

Minutes
Western Piedmont Council of Governments
Bimonthly Policy Board Meeting
Tuesday, May 27, 2025
WPCOG, Long View

Members Present

Joseph L. Gibbons, Chair
Randy Burns, Vice Chair
George Holleman, Treasurer
Larry Chapman, Secretary
Jill Patton, Past Chair
Mike LaBrose, At-Large
Larry Yoder, At-Large
Marla Thompson, At-Large
Ronnie Setzer
Donald Robinson
Barbara Beatty, Alternate
Johnny Berry
Joie Fulbright
Brenda Powell, Alternate
Dennis Anthony
Barbara Pennell
Dr. Caryl Burns
Tracy Townsend, Alternate
Charlotte Williams, Alternate
Ben Honeycutt
Ralph Prestwood, Alternate
Phyllis Pennington, Alternate
Holly Crafton-Lay
Beverly Danner, Alternate
Carroll Hoyle
Bobby Mosteller
Amparo R. Alfaro
Helen Chestnut
Malla Vue
Mark Transou
Tonia Stephenson

Members Absent

Cole Setzer, At-Large
Josh Lail, Alternate
Kelvin Gregory
Jeff Brittain, Alternate
Lloyd Robbins, Alternate
Robbie Wilkie, Alternate

Local Government/Agency

Lenoir
Burke County
Taylorsville
Hudson
Hickory
Caldwell County
Alexander County
Long View
Cajah's Mountain
Catawba
Catawba County
Connelly Springs
Conover
Conover
Drexel
Gamewell
Granite Falls
Granite Falls
Hickory
Hildebran
Lenoir
Long View
Maiden
Newton
Rutherford College
Sawmills
Appointed
Appointed
Appointed
Appointed
Appointed

Catawba County
Alexander County
Brookford
Burke County
Cajah's Mountain
Caldwell County

Carroll Yount, Alternate
Bob Floyd
Dale Sherrill
Ramona Duncan, Alternate
Ron Lackey, Alternate
Sheila Perkins
Mike Smith, Alternate
Jim Engelman, Alternate
Ronnie Williams, Alternate
Chris Jernigan
Ronnie Thompson, Alternate
Jerry Hodge
Allen Spencer
Kendra Edwards, Alternate
Yates Jensen, Alternate
Joe Wesson, Alternate
Kimberly S. Brown Alternate
Charlie Watts
Rexanna Lowman, Alternate
Erisha Lipford
Tommy Luckadoo

Catawba
Cedar Rock
Claremont
Connelly Springs
Gamewell
Glen Alpine
Hildebran
Hudson
Maiden
Morganton
Morganton
Newton
Rhodhiss
Rhodhiss
Rutherford College
Sawmills
Taylorsville
Valdese
Valdese
Appointed
Appointed

Guests/Others Present

Randy Feierabend
Danny Hipps
Tamara Stamey
Bill Carroll
Bonnie Caudle
Holly Jones
Daniel Cobb
Allen Bumgarner
James Cozart
Heather Minor
Sidney Shirley
Keith Warren

Cajah's Mountain
Catawba
Connelly Springs
Drexel
Gamewell
Governor Stein's Office
Granite Falls
Long View
Long View
Long View
Long View
Sawmills

WPCOG Staff Present

Anthony Starr, Executive Director
Andrea Roper, Director of Finance
Alison Adams, Director of Community and Regional Planning
Charity Patterson Hamber, Director of Workforce Development
Jason Toney, Communications Manager
Elizabeth Monciet, Regional Housing Authority Manager
Elizabeth Hilliard, Executive Administrative Assistant

Call to Order/Welcome

A regular meeting of the WPCOG Policy Board was called to order at 6:45 pm by Chair Gibbons. Chair Gibbons thanked the Town of Long View for hosting. Town of Long View Mayor, Marla Thompson, welcomed the Policy Board to Long View.

Introductions

Introductions were made by everyone in attendance.

Minutes of Previous Meeting

Minutes of the previous meeting were considered. Mr. Joie Fulbright made a motion to approve the minutes from the March 25, 2025 meeting and Ms. Jill Patton offered a second. The motion passed unanimously.

