

WESTERN PIEDMONT COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS NEWSLETTER JANUARY & FEBRUARY 2025



CONTENTS

- » American Rescue Plan Act Funding used to meet the needs to Older Adults
- » WPCOG helps with funding for Conover multi-family project
- » 2019-2023 (5-Year) American Community Survey Data Now Available
- » Winter 2024 EIN Highlights Hickory Metro Region Traffic Count Trends
- » Vouchers Offer a Coordinated Approach to Housing Stability
- » Workforce Development Board – Kianna’s Success Story
- » Ageism
- » Homelessness Response Team Conducting Surveys of Region
- » Porting Your Housing Choice Voucher

American Rescue Plan Act Funding Used to Meet the Needs to Older Adults

Article by Michael Layza

The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) provided critical funding to support older adult enabling the provision of essential services to help them age in place safely. The AAA received grant funding through ARPA in late 2022 to offer Chore and Chore-Enhanced Services to older adults in Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, and Catawba counties. These services were designed to assist individuals aged 60 and older who required help with household tasks but had no one available to assist them.

Services Provided:

With the ARPA funding, the AAA was able to offer two primary types of services:

- Chore Services: Light housekeeping and yard work to maintain a clean and safe living environment.
- Chore-Enhanced Services: More intensive cleaning, such as deep cleaning (washing windows, cleaning appliances, and carpets), severe decluttering, and pest control.

Number of Individuals Helped:

Over the course of the program, more than 70 older adults received assistance each month. Through the ARPA funding, the AAA provided essential support to older adults in the community by offering a range of Chore and Chore-Enhanced Services. For example, one client, who was wheelchair-bound, received bimonthly cleaning services to help maintain cleanliness of her home. Clients with limited mobility or insufficient financial resources benefited from lawn care services. The program also assisted clients with carpet cleaning, tree/limb removal to prevent damage to their homes, and indoor and outdoor window washing to improve safety and living conditions. Pest control services were provided to individuals struggling with infestations of cockroaches, bedbugs, and termites, addressing urgent health and safety concerns. These services were vital in helping older adults live independently at home, providing peace of mind during a particularly vulnerable time.

Impact and Challenges:

The ARPA funding allowed the AAA to assist those who were most vulnerable, including individuals unable to perform Instrumental Activities of Daily Living (IADLs), such as cleaning, cooking, and shopping, or Activities of Daily Living (ADLs) like bathing and dressing. Clients served were prioritized based on an assessment tool, ensuring that those in greatest need received help first.

While the services have made a significant impact in helping older adults maintain their independence, the program faced the challenge of limited funding. Services were suspended to clients at the end of 2024. Clients in Caldwell County were able to be continued for a limited time through receipt of funds from the Caldwell United Way. The AAA was able to offer crucial support to older adults in need, enhancing their quality of life by helping them live safely at home. Over the past two years, the program provided assistance to individuals at risk of neglect, ensuring they had the resources necessary to age in place.

At this time, we are no longer taking applications for Chore & Enhanced Chore services.



WPCOG Helps with Funding for Conover Multi-family Project

Article by Paul Teague

WPCOG staff worked with developers and property managers to leverage federal Home Investment Partnership Program funding to build a 72-unit affordable housing community in Conover.

The \$15.8-million Fernhill Apartments project celebrated its grand opening in November and features 10 units to be leased to low- to moderate-income households.

The WPCOG utilized \$300,000 in funds from the Unifour Consortium HOME Program as part of the leverage for funding the project.



Mosaic Property Group was the lead developer, and the property is managed by Excel Property Management.

The eligibility income limits for households of two or four persons range from \$25,000 to \$46,860 per year.

2019–2023 (5-Year) American Community Survey Data Now Available

Article by Taylor Dellinger

On December 12, 2024, the US Census Bureau released data from the 2019-2023 (5-Year) American Community Survey (ACS) for all areas in the United States. More than 40 topics are available from the 2019-2023 ACS including educational attainment, housing, employment, commuting, language spoken at home, nativity, ancestry and selected monthly homeowner costs. The 2019-2023 ACS data can be found on the US Census Bureau web site (www.census.gov). 2019-2023 American Community Survey data summaries for the Hickory-Morganton-Lenoir MSA, Alexander County, Burke County, Caldwell County, Catawba County, and the municipalities and Census Designated Places (rural communities) in the region are also available for download in the Community and Regional Planning-Center for Advanced Research & Data Analytics (regional data) section of Western Piedmont Council of Governments web site (www.wpcog.org). For more information about the 2019-2023 American Community Survey, contact Senior Data Analyst Taylor Dellinger at 828.485.4233 or taylor.dellinger@wpcog.org. 2024 ACS data for the region is scheduled to be released in September 2025.



