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## WPCOG - Newsletter

July 2020

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## Area Agency on Aging Seniors and COVID-19: How Can We Help



During the COVID-19 pandemic seniors are more vulnerable and have increased risk, especially those with preexisting health issues. During this pandemic, we are directed to stay at home and practice social distancing, to better protect our health. Social isolation is critical for older adults to follow for the benefit of their health and well-being and at the same time is a major concern for older adults and caregivers who are caring for seniors. Many older adults, especially those who live alone, are dealing with the effects of social isolation. Activities that seniors enjoyed before the pandemic, such as attending group exercise at the senior center, participating in activities at their church, or volunteering, are all things that they cannot do during this time. Staying at home alone and watching the news all day can lead to feelings of depression, anxiety, and feeling overwhelmed.

Staying connected is so important, especially during these times; finding creative ways to stay in touch is critical with helping seniors, as well as caregivers of older adults, get through this particular time. Checking in on an older adult with a simple phone call is a great way to be in touch and help relieve feelings of loneliness. It can also be an opportunity to learn if the senior needs any help with groceries, medications, yard work or other needs. Sending a card or note in the mail is another great way to connect with a senior and let them know you are thinking about them.

While isolation may be necessary during the COVID-19 pandemic - and vital to keeping higher-risk older adults safe - activities and hobbies can help engage older adults and encourage them to have fun. If your loved one enjoys reading, drop off or mail books and magazines they might enjoy. Some older adults like to knit and crochet, work crossword puzzles and do crafts. Try to help them engage with those hobbies, by ensuring they get the supplies they need so they can continue to enjoy their activities.

There are a number of local businesses now offering free delivery service, so it may be helpful to let seniors know about these services and how they can access them. If they do not have access to the internet, you could help them order these items online and have them shipped or delivered. These services take just a little time to help someone receive the things they need, and can relieve stress or anxiety about how they are going to get the things they need.

We also need to remind our seniors to stay home and protect themselves. We know they are anxious to get out of the house and run errands to go shop for items in person, but they need to be reminded of the risks. If we can offer to help our parents, grandparents, or neighbors by picking up items for them or arranging for online orders and delivery, we can lower their risk of exposure.

Staying active and healthy during these times can be challenging, but it is important for seniors to stay active physically and mentally. Offer to meet your senior neighbor or friend outside and take a walk. Instead of focusing on the things they cannot do, help to come up with things they can do, like gardening, reading, or taking a walk. Offer to check out books from the library for them or offer to bring puzzles for them to enjoy.

Many of us experience anxiety over all of the recent unknown or what is next during COVID-19. Beginning a conversation with a senior about what we are all experiencing can be the catalyst for helping ease their minds and assuring them they can express their concerns to you. Discussions about current circumstances and all of the unknowns and reassurance that things will be better once we are past the pandemic can be very helpful. Most of us are hesitant to ask for help, so when calling a senior, it might be helpful to ask open questions to invite a response letting you know they may need help.



***Picking up a meal and activity packet from the West Hickory Senior Center as part of the Catawba County Senior's Morning Out program.***

Most everyone appreciates having their own independence and understandably will try to protect it at any cost. Acknowledging this and assuring someone that your help can assist with his or her independence as much as possible helps reduce their anxiety. Seniors like to be helpful in return. See if you can find a way that they can help you in return or ways they can help the community like sewing and making masks or calling and checking in on others. These conversations can help someone feel more connected, less isolated and help move things in a positive direction.

Extra precautions should be taken to protect older adults and those with existing health issues. Following the Center for Disease Control's guidelines is the best place to begin. This includes social distancing, washing hands frequently and wearing face coverings when out in public. Seniors, especially, are "safer at home" and should limit their exposure to others. If you live with an older adult or are a caregiver for an older adult, you and other family members should also limit your exposure to others to lessen risk of infection. Frequent cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces and fixtures in the home is an excellent avenue for keeping your home as safe as possible for the whole family.

