

THE CENTRAL VIEW

Serving the Citizens of Fairfield, Lexington, Newberry & Richland Counties



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CMCOG BOARD TO VISIT CHARLOTTE



On October 21st, 2004, the Central Midlands Council of Governments Board and invited guests will visit Charlotte, NC.

The one day trip has been arranged to allow those attending to hear about some of the innovative programs and ventures undertaken by a number of the key planning agencies and service providers in one of Columbia's larger near neighbors.

E.W. Cromartie, II, CMCOG Chairman calls the visit "a great opportunity for us to be informed and educated by one of our sister jurisdictions, who has already experienced some of the problems that we will soon be forced to face in the Midlands."

In the morning, the group will hear from the Centralina Council of Governments about some of their innovative regional programs, such as SEQL (Sustainable Environment for Quality of life), the Lake Nor-

man Marine Commission, and information on rural transportation planning organizations.

Over lunch, the North Carolina Department of Transportation will present details of their achievements with high-speed rail from Virginia to Charlotte and their goals for extending service further into South Carolina and how that may be accomplished.

The afternoon will be devoted to presentations from the Charlotte Area Transit System (CATS) who will review goals and achievements for transit in the Charlotte Metro area. CATS is in the process of building a state-of-the-art

rapid transit system which will integrate bus, light rail, commuter rail and bus rapid transit into a comprehensive network for the 21st century. Significantly, CATS has experienced steady growth. In 2003/04 ridership increased 5.3% and is up 38% since 1998.

The visit will also include a ride on new rail lines that are now operational, before the return journey to Columbia.

"This short trip will give Midlands decision-makers an opportunity to see what can be done regarding public transit, as well as to understand some of the problems experienced along the way," said Mr. Cromartie. "The establishment of our own RTA is just the first step. Developing and maintaining a regional transportation system is the key to our long term economic success. Hopefully, this trip will serve to broaden our horizons"

The trip marks the first time the CMCOG Board has made a special trip to an area outside the Midlands region.

Our deepest condolences go to the family of Gonzer Lee Hunter who passed away June 28, 2004, aged 57.

A dedicated public servant, Major Hunter had represented the City of Newberry on the Central Midlands COG Board since 1999.

Major Hunter also served on the Community Development Rating & Ranking Committee as Vice-Chair and had been a member of the Executive Committee since 2002.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT RECEIVES SOUTHERN GROWTH POLICIES AWARD

In June 2004, the Midlands OneStop was presented with a Regional Innovator award from the Southern Growth Policies Board for its efforts to better integrate immigrants into the local workforce.

The Southern Growth Policies Board is a prestigious non-partisan public policy think tank comprised of 13 southern states that advances visionary economic policies for the South.

The Midlands OneStop initiative

called "Connecting People To Jobs" is designed to move low-income Hispanic/Latino residents into living wage jobs by connecting them with job training, education, and support services. The program is run in conjunction with the *Aceramiento Hispanico de Carolina del Sur* and has helped over 300 persons from 15 countries obtain language and job skills to meet the needs of employers in the Midlands.



Russell Knight (2nd left) of Midlands OneStop, receives the award from Oklahoma's Governor Henry. Also pictured: Governor Huckabee of Arkansas & Governor Riley of Alabama (far right).

Spotlight on: CMCOG WEBSITE



Central Midlands Council of Governments Area Agency on Aging currently has three interns.

Julie Merrill and Valentine Baptiste are both Master of Social work candidates at USC and are assisting with the Family Care-giver Support Program under the supervision of **Joe Ritchey**.

Marshika Morris, is a candidate for the AA degree in Human Services at Midlands Technical College and will pursue a Bachelor of Social Work degree following graduation. She is currently assisting the Aging Program Coordinator, Carol

Where would you go if you wanted to know the population of Newberry County? Or who to contact for information on home-delivered meals? Or to find out the average number of vehicles that travel along Assembly Street in Columbia each day?

All of this information and much more is available on Central Midlands COG's three websites.

Our main site, **www.centralmidlands.org**, gives a brief description of the agency as well as an overview of our programs and services. Other items of interest include regional links to a wide variety of organizations



CMCOG's 3 websites host a wide variety of information

around the Midlands region, a list of board members, meeting agendas, news and events and backissues of our newsletters. Documents such as our Building Permit Study and Commercial Real Estate Survey can also be purchased.

scmidlandsinfo.com is our

portal to information about the Midlands, as well as other pertinent sites for research and statistics. Information is divided into sub-categories for ease of use—census data, regional resources, maps etc. Interactive traffic count maps are also accessible from this site.

