

Central Midlands

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy 2023 Annual Performance Report

The 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. 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 updated every five years. Central Midlands Council of Governments (CMCOG) serves as the EDD for the Central Midlands region. CMCOG adopted a new five-year CEDS document in December 2022. As part of the ongoing planning process, EDA requires development of a CEDS Annual Performance report each year. The 2023 Annual Performance Report provides an update of selected regional economic conditions as they relate to the goals, objectives, and evaluation metrics established in the 2022 – 2027 CEDS. The 2023 Annual Performance Report does not include or recommend any “major changes” to the 2022-2027 CEDS.

COMMUNITY

Growth and Development

The current American Community Survey (ACS) 2017-2021 five-year population estimate for the CMCOG region is 765,470, which is an 8% increase from the 2010 Census. The regional annual average growth rate of 0.8% is less than the SC rate of 1.1% but higher than the national rate of 0.6%.¹

In 2022, a total of 5,978 residential building permits were issued in the region, a 13% increase from the previous year. Forty percent of the residential permits issued were multi-family. The total value of residential permits was \$1.1 billion. A total of 6,003 addition and repair permits were issued representing a 21% increase from the previous year. The total value of addition and repair permits was \$536.5 million. Richland County issued a total of 3,661 residential permits, 47% of which were multi-family units. Lexington County issued a total of 2,125

¹ American Community Survey (ACS) 2017 – 2021.

residential permits, 34% of which were multi-family units. Fairfield County issued 57 residential permits and Newberry County issued 135.²

Table 1: Regional Demographic Characteristics

	Percent			Value		
	Central Midlands	South Carolina	USA	Central Midlands	South Carolina	USA
Demographics						
Population (ACS)	—	—	—	765,470	5,078,903	329,725,481
Male	48.6%	48.7%	49.5%	372,045	2,474,059	163,206,615
Female	51.4%	51.3%	50.5%	393,425	2,604,844	166,518,866
Median Age ²	—	—	—	36.7	39.8	38.4
Under 18 Years	22.2%	21.9%	22.5%	169,818	1,109,803	74,234,075
18 to 24 Years	11.7%	9.1%	9.2%	89,904	461,929	30,339,089
25 to 34 Years	13.9%	13.0%	13.8%	106,210	660,600	45,360,942
35 to 44 Years	12.6%	12.3%	12.9%	96,396	623,443	42,441,883
45 to 54 Years	12.4%	12.6%	12.6%	94,737	638,085	41,631,458
55 to 64 Years	12.6%	13.5%	13.0%	96,393	683,546	42,829,413
65 to 74 Years	9.2%	11.1%	9.6%	70,341	561,298	31,590,619
75 Years and Over	5.4%	6.7%	6.5%	41,671	340,199	21,298,002
Race: White	56.5%	65.7%	68.2%	432,378	3,334,961	224,789,109
Race: Black or African American	34.4%	26.2%	12.6%	263,585	1,328,691	41,393,012
Race: American Indian and Alaska Native	0.2%	0.3%	0.8%	1,669	15,595	2,722,661
Race: Asian	2.4%	1.6%	5.7%	18,154	83,441	18,782,924
Race: Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	0.1%	0.1%	0.2%	702	4,545	615,557
Race: Some Other Race	2.3%	2.2%	5.6%	17,266	109,896	18,382,796
Race: Two or More Races	4.1%	4.0%	7.0%	31,716	201,774	23,039,422
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	5.8%	6.0%	18.4%	44,452	306,230	60,806,969
Population Growth						
Population (Pop Estimates) ⁴	—	—	—	785,065	5,282,634	333,287,557
Population Annual Average Growth ⁴	0.8%	1.1%	0.6%	6,103	56,361	1,940,990
People per Square Mile	—	—	—	283.1	175.7	94.3

Source: [JobsEQ®](#)

1. American Community Survey 2017-2021, unless noted otherwise

2. Median values for certain aggregate regions (such as MSAs) may be estimated as the weighted averages of the median values from the composing counties.

3. Disconnected Youth are 16-19 year olds who are (1) not in school, (2) not high school graduates, and (3) either unemployed or not in the labor force.

4. Census Population Estimate for 2022, annual average growth rate since 2012. Post-2019 data for Connecticut counties are imputed by Chmura.

² Central Midlands Council of Governments

Table 2: 2022 Regional Building Permit Summary

Year	CMCOG	Fairfield	Lexington	Newberry	Richland
Total Permits Issued	10,478	190	4,086	533	5,669
Total Value	\$2,164,075,881	29,364,611	\$939,032,391	\$115,591,908	\$1,080,086,971
Total Residential Permits	5,978	57	2,125	135	3,661
Total Residential Permit Value	\$1,187,134,421	\$17,929,043	\$566,983,510	\$35,612,567	\$566,609,301
Single Family Units	3,539	57	1,409	135	1,938
Single-Family Permit Value	\$880,147,208	\$17,929,043	\$474,938,022	\$35,612,567	\$351,667,576
Multi-Family Units	2,439	0	716	0	1,723
Multi-Family Permit Value	\$306,987,213	\$0	\$92,045,488	\$0	\$214,941,725
Additions/Repairs	6,003	90	2,232	284	3,397
Addition/Repairs Value	\$536,524,616	\$6,763,499	\$150,882,479	\$18,281,134	\$360,597,504
New Non-Residential	812	43	394	114	261
Non-Residential Value	\$440,416,844	\$4,672,069	\$221,166,402	\$61,698,207	\$152,880,166

Source: Central Midlands Council of Governments

The Midlands Business Leadership Group (MBLG) Governmental Coordination Committee continues working towards breaking ground on the first of eight planned landscaped gateways along key corridors around the region. Final designs for the SC 302/Airport Boulevard Gateway, which will be the first project to be implemented, is nearing completion and anticipated to be bid for construction in 2024.

Several initiatives are underway to promote the natural, cultural, and outdoor recreational resource economy. The Congaree Biosphere Region Advisory Council continues to coordinate efforts in Richland County, while Fairfield County recently completed a Recreation Economy for Rural Communities plan with assistance from the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Catawba Regional Council of Governments (CRCOG) received a \$1,000,000 sub-grant from the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (SC DHEC) for the implementation of the South Carolina Brownfields Environmental Site Testing (SC BEST) program. The SC BEST program was created to fund environmental assessments of brownfield sites across the state. CRCOG serves as the Program Administrator and has allocated funding to each of the ten SC Councils of Governments to conduct eligible site testing within their respective regions. Funds allocated to each COG region are being used to conduct Phase I and Phase II Environmental Site Assessments for sites that have the potential for economic redevelopment with benefits for low-moderate income and rural areas. CMCOG received an allocation of approximately \$104,748 and has so far has identified five brownfields sites for potential inclusion in the program.

Richland County continued work on repurposing the former Columbia Place Mall as a County operations center and public service facility. The Town of Winnsboro received a MASC grant to develop a Main Street revitalization plan for the Town’s central business district.

Housing

There are 336, 294 housing units in the CMCOG region, 59.6% of which are owner occupied, and 29.7% of which are renter occupied. The homeowner vacancy rate is 1.3% and the renter vacancy rate is 5.1%. Approximately 5.7% of all occupied housing units have no vehicle available. The median house value is \$167,941.³

Under HUD criteria, a household is considered to be cost burdened if its occupants are paying more than 30 percent of their income for housing costs. On average, approximately 52% of renters in the CMCOG region are cost burdened while 24% of homeowners are cost burdened.

