

THE CENTRAL VIEW

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



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Central Midlands Cares

COG staff were recently recognized for their charitable contributions

Staff received a 2004 United Way of the Midlands Merit Award for exceeding their goal and increasing participation by 183% since 2003.

Angela Sparks, CMCOG United Way Coordinator, says "I am proud of our staff for helping to make a difference in our communities."

Over \$1,550 was collected for Midlands charitable causes by staff this year.

CHARLOTTE VISIT OPENS EYES FOR RAIL FUTURE



Central Midlands delegates ride the new trolley on their recent visit to Charlotte, NC

In October 2004, a delegation of Central Midlands Council of Governments Board Members and invited guests traveled to Charlotte to see how some of their recently introduced public transportation initiatives were working, as well as to learn from their experiences encountered, as the Central Midlands region begins to formally assess the options for high speed and commuter rail.

CMCOG Chairman, E.W. Cromartie, II said that the visit to Charlotte was "a wonderful trip" and thanked everyone who participated in making it "a great success." "Rail travel is our future", he said, "and we have to plan for it. Being able to witness what Charlotte has achieved, and being able to learn about the problems they faced was extremely insightful."

It is hoped that with the reauthorization of the Transportation Equity Act, funds will be available to fund a high speed rail study from Raleigh to Charleston via Columbia, which will go a long way towards determining how soon high speed rail can become a reality in the Midlands.

For commuter rail issues, Central Midlands COG is currently soliciting Requests for Qualifications for a feasibility study along four primary routes in the Central Midlands which would serve as rail corridors linking Batesburg-Leesville, Camden, Newberry and Charlotte with Columbia.

Central Midlands COG continues to develop plans for mass transit and has recently completed a fiscally constrained transit element to its Long Range Transportation Plan which will act as a guide for future transit planning efforts. Significant growth in mass transit travel is expected in the next twenty years, however, the system must be financially sustainable and land use and travel patterns must be adapted to support the use of mass transit.

High speed and commuter rail, coupled with a solvent Regional Transit Authority would be attractive for continued regional economic development, as well as improving the efficiency of travel throughout the Central Midlands region.

CMCOG TO EXPAND OFFICE BUILDING

This spring, Central Midlands Council of Governments will break ground on a 1,500 square foot expansion wing to its office building located at 236 Stoneridge Drive, Columbia.

The new space is needed to house CMCOG's expanding program of services, as well as allowing for growth in the future.

In all, the expansion wing will consist of five new offices, a conference room and an open common work area, which will be used as space for interns.

The addition has been designed by the architectural firm, Quackenbush and will match the existing structure as closely as possible.

CMCOG Executive Director, Norman Whitaker, is excited about the expansion project. "An additional 1,500 square feet will enable us to work more efficiently as a staff, as well as make the work environment more comfortable."

Construction is expected to start on the building extension in late February and is expected to be completed by the end of the summer 2005.



CMCOG is to expand its existing offices

Spotlight on: CMCOG's Newest Staff Members



As Central Midlands COG expands both its facilities and its work program, four new faces have also recently been added to the staff.

Susan Wilson joined CMCOG in November, 2004 as a Senior Transportation Planner. Ms. Wilson is a Columbia native, who received her BA in Geography from the University of South Carolina and her MRP in Transportation Planning from the State University of New York at Albany. Prior to joining Central Midlands, Ms. Wilson worked as a GIS Support Specialist for Palm Beach County, Florida.

Joe Ryan, joined CMCOG in January 2005 as a Senior Planner.

Mr. Ryan originally hails from the Boston area and joins us after a 2 year mobilization with the Army Reserve where he worked as an Intelligence Analyst studying Iraqi insurgency. Mr. Ryan possesses a BA in Geography from Southern Connecticut State University and a Masters of Urban Planning degree from the University of Buffalo (NY). Mr. Ryan previously worked for the Greenville County Planning Commission prior to being mobilized to active duty.

Spencer Feaster and **Kelly White** joined the Central Midlands WIA Program in February 2005.

Mr. Feaster will serve as the

WorkKeys Assessment Proctor/Developer and joins us from the SC Employment Security Commission where he served as a Program Assistant monitoring Internet Unemployment Insurance Claims operations in the Columbia Comprehensive OneStop Center. Mr. Feaster also previously worked for the US Postal Service and is a Navy veteran.

