

WESTERN PIEDMONT COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS NEWSLETTER MAY 2024



CONTENTS

- » **Celebrating Older Americans Month**
- » **WPCOG Helps Local Governments Secure NC Commerce Grants**
- » **Workforce Development Board Welcomes New Team Member**
- » **2024 University Tour**
- » **NCWorks at Metropolitan Community Recruitment & Resource Event**
- » **RHA Awarded Special Purpose Vouchers**
- » **Spring Economic Indicators Newsletter**
- » **US Census Bureau Impacted by Change in OMB Race/Ethnicity Standards**

Celebrating Older Americans Month: Powered by Connection

Article by Ashelin McCoy

Older Americans Month (OAM) has been celebrated every May since being established in 1963. Led by a federal agency, the Administration for Community Living (ACL), OAM is a time to recognize older Americans' contributions, highlight aging trends, and reaffirm commitments to serving the older adults in our communities.

This year's theme, "Powered by Connection," focuses on the profound impact that meaningful connections have on the well-being and health of older adults — a relationship underscored by the **U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community**.



POWERED BY CONNECTION: MAY 2024

How can community groups, businesses, and organizations mark OAM?

- Spread the word through professional and personal networks about the mental, physical, and emotional health benefits of social connection.
- Encourage social media followers to share their thoughts and stories of connection using hashtag #PoweredByConnection to inspire and uplift.
- Promote engaging opportunities, like cultural activities, recreational programs, and interactive virtual events.
- Connect older adults with local services, such as counseling, that can help them overcome obstacles to meaningful relationships and access to support systems.
- Host connection-centric events or programs where older adults can serve as mentors to peers, younger adults, or youths.

What can individuals do to connect?

- Invite more connection into your life by finding a new passion, joining a senior center, taking a class, or trying new activities in your community.
- Stay engaged in your community by giving back through volunteering, working, teaching, or mentoring.
- Invest time with people to build new relationships and discover deeper connections with your family, friends, colleagues, or neighbors.

Contact your local senior center to get involved and stay connected!

Alexander Senior Center

730 7th Street SW
Taylorsville, NC 28681
(828) 632-1717

www.alexandercountync.gov/senior-center

Bethlehem Site

Mt. Pisgah Lutheran Church
9379 NC-127
Bethlehem, NC 28601
(828) 409-3742

Burke County Senior Services

www.burkenc.org/departments/senior-services

East Burke Senior Center

101 Main Ave. West, Suite A
Hildebran, NC 28637
(828) 397-3397

Morganton/Burke Senior Center

501 North Green Street
Morganton, NC 28655
(828) 430-4147

Caldwell Senior Center

PO Box 933
650 Pennton Avenue SW
Lenoir, NC 28645
(828) 758-2883

www.caldwellseniorcenter.org

Catawba County Council on Aging

West Hickory Senior Center
400 17th Street SW
PO Box 835
Hickory, NC 28603
(828) 328-2269

www.catawbacoa.org

Neighbors Network

502 Thornburg Drive
Conover, NC 28613
(828) 464-1111

www.neighborsnetwork.org

For more information, visit the official **OAM website** and join the conversation on social media using the hashtag #OlderAmericansMonth.

WPCOG Helps Local Governments Secure NC Commerce Grants

Article by Paul Teague

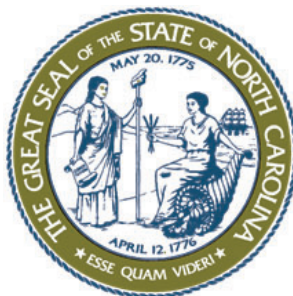
Five local governments have obtained NC Commerce grants – totaling more than \$1.76 million – with assistance from WPCOG staff.

The grants were among 18 awarded under the state's new Rural Downtown Economic Development program and are aimed at enhancing funding for previously designated projects.

The grants include:

- **Lenoir** – A \$325,000 grant to further renovations at the Lenoir High School site along with the construction of a 4,300-square-foot outdoor pavilion that is part of the expansion of the Overmountain Victory Trail.
- **Newton** – A \$475,000 grant to assist the city with its Downtown Revitalization Streetscape Project. This effort includes pedestrian improvements, lighting, underground utilities, water and sewer upgrades, bike lanes, and on-street parking.
- **Hildebran** – A \$62,500 grant to support the town's Auditorium Renovation Project. The funds will improve ADA accessibility, create a concessions/ticketing area, and expand the backstage area.
- **Valdese** – A \$487,500 grant to further renovations of the Old Rock School. Along with ADA improvements, the project will enhance safety and functionality while making the building more energy-efficient.
- **Alexander County** – A \$412,500 grant to support the Housing Our Teachers Project that involves the renovation of a two-story, 4,561-square-foot building in downtown Taylorsville. The first floor is being renovated for commercial space, while the second floor is set to have two one-bedroom apartments that will be leased to new Alexander County teachers at an affordable rate.

