

CENTRAL MIDLANDS

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy



DRAFT 9-29-17

2017-2022



Newberry • Fairfield • Richland • Lexington

This report was developed
through a collaborative partnership between:

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Adopted by the CMCOG Board on [Date]

Contents

- 1 Introduction, 4
- 2 Regional Summary, 8
- 3 SWOT Summary, 22
- 4 Action Plan, 24



Introduction

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he United States Economic Development Administration (EDA), which is part of the US Department of Commerce, is charged with leading the federal economic development

agenda for the country by promoting innovation and regional collaboration as a means for increasing global competitiveness and building diversified and resilient regional economies. EDA accomplishes this goal by making strategic regional investments that foster job creation, leverage public and private resources, foster innovation, increase competitiveness, promote environmental sustainability, and strengthen underserved communities. These projects must also support the following national strategic priorities:

- Development and growth of innovation clusters
- Growth and expansion in manufacturing, and manufacturing supply chains
- Economic resiliency and readjustment
- Expansion and development of information technology(IT) infrastructure
- Increasing access to capital for small and medium-sized, and ethnically diverse enterprises
- Innovations in science and health care; technology transfer, and technology commercialization efforts
- Job-driven skills development

What is a CEDS?

EDA promotes regional collaboration by designating local economic development districts (EDD) which are then required to create and maintain a comprehensive economic development strategy (CEDS). The CEDS is designed to be an inclusive, strategy driven planning process that defines a regional vision for economic growth and resilience and identifies local priorities for future investment. The CEDS is an ongoing planning process that must be revisited annually and comprehensively updated every five years.

The last CEDS plan for the Central Midlands EDD, which includes Fairfield, Newberry, Richland, and Lexington counties, was adopted in 2012. The document presented here represents the 2017-2022 five year update. Per EDA guidelines the 2022 CEDS is structured around the following elements:

1. Summary background of the regional economy, including socio-economic trends, an inventory of natural and cultural resource assets, and an assessment of economic conditions;
2. Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis;
3. Regional goals and objectives; and
4. Performance measurement framework.

These elements were developed through a collaborative planning process that included a CEDS Strategy Committee and coordination with other local and regional planning processes.

CEDS Strategy Committee

The CEDS Strategy Committee, which is charged with guiding the development of the plan, includes representatives from a broad range of public and private sector stakeholders intended to represent the main economic interests of the region. Per EDA guidelines, the committee included involvement from the private sector, the economic development community, higher education, workforce development, and community and labor groups. The makeup of the strategy committee was also designed to ensure geographic representation across the four county EDD.

Coordination and Synthesis with Other Plans

A primary goal of the CEDS planning process is to take into account, integrate, and leverage other planning processes. Such coordination efforts help to reduce the duplication of efforts, foster inter-agency/organizational collaboration, and recognize the economic development work already being done at the regional and local level. The 2017-2022 Central Midlands CEDS was developed by ensuring consistency with existing economic development plans, and directly engaging with ongoing planning processes. Some key regional and local planning projects that were directly integrated with the CEDS are summarized on the following page.

EDA Programs/Funding Opportunities

EDA strives to meet their investment priorities by making funding available to local and regional partners through the following programs:

- Public Works and Economic Adjustment
- Trade Adjustment Assistance for Firms
- University Center Economic Development
- Regional Innovation Strategies
- Planning and Technical Assistance
- Economic Development Integration

In order to be eligible for EDA funding, projects should demonstrate consistency with the goals and objectives of the CEDS. For more information visit the EDA website at www.eda.gov.

Stronger Economies Together



MBLG Regional Competitiveness Initiative

In 2016 an eleven county region in South Carolina was awarded a USDA Rural Development technical service and training grant called Stronger Economies Together (SET). The purpose of the program is to strengthen the capacity of communities in rural areas to develop and implement an economic blueprint based on current and emerging economic strengths in their region.

Through this process partners and other stakeholders (which included three councils of governments) collaboratively developed a regional economic development plan. Like the CEDS, the planning process was designed to build synergy and consistency between multiple regional economic development planning processes funded through various federal, state, and local initiatives. Through the facilitated SET planning process, the regional project partners developed a set of broad based regional goals and objectives focused on three key clusters

- Agriculture and Local Food Systems
- Regional Military Installations
- Recreation, Arts, Tourism, and Entertainment

Key information from the public input sessions, SWOT analysis, focus groups meetings, and goals and objectives from the SET plan were directly incorporated into the CEDS planning process.

Four years ago, EngenuitySC embarked upon an effort to measure and benchmark competitiveness in the Columbia region. This effort, now published annually as the Midlands Regional Competitiveness report, features data from research economists at the University of South Carolina on five indicators of competitive communities:

- Talent
- Entrepreneurial and Business Environment
- Innovation
- Industry Clusters
- Livability

The Midlands Business Leadership Group (MBLG), a consortium of regional business leaders, is now using this annual report, as a tool for developing a collaborative, regional action strategy to enhance regional competitiveness and prosperity, and to provide a blueprint for future growth and development.

Central Midlands Council of Governments (CMCOG) in partnership with the Department of Defense, Office of Economic Adjustment (OEA), and area military installations are conducting a planning and feasibility study to identify opportunities to guide land use development around the installations by directly connecting compatible conservation and “working” land uses with military readiness priorities. The planning assessment includes a “working” land suitability analysis, a peer community/case study review, a comprehensive supply and demand based market analysis of agriculture, forestry, conservation, eco and agri-tourism related industries, and an assessment of institutional demand for regionally produced agricultural and forestry goods.

This study is also being coordinated with a larger effort by the Midlands Area Joint Installation Consortium to pursue a Federal Sentinel Landscape designation for the areas between Fort Jackson, McEntire JANGB, Shaw AFB, and the Congaree National Park. The U.S. Departments of Agriculture, Defense, and the Interior established the Sentinel Landscapes Partnership to better serve areas of the United States where working and natural lands converge with national defense facilities. The goals and objectives of the Joint Land Use Study and the regional sentinel landscape efforts are consistent with the goals and objectives established in the 2017-2022 CEDS.

