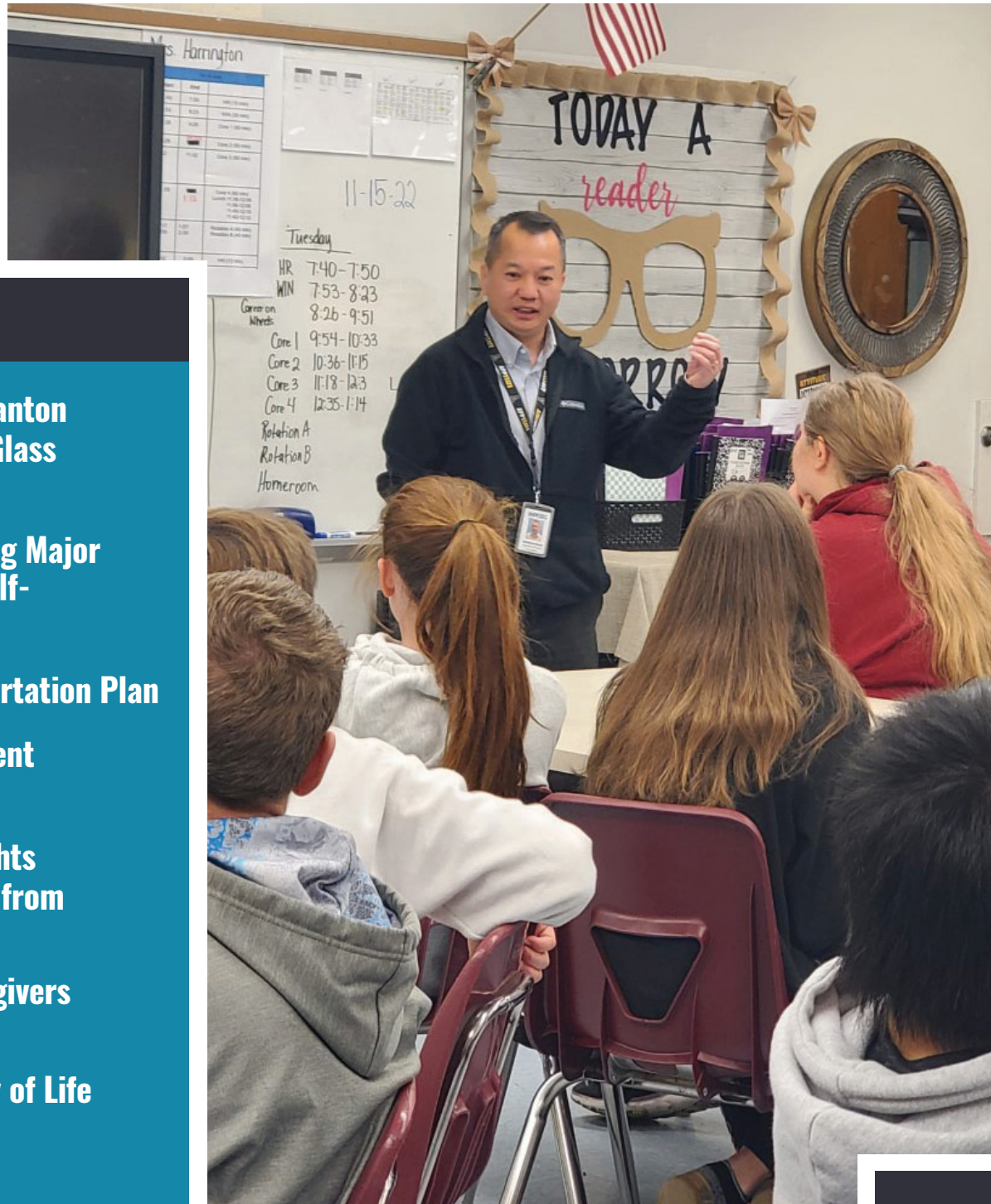


WESTERN PIEDMONT COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS NEWSLETTER NOVEMBER 2022

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WPCOG Assists Morganton with Grant for Fiber Glass Manufacturer

Article by Paul Teague

WPCOG Staff has assisted the City of Morganton in being awarded a \$200,000 N.C. Commerce Building Reuse Grant on behalf of Molded Fiber Glass, a composites and fiber glass manufacturer.

The company plans to invest nearly \$7.2 million to expand its facility along Reep Road and will create 30 new, full-time jobs paying an average wage of \$41,000 per year. Headquartered in Ashtabula, Ohio, Molded Fiber Glass has been in operation in Morganton for the past 29 years.

