

**Minutes**  
**Western Piedmont Council of Governments**  
**Bimonthly Policy Board Meeting**  
**Tuesday, July 25, 2023**  
**First United Methodist Church, Granite Falls**

**Members Present**

Jill Patton, Chair  
Larry Chapman, Secretary  
Bob Floyd, Past Chair  
Larry Yoder, At-Large  
Randy Burns, At-Large  
Marla Thompson, At-Large  
Ronnie Setzer  
Mike Labrose  
Donald Robinson  
Joie Fulbright  
Jim Green, Alternate  
Dennis Anthony  
Barbara Pennell  
Dr. Caryl Burns  
Tracy Townsend, Alternate  
Phyllis Pennington, Alternate  
Chris Jernigan  
Jerry Hodge  
Allen Spencer  
Bobby Mosteller  
Charlie Watts  
Rexanna Lowman, Alternate  
Erisha Lipford  
Helen Chestnut  
Tonia Stephenson

**Members Absent**

Joseph L. Gibbons, Vice-Chair  
George Holleman, Treasurer  
Cole Setzer, At-Large  
Josh Lail, Alternate  
Kelvin Gregory  
Johnnie Carswell, Alternate  
Lloyd Robbins, Alternate  
Robbie Wilkie, Alternate  
Carroll Yount, Alternate  
Barbara Beatty, Alternate  
Dale Sherrill  
Ramona Duncan

**Local Government/Agency**

Hickory  
Hudson  
Town of Cedar Rock  
Alexander County  
Burke County  
Long View  
Cajah's Mountain  
Caldwell County  
Catawba  
Conover  
Conover  
Drexel  
Gamewell  
Granite Falls  
Granite Falls  
Long View  
Morganton  
Newton  
Rhodhiss  
Sawmills  
Valdese  
Valdese  
Appointed  
Appointed  
Appointed

Lenoir  
Taylorsville  
Catawba County  
Alexander County  
Brookford  
Burke County  
Cajah's Mountain  
Caldwell County  
Catawba  
Catawba County  
Claremont  
Connelly Springs

Steve Smart, Alternate  
Ron Lackey, Alternate  
Sheila Perkins  
Charlotte Williams, Alternate  
Ben Honeycutt  
Mike Smith, Alternate  
Jim Engelman, Alternate  
Ralph Prestwood, Alternate  
Holly Crafton-Lay  
Ronnie Williams, Alternate  
Ronnie Thompson, Alternate  
Beverly Danner, Alternate  
Kendra Edwards, Alternate  
Wayne Annas  
Yates Jensen, Alternate  
Joe Wesson, Alternate  
Jack Simms, Alternate  
Amparo R. Alfaro  
Jeanna Price  
Malla Vue  
Tommy Luckadoo

Connelly Springs  
Gamewell  
Glen Alpine  
Hickory  
Hildebran  
Hildebran  
Hudson  
Lenoir  
Maiden  
Maiden  
Morganton  
Newton  
Rhodhiss  
Rutherford College  
Rutherford College  
Sawmills  
Taylorsville  
Appointed  
Appointed  
Appointed  
Appointed

**Guests/Others Present**

Alan Glines  
Donald Duncan  
Hunter Clark  
Danny Hipps  
Tom Hart  
Bonnie Caudle  
Jerry Church  
Mike Mackie  
Martin Townsend  
Courtney Kennedy  
Larry Knight  
Jim Mackie  
Scott Hildebran  
Chase Winebarger  
Seth Eckard

Burke County  
Caldwell County  
Caldwell County  
Catawba  
Conover  
Gamewell  
Granite Falls  
Granite Falls  
Granite Falls  
Granite Falls  
Granite Falls  
Granite Falls  
Lenoir  
Sawmills  
Valdese

**WPCOG Staff Present**

Anthony Starr, Executive Director  
Sherry Long, Assistant Executive Director  
David Pugh, Director of Administrative Services and Human Resources  
Ben Willis, Director of Community and Economic Development

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Averi Ritchie, Transportation Planning Manager  
Donna Gilbert, Program Manager of Workforce Development  
Jason Toney, Communications Manager

### **Call to Order/Welcome**

A regular meeting of the WPCOG Policy Board was called to order at 6:45 pm by Chair Patton. Chair Patton thanked the Town of Granite Falls for hosting. Town of Granite Falls Mayor, Dr. Caryl Burns welcomed the Policy Board to Granite Falls.

