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News & Updates

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RHA Completes Annual Updates to Its Administrative Plans

At the beginning of each year, WPCOG Regional Housing Authority (RHA) staff begin reviewing their plans for new regulation and policy updates that need to be made. WPCOG has three plans: the RHA's Administrative Plan, the Family Self-Sufficiency's Action Plan, and the WPCOG - Valdese Public Housing Admission and Continued Occupancy Policy (ACOP). The plans contain US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) regulations along with agency policies. These plans are crucial to the operation of all programs because they serve as the guidebooks on how the RHA implements HUD's regulations.

WPCOG completes its policy revisions in the first quarter each year. A public hearing is held to give tenants and members of the community the opportunity to ask questions about any of the upcoming changes, followed by a presentation to the Policy Board requesting approval. This year the public hearing was held on April 1, 2026, and Policy Board approval followed on April 28. The newly approved changes will become effective on July 1 of this year. However, if minor modifications are needed throughout the year, they can be made at any point.

Most of the changes for 2026 - 2027 are HOTMA-related. HOTMA is a law that Congress signed on July 29, 2016, which made numerous changes to statutes governing HUD programs. Even though the timelines for HOTMA implementation continue to change, PHAs are still required to create a plan with the new regulations. Although HUD has extended the mandatory HOTMA compliance dates several times, agencies must have a plan ready to put into effect when HUD gives the go-ahead. As required, the RHA included pre- and post-HOTMA chapters in the administrative plan and ACOP to include the HOTMA rules.

WPCOG's RHA also offers a Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) Program called REACH, which has its own action plan. This year there were policy changes, not regulation changes. In the summer of 2022, HUD implemented its first significant FSS program changes in more than 25 years. A new component of the FSS program is an account that only receives funds when FSS participants forfeit their escrows, typically following voucher termination. Then those funds can then be used to help other active participants in the program who need assistance to overcome a barrier. Because this fund and its uses have only been in effect for three years, most PHAs are still trying to figure out the best practices for using the funds. The WPCOG FSS action plan added some new limited options to use these funds such as one-time debt assistance for those willing to participate in credit counseling, as well as assistance in obtaining a small secured loan to help establish credit.

The WPCOG Administrative Plan, the FSS Action Plan, and the ACOP are available at www.wpcog.org. For more information, please contact Elizabeth Moncrief, Assistant RHA Director, at 828.485.4244 elizabeth.moncrief@wpcog.org or Kim Duncan, FSS Coordinator, at 828 485 4299 kim.duncan@wpcog.org.

Greater Hickory MPO Launches 2055 Metropolitan Transportation Plan Update

The Greater Hickory Metropolitan Planning Organization (GHMPO) has officially begun work on the 2055 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) — the region's long-range blueprint for guiding transportation investments and priorities over the next three decades.

The MTP will identify the region's future transportation needs, challenges, and opportunities, ensuring that upcoming investments support community goals, economic growth, safety, mobility, and overall quality of life across the Greater Hickory area.

Throughout the planning process, the GHMPO will collaborate closely with local governments, partner agencies, stakeholders, and residents to evaluate current transportation conditions and shape a shared vision for the future. Public input will be a central component of the update, with multiple opportunities for community members to provide feedback and help guide decision-making.

As the 2055 MTP update gets underway, the GHMPO looks forward to working with the community and regional partners to build a transportation system that is safe, connected, reliable, and responsive to the needs of a growing and evolving region.

Article by Averí Ritchie, Transportation Planning Director

Charity Patterson Hamber Elected Vice President of the NC Association of Workforce Development Boards Executive Directors Council



Charity Patterson Hamber, Director of the Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board, has been elected Vice President of the Executive Directors Council of the North Carolina Association of Workforce Development Boards (NCAWDB) for the 2026–2028 term.

In this statewide leadership role, Charity will help guide strategic workforce discussions and collaborate with executive directors from local workforce development boards, the Division of Workforce Solutions, and the NCWorks Commission. Her work will support efforts to strengthen services, align resources, and advance workforce initiatives across North Carolina.

Charity will serve alongside:

- Anna London, President – Charlotte Works Workforce Development Board
- Lou Grillo, Second Vice President – Kerr-Tar Workforce Development Board

To learn more about the North Carolina Association of Workforce Development Boards, visit www.ncawdb.org.

WPWDB Partners with CVCC Communication Club for Interactive Interview Skills Session



The Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board recently partnered with Catawba Valley Community College's Communication Club to deliver an interactive session on interview skills and workplace communication.

Students explored strategies for answering interview questions with confidence, highlighting their strengths, and demonstrating professionalism in a variety of workplace scenarios. The session encouraged discussion, practical application, and reflection on the role strong communication plays in today's workforce.

We appreciated the opportunity to engage with such motivated students and are grateful to the Communication Club for its commitment to preparing the next generation of talent. Partnerships like this help build meaningful pathways to success and strengthen the future workforce of the Western Piedmont region.