Unfinished Business/Reports

There was no unfinished business.

New Business

Amendments of FY26 Assessments for Local Governments

Mr. Anthony Starr, Executive Director, stated each year, the WPCOG assesses dues to its local governments per its charter and bylaws. The Policy Board approved the FY26 Assessments at its meeting in January.

The approved assessments included temporary assessments for funding regarding the WNC Passenger Rail Project to fund our region's share (\$50,000) for the non-federal match for the service development plan. The NC Department of Transportation informed our transportation planning staff that it will provide the non-federal match for the service development plan. As a result, assessing our local governments for the \$50,000 match in FY26 is no longer necessary.

Future local matching funds may be required for this rail project but details are not currently available.

The bylaws require the Policy Board to approve the assessments. The WPCOG Executive Committee reviewed the proposed amendments and recommended approval.

The proposed Assessment Table was included in the Policy Board Agenda Packet.

The Executive Committee and staff requested the Policy Board review and approve amendment of the FY2025-26 assessments.

Mr. George Holleman made a motion that the Policy Board approve the amendment of the FY26 assessments as presented and Ms. Jill Patton offered a second. Motion passed unanimously.

FY 2025 WPCOG Audit Contract

Ms. Andrea Roper, Director of Finance, stated Thompson, Price, Scott, Adams & Co., P.A. (TPSA) has been serving clients since the 1950s. They have six offices, five located in North Carolina and one in

Tennessee. Professional staff are thoroughly versed in the complex governmental arena, allowing them to provide the highest quality of service to their governmental clients. It is the firm's policy that all professional personnel comply with the continuing professional education requirements of the AICPA, state societies, state Boards of Accountancy, the U.S. Government Accountability Office, and other regulatory agencies, if applicable.

The cost for the FY 2024 audit was \$28,500. TPSA has asked for a total of \$30,500 to perform the FY 2025 audit, resulting in an increase of \$2,000 from FY24.

Staff recommended awarding the 2024-2025 WPCOG audit contract to Thompson, Price, Scott, Adams & Co., P.A.

Mr. Randy Burns made a motion that the Policy Board approve the 2024-2025 audit contract with Thompson, Price, Scott, Adams & Co., P.A. and Mr. Larry Yoder offered a second. Motion passed unanimously.

2nd Reading of the FY2025-26 Budget

Mr. Anthony Starr, Executive Director, stated the 2nd Reading of the FY2025-26 budget reflects a total budget of \$40,210,843 and an operating budget of \$11,788,489 which represents an increase of the total budget from the March 25, 2025, budget amendment of approximately 10% or \$3,661,841.

Some key parts of the budget are uncertain at this time and that is normal for the second reading. The 2nd Reading of the FY2025-26 Budget includes:

- 79 full and part-time staff positions.
- WPCOG dues rate reflect no increase and remain at 98.1 cents per capita along with no increase for the required match for MPO as approved by the Board in January. Inflation increased 2.89% from December 2023 to December 2024, representing no increase.
- Financial administration services for three local governments and one local non-profit.
- Town planning services for 12 local governments.
- ADA planning services for 4 local governments.
- Code enforcement services for 15 local governments.
- Administration of several new community & economic development projects (disaster relief, infrastructure, home outreach, economic development, etc.).
- GASB 87 – Indirect Leases reflects the future value of lease payments funded with indirect funds.
- The budget includes an average merit increase of 3.75% effective in January 2026.
- A group insurance increase of \$69,451, reflecting a rate increase of 15%.
- The increase in contractual is attributed to the utilization of disaster relief funds within the Aging Department and Workforce Development Department.
- Rent/Lease – Building increased due to additional funding for the homelessness response team. These funds pay for security deposits and rent payments.
- Supplies increased mainly due to the PEAS (Providing Elders Additional Sustenance) program within the Aging Department.
- Decrease in contingency due to project funds anticipated to be utilized in FY25.

