COVID-19 Update from the Executive Director

Dear LSCOG Communities and Partners:

I hope that you, your family and communities are keeping safe during the COVID-19 pandemic.

During this uncertain time, the Lower Savannah Council of Governments is continuing to work to provide essential services to our communities. However, like most everyone else, we have taken certain precautions to ensure that our staff and clients are safe.

The LSCOG Office on Wagener Road in Aiken was closed to the public in early-mid March and staff were working staggered shift. Early in April, Governor McMaster issued Executive Order 2020-21 putting a mandatory “Home-or-Work Order” in place to help limit the spread of COVID-19. Since then, most LSCOG staff are working from home.

Per the federal and state governments, most of the COGs’ staff work in areas that are considered non-essential services. These staff members work in different divisions and departments, and will continue to work from home on assigned programs and projects. They can be reached by email or phone.

The LSCOG has two programs that are included in the federal and state governments’ definition of Essential Services. The COG will continue to work with Aiken Senior Life Services (ASLS) to ensure that Mobility Management (MM) services are provided to seniors (and others) in the urban area of Aiken County. Mobility Management provides essential transit services that include essential public transit (the Best Friend Express) and getting patients to dialysis, etc. with the Dial-A-Ride service.

The second essential service ensures that senior meals are delivered to existing and new clients throughout the region. The Area Agency on Aging (AAA) is working with vendors and local providers to safeguard the meal pipeline so qualifying seniors receive a well-balanced - nutritious meal each day.

Essential, Finance and Administrative staff are working both out of the Wagener Road Office and at home. That said, all staff members can be contacted by email or phone. A more detailed explanation of how each division/department is continuing to work is in this newsletter.

The above stated policy will run in conjunction with Governor McMaster’s E.O. 2020-21 and will be regularly reviewed. Please contact me if you have any questions and please, please keep yourself and your families safe.

William Molnar, Ph.D.
Executive Director
Human Services Department of Aging and Transit program staff have spent many hours collaborating with the South Carolina Department of Aging (SCDOA) Director, State and Federal transit staff, and our six county contractor partners to insure that the Covid-19 pandemic has a minimal impact on the essential services we provide seniors and the public in the Lower Savannah region. Proper counsel and guidance was given to enable us to form new partnerships and processes to address the senior insecurities that were developing.

By mid-March, all of our six county group dining sites and counties providing evidence-based programs were closed. Working with our contractor partners, temporary home delivered meals are being provided to all who attended the group dining programs. Seniors who were currently receiving home delivered meals are continuing to receive home delivered meals with no interruption. We also are receiving an increase in requests for meal services from seniors because of food insecurity from grocery food shortages. Many seniors called stating they had no food in their home. We have collaborated with people in those communities to secure shelf stable food bags for those seniors. With this increased demand, we have secured meals from a local restaurant and a new national company to provide additional meals. The staff and contractor partners are working collectively to insure that we meet the increased meal demand for our senior population.

Our contractors are also continuing to provide essential transportation services for medical, pharmacy, and grocery shopping trips for their respective counties.

The Best Friend Express and Dial-A-Ride transit service is running normal hours of operation to meet the essential needs of the public in Aiken County. Working with the operator Aiken Senior Life Services, extra safety measures have been put in place to insure rider and bus operator wellbeing during the Covid-19 pandemic. Vehicles are cleaned and disinfected multiple times a day. Sanitary disinfectant wipes and garbage baggies are available for passengers to wipe down their personal space. Passengers are encouraged to practice social distancing and cover coughs and sneezes. Informational posters from the U.S Centers for Disease Control (CDC) on how to stop the spread of this virus are displayed on all vehicles.

The Long Term Care Ombudsman Program is following Covid-19 protocols for nursing and resident facilities by maintaining routine contacts with senior clients by phone and cards and letters until on-site visits are again permitted. Ongoing contact with the fifty-six facility operators and various residents from each home will remind them that their ombudsman is still available for advocacy, complaint resolution and routine contact as needed.

The Elderly Legal Services program referrals and approvals continue without interruption.

The Medication Assistance Program (MAP) is operating two days per week with concentration on the current client’s refills for medications.