Fairfield County engaged a consultant team to undertake a housing study and needs analysis to assist the county and its partners in shaping the future housing market to meet the needs of current and future residents. The assessment, scheduled to be complete in early 2024 will provide the County with important information to assist with addressing housing stock, affordability, and future growth needs. The City of Columbia Affordable Housing Task Force also continues to work on housing affordability issues in within the City of Columbia and surrounding areas.

Table 3: Regional Housing Characteristics

	Percent			Value		
	Central Midlands	South Carolina	USA	Central Midlands	South Carolina	USA
Total Housing Units	—	—	—	336,294	2,325,248	139,647,020
Median House Value (of owner-occupied units) ²	—	—	—	\$167,941	\$181,800	\$244,900
Homeowner Vacancy	1.3%	1.4%	1.2%	2,599	19,258	1,021,651
Rental Vacancy	5.1%	8.7%	5.7%	5,504	56,828	2,674,125
Renter-Occupied Housing Units (% of Occupied Units)	33.2%	29.7%	35.4%	99,719	586,430	43,858,831
Occupied Housing Units with No Vehicle Available (% of Occupied Units)	5.7%	5.8%	8.3%	17,004	115,534	10,349,174

Source: [JobsEQ®](#)

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4. Census Population Estimate for 2022, annual average growth rate since 2012. Post-2019 data for Connecticut counties are imputed by Chmura.

³ American Community Survey (ACS) 2017 – 2021.

Regional Equity

The median household income in the Central Midlands is \$59,119. Based on the ACS, 108, 515 people or 14.8% of the population are below the poverty line. This is consistent with SC poverty levels, but higher than the national average. Approximately 10.8% of all households receive food stamps or SNAP benefits.⁴ Based on EDA's distress criteria, the CMCOG region has a 24-month unemployment rate of 2.98, which is lower than the national average; and a 2022 BEA Per Capita Personal Income of \$54,754, which is 83% of the national average. Of the four counties, Fairfield County has the highest 24-month unemployment rate and Newberry County has the lowest BEA Per Capita Personal Income.⁵

Created in 2017 by Congress through the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, Opportunity Zones are a federal program that incentivizes private economic development and job creation in low-income communities. The CMCOG region has 20 Census tracts designated as Opportunity Zones. In addition to the tax incentives offered by the Opportunity Zone program, many other federal, state, and local funding opportunities, including EDA programs, offer competitive advantages for investing in projects located within designated opportunity zones. Key economic assets and investment opportunities located within designated Opportunity Zones include: the SC I77 Megasite, the Fairfield Commerce Center, and the Walter Brown Industrial Park in Fairfield County; the Buckner Road/I-20 industrial area, and various medical office parks in Richland County; the Saxe Gotha Industrial Park in Lexington County; and various industrial sites in Newberry County with ready access to freight infrastructure. Critical economic development needs within the Opportunity Zones include: affordable office space for small businesses, support for minority and women owned business enterprises, workforce skills training and apprenticeship opportunities, transportation accessibility, and water and sewer infrastructure improvements.

The Southeast Crescent Regional Commission (SCRC) is a federal-state partnership authorized in the 2008 Farm Bill to promote and encourage economic development in areas of Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, and all of Florida. SCRC invests in projects supporting basic infrastructure, business development, natural resources, and workforce/labor development. SCRC's mission is to help create jobs, build communities, and improve the lives of those who reside in the 428 counties of the seven-state region. There are thirty-nine SCRC-designated counties in South Carolina and three in the Midlands Region: Fairfield, Lexington, and Richland. Each regional Council of Governments (COG) will be involved in the planning and project development activities required for the implementation of the State's SCRC program. For the 2023-24 Grant Year, the SCRC allocated \$20,000.00 towards public infrastructure projects categorized as basic public, telecommunications, and transportation, as well as projects to support basic health care, access to affordable housing,

⁴ American Community Survey (ACS) 2017 – 2021

⁵ StatsAmerica, using U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (unemployment), U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (PCPI) and U.S. Census Bureau (ACS 5-year PCMI) data

business, and workforce development, resource conservation and preservation, tourism, and recreation.

The City of Columbia Food Policy Committee, the West Columbia-Cayce Food Policy Coalition, and Fairfield Forward continue to work to address food access and equity issues in the Central Midlands region. The City of Columbia, in partnership with the Food Policy Committee, announced major new initiatives in 2023 to include the launch of a City supported mobile market, Grocery Access Pilot (GAP) program to increase access to online grocery delivery, and a business incentive program to attract grocery stores to underserved areas. The West Columbia-Cayce Food Policy Coalition and the Brookland Lakeview Empowerment Center developed a Community Food Assessment and implemented farmers markets and community gardens in underserved areas of Lexington County.

Table 4: Social Characteristics

	Percent			Value		
	Central Midlands	South Carolina	USA	Central Midlands	South Carolina	USA
Poverty Level (of all people)	14.8%	14.5%	12.6%	108,515	718,345	40,661,636
Households Receiving Food Stamps/SNAP	10.8%	10.7%	11.4%	32,506	211,210	14,105,231
Enrolled in Grade 12 (% of total population)	1.3%	1.2%	1.3%	10,051	63,346	4,425,322
Disconnected Youth ³	2.1%	2.9%	2.5%	1,010	7,835	432,389
Children in Single Parent Families (% of all children)	41.5%	39.7%	34.0%	66,112	410,901	23,909,672
Uninsured	9.3%	10.5%	8.8%	69,099	521,410	28,489,142
With a Disability, Age 18-64	12.1%	12.0%	10.3%	55,594	359,036	20,537,729
With a Disability, Age 18-64, Labor Force Participation Rate and Size	46.1%	39.6%	44.2%	25,603	142,194	9,068,973
Foreign Born	5.5%	5.2%	13.6%	41,962	263,917	44,844,808
Speak English Less Than Very Well (population 5 yrs and over)	2.8%	2.8%	8.2%	20,033	132,701	25,535,259

Source: [JobsEQ®](#)

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Table 5: EDA Economic Distress Criteria24-month Avg. BLS Unemployment Rate ending **October 2023****2022** Per Capita Personal Income (BEA PCPI)**2021** Per Capita Money Income (ACS 5-year PCMI)

	24 Month Unemployment	Threshold Calculation	BEA PCPI	Threshold Calculation	ACS 5-Year PCMI	Threshold Calculation
CMCOG Region	2.98	-0.69	\$54,754	83.6	\$32,982	87.6
U.S.	3.67	0.00	\$65,470	100.0	\$37,638	100.0
Fairfield County, SC	4.47	0.80	\$50,074	76.5	\$27,478	73.0
Lexington County, SC	2.63	-1.04	\$57,076	87.2	\$33,993	90.3
Newberry County, SC	2.84	-0.83	\$47,464	72.5	\$28,591	76.0
Richland County, SC	3.20	-0.47	\$53,963	82.4	\$32,952	87.6

Note: The threshold calculation for unemployment reflects the percentage point difference between the unemployment rate for the selected area and the U.S. figure. For example, if a region has a 24-month rate of 6.9 and the U.S. rate is 7.9, the difference shown in the threshold column is -1.0—meaning it is 1 percentage point lower than the national rate. The threshold calculation for income is the selected area’s per capita value divided by U.S. per capita income and shown as a percentage share of the U.S. figure. For example, if the selected area has a threshold calculation of 145.2, this means its per capita income is 45.2 percent higher than the nation at large.

