



Southcentral Michigan Planning Council

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2019 Southcentral Michigan Planning Council Annual Report

In 2019, the Southcentral Michigan Planning Council (SMPC) completed its sixth year of service to Planning Region 3 (Branch, Calhoun, Kalamazoo, and St. Joseph counties). Since its first meeting in 2013, SMPC has worked hard to deliver 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 local communities at deeper service levels in the coming years. Although SMPC's fiscal year coincides with MDOT's in ending September 30, this annual report covers the calendar year of 2019.

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 2019. SMPC staff worked to update master plans in Sherman Township (St. Joseph County), Nottawa 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 their existing master plans; work is ongoing for each of these plans. In addition, SMPC staff have provided informal assistance and guidance to several local units of government with their master plan updates. SMPC has agreements with several other communities for similar master plan work in 2020.

SMPC assists many municipalities with minor land use planning and zoning issues. SMPC staff review and provide advice on master plans, recreation plans, and zoning ordinances for local jurisdictions. These services are typically offered at no cost to the unit of government. SMPC provided these services to several units of government in 2019, and any local partner should not hesitate to contact Lee Adams (269-385-0409) if SMPC can provide this kind of assistance.

Economic Development

SMPC continues to provide economic development planning services to communities within Planning Region 3. An important component of this work has been achieving special status for the region to be eligible to receive certain federal grants. 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 (EDD); this designation would enable SMPC to bring additional federal funding to the region. In 2019, SMPC renewed the petition to EDA for District Organization designation, and SMPC will continue this work until our region (Branch, Calhoun, Kalamazoo, and St. Joseph counties) is designated by the EDA as an EDD. In addition to petitioning for District Organization status in 2020, SMPC will update the Comprehensive Economic Development Plan for our region. The most recent CEDS was written in 2014 and expired in December of 2019, so it is due for an overhaul. An updated plan is needed to gain access to EDA project funding. SMPC is currently recruiting stakeholders from around our region to serve on its CEDS Committee; if you are, or know someone who may be, interested, please apply at <https://smpcregion3.org/ceds>.

Education

Providing education to communities in Planning Region 3 is a major priority for SMPC as it is one of the six goals found in the SMPC Strategic Plan. In May of 2019, SMPC hosted a workshop on the land use implication of wind and solar developments. SMPC will host four educational workshops around our region in 2020 thanks to a generous grant from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation. If you would like to attend any of the upcoming workshops, please contact the newest staff member of SMPC, Molly Trueblood, at trueblood@upjohn.org or 269-385-0458.

Grant Support

SMPC also provided many letters of support for various grant applications throughout the region in 2019. SMPC can supply letters of support for any application or initiative congruent with its strategic priorities. Because of its partnership with the Upjohn Institute, SMPC is also able to quickly help local units of government assemble authoritative demographic and economic information for grant applications.

Housing

In response to needs expressed by local governments and nonprofit organizations, SMPC began to develop and foster staff expertise around housing. In 2019, local companies, governments, and nonprofit organizations felt pressure to respond to increased demand on their housing ecosystems and looked to SMPC and the Upjohn Institute for guidance. As staff have been learning to help local groups address their housing issues, SMPC and the Upjohn Institute staff have drawn on their organizational history of housing research and programs that were designed to address changes in local housing demand. The plans, projects, and research that SMPC began in 2019 demonstrate the Upjohn Institute's continued commitment to finding innovative solutions to housing issues in southcentral Michigan.

St. Joseph and Kalamazoo county governments both contracted SMPC to create housing plans for their communities in 2019, and the work for both these plans is ongoing in 2020. These plans will evaluate and make recommendations for improving the efficient functioning of the counties' local housing ecosystems. In 2018, the Southwest Michigan Prosperity Initiative (SWMPI) Committee also saw the need for housing leadership in its regional survey results. As a result, the SWMPI Committee selected the SMPC and Upjohn Institute to create a toolkit for local groups in the region to use when developing housing plans. Staff are nearly finished creating the toolkit, which will have four major elements: regional housing data, a feasibility model for potential housing developments, best practices from across the country, and a housing plan blueprint. This toolkit will be shared widely once completed and will be housed on the SMPC website as a resource intended to help local stakeholders create plans for their communities. The housing research that SMPC is just beginning will also compliment the housing toolkit since it tests methods for increasing the rental housing acceptance rates of low-income families in Kalamazoo. This is an exciting area of growth for SMPC, and staff look forward to developing even more housing resources for communities in our region.

Regional Prosperity – Southwest Michigan Prosperity Initiative (SWMPI)

SMPC continued to serve as co-administrator and co-applicant for SWMPI (Prosperity Region 8) in 2019. SMPC staff helped the SWMPI Committee review its priorities from 2018 and helped guide the group towards progress in 2019. While 2019 saw an end to the state-provided funding that made the Regional Prosperity Initiative possible, the SWMPI Committee was still able to accomplish a good amount of work before this conclusion. The SWMPI Committee generated priorities for the region, its work, and the fundable projects that coincided with their priorities. The SWMPI Committee was also determined to fund projects throughout the region that only needed a small amount of funding to move forward, under \$10,000. Subsequently, the SWMPI Committee issued nine microgrants to local groups who implemented projects to further the mission of SWMPI.

In 2019, the SWMPI Committee funded two sizable programs: the creation of the regional housing toolkit (detailed above) and a regional infrastructure asset management assessment system. The infrastructure asset management program was designed to work with local infrastructure asset owners to assess the condition of their assets. The program enters local information into a state-wide database so that policymakers can determine how to best maintain those assets into the future. Although the SWMPI ceased operations in February 2020, SMPC will continue this program moving forward.

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. As was the case in 2019, SMPC will have funds in 2020 to assist local communities with their transportation planning. Please contact Lee Adams (269-385-0409) of SMPC or Fred Nagler (269-343-0766) of KATS if you have transportation planning needs.

Conclusion

SMPC and the Upjohn Institute are grateful for the opportunity to work with local governments in southcentral Michigan to improve the economic, environmental, and fiscal health of member organizations through transportation, land use and environmental planning, economic development, and efficient local staffing. **Thanks for a great year, and we look forward to working with you in 2020!**