

Minutes
Western Piedmont Council of Governments
Bimonthly Policy Board Meeting
Tuesday, July 28, 2026
Catawba County EMS Operations Center, Newton, NC

Members Present

Randy Burns, Chair
Larry Yoder, Vice Chair
George Holleman, Treasurer
Larry Chapman, Secretary
Cole Setzer, At-Large
Chris Jernigan, At-Large
Jill Patton, At-Large
Ronnie Setzer
Donald Robinson
Bob Floyd
Dale Sherrill
Johnny Berry
Joie Fulbright
Brenda Powell, Alternate
Dennis Anthony
Barbara Pennell
Tracy Townsend
Ritch Bolick, Alternate
Charlotte Williams, Alternate
Mike Smith, Alternate
Ben Honeycutt
Ronnie Thompson, Alternate
Beverly Danner
Allen Spencer
Carroll Hoyle
Keith Huffman
Amparo R. Alfaro
Mark Transou
Tommy Luckadoo
Tonia Stephenson
Wes Christopher
Helen Chestnut

Members Absent

Joseph Gibbons, Past Chair
Mike LaBrose, At-Large
Josh Lail, Alternate
Kelvin Gregory
Jeff Brittain, Alternate

Local Government/Agency

Burke County
Alexander County
Taylorsville
Hudson
Catawba County
Morganton
Hickory
Cajah's Mountain
Catawba
Cedar Rock
Claremont
Connelly Springs
Conover
Conover
Drexel
Gamewell
Granite Falls
Granite Falls
Hickory
Hildebran
Hildebran
Morganton
Newton
Rhodhiss
Rutherford College
Valdese
Appointed
Appointed
Appointed
Appointed
Appointed
Appointed

Local Government/Agency

Lenoir
Caldwell County
Alexander County
Brookford
Burke County

Lloyd Robbins, Alternate
Carroll Yount, Alternate
Barbara Beatty, Alternate
Ramona Duncan, Alternate
Ron Lackey, Alternate
Chad Wykle
Kevin Herron, Alternate
Jim Engelman, Alternate
Ralph Prestwood, Alternate
Allen Bumgarner
Phyllis Pennington, Alternate
Holly Crafton-Lay
Fore Rembert, Alternate
Scott Gilleland, Alternate
Kendra Edwards, Alternate
Yates Jensen, Alternate
Bobby Mosteller
Joe Wesson, Alternate
Kimberly S. Brown Alternate
Rexanna Lowman, Alternate
Erisha Lipford

Cajah's Mountain
Catawba
Catawba County
Connelly Springs
Gamewell
Glen Alpine
Glen Alpine
Hudson
Lenoir
Long View
Long View
Maiden
Maiden
Newton
Rhodhiss
Rutherford College
Sawmills
Sawmills
Taylorsville
Valdese
Appointed

Guests/Others Present

Randy Feierabend
Logan Shook
Mary Furtado
Rick Justice
Randy Isenhower
Dale Stiles
Paul Murray
Adam Lindsay
Justin Mundy
Arthur Salido
Will Rutland
Wes Barfield
Rick Hammer

Cajah's Mountain
Hildebran
Catawba County
Rhodhiss
Catawba County
Catawba County
Catawba County
Catawba County
Catawba County
Three Notch Group
Three Notch Group
Three Notch Group
Lowdermilk Church & Co

WPCOG Staff Present

Anthony Starr, Executive Director
Alison Alexander, Assistant Executive Director
Sarah Watson, Administrative Services Manager / Clerk to the Board
Andrea Roper, Director of Finance
Alison Adams, Director of Community and Regional Planning
Ben Willis, Director of Community and Economic Development

Sarah Evitt, Director of Area Agency on Aging
Stephanie Hanvey, Director of Regional Housing Authority
Averi Ritchie, Director of Transportation Planning
Jason Tony, Communications Manager
Max Charles, Management Intern

Call to Order/Welcome

A regular meeting of the WPCOG Policy Board was called to order at 6:35 pm by Chair Burns. Chair Burns thanked Catawba County for hosting.

Introductions

Introductions were made by everyone in attendance.

Minutes of Previous Meeting

Minutes of the previous meeting were considered. Chris Jernigan made a motion to approve the minutes from the May 26, 2026 meeting and Jill Patton offered a second. The motion passed unanimously.

Unfinished Business/Reports

There was no unfinished business.

New Business

Intern Presentation

Since early May, WPCOG has hosted Max Charles as a summer intern, working primarily with Administration. Max suggested a new tradition for interns and Fellows at WPCOG – a presentation to the Policy Board to demonstrate what he's learned over the summer. Originally from Hickory, Max is a graduate of Stephen's High School and is a rising sophomore at Clemson University, where he is majoring in Political Science.

