



Western Piedmont
Council of Governments

2019

ANNUAL REPORT

CHAIR'S REMARKS



The year 2019 was a successful year for our region and its communities. The economy continued to grow for our 374,896 residents. Many of our local governments continue to make substantial investments to improve the lives of our residents and to enhance our appeal for economic opportunities. Sound leadership at the local and regional level facilitates those opportunities that generate success.

Since 1968, our local governments continue to ask the Western Piedmont Council of Governments to serve as a mechanism to share expertise and resources between our communities. That collaboration allows us to reach new levels of achievement that benefit our residents and businesses.

Many of the problems and issues we face as individual communities are shared with our neighbors throughout this region. The WPCOG is the common thread that ties us together. With the impacts of COVID-19 in 2020, we begin our work toward recovery. The WPCOG is certain to play a key role in assisting our communities and counties regarding that goal.

Within this Annual Report, you will find some of the work and successes that happened in 2019 that demonstrates the value of the WPCOG. The leadership, vision, and engagement of our local governments built one of the strongest Councils of Governments in North Carolina and the nation. Count on the WPCOG to serve your needs. Let us count on each other to succeed on behalf of our residents and businesses.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert Floyd, Jr.", written in a cursive style.

Bob Floyd, Jr.
Chair, Western Piedmont Council of Governments
Mayor, Village of Cedar Rock



The WPCOG is governed by a Policy Board which includes delegates and alternates appointed by each of the 28 municipal and county member governments. Each city and county member government has one vote. The Policy Board also includes seven appointed members who represent the private sector.

Current membership of the WPCOG is 100% of the eligible counties, cities and towns located within the area designated including: Alexander, Burke, Caldwell and Catawba Counties, and the municipalities of Brookford, Cajah's Mountain, Catawba, Cedar Rock, Claremont, Connelly Springs, Conover, Drexel, Gamewell, Glen Alpine, Granite Falls, Hickory, Hildebran, Hudson, Lenoir, Long View, Maiden, Morganton, Newton, Rhodhiss, Rutherford College, Sawmills, Taylorsville and Valdese.

An Executive Committee including a Chair, Vice-Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, Past Chair and four At-Large members is elected annually by and from the Policy Board at their November meeting. Officers are installed at the January Policy Board Meeting.

ADMINISTRATION

The staff of the Administration Department supports the efforts of all other WPCOG departments, including general office supports, facility management and communications. Additionally, the Administration Staff support the activities of the WPCOG Policy Board, Executive Committee and several other regional committees. Administration strives to deliver courteous and timely service to government officials and staff, the public, as well as WPCOG staff.

Executive Searches

The WPCOG Administrative staff, led by the Executive Director and Administrative Services & Human Resources Director, regularly conducts executive searches for area local governments to fill essential and high profile positions. Staff has extensive experience facilitating the hiring of personnel, including Town Managers, Town Administrators, Chiefs of Police Community and Regional Planners and more. In 2019, WPCOG facilitated the Town Manager search for the Towns of Hildebran, Sawmills, Cahah's Mountain and Catawba. Additionally, WPCOG administered the search for the Town of Long View Police Chief. This service is conducted with the highest level of integrity and confidentiality. Staff are available through every step of the process, including writing and distributing job announcements, reviewing incoming resumes, focusing the potential candidate list, interviews, and providing an objective and non-bias assessment of final candidates.

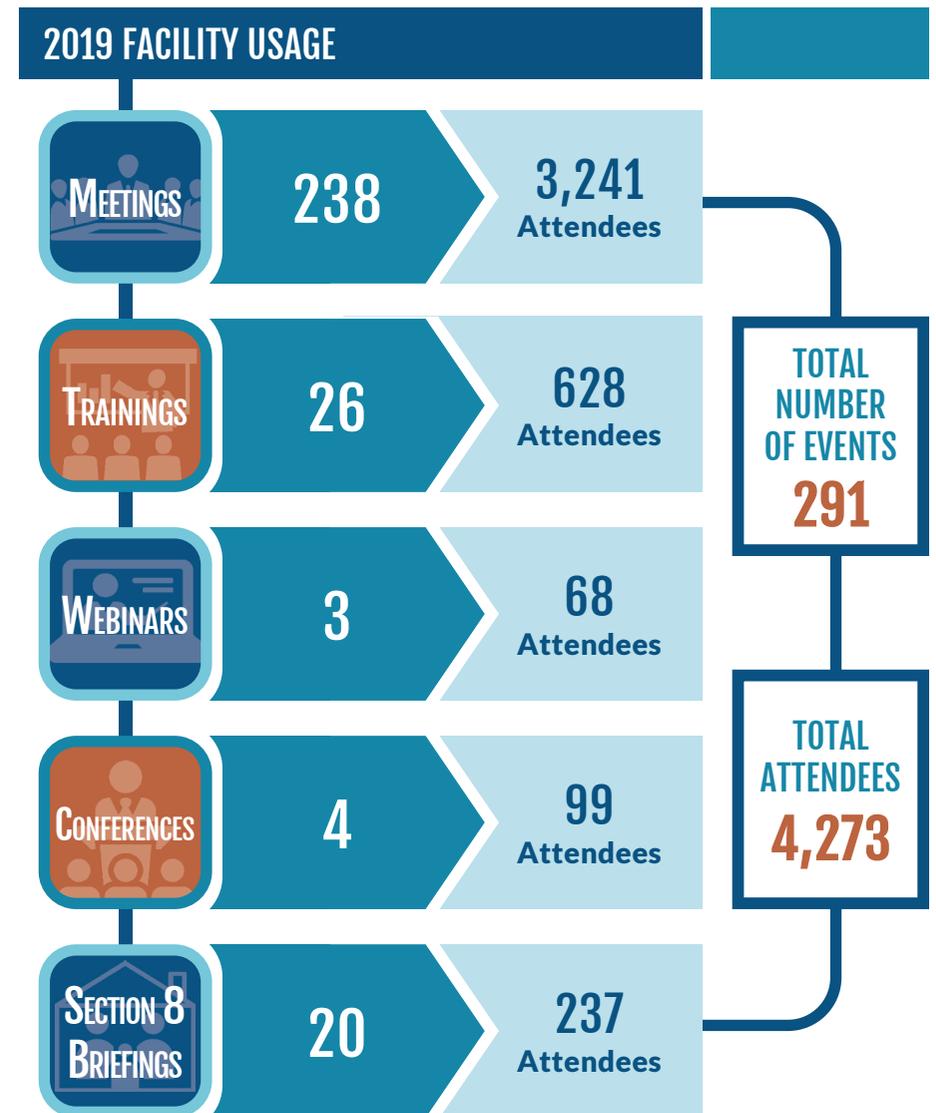
Retreat and Meeting Facilitation

In 2019, local governments called upon the WPCOG Executive Director and other WPCOG staff to facilitate various planning retreats and meetings. Having a trusted, impartial third-party facilitate these types of events often allows for a more open discussion, and the development of action plans.

IT/FACILITIES

IT/Facilities oversaw the installation of a new generator. In the event of a power outage, the generator will continue to provide power to the WPCOG's vital systems, reducing any loss of services and minimizing staff downtime.

Installation of a new security/card entry system was completed, which creates a more easily controlled internal security. Visitors to the office will find that we now maintain security doors that stay closed at all times that can only be accessed with the proper key card. Guests are escorted by an employee to meetings and appointments and escorted out afterward, which creates a better



personal relationship with clients and visitors, and provides better security to staff. The system also provides control to schedule opening and closing times for the doors to prevent a door from being left unlocked during nonoperational hours.

IT SERVICES



Other services were improved to help the staff in their day-to-day work. Staff is now using newly installed VPN (Virtual Private Network) software, which allows staff to access needed files stored at the office while in the field or telecommuting. IT also completed a new backup system for Office 365, so staff would not potentially lose valuable information if a file was lost or damaged.

Communications

This past year, Communications created web sites for the Village of Cedar Rock and Catawba County Council on Aging. Each project was tailored to the end user's needs and the client's preferences for ease of use and aesthetics. Staff also continued web support for the Town of Long View, which includes design adjustments, troubleshooting issues and technical support.

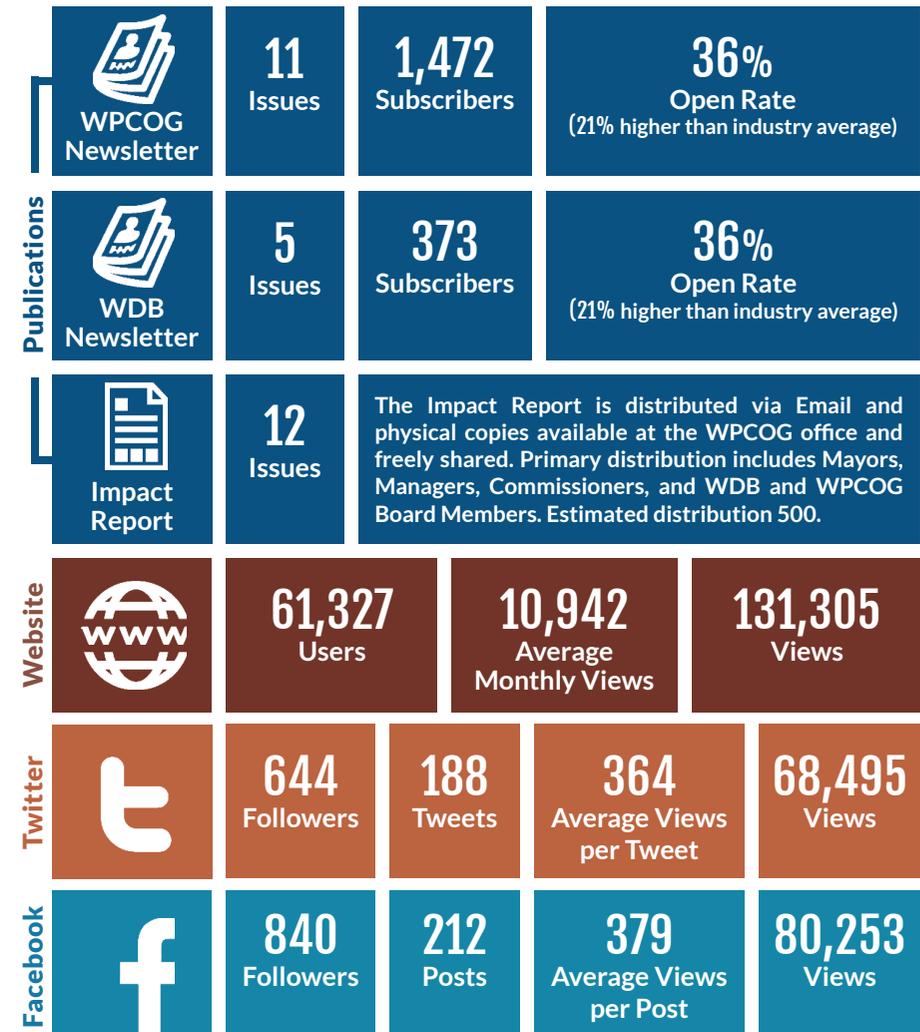
Communications was also asked to create a Housing Survey Report for the Catawba County Chamber of Commerce. The report highlighted questions asked of local business leaders and employers, and the growing housing needs of our workforce.

