MINUTES
BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING
UPPER SAVANNAH COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION
430 HELIX ROAD
GREENWOOD, SOUTH CAROLINA
OCTOBER 26, 2026

MEMBERS PRESENT: Jackie Brown, Matthew Brownlee, Jeffrey Carroll, Jim Coleman, Frank Daniel, Ken Durham, Qwen Etheredge, Charles Goodwin, Otis Grier Jr., Shirley Jenkins, Charles Jennings, Miliken Matthews, Matthew Miller, Sen. Floyd Nicholson, Willie Norman, Dayne Pruitt, David Sawyer, Ernie Segars, Brandon Smith, Roy Smith Jr., Albert Talbert, Faye Thomas, and Anita Williams.

MEMBERS ABSENT: Johanna Bishop, Charlie Henry, Tiffani Ireland, Justin Lane, Theo Lane, Wes McAllister, Sen. Shane Massey, Marian Miller, Don Smoak, and Sen. Danny Verdin.

STAFF PRESENT: Patricia Hartung, Sam Leaman, Rick Green, Peggy Merritt, Langley Richardson, Kal Kunkel, and David Hays.

GUESTS PRESENT: Scott Neely, Dominion Energy; Tyke Redfearn, SCDOT Program Manager; Clint Scoville, SCDOT Project Manager; Amy Hearing, SCDOT Assistant Program Manager; Todd Oswald, SCDOT Regional Planning Manager; Dusty Turner, SCDOT District 2 Administrator; Archit Patel, S.C. Office of Public Transit; Jerre Threatt, Laurens County Administrator; Cissy Penner and Beth Gibson, Edgefield County Senior Citizens Council; Becky Powell Moon, McCormick Senior Center.

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 of the August 24, 2026, meeting were approved unanimously following a motion by Jim Coleman and a second.
Guest Presentation: SC Department of Transportation	SCDOT Program Manager Tyke Redfearn updated the Board on Upper Savannah Regional Mobility Program projects and other activities. He gave a timeline on several projects. He said the Shortcut Road and U.S. 25 intersection in Edgefield County will require a new traffic signal and realigning of the intersecting roads. Right of way acquisition has begun, and construction is scheduled to start May-June 2027. Right of way acquisition has begun at the Sweetwater Road and 25 Bypass intersection in Greenwood County while construction is scheduled to start later this year, Redfearn said. DOT will be adding a traffic signal and turning lanes there. He said the intersection of Highways 101 and 14 in the Town of Gray Court will require some restructuring and possibly another traffic signal. Right of way acquisition is scheduled for mid-2027 with construction beginning late 2027. The Augusta Road and Bauskett Street intersection in the Town of Edgefield will include adding turn lanes. Right of way acquisition is scheduled for late 2027 and construction late 2028.

	The Lee and Edisto streets intersection near the Triangle Restaurant in the Town of Johnston, which has five legs and multiple islands, will be simplified, with right of way acquisition beginning in late 2027 and construction in late 2028. Turn lanes and updates to the existing traffic signal are expected to be added to West Cambridge Street near Greenwood Country Club in the City of Greenwood. Acquisition is set for late 2027 and construction late 2028. Redfearn then discussed projects included in SCDOT's bridge program. Unlike the intersection projects, these bridge projects are not funded through the Upper Savannah Rural Guideshare program. He said the Long Cane Creek bridge on Charleston Road in McCormick County near the Town of Troy is closed and will be replaced with a bridge that accommodates one lane of traffic. Right of way acquisition is scheduled for late 2026 and construction late 2027. A closed bridge on Mile Bridge Way in the Johnston area is also being advanced through the bridge program with right of way acquisition scheduled for early 2027 and construction early 2028. A bridge on Kilgore Bridge Road over the Enoree River, at the Laurens-Spartanburg county line, has been out of service and Hurricane Helene further affected the project. Following public discussion, Redfearn said there was strong support for replacing the bridge. Right of way acquisition is scheduled for early 2027, with construction beginning in early 2028. A bridge over Duncan Creek on S.C. 56 in Laurens County will be replaced, with right of way acquisition complete and construction beginning late 2026. The road will be closed and detoured during construction. The Long Cane Creek bridge on S-33 in Abbeville County will have construction begin in late 2027, Redfearn said. Construction of the bridge over Horn Creek on Lanham Road in Edgefield County is scheduled to be completed in early 2027. Construction of the bridge over the Little Saluda River on U.S. 378 near Saluda has started and will be complete mid-2027. Other SCDOT projects include sidewalks in the Town of Ninety Six connecting the high school to the elementary school, accepting construction bids this November. The project is funded by the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP). The regional investment of these intersection and bridge projects is $85 million, Redfearn said.
Staff Reports: Transportation	Government Services Director Rick Green made two announcements, informed the Board about two transportation surveys that need to be completed, and discussed SCDOT's Recommended Safety Performance 2023–2027 document. Green said the Long Range Transportation Plan update will be postponed until the February 2027 Board meeting to allow additional time for SCDOT to review previously selected intersection projects.

