

WESTERN PIEDMONT COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS NEWSLETTER AUGUST 2022



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NEW OPERATING HOURS

THE NEW WPCOG OFFICE HOURS:

MONDAY - THURSDAY | 7:30 AM TO 5:30 PM

FRIDAY | 7:30 AM TO 11:30 AM

**If you have documents you need to deliver before or after our operating hours, please leave those in the drop box to the right of the doors.*



WPCOG Launches the NC Foothills Experience Web App

Article by Duncan Cavanaugh

After two years of development, hundreds of drone flights, and extensive work with community partners, the Western Piedmont Council of Governments (WPCOG) is excited to announce the launch of the NC Foothills Experience Web App, a new comprehensive program highlighting the rich collection of adventures, experiences, amenities, and food destinations across the four-county region.

The project, which was made possible through funding from the EDA CARES Act, is a first-of-its-kind application designed to demonstrate to prospective residents and businesses – as well as current residents – that by relocating to or staying in our region, they can experience a high quality of life that offers an ideal work-life balance.

“We are excited to launch the NC Foothills Experience. Our region possesses so many great assets and things to do. This tool helps our residents and visitors easily access information, and it demonstrates how this area is the best of North Carolina,” said Anthony Starr, WPCOG Executive Director.

The web app, which can be found at expncfoothills.com, focuses on four key categories that contribute significantly to our region's high quality of life:

Outdoor Adventures – state and local trails and greenways, parks, ball fields, and biking opportunities; Fun Places – cultural amenities including museums, libraries, art galleries, and historic destinations; Farm Fresh – local food in the form of u-pick farms, roadside stands, butchers, and farmers' markets; and Cool Spaces – wineries, distilleries, bike shops, outfitters, and local breweries.

Each location and event included within these four categories are represented by icons on maps, which users can click on to see immersive high-definition drone videos, photos, and engaging descriptions. Users can then click on another category to build their own personalized experiences. For example, after selecting a historic destination to visit, a user can click on the other categories to create a multi-destination experience, including a bite to eat at a local brew pub, a bike ride on a greenway, and a visit to a downtown.

Visitors and prospective new neighbors will find an amazing treasure trove of experiences to explore, while even long-term residents are likely to discover something new to try.

WPCOG is grateful to the many project partners and stakeholders who worked together to make this vision a reality. Project partners included our 28 local government members, the US Economic Development Administration, our local tourism promotion and visitors bureaus, Main Street and downtown development programs, chambers of commerce and EDCs, local extension offices, and the hundreds of people across the region that assisted us by providing photos of their locations and events.



Signs of Dementia

Article by Karen Phoenix

One out of every six people over 65 have early signs of dementia. Could it be you?

Estimates from the National Institutes of Health and other professional organizations indicate that one in six people over the age of 65 have some symptoms of memory loss and dementia. The next time you are in a group of six people, look around and realize how scary that statistic can be. As baby boomers begin to outnumber those younger, the statistics increase to one out of three people having dementia. When you are in a group of three people, look left, look right – if it is not one of them, it is you. Dementia is the third leading cause of death among seniors. More people currently die of Alzheimer's or Dementia related illnesses than those who die of Breast Cancer and Prostate Cancer combined.

With all the scary statistics surrounding dementia, how do you know if your forgetfulness is now something beyond normal aging, and what can you do about it? Look at the information below and see if it helps to clarify normal aging vs. aging with dementia as provided by the Alzheimer's Association.

Normal: Sometimes forgetting names or appointments, but remembering them later.

Not Normal: Forgetting new information, such as appointments or events.

Normal: Occasional errors with math or financial matters.

Not Normal: Problems following a recipe or instructions for a task.

Normal: Occasionally needing help with new electronics or resetting devices.

Not Normal: trouble navigating to a familiar location or trouble following the rules of interaction.

Normal: Getting confused about a day or date but remembering it later.

Not Normal: Lose track of dates, seasons, and passage of time.

Normal: Having normal age-related vision changes.

Not Normal: Trouble reading, balance issues, trouble judging distance.

Normal: Sometimes have trouble finding the right word or name for something.

Not Normal: New or increased problems finding the right word, problems following a conversation, or repetition of words or stories

Normal: Misplacing things but remembering to retrace steps to find them.

Not Normal: Placing things in unusual places and unable to retrace steps to return to find them.

Normal: Occasionally making a bad decision or occasionally forgetting to perform a routine, like changing the oil in the car.

Not Normal: Changes in judgment or decision-making with money, hygiene, and social graces.