Other key planning resources that were directly consulted as a part of the planning process include:

- Fairfield County Strategic Plan
- I-77 Alliance Strategic Economic Plan
- Richland County Strategic Economic Plan
- City of Columbia Economic Development Strategic Plan
- New Carolina: South Carolina’s Council of Competitiveness Plans
- Lower Richland Tourism Study
- Workforce and Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) Plans
- COATS 2040 Long Range Transportation Plan
- Central Midlands Rural Long Range Transportation Plan
- COATS Regional Congestion Mitigation Plan
- Central Midlands Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan
- Self-Sufficiency Standard for South Carolina 2016
- Local Government Comprehensive and Strategic Plans

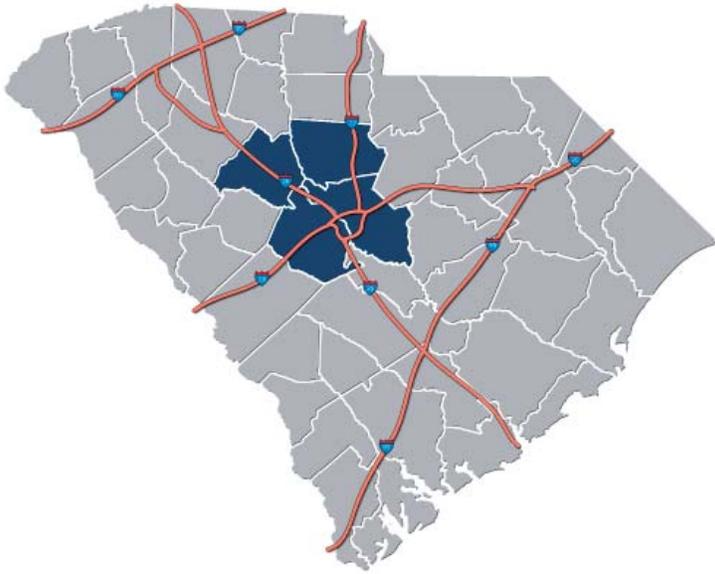
Fort Jackson McEntire Joint Land Use Study

Sentinel Landscape Initiative

Other Regional and Local Plans



Regional Summary



Located near the geographic center of the state, the Central Midlands Economic Development District (EDD) consists of Fairfield, Newberry, Richland, and Lexington Counties. The region is approximately equidistant between the blue ridge mountains and the Atlantic ocean, and is bisected by two major river systems, the Broad and Saluda, which converge in downtown Columbia. The four counties make up a combined metro and micropolitan statistical area that has a diverse and resilient economy, a rich natural and cultural heritage, and a growing population that is projected to exceed 1 million by the year 2050. The following regional summary highlights key trends related to growth and development, natural and cultural resources, infrastructure assets, and the regional economy and workforce.

Demographics

Like many parts of the Southeastern United States, the Columbia Metropolitan area continues to be a hotspot for growth and development. Since the 1970s urban and suburban growth has spread outward from the city center transforming small rural towns into booming bedroom communities. Northeast Richland County, the Irmo-Chapin area, and the Town of Lexington consistently absorb the largest share of regional population growth. In recent years, however, downtown Columbia has experienced a residential and commercial resurgence, highlighted by the Bull Street development and a boom in new student housing. Other historic business districts around the region, such as Newberry and Lexington, are also experiencing a renaissance, and are transforming themselves into vibrant, mixed use, regional activity centers.

Despite the rapid pace of growth in Richland and Lexington counties, it is important to recognize that much of the central midlands region remains rural in nature and has not experienced the same level of residential and commercial development over the last several decades.