	Green said the S.C. Office of Resilience has announced a grant opportunity for stormwater mitigation and improvements. Additional information was distributed to local contacts last week via Constant Contact. Green encouraged Board members to complete two SCDOT surveys included in their Board packets. The Rural Official Survey seeks information about local officials' involvement in transportation planning, while the Office of Public Transit's statewide transportation survey will help update the state's transit plan. The Office of Public Transit will also hold an online meeting Nov. 5, from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. Green gave an update on the completed transit feasibility study for Abbeville, Laurens and Saluda counties. He has recently made presentations to both the Abbeville and Saluda county councils and will present to Laurens County Council Nov. 9. Green updated Board members on SCDOT's Rural Safety Program ongoing projects in the Region, including Highway 14 in Laurens County with widening and striping on the sides and rumble strips, and similar safety improvements on Highway 39 from Saluda to Ridge Spring. Green said the SCDOT Performance Safety Targets document requires annual Board approval. Federal legislation requires that each state come up with its own performance measures and safety standards that must be approved by COGs and Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs). Jim Coleman made a motion to approve the SCDOT Performance Safety Targets document, which was properly seconded. The document was approved unanimously.
Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Annual Update	Green requested approval of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) annual update which is necessary to make the region eligible for Economic Development Administration (EDA) funding. Upper Savannah COG has two EDA applications pending, including a water line on Murrah Road in Edgefield County and a water line replacement project on Highway 221 in Laurens County. A motion was made and properly seconded, and the CEDS was approved unanimously.
Workforce Development Program Update	Workforce Development Director Kal Kunkel presented the Program Year 2025 (July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2026) annual performance results and early momentum for PY '26. He said the mission remains focused on connecting regional job seekers with quality, high-demand careers, and equipping the local business community with a reliable, skilled talent pipeline. Kunkel described workforce conditions across the seven counties in the Upper Savannah Workforce Area. The region has a labor force of 113,575, with 108,041 employed and an unemployment rate of approximately 4.9 percent, compared with the statewide rate of 4.4 percent. Greenwood and Laurens counties accounted for more than half of the Region's labor force. During PY '25, SC Works recorded 12,360 customer visits, registered 3,362 new job seekers, delivered 33,458 individualized job-search services, and assisted 2,144 businesses. Nearly 1,500 job seekers connected with employers through hiring events.