Our loved ones living in long-term care facilities such as an assisted living or nursing home, have not been allowed to have in-person visits since the pandemic hit. These rules were put in place to protect the health and well-being of these frail, elderly residents. While these restrictions on visitors have helped to limit the spread of COVID-19 in our facilities, they have caused increased isolation among the residents. Family members can arrange for "window visits" where they can visit their loved one and see them through the window glass and talk on the phone. Most facilities have increased their capabilities to be able to use devices such as an iPad to allow their residents to FaceTime their loved ones regularly. You can also help stay connected with your loved ones by having flowers delivered, mailing cards or drawings from grandchildren, dropping off gifts - especially activities that can help keep them mentally active, like adult coloring books, large print word search, large print books, colorful magazines, etc. Put together a special photo book for your loved one with pictures of family members and special memories.

The Western Piedmont Council of Governments Area Agency on Aging (AAA) is the recipient of funding from the CARES (Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security) Act. These funds are to support older adults and their caregivers who live in Alexander, Burke, Caldwell and Catawba counties in response to the pandemic. The AAA is available to help with a variety of items such as access to meals, groceries, pharmacy items, cleaning supplies, face coverings, incontinence supplies, assistive technologies, etc. The AAA can also help connect you with other community resources. Please call the AAA if you need assistance or have questions at (828) 485-4257.

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## Community & Economic Development

### Down-payment Assistance Program Guidelines have been Updated

The Unifour Consortium Down-payment assistance program has been increased to 20% of the purchase price, capping at \$30,000 to eligible first time homebuyers.

But because the program will have much more financial exposure, additional underwriting requirements will be imposed. A Minimum Credit Score of 620 will be required. Front End Ratios may not be more than 30%, Back End Ratios may not be more than 38%, and if Monthly Private Mortgage Insurance Premiums are required, then they may not be more than \$30. Simply think (30/38/\$30). Current rent amounts and debt, along with Credit Score will be taken into account.



Interest Rates and Fees must be attractive and reasonable for the goal of providing affordable housing. Any deviation above the 30/38/\$30 will require a 700 or better Credit Score for further consideration.

Clients must be within the income guidelines, have \$500 going towards the purchase of the home, and be able to obtain a loan from a participating lender.

#### 2020 INCOME LIMITS BASED ON FAMILY SIZE

1 Person	2 Persons	3 Persons	4 Persons	5 Persons	6 Persons	7 Persons	8 Persons
\$33,350	\$38,100	\$42,850	\$47,600	\$51,450	\$55,250	\$59,050	\$62,850

Maximum Existing Home Purchase Price cannot be more than \$157,000 in Alexander, Burke, and Caldwell Counties.

Maximum Existing Home Purchase Price cannot be more than \$161,000 in Catawba County.

Maximum New Construction Home Purchase Price is \$238,000 for all four counties

Please contact [Rick Oxford](#) at 828-485-4245 or [Jennifer Cannon](#) at 828-485-4250 for more information.

Article by [Jennifer Cannon](#)

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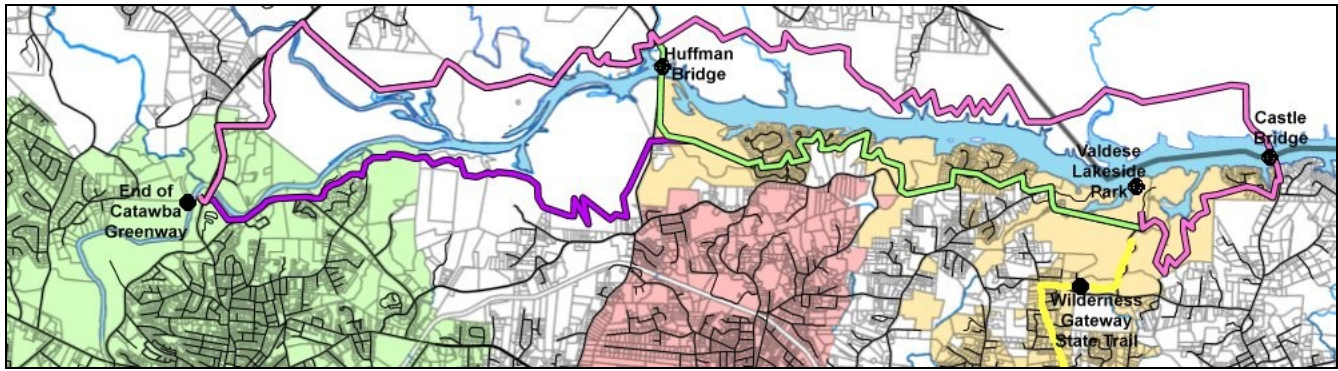
## Community & Regional Planning