Source: StatsAmerica, using U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (unemployment), U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (PCPI) and U.S. Census Bureau (ACS 5-year PCMI) data

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE

Education and Training

The CMCOG region has a civilian labor force of 388,155 with a participation rate of 64.3%. Of individuals 25 to 64 in the Central Midlands, 36.2% have a bachelor’s degree or higher which compares with 35.1% in the nation. Expected growth rates for occupations vary by the education and training required. While all employment in the Central Midlands is projected to grow 0.4% over the next ten years, occupations typically requiring a postgraduate degree are expected to grow 0.7% per year, those requiring a bachelor’s degree are forecast to grow 0.8% per year, and occupations typically needing a 2-year degree or certificate are expected to grow 0.7% per year.⁶

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⁶ JobsEQ®, <http://www.chmuraecon.com/jobseq>

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typically needing a 2-year degree or certificate are expected to grow 0.7% per year. The average worker in the Central Midlands earned annual wages of \$55,821 as of 2023Q2. Average annual wages per worker increased 6.6% in the region over the preceding four quarters. For comparison purposes, annual average wages were \$70,318 in the nation as of 2023Q2.

The largest major occupation group in the Central Midlands is Office and Administrative Support Occupations, employing 56,369 workers. The next-largest occupation groups in the region are Sales and Related Occupations (37,743 workers) and Transportation and Material Moving Occupations (33,962). Occupation groups in the Central Midlands with the highest average wages per worker are Management Occupations (\$109,500), Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations (\$95,000), and Legal Occupations (\$93,700). The unemployment rate in the region varied among the major groups from 1.2% among Legal Occupations to 5.0% among Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations. Over the next year, the fastest growing occupation group in the Central Midlands is expected to be Healthcare Support Occupations with a +1.4% year-over-year rate of growth. The strongest forecast by number of jobs over this period is expected for Transportation and Material Moving Occupations (+300 jobs) and Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations (+230). Over the same period, the highest separation demand (occupation demand due to retirements and workers moving from one occupation to another) is expected in Office and Administrative Support Occupations (6,742 jobs) and Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations (6,302).

As of 2023Q2, total employment for the Central Midlands was 398,457 (based on a four-quarter moving average). Over the year ending 2023Q2, employment increased 1.7% in the region. The unemployment rate for the Central Midlands was 2.5% as of September 2023. The regional unemployment rate was lower than the national rate of 3.6%. One year earlier, in September 2022, the unemployment rate in the Central Midlands was 2.8%.

Staff from the Midlands Workforce Development Board and the CMCOG Department of Research, Planning, and Development have been working to develop workforce training and certification pipelines for water and sewer utility operators, a public service sector job that is currently in high demand, particularly for rural utility providers.

Supportive Services and Accessibility

CMCOG Staff has been working to identify gaps, needs, and barriers to essential workforce support services such as transportation, and quality childcare, two critical barriers for prime – age labor force participation in distressed-rural communities such as Fairfield County. CMCOG partnered with Catawba Regional Council of Governments (CRCOG) to prepare and submit a Phase I and Phase II grant application for the EDA Recompete Pilot Program. If awarded the strategy planning and implementation grants will provide funding to help improve transportation and childcare access in Fairfield, Chester, and Union counties.

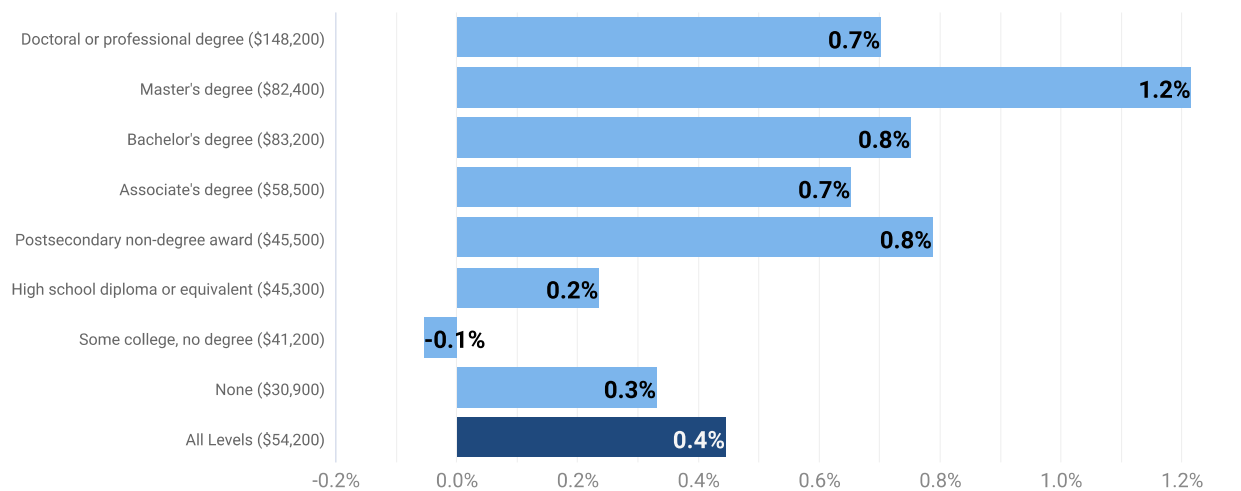
Table 6: Labor Force And Education Characteristics

	Percent			Value		
	Central Midlands	South Carolina	USA	Central Midlands	South Carolina	USA
Labor Force Participation Rate and Size (civilian population 16 years and over)	64.3%	60.2%	63.4%	388,155	2,444,002	166,672,597
Prime-Age Labor Force Participation Rate and Size (civilian population 25-54)	83.0%	81.3%	82.5%	243,075	1,548,075	106,173,534
Armed Forces Labor Force	1.8%	0.9%	0.5%	11,274	35,688	1,196,529
Veterans, Age 18-64	6.9%	6.0%	4.4%	32,591	183,279	8,848,937
Veterans Labor Force Participation Rate and Size, Age 18-64	74.1%	75.0%	77.0%	24,148	137,422	6,809,906
No High School Diploma	8.3%	10.2%	10.3%	32,769	266,056	17,756,046
High School Graduate	24.1%	28.1%	25.3%	95,069	731,241	43,535,564
Some College, No Degree	21.8%	20.5%	20.1%	85,646	534,926	34,637,141
Associate's Degree	9.6%	10.7%	9.3%	37,734	278,119	15,944,395
Bachelor's Degree	22.8%	19.7%	22.0%	89,663	513,078	37,890,674
Postgraduate Degree	13.4%	10.8%	13.1%	52,855	282,254	22,499,876

Source: [JobsEQ®](#)