- Compensated Absence Liability increased \$10,233 due to an increase in fringe funds generated by additional salaries. The Compensated Absence Liability allocation may increase with the availability of funds. Funding the compensated absences liability improves the net position of the WPCOG.
- Increase in the WIOA SRF due to additional disaster relief funding received.
- HUD Housing Vouchers Fees & Services SRF increased to reflect additional administrative and voucher funding resulting from the transition of the Hickory Public Housing Authority to WPCOG.
- The Capital Reserve Fund increased by \$60,683 due to transfers from the General Fund. Additional indirect funds were generated by the additional salaries.
- The proposed budget includes approximately \$383,322 in anticipated contracts for FY26. This amount is
- \$69,106 higher than the FY25 anticipated contracts amount at this time last year. The unfunded areas at this point are within the Community & Economic Development, Environmental & Planning Programs/Departments. A number of new projects are anticipated but not yet finalized.

Staff requested that the Policy Board hold the required public hearing, receive any public comments, and adopt the attached budget ordinance.

Mr. Mike LaBrose made a motion to move the Policy Board open the public hearing and Ms. Jill Patton offered a second. Motion passed unanimously.

There were no comments made during the public hearing.

Ms. Jill Patton made a motion that the Policy Board close the public hearing and adopt the budget ordinance and FY2025-26 Budget as presented and Mr. Larry Yoder offered a second. Motion passed unanimously.

Workforce Development Board Reappointments and New Board Appointments

Ms. Charity Patterson Hamber, Director of Workforce Development, stated the following Workforce Development Board members two-year terms are expiring and are eligible for re-appointment:

- Dr. Tim Sims, Director of Federal Programs, Hickory City Schools – Catawba County
- Dr. Joel Welch, President, Western Piedmont Community College – Burke County
- Adam Gray, Owner, Precision Contracting – Caldwell County
- Beth Mills, Unit Manager, Employment & Independence for People with Disabilities – Regional
- Felicia Culbreath-Setzer, Regional Operations Director, Department of Commerce – Regional
- Rose Cook, Director of Organizational Learning, Catawba Valley Medical Center – Catawba County
- Josh McKinney, Vice President, Peoples Bank – Catawba County

Ms. Charity Patterson Hamber, Director of Workforce Development, stated the Workforce Development Board Executive Committee would like to have the following individuals appointed to the Workforce Development Board for an initial two-year term to begin July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2027:

- Leighanna Hueber, Owner of Foothills Temporary Employment.
- Stephanie Reeves, Manager of Employee Development and Recruitment with Blue Ridge Energy.

The two new appointments will meet the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) board private sector openings, both representing Caldwell County.

Staff requested the Policy Board to re-appoint the seven current Workforce Development Board members for another two-year term along with Leighanna Hueber and Stephanie Reeves to Workforce Development Board membership for a two-year term from July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2027.

Mr. Randy Burns made a motion that the Policy Board re-appoint the seven current Workforce Development Board members for another two-year term, along with Leighanna Hueber and Stephanie Reeves to Workforce Development Board membership for a two-year term from July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2027 and Mr. Joie Fulbright offered a second. Motion passed unanimously.

WIOA Plan Summary Update Program Year 2025

Ms. Charity Patterson Hamber, Director of Workforce Development, stated The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) requires each Workforce Development Board to develop and submit, in partnership with the local chief elected official, a comprehensive four-year plan. The 2025 local and regional area plan update for the Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board was submitted on May 1, 2025.

Annually, each WDB is to provide updates to the Comprehensive Four-Year Plan (PY 2024-2028). The plan, effective July 1, 2024 - June 30, 2028, provides current information and all current local policies. Program year 2025 updates to the Four-Year Plan must be made available for 30 days for public comment. The plan was located on the workforce website www.westernpiedmontworks.org.

Staff requested that the Policy Board review and provide feedback on the program year 2025 updates to the WIOA Program Four-Year plan for 2024-2028 as needed.

This was for informational purposes only. No motion was required.

