

2024 ANNUAL REPORT



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A MESSAGE FROM THE COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

This year has been a blend of challenges and remarkable achievements for Georgetown County. As we reflect on 2024, we celebrate key accomplishments while preparing to address future needs with resilience and innovation.

Here are some highlights from the 2024 calendar year:

- **CPST Referendum Approved:** Georgetown County residents voted to implement a 1% Capital Project Sales Tax, which will fund critical infrastructure projects, including water and sewer improvements in rural areas and a new emergency operations center. The tax goes into effect May 1, 2025, and will remain in place for eight years. It is conservatively estimated to raise about \$10 million annually. Approval of this referendum is a transformative step forward for our community.
- **Detention Center Groundbreaking:** In June, Georgetown County broke ground on a new Detention Center. This state-of-the-art facility symbolizes our commitment to justice, safety, and the well-being of our residents.
- **Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting:** For the seventh consecutive year, Georgetown County earned this prestigious recognition, underscoring our dedication to transparency and fiscal responsibility.
- **Awards for Excellence:** Georgetown County staff members earned several notable accolades. Brandon Ellis, Director of Emergency Services, was named Director of the Year by the SC Emergency Management Association. Building Official Stephen Elliott contributed significantly to floodplain management and was honored nationally. Public Information Officer Jackie Broach received several awards at the national and state levels in recognition for outstanding communication initiatives.
- **Departmental Accreditation/Reaccreditation:** The Sheriff's Office received a national accreditation and the Public Services Department received international reaccreditation. For each department, this achievement was a testament to their excellence in operations.
- **Retirements:** We bid farewell to Chief Magistrate Isaac Pyatt, whose 40 years of service shaped our legal system, and other distinguished retirees who left indelible marks on our county.
- **Commitment to fiscal responsibility:** This year's \$104.7 million budget reflects a careful balance of fiscal responsibility and strategic investments. Key allocations addressed infrastructure, employee compensation, and public safety enhancements.



You'll read more about these topics in later sections of this report. Thank you for your interest in Georgetown County and its accomplishments and challenges from 2024.

Angela Christian
COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES & HUMAN RESOURCES



The Administrative Services and Human Resources Department of Georgetown County achieved numerous milestones in 2024, reflecting its commitment to employee well-being, cost savings, and community engagement.

Major Accomplishments

- **High Performance Employer Award:**

Georgetown County was recognized by Gallagher for achieving the Best Results in Physical Wellbeing among more than 185 employers in the Eastern U.S. The county's innovative health clinic, which offers free care and medications to employees and their families, has contributed to significant improvements in employee health and a 13.11% reduction in healthcare costs over the past five years, compared to the industry trend of rising costs.

- **Cost Savings and Benefits Enhancements:** The county is on track to save \$700,000 in health insurance costs for 2024. Stop-loss insurance costs were reduced by \$58,000 for the 2025 calendar year. Additionally, a partial benefits plan was introduced for permanent part-time employees, demonstrating a commitment to supporting a broader range of staff.

- **Fraud Protection Service Implementation:** In March, Georgetown County launched a Property Fraud Alert service through the Register of Deeds office. This free service helps residents monitor for

fraudulent real estate transactions, providing immediate alerts when documents matching their registered names are recorded. This initiative enhances security and public trust.

- **Safety and Risk Management Initiatives:** The department received the Outstanding Safety Achievement Award for a program addressing heat-related illnesses among employees. Additionally, Risk Manager Holley Laycock earned the Service Award from the S.C. Association of Counties for her efforts in supporting other counties with best practices in risk management.
- **Community Leadership and Engagement:** Administrative Services played a pivotal role in the successful voter approval of the Capital Project Sales Tax proposal by spearheading public education efforts.
- **Digitization of Property Records:** The Register of Deeds Office transitioned property records to a fully digital format and expanded land records accessibility online. Mortgages dating back to July 1986 and deeds dating back to January 1977 have been scanned and can now be accessed online. Plats dating back to July 1988 have additionally been scanned.
- **Connecting Veterans with their Benefits:** The Veterans Services Office hosted a Benefits Claims Clinic in July in partnership with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs as part of a new outreach campaign. The event

was attended by more than 100 local veterans, making it easier for them to access services without having to travel long distances. The clinic brought the full resources of the regional office in Columbia to veterans in their community. Additionally, multiple events took place to honor veterans for their service.



A Veterans Benefit Claims Clinic in June was attended by more than 100 local veterans.

Key Metrics and Innovations

- The county's workers' Compensation rate was reduced to 0.76, resulting in a \$205,000 savings for the county.
- Completed 74 property damage claims, recovering more than \$300,000 in insurance reimbursements and \$17,453 in glass claims reimbursement.
- More than 10,500 documents were recorded and \$3.4 million collected in the Register of Deeds Office. Of these, 60% have been e-recorded.
- New countywide aerial photography imaging was completed.

Looking Ahead

The Administrative Services and Human Resources Department remains focused on enhancing employee support, improving operational efficiencies, and delivering innovative solutions to benefit Georgetown County residents and staff alike. These achievements reflect the department's dedication to fostering a healthier, safer, and more engaged community.

Giving Back to the Community

In October, Georgetown County employees collected 888 pounds of nonperishable food items to donate to Helping Hands of Georgetown. The annual food drive is organized by the county's Morale Committee, which is overseen by the Administrative Services and Human Resources Department. Pictured, staff members Randy Akers, Russell Goodale and Maya Morant drop off donations with Helping Hands Executive Director Brendon Barber at the Georgetown distribution center.