Population 18
and Under

23.4%

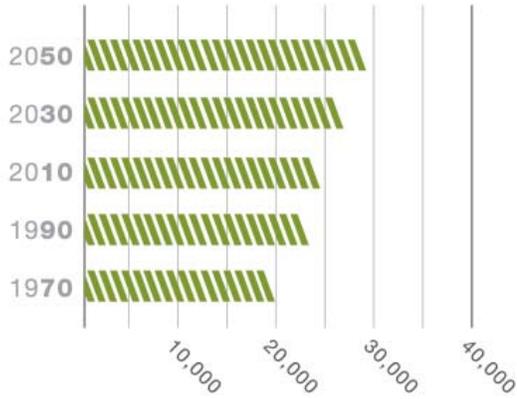
Population 65
and Older

11%

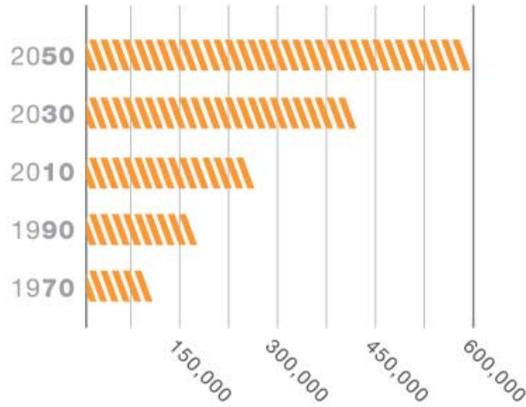
Median Age

35.2

FAIRFIELD COUNTY



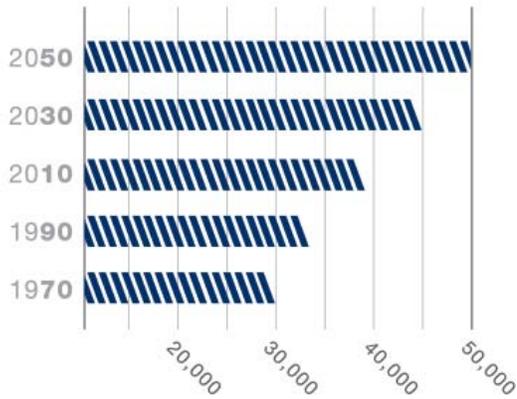
LEXINGTON COUNTY



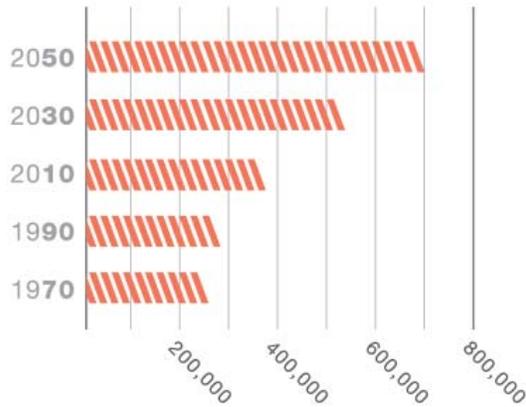
2015
772,274
Estimate

2050
1,365,128
Projection

NEWBERRY COUNTY



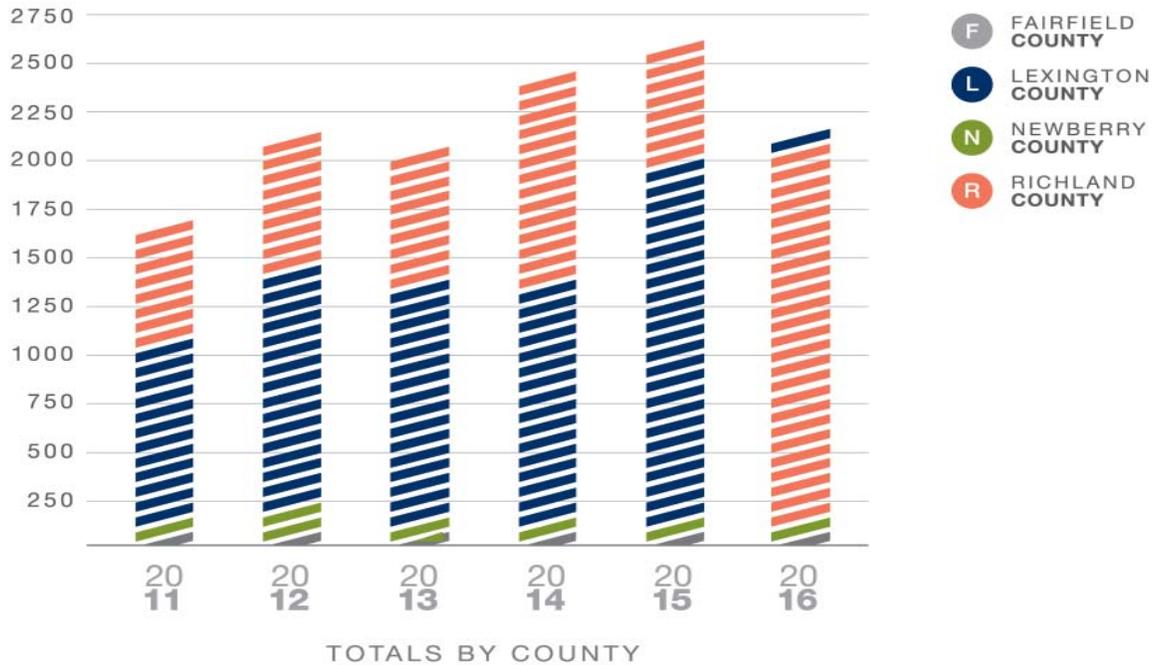
RICHLAND COUNTY



POPULATION
TRENDS
&
PROJECTIONS



BUILDING PERMIT TRENDS



The entire region, however, will likely be impacted in some capacity, by the level of growth that is expected to take place over the next thirty years. By the year 2050 the entire region is expected to have over 1.3 million residents, which represents a 76% increase from the 2015 population estimate.

As would be expected, the age demographics for the region are reflective of the urban and rural divide, with the urban counties having a much larger population of younger and middle age residents, while the rural areas have a much larger aging population. The region as a whole is expected to see substantial growth in this age cohort over the next thirty years as retirees continue to migrate into the Southeastern United States. Needed investments in services and infrastructure to accommodate this aging population will continue to play an important role in regional planning and economic development initiatives.

As the regional population grows, it is also becoming more diverse. Since the 2000 Census the region has seen an increase in racial and ethnic diversity, especially in regards to the Hispanic population. According to estimates from the 2015 American Community Survey, Hispanics comprise around 5.3% of

the Central Midlands population. The needs of this community are as diverse as they are themselves. An estimated 1.8% of the Central Midlands Hispanic population speaks only Spanish. According to state-wide data from the 2014 American Community Survey, 25% of the total Hispanic work-force-age population lives below poverty level and around 37% lack health insurance. Of the naturalized US citizens, around 35% of foreign-born immigrants had a bachelor degree or higher.

Hispanics, including unauthorized ones, are active contributors in the South Carolina culture, society, and economy. In 2014 the purchasing power of Hispanics totaled \$5.1 billion, and in 2007 the sales of Hispanic-owned businesses were almost \$2 billion. According to the US Census, immigrants comprise around 6.3% of the statewide workforce. Unauthorized immigrants made up 3% of the State's workforce in 2012, according to the Pew Hispanic Center. In 2010 unauthorized immigrants paid around \$33 million in state and local taxes according to the Institute of Taxation and Economic Policy. As these socioeconomic trends are expected to continue state-wide, improved communication with the Hispanic community is required to fully address the economic issues in the region.

Housing, Income, and Poverty

The demand for new housing continues to rise across the central midlands region, particularly in the high growth areas of Richland and Lexington counties. In 2016, over 4,000 residential building permits were issued at an estimated value of \$862,065,304. Steady growth in building permits since 2011 indicates recovery from the recession. On average, about 70% of households own their home versus renting. This number has seen a slight decline over the last several decades. Median home values and rents have been steady, are slightly below the state average, and in some cases are significantly lower than other comparable market areas across the country. The median household income has also remained steady showing very little growth when adjusted for inflation. These numbers, averaged for the region, are comparable to SC as a whole, and significantly less than the US.

