

WESTERN PIEDMONT COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER & OCTOBER 2024



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What is the Senior Tar Heel Legislature?

Article by Ashelin McCoy



Supported by NCDHHS DAAS

The North Carolina General Assembly created the North Carolina Senior Tar Heel Legislature by passing Senate Bill 479 in July of 1993. The Senior Tar Heel Legislature (STHL) was created to:

- Educate senior adults on the NC legislative process and agenda.
- Promote citizen involvement and advocacy concerning aging issues before the NC General Assembly.
- Assess the legislative needs of older adults by convening a forum modeled after the NC General Assembly.

The STHL reports and makes recommendations to the NC General Assembly. The STHL comprises delegates and alternates representing all counties in NC, and they must meet the requirements of being 60 years old or older and living in the county they represent. Delegates and Alternates representing our four-county service area meet to review local and regional needs and priorities to pursue at the statewide meetings. In addition, each STHL works in its county, advocating for resources and solutions for older adults. The efforts of the STHL are supported by the local Area Agency on Aging and the NC Division of Aging.

All STHL members statewide meet three times yearly to discuss and establish their “legislative priorities” for the year. These priorities are advocated for in the NC General Assembly, where the STHL members travel to Raleigh to meet with representatives. The STHL has been successful with past legislative priorities and its efforts to advocate for needed changes, increased funding, and expanded services for older adults in NC.

- Allocate an additional \$8M in recurring funds for Adult Protective Services to address staff shortages.
- Increase the Senior Center General Purpose appropriation by \$1,265,316 in recurring funds.
- Allocate an additional \$8M in recurring funds for the Home and Community Care Block Grant.
- Allocate an additional \$1.5M in recurring funds for 11 additional long-term care ombudsmen.
- Strengthen long-term care staffing standards.

There are open positions for Alternate for Alexander and Catawba counties. If you are interested, contact Ashelin McCoy at ashelin.mccoy@wpcog.org with the Area Agency on Aging for an application. To learn more about the NC STHL, please visit their website at NC Senior Tar Heel Legislature | NCDHHS.

Helton Retires After Nearly 33 Years of Service

Article by Paul Teague

The WPCOG honored one of its longest-serving team members with an ice cream retirement celebration for Community and Economic Development Administrator Lisa Helton, who has stepped down after nearly 33 years of service.

A native of Caldwell County, Helton worked in various areas within the Community and Economic Development section – including the Essential Single Family Rehabilitation Program, the Urgent Repair Program, the Community and Development Block Grant (CDBG), and the Building Reuse Grant. Helton was the administrator for the City of Morganton's CDBG allocation.

"It has been an honor to service the people and communities of the Unifour alongside wonderful people," Helton said. "I always wanted to have a career where I made a difference, and I feel like I have been able to do that here at WPCOG."

Helton and her husband, Chad, reside in Caldwell County. They have two daughters – Kasie Gibbs and husband, Garrett, and Sydney Helton – and a newborn grandson, Brooks Gibbs.