	Kunkel said Upper Savannah met or exceeded all federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I performance standards, including overall performance scores of 116.4 percent for Adult programs and 116.2 percent for Dislocated Worker programs. Kunkel highlighted several operational improvements, including relocating the Laurens County SC Works Center to Clinton, co-locating with the Laurens County Chamber of Commerce. Workforce staff transitioned Abbeville, Edgefield, McCormick, and Saluda SC Works from leased offices into community-based Connection Points at local libraries and adult education facilities. Paired with the Mobile Career Coach, this lowered overhead while preserving in-person assistance. Workforce staff also secured a $97,500 Statewide Reserve Security Grant to provide armed security at SC Works comprehensive centers in Greenwood and Newberry counties, and Eckerd Connects was re-procured under a four-year contract to provide Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth, and One-Stop Operator programs. Training investments through WIOA, SC WINS and Workforce Pell funding focused on nursing, phlebotomy, patient care and medical billing while also targeting heavy equipment, mechatronics, welding and commercial driver's licenses to address local supply chain shortages. A $52,500 Layoff Aversion Grant at AluPress helped upskill 32 incumbent workers, protecting vital manufacturing jobs in Laurens County. Kunkel presented four participant success stories illustrating the impact of workforce services, including assistance with phlebotomy, commercial driver's license, medical assistant, and certified nursing assistant training, leading to employment opportunities in the Region. Kunkel also highlighted the strong start to PY '26. September activity included 979 SC Works customer visits, 197 new job seeker registrations, 2,788 direct career coaching and job-search services, and assistance to 95 businesses through 260 service engagements. The Fall Regional Job Fair at Piedmont Technical College Sept. 24 brought together 46 employers and 242 job seekers. Additional initiatives included the launch of an online 24/7 virtual career readiness workshop hub covering resume building, interview preparation, and career transitions. Regional Workforce Development Month activities elevated local career opportunities and business resources. Staff training focused on rural Connection Points, cross-program coordination, and case management. Looking ahead, Kunkel said strategic priorities include aligning workforce training with major capital projects, such as synchronizing WIOA training enrollments with the new $11.27M EDA-funded Piedmont Technical College Health Sciences Building and incoming industrial expansions. Staff will also continue refining the Eligible Training Provider List by adding high-demand credentials such as HVAC training at Aiken Technical College while removing underperforming courses. Staff is also seeking a private sector seat in Saluda County to replace Darron Wilson who has served on the Upper Savannah Workforce Development Board for nearly 30 years.

Aging Program Update	Area Agency on Aging (AAA) Program Director Peggy Merritt addressed Board members about the recently completed Needs Assessment survey which is used to help develop the Area Plan, and also about an ongoing Guidehouse Consulting Firm study examining whether Area Agencies on Aging should be re-organized. Merritt proudly proclaimed that although Upper Savannah has the smallest Area Agency on Aging (AAA), it achieved the third-highest number of completed assessments statewide. She credited the AAA staff's efforts to conduct surveys at outreach events, senior centers, and throughout the community for this accomplishment. Among survey respondents, 843 identified as white and 718 as African American. Although services are not income-based, 44 percent of seniors surveyed reported incomes at or below the federal poverty level. Statewide assessment findings identified several priority areas, including aging in place, falls prevention, financial security and healthcare affordability, social connection, health and wellness, nutrition, transportation, and caregiver support. Aging in place is listed as the top concern among those who completed the survey statewide, Merritt said. Helping seniors remain independent in their homes is far less expensive than residential care and aligns with seniors' preferences. Reducing falls helps prevent hospitalization and/or institutionalization. Financial security and healthcare affordability concerns highlight the importance of the AAA's State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP) and assistance with Medicare and Medicaid benefits. Social connection and community engagement reinforce the importance of senior centers, which provide opportunities for congregate dining, nutrition programs, health promotion, exercise, and social interaction. Health, wellness, and physical activity concerns focus on the role of evidence-based health programs along with the need for additional mental health support in the community. Nutrition and food access concerns address nutritional needs through congregate dining and home-delivered meals to support health, well-being, and independence. Transportation programs provide access to congregate dining, medical appointments, and essential shopping through regional senior transportation services. Caregiver support concerns recognize the challenges faced by family caregivers and the need for support and respite services, as well as assistance for seniors raising children. Merritt highlighted the role of the region's senior centers in addressing social isolation, promoting physical activity, and improving food access. She said there are currently no waiting lists for congregate dining. Individuals age 60 and older may participate at no cost in congregate dining, nutrition programs, health promotion, and exercise activities at senior centers in each of the region's six counties. Merritt provided an update on the Guidehouse study examining whether South Carolina's existing planning and service areas for its 10 Area Agencies on Aging should be reorganized. The study originated from a 2023 recommendation by the House Legislative Oversight Committee, with the Senate Legislative Oversight Committee requesting an update in 2026. The SC Department on Aging selected Guidehouse to conduct the study.

