

*Trusted Partnership*



**Western Piedmont**  
Council of Governments

**2025**  
ANNUAL REPORT



*Randy Burns*  
**Randy Burns**  
Board Chair, WPCOG  
& Burke County  
Commissioner

Since its founding in 1968, the Western Piedmont Council of Governments has worked to become a trusted partner to our member governments. This past year stands as yet another strong example of that commitment in action. Together, our staff and local governments delivered services and projects that strengthened each of our communities and advanced the region we share.

The Western Piedmont is uniquely blessed with a spirit of cooperation—one that continues to shape one of the finest Councils of Governments not only in North Carolina, but across the nation. That collaborative spirit remains our greatest asset, and it is the foundation on which our success is built. It is reflected in every program we administer, every plan we develop, and every challenge we face together. Our ability to unite around shared goals has allowed us to respond to emerging needs, support long-term growth, and deliver meaningful results for the people who call this region home.

Our region succeeds because we work together, and the partnership between our member governments and the WPCOG staff continues to deliver real results for the people we serve. This past year demonstrated once again that when we combine local leadership with regional collaboration, we create opportunities that no single community could achieve alone. We can be proud of what we accomplished and confident in the direction we are heading. The work ahead is important, but so is the momentum we carry into it—momentum built on trust, cooperation, and a shared commitment to strengthening the Western Piedmont for generations to come.



*Anthony W Starr*  
**Anthony W Starr**  
ICMA - CM, AICP  
Executive Director, WPCOG

The WPCOG continues its focus on meeting the needs of our local governments and partners. The success of our region is dependent on intentional actions and effective partnerships. Cooperation does not happen naturally, and we are fortunate to benefit from local government and community leaders who emphasize its importance. That cooperation is built on trust and fosters ongoing partnerships that yield many positive results for our residents, businesses, community organizations, and partners.

In an era when trust is less common, we must take action to protect our trusted partnerships through honesty, accountability, high ethical standards, clear communication of needs, prioritizing relationships, finding common ground, and extending grace when appropriate. Our success as a region and our respective organizations requires effective partnerships and resource sharing. The WPCOG exists to facilitate the vision and goals of our counties, communities, and partner organizations.

The WPCOG enjoys trusted partnerships with so many, evident in our growth as an agency. Soon, we will occupy our new building addition made possible by appropriations from the North Carolina General Assembly. We extend our gratitude to our local legislators for making that appropriation possible, especially Rep. Jay Adams and former Senator Dean Proctor. The new space makes room for our staff as they work for our region and provides additional meeting space for our local governments and partners. It is a necessary and key tool to accomplish our mission.

Our staff make so many great contributions in the region. They include all our departments, and while some contributions are more publicly visible than others, all their work is important. I can't adequately convey how amazing a team we have, with dedicated professionals who care about their jobs and their community. That dedication and care are evident in so many ways. Public service is a noble endeavor, and our team answers the call. I am proud to work with these fine individuals as they do many great things.



The Western Piedmont Council of Governments (WPCOG) is governed by a Policy Board comprised of delegates and alternates from 28 municipal and county member governments, with each entity holding one vote. In addition, the Policy Board includes seven appointed members representing the private sector.

The current membership of the WPCOG encompasses all eligible counties, cities, and towns within the designated area, specifically including Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, and Catawba Counties, as well as the municipalities of Brookford, Cajah's Mountain, Catawba, Cedar Rock, Claremont, Connelly Springs, Conover, Drexel, Gamewell, Glen Alpine, Granite Falls, Hickory, Hildebran, Hudson, Lenoir, Long View, Maiden, Morganton, Newton, Rhodhiss, Rutherford College, Sawmills, Taylorsville, and Valdese.

Annually, during the November meeting, the Policy Board elects an Executive Committee, which consists of a Chair, Vice-Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, Past Chair, and four At-Large members. The officers are formally installed at the January Policy Board meeting.

# ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES



The staff of the Administration Department supports the efforts of all other WPCOG departments, including general office support, facility management, and communications. Additionally, the Administration Staff supports the WPCOG Policy Board, Executive Committee, and several other regional committees.