Normal: Sometimes uninterested in events and family functions.

Not Normal: Change in ability to follow a conversation leading to withdrawal from interests, social activities, or hobbies. Trouble keeping up with programs or sporting events that were once of interest.

Normal: Upset when your plan or routine changes.

Not Normal: Personality changes such as confusion, depression, suspiciousness, fear, or anxiousness. Very upset with new situations.

If any “**not Normal**” situations apply to you, speak with your physician about them. It is best when signs of dementia are found early. However, many symptoms could be related to infections or other treatable conditions and not dementia. Project CARE is a State Funded program to assist caregivers of people with dementia through education, support, access to resources, and occasional respite assistance. Our Project CARE coordinator, Karen Phoenix, is available to talk with you at 828-485-4267 or can be reached at karen.phoenix@wpcog.org.



WPCOG to Oversee \$378,500 in Funding for Home Repair Program

Article by Paul Teague

The WPCOG will administer \$378,500 in funding for the 2022-23 fiscal year for the Urgent Repair Program (URP) for two separate grants for Alexander, Burke/Caldwell Counties, and Catawba County. The WPCOG received \$253,500 that has been earmarked for urgent repairs for 20 homes in Alexander, Burke, and Caldwell counties, and Catawba County was funded \$125,000 for ten homes.

The funding is provided through the North Carolina Housing Finance Agency.

The program provides eligible homeowners with needed repairs or improvements. The program has income guidelines (to be eligible, the household will have to be below 50 percent of the median income), and consideration is given to homeowners who are elderly, disabled, a veteran, a single parent with a child under the age of 18, or a family of five or more. There are caps on how much any home can be allotted, and all work is bid out through licensed, eligible contractors. Typical repairs include fixing roof leaks, replacing faulty heat or air conditioning systems, or installing handicapped accessible ramps or showers.

There is already a current waiting list for both programs.

For further information, you may contact Lisa Helton, who will be administering Burke and Caldwell Counties and can be contacted at 828-485-4281 or email lisa.helton@wpcog.org, or Laurie Powell, who will be administering Alexander and Catawba Counties and can be contacted at 828-485-4249 or email at laurie.powell@wpcog.org.

NORTH CAROLINA

HOUSING

FINANCE

AGENCY

From the Eyes of an Intern - Abby Fleri

Article by Stephanie Godfrey

Abby is a junior at UNC-Chapel Hill, working towards her Bachelor's in Business Administration and Psychology. She worked with the Regional Housing Authority for two summers in a row.

What attracted you to get an internship with the Western Piedmont Council of Governments (WPCOG)?

"I was unaware of Western Piedmont Council of Governments, or the COG until a family member told me about it. I was told that Elizabeth wrote grants, so I had the idea that the COG was here to get money from grants."

What did you think the Regional Housing Authority did versus what they actually did?

"I did not know how much the workers did. Caseworkers do case management; there is FSS, inspections, and people going out to the units to inspect. I did not realize the work is so personal between the client and worker, and the workers truly build them up. I thought it was more of a program where the government paid peoples' rent, but really, there is more of a personal relationship that each person has with their tenants and landlords. I thought they gave the money to the clients, and that was it. I did not realize there was so much work to ensure accommodating the client. I also did not realize that someone would go and make sure the unit is livable."

Tell me what a typical day/ week would look like for you as an intern.

"Almost every week was different. There were different themes: waitlist, working on flyers, sending out applications, doing inspections, and working with FSS. The housing department does so many different things that I was able to do a different job each week, I was given the opportunity to see how it all tied together."

What was your favorite part of the job?

"I really enjoyed the inspection-related tasks. I enjoyed having autonomy and determining how I would do the project; it was like a puzzle. I had a sense of ownership, which made me proud to be a part of it. I also really enjoyed getting to know the entire staff of the housing department this year. Last year I was shy, so I did not make as many connections; I experienced individual relationships this year. I can recognize personal growth from last year."

Continued - From the Eyes of an Intern - Abby Fleri



What was your least favorite part of the job?

"There was nothing I dreaded doing, but filing was my least favorite. Filing can be an overwhelming task because it piles up so quickly. However, once the filing was completed, it felt good because I felt accomplished".

In your opinion, what skills are most important to have to be a Housing Specialist?

"To be a housing specialist, someone needs to be empathetic. They need to step back as a caseworker and understand where these people are coming from. We must remember where people are and understand they are having a hard time. Once you understand where they are coming from, you can help them better. Having problem-solving skills and being creative is another skill caseworkers should have because not all applicants or situations are the same. All are unique individuals with different living circumstances. You have to think on your feet and think of solutions for them instead of a one size fits all approach. You have to be adaptable."