Communications staff also worked as a team member for the WPCOG Housing Forum Series, promoting and providing material handouts. The first of the series highlighted a developer from Charlotte (Matt Gallagher) and his insights into barriers to housing construction and sales. A panel of local lenders (Judy Street with Peoples Bank, Steven Gunzenhauser with BB&T, and Darrell Johnson with First Horizon Bank) also led a discussion of their insights into the housing market in the region.

This past year marked the WPCOG's 50th Anniversary celebration during April's Annual Meeting. To highlight 50 years of accomplishments, staff spent months in advance researching the history of the WPCOG. The history and 50 years of major accomplishments were presented in a special edition of the Annual Report. Staff also worked with Benjamin Coffey of BC Cinematics,

LLC, to produce a 4-minute video piece that included interviews and footage of the WPCOG Staff working in the community.

2019 SOCIAL MEDIA/PUBLIC OUTREACH STATS



AREA AGENCY ON AGING

The Area Agency on Aging (AAA) is an organization working within a federal mandate to inform, advocate and plan for community services on behalf of older adults and caregivers. The agency is part of the national network set in place by the Older Americans Act of 1965. There are 622 AAA's in the US and 16 in North Carolina. The Western Piedmont AAA serves Alexander, Burke, Caldwell and Catawba counties.

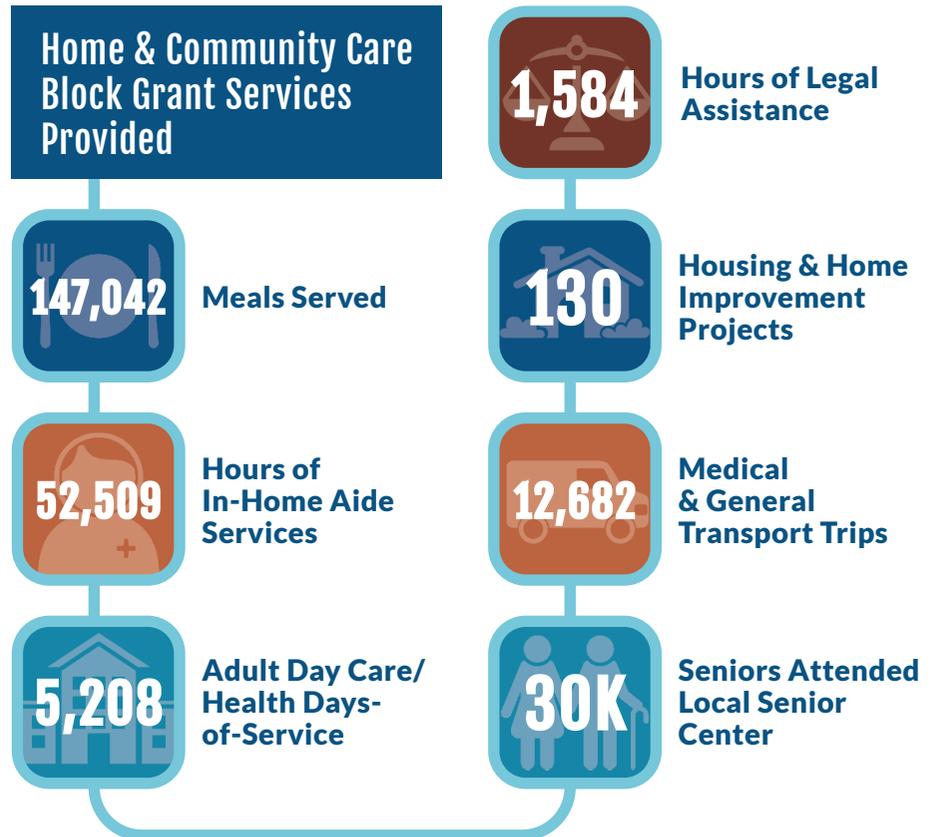
Services

- » Resource Directory for Older Adults
- » Regional Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program
- » Family Caregiver Support Program
- » Technical Assistance to Agencies Serving Older Adults
- » Reverse Mortgage Counseling
- » Senior Tar Heel Legislature Support
- » Operation Fan/Heat Relief
- » Medicare Information for Patients and Providers Act Grant
- » Local Contact Agency
- » Project C.A.R.E.
- » Evidence-Based Health Promotion Classes
- » Presentations on Aging Issues

The AAA administers the Home and Community Care Block Grant (HCCBG) for the region. This grant funds an array of in-home and community-based services to help seniors stay in their homes. The HCCBG allows counties the flexibility to determine which services to fund based on community needs. Services are provided to older adults age 60+ and are based on need.

HCCBG Services Funded in Region E

- » Home Delivered Meals
- » Congregate Meals
- » In-Home Aide
- » Adult Day Care
- » Adult Day Health
- » Medical Transportation
- » General Transportation
- » Housing & Home Improvement
- » Senior Center Operations
- » Information & Options Counseling



2019 HIGHLIGHTS

Family Caregiver Support Program

- » Continued partnership with YMCA of Catawba County to offer Parenting The Second Time Around support group for grandparents raising grandchildren, and added two summer events.
- » Received NADO and SE4A awards for FCSP Parenting the 2nd Time Around (grandparents raising grandchildren support group).
- » Continued support groups for Caregivers and Grandparents raising children and distributed back to school backpacks/school supplies and information packets on summer opportunities.
- » Continued the Caregiver Directed Voucher program, providing caregivers respite from their caregiving responsibilities.
- » Staff partnered with High Country AAA to provide two events in the Lenoir/Blowing Rock area.
- » Started a Caregiver Support Group in Caldwell County.
- » Collaborated with NCWORKS, area employers and human resource professionals to provide caregiver information to staff and employees of local businesses/organizations.

AAA Outreach and Support

- » Assisted 49 individuals in the region with Medicare Part D Open Enrollment/Low-Income Subsidy/Extra-Help Applications.
- » Responded to 672 telephone calls for Information & Assistance Referrals and provided Options Counseling to 5 individuals/families
- » Volunteered with Foothills Service Project and built a handicapped ramp for an older adult in the region.
- » Served on the Community Health Assessment Leadership Team.
- » Participated in Burke Wellness Initiative and helped with the Burke County Health Needs Assessment.
- » Served as the administrative agency for Senior Information Resources.
- » Updated and published new Resource Directory for Older Adults.
- » Participated in the proposal for Medicaid Managed Care Ombudsman.
- » Signed up to participate in NCCARE360.

AAA Events & Conferences

- » Sponsored 2019 Alzheimer's Walk, participated in walk and raised \$700 from our team for Alzheimer's research.
- » Held 5th annual Caregiver Conference at First United Methodist Church, Hickory, and made a profit of \$4,535.26 for ACAP Hickory's 2020 budget to support educational programs for caregivers.
- » Ombudsman program coordinated and held Scam Jam to educate older adults about financial exploitation - with 180 participants. Secured speakers, including Secretary of State, Elaine Marshall.
- » FCSP and Ombudsman program collaborated on the program: *Taking*

Charge - Knowing Your Long Term Care Options.

- » Presented at SE4A Conference, NCAOA Conference, Statewide Dialysis Social Worker Conference, Statewide CNA Teachers conference, and Director was Keynote Speaker for NC PACE Conference.
- » Coordinated Elder Abuse Awareness events in June. Distributed 5,000 awareness bracelets, posters, table tents, encouraged everyone to wear purple on June 15 and submit photos, and delivered breakfast to all four DSS's Adult Protective Services staff as a token of appreciation.



Reassigned duties and transitioned staff from Local Contact Agency (LCA) to part time Ombudsman effective Oct. 1, 2019.



Program was transitioned to another region for coverage.



The program serves 16 counties; provides services to 200 caregivers of people living with Alzheimer's, dementia and related cognitive disorders; and, provides information, education, care management, and respite vouchers.



COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Grant Development and Administration

In 2019, staff developed applications that resulted in grant funding for 25 projects totaling \$8,906,915. The funding ranged from \$20,000 from the State Home Foreclosure Prevention Project (SHFPP) to \$2,661,216 for an industrial access road along Goat Farm Road near the Hickory Regional Airport.

In addition to the creation of 435 new, full-time jobs, new private sector investments for economic development projects in 2019 totaled \$62,591,525. Staff was able to secure four (4) N.C. Commerce Building Reuse grants and continued to administer more than 50 community and economic development grant projects.

