

UPPER SAVANNAH COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS
 Annual Report to the Board Members Representing Laurens County
 For the Fiscal Year Ending 2024

Financial Review - Upper Savannah COG Revenue Highlights

Local Government Funding	\$151,524
State Aid to COGs	110,533
Federal & State	2,619,368
General, In-kind & Miscellaneous	94,500
Contractual & Direct Services	<u>5,570,111</u>
TOTAL	\$8,546,036

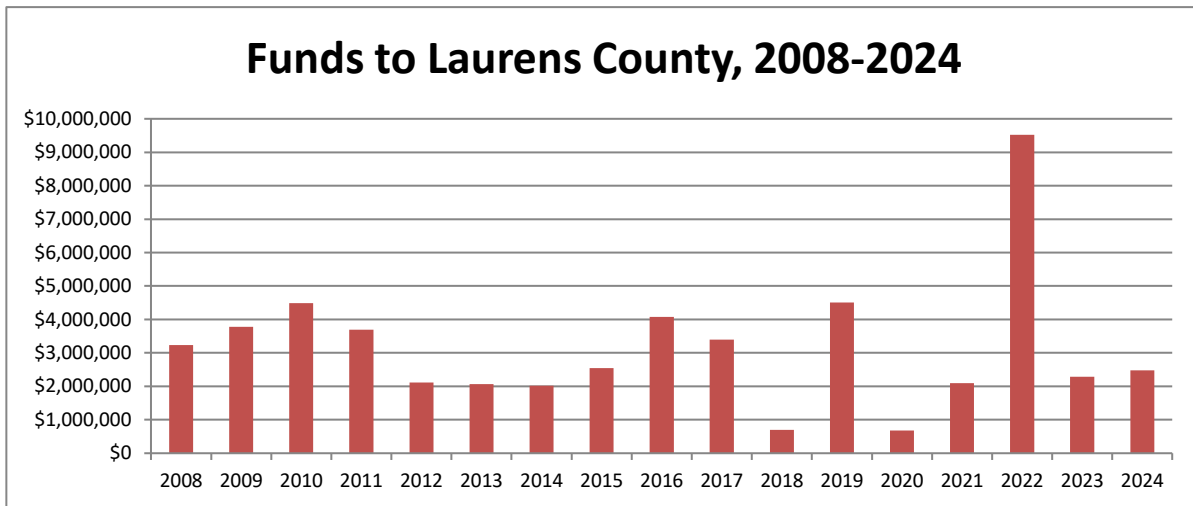
Return on Investment – Laurens County – Fiscal Year 2024

Local Government Investment	\$47,462
-----------------------------	-----------------

Funds to Laurens County

Aging Direct Services	\$547,458
Workforce Development Direct Services	197,174
Rural Guideshare Allocation (SC 101 and SC 14 intersection)	81,495
Grants by USCOG Initiation – FY 2024 (see page 2)	<u>1,648,286</u>
TOTAL	\$2,474,413

Return on Investment: 52:1



Direct Services funding consists of federal and state dollars for Workforce Development and Aging program services provided to the counties in the Upper Savannah region based on performance, need and eligibility. The COG administers these two programs under contract for direct service delivery and is responsible for the allocation and fiscal administration of these dollars. The funds assist in delivering services that provide for the health, welfare and employment of certain segments of a county’s population, thus easing the financial and administrative burden on local governments. Rural Guideshare funds are Federal Highway Administration dollars designated for highway system improvements. USCOG Board of Directors prioritizes the projects for final consideration by the SCDOT Commission.

