

**MINUTES
BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING
UPPER SAVANNAH COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION
430 HELIX ROAD
GREENWOOD, SOUTH CAROLINA
AUGUST 24, 2026**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Jackie Brown, Matthew Brownlee, John Calhoun, Jeffrey Carroll, Jim Coleman, Frank Daniel, Qwen Etheredge, Charles Goodwin, Otis Grier Jr., Charlie Henry, Tiffani Ireland, Charles Jennings, Theo Lane, Wes McAllister, Miliken Mathews, Marian Miller, Matthew Miller, Sen. Floyd Nicholson, Willie Norman, David Sawyer, Ernie Segars, Brandon Smith, Don Smoak, Roy Smith Jr., Albert Talbert, Faye Thomas, and Anita Williams.

MEMBERS ABSENT: Johanna Bishop, Ken Durham, Shirley Jenkins, Justin Lane, Sen. Shane Massey, Dayne Pruitt, and Sen. Danny Verdin.

STAFF PRESENT: Patricia Hartung, Sam Leaman, Rick Green, Keith Smith, Kal Kunkel, and David Hays.

GUESTS PRESENT: Anna Huckabee Smith, Director of Conservation Grants and Strategic Outreach, S.C. Department of Natural Resources; Myranda Butler, Saluda Town Council; Raymond Viggo Lassen, Mayor of Calhoun Falls; Scott Neely, Dominion Energy; Ryan Syrbe, Field Representative, Office of U.S. Senator Tim Scott; Libby Redd, S.C. Human Affairs Commission; Michael Hannah, District Construction Engineer, SCDOT District 2; Billy Lybrand, Assistant District Traffic Engineer, SCDOT District 2; Todd Oswald, Regional Planning Manager, SCDOT; Clint Scoville, SCDOT Project Manager; Tyke Redfearn, SCDOT Program Manager; Amy Hearing, SCDOT Assistant Program Manager.

Call to Order	The meeting was held in person with the option to attend via Zoom. Willie Norman gave the invocation and Chairman Frank Daniel called the meeting to order. The minutes from the June 22, 2026, meeting were approved unanimously upon motion by Jim Coleman and properly seconded. Daniel recognized several guests. Daniel congratulated Faye Thomas on being recently elected Mayor of Abbeville.
Guest Presentation: Governor's Conservation Initiative and SCDNR's State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP)	Anna Huckabee Smith, Director of Conservation, Grants and Strategic Outreach with the S.C. Department of Natural Resources, provided an overview of her responsibilities and the agency's new Urban Outreach Program. She explained that her duties include overseeing the State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP), which focuses on species that may be rare, declining, or important to the food chain; preparing land acquisition grants that result in Wildlife Management Areas, Heritage Preserves, and other lands available for hunting, fishing, and recreation; and overseeing the Forest Legacy Program. She is also heading the new Urban Outreach Program. Smith said that South Carolina has been the fastest-growing state in the nation for three consecutive years, creating significant pressure on natural resources as undeveloped land is converted to other uses. She emphasized that economic growth and conservation do not have to be mutually exclusive, but that uncoordinated and poorly planned development can result in significant impacts to natural resources. The goal is to find a balance that allows economic progress while protecting the state's natural resources and avoiding development beyond sustainable limits, she said.

Smith discussed several challenges associated with rapid growth, including poorly planned development, habitat loss and fragmentation, water-quality impacts from pollutants and sedimentation, increased flooding, the spread of invasive species, and the obstruction of natural marsh migration caused by sea-level rise caused by development.

She said communities frequently use nature-related names for neighborhoods and streets, while simultaneously removing the natural landscapes and native species that inspired those names when developing new neighborhoods.

She also highlighted the importance of natural resources to South Carolina's economy, saying forestry contributes \$23.2 billion to the state's economy, agriculture \$28.6 billion, and tourism \$31 billion. Much of the state's tourism economy is tied to natural resources, including beaches, Congaree National Park, national forests, lakes, hunting, fishing, birdwatching, the Foothills Trail, the Palmetto Trail, spring wildflowers, fall foliage, and festivals. She emphasized that protecting natural resources is therefore not only an environmental issue but also an economic-development strategy.