HOME Consortium

In 2019, the HOME Program provided assistance to 71 first-time homebuyers and leveraged more than \$6 million in lender financing. Furthermore, the HOME program provided \$243,341 in funding to three (3) different Community Housing Development Organizations for the construction of seven (7) Habitat for Humanity Homes.

The HOME Program also assisted with the development of two (2) multi-family properties – Pondview in Hildebran and Woodland Street Apartments in Granite Falls. These projects leveraged \$18.1 million for the creation of 126 multi-family housing units.

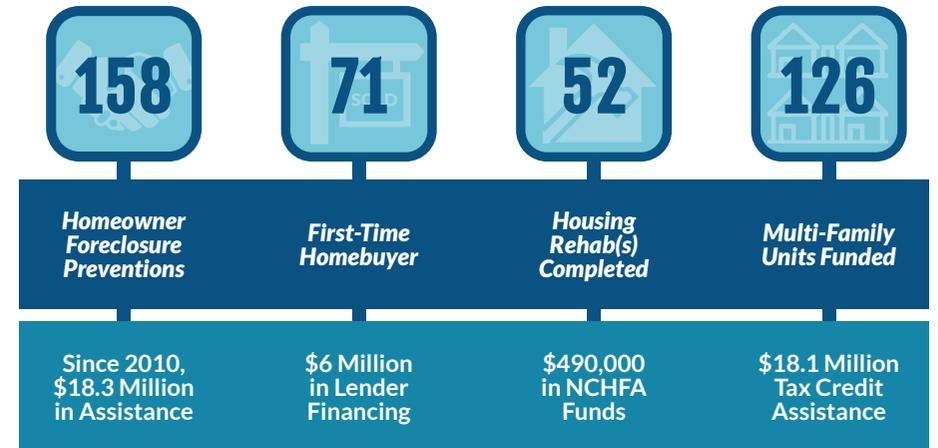
Housing Repairs, Foreclosure Prevention

WPCOG's housing counselors wrapped up a nine-year stint of working with the NC Housing Finance Agency's (NCHFA) Hardest Hit Funds Program. 960 foreclosure prevention loans were closed during that period totaling \$18,263,359 -- truly making an impact on the lives of the homeowners and their families. In 2019, staff also submitted 158 hardship packages, with 95 of these being approved for loan modifications.

Staff also created and administered a new nine-month education program for first-time homebuyers. The Individual Pre-purchase Homeownership Counseling sessions included 21 households, and the Group Homeownership Education Classes met once per month. In total, 12 participants completed the program and were recognized with a graduation event. Staff also

had a counselor pass a nationally required exam for HUD Housing Counselor certification.

During 2019, 52 homes received needed repairs thanks to a combined \$490,000 from the NCHFA's Urgent Repair Housing and Essential Single-Family Rehabilitation programs.



2019 GRANT HIGHLIGHTS



Projects funded in 2019	Grant Amount	Jobs Created	Housing Units Affected	Private Sector Investment
Alexander County-NCHFA-Essential SFR	\$190,000		7	
Alexander County-ARC Broadband Pilot Project	\$60,000			
Burke County-NC Commerce Marves Building Reuse	\$312,000	25		\$1,865,315
Burke County-NC Commerce Synergy Labs	\$500,000	42		\$12,249,700
Burke County-ARC Goat Farm Road (Industrial Access Road)	\$1,500,000			
Catawba County-NCHFA-Essential SFR	\$190,000		7	
Catawba County-NCHFA-Urgent Repair Housing Grant	\$75,000		12	
Catawba Valley Community College-EDA-i6	\$750,000			\$750,000
Conover-NC Commerce Star Snax Building Reuse	\$500,000	40		\$1,925,856
Conover-Golden Leaf Project Grow	\$250,000	67		\$26,000,000
Conover-NC Commerce Neighborhood Revitalization	\$750,000		15	
Hickory-NC Commerce Design Foundry Building Reuse	\$500,000	109		\$2,036,654
Hickory-NC Commerce Project Cure IDF Road	\$225,000	137		\$17,000,000
Hudson-Part F Optimist Park	\$222,500			
Lenoir-ARC Broyhill Site Clean-Up	\$300,000			
Lenoir-HUD CDBG Entitlement	\$135,877			
Lenoir-HUD HOME Consortium	\$1,102,000			
Morganton-HUD CDGB Entitlement	\$148,237			
Regional-ARC VEDIC Revolving Load Fund	\$100,000	15		\$100,000
Regional-NCHFA State Home Foreclosure Prevention Project (SHFPP)	\$20,000		133	
Regional-NCHFA Urgent Repair 2019	\$200,000		27	
Regional-HUD Housing Counseling Grant	\$40,701		158	
Valdese-NC Commerce Valdese CDBG Housing	\$350,600		12	
Valdese-DEQ Lakeside Park Phase I	\$200,000			\$200,000
Valdese-Part F Lakeside Park Phase I	\$285,000			\$464,000
Totals	\$8,906,915	435	371	\$62,591,525

ARC – Appalachian Regional Commission
DEQ – Division of Environmental Quality
NCHFA – North Carolina Housing Finance Agency
SFR – Single Family Rehabilitation
WWTP – Wastewater Treatment Plant

HUD – US Department of Housing and Urban Development
CDBG – Community Development Block Grant
SHFPP – State Home Foreclosure Prevention Program
IDF – Industrial Development Fund
URP – Urgent Repair Program

COMMUNITY & REGIONAL PLANNING

PLANNING

Planning provides a variety of current and long-range planning support to member governments. Current planning consists of daily permitting and inquiries, text amendments, rezoning, conditional use permits, plan (residential, commercial and industrial) review and action plans. Current planning contracts: 8 (Drexel, Hudson, Hildebran, Catawba, Sawmills, Gamewell, Rutherford College and Valdese).

Long-range planning consists of visionary plans, such as comprehensive plans, small area plans (Downtown, neighborhood, commercial nodes), and corridor plans. Long-range planning contracts: 8 (Caldwell County Comprehensive Plan, Sawmills Land Use Plan, Glen Alpine Land Use Plan, Alexander County Recreation Plan and the Bethlehem Comprehensive Plan).

To ensure the department is using best practices, staff attended and/or hosted 12 training events at the WPCOG. Training for the region and planning staff has and will continue to be important. Training opportunities included NCDOT, NCSOG, Carolina Thread Trail, NCAZO, ICMA, Catawba County Chamber of Commerce, Burke County Chamber of Commerce, Air/Water Quality Conferences, NCAPA, NC Arc Users Group, NCMS, and NCLM.

Accomplishments:

- » Hudson Bike and Pedestrian Plan assistance
- » Hildebran Façade Improvement Grant Program
- » Commercial property marketing sheet development
- » Assisted with Shurtape expansion in Town of Catawba
- » Online Community Survey creation through NCDOT Metro Quest
- » Facilitated Rutherford College's Planning Board retreat
- » Glen Alpine Comprehensive Plan
- » Sawmills Comprehensive Land Use Plan
- » Approval of 66 unit apartment complex PUD in Hudson
- » Alexander County - Bethlehem Comprehensive Plan
- » Caldwell County Comprehensive Plan
- » Caldwell County Interim Planning Director
- » Town of Glen Alpine Town code re-write
- » City of Lenoir solid waste feasibility study
- » Alexander County Recreation Plan
- » WPCOG housing symposium
- » NCSOG vacant housing workshop

- » BDI Burke County housing study
- » Survey for Dogwood Foundation
- » Director of Planning graduated from Leadership Catawba and Leadership Burke



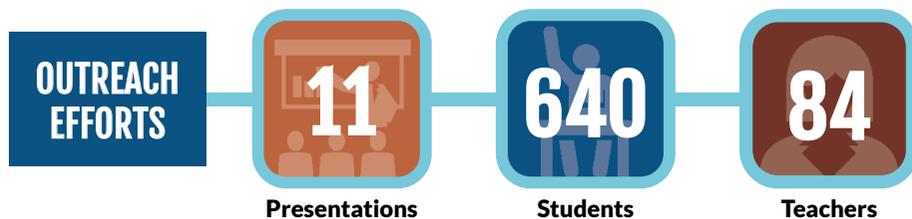
ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING

The Western Piedmont Water Resource Committee

The Western Piedmont Water Resource Committee is the key interface used by the Western Piedmont Council of Governments (WPCOG) to interact with local governments on water resource issues. The Water Resources Committee consists of local government representatives, nonprofit organizations, educational institutions, and businesses from Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, and Catawba Counties.

Stormwater Planning and Administration

As of July 2019, the WPCOG has expanded the Stormwater program beyond education & outreach. The new program is designed to allow municipalities to comply with DEQ requirements as well as ensure the quality of their local waterways at a very reasonable cost. The WPCOG Stormwater program focuses on the measures required by EPA municipal stormwater permits (NPDES MS4): Education and outreach on stormwater issues, illicit discharge monitoring and enforcement, permitting and inspection of stormwater control structures for new and existing developments, and monitoring good housekeeping procedures to ensure municipalities are following required environmental practices. The WPCOG is contracted to administer full stormwater programs for Lenoir, Granite Falls, Hudson, Gamewell, Sawmills, Cahaj's Mountain, Valdese, and Conover. In addition, the WPCOG administers educational programs in Hickory, Maiden, Morganton, and Rutherford College.



This year the WPCOG participated in seven Education Matters Extreme STEM Tours and also aided STEM West with four week-long teacher workshops.