Our third site, **www.scwebseek.com** is one of the most frequently used search engines in the State. Recently rebuilt, SC Webseek receives around 2,000 visits a day from people searching for information on the Midlands region and state and local government.

Our thoughts and prayers are with the family of **Barry Butler**, Senior Planner with the Midlands Workforce Development Program.

Barry is a 1st Lieutenant with the 178th Unit, Field Artillery Battalion, based in Manning, SC, and is on an 18 month deployment to Iraq.

We wish Lieutenant Butler a safe and speedy return home to the Midlands.

CMCOG CELEBRATES OWNERSHIP OF BUILDING

In June, Central Midlands COG reached a milestone as it made the final payment on the mortgage on its offices in Columbia.

On August 26th, 2004 a "Mortgage Burning" ceremony was held at the COG offices to celebrate being debt free.

The ceremony was attended by the current CMCOG Board, staff and other honored guests, including Earl F. Brown, Jr, Chairman at the time the offices were



Chairman E.W. Cromartie presents the final check to Andy Smith of BB&T.

constructed in 1992; Miles Hadley, head of the Site Search Committee and two former executive directors, Ron Althoff and Doug Phillips.

"To have paid off this mortgage in 12 years, is an extraordinary achievement," said Mr. Cromartie. "It demonstrates remarkable financial management."

Plans are now in the works to add a 1500 square foot expansion to the building to add new offices and meeting space.

CMCOG HAS NEW GIS TOOL

CMCOG has a new tool at its disposal. As a result of a grant application submitted to ESRI, the leader in GIS software solutions, CMCOG was able to obtain a Trimble GeoXT mobile GIS/GPS unit.

This state-of-the-art device combines GPS capabilities with Windows Mobile software for Pocket PCs to collect data in one unit to allow the collection of and maintenance of GIS data, through the use of customized interfaces.

The built-in GPS receiver boasts sub-meter accuracy to make a compact,



The Trimble GeoXT

rugged and versatile tool to capture accurate data while out in the field.

The Trimble GeoXt was recently used to perform a housing stock survey and analysis in the Town of Winnsboro as part of a CDBG local planning grant.

Using a custom-built application, data was collected on the condition of each housing unit within the Town. The data collected was then linked back to existing parcel data to show the density of units in need of repair. The data collected will serve as a tool for local officials to determine potential areas for housing grant applications.

The GeoXT will also be used to perform a similar housing stock survey in the City of West Columbia.

RURAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN IS MOST EXTENSIVE YET

Central Midlands' rural transportation plan is its most extensive to date. Our new approach has permitted local citizens more opportunity to identify and comment on proposed improvements with 2 rounds of meetings held in the first half of 2004. The needs identified at these meetings, as well as those identified from the new rural model were classified into three broad categories: **Maintenance, Congestion** and **Safety**. Goals and implementation strategies have been identified for each category.

Maintenance: Needs are linked to the need for additional funding at both the state and local levels. The Rural Transportation Plan acknowledges that maintenance issues transcend traditional notions of road resurfacing that the scope should be broadened to include repair and replacement of bridges and guard rails as well as traffic signal



Rural ITS can warn drivers of changing driving conditions

maintenance.

Congestion: Proposed to be addressed with network improvements and policy changes. Three road segments that are expected to operate below a Level of Service D in the year 2025 were identified (the estimated cost to improve these segments is \$23.9 million). Also recommends is an additional 182 miles of road improvements to address congestion and safety issues, but will not add capacity. In an effort to make the plan a multi-

modal transportation document, issues such as the impact of motor freight on the network were addressed and of bicycle/pedestrian facilities were also recommended. New policy changes recommend providing for mixed-use developments in land-use regulations, and developing a process to evaluate the capacity of unpaved roads.

Safety: A number of intersections and road segments with safety issues have been identified. Also recommended is the development of a rural Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) program to provide information on changes in road conditions.

The draft plan is in the review stage, but when adopted, will provide a valuable tool for addressing the region's rural transportation needs. For more information on the Rural Transportation Plan, contact Wayne Shuler (803) 376-5390.

We would like to welcome our newest Board members:

John N. Hardee, SC DOT Commissioner, representing the City of Columbia

Cathy Novinger, representing the City of Columbia

T. Edward Kyzer, Mayor, City of Newberry

Earl F. Brown Jr., representing Richland County

Tameika Issac Devine, representing the City of Columbia

Pete Amoth, representing the Town of Blythewood

STAFF ATTENDS BROWNFIELDS CONFERENCE

In preparation for the submission of its Brownfields Assessment Grant to the Environmental Protection Agency next fall, Central Mid-

lands COG staff recently attended the National Brownfields Conference in St. Louis, Missouri.