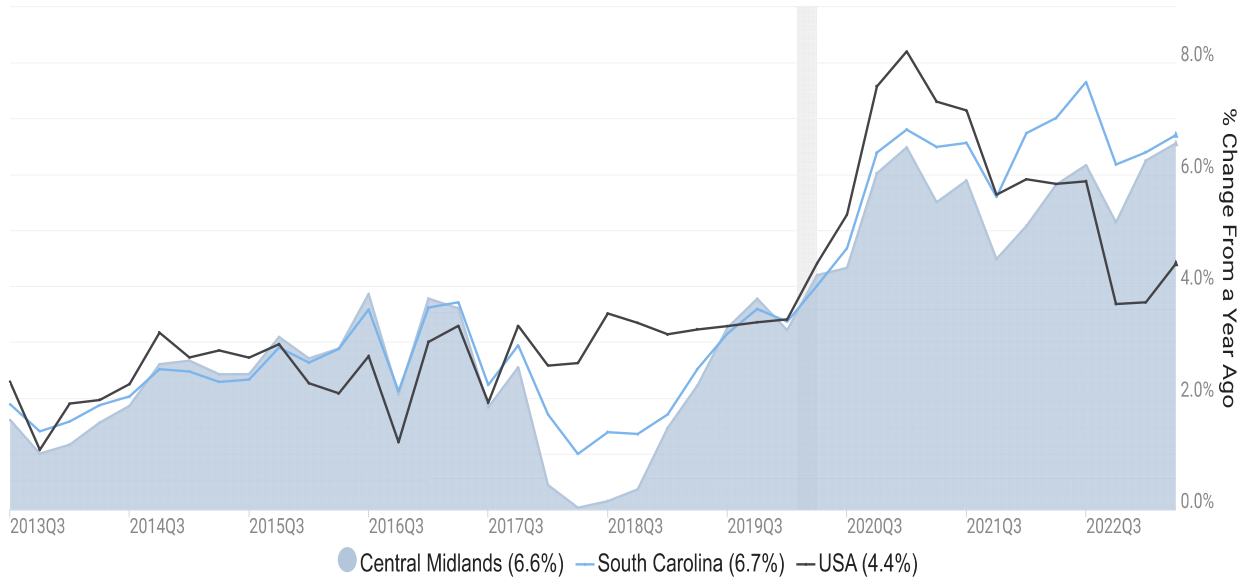
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Figure 1: Annual Average Projected Job Growth by Education Levels



Source: [JobsEQ®](#)

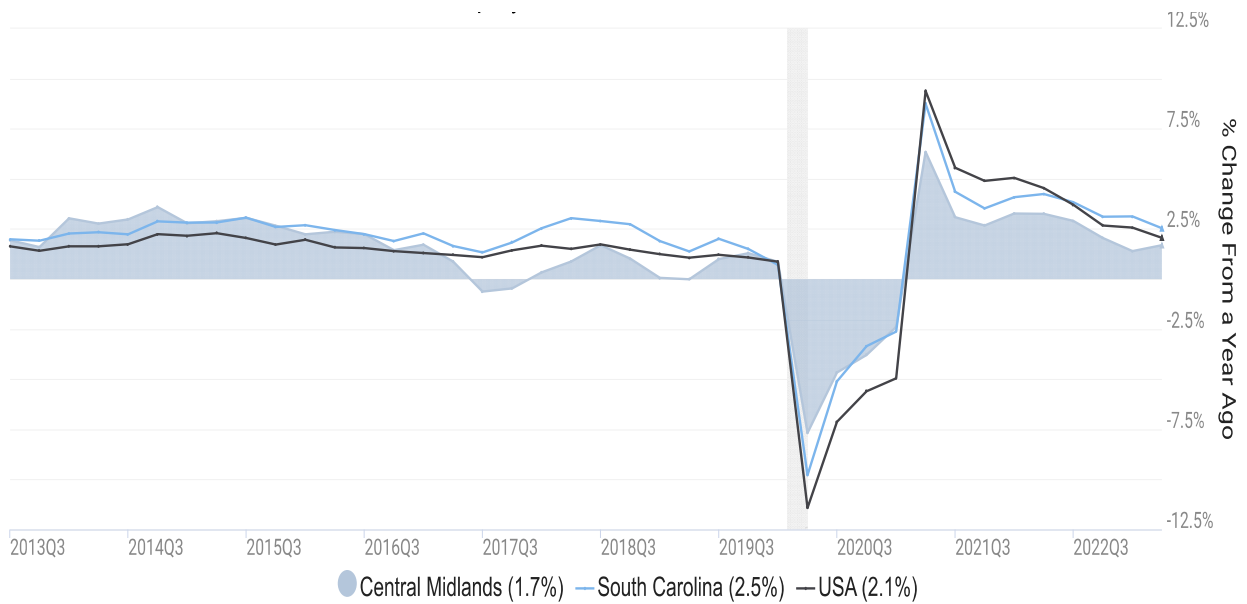
Figure 2: Average Annual Wages



Source: [JobsEQ®](#).

Annual average wages per worker data are derived from the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics and imputed where necessary. Data are updated through 2023Q1 with preliminary estimates updated to 2023Q2.

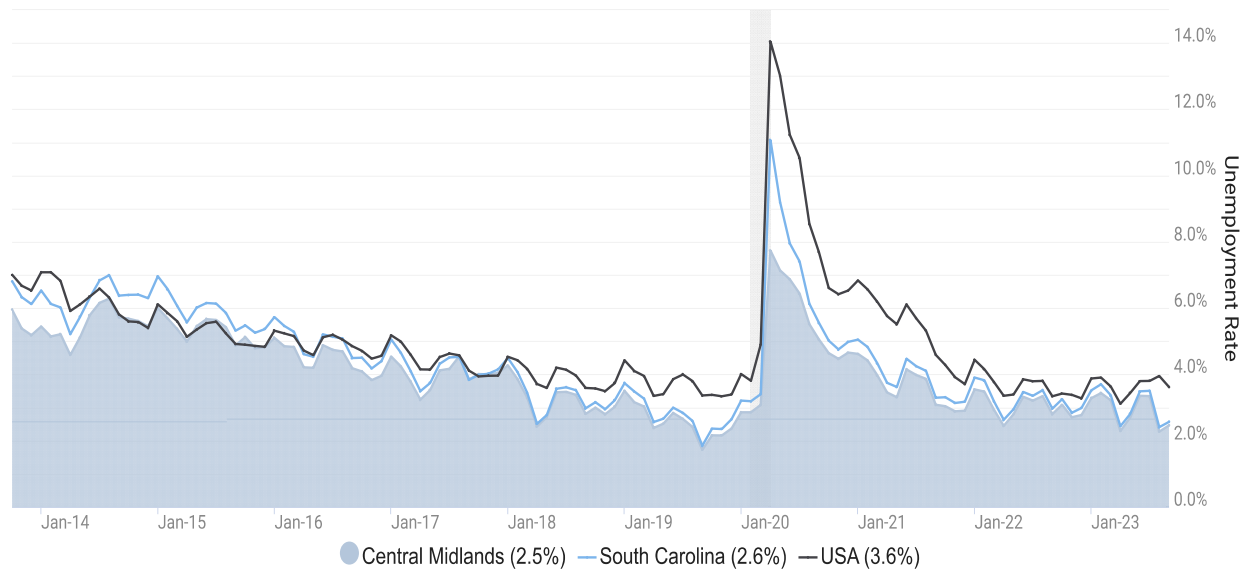
Figure 3: Employment Trends



Source: [JobsEQ®](#).

Employment data are derived from the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics and imputed where necessary. Data are updated through 2023Q1 with preliminary estimates updated to 2023Q2.

Figure 4: Unemployment Rate



Source: [JobsEQ®](#).

