



Western Piedmont Council of Governments

Creative Regional Solutions Since 1968

April - May 2016

Table of Contents:

Area Agency on Aging

- [Foothills Service Project](#)

Community & Econ. Development

- [NC Foreclosure Prevention Fund](#)

Community & Regional Planning

- [WPBP Wins NADO Award](#)
- [Spring 2016 EIN](#)

IT/GIS Services

- [Bringing Old Maps Back to Life](#)

[Contact](#) | [Announcements](#)

Regional Housing Authority

- [Open Application Period Closes](#)

Workforce Development

- [NCWorks Career Center-Catawba](#)

Community & Economic Development NC Foreclosure Prevention Fund



North Carolina
Housing Finance Agency
Financing North Carolina's Future

Twice during the past few months North Carolina's Foreclosure Prevention Fund, administered by North Carolina Housing Finance Agency, has been allocated additional funding that will help homeowners throughout the state. Western Piedmont Council of Government's housing counselors utilize this fund to assist area homeowners who are experiencing mortgage-related hardships.

In late December, Congress passed The Consolidated Appropriations Act which gave an additional \$2 billion for the Hardest Hit Fund (HHF) for 18 states and the District of Columbia. Funds were allocated in two phases.

The first phase distributed \$1 billion of the funds based upon each state's population and the utilization of their previous HHF allocation. In the first phase North Carolina received \$78,016,445.

North Carolina Housing Finance Agency then had to submit an application asking for an additional allocation from the remaining funds. In March North Carolina Housing Finance submitted an application. In late April the US Treasury notified NCHFA that the state would receive \$145,709,333 of additional Hardest Hit Funds. North Carolina received the fourth highest amount of any state, only behind California, Illinois and Michigan.

The WPCOG staff is pleased that North Carolina received the additional \$224 million so homeowners statewide can receive additional assistance. This funding gives WPCOG's counselors additional resources to help local homeowners.

Article by Kim Duncan

Community & Regional Planning

Western Piedmont Bicycle Plan Wins NADO Award



The Western Piedmont Bicycle Plan has been chosen to receive a NADO 2016 Excellence in Regional Transportation Award. Members of the WPCOG IT/GIS and Community & Regional Planning departments will be honored among other national award winners at the National Rural Transportation Peer Learning Conference in Chattanooga, TN, June 13-15, 2016.

Development of the Western Piedmont Bicycle Plan (WPBP) began in 2013 when the Western Piedmont Council of Governments (WPCOG) received funding from the North Carolina Department of Transportation's (NCDOT) Bicycle and Pedestrian Division to develop a regional bicycle plan for the four-county region of Alexander, Burke, Caldwell and Catawba Counties. The bicycle plan provides a clear framework for the development of new facilities, programs and policies that will support safe and efficient bicycling throughout the region.

The Western Piedmont region has a growing interest in bicycling as both a form of recreation and as a means of everyday transportation. Advocating for changes within the region is a small, but dedicated group of bicyclists organized in each of the larger municipalities in the region. Inside the urbanized areas, roads are used more for transportation, where outside the urbanized areas the roads are narrow and used more for recreation.

Regional bicycle planning for the Western Piedmont Region has been evident since the late 1990's, when the Greater Hickory (Hickory-Newton-Conover) Metropolitan Planning Organization (GHMPO) supported funding for county bicycle plans for all four Western Piedmont counties to be included in the Metropolitan Transportation Improvement Program (MTIP) and State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). A county plan for Catawba County was started in 2001 and progressed for several months until staff and funding changes at NCDOT derailed the region's first county plan. The development of regional and county bike plans was put on hold in our area until 2009, when a joint effort was launched to develop the Lake Norman Bicycle Plan which included a large portion of Catawba County.

Western Piedmont Council of Governments, the Greater Hickory MPO and Unifour RPO continued the success of the Lake Norman Bicycle Plan by including Alexander, Burke, Caldwell and Catawba Counties in the Western Piedmont Bicycle Plan. The Western Piedmont route system is made up of several route segments that provide on-road connections and linkages between town and cities, recreation areas, and points of interest within the four counties.

