

Minutes
Western Piedmont Council of Governments
Bimonthly Policy Board Meeting
Tuesday, January 23, 2024
First Baptist Church, Taylorsville

Members Present

Joseph L. Gibbons, Chair
Randy Burns, Vice Chair
George Holleman, Treasurer
Larry Chapman, Secretary
Jill Patton, Past Chair
Mike LaBrose, At-Large
Larry Yoder, At-Large
Cole Setzer, At-Large
Marla Thompson, At-Large
Josh Lail, Alternate
Ronnie Setzer
Donald Robinson
Bob Floyd
Joie Fulbright
Brenda Powell, Alternate
Dennis Anthony
Barbara Pennell
Dr. Caryl Burns
Tracy Townsend, Alternate
Mike Smith, Alternate
Phyllis Pennington, Alternate
Holly Crafton-Lay
Allen Spencer
Bobby Mosteller
Kimberly S. Brown, Alternate
Amparo R. Alfaro
Erisha Lipford
Helen Chestnut
Malla Vue
Mark Transou
Tonia Stephenson

Members Absent

Kelvin Gregory
Johnnie Carswell, Alternate
Lloyd Robbins, Alternate
Robbie Wilkie, Alternate
Carroll Yount, Alternate
Barbara Beatty, Alternate

Local Government/Agency

Lenoir
Burke County
Taylorsville
Hudson
Hickory
Caldwell County
Alexander County
Catawba County
Long View
Alexander County
Cajah's Mountain
Catawba
Cedar Rock
Conover
Conover
Drexel
Gamewell
Granite Falls
Granite Falls
Hildebran
Long View
Maiden
Rhodhiss
Sawmills
Taylorsville
Appointed
Appointed
Appointed
Appointed
Appointed
Appointed
Brookford
Burke County
Cajah's Mountain
Caldwell County
Catawba
Catawba County

Dale Sherrill
Ramona Duncan
Johnny Berry, Alternate
Ron Lackey, Alternate
Sheila Perkins
Charlotte Williams, Alternate
Ben Honeycutt
Jim Engelman, Alternate
Ralph Prestwood, Alternate
Ronnie Williams, Alternate
Chris Jernigan
Ronnie Thompson, Alternate
Jerry Hodge
Beverly Danner, Alternate
Kendra Edwards, Alternate
Wayne Annas
Yates Jensen, Alternate
Joe Wesson, Alternate
Charlie Watts
Rexanna Lowman, Alternate
Tommy Luckadoo

Claremont
Connelly Springs
Connelly Springs
Gamewell
Glen Alpine
Hickory
Hildebran
Hudson
Lenoir
Maiden
Morganton
Morganton
Newton
Newton
Rhodhiss
Rutherford College
Rutherford College
Sawmills
Valdese
Valdese
Appointed

Guests/Others Present

Jamie Starnes
Kent Herman
Ronnie Reese
Randy Feierabend
Donald Duncan
Danny Hipps
Bill Carroll
Bonnie Caudle
Jerry Church
Scott Hildebran
Rick Justice
Keith Warren
Aaron Wike
Eric Bumgarner
Jack Simms
Tamara Odom
Yolanda Prince
Zachary Greene
Priscilla Jenkins
Stuart Hill

Alexander County
Alexander County
Alexander County
Cajah's Mountain
Caldwell County
Catawba
Drexel
Gamewell
Granite Falls
Lenoir
Rhodhiss
Sawmills
Taylorsville
Taylorsville
Taylorsville
Taylorsville
Taylorsville
Taylorsville
The Bridge Community, Inc.
Thompson Price Scott Adams & Co., PA

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
John Wear, Assistant Director of Community and Regional Planning
Stephanie Hanvey, Director of Regional Housing Authority
Jason Toney, Communications Manager
Elizabeth Hilliard, Executive Administrative Assistant
Tasmin Mack, Human Resources Coordinator

Call to Order/Welcome

A regular meeting of the WPCOG Policy Board was called to order at 6:45 pm by Chair Gibbons. Chair Gibbons thanked the Town of Taylorsville and Alexander County for hosting. Town of Taylorsville, Mayor, George Holleman, welcomed the Policy Board to Taylorsville.