Since 2000, the region has seen a steady increase in families below the federal poverty level with the highest percentage in Fairfield County and the lowest percentage in Lexington County.

On average 16% of the total population is considered to be food insecure with the highest insecurity rates found in Fairfield and Richland counties. Approximately 2.6% of the population does not have access to a vehicle, with the some of the highest rates occurring in rural areas with limited access to public transportation. According to the United Way of the Midlands Self – Sufficiency Standards for South Carolina, in order to make ends meet (e.g., pay for housing, child care, food, healthcare, transportation, etc.), a family of 2 adults with children would need to make approximately \$44,396 a year, which is just barely on par with the median HH income. This data underscores the importance of regional planning and economic development initiatives that increase access to food, affordable housing, and living wage employment opportunities.

Richland and Lexington Counties
Average Monthly Rent

\$856

MEDIAN HOME
VALUE



Fairfield and Newberry Counties
Average Monthly Rent

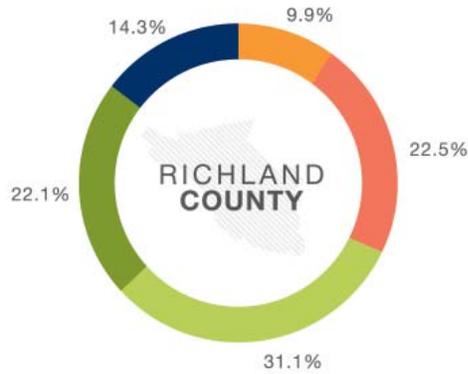
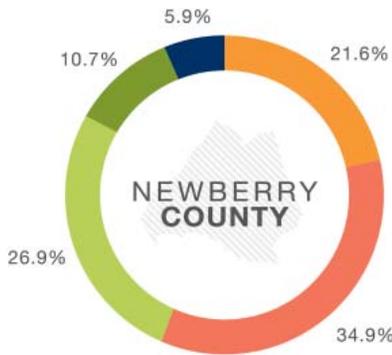
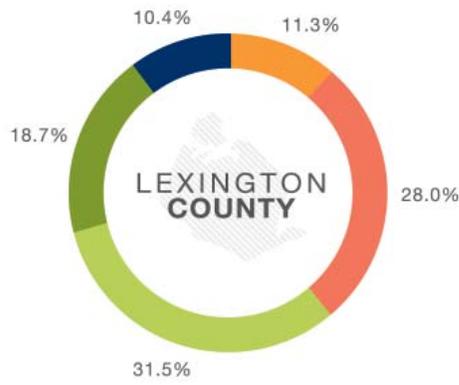
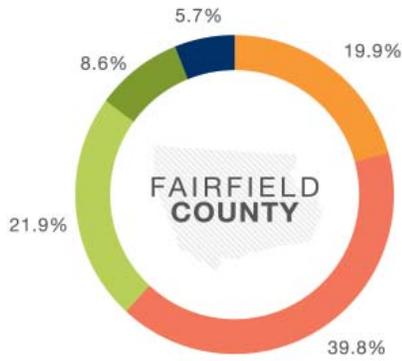
\$667



Education and Workforce

Since 2010, the region has added an estimated 16,360 people 16 years and older to the labor force. This increase has largely been a result of population growth in Richland and Lexington counties as the population in the labor force has decreased in Newberry and Fairfield Counties. During this same timeframe the unemployment rate has dropped by 4.7% from an all-time high of 9.17% in 2010. Despite these regional gains the 2016 Fairfield County unemployment rate of 6.99% is still well above the state and national average. This figure is expected to increase due to the recent VC Summer announcement to halt construction of the two new nuclear reactors. This event will likely have a significant impact on employment trends across the region and beyond.