Unemployment rate data are from the Local Area Unemployment Statistics, provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics and updated through September 2023.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Water and Sewer

In April 2023 the S.C. Rural Infrastructure Authority (RIA) announced it awarded \$1.369 billion in grant funding to communities across the state to assist with improvements for clean drinking water, sanitary sewer and stormwater resilience. The purpose of the funds is help modernize and upgrade critical facilities that will have far-reaching impacts and benefits for communities in every county in the state. The S.C. Infrastructure Investment Program (SCIIP) was created by RIA as a major, one-time initiative designed to have a transformative impact on water, wastewater and stormwater systems in small and disadvantaged communities as well as larger, growing communities using federal funds allocated by the 2021 American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).

The CMCOG region was awarded 19 SCIIP projects totaling more than \$138 million. These transformative infrastructure investments from across the four county area range from major water, sewer, and drainage system improvements, to water and wastewater treatment plant expansions, to viability planning grants for smaller utilities.

The Fairfield Joint Water and Sewer System continues to work with Fairfield County and the Town of Winnsboro to plan for implementation of a new Wastewater Treatment Plant in Fairfield County. This important project will help expand wastewater treatment capacity in the County, which is essential for facilitating community and economic development growth.

Table 7: RIA SCIIP Projects Awarded in the Central Midlands Region

Grantee	Project Title	Awarded Amount
Batesburg-Leesville, Town of	Regional Connection to Finished Water Supply	\$ 10,000,000.00
Cayce, City of	Avenues Drainage Improvements	\$ 10,000,000.00
Columbia, City of	Lower Crane Creek Equalization Storage	\$ 10,000,000.00
Fairfield Joint Water and Sewer System	Winnsboro Sewer System Connector	\$ 10,000,000.00
Joint Municipal Water and Sewer	Water System Expansion to Batesburg-Leesville	\$ 10,000,000.00
Lexington, Town of	Watergate Service Area Improvements	\$ 10,000,000.00
Newberry County Water and Sewer Authority	Water Distribution System Upgrades	\$ 10,000,000.00
Newberry, City of	Major Interceptor Sewer Replacement	\$ 10,000,000.00
Richland County	Eastover Wastewater Treatment Plant Expansion	\$ 10,000,000.00
West Columbia, City of	Water System Improvements	\$ 10,000,000.00
Winnsboro, Town of	Water Treatment Plant Upgrade and Expansion	\$ 10,000,000.00
Richland County	Hickory Ridge Stormwater Conveyance System Upgrades	\$ 9,984,882.00
Gilbert-Summit Rural Water District	Water Treatment, Supply, Storage and Conveyance Improvements	\$ 9,616,356.00
East Richland County Public Service District	Sewer Trunk Lines Rehabilitation	\$ 6,000,000.00
Whitmire, Town of	Water and Sewer Infrastructure Improvements	\$ 849,953.00
Eastover, Town of	Water and Sewer System Assessment and Drainage Study	\$ 681,500.00
Swansea, Town of	Utility System Evaluation	\$ 606,655.00
Newberry County Water and Sewer Authority	Water Distribution System Upgrades	\$ 500,000.00
Whitmire, Town of	Water and Sewer Infrastructure Improvements	\$ 75,922.00
Total Investment in the Central Midlands Region		\$ 138,315,268.00

Source: SC Rural Infrastructure Authority; Central Midlands Council of Governments

Transportation

Construction of Phase I and Phase II of the \$1.7 billion Carolina Crossroads project began in 2023. The overall project calls for the construction of 132 mi. of new lanes; 14 mi. of widened interstate highways; 43 new bridges; seven reconstructed interchanges to replace outdated cloverleaf loops; and safer interstate exit points that are farther apart and separated from other freeway traffic.

Phase 1 of Carolina Crossroads is focused on the south end and is being built at a cost of \$210 million. It centers on the reconfiguration of the I-126/Colonial Life Boulevard interchange where two existing bridges are being rehabilitated and three new overpasses are being constructed to create a less-congested, full-access interchange. Nearby, improvements also are

planned to increase traffic flow along I-26 heading in the direction of U.S. Highway 378/Sunset Boulevard.

Phase 2 of Carolina Crossroads is being built at a cost of \$210 million and will consist of building three new bridges and the implementation of an offset diverging diamond at the Broad River Road interchange at I-20. This part of the project also will include construction of a new collector/distributor ramp that will make it easier for drivers to access I-26 westbound when coming from I-20 westbound. Another major component of this segment of the project is the removal of the shared ramp with Garner Lane Road to eliminate possible wrong-way driving out the eastbound entrance ramp to I-20.

In 2022, the Columbia Metropolitan Airport welcomed over one million passengers through the airport representing a 21% increase over the 2021 passenger traffic. In total the airport saw 527,599 enplanements and a total of 1,063, 630 total passengers through the airport (including those with one-way tickets to Columbia).

The COATS MPO/CMOG initiated a number of transportation planning sub-area and corridor studies in 2023, including one for East Columbia area, the Riverbanks area, Corley Mill/Andrew Corley Road Corridor, SC 6/SC 60 Corridor, and the US 76 Corridor.

The Irmo Chapin Recreation Commission kicked off preliminary engineering and design work for Phase I and Phase II of the Lower Saluda Greenway. Once complete the project will connect the Lake Murray Dam with the Saluda Greenway at the Riverbanks Zoo. New portions of the Saluda Greenway near Boyd Island were also opened to the public. Work continued on planning for the implementation of two pedestrian bridges across the Broad and Congaree rivers connecting the Saluda Greenway and West Columbia to the portion of the greenway running along the Columbia Canal. Once complete these projects will be transformative for the region.

Energy and Digital Technology

The SC Broadband Office continued work on the state's Broadband, Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) initiative. The BEAD program was created to identify the state's areas of greatest need, invest in broadband infrastructure, and provide resources to make broadband available to every home, business, and community in the state. More than 18,000 individuals and businesses across the state have been surveyed, and GetConnectedSC has taken part in nearly 50 community forum events to inform these investments for maximum impact.

Various agencies continue to work towards implementing Governor McMaster's Executive Order 2022-31 to develop a statewide economic development initiative to support growth of the electric vehicle industry. As part of this initiative the SC Department of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism will be installing EV charging stations at every state park, three of which are located within the Central Midlands region.

The Nexus for Advanced Resilient Energy (SC Nexus) received the U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration's (EDA) designation as one of 31 Regional

Technology and Innovation Hubs (Tech Hubs). The South Carolina Department of Commerce (S.C. Commerce) submitted the application for designation on behalf of SC Nexus, a broad consortium of higher education institutions, technical colleges, numerous state agencies, the Savannah River National Laboratory, economic development alliances, community organizations, non-profits and private companies, including electric utilities. The designation is part of a national program funded through the bipartisan CHIPS and Science Act of 2022, which authorized \$10 billion over the next five years to support the effort. The program is designed to support collaborative public, private, and academic partnerships to drive inclusive and equitable growth and economic development around these tech based industries. SC was one of 32, out of over 400 applicants, to be receive this Tech Hub designation.

The geographic focus of the project encompasses the Columbia, Greenville, Spartanburg, and Anderson Metropolitan Statistical Areas, as well as some additional surrounding counties including Aiken and Orangeburg. This geographic area covers more than 60% of the state's distressed counties, and the consortiums goal is for more than 40% of the jobs created from this effort to be sourced from underserved and rural communities. The designation furthers the work of SC's ongoing focus on energy resiliency and the development of advanced energy technology. It is also in alignment with a number of CMCOG regional initiatives, such as the EPA Climate Pollution Reduction grant, SCDOT carbon reduction program, and the inclusive economic and workforce development goals outlined in our comprehensive economic development strategy (CEDs).