What challenges did you face while working as an intern for the Regional Housing Authority?

"Paperwork was a challenge because I had to get to the point where I could understand all the paperwork and processes to be helpful, and there are so many processes and parts of the file. I also recognized the paperwork could be burdensome for the client. The process could be challenging for individuals applying to our waitlist because living circumstances change so much. I also believe there is a digital divide between the counties, which created concerns in the application process."

This is the second year you completed an internship with the Regional Housing Authority; how were they different? How were they alike?

"The first year was a lot more training basics, and I did not go in-depth with any specific projects. I learned how to key move-ins, annuals, and figured out the filing system. This year I felt like I had a quick refresher of what I learned last year and could do many projects independently, making me feel like a real employee. I created my own processes for many of the projects I was assigned. I feel like I have matured a lot more from this experience."

What did you learn from this experience? What skills did you learn?

"I learned about the work environment and what it is like to work on an active team. The only experience my previous team projects were for school, so this gave me a realistic perspective. The experience also gave me the ability to gain an understanding of one another. I also learned more about my community. I have lived in Caldwell County my entire life, but I saw my community differently. Through this experience, my communication skills have improved. My role required email and phone communication, especially when I worked at the front desk. The situations I was presented with, and the projects I was assigned forced me to step out of my comfort zone to grow and learn."

Is there anything you wish everyone knew?

"I wish more people in the community knew about the COG. When I would tell people what I was doing this summer, many people did not know what it was. It is a shame because it is such a great community resource."

Where do you see yourself after you graduate?

"I am still thinking about this, although I am considering continuing my education and pursuing a graduate degree. After that, I would love to work with nonprofits. If not in a career, I will definitely volunteer because I think it is important."

Workforce Development Board - Success Stories

Article by Charity Patterson Hamber

Coby's Story

Coby "Elaine" Crooks visited the NCWorks Career Center - Catawba on July 20, 2022 and again on July 21, 2022 to receive work search assistance. She was interested in changing careers. Career Center staff provided Ms. Crooks assistance using NCWorks.gov. Ms. Crooks visited Freedom LLC/ Home Instead, one of the area's leading providers of in-home health care assistance, on July 25, 2022. She returned to NCWorks Career Center - Catawba on August 4, 2022, to report that she had obtained employment.

"When I walked into the Home Instead office, human resources asked why I would like to work for them. I told the interviewer that I like to help people. I could tell that she was impressed with what I had to say. Home Instead is willing to work around my required appointments. I knew that I did not have to apply anywhere else." Home Instead says they are thrilled to have Elaine come to work for them!

Ms. Crooks started orientation on Tuesday August 9, 2022, with Home Instead as a Home Health Aide. This is a career change for her and she is excited about the opportunity. Ms. Crooks had worked in manufacturing for 16 years prior to joining Home Instead.



Estella's Story



Ms. Estella "Lynne" Alexander started her journey with the Trade Program at the beginning of the COVID Pandemic. Being a new student going through training is hard, but learning how to navigate a new system and work with instructors and administration without ever seeing them in person, is even harder.

Just when the finish line was in sight, graduation was pushed back. Ms. Alexander viewed all of the complications she encountered, as a speed bump instead of a dead end. Ms. Alexander is a real winner because she forged ahead through all of the many hardships.

Ms. Alexander completed her coursework in Library Information Technology with an Associate's Degree from Central Carolina Community College in Sanford, NC on May 9, 2022. She is currently working part-time at Catawba County Library in Conover, NC as an intern and working for Fed Ex while pursuing a full-time position in a library.

2022 Summer Economic Indicators Newsletter

Article by Taylor Dellinger

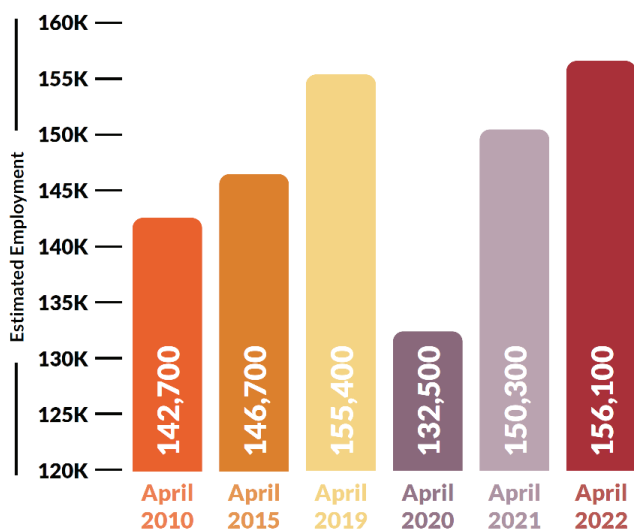
The latest issue of the Economic Indicators Newsletter (EIN) focuses on economic trends and issues affecting the Hickory Metro Region. The current issue addresses Hickory Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) unemployment rates, Hickory Metro gross state tax collections Hickory MSA Current Employment Statistics and North Carolina MSA Employment Comparisons.

