



Southcentral Michigan Planning Council

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2018 Southcentral Michigan Planning Council Annual Report

In 2018, the Southcentral Michigan Planning Council (SMPC) completed its fifth year of service delivery in Planning Region 3 (Branch, Calhoun, Kalamazoo, and St. Joseph Counties). Since its first meeting in 2013, SMPC has worked hard to delivered land use, transportation, economic development, education, and grant support services to member counties and local governments in the region. The SMPC Board and Staff look forward to assisting communities within Planning Region 3 in for another five years. Although SMPC's fiscal year coincides with MDOT's in ending September 30, this annual report covers the calendar year of 2018.

Land Use Planning Services Provided to the Planning Region

SMPC assisted local units of government with land use planning issues in all four of the member counties during 2018. SMPC staff worked to update master plans in Lockport Township (St. Joseph County), Florence Township (St. Joseph County), Sherman Township (St. Joseph County), and the City of Parchment (Kalamazoo County). Staff worked with the Planning Commissions of each of the local units of government to completely overhaul the existing master plans. SMPC staff provided assistance and guidance to several local units of government with their master plan updates.

SMPC staff continues to serve as the staff planner for Kalamazoo Township and St. Joseph County. As the staff planner for St. Joseph County, SMPC staff advises its County Planning Commission on zoning and land use matters within the County. SMPC staff typically reviews zoning or planning changes in the county and provides recommendations to the County Planning Commission as well as feedback to the local unit of government proposing changes. As the staff planner for Kalamazoo Township, SMPC staff holds office hours to interact with the constituents of Kalamazoo Township, acts as the zoning administrator, and serves the Planning Commission at and between meetings.

SMPC assists many municipalities with minor land use planning or zoning issues. SMPC will review and provide advice on master plans, recreation plans, and zoning ordinances to local units of government. These services are typically offered at no cost to the local unit of government. SMPC provided these services to several local units of government in 2018. Do not hesitate to contact Lee Adams (269-385-0409) if you need assistance.

Regional Prosperity – Southwest Michigan Prosperity Initiative (SWMPI)

SMPC continued to serve as co-administrator and co-applicant for SWMPI (Prosperity Region 8) in 2018. As such, SMPC staff facilitated the SWMPI Committee and its work. SMPC facilitated a region-wide survey on prosperity. The survey received 1,165 responses. The survey revealed desires for better roads, higher wages, more workforce training or internship opportunities, and an improved housing system. The SWMPI Committee examined the results of the survey before choosing to focus its resources on improving access to workforce training and internship opportunities. The SWMPI Committee sought partners to help it create and implement an internship awareness and development plan. SWMPI Committee chose to partner with Southwest Michigan First (SMF) and Western Michigan University (WMU). SMF and WMU partnered with Michigan Works! Southwest to develop Internship 101 informational workshops. SMF and WMU will to create an internship portal for Southwest Michigan in 2019.

Acting again as a co-applicant, SMPC successfully applied to the Michigan Department of Technology, Management and Budget for SWMPI's 2019 RPI grant. The work in 2019 will center around four subcommittees: Community Development, Economic Development, Infrastructure, and Workforce Development and Education. The Subcommittees will work to take on one pressing issue in the region that pertains to its goals and objectives.

Economic Development

SMPC provides economic development planning services to communities within its service area. In 2017, SMPC applied to the U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration (EDA) to become the District Organization for the regional Economic Development District; this designation would enable SMPC to bring additional federal funding to the region. In 2018, SMPC continued to petition EDA for the District Organization designation. SMPC will continue this work in 2019. The Economic Development District (Barry, Branch, Calhoun, Kalamazoo, and St. Joseph Counties) is designated by the EDA as an Economic Development District. In addition to petitioning for District Organization status in 2019, SMPC will update the Comprehensive Economic Development Plan for the Region. The plan was written in 2014 and expires in December. The plan is needed to gain access to EDA project funding. Several projects have applied for EDA funding since the CEDS was approved; the WMU Business and Technology Research Park received \$2.1 million in EDA funds in 2016.

SMPC remains a technical assistance provider for the Michigan Economic Development Corporation's (MEDC) Redevelopment Ready Communities (RRC) program. SMPC has funds to help communities achieve RRC Certification. Any community is eligible to participate in the RRC program. In fact, the MEDC restricts certain funding sources to only allow RRC Certified communities access. Fortunately, it is free to participate in the program and SMPC is ready, willing, and able to provide assistance with the certification process. Contact Lee Adams (269-385-0409) or Karen Wieber of the MEDC (517-881-9938) if you are interested in more information.

Transportation

SMPC provides transportation planning services to the region through the Kalamazoo Area Transportation Study (KATS). The Michigan Department of Transportation contracts with SMPC to provide transportation planning services on its behalf. In 2018, SMPC and KATS administered technical assistance, access management, Pure Michigan Byway, Rural Task Force, Small Urban, and asset management programs for the region on behalf of MDOT. SMPC will have funds in 2019 to assist local communities with their transportation planning needs. Please contact Lee Adams (269-385-0409) of SMPC or Fred Nagler (269-343-0766) of KATS if you have transportation planning needs.

Education

Providing education to communities in Planning Region 3 is a major priority for SMPC; it is one of the six goals found in the SMPC Strategic Plan. In May of 2018, SMPC hosted a workshop on the Open Meetings Act and parliamentary procedure. Wendy Walker, Esq. from Michigan State University Extension led a session on the Open Meetings Act; she focused on the legal requirements each public body must keep in mind when holding a meeting open to the public. Julie Pioch, Vice President of the Michigan State Association of Parliamentarians, also from MSU Extension led a session on how to use parliamentary procedure at local government meetings. The workshop was attended by over 40 local government representatives. SMPC held another educational workshop in November of 2018; this workshop focused on the land use implications of marijuana legalizations. Catharine Kaufman of Bauckman, Sparks, Thall, Seeber, and Kaufman, P.C. lead sessions on medical marijuana and the recently approved recreational marijuana initiative. The workshop was attended by more than 50 local government representatives.

Grant Support

SMPC provided many letters of support for various grant applications throughout the region. SMPC is willing to supply letters of support for any application or initiative congruent with its strategic priorities. Because of its partnership with the W.E. Upjohn Institute, SMPC is able to quickly assist local units of government assemble authoritative demographic and economic information for grant applications.

Administrative

SMPC completed a strategic plan in 2018. The strategic plan is found here: <http://smpcregion3.org/about>. SMPC board members and staff joined the Michigan Association of Planning in 2018. Finally, the SMPC Board discussing a long-term staffing plan; the board is working to extend the staffing agreement with the W.E. Upjohn Institute.