Central Midlands Council of Governments Internship

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About the CMCOG

The Central Midlands Council of Governments was founded in 1969 as a political body situated between the county and state levels of government. It serves four counties in central South Carolina—Richland, Lexington, Newberry, and Fairfield—and the many municipalities within them. The role of the CMCOG, according to its founding agreement, is to “study and make recommendations on matters affecting the public health, safety, general welfare, education, recreation, pollution control, utilities, planning, development, and such other matters as the common interests of the members may dictate,” as well as to facilitate cooperation and communication among its members (Crowe, 2018). In other words, it serves a supportive role for local governments, assisting them with research, resources, and communication to prepare them as best as possible for a variety of issues.

Overview

Every ten years, the Central Midlands Council of Governments is responsible for writing and updating comprehensive plans for each of the counties and municipalities under its jurisdiction. A comprehensive plan is a living document that details long-term objectives for community development, growth, and resilience.

In South Carolina, comprehensive plans must include an inventory of existing conditions, statements of needs and goals, implementation strategies, and a timetable in which to reach stated objectives. The plans are broken up into ten elements: population, economic development, natural resources, cultural resources, community facilities, housing, land use, transportation, priority investment, and resilience. Resilience is new as of 2020 and was added in response to concerns about an increase in strategies, and a timetable in which to reach stated objectives. The plans impacts from natural hazards and climate change.

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My Role at the CMCOG

As an intern with CMCOG, I assisted with research and narrative-writing for several comprehensive plans. Most of my work focused on the natural resources and resilience elements of both the Fairfield County and town of South Congaree plans. Additionally, I did demographic research for the Fairfield County population section.

The natural resources section of the comprehensive plan includes information on land and soil type, climate, and water resources. This data helps planners understand the current state of the natural environment of an area and what changes need to be planned for in the next decade. I collated information on climate from the SC Climatology Office, on forests from the SC Forestry Commission, on impaired water bodies from SCDHEC, and on solar power capacity through Solar.SC.gov. I synthesized this information, creating narratives for public use.

I worked on two of the first comprehensive plans to include a resilience element. The resilience sections analyzes how community exposure to natural hazards may be affected by a changing climate. By studying the impacts and frequency of natural hazards, the goal of the resilience section is to be prepared for their inevitable occurrence and to mitigate their negative effects. Some of the hazards I have researched include heat, flooding, drought, hurricanes, thunderstorms, winter weather, wind, and tornados. For each hazard, I found information on direct monetary loss, injuries/fatalities, frequency, and expected change in overall risk. I identified the top five natural hazards and wrote narratives about each for each site. I also researched social vulnerability and intergovernmental coordination to better understand the ability of communities to withstand natural hazard events. This information is central to a risk-based approach, which is one of the most productive ways to manage climate change adaption. The greater the perceived risk, the greater demand for adaption to manage the risk (Dow, 2013). I mirrored this approach in my work, as I focused on the top five natural hazard risks in each comprehensive plan to ensure governments are adequately prepared for them.

Finally, for Fairfield County I used information from the 2020 census to update the population element. This includes demographics, income levels, health, unemployment, diversity, and educational attainment to name a few. I wrote narratives explaining this data and how it affects the county’s future. For example, as shown in the graph to the left, Fairfield County has an extremely high obesity rate of 45%, which has a large impact on factors such as healthcare and life expectancy.

References