### Burke County River Trail

WPCOG is excited to work with Burke County officials on trail connectivity in eastern Burke County. This initiative, promoted by Representative Blackwell, will determine the feasibility of potential trail segments connecting the Morganton Catawba River Greenway to pedestrian amenities in Catawba County. WPCOG and Friends of the Valdese Rec hosted its first stakeholders meeting on July 29th. WPCOG staff discussed the initial methodology and parcel analysis showing most suitable connecting parcels along the Catawba River. This discussion was followed with a description of potential funding sources to pursue once the feasibility study is finalized. Beth Heile, representing Friends of the Valdese Rec, gave an update about progress and possibilities with land owners throughout the study area.

As stakeholder meetings continue, the goal is to receive and integrate input from Town/County Managers, council members, trail groups, and land owners into the feasibility study. The feasibility study should serve as a guide for trail direction as well as a document for stronger grant applications. We look forward to the next

stakeholder meeting and are happy to be involved in the planning of Burke County's trail system. Please see a map of the study area and possible trail alignment below:



*Early Proposed Routes. Map created by Shane Prisby. Routes are not based off of topography or other factors - just connecting properties together to assess feasibility. Purple-Green-Pink is the top choice. Does not show entire route to Catawba County. More information can be found at [friendsofthevaldeserec.org/burke-river-trail](http://friendsofthevaldeserec.org/burke-river-trail)*

Article by Averi Ritchie

## Regional Housing Authority WPCOG offers REACH, a Family Self-Sufficiency Program, to its Housing Choice Voucher Tenants



The recipe for a good REACH participant should read: stir in a dash of desire to make positive changes in your life, then add a pinch of willingness to accept guidance while following through with resources offered and mix it together with the resilience to pick yourself up if you stumble when an unexpected life event happens. Give the batter time to rise and bake and maybe fall a little in the middle, but the final result will be worth the effort and the wait.

Saudia Young, a recent REACH graduate, added a sunny spirit and a strong focus on reaching her goals to her mixture. These traits all greatly benefited her in her four and a half year journey in the program.

In 2015, a single mother of a then five-year-old, Saudia joined WPCOG's Family Self-Sufficiency Program. She had an associate's degree in medical office administration but was struggling to find the kind of work that paid decently, fulfilled her, and gave her a schedule that would let her be with her child when she needed to.

Fast-forward three years to find Saudia standing at a podium telling a group of HUD officials, media representatives and WPCOG staff about part of her journey with REACH. She told how attending a job fair at NCWorks, a REACH partner, had led to a job that she enjoyed.

Saudia shared part of her story on WPCOG's commemorative video in 2019. She said she came to WPCOG looking for housing help but found "there's always someone here with resources."

By the time Saudia graduated from REACH earlier this year, she had used many of the resources offered to her. She participated in NetworX, a local faith-based supportive community program that builds strong relationships and teaches valuable life skills. She had a job with a company where she provided direct patient care but she had also been allowed to get some experience using her medical administration skills. She had worked to improve her credit through Operation HOPE, also.

Throughout her time in the REACH program, Saudia checked in regularly and almost always shared the same thought - "I want to reach my goals," she said. Not only did she complete her goals, but she also wrote new ones for herself in her exit survey. They included finding a job with better pay and benefits, saving money and becoming a future homeowner.