Direct grants awarded in Fiscal Year 2024:

- **CDBG - \$1,618,000** – Clinton-Joanna Wastewater Treatment Plant Upgrade Phase II
- **CDBG-CV Cares Act - \$21,286** – Home Delivered Meals
- **SC BEST - \$9,000** – Lydia Mill and Academy Mill Brownfields environmental testing

Laurens County Highlights

Clinton-Joanna WWTP Upgrade Phase II – Laurens County was awarded \$1,618,000 in July 2024 for Clinton-Joanna Wastewater Treatment Plant Upgrade Phase II. In June 2023, the project for the plant was bid for construction, including installation of a second 750,000-gallon sludge holding tank as an alternate bid item. However, due to the high bids the second tank was unable to be funded. As a result, the project was awarded with the construction of only one 750,000-gallon tank. In the spring 2024 CDBG application round, funds were requested to continue upgrading the plant including the purchase and installation of the second sludge holding tank, aeration, mixers, pumps, controls, and other necessary fittings. Project cost is estimated to be \$1,780,000, including \$162,000 in matching funds provided by Laurens County Water & Sewer Commission. The proposed improvements consist of installing the 750,000-gallon tank. The drying beds were removed as part of the original scope in Phase I. The location is already cleared and will provide the space necessary to house the proposed second tank and its equipment, without acquisition and/or land clearing. This additional tank will be the completion of the 2022 original scope, providing the plant its necessary capacity to not only sustain its increasing wastewater volume, but to handle the facility's maximum capacity.

Clinton-Joanna WWTP Upgrade Phase I - Laurens County received \$1,500,000 in CDBG funds in August 2022 to upgrade Clinton-Joanna Wastewater Treatment Plant. Improvements included removing existing drying beds and upgrading the WWTP process by installing two large sludge holding tanks, aeration, mixers, pumps, controls and other necessary fittings for liquid land application of the digested sludge. However, due to high bids the second tank was unable to be funded. Project cost is estimated to be \$3,026,000, including \$1 million from State Revolving Fund and \$526,000 from Laurens County Water and Sewer Commission (LCWSC). Project will benefit estimated 8,078 people of which 64.88 percent are considered low to moderate income. Bids came in over budget, worked with LCWSC and Department of Commerce to acquire an additional \$850,000. Construction began in December 2023 and was expected to be completed Oct. 31, 2024.

Clinton Fire Truck - City of Clinton received \$500,000 in CDBG funding in November 2021 for purchase of a new fire truck to replace a 1995 model that was decommissioned. City provided a match of \$144,911. The truck was delivered May, 29, 2024.

Highway 56/76 Sewer Upgrades – Project awarded in September 2020, with \$715,000 in CDBG funds, \$120,000 local match for total project cost of \$835,000. Project repaired two major sections of trunk line at intersections of Hwy 76/Springdale Drive and Hwy 56/Springdale Drive, including installation of new lines, casings, and manholes benefitting an estimated 2,300 households and businesses. Construction began Jan. 16, 2023, and is now complete. Project has been closed out.

Fibertex Sewer Upgrade - Laurens County Water and Sewer Commission was awarded a \$2,000,000 EDA grant to upgrade the sewer facilities serving the Fibertex manufacturing facility in Gray Court. Specifically, the existing pump station and sewer line serving the plant were replaced providing additional capacity to accommodate the increased flow. The infrastructure improvements will help the company create 50 jobs and leverage \$50,000,000 in private investment. The total estimated project cost is \$2,735,000. Construction began in the spring of 2023 and is now complete.

Malouf Companies Water Upgrade – Laurens County Water and Sewer Commission was awarded a \$5,422,800 EDA grant to fund water system improvements to serve Malouf Companies and generally upgrade water services in the area around the Interstate 385 and US 221 interchange. The infrastructure improvements will help the company create 240 jobs and leverage \$47,200,000 in private investment. The total project cost is \$6,778,500. The grant will fund 29,500 linear feet of 16-inch water line and a 500,000-gallon elevated water tank on Metric Road. Contracts have been signed and notice to proceed issued.

Revolving Loan Fund Programs - Staff are currently servicing five loans in Laurens County. The original loan amount on all these loans total \$352,400.

Mill Site Brownfields Testing – Laurens County and City of Clinton each received \$4,500 in SC BEST (Brownfields Environmental Site Testing) funding for environmental testing. Developer is wanting to begin work on this abandoned Lydia Mills site to build more housing opportunities for this area. There is potential development on a project that would take the vacant former Clinton Mills site and create a mixed-use residential/commercial investment. Redevelopment would add many more single-family houses to the area tax rolls and bring in more families.