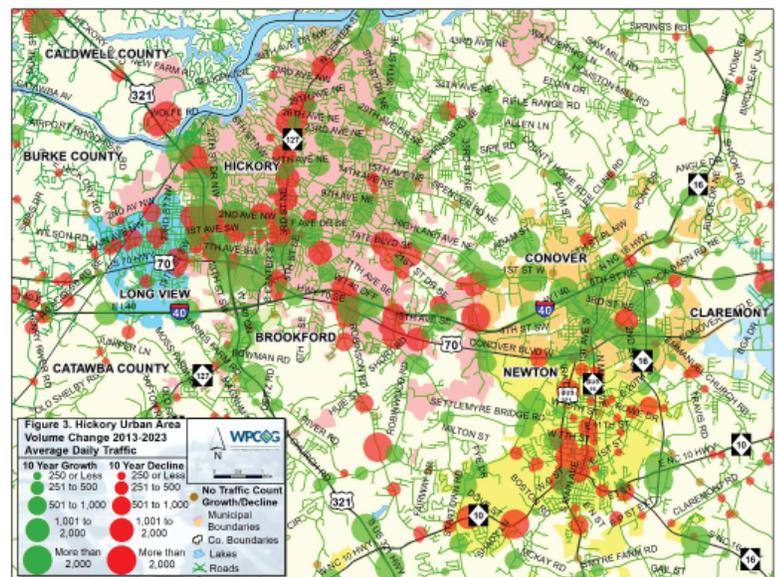
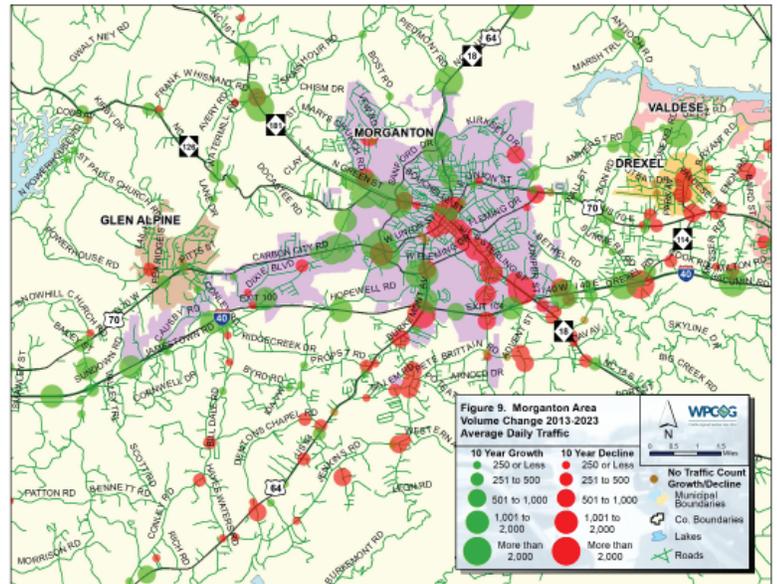
Winter 2024 EIN Highlights Hickory Metro Region Traffic Count Trends

Article by Taylor Dellinger

The newly released Winter 2024 Economic Indicators Newsletter (EIN) addresses Hickory Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) unemployment rates, Hickory Metro State gross collections and Hickory MSA traffic counts.

Highlights include:

