

UPPER SAVANNAH COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS
 Annual Report to the Board Members Representing Saluda County
 For the Fiscal Year Ending 2023

Financial Review - Upper Savannah COG Revenue Highlights

Local Government Funding	\$150,661
State Aid to COGs	171,025
Federal & State	2,321,308
General, In-kind & Miscellaneous	81,300
Contractual & Direct Services	<u>4,424,240</u>
TOTAL	\$7,148,534

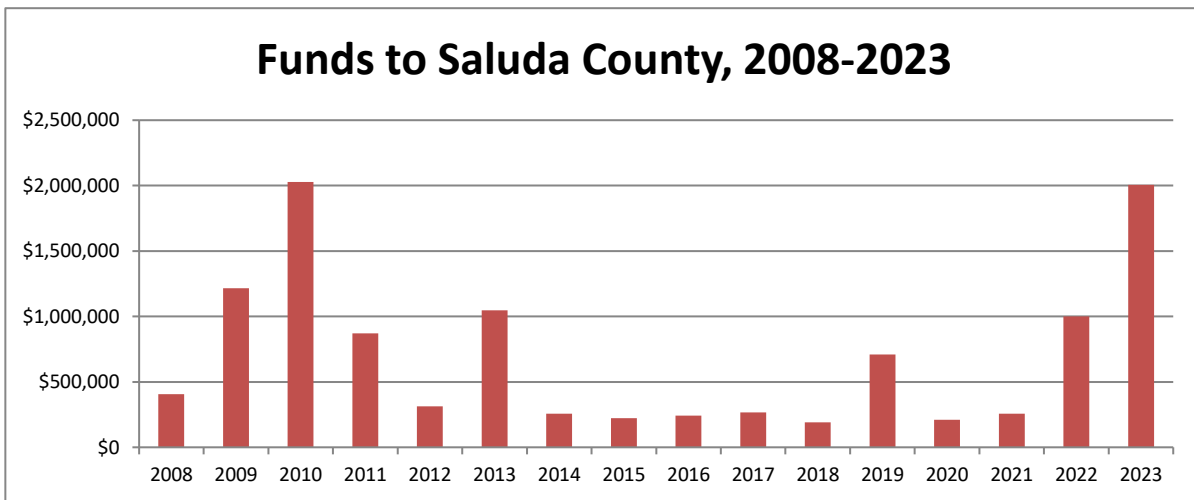
Return on Investment – Saluda County – Fiscal Year 2023

Local Government Investment	\$13,203
-----------------------------	-----------------

Funds to Saluda County

Aging Direct Services	\$145,894
Workforce Development Direct Services	59,751
Grant by USCOG Initiation – FY 2023 (see page 2)	<u>1,799,053</u>
TOTAL	2,004,698

Return on Investment: 152:1



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.

Direct grants awarded in Fiscal Year 2023:

- **CDBG - \$1,700,000** – Town of Ridge Spring Sewer Rehab
- **CDBG-CV - \$1,490** – public transportation
- **Healthy Eating and Acting Living (HEAL) - \$4,900** – Town of Ridge Spring playground equipment
- **CDBG-CV Cares Act - \$72,663** – Home Delivered Meals

Saluda County Highlights

Town of Ridge Spring Sewer Rehab - Town received \$1,700,000 in CDBG funds in August 2022 to rehabilitate three major sections of the Town’s main sewer trunkline. A study completed in 2005 indicated excessive inflow and infiltration within the Town’s system. Recent inspections indicated conditions significantly worsened. Project includes approximately 2,541 linear feet (LF) of 8” gravity sewer, 2,151 LF of 10” gravity sewer, 200 LF of 16” steel encased pipe (bore), 3,361 LF of CIPP and installation of approximately 42 manholes. Project costs are estimated to be \$2,086,090, including \$386,090 from the Town. Ridge Spring has an estimated population of 920, of which 68.47 percent are considered low-to-moderate income (LMI). Engineer working on bid package. Upper Savannah and the Town are working to acquire right of way. Project going out to bid in fall 2023.

Town of Saluda Streetscape - The Town received \$721,212 in CDBG funding in November 2021 for streetscape at North Main and West Church streets. The project focuses on beautification throughout downtown in hopes of providing a welcoming atmosphere for economic development, while improving and providing accessibility for all. Improvements would encourage foot traffic, potentially stimulating business opportunities within the available storefronts. The project includes a \$102,562 local match for total cost of \$823,774. Finalizing engineering and design for bid in October 2023.

Town of Ridge Spring Playground Equipment - Submitted successful Healthy Eating and Active Living (HEAL) mini-grant applications for the Town of Ridge Spring. The Town received \$4,900 from the Wholespire organization for a bicycle rack to be placed at the town Farmer’s Market as well as new playground equipment that will encourage musical play and sensory interaction at the playground outside the Civic Center.

Public Transportation - CDBG-CV (Coronavirus) funds awarded in FY ’22 were used for medical and essential transportation in the County. The scope of work was amended to include transit to SC Works centers and places of employment. Contract and Memorandum of Understanding were signed in September 2022. Seventy-two trips totaling 149 miles at \$10 per mile (\$1,490 total) were used until the project ended on June 30, 2023.