A brownfield is defined as "With certain legal exclusions and additions . . . real property, the expansion, redevelopment, or reuse of which may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous

substance, pollutant, or contaminant."

The EPA Brownfields Assessment Grant program provides up to \$200,000 to inventory, characterize, assess, and conduct planning and community involvement related to brownfield sites. Jurisdictions interested in participating in this application should contact Wayne Shuler at (803) 376-5390.



CMCOG TO HOST GRANT WRITING WORKSHOP

On November 29th and 30th, 2004, Central Midlands Council of Governments will host a grant writing workshop in partnership with Grant Writing USA.

Grant Writing USA has trained over 5,000 individuals from every field imaginable about the skills and nuances of preparing successful grant applications. Suitable for both novices and experienced grant writers, the

2 day course includes a workbook, 200 megabyte resource CD, 199 example proposals and links to funding sources and is ideal for anyone who wishes to increase their fundraising competitiveness and broaden their funding focus.

Enrollment is \$349 per person and the session is open to anyone. Seating is limited and online reservations are re-

quired.

For more information on the Grant Writing USA workshop visit <http://grantwritingusa.com> or contact Andy Simmons or Ben Mauldin at (803) 376-5390.



Congratulations go to **Felicia Anderson** and **Joe Ritchey** of CMCOG staff.

Ms. Anderson recently completed her Ombudsman Certification Training and is now certified as a Regional Long Term Care Ombudsman.

Joe Ritchey has received his Licensed Independent Social Worker (LISW) certificate.

Mr. Ritchey has been a Licensed Master of Social Work since 1999. The LISW requires study of psychopathology and psychodiagnostics, professional ethics as well as a number of hours under clinical supervision, in addition to an examination.



The official newsletter of CMCOG

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Fairfield County, Lexington County, Newberry County, Richland County, Town of Batesburg-Leesville, City of Cayce, City of Columbia, City of Forest Acres, Town of Immo, Town of Lexington, City of Newberry, Town of Springdale, City of West Columbia, Town of Winnsboro.

Central Midlands COG welcomes our newest staff member

Reginald Simmons joins Central Midlands COG as Director of Transportation Planning.

Mr. Simmons holds a Master's Degree in Public Administration from Indiana State University and comes to us from the Sumter City-County Planning Commission, where he was Transportation Coordinator for 6 years.

Articles contributed by CMCOG staff

A WORD FROM THE CHAIRMAN

The last year has been an extremely productive one for Central Midlands Council of Governments. Our Executive Director has just completed his first year at the helm, and has overseen a number of accomplishments by staff in that time.

In June of this year, we made the final payment on the mortgage on the COG building; an event which we commemorated with a ceremony on August 26th, attended by many current and former board members as well as two former executive directors. Being able to pay off the building in such a short time shows remarkable financial management and will allow us to further expand the COG facility as we broaden our scope of services.

This past year has also seen the revival of the High Speed/Light Rail Committee. Since the 1970s, the COG has been an active participant in transportation planning and was instrumental in helping the Regional Transit Authority become operational. However, as our region continues to grow, alternative methods of public trans-



E.W. Cromartie, II, CMCOG Chairman, City of Columbia.

portation need to be studied to help prepare for future growth before we reach a state of complete gridlock.

It is my opinion that transit service, and in particular rail transportation, is the way forward for the Central Midlands, both to relieve congestion on our roadways, using light rail and express buses, and as a means of attracting further economic development, through a southeast regional high speed rail network.

Such a rail network in the Central Midlands area is currently a long way from becoming reality, but steps must be taken to make sure that we do not fail the citizens of the Midlands by failing to explore these options. Commuter

rail and express bus services need to be studied in greater depth as part of our ongoing long range transportation planning process, and the Rail Committee will help guide and shape our efforts towards that goal.

The upcoming visit of our Board to Charlotte on October 21st will be a wonderful opportunity to witness first hand what our colleagues in the Queen City have already accomplished regarding rail transit. We will hear from the North Carolina Department of Transportation and the Charlotte Area Transit System (CATS) about their experiences with high speed rail and commuter rail respectively, including the latter's collaboration with the City of Rock Hill, SC. We will also meet with the Carolina COG to hear about some of their innovative regional programs, which could be implemented here in the Midlands.

Such broad goals require regional cooperation to bring to fruition, but that is what Central Midlands COG does best by providing a forum for regional planning solutions to regional problems.