- The Hickory MSA's unemployment rate equaled 3.4% in October 2023. Over the past year, the Hickory MSA's unemployment rate has increased to 3.5% as of October 2024.
- Between October 2023 and October 2024, the estimated number of employed persons decreased from 168,796 to 166,860 (-1,936), while the civilian labor force fell from 174,685 to 172,850 (-1,835).
- Hickory Average annual Hickory MSA wages increased from \$40,924 in 2019 to \$50,440 in 2023.
- Data from the North Carolina Department of Transportation reveals that the highest 2023 traffic count in the Hickory Metro region of 68,000 vehicles per day occurred along I-40 between US 321 (Exit 123) and MacDonald Parkway (Exit 126).
- The largest traffic volume increase in the Hickory-Newton-Conover area between 2013 and 2023 (8,000 vehicles per day) was along Springs Road just south of Kool Park Road NE.
- The highest Alexander County traffic count in 2023 (13,500) was located at NC 127 just south of Gazebo Road in the Bethlehem community.
- Between 2013 and 2023 Average Daily Traffic (ADT) increases of 800 vehicles per day occurred along US 64 east of Liledoun Road, east of Liberty Grove Church Road, east of Old Mountain Road, north of Lentz Road, and west of Crestview Drive.
- Twelve traffic count locations in Caldwell County had ADTs of 25,000 or more in 2023. All of these counts occurred on US 321 between Hospital Ave in Lenoir to the Catawba River Bridge.
- Traffic counts were much higher in 2023 than in 2013 at several locations along US 64/NC 18 (Morganton Blvd) between Gamewell and Lenoir.
- Burke County/Morganton area traffic counts higher than 35,000 vehicles per day in 2023 were all found along I-40.
- The largest traffic count increases (6,500 to 7,500) in the Morganton Area over the past 10 years occurred at US 64-70 (Fleming Dr) west of US 64 (Burkemont Ave) and south of Golf Course Road. Over the past two years, the largest increase (2,500 vehicles per day) was at I-40 between Exit 98 (Causby Rd) and Exit 100 (Jamestown Rd).



To subscribe visit www.wpcog.org/economic-indicators-newsletter. Questions about the EIN, contact Taylor Dellinger (taylor.dellinger@wpcog.org), Senior Data Analyst at 828-485-4233.

Vouchers Offer a Coordinated Approach to Housing Stability

Article by Kaleigh Reinhardt

Western Piedmont Council of Governments' Regional Housing Authority (RHA) was awarded five Stability Vouchers from HUD to assist low-income families experiencing homelessness and in support of the community-wide commitment to the goal of ending homelessness.

Stability Vouchers (SV) are special purpose vouchers that HUD awards to Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) to assist those who are currently experiencing homelessness or at the risk of homelessness, fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence, dating violence, stalking, or sexual assault, and veterans and families that include a veteran that meet one of the previous criteria. This special purpose voucher program is available for PHAs in partnerships with a Continuum of Care (CoC). A CoC is a local or regional planning body that is responsible for coordinating the funding and delivery of housing and services for people experiencing homelessness in its geographic area.

The CoC will verify if a family meets one of the four criteria for assistance and refer that family to the PHA. The referral from the CoC must include supporting documentation verifying the family meets the eligibility criteria. Overall, this initiative is designed to direct those eligible for the Stability Vouchers to PHAs collaborating with a CoC, to implement a coordinated approach to reduce the prevalence of homelessness, improve service engagement, and promote housing stability.

As of the end of December 2024, the RHA had issued two vouchers but was working with 12 other households to determine eligibility. Once all five Stability Voucher have been utilized, families that meet these criteria will be placed on a waitlist.

For more information, contact Kaleigh Reinhardt at 828.485.4234 or kaleigh.reinhardt@wpcog.org.

Workforce Development Board – Kianna's Success Story

Article by Chasity Patterson Hamber

The NCWorks NextGen program provided a scholarship to assist Kianna in receiving her High School Equivalency at Western Piedmont Community College, as well as develop her work skills in a Work Experience at the Morganton Library.

Kianna met her advisor, Maddie Shell, at her high school and was ready for a new start. As her advisor was in the process of reviewing her for the program, Kianna dropped out of High School and enrolled in the High School Equivalency program at Western Piedmont Community College (WPCC). Once she was enrolled, WIOA assisted with supporting her through that program which she successfully completed in November.

While enrolled at WPCC, Kianna found out she was having a baby, but that did not stop her from digging her heels in to begin developing her professional skills. Her advisor found her a Work Experience at the Morganton Library where she enjoyed working in the children's programs and spending her afternoons quietly organizing the library space. Kianna learned so many great skills including effective communication, teamwork, and self-advocacy. She worked at the library until her due date.

She continued to show her strength and resilience as she sheltered from Hurricane Helene in Black Mountain, and shortly after, had her baby boy.

Kianna will continue to receive center services as she makes her way into her career!



Article by Ashelin McCoy

Have you ever used “anti-aging” face cream or thought someone was too young to be a manager? These are ageist beliefs and actions. Ageism refers to how we think (stereotypes), feel (prejudice), and act (discrimination) towards others and ourselves based on age. Ageism is viewed as one of the last socially acceptable prejudices and is often not talked about though it is very prevalent in our society.