AIRPORT

2024 was a transformative year for the Georgetown County Airport, with significant developments that enhance its economic impact, operational capacity and reputation as a vital regional hub.

Operational Success

- **Traffic Increase:** Daily aircraft operations at the Georgetown County Airport have increased by more than 33%, driving additional revenue for the Fixed Base Operator (FBO) and the county. This rise in activity reinforces the airport's role as a critical asset for regional commerce and connectivity.

Economic Development

- **Construction Completion:** A U.S. Economic Development Administration project was successfully completed, paving the way for up to four new aviation-related businesses to establish operations at the airport. This project promises to create high-paying jobs and expand the airport's economic contribution to Georgetown County. The newly constructed Taxiway Delta is a

key component of this initiative.

- **Business Growth:** The airport has received four Letters of Intent from businesses eager to expand their operations at the facility. Negotiations for Land License Agreements are underway, signaling a strong demand for aviation opportunities in the County.

Media and Publicity

- The airport garnered national attention in 2024, with three prominent articles showcasing its new Economic Development Area. These articles emphasized the facility's growth potential and its ability to attract aviation-related businesses, further boosting its reputation.

Looking Ahead

The Georgetown County Airport remains a cornerstone of economic development and innovation in the region. With new business opportunities, enhanced operations, and increasing traffic, the airport is poised for continued growth and success.



In April, one of the last two B-29 Superfortress airplanes still flying was on site at the Georgetown Airport, drawing a huge crowd.

BUILDING, PLANNING & ZONING

The Building, Planning and Zoning Department made substantial progress in 2024, advancing strategic plans and implementing initiatives that foster growth, streamline processes, and enhance quality of life for residents.

Major Accomplishments

- **Comprehensive Plan Updates:** The department made major progress in updating the Comprehensive Plan, with all 10 required elements now adopted. In 2024, the Population, Priority Investment, Land Use and Natural Resources elements were approved. The Land Use Element, a particularly complex component, was finalized in July with the assistance of a consultant. The Natural Resources Element was approved in December, completing this multi-year project initiated in late 2021.
- **Impact Fee Revisions:** On July 1, new impact fees for commercial and residential properties took effect. These updates introduced a square footage-based structure for residential developments, ensuring fairer distribution of costs. The changes are being phased in over three years, with rates increasing incrementally.
- **Blight Removal Efforts:** Phase II of the Spring Gully blight removal project was completed, clearing nine blighted structures using American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds. Combined with Phase I, the project has removed 20 structures to date, with Phase III planning underway.
- **Code Enforcement and Nuisance Control:** The Code Enforcement Division successfully addressed two high-profile nuisance violations through legal channels, resulting in the removal of these violations.

Community and Professional Engagement

- **Heirs Property Clinic:** The department co-sponsored and participated in an Heirs Property Clinic in February, addressing legal and property management challenges for families.
- **Damage Assessment Training:** Staff collaborated with the Emergency Management Division to train Damage Assessment Teams in using new Forerunner software, enhancing

ing storm damage assessment capabilities.

- **National Recognition:** Representatives presented on flood regulations and innovative software solutions at the Association of State Flood Plain Managers national conference, furthering Georgetown County's leadership in floodplain management.
- **Affordable Housing:** The department supported a Housing Forum focused on affordable housing solutions.
- **Public Input:** The department solicited and received a huge amount of public input on various elements of the Comprehensive Plan — particularly the land use element. Three open houses were attended by more than 300 people and 1,770 individual data points were collected. Five focus group meetings were held with groups including HOAs, developers, employers and environmental groups, among others. Four public “roadshow meetings” took place throughout the county, along with additional listening sessions, a virtual brownbag lunch event and more.

Looking Ahead

The department remains dedicated to implementing strategic improvements and addressing community needs. With the Comprehensive Plan essentially complete and impactful programs underway, the Department of Building, Planning and Zoning continues to play a vital role in shaping Georgetown County's future.

By the numbers...

- ⇒ The Zoning Division investigated 35-40 complaints per month in 2024 and issued 10-15 Orders to Remedy per month.
- ⇒ The Planning Department reviewed 258 plats this year and processed 45 rezoning requests.
- ⇒ The Building Department performed 6,368 inspections and issued 3,074 building permits during calendar year 2024.

COURTS

Georgetown County Courts marked significant milestones and faced key transitions this year that highlighted the ongoing commitment to justice and community service.

Milestones and Achievements

- **Retirement of Chief Magistrate Isaac Pyatt:** After 27 years on the bench and 40 years of service to Georgetown County, Chief Magistrate Isaac Pyatt retired in January. His career, which began in law enforcement and transitioned to the judiciary, left a legacy of fairness, compassion, and community-focused decision-making. Pyatt’s leadership extended beyond the courtroom, contributing to statewide judicial education and mentoring programs.



Isaac Pyatt



Tony Love

- **New Leadership in the Magistrate Court:** John A. “Tony” Love, previously Associate Chief Magistrate, was promoted to Chief Magistrate, bringing extensive experience and a strong commitment to community service. Love’s work with the county’s Drug Court program has been particularly impactful, helping individuals overcome substance abuse challenges and reintegrate into society. Judge Steven Pop succeeded Love as Associate Chief Magistrate, continuing a legacy of fairness and accessibility in the court system. Mary C. Vanderhost, a longtime employee of the Clerk of Court’s Office, was sworn in on July 19 as the new Georgetown area magistrate.
- **Recognition for Outstanding Service:** Georgetown County Clerk of Court Alma White was honored with the Robert K. Patterson Sr. Community Achievement Award, presented by Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Inc.’s Georgetown Chapter. White was recognized for her decades of service, not only in her role as Clerk of Court since 2001 but also as an educator, journalist, and public servant.