She noted the recent designation of the Prothonotary Warbler as South Carolina's state migratory bird. South Carolina hosts such a huge part of the global population of Prothonotary Warblers that without protecting it, we would do disservice to the population as a whole.

The Urban Outreach Program has three primary objectives: conserving high-quality lands within county jurisdictions and working with individuals and officials to conserve them to meet the Governor's initiative to protect seven million more acres in South Carolina. Also, enhancing municipal planning documents and ordinances, and providing education and outreach regarding urban wildlife and other conservation issues. She emphasized that conservation opportunities exist even in areas where maps may initially appear to show little undeveloped land. She mentioned conservation subdivision design principles, green (terrestrial) and blue (aquatic) wildlife corridors, and the importance of maintaining connections between landscapes to allow species to disperse. She also discussed the need for better public education regarding urban wildlife, noting that people sometimes lack an understanding of how to live alongside wildlife, which can contribute to nuisance-wildlife problems.

As part of the Urban Outreach Program, Smith has been conducting listening sessions with county administrators, councils of governments, planning departments, and greenbelt advisory committees throughout the state. The purpose of these meetings is not for the state to tell local governments what they should do, but rather to identify local needs and provide tools and resources that can help communities achieve their existing goals. SCDNR provides maps, data, decision-support tools, and links to existing and emerging conservation services.

Smith said she reviews local land-use plans and related planning documents and provides recommendations. The agency is also working to improve coordination among state natural-resource agencies so that local governments can more easily determine which agency to contact for specific conservation and resilience needs. She likes to encourage counties to seek conservation and green growth funding and help celebrate successful conservation initiatives and acreage protected.

	Other resources include the State Wildlife Action Plan's Conservation Opportunity Areas map which shows where there are hot spots for biodiversity across South Carolina and where additional conservation could have significant benefits. The color-coded McMaster Land Conservation Plan map shows conservation opportunity areas divided by acres. SCDNR also has a solar-siting tool and related training materials that can help identify locations where renewable-energy facilities may be appropriately located while reducing potential permitting issues and environmental conflicts. Additional tools are being developed in cooperation with the Office of Resilience, she said. Suggestions that Smith has received are to create a state agency flow chart so officials know who to call for which services. She hopes to create a list of all plans and revision timelines in preparation for reviews so she can reach out to provide help. Smith said creating county or municipality specific information packets with tools and resources can be helpful and providing continuing education for county and municipal planning staff. She also discussed ecotourism opportunities associated with wildlife, citing Congaree National Park's synchronous firefly event that attracts 20,000 people into a lottery system for select amounts who get chosen to view this event. That attracts many visitors who stay in local hotels, eat at local restaurants, and visit other attractions. She said every county has at least one species or natural resource that could potentially serve as a focal point for conservation and tourism messaging. Smith said she has been presenting and advertising to groups such as COG boards, S.C. Association of Counties, etc. DNR also has future plans to build a data center siting tool, hoping to steer the centers clear of biodiverse areas. Smith said she can be contacted at 843.214.0092 or smithah@dnr.sc.gov. Daniel mentioned that developers often clear trees from entire sites and subsequently plant trees to satisfy landscaping requirements. Smith said conservation subdivision design can allow developers to work with the existing landscape rather than removing all vegetation and attempting to replace it later. She noted that well-intentioned landscaping ordinances can sometimes result in trees being planted simply to satisfy requirements without considering appropriate native species, mature tree size, root systems, canopy growth, or proper spacing. She recommended coordination with SCDNR's urban forestry resources to help communities select appropriate species and develop better tree-placement practices.
Staff Reports: Long-Range Transportation Plan Intersection Improvement Plan	Government Services Director Rick Green gave an overview of the Long-Range Transportation Plan with a focus on intersection improvements. But Green first told Board members about Rural Development Initiative opportunities through the S.C. Department of Commerce. Funding up to \$500,000 is available with required match for infrastructure, community revitalization, and job creation projects. He said more information was in their Board information packets as well as a vehicular accident fatality report update through August 16. Green provided an update on the public transit feasibility study for Abbeville, Laurens and Saluda counties, which do not have public transportation. The Plan is in its final stages and should be completed by the end of September. He said Abbeville County is