ECONOMY

Competitive Advantages

The Cost of Living Index estimates the relative price levels for consumer goods and services. When applied to wages and salaries, the result is a measure of relative purchasing power. The cost of living is 6.6% lower in Central Midlands than the U.S. average.⁷

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is the total value of goods and services produced by a region. In 2022, nominal GDP in the Central Midlands expanded 6.9%. This follows growth of 6.7% in 2021. As of 2022, total GDP in the Central Midlands was \$48,790,937,000. Of the sectors in the Central Midlands region, Real Estate and Rental and Leasing contributed the largest portion of GDP in 2022, \$5,872,158,000. The next-largest contributions came from Health Care and Social Assistance (\$5,288,175,000); Manufacturing (\$5,078,228,000); and Finance and Insurance (\$4,410,471,000).

⁷ JobsEQ®, <http://www.chmuraecon.com/jobseq>

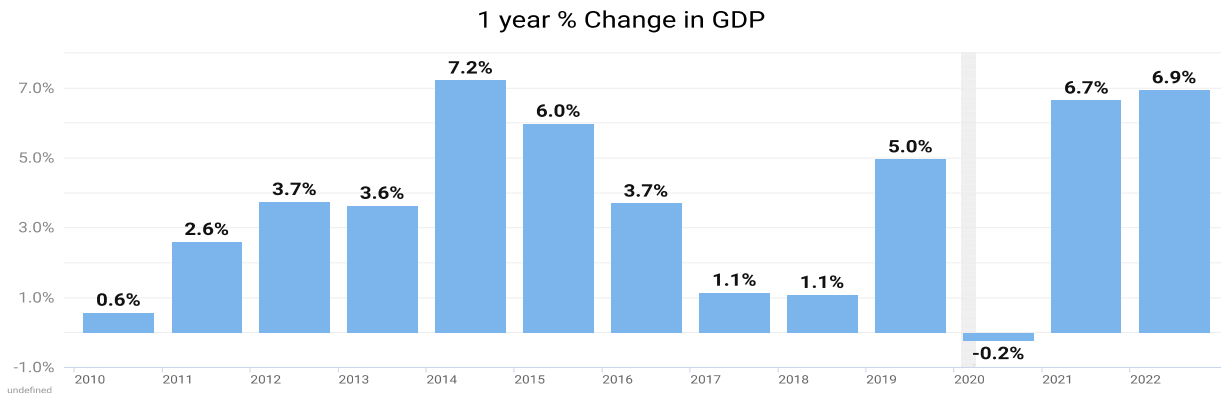
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Table 8: Cost of Living Index

	Annual Average Salary	Cost of Living Index (Base US)	US Purchasing Power
Central Midlands	\$55,821	93.4	\$59,764
South Carolina	\$56,304	93.0	\$60,513
USA	\$70,318	100.0	\$70,318

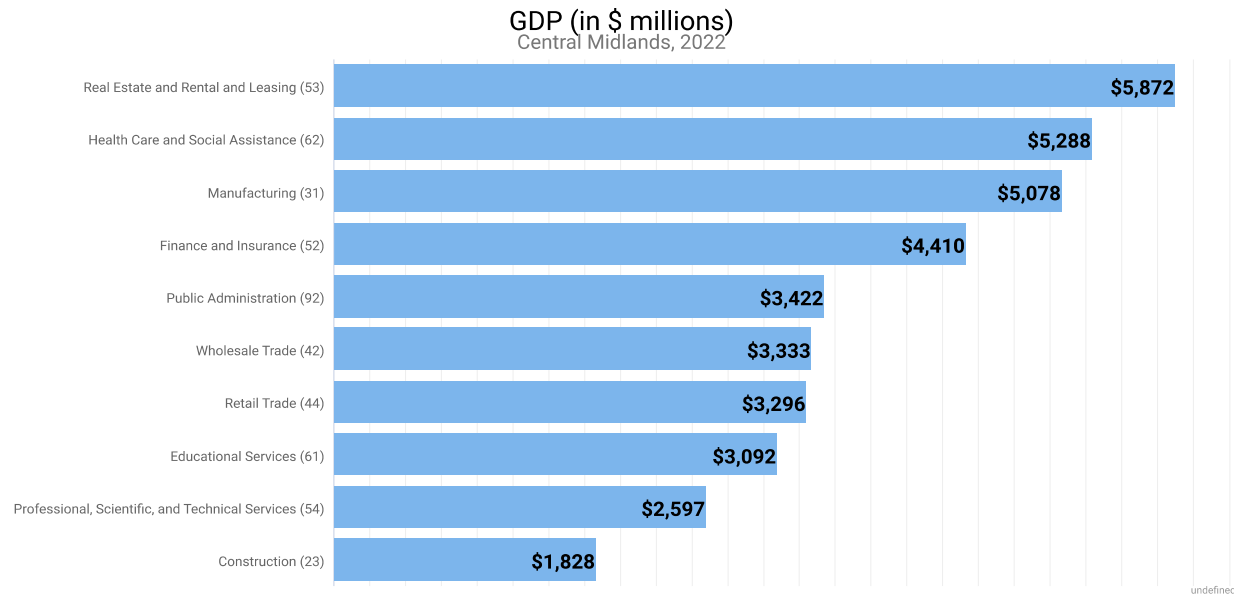
Source: [JobsEQ®](#)
 Data as of 2023Q2. Cost of Living per [COLI](#), data as of 2023Q2, imputed by Chmura where necessary.

Figure 5: Gross Domestic Product



Gross Domestic Product data are provided by the Bureau of Economic Analysis, imputed by Chmura where necessary, updated through 2022.

Figure 6: Gross Domestic Product by Sector



Gross Domestic Product data are provided by the Bureau of Economic Analysis, imputed by Chmura where necessary, updated through 2022.

Target Sectors

Of the sectors in the Central Midlands, Real Estate and Rental and Leasing contributed the largest portion of GDP in 2022, \$5,872,158,000. The next-largest contributions came from Health Care and Social Assistance (\$5,288,175,000); Manufacturing (\$5,078,228,000); and Finance and Insurance (\$4,410,471,000). The largest sector in the Central Midlands is Health Care and Social Assistance, employing 55,488 workers. The next-largest sectors in the region are Retail Trade (42,557 workers) and Accommodation and Food Services (35,337). High location quotients (LQs) indicate sectors in which a region has high concentrations of employment compared to the national average. The sectors with the largest LQs in the region are Public Administration (LQ = 1.77), Finance and Insurance (1.54), and Utilities (1.49).⁸

Sectors in the Central Midlands with the highest average wages per worker are Utilities (\$110,244), Wholesale Trade (\$87,506), and Management of Companies and Enterprises (\$86,605). Regional sectors with the best job growth (or most moderate job losses) over the last 5 years are Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services (+4,001 jobs), Manufacturing (+3,944), and Transportation and Warehousing (+2,074). Over the next 1 year, employment in the Central Midlands is projected to expand by 1,772 jobs. The fastest growing sector in the region is expected to be Transportation and Warehousing with a +1.3% year-over-year rate of growth. The strongest forecast by number of jobs over this period is expected for Health Care and Social Assistance (+555 jobs), Transportation and Warehousing (+198), and Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services (+186).

