

WESTERN PIEDMONT COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS NEWSLETTER AUGUST 2024



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What is an Area Agency on Aging?

Article by Sarah Evitt

Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) are organizations working within a federal mandate to inform, advocate, and plan for community services on behalf of older adults and caregivers. The WPCOG AAA is part of a National Network of over 600 AAAs set in place by the Older Americans Act (OAA) of 1965.

All AAAs offer five core services under the OAA:

- » Elder Rights
- » Caregivers
- » Nutrition
- » Health & Wellness
- » Supportive Services

Many of these services are provided through partnerships with community-based organizations such as local senior centers, meals on wheels programs, and local in-home aide agencies.

The Western Piedmont AAA strives to be the leading source of information and resources to the growing aging population through a variety of services. Those services include but are not limited to caregiver support, elder abuse, health promotion programs, Home and Community Care Block Grant (HCCBG) services, options counseling, Project CARE (Caregiver Alternatives to Running on Empty), Regional Ombudsman, and the Senior Tar Heel Legislators.

The Western Piedmont AAA is made up of seven staff members:

- » Tina Miller, AAA Director
- » Sarah Evitt, Aging Program Manager
- » Mary Mitchell, Family Caregiver Program Administrator
- » Karen Phoenix, Project CARE Family Consultant
- » Christina Franklin, Regional Long-Term Care Ombudsman
- » Michael Layza, Aging Specialist/ Regional Long Term Care Ombudsman
- » Ashelin McCoy, Aging Specialist

AAA staff volunteer annually with the Foothills Service Project to build an accessibility ramp for an older adult in the region.

Pictured left to right: Tina Miller, Sarah Evitt, Ashelin McCoy, Christina Franklin, Karen Phoenix, Mary Mitchell, and Michael Layza.

To learn more about the Area Agency on Aging and the service they provide, please visit www.wpcogaaa.org.



WPCOG Assists Caldwell County with \$50K Golden LEAF Grant Award

Article by Paul Teague

The Caldwell County Economic Development Commission has received a \$50,000 grant from the Golden LEAF Foundation to conduct site analysis for approximately 1,000 acres at the Foothills Regional Airport Industrial Park.

Assisted by WPCOG staff in applying for and administering the grant, the Caldwell EDC will seek to complete a geotechnical report of a western section of the park, along with initial environmental assessments for property outside the airport boundary.

The airport is collectively funded and managed by Caldwell County, Burke County, the City of Lenoir, and the City of Morganton. Local officials seek to utilize the airport property for commercial and industrial development.

The assessments are expected to be completed later this year or early 2025.



Western Piedmont Workforce Development Employer Forum

Article by Charity Patterson Hamber

On August 7, 2024, employers from Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, and Catawba Counties met for the Western Piedmont Workforce Development Employer Forum.

John Metcalf and Ken Allen led the group in an open discussion about today's workforce's current needs and challenges. Employers shared insight into the challenges businesses face and processes and initiatives to combat those challenges.

We are grateful to John and Ken for facilitating this forum, and we were excited to have such an engaging group of employers.



OPT-IN 2024 Graduation

Article by Charity Patterson Hamber

On August 9, 2024, Work in Burke celebrated the graduation of its third OPT-IN cohort, with 20 interns completing the 2024 program. Interns and their guests, employers, and mentors had the opportunity to reflect on their journey through a gallery wall showcasing quotes and photos from their experience. Each participant was awarded a certificate of completion, marking the end of this exploratory 8-week experience.

OPT-IN is a unique internship program designed for recent high school graduates. The program offers them the chance to explore potential careers while earning a paycheck. Interns are paired with a community mentor and a work buddy throughout the summer. They participate in professional development classes to help them confidently plan their next steps.

This year, the program expanded to include several new employers, including multiple contractors, allowing participants to learn about the construction trade. The ultimate goal of OPT-IN is to guide students toward enrolling in post-secondary education, securing employment at their internship site, or joining Work in Burke's Jobs, Education, and Training (J.E.T.) Program for further support on their career journey.