Charles went on to speak about his experience at WPCOG and what he had learned from his time there. He thanked Anthony Starr and Alison Alexander for the opportunity.

No board action was requested, as this item was for informational purposes only.

Community and Economic Development Strategies (CEDS)

Alison Adams, Community and Regional Planning Director, stated Western Piedmont Council of Governments (WPCOG) was designated as the Economic Development District (EDD) for the region by the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) in 2004. As the region's designated EDD, WPCOG is responsible for developing and maintaining a regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), which must be updated every five years. The current CEDS was adopted in 2022 and subsequently amended in 2023.

The Policy Board is requested to appoint the recommended CEDS Committee members (see attached), who have been selected to provide broad regional representation and reflect various characteristics, including geographic distribution, professional background, etc. The CEDS Committee will convene six times throughout the planning process, with each meeting focused on one of six strategic topic areas: Economic Development, Workforce, Infrastructure, Housing, Marketing, and Community Life. To support development of the plan, WPCOG will conduct one-on-one stakeholder interviews, administer a regional survey, and gather input from committee members and other stakeholders.

Each focus area will include an overview of its regional significance, supporting demographic and economic data, survey findings, and a series of goals and strategies. Each strategy will identify specific implementation actions, performance measures, and responsible partners to facilitate accountability and long-term progress.

Working collaboratively, the CEDS Committee and WPCOG staff will develop a forward-looking strategy that positions the Western Piedmont region for sustained economic prosperity by promoting business growth and investment, expanding housing opportunities, strengthening workforce development, enhancing regional marketing efforts, fostering inclusive and vibrant communities, and supporting resilient, efficient infrastructure. The resulting CEDS will serve as the region's strategic roadmap for coordinated economic development and continued eligibility for EDA funding opportunities.

Staff requested the Policy Board review and appoint the 2026-2027 CEDS Committee members as presented.

Jill Patton moved the Policy Board appoint the CEDS Committee members as presented and Larry Yoder offered a second. Motion passed unanimously.

Hickory Public Housing Authority Audit Presentation

Andrea Roper, Finance Director, stated Rick Hammer, an independent auditor with Lowdermilk Church & Co., will present a report to the Board regarding the financial audits of the City of Hickory Public Housing Authority (HPHA) for the year ended September 30, 2024 and the nine months ending June 30, 2025. The audit is required by State Law and various regulations of funding entities.

During the audited fiscal period ending September 30, 2024, the Hickory Public Housing Authority (HPHA) was not affiliated with the Western Piedmont Council of Governments (WPCOG). However, after WPCOG assumed responsibility for HPHA on July 1, 2025, WPCOG requested that the audit be completed. As a result, the audit was conducted and finalized in December 2025.

During this nine-month audit, WPCOG Executive Director, Anthony Starr, was appointed Interim Executive Director of the HPHA January 21, 2025. On March 13, 2025 WPCOG Finance Director, Andrea Roper, was appointed as Finance Officer for HPHA.

For the audit ending September 30, 2024, there were no prior year findings. However, in the fiscal year 24 audit there were three findings.

Finding 2024-001

Type of Finding: Noncomplicance

The Authority did not meet the minimum requirements for the finance officer's fidelity bond as required by North Carolina General Statute 159-29.

Finding 2024-002

Type of Finding: Material Weakness

The Authority overspent funds or spent funds more than the normal expected business cost. This was a lack of oversight by staff and management.

Finding 2024-003

Type of Finding: Material Weakness

Every twelve months the tenant files for the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program are required to undergo recertification. Included in this process are a list of required forms signed by the tenant along with information supporting the tenant's portion of their rent and a bi-annual inspection of the participant's unit must be conducted. Of the tenant files that were pulled for sample testing, twenty-two of these files were missing, one or more of the items required to be included in the file and/or were not recertified within the twelve-month period.

For the audit of the nine months ending June 30, 2025, there were three previous findings. However, for the time ending June 30, 2025, there was one finding that was still applicable from FY24.

Finding 2025-001

Type of Finding: Material Weakness

This finding is the same finding as 2024-003, regarding missing tenant files. Of the files pulled for testing, there were eight files that were missing one or more items required to be included in the file and/or were not recertified within the twelve-month time frame. The Authority was also unable to find ten tenant files that were selected for testing.

Rick Hammer went on to discuss the findings in detail.

Staff requested that the Policy Board review the attached audit information and accept the audit report as presented.

Larry Chapman moved that the Policy Board accept the audit report as presented and Jill Patton offered a second. Motion passed unanimously.

Offer to Purchase 941 11th Ave Blvd SE, Hickory, NC

Alison Alexander, Assistant Executive Director, stated that the Hickory Housing Authority (HHA) through Advent Housing Group, owned a 4.36-acre vacant parcel located at 941 11th Ave Blvd SE, Hickory, NC (parcel 371213142068). With the absorption of the HHA, the property came under the ownership of the WPCOG.