Community Engagement and Education

- **Empathy in Action Event:** The Probate Court co-hosted the Empathy in Action event, designed to raise awareness about the struggles faced by individuals seeking help for mental health and substance abuse issues. The event provided participants with a hands-on experience of navigating systemic barriers and underscored the need for collaborative solutions among policymakers and service providers.
- **Outreach to Senior Centers:** The Probate Court conducted outreach programs at senior centers across Georgetown County, educating residents on estate planning, probate processes, and the court’s role in safeguarding family assets.

Looking Ahead

The Courts Department remains committed to enhancing public trust and access to justice. With new leadership and a continued focus on community engagement, the department aims to address emerging challenges and uphold its mission of serving the people of Georgetown County with integrity and fairness.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

In 2024, the Georgetown County Economic Development Department faced significant challenges, including the closure of one of the county's major employers and operating without a director. Despite these hurdles, the department made substantial progress on several key projects, demonstrating resilience and dedication to the county's economic prosperity. County Administrator Angela Christian has committed to resuming the search for a department director in 2025, a critical step in bolstering the team and accelerating progress.

Key Accomplishments

- **Industrial Park Development:** The Georgetown County Business Center in Andrews is nearing full capacity with several new companies constructing facilities there, including Spry, Craftmade Foods and Diatom. Zilmet USA is advancing construction on its facility, and Santee Electric is preparing to build a 100,000-square-foot structure to accommodate future tenants. This flurry of activity represents a major boost to the county's industrial capacity and long-term economic prospects.
- **Harbor Dredging Funds:** A request from Georgetown County and the City of Georgetown for federal funds to deepen the inner harbor was granted. The project will receive \$6.5 million, allowing the harbor in Georgetown to be deepened for the first time since before the Army Corps of Engineers announced in 2008 that it would no longer dredge that channel. In the ensuing years, major silting has occurred, leaving some areas of the harbor with no more than 3 feet of depth at low tide. This is a hazard for recreational boats and threatens the area's future as a working waterfront, as shrimp boats and small to mid-size recreational boats require at least a 7-foot depth at mean low water to operate.
- **Pennyroyal Industrial Park Progress:** Negotiations with an undisclosed company, referred to as "Project Current," are underway. Infrastructure improvements, including the widening of the Sampit Channel, are being supported by a \$1.3 million grant from the

S.C. Department of Commerce. These upgrades will enhance the site's appeal to potential users.

- **Port Property Environmental Assessments:** Following the county's acquisition of the Georgetown port property last year, Phase I of environmental assessments has been completed. The department has engaged GEL Engineering to begin Phase II. The property, cleared of several dilapidated structures, is primed for future redevelopment.
- **Airport Expansion Plans:** The Georgetown County Airport completed its master plan, which will guide future improvements to optimize the site for aviation use.

Addressing Major Challenges

- **International Paper Closure:** The closure of the International Paper mill in Georgetown at the end of this year dealt a significant blow to the local economy, displacing nearly 700 employees and impacting hundreds of contractors. In response, the county collaborated with SC Works, local agencies and regional partners to organize a coordinated response. This included skill development workshops and a job fair held at the Howard Center, connecting impacted workers with employers offering new opportunities. County leadership has made it a priority to help impacted families in finding local employment, ensuring they can remain part of the Georgetown community.

Looking Ahead

With the search for a new director resuming in 2025 and the continued dedication of the existing staff, the county's economic development efforts are positioned to achieve even greater success in the years ahead. Land is being sought for development of a new industrial park. The county is also poised for the next phase at the port property. Clemson University students were challenged with creating a proposal for redevelopment of the property, which will be presented in January 2025. If the proposal is accepted, a Request for Proposal will be issued for a Master Plan for the site.

EMERGENCY SERVICES

The Georgetown County Emergency Services Department had a remarkable year in 2024, marked by leadership recognition, innovative programs and critical response efforts that strengthened community safety and resilience.

Major Accomplishments

- **Director of the Year:**

Brandon Ellis, Emergency Services Director, was named Director of the Year by the South Carolina Emergency Management Association in February. This award highlights his exemplary service, including his coordination of hurricane evacuation updates, leadership during Tropical Storm Idalia, and innovative strategies for deployable satellite communications. Ellis' commitment to enhancing emergency management capabilities has positioned Georgetown County as a model for other regions.



Brandon Ellis

- **Community Engagement and Preparedness:** The department conducted several Hurricane Preparedness Town Hall Meetings across the county, fostering collaboration with neighboring Horry County. It also launched Tropical Talks, a joint initiative with the Public Information Division, to educate the public about tropical weather risks. Additionally, Georgetown County Emergency Services and its Emergency Management Division represented Georgetown County at state and federal events, including Congressman Russell Fry's Federal Agency Day and the Governor's Annual Hurricane Workshop.
- **Innovative Emergency Planning:** In conjunction with the S.C. Emergency Manage-

ment Division and other coastal counties, Georgetown County Emergency Management updated the Hurricane Evacuation Study, hurricane zones and evacuation plan, emphasizing impact-based decision-making. The new plan reduces what Ellis calls the "over evacuation problem" by focusing on storm surge rather than wind speed for a more realistic determination of whether evacuation will be needed.