### Protecting the Region's Water

Significant time was devoted to strategies and activities related to Charlotte Water's 30MGD Interbasin Transfer Request (IBT), which threatens future growth and capabilities of our region, particularly during droughts. The result of these efforts was a legislative moratorium on large IBTs until March 2027, concurrent with a study by the NC Collaboratory that may lead to additional legislative changes to the IBT process.

### State Legislative Agenda

As an outgrowth of the IBT efforts, administrative staff worked with the Executive Committee to draft the WPCOG's first legislative agenda, which was adopted by the Policy Board in November 2025. The document provides a framework for staff and member governments to use when interacting with state-elected officials on matters of regional concern.

### Executive Searches & Retreat Facilitation

WPCOG Administrative staff, led by the Executive Director and Human Resources staff, regularly conduct executive searches for area local governments to fill important and high-profile positions. The staff has extensive experience facilitating the hiring of personnel positions, including town managers, town administrators, department directors, and more. In 2025, the WPCOG completed the executive search for the Valdese Town Manager.

The Executive Director routinely facilitates retreats for city and town councils, both as part of their annual budget process and upon request for additional strategic planning.

*"The WPCOG's support was instrumental in helping Claremont hire our new Police Chief. Their objective approach, thorough candidate assessments, and streamlined process transformed what is often a tedious undertaking into an efficient and smooth experience. They kept our council well-informed at every step and incorporated our feedback into each decision. We are grateful for their partnership and professionalism."*

— Jason Brown, Claremont City Manager

## Communications & Outreach

The Communications team plays a vital role in helping the WPCOG share its work, highlight regional initiatives, and strengthen public understanding of the COG's mission. Through strategic messaging and consistent outreach, Communications ensures that residents, partners, and stakeholders stay informed about programs, services, and regional accomplishments.

The team manages a wide range of public-facing platforms—including social media, the WPCOG website, digital newsletters, and both print and online press—to broaden awareness and foster meaningful engagement across the region.

In addition to promoting WPCOG activities, Communications staff provides support to local governments, sister COGs, and partner organizations by helping them develop and maintain: professional, user-friendly websites; clear and cohesive brand identities; brochures, reports, and informational materials; email campaigns and digital outreach tools; Graphics, templates, and visual assets that strengthen messaging.

This collaborative support helps ensure that public agencies across the region communicate with clarity, consistency, and impact—enhancing transparency and building trust with the communities they serve.



Users  
29,100  
Sessions  
47,098



Posts  
302  
Reaches  
210,881



Meetings  
261  
Attendees  
2,998



Executive  
Searches  
Completed  
1

# AREA AGENCY ON AGING



The Area Agency on Aging (AAA) system is a nationwide network created under the Older Americans Act of 1965, designed to ensure that older adults and caregivers have access to community-based services, advocacy, and long-term planning support.

**AAA Services:**

- > *Resource Directory for Older Adults*
- > *Regional Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program*
- > *Family Caregiver Support Program*
- > *Technical Assistance to Agencies Serving Older Adults*
- > *Senior Tax Heel Legislature Support*
- > *Information & Options Counseling*
- > *Operation Fan/Heat Relief*
- > *Medicare Information for Patients & Providers Act Grant*
- > *Project C.A.R.E.*
- > *Evidence-Based Health Promotion Classes*
- > *Presentations on Aging Issues*

## Family Caregiver Support Program

In 2025, the Family Caregiver Support Program (FCSP) strengthened services for caregivers and expanded community partnerships across the region.

FCSP continued the Caregiver Directed Respite Voucher Program, allowing families to select their own respite providers. The program also supported grandparents raising grandchildren by distributing school supplies in Alexander, Burke, and Catawba Counties and hosting multiple family-focused events, including Grand Family Night with Catawba County Schools and a Grandfamily Night outing with the Hickory Crawdads.

To support the needs of working caregivers, FCSP partnered with Workforce Development to offer Empowering Working Caregivers workshops for local employers in partnership with Carolina Caring, Adult Life Programs, Catawba Council on Aging and Project CARE.