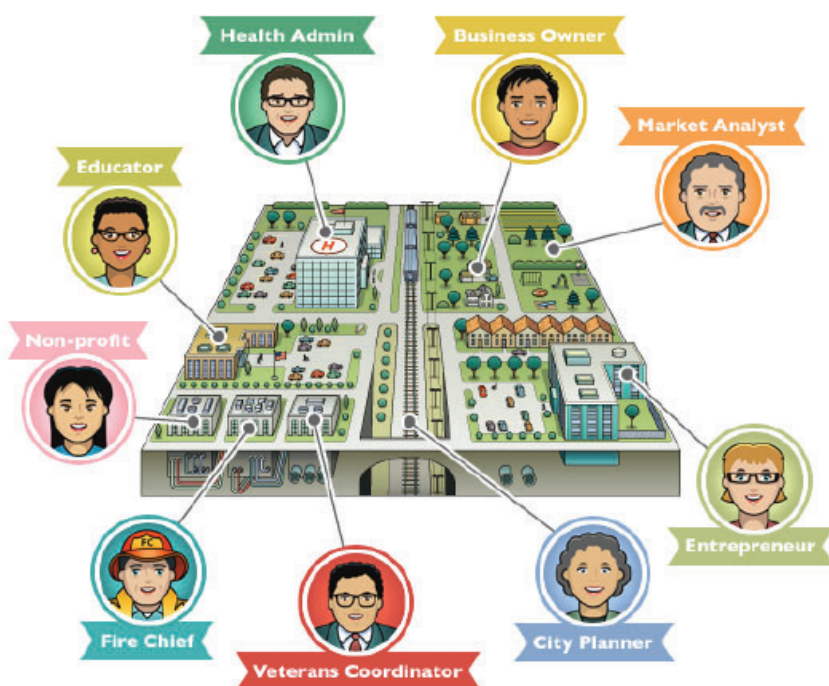


2023 (1-Year) American Community Survey Data Now Available

Article by Taylor Dellinger

On September 12, 2024, the US Census Bureau released data from the 2023 (1-Year) American Community Survey (ACS) for all areas in the United States with populations greater than 65,000. More than 40 topics from the 2023 ACS are available, including educational attainment, housing, employment, commuting, language spoken at home, nativity, ancestry, and selected monthly homeowner costs. The newly released 2023 ACS data is on the US Census Bureau website (www.census.gov). 2023 American Community Survey data summaries for the Hickory-Morganton-Lenoir MSA, Burke County, Caldwell County, and Catawba County are also available for download in the data services (regional data) section of Western Piedmont Council of Governments website (www.wpcog.org/regional-data). For more information about the 2023 American Community Survey, contact Senior Data Analyst Taylor Dellinger at 828.485.4233 or taylor.dellinger@wpcog.org. Five-year (2019-2023) regional ACS data is scheduled for release in December.

The US Census Bureau's American Community Survey is a vital source of information that helps communities, businesses, and state and local governments invest, provide services, and plan for the future. With statistics on age, income level, education, occupation, and veteran status, the ACS enables decision-makers to fund school-lunch programs appropriately, place new hospitals, build new businesses, and take other actions leading to healthy towns and cities.



Housing Choice Voucher (Section 8) Waiting List Update

Article by Viveca Huffman

Western Piedmont Council of Governments Regional Housing Authority (RHA) opened its Housing Choice Voucher (Section 8) waiting list on Monday, July 1, 2024. After 26 days of open enrollment, the RHA closed the waiting list on July 26, due to wait list capacity.

The online pre-application asked only 16 basic information questions. Pre-applications were evaluated for eligibility and then placed in order according to preference points. Points are assigned by:

- **Residency** (applicants who live or work in Alexander, Caldwell, Burke, and Catawba counties)
- **Disability** (certified through a knowledgeable professional or Social Security paperwork)
- **Veteran status** (documented with DD214)
- **Homelessness** (verified by an agency assisting the homeless)

Applicants must be income-eligible for the program. Approximately 300 pre-applicants were determined to be over-income for the program. Now that the pre-application assessments are complete, applicants can find their waitlist number at <https://housing.wpcog.net/>. This number will change monthly when the top 75 applicants are selected from the waiting list and receive a congratulations letter notifying them that they have reached the top of the list.

Along with the congratulations letter, applicants will be mailed a paper application. The RHA gives 15 business days to complete the forms and return them with the necessary documents. These documents include pay stubs, child support, birth certificates, and social security cards. Once RHA staff evaluates the information, qualified applicants are invited to a briefing where they will receive a voucher and can begin their housing search.

For more information, contact Viveca Huffman at viveca.huffman@wpcog.org or 828 485 4241.