- **Enhanced Training and Partnerships:** The Emergency Services Department hosted training sessions for county personnel and stakeholders, including Emergency Operations Center (EOC) training and joint damage assessment exercises. The Department director also delivered the keynote address at FEMA's Basic Academy graduation and participated in multiple conferences to share best practices. Ellis also served on a roundtable regarding firefighter recruit school initiatives at the S.C. Association of Counties annual conference, and several other noteworthy events.
- **Fire Safe Community:** Georgetown County was once again named a Fire Safe Community, thanks to the efforts of Georgetown County Fire & EMS and Midway Fire Rescue. The departments were recognized by Fire Safe South Carolina for community risk reduction efforts. Just 154 departments across the state received the Fire Safe designation this year. The communities designated under this program continuously work to reduce fire related injuries, thereby decreasing the risks for residents and firefighters. They also promote consistent fire safety messaging and stress the importance of providing all relative data collected at fire scenes.
- **J. Mitchell Graham Award:** Georgetown County received an Honorable Mention in the 2024 J. Mitchell Graham Memorial

Awards Competition. Presented by the S.C. Association of Counties, the award recognizes counties that address community challenges, implement operational improvements or enhance their residents' quality of life in a unique way. Georgetown County was recognized for Midway Fire Rescue's development of a new firefighter ability test, which replaced an outdated test and is better able to get an accurate gauge of a firefighter's ability to perform their job duties.



Pictured from left, County Council Members Louis Morant and Clint Elliott, SCAC President Bill Robinson, Battalion Chief Pete Copeland of Midway's Safety Committee, and Georgetown County Emergency Services Director Brandon Ellis during the presentation of the J. Mitchell Graham Honorable Mention.

- Improved Services and Equipment:** New EMS medical protocols were introduced and the Medical Nitrous Program for pain management was implemented. Grant funding was secured for state-of-the-art EMS simulation mannequins and new equipment, including Lucas CPR devices and a water rescue boat. A Capital Project Sales Tax approved by voters in November will mean future construction of a new Emergency Operations Center and replacement of a fire station at DeBordieu. The new EOC will be constructed on the same campus as a new Detention Center currently under construction. Site clearing for the EOC has already begun.

Notable Response Efforts

- Hurricane Helene and Other Weather Events:** The department activated the EOC twice in preparation for storms (Hurricanes Debby and Helene), coordinated response efforts, and deployed personnel to assist other counties impacted by Hurricane Helene. It also provided critical support during the severe flooding from a non-tropical low-

pressure system in December 2023, relocating county offices and aiding affected residents through the Winyah Bay Community Organizations Active in Disaster (COAD). Additionally, the department monitored and responded to flooding impacts along the Santee River following unprecedented outflows from the Santee Cooper Dam.

- Coal Pile Incident Recovery:** Georgetown County Emergency Services assisted in the response and recovery efforts during the Santee Cooper Winyah Generating Station coal pile incident, which claimed one life.
- Support for Emergency Partners:** The department hosted temporary office space for the City of Georgetown Fire Department after their headquarters were impacted by flooding.

Looking Ahead

The Emergency Services Department remains committed to continuous improvement, fostering resilience, and enhancing the safety of Georgetown County residents through innovative programs, effective training, and unwavering dedication.

FINANCE

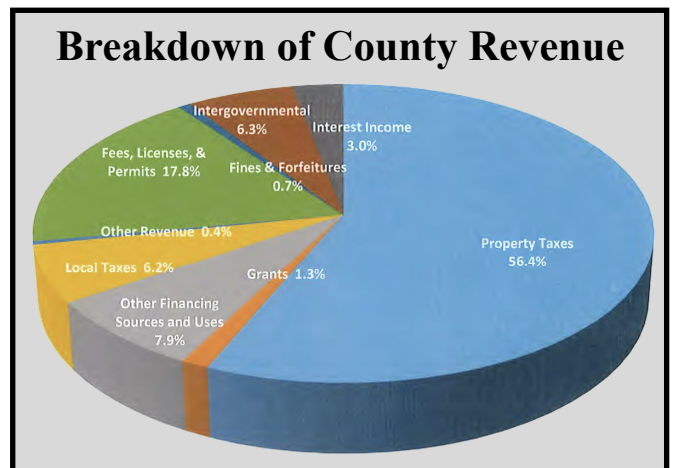
The Georgetown County Finance Department achieved another remarkable year, reinforcing its reputation for excellence while addressing the evolving fiscal needs of the county.

Key Accomplishments

- **Excellence in Financial Reporting:** For the seventh consecutive year, the Finance Department received the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting from the Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada. This award recognizes the county's annual comprehensive financial report for its adherence to high standards, transparency, and clarity. This continued achievement underscores the department's commitment to financial accountability and its role as a steward of public trust.
- **Transparency and Accessibility:** The department maintained a strong emphasis on transparency, publishing detailed financial reports online to ensure residents and stakeholders could easily access and understand the county's financial status. The reports were praised for their full disclosure and ability to motivate potential users to engage with the financial narrative.
- **Fiscal Responsibility:** The 2024/2025 budget reflects a strategic approach to balancing the county's priorities with fiscal constraints. This \$105 million budget, a 4.3% increase from the previous year, includes significant investments in employee compensation, technology upgrades, emergency preparedness and infrastructure improvements. These efforts demonstrate a forward-thinking approach to addressing rising operational costs while preparing for long-term sustainability.

Budget Highlights

- **Support for Employees:** The budget allocated a 5% pay increase for all employees, with additional adjustments for public safety personnel. Sworn officers earning below \$50,000 annually saw their salaries raised to \$53,000, with proportional increases for higher brackets, ensuring competitive compensation and enhancing recruitment and retention.
- **New Initiatives:**
 - ⇒ Establishment of a Disaster Recovery Fund to safeguard against unforeseen events like natural disasters and economic disruptions.
 - ⇒ Investments in technology infrastructure, including enhanced cybersecurity and digitization of public records to improve service efficiency and data security.
 - ⇒ Infrastructure projects such as dock repairs, playground upgrades, and the installation of a new elevator at the Rice Museum.