Western NC Air and Water Quality Conferences

The Western NC Air and Water Quality Conferences were held in July. The Reese Institute for the Conservation of Natural Resources and the WPCOG hosted these Annual Conferences at LRU in Hickory, NC. This year both conferences began with a presentation from students that completed projects related to air and water quality. Other speakers included Duke

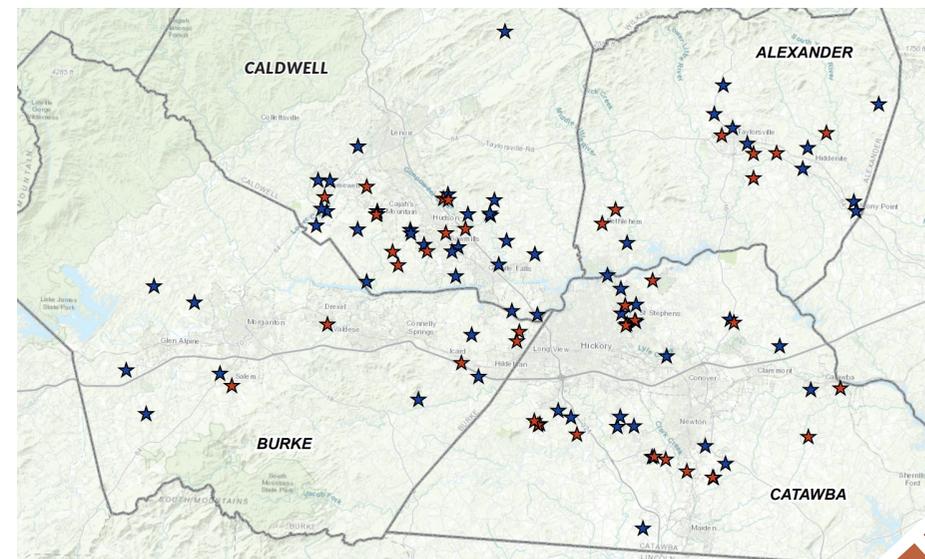
Energy, Lake James Association, Catawba Wateree Initiative, Mecklenburg County Stormwater, City of Charlotte, City of Greensboro, NC Division of Environmental Quality, NC Wildlife Resources Commission, and Advanced Energy.

The Henry Fork & Jacob Fork Watershed Conservation Plan

The Foothills Conservancy has contracted with the WPCOG to complete the Henry Fork and Jacob Fork Watershed Conservation Plan. The purpose of the Plan was to provide current surface/water quality data and conditions, historical and cultural data, demographics and development data for the watersheds, focus areas for the project, riparian buffer resources conditions and recommendations, public river access and recreation targets, and prioritized parcels for conservation areas. Three stakeholder meetings were held to recommend, review, and approve information in the document.

The Septic Tank Repair Project Reaches 100 Repairs

To repair or replace failing septic systems, the WPCOG was awarded an NC Clean Water Management Trust Fund Grant in 2013, and a US Environmental Protection Agency 319 Grant in 2017. Since 2013, over 100 septic tanks were replaced or repaired in the region. The Septic System Repair Program is beneficial in several ways, helping low-income individuals with a much-needed expense, the public health by preventing septic run-off, and providing environmental benefits for water quality.



- ★ Completed Projects 2013 - 2015
- ★ Completed Projects 2017 - 2019

DATA CENTER/GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEMS

Data Center

A Lead Regional Organization (LRO) Affiliate of the North Carolina Data Center, WPCOG Data Center Staff provides assistance in locating and analyzing demographics for local governments, nonprofits and the private sector. Data Center staff also produces specialized data products, including community assessments, economic indicators newsletters, industry growth analysis, and student growth estimation models.

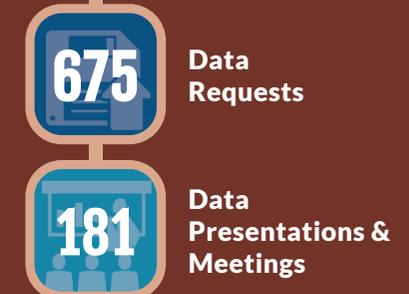
Accomplishments:

- » Completed demographic profile for Hickory Riverwalk Plan
- » Presented on Burke Quality of Life Explorer at NC GIS Conference
- » Updated regional statistical profile for Bernhardt Foundation
- » Analysis of construction trades in the Hickory MSA for NC Center of Engineering Technologies
- » Completed census tract and block group change maps for Census Bureau Participant Statistical Areas Program (PSAP)
- » Completed 2010-2018 Hickory MSA population change analysis
- » Generated population and housing estimates/projections of three Catawba County watersheds for Foothills Conservancy grant
- » Analysis of Catawba County low moderate-income and minority concentration Census Block Groups based on 2011-15 ACS data
- » Completed demographic section of the Alexander Co. Rec Plan
- » Analysis of the number of housing units in Claremont's ETJ
- » Tabulated 2018 Vehicle Occupancy Rate report for Hickory MPO
- » Assisted Hickory with data updates for Hickory Bond report
- » Updated 2019 Building Permit data for Morganton and Alexander, Burke, Caldwell and Catawba Counties
- » Analysis - boardings/alightings per stop Catawba Co. Greenway routes
- » Created 2019 population estimates for the Caldwell Co. fire districts
- » Analysis of traffic counts near Morganton Heights Shopping Center
- » Analysis of current openings by educational attainment level - CVCC
- » Updated Demographic Data for ARC 2020 Plan
- » Analysis of Traffic Analysis Zone demographic and employment data in the Sherrill's Ford area
- » Analysis of regional fair market housing data for Habitat for Humanity
- » Completed demographic chapters for Bethlehem Small Area Plan and Caldwell Comprehensive Plan

Data Center Publications

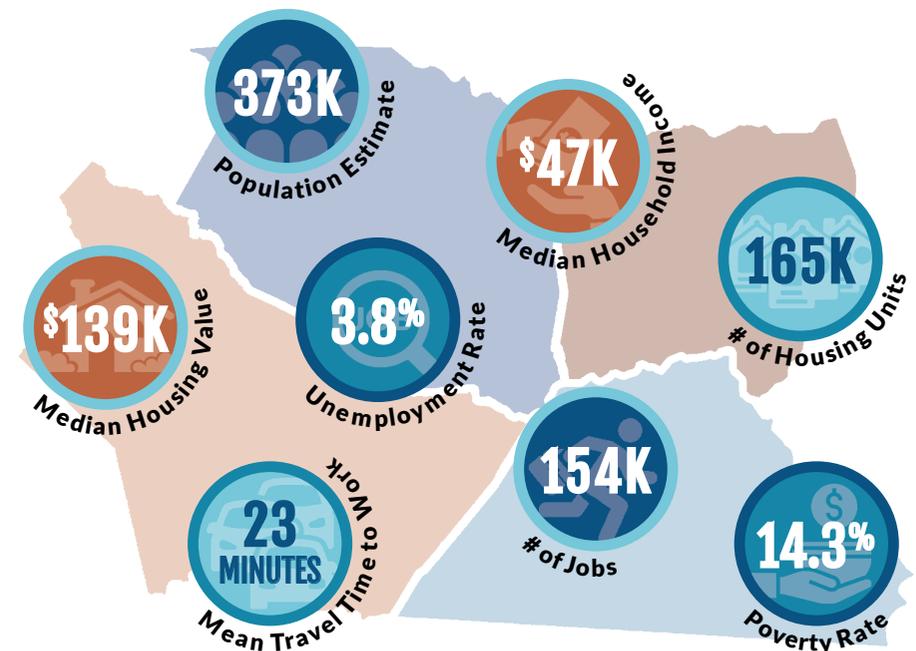


Data Center Activities



- » 2019 Catawba Early Head Start Community Assessment
- » 2018-19 Greenway Passenger Sampling Report
- » 2019-20 Greenway Passenger Methodology Report

WPCOG Regional Snapshot



Sources: NC Office of Management and Budget, NC Labor and Economic Analysis Division, 2018 American Community Survey

Geographic Information Systems (GIS)

The WPCOG is a resource of geographic information for the Western Piedmont Region. The WPCOG provides a variety of digital mapping solutions and geospatial data services for member governments and other public and private agencies. The WPCOG's GIS group maintains an extensive library of local, county, regional, and statewide datasets to support numerous WPCOG projects. GIS became part of the WPCOG Planning Department in July 2019.

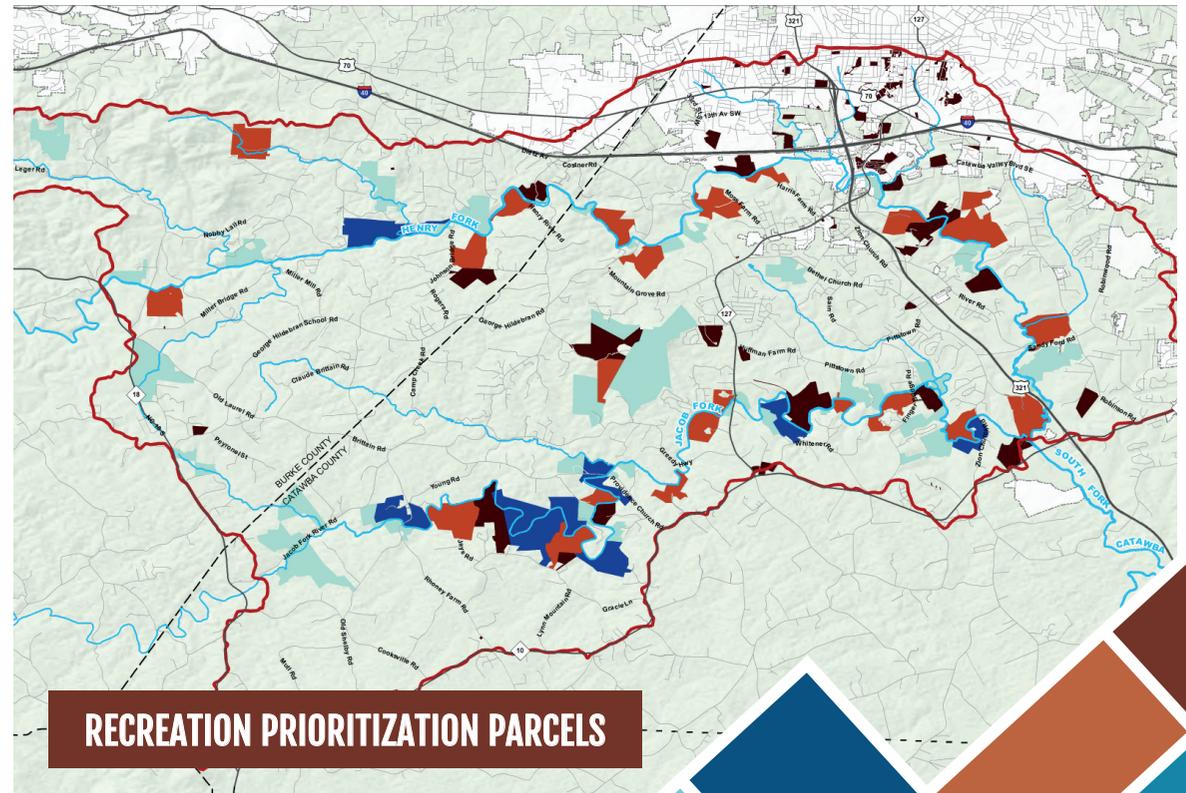
Accomplishments:

