

CEDS Accomplishments Update from 4/1/2026 – 9/30/2026 (6 months)

Economic Development:

Strategy 2 – Enhance and maintain capacity for project and grant development.

- WPCOG staff delivered vital technical assistance to local governments, successfully developing and submitting 23 grant applications totaling more than \$84.4 million. The majority of these requests focus on Helene recovery, utilizing funding mechanisms such as CDBG-DR, ARC, and state opportunities through NC Commerce.
- Staff spearheaded the development of 5 EDA-DR applications representing over \$101.5 million in regional investments. These projects span multi-city utility interconnections, sewer line extensions, and a regional Life Sciences initiative.
- WPCOG secured a \$500,000 EDA-DR grant to fund preliminary engineering reports across the region, establishing a strong, proactive pipeline for future economic development projects.

Strategy 3 – Maximize building reuse and site redevelopment opportunities.

- WPCOG staff provided technical assistance to the City of Claremont for \$500,000 for Prysmian Cables Expansion Project. This project supports an additional \$42,923,167 in committed private investment and 434 committed new jobs.

Strategy 6 - Promote & support regional assets such as the Manufacturing Solutions Center (MSC), Morganton Campus of the NC School of Science and Math (NCSSM), Appalachian State University - Hickory, the NC Center of Engineering Technologies (NCCET), community colleges, LRU, & other critical economic development assets.

- WPCOG staff provided technical assistance to CCCTI for the \$49 million WNC Life Science EDA-DR project.
- Staff also provided technical assistance to WPCC for their \$8 million Regional Skilled Trades Solutions Center Expansion EDA-DR project.

Infrastructure:

Strategy 1 - Improve and expand the bicycle and pedestrian network in the region to include greenway opportunities adjacent to existing, connecting to, or creating a connection to economic opportunities.

- \$100,000 grant awarded for Blueway planning in Burke and Catawba counties. The Blueways trail will connect South Mountain State Park along the Wilderness Gateway State Trail to the future State Park in Hickory, with the terminus ending at Jacobs Fork Park, which is the beginning of the state-appropriated trail that will allow users to cross the state line into South Carolina.

Strategy 2 –Extend access and improve service and capacity for necessary utilities, including water, sewer, and broadband, to businesses, schools and community facilities, low-income households and other underserved communities to businesses, schools and community facilities, low-income households, and other underserved communities.

- 420 senior learners reached by the WPCOG Digital Navigator's digital literacy classes; project was funded through \$473,000 in grant funding from the North Carolina Department of Information Technology to establish a Digital Navigator role.

- \$100,000 grant awarded from Dogwood Health Trust to further the effort of Digital Navigation in Burke County for the next two years.
- Assisted the Town of Maiden with an \$8 million Headworks grant application through the NC DEQ State Revolving Fund (SRF).
- Developed a \$24 million Water Interconnection application through EDA-DR linking the City of Lenoir and the City of Hickory's water systems.

Strategy 5 – Promote water and air quality initiatives, erosion mitigation, contaminants, and management of water resources to protect drinking water sources, support the outdoor economy, and encourage climate resiliency.

- \$75,000 grant awarded for Septic Repair Program; 4 applicants served. 950 lbs. of litter collected during volunteer litter clean-up events.
- \$5.5 million awarded for Helene and Non-Helene related wastewater (septic) repair and resiliency efforts.

Strategy 6 - Promote the development of a comprehensive, affordable public transportation network to improve labor force participation.

- Assisted with Micro transit zone expansion; developed interactive mapping tools and Locally Coordinated Plan for Greenway Public Transportation

Strategy 8 - Explore potential rail and air service improvements for job creation and economic development.

- 6 aviation improvement projects and 1 passenger rail project identified and submitted to NCDOT for Project Prioritization Process

Workforce:

Strategy 2 – Align career pathways with education and training opportunities to meet industry needs.

- 3,168 customers entered the NCWorks Career Centers for employment services.
- 17 jobseekers received job placement through the WIOA On-the-Job-Training Program and/or the Youth Work Experience Program.
- 22 Educational scholarships were awarded through the WIOA program.
- 863 jobseekers were provided Resume development and update assistance.

Housing:

Strategy 1 - Increase the amount of all types of housing (market-rate, workforce, affordable, rental assistance, aging in place, and mixed-use) and mixed-use)

- WPCOG staff provided \$300,000 in down-payment assistance to 15 first-time homebuyers.
- Established the regional Home BASE housing program (Building Access for Strategic Expansion) to develop housing systems that are adaptable, inclusive, and scalable to meet changing housing market preferences.
- Awarded a grant from UNC Chapel Hill to participate in the Our State, Our Homes cohort program to address access to and availability of affordable housing on a regional level. Created a mapping tool to identify tax-delinquent and local government-owned properties to support housing infill.

Strategy 2 – Reduce the number of vacant and substandard homes throughout the region.

- Staff completed Urgent Repair and Essential Single-Family Repair on 29 homes throughout the region.
- Conducted 68 minimum housing inspections – Code Enforcement Efforts; 860 minimum housing inspections for Section 8 housing.
- Partnering with NC Department of Environmental Quality to administer a \$6 million Weatherization program for Western NC to improve homes affected by Helene.
- \$5.5 million awarded for Helene and Non-Helene related wastewater (septic) repair and resiliency efforts.

Strategy 4 - Develop a Regional Housing Plan

- Completed the regional Western Piedmont Housing Growth Roadmap Initiative, an interactive online plan designed to address the need for increases in all housing types. It includes a developability map and Visual Preference Survey, and focuses on market demographics, barriers to new housing development, and building permit trends. The plan covers all 28 local governments. Data is consistently being updated.

Community Life:

Strategy 1 - Work to achieve 1 to 2 % regional population growth annually to avoid population loss and maintain healthy community growth.

- Latest population growth data indicated continued to show improvement, with only one local government experiencing population loss since 2020.

Strategy 4 - Promote regional healthy-living initiatives.

- GIS application for WPCOG Homelessness Response Team was developed and is in use; application will track overall population numbers and provide location analytics data.

Strategy 5 – Support emergency management efforts to enhance community and regional resiliency.

- NCARCOG secured \$124,000 from Dogwood to implement Beehive, an emergency management tabletop scenario planning software; six COGs have access from May 1, 2026, to April 30, 2027.
- 90 GIS features collected in Caldwell County to support post Helene FEMA mapping and grant activity
- 71 GIS features collected in Burke County to support post Helene FEMA mapping and grant activity
- Supported 7 local governments with FEMA reimbursement and recovery efforts

Marketing:

Strategy 2 – Maintain & market the NC Foothills Experience.

- Catawba Valley Community College Marketing and Graphic Design Class created visuals and marketing materials for each of the counties in the region. The partnership
- will continue in the coming year.