



Western Piedmont Council of Governments

Creative Regional Solutions Since 1968

November 2016

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Community & Economic Development

Essential Single Family Rehabilitation (ESFR) Program Available to Alexander County Eligible Homeowners

The Western Piedmont Council of Governments has been awarded \$175,000 from the North Carolina Housing Finance Agency to rehabilitate five (5) homes scattered throughout Alexander County. The primary goal of the ESFR program is to encourage the essential rehabilitation of scattered-site single-family housing units owned and occupied by lower-income households with an elderly and/or disabled full-time household member or with a child under the age of 6 whose health is threatened by the presence of lead-based paint hazards and veteran households with incomes at or below eighty percent (80%) of the area median incomes. (See chart below). These funds come from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development Federal HOME Investment Partnership Program.

2016 Income Limits for the Alexander County Essential Single-Family Rehabilitation Program

Number in Household	80% of Median ("Low Income")
1	\$29,250
2	\$33,400
3	\$37,600
4	\$41,750
5	\$45,100

The amount of funds available for the rehabilitation of each home can vary from \$5,000 to \$25,000, depending on the condition of the home. The home must be economically feasible to rehabilitate. Each dwelling unit assisted must meet all requirements of the ESFR Rehabilitation Standards at a cost that is within the program limits. Mobile homes are not eligible for this program.

All work completed must meet the current North Carolina State Residential Building

6	\$48,450
7	\$51,800
8	\$55,150
Income limits are subject to change based on annually published HUD Home Income Limits.	
Note: Income limits are adjusted periodically by The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The most recent income limits will be used as they become available.	

Code standards set forth by the State and be done in compliance with all state and local permitting, inspections, licensing, and insurance requirements. All work completed must meet Alexander County's Minimum Housing Code as well.

Eligible applicants will be served on a first-come, first served basis without regard to race, color, religion, gender, national origin, physical or mental handicaps, or family status. ESFR assistance will be provided to eligible

owner-occupants in the form of interest-free, forgivable loans covering the costs associated with rehabilitation of the unit. These interest-free loans will be forgiven at the rate of \$3,000 per year. For example, if \$24,000 is spent on housing rehabilitations and the owner lived in the home for eight (8) years after the work is completed, the loan is totally forgiven.

Staff is currently taking applications for this program. Homeowners desiring additional information or wishing to apply for the ESFR Program may do so by contacting Laurie Powell at 828-322-9191 ext. 249.

Article by Laurie Powell

Community & Regional Planning

Extreme STEM Tours

On Wednesday, November 9, 2016, the WPCOG hosted over eighty STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) students at our offices. The students were from Newton-Conover Middle School and were part of the Education Matters Extreme STEM Tour. Students learned about planning, transportation, mapping, and air and water quality as well as potential career choices in each sector. Types of jobs highlighted include Land Use Planners, Transportation Planners, Geographic Information Specialists, Cartographers, Environmental Specialists, Water Quality and Air Quality Specialists, Data Analysts, GPS field technicians, Information Technology Specialists, Project Managers, and Recreation Specialists. Students visited three stations. Each station offered basic career descriptions and insight into required training. Featured stations included:



Environmental Planning

Senior Planner and Natural Resource Administrator, John E. Wear, and Data Analyst, Taylor Dellinger, discussed with students the importance of implementing policies and initiatives relating to stormwater management, air quality, water quality and land use.

GIS and Data Analysis

GIS Analyst, Tom Bell, and GIS Technician, Todd Stroupe, gave a brief overview of how Geographic Information Systems maintain an active role in many initiatives. Our IT/GIS Services team plays a crucial role in maintaining a vast library of local, county, regional and statewide datasets to support various WPCOG projects. These projects range from digital mapping solutions to geospatial data services and demographic data.

Transportation/Land Use Planning

Planners, Erin Schotte and Leslie Meadows, Transportation Planner, Cody Moneymaker, and Planning Technician, Averi Ritchie, covered a broad range of topics about zoning, code enforcement, long-range transportation planning and pedestrian/bicycle-friendly infrastructure. Students were given a basic understanding of the roles and necessary requirements involved in transportation and land use planning.

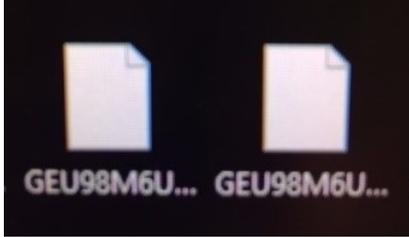
[Article by Averi Ritchie](#)

IT/GIS Services

Cryptoviruses: A Real Threat to Local Governments

After lunch one day, you enter the office and go to your computer. Once it wakes up, you notice that your files look different. All of them are renamed, and instead of ending in .docx or .xlsx, they all end in .THOR or .LOCKY and won't open. You have just become the victim of a cryptovirus.

Cryptoviruses are a type of ransomware which enters a computer and encrypts nearly all the files and extensions



Microsoft Word files made useless by a cryptovirus.

using a secret code. The Ransomware can be especially problematic if the infected user account has access to a network drive with editing permissions, as the virus will encrypt all the files on the network that a user has permission to edit. The only files that can be opened are numerous internet pages that instruct the user to pay a ransom to unlock the files. Payment is to be made in Bitcoin currency to persons in Belarus or other countries, who then promise to send the codes in return.

