

**MINUTES  
 BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING  
 UPPER SAVANNAH COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS  
 DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION  
 430 HELIX ROAD  
 GREENWOOD, SOUTH CAROLINA  
 FEBRUARY 24, 2025**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Jackie Brown, John Calhoun, Jim Coleman, Frank Daniel, Ken Durham, Qwen Etheredge, Charles Goodwin, Otis Grier Jr., Tiffani Ireland, Shirley Jenkins, Charles Jennings, Theo Lane, Miliken Matthews, Wes McAllister, Marian Miller, Sen. Floyd Nicholson, Willie Norman, David Sawyer, Ernie Segars, Brandon Smith, Roy Smith Jr., Don Smoak, Albert Talbert, and Faye Thomas

MEMBERS ABSENT: Charlie Henry, Sen. Shane Massey, Matthew Miller, Randy Randall, and Sen. Danny Verdin.

STAFF PRESENT: Patricia Hartung, Sam Leaman, Rick Green, Kal Kunkle, David Hays

GUESTS PRESENT: Kennetta-Renee' Robertson, Executive Director, McCormick County Chamber of Commerce; Lena Hester Miller, Executive Director, Freshwater Coast Community Foundation; Kevin McLaughlin, District 2 Administrator, SCDOT; Brent Rewis, Weston & Sampson (retired from SCDOT); Susan Jackson, District Outreach Director for US Representative Sheri Biggs; Rev. Carlton Whidby, guest of Frank Daniel; Myranda Butler, Saluda Town Council.

<p><b>Call to Order</b></p>	<p>The meeting was held in person with the option to attend via Zoon. Willie Norman gave the invocation and Chairman Charles Jennings called the meeting to order. The minutes from the Oct. 28, 2024, meeting were approved unanimously.</p> <p>Jennings recognized several guests.</p>
<p><b>The 250th Anniversary of the American Revolution</b></p>	<p>USCOG Government Services Director Rick Green, McCormick County Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Kennetta-Renee' Robertson, and USCOG board member and Laurens County SC250 Committee Chairman Ernie Segars gave overview of how South Carolina is preparing for the 250th Anniversary celebration of the American Revolution and birth of America, as well as what McCormick and Laurens counties are planning.</p> <p>Green said America and South Carolina will commemorate the 250th anniversary of the first shots fired in the Revolutionary War in Massachusetts in April 2025, the signing of the Declaration of Independence July 4, 2026, and also the local battles of Star Fort in Ninety Six and Fort Charlotte (McCormick County). South Carolina 250 was formed in 2019 and has made grants available to fund commemoration of Revolutionary War activities in South Carolina, Green said. Grant funds were recently used to develop an artist's rendition of the Battle of the Long Canes which occurred at what is now the border of Greenwood and McCormick counties. The grant also included battle commemoration signs to be placed at Wisteria Park in the Town of Troy. Each county has an SC250 committee and Green said committee members are looking for stories from all angles of the Revolutionary War including Patriots, Native Americans involved on both sides of the war, slaves, women and even Loyalists. The end of the Revolution in 1783 will also be commemorated in 2033. Also, the 250th anniversary of the U.S.</p>

	<p>Constitution will be celebrated in the late 2030s, he said.</p> <p>McCormick County Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Kennetta-Renee' Robertson discussed projects commemorating events in McCormick County. She said there are "Gateway" Historical Site Map signs in downtown McCormick and Willington as a part of the advance activities to recognize and celebrate the 250th Anniversary of America's Independence and McCormick County's significant role during that fight for freedom. She said an event called the Raising of Fort Charlotte will be held July 12, 2025. The ruins of Fort Charlotte today lie under the water of Lake Thurmond. Robertson said it is important that all the stories be told, including perspectives from Native Americans and African Americans.</p> <p>Segars said the Laurens County SC250 Committee has been quite active, having launched campaigns for a bicycle trail, school system involvement, and a display at the County museum. He said 15 sites have been identified along the trail which will include eight-foot kiosks with narratives about the battle or event, artwork, and QR codes for downloading details. He said there are expected to be eight kiosks (some sites will be combined) to be completed late summer to early fall. Another campaign will involve the Laurens County schools, with plans to get school children involved in the project for the next several years.</p> <p>Going back to more examples of war sites, Segars cited the Hayes Station Massacre south of Joanna in 1781 when approximately 15 Patriots were brutally murdered and buried in a common grave. Also, the Battle of Hammond's Store in 1780 when more than 100 Loyalists were killed.</p> <p>The third phase will include a wall exhibit at the County Museum, with funding from an \$80,000 grant. It will feature Patriots, Loyalists, women, laypersons and Native Americans. Segars said he expects that exhibit to be completed next year.</p> <p>Hartung said Abbeville, Edgefield, Greenwood and Saluda counties are also working on events and welcomed anyone in the future to share their plans.</p>
<p><b>Freshwater Coast Community Foundation</b></p>	<p>Freshwater Coast Community Foundation Executive Director Lena Hester Miller gave an overview of the organization. She said the Foundation's Abbeville Promise program enables any student who is a resident of Abbeville County and graduates high school to be eligible for tuition free education at Piedmont Technical College. She said the Foundation is working with Clemson Extension to create entrepreneurial workshops and youth leadership programs. The Foundation also administers the Be Well Campaign to encourage health and wellness. She said the Local Buy Rewards Card Program encourages buying locally to re-invest back into the local community. Several local businesses and farmer's market vendors honor the card. Miller said she looks forward to working with other local organizations.</p> <p>Wes McAllister said he is glad to have Miller, a Calhoun Falls native, back in the area with the Foundation and looks forward to it partnering with USCOG.</p>
<p><b>System Performance Report, SCDOT</b></p>	<p>Government Services Director Rick Green noted that the Board passed the SCDOT Performance Measures Statewide Highway Safety Targets in October 2024. Every two years, SCDOT compiles a report as an amendment to the Long-Range Plan that also</p>