Here are a few key highlights of the EIN:

- The Hickory MSA's unemployment rate fell from 5.0% in April 2021 to 3.1% in April 2022.
- Between April 2021 and April 2022, the estimated number of employed persons increased from 158,762 to 167,330 (8,568), while the civilian labor force grew from 167,041 to 172,767 (5,726).
- Hickory MSA Per Capita Personal Income (PCPI) grew from \$38,056 in 2017 to \$43,496 in 2020.
- The Covid-19 pandemic caused employment in the region to decrease by 22,900 jobs from April 2019 (155,400) to April 2020 (132,500).
- Since April 2020, the region has experienced rapid employment growth as the effects of the pandemic have waned. In fact, as of April 2022, the total number of jobs in the Hickory MSA (156,100) exceeded the number of employed workers in April 2019 (155,400).
- Hickory MSA goods-producing employment, which includes mining, construction, and manufacturing, declined from 46,500 in April 2019 to 38,200 in April 2020. Most of the goods-producing employment losses occurred in furniture and textiles. Fortunately, many of these workers have been reemployed as of April 2022.
- Hickory MSA service-providing employment was also substantially hit by the pandemic.
- Service-providing employment decreased 13.4% from April 2019 (108,900) to April 2020 (94,300).
- The biggest service sector employment decrease (-8,100) from April 2019 to 2020 occurred in leisure and hospitality services.
- Most service-producing sectors now have more employment than two years ago. The major exception would be in the leisure and hospitality services sector, whose employment total in April 2022 (12,700) is still 1,800 less than in April 2019.
- Among NC MSAs, the Hickory MSA had the fourth highest percentage of job growth (17.8%) over the past two years.
- The Hickory MSA had the highest percentage growth in goods-producing employment between April 2020 and 2022 (22.5%) of the NC MSAs due to recovery and growth in the region's manufacturing industry.

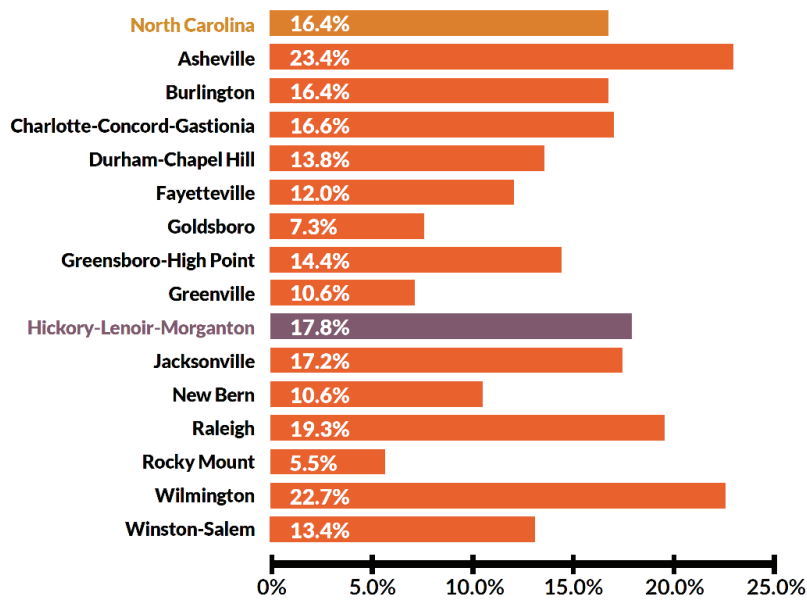
The following figures come from the Summer 2022 edition of the EIN. To see the latest issue click [here](#) or [subscribe](#).

Figure 4. Hickory MSA Estimated Employment Totals, April 2010-April 2022*



* Employment numbers shown are not seasonally adjusted.
Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, CES Program, 2022.

Figure 12. Percentage Gain in NC MSA Employment, Apr. 2020-2022



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, CES Program, 2022.



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