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News & Updates

May | 2026

Trey Hedrick Named Western NC Representative on Statewide Business Services Steering Committee

The Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board is pleased to announce that Trey Hedrick has been selected to serve as the Western North Carolina Representative on the North Carolina Business Services Consortium Steering Committee.

The statewide Steering Committee brings together workforce leaders and business services professionals to strengthen employer engagement, align regional strategies, and advance workforce solutions that help North Carolina businesses connect with the talent they need to grow.

In this role, Trey will represent the unique workforce and industry needs of Western North Carolina while collaborating with partners across the state to enhance services delivered through Workforce Development Boards, NCWorks Career Centers, and regional employer networks.

Trey's commitment to employer engagement, regional collaboration, virtual service delivery, and innovative workforce strategies continues to make a meaningful impact—both within the Western Piedmont region and across North Carolina's workforce system.

Please join us in congratulating Trey on this well-deserved appointment and leadership opportunity!

Article by Charity Patterson Hamber, Workforce Development Board Director



Housing Choice Voucher (Section 8) Program Update

The Western Piedmont Council of Governments Regional Housing Authority (RHA) temporarily paused issuing Housing Choice Vouchers earlier this year due to federal funding restrictions. On January 13, 2026, all clients with open vouchers were notified that their vouchers were being pulled back due to funding delays caused by the prolonged federal government shutdown. A total of 59 voucher holders were required to pause their housing search during this period.

RHA staff assured affected clients that once funding was restored, all canceled vouchers would be fully reinstated for a complete 60-day search period, regardless of the time remaining on the original voucher. Funding was resolved in late March, and on April 14, all 59 vouchers were reinstated and mailed to clients.

Because of the funding interruption, RHA also canceled all scheduled briefings beginning January 13, and no new vouchers were issued between January 13 and April 14. Briefings resumed on April 30, with a second session held on May 5. These two briefings provided approximately 50 families with new vouchers to begin their search for safe, affordable housing. Additional briefings will continue to be scheduled as applications are processed.

RHA currently has 909 families on the waiting list. Beginning in May, applications will be mailed to the first 100 families at the top of the list each month. This process will continue until all applicants have been served, which staff estimates will take approximately nine months, placing completion around January 2027, assuming no further funding disruptions.

Once all current applicants have been served, WPCOG will announce the reopening date for new applications to the waiting list.

For more information, contact

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828-485-4241

Article by Viveca Huffman, RHA Housing Specialist

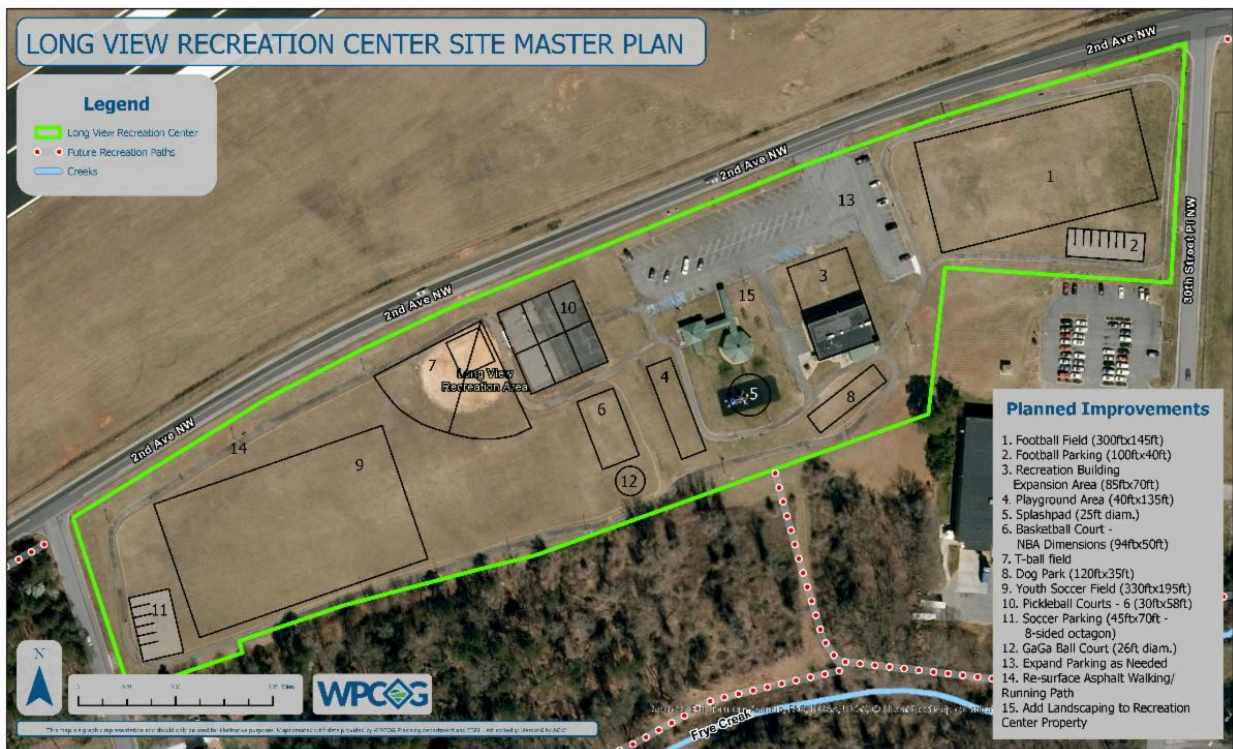
Long View Adopts Comprehensive Recreation Plan

