

# WESTERN PIEDMONT COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS NEWSLETTER JANUARY 2022



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# WPCOG Assists Local Governments with 3 Grants Totaling \$920K, 140 Jobs

Article by Paul Teague

WPCOG Staff worked with three local governments to develop North Carolina Department of Commerce Building Reuse grant awards totaling \$920,000 and 140 new, full-time jobs.

In Conover, longtime manufacturer Sherrill Furniture is investing more than \$2.5 million to renovate a 145,000-square-foot building and create 80 new, full-time jobs. In operation for 75 years, the company is a maker of upholstery and case goods products. The \$440,000 grant is through the City of Conover.

Meanwhile, EJ Victor – a high-end furniture manufacturer that has pieces in the White House – has committed to renovating a portion of its 195,000-square-foot facility. Located in Morganton, the company plans to invest \$8.9 million and create 30 new, full-time jobs. The \$240,000 grant is through the City of Morganton.

Also in Burke County, Toner Machining Technologies is purchasing a site that features multiple buildings, including a 40,000-square-foot facility that will be renovated in order for the company to expand its product and customer base. A supplier of milling and machining products for use in the automotive, nuclear energy and other fields, the company is investing nearly \$1 million dollars and hiring 30 new, full-time employees. The \$240,000 grant is through Burke County.

All of the new jobs being created through these grants feature average annual wages well above their county averages. In order to receive grant funds, the companies must create and maintain the jobs for a specified time period.

In formulating the grants, the WPCOG worked with the respective local governments, the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina, Burke Development, Inc., the Catawba County Economic Development Corporation, and NC Commerce's Rural Economic Development Division.

E J V I C T O R  
S H E R R I L L  
F U R N I T U R E



## Workforce Development Center Launches in Ridgeview

Article by Wendy Johnson

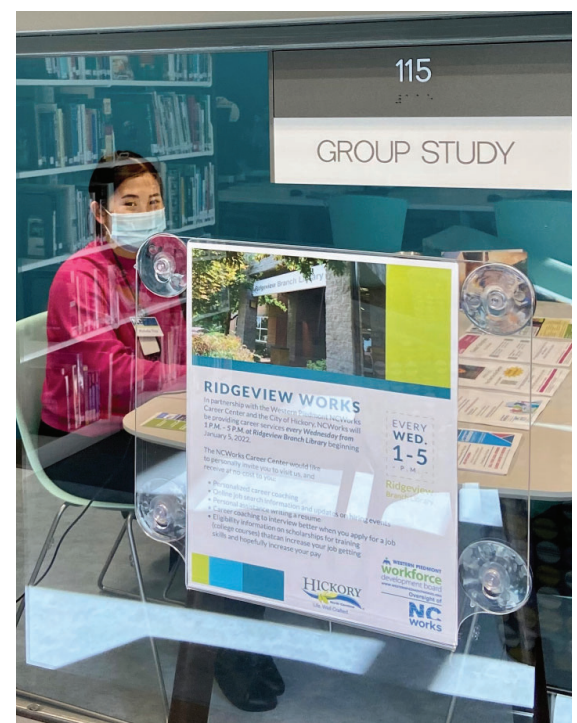
Ridgeview Works is a collaboration between the City of Hickory and Western Piedmont Workforce Development - NCWorks to provide career services to the Ridgeview community of Hickory. Western Piedmont Workforce Development is a service of the Western Piedmont Council of Governments.

Beginning Wednesday, January 5, 2022, the Western Piedmont NCWorks Career Center of Catawba County will have a representative in the group study room at the library every Wednesday from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m.

NCWorks Career Advisor(s) will offer personalized career coaching and interviewing tips, assistance with resume writing, online job search information and updates on hiring events, and eligibility information on scholarships for local training opportunities.

Ridgeview Branch Library will host a kickoff event called the Ridgeview Works Job Fair in the community room at the library on Tuesday, February 8, 2022, from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m.

Ridgeview Branch Library is located at 706 First Street SW in Hickory. For more information about NCWorks Career Services, please contact the NCWorks Career Center of Catawba County at 828-466-5535.



# Resources Provide Vital Support Opportunities

## Article by Kim Duncan

Resources provide vital support opportunities to Housing Choice Voucher holders. In the past two years, the global pandemic has created even greater needs, but also has generated some new supports.

