

**MINUTES**  
**BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING**  
**UPPER SAVANNAH COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS**  
**DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION**  
**430 HELIX ROAD**  
**GREENWOOD, SOUTH CAROLINA**  
**JUNE 23, 2025**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Jackie Brown, Matthew Brownlee, John Calhoun, Jeffrey Carroll, Jim Coleman, Frank Daniel, Charles Goodwin, Otis Grier Jr., Tiffani Ireland, Charles Jennings, Justin Lane, Wes McAllister, Marian Miller, Matthew Miller, Sen. Floyd Nicholson, Willie Norman, David Sawyer, Roy Smith Jr., Albert Talbert, and Faye Thomas.

MEMBERS ABSENT: Ken Durham, Qwen Etheredge, Charlie Henry, Shirley Jenkins, Theo Lane, Miliken Matthews, Sen. Shane Massey, Ernie Segars, Brandon Smith, Don Smoak, Sen. Danny Verdin, and Anita Williams.

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

GUESTS PRESENT: Rachael Maitland, Deputy Director; Chenille Williams, Senior Energy Specialist; Kayla Nelums, Program Energy Specialist; and Rene Kelly, Clean Transportation Coordinator, State Energy Office, SC Office of Regulatory Staff; Al Jenkins, Regional Director, Senator Tim Scott's office; Ryan Syrbe, Senator Tim Scott's Office; and Scott Neely, Dominion Energy.

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| <b>Call to Order</b>  | <p>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 Feb. 24 and April 28, 2025, meetings were approved unanimously upon motion by Jim Coleman, seconded by Willie Norman.</p> <p>Jennings introduced new Board members Matthew Brownlee, Jeffrey Carroll and Justin Lane from Laurens County.</p>   |
| <b>Guest Presentation: State Energy Office, SC Office of Regulatory Staff</b> | <p>The State Energy Office, SC Office of Regulatory Staff (SC ORS) gave a presentation about their programs and solicited feedback on how they can best support local governments and public entities.</p> <p>Deputy Director Rachael Maitland introduced her staff Chenille Williams, Senior Energy Specialist; Kayla Nelums, Program Energy Specialist; and Rene Kelly, Clean Transportation Coordinator. Maitland said the mission of the State Energy Office is to advance South Carolina's energy strategy and policy through education and outreach. The Office promotes the efficient use of all energy sources and encourages energy efficiency, renewable energy, and clean transportation. She said every state as well as Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands have a state energy office. The Office is funded by the U.S. Department of Energy.</p> <p>Maitland said the Office has the flexibility to reshape their programs on an annual, three-year or five-year basis to best fit the needs of South Carolina. The office works with local and regional governments, state agencies, K-12 public schools, colleges and universities, non-profit organizations, community organizations and private entities. The</p> |

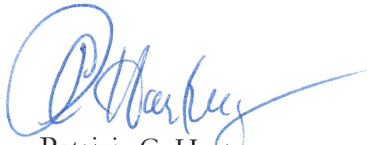
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|   | <p>Office offers funding opportunities, education and outreach, training, energy data resources, and technical assistance, Maitland said.</p> <p>Kelly told the Board that the State Energy Office's Palmetto Clean Fuels Coalition strives to help people transition into cleaner fuels. The Coalition is also looking at advanced technology including electric vehicles and other fuel types. The Coalition provides free education, outreach and training on cleaner fuels. She said US Department of Transportation grants are available for buses, bus-related facilities and for people looking to transition to cleaner fuels. Kelly provided flyers and said the grant application deadline is July 14.</p> <p>Williams said Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grants (EECBG) are available, mini-grants will become available this summer, and expects home energy rebates to become available in 2026. Maitland said \$137 million will be available for eligible homeowners for home electrification and other energy-efficiency upgrades. Maitland said the program will be primarily geared toward low and moderate income households. The mini-grants for up to \$20,000 are for local governments and state agencies focusing on high visibility clean transportation, renewable energy and energy efficient demonstration projects such as electric vehicles chargers, solar panel installations, and lighting retrofits.</p> <p>Kelly said the Office provides online resources including a data hub that highlights data on South Carolina's energy landscape, and an energy saver website which promotes resources, incentives, tax credits and rebates for consumers. The solarsc.gov site will be available soon with information on how to choose, finance or install a solar energy system and be aware of scams. Office staff provide technical assistance to state agencies, college and universities, public school districts, local governments and 501c3 companies for energy audits and how to implement energy improvement recommendations.</p> <p>Wes McAllister said there is confusion among homeowners about solar panels, whether they are worth pursuing and about scams. Kelly recommended going to the solar website to get answers to any of those questions and concerns.</p> <p>Kelly said the Office is requesting more feedback as to what communities need for energy savings, and whatever is heavily impacting their community.</p> |
| <p><b>Upper Savannah Workforce Program Update</b></p> | <p>Workforce Development Director Kal Kunkel gave an update on workforce development activities. He shared the guiding principles of the Workforce Investment Opportunity Act (WIOA) which include increasing access to education, training, and employment, particularly for people with barriers to employment; creating a comprehensive, high-quality workforce development system by aligning workforce investment, education, and economic development; and improving the quality and labor market relevance of workforce investment, education, and economic development efforts. He said he is awaiting Congress to update the workforce legislation and is hoping for more investment into workforce development in the future.</p> <p>Kunkel said Upper Savannah is one of 12 Workforce Areas in the state and covers seven counties, including Newberry. He said one of Upper Savannah's greatest accomplishments in the last year was helping 231 employees affected by the Ascend plant shutdown in Greenwood County find new employment before receiving their final</p>   |