The Morganton site makes fiber glass reinforced plastic parts for companies such as General Motors, Freightliner, American Standard, and Hummer. The operation currently has more than 275 full-time employees.

The grant program provides companies with re-reimbursement funds for eligible construction expenses. The businesses must also create and maintain the new, full-time jobs for six consecutive months.



New Regulations Bring Major Changes to Family Self-Sufficiency Program

Article by Kim Duncan

The details of the first significant changes to HUD's Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) Program in nearly 25 years were released in May. Western Piedmont Council of Government's Regional Housing Authority offers REACH, a FSS program, to its tenants and the agency has worked for the past several months to meet all of HUD's guidelines for implementing the program modifications.



The FSS Final Rule changes became effective on June 16, 2022. HUD required every Public Housing Authority (PHA) with a FSS program - more than 800 PHAs nationwide - to follow its implementation timeline.

On June 17, all program enrollments temporarily stopped to give HUD, program coordinators, and software companies time to prepare for new contracts, new policy guidelines, and new software updates. All changes must be completed by Nov. 14, 2022 or a PHA will be out of compliance and risk not receiving its program funding.

PHAs were required to update their FSS Action Plans and submit them for review by Sept. 30. An action plan outlines all the FSS regulations and PHA policies that the agency uses as its guidebook for the program.

Because these changes were so significant, WPCOG's FSS Action Plan needed Policy Board approval before it could be submitted to HUD. The board approved the changes on Sept. 27 and the action plan was sent to HUD on Sept. 28 with the expectation that HUD will meet its Nov. 14 deadline for approvals.

"Once our new action plan is approved and the new regulations go into effect, the program will experience a shift in favor of giving my families more input and reducing barriers in the decisions they make while in the FSS program. It has been a trying time for HUD and coordinators to prepare for so many changes happening all at once. However, in the end it will be worth it because families will have more ways to benefit from the program," said Kim Duncan, WPCOG FSS Coordinator.

For more information on the FSS program, contact Kim Duncan at 828.485.4299 or kim.duncan@wpcog.org.

Metropolitan Transportation Plan

Article by **Averi Ritchie**

The Greater Hickory Metropolitan Planning Organization (GHMPO) is updating its Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP). Under federal law, all metropolitan areas with a population greater than 50,000 must have a long-range transportation plan to access federal funds. Long-range transportation planning allows the region to plan for the infrastructure needed to handle increases in population, employment, and travel demand and to help mitigate congestion, air pollution, and other associated issues. This update covers through the year 2050 and will be adopted no later than July of 2023. While not all transportation projects within the plan are fully funded or committed, the plan does include a fiscal component with cost estimates. The plan also includes planned and current bicycle, pedestrian, and transit projects within the region. Included chapters are listed below. In addition, draft versions are available for public comment on select chapters.

- **Goals and Objectives**
- **Natural Environment (Draft available)**
- **Financial Plan**
- **Highways and Roadways (Draft available in December)**
- **Bicycle and Pedestrian**
- **Environmental Justice**
- **Congestion Management**
- **System Resiliency (Draft available in December)**
- **Freight (Draft available)**
- **Aviation (Draft available)**
- **Health and Equity (Draft available)**
- **Performance Measures (Draft available)**
- **Public Involvement and Title VI**
- **Safety and Security (Draft available in December)**
- **Population and Employment (Draft available)**
- **Public Transportation (Draft available)**

Public involvement is a main priority for MTP development and accuracy. MPO staff attend many events to educate locals about current and planned transportation systems and infrastructure. Contact averi.ritchie@wpcog.org with questions, comments, or events MPO staff should attend to provide MTP information.



Workforce Development in Action

Article by Charity Patterson Hamber



2022 Governor's NCWorks Awards of Distinction winner for Outstanding Adult, Tabitha Arrowood. With support from a workforce training scholarship through the NCWorks Career Center in Burke County, Arrowood graduated from the Interpreter Education program at Western Piedmont Community College in 2021, as the first college graduate in her family. She remained focused on her educational goals while working two jobs and raising two young children. After graduating from WPCC, Arrowood obtained her state Transliterator license and worked at the college assisting deaf and hard-of-hearing students. She also served as a staff interpreter for the N.C. School for the Deaf. She has recently joined Purple Communications as a sign language interpreter.



Staff from Workforce Development and the Western Piedmont NCWorks Career Centers attended the NCWorks Partnership Conference on **October 12-14, 2022.**



NCWorks Career Center - Catawba participated in the Mobile Free Pharmacy Event and Resource Fair in Alexander County on **October 22, 2022.**



On October 25, 2022 Western Piedmont Workforce Development staff invited partners from North Carolina Department of Commerce, Caldwell County, and NCWorks to attend the 2022 Women's Leadership Conference, presented by Catawba Valley Health System and the Chamber of Catawba County.