The Town of Long View recently took a significant step toward enhancing its community infrastructure by adopting a Comprehensive Recreation Plan. This strategic document will serve as a guide for the town's recreation investments, aiming to modernize existing facilities and identify potential future recreation opportunities. By creating the plan, the town has established a clear vision for growth, ensuring that recreation remains a key part of Long View's quality of life and economic development.

The creation of Long View's recreation plan was rooted in a robust public participation process that was designed from the start to include the community's voices. Public input was obtained through a community survey, a public open house, and through the guidance of the town's Recreation Plan Steering Committee. This collaborative approach ensured that the final plan accurately reflected the current needs and future aspirations of the residents of Long View.

Looking ahead, the plan will provide the necessary framework for the town to qualify for state and federal grants, such as the North Carolina Parks and Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF), which requires up-to-date plans for eligibility.

Article by Duncan Cavanaugh, Research and Data Analytics Center Manager



Celebrating Older Americans Month: Champion Your Health



Observed each May, Older Americans Month (OAM) is led by the Administration for Community Living (ACL). Established in 1963, it provides an opportunity to honor the contributions of older Americans, spotlight key aging trends, and reaffirm our commitment to supporting older adults in our communities.

This year's theme, "Champion Your Health," focuses on prevention, wellness, and personal responsibility as cornerstones of healthy aging. It encourages older adults to take an active role in their health — advocating for themselves, accessing preventive care, and making informed decisions that support independence.

This Older Americans Month, communities and individuals alike can take steps to champion health and advance healthy aging.

How can community groups, businesses, and organizations mark OAM?

- Promote OAM through newsletters, meetings, and social media channels.
- Invite community members to share stories and reflections using #ChampionYourHealth.
- Highlight practical tips and trusted resources that support prevention and healthy aging.
- Elevate local programs and events that help older adults stay healthy, active, and engaged.

How can individuals take charge of their health at every age?

- Stay up to date on preventive care and screenings.
- Build and maintain social connections that support emotional well-being.
- Choose nutritious, minimally processed foods.

- Incorporate regular physical activity to maintain strength and mobility.
- Practice daily habits that support mental health and resilience.

Contact your local senior center to get involved and stay connected!