Minutes of Previous Meeting

Minutes of the previous meeting were considered. Mr. Anthony Starr, Executive Director, stated there were two corrections needed on page 3 of the November 28, 2023 minutes in the new business section where the bullet points are listing the items that were discussed. The third and fifth bullets will be corrected to show: "How to retain your manager" and "How to attract a new manager." Mr. Joie Fulbright made a motion to approve the minutes with these corrections from the November 28, 2023 meeting and Ms. Jill Patton offered a second. The motion passed unanimously.

Introductions

Introductions were made by everyone in attendance.

Unfinished Business/Reports

There was no unfinished business.

New Business

Recognition of New Board Member

Chair Gibbons welcomed Mark Transou as a newly appointed board member.

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

FY 2022-2023 Audit Presentation

Mr. Stuart Hill, Thompson, Price, Scott, Adams and Co., P.A., presented the independent audit observations and report to the board regarding the financial audit of the Western Piedmont Council of Governments for fiscal year ending June 30, 2023. The audit is required by state law and various regulations of funding entities. The audit PowerPoint slides were included in the agenda packet for the board to review prior to the meeting.

Staff requested the Policy Board review the attached audit information.

A motion that the Policy Board accept the audit report as presented was made by Mr. Larry Yoder and a second offered by Mr. Larry Chapman. The motion passed unanimously.

FY 25 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 FY25 reflect a 1.3% increase in population based on the state population estimate for July 2022. The current population estimate reflects 4,844 additional persons for the region than 2021. The proposed assessments represent a total increase of required assessments of 0.8% (\$4,751.97 increase).

The general assessments rate reflect no increase and remain at 98.1 cents per capita. Inflation increased 3.35% from December 2022 to December 2023. The proposed per capita rate represents no increase. The proposed rate remains lower than the rate going back to the 1970s, when adjusted for inflation.

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 funds also support the data services provided to local governments.

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 not increasing for FY25. Assessments for water resources remain the same as the current fiscal year. A narrative for further details were included in the agenda packet.

The proposed assessments table shows all the assessments including the optional dues for Sister Cities.

The assessments table was included in the agenda packet.

Staff requested the Policy Board review and approve the FY2024-25 assessments.

A motion that the Policy Board approve the assessments as presented as made by Mr. Bob Floyd and a second offered by Ms. Jill Patton.

Resolution 2024-01: Consolidation/Transfer of the Valdese Public Housing Authority to the WPCOG

Ms. Stephanie Hanvey, Director of Regional Housing Authority, stated recently the Valdese Housing Authority reached out to the WPCOG Regional Housing Authority (RHA) regarding a potential consolidation. Staff have been in discussions with the Valdese Housing Authority's executive director and board chair regarding the consolidation of the Valdese Housing Authority into the WPCOG with an effective date of July 1, 2024. Both housing authorities are on the same fiscal year, which ends June 30, 2024. Staff suggest the effective date of July 1, 2024 to facilitate a smooth transition that coincides with the beginning of our fiscal year.

HUD requires that the request to consolidate be submitted at least 120 days prior to the effective date of the consolidation. Federal regulations and state law already allow the consolidation of housing authorities, but require the Policy Board to consider the request. The WPCOG RHA brought to the board the resolution for approval of the acceptance of the Valdese Housing Authority to be consolidated with the Western Piedmont Council of Governments Regional Housing Authority. The effective date for the consolidation/transfer would be July 1, 2024.

The consolidation of housing authorities in the region has been an ongoing goal to provide better service to housing clients, increase efficiencies, and improve accountability. The Valdese Housing Authority employs four persons that would become WPCOG staff. The Valdese Housing Authority operates 121 housing units and those properties would become the property of the WPCOG. The Valdese Executive Director is willing to remain on staff for training purposes and to ensure a smooth transition to the WPCOG's Regional Housing Authority.