WPCOG Regional Housing Authority is Growing!

Article by Elizabeth Moncrief

On July 1, 2024, the Valdese Housing Authority (VHA) transferred its 121 public housing apartment units to the Western Piedmont Council of Governments Regional Housing Authority. Before July 1, WPCOG administered Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) rental assistance only, also known as Section 8. HCV assistance is tenant-based rental assistance that allows a tenant to rent from a private landlord and the landlord to receive a rental subsidy from the program in an effort to make the rent more affordable to the tenant. It is an income-based program, and tenants pay approximately 30 percent of their income toward rent.

With the addition of the Valdese Housing Authority apartments, WPCOG now owns and operates public housing. The units are in Valdese on Rora Avenue, Morganton Street, and Lydia Avenue. WPCOG will be responsible for maintaining the units and administering the program. With the transfer, WPCOG welcomes the addition of a program manager, two maintenance staff, and an office administrator.

The WPCOG Policy Board and the Valdese Housing Authority Board approved the transfer process through a resolution in January 2024. WPCOG and VHA submitted the requested transfer documents to the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) at the beginning of March and received HUD approval prior to July 1, 2024.

All VHA residents were notified in advance of the transfer. On July 25, 2024, WPCOG RHA hosted a boxed barbeque lunch meet-and-greet with VHA residents. The RHA staff was on-site at the VHA community room to serve the VHA residents the meal and answer any questions regarding the transfer.

"My staff and I look forward to getting to know our Valdese residents. This transfer gives WPCOG another way to serve our community and increase affordable housing opportunities," said Stephanie Hanvey, WPCOG RHA Director. For questions about the transfer, contact Elizabeth Moncrief at 828.485.4244 or elizabeth.moncrief@wpcog.org.



Enhancing Road Safety with Latest Crash Data Insights

Article by Casey Fullbright

Current Initiatives Based on Recent Traffic Safety Data

In our ongoing commitment to improving transportation safety, the Greater Hickory Metropolitan Planning Organization (GHMPO) has recently released a detailed crash summary report covering 2016 to 2023. This report is instrumental in shaping our current and future safety initiatives under the Western Piedmont Transportation Safety Plan (TSP).

Current Analysis and Strategic Focus

The report's insights are already driving our departmental activities. Our current focus is on the key types of crashes identified, including collisions with fixed objects, head-on collisions, rollovers, and incidents involving vulnerable road users like pedestrians and cyclists. These categories help us pinpoint areas where targeted interventions are most needed. For instance, the high incidence of crashes involving fixed objects and parked vehicles is leading us to prioritize safety improvements in these areas, ensuring that our roadways are safer and more resilient.

Our analysis of emphasis areas—such as lane departures, intersection-related crashes, and impaired driving—has been pivotal in refining our safety strategies. The data shows that lane departure crashes are a significant concern, prompting us to explore enhanced road design solutions and innovative driver education programs to address this issue effectively. We are also intensifying our efforts to tackle impaired driving and improve intersection safety based on the trends highlighted in the report.

Tailored County-Specific Actions

The detailed county-specific data has already informed our strategic approach in Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, and Catawba counties. For example, the high proportion of crashes on secondary routes in Alexander County has led to a targeted review of these roadways to enhance safety measures. Similarly, the data from Catawba County, which highlights a notable number of crashes on major collectors, guides our focus on improving road conditions and safety protocols in these areas.

Advancing Road Safety

Our department is actively using these insights to drive new safety initiatives and refine existing ones. The trends and patterns identified in the crash data are guiding our efforts to implement effective safety measures, develop targeted strategies for each county, and foster a culture of road safety across the Greater Hickory MPO region.

As we continue to work towards these goals, we remain committed to ensuring that our roadways are as safe as possible for all users. The data from this report will continue to inform our strategies and drive improvements, contributing to a safer and more efficient transportation network in our region. Stay connected for further updates on our progress and new initiatives as we leverage this valuable data to enhance road safety.





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