- » Outfall locations, city limit, and watershed maps for 6 Stormwater Management Plans
- » Began Hickory Tap Card Project
- » Final maps for Caldwell County Comprehensive Land Use Plan
- » General mapping support for Municipalities of Claremont, Gamewell, Hickory, Hildebran, Hudson, Maiden, Sawmills, Valdese, and WPCOG Community & Economic Development Department
- » Geocoded and generated maps for January and July Carolina Textile District (CTD) clients, CTD members, Manufacturing Solution Center (MSC customers and referral companies impact mapping)
- » Violation Status Category maps for Code Enforcement reports
- » Maps for Town of Catawba Marketing Sheets
- » Maps/Analysis for WPCOG Regional Housing Authority SEMAP 2019
- » Maps for Alexander County Recreation Plan
- » Maps for Granite Falls & Lenoir Environmental Reviews
- » Maps, conservation analysis, and recreation analysis for Henry Fork and Jacob Forks Study
- » Completed sewer and hydrology map for Hickory Public Works
- » Set-up Collector App for GPS Field Collection (Hickory)
- » Development of Right-of-Way Accessibility Collection App for ADA
- » Maps for Hickory Multi-Family Construction Project Environmental Assessment
- » Completed Survey 123 ADA Right-of-Way Collection Form
- » Updated Greenway Taylorsville Routes Web Map
- » Creation of new Burke Co. Transit Routes Brochure Maps
- » Implemented online water and wastewater GIS with a work-order system for Claremont

GIS ACTIVITIES & IMPACTS



The Henry Fork & Jacob Fork Watershed Conservation Plan Mapping



CODE ENFORCEMENT

July 2018, Code Enforcement services began for Hudson, Cedar Rock, Maiden, Drexel, Hildebran and Rhodhiss. July 2019, Catawba, Cahah's Mountain, Brookford and Valdese contracted with the WPCOG for code enforcement services. WPCOG's Code Enforcement Program uses a different approach than traditional code enforcement efforts. Staff use a KOD or Knock-On-Door policy with compassion. An in-house GIS application allows Staff to create a living information database in real-time and print documents as needed. The Code Enforcement Program has made a substantial impact in and for the participating municipalities, as approximately 769 violations in 2019 were resolved. The total estimate of municipal monies saved due to abatement from citizens and business owners, after enforcement notification within those municipalities was served, equaled \$790,155.00.

Code Enforcement is supporting the WPCOG Stormwater Program by providing Illicit Discharge Detection and Elimination program. An illicit discharge is any non-stormwater discharge to our storm system (including natural waterways), which damages water quality. The WPCOG's Code Enforcement program will be performing waterway inspections, to eliminate illegal discharges to promote a cleaner environment.

Accomplishments:

- » Obtained State Certified MS4 Phase II Inspector licensing
- » Assisted in revisions to GIS code enforcement field collection app
- » Worked with municipal Fire Departments to abate 23 Minimum Housing issues
- » Saved the 10 municipalities participating in the Code Enforcement Program over \$790 million through having issues resolved without having them abated at the municipalities expense
- » Added a Code Enforcement Officer position
- » Received the NADO (National Association of Development Organization) Aliceanne Wohlbruck Impact award for the Code Compliance Program. The award recognizes innovative approaches to Regional Economic and Community Development

1,632 Total Code Violations



72 Minimum Housing Standards Resolved



42 Abandoned Mobile Homes Removed



24 Illicit Discharge Cases



487 Tall Grass Cases Resolved



863 General Nuisance Cases



8 Non-residential Housing Standards Cases



140 Abandoned Junk & Nuisance Vehicles Removed

Enforcement Efforts



14 Property Owner Not Found



809 Notices of Violation Issued



769 Self-Compliance



40 Civil Citations Issued

276 Meetings

Citizen Informational, Planning Board, Town Council and Policy Board meetings to address code enforcement concerns, provide general feedback, educate members and the public, and to resolve issues.

ADA TITLE II FOR STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

The ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) is an unfunded mandate. WPCOG's ADA Title II program is designed to inventory all local government-owned existing facilities or any facility used by that local government, all municipal parking lots, and all features located within the public right of way. The ADA coordinator takes account of all inventory using an In-House GIS Application tailored to create a database for present and future use. This data will be used to create a Transition Plan for participating municipalities. Facilities are broken down into critical, medium and low impact, which will be addressed during future maintenance or repairs as dictated by the municipality's schedule with the goal to obtain compliance. The ADA coordinator works on behalf of the municipalities to head off any investigations or respond during audits. Currently, ADA inventorying and transition plans are underway in Granite Falls and Conover.

Accomplishments:

- » Established ADA Program on July 1, 2019
- » Established Grievance Procedures regarding ADA protocol and assisted in the design of a new GIS ADA Title II data collection application
- » Added 3 cars to the WPCOG fleet - Code Enforcement, ADA, and Stormwater
- » Provided ADA Recommendations for parks in Alexander County, Granite Falls, and Conover
- » Created collector pedestrian right of way application for documenting mobility hazards using criteria from PROWAG, ADAAG, and the US Access Board – application covers criteria for sidewalks, curb ramps, driveway cuts, intersections, railroad crossings, bus stops, crosswalks, and pedestrian islands



- » Conducted walking audits and provided reports for pedestrian right of way segments in Granite Falls and Conover
- » Drafting and prioritizing 2 ADA Transition Plans with recommendations and associated cost estimates
- » Submitted 9 monthly reports to Granite Falls and Conover regarding ADA inventory
- » Drone footage of problem intersections and mobility hazards

Conover – ADA Compliance Inventory*



Granite Falls – ADA Compliance Inventory*



*as of December 31, 2019

TRANSPORTATION

Designated as the Lead Planning Agency for the Greater Hickory Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), the WPCOG is responsible for regional transportation planning. The MPO evaluates transportation system performance, identifies project needs, develops long-range plans, prioritizes projects, and recommends funding. The WPCOG is the primary local recipient of the transportation planning funds received from the state and federal governments. The MPO is governed by the Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) comprised of elected officials from each of the 28 local governments in the region.

351

Total Bus Route Passenger Samplings

135

Trips in
Burke
County

216

Trips in
Catawba
County

MEETINGS &
PRESENTATIONS

10

MPO TAC/TCC
Joint Board

11

Greenway Public
Trans. Board

3

Transit
Advisory Board

2

County
Workforce
Committees
(Burke & Caldwell)

1

Catawba County
Chamber

2

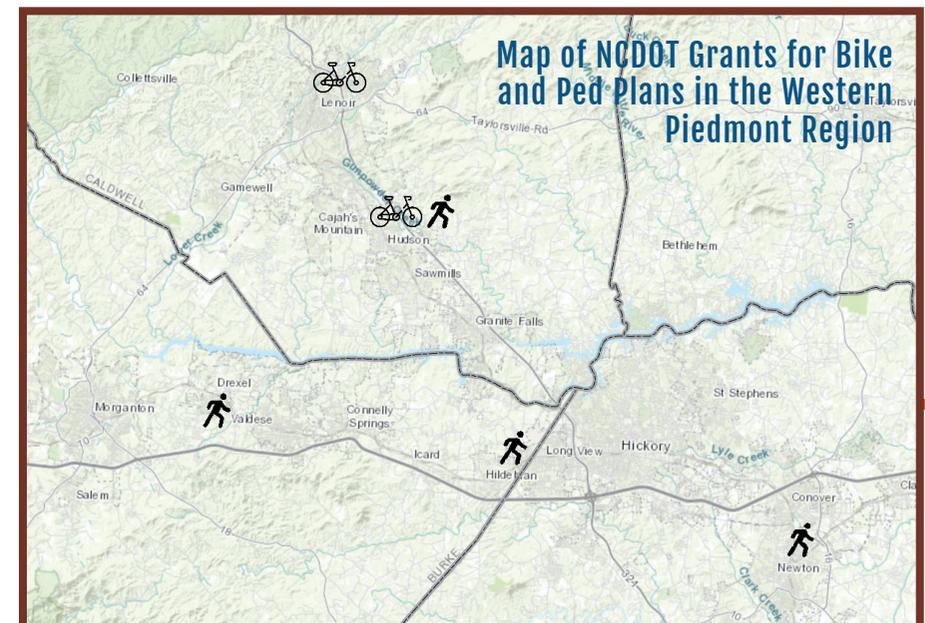
County
Commissions
(Alexander &
Catawba)

4

Town Boards
(Cajah's Mountain,
Hildebran, Hudson &
Rutherford College)



Thanks to a competitive grant applied for by WPCOG and awarded by the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT), a new Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan was being developed for the Town of Hudson. Last year, families provided their feedback on draft recommendations, while children also had fun learning about bicycle safety at Hudson Elementary.