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|   | <p>paychecks from Ascend.</p> <p>Kunkel listed SC Works partners including the SC Department of Employment and Workforce, Vocational Rehabilitation, Adult Educations, GLEAMNS, and businesses and industries.</p> <p>He said the Upper Savannah Region's unemployment rate is averaging 4.6 percent, around the state average.</p> <p>Kunkel showed SC Works Center traffic numbers for May 2025 and Program Year 2024. The Program Year numbers include 6,397 visits to Greenwood County SC Works, 2,599 in Laurens, 256 in Edgefield, 215 in Abbeville, 138 in McCormick, 4,250 in Newberry and 198 in Saluda for a regionwide total of 14,053. That total could reach 15,000 by the end of the Program Year at the end of June, he said.</p> <p>Kunkel showed SC Works System services statistics through Program Year 2024 including 354 individuals going to SC Works orientation, 42 hiring events across the seven counties, 330 employers at the hiring events, and 3,263 job seekers at the hiring events.</p> <p>Kunkel displayed Department of Labor statistics which show the impact of workforce development programs on the national, state and region economies. The numbers include more than 2.2 million receiving services nationwide, \$6.6 billion return on investment with an average salary of \$42,552. Southeastern states numbers (eight states) include 428,867 served, \$11 billion return on investment, and an average salary of \$36,415. South Carolina numbers include 37,628 served, \$1.1 billion return on investment, and an average salary of \$40,340. Upper Savannah region totals include 2,225 served, \$54 million return on investment, and average salary of close to \$34,000.</p> <p>Kunkel described to the Board three of the many success stories in the workforce development program, including a welder from Abbeville County presently making \$23 per hour, a CNA and patient care technician from Newberry County who plans to get her registered nursing degree, and a young man from Newberry County who earned his GED, finished certified nursing and phlebotomy courses and is now in an internship while hoping to soon join the workforce.</p> |
| <b>Community Development Block Grant Program Update</b> | <p>Community Development Director Keith Smith updated the Board on current Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) projects and one application that was submitted in April.</p> <p>USCOG Community Development staff submitted a \$1.3 million application for upgrade and relocation of water and sewer lines in the Laurens County Joanna community in the April spring infrastructure round. Grant awards from the spring round will be announced by the SC Department of Commerce any day now, Smith said.</p> <p>Smith updated the Board on current projects, including the Saluda County library renovation of its new location on W. Butler Street for which the bid package is currently being put together. Construction on the Laurens County Clinton-Joanna Wastewater Treatment Plant Upgrade Phase II which will include installing a second 750,000-gallon capacity holding tank will begin in July. Bid package is currently being put together for</p>   |

