

Changes in the Rural-Urban Composition of the Fifth District

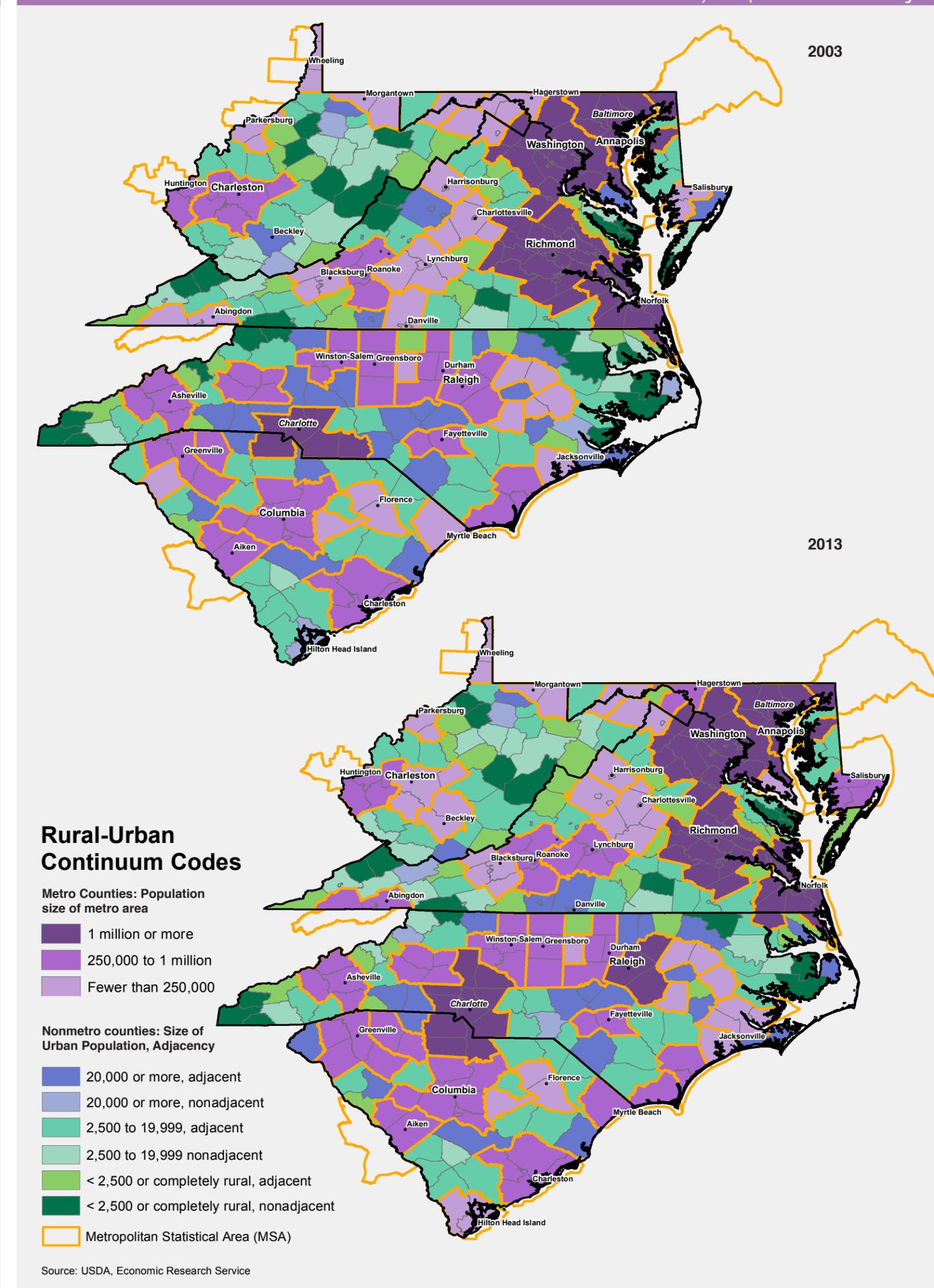
This issue of *5th District Footprint* provides a look at changes along the rural-urban continuum for localities in the Fifth District between 2003 and 2013. The Economic Research Service (ERS) at the U.S. Department of Agriculture released the first set of rural-urban continuum codes in 1975.¹ ERS updates the codes after every decennial census. These updates follow revisions of Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) definitions conducted by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) which uses population and commuting patterns to determine metropolitan status. The purpose of the codes is to classify finer gradations based on regional labor-market concepts rather than the simple rural versus urban designation.

Metro counties are categorized based on the total population size of the MSA to which they belong. Nonmetro counties are categorized by the size of their aggregate urban population as well as level of adjacency to an MSA. A county is adjacent to an MSA if its boundaries directly touch the borders of any MSA and two percent or more of the county's employed labor force works in a central metro county.

Between 2003 and 2013, the number of metro counties in the United States grew by seven percent.² The Fifth District had an eight percent growth in metro counties which was slightly higher than the national rate. Three-fourths of the District's counties did not have a continuum code change. Sixty-eight counties moved in a more urban direction along the continuum while 22 counties shifted to a more rural designation.

Movements along the continuum code can be largely attributed to MSA boundary redefinitions.³ Comparing the Charlotte MSA's boundaries between 2003 and 2013, there is a shift from the east to the northwest and down further into southwestern South Carolina. Anson County, N.C. lost its metro designation while the counties of Iredell, Lincoln and Rowan in North Carolina and Chester and Lancaster in South Carolina gained metro status. In contrast, the Richmond MSA's boundary changes resulted in three Virginia counties losing their metro status – Cumberland, King and Queen, and Louisa.

As a result of decennial population changes, there were new MSA formations as well as dissolutions of existing ones. Beaufort and Jasper Counties



shifted from nonmetro to metro as a result of forming the new Hilton Head Island-Bluffton-Beaufort, S.C. MSA. The Danville, Va. MSA lost its metropolitan designation, so the city of Danville and Pittsylvania County went from the "Fewer than 250,000" metro category to the "20,000 or more, adjacent" nonmetro category.

Counties have also moved along the continuum because of MSA population changes without accompanying boundary changes. The Lynchburg, Va. MSA went from the "Fewer than 250,000" metro category in 2003 to the "250,000 to 1 million" metro category in 2013 because its Census 2010 population increased to 252,634 from its Census 2000 count of 214,911.⁴

The number of counties that fall into the most rural category (<2,500 or completely rural, nonadjacent) declined from 27 to 18. Maryland and South Carolina do not have any counties that fall into this category. While the majority of counties with this designation in 2003 either stayed in this category or shifted to another

nonmetro category for 2013, Pamlico County, N.C. had the biggest change in moving to the metro category of "Fewer than 250,000" by becoming part of the newly formed New Bern, N.C. MSA.

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¹ "USDA ERS - Urban-Rural Continuum Codes," Last updated May 2013.
² USDA ERS 2003 Rural-Urban Continuum Codes; USDA ERS 2013 Rural-Urban Continuum Codes.
³ U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division; Office of Management and Budget, February 2013 delineations of Core Based Statistical Areas (CBSAs) and Combined Statistical Areas (CSAs).
⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, (2001), Profiles of General Demographic Characteristics: 2000 Census of Population and Housing, Washington, DC: May; U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, (2014), "Annual Estimates of the Resident Population: April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2013 - United States - Metropolitan and Micropolitan Statistical Area; and for Puerto Rico, 2013 Population Estimates," March.