Ms. White also joins the Central Midlands WIA staff from the SC Employment Security Commission where she worked with grant budgets and WIA training programs. Ms. White previously worked for *The State Newspaper* in Columbia.

Central Midlands COG New Procurement Process for Aging Services

As a result of new federally mandated competitive procurement guidelines, the Central Midlands Area Agency on Aging (AAA) is in the process of receiving Requests for Proposals for a number of services to the elderly in the Central Midlands Region.

Services being bid include group dining, home delivered meals, adult day care, disease prevention & health promotion, levels I, II & III home care, transportation and legal services, as well as catering services for the elderly nutrition program.

A pre-proposal conference was held on January, 18th, attended by 36 participants. Bids for services are due March 1st,

CAREGIVER PROGRAM HELPS LOCAL GRANDPARENTS

Central Midlands' Family Caregiver Support Program provides assistance to persons caring for seniors at home, as well as help for grandparents raising children. The following is a recent testimonial to the invaluable assistance that is provided through this program.

Ms. P is living on social security and caring for two teenage granddaughters and was having problems affording items such as winter clothes and shoes. After contacting the Caregiver

Support Program, Ms. P met with Caregiver staff at a local store and was given assistance purchasing clothing for the two girls. The Family Caregiver Advocate encouraged Ms. P to buy gloves and scarves and toiletries as well as the jackets, shirts and jeans that she had originally requested.

Joe Ritchey, Family Caregiver Advocate said that clients such as Ms. P don't want to take advantage of anyone, but that they often need help with purchasing essentials. Ms. P herself

expressed her appreciation of the program, saying it is a blessing for people like herself and said how much of a difference the program has made in her family's life.



South Carolina Family Caregiver Support Program
SC Aging Network
Supporting Caregivers

COLUMBIA COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE MARKET REMAINS STABLE

The Commercial Real Estate market in the Greater Columbia area remained stable in 2004, according to the findings of the Central Midlands COG's Commercial Real Estate Report.

Office space in the Greater Columbia area increased by over 276,000 square feet in 2004, while rental rates increased 0.9% to 19%. An additional 310,000 square feet of office space is currently under construction

in Richland & Lexington counties. most 17 million square feet.

The Greater Columbia area added just over 500,000 square feet of commercial retail space in the last year. During 2004, retail vacancy rates increased just 0.6% to 10.7%. There are currently over 1.3 million square feet of retail space under construction, which when complete will bring the total square footage in the Columbia area to al-



Columbiana Center-the largest regional mall in Columbia

GOVERNOR ANNOUNCES \$1.8 MILLION IN GRANT FUNDS FOR MIDLANDS

In December, Governor Sanford announced the award of over \$1.8 million to fund five Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) out of the six submitted to the SC Department of Commerce, Division of Community Grant Programs from the Central Midlands region in the fall of 2004.



Downtown Whitmire will soon be revitalized using \$392,000 in grant funds

The recent grant awards total \$1,868,174 in federal funds and are split between four different units of local government.

The grant awards fall into three different categories: Commercial Revitalization; Community Infrastructure and Small Business Development.

- The **Town of Swansea** received \$500,000 to conduct streetscape and façade improvements in its Downtown area, benefiting 656 persons, of whom 52% are

- low to moderate income (LMI).
- The **Town of Winnsboro** received \$392,310 to conduct streetscaping improvements in Downtown Winnsboro benefiting 3,815 persons, 54% of whom are LMI.
- The **Town of Whitmire** received \$436,867 to undertake street and façade improvements, move utilities underground, improve handicapped accessibility and provide street lighting in Downtown Whitmire. This project will benefit 1,482 persons,

58% of whom are LMI.

- The **Town of Whitmire** was also the recipient of a further \$461,000 to be used to upgrade the Town's water system. The water system upgrade project will benefit 380 persons (88% LMI).
- The **Town of Eastover** received \$78,000 to provide scholarships to 40 low to moderate income persons, to attend training for small business development .

CMCOG grants staff are currently working on developing applications for the April 2005 funding cycle, where it is anticipated that 8 Projects will be submitted.