If a cryptovirus has infected your PC, you may be in trouble. The codes are often unbreakable, and unless your data is backed up all encrypted files are likely lost. Your IT staff will also spend many hours sorting out the problem. The good news is that by adopting some straightforward and common-sense measures, cryptoviruses can be avoided or at least mitigated. Here is how:

- Backup your data regularly. On an individual PC, it is better to store local files on a shared drive which is backed up regularly, rather than just on the PC's C: drive. Network back-ups allow the IT administrator to restore system files from a previous time. It is worth pointing out that an external hard drive which remains continuously connected to a PC for backups will become infected by the cryptovirus as well.
- Make a habit of restarting your computer. Microsoft sends out security updates to each PC, and these are typically installed when a computer restarts.
- Be careful with email! Cryptoviruses are often sent as email attachments that are activated when a user opens them. They are disguised as legitimate email (a practice known as "phishing"), but there are some red flags to look for:
 - An attachment is a .zip file. Never open a .zip file attachment unless you are expecting it, even from someone you know. IT administrators can ban email .zip files and instead use FTP or other means to send .zip files when needed.
 - The description says "[BULK]." Just as in post-office mail, "BULK" means that the email has been sent to thousands or millions of people, and is a tip-off that it is not a unique email sent specifically to the user.

Never pay the ransom. Unlocking ransomware is expensive, and you will be dealing with criminals in far-off countries who instruct the victim to install further malware (such as a .TOR browser) to make payment, and even then they may never send the unlocking codes. Instead think ahead and institute the above smart practices so that you and your staff will not become victims.



Example of an email with Cryptovirus. The .zip attachment and [BULK] designation is a red-flag.

Article by Tom Bell

Regional Housing Authority

Family Unification Program (FUP) Success Story

The Regional Housing Authority (RHA) works in cooperation with Public Child Welfare Agencies (PCWA) to assist families with Family Unification Program (FUP) Vouchers. These vouchers help families who lack adequate housing which is a primary factor in either, the threat of placement of the family's child or children in out-of-home care or delay in the discharge of the child or children to the family from out-of-home care. The PCWA initially determines if the family meets the FUP requirements, then

refers those eligible families to the RHA. Applicants must apply through the Department of Social Services or family services programs working in collaboration with the RHA. Eligible applicants can qualify for immediate assistance.

This past June, a family was referred to the RHA for a FUP voucher. The family was living in a one-bedroom garage home, lacking adequate power or running water, and was dependent on their neighbors for help. The generator they used for heating and lights was stolen at the beginning of the summer. The family, having limited familial support and few options, were referred by a concerned case worker since the child was in imminent danger of being removed and placed in out-of-home care. The RHA determined that the family was eligible for a FUP voucher, based on the lack of adequate housing and immediate need.

The family attended all scheduled meetings and responded promptly to all requests from the RHA, which expedited their voucher. They were able to use their voucher for housing in August. The client stated, "We are very thankful for the FUP voucher. We no longer need to depend on neighbors for water and my child now has her own room." Due to the referral, the family did not have to wait on the regular voucher waiting list. They were able to be assisted immediately. They are able to remain together, thanks to the partnership program between the Department of Social Services and the RHA.

For additional information about FUP, please contact [Elizabeth Moncrief](#) at 828.485.4244

[Article by Stephanie Hanvey](#)

Workforce Development

NCWorks Career Centers Offer Employer Recruitment Success

The Workforce Development NCWorks Career Centers have done an amazing job assisting businesses with their recruitment needs. At this point, in 2016, the NCWorks Career Centers have provided over 50 recruitment and/or job fair services.

Read below how Aerotek felt about their experience with the Catawba County NCWorks Career Center services.

Dear NC Works Staff,

Since the start of our recruitment events at the NC Works facility in Conover, we have successfully placed 19 candidates. Thank you so much to the NC Works Career Center for their time and efforts over the last several months. I am grateful for our partnership and look forward to finding full time employment for many more in the future.

Regards,

Jordan Bailey

[Article by Wendy Johnson](#)

Area Agency on Aging National Caregivers Month

November is National Family Caregivers Month and is an opportune time to recognize and honor the more than 1.73 million family caregivers on any given day in North Carolina and across the nation who are providing exceptional care for parents, spouses, relatives, friends and children. As the number of older adults continues to grow, and rates of illness increase in older adults, more and more Americans are playing a critical role in caring for a loved one by providing assistance such as transportation, emotional support, meal preparation, housekeeping, bathing and dressing, medication management, wound care and financial assistance.



The 2016 theme for National Caregivers Month is "Take Care to Give Care." Caregiving can be a rewarding experience, but it can also be physically and emotionally demanding. The first rule of taking care of others is for the caregiver to take care of themselves first. Only by taking care of themselves can the caregiver be strong enough to take care of a loved one. A caregiver truly does need to "take care to give care."

The WPCOG Area Agency on Aging Family Caregiver Support Program is committed to supporting caregivers with information and resources to assist their caregiver journey and provides the following services:

- Information about available services and resources to help families in their caregiver roles.
- Assistance to families gaining access to services.
- Caregiver support to help families cope with the emotional and physical stress associated with caregiving.
- Respite care to enable caregivers to be temporarily relieved from their caregiving responsibilities.
- Limited supplemental services to complement the care provided by caregivers.

For additional information visit WPCOG Area Agency on Aging website: www.wpcogaaa.org or call The Family Caregiver Support Program at (828) 485-4256.

Join us during the month of November as we recognize, celebrate and empower caregivers across North Carolina and our nation for their dedication and service caring for friends and family!

"Our Nation was founded on the fundamental ideal that we all do better when we look out for one another, and every day, millions of Americans from every walk of life balance their needs with those of their loved ones as caregivers. This month and every month, let us lift up all those who work to tirelessly advance the health and wellness of those they love." (President Barack Obama, Presidential Proclamation-National Family Caregivers Month, 2016)

Article by Mary Mitchell

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