Overall the last year, 11 new industrial projects and 9 expansions of existing industries were announced in Richland, Lexington, and Newberry Counties. The combined investment for these projects is expected to be worth more than \$3 billion and create or retain more than 6,000 jobs.

The largest project announced in 2023 was the Scout Motors, Inc. project in northern Richland County. The \$2 billion manufacturing facility will be situated on a 1,600-acre site at the intersection of Interstate I-77 and Blythewood Road, just 2.5 miles south of the Fairfield County line. The facility is estimated to employ at least 4,000 employees and produce 200,000 vehicles annually. American automaker Scout Motors operates as a separate division of the Volkswagen Group. The business was founded in 2022 to provide electric automobiles with off-road capabilities. The Blythewood plant, with an operational launch date of late 2026, will be the first factory the company constructs. The location of the Scout facility will be the entire region, but especially Richland and Fairfield Counties, is expected to experience related industrial, commercial, and residential growth from the jobs created at this facility. This project will be transformative for the Central Midlands region.

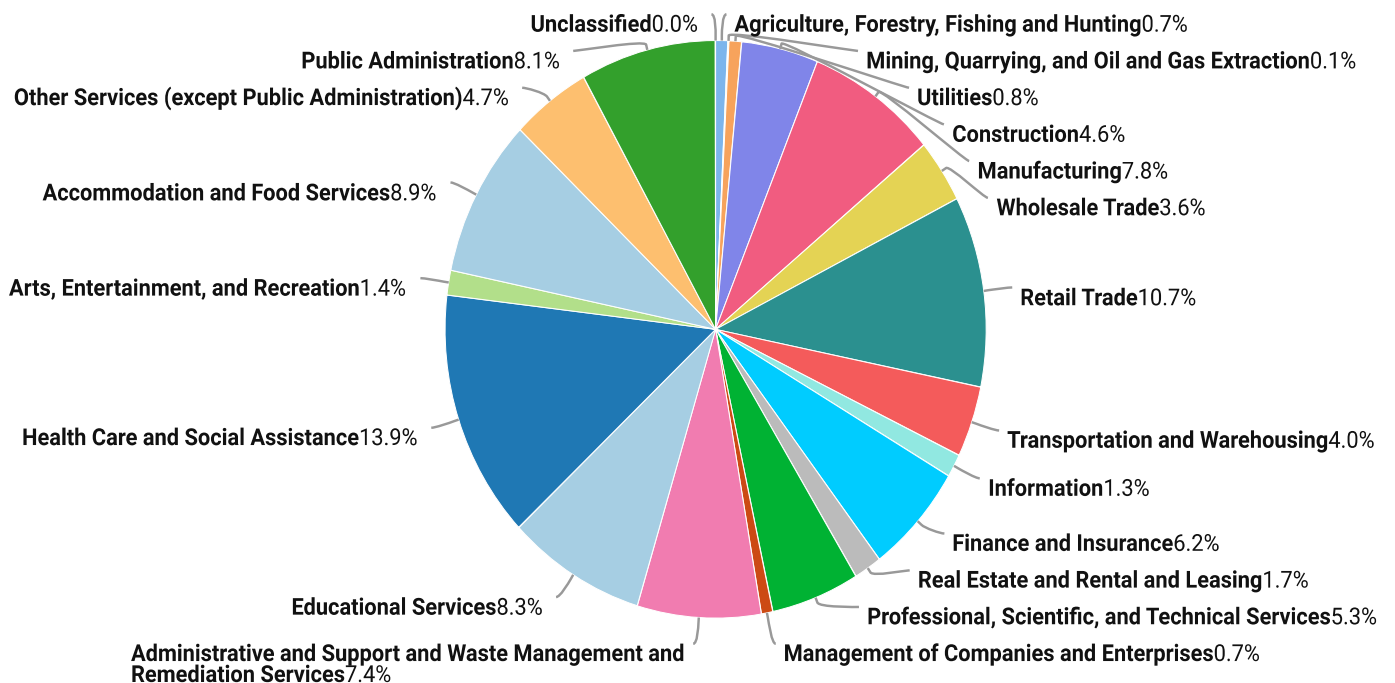
⁸ JobsEQ®, <http://www.chmuraecon.com/jobseq>

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The Columbia Metro Area, hosting the State’s capital, is home to multiple federal, state, and local government agencies and administrative staff. The public sector is well represented in the Central Midlands region, accounting for almost 20% of all employment. Average annual wages in the public sector are often competitive or surpass the rates of the private sector in multiple industry types. Industries such as Utilities and Information technology may benefit from more competitive salaries to aid in employee retainment.

The public sector wholly captures the *Public Administration* industry in the Central Midlands region, yet it has significant impacts in other industries. The public sector provides around 80% of employees in the *Educational Services* industry, from elementary to post-doctoral education. The proportion of public sector employees decreases dramatically in other industry types, even those necessary for efficient public administration. The public sector makes up 15-20% of industries such as Health Care & Social Assistance, and Information services. The public sector provides 10% of employees to the Utilities industry, an industry well represented by various local governments in the Central Midlands region.

Figure 7: Total Workers by Industry



Source: [JobsEQ®](#)
 Employment data are derived from the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics and imputed where necessary. Data are updated through 2023Q1 with preliminary estimates updated to 2023Q2.

Table 9: Industrial Development Activity

County	Firm Name	Investment	Jobs	Type	Description
Lexington	Flex	\$17,000,000	407	New	Electronic contract manufacturing
Lexington	Fed Ex	\$54,000,000	151	Expansion	Small package ground delivery services
Lexington	Givens	\$15,000,000	-	New	Distribution Center
Lexington	Ceeus	\$52,000,000	61	Expansion	Electronic contract manufacturing
Lexington	Southern Glazers Wine and Spirits	\$80,000,000	415	Expansion	Wine & distilled alcoholic beverage distribution
Lexington	Mattress Warehouse		108	New	Mattresses & assorted sleep products
Lexington	Chick-Fil-A Supplies	\$80,000,000	165	New	wood warehousing & distribution for Chick-Fil-A
Lexington	Executive Personal Computers	\$9,500,000	133	New	Information technology asset disposition (ITAD) provider
Richland	Husqvarna Construction Products	\$13,000,000	1	Expansion	Segmented diamond saw blades & core drill bits for cutting & drilling concrete, asphalt & stone
Richland	The Ritedose Corp	\$81,000,000	94	Expansion	Contract manufacturer with a focus on inhalation & ophthalmic products
Richland	Palmetto Millworks of the Carolinas	\$5,500,000	47	New	Construction products & materials
Richland	Mungo Homes	\$10,000,000	40	Expansion	HQ Residential home construction
Richland	Xerxes Corporation	\$6,390,000	80	New	Fiberglass reinforced plastic underground storage tanks
Richland	FN America	\$18,000,000	102	Expansion	DOD contractor & gun manufacturing
Richland	Cirba Solutions, LLC	\$323,000,000	310	New	EV battery recycling
Richland	Scout Motors	\$2,000,000,000	4,000	New	Manufacturing of electric, next-generation trucks & rugged SUVs
Newberry	West Fraser Timber Company	\$17,000,000	30	Expansion	Sawmills
Newberry	Kraft Heinz	\$72,000,000	-	Expansion	Poultry processing, deli meats, chicken strips & dinner sausage
Newberry	Duke Energy	\$70,000,000	-	New	energy
Newberry	Ecoplexus Inc.	\$89,000,000	-	New	Solar farm