	Guidehouse met with aging service providers, AAA directors, Council of Governments directors, and the Department on Aging. The firm also distributed surveys addressing processes, communication, funding, contracting, and service delivery. Guidehouse will submit a report with recommendations next year to the Legislature, which will determine whether changes to the current planning and service areas are warranted. Merritt said the study results will not eliminate AAAs from the Aging Network but could result in consolidation, mergers, or changes to their relationship with Councils of Governments. Merritt expressed concern about the potential impact on Upper Savannah's six-county rural service region, where needs differ from those of more urban areas. She said Upper Savannah AAA's local knowledge, established community relationships, and experience delivering services help ensure that the needs of seniors in smaller, rural counties are not overlooked. Merritt praised Upper Savannah's superior outreach record, with 319 outreach events conducted in Fiscal Year 2026 compared with 112 in the next-highest region. Six regions conducted fewer than 40 events. Merritt stressed the benefits of AAAs being part of COGs, including executive leadership, financial and administrative support, office space, Board of Directors input, and relationships with local governments. Collaboration across COG divisions is also valuable in addressing regional challenges, she said. Merritt said being a part of a COG also helps with employee recruitment and retention due to benefits, including State Health Plan insurance, State Retirement System participation, paid leave, paid holidays, and deferred compensation options. The next steps remain uncertain pending the release of the Guidehouse findings to the Legislature. Merritt emphasized that despite being South Carolina's smallest COG and AAA, its strong local presence and community partnerships enable it to provide personalized services and ensure seniors throughout the region can access information, assistance, and advocacy.
Annual County Investment Reports	Assistant Director Sam Leaman discussed Upper Savannah's Annual County Investment Reports. Board members received a Fiscal Year 2026 report from the county that they represent. The report includes how USCOG is funded through county dues, federal and state dollars, and direct services funding. A return-on-investment page summarizes each county's investment, direct services provided through Aging and Workforce Development, and direct grants. These figures are used to calculate each county's return on investment. The report also includes a narrative description of county and region highlights. The Region's counties invested a total of $153,607 through annual county assessments in FY 2026, at a rate of $0.70 per capita. These assessments leveraged $5,121,382 in projects and services throughout the region, representing a 33:1 return on investment. Abbeville and McCormick had the highest return on investment ratios at 51:1. Greenwood had the highest dollar total at $2.3 million. Projects included water and sewer infrastructure, emergency medical equipment, streetscape improvements and county facility upgrades. Services included home-

	delivered meals, family caregiver support, home care services, job training, job fairs, dislocated worker support, and work experience for youth. Leaman suggested sharing the reports with their councils and staffs.
Board Member Updates	Roy Smith Jr. announced that they are using Jeff Shacker as a part-time administrator in the Town of McCormick. Shacker's previous experience includes GIS work at USCOG, as well as serving as director for the City of Newberry and Newberry County. He has also worked with the Municipal Association. Brandon Smith, Faye Thomas and Charles Jennings said festivals in their communities were successful. Smith referred to the 4 the Love of Festival in the City of Greenwood, Thomas referred to the Hogs and Hens Festival in the City of Abbeville, and Jennings the Gold Rush Festival in the Town of McCormick. Frank Daniel and Qwen Etheredge invited all to the Ridge Spring Harvest Festival, which runs Oct. 29-31 and includes music, hayrides, food, trunk or treat, a parade and more. Charles Goodwin thanked Scott Neely and Dominion Energy for sponsoring the Board's meal.
Executive Director's Report	Executive Director Patricia C. Hartung told the Board that she, Leaman and Green have met twice with Dr. Hala Nassar, head of Clemson University's landscape architecture program, about having graduate students perform a community improvement project in the Upper Savannah Region. Recent projects completed by students of that Clemson program include revitalization and disaster recovery design for historic mill areas affected by a tornado in Seneca, community flood recovery, resiliency mapping and town planning after a major hurricane in the Town of Nichols, local neighborhood design including Cadillac Heights in the City of Clemson, and a community park design in the City of Simpsonville. Green said Dr. Nassar will seek project ideas at Upper Savannah's next public administrators meeting Feb. 25, 2027. Rural Infrastructure Authority (RIA) Executive Director Bonnie Ammons is requesting COG assistance on making utility board members aware of an online training manual that communicates their roles and responsibilities. The manual is not available yet and Hartung said the COG will send out the link once it goes online.
Adjourn	There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Patricia C. Hartung
Executive Director