Throughout the year, FCSP facilitated six ongoing caregiver support groups and collaborated with community partners to offer the Healthier Lifestyle, Healthier You event at Ridgeview Recreation and a Grandparents Celebration with Alexander Early Head Start. The program also co-hosted the Caregiving Connection Caregiver Conference with Adult Children of Aging Parents and Catawba Valley Community College.

FCSP provided educational outreach to Lenoir-Rhyne University nursing students on caregivers and available resources to support caregivers in our community. In partnership with Carolina Caring, FCSP offered Church & Care workshops to local faith-based community staff in Catawba and Burke counties to help support caregiving families in their communities.

## Home & Community Care Block Grant

The AAA administers the Home and Community Care Block Grant (HCCBG) for the region. This grant funds an array of in-home and community-based services to help seniors stay in their homes. The HCCBG allows counties the flexibility to determine which services to fund based on community need. Services are provided to older adults age 60+ and are based on need.

**HCCBG Services Funded in the Region:**

- > *Home Delivered Meals*
- > *Congregate Meals*
- > *In-Home Aide*
- > *Adult Day Care*
- > *Adult Day Health*
- > *Medical Transportation*
- > *General Transportation*
- > *Housing & Home Improvement*
- > *Senior Center Operations*
- > *Information & Options Counseling*

**1,000+**  
Resource Directories Distributed

**49**  
Community Presentations on Aging

 **150,053**  
Meals Served

 **32,652**  
Hours of In-Home Aide Services

 **112**  
Housing & Home Improvement Projects

 **6,462**  
Medical & General Transport Trips

 **6,464**  
Adult Day Care/Health Days-of-Service

 **610**  
Hours of Legal Service

## Regional Long-Term Care Ombudsman

 **63**  
Long-Term Care Complaints

 **105**  
Technical Assistsances to the Community

## Project C.A.R.E. (Caregiver Alternative to Running on Empty)

Project C.A.R.E. continued to provide critical support to caregivers of individuals living with Alzheimer's disease, dementia, and related cognitive disorders across its 16-county service area. The program delivered information, education, care management, and respite vouchers to help families sustain safe, stable care at home.

Client Assessments  
**59**

Home Visits  
**43**

Granted Vouchers  
**54**

Information & Referrals  
**302**

Outreach Events  
**27**

## Outreach & Support

The Area Agency on Aging participated in key outreach and engagement events throughout the year to strengthen community awareness of available aging services and supports.

- > **SIR Expo Participation:** AAA staff attended the SIR Expo in September to share information about services offered through the agency and to highlight local provider resources. Staff also engaged directly with older adults to explain county-specific programs and supports available to them.
- > **Information & Assistance Response:** AAA staff responded to 1,229 telephone calls for Information & Assistance referrals, ensuring that older adults and caregivers received timely guidance and connections to appropriate services.
- > **Options Counseling:** Staff provided Options Counseling to 5 individuals or families, offering personalized support to help them understand available long-term care choices and make informed decisions.

## Choosing Home – State Fiscal Recovery Funds (SFRF) Housing & Home Improvement

Choosing Home funding allowed the AAA to address critical housing and safety needs for older adults across the region. Through these resources, the agency provided targeted assistance that helped residents remain safely and comfortably in their homes.

- > **Direct Assistance to Older Adults:** AAA supported 20 older adults with essential housing and stability services.
- > **Types of Support Provided:** Assistance included heat pump repairs, replacement appliances, utility support, and rental assistance, ensuring that older adults facing financial or environmental hardships could maintain safe, functional living conditions.

## Providing Elders Additional Sustenance (PEAS)

Providing Elders Additional Sustenance (PEAS) is a statewide nutrition initiative designed to reduce food insecurity among high-risk older adults and support their ability to remain independent. It uses state recovery funds to deliver consistent, nutritious food directly to seniors who face barriers to preparing meals or accessing grocery stores.

### Program Purpose

PEAS focuses on older adults age 60+ who are at heightened risk due to cognitive impairment, functional limitations, or other health and mobility challenges. By ensuring reliable access to healthy food, the program helps stabilize daily living conditions and reduces the likelihood of premature institutional placement.