Alexander Senior Center

730 7th Street SW

Taylorsville, NC 28681

(828) 632-1717

www.alexandercountync.gov/senior-center

Bethlehem Site

Mt. Pisgah Lutheran Church

9379 NC-127

Bethlehem, NC 28601

(828) 409-3742

Burke County Senior Services

<https://www.burkenc.org/1213/Services-Activities>

East Burke Senior Center

101 Main Ave. West, Suite A

Hildebran, NC 28637

(828) 397-3397

Morganton/Burke Senior Center

501 North Green Street

Morganton, NC 28655

(828) 430-4147

Thrive (formerly Caldwell Senior Center)

PO Box 933

650 Pennton Avenue SW

Lenoir, NC 28645

(828) 758-2883

www.thrive828.com

Catawba County Council on Aging

West Hickory Senior Center

400 17th Street SW

PO Box 835

Hickory, NC 28603

(828) 328-2269

www.catawbacoa.org

Neighbors Network

502 Thornburg Drive

Conover, NC 28613

(828) 464-1111

www.neighborsnetwork.org

For more information, visit the official website at <https://acl.gov/oam/older-americans-month> and join the conversation on social media using the hashtag #OlderAmericansMonth.

Article submitted by Ashelin McCoy, Aging Specialist

**Spring 2026 Economic Indicators Newsletter
Highlights Hickory MSA Real Estate Trends and**

The Western Piedmont Council of Governments has released the latest issue of the Economic Indicators Newsletter (EIN). This edition provides updated analysis of Hickory Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) unemployment rates, Hickory Metro gross state tax collections, regional real estate trends, and job market conditions, offering a timely snapshot of the region's current economic landscape.

Here are a few key highlights of the EIN:

- The Hickory MSA has the 5th lowest unemployment rate in the state, with the unemployment rate dropping slightly from 3.4% in December 2024 to 3.3% in December 2025.
- Between December 2024 and December 2025, the estimated number of employed persons decreased from 163,362 to 162,317 (-1,045), while the civilian labor force fell from 169,106 to 167,931 (-1,175).
- Average annual Hickory MSA bank deposits grew from \$4.822 billion in June 2019 to \$6.561 billion in June 2025.
- The Hickory MSA had 5,833 new housing listings and 4,306 closed sales in 2025. These totals were more than 5% higher than in 2024. All Hickory MSA locations, except Burke County and Morganton, had more new listings and closed home sales in 2025 than in 2024.
- The Hickory MSA's median sale price increased 3.4% in 2025 to \$299,900. All Hickory MSA locations, except Newton, had a median sales price of \$250,000 or more in 2025. Catawba County had the highest median sales price in 2025 (\$316,500), followed by Hickory (\$300,000) and Alexander County (\$289,900).
- The Hickory MSA average sales price exceeded \$364,000 for the first time in 2025. The highest average sales price was in Catawba County (\$382,990), followed by Alexander County (\$372,988) and Hickory (\$357,564).
- As of December 2025, the Hickory MSA had 1,081 houses for sale on the region's Multiple Listing Service.
- During 2025, it took on average about 53 days to sell a home once it was on the market. A sign of a continued tight housing market, the Hickory MSA had only 3.0 months of supply of housing inventory in December 2025.
- As of November 2025, the Hickory MSA ratio of unemployed per job opening equaled 1.05. The 1.05 ratio means that there are slightly more persons counted as "unemployed" in the region than the number of job openings.
- Healthcare practitioners and technical occupations, sales, and management occupations had the most Hickory MSA online job openings. These three occupation groups accounted for 48.5% of all November 2025 job openings.

See the selected figures below for additional information. The EIN is produced quarterly and is a publication of the Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board. To subscribe to the EIN, please contact Taylor Dellinger, Data Analyst at 828-485-4233 or by email taylor.dellinger@wpcog.org.

To download the latest edition, follow the link:

<https://files.constantcontact.com/a70cd8de301/4377c76f-8915-4826-ae2e-0fe993ab960a.pdf?rdr=true>

Article by Taylor Dellinger, Senior Data Analyst

Leading the Way: WPCOG Drives Regional Home Repair Recovery

At the Western Piedmont Council of Governments (WPCOG), regional resilience is built through proactive leadership. As our communities recover from Tropical Storm Helene,

WPCOG is coordinating the Home Repair Readiness Program and serving as the anchor for essential recovery resources in partnership with NCDEQ and our regional COG partners. By standardizing eligibility and streamlining contractor procurement, WPCOG ensures that disaster recovery funds are deployed strategically and efficiently to support the households that need them most.