In August 2025, the Executive Committee approved the sale of the above parcel via the upset bid process, as outlined in G.S. 160A-269, with the proceeds to be used to reduce the HHA debt covered by the City of Hickory as part of the transfer of HHA voucher program to the RHA, with any remaining funds to be used as part of the RHA as whole.

In March 2026, two bids were presented to the Policy Board. Both bids were well below the tax value and were rejected. On July 7th, we received a bid in the amount of \$352,300.00 from Hedley Homes, Inc, which is 92.7% of appraised value, and 90.9% of tax value. The WPCOG is using an attorney to assist with the bid and sale process, but no real estate agent.

Current tax value: \$387,400 (2023 county appraisal)
Appraised value: \$380,000 (May 21, 2026 report, attached)
Current Bid: \$352,300 (Hedley Homes, dated July 7, 2026).

If a proposed bid is accepted by the Policy Board, public notice will be published announcing the proposed purchase price and provide that anyone may file an upset bid within ten (10) days of the notice. If a new upset bid is received, the notice will be re-advertised with the new price with another ten (10) days to file a new bid. To be considered, a new bid must raise the bid by not less than ten percent (10%) of the first one thousand dollars (\$1,000) and five percent (5%) of the remainder. This procedure would be repeated until there are no more new bids. Once this process is complete, the Policy Board/Executive Committee may accept the offer as presented or may reject the offer.

Staff requested that the Policy Board accept the bid from Hedley Homes, Inc in the amount of \$352,300 for the purchase of 941 11th Ave Blvd SE, Hickory, NC (parcel 371213142068).

Jill Patton moved the Policy Board accept the bid submitted by Hedley Homes, Inc for 941 11th Ave Blvd SE, Hickory, NC and begin the upset bid process and Joie Fulbright offered a second. Motion passed unanimously.

Work and Dignity Coalition

Stephanie Hanvey, RHA Director, stated that in February 2026, she met with HUD Secretary Tanner regarding the Work and Dignity Coalition, announced a proposed rule to provide all public housing authorities (PHAs) and Section 8 project-based rental assistance owners flexibility to implement work requirements and time limits for non-elderly, nondisabled work-capable adults in HUD-funded housing. Secretary Tanner launched the Work and Dignity Coalition, bringing together PHAs, owners, Tribes, states, non-profit partners, and faith-based organizations that support the principles behind HUD's proposed efforts to strengthen work, opportunity, and self-sufficiency.

In June, RHA staff met at the WPCOG office with Hannah Abernathy, Special Assistant to Assistant Secretary for Public and Indian Housing at HUD. She further explained that the coalition is rooted in the belief that federal housing programs should not only provide stability in times of hardship, but should also actively promote pathways to independence, upward mobility, and long-term self-sufficiency.

HUD is requesting the WPCOG join the coalition. The Assistant Secretary for Public and Indian Housing may attend the local signing of our support letter. By joining this coalition, participating entities will publicly signal support and interest in implementing accountability and supportive services to promote the dignity of work and economic independence. These supportive services are designed to better align housing policy with workforce participation, while maintaining strong protection for vulnerable populations including seniors, individuals with disabilities and children.

There are no specific obligations associated with joining the coalition but it provides opportunities for employing future policies for self-sufficiency of our clients.

Staff requested the Policy Board review the proposed information and approve joining the coalition.

Bob Floyd moved that the Policy Board review the proposed information and approve joining the coalition and Chris Jernigan offered a second. Motion passed unanimously.

RHA Policy Change – Minimum Monthly Rent

Stephanie Hanvey, RHA Director stated HUD PIH Notice 2025-28 lists several cost-saving measures for housing authorities, including raising the minimum rent, to lower Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) expenses and ensure the program's long-term financial health. Federal regulation 24 CFR § 5.630 allows housing authorities to set this minimum rent up to \$50.

The WPCOG Regional Housing Authority (RHA) has maintained a \$0 minimum rent since 2020. However, because per-unit costs have risen 8% since 2025 and federal funding has remained largely flat for 2026, the RHA needs to adjust this policy as one of our cost saving measures. Raising the minimum rent to \$50 encourages work and it gives households reporting zero income an incentive to find employment, sign up for financial safety nets (like TANF or SSI), or to participate in the WPCOG Family Self-Sufficiency Program. The HAP funds saved on rental assistance can be used to issue more vouchers to families currently on our waiting list.

The RHA will strictly follow federal rules to protect families facing financial emergencies. If a family cannot pay the \$50 due to a crisis, they can request a "hardship exemption." Eligible hardships include:

- Loss of a job or reduced work hours.
- Loss of a government benefit (like Social Security or Disability) or waiting for a new benefit to start.
- Risk of eviction due to an inability to pay the minimum rent.
- A death in the family that impacts household income.