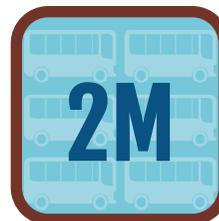
New Funding for Area Transportation Projects

6 Newly Committed STIP Projects Funded by 2025

\$157M	for NC 150 widening in Catawba County
\$30M	for Springs Rd access improvements
\$21M	for Dudley Shoals Rd on-ramp to US 321
\$16M	for Cahaj's Mountain Rd modernization
\$3M	for College St Multi-Use Path in Morganton
\$1.4M	for Burkemont / W Fleming intersection in Morganton

5 Newly Prioritized STIP Projects Funded by 2029

\$138M	for I-40 widening between Exits 123 and 128
\$48M	for NC 16 modernization in Alexander County
\$19M	for NC 127 access improvements in Viewmont
\$11M	for NC 126 modernization in Burke County
\$5M	for I-40 Exit 99 Causby Rd in Burke County



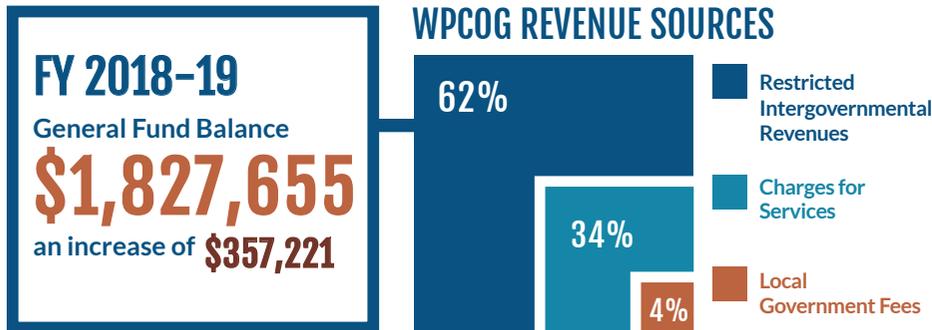
2M in replacement buses for Greenway Public Transportation

NCDOT Grants for Bike and Ped Plans in the Western Piedmont Region

Community	Year Completed	Plan Focus
Hudson	2020	Bike and Pedestrian
Rutherford College & Valdese	2019	Pedestrian
Lenoir	2018	Bike
Newton	2017	Pedestrian
Hildebran	2010	Pedestrian

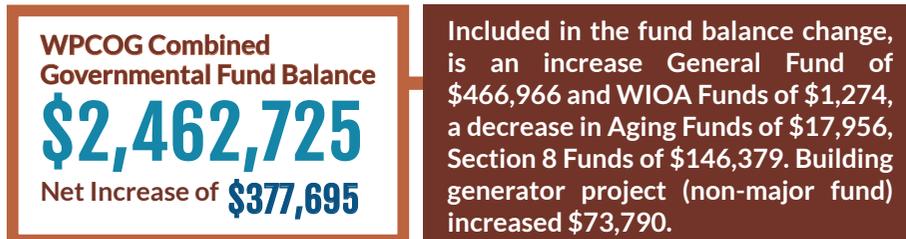
NCDOT has awarded planning assistance to Hudson, Rutherford College, Valdese, Lenoir, Newton and Hildebran over the last ten years, Hudson being the most recent grantee.

The Finance Department manages the agency's pass-through funds totaling more than \$9.5 million and supervises the intricacies of a \$19 million budget, which includes over 100 different contracts and programs with local, state and federal agencies and private firms.



The focus of the Western Piedmont Council of Governments' governmental funds is to provide information on near-term inflows, outflows, and balances of unusable resources. Such information is useful in assessing the Western Piedmont Council of Governments' financing requirements.

The General Fund is the primary operating fund of the WPCOG. At the end of the 2019 fiscal year, WPCOG's available fund balance in the General Fund was \$307,252, while total fund balance reached \$1,827,655. Western Piedmont Council of Governments currently has an available fund balance of 5.43% of General Fund expenditures, while total fund balance represents 32.28% of general fund expenditures.



The Finance Department provides cost-effective services to our local governments and other non-profit organizations. With over 54 years of governmental accounting experience, and staff with NCGFOA certification, and master's degrees in accounting, and dedicated to providing exceptional financial administration services.

During the past year, the Finance Department was able to assist five local governments and one non-profit with financial administration services. These services enabled local governments to continue business without interruption of financial services. One local government uses full financial administration through a WPCOG provided finance officer.

Technical expertise is required by the Financial Accounting Standards Board and Governmental Accounting Standards Board to review financial reporting. Two local governments used WPCOG finance staff to review their financial statements, eliminating audit findings or errors in the financial reports. Three municipalities used as needed financial assistance. Specific duties included payroll administration, financial report reconciliations, monthly reconciliations, and journal entry assistance. The WPCOG offers full or a selection of financial services to governmental and non-profit organizations in the region.

TOTAL GOVERNMENTAL REVENUES AND EXPENSES

Department	Revenues	Expenses
General Government	231,690	318,519
Transportation	1,073,747	906,324
Environmental Protection	192,926	219,021
Community Development	941,654	890,922
Community & Regional Planning	487,184	417,104
Economic Development	387,020	520,569
Regional Public Housing	5,842,444	5,971,021
GIS and IT Services	345,218	310,770
Area Agency on Aging	3,539,793	3,629,556
WIOA	2,355,915	2,350,956
Misc/Local Dues/Fringe & indirect	254,525	-278,341
Total	15,634,116	15,256,421

REGIONAL HOUSING AUTHORITY

The Regional Housing Authority (RHA) diligently seeks partnerships with property owners, community advocates, and housing resource providers to ensure the fulfillment of the mission to provide residents access to quality, affordable housing.

Housing Choice Voucher program tenants are encouraged to seek opportunities to participate in a multitude of special programs and activities offered by the RHA. The goal is to provide a foundation for improving participant's quality of life and achieving self-sufficiency through realizing the housing voucher program's potential to enable families to move to better neighborhoods.



Housing Choice Voucher Program

The housing choice voucher program is the federal government's major program for assisting very low-income families, the elderly, and the disabled to afford decent, safe, and sanitary housing in the private market. Since housing assistance is provided on behalf of the family or individual, participants can find their housing, including single-family homes, townhouses and apartments.

1,214
Families Served

The participant is free to choose any housing that meets the requirements of the program and is not limited to units located in subsidized housing projects. A family that is issued a housing voucher is responsible for finding a suitable housing unit of the family's choice, where the owner agrees to rent under the program. This unit may include the family's present residence. Rental units must meet minimum standards of health and safety, as determined by Housing Quality Standards.

A housing subsidy is paid to the landlord directly by the Housing Authority on behalf of the participating family. The family then pays the difference between the actual rent charged by the landlord and the amount subsidized by the program.

Annual Landlord Seminar

The 6th annual Landlord Information Seminar was held in November 2019 with approximately 50 landlords in attendance. The Regional Housing Authority staff and two guest speakers presented during the interactive meeting. Information was provided from Legal Aid of NC regarding emotional support animals and service animals. The Hickory Fire Department informed landlords on fire safety regulations as well as fire alarm protocols and guidance.

HUD REPORTING

Section 8 Management Assessment Program (SEMAP)

The RHA is required to submit a performance assessment to HUD yearly. The Section Eight Management Assessment Program (SEMAP) measures the performance of the public housing agencies (PHAs) that administer the Housing Choice Voucher Program. In addition to 14 key indicators HUD uses to target and monitor assistance, PHAs are also allowed the opportunity to earn five bonus points. Those points can be earned by tracking Section 8 families with children living within high poverty areas. The information below was submitted to HUD, demonstrating those percentages.

Fiscal Year	# of Section 8 Families in High Poverty Areas	Total # of Section 8 Families	% of # of Section 8 Families in High Poverty Areas
2018	163	454	35.9%
2019	139	398	34.9%

For the fourth consecutive year, the RHA has received a 100% score on SEMAP and has maintained a High Performer Rating. Housing authorities that achieve an overall performance rating of high performers receive national recognition by HUD and are given competitive advantage under notices of funding availability.

Voucher Management System (VMS)

HUD requires Housing Authorities to submit monthly reports on Housing Choice Voucher management through the Voucher Management System (VMS). The HUD Financial Management Center (FMC) utilizes VMS reports to calculate the monthly dollar amount to distribute to each Housing Authority. In October 2019, FMC auditors visited the RHA for a randomly selected VMS audit. The Regional Housing Authority was given an excellent review and compliments of a job well done. FMC auditors found less than 1% overall error rating.

Fraud Collection

Families assisted through the RHA Housing Choice Voucher program who inaccurately report their income, are placed on a repayment agreement. If the RHA is unable to collect the income from the family through an agreement, the family is entered into the NC Debt Setoff collection system. This year, the RHA collected \$22,016.43. This amount reflects current repayment clients, including those who have paid off their balances, as well as NC Debt Setoff amounts collected.

SPECIAL PROGRAMS

The RHA works to enhance the quality of life for participating families by offering opportunities through special programs, including REACH - Family Self-Sufficiency Program (FSS), Homeownership, Family Unification Vouchers, and Mainstream Vouchers.

- » **Mainstream Vouchers** assist non-elderly persons with disabilities.
- » **Family Unification Vouchers** are designed to help families facing the imminent threat of their children being removed due to inadequate housing. The voucher can also be used to help youth who are transitioning out of the foster program to live independently.
- » **Homeownership** program allows Section 8 participants to use their rental subsidy toward mortgage payments.
- » **Family Self-Sufficiency (REACH)** helps families become self-sufficient by creating a plan and counseling them through steps to overcome barriers.

FAMILY SELF-SUFFICIENCY (REACH)

68

Total Participating Families

18

New Enrollments in 2019

8

Families Graduated Program in 2019

\$27,310

Earned and Distributed to Graduates

\$128,931

Total amount in FSS Escrow at Close of 2019

REACH is a family self-sufficiency program for Housing Choice Voucher participants. The coordinator helps those families create a plan and counsels families through steps to overcome those barriers and become self-sufficient. The RHA deposits money into an escrow account for each participant as they obtain employment, increase their household earned income and achieve their goals. The family earns escrow savings by achieving their goals and graduating from the REACH program.