As of early January 2022, this is what is known about traditional and pandemic-related resources:

**Low Income Energy Assistance (LIEAP)** - The Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP) is a federally-funded program that provides a one-time vendor payment to help eligible households pay their heating bills. The application cycle is from Jan. 1 – March 31 or until funds are exhausted.

A household that meets the following criteria may be eligible if it:

- Has at least one U.S. citizen or non-citizen who meets the eligibility criteria.
- Meets an income test.
- Has reserve funds at or below \$2,250.
- Is responsible for its own heating costs.

Required information to bring to your appointment:

- Household income including all wage stubs for the month prior
- Household bank account statements (savings and checking)
- Household asset information such as property, stocks, bonds
- Name, date of birth and social security numbers for each household member
- Photo Id
- Copy of utility bill

Catawba – Contact Eastern Catawba Cooperative Christian Ministries at [www.ecccm.org/lieap-cip-ga](http://www.ecccm.org/lieap-cip-ga)  
Alexander, Burke, and Caldwell – Contact your local DSS office.

**Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB)** – Those who signed up before Dec. 31, 2021 will continue their benefits as the program transitions. Congress created the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) that will replace EBB beginning March 1, 2022.

## Who is eligible for the Affordable Connectivity Program?

A household is eligible if a member of the household meets at least one of the criteria below:

- Has an income that is at or below 200% of the federal poverty guidelines  
(See <https://aspe.hhs.gov/topics/poverty-economic-mobility/poverty-guidelines>)
- Participates in certain assistance programs, such as SNAP, Medicaid, Federal Public Housing Assistance, SSI, WIC, or Lifeline
- Participates in Tribal specific programs
- Is approved to receive benefits under the free and reduced-price school lunch program or the school breakfast program, in the 2019-2020, 2020-2021, or 2021-2022 school year
- Received a Federal Pell Grant during the current award year
- Meets the eligibility criteria for a participating provider's existing low-income program

Follow this link, [www.fcc.gov/acp](http://www.fcc.gov/acp) for more information on the program and its changes.

**Legal Aid Statewide Housing Helpline** – Legal Aid of NC recently launched a new statewide eviction-defense project to help renters stay in their homes.

Help is available for situations such as:

- eviction
- repair and maintenance issues
- mobile home evictions
- other landlord-tenant issues
- subsidized housing lease terminations

Call 877.201.6426 Monday through Thursday 8:30 am to 4:30 pm to be screened for assistance.

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# CONTINUED - Resources Provide Vital Support Opportunities

## Low Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP)

The Low Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP) is a federally-funded program that provides emergency assistance to low-income households, particularly those with the lowest incomes that pay a high proportion of household income for drinking water and wastewater services.

A household may be eligible if they meet the following criteria:

- Have income equal to or less than 150% of the federal poverty level
- Have household services that are disconnected, in jeopardy of disconnection or have a current outstanding bill
- Be responsible for the water bill

The State of North Carolina has provided an online application at <https://epass.nc.gov/>.

## Currently No Longer Available

**HOPE Program** – North Carolina’s HOPE program helped more than 148,900 households affected by Covid and resulting in rent and utility issues. The program’s last applications were taken in December 2021 as their funding was nearly depleted. All applications submitted before the deadline will be processed. At this time no additional funds have been awarded.

**Child Tax Credit payments** – The current law says no payments will be made after Dec. 31, 2021 and at this point no renewal bill has passed.

## How to find help

Resource information is always changing. The Regional Housing Authority keeps a list of resources updated and available, so contact your Housing Specialist for guidance. Resource information for all counties in NC is also available by calling 2-1-1.

## 2050 Plan Survey Captures Area Values for Future Transportation Priorities

**Article by: Brian Horton**

Under federal law, all metropolitan areas must have a long-range transportation plan in order to access federal funds for transportation projects. In metropolitan areas like our four-county region, this long-range plan is called a Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) and is updated every five years. The last 2045 Plan was adopted in 2018. WPCOG staff have started developing the 2050 Plan, which must be completed by 2023.

Late in 2021, 188 survey responses were collected to gather area input on changing values and priorities for future transportation needs. Among those who shared where they lived, 80 survey respondents were from Catawba County, 31 from Caldwell, 26 from Burke, and 10 from Alexander. One of the survey questions asked respondents to pick and rank their top transportation values. Safety was both ranked consistently highest and listed among respondents’ top priorities. Congestion Relief was the second highest ranked value, though not as often listed among respondents’ top priorities as other values, including in order of times listed, Accessibility, Livability, Economy, Environment, and Maintenance.