Home-Delivered Meals - CDBG-CV (Coronavirus) funds are being used to fund home-delivered meals to qualifying seniors in the County. These seniors include those on waiting lists for meals funded by State Unit on Aging dollars and some congregate diners. A total of 11,626 meals were served in Saluda County from July 1, 2022, through June 30, 2023. Cost of the meals was

\$72,662.50. Received approval to extend the CDBG-CV Public Services grant. This will allow the home-delivered meals project to continue to serve meals to seniors in the County through June 5, 2024.

Revolving Loan Fund Programs – Staff are currently servicing three loans in Saluda County. The original loan amount on all these loans totals \$96,000.

EMT and Paramedics Training - Continue to support the Emergency Medical Technician and paramedic training as part of the Level Up Rural Healthcare federal grant designed to relieve EMT and paramedic shortages throughout the Upper Savannah region. There are nearly 100 total enrollees to date, 53 currently working in emergency services. There are 10 in training and 7 waiting for certification testing. Level Up program is funding tuition, books and fees, materials and travel reimbursement for all students. Staff negotiated for more funding to serve another 20 trainees.

On-the-Job Training Grant - Five South Carolina workforce development areas were awarded a \$2.8 million grant to offer On-the-Job training and other services for more than 260 dislocated workers in those five areas, including the Upper Savannah Region. USCOG is focusing on individuals who are long-term unemployed, especially those who are veterans, homeless or offenders.

Regional Job Fairs - Helped hundreds of job seekers and 70+ employers at Upper Savannah SC Works/Piedmont Technical College Regional Job Fairs in March 2023 and October 2022 at PTC. Also assisted with several other smaller job fairs in Abbeville, Edgefield, Laurens, Newberry and Saluda counties.

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. Surveyed 200 local employers to identify those who hire recent high school graduates.

Giving Eighth Graders Glimpse of Future - Held career exploration activities day for 1,600 eighth grade students from throughout the Region, featuring hands-on demonstrations and computer simulations from several area employers.

Adult Education – Helped connect adult education with other service providers. There is a \$500 bonus for those who complete the GED this year.

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. More than 1,000 job seekers were matched with jobs through the SC Works system. During the year there were more than 9,000 distinct individuals receiving services. More than 5,000 employer services were logged.

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 Laurens County and Piedmont Technical College.

South Carolina Infrastructure Improvement Program (SCIIP) – Assisted local governments and utilities in applying for South Carolina Infrastructure Improvement Act (SCIIP) funds for water, sewer, and stormwater projects through the South Carolina Rural Infrastructure Authority (RIA).

These funds were originally American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) dollars directed to the State. There were 20 projects awarded in the region totaling \$79,891,066. USCOG will also assist in the implementation of nine awarded projects in the region totaling \$26,598,719. Projects in Saluda County include Saluda County Water and Sewer Authority Wastewater Treatment Plant Upgrades, \$2,918,750; and Town of Ridge Spring Water System & Storm Drainage Evaluation, \$500,000. The COG is assisting in the administration of the Town of Ridge Spring project.

Transportation Planning – Began working 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. Preliminary results show that speed and not wearing seatbelts 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. The final report is scheduled to be completed in late 2023.

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 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, 75 people received the required training.

Community Development Block Grants – Closed out some grant awards for CDBG-CV Public Services funding. Public service projects included air purifiers for schools in Laurens County School District 55 and limited public transit services in Saluda County. The food service portion of the program (home-delivered meals) continues through the end of the current fiscal year through partnership with Piedmont Agency on Aging.

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 Upper Savannah Land Trust, which has preserved more than 55,000 acres in eight-county area that includes the USCOG region.

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 15 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.

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.

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 359 contacts and attended one outreach event from July 1, 2022, to June 30, 2023.

Family Caregiver Support Program (FCSP) – Program provided funding to 269 caregivers as well as information, assistance, education, support, and referrals to many more throughout the region. The program provides respite, which is a break from daily care-giving that is important in helping caregivers do a better job over a longer period of time. The program also helps caregivers with supplemental services, such as incontinence supplies and assistive technology. The FCSP also continues to be available for grandparents 55 and older caring for grandchildren 18 and younger. Many grandparents take on the parental role in order to keep the grandchildren out of the overburdened foster care system. The FCSP helps those grandparents who have stepped into the role of parent due to death, incarceration or other parental problems with some funded services as well as information and support groups.

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 two certified IR&A specialists.

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 58 seniors in the Home Safety Program throughout the region during FY 2023.

Assistive Technology (lifelines) – Program assisted approximately 25 seniors throughout the region with lifelines in FY '23.

Legal Services Program – Program served 51 seniors in FY '23 with various legal concerns such as Power of Attorney, will preparation, and grandparent custody issues. 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 are in need of services such as light housekeeping and some personal care. The program provides consumer choice for the seniors and their families and adds support to keeping older persons in their homes as long as possible. The program served 110 people in FY 2023.

Advocate for Senior Citizens – Continued to serve as an advocate for 2,108 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.