There are currently 153 participant households (9% of the program) that may be affected. This change will save the RHA approximately \$91,800 annually. The public hearing was held on Thursday, July 9, 2026, with no one appearing to oppose the policy.

Staff requested that the Policy Board approve updating the RHA voucher program rules to establish a \$50 minimum monthly rent, effective August 1, 2026.

Larry Yoder moved to approve updating the RHA voucher program rules to establish a \$50 minimum monthly rent, effective August 1, 2026, and Jill Patton offered a second. Motion passed unanimously.

1st Amendment of the FY2026-27 Budget

Andrea Roper, Finance Director, stated the 1st Amendment of the FY2026-27 budget reflects a total budget of \$50,342,885 and an operating budget of \$12,182,498 which represents a decrease of the total budget from the May 26, 2026 budget adoption of \$230,041.

The 1st Amendment of the 2026-2027 Budget includes:

- A decrease in Environmental & Community Development due to grant work being completed in FY26.
- Community & Regional Planning decreased due to personnel changes and actual anticipated FY27 project work.
- Economic Development increased to account for multi-year project work remaining for FY27.
- An increase in Workforce Development to reflect additional funding for the incumbent worker grant.
- Additional Fringe & Indirect Funds were added to reflect funds generated by salaries paid to Valdese Public Housing staff.
- Staff salaries and retirement decreased due to personnel changes.
- Group Insurance increased due to the addition of a new finance position and to correct the number of employees utilizing the insurance.
- Contractual increased due to a new CDBG grant.
- Advertising/subscriptions increased to reflect software subscription costs for the Planning Department.
- Maintenance/Equipment decreased to allocate funds to advertising/subscription for the Planning Department.
- Contingency decreased to utilize grant funding across multiple departments for the current fiscal year.
- Capital Outlay increased due to needs within the Planning Department.
- Transfer to Capital Reserve Fund decreased due to the decrease in indirect funds generated by chargeable salaries and an increase in anticipated indirect charges.
- The WIA Fees & Services Special Revenue Fund increased to reflect the incumbent worker grant.
- Valdese Public Housing Special Revenue Fund increased to reflect the transfer of fringe and indirect funds generated by salaries to the General Fund.
- The Disaster Recovery Special Revenue Fund was adjusted to reflect funds utilized during FY26.
- Capital Reserve Fund decreased due to a decrease in transfers from the general fund.
- All other changes reflect normal programmatic needs.

Staff requested the Policy Board review and approve the First Amendment of the 2026-2027 Budget.

Chris Jernigan moved that the Policy Board review and approve the First Amendment of the 2026-2027 Budget, and Larry Chapman offered a second. Motion passed unanimously.

Other Business

Executive Director and Staff Reports

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

- A new Lead for NC Fellow, Abby Carpenter, will begin working with Admin and CED on August

3rd for an 11-month Fellowship.

- The next Mayors, Chairs and Managers meeting is August 27th in Cedar Rock/Caldwell County at Cedar Rock Country Club. Topic of discussion will be “leading local government in an era of social media and incivility.”
- AAA received FY27 budget allocations from NC Division of Aging and is moving forward with local service providers to create budget forms to present to regional county commissioners in July for approval. Allocations were presented and approved by the county commissioners in each county to begin service July 1, 2026.
- Throughout May and June, Community and Economic Development Division has been managing a diverse portfolio of grant-funded projects, with the majority of applications focused on Hurricane Helene recovery. These initiatives represent a total regional investment of \$40,210,287.
- Community and Regional Planning department is continuing to negotiate with the Division of Water Infrastructure on the scope and specific requirements for the Helene Septic Repair funds. DEQ does not have experience with septic tank repair projects like WPCOG staff does.
- Transportation Planning staff continue reviewing Prioritization 8 data and developing recommendations for the allocation of local input points to regional impact projects.
- Finance Department staff are working on the FY26 audits for WPCOG, Hickory-Conover Tourism Development Authority and the Village of Cedar Rock.
- Western Piedmont Workforce Development (WPWD) continues to expand its leadership presence at the state level. Director Charity Patterson Hamber has been elected Vice President of the Executive Directors Council for the North Carolina Association of Workforce Development Boards for the 2026–2028 term, where she will help guide statewide workforce discussions and collaborate with workforce leaders to strengthen North Carolina's workforce system.

Next Meeting

The next Policy Board meeting will be Tuesday, September 22, 2026, hosted by Granite Falls.

Adjournment

Chair Burns thanked Catawba County for their hospitality. Meeting was adjourned at 7:23 pm.

Respectfully submitted,


Randy Burns
Chair
Larry Chapman
Secretary