On November 14 and 15, 2022, staff from NCWorks Career Center-Catawba & Workforce Development attended Career Day events held at West Alexander Middle School and East Alexander Middle School.



On November 6, 2022, staff from NCWorks Career Center-Caldwell and Workforce Development attended a ribbon cutting for the new Dairi-O location in Caldwell County.



On November 16, 2022, staff from NCWorks Career Center-Caldwell and Workforce Development attended a ribbon cutting for the new Yokefellow location in Caldwell County.



On November 10, staff from NCWorks - Burke, Caldwell and Catawba participated in the 2022 Foothills Veterans Winter Stand Down held at the J.E. Broyhill Civic Center. Services available to veterans at the Foothills Winter Stand Down included: Medical Services, food, clothing, employment counseling, haircuts, shoes, community resources, education and fellowship.

Fall 2022 EIN Highlights Hickory MSA Results from the 2021 ACS

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 average annual wages, and Hickory MSA 2021 income and poverty, educational attainment, and health insurance coverage results from the American Community Survey (ACS).

Here are a few key highlights of the EIN:

- The Hickory MSA's unemployment rate decreased from 4.6% in August 2021 to 3.6% in August 2022, making the Hickory MSA the 5th lowest unemployment rate in the state.
- Between August 2021 and August 2022, the estimated number of employed persons grew from 159,364 to 165,702, while the civilian labor force increased from 167,094 to 171,927.
- Hickory MSA State gross tax collections increased from \$180.8 million in 2017 to \$252.9 million in 2021.
- Over 79% of Hickory MSA workers in 2021 received income through private sector wage and salary jobs.
- About 5% of Hickory MSA workers were self-employed. ACS results indicated that the Hickory MSA had the fifth lowest percentage of self-employed workers among NC MSAs.
- The Hickory MSA had the sixth lowest percentage of government employees (14.5%).
- The average Hickory MSA household income from earnings is \$73,040. The Hickory MSA was one of six North Carolina MSAs with mean household income from earnings between \$70,000 and \$80,000
- About 38.6% of Hickory MSA households gained income from Social Security. Only the Asheville and New Bern MSAs had a greater percentage of households getting Social Security income than the Hickory MSA.
- The number of persons below the poverty level in the Hickory MSA decreased 10.9% from 56,232 (15.8% poverty rate) in 2016 to 50,094 (14.0% poverty rate) in 2021. The under age 18 and White, not Hispanic groups experienced decreases in the number of persons below the poverty level between 2016 and 2021.
- The number of persons over 25 in the Hickory MSA with an attainment level of "Bachelor's Degree" grew from 22,333 in 2000 to 36,342 in 2021. The 14,009 increase is the most of any Hickory MSA educational attainment category.
- In 2021, the Hickory MSA had the lowest percentage of persons over age 25 with an attainment level of high school or higher (84.6%) among the State's 15 metro areas.
- In 2021, the Hickory MSA had the third lowest percentage of persons 25 and older with a bachelor's degree or higher (21.5%) among the State's 15 metro areas.
- The percentage of Hickory MSA population that has health insurance coverage increased from 88.9% in 2016 to 89.9% in 2021.
- The Hickory MSA had an estimated 36,508 persons (10.1% of the population) without health insurance as of 2021.

The EIN is produced quarterly and is a Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board publication. The EIN is available digitally. To join the EIN subscription list, please go to www.wpcog.org and click on the "Sign up for the EIN" hyperlink. For questions concerning the EIN, please contact Taylor Dellinger, Data Analyst, at 828-485-4233 or by email taylor.dellinger@wpcog.org.

Figure 1. MSA Unemployment, Aug. 2021 - Aug. 2022

Source: NC Labor and Economic Analysis Division, 2022.