Article by Charity Patterson Hamber, Workforce Development Board Director

Vanessa De La Cruz Sanchez Success Story

During her high school years, Vanessa De La Cruz Sanchez often felt uncertain about her future. She dreamed of entering the medical field, but academic challenges made those goals seem increasingly out of reach. While working part-time at a Boost Mobile store to support herself, Vanessa saw few clear pathways to the career she envisioned.

Everything shifted when she learned about the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) scholarship program. With encouragement from her teachers and guidance through the application process, Vanessa was connected to resources that helped transform her aspirations into achievable steps. Support from her family, educators, and program staff provided the stability and confidence she needed to move forward.

As she completed the CNA program through the WIOA scholarship, Vanessa's life began to change. The training opened doors she once thought were closed, and her determination

grew stronger with each milestone. Today, she serves as a Unit Coordinator at Catawba Valley Medical Center and continues working toward her goal of becoming a Certified Nursing Assistant. The experience has given her a renewed sense of purpose and direction.

For Vanessa, the WIOA scholarship meant far more than financial assistance. It offered the opportunity to pursue higher education, build a meaningful career, and create a future that once felt out of reach. As the first person in her family to attend college, she is forging a new path—one defined by resilience, opportunity, and the belief that her dreams are within reach.

Article by Charity Patterson Hamber, Workforce Development Board Director



World Elder Abuse Awareness Day



Since June 15, 2006, World Elder Abuse Awareness Day has served as a global call to action to recognize, prevent, and respond to elder abuse. The day raises awareness about the many forms abuse can take and empowers communities with the knowledge and courage needed to report concerns. Each year, reports of elder abuse continue to rise. According to the National Center on Elder Abuse, at least one in ten community-dwelling older adults experienced some form of abuse in the past year. Yet for every case reported, an estimated 24 incidents go undetected.

Elder abuse can occur in many forms, including physical, sexual, psychological, and financial abuse, as well as neglect, abandonment, and verbal threats. It is often difficult to recognize, and while the abuser may be a stranger, it is far more common for the perpetrator to be someone the victim knows—such as a spouse, family member, caregiver, or friend. Individuals at highest risk include those with dementia, women, and adults of advanced age. In many cases, the person experiencing abuse may be unable to communicate what is happening, making it essential for others to recognize the signs and take action.

If you suspect that someone you know is being abused, report it immediately.

- If the situation is life-threatening, call 911.
- To report suspected abuse, contact Adult Protective Services at the Department of Social Services or your local law enforcement agency in the county where the adult resides.
- For concerns involving a nursing facility, contact your Regional Ombudsman or the Division of Health Service Regulation in North Carolina.

The Area Agency on Aging also offers programs and resources designed to reduce the risk of abuse and support older adults and caregivers. To learn more about available services in your community, visit www.wpcog.org.

On June 15, 2026, we invite the entire community to stand together against elder abuse by wearing purple in recognition of World Elder Abuse Awareness Day.

To learn more about World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, please visit:

The NC Division of Aging and Adult Services

- [The NC Division of Aging and Adult Services](#)
- [NC Adult Protective Services](#)
- [Long Term Care Ombudsman](#) (Advocacy for Residents in Long Term Care Facilities)

The National Center of Elder Abuse Resources

- [Publications](#)

Area Agencies on Aging

- [Directory](#)

The NC Division of Social Services

- [Department of Social Services Directory](#)

To report elder abuse contact your local

Department of Social Services:

Alexander County

828-632-1080

Catawba County

828-695-5600

Burke County

828-764-9600

Caldwell County

828-426-8200

Article by Michele Francois, Regional Ombudsman

WPCOG Advancing Economic Growth and Community Revitalization Across the Region



Paragon Films Rail Infrastructure Project Nears Completion

The Western Piedmont Council of Governments (WPCOG) is proud to support the successful completion of the Paragon Films Rail Infrastructure Project in Alexander County. Funded through the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Economic Development program, the project invested \$222,375 to construct approximately 763 linear feet of new rail spur infrastructure within the Alexander County Industrial Park.

Located adjacent to NC Highway 90 and the Alexander County Railroad, the new spur connects directly to the existing rail network serving Paragon Films. The project area—positioned between established industrial facilities and previously developed rail spurs—was strategically selected to minimize impacts on surrounding properties while maximizing opportunities for future industrial expansion.

This rail investment has enabled Paragon Films to expand its warehouse capacity and operations to meet growing market demand. Without the project, the company's planned growth would have been significantly limited. By improving rail access and freight capacity, the project strengthens the region's industrial infrastructure, supports long-term economic development, and enhances the competitiveness of Alexander County's manufacturing sector.

Project closeout activities began this month, marking the final phase of implementation for this successful economic development initiative. As the project moves into closeout, WPCOG celebrates its partnership with Alexander County, Paragon Films, and state and local stakeholders whose collaboration made this important investment possible. The rail spur represents a meaningful step forward in supporting economic growth and industrial expansion in Alexander County.