WPCOG staff will continue to work with the local governments on these grants through their completion.



NORTH CAROLINA
**DEPARTMENT of
COMMERCE**

Workforce Development Board Welcomes New Team Member

Article by Charity Patterson Hamber

Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board would like to welcome the new member of the Workforce Development Team:

Trey Hedrick, Business and Virtual Services Coordinator

Trey was born in Claremont and grew up primarily in the Catawba County area. He graduated from Hickory High School in 2008 and attended Catawba Valley Community College from 2009-2011 where he received an associate's degree. He graduated from Appalachian State University with a Bachelor of Science in Psychology with a concentration in Human Services. He has with NCWorks in various roles that served job seekers and employers. He left NCWorks in September of 2021 to be the Plant Manager for Marx LLC in Sawmills, NC. When offered the position to work for Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board as the Business and Virtual Services Coordinator, he stated "I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity and cannot wait to help serve this great community again!"

Trey currently holds a 4th degree black belt in karate and teaches karate at Mountain View Karate Centers in Hickory. Go Team MVKC! He also coaches their tournament team alongside other amazing coaches.



2024 University Tour

Article by Charity Patterson Hamber

The Nextgen youth program kicked off the 2024 University Tour, with the first stop being Appalachian State University, and what a success! For most of these students, this was the first time they had met, but you can't tell by the photo! Led by a fantastic group of advisors, three having graduated from App State, the tour was what you would call special. On this tour, our youth were to increase awareness, accessibility, and exploration while creating a support system for each student to believe they can achieve! This trip sparked an interest in furthering their education but also encouraged them to look past their known barriers and focus on their future potential opportunities. What a great way to start a summer full of excitement and success!



NCWorks at Metropolitan Community Recruitment & Resource Event

Article by Charity Patterson Hamber

On Friday, May 3, 2024, from 12:00 pm until 4:00 pm, Goodwill Industries held the Metropolitan Community Recruitment and Resource Event at the Newton Central Recreation Center. There were 31 businesses in attendance.

The library Go Mobile Bus was on-site to assist with online applications. With 31 employers present, most of the local industries were represented. NCWorks-Catawba was in attendance to promote and provide career exploration services. The event was well attended by community members seeking employment and resources. NCWorks is always glad to collaborate with incredible partners like Goodwill Industries.



RHA Awarded Special Purpose Vouchers

Article by Elizabeth Moncrief

HUD recently awarded the WPCOG Regional Housing Authority (RHA) two types of Special Purpose Vouchers: Foster Youth Initiative (FYI) vouchers and Housing Stability (HS) vouchers.

WPCOG requested additional FYI vouchers in December 2023. In March 2024, HUD notified WPCOG that the RHA would receive 11 FYI vouchers. FYI vouchers are tenant-based housing assistance vouchers that assist youth who have left foster care or will be leaving foster care within 90 days. In addition, the youth must be between the ages of 18 and 24 and be homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

HUD allows Public Housing Authorities (PHA) to request up to 25 FYI vouchers on a non-competitive basis annually. As a condition of the request, a PHA must lease over 90 percent of its existing allocation of Family Unification Program (FUP) vouchers. As mandated by federal statute, FYI vouchers provide a maximum of 36 months of housing assistance unless the youth receives an extension. If granted an extension, the FYI program can provide an additional 24 months of housing assistance. FYI vouchers pair housing assistance with other supportive services, including basic life skills, such as money management, healthcare access, educational advancement counseling, and employment preparation.

WPCOG was awarded five Housing Stability vouchers in October 2023. The Consolidated Appropriations Act 2021 made more than \$43 million available for new incremental Housing Stability voucher assistance for individuals and families experiencing or at risk of homelessness. The vouchers are also for those fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, or human trafficking, as well as veterans or families that include a veteran family member and who meet one of the proceeding criteria.

WPCOG is partnering with the regional Continuum of Care (CoC) to receive Housing Stability voucher referrals from the CoC Coordinated Entry (CE) system. CE helps coordinate and manage crisis response resources so that participating agencies can make consistent decisions based on the available information to connect people to housing and service interventions efficiently and effectively.