Looking Ahead

The Finance Department continues to face challenges such as inflationary pressures and aging infrastructure. However, its strategic approach to budgeting and fiscal management positions Georgetown County to navigate these hurdles effectively.

As the department looks ahead, its commitment to transparency, innovation, and accountability remains steadfast, ensuring the financial stability and well-being of Georgetown County for years to come.

LIBRARIES

For the Georgetown County Library system, 2024 was marked by significant milestones and transformative projects. From honoring its 225th anniversary to expanding services and facilities, the library system reinforced its vital role in the community.

225th Anniversary Celebration

- **Commemorating History:** This year was the library's 225th anniversary and the occasion was celebrated with a series of programs recognizing its substantial contributions to the community. This milestone was marked by public lectures and other activities funded through \$45,000 in grants from the Humanities Council SC and the S.C. State Library, as well as a \$10,000 county grant for marketing. Events highlighted the library's journey from its 1799 founding to its present-day service for all residents.
- **Community Engagement:** A special presentation, "Happy Birthday Georgetown Library," was featured on YouTube, celebrating the library's history and legacy.

Facility Improvements

- **Georgetown Branch Renovation and Expansion:** Following a \$2.8 million renovation, funded in part by a \$1.4 million bequest from the late Mrs. Jean Flournoy Moody and matching funds from the county, the Georgetown Library reopened on Aug. 1. This project included:
 - ⇒ A 3,120-square-foot expansion housing a modern auditorium and office space.
 - ⇒ Renovations such as new flooring, lighting, furniture, and a refreshed foyer.
 - ⇒ Landscaping improvements supported by the Friends of the Georgetown Library, who are also raising \$40,000 for a sculpture of Harriet Tubman and her nephew James Bowley to be commissioned and installed in the near future.
- **Reopening:** While awaiting final furnishings and landscaping, the library welcomed patrons back this summer after a 14-month closure, emphasizing the community's eagerness to return. A grand reopening and ribbon cutting ceremony took place in November.



Following a soft opening in August, the Georgetown branch had a grand reopening and ribbon cutting event on Nov. 7.

Expanding Accessibility

- **New Bookmobile:** A new, state-of-the-art bookmobile, funded by a \$225,000 Community Development Block Grant, began operations in May. Designed to enhance access for underserved areas, the vehicle includes mobile



A new Bookmobile hit the streets in May after a year of design and construction.

Wi-Fi, improved shelving, and safety features like multiple backup cameras. It serves daycares, nursing homes, and rural communities, circulating up to 1,200 items monthly.

Programs and Grants

- **Innovative Grants:** The library secured \$124,419 in grant funding for programs, including:
 - ⇒ **Food Literacy at the Library and Shared Traditions**, which celebrate cultural heritage.
 - ⇒ **Lights, Camera, Action**, a digital video production program for youth.
- **Cultural Enrichment:** Programs like "Shared Traditions" and creative tech labs furthered the library's mission to foster learning and cultural appreciation.

Usage and Challenges

- **Library Usage:** The system served 52,796 patrons, with 149,320 items circulated. Online engagement remained strong, with 225,000 visits across digital platforms.
- **Challenges:** The Georgetown Library's closure during renovations contributed to a decrease in physical item circulation. However, this was mitigated by temporary library services and bookmobile stops.

Looking Ahead

The Georgetown County Library System continues to expand its offerings, innovate its services, and preserve its rich history while meeting the evolving needs of the community. Its milestones in 2024 exemplify its dedication to learning, accessibility and community engagement.

Pictured are some of this year's library programs. From top: Georgetown native and chef Altor Smith gives a demonstration of how to make Lowcountry rice and fish during a program on "distinct Georgetown foodways" in August. Also in August, participants spent a beautiful day on a salt marsh paddle with prominent wildlife and nature writer John Lane, author of "My Paddle to the Sea" and "Still Up-right and Headed Downstream." In March, participants were able to enjoy some of their favorite songs from the Fab Four during Yesterdaze: A Beatles Tribute. The show was a musical trip back to the 1960s and Beatlemania and was part of the Waccamaw Library's Musician Series, sponsored by the Friends of the Waccamaw Library. Many of the library system's programs are available to watch anytime on the library's popular [YouTube channel](#).



PARKS AND COMMUNITY SERVICES



A small group of G.O.A.T. Herd members pose with the program's flag during an outing.

For the Parks and Recreation Department, 2024 was a year focused on community engagement and innovative outdoor programs.

Expansion of Outdoor Programs

- **Georgetown Outdoor Adventure Trails:** Launched in January, this initiative program (called G.O.A.T. for short) encourages residents and visitors to explore local trails through walking, biking or paddling. The program emphasizes physical activity and appreciation of the county's natural beauty. It has grown tremendously since its launch with more than 1,000 members and the development of numerous subgroups, including the Golden Goats, a group of seniors who utilize the program to stay active. A webpage for the program was set up this winter at gtcounty.org/GOAT. It also has a very active Facebook group.
- **Compass Navigation Courses:** Introduced in March at 8 Oaks Park and Stables Park, these beginner-level courses teach navigation skills using traditional or smartphone compasses. Participants locate waypoints marked by metal squirrels to complete the trail.
- **Kids TRACK Trails:** Three new trails were opened at Rocky Point Landing, 8 Oaks Park and Stables Park this fall. These trails include educational brochures and activities designed to engage children in outdoor exploration and learning. Participants can register their adventures online to earn prizes.