The Plan was also able to connect other existing bicycle and pedestrian facilities in the region such as:

- Carolina Thread Trail
- Lake Norman Bike Route
- NC Bicycle Routes #2 and #6
- Lake James Loop Trail
- Over the Mountain Victory Trail

The development of the Western Piedmont Bicycle Plan included an open, participatory process, with residents providing input through public events, stakeholder meetings, the project Steering Committee, social media and online surveys. The bicycle segments for the plan relied on input from the public and participating members of the Steering Committee.

Article by John Marshall

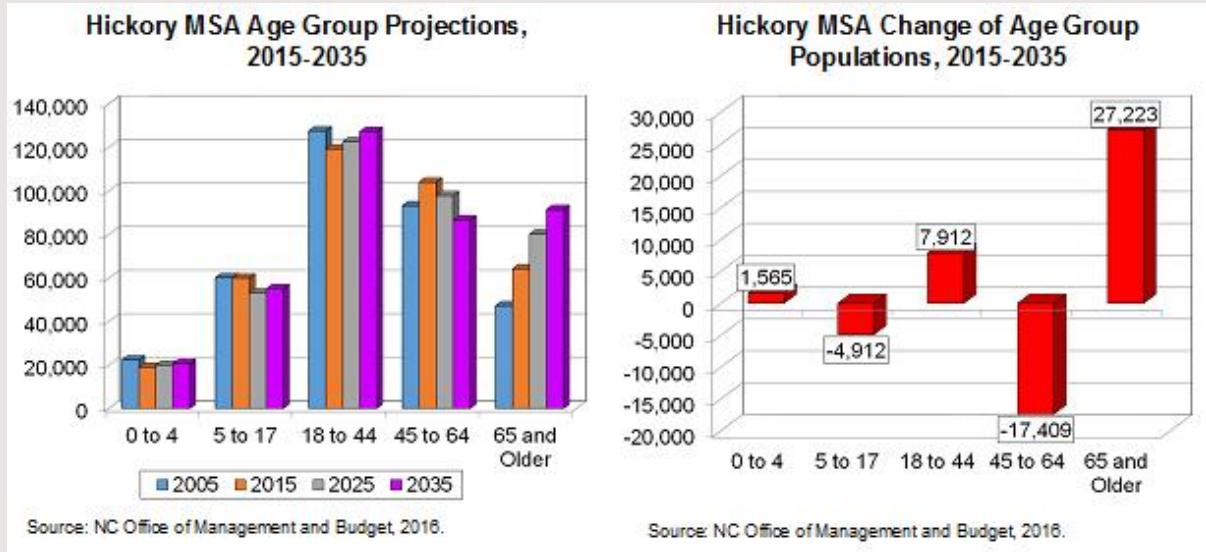
Community & Regional Planning

Spring 2016 Economics Indicator Newsletter

The latest issue of the Economic Indicators Newsletter (EIN) is now available. The current issue addresses Hickory Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) unemployment rates, Hickory Metro bank deposits, Hickory MSA 2015-2035 population projections and Hickory MSA job market information.

Here are a few key highlights of the EIN:

- The Hickory MSA's unemployment rate has dropped from 6.3% in July 2015 to 5.6% in January 2016.
- The number of employed persons grew by 337 while the civilian labor force decreased from 167,746 to 166,931 (-815).
- Hickory MSA bank deposits fell from \$4.555 billion in June 2011 to \$4.126 billion in June 2015.
- Between 2015 and 2035 the Hickory MSA's population is expected to grow from 366,073 to 380,452.
- Only the Rocky Mount MSA is anticipated to experience a slower rate of population growth (-3.8%) than the Hickory MSA (3.9%). The expected rate of Hickory MSA population growth from 2015 to 2035 is also significantly lower than the overall North Carolina growth rate (20.6%).
- The 65 years and older cohort is expected to be the fastest growing age group (42.5%) in the region over the next 20 years. This prediction is based on baby boomers reaching retirement age during the next two decades.
- Population declines are forecast for the Hickory MSA's age 5 to 17 and 45 to 64 groups due to a lack of net in-migration into the region.
- The number of monthly job openings in the Hickory MSA grew 88.6% from 4,012 in December 2011 to 7,565 in December 2015.
- The growth in job openings combined with a decrease in the number of unemployed has led to a significant decline in the number of unemployed per job opening from 4.88 in December 2011 to 1.15 in December 2015.