Preliminary Engineering – A total of \$81,494.53 in Rural Guides share funds from the Federal Highway Administration designated for highway system improvements were used for preliminary engineering for the SC 101 and SC 14 intersection improvement project during FY '24. The USCOG Board of Directors prioritizes the projects for final consideration by the S.C. Department of Transportation Commission.

Home-Delivered Meals - CDBG-CV (Coronavirus) funds were used to provide home-delivered meals to qualifying seniors in the County. These seniors included those on waiting lists for meals funded by State Unit on Aging dollars and some congregate diners. A total of 3,177 meals were served in Laurens County from July 1, 2023, through June 30, 2024. Cost of the meals was \$21,285.90.

SC Works Centers – SC Works Centers are the focal point of the workforce development system and are located in all seven counties in the Upper Savannah Workforce Area. Abbeville County added 62 available jobs during FY '24 within the SC Works system. Throughout the year, 188 individuals entered the Abbeville SC Works Center to receive services with assistance for more than 600 job searches. A total of 21 employer services were logged in the Abbeville Center.

Regional Job Fairs – Helped hundreds of job seekers and 70+ employers at Upper Savannah SC Works/Piedmont Technical College Regional Job Fairs in March 2024 and October 2023 at Piedmont Technical College in Greenwood. Also assisted with several other smaller job fairs in Abbeville, Edgefield, Greenwood, Laurens, Newberry and Saluda counties. Many of these smaller

job fairs are also predated by resume and interviewing workshops to give the public a chance to prepare with staff prior to each hiring event.

H1B Rural Healthcare Training Grant – Upper Savannah partnered with the Pee Dee Council of Governments on a \$2.2 million grant to provide training assistance for in-demand health care occupations. Upper Savannah identified an immediate need for Emergency Medical Technicians and Paramedics to fill severely understaffed stations in all our Region’s counties. Upper Savannah partnered with Piedmont Technical College to provide these trainings to interested students or incumbent EMT workers looking to advance their EMT training to Advanced EMT or Paramedic. Through 2024, 102 trainings were completed in our Region. More than 50 percent of students who earned credentials went to work in Emergency Medicine for our Region’s county agencies. Most county EMS stations did see a drastic decrease in vacancies. The grant will end in January 2025.

High School Seniors – Distributed “Your Next Step” booklet to the more than 2,000 high school seniors across the Upper Savannah Region before graduation; includes list of employers who hire recent graduates as well as job search tips and information regarding pursuing higher education locally. Students from Abbeville, Calhoun Falls and Dixie high schools were among those receiving booklets.

Giving Middle and High School Students a Glimpse of Future – Held career exploration activities day for 1,500 middle school and high school students from throughout the Region, featuring hands-on demonstrations and computer simulations from several area employers. This included the ambulance simulator that was purchased by the COG for Piedmont Technical College via the H1B Rural Healthcare Training Grant Funding.

Partners – Our vital network of partners continue to help across the Workforce Area’s seven counties to provide and utilize all resources in our Region to reach individuals and offer career assistance, training opportunities, and overall barrier-breaking services to empower clients. This system allows for a referral process from partner to partner, ensuring that clients are being met with particular services that encompass their total need.

Economic Development Administration (EDA) – Updated the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) to keep the Upper Savannah Region eligible for EDA funding. Assisted in the development of project applications for the Town of Gray Court and Piedmont Technical College and continued administering two funded projects in Laurens County. The PTC Health Sciences building grant application for \$11.27 million will be awarded in FY ’25.