The Savannah River Site Retiree Association (SRSRA) will be operating remotely for volunteers to assist retirees by phone.
Planning, Community and Economic Development (PCED) adjusting during COVID-19

The Planning, Community and Economic Development (PCED) Division is adjusting to our “new normal.” PCED is looking at our immediate challenges and those in the future with optimism, resilience and vision. While our daily environment has changed, we are still working on all our grants, projects and tasks to ensure that we are moving forward to accomplish our goals and objectives for the communities we serve.

During this time, we are taking advantage of educational webinars, live chats, and conference calls through our partners such as HUD, ICMA, SCMA, NADO, Department of Commerce, APA, ULI, to get a better understanding of the CARES ACT and how to best be prepared for the effects and repercussions that CoViD-19 will have on our region. In addition to our virtual education, we continue writing and developing CDBG grants for infrastructure improvements in municipalities in the region. Working with and writing the ten-year comprehensive plan updates for municipalities and counties. Staying abreast of transportation planning. Overseeing the Lower Savannah Regional HOME program; working on the Annual Action Plan and upcoming Consolidated Plan for HUD. Working with five of our counties in updating their Hazardous Mitigation Plans for submission to SCEMD/FEMA as well as working with several municipalities and counties in review and updating zoning plans and ordinances. As well as maintaining the financial health of all of our programs for the division.

While we miss being under one roof for our daily operations, we are getting used to new communication methods such as ZOOM, Teams and continue to use conference calls to keep meetings going and projects flowing. The PCED Division is operating with flexibility and business as usual in our state of new normal.

Please let us know how we can help your community during this time.

Fill out your Census Form, grant funds for your community depend on it.

[Website link: www.2020census.gov]

Lower Savannah Workforce Development in the midst of COVID-19

Like much of the nation, the entire workforce development region of Lower Savannah has been impacted by COVID-19. From the closings of our SC Works Centers to the public, to the temporary closures and layoffs that are affecting many of our employer organizations/citizens, we are attempting to adjust to a “new normal.” The Workforce Division of the Lower Savannah Council of Governments has dedicated itself to providing quality workforce development to both employers and jobseekers through this national crisis. Below are just a few of the modified services available within the Lower Savannah Region:

- SC Work Center Services – SC Works Center staff are providing virtual (telephone and email) SC Works services. These services include Unemployment Insurance filings, virtual Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) enrollments and necessary partners referrals
- On-the-Job Training (OJT) – Lower Savannah staff continue to enroll and maintain current OJT contracts for participating employers across the region
- Latest COVID-19/CARES Act updates – Weekly dissemination of federal, state and local information to employers, jobseekers, and workforce development partners is being conducted via mailings, Facebook, and the Lower Savannah Workforce Development Area website, [www.lowersavannahwda.org](http://www.lowersavannahwda.org).

[Website link: www.HUD.gov/Fairhousing]

APRIL is Fair Housing Month
Visit Thoroughbred Country Virtually

Thoroughbred Country staff continues to work to support our region. We know your daily schedule is not what it has been, so we have pulled together informative videos from some of our regional favorites that you can enjoy in the comfort of your home. Please let us know if you have a video that should be on our list. Simply email us at Tourism@LSCOG.org. Take care and be safe.

https://www.tbredcountry.org/Visit-Thoroughbred-Country-Virtually

SCPRT Weekly Dashboard

South Carolina Parks, Recreation & Tourism (SCPRT) is working on a strategic marketing plan for recovery, keeping South Carolina in the minds of consumers and planning to welcome them back when they are ready to travel.

In order to provide our industry partners with the most accurate and up-to-date information during the COVID-19 pandemic, SCPRT has developed a special dashboard that distributed via a weekly e-newsletter. In this dashboard, you will find the latest statistics for our lodging industry, updates on SCPRT programs and activities, insights into consumer activities on SCPRT’s websites and social media platforms, and economic relief resource information. https://www.scprt.com/tourism

Upcoming Committee Events

Visit www.LSCOG.org/events for details.

May 12 | Tourism Advisory Committee meeting
May 14 | LSCOG Executive Committee - TBA
May 19 | Aging Advisory Committee
June 2 | Workforce Development Board Meeting
June 11 | LSCOG Full Board Meeting - Calhoun
Aug. 4 | Workforce Development Board Meeting
Aug. 11 | Tourism Advisory Committee meeting
Aug. 13 | LSCOG Full Board Meeting - Bamberg
Dec. 12 | LSCOG Annual Meeting - Clemson REC