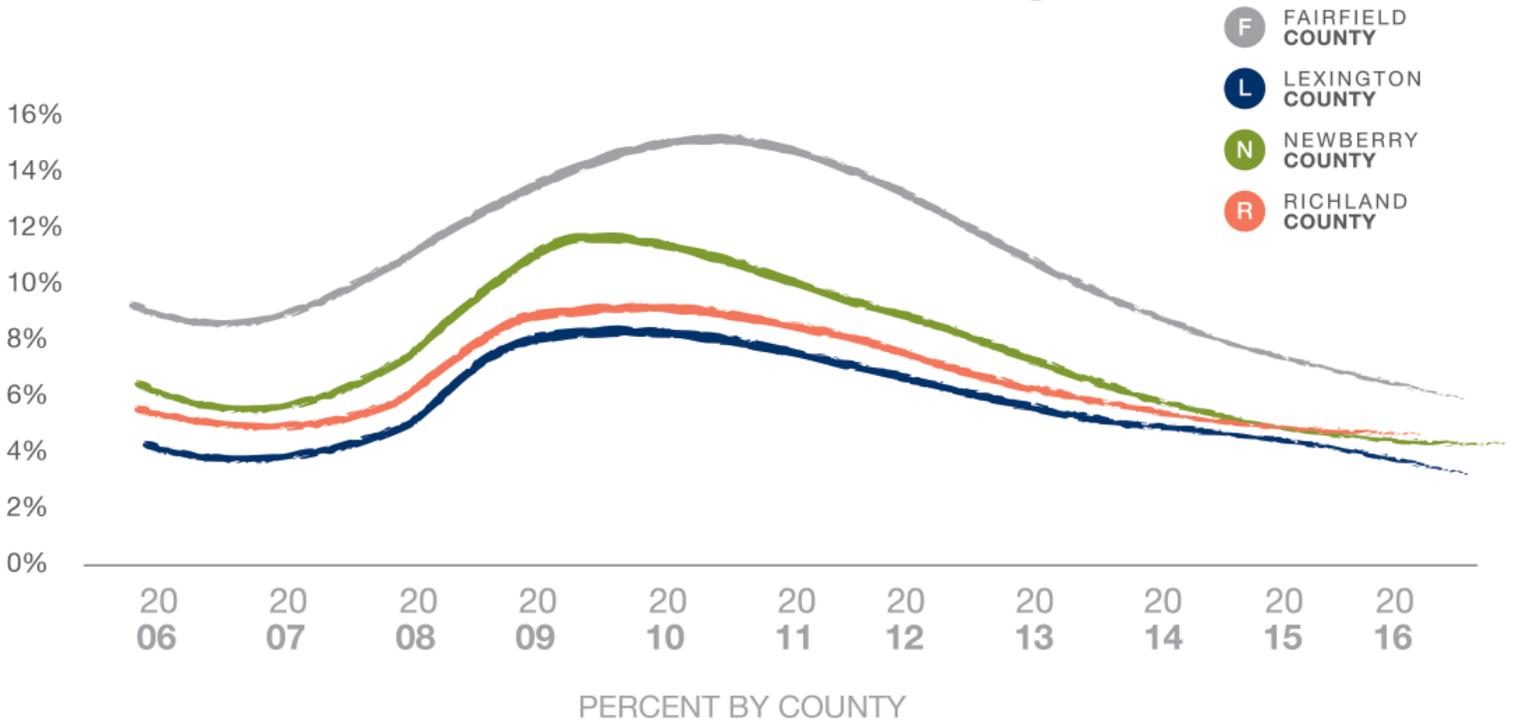
Because of the existing educational infrastructure in all four counties, the region is relatively strong in terms of educational attainment. Approximately 84% of the population 25 years and older have a high school diploma or higher, while 24% have a bachelor's degree or higher. The region is well endowed with a number of quality institutions of higher education serving a student body of almost 60,000. The technical college system continues to develop programming with regional workforce needs in mind and there are also a number of other public, private, and non-governmental entities working collaboratively to expand the region's capacity to meet changing labor demands.



HIGHEST EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

- >HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA
- HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA
- SOME COLLEGE OR ASSOCIATE'S DEGREE
- BACHELOR'S DEGREE
- GRADUATE OR PROFESSIONAL DEGREE

UNEMPLOYMENT ► TRENDS



Fairfield County
2016 Unemployment Rate

6.9%

Newberry County
2016 Unemployment Rate

4.3%

Lexington County
2016 Unemployment Rate

3.9%

Richland County
2016 Unemployment Rate

4.6%

ALLEN UNIVERSITY	▶ 6,00
BENEDICT COLLEGE	▶ 2,282
CENTURA COLLEGE	▶ 70
COLUMBIA COLLEGE	▶ 1,200
COLUMBIA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY	▶ 1,011
FORTIS COLLEGE	▶ 178
LIMESTONE COLLEGE	▶ 355
MIDLANDS TECHNICAL COLLEGE	▶ 16,000
NEWBERRY COLLEGE	▶ 1,155
REMINGTON COLLEGE	▶ 374
SOUTH UNIVERSITY	▶ 1,464
UNIVERSITY OF PHOENIX	▶ 487
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA	▶ 34,099

INSTITUTIONS OF
HIGHER EDUCATION
2016
ENROLLMENT



Photo credit: Experience Columbia SC

Natural and Cultural Resources

The natural and cultural resources of the region are important and critical assets. The preservation and long term sustainability of these resources is a high priority economic development objective. In addition to providing critical resources to area businesses, a clean and attractive natural environment with an abundance of art, culture, and recreational resources is an asset for attracting and retaining a skilled workforce, promoting tourism, and ensuring that the region maintains a reputation as one of the best places to live and do business.

Water is one of the most abundant resources in the region. The three rivers which converge in downtown Columbia are now being recognized as one of the region's greatest assets. While the rivers have historically served as a dividing line in some ways, a renewed focus on a clean, accessible river system promises to serve as a major selling point for the region for years to come. Much work still needs to be done, however, as 25% of the water quality monitoring stations in the region are impaired and do not support their designated use. This is especially important for Lower Saluda and Congaree rivers which support a growing recreational water use industry.

Another important natural resource for the region is its land base which is both biologically diverse and supportive of a strong agricultural sector that has a rich heritage and renewed emphasis on local food production. Protecting critical habitat and preserving working land uses such as farming and forestry, are two important objectives with great economic development potential.

The region's arts and entertainment industries are also an important and emerging sector of the regional economy, with an 80% growth rate between 2010 and 2017. Natural, cultural, recreational, and tourism industries continue to grow at a rapid rate and should be supported by public and private entities alike in order to sustain this growth and create new economic opportunity.

Infrastructure

Investment in our regional infrastructure is a critical component of economic development that enhances the daily functioning of our community and provides the necessary ingredients for growth and prosperity. Because of the abundance of water resources, the region has been successful in developing an expansive water distribution and sewer collection system serving the urbanized area. Centralized water and sewer service in the rural areas, however, continues to be limiting factor for growth and industrial development. The lack of consolidation of water and sewer providers across the region also presents a number of challenges for both urban and rural areas, most important of which is the limited ability to make capital intensive investments in infrastructure improvements and system expansions.

Broadband access, an important economic driver, also follows the urban-rural divide as it is abundant in the urban and suburban areas but limited in the two rural counties. The issue of providing better service is complicated by the fact that South Carolina law determines which providers can provide service in any given area.

While most of the region has access to power, electricity prices remain high. A primary driver is the 2007 Base Load Review Act which has allowed utility companies to pass along rate hikes for nuclear construction to consumers during the construction of 2 new reactors at the V.C. Summer Nuclear Station, a project which was recently abandoned.