### **Minutes of Previous Meeting**

Minutes of the previous meeting were considered. Mr. Joie Fulbright made a motion to approve the minutes from the May 23, 2023 meeting and Ms. Helen Chestnut offered a second. The motion passed unanimously.

### **Introductions**

Introductions were made by everyone in attendance.

### **Unfinished Business/Reports**

There was no unfinished business.

### **New Business**

#### Census 2010 to 2020 Age Cohort Comparison

Mr. Anthony Starr, Executive Director, stated the Census Bureau released age cohort data from the 2020 Census for our region that confirms previously acknowledged trends. The data clearly points to significant changes for our workforce and demonstrates the need to attract new workers to our communities to replace retiring persons.

The data shows over 50,000 people will retire in the next few years within our region and not enough young people exist to replace them. Without new workers moving into the region, there will be over 8,000 fewer people in our regional workforce. Data from public schools coincide with the Census data and reflect a continuing trend of lower school enrollment. Attracting new workers to our region is necessary to maintain our number of jobs.

This presentation provided an overview of the data and highlighted some of the implications local officials should consider.

This item was for informational purposes only and no policy board action needed.

#### Workforce Development Board Appointments

Ms. Donna Gilbert, Workforce Development Program Manager, stated staff requested the Policy Board appoint Rose Cook, Director of Organizational Learning for Catawba Valley Medical Center and Adam Gray, Project Manager for Steelcon Builders, to meet the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) board membership in the private business category for a staggered two-year term ending June

30, 2025. These vacancies occurred due to former board members' retirements. These appointments represent Catawba and Caldwell counties.

Mr. Jerry Hodge made a motion to appoint Rose Cook and Adam Gray to the Workforce Development Board for a two-year term ending June 30, 2025 and Mr. Donald Robinson offered a second. The motion passed unanimously.

#### Project Submittals to NCDOT – Prioritization 7.0

Ms. Averi Ritchie, Transportation Planning Manager, stated the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) Strategic Prioritization Office (formerly known as SPOT) refers to the prioritization process that guides the development of the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). The STIP is the main vehicle for transportation improvement funding in the state as set by the State Transportation Investments (STI) Law. This is a multi-modal process, as our region is capable of submitting public transit, bike and pedestrian, highway, aviation, and railroad projects. NCDOT and WPCOG staff are currently working with local government staff to test score identified needs and requests within the WPCOG region.

This item is for informational purposes only no policy board action needed.

#### WPCOG Building Expansion – Architect Final Contract

Mr. David Pugh, Director of Administration and HR, stated per authorization of the Policy Board at their May 2023 meeting, WPCOG staff negotiated a final contract with McMillan Pazdan Smith (MPS) Architecture.

The contract document was included in the agenda packet. Exhibit A defines the scope of services. Generally, as listed in "Part 1" of Exhibit A, the scope includes architectural services to construct an addition and renovate the existing WPCOG building. Specifically, the new building addition will be 16,000-20,000 square feet, including 4,000 square feet of potential basement storage and utility space. The basement inclusion is a positive, as it allows for more space while also working with the sloping land contours on the property where the addition will be located. All of the described elements listed above will satisfy the expansion priorities, including additional space for WPCOG staff growth and a space for the regional NC Works Careers Center.

The total fee for basic and supplemental architectural services is \$456,000. The current anticipated total project cost is approximately \$7 million. Therefore, the fee percentage is 6.5%. Anything under 9-10% for an architectural fee for a project of this size is a very solid rate.

As a reminder from the May 2023 memo, McMillan Pazdan Smith especially yielded high marks during the RFQ process for the following reasons:

- Participated in previous project involving NC Works, which is a central element to the WPCOG building expansion.
- Previous work and familiarity with COG's.
- Impressive construction administration credentials and staff.