HOME OWNERSHIP PROGRAM

5

Participating Families

\$1,286

Paid Monthly Toward Mortgages

\$15,432

Paid Yearly Toward Mortgages

MAINSTREAM VOUCHERS

35

Initial Vouchers Used in 2019

96

Additional Vouchers Awarded in 2019

FAMILY UNIFICATION PROGRAM

22

Participating Families

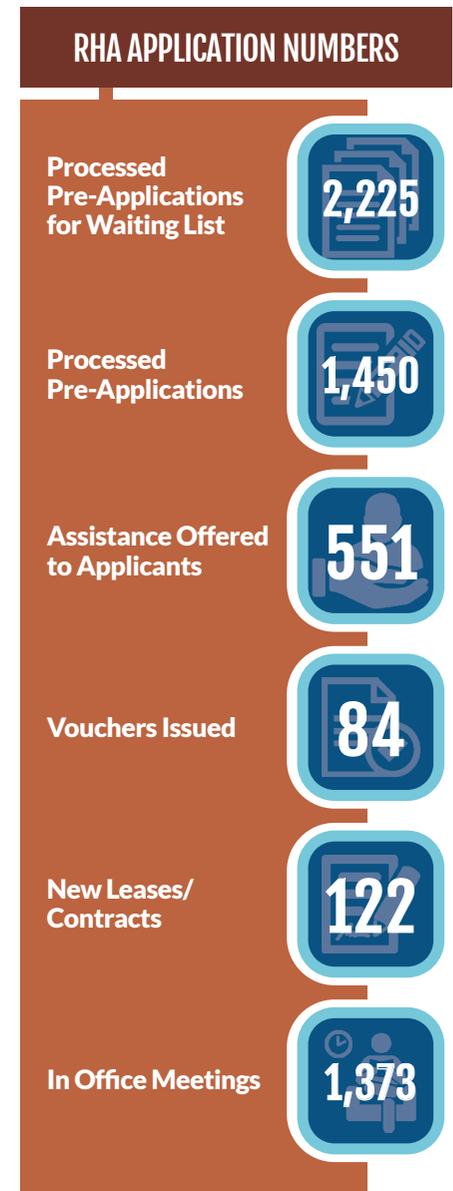
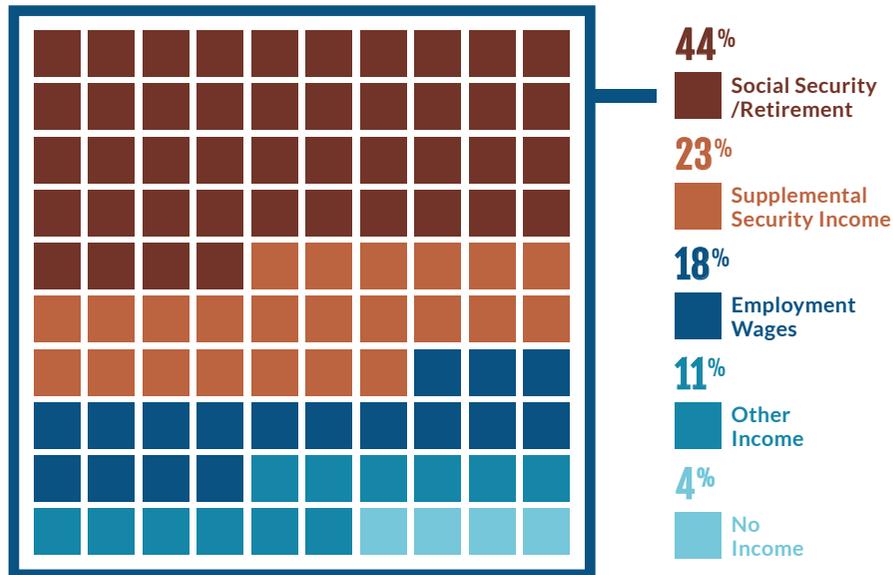
ENVISION CENTER DEMONSTRATION

The EnVision Center demonstration is premised on the notion that financial support alone is insufficient to solve the problem of poverty. Intentional and collective efforts across a diverse set of organizations are needed to implement a holistic approach to foster long-lasting self-sufficiency. EnVision Centers will provide communities with a centralized hub for support in the following four pillars: (1) Economic Empowerment, (2) Educational Advancement, (3) Health and Wellness, and (4) Character and Leadership.

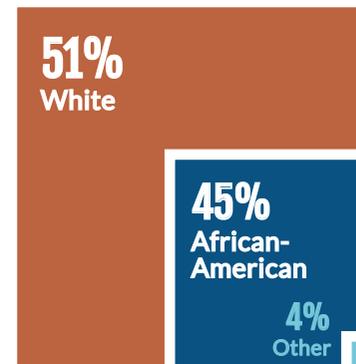
In 2019, the RHA operated a Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) site in partnership with the IRS. The VITA site was open from February 1 to April 15. Every other Saturday, local volunteers assisted in preparing taxes, free of charge. During 2019, the RHA assisted 21 families that received tax refunds totaling \$30,487.

The 2019 Dignity Drive successfully collected over 9,000 feminine hygiene products for disadvantaged women in Burke and Catawba Counties, with the support of local partner agencies.

CLIENT PRIMARY INCOME SOURCES



Client Racial Breakdown



Client Ethnicity Breakdown



RHA INSPECTIONS & RE-CERTIFICATIONS

INSPECTIONS

2,015

RE-CERTIFICATIONS

1,084

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD

The purpose of the Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board is to be at the center of community and regional leadership to identify workforce challenges, to be the convener of the conversation to resolve the challenges, to be the champion for workforce development, to work in a collaborative partnership with key stakeholders, (especially economic development and education), to bring resources to bear on resolving the challenges, and to act as the accountability agent to ensure the work is completed.

Through the planning and oversight of the Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board, our local area NCWorks Career Centers have delivered:



SCHOLARSHIP FUNDING	#ITAs	Jan-Dec '19 Expenditures
CCCTI	53	\$47,352.12
CVCC	52	\$62,477.37
Western Piedmont	26	\$28,654.94
Other Community Colleges	13	\$20,067.57
Other Training Dollars*		\$102,908.07
Other Support Dollars**		\$90,005.11
Grand Total		\$351,465.18

*Other Training Dollars covers books, fees, tools of the trade, health related costs (vaccines).
 **Other Support Dollars covers support services for childcare and transportation.

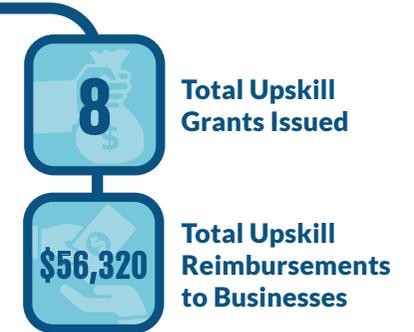
Upskill

In 2019 the Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board reinstated its Incumbent Worker Grant program, branded as Upskill. The Upskill Grant offers competitive training grants to businesses in addressing employees' skill gaps, improving employee retention, helping stabilize the business, and increasing the competitiveness of the employee and business. Through this effort, businesses:

- » Improve Productivity and Increase Competitiveness
- » Retain Key Talent and Expertise
- » Reduce Employee Turnover

COMPANIES THAT PARTICIPATED

- » Hanes Companies
- » Sherrill Furniture
- » Steele Rubber Products
- » North by Northwest Consulting, Inc.
- » HSM
- » Baker Furniture
- » Carolina Nonwovens
- » Snyder Paper



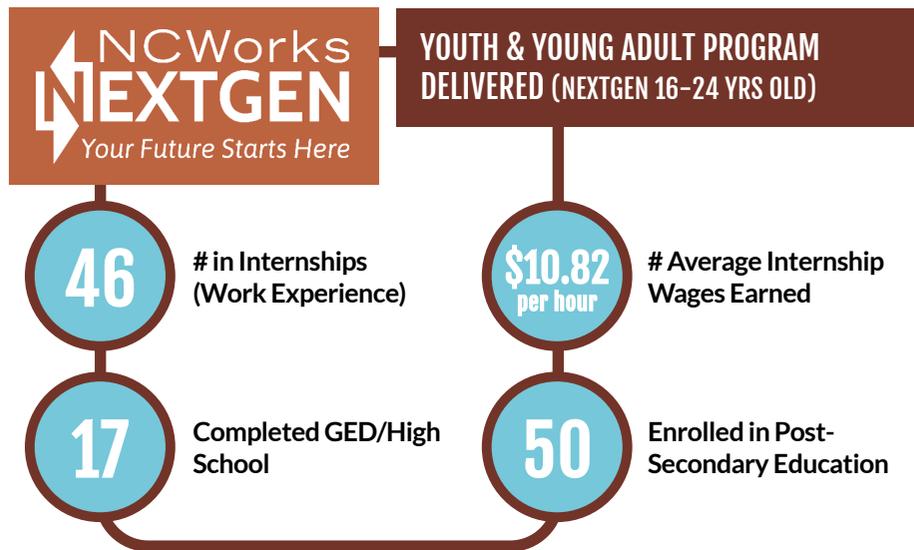
Upskill Success Story

Steele Rubber Products, Inc is a manufacturer of automotive parts for classic American cars, trucks, and hot rods in Denver, North Carolina. Steele Rubber Products was seeking resources to help sustain its growth and prevent the loss of skills due to the retirement of its skilled workforce. Upskill Western Piedmont, in partnership with Catawba Valley Community College, was able to assist Steele Rubber Products in achieving its goal for current employee training.