The region is served by a well-connected multi-modal transportation system consisting of highway, rail, bus transit, and air infrastructure. Because of its location in the center of the state, the transportation network effectively connects the Columbia area to the port of Charleston and a number of other major metropolitan markets within the Southeastern United States. Despite the regional connectivity, peak hour congestion in the Columbia area is a major challenge with some of the hot spots consisting of the I-26/I-20 interchange and many of the region's primary thoroughfares connecting suburban areas with the interstate and downtown Columbia (e.g., US 378 and US 1). The Comet, which is the region's primary public transit system, provides fixed route bus service in the Columbia area with some limited services in Lower Richland County and West Columbia/Cayce. As the region's population grows, effective public transit upgrades and service expansions will be needed, including investments in commuter based services, especially now that Newberry-Columbia Smart Ride has been suspended.

The region is poised to make significant investments in the regional transportation system in the coming years. The Richland County 1% penny sales tax, passed in 2012, is providing a steady stream of funding for road improvements, transit service, and bike, pedestrian, and greenway facilities. SCDOT has also committed to improving the I-26/I-20 interchange, branded as the "Carolina Crossroads" project. Once implemented this project alone will have a positive impact regional mobility.



PLANNED TRANSPORTATION INVESTMENTS

I-77, I-26, I-20 Widening
Columbia Ave S-48
Hard Scrabble Road SC 262
Shop Rd Extension
Agusta Hwy



3 Rivers Greenway (Zoo)
3 Rivers Greenway Saluda Bridge
3 Rivers Greenway Congaree Bridge
Gills Creek Greenway
Smith/Rocky Branch Greenway



New Buses
New Stops and Shelters
New Flex Ride Services
New Downtown Circulator



Carolina
Crossroads

\$1.5b

Interstate
Widening Projects

\$404m

Top Road
Widening Projects

\$183m

TOP 5 LARGEST PRIVATE EMPLOYERS



10,500 ◀



▶ 6,450



4,000 ◀



▶ 3,974



2,500 ◀

Economy

The region is fortunate to have a diversified economic base built on a foundation of anchor institutions such as the state government, higher education, healthcare, military installations, and a broad range of large private sector employers of regional and statewide significance. Overall the regional cluster portfolio is approximately 70% local and 30% traded. Some of the top industry clusters by location quotient are vulcanized and fired materials, insurance services, and electric power generation.

Other top industries in terms of employment include state and local government, business services, distribution and electronic commerce, education and knowledge generation, hospitality and tourism, livestock processing, financial services, and transportation and logistics. The insurance tech industry, one of the nation's strongest, and distribution and logistics, are both area of competitive advantage for the region because of the favorable location and relatively educated workforce compared to the rest of the state. Increased onshoring of advanced manufacturing in recent years has led to several major foreign investments in the region - most notably, Samsung in Newberry County and China Jushi in Richland County. Other recent economic development announcements include LulaRoe, MM Technics, Electro-Spec Inc., and the expansion of the Trane facility.

The region has long had strengths in textiles and in business services, but these are declining in employment as industry shifts towards high-tech advanced manufacturing, cloud computing and outsourced business staffing needs. As mentioned earlier, the recent decision to halt construction of the VC Summer Nuclear power plant will also have significant impacts on the regional economy.

Competitive Advantages

- Central Location
- Abundant Water Supply
- Stable Institutional Anchors
- Low Cost of Living
- Natural Resources Base

Agriculture and local food systems is an area of the regional economy that has the potential for future growth as the demand for local foods continues to increase. According to the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Lewis' 2017 report: Harvesting Opportunity, there was a 223 percent increase in growth in local food demand over a 20-year span that far outpaced the average rate of sales growth in the U.S. agricultural sector. South Carolina is a prime food source for the Eastern Seaboard. However, despite the growing demand for local foods, over 90% of the food purchased by South Carolinians is sourced out-of-state. This data indicates a huge leakage in food purchases to out-of-region sources when demand indicates a potential for retaining much of the food chain dollars within the regional economy. According to Utah State University Extension, when you purchase more of your food locally, more of the money you spend remains in the local community. On average, it is estimated that buying local keeps approximately 65% of your dollar within the community, whereas shopping at large chain stores keeps only 40%. Creating new linkages in the local food chain would build the regional economy that would increase the multiplier effect of each food dollar spent purchasing from local farms.

The region's military installations are another critical aspect of the regional economy with a combined total economic of \$3.03 billion (including Shaw AFB in Sumter). Continuing and strengthening the ties between the installations and the region will strengthen the regional economy in the short term and ensure the long-term continuation of the military installations as a major regional economic engine.

Strategic Target Sectors

Insurance and Tech Industries
 Transportation, Distribution, Logistics
 Advanced Manufacturing
 Agriculture and Local Food Systems
 Arts, Recreation, and Tourism

TOP 5 TRADED INDUSTRY CLUSTERS BY LOCATION QUOTIENT





Resilience

Economic resilience is the ability to prevent, withstand, and quickly recover from any type of major disruption to the local or regional economic base. A disruption can be caused by the loss of a major employer, by a downturn in a specific industry or cluster, by a larger economic recession, or by a man made or natural disaster. In order for a region to be resilient, it must be able to adequately evaluate socio-economic risk and vulnerabilities, assess potential impacts, and build the institutional capacity to mitigate, respond, and recover from an event. Examples of strategies a community can adopt include, economic diversification, workforce resiliency, natural hazard mitigation (i.e., protecting critical economic and infrastructure assets), and regional coordination for pre and post disaster planning.

The central midlands region is fortunate to have a diversified economic base, increasing its ability to withstand and absorb a major disruption such as the recent suspension of work on the new reactors at the VC Summer Nuclear Power Plant. Though this disruption has been felt across the region, with a particularly devastating impact on Fairfield County, the economic and workforce development community has responded to address the short term needs of those directly affected. There remains, however, a need for regional coordination and collaboration in assessing and responding to the longer term impacts of this event.