There are many ways ageism can appear and impact our lives including internalized ageism, implicit ageism, interpersonal ageism, cultural ageism, and institutional ageism. A common form of interpersonal ageism is Elderspeak, where someone speaks to an older adult in a higher pitch or more slowly as if they were speaking to a child. A 2020 poll found that 82% of older adults experience ageism daily and those who experience multiple forms of ageism are more likely to have chronic health conditions and depression.



In our society, aging is often viewed as a negative or bad thing when there are so many great aspects of aging. There are a lot of misconceptions about getting older that are based on ageism. For example, many people believe that falls are a normal part of aging or that developing Dementia or Alzheimer’s are normal and that is not true. Ageism has a negative impact on our health and well-being, so it is very important for us to actively combat this “ism”. Older adults with a more positive self-perception of aging tend to live 7.5 years longer than those with negative self-perceptions of aging.

So how do we combat ageism? The first step to combat any “ism” is to first acknowledge its existence and think about how it might impact people. We all have biases, whether we know it or not. Implicit bias is an unconscious negative attitude toward a group of people. This can lead to stereotypes and prejudices. Implicit biases are often ingrained in our society and reinforced in us. Even at age 3, children are familiar with ageist stereotypes. We can have a positive intention and still have a negative ageist impact through our behaviors because of implicit bias.

Education about aging and intergenerational programs have proven to be effective ways to combat ageism. The next time you find yourself having a negative thought about aging, ask yourself why and what you could do to change it. Continue to educate yourself about aging and what is normal and what is a stereotype. Aging is nothing to be feared, but rather celebrated.

Reference:

American Society on Aging. (2024, October). Ageism fact sheet. [www.asaging.org](https://asaging.org/sites/default/files/2024-08/Ageism%20Fact%20Sheet%20-%20Ageism%20Awareness%20Day_0.pdf).
https://asaging.org/sites/default/files/2024-08/Ageism Fact Sheet - Ageism Awareness Day_0.pdf

Homelessness Response Team Conducting Surveys of Region



Article by Paul Teague

The WPCOG Homeless Response Team has been conducting point-in-time surveys of the region in order to ascertain the state of the unhoused population and offering pathways for assistance.

In cooperation with local governments, churches and other non-profits, the team has been identifying the homeless population in Alexander, Burke, Caldwell and Catawba counties.

The objective is not only to identify those who are unhoused, but also to seek short- to long-term solutions.

The WPCOG Homelessness Response Team was founded in 2023 via grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The group has looked to work with local leaders and current resources.

For more information about the team and its activities, contact WPCOG Homelessness Response Team Program Manager Ric Smith at ric.smith@wpcog.org.

Porting Your Housing Choice Voucher

Article by Kaleigh Reinhardt

An important benefit of the Housing Choice Voucher program is portability. Portability allows participants to transfer or “port” their housing rental assistance to any Public Housing Authority (PHA) in the United States that operates a Section 8 program. This process gives participants the flexibility to relocate for better job or housing opportunities while still receiving housing assistance.

There are some limitations to this process. Applicants must be residents of the WPCOG service area - Alexander, Catawba, Caldwell or Burke County - at the time of their application.

Non-resident applicants and current participants must reside in the WPCOG service area for at least 12 months, with housing assistance, prior to porting. After the 12 months is completed, they must submit the following documentation in writing to their Housing Specialist:

- A copy of a 30- or 60-day notice to vacate from their current unit
- Details of the Housing Authority they want their voucher ported to

The Housing Specialist will contact the landlord of the tenant who is porting to verify that they are current on their portion of rent and in good standing. Once verified, the Housing Specialist will transfer the voucher to the new PHA.

A portability voucher is good for 60 days. Portability requires the cooperation of both housing authorities to help the tenant have the best possibility of moving to a new area.

For more information on porting, contact Kaleigh Reinhardt at 828 485 4234 or kaleigh.reinhardt@wpcog.org.



Western Piedmont
Council of Governments



CONTACT INFORMATION

Telephone: 828.322.9191

Fax: 828.322.5991

Email: jason.toney@wpcog.org

Mailing: P.O. Box 9026 | Hickory, NC 28603

Location: 1880 2nd Avenue NW | Hickory, NC 28601

www.wpcog.org



facebook.com/WPCOG



x.com/WPCOG



instagram.com/WPCOG1968