A budget exercise allowed survey takers to break up one dollar proportionally among their priorities. Listed in order of priorities given the most to least funding by survey respondents, Safety was the top budget item, followed by Congestion, then Maintenance, Economic Development, Transit, Pedestrian Facilities, Technology, and Bike Facilities. The survey also has a map exercise where respondents could drop icons and comments on facility needs or other concerns. A total of 446 map-markers and 235 comments were collected. Many of these markers and comments pointed to targeted locations, even when noting widening needs, such as congestion concerns near schools.

A summary of this survey was presented to area local government representatives who serve on the Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) on January 19. To see a PDF copy of this presentation, visit the Metropolitan Transportation Plan page at: [www.wpcog.org/metropolitan-trans-plan-mtp](http://www.wpcog.org/metropolitan-trans-plan-mtp).

# Frequently Asked Questions About COVID-19\*

Article by: Michael Layza



**Q: I have been exposed to somebody with COVID – What do I do?**

**A:** Stay at home (except to get medical care), separate yourself from others, monitor your symptoms, wear a mask over your nose and mouth when around others, cover your coughs and sneezes, wash your hands often, clean high touch surfaces every day and avoid sharing personal household items.

**Q: I am not feeling well – Should I get tested?**

**A:** Fully vaccinated people should be tested 5–7 days after their last exposure. People who are not fully vaccinated should get tested immediately when they find out they are a close contact. If their test result is negative, they should get tested again 5–7 days after their last exposure or immediately if symptoms develop.

**Q: I tested positive for COVID – Now what?**

**A:** Stay home: Most people with COVID-19 have mild illness and can recover at home without medical care. Do not leave your home, except to get medical care. Do not

visit public areas. Take care of yourself: Get rest and stay hydrated. Take over-the-counter medicines, such as acetaminophen, to help you feel better. Stay in touch with your doctor: Call before you get medical care. Be sure to get care if you have trouble breathing, or have any other emergency warning signs, or if you think it is an emergency.

Avoid public transportation: ridesharing, or taxis.

**Q: Why should I get a vaccine if I might still get COVID?**

**A:** Studies shows that getting a COVID-19 vaccine after you recover from COVID-19 provides added protection to your immune system. Vaccines are a safe way to keep you from getting and spreading COVID-19. COVID-19 vaccination also helps protect you from serious illness if you get sick again.

**Q: How can I or a loved one get the COVID-19 vaccine at home if there is an issue with mobility?**

**A:** Vaccines are available to individuals ages 12 and up who are at-home due to limited mobility. Call the At-Home Vaccination Hotline: 1-866-303-0026 or visit: [www.ptrc.org/COVID](http://www.ptrc.org/COVID) for more information!

For more information about COVID-19 or the COVID-19 Vaccine, please visit: [www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html) or [covid19.ncdhhs.gov](http://covid19.ncdhhs.gov)

\*Information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)



**Western Piedmont Council of Governments**  
828-485-4271

## Get a safe, effective and free COVID-19 vaccine at home.

- ✓ COVID-19 vaccines are tested, safe, effective and available to everyone 5 and older.
- ✓ Personal information about your health and identity is carefully managed to protect your privacy. It is not shared with the CDC or ICE.
- ✓ The vaccines are proven to help prevent COVID-19 and are effective in preventing hospitalization and death. Like all vaccines, The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) keeps checking safety through its reporting systems.
- ✓ You may have temporary reactions like a sore arm, fever, headache or feeling tired and achy for a day or two after receiving the vaccine.
- ✓ Millions of people in the U.S. have received their COVID-19 vaccine. A diverse group of volunteers, including Black and Hispanic/Latinx, participated in clinical trials with no serious safety concerns noted.
- ✓ The COVID-19 vaccine is available to everyone for free, whether or not you have health insurance and regardless of your immigration status.

**Call the At-Home Vaccination Hotline: 1-866-303-0026 or visit: [www.ptrc.org/COVID](http://www.ptrc.org/COVID).**

Vaccines available to individuals ages 12 and up who are at-home due to limited mobility.