	<p>must be approved by COG Boards and MPOs. The Regional Long Range Plan with the System Performance Report as an amendment was made available for public review and no comments were received. Jim Coleman made a motion to approve the SCDOT Performance Report document, seconded by Willie Norman. The document was approved unanimously.</p>
<p><b>Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Update</b></p>	<p>Workforce Development Director Kal Kunkle gave an update on workforce development activities in the region, beginning with Legislative updates.</p> <p>He said the current Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) is becoming somewhat outdated while new legislation called A Stronger Workforce for America Act is currently held up in Congress. Kunkle said he is not sure when or if that legislation will start moving forward. Also, Senator Tim Kaine of Virginia has proposed the Jumpstart Our Businesses by Supporting Students for Jobs Act which would expand the use of Pell Grant funds from two and four-year degrees to also include short-term vocational training and certification.</p> <p>Kunkle said staff completed the new four-year plan for the Upper Savannah Workforce Region which will take effect July 1, 2025. The newly adopted Plan was completed Jan. 15, 2025, and includes economic development statistics and needs updates.</p> <p>He said the SC Works System will be undergoing re-certification this year so staff will be helping workforce partners to achieve re-certification of the system and the services offered. Kunkle said state funds will be used to provide professional development training on March 19-20 at Piedmont Technical College for workforce partners including the Department of Social Services, Department of Employment and Workforce, Vocational Rehab, GLEAMNS Human Resources, etc.</p> <p>He said the Greenwood County SC Works Center was relocated from the GLEAMNS Brewer Center which sustained damage from Hurricane Helene to the United Center on Phoenix Street in Greenwood. He said the move has worked out well. Kunkle said staff is working with SC Works Centers in the Region's rural counties to create "connection points" with access to new technology to better serve rural communities.</p> <p>Kunkle shared some SC Works Center numbers with the Board, covering the period of July 1, 2024, through January 31, 2025. A total of 8,960 job seekers visited centers in the seven counties, 4,000-plus job seeker services were offered, and there were 1,299 services provided to employers.</p> <p>There have been several job fairs including some hosted by Ascend, which is closing its plant in Greenwood County early this year. The job fairs have enabled some of the Ascend employees to find new jobs. He said 24 employers attended the Edgefield County Career and Resource Fair last Thursday at Old Macedonia Missionary Baptist Church in North Augusta. Almost 60 job seekers attended with 33 being offered job opportunities. The career and resource fair was a joint effort from Upper Savannah and Lower Savannah COGs.</p>
<p><b>Executive Director's Report</b></p>	<p>Executive Director Patricia C. Hartung said the COGs made their annual presentation to the Constitutional Budget Committee in January. The State allocates \$1.55 million statewide to the 10 COGs, divided based on each region's population. Upper Savannah</p>

has the smallest population and receives the smallest allotment, totaling approximately \$111,000. Those state appropriation funds go toward matching federal program funding. It's a small amount to meet rural needs, especially regarding specific general government assistance requested by some cities and counties. To meet this demand, the COGs have drafted a Government Services Program proposal and are presenting it to the legislature for additional funding. It is uncertain at this time as to whether or not the legislature will provide funding for this request, but the SC Association of Counties and the Municipal Association of South Carolina have endorsed it and said such a program is needed in South Carolina. The request is for a statewide total of \$2 million annually for three years, divided equally among the 10 COGs.

Hartung said that, as with other local, state, and national agencies, the USCOG is also watching the current federal program funding cutting very closely. She said Rural Infrastructure Authority Executive Director Bonnie Ammons met with the COGs this month and told them that SC Infrastructure Investment Program (SCIIP) project funding is safe as long as these water, wastewater, and stormwater system improvement projects are progressing on schedule. Upper Savannah is currently administering nine SCIIP projects throughout the Region. She said USCOG does not work with the Department of Education or USAID which are facing cuts. However, she said any cuts to Economic Development Administration funding would negatively impact the region.

Hartung discussed the reconfiguration of the former Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC), now the Department of Environmental Services (DES). She said DES has approached USCOG and three other COGs to consider helping with a water quality program. Six COGs in the state are already involved in the water quality program (208 Water Quality Management planning). She said the program would involve a lot of work, including preparing a water quality plan for the Region and evaluating new water permits to determine if they meet the plan's standards. Hartung said the other COGs who are not in the program have not yet made a decision about whether it will take on the 208 program.

Hartung distributed the staff activities report.

Jim Coleman mentioned three new bills being introduced that Board members should be aware of, two that would cost municipalities and school districts revenue. He said H3951 which allows a property tax exemption limiting the increase in property tax value would be a big blow to municipalities and school districts. Another bill would cut the market value of boats and outboard motors by 50 percent, slicing taxes in half which would also be harmful. Also, a new bill which would increase the property tax homestead exemption amount from the first \$50,000 to the first \$100,000 of the fair market value of the residence would be a positive development, Coleman said.

**Adjourn**

Being no other business, the meeting was adjourned.

  
Patricia C. Hartung  
Executive Director