

WESTERN PIEDMONT COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS NEWSLETTER AUGUST 2023

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WPCOG Appoints Chasity Houck as Regional Homelessness Response Manager

Article by Paul Teague

The Western Piedmont Council of Governments (WPCOG) is pleased to announce the appointment of Chasity Houck as the Homelessness Response Manager for the region. Houck's selection marks the first step in the formation of the newly developed Homelessness Response Team, which aims to collaborate closely with area municipal leaders, law enforcement, and nonprofit organizations in Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, and Catawba counties to provide vital resources to the homeless population.

Over the past year, the WPCOG has diligently worked on creating the Homelessness Response Team, engaging in extensive consultations with various stakeholders from all four counties. The valuable insights gathered from these meetings were shared with managers and local elected officials, ultimately leading to the establishment of a comprehensive plan.

Anthony Starr, the Executive Director of the WPCOG, expressed his gratitude for the collaborative process, stating, "Thanks to the strong leadership of our local governments, Chasity Houck and her team will be instrumental in addressing homelessness issues effectively."

The WPCOG Homelessness Response Program is made possible through a \$4.2 million grant from the U.S. Housing and Urban Development HOME American Rescue Plan (HOME-ARP), awarded to the City of Lenoir's HOME Consortium program. Lenoir's HOME Consortium, a regional body comprised of all 28 local governments in Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, and Catawba counties, was originally formed to secure HUD funding to address housing-related challenges. Over the years, the consortium has facilitated numerous initiatives, including down payment assistance for first-time homebuyers, financial support for multi-family housing developers, and funding for nonprofit organizations dedicated to creating affordable housing.



As the first member of the Homelessness Response Team, Houck will play a pivotal role in building, developing, and coordinating the program. The team will include designated homeless specialists for each county, working directly with the homeless population, local law enforcement, and area service providers to ensure homeless individuals receive targeted assistance tailored to their needs.

The WPCOG currently offers several Homelessness Outreach Specialist positions for individuals interested in making a difference and contributing to the region's homelessness response efforts. To apply, please visit www.wpcog.org/career-opportunities.

With Houck at the helm and the collaboration of regional partners, the Western Piedmont Council of Governments is determined to significantly address homelessness and foster a more compassionate and supportive community for all its residents.

GHMPO Advances Towards Safer Transportation with Comprehensive Highway Safety Plan Application

Article by Daniel Odom

The Greater Hickory Metropolitan Planning Organization is pleased to announce its application for funding to complete a Comprehensive Highway Safety Plan through the North Carolina Department of Transportation's Traffic Safety Unit. If funded, the Comprehensive Safety Plan will enhance road safety for all users through a data-driven approach, identifying high-risk areas, proposing targeted solutions, and fostering collaboration with local authorities and historically marginalized communities. This application and potential plan completion illustrate GHMPO support and solidarity with both Safe Streets for All (SS4A) and the North Carolina Vision Zero Initiative, which plans to cut all traffic fatalities and serious injuries in half by 2035 and eliminate traffic fatalities and serious injuries by the year 2050. Please note that this application is still pending, and the GHMPO plans to provide application status updates and potential plan development updates in the coming months.

For more information on the Traffic Safety Unit, Highway Safety Plan, and Safe Streets for all, please visit: <https://www.ncdot.gov/initiatives-policies/safety/traffic-safety/Pages/default.aspx>.

Signs of Dementia



Article by Karen Phoenix

One out of every six people over 65 have early signs of dementia. Could it be you?

Estimates from the National Institutes of Health and other professional organizations indicate that one in six people over 65 have some symptoms of memory loss and dementia. The next time you are in a group of six people, look around and realize how scary that statistic can be. As baby boomers outnumber younger generations, the figures increase to one out of three people with dementia. When you are in a group of three people, look left, look right – if it is not one of them, it is you. Dementia is the third leading cause of death among seniors. More people currently die of Alzheimer's or dementia-related illnesses than those of breast and prostate cancer combined.

With all the scary statistics surrounding dementia, how do you know if your forgetfulness is now something beyond normal aging, and what can you do about it? Look at the information below and see if it helps to clarify Normal aging vs. aging with dementia, as provided by the Alzheimer's Association.