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## Article by Averí Ritchie

In 2018, NCDOT sent a letter to all municipalities and local government agencies that utilize federal funds. This letter requested municipalities and agencies open to the public to identify mobility barriers and plan solutions per the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 is a civil rights law prohibiting discrimination based on someone's disability. However, title II of the ADA Act only addresses municipally-owned facilities and public rights of way. It does not address employment or issues discussed in other sections of the ADA Act.

Western Piedmont Council of Governments' (WPCOG) ADA Planning Services team partners with local governments to develop ADA policies, improve existing facilities, and develop Transition Plans. Our mission is to ensure that local government programs, facilities, policies, and procedures comply with ADA regulations. In addition, we maintain current information regarding state and federal ADA regulations and adhere to best practices regarding the rights of persons with disabilities. Our team is also responsible for reviewing ADA-related grievances and appeals.

Recently, WPCOG completed its own ADA Transition Plan, as well as the City of Conover and Town of Granite Falls' Transition Plans. The process involved inventorying all public facilities and elements within the pedestrian right of way and documenting all findings within the plan and GIS application. All completed Plans have now entered maintenance contracts. Maintenance contracts allow WPCOG staff to update Plans with all ADA progress and provide guidance for new construction and potential mobility barrier solutions. WPCOG staff also communicates with NCDOT regarding possible ADA solutions on behalf of the municipality. In addition, WPCOG is currently inventorying and completing Town of Sawmills' ADA Transition Plan. See a list of completed and active services below:

## List of Completed Plans & Active Services

### ADA Transition Plan Maintenance Contracts:

- City of Conover
- Town of Granite Falls

### Completed Inventory & ADA Transition Plans:

- Western Piedmont Council of Governments
- City of Conover
- Town of Granite Falls

### Current Full-Service ADA Inventory and Transition Plan Contracts:

- Town of Sawmills

## Why You Need an ADA Inventory and Transition Plan

- Title II of the Act states that municipalities are required to have a plan to make accommodations for everyone.
- Title II is an unfunded mandate; however, federal transportation funding may be withheld without an inventory and plan in place.
- Having an inventory and plan reduces liability concerns and the likelihood of being audited by the Department of Justice (DOJ).
- Protect citizens with disabilities by improving accessibility

## Common Questions

### 1. Will municipalities be expected to correct all identified ADA issues immediately?

Answer: No, the Department of Justice (DOJ) wants to see a plan in place that shows ADA progress over time. Some municipalities dedicate a small percentage of their budgets each year to ADA improvements. ADA Transition Plans identify high, medium, and low priority items. Plans generally advise municipalities to address high-priority items first.

### 2. How is pricing determined?

Answer: Pricing is based on the number of facilities open to the public and the number of sidewalk miles.

### 3. What is included within ADA Contracts?

Answer: This includes an inventory of public facilities (also includes parks and parking lots) and elements within the pedestrian right of way (such as sidewalks, curb ramps, bus stops, driveway cuts, etc.). The ADA Transition Plan documents barriers found within the facilities and ranks them as high, moderate, or low priority items. Drone footage of immediate safety hazards, as well as potential fixes, are included. All other pedestrian right of way issues are covered in the Pedestrian Right of Way Collector Application in GIS.



#### 4. What is the Pedestrian Right of Way Collector Application in GIS?

Answer: WPCOG developed a GIS application to document sidewalk ADA issues and anything within the pedestrian right of way. The GIS application shows the location of the issue and whether it is a “high, moderate, or low” priority item. The application also attaches a picture and a written description of the non-compliant problems. The Transition Plan document only covers substantial safety issues for pedestrians. All other non-compliant issues are covered in the GIS collector application. This application is utilized during inventory and treated as an appendix to the ADA Transition Plan.

#### 5. Will federal funds be withheld without a Transition Plan?

Answer: Transition Plans have been part of an unfunded mandate since the early 90s. Recently, NCDOT has communicated an urgency for Transition Plans. With funding for projects becoming more competitive, cities should be aware that federal funding may be withheld if a city does not have an ADA transition plan completed or in the works.

Please contact Averı Ritchie, Transportation Planner/ADA Administrator, with any questions or concerns at [averi.ritchie@wpcog.org](mailto:averi.ritchie@wpcog.org) | 828-485-4248.

# WESTERN PIEDMONT COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

## ADA TRANSITION PLAN



Western Piedmont  
Council of Governments





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