregiver training, support groups, and supplemental services which help delay institutionalization.</p> <p>Title VII funds elder rights and protection, including the Long-Term Care Ombudsman</p>

	<p>Program (core funding), elder abuse prevention, investigations, and support, and legal assistance for vulnerable adults. The programs ensure safety, dignity, and rights in the long-term care community.</p> <p>The Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) funding comes from the State (federal funding must be spent first) and can pay for services in the following programs: personal care/homemaker services, home-delivered meals, transportation, home modifications such as ramps and grab bars, respite and Alzheimer and Dementia-Related Disease Support, and Office of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (OIDD) and Office of Mental Health (OMH) Ombudsman. The last three services can only be funded by the state.</p> <p>Merritt said Upper Savannah AAA staff provides Information and Referral, assessments, Medicare counseling and Medicare fraud prevention, Ombudsman to nursing homes and assisted living, Ombudsman to OIDD/OMH, and Outreach and Education. The AAA also contracts with Mom’s Meals to serve seniors who live too far from senior centers, and with SC Legal Services to assist older adults.</p> <p>The senior centers provide congregate dining, home-delivered meals, nutrition education, transportation for congregate dining, medical, and essential shopping, and evidence-based health promotion.</p> <p>Merritt also provided a spreadsheet showing transportation, congregate meals and home-delivered meals units served in the Upper Savannah Region in the first quarter of FY 2026, which ran from October to December 2025.</p> <p>Merritt invited Board members to fill out needs assessment surveys provided in their packets to help determine future needs for older adults in the Region.</p>
<p>Community Development Block Grant Program</p>	<p>Community Development Director Keith Smith updated the Board on current Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) projects.</p> <p>The following projects are in start-up phase including Greenwood County Department of Public Health Building Improvements, \$923,890 for both interior and exterior building improvements, new HVAC, bathroom improvements, ADA upgrades, paint, doors, and parking lot improvements. Abbeville County DSS Parking Lot Improvements, \$445,328 for parking lot improvements, including asphalt replacement, striping, signage, sidewalk, curb stop and speedbumps also in start-up phase. Also, Saluda County EMS Station Blood Storage Equipment, \$65,872 for an autonomous portable refrigerator unit, cables, adaptors, vehicle mount, blood warmer, backup battery, and blood.</p> <p>Smith gave update on current CDBG projects including Laurens County Joanna Water and Sewer which will go out to bid in March and Clinton-Joanna WWTP Upgrade Phase II which is expected to be completed in March. The second 750,000 gallon holding tank has been installed, Smith said.</p> <p>The Saluda County Library Improvements project should go out to bid in February or March. The \$750,000 project will fund renovation to the new library located on West Butler Street. Improvements include interior construction, parking improvements, and</p>

	<p>ADA accessibility. The engineers are working on the bid package, interior asbestos has been removed, and exterior asbestos is being removed in the Greenwood County DSS Building project. The current building needs a new roof, HVAC, improved restrooms, asbestos abatement, ADA accessibility, waiting area improvements, flooring, lighting, repainting, parking lot and safety improvements.</p> <p>The Chestnut Street Project in Abbeville is near completion with the addition of fixed playground equipment, picnic tables, mulch, an open-air pavilion, and ADA parking. A grand opening will be held there at 11 a.m. Saturday, March 21.</p> <p>The Town of Saluda North Main and West Church Streetscape construction and monitoring are complete and cameras are being installed. The Town of McCormick North Main and Augusta Streetscape is near completion. Smith said contractors are working on landscaping, waiting on a few bricks, and also installation of the medallions at the veteran's park.</p> <p>The Town of Ridge Spring Sewer Line Upgrade property acquisition is complete and the engineers are working to complete the bid package. Smith expects the project to go out to bid in March.</p> <p>Greenwood County Matthews Mill II Sewer Upgrade has been completed and closed out, City of Greenwood Washington Sewer Rehab monitoring is complete and close-out has been submitted to Department of Commerce, and City of Greenwood Waller Avenue Streetscape monitoring is also complete and close-out submitted.</p> <p>Smith said USCOG Community Development staff sent out a memo on Feb. 5 for the CDBG application deadlines and funding information. He explained how staff identifies CDBG projects. Every fall staff sends out the Needs Assessment documents to each locality and potential sub-recipients, allowing everyone to update their needs by both adding or removing items from the list. The needs outlined in these documents are not limited to CDBG items and can be updated at any time, he said. The COG has received all the Needs Assessments back and scheduled the public hearings this month, having been posted at each locality and on social media. The public hearings allow citizens and other organizations to participate, and their needs are added to the list. This allows Upper Savannah to review the needs and prioritize seeing which are eligible and feasible for the CDBG program. The Greenwood, Laurens and Saluda county hearings were last week, Abbeville, Edgefield and McCormick this week.</p>
<p>Workforce Development Update</p>	<p>Workforce Development Director Kal Kunkel presented an overview of the workforce development system.</p> <p>SC Works, under the guidance of the State Workforce Development Board, seeks to expand and develop a skilled workforce and a responsive workforce system that meets the needs of business and industry leading to sustainable growth, economic prosperity and regional and global competitiveness for South Carolina. He said Upper Savannah has a 20-member Workforce Development Board which is required to have at least 51 percent private industry representation.</p> <p>Kunkel said workforce development funding comes from the U.S. Department of Labor. He said the federal funding has decreased every year since 2016, though some of</p>