	starting a Family Resource Center which will use volunteer drivers to provide localized transportation services, with the potential for successful programs to be expanded into additional counties. Green said the final public transit document will be placed on Upper Savannah's web site once complete and plans to present the report to Abbeville, Laurens and Saluda county councils. Green discussed the Upper Savannah Region's Long Range Transportation Plan, which is focusing on intersection safety more so than highway widening projects of the past. An updated list of transportation projects was distributed in the Board packets for review. The list originated with projects identified in 2021 and was updated to remove projects that are already currently underway with money assigned to them or with features that could benefit from other pots of money. He said the project list is a component of the larger Long Range Transportation Plan and that additional documentation and planning work will be required as projects move forward. Green reminded the Board that the SC Department of Transportation is undergoing changes through the Modernization Act which could affect transportation planning priorities and procedures. He said the full Five-Year Long Range Plan would likely be presented to the Board at the October meeting. Board members discussed several intersection projects on the list, including a Y shaped intersection in the Town of Edgefield which will be converted into a T intersection, two other intersections in Edgefield County, and two in Greenwood County. Board members also discussed the fatality report, with Laurens County having the most deaths. Green said the major reason for Laurens County's numbers is the interstates. He said rural road initiatives are under way including rumble strips and other safety features though roadway departures continue to have tragic consequences. Green also said a statewide pothole management program will allow the public to use a pothole reporting app intended to improve response times for fixing potholes. The Long Range Plan was approved unanimously upon motion by Jim Coleman, seconded by Willie Norman. Green said Greenwood County will continue to work with McCormick Area Transit (MAT Trans) to provide public transportation, which will be notated in the Long-Range Plan.
Community Development Program Update	Community Development Director Keith Smith updated Board members on Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) projects. He said two new projects were awarded in July 2026: the City of Clinton Florida Street Sub-Basin Sewer Project and Laurens County Beards Fork Sewer Force Main Project. The City of Clinton was awarded \$924,000 for the Florida Street Project which will benefit approximately 81 structures and include 836 feet of 10-inch sewer line, 8,351 feet of 8-inch sewer line, 23 manhole rehabs and asphalt patching. The total project cost is approximately \$2.5 million including funds from the Rural Infrastructure Authority (RIA) and a match provided by the City. Laurens County was awarded \$999,970 for the Beards Fork Sewer Force Main Project to rehab the portion of line which handles wastewater from approximately half of the City

	of Clinton. The project will include approximately 6,900 feet of 10-inch PVC force main, 100 feet of 10-inch ductile iron pipe, 40 feet of boring, and rehabilitation of 37 manholes. The total project cost is estimated to be \$1,189,970. Smith said USCOG's Community Development staff will submit three CDBG applications in the fall round include City of Abbeville Demolition, \$480,860 to demolish 28 dilapidated homes; Town of Johnston Park, \$300,000, to construct a downtown park and pavilion; and Town of Edgefield Rail Trail Extension, \$300,000 to extend trail to Star Road. Smith said CDBG projects in the startup phase include 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. Beauford Design Build is working on the bid package. Also, Abbeville County DSS Parking Lot Improvements, \$445,328 for asphalt replacement, striping, signage, sidewalk, curb stop and speed bumps. Davis & Floyd is working on the bid package, and project is expecting to go out for bids in late September. 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 to help trauma patients. Other projects include Laurens County Joanna Water and Sewer, construction began on July 6 and is expected to be completed in March 2027. Clinton-Joanna Wastewater Treatment Plant Upgrade Phase II which is complete and working on project closeout. Saluda County Library Improvements, \$750,000 to renovate the new library located on West Butler Street. Improvements include interior construction, parking improvements, and ADA accessibility. The project is out for bids with the bid opening Sept. 2. Greenwood County DSS Building which needs a new roof, HVAC, improved restrooms, asbestos abatement, ADA accessibility, waiting area improvements, flooring, lighting, repainting, parking lot and safety improvements. Interior asbestos has been removed, and exterior asbestos is being removed along with the windows being replaced. The bid package has been reviewed and is being updated by the engineers. Project expected to go out for bids in late September. The Town of Ridge Spring Sewer Line Upgrade is currently out for bids and will have a bid opening Sept. 2. Projects completed this year include City of Abbeville Chestnut Street Park, Town of Saluda North Main and West Church Streetscape, and Town of McCormick North Main and Augusta Streetscape. The closeout packages have been submitted to SC Department of Commerce for the Abbeville and Saluda projects while staff is working on closeout package for McCormick project.
EDA Conflict of Interest Regulations for RLF Recipients	Economic Development Director Sam Leaman presented the EDA Conflict of Interest Regulations with Special Rules for Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) Recipients. Conflict of interest avoidance is a point of emphasis for EDA in all its programs. Part of the updated RLF Plan requires the Board to review these regulations annually. Information in the packet defines an interested party as a member of the USCOG Board of Directors, loan review committee, or anybody in an advisory or consulting role in the RLF program.