**66** Older Adults Used the Program

**532** Grocery Orders Placed

**\$44,811** in Groceries



# COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

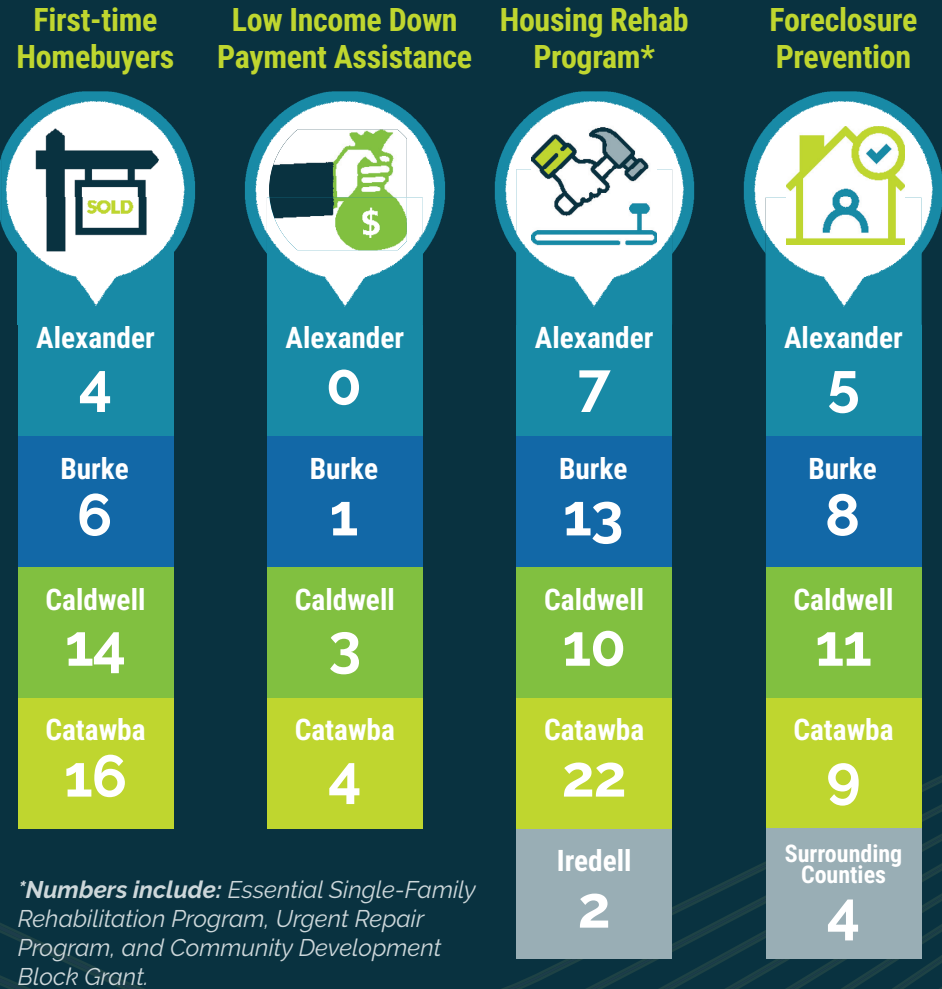


**\$6.5 million investment for the Town of Drexel - Drexel Heritage Furniture plant #1 redevelopment into a pad-ready site with updated utilities. Projected creation of 200+ jobs.**

In 2025, Community & Economic Development prepared 55 grant applications totaling \$167+ million, securing 30 awards worth \$18.5 million, with 16 applications pending. Funding came from N.C. Commerce, Appalachian Regional Commission, NC Housing Finance Agency, Department of Housing and Urban Development, NC Department of Environmental Quality, Dogwood Health Trust, Golden LEAF, and others. Awarded economic-development projects are expected to leverage \$8+ million in private investment and create 127 full-time jobs. Staff continued administering 70+ active community and economic development projects.

