

2022 WPCOG STRATEGIC PLAN



About the Western Piedmont Council of Governments (WPCOG)

The WPCOG is a regional governmental agency governed by and serving the 28 local governments in Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, and Catawba Counties. The WPCOG provides a range of services to local governments and residents throughout the region. Those services, departments, and programs include administrative and human resources services to local governments, Area Agency on Aging, Community & Economic Development, Community & Regional Planning, financial administration for local governments, Regional Public Housing Authority, Workforce Development Board, and many other programs.

The WPCOG was established in 1968 by its local governments and state law provides that a council of governments can exercise any authority that a local government delegates except the power of eminent domain and taxation. The WPCOG seeks to fulfill its mission to serve local governments by providing services for municipalities and counties in a variety of areas.

Strategic Planning Process

The Policy Board is the governing board for the WPCOG and it initiated a strategic planning process in 2020 to ensure the best performance of the organization. That process began with an assessment with local governments and various stakeholders throughout the region. It included surveys, group meetings and stakeholder interviews to collect key insight about the role of the WPCOG and the needs of the region. An assessment report was generated and presented to the Policy Board and the following strategies were developed based on the input and conversations that followed.

Community and Regional Marketing

The economy for the region has grown modestly after severe contraction from 2001 through the Great Recession. The population growth for the region is stagnant with most counties experiencing minor decreases from the 2020 Census. The labor force is decreasing for the region and the nation. The availability of trained talent is a competitive issue for every community and region. The nearby Charlotte region continues to experience significant growth in jobs and population. However, our region is not well-known beyond our four counties despite its economic impact on the state.

Strategies

- Market the region's proximity to the Charlotte region as an advantage to attract new workers and residents.
- Develop specific methods that should be employed regionally and on a community basis to attract new people and leverage the appealing aspects of the region. Consider collaborative approaches that supplement existing marketing efforts.
- Consider the recruitment of retirees as part of the approach to increase the regional population and spur economic growth.

Responsible Parties and Partners

- Local governments
- Economic Development Corporations/Commissions
- Chambers of Commerce
- Tourism Offices
- WPCOG

Healthy Housing

The demand for affordable and market rate housing is significant for the region. While this challenge is not unique for our region, it can become a barrier to economic growth and good quality of life. In addition, U.S. Census Bureau data shows the region has a high rate of older housing which can be associated with substandard housing conditions.

Strategies

- Develop a regional housing plan or a toolkit of policy initiatives for local governments to consider for increasing market-rate and affordable housing construction.
- Assist local governments with efforts to promote housing growth that facilitates a population increase of 1-2% annually.
- Continue efforts to provide new affordable housing through the HOME Consortium, tax credit projects, and other initiatives.
- Continue efforts to rehabilitate homes for low to moderate-income families through federal and state grant programs.
- Assess the status of vacant housing in the region and consider additional actions to meet the need.
- Encourage more local governments to increase code enforcement efforts to protect neighborhood property values and provide adequate living conditions.
- Continue efforts to increase the number of rental housing choice vouchers with the WPCOG Regional Housing Authority.
- Engage in conversations to consolidate housing authorities with the WPCOG Regional Housing Authority to provide improved client service and better efficiencies.

Responsible Parties and Partners

- Local governments
- WPCOG

Utilities Infrastructure

Utilities are a key component of success or failure for a community to grow. The costs to operate and expand water and wastewater utility systems continue to increase. Collaboration among local utilities presents opportunities to reduce costs, maintain operations, and expand services with inflationary costs and in an increasingly complex regulatory environment.

Strategies

- Form a Regional Utilities Task Force to increase communication and collaboration between local government utility systems.
- Encourage cooperative agreements for coordination of investments and cost-sharing arrangements for operations.
- Facilitate discussions for merging of utility systems when it serves the interests of both parties.
- Continue efforts to obtain grant funding to improve and expand water and wastewater infrastructure.

Responsible Parties and Partners

- Local governments
- WPCOG
- Engineers

WPCOG Staff Succession Planning

The WPCOG and its local governments have benefited from long tenured and quality staff at the WPCOG. Several key positions have been replaced in recent years with success. However, there are additional key personnel that can retire soon and careful planning must continue to ensure quality service is uninterrupted.