See the selected figures above for additional information. The EIN is produced quarterly and is a publication of the Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board. To subscribe to the EIN, please contact Taylor Dellinger, Data Analyst at 828-485-4233 or by email taylor.dellinger@wpcog.org.

Article by Taylor Dellinger

IT/GIS Services

Bringing Old Drawings and Maps Back to Life

Most local governments possess a dusty storeroom containing hundreds or thousands of old maps and architectural drawings (known as "as-builts") that were produced when building projects and improvements were implemented. Some of these documents go back over a century and contain key information of the location and attributes of water, sewer, stormwater and electrical infrastructure. Unfortunately, it is difficult to catalog all these drawings for quick reference, and they often sit in boxes until they begin to crumble from age.



1947 & 1974 Views of Maiden Water Infrastructure

WPCOG's IT/GIS staff have been assisting local governments with mapping their infrastructure since the 1990s and they know the value of these old documents. The IT/GIS staff has worked with local governments to preserve information that is on paper and place it into a system where it can be accessed and useful.

WPCOG staff uses a large-format scanner to create a high-resolution digital version of each document. Sometimes paper, which has deteriorated, needs special handling and repair before it can be digitized.

Once an image is digitized, the image is placed in a Geographic Information System (GIS), where an overlay of the image onto map layers can be done using a PC. This process, known as "georeferencing," allows the image to be portrayed in a GIS at its actual location on the ground."

When a spatial document is georeferenced, it can be turned on-and-off and compared with other drawings, maps and GIS layers of utility features. Scanned documents are very useful in determining locations of infrastructure items, especially those which may have been buried or paved over. WPCOG staff uses this method to help determine the location of features including water lines, valves, sewer lines and hidden manholes. Several local governments have been assisted in this process by WPCOG staff, including Hickory, Lenoir, Maiden and Morganton.



Old Utility Maps and As-Builts Rolled Up and Deteriorating



Mid-1800s Lenoir Map and Modern Orthophotography

The advent of ArcGIS Online now allows local government staff in the field to use their mobile devices and GPS to view as-builts of an area where they may be standing while searching for a utility feature. ArcGIS also allows local government staff to see changes in municipal infrastructure that have occurred at any given location over time.

If you are interested in georeferencing your local government's legacy maps and as-builts into a GIS, please contact Tom Bell, GIS Analyst, at tom.bell@wpcog.org.

Article by Tom Bell

Regional Housing Authority

Open Application Period Closes

Recently, the Regional Housing Authority accepted applications for the first time since June 2014. Applications were released April 5 on the website. During the first 10 days, the website received over 3,500 hits. When the applications were posted to social media, the RHA reached 863 people through Facebook and over 400 through Twitter. Applications were available with instruction pages in English, Hmong and Spanish.

During the three-day period, the Regional Housing Authority worked in cooperation with Alexander, Burke and Caldwell County Departments of Social Services to accept applications at each of their locations.

Approximately 1,500 applications were accepted between April 19 and 21. Processing the applications may take 30 days. Applicants and families will be notified by mail of their eligibility. Approximately 1,200 eligible applications have been added to the waiting list. The other 300 were determined ineligible due to various reasons. Eligible applicants are added to the waiting list by date and time of application received by the RHA. In addition to date and time, the RHA uses three preferences for placing families on the waiting list. A point system is used to rank families who receive those preferences. Three points are given to residents within our jurisdiction; two points are given to families with a household member who is disabled; and one point is given to veterans, widowers of veterans, or families with an active duty member.

The Regional Housing Authority will notify all eligible applicants by mail of their waiting list position within 30 days of receiving their application. It is crucial that applicants keep the RHA updated of any changes, specifically address changes. Changes may be submitted, in writing, to the attention of Kala Guido by mail, fax or email.