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“By developing the skills and techniques of our employees in training roles to train co-workers through effective communications, understanding the learner, applying the appropriate teaching methods, and successful instructor-learner relationships. With a third of our employees eligible for retirement within a few years, we will have a group of qualified trainers to ensure continuity and support for ongoing knowledge transfer.” --Debra Lail, Human Resource Manager.



NCWorks Successes



Earlier this year, Jakob was in a tough spot. He was homeless, no car, no job, and had only recently moved back to North Carolina after being out of state for some time. After help and support from NCWorks, Jakob began a NEXTGEN paid internship with Granite Counter Connection. Through his paid internship, he learned core skills to help me obtain full-time employment with Granite Counter Connection. Best of all, Jakob now has an apartment of his own, a car, and a steady income. It can be done!

“I’d like to tell you of how thankful I am with NC Works. From the first day I came in here, I was welcomed by everyone, and everyone was more than ready to help me get started on my road to success.” Two weeks later Pablo was employed for a company ,and he loves the work and the people with which he works. Thank you NCWorks!



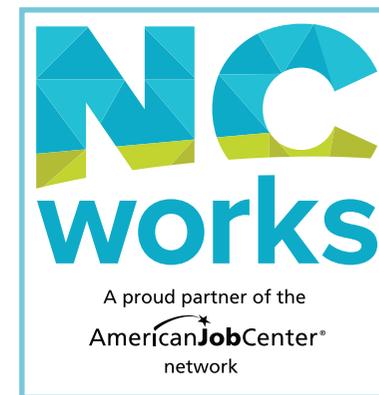
Brittany was one of the first Finish Line Grant participants in Burke County. She sought out the Finish Line Grant through NCWorks and Western Piedmont Community College so that she could finish the Recreational Therapy Assistant program. She was attending Western Piedmont Community College and graduated May 11, 2019, with her Associate Degree in Recreational Therapy Assistant. On July 1, Brittany was offered and accepted a position in Recreational Therapy with Broughton Hospital. I asked Brittany to send us a “selfie” and to write a few words about her program participation.

“In a moment like this, I think the best selfie I can choose is the one for my work badge! I will forever be thankful for receiving the Finish Line Grant during such a stressful time in my life. Thanks to the grant, I was able to graduate from the program and work in my career field at a job I absolutely love!”

Thank you so much! I truly appreciate all the help you provided me with it was a pleasure to meet with you.” --Brittany Kaylor, LRTA

Improving on What Works

The updated NCWorks logo and branding was announced at the October 2019, NCWorks Partnership Conference. There has been a lot of work to raise the profile of NCWorks among business leaders across North Carolina. As part of that effort, NC wanted to launch a new logo and a new brand. Some of this effort is underway with two new NCWorks social channels, Facebook (www.facebook.com/NCWorks) and LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com/company/ncworks), in addition to the already refreshed Twitter account (twitter.com/ncworks).



As leaders in workforce development, we will work to increase the online reach of NCWorks as we communicate the wide variety of services our NCWorks Career Centers offer, and highlight the impactful work that is being done every day.

**The Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board provides, planning, technical assistance and implementation of employment, and training activities as required by Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) for the local area, as well as providing oversight, coordination and guidance of the local NCWorks Career Centers.*

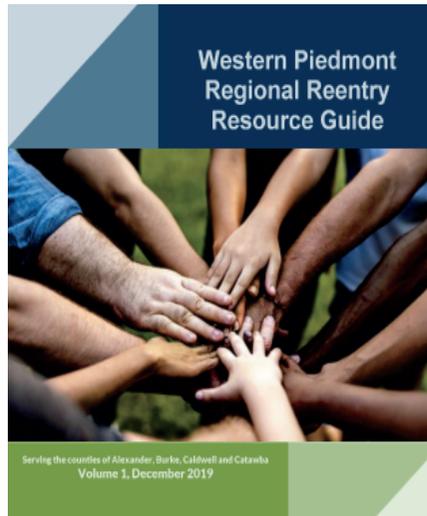
Regional Reentry Initiative

Statistics indicate that over 6 million individuals in the United States and approximately 134,000 people in North Carolina have a criminal record. About 95% of those incarcerated are released! Various agencies are already providing successful services in our area, yet with collaboration, we will take REENTRY to another level in the Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board Region Catawba, Alexander, Caldwell, and Burke Counties.

On November 29, 2019, the Western Piedmont Council of Governments Workforce Development Board hosted an initial Regional Reentry meeting, facilitated by Vanessa L. James, Regional Reentry Specialist for the NC Department of Commerce. Seventy individuals attended the meeting from various federal and state government agencies, community partners, interested citizens, and some individuals formerly involved in the criminal justice system. Ms. James proposed an idea of facilitating collaborative efforts and intentional networking. To paint a realistic picture of what truly is needed to assist a person reentering the community from incarceration, Joshua Proby shared his life story and experience.

Feedback from the meeting strongly encouraged further discussion of a joint reentry vision for our area. These first discussions towards this vision include each of the four counties (Alexander, Catawba, Caldwell, and Burke) having their own reentry group along with the joint regional efforts. Since November 2019, the Regional Reentry meetings have continued, strengthening partnerships and resource efforts across the region. The group has developed a Regional Reentry Resource Guide, which can be found at www.wpcog.org/publications.

The Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board serves all four of these counties and is directly involved in the Regional Reentry Initiative.



NCWorks Career Pathways

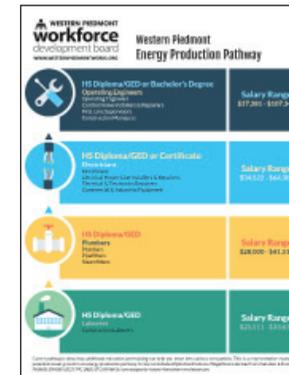
The Western Piedmont Workforce Development Boards Local Area, in collaboration with five other NC Workforce Development Boards, received their NCWorks Certified Career Pathway for Energy Services. The five Workforce Development Board Local Areas received recognition from Chief Deputy Secretary of Commerce, Liz Crabill. This certification by the State of NC marks Western Piedmont's third certified career pathway.



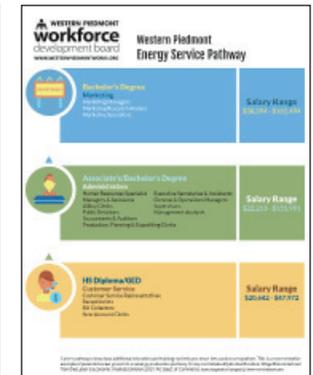
Energy Maintenance Pathway



Energy Production Pathway



Energy Service Pathway



Each of these pathways can be viewed, downloaded and printed at www.westernpiedmontworks.org.

ADMINISTRATION

Anthony Starr - Executive Director
Sherry Long - Assistant Executive Director/ Community & Economic Development Director
Ashley Bolick - Director of Administrative Services & Human Resources
Jason Toney - Communications Specialist
Lori Dixon - Administrative Assistant
Judy Caldwell - Receptionist

AREA AGENCY ON AGING

Tina Miller - Director of Area Agency on Aging
Christina Franklin - Regional Ombudsman
Mary Mitchell - Family Caregiver Specialist
Karen Phoenix - Project C.A.R.E. Family Consultant
Sarah Stamey - Aging Specialist
Anita Roberts - Aging Specialist

COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Sherry Long - Assistant Executive Director/ Community & Economic Development Director
Paul Teague - Community & Economic Project Developer
Rick Oxford - Housing Program Manager
Laurie Powell - Community & Economic Development Administrator
Lisa Helton - Community & Economic Development Administrator
Jennifer Cannon - Community & Economic Development Administrator
Erin Schotte - Community & Economic Development Administrator
Helen Whisnant - Housing Counselor
Joel Herman - Housing Inspector

COMMUNITY & REGIONAL PLANNING

Alison Adams - Community & Regional Planning Director
John Wear - Senior Planner & Natural Resources Administrator
Teresa Kinney - Community & Regional Planner
Hunter Nestor - Community & Regional Planner
Ashley Kale - Community & Regional Planner
Jack Cline - Stormwater Administrator
Taylor Dellinger - Senior Data Analyst/GIS Manager
Todd Stroupe - GIS Analyst
Trey Schweitzer - GIS Technician

Dustin Millsaps - Transportation/Planning Technician
Brian Horton - Transportation Planning Manager
Averi Ritchie - Transportation Planner/ADA Administrator
Duncan Cavanaugh - Transportation Planner/Data Technician
Patrick DeMauro - Code Enforcement Officer
Todd Justice - Code Enforcement Officer

FINANCE

Andrea Roper - Director of Finance
Kelsie Mease - Assistant Finance Director
Sandy Jones - Financial Manager
Kim Eckard - Payroll Technician
Ashley Adkins - Accounting Technician
Sherry Farris - Accounts Receivable Technician

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY/FACILITIES

Scott Miller - Director of IT/Facilities

REGIONAL HOUSING AUTHORITY

Stephanie Hanvey - Director of Regional Housing Authority
Kim Duncan - Family Self-Sufficiency Coordinator
Kala Guido - Housing Program Specialist
Elizabeth Moncrief - Housing Program Specialist
Ashley Dale - Housing Program Specialist
Sharday Black - Housing Program Specialist
Joann Parlier - Housing Compliance Specialist
Jared Nava-Salgado - EnVision Center Coordinator
By Khang - Housing Inspector

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD

Wendy Johnson - Director of Workforce Development
April Lail - Financial Manager
Donna Gilbert - Program Administrator
Elizabeth Hilliard - Program Coordinator
Leslie Farris - Strategic Initiatives Coordinator
Matthew Xiong - Business Services Consultant

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Western Piedmont Council of Governments

Creative Regional Solutions Since 1968

Mailing: P.O. Box 9026 | Hickory, NC 28603

Location: 1880 2nd Avenue NW | Hickory, NC 28601

Phone: 828.322.9191 | Fax: 828.322.5991

www.wpcog.org