Normal: Sometimes forgetting names or appointments but remembering them later.

Not Normal: Forgetting new information, such as appointments or events.

Normal: Occasional errors with math or financial matters.

Not Normal: Problems following a recipe or instructions for a task.

Normal: Occasionally needing help with new electronics or resetting devices.

Not Normal: Trouble navigating a familiar location or following the rules of interaction.

Normal: Getting confused about a day or date but remembering it later.

Not Normal: Lose track of dates, seasons, and passage of time.

Normal: Having normal age-related vision changes.

Not Normal: Trouble reading, balance issues, trouble judging distance.

Normal: Sometimes have trouble finding the right word or name for something.

Not Normal: New or increased problems finding the right word, problems following a conversation, or repetition of words or stories.

Normal: Misplacing things but remembering to retrace steps to find them.

Not Normal: Placing things in unusual places and unable to retrace steps to return to find them.

Normal: Occasionally making a bad decision or forgetting to perform a routine, like changing the oil in the car.

Not Normal: Changes in judgment or decision-making with money, hygiene, and social graces.

Normal: Sometimes uninterested in events and family functions.

Not Normal: Change in ability to follow a conversation, which leads to withdrawal from interests, social activities, or hobbies. Trouble keeping up with programs or sporting events that were once of interest.

Normal: Upset when your plan or routine changes.

Not Normal: Personality changes such as confusion, depression, suspiciousness, fear, or anxiousness. Very upset with new situations.

If any "Not Normal" situations apply to you, speak with your physician about them. It is best when signs of dementia are found early. Many symptoms may not be related to dementia but infections or other treatable conditions.

Project CARE is a State Funded program to assist caregivers of people with dementia through education, support, access to resources, and occasional respite assistance. Our Project CARE coordinator, Karen Phoenix, is available to talk with you at 828-485-4267 or can be reached at karen.phoenix@wpcog.org.

Workforce Development in the Community

Article by Charity Patterson Hamber



Caldwell County Library Multi-employer Job Fair

NCWorks Career Center – Caldwell, in partnership with the Caldwell County Library - Lenoir Branch and multiple employers, hosted a summer job fair at the Caldwell County Public Library. Many job seekers attended the job fair and left feeling hopeful about connecting with employers and the potential job opportunities available.

Employers were excited to be a part of the job fair and to be given the opportunity to recruit qualified candidates for their positions. NCWorks strives to create and maintain partnerships to collaborate and assist employers and job seekers in need.

Hmong Southeast Puapheej Career Fair

On August 5, 2023, NCWorks Career Center - Catawba attended the Hmong Southeast Puapheej (HSP) Career Fair in Newton, NC. NCWorks provided various materials and information regarding employment opportunities, job search tips, and educational and scholarship opportunities. They also made the participants aware of the virtual workshops offered in the area. All services NCWorks provides are at no cost to the participant.

“It’s Your Right to Vote”

NCWorks Career Center – Catawba attended the “It’s Your Right to Vote” for the formerly incarcerated at the Ridgeview Recreation Center on August 5, 2023, sponsored by The League of Women Voters. The purpose was to inform the formerly incarcerated that they had a right to vote. There were resource tables to assist with obtaining IDs, driver’s licenses, birth certificates, SS cards, job search and training information, and expungements. During the event, speakers were present to share their own inspirational stories.



Perspective of a Regional Housing Authority Intern

Article by Riley Hatton

I am Riley Hatton, a Golden Leaf Scholars Leadership Program (GLSLP) scholar. I am a 21-year-old Alexander County native, and in a few weeks, I will begin my senior year at Western Carolina University (go CATS!), where I am triple majoring in chemistry, biology, and political science. I have two older brothers and three Labrador retrievers.

As a Golden Leaf Scholar, I am required to complete three summer internships. I interned in quality control for labs and production for the past two years. This year, I decided to complete an internship in the political science/human services direction. I began my search with local governments in Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, and Catawba counties. I called nearly 15 organizations but could not find a position. Finally, I was directed by the GLSLP to contact the Western Piedmont Council of Governments Regional Housing Authority because they had hosted a Golden Leaf Scholar before. After speaking with the Director of the Regional Housing Authority, I was accepted as an intern.