For further information on the CDBG program and eligibility, contact Robin Cooley at the CMCOG office.

We would like to welcome our newest Board members:

Valerie Hutchinson,
Richland County Council

Damon Jeter,
Richland County Council

Mark Williams,
City of Forest Acres,
City Administrator

Rep. Edward H. "Ted" Pitts,
Lexington County Legislative Delegation

Charles Haggard,
Mayor, Town of Pelion

WIA YOUTH ACHIEVEMENT AWARD ANNOUNCED

Each year, the SC WIA Youth Achievement Award is presented to a young person in the WIA Program who has shown determination and dedication to further their education and training against the odds.



Faith Luttrell receives the 2004 WIA Youth Achievement Award

The 2004 award winner is Faith Luttrell, who has shown the fortitude to complete her associates degree to become a successful dental technician, whilst raising a

family after becoming pregnant while still in high school. Ms Luttrell enrolled in the WIA Program after being unable to afford the cost of a dental hygiene course at Midlands Technical College while raising her young son. Teresa Jordan, Faith's boss, says that "Faith is an example of what can be done with hard work if you have the desire to improve yourself."

HISTORIC HOSPITAL PROJECT COMPLETE

In July 2002, the City of Newberry was awarded a \$350,000 CDBG grant to be used in conjunction with other funding sources such as HOME funds, Low Income Housing Tax Credits as well as local funds to renovate the former Newberry Hospital, an historic building, into 35 apartments for low income senior citizens.

On November 18th, 2004, the completion of the \$4 million project was opened with a ribbon

cutting ceremony attended by state and local officials, project partners and residents of the facility.

The project's successful completion shows great cooperation between state and local government, as well as the private sector in preserving an historic community landmark. This adaptive reuse of an historic building now means that residents have access to affordable housing

through the efforts of the Newberry Housing Authority and have access to the facilities and programs of the Newberry County Council on Aging, located adjacent to the facility.



The renovated Newberry Hospital



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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.**

A WORD FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Central Midlands COG's first annual report in 1970 included the following statement by Chairman William H. Tuller. *"The concept of multi-jurisdictional cooperation provides an opportunity to provide a program of planning services to benefit all the people of the area. We can do more for less cost by working together than we can working separately."*

For over 30 years, the "COG" has constantly been seeking ways to positively address the needs of the region as a whole, whilst being mindful of the needs of local residents and local government s.

Recent accomplishments speak volumes for the work that staff undertake every day in the pursuit of planning for the future of our four county Central Midlands region. These recently completed projects are diverse in nature and reflect the ideals of cooperation and regionalism that the Councils of Government were set up to embody.

The first significant accomplishment was the completion of the our Rural Transportation Plan. This plan, adopted in September



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

2004, was the most extensive rural transportation planning process undertaken within our region, addressing a wide variety of rural transportation issues. The plan, which was the result of over twelve months deliberation on the part of the Rural Transportation Committee, COG staff and the general public, will form a rational basis for the prioritization of rural transportation funds for the coming years.

In January, CMCOC was the recipient of \$175,000 in advance planning funds from the US Department of Defense to develop conceptual reuse plans for Fort Jackson and McEntire ANG Station in the event they are shut down in the next round of military base closures to be announced in May

2005. It is hoped, however, that this Advance Planning Grant will simply be a good exercise in planning, and will not have to be acted upon, as the closure of either facility would have a significant impact on the Central Midlands region.

The final major accomplishment was the completion of the Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan. The plan, which has just been approved by both the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the SC Emergency Management Division, includes a comprehensive natural hazard risk assessment, a social vulnerability study, and an inventory of potential mitigation goals and projects. The plan will serve as a useful tool for local governments in the Midlands in coping with the effects of a natural disaster.

As we begin 2005, CMCOC's work program is becoming broader and more varied. Two new planners have been hired and work will soon begin on 1,500 sq.ft of additional offices and meeting space at CMCOC's offices. As the COG and our region grow, it becomes ever more evident that CMCOC continues to provide a cost-effective program of regional planning services for the benefit of everyone in the Midlands, which are just as relevant today as they were 35 years ago.

*Articles contributed
by CMCOC staff*