Newton Central Recreation Revitalization Project Breaks Ground

In March 2026, the City of Newton officially broke ground on the Newton Central Recreation Revitalization Project, marking an important milestone in the preservation and revitalization of the historic former Central High School campus.



Supported by **\$5,950,000** in CDBG Neighborhood Revitalization funding, the project will transform the long-vacant school into a modern recreation and community center serving residents of the surrounding low- to moderate-income neighborhood.

Central High School once served as the only African American high school in Catawba County prior to desegregation and remains an important cultural and historical landmark for the community. Following years of vacancy and deterioration, the City of Newton acquired the property and has worked alongside community partners to reimagine the site as a space for recreation, gathering, and community engagement.

The revitalization project will preserve the site's historic significance while creating accessible recreation opportunities, meeting space, and programming for area residents. Once completed, the facility will serve as a catalyst for neighborhood reinvestment and community pride in central Newton.

WPCOG is honored to assist the City of Newton in advancing this transformative project and preserving an important piece of local history for future generations.

For more information about WPCOG's grant administration, economic development, and community revitalization services, or to discuss potential project opportunities, please contact Ben Willis at ben.willis@wpcog.org.

Articles by Kyle Case, Community & Economic Development Manager

**WPCOG Assists the Town of Peletier Through
CAMA Land Use Planning Process**



The Western Piedmont Council of Governments (WPCOG), in partnership with the Eastern Carolina Council (ECC), recently completed the Town of Peletier's Comprehensive Land Use Plan, a planning document developed in accordance with the requirements of North Carolina's Coastal Area Management Act (CAMA).

CAMA Land Use Plans serve as a foundational planning tool for coastal communities, helping local governments evaluate growth trends, establish a community vision, identify future land use priorities, and address issues related to natural resources, infrastructure, resiliency, and coastal management. The planning process requires extensive coordination with the North Carolina Division of Coastal Management and incorporates public engagement, policy development, future land use planning, and state agency review.

WPCOG served as the primary planning agency, responsible for drafting the plan, facilitating the planning process, coordinating with stakeholders, preparing required plan components, and guiding the project through the CAMA review and approval process. The resulting plan provides the Town of Peletier with a clear framework for future decision-making while ensuring compliance with state coastal planning requirements.

The project reflects WPCOG's growing capacity to provide comprehensive planning services to regional councils across the state. Through partnerships with fellow Councils of Governments, WPCOG continues to support communities across North Carolina with comprehensive planning, land use planning, downtown revitalization, parks and recreation planning, and other community development initiatives."

Article by Daniel Odom, Planning Manager

Day One Families Fund: Helping Families Take the First Step Home

When families experience a housing crisis, timing and support matter. Through the Day One Families Fund, our Homeless Response Team provides flexible financial assistance to help families overcome immediate barriers and move toward safe, stable housing. Day One was created to fill gaps when traditional community resources are not enough, because one unexpected expense can sometimes stand between a family and housing stability.

Who may qualify?

To be considered for Day One Families Fund assistance, households must:

- Include at least one adult and one child under age 18, or a dependent adult child with documented physical or mental impairments that limit daily functioning.
- Meet HUD's definition of homelessness under Category 1 or Category 4.
- Be enrolled in Coordinated Entry.
- Have barriers to housing that cannot be resolved through existing community resources.

Understanding HUD's Definition of Homelessness

HUD Category 1 – Literally Homeless

A family that lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. This may include households who:

- Are staying in places not meant for human habitation (such as a vehicle, campground, or outside),
- Are living in an emergency shelter, transitional housing, or a hotel/motel paid for by a charitable or government program, or
- Are exiting an institution after 90 days or less, and were experiencing homelessness immediately before entering.

HUD Category 4 – Fleeing Domestic Violence

A family who:

- Is fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence,
- Has no other safe residence available, and
- Lacks the resources or support network to obtain permanent housing.

Funds may assist with things like security deposits, first month's rent, landlord incentives, moving expenses, short-term hotel stays, childcare, car repairs, household setup items, employment-related costs, pet deposits, documentation expenses, storage units, and other housing stabilization needs, but our support doesn't stop there.

In addition to homelessness services, our team also has HUD-certified housing counselors on staff who provide free services, including budget counseling, credit counseling, foreclosure prevention counseling, and first-time homebuyer education. These services help individuals and families strengthen financial stability, build long-term housing success, and often prevent a housing crisis before it ever begins.

Housing stability is about more than finding a place to live. It's about creating pathways to long-term success and making sure families have the tools, resources, and support they need every step of the way.

Interested in learning more?

Please reach out to our team for additional information about available services, eligibility requirements, and how we can help connect families to housing and supportive resources.

Western Piedmont Council of Governments
www.wpcog.org



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