South Carolina Infrastructure Improvement Program (SCIIP) - Assisted local governments and utilities in administering South Carolina Infrastructure Improvement Act (SCIIP) funds for water, sewer, and stormwater projects through the South Carolina Rural Infrastructure Authority (RIA) awarded in April 2023. These funds were originally American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) dollars directed to the state. USCOG will continue to assist in the implementation of nine awarded projects in the region totaling \$26,598,719, including projects for City of Abbeville, Town of Due West, Town of Edgefield, Ninety Six CPW, Town of Ware Shoals, City of Clinton, Laurens CPW, McCormick CPW and Town of Ridge Spring. Laurens County SCIIP projects include City of Clinton Miller’s Fork Basin Sewer Rehabilitation, \$4,250,000 SCIIP, \$500,000 RIA; Laurens CPW Water System Improvements, \$10,000,000 SCIIP, \$500,000 RIA; and Laurens County Water & Sewer Commission Hospital Area Water System Improvements, \$7,922,850 SCIIP.

The City of Clinton Miller's Fork Basin Sewer Rehabilitation project involves the rehabilitation of aging sewer lines to prevent sanitary sewer overflows and to satisfy an existing DHEC consent order. It is expected to directly serve approximately 500 households and 10 businesses.

The Laurens CPW Water System Improvements project involves the construction of a new water tank, as well as water treatment plant and waterline upgrades that will allow decommissioning of booster pumps stations and multiple water tanks to address water pressure problems. This project increases capacity to provide quality services to current and future customers. It is expected to directly serve approximately 5,551 households and 757 businesses.

The Laurens County Water & Sewer Commission Hospital Area Water System Improvements project involves the construction of booster pump stations, an elevated water tank and waterline improvements to increase water capacity and reliability in the hospital service area. This project increases capacity to provide quality services to current and future customers. It is expected to directly serve a total of approximately 3,965 households and 115 businesses.

Transportation Planning – Completed work on a regional plan to reduce and eliminate roadway departure vehicle crashes. These types of crashes, where a vehicle leaves its designated lane and crashes into an object, land feature or another vehicle, are the number one type of accident in the Upper Savannah COG region. Speeding, driver distraction, driver impairment, and not wearing seat belts contribute to the high number of deaths and serious injuries from these types of crashes. Counter measures include more lighted or reflective signage and various pavement treatments.

Transit – Received, reviewed, and ranked transit grants from regional providers and forwarded them on to SC Department of Transportation. Continuing to pursue grants and partnerships to expand transit in all counties and throughout the region.

Planning Commissioner Training – Hosted numerous workshops to provide planning commissioners, zoning appeals board members, and staff with state-mandated training. Across the region, 78 people received the required training.

Community Development Block Grants – Began close-out on grant awards for CDBG-CV1 (Coronavirus) Public Services funding. The food service portion of the program continued through the end of the past fiscal year (June 30, 2024).

Americans with Disabilities Act – Continued updating ADA plans for local governments as needed by the Community Development program.

Environmental Reviews – Completed environmental reviews for Community Development Block Grant projects.

Upper Savannah Land Trust – Continued providing technical assistance to the Upper Savannah Land Trust, which has preserved 57,753 acres in an eight-county area that includes the USCOG region. Laurens County has eight easements covering a total of 2,815 acres.

HOME – Continued monitoring completed projects with the HOME Investment Partnership Program. HOME is a HUD-funded program that provides rehab or new construction funding for

homes of low-income individuals and rental units. Monitoring tenant income and rent levels will continue for the next 14 years. There is no more local funding in this program.

Planning – Continued assisting various municipal and county planning commissions with development or zoning questions as needed.

Grant writing – Assisted with grant writing for local governments as requested.

Aging & Disability Resource Center (ADRC) Services – The Upper Savannah Aging & Disability Resource Center (ADRC) provides, coordinates and contracts for services to the Upper Savannah Region’s senior population. In addition to the regional services through the ADRC described below, Upper Savannah contracts with the Region’s senior centers and other providers to meet the needs of senior adults. Contracted services include transportation, home-delivered meals, congregate dining with activities, home care, and health and wellness promotion.

Aging Services in Laurens County – Seniors in Laurens County were served 1,798 congregate meals and 31,238 home-delivered meals during FY ’24, an average of 56 seniors per month received transportation, 16 seniors received minor home repair, and there were 2,098 hours of home care spent in the County.