	<p>the cuts are due to less unemployment. He did say current unemployment figures have increased slightly in the Region.</p> <p>Kunkel said Upper Savannah is looking at eliminating SC Works Centers in the lesser populated counties of the Region to cut spending. He said Connection Points are available in each county, mainly in libraries, adult education sites and Goodwill Job Connection locations, providing computer space to help job seekers. He said popup events will continue throughout the Region to promote workforce development. Also, live chat is available for job seekers via phone, laptop or desktop from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Mondays and Wednesdays on the www.upperscworks.com website. Kunkel said the live chat hours could be increasing soon.</p> <p>Kunkel presented two Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act (WIOA) success stories. They include a certified nursing assistant (CNA) and a certified medical assistant (CMA), both of whom faced significant challenges in their pursuit of their certifications. They are both now employed full-time with livable wages.</p>
<p>EDA and Revolving Loan Program (RLF) Update</p>	<p>Assistant Director Sam Leaman presented an overview of Economic Development Administration (EDA) projects and the EDA funded Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) programs.</p> <p>Currently one EDA funded project is under construction, the Piedmont Technical College Health Sciences Building. Upper Savannah COG staff has helped develop and submit two new applications for funding under EDA's disaster supplemental funding opportunity. One is the Murrah Road Water Main, Water Tank and Booster Pump Station Project which is proposed by the Edgefield County Water and Sewer Authority. The other is the Highway 221 Waterline Replacement Project proposed by the Laurens County Water and Sewer Commission. Both projects will improve portions of their respective systems, making them more resilient in times of emergencies and disasters. The projects will also bolster capacity which will enhance opportunities for economic development.</p> <p>The two RLF programs operated by Upper Savannah COG have combined to make 86 loans totaling \$5.5 million to small businesses in the region. These loans have leveraged private sector investment and created or retained 825 jobs.</p>
<p>Board Member Updates</p>	<p>The floor was opened to Board members to report on items of interest from their communities.</p> <p>Charles Jennings said McCormick County has been awarded a \$5 million grant to construct hangars as part of an airport expansion to aid economic development efforts. Frank Daniel said Saluda County is in the final stages of completing the construction of a new jail and also a new EMS station.</p>
<p>Executive Director's Report</p>	<p>Executive Director Patricia C. Hartung asked Board members to verify their e-mail and mailing addresses for the Board roster.</p> <p>Hartung said the S.C. House has increased council of government recurring appropriations from \$1.5 million to almost \$2 million. If approved, USCOG would receive approximately \$35,000 based on the funding formula for each of the state's 10</p>

	COGs. Upper Savannah receives the smallest funding portion due to being the least populated region. COGs will now wait for the Senate to consider the appropriations increase and Hartung hopes to have an update at the April Board meeting.
Adjourn	Being no other business, the meeting was adjourned.



Patricia C. Hartung
Executive Director