Fall 2024 EIN Highlights Hickory MSA Results from the 2021 American Community Survey

Article by Taylor Dellinger

The fall issue of the Economic Indicators Newsletter (EIN), scheduled to be released in early November, will address Hickory Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) unemployment rates, Hickory Metro average annual wages, and Hickory MSA 2023 income and poverty, educational attainment, and health insurance coverage results from the American Community Survey (ACS).

Highlights include:

- The Hickory MSA's unemployment rate increased from 3.4% in July 2023 to 4.1% in July 2024.
- Between July 2023 and July 2024, the estimated number of employed persons decreased from 169,497 to 167,222 (-2,275), while the civilian labor force fell from 175,546 to 174,437 (-1,109).
- Hickory MSA State gross tax collections grew from \$197.8 million in 2019 to \$286.0 million in 2023.
- Over 81% of Hickory MSA workers in 2023 received income through private sector wage and salary jobs.
- About 4.5% of Hickory MSA workers were self-employed. ACS results indicated that the majority of NC MSAs had a higher percentage of self-employed workers than the Hickory MSA.
- Close to 14.4% of Hickory MSA workers are government employees.
- The average Hickory MSA household income from earnings is \$81,070. The Hickory MSA was one of seven North Carolina Metros with mean household income from earnings between \$80,000 and \$90,000.
- Only the Pinehurst (40.2%) and Wilmington (37.9%) Metros had a higher percentage of households receiving Social Security than the Hickory MSA (37.1%).
- The number of persons below the poverty level in the Hickory MSA decreased 4.4% from 51,336 (14.3% poverty rate) in 2018 to 49,083 (13.6% poverty rate) in 2023. The under age 18, African-American, Hispanic, and White, not
- Hispanic groups experienced decreases in the number of persons below the poverty level between 2018 and 2023.
- The number of persons over 25 in the Hickory MSA with an attainment level of "Bachelor's Degree" grew from 30,711 in 2013 to 38,960 in 2023. The 8,249 increase is the most of any Hickory MSA educational attainment category.
- In 2023, the Hickory MSA had the third lowest percentage of persons over age 25 with an attainment level of high school or higher (86.8%) among the State's 15 metro areas.
- In 2023, the Hickory MSA had second lowest percentage of persons 25 and older with a bachelor's degree or higher (21.1%) among the State's 15 metro areas.
- The percentage of Hickory MSA population that has health insurance coverage increased from 88.7% in 2018 to 89.4% in 2023.
- The Hickory MSA had an estimated 38,363 persons (10.6% of population) without health insurance as of 2023.

The EIN is produced quarterly and is a publication of the Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board, and is available digitally. To join the EIN subscription list, please go to www.wpcog.org and click on the "Sign up for the EIN" hyperlink. For questions concerning the EIN, please contact Taylor Dellinger, Senoir Data Analyst at 828-485-4233 or by email taylor.dellinger@wpcog.org.

Enhancing Accessibility to Forge Pathways for Mobility

Article by Casey Fullbright

The Transportation Department recently conducted a small Community Mobility Assessment in the Ridgeview community on Friday, September 13th. The initial assessment aims to pique interest and gather preliminary feedback from residents about their transportation needs. Participants included community members, representatives from Catawba Health, and the WPCOG Transportation Department, who came together to share their valuable insights. Through surveys and discussions, we were able to highlight various areas that require attention, ensuring that the voices of local community members were heard and considered in future planning.

Key findings from the assessment revealed a strong desire for increased lighting throughout the community, which is essential for enhancing safety, particularly in pedestrian-heavy areas. Additionally, participants emphasized the need for improved pedestrian infrastructure, including sidewalks and crosswalks that will seamlessly connect to the historic Ridgeview Walk, which is nearing completion. This project aims to create a cohesive pedestrian network, making it easier and safer for residents to navigate the area. Ensuring full accessibility for all residents is a top priority, as these enhancements will significantly improve safety and connectivity, benefiting the community.