Public Housing Capital Funds to Transition to Operating Funds

Ms. Elizabeth Moncrief, Program Manager of Regional Housing Authority, stated in July 2024, the Western Piedmont Council of Governments Regional Housing Authority absorbed the Valdese Public Housing Authority with its 121 public housing units. The US Department of Housing and Urban Development awards all public housing agencies capital funding for capital improvement projects and operating funding to cover the daily operations of the public housing authority (PHA). Prior to absorbing the Valdese Public Housing Authority, the housing authority had been working with an architectural firm to do the upgrades/improvements on its units. Upon investigating this process, staff determined that

the architectural firm has been charging fees that were extremely high, and staff looked for other options to consider with its capital funding.

HUD allows small PHA's to shift some or all their capital funding into their operating funding with board approval. Small PHA's must also work with HUD on a 5-year plan for upgrades/improvements. The former Valdese Public Housing Authority is considered a small PHA because it has less than 250 public housing units. The RHA has been in discussion with HUD about the process involved in moving most of the Valdese Public Housing's capital funding into the operating fund for that program. A public hearing was held on May 22, 2025, to notify the residents of this funding transition plan and to present a proposed five-year plan for housing authority upgrades/improvements that we plan to complete in the next five years with this increase in the operating funding. By transitioning capital funding to operations, it gives the housing authority more control and flexibility over choosing what upgrades/improvements can be completed. Procurement and bid processes would still be followed for all upgrades/improvements.

Staff requested that the Policy Board approve the transition regarding most of Valdese Public Housing 2024 and 2025 capital funding to operating funding to have more control and flexibility with upgrades/improvements on the Valdese Public Housing units/buildings.

Ms. Jill Patton made a motion that Policy Board approve the transition regarding most of the Valdese Public Housing 2024 and 2025 capital funding to operating funding and Mr. Larry Chapman offered a second. Motion passed unanimously.

8th Amendment of the FY2024-25 Budget

Ms. Andrea Roper, Director of Finance, stated the 8th Amendment of the FY2024-25 budget reflects a total budget of \$37,638,132 and an operating budget of \$11,123,671 which represents an increase of the total budget from the February 25, 2025 budget adoption of \$133,687.

The 8th Amendment of the 2024-2025 Budget includes:

- An increase in General Government due to additional sponsorships for the WPCOG annual meeting.
- Transportation decreased to reflect actual CRRSAA (Coronavirus Response & Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2021) funds to be utilized in FY25.
- The decrease in Community Development is attributed to personnel changes and the deferral of project work to the next fiscal year.
- Community and Regional Planning anticipate a decrease in expenditures due to project work being shifted to the next fiscal year.
- Economic Development increased due to the initiation of several new projects scheduled to be completed by the end of the current fiscal year.
- Regional Public Housing saw an increase driven by personnel changes and additional revenue generated through the management of the Hickory Public Housing Authority.
- The increase in Workforce Development is due to hurricane relief funding allocated for

participant services.

- Increases in salaries, incentives, longevity, retirement & group insurance due to personnel changes across multiple departments.
- Contractual costs declined as project work was postponed across several departments.
- Travel expenses increased to more accurately capture administrative travel costs.
- Rent/Lease – Building expenses increased to better account for security deposits and rent payments for the homelessness response team.
- A reduction in supplies expenditures resulted mainly from shifting the PEAS (Providing Elders Additional Sustenance) project to the next fiscal year.
- Contents/Liability expenses increased to reflect actual costs associated with additional properties acquired through the VHA acquisition.
- Increase in legal fees to align with actual costs associated with legal counsel.
- An increase in Capital Outlay – Equipment reflects updated costs for two servers for IT and the purchase of vehicles and software for Planning.
- Contingency decreased due to funds being either utilized during the current fiscal year or deferred to the next.
- The Special Revenue Funds for Aging Fees & Services, HUD Housing Voucher Fees & Services, WIOA Fees & Services & Valdese Public Housing Fees & Services changed to reflect adjustments in administrative costs within each respective fund.
- All other changes reflect normal programmatic needs.

Staff requested that the Policy Board review and approve the Eighth Amendment of the 2024-2025 Budget.

Mr. George Holleman made a motion that the Policy Board approve the Eighth Amendment of the 2024-2025 Budget as proposed and Ms. Jill Patton offered a second. Motion passed unanimously.