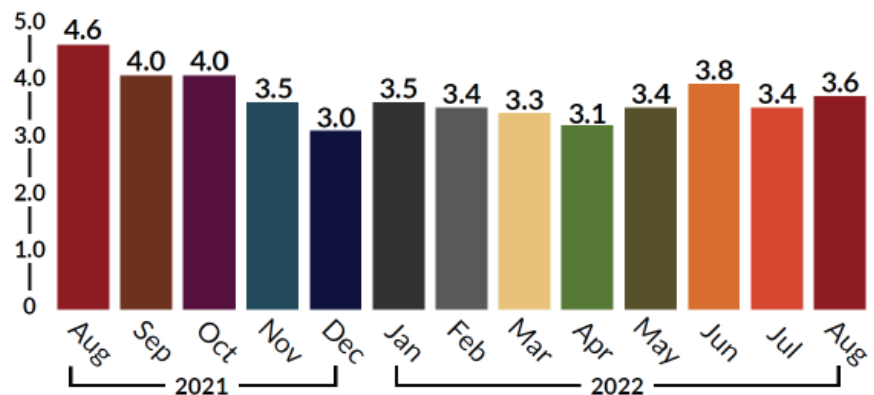
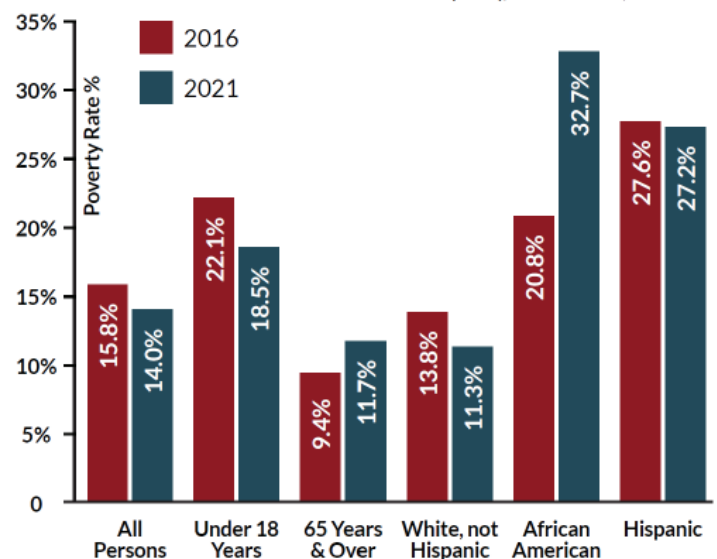


Figure 6. Hickory MSA Poverty Rate by Group, 2016 and 2021

Source: 2016 and 2021 American Community Survey, US Census Bureau, 2022.



Article by Mary Mitchell

November is National Family Caregivers Month, celebrating family caregivers and recognizing the reality that so often, caregiving just happens. Over 53 million individuals in our nation today provide care for a family member, loved one, or friend, and the numbers continue to grow. Families are the primary source of support for older adults, those who are ill, and those with disabilities across the United States. Many family caregivers work and provide care while trying to overcome challenges and balance the many expectations in their life.

The 2022 theme for National Family Caregivers Month, **#CaregivingHappens**, is a way to acknowledge the reality that family caregiving is not always convenient or expected. Caregiving happens when we are at work, at the grocery store, picking up the kids, out of town, and often least expect it. However, caregivers step-up to these unexpected times and do their best to selflessly care for a loved one who may be a relative, friend, or spouse of a parent. The role of a caregiver can be very challenging but a tremendous gift to a loved one.

This national caregiver recognition opens the door to increasing support for caregivers across our region, North Carolina, and the United States and helps raise awareness of the many caregiving realities and challenges. In addition, National Family Caregivers month and **#CaregivingHappens** raise awareness of the importance of encouraging caregivers, supporting their efforts, and providing them with the recognition they deserve.

Caregivers can reach out to WPCOG Area Agency on Aging Family Caregiver Support Program for resources to assist in their caregiving journey and provides the following services:

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

Show your Support for Family Caregivers During National Family Caregivers Month!

Supporting family caregivers is an issue that will touch us in some way during our lives, whether we need care or provide care for someone. In recognition of National Family Caregivers Month, consider reaching out to someone you know who cares for a loved one. It isn't always easy for a caregiver to reach out for help, even when someone really needs the help. However, something as simple as reaching out to encourage someone or offering to help in some small way can make a tremendous difference by supporting their valuable role as a caregiver. Please show your appreciation for their commitment and help them feel confident and appreciated in their role as a caregiver during November and throughout the year.

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



Burke County Quality of Life Explorer Data Update

Article by Duncan Cavanaugh

After receiving a grant from the Community Foundation of Burke County, WPCOG Planning and GIS staff have updated the Burke County Quality of Life (BQoL) Explorer. Updates include the most recent disease rates (asthma, cancer, COPD, diabetes, hypertension, kidney disease, and unintentional opioid overdose rates) obtained from UNC Health BlueRidge and several key demographic measures from the Census Bureau's 2016-2020 American Community Survey.