Board Member Updates	The floor was opened to Board members to report on items of interest from their communities. Tiffani Ireland said Edgefield County has established an ordinance for property developers including a rule that if any native trees are removed, they be replaced by native trees. She said a Tractor Supply store, for instance, is coming to Edgefield County and the store will be required to abide by the ordinance. She also alluded to a zoning ordinance (adopted in July) concerning data centers, with the purpose of neither inviting nor turning down potential data centers but to dictate where they can locate and what duties they can perform. She said such ordinances are in place to protect the County. Wes McAllister said the public needs to look at both sides of the data center issue. He said in the early 1980s, for instance, there was an outcry over Cooper Communities developing the Savannah Lakes Village retirement community. Theo Lane said most of the public is unaware that the United States is in an information race with China. He said that although the U.S. has “1,400 data centers,” to “400” in China, the centers are much larger in China. He said China is building more every day. Ireland said the public should not go to Facebook or other social media for information about data center pros and cons. She said Edgefield County has been following the data center boom in Georgia to learn more about the topic. Frank Daniel said Saluda County had a ribbon cutting ceremony for its first urgent care facility. Jackie Brown said McCormick County’s 46th annual Gold Rush Festival will be Sept. 19. She said visitors can pan for gold and there will be vendors and many family activities. Matthew Brownlee said Laurens County has completed more capital gains sales tax projects including the Agriculture and Business Center, Clemson Extension, and EMS Headquarters. He said County officials have participated in data center discussion, while also passing animal control and hazardous waste facilities ordinances. Brown said McCormick County is working on a strategic plan, seeking public input. A listening session was held Aug. 16 and two more are planned for Aug. 26 and 27 to see “what we want the county to look like 5-10 years from now.” Myranda Butler noted that Saluda Elementary School recently had its dedication ceremony. She said Progressive Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ will host a community day event Sept. 19, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., with food, games and resources. Brandon Smith lauded upgrades to Greenwood’s public works facility and announced that Discover Greenwood is open in Uptown Greenwood, celebrating the county including Greenwood, Ware Shoals, Ninety Six, Hodges and Troy. Sen. Floyd Nicholson said the Piedmont Agency on Aging recently held a groundbreaking ceremony for its new nutrition center where Meals on Wheels are cooked and prepared. He said the larger new facility would be completed around the middle of 2027.
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Executive Director's Report	Executive Director Patricia C. Hartung said the annual SC COG Training Conference will be Nov. 22-24 at Kingston Plantation in Myrtle Beach. Waccamaw Council of Governments is responsible for the event. She asked Board members to fill out the registration form which was included in the Board information package. She said the theme of the conference is "Helping Communities Succeed in a Rapidly Changing World." Dueling Pianos will be the entertainment, she said. Hartung said the S.C. General Assembly approved, for the most part, the FY 2026-27 state budget on Aug. 11, including a statewide appropriation increase of approximately \$444,000 for the state's 10 COGs. Upper Savannah's portion will be approximately \$31,000. Hartung informed the Board that the next meeting will be Oct. 26, not Oct. 19 as originally scheduled. Hartung reminded Board members to review the activity reports included in their packets and to contact staff with any questions.
Adjourn	Being no other business, the meeting was adjourned.



Patricia C. Hartung
Executive Director