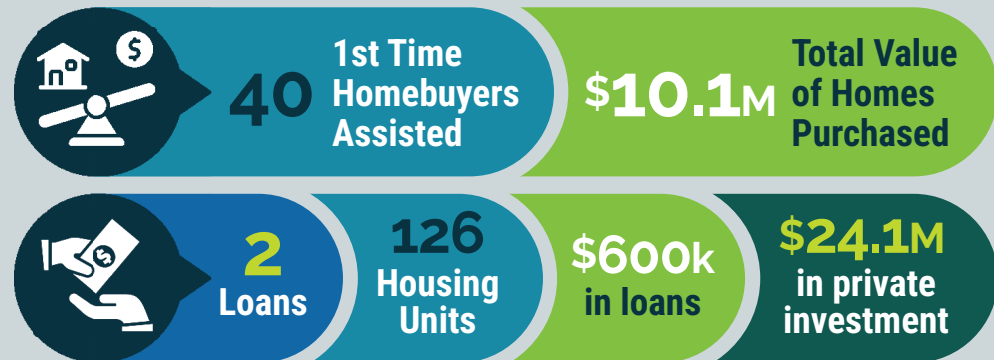
Major project awards included \$1 million for site grading at Evergreene Industrial Park (Sawmills), \$700,000 for water/sewer improvements on Albert Tron Boulevard in Morganton, \$673,000 for Sterling Road upgrades (Alexander County), and \$300,000 for modern equipment supporting CVCC trade programs. \$100,000 supported Kooima Company's expansion in Conover, tied to \$19+ million in investment and 13 new jobs. With local matches, staff supported \$20+ million in total project development.

Hurricane Helene recovery remained a priority, with 2025 awards including \$1 million for River Village Boardwalk repairs (Morganton), \$87,000 for a replacement generator at the Gamewell wastewater pump station, and \$75,000 for housing development in Hildebran. Twenty-four related Helene-related applications have been submitted to date, representing early steps in a long-term regional recovery strategy, with additional applications underway as new funding becomes available.



## HOME Consortium Program

Riverbend Apartments in Morganton is nearing completion with support from a \$300,000 HOME Consortium loan, part of a \$14.8 million project creating 66 new units. Tron Place Apartments in Valdese is also nearing completion, backed by a \$300,000 HOME Consortium loan for a \$9.3 million project that will deliver 60 senior units.