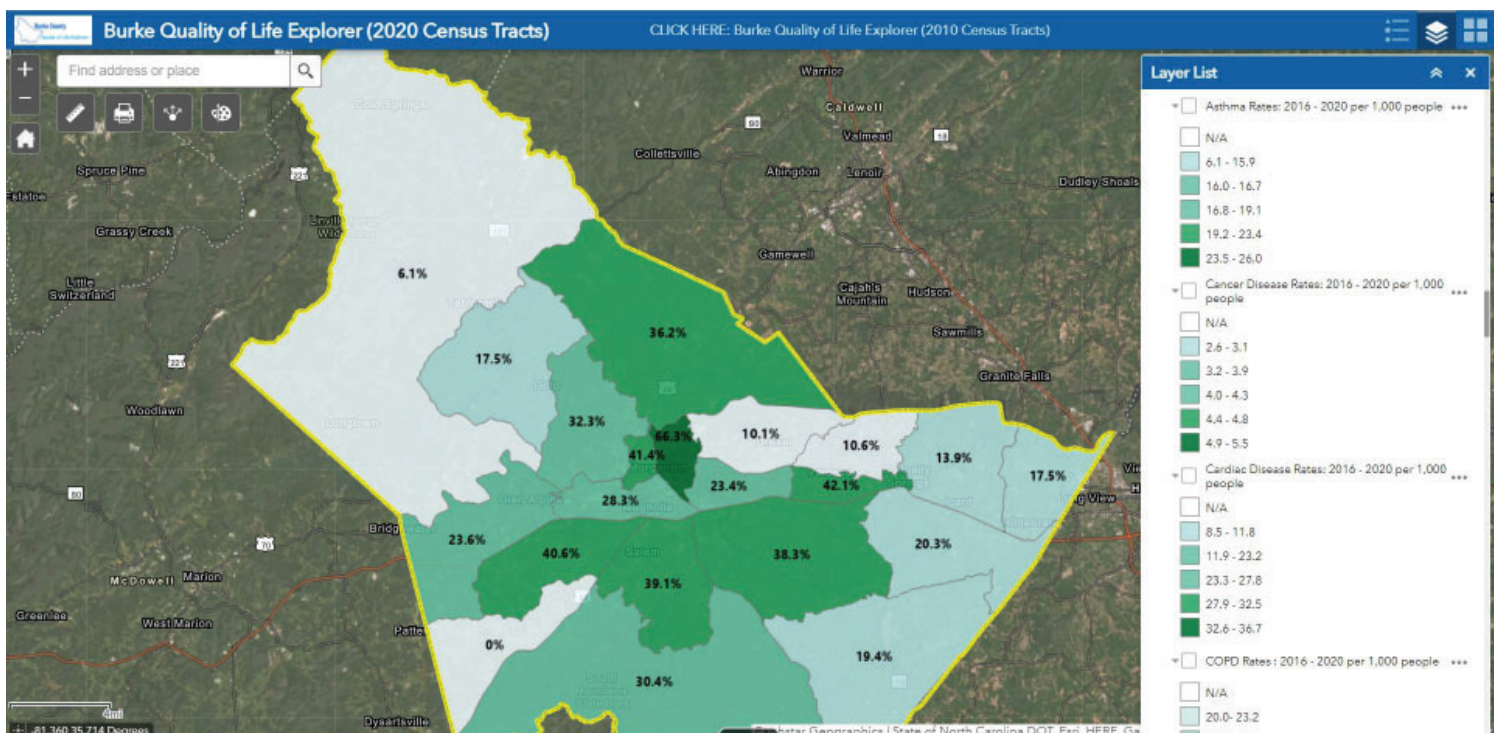
Two new datasets were added during this year's update:

- Asthma rates
- Fertility rates

The BQoL is a free online interactive map tool that allows users to examine many of the county's social determinants of health. Users can access and download key health indicators and demographics across multiple categories, including, but not limited to:

- Disease Rates (asthma, cancer, COPD, diabetes, hypertension, kidney disease)
- Census demographics (median household income, vehicle access, age, gender, vacant housing units, residents lacking health insurance, residents living with a disability, etc.)
- Food Sources (food deserts, farmers markets, grocery stores, gas stations, etc.)
- Health Care (doctors' offices, mental health care providers, etc.)
- Community (schools, child care centers, churches, shelters, etc.)
- Recreation (playgrounds, parks)
- Transportation (transit routes, traffic counts)

If you would like to schedule a BQoL training session, please contact Duncan Cavanaugh at duncan.cavanaugh@wpcog.org. In addition, the BQoL can be accessed through the Western Piedmont Council of Government's Community and Regional Planning page at www.wpcog.org.





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