



Jasper County South Carolina

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Airport upgrades, I-95 widening, major infrastructure improvements key to Jasper County in 2023-24

Continuing expansion of the Ridgeland-Claude Dean Airport, including an enlarged parking apron for planes, a fuel farm and automated weather station, and the first steps toward widening Interstate 95 through Jasper County were among major infrastructure improvements across the county in 2023.

For 2024, county leaders expect to find a site for the BMX bike tract project, finalize construction of the airport's fuel farm, address concerns about the animal shelter, adopt new growth management policies, and begin the Pratt Memorial Library renovation project in Ridgeland.

"It was an exciting year of growth across Jasper County, including population growth, development growth and certainly economic growth," said County Council Chairman Marty Sauls.

In addition to being the Chairman of County Council, Sauls also serves as the President of the Southern Carolina Regional Development Alliance (SCA).

"In the last two years, the County Council has authorized numerous incentive agreements with companies proposing to locate in Jasper County and we have celebrated the location of six new companies which will collectively be investing \$264.3 million and creating 754 new jobs," said Sauls.

The County Council continues to work with staff to review development planning while a moratorium on new projects continues across parts of the county. Mid-year, Council approved a 270-day halt to large residential subdivisions, commercial development and signage within the Euhaw Broad River Area of northern Jasper County.

The action came as Council grew alarmed at the impact of new subdivisions and commercial development on roads, evacuation routes, streetscapes, overall traffic congestion, stormwater management and the challenge of how to protect open space and natural habitats in the northern part of the county.

Meanwhile, Council continues to work with the local legislative delegation and SC Department of Transportation officials in hopes of speeding up resurfacing of key roadways including US 278, US 17 and SC Highway 462.

“With County Council’s leadership, we are keeping up with the growth and trying to prepare for the future,” said County Administrator Andrew Fulghum.

As part of that preparation, Fulghum, his staff and County Council have identified more than \$80 million in needed capital improvement projects to renovate or provide new government facilities.

“The County Council’s policy direction is to build the tax base with economic development projects in appropriate areas. That strategy is working and enabled a property tax rate reduction in 2023, after a nine-year stretch of holding the same tax rate,” said Fulghum.

They continue to work with developers in South Carolina and Georgia to bring port-related development and support distribution centers to the southern area of Jasper County. The Jasper Ocean Terminal, a multi-billion project, remains in discussion but much of the immediate focus is on creating distribution centers in Jasper County to connect to I-95 and railways.

The South Carolina Department of Transportation and its engineering consultants have been working closely with Jasper officials on the extensive widening of Interstate 95 through Jasper County. Much of the work to date has involved clearing land along the roadway of shrubs and small trees.

In coming years, crews will add a travel lane to both the north and south-bound parts of I-95, along with creating more room between the roadway and tree line for safety.

Over the past three years, the Ridgeland-Claude Dean Airport on Grays Highway has expanded its services. The airport now fully supports business jets, a critical element of the county’s economic growth plan to enable potential investors and developers to easily fly directly to Jasper County, Fulghum said.

“By completing the South Apron Expansion Project, we have doubled the airport’s capacity to park airplanes and at the same time, decrease congestion,” said Danny Lucas, director of Jasper County’s Development Services Division.

Establishing an independent Jasper County Airport Commission provides another level of involvement, expertise and oversight, Lucas said. Commission members include Mr. Steven Alston, Mr. Avery Cleland, Mr. Richard Dean, Mr. Baylor O’Cain and Mr. James Williams.

“Over the past decade, Jasper County was among the fastest-growing counties in South Carolina with a 28 percent population increase from 2010 to 2020,” Fulghum noted. “From the interest we have seen over the past two years, there is no indication that is going to change.”

Other key 2023 work by Jasper County leaders included:

- Completing a digital fiber connection between all county buildings and law enforcement buildings, improving both efficiency and security of data;
- Developing and staffing a Geographic Information System department (GIS) to assist with county and municipal planning work;
- And entering into an Intergovernmental Agreement with Beaufort, Colleton and Hampton counties to explore building a regional jail to service those counties.

Early issues for 2024 include working with agencies to improve conditions at the Jasper Animal Rescue Mission. The county provides some funding to the rescue group but doesn't operate the facility. Issues have included too many animals being abandoned at the site, concerns about poor health conditions for the animals and workers, and inadequate sanitation.

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