Capital Improvement Plan

- **Waverly Park:** Completed in March, this \$6 million tournament-level baseball and softball facility is a major addition to the county's recreational infrastructure, marking the culmination of an 18-year Capital Improvement Plan.

Community Events & Engagement

- **Anthuan Maybank Day:** This annual event in April celebrates the achievements of Olympic Gold Medalist Anthuan Maybank at the track named in his honor. This year, Maybank also participated in the hosting of the Waccamaw Senior Sports Classic and a youth track exposition at the Maybank track.
- **Outdoor Expo:** Hosted in October, this event brought outdoor enthusiasts together to promote environmental stewardship alongside the popular "Forest's Not So Spooky Halloween Trail," a family-friendly Halloween event at Rocky Point Community Forest.
- **Our Marsh Counts (OMC):** The department continued to be heavily involved in this col-



A ribbon cutting at Waverly Park took place March 13.

laborative initiative to address plastic pollution in our waterways. Activities included educational programs, litter sweeps, and the development of inlet-friendly business practices. A \$275,692 grant was received to support expanded litter collection and educational programming.



Parks and Recreation is hopeful that funding may allow for additional compacting trash cans for the Marshwalk. Additionally, the department is discussing opportunities to install a physical barrier along the bottom of the Marshwalk to keep litter from blowing from the decks into the marshes.

- **Youth Sports and Education:** The department strengthened its partnership with the Georgetown County School District through the Sportsmanship Initiative, aligning youth training programs with high school athletic standards and offering mentorship sessions to promote life skills. Youth sports participation numbers continue to grow.
- **Volunteer Opportunities:** The department continues to offer expanded volunteer opportunities throughout the year, encouraging community participation in recreation programs and sharing skills. With the addition of the G.O.A.T. program, outdoor opportunities for trail projects, litter sweeps and water monitoring training are planned in 2025. Additionally, through the Sportsmanship Initiative, recreation staff and high school coaches are working in tandem to assist volunteer coaches in improving coaching skills through assistance at practices and games. Off-season coaching boot camps will continue to offer opportunities to improve upon coaching skills.

Senior Programs

- **Expanded Programming:** The Department's Bureau of Aging Services (BOAS) significantly expanded senior fitness programs by introducing multiple sessions of evidence-based activities, including the Arthritis Foundation's Walk With Ease and Tai Chi programs countywide. These initiatives aim to enhance the health and well-being of sen-

ior residents by providing accessible and effective fitness options. The Walk With Ease program is designed to help individuals with arthritis or related conditions reduce pain, increase balance, strength, and walking pace, and improve overall health. The Tai Chi program focuses on improving balance, flexibility, and overall physical health through gentle, flowing movements.

- **Partnership with Tidelands YMCA:** In addition to county facilities, the Tai Chi program has been extended to local Tidelands YMCA facilities, broadening access for seniors and fostering community partnerships to promote active lifestyles among older adults.
- **Milestones:** In 2024, BOAS achieved several significant milestones to enhance the well-being of senior residents.
 - ⇒ The Bureau's office and the Georgetown Senior Center moved to the Howard Center. This new location offers improved facilities and accessibility.
 - ⇒ A dedicated newsletter was launched to keep program participants and area seniors informed about programs, activities, and services available at the senior centers, fostering better communication and engagement.
 - ⇒ The Bureau continued to offer a range of services, including: home delivered meals for homebound seniors age 60 and up, group dining, health screenings and wellness programs, transportation services and a wide range of fun activities and events that provide opportunities for socialization, learning, and recreation.
- **Volunteer Opportunities:** BOAS continued to offer expanded volunteer roles, inviting community members to contribute by teaching classes, sharing hobbies, planning activities and coordinating special events.

Looking Ahead

The Parks and Recreation Department remains dedicated to fostering community engagement, enhancing outdoor experiences, and promoting health and wellness for all residents. By expanding recreational opportunities and supporting environmental stewardship, the department continues to play a vital role in enriching the lives of Georgetown County residents.

PUBLIC INFORMATION

The Georgetown County Public Information Office achieved significant milestones in 2024, expanding its reach, fostering community engagement, and receiving national recognition for excellence in government communication.

Major Accomplishments

- **Launch of the First Friday Podcast:** In January, the Public Information Department introduced a monthly podcast titled “First Friday with Georgetown County.” It serves as a new vehicle by which to deliver information concerning county news, events and interviews with county staff and other county-affiliated guests. The podcast, hosted by Public Information Officer Jackie Broach, is primarily accessed by listeners on YouTube, but is also available via Apple, Spotify and other top podcast locations. Its audience continues to grow monthly.
- **Educational Campaigns:** Public Information played a key role in educating residents about the Capital Project Sales Tax and Local Option Sales Tax referendums, ensuring voters had easy access to the information needed to make informed decisions.
- **Social Media Success:** Facebook remains the county’s most popular social media platform, with over 24,000 followers and more than 3.4 million impressions this year. Instagram saw significant engagement, with 37,492 unique likes and 3.2 million impressions, helping to amplify the county’s initiatives. LinkedIn, with 706 followers, has become an effective tool, garnering over 71,000 impressions and highlighting the county’s achievements.
- **Awards and Recognition:** Public Information Officer Jackie Broach won two National Association of County Information Officers Awards of Excellence for photography, recognizing her exceptional work on projects like the Public Works apprenticeship program. NACIO's Awards of Excellence program honors the innovative, creative, and outstanding work of county government communicators throughout the nation. The

county’s newsletter, the Georgetown County Chronicle, also received statewide recognition from the South Carolina Press Association. In both cases, Georgetown County was competing against many larger and better funded agencies.