For questions regarding the FYI or HS vouchers, please contact Kaleigh Reinhardt at 828.485.4234 or kaleigh.reinhardt@wpcog.org.



Spring Economic Indicators Newsletter

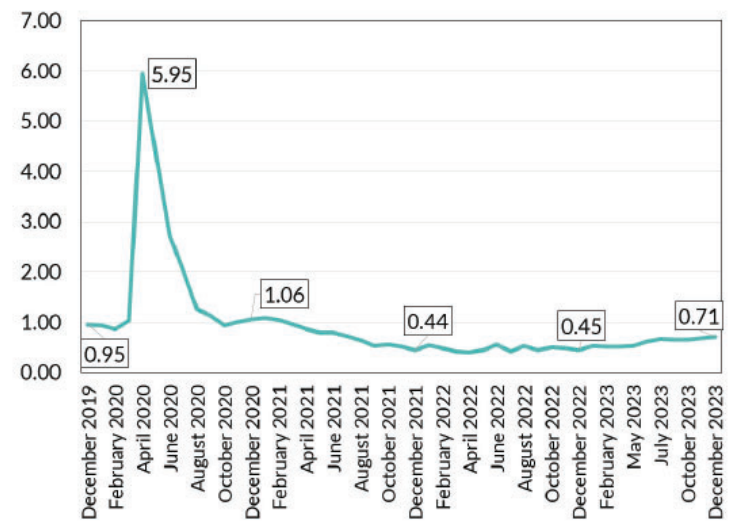
Article by Taylor Dellinger

The latest issue of the Economic Indicators Newsletter (EIN) focuses on economic trends and issues affecting the Hickory Metro Region. The current issue addresses Hickory Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) unemployment rates, Hickory Metro gross state tax collections, Hickory MSA real estate trends and Hickory MSA job market information. Here are a few key highlights of the EIN:

- The Hickory MSA's unemployment rate has increased slightly from 2.9% in December 2022 to 3.1% in December 2023.
- Between December 2022 and December 2023, the estimated number of employed persons fell from 169,158 to 168,784 (-374), while the civilian labor force decreased from 174,236 to 174,114 (-122).
- Average annual Hickory MSA bank deposits grew from \$4.523 billion in June 2017 to \$6.534 billion in June 2023.
- The Hickory MSA had 4,741 new housing listings and 3,909 closed sales in 2023. These totals were more than 4% lower than in 2022. All Hickory MSA locations, except Caldwell County and Lenoir had fewer new listings and closed home sales in 2023 than in 2022.
- The Hickory MSA's median sale price increased 10.8% in 2023 to \$275,000. All Hickory MSA locations, except Lenoir, had a median sales price of \$240,000 or more in 2023. Catawba County had the highest median sales price in 2023 (\$300,000) followed by Hickory (\$280,000) and Alexander County (\$265,000).
- The Hickory MSA average sales price exceeded \$324,000 for the first time in 2023. The highest average sales price was in Catawba County (\$346,817) followed by Hickory (\$319,891) and Morganton (\$309,876).
- As of December 2023, the Hickory MSA had only 707 houses for sale on the region's Multiple Listing Service.
- During 2023, it took on average about 33 days to sale a home once it was on the market. A sign of a tight housing market, the Hickory MSA had only 2.2 months supply of housing inventory in December 2023.
- As of December 2023, the Hickory MSA ratio of unemployed per job opening equaled 0.71. While the December 2023 ratio is higher than the past two years, there are still more openings than persons counted as "unemployed" in the region.
- Healthcare practitioners and technical occupations, sales and related occupations, and production occupations had the most Hickory MSA online job openings. These three occupation groups accounted for 29.5% of all December 2023 job openings.

