

Minutes
Western Piedmont Council of Governments
Bimonthly Policy Board Meeting
Tuesday, January 24, 2023
Fyreside Taproom and Eatery, Caldwell County

Members Present

Joseph L. Gibbons, Vice Chair
George Holleman, Treasurer
Larry Chapman, Secretary
Bob Floyd, Past Chair
Larry Yoder, At-Large
Randy Burns, At-Large
Cole Setzer, At-Large
Marla Thompson, At-Large
Johnnie Carswell, Alternate
Robbie Wilkie, Alternate
Ronnie Setzer
Mike Labrose
Donald Robinson
Dale Sherrill
Ramona Duncan
Joie Fulbright
Jim Green, Alternate
Dennis Anthony
Barbara Pennell
Dr. Caryl Burns
Tracy Townsend, Alternate
Mike Smith, Alternate
Phyllis Pennington, Alternate
Jerry Hodge
Beverly Danner, Alternate
Amparo R. Alfaro
Erisha Lipford
Helen Chestnut
Jeanna Price
Malla Vue
Tonia Stephenson
Tommy Luckadoo

Local Government/Agency

Lenoir
Taylorsville
Hudson
Town of Cedar Rock
Alexander County
Burke County
Catawba County
Long View
Burke County
Caldwell County
Cajah's Mountain
Caldwell County
Catawba
Claremont
Connelly Springs
Conover
Conover
Drexel
Gamewell
Granite Falls
Granite Falls
Hildebran
Long View
Newton
Newton
Appointed
Appointed
Appointed
Appointed
Appointed
Appointed
Appointed

Members Absent

Jill Patton, Chair
Kelvin Gregory
Sheila Perkins
David Williams, Alternate

Hickory
Brookford
Glen Alpine
Hickory

Members Absent (continued)

Ben Honeycutt	Hildebran
Holly Crafton-Lay, Alternate	Maiden
Chris Jernigan	Morganton
Allen Spencer	Rhodhiss
Wayne Annas	Rutherford College
Yates Jensen, Alternate	Rutherford College
Bobby Mosteller	Sawmills
Charlie Watts	Valdese

Guests/Others Present

Randy Feirerabend	Cajah's Mountain
Donald Duncan	Caldwell County
Ashley Bolick	Caldwell County
Donnie Potter	Caldwell County
Jimmy Harrison	Caldwell County
Abby Rich	Caldwell County
Sherri Bradshaw	Drexel
Bonnie Caudle	Gamewell
Jon Greer	Hudson
Scott Hildebran	Lenoir
Danny Hipps	Maiden

WPCOG Staff Present

Anthony Starr, Executive Director
Sherry Long, Assistant Executive Director
David Pugh, Director of Administrative Services and Human Resources
Andrea Roper, Director of Finance
Ben Willis, Director of Community and Economic Development
Alison Adams, Director of Community and Regional Planning
Charity Patterson Hamber, Director of Workforce Development
Jason Toney, Communications Specialist
Elizabeth Hilliard, Executive Administrative Assistant
Curt Willis, Code Enforcement Office

Call to Order/Welcome

A regular meeting of the WPCOG Policy Board was called to order at 6:45 pm by Vice Chair Gibbons. It was noted that Chair Patton was not able to attend the meeting. Vice Chair Gibbons thanked Caldwell County for hosting. Fyreside Taproom and Eatery staff were thanked as well. Caldwell County Commissioner Vice Chair Mike Labrose welcomed the Policy Board to Caldwell County.

Introductions

Introductions were made by everyone in attendance.

Recognition of New Board Delegates and Outgoing Board Delegate

Vice Chair Gibbons welcomed Cole Setzer, Catawba County Delegate and Tonia Stephenson, Appointed Delegate to the Policy Board. Vice Chair Gibbons thanked outgoing board member Danny Hipps, Town of Maiden Delegate for his service to the Policy Board. This is for informational purposes. No action required by the board.

Minutes of Previous Meeting

Minutes of the previous meeting were considered. Mr. Joie Fulbright made a motion to approve the minutes from the November 22, 2022 meeting and Mr. Jerry Hodge offered a second. The motion passed unanimously.