As we move forward, we are excited to announce that a full assessment is planned for this fall. The full assessment will provide an invaluable opportunity to gather more detailed feedback and insights from the residents, allowing us to delve deeper into the unique transportation issues that arise in our small local communities. Engaging with residents on these critical topics will be vital in shaping a more accessible and connected Ridgeview.

Western NC Infrastructure Updates

Article by Casey Fullbright

In the aftermath of Hurricane Helene, Western North Carolina faces several infrastructure challenges due to heavy rainfall and flooding. NCDOT is working to identify and update road closures. NCDOT released <https://drivenc.gov>, an interactive map where closures and incidents are cataloged. As of the latest updates from NCDOT regarding the aftermath of Hurricane Helene in Western North Carolina:

1. **Road Closures:** NCDOT has identified several road closures due to flooding and debris. They are actively working to clear blocked routes and restore normal traffic conditions.
2. **Damage Assessments:** Crews are conducting assessments of highways, bridges, and local roads to determine the extent of the damage, including checking for structural integrity and any necessary repairs.
3. **Emergency Repairs:** Immediate repairs are prioritized on major thoroughfares and critical access routes to ensure emergency services can operate effectively.
4. **Traffic Alerts:** NCDOT has issued alerts to inform the public about hazardous conditions, detours, and ongoing maintenance work.
5. **Long-Term Planning:** The agency is discussing potential long-term infrastructure improvements, including upgrades to drainage systems and enhancements to road resilience, to better withstand future storms.

NCDOT recommends checking its official website and social media channels for the most current information for real-time updates and specific road conditions. Overall, while the full extent of the damage is still being assessed, it is clear that infrastructure in Western North Carolina experienced significant stress, highlighting the need for ongoing improvements to enhance resilience against future storms.

Workforce Reentry Simulation

Article by Charity Patterson Hamber

On September 20, 2024, the Western Piedmont Workforce Development staff and the Western Piedmont NCWorks Career Centers participated in an eye-opening experience at a Reentry Simulation. The simulation was organized by Goodwill Industries of Northwest NC and Project Reentry in partnership with the NC Department of Adult Correction, Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board, NCWorks, and The Chamber of Catawba County.

The simulation provided a realistic view of individuals' experiences and barriers when returning home after incarceration. All participants were put in the shoes of someone returning home and gained insight into the perspectives of returning citizens. Participants then discovered innovative ways to serve and assist individuals with their transition back to the community.



North Carolina Association of Workforce Development Boards Annual Meeting

Article by Charity Patterson Hamber

Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board members and staff attended the North Carolina Association of Workforce Development Boards Annual meeting at the NCWorks Partnership Conference held at the Koury Convention Center on October 9, 2024. Many insightful presenters gave critical information on serving the needs of businesses in North Carolina.



WPCOG Assists Burke County in Closing out Meritor Project

Article by Paul Teague

With the assistance of WPCOG staff, Burke County has successfully closed out its NC Commerce Building Reuse Grant on behalf of Meritor Heavy Vehicle Systems.



Located in Morganton, Meritor manufactures heavy vehicle auto components. The company was acquired by Cummins in 2022.

The \$200,000 grant assisted Meritor in upgrading its Morganton facility. The company created 25 new, full-time jobs at the location. The jobs are verified and maintained to fulfill the grant requirements.

The Meritor project is one of several Building Reuse Grants that the WPCOG has assisted Burke County and the City of Morganton with in recent years.

2024 Annual RHA Landlord Information Workshop



Western Piedmont
Council of Governments

Regional Housing Authority

2024 ANNUAL LANDLORD INFORMATION WORKSHOP

Western Piedmont Council of Governments Office
1880 2nd Ave NW | Hickory, NC 28601

November 20th, 2024

9:00 am - 11:00 am

**All current & interested landlords and
property managers are invited to attend.**

- Breakfast
- HCV Program Updates
- Q&A with Housing Specialists

RSVP:

<https://form.jotform.com/242524869512158>

Email: grace.garnett@wpcog.org

Call: 828.485.4227



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



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