Community Programs and More

- **Taxpayer Academy:** The second annual Georgetown County Taxpayer Academy, held during National County Government Month in April, graduated seven enthusiastic residents who gained a deeper understanding of county operations and services. This program continues to transform participants into informed residents who can help tell the county’s story across the community.
- **International Paper Shutdown:** The County’s PIO led the joint city/county media and public communication efforts following the unexpected and devastating announcement that International Paper would close its mill by the end of this year. This resulted in ensuring coordinated, timely and effective communication.
- **Employee Recognition Programs:** The department coordinated awards such as Employee of the Quarter, Manager of the Year and Volunteers of the Year, publicly recognizing and celebrating outstanding contributions from county staff.
- **Training and Development:** Participated in training sessions on communication best practices and worked with the South Carolina Association of Counties to secure statewide recognition for Georgetown County’s achievements.
- **FOIA:** In 2024, the department processed and worked 220 Freedom of Information Act requests, closing 216 by the year’s end.

Looking Ahead

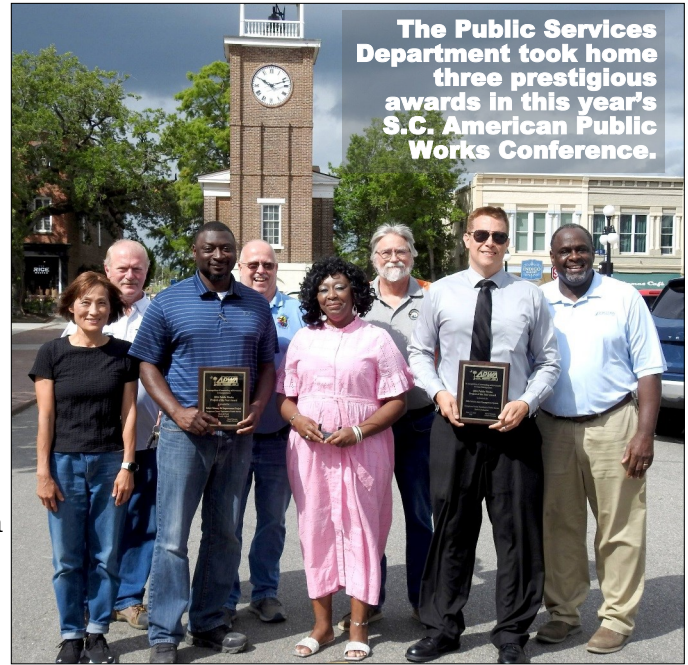
The Public Information Office will continue to innovate and expand its outreach, leveraging diverse communication platforms to inform and engage residents. Through award-winning storytelling and strategic communication efforts, the office remains dedicated to fostering transparency, trust and collaboration in Georgetown County.

PUBLIC SERVICES

Throughout this year, the Georgetown County Public Services Department's work reflected its commitment to improving infrastructure, fostering community engagement and enhancing the quality of life for residents.

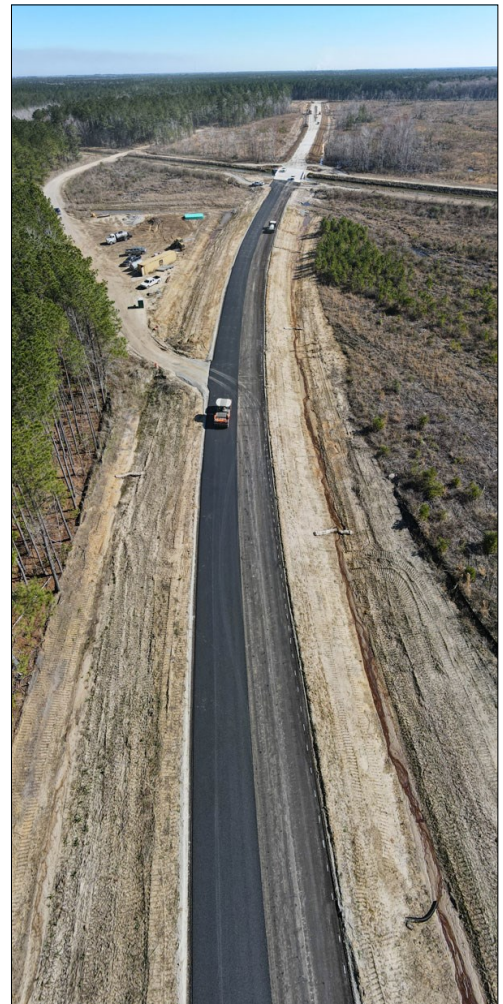
Major Accomplishments

- **APWA Reaccreditation:** For the fourth time, the department received full accreditation from the American Public Works Association (APWA). This recognition underscores excellence in public works management practices and a commitment to continuous improvement.
- **National and State Awards:** Georgetown County swept awards at the South Carolina American Public Works Association conference, winning:
 - ⇒ Project of the Year for Phase 1 of the Brick Chimney Road project.
 - ⇒ GIS-Centric Asset Management System of the Year for its innovative technology improving efficiency and service.
 - ⇒ Special recognition for hosting the Backhoe Rodeo for 20 years.



Infrastructure Improvements

- **Road Projects:** Major projects included paving and resurfacing roads throughout the county, such as Corner Loop, Soldierwood Drive and others, totaling over \$3.3 million in improvements.
- **Drainage Enhancements:** Significant efforts such as the Rainbow Drive drainage project and federally funded initiatives, including the Silver Hill/Graves Station drainage project, addressed critical stormwater management needs.
- **Bike and Pedestrian Facilities:** Projects including the Murrells Inlet Bike Bridge and Waverly Road Bike Path enhanced connectivity and help continue to promote outdoor activity.