[Article by Kala Guido](#)

Workforce Development

NCWorks Career Center-Catawba

What started as a vision several years ago is now coming to fruition. On April 4, the previous employment security office, now operating with a new integrated service delivery business plan as the NCWorks Career Center, opened in the City of Conover at 403 Conover Station SE, on the first floor of the Conover Station Building. Over the past two years, the Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board, with the Western Piedmont Council of Governments and Catawba County, looked for an efficient, innovative space for the Catawba NCWorks Career Center. In order to provide relevant workforce solutions to businesses and jobseekers, it is imperative that NCWorks Career Centers operate for the 21st Century both visually and systematically.



Felicia Setzer, Manager of the NCWorks Career Center-Catawba, addresses students during the Extreme STEM tours at the newly opened Conover Station office.

By April 6, NCWorks Career Center staff were prepared to host the first visitors. Those visitors were Catawba County middle schools students, as part of their "EXTREME STEM" Tour. Tracy Hall, "EXTREME STEM" tour coordinator had this to say:

"Felicia jumped right into the EXTREME STEM Tour and met with 210 Arndt 8th graders, plus teachers and administrators from Catawba County Schools. She gave them positive messages about planning for their future and gave them a tour of the Career Center. This tied in so perfectly with our goals to learn about STEM careers, learn about the training and education available for STEM careers, and now where to apply and get help to get a STEM Career."

Article by Wendy Johnson

Area Agency on Aging Foothills Service Project

On April 1, the Area Agency on Aging (AAA) staff volunteered with Foothills Service Project to build a wheelchair ramp for a caregiver in Catawba County. Foothills Service Project is a non-profit home repair organization established for the purpose of making homes safe and accessible. With an emphasis on assisting the older adult population, Foothills Service Project provides Housing and Home Improvement projects in the region to older adults and their caregivers. Foothills Service Project is the recipient of Home and Community Care Block Grant funds as well as Family Caregiver Support Program funds. In 2015, Foothills Service Project completed 132 projects to assist older adults and caregivers in the region.

The Family Caregiver Support Program is dedicated to empowering the caregiver with information and resources to make their caregiver journey successful. The ramp was built for a caregiver who is caring for his wife who has several chronic conditions and mobility limitations. The ramp built by the AAA and Foothills Service Project will allow the caregiver to transport his wife to needed medical appointments. By providing services such as these, older adults can age while remaining independent in their homes. The AAA staff appreciated the opportunity to directly serve an older adult and her caregiver. It was a great team building experience and one the AAA hopes to continue annually.

If you would like more information on programs that serve older adults, please contact [Sarah Evitt](#), AAA Aging Specialist at 828-485-4216.

If you would like more information about Foothills Service Project or are interested in volunteering please



Article by Sarah Evitt

Announcements

Annual Local Government Training Survey

The time has come to conduct the Local Government Training Program's (LGTP) annual survey to gather information about the training needs of local governments in Western North Carolina. *The results of this survey will help with the development of next year's schedule for UNC School of Government training workshops in the west,* so please consider taking approximately 5 minutes to complete the survey (link below) to provide input about your or your organization's training needs for the upcoming year.

Link to survey: https://wcu.az1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_ehDmyvuyuF8zY2N

Please feel free to forward to others in your organization.

About the Local Government Training Program

Since its inception in 1984, the LGTP at Western Carolina University in Cullowhee has addressed the training needs of public officials and personnel in the 26 westernmost counties of North Carolina. The LGTP brings courses from the UNC School of Government in Chapel Hill to the western part of the state.

The LGTP also offers workshops and seminars tailored to the specific needs of regional offices. Through the LGTP, local officials and public personnel in Western North Carolina can receive:

- Training in necessary technical skills.
- Opportunities to share and exchange information with peers.
- Updates on trends and developments affecting local government, including changes in federal and state programs.
- Help in anticipating and formulating policy for current and future concerns of western North Carolinians.

For more information, feel free to visit the [Local Government Training Program website](#) or contact Rebecca Scott using the contact information below.

Western Piedmont Council of Governments
1880 2nd Ave NW | Hickory, NC 28601
Mail: P.O. Box 9026 | Hickory, NC 28603
P: 828.322.9191 | F: 828.322.5991

STAY CONNECTED