Source: Central SC Alliance

Table 10: Industry Snapshot

NAICS	Industry	Empl	Avg Ann Wages	LQ	Empl Change	Ann %	Total Demand	Exits	Transfers	Empl Growth	Ann % Growth
62	Health Care and Social Assistance	55,488	\$65,053	0.97	1,873	0.7%	6,265	2,628	3,082	555	1.0%
44	Retail Trade	42,557	\$36,861	1.07	944	0.4%	6,009	2,579	3,435	-5	0.0%
72	Accommodation and Food Services	35,337	\$21,370	1.03	-366	-0.2%	6,327	2,800	3,389	137	0.4%
61	Educational Services	33,070	\$53,284	1.05	419	0.3%	3,321	1,544	1,710	67	0.2%
92	Public Administration	32,302	\$57,685	1.77	-805	-0.5%	3,208	1,321	1,881	6	0.0%
31	Manufacturing	31,256	\$68,467	0.97	3,944	2.7%	3,449	1,258	2,145	47	0.1%
56	Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	29,381	\$38,809	1.15	497	0.3%	3,654	1,442	2,107	105	0.4%
52	Finance and Insurance	24,594	\$84,152	1.54	1,854	1.6%	2,418	871	1,435	112	0.5%
54	Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	21,096	\$85,274	0.72	4,001	4.3%	2,095	704	1,205	186	0.9%
81	Other Services (except Public Administration)	18,867	\$38,111	1.11	64	0.1%	2,380	954	1,327	99	0.5%
23	Construction	18,313	\$61,835	0.77	92	0.1%	1,885	646	1,147	92	0.5%
48	Transportation and Warehousing	15,843	\$50,887	0.80	2,074	2.8%	2,095	765	1,132	198	1.3%
42	Wholesale Trade	14,157	\$87,506	0.94	374	0.5%	1,598	578	991	28	0.2%
53	Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	6,643	\$58,024	0.94	116	0.4%	725	307	380	38	0.6%
71	Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	5,507	\$26,288	0.71	-24	-0.1%	874	348	479	47	0.8%
51	Information	5,148	\$72,650	0.64	-626	-2.3%	546	182	327	37	0.7%
22	Utilities	2,996	\$110,244	1.49	-1,110	-6.1%	241	104	183	-45	-1.5%
11	Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	2,888	\$44,970	0.57	-382	-2.5%	370	162	204	4	0.1%
55	Management of Companies and Enterprises	2,714	\$86,605	0.44	-210	-1.5%	291	95	162	34	1.3%
21	Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	274	\$83,271	0.19	-17	-1.2%	30	9	19	1	0.4%
99	Unclassified	26	\$83,085	0.03	26	n/a	3	1	2	0	0.5%
Total - All Industries		398,457	\$55,821	1.00	12,740	0.7%	47,754	19,197	26,785	1,772	0.4%

Source: [JobsEQ®](#)

Data as of 2023Q2

Note: Figures may not sum due to rounding.

1. All data based upon a four-quarter moving average

Exits and transfers are approximate estimates based upon occupation separation rates.

Employment data are derived from the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics and imputed where necessary. Data are updated through 2023Q1 with preliminary estimates updated to 2023Q2. Forecast employment growth uses national projections adapted for regional growth patterns.

RESILIENCE

Natural Hazard Mitigation

In December 2022 CMCOG completed the five-year update to the Central Midlands Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan and worked with local government partners to adopt the plan. According to the plan, the economic impact of natural hazards in the Central Midlands region totals an estimated \$85.16B of direct property and crop damage in the period from 1960 to 2018. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) provides grant funds to proactively address these impacts. Examples of activities funded by the FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant Program include project planning, infrastructure retrofits, code enforcement, and early warning systems. The positive economic impacts of these activities extend beyond protecting life and property. A 2019 report by the National Institute of Building Sciences, *Natural Hazard Mitigation Saves*, studied the impacts of hazard mitigation through a benefit-cost analysis of hazard mitigation projects. The report utilized a nationwide dataset to show how \$1 invested into federal hazard mitigation programs saves an average of \$6 in future natural hazard losses. Other activities, such as updating to the latest building code requirements, saves an average of \$11 for every \$1 invested.

Table 12: Natural Hazard Impacts 1960-2018

Impact	Fairfield	Newberry	Lexington	Richland
Direct Losses	\$84,061,387	\$80,114,941	\$95,716,669	\$238,143,545
Injuries/Fatalities	79	78	107	211
Building Stock Value	\$2.24B	\$4.00B	\$29.89B	\$49.03B

Source: Central Midlands Council of Governments

Regional Coordination

Two new Federal programs are providing funding for carbon reduction measures. Under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, the USDOT is providing funding to SCDOT to develop and implement carbon reduction strategies focused on reducing transportation emissions. SCDOT is working to identify and deploy traffic signal performance improvements on key transportation corridors to optimize existing capacity and operations. They are currently working with the COATS MPO/CMCOG to identify corridors with the highest levels of delay for inclusion in the program.

As part of the Inflation Reduction Act, CMCOG was awarded a \$1M EPA Climate Pollution Reduction planning grant. The grant’s focus is to create a regional climate action plan for the Columbia-Newberry Combined Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). The climate action plan will include a regional Green-House-Gas (GHG) inventory, identification of GHG reduction measures, a community benefits analysis, and a workforce development analysis. As part of

the planning process, CMCOG intends to work with regional and state partners to apply for implementation funding through a separate Phase II grant competition. In addition to applying for implementation funding, the GHG inventory and project list generated in the climate action plan will also be useful for inclusion in the CEDS planning process as well as for the required resiliency elements in local government comprehensive plans.

Inclusive Economic Development

Significant barriers and inequities continue to exist for minority and women-owned business enterprises resulting in long-standing wealth and opportunity gaps. Supporting the growth and sustainability of minority and women-owned businesses is essential for local and regional economic recovery and resilience. The Mastercard Center for Inclusive Growth in partnership with Accelerator for America and Drexel University have created a small business equity tool to help local leaders and economic development officials better understand these issues within their regions. Data from this toolkit for the Columbia Metropolitan Statistical Area is summarized below.

Table 11: Small Business Equity (Columbia Metropolitan Statistical Area)

	Minority Owned Businesses		Women Owned Businesses	
	Number	Pct of Total	Number	Pct of Total
Population	361,426	43.8% of 825,004	424,165	51.4% of 825,004
Businesses	1,531	12.2% of 12,561	2,300	18.3% of 12,561
Jobs Created	17,201	6.1% of 284,012	26,586	9.4% of 284,012
Average Salary	\$24,941	59.2% of \$42,120	\$30,819	73.2% of \$42,120

	Minority	Non-Minority	Women	Men
Business Density Per 1,000 Residents <i>(Average, Top 100 Metros)</i>	4.2 (6.9)	20.4 (23.4)	5.4 (6.6)	18.5 (21.9)
Average Annual Sales - \$1Ks <i>(Average, Top 100 Metros)</i>	\$1,671 (\$1,280)	\$2,046 (\$2,611)	\$1,326 (\$1,322)	\$2,380 (\$2,857)
High-Wage Industry Participation <i>(Average, Top 100 Metros)</i>	9.5% (10.3%)	16.1% (16%)	19.3% (16.4%)	15% (15.3%)

Source: Small Business Equity Toolkit TM. Available online: www.smallbusinessequitytoolkit.com