- Extensive understanding of the WPCOG specific needs regarding the building expansion project, including interior space design and functionality as related to WPCOG services.
- Schedule and availability to begin work soon.

WPCOG Attorney David Hood reviewed the architect contract document and is comfortable with WPCOG moving forward with approval.

Staff requested that the board approve the following:

1. The AIA Standard Form of Agreement Between the Owner (WPCOG) and Architect (McMillian Pazdan Smith), including the "Exhibit A" Scope of Services section.
2. Authorization to delegate authority to the WPCOG Executive Committee to take any time sensitive action regarding the WPCOG building expansion during the duration of the project.

Mr. Bob Floyd made a motion that the Policy Board approve the agreement with McMillan Pazdan Smith Architecture and to authorize the WPCOG Executive Committee to take any time sensitive actions regarding the WPCOG building expansion during the duration of the project and Mr. Larry Yoder offered a second. Motion passed unanimously.

#### **Detailed Background Section:**

**History and Current Office Status.** The current offices of the Western Piedmont Council of Governments were constructed in 2011. At that time, the offices provided significant extra space for the staff. However, the staff has grown in recent years from 45 employees to currently 75 full-time and part-time employees. Three years ago, staff converted the library to a suite for seven cubicle offices to provide additional capacity for staff. All of those cubicles are full. We also converted a workroom into a two-person office. We currently have three small offices available near the reception area and an extra desk in a copier room. We could create additional space by asking more staff to share offices or eliminating a conference room.

**NCWorks Career Centers.** Foot traffic at the career centers began decreasing in 2015, well before the Pandemic, and it is expected for that to continue beyond COVID-19. This reduces the justification for operating career centers in every county. With the construction of a regional career center, we could provide a much nicer and more functional career center and lower the costs for the Workforce Development Program. The WPCOG would work with local governments and partners to provide small meeting spaces for those who have travel limitations. A regional career center allows us to provide more outreach services in various communities.

WPCOG pays \$99,732 annually to lease the space at Conover Station (the state reimburses us \$9,255). In addition, the NC Division of Workforce Solutions leases space for the Caldwell and Burke career centers for a total cost of \$116,740 each year. Federal rules require that the state, local workforce boards, and other partners share the cost of the career centers based on a pre-determined formula.



**Planning for Expansion.** Staff began planning for expansion of the office to accommodate future growth of WPCOG staff and to consolidate the regional NCWorks Career Centers to one location. A previous conceptual plan and cost estimates determined the feasibility of the project and provided the necessary details for the Executive Committee and Policy Board to make informed decisions. The plans provide for about 7,400 square feet of space for WPCOG offices and 9,600 square feet for the regional career center. It also adds 77 additional parking spaces using the land purchased by the WPCOG a few years ago for a total of 185 spaces.

**Construction Costs.** As of December 2021, estimates for the cost of construction for the entire project at \$4.98 million including a contingency of 20%. The regional career center portion represents about 56% of that cost and the WPCOG office the remaining portion totaling 44%.

#### URP 2023 Assistance Policy and Procurement and Distribution Policy

Mr. Ben Willis, Director of Community and Economic Development, stated the Urgent Repair Program is funded through the NC Housing Finance Agency (NCHFA) in order to provide emergency home repairs for qualified low-income homeowners. The assistance is in the form of a forgivable loan up to \$12,000 per home. The NCHFA requires certain procedures and policies for the grant and these policies require adoption by the Policy Board.

The Assistance Policy explains what the program requirements are and how the program will operate during the cycle of funding. The Procurement and Disbursement Policy provides procurement and disbursement guidelines.

Both policies were included in the agenda packet.

Staff requested that the policy board review and approve the 2023 Alexander, Burke and Caldwell County URP 2023 Assistance Policy and the Procurement & Disbursement Policy.

Mr. Randy Burns made a motion that the policy board approve the Alexander, Burke and Caldwell County URP'23 Assistance Policy, and the Procurement and Disbursement Policy as proposed and Ms. Helen Chestnut offered a second. Motion passed unanimously.