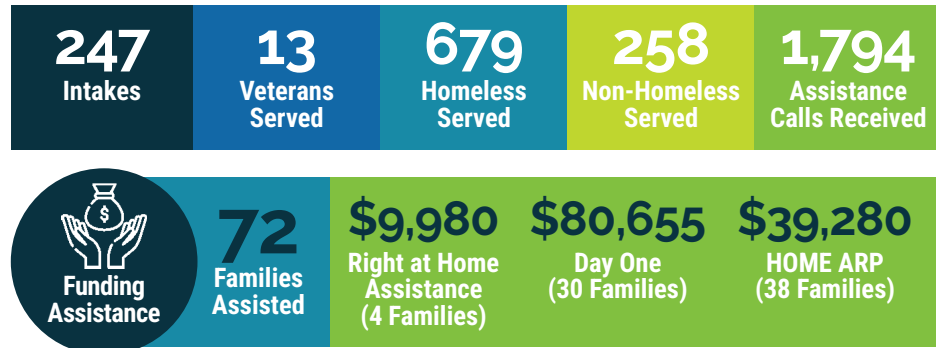
# 2025 Awarded Grants

Project	Community	Funding Source	Awarded Funds	Project Total	Jobs Created	Housing Units
Urgent Repair Program	Alex./Burke/Cald.	NCHFA	\$330,000	\$330,000		22
Alexander County Sterling Road	Alexander County	CDBG-NR	\$673,596	\$1,318,640		
ESFR Alexander County 2027	Alexander County	NCHFA	\$182,000	\$182,000		2
Enhancing Trade Programs through Modern Equipment	Alexander County	ARC-AD	\$300,000	\$600,000		
WPCC Heavy Equipment Operating Program	Burke County	Golden LEAF	\$479,949	\$479,949		
Heavy Equipment for Vocational Programs	Burke County	ARC-AD	\$150,000	\$300,000		
Foothills Regional Airport Sewer PER	Caldwell County	NCRR	\$50,000	\$50,000		
Caldwell-Watauga Educational Attainment Initiative	Caldwell/Watauga	ARC-AD	\$300,000	\$600,000		
Urgent Repair Program	Catawba County	NCHFA	\$165,000	\$165,000		12
ESFR Catawba County 2027	Catawba County	NCHFA	\$182,000	\$182,000		4
WNC Weatherization Program	WNC	NCDEQ	\$6,000,000	\$6,000,000		
Lenoir HOME Unifour Consortium	WPCOG Region	HUD	\$984,231	\$984,231		
Right at Home Homeless Prevention Funding	WPCOG Region	Right at Home	\$10,000	\$10,000		
WPCOG Capacity Building	WPCOG Region	Dogwood	\$600,000	\$600,000		
Claremont Mcklin Outfall Line	Claremont	IDF	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000		
Project Kettlecorn - Kooima Company	Conover	NCDOC - Building Reuse	\$100,000	\$19,435,000	13	
Drexel Heritage Gap Funding	Drexel	CDBG-NR	\$1,600,000	\$1,600,000		
Drexel Substation Construction - Matching Funds	Drexel	Dogwood	\$2,000,000	\$7,192,398		
Gamewell Pump Station Generator Replacement	Gamewell	NCDOC - SmBiz	\$87,290	\$87,290		
Glen Alpine Asset Inventory and Assessment	Glen Alpine	NCDEQ	\$150,000	\$150,000		
Hildebran Switch Housing Project	Hildebran	Dogwood	\$75,000	\$75,000		
Lenoir CDBG Entitlement 2025	Lenoir	HUD	\$136,612	\$136,612		
Morganton CDBG Entitlement	Morganton	HUD	\$212,470	\$212,470		
Boardwalk Repair and Replacement	Morganton	NCDOC - SmBiz	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000		
Albert Tron Boulevard Water and Sewer Project	Morganton	ARC-AD	\$700,000	\$1,400,000		
Evergreene Industrial Park Site Grading	Sawmills	Golden LEAF SITE	\$1,016,784	\$1,016,784		
Expanding Capital Opportunities to Small Businesses	Valdese	ARC-AD	\$300,000	\$600,000		
<b>TOTALS</b>			<b>\$18,784,932</b>	<b>\$45,707,374</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>40</b>

# Homelessness Response Team

The Western Piedmont Council of Governments (WPCOG) Homelessness Response Team is a multidisciplinary team with expertise in mental health, substance use disorders, domestic violence, workforce development, public health, and housing. Together, they provide direct, person-centered support to individuals experiencing homelessness across the region.

The team meets people where they are—on the streets, in encampments, and in other public spaces—to understand their needs and connect them to appropriate services. In addition to direct outreach, the team coordinates with local governments, nonprofits, churches, law enforcement, and social service organizations to strengthen the regional response to homelessness and reduce service gaps.



## Summer PIT Count Highlights

Outreach teams connected with 300 individuals across five counties during the August Summer Point in Time Count. Only 47 reported housing as their sole need. The effort also generated 11 new community partnerships.

### Alexander

- > Outreach at 8 locations

### Burke

- > Outreach to 14 community partners
- > Resource Fair held with BUCM

### Caldwell

- > Outreach at 10 locations, including Yokefellow (Lenoir) and RHA

**13**

### Catawba

- > Outreach across 17 partners/locations
- > Strong engagement with library systems
- > Resource Fair with Hickory Soup Kitchen

### McDowell

Major support from MMA, with 100+ entries collected

## HRT Referrals

Staff has streamlined its intake and referral process. Referrals to HRT can now be submitted using the new electronic referral form and the HRT-specific release of information form. Once completed, please email your forms to the dedicated HRT email portal at [homelessresponse@wpcog.org](mailto:homelessresponse@wpcog.org).

HRT also has a dedicated line for general inquiries: **(828) 485-4201**.



# COMMUNITY & REGIONAL PLANNING



## Planning

The Western Piedmont Council of Governments' Regional and Community Planning Department provides comprehensive current and long-range planning support to member governments across the region. Our planners work closely with local staff, elected officials, and community stakeholders to guide responsible growth, protect community character, and advance long-term goals.