Natural hazard mitigation is an important component of resiliency planning. Analyzing the historical extent and impact of hazard events aids in determining the probability of re-occurrence. Combining this information with socioeconomic data such as income, ethnicity, age, property values, and available housing units provides a clearer picture as to the locations most vulnerable and which may require assistance with returning to regular economic function.

Each County in the Midlands contends with various natural hazards, each with different economic implications. Hazards such as tornadoes and hurricanes have caused more than \$329 million in property loss and inflicted more than 200 casualties in the region since 1960. While these events are highly visible and immediate in their impacts, hazards like drought and extreme heat or cold result in hard-to-track but expensive economic impacts and threaten vulnerable populations. Since 1960 these hazards have caused more than \$225 million in damages to agriculture and infrastructure.

Continuous and collaborative, long-term resiliency planning is needed in order for the region to adequately adapt to future changes in the frequency and variability of extreme weather events. Temperatures in the southeastern United States are projected to increase as a result of increased levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Climate models consistently project higher minimum (overnight) temperatures, and higher maximum (afternoon) temperatures. The number of extreme high heat days about 95°F will likely increase.

Future changes in annual average precipitation are less certain as some models project higher annual precipitation, while others project decreases. However, heavy precipitation events could increase in frequency and intensity due to atmospheric water vapor increases. Despite possible increases in precipitation, increases in temperature can cause more evaporation and more rapid loss of soil moisture. When this happens in the midst of a dry spell, future droughts would be more intense. These changes will directly impact water quality and availability for the region as well as the natural and human systems that rely on this resource. Population growth in the region will increase competition for water and may also impact water quality due to land use change and decreased pervious surfaces near water bodies. In order to meet these challenges, the EDD should be prepared to serve as a source of information for resiliency planning and a facilitator for regional coordination and collaboration.

Economic Impacts of Natural Hazards in the Midlands Since 1960-2014



SWOT Summary

▼ Strengths

- Access to interstate highways connecting the region to major markets
- Proximity to rail lines, airport and Port of Charleston
- Abundant recreational and cultural attractions
- Longest unpolluted downtown riverfront
- Military presence and employment
- Insurance technology & services industry
- Low cost of living
- Water resources readily available and not limiting
- Higher education system
- Stable base of government employment



- Completion of downtown riverfront development with greater river access
- Enhancement and coordination of regional marketing and sense of pride
- Streamlining of licensing and permitting processes for businesses
- Reduction in property taxes
- Pursuit of midsize company headquarters
- Development of suitable sites and incentives for the knowledge economy
- Infill development and improved accessibility/walkability within the downtown areas
- Maintenance and improvement of existing infrastructure
- Improved awareness of regional opportunities
- Address gaps in basic student needs
- Maintenance and improvement of existing infrastruce
- Water and sewer access expansion in rural areas

▲ Opportunities

Weaknesses ▼



- Low awareness of attractive elements, including internally
- Lack of intergovernmental and intra-regional cooperation
- Utility costs
- Commercial property taxes, especially Richland County
- Lack of suitable development product and no regional megasites
- Limited rural infrastructure, especially water and sewer
- K12 education quality is inconsistent
- Poor roads, leading to accidents and congestion
- Labor skills mismatches in existing workforce
- High percentage of employment in low-wage sectors leads to persistent poverty



- V.C. Summer project cancellation's long-term effects are uncertain
- Continued dependence on shrinking government sector to fill employment needs
- Not enough focus on business growth and retention
- Inconsistency of proactive approaches to regional economic development
- Columbia Metropolitan Airport doesn't provide effective service - limited flight options
- Lack of a modern funding model for transportation and infrastructure
- Lack of regional cooperation in planning and coordination
- Poor planning for growth; traffic congestion and conflicts with land development
- Racial divides that continue to inhibit growth
- Aging workforce
- No solution to lower utility rates in sight

Threats ▲

Action Plan

Based upon the group's SWOT analysis and the numerous planning initiatives integrated into this document, several major goals emerged as regional priorities. These goals and their underlying strategies address systemic issues and opportunities which have the potential to transform the region's economic growth patterns and aid in the transition from a light manufacturing, government and basic services-centered economy to one attracting knowledge-based companies in advanced manufacturing, technology and other high-growth fields.

VISION

The midlands region will be a diverse, resilient, and creative region supported by a sustainable and inclusive environment for the development of a diversified economic base, a skilled workforce, and a high quality of life for all residents.

Goal 1: Develop a coordinated strategy for economic development across the region, built upon existing strengths and future industries.

Goal 2: Improve regional infrastructure, including transportation, housing, water, sewer and broadband.

Goal 3: Coordinated strategies for cross-sector regional planning to ensure sustainable growth and high quality of life, meeting economic, environmental and social needs.

Goal 4: Diversify and develop regional leadership.

Goal 5: Coordinated solutions for workforce development, that directly integrate regional and local economic development and growth plans.

Goal 1: Develop a coordinated strategy for economic development across the region, built upon existing strengths and future industries.

Background:

The Central Midlands has seen some significant wins in recent years with announcements such as Samsung, China Jushi and Amazon. However, the region currently has numerous entities practicing economic development in some capacity, and there remains little coordination between these entities to utilize consistent branding, strategy and target markets. In addition, current incentive structures have fostered a limited definition of economic development, reflected in a narrow focus on manufacturing, distribution and similar announcements. Better connections between local agricultural and military systems present significant opportunities for the region.

Strategies:

- Develop incentive programs for non-manufacturing/distribution growth, focused around higher average wages, with better tools to grow existing industry
- Continue the diversification of the Central Midlands' industry base through a broader definition of economic development and a more diverse recruitment strategy
- Create a program to recruit small companies with high growth potential
- Increase economic connections between regional military installations and communities
- Develop a sustainable, accessible, local food system that reduces agricultural barriers, stimulates demand for locally produced goods, decreases food insecurity, agricultural barriers, and reduces food waste

Evaluation Metrics

- Increase in local food products consumed by residents and visitors
- Number of acres of farmland preserved
- Decrease in food waste sent to landfills
- Job creation
- Average wages
- New investments
- Military installations economic impact

Goal 2: Improve regional infrastructure, including transportation, housing, water, sewer and broadband.