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|   | <p>the Greenwood County DSS building upgrade, which will involve adding a new roof, new HVAC, parking lots improvements, etc.</p> <p>Smith said the Greenwood County Mathews Mill II sewer upgrade, City of Greenwood Booker T. Washington sewer upgrade, and City of Greenwood Waller Avenue Streetscape projects are now complete. Closeout monitoring for Mathews was completed in early June while the other two projects will have closeout monitoring in July.</p> <p>Bids have been opened and are now awaiting Department of Commerce approval for the City of Abbeville Chestnut Street Park project which will involve adding playground equipment, picnic tables, an open-air pavilion and ADA parking. The Town of Saluda North Main/West Church Streetscape is 90 percent complete and will be finished in July.</p> <p>The Town of McCormick North Main/Augusta Streetscape has had several delays. Mayor Roy Smith said the project which will include a veteran's park is approximately 75 percent complete and will be a project the "community will be proud of." Engineers are working on the bid package for the Town of Ridge Spring Sewer upgrade, a project which includes a large portion of the Town. Right of way acquisition for the project is continuing.</p> <p>Community Development staff is continuing to provide assistance to local governments in project development, needs assessments and technical assistance in the CDBG program through the Regional Planning Grant.</p> <p>Keith Smith said The Index-Journal published an article last week about USCOG's CDBG program and how it has brought in more than \$122 million to the Region since 1985. He recommended that Board members read the article.</p> |
| <p><b>Hurricane Helene CDBG Disaster Recovery Program</b></p> | <p>Government Services Director Rick Green updated the Board on the Western Transportation Institute's transportation feasibility study for Abbeville, Laurens and Saluda counties. Two WTI consultants came from Montana earlier this month to visit the three counties to learn more about their transportation challenges. They will complete the study as required by SCDOT in September, with the goal of assessing the need for a public transit system for each of the three counties. Green said he hoped to report back in October.</p> <p>Green provided information on the Hurricane Helene CDBG Disaster Recovery Program. He said the State Office of Resilience has \$150 million in CDBG funds to help rehabilitate or replace homes damaged by Helene. Eighty percent of the funding will be allocated for Greenwood, Laurens, Aiken, Greenville, Spartanburg and Anderson counties. The other 20 percent will go to the lesser populated counties in western South Carolina including Abbeville, Edgefield, McCormick and Saluda.</p> <p>Green urged anyone with Helene damage to their home call 1-803-898-2511. Potential qualifiers will be assigned a case worker to evaluate their claim. The funds can replace an entire house up to \$225,000 or rehab a home for up to \$75,000. Any such home would require a three-year lien. Those most eligible for funding include senior citizens, low income, children in the home or disability.</p>  |

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|   | <p>The Office of Resilience made presentations in Greenwood, Aiken, and North Augusta recently. Green said Office of Resilience staff will make more presentations, if requested.</p>  |
| <p><b>Budget: FY 2026 Budget and Annual Resolution on Select Operating Policies</b></p> | <p>Assistant Director Sam Leaman said the combined Operating and Pass Through budget is down 17.9 percent primarily due to funding reductions across most programs.</p> <p>The Operating budget is down 15.5 percent primarily due to funding reductions across most programs.</p> <p>Significant revenue reduction items include the loss of the \$100,000 State Aid Supplemental funding, S.C. Infrastructure Investment Program (SCIIP) revenue which was a planned reduction as those projects move toward completion, Workforce Development funding reductions of 24 percent and although overall Aging funding is now in good shape, an Aging program decrease of 14 percent in this budget because last year's budget number was estimated on the high side.</p> <p>Significant expense items include salary and fringe benefits, which is 61 percent of the budget, supplies and printing primarily for Aging, and property/liability insurance and equipment rental due to computer systems and network upgrades being leased. Workforce Development has reduced its share of Workforce Center operating costs through new lease agreements and other cost control. Aging direct services have also decreased significantly, which reflects a more realistic number in this year's budget.</p> <p>Jim Coleman made a motion to approve the budget, seconded by Willie Norman. The budget was approved unanimously.</p> <p>Leaman presented the FY 2026 Annual Resolution on Select Operating Policies. The resolution proposed an increased reimbursement rate for the use of personal vehicles from 62 to 66 cents per mile. No more changes were proposed from last year's resolution.</p> <p>After having been approved by the Executive Committee, Matthew Miller made a motion to approve the resolution, seconded by Albert Talbert. The resolution was approved unanimously.</p> |
| <p><b>Executive Director's Report</b></p>   | <p>Executive Director Patricia C. Hartung thanked Al Jenkins from Senator Tim Scott's office for hearing the COG's concerns over Aging funding at the previous Board meeting in April. Jenkins provided a lead to his Deputy State Director Danielle Gibbs, who would meet with all 10 COGs about the issue. The COGs provided Gibbs a document detailing their concerns over possible Aging funding cuts which could lead to disruptions in services to seniors. The statewide Aging program funding issue related to the changes to the program at the US Dept of Health and Human Services have been resolved through FY 26.</p> <p>Hartung said finalizing the COG's 2026 budget was difficult due to funding uncertainties. She said the COG is moving forward under the premise that CDBG and Economic Development Administration (EDA) funding will continue to remain available. She stressed that municipalities in the USCOG Region are not entitlement communities and must compete for CDBG funding, unlike urban areas. She said it's a</p>   |

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|                | <p>testament to USCOG's hard work from Community Development staff whose grant writing has resulted in more than \$122 million in CDBG funding into the Upper Savannah Region since 1985.</p> <p>Hartung said she would like to hear from Board members about interesting programs in their counties and is considering making it an agenda item in August.</p> <p>Hartung reminded the Board that USCOG activity reports are in their meeting folder packets.</p> |
| <b>Adjourn</b> | Being no other business, the meeting was adjourned.  |



Patricia C. Hartung  
Executive Director