Strategies

- As funding permits, hire a new Community and Economic Development Director to work alongside the Assistant Executive Director to address the transition that will occur in a few years.
- Develop career step opportunities for staff to retain high performing personnel.
- Continue cross-training efforts among staff to prepare for normal vacancies and retirements.
- Continue efforts to improve the diversity of the staff.

Responsible Parties and Partners

- WPCOG Policy Board, management, and staff

Workforce Development

Workforce development is an important issue for the economic health of a region. Significant disruption to the training needs of our workforce and a decreasing labor force participation rate amplifies the need to respond to changing needs. The WPCOG is responsible for oversight, planning and guidance of the NCWorks Career Centers that provide job seeker and employer resources. Fast changing labor conditions require greater flexibility for our NC Works Career Center staff and careful analysis about job growth is needed for effective strategies to train job seekers and recruit new industry.

Strategies

- Update the Industry Growth Analysis to provide the latest information for business and local government leaders to use for decisions regarding investment and policies.
- Consider constructing a regional NC Works Career Center at the WPCOG campus to reduce operational costs, provide staff flexibility, and facilitate greater community outreach efforts.
- Seek funding from the General Assembly to construct the regional NC Works Career Center and utilize lease payments from the state to cover the debt service for construction of the facility.
- Seek funding for a mobile workforce unit to provide on-site services for job seekers and employers throughout the region and in underserved communities.

Responsible Parties and Partners

- Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board
- WPCOG
- Local governments
- Community colleges
- NC Department of Commerce
- Other workforce partners

Weather Radar Service

The spatial area located between Charlotte, Hickory, and the Piedmont Triad, in the western half of North Carolina is not adequately covered by National Weather Service (NWS) radars. The current radar system cannot see lower altitude weather (below 7,500 feet) due to the radar locations in the Greenville-Spartanburg (South Carolina) and Blacksburg (Virginia) areas. The project area is inadequately protected due to gaps in radar coverage. This causes the NWS to issue warnings based on incomplete data, including only using the rotation of the storms at high altitudes. The NWS is unable to promptly detect dangerous weather conditions and warn the public promptly. That delay increases the risk for property damage, injuries, and loss of life. The recently adopted state budget includes a provision requiring the NC Division of Emergency Management to work with the affected COGs to study the feasibility of improving weather radar service.

Strategies

- Work with the NC Division of Emergency Management to complete the study regarding the need and feasibility to improve weather radar coverage for the region.
- Upon completion of the study, seek funding from the General Assembly, and potentially the federal government, to construct additional radar sites in the area.
- Identify ongoing funding requirements for the new radar sites that might require appropriations from the state or local governments.

Responsible Parties and Partners

- WPCOG, Piedmont Triad Regional Council, and Centralina Regional Council
- Local governments
- General Assembly
- NC Division of Emergency Management

Expansion to WPCOG Office

The current WPCOG office was constructed and occupied in 2011. The 20,000 square foot facility has been a very positive asset for the region and its local governments. While additional space was constructed for the staffing of the WPCOG, less than 10% of capacity remains for new staff. As the WPCOG grows to serve its local governments and administer federal and state programs, new office space is required. The WPCOG purchased additional land to accommodate a building expansion on the existing site.

Strategies

- Consider constructing an addition to the WPCOG office to provide for future staff and program growth.
- Seek funding from the General Assembly for the construction of the addition.
- If funding from the General Assembly is unavailable, use financing to construct the addition.
- Construct the addition in conjunction with the creation of a new regional NC Works Career Center.

Responsible Parties and Partners

- WPCOG
- General Assembly
- Local governments

New and Expanded Services to Local Governments

The WPCOG has a strong history of serving its local governments as its priority. The comprehensive range of services provided by the WPCOG places it among the best councils of governments in the nation. Continued efforts, identification, and implementation of new services and expansion of existing services will benefit local governments. The benefits for local governments include cost savings, improved efficiencies, effectiveness, and capacity sharing among local governments, etc.

Strategies

- Develop and provide local and cost-effective supervisor training for local government staff.
- Continue to expand code enforcement and stormwater services.
- Assist local governments with the planning, implementation, and administration of American Rescue Plan Act projects.
- Explore the feasibility of establishing a pre-trial release program for low-risk defendants that will reduce jail operation costs for local governments.
- Explore other potential services to assist local governments.

Responsible Parties and Partners

- WPCOG
- Local governments
- Criminal justice system partners