This work is producing measurable results. As of May 2026, the program has secured 161 applications, with 113 active projects currently moving through the management pipeline. Through diligent oversight of the contractor network, WPCOG has issued \$239,115 in rebates for 19 completed jobs and is actively managing more than \$565,000 in repair quotes. Each completed project represents a supported family and a home that is more resilient against future weather events.

This progress reflects the strength of regional collaboration. By aligning efforts with partner COGs and NCDEQ, WPCOG is moving Hurricane Helene recovery projects from planning to active installation at a rapid pace. WPCOG remains committed to expanding these programs to reach even more families across Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, and Catawba counties.

Know someone who needs housing repairs? Visit WNCready.org to apply.

Article by Ben Willis, Community & Economic Development Director

Interactive TAZ Mapping Tool: Enhancing Local Input in Regional Growth Forecasting

The Greater Hickory Metropolitan Planning Organization (GHMPO) is advancing development of a new interactive mapping tool to support updates to the region's Traffic Analysis Zones (TAZ). This platform will give local governments a more accessible, collaborative way to review, refine, and contribute to future growth projections for the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP).

What TAZs Do

Traffic Analysis Zones form the backbone of regional transportation planning. Each zone represents a geographic area used to estimate population, housing, and employment patterns across the region. Updated with every MTP cycle, TAZ projections look roughly 30 years ahead, helping planners understand where growth is expected and how it will shape future transportation needs.

How the Tool Improves the Process

The interactive TAZ tool allows local governments to:

- Review existing housing and employment data
- Suggest updates to the transportation network based on local knowledge of where job and housing growth are expected
- Collaborate directly with GHMPO staff on future growth assumptions

These inputs feed into the region's travel demand model, which forecasts future traffic volumes, congestion patterns, and system performance.

Why It Matters

Accurate TAZ data is essential for planning the region's transportation future. By improving how information is collected and shared, GHMPO is strengthening its ability to:

- Plan for long-term growth
- Identify potential congestion areas

- Support data-driven decision-making
- Align infrastructure investments with future demand

This tool represents a major step toward a more transparent, collaborative, and informed regional planning process.

Article by Aver Ritchie, Transportation Planning Director

No One Faces It Alone: The Power of Community Collaboration

Collaboration is more than organizations working side by side. It is people and agencies coming together with a shared purpose: to support individuals and families during some of life's most difficult moments. In communities like ours, these partnerships allow local governments, nonprofits, community leaders, and service providers to respond with greater compassion, urgency, and effectiveness.

And most importantly, **our community benefits.**

A recent collaboration between the Homeless Response Team, Family Care Center, and the Women's Resource Center—highlighted in this project—shows that impact in real time. After losing her home in a devastating fire, one community member received immediate support through the coordinated efforts of local agencies. Because partners worked together, resources were mobilized quickly, barriers were reduced, and she was able to move toward stability and self-sufficiency far sooner than she could have on her own.

This work rarely happens in headlines or conference rooms. It happens in the quiet, often unseen moments when organizations answer calls, share resources, advocate for families, and step in together during crisis.

At the center of every partnership is a person. In this case, a woman who lost everything did not have to face tragedy alone. She was met with coordinated support, compassion, and a community willing to stand beside her during one of the hardest moments of her life. That is the true impact of collaboration: not just services delivered, but stability restored, hope rebuilt, and the reminder that no one has to navigate hardship alone.

You can view the video here: <https://vimeo.com/1185195270?share=copy>

Special thanks to Blue Yonder for bringing this story to life through video, and to Family Care Center, Women's Resource Center, and the Homeless Response Team for their partnership, compassion, and commitment to supporting our community.

Article by Amber Brafford, Homelessness Response Manager

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