Staff requested that the policy board approve the consolidation and transfer of the Valdese Housing Authority to the Western Piedmont Council of Governments Regional Housing Authority.

A motion that the Policy Board approve the transfer/consolidation and adopt the Resolution for the consolidation of the Valdese Housing Authority to the Western Piedmont Council of Governments with an effective date of July 1, 2024 was made by Ms. Jill Patton and a second offered by Mr. Larry Yoder. Motion passed unanimously.

Western Piedmont Septic Tank Repair Project

Mr. John Wear, Assistant Director of Community and Regional Planning, stated when household septic systems fail, untreated sewage can contaminate the surrounding land and nearby water sources. This untreated wastewater may contain dangerous viruses and bacteria that can threaten human health as well as pollute the environment. Septic systems are designed to remove or break down contaminants contained in sewage before it enters groundwater. When these pollutants are not treated properly, bacteria and other contaminants could infiltrate nearby lakes and streams, used as public water sources.

The Catawba River Watershed has the highest density of septic tanks in North Carolina. While actual numbers are unknown, many of these older systems are failing, and thus pose a threat both to the population and the environment. Many of these failing systems are owned by middle and low-income residents who do not have the financial resources to pay for repair work. In addition, many local governments cannot justify extending sewer to rural areas in the region.

The WPCOG has administered a no-interest, revolving loan program for qualifying homeowners for repairing failing septic systems. Since 2013, there have been just over 100 septic tanks replaced or repaired in our region. The Western Piedmont Septic System Repair Program is beneficial for multiple reasons including, helping low-income individuals with a much-needed expense, the public health benefits from preventing septic run-off, and the environmental benefits for water quality.

In 2013, the WPCOG was awarded a \$433,354.06 grant from the North Carolina Clean Water Management Trust Fund to help address the regional need for septic repairs. The grant established a no-

interest, revolving loan program for repairing failing septic systems and straight piping in Alexander, Burke, Caldwell and Catawba Counties. The goal of the project was to repair or replace 50 septic tanks. In the end, the project exceeded expectations, and 63 septic systems were replaced or repaired.

In 2017, the WPCOG was awarded a \$220,000 grant from the US Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA) 319 Grant Program to continue to address the regional need for septic repairs. The goal this time was to repair or replace thirty septic tanks. In 2020, US EPA awarded \$19,997 in additional funding as part of this round of funding. The WPCOG had completed construction on 41 repairs with this funding.

Potential participants continue to inquire about assistance, and the counties are hoping the project continues to receive additional funding. The WPCOG would like to request a state appropriation of \$500,000 to support the continued efforts of the septic repair program due to the ongoing needs the region. The Western Piedmont Septic System Repair Program is beneficial for multiple reasons including, helping low-income individuals with a much-needed expense, the public health benefits from preventing septic run-off, and the environmental benefits for water quality.

Staff continue efforts to obtain additional funding to continue this program. However, recent grants applications have not been approved. Seeking funding from the Governor's Office or General Assembly are additional steps that could be taken.

Staff requested the Policy Board support the request of \$500,000 from a State appropriation to be used to replace or repair septic systems through the region.

A motion that the Policy Board support an appropriation from the State of \$500,000 to continue the project was made by Mr. Randy Burns and a second offered by Mr. Joie Fulbright. Motion passed unanimously.

WPCOG Homelessness Response Team Update

Mr. Ben Willis, Director of Community and Economic Development, presented a brief overview of the recently established Homelessness Response Team, their focus on current outreach initiatives and the forthcoming Point in Time (PIT) count scheduled for 2024. He shared the team's background experience, highlighting their recent engagement with the homeless population during police ride-alongs throughout the region. Additionally, specific figures about the homeless population they have addressed. The presentation also gave an overview on their efforts related to the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS).