#### ESRFLP 2023 Caldwell County Assistance Policy and Procurement and Distribution Policy

Mr. Ben Willis, Director of Community and Economic Development, stated the Essential Single Family Rehabilitation Loan Pool is funded through the NC Housing Finance Agency (NCHFA) to provide essential home repairs for qualified low to moderate income homeowners. The WPCOG has been awarded \$162,000 for three (3) homes in Caldwell County. Once the initial set aside has been spent, WPCOG can request more funding for additional homes for the loan pool. The assistance is in the form of a deferred loan up to \$40,000 per home. WPCOG will receive soft cost and administration funds for each unit in addition to the \$40,000 per unit for rehabilitation. The NCHFA requires certain procedures and policies for the grant and these policies require adoption by the Policy Board.

The Assistance Policy explains what the program requirements are and how the program will operate during the cycle of funding. The Procurement & Disbursement Policy provides procurement and disbursement guidelines. These policies were included in the agenda packet.

Staff requested that the Policy Board review and approve the 2023 Essential Single Family Rehabilitation Loan Pool (ESFRLP) Caldwell County Assistance Policy, and Procurement and Disbursement Policy.

Mr. Larry Chapman made a motion that the policy board approve the 2023 Essential Single Family Rehabilitation Loan Pool (ESFRLP) Caldwell County Assistance Policy, and Procurement and Disbursement Policy and Mr. Larry Yoder offered a second. Motion passed unanimously.

#### LEP Policy and Plan (2023-2027)

Mr. Ben Willis, Director of Community and Economic Development, stated the purpose of this Policy and Plan is to ensure compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and other applicable federal and state laws and their implementing regulations with respect to persons with limited English proficiency (LEP). Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination based on the ground of race, color or national origin by any entity receiving federal financial assistance. Administrative methods or procedures, which have the effect of subjecting individuals to discrimination or defeating the objectives of these regulations, are prohibited. This policy shall apply to all funding from the North Carolina Housing Finance Agency.

Staff requested that the Policy Board review and approve the 2023-2027 Limited English Proficiency Policy and Plan.

Mr. Larry Yoder made a motion that the policy board approve the 2023-2027 Limited English Proficiency Policy and Plan and Mr. Donald Robinson offered a second. Motion passed unanimously.

#### **Other Business**

##### Executive Director and Staff Reports

Mr. Anthony Starr, Executive Director, reviewed the Executive Director's Report providing details and current operations of the WPCOG and issues that may be of interest to board members.

#### **Administration**

- The WPCOG promoted Chasity Houck as the homelessness response manager to lead our efforts to mitigate homelessness in the region. The WPCOG is recruiting for four homelessness outreach specialist positions as well.
- The WPCOG hired two experienced financial managers.
- The WPCOG is conducting the search process for a new Caldwell County DSS Director and will soon start on the process for the Granite Falls Town Manager.
- The next Mayors-Chairs-Managers event will be August 31<sup>st</sup> at Cedar Rock Country Club.

### **Community and Economic Development**

- It was noted the region received \$5.56 million in Rural Transformation Grants from state, which represents 11.6% of the total funds despite our region only having 3.5% of the state's population.

### **Community and Regional Planning**

- With the recent completion of the Western Piedmont Housing Growth Toolkit, WPCOG staff have begun work on a regional housing plan. Completion of the plan around June of 2024 is anticipated.
- In response to local government requests, the WPCOG is developing a proposal to utilize new data subscription software that provides nearly real time data about people and activities in our communities that will aide local government decision-making. Additional information is forthcoming.

### Next Meeting

The next Policy Board meeting is scheduled for September 26, 2023 and will be hosted by the City of Morganton.

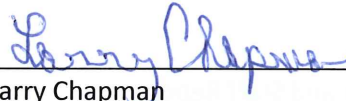
### Adjournment

Chair Patton adjourned the meeting.

Respectfully submitted,



Jill Patton  
Chair



Larry Chapman  
Secretary