"Saudia consistently updated me and sought guidance. She stayed focused on completing her goals" said Kim Duncan, REACH coordinator. "She was a wonderful participant who did a great job of following through. Her cheerful nature and her willingness to pick herself up and keep going when she hits bumps in the road are special to who Saudia is and will serve her well."

REACH is looking for more participants like Saudia. If you want make a commitment to setting goals and working toward achieving them in the hope of moving your life forward, contact REACH coordinator, Kim Duncan, at [kim.duncan@wpcog.org](mailto:kim.duncan@wpcog.org) or call 828.485.4299.

Article by Kim Duncan

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## Transportation

### Burke Women's Fund Grant Leverages Transit for EnVision Center

Burke Women's Fund, operating under the auspices of the Community Foundation of Burke County, awarded Western Piedmont Council of Governments \$8,000 to leverage the Burke Flex Routes and support the collaboration of the EnVision Center with area non-profits and services. The mission of the Burke Women's Fund is to "invest in the needs and promise of our women and families," which aligns well with the goals of the EnVision Center to foster long-lasting self-sufficiency for households seeking or living in affordable housing. The EnVision Center seeks to connect these households with opportunities to improve their economic outlook, education, health, character and leadership. Since late 2018, utilizing multiple grants, including a prior \$10,000 award from Burke Women's Fund, WPCOG has contracted Greenway Public Transportation to operate the Burke Flex Routes in the communities of Morganton, Drexel, Valdese, and Rutherford College.

The scope of this newer grant-funded project addresses self-sufficiency by helping fund personalized self-assessments and travel training for voluntarily participating households. The Burke Flex Routes provide access for women and their families to a wide range of established resources, including victim's assistance, affordable housing, child development and daycare centers, literacy council, health clinics, pediatrics, pharmacies, groceries, food pantries, career center, employment agencies, and continuing education. The travel training component of the personalized self-sufficiency plans offers the opportunity for women to learn how to independently access these resources via transit. The project's ultimate goal is to effectively improve the lives of multiple women-headed households, thereby realizing success stories that inspire more women to also develop and lead their own success.

Article by Brian Horton

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## Workforce Development Board

### Dream It. Plan It. Be It.

In today's labor market there are tens of thousands of different career opportunities that did not exist 20 years ago or that have changed drastically. How does a anyone determine a career path they might like to take? Here is one way to explore those opportunities: [www.nccareers.org](http://www.nccareers.org) has a NEW look!! The site is LIVE and ready for you to explore career options at any age! You can conduct self-assessments, explore occupations, outline a career plan, view education and training opportunities and prep for a new job. Explore [www.nccareers.org](http://www.nccareers.org) and get started toward your new career today!

Article by Wendy Johnson

## ANNOUNCEMENTS



It is during times like this when our communities rely on their local government teams for so much, and the team at the Alliance is tremendously proud to work alongside you and support your efforts. We know there are significant demands on your teams right now, and pivots you are making in your own organizations to keep operations running. And of course, the health and well-being of you and your teammates are our top priority.

To ensure your safety, and be mindful of the shifting priorities, **AFI has been able to move the TLG 2020 conference dates to Sept. 1-4.** These four days of fiery positive energy will be a welcome inspiration and a coming together of passionate local government professionals - just what we all will need to reboot and reenergize!

Anyone who has already registered for the conference under the original dates will have their registrations automatically transferred (while the some hotel blocks will be available, hotel reservations will need to be re-booked).

If you haven't registered, registration is still open at [transformgov.org/tlg2020](https://transformgov.org/tlg2020). And as a reminder, because of AFI's partnership, members can register now with discount code WPCOG to save \$50 off the registration cost. Follow along on Twitter at #TLG2020 to keep in touch with the latest conference updates, or reach out to our team at [conferences@transformgov.org](mailto:conferences@transformgov.org) with any questions.

## WPCOG CALENDAR

All scheduled meetings are currently being conducted electronically.  
For a listing of upcoming meetings and information on how to participate or attend, please visit [www.wpcog.org/electronic-public-meetings](https://www.wpcog.org/electronic-public-meetings).

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