Other Business

Executive Director's and Staff Reports

Mr. Anthony Starr, Executive Director, highlighted the following items in his Executive Director's Report, which was included in the agenda packet:

Administration

- Ms. Alison Alexander, Assistant Executive Director, has been hired.
- House Bill 850 passed the NC House and is under consideration by the Senate. It requires a study and imposes a moratorium on new/increased interbasin transfers exceeding 16 million gallons per day. Staff and the IBT team will continue to seek implementation of our coalition's goals.
- Building expansion project update: The general contractor started construction on January 13th. Significant progress continues. The contractor has completed the concrete slab and steel erection. The project remains on schedule.
- Administration continues to monitor various sources of information regarding funding of federal programs. Much uncertainty remains and could affect programs benefiting the WPCOG and its local governments. We are preparing an informational document that demonstrates the value of

federally funded programs administered by the WPCOG.

- The WPCOG completed its assistance with the Town of Valdese for its manager search. Todd Herms was appointed effective May 1st.
- Staff presented a successful WPCOG annual meeting on April 10th, and Mayors, Chairs and Managers meeting on May 8th.
- Hickory Public Housing Authority units were leased at a lower rate than what records showed.
- Nu-Dimensions owes the Hickory Public Housing Authority \$279,000.
- Hickory Public Housing Authority has \$174,000 in outstanding bills.
- HUD has approved the Hickory Public Housing Authority vouchers to WPCOG effective July 1, 2025.

Area Agency on Aging

- BCBS Foundation is granting AAA \$75,000 in hurricane relief funding to assist with nutrition needs for older adults in the region. AAA plans to grocery program to serve older adults who are in need but do not qualify for PEAS (Providing Elders Additional Sustainance) program.

Community & Economic Development

- BRIC Grants transitioning to Hazard Mitigation: With the discontinuation of the BRIC program, the NC Department of Public Safety (NCDPS) plans to integrate these projects into their Hazard Mitigation program. WPCOG is collaborating closely with NCDPS to ensure all required documentation and new applications are submitted. We've already submitted new applications for Caldwell County, the City of Newton, the Town of Cahah's Mountain, the City of Lenoir, and the Town of Taylorsville. Collectively, these projects represent an estimated \$50 million in regional infrastructure planning and improvements.
- Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) Applications: The CED team is actively supporting the region with the spring round of ARC applications. We're currently assisting with six applications for Caldwell Community College & Technical Institute (CCC&TI), Western Piedmont Community College (WPCC), Catawba Valley Community College (CVCC), the Town of Gamewell, the City of Morganton, and VEDIC. These projects cover a diverse range of needs, including equipment purchases, workforce development, and Hurricane Helene recovery initiatives totaling \$1.7 million

Housing Programs & Support:

- Catawba County was awarded \$165,000 through the NC Housing Finance Agency for the Urgent Repair Program (2025/2026), which WPCOG will administer.

Mr. Ben Willis, Director of Community & Economic Development, shared a few updates on the Homelessness Response Team:

- Working with Workforce Development.
- Amber Brafford is the new Manager of the Homelessness Response Team.
- Day 1 funds are available to help families with children.
- \$59,229 has been disbursed so far this year to help families experiencing homelessness in our four counties this year.

- Last week a contract was signed for \$6 million for DEQ for Hurricane Helene Recovery. Will be working with the Department of Community Development and other Councils of Governments.

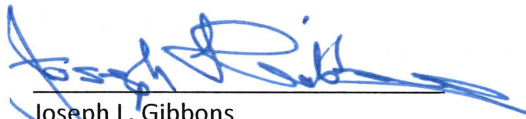
Next Meeting

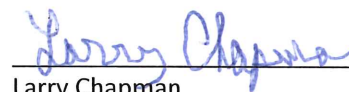
The next Policy Board meeting is scheduled for July 22, 2025 and will be hosted by the Town of Maiden.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:23 pm.

Respectfully submitted,



Joseph L. Gibbons
Chair

Larry Chapman
Secretary