Unfinished Business/Reports

There was no unfinished business.

New Business

Workforce Development Board Appointment

Ms. Charity Patterson Hamber, Director of Workforce Development, requested the Policy Board appoint Robin Ross, Vice President for Talent Development and K-64, Catawba Valley Community College, in order to meet the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) board membership requirement for Adult Education and Literacy eligible under WIOA Title II.

Mr. Randy Burns made a motion that the Policy Board appoint Robin Ross to the Workforce Development Board for a staggered two-year term beginning February 2023 to July 2025 and Mr. Larry Yoder offered a second. The motion passed unanimously.

NCARCOG 2023 Policy Agenda

Mr. Anthony Starr, Executive Director, stated each year, the North Carolina Association of Regional Councils of Governments (NCARCOG) adopts a policy agenda to use as a guide for its efforts to seek state and legislative changes. The goals intend to assist councils of governments (COGs) and their local governments on a variety of topics. Anthony Starr serves as the chair of the legislative committee for the NCARCOG.

The 2023 NCARCOG Policy Agenda includes goals for the following:

- A requested appropriation for the General Assembly to COGs to fund 32 new finance positions across the state to assist local governments with financial administration. Local governments do not have appropriate separation of duties for finance.
- A request to replace the outdated reimbursement system (called ARMS) that handles the financial transactions for area agencies on aging and local senior adult service providers.
- A requested appropriation for the General Assembly to increase funding and the number of long-term care ombudsmen in the state.
- A request to modify the Prosperity Zones in NC to conform to COG regional boundaries.

- A request to utilize COGs to provide hazard mitigation planning and disaster resiliency for local governments within their regions.
- Support for additional improvements for broadband service to underserved communities.
- Additional funding for aging, community development, infrastructure, and workforce programs.
- Using COGs as the default mechanism for the regional delivery of services instead of creating new organizations or divisions within the state government.
- Designating COGs as eligible entities for receiving grants on behalf of local governments when regional collaboration on certain projects makes sense.

Staff requested the Policy Board review the information, share it with other elected officials, and provide feedback. No action is required by the board.

Community and Economic Development 2022 Grant Awards Summary

Mr. Ben Willis, Director of Community and Economic Development, stated in 2022 Community and Economic Development staff developed applications that resulted in grant funding for 31 projects totaling \$17,571,930. The funding ranged from \$10,000 each to provide charging stations in three communities to \$4,990,000 in Rural Economic Development Division funds for a sewer project.

New private sector investments for economic development projects in 2023 totaled \$235,225,000 in addition to the creation of 400 new, full-time jobs and affecting 442 housing units. Staff was able to secure six (6) N.C. Commerce Building Reuse grants, six (6) Rural Transformation grants, three (3) Rural Economic Development Division grants, and continued to administer more than 80 community and economic development grant projects.

A brief overview was given of the grants/projects that were awarded for our region. The grant awards and dollars are:

County	Grant Awards	Total Award Dollars
Alexander	5	\$1,720,544
Burke	10	\$5,118,200
Caldwell	7	\$8,018,189
Catawba	9	4,297,000

There are still a lot of funds available but projects need to be shovel ready. The WPCOG is available to assist with writing grants with no charge.

This is for informational purposes. No action required by the board.

FY2023-24 WPCOG Assessments for Local Governments

Mr. Anthony Starr, Executive Director, stated each year the WPCOG assesses dues to its local governments per its charter and bylaws. The proposed assessments for FY23 reflect a 1.2% increase in population based on the state population estimate for July 2021. The current population estimate reflects 4,438 additional persons for the region than 2020. The proposed assessments represent a total increase of required assessments of nearly 5.8% (\$30,169.89 increase).

The general assessments rate reflect an increase from 83.4 to 87.6 cents per capita to adjust for a portion of annual inflation. Inflation increased 6.45% from December 2021 to December 2022. The proposed per capita rate represents a 5% increase. Last year, the inflation rate exceeded 7% and the assessments rate increased 3%.