The WPCOG started this program at the request of local governments and area partners after extensive outreach and engagement within the region. Last year, the WPCOG developed a plan and received approval from HUD using the regional allocation of \$4.2 million. Our region must spend the funds by 2030 as required by federal legislation. The key strategies, after engaging with local governments and area organizations, include: improved regional coordination to promote effective and efficient homelessness services, case management through direct outreach to homeless persons, gap in service analysis, and limited housing vouchers.

The PowerPoint presentation was included in the agenda packet.

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

NCARCOG 2024 Policy Agenda

Mr. Anthony Starr, Executive Director, stated that each year the NC 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 2024 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.
- 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.
- Amend state law to provide clear legislative authority for COGs to apply for transit planning, capital, and operating grants offered through NCDOT and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA).
- 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.

The NCARCOG 2024 Policy Agenda was included in the agenda packet.

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

Other Business

Executive Director and Staff Reports

Mr. Anthony Starr, Executive Director, recognized Ms. Sherry Long, Assistant Executive Director, who will receive the Don Myers Humanitarian Award at the Development District Association of Appalachia annual conference in March 2024. This award was established to recognize an individual who has shown leadership and provided community service that has enriched Appalachia. This award is presented to a person whose life has been marked by actions that have led to the growth and development of the

region, enhanced the fabric of their local community, and reinforced the sense of selflessness and self-reliance so strongly identified within Appalachian communities. Ms. Sherry Long was congratulated on her service through the years.

Administration

- The WPCOG continues the search process for the Granite Falls Town Manager position, which is due to be complete within the coming weeks. Staff began assisting Claremont with its search for a new police chief.
- Work continues for the design of the WPCOG office expansion. The estimated project cost is currently \$7.2 to \$8.4 million according to the architect's communications with general contractors. We are within our ability to finance \$4.2 to \$5.4 million (reflects the \$3 million state appropriation). About 31% of the total project cost will be covered through lease payments using federal workforce development funds.
- IMPORTANT CALENDAR REMINDER: The WPCOG 2024 Annual Meeting will be held the evening of Thursday, April 11th at the Hickory Metro Convention Center. More information and official electronic invitations to come soon!
- The Executive Committee approved contracting with EQV Strategic for 2024 to seek additional funding for the WPCOG office expansion through the General Assembly. EQV assisted with securing \$3 million for the WPCOG office expansion and we intend to seek additional funds.

Community and Economic Development (CED)

- CED staff assisted in obtaining two (2) building reuse grants for the region. The City of Morganton received a \$200,000 grant on behalf of Chaddock Furniture. The company plans to renovate its 287,000-square-foot facility and create 25 new, full-time jobs. The overall investment is just under \$1 million.
- The City of Newton received a \$50,000 grant on behalf of Backstreets Bar and Grill. The restaurant – which has been a staple in Hickory for over 25 years - is renovating a vacant, 12,000-square-foot building in downtown Newton and creating at least 10 new, full-time jobs. The private investment is more than \$2.4 million.
- Urgent Repair Program for Alexander/Catawba Counties – 5 (five) houses under contract and 2 (two) out to bid, 2 (two) recently completed.

Mr. Anthony Starr, Executive Director, shared slides of the new building. The COG will have 30 new offices for staff. Due to the layout of the land, there will be a basement under the NCWorks portion of the building that will provide storage. There will also be an elevator.

Mr. Ben Willis, Director of Community and Economic Development, stated ARP opens in March 2024 and asked for ideas to be shared.


Next Meeting

The next Policy Board meeting is scheduled for March 26, 2024 and will be hosted by the Town of Hudson.

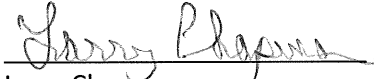
Adjournment

Chair Gibbons adjourned the meeting at 7:51 pm. A motion to adjourn by made by Mr. Larry Chapman and Mr. Larry Yoder offered a second. Motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,



Joseph L. Gibbons
Chair



Larry Chapman
Secretary