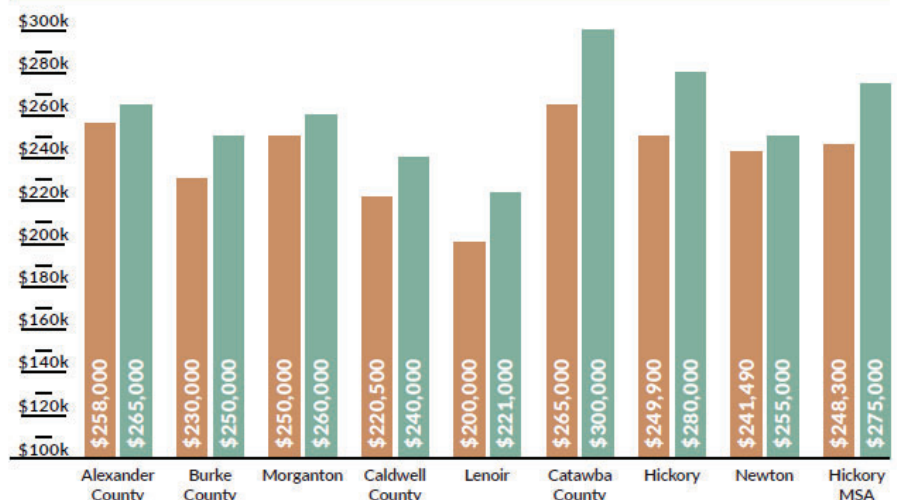
See the selected figures for additional information. The EIN is produced quarterly and is a publication of the Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board. To subscribe to the EIN, please contact Taylor Dellinger, Data Analyst at 828-485-4233 or by email taylor.dellinger@wpcog.org.

Figure 9. Hickory MSA Ratio of Unemployed Persons per Job Opening, December 2019-2023



Source: NC Works Online, NC Department of Commerce, 2024.

Figure 5. Hickory MSA Median Sales Price, 2022-2023
(Source: Canopy Multiple Listing Services, Inc. (Canopy MLS), 2024.)



US Census Bureau Impacted by Change in OMB Race/Ethnicity Standards

Article by Taylor Dellinger

On March 28, 2024, the US Office of Management and Budget (OMB) published the results of its review of Statistical Policy Directive No. 15 (SPD 15). OMB also issued updated standards for maintaining, collecting, and presenting race/ethnicity data across federal agencies. Among the most significant updates were directives to use a combined race/ethnicity question, the addition of a new “Middle Eastern and North African” minimum reporting category, and a requirement to collect detailed race/ethnicity responses.

In the future, all federal agencies, including the US Census Bureau, will collect race and ethnicity (i.e. Hispanic/Latino Origin) data with a single question. Middle Eastern or North African (MENA) is now a minimum race category. Race categories for the 2030 Census will be White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and Middle Eastern or North African. It is important to note that in the updated standards, a single ethnicity response, such as Hispanic or Latino, is considered a complete answer to the Census form’s race/ethnicity question.

As was the case in the 2020 Census, respondents will be able to respond to multiple races. Detailed race responses will be part of the default collection process—spaces will be available after each race category checkbox to allow respondents to provide detailed race responses (e.g., “Nigerian” as a detailed “Black or African American” response).

OMB told federal agencies to adjust to these revisions “as soon as possible.” For details of these changes, see the “Revisions to OMB’s Statistical Policy Directive No. 15: Standards for Maintaining, Collecting, and Presenting Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity” Federal Register Notice.

Revised Definitions for Minimum Race/Ethnicity Reporting Categories in 2024 SPD 15	
Minimum Race/Ethnicity Reporting Category	Definition
American Indian or Alaska Native	Individuals with origins in any of the original peoples of North, Central, and South America, including, for example, Navajo Nation, Blackfeet Tribe of the Blackfeet Indian Reservation of Montana, Native Village of Barrow Inupiat Traditional Government, Nome Eskimo Community, Aztec, and Maya.
Asian	Individuals with origins in any of the original peoples of Central or East Asia, Southeast Asia, or South Asia, including, for example, Chinese, Asian Indian, Filipino, Vietnamese, Korean, and Japanese.
Black or African American	Individuals with origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa, including, for example, African American, Jamaican, Haitian, Nigerian, Ethiopian, and Somali.
Hispanic or Latino	Includes individuals of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Salvadoran, Cuban, Dominican, Guatemalan, and other Central or South American or Spanish culture or origin.
Middle Eastern or North African	Individuals with origins in any of the original peoples of the Middle East or North Africa, including, for example, Lebanese, Iranian, Egyptian, Syrian, Iraqi, and Israeli.
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	Individuals with origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands, including, for example, Native Hawaiian, Samoan, Chamorro, Tongan, Fijian, and Marshallese.
White	Individuals with origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, including, for example, English, German, Irish, Italian, Polish, and Scottish.



CONTACT INFORMATION

Telephone: 828.322.9191

Fax: 828.322.5991

Email: jason.toney@wpcog.org

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

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

www.wpcog.org



facebook.com/WPCOG



x.com/WPCOG



instagram.com/WPCOG1968