The WPCOG uses the general assessments to provide the required matching funds for the Area Agency on Aging, Economic Development Administration, and Appalachian Regional Commission.

The assessments also include the required match for the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) per federal and state requirements. The federal funding for the MPO is increasing 5% for FY23-24. Assessments for water resources also increased 5%. See the attached narrative for further details.

The Fiscal Year 2023 – 2024 Assessments was included in the Policy Board agenda packet which includes the optional dues for Sister Cities. Mr. Anthony Starr asked the board members present to let him or staff know if there is an interest in joining the Western Piedmont Sister Cities.

Staff requested that the Policy Board review and approve the FY2023-24 assessments.

Mr. Jerry Hodge made a motion that the Policy Board approve the assessments as presented and Mr. Joie Fulbright offered a second. The motion passed unanimously.

Local and Regional Disaster Recovery, Mitigation, and Resiliency Technical Assistance

Ms. Alison Adams, Director of Community and Regional Planning, stated the General Assembly appropriated \$6 million to the North Carolina Association of Regional Councils of Government (NCARCOG) from the state's Disaster Relief and Mitigation Fund. The appropriation provides funding to aid local and regional governments with emergency management, disaster recovery, and mitigation efforts. Each council of governments is a sub-grant recipient receiving a total allocation of \$331,250. The funding was awarded on July 1, 2022, and is required to be spent by June 30, 2024. The scope of the funding supports two areas – Disaster Recovery Financial Administration Training Deployment and Regional Recovery Capacity Grants. To date, we have worked and will continue to work with the Office of State Budget Management, NCARCOG, NC Division of Public Safety - Division of Emergency Management (Greg Atchley - Western Region Manager, and the multi-hazard planners representing our four counties), and the County Emergency Management Coordinators (Daniel Fox, Vic Misenheimer, Mike Willis, and Karyn Yaussy) and their support staff, as well as the County Soil and Water personnel.

Disaster Recovery Financial Administration Training Deployment – \$37,500

The NCARCOG is referring to this effort as a train-the-trainer model. NCARCOG will hire a contractor to provide training to each COG-designated representative. The COG representative will facilitate emergency management recovery mitigation grant training to local government personnel. Curt Willis is the Western Piedmont Council of Governments' designated representative. Curt has a variety of experiences that will lend themselves to aid this initiative.

Regional Recovery, Mitigation, and Resiliency Capacity Grants - \$293,750

The second initiative is being divided into three areas:

Reimbursement Support and Grant Writing

- Establish an emergency management planning position to facilitate the acquisition of finance/funding for regional and/or local government projects through training and technical assistance pre-disaster.
- Aid in the coordination of funding efforts for local governments during and post-disaster through administrative support.
- Continue mitigation support for local governments through federal, state, and private grant acquisitions.

Stream Mitigation Clean-up Prioritization

- Assist in recovery planning, specifically related to flooding, that utilizes drone technology to create baseline information, identifying high-risk areas that need priority mitigation to prevent further damage. The baseline is a detailed aerial analysis of problem areas that will prioritize mitigation efforts based on variables related to impact on infrastructure, underserved areas, and feasibility of mitigation due to locational factors. The creation of this baseline creates justification for mitigation clean-up grant opportunities.

Resiliency Mapping Tool – CHADME (Community Health and Disaster Mitigation Explorer)

- Establish a Quality of Life tool for mitigation, preparedness, and resiliency planning. The quality of life tool is a metrics-based software solution addressing mitigation practices through a hierarchy of variables – socioeconomic, high-risk health patients, limited or no means of transportation, proximity to natural features, little or no housing options, etc. The creation of the tool will allow emergency management response teams and managers to remain prepared and create resiliency due to readily available information. Obtaining grant funding is possible with the quality of life tool by providing proof of specific locational needs to address local or regional resiliency. Upon completion, local governments will have a detailed analysis and a working metrics-based database to make prompt critical decisions.