Phase 1 of Georgetown County's Brick Chimney Road Project was recognized as Project of the Year.

Environmental & Community Initiatives

- **Brownfields Assessment Grant:** The department received \$500,000 from the Environmental Protection Agency to begin rehabilitating contaminated sites, transforming them into community assets through inclusive public input.
- **Environmental Services:** This Division hosted two Household Hazardous Waste events, serving more than 900 residents and collecting 165,000 pounds of roadside litter through a part-time litter control crew. Educational events reached more than 400 children.
- **Stormwater Education and Control:** Efforts included public

outreach and securing more than \$20,000 for mosquito control-related items.

- **Training and Certifications:** Staff completed Solid Waste Association of North America certifications and other specialized training, enhancing expertise in recycling, landfill operations, and environmental safety.

Looking Ahead

While Georgetown County Public Services celebrated a year of successes, challenges such as increasing demand on infrastructure and the need for continued funding remain focal points. The department plans to build on 2024's achievements by advancing long-term projects like Phase 2 of Brick Chimney Road and expanding environmental initiatives.

Georgetown County Public Services demonstrated in 2024 its ability to address diverse community needs through innovative leadership, teamwork, and strategic investment. These accomplishments affirm its dedication to enhancing the county's infrastructure, environment, and overall quality of life.



Public Works Staff worked around the clock in the lead-up to Hurricane Debby to mitigate as many potential contributors to flooding as possible.

BY THE NUMBERS

\$3.3 million

in road improvements

165,000

pounds of roadside litter collected

329 miles

of roadway maintained by the county

900

households participated in Household Hazardous Waste Collections

68.4

miles of dirt roads

975

total roads maintained by the county

\$20,259

received from S.C. Dept. of Health for mosquito control

\$3.37 million

spent on bikeway projects

\$2 million

grant received for Silver Hill/Graves Station drainage project

SHERIFF'S OFFICE

For the Georgetown County Sheriff's Office, 2024 was a year of progress and achievement, enhancing public safety through innovative programs, community engagement and infrastructure improvements.

Key Accomplishments

- **Calls and Services:** The Sheriff's Office responded to 38,987 calls for service, issued 7,326 traffic tickets, and conducted 366 transports, demonstrating its commitment to maintaining safety and order across the county.
- **New Detention Center Groundbreaking:** In June, the Sheriff's Office and county officials broke ground on an 85,000-square-foot detention center, set to open in 2027. The \$65 million facility will include 256 beds with expansion potential, a morgue and a building for the Sheriff's Re-entry Program, which focuses on rehabilitation and reducing recidivism.
- **National Accreditation:** GCSO earned CALEA accreditation, placing it among a select group of dual state and nationally accredited agencies. This recognition reflects excellence in law enforcement operations and policy compliance.
- **Traffic Safety Recognition:** The GCSO Traffic Unit achieved Gold Level status from the S.C. Department of Public Safety for its efforts to combat impaired and reckless driving.

Community Engagement

- **Polar Plunge for Special Olympics:** GCSO raised over \$42,000 to support Special Olympics athletes through its fourth annual event.
- **Citizens Academies:** Two academies offered residents hands-on experience in forensic science, marine patrol, and other aspects of law enforcement.
- **Sheriff's Explorer's Post #333:** A new program was launched for high school students to gain immersive law enforcement experience, including ride-alongs and training



- with different units.
- **Re-entry and Rehabilitation Programs:** The Sheriff's Office expanded the Sheriff's Re-entry Program, offering certification in high-demand trades including welding and HVAC repair. The program has reduced recidivism among participants to less than 10% of the national average and was highlighted this fall in a national professional publication.
- **National Night Out:** Along with the City of Georgetown Police Department, the Sheriff's Office co-hosted this annual event, providing a platform for community members to connect with law enforcement in a friendly and positive way.

Innovations and Technology

- **K9 Program Expansion:** The department welcomed three new Belgian Malinois K-9 officers specializing in narcotics detection and tracking.
- **Grants and Funding:** Staff managed \$2.7 million in grants for equipment, staffing, and technology, including body cameras and forensics tools.

Looking Ahead

The Georgetown County Sheriff's Office remains committed to enhancing safety and fostering trust within the community. With the upcoming detention center opening and continuous investment in technology and community programs, the GCSO is well-positioned to address future challenges while strengthening public safety and community relations.

CLOSING REMARKS

2024 has been a year of resilience and progress for Georgetown County. Across every department, we have worked together to overcome challenges, seize opportunities, and deliver meaningful results for our residents. From significant infrastructure projects and environmental stewardship to innovative programs and strengthened public safety, our accomplishments reflect a shared commitment to enhancing the quality of life in our community.

As we look to the future, we are inspired by the dedication and collaboration of our staff, leadership, and residents. Together, we will continue to build on these achievements, fostering growth, sustainability and inclusivity to ensure Georgetown County remains a place where everyone can thrive.

2025 will additionally mark the beginning of the long process for implementation of projects included under the recently approved Capital Project Sales Tax. One of the first meetings on this topic will take place in early January between the county and municipal partners, and will focus on logistics for moving forward with the projects to be funded by the sales tax.

Thank you for your support and trust in our efforts. We are proud to serve you and look forward to another year of progress and partnership.

CONTACT US



843-545-3063



pio@gtcounty.org



716 Prince Street,
Georgetown, SC 29442



www.gtcounty.org