I had never heard of the Western Piedmont Council of Governments when I began my internship. I wanted to know what a Regional Housing Authority (RHA) did for the community. I quickly learned that an RHA offers housing choice vouchers (HCV) and a family self-sufficiency program (FSS). I was warned that RHA was a fast paced environment, and it was precisely that. I began by training with a housing specialist who manages the waiting list, where I helped prepare applications for voucher issuance. I also completed many tasks, such as auditing files, processing applications, distributing reports, returning phone calls, creating flyers, and filing.

While each week offered different experiences, my favorite part of this internship was auditing application files to ensure the file was complete. Once an application file is complete, the applicant attends a tenant briefing and receives a voucher, and the area I saw directly impacted the clients.



I struggled the most with public speaking. I had no prior experience, so it was very new. I do not naturally enjoy speaking to people over the phone, but taking phone calls and returning them made me more comfortable dealing directly with our clients. In the end, speaking to the public is where I have seen the most personal growth.

Learning about such an important service that I had no idea even existed was incredibly interesting. This organization's assistance and support to the community was staggering to me. The care and compassion showed our clients and community by the people I had the pleasure of working with were equally astonishing. It would be easy to look at the people we serve as numbers on a list, but this is far from the RHA staff's positive attitude. This internship provided me with the best opportunity to understand what it is like to serve a population truly, and it is something that I will continue to reflect on in the years to come.

The Southern Conover Small Area Plan

Article by John Wear

The Southern Conover Small Area Plan will be a comprehensive strategy for sustainable development that balances growth with historical preservation and utilizes the existing strengths of the district to create a thriving and mixed-use community. The evolution of the project began from the initial plan of an expansion of the Bolick National Historic District in 2019 to a more comprehensive Southern Conover Small Area Plan in 2023. The key features of the plan will be:

- The addition of new housing and business options in Conover. This focus on urban development and growth will allow for a mix of residential and commercial spaces.
- Preserving historic industry by maintaining or repurposing historic buildings and structures, keeping the district's industrial heritage.
- Tying together existing assets like Conover City Park and the downtown area. This integration could enhance the overall cohesiveness and attractiveness of the district, making it a more vibrant and accessible space for both residents and visitors.
- Quadrants and Specific Areas: The plan focuses on the Northwest and Southwest quadrants of 2nd Ave SE and Conover Blvd and the areas around the Southern Furniture Company within the Southeast quadrant. These areas are likely to experience concentrated development and revitalization efforts.
- Residential Infill: The plan emphasizes the importance of utilizing vacant or underutilized lots for residential development. Infill could include various housing types, such as single-family homes, small duplexes and quadplexes, townhomes, and multifamily structures, all tailored to the community's specific needs.
- Connectivity: The proposal suggests new roadways and pathways to improve district connectivity and link it with other parts of the town. This connectivity enhances accessibility and fosters a more integrated urban environment.
- Rejuvenation of Existing Buildings: The plan's focus on reusing and revitalizing existing buildings ensures that the historical and architectural heritage of the area is preserved while allowing for modern functions.
- Gateways and Entrances: By creating gateways at the entrances to the city, the plan can make a visual statement and provide a sense of arrival for residents and visitors alike.
- Parks and Open Spaces: The expansion of existing parks and the city cemetery contribute to creating a more livable and attractive environment.
- Business Spaces: Allocating new spaces for businesses of various types diversifies the local economy and enhances the vibrancy of the district.
- Honoring Heritage: The plan's commitment to respecting the Bolick Historic District and the area's industrial and manufacturing heritage is essential for maintaining the district's identity and character.

It's crucial for such plans to consider community input and engagement to ensure that the outcome aligns with the needs and aspirations of the residents and stakeholders. On Tuesday, August 1st, 2023, the Western Piedmont Council of Governments and the City of Conover held a public input meeting for the Southern Conover Small Area Plan. Throughout the planning and implementation process, involving the community, stakeholders, and residents can lead to a more effective small area plan that reflects the needs of the people who call the area home.





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