State Health Insurance Program (SHIP) – The SHIP program helps seniors and individuals with disabilities research and understand Medicare coverage options with their Medicare prescription drug plans and Medicare Advantage plans. This Program also counsels and assists beneficiaries with Medicare Part A & B issues and Medigap coverage, and alerts seniors to fraudulent Medicare and Medicaid practices through the Senior Medicare Patrol Program. The Upper Savannah SHIP Program made 1,841 contacts and attended 32 outreach events in FY ’24.

Family Caregiver Support Program (FCSP) – Program provided funding to 277 caregivers during FY ’24 as well as information, assistance, education, support, and referrals to many more throughout the Region. The program provides respite, which is a temporary break from daily caregiving that is important in helping reduce caregiver burnout so they can provide better care for their loved one. The program also helps caregivers with supplemental services, such as incontinence supplies and assistive technology. The FCSP also continues to be available for seniors ages 55 and older caring for children 18 and younger through the Seniors Raising Children (SRC) Program. Many seniors take on the parental role to keep the child(ren) out of the overburdened foster care system due to parents being unable to do so themselves for various reasons including death, incarceration, drug problems, etc. The program provides children with a chance to be a part of after-school care and activities such as sports and camps. The program provides them with clothing vouchers twice a year to help with the cost of clothes. The Family Caregiver Advocate attended 19 outreach events in FY ’24 to share our services with the Region.

Information, Referral and Assistance (IR&A) – The IR&A program is designed to provide seniors and people with disabilities access to helpful resources. Upper Savannah staff includes one certified IR&A specialist. Staff have made 3,306 contacts with seniors throughout the Region concerning services in FY ’24.

Assessments – Assessment specialists provided holistic, person-centered assessments to identify seniors’ needs and to determine service eligibility for aging programs. The assessment team completed 1,531 Assessments in FY ‘24.

Home Safety Program – The program has helped many individuals throughout the Region with projects that improve unsafe areas in the home, including the building of handicap accessible ramps and installation of handrails, grab bars, etc. Partnerships with area churches have maximized the funding potential. The AAA helped 95 people in the Home Safety Program throughout the Region during FY ‘24.

Assistive Technology (lifelines) – The program assisted approximately 27 seniors throughout the Region with lifelines in FY ‘24.

Legal Services Program – Program served 61 seniors with various legal concerns such as Power of Attorney, will preparation, and grandparent custody issues in FY ‘24. Attorneys throughout the Region have agreed to work with the ADRC at reasonable rates to better serve the senior population.

Home Care Program – Upper Savannah AAA provides a Home Care Program that helps seniors who need services such as light housekeeping and some personal care. The program provides consumer choice for the seniors and their families and adds support to allow seniors to stay in their homes as long as possible. The program served 106 people in FY ‘24.

Advocate for Senior Citizens – Continued to serve as an advocate for 2,078 seniors in the Region’s nursing homes and residential care facilities through the continued administration of the Regional Ombudsman Program. The Regional Long-Term Care Ombudsman investigates and works to resolve problems or complaints affecting residents in nursing homes and residential care facilities. The Ombudsman also educates residents and family members about long-term care and related issues while advocating for the protection of the resident’s rights.

Advocate for Individuals with Disabilities and Special Needs, and Mental Health – The DDSN/DMH Long-Term Care Ombudsman has continued to serve as an advocate for 620 residents in 113 residential, home shares, and intermediate care facilities operated or contracted for operation under the Department of Disabilities and Special Needs and the Department of Mental Health through the continued administration of the Regional Ombudsman Program. The Ombudsman visits 5-day programs with a total of 1,377 consumers who attend during the day to receive skills training. The Ombudsman investigates and works to resolve problems or complaints affecting consumers in DDSN and DMH facilities. The Ombudsman also educates residents, family members, and staff about long-term care and related issues while advocating for the protection of the resident’s rights. The Ombudsman has continued to increase in-person staff training on topics such as resident rights; abuse, neglect and endangerment, and reporting to improve quality of care and life for all consumers who reside in these facilities.