Background:

The Central Midlands has significant opportunities to create a friendlier environment for economic development through the improvement of transportation and infrastructure networks. While the region faces relatively short commute times and has a strong network of interstate highways providing easy access to major markets, road conditions and infrastructure need upgrades to handle increasing population and volume. In addition, water and sewer expansion and upgrades represent opportunities to increase the area accessible for economic development while limiting waterway pollution. Alternative transportation options are currently limited, but represent an area of focus as growth continues throughout the region. Broadband access and providers are regulated by state law, limiting the ability to provide better service to many areas.

Strategies:

- Expand public transit service to non-Richland County areas and explore alternative funding models
- Support and invest in all modes of transportation (e.g., bike, pedestrian, and greenway facilities)
- Increase and preserve affordable housing across the region
- Improve traffic flow along major corridors through coordination with SCDOT and CMCOG/COATS
- Develop a regional water resource management plan to improve water quality and ensure long term sustainability for domestic, industrial, and recreational uses
- Increase water and sewer capacity in rural areas through regionalization of wastewater treatment facilities and funding for service expansion and needed upgrades
- Improve Columbia Metropolitan Airport with more flight options, lower fares, and more connections with mass transit

Evaluation Metrics

- New water and sewer service
- Average commute time
- Number of public transit users and new service routes
- Investments in bike, pedestrian, and greenway facilities
- Number of passengers flying into/out of CAE
- % of housing burdened households

Goal 3: Coordinated strategies for cross-sector regional planning to ensure sustainable growth and high quality of life, meeting economic, environmental and social needs.

Background:

Much as with economic development, local government planning is often conducted within the confines of individual political jurisdictions. This has led to a development pattern dominated by low density single family residential development with little focus on infill opportunities. This type of development pattern can lead to increased congestion, greater infrastructure costs, a loss of open space, air and water quality concerns, and limitations to economic mobility. Current and future trends at the national and local level a growing demand for more mixed-use, infill development, particularly within downtown areas. Collaborative growth planning efforts are needed to ensure more efficient and resilient development patterns.

Strategies:

- Create a master growth and development plan that takes into account economic development, historic preservation, environmental, and social needs, with support and “buy in” from local government, business, and nonprofit leadership
- Host regional planning summits bringing together various planning entities and initiatives
- Encourage prioritization of higher density, mixed-use, walkable and bikeable communities as a key tenet of attractive environments for economic development
- Complete development of a connected riverfront, including the downtown section, to create a regional attraction and destination spurring private-sector investment
- Create a nimble public/private entity to oversee downtown riverfront development
- Adopt a clear definition of “livability”, shared by all stakeholders across the region
- Coordinate regional marketing to promote the region for both economic development and tourism, with greater recognition and promotion of regional assets
- Enhance support for existing regional arts, entertainment, recreation, and tourism assets by increasing their visibility, promoting connectivity, and facilitating targeted research and investment opportunities
- Preparedness to serve as a responsive partner, information hub, and convener to facilitate rapid and long term recovery from economic disruption

Evaluation Metrics

- Number of pedestrian/cyclist commuters
- Regional population and employment growth by Census Tract
- Greenfield vs. infill development - # and distribution of new single-family residential building permits issued
- Urban core population in Columbia, West Columbia, Cayce and Lexington
- Increased economic impact of arts, recreation, and tourism industries

Goal 4: Diversify and develop regional leadership.

Background:

The Central Midlands faces a looming leadership gap, with little diversity of age, race and gender in leadership positions. By working with current leaders across private and public sectors, an initiative to develop the next generation of regional leadership could create a smooth transition and greater opportunities for collaboration and growth.

Strategies

- Systematize leadership development on regional boards and commissions, including those of non-profits, to prioritize greater diversity and young leadership representing a broader cross-section of the community
- Increase public sector engagement and coordination with service providers, community leaders, and stakeholders representing limited english proficiency (LEP) populations
- Develop an integrated, cohesive regional economic development coordinating council or information network that includes public, private and nonprofit sector representation

Evaluation Metrics

- # of regional public, private, and non-profit organizations with diverse leadership and board representation
- # of public sector outreach efforts targeting LEP populations

Goal 5: Coordinated solutions for workforce development, that directly integrate regional and local economic development and growth plans.

Background:

Much like the nation as a whole, the region faces skills gaps in fields such as advanced manufacturing, engineering and computer science. Numerous initiatives aim to address pieces of this issue, but a collaborative, region-wide effort could put the Central Midlands at the forefront of the fight against the skills gap and present a tremendous asset in attracting and retaining businesses, while also increasing regional entrepreneurship and innovation.

Strategy:

- Close the skills gap by increasing workforce training programs matched to higher-opportunity jobs
- Enrich the relationship between businesses and education, with more embedded programs in schools (vs. at businesses) and with adaptive curricula
- Adopt STEM Premier in all districts in 4-county CEDS Region
- Develop region-wide employability skills training programs for the high school, transitioning workforce and existing workforce levels
- Create apprenticeship programs for knowledge economy positions, extending into regional leadership organizations
- Incentives to retain and recruit immigrant workforce in areas of need
- Develop an integrated solution to attract and retain talent
- Develop a centralized database of service providers and outreach programs serving limited english proficiency (LEP) populations

Evaluation Metrics

- Number of registered apprenticeship and internship programs
- Number of workforce training program graduates (e.g., ReadySC trainees)
- # of new jobs created
- # of students with access to STEM Premier
- # of degrees awarded from regional institutions of education
- Local retention rates of college graduates from regional institutions of higher education



Photo credit: City of Newberry