The next steps are as follows:

- Begin training with NCARCOG training contractor once selected.
- Continue constructing the mapping tool based on emergency management feedback
- Obtain an inventory from emergency management coordinators to administer drone flights to document debris, prioritize clean up and obtain grant funding.
- Continue to work with all emergency management personnel to create a local layer that is county specific based on needs and known issues that are not identified on FEMA maps.
- Aid emergency personnel in the construction of preparedness plans using the mapping tool and drone footage.

We will continue to collaborate and engage partners throughout the region to obtain information, and feedback, and to help develop a valuable tool that assists our four counties' emergency management efforts and serve as a best practice for preparedness.

Staff requested the Policy Board provide feedback and guidance. No action is required by the board.

4th Amendment of the FY2022-23 Budget

Ms. Andrea Roper, Director of Finance, stated the 4th Amendment of the FY2022-23 budget reflects a total budget of \$24,813,456 and an operating budget of \$8,750,373 which represents a decrease of the total budget from the November 22, 2022, budget adoption of \$24,515.

The 4th Amendment of the 2022-2023 Budget includes:

- A decrease in Transportation due to increased project work in the Planning department.
- Community and Regional Planning increased due to new GIS and planning project contracts.
- Fund Balance Appropriated increased \$18,000 due to the new EQV Strategic contract.
- Chargeable salaries decreased and compensated absences increased due to personnel changes and to better reflect planned staff absences.
- Contractual increased \$19,284 mainly due to the new contract with EQV Strategic to solidify legislative goals.
- Capital Outlay - Equipment increased to cover the anticipated purchase of LIDAR technology for disaster recovery project work.
- An increase in contingency due to the addition of several new contracts.
- A decrease in Compensated Absence Liability due to the decrease in fringe funds generated by chargeable salaries and the increase in fringe expenses.
- Transfer to Capital Reserve Fund decreased due to the decrease in indirect funds generated by chargeable salaries.
- Capital Reserve Fund decreased due to the decrease in transfers from the general fund.

Staff requested the Policy Board review and approve the Fourth Amendment of the 2022-2023 Budget.

Mr. George Holleman made a motion that the Policy Board approve the Fourth Amendment of the 2022-2023 Budget as proposed and Mr. Donald Robinson offered a second. The motion passed unanimously.

Other Business

Executive Director's and Staff Reports

Mr. Anthony Starr, WPCOG Executive Director, reviewed the Executive Director's Report providing details and current operations of the WPCOG and issues that may be of interest to board members.

Administration

- The WPCOG completed the search process for the Long View town manager position and the Brookford police chief. Staff are also assisting Hildebran for the search for a new town attorney and Hickory for a new city attorney. Work also continues for Greenway Public Transportation with the selection of a new executive director. Finally, work is beginning with search for a new county manager for Alexander County.
- The WPCOG has hired David Pugh as the new Director of Administrative Services and HR. He began work on January 17, 2023. He brings 13 years' experience as a town manager to the position.

- Staff anticipate releasing the RFQ for architectural services for the expansion of the WPCOG office. We are using the services of a lobbyist to assist in securing additional funding for the project beyond the \$1 million appropriated last year by the General Assembly. The WPCOG is working with EQV Strategic in order to get additional funds appropriated.

Community and Economic Development (CED)

- Currently managing 82 grant projects.
- CED has had a good year so far.

Community and Regional Planning

- The Long View Council approved the Land Use Plan prepared by the WPCOG.
- Staff began reviewing the Hildebran zoning ordinance for needed text amendments.
- Work begun on the Rhodhiss zoning and subdivision ordinances.
- Digital Inclusion Planning for the four-county region has begun with multiple meetings.
- The Regional Housing Tool Kit draft is complete and being reviewed internally.
- WPCOG is assisting Claremont with interim daily planning services for 3 days per week.

Regional Housing Authority (RHA)

- In December 2022, the RHA was notified that we will be awarded \$123,000 in Extraordinary Administrative Funding to provide additional support to Mainstream Voucher families in securing and maintaining stable housing. The RHA received the 9th highest award out of 150 total national awards.

No additional staff reports were given.

Next Meeting

The next Policy Board meeting is scheduled for March 28, 2023 and will be hosted by City of Hickory.

Adjournment

Vice Chair Gibbon adjourned the meeting at 7:28 pm.