### Current Planning

WPCOG delivers day-to-day planning assistance that helps communities manage development, interpret regulations, and respond to emerging needs. Core services include:

- > **Zoning** – Providing daily interpretation, application, and updates to zoning regulations to help communities achieve their development goals
- > **Annexations** – Advising on the process, impacts, and implementation of municipal boundary expansions
- > **Ordinance Revisions** – Updating local land-use ordinances to reflect best practices, community priorities, and changing conditions
- > **Land-Use Issues** – Offering guidance on development trends, land-use conflicts, variances, and special use permits to ensure compliance with local regulations

In 2025, WPCOG provided daily land-use planning services to 14 local governments: Alexander County; Caldwell County; City of Lenoir; Village of Cedar Rock; Towns of Catawba, Drexel, Gamewell, Hildebran, Hudson, Long View, Maiden, Rhodhiss, Rutherford College, and Valdese.

## Long-Range Planning

Long-range planning helps communities establish a shared vision for the future and chart a path toward sustainable growth. WPCOG supports local governments through:

- > **Comprehensive Planning** – Developing long-term plans that address future land use, parks and recreation, public services, natural and historic resources, and economic development
- > **Environmental Planning** – Integrating environmental considerations and sustainable practices into land-use decisions
- > **Strategic Planning** – Crafting long-term goals and actionable strategies rooted in community input and aligned with local priorities

In 2025, WPCOG provided long-range planning services for additional communities outside our region:

- > **Town of Peltier, Carteret County** – CAMA Land Use Plan
- > **Town of Pikeville, Wayne County** – Comprehensive Land Use Plan

Additionally, WPCOG and the East Carolina Council of Governments jointly submitted a proposal to develop Greene County's Comprehensive Land Use Plan.

## Parks & Recreation Planning

WPCOG helps communities shape a shared recreation vision and develop actionable plans that enhance quality of life. While parks and recreation planning is a key component of comprehensive planning, WPCOG also offers stand-alone expertise In 2025:

- > Completed Valdese Comprehensive Recreation Plan
- > Initiated Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Plans for Brookford and Long View



## Research and Data Analytics Center

As a Lead Regional Organization (LRO) Affiliate of the North Carolina Data Center, the WPCOG Research and Data Analytics Center provides expert support in locating and analyzing demographic data for local governments, nonprofits, and private-sector partners.

Center staff develop specialized data products that help communities plan, grow, and make informed decisions. These products include community assessments, economic indicator newsletters, industry growth analyses, and student growth estimation models.

### Data Center Publications

- > 4 - Economic Indicator Newsletters
- > 4 - Hickory Economic Indicators Reports
- > Catawba County Schools – Early Head Start Community Assessment



### Accomplishments

Over the past year, the Research and Data Analytics Center delivered a wide range of high-value projects and data products that strengthened regional planning, economic development, and community decision-making. Key accomplishments include:

### Major Projects & Deliverables

- > Alexander County Schools Voting District redistricting project
- > Four Regional and four Hickory Economic Indicators Newsletters
- > Added 2025 building permit data for the region into the database
- > Completed data updates for Regional Housing roadmap website
- > Collected demographic and economic data for the Regional Home Program and Lenoir Comprehensive Plans for HUD
- > 50 Location Analytics (Placer) requests, including visitor data for festivals, events, traffic data, etc.
- > FY 2024-25 Greenway Passenger Sampling reports
- > Completed 2025 Regional Data Snapshot reports (2015-2025)
- > Completed 2025 Vehicle Occupancy Rate Calculations and analysis of 2023 average daily traffic counts (changes 2013 - 2023)
- > Analyzed and updated regional commuting pattern statistics

## Regional Snapshot

**\$299,990**  
Median Home Sales Price

**\$364,369**  
Average Home Sales Price

**3.7%**  
Unemployment Rate

**14.5%**  
Poverty Rate

**24.9 Minutes**  
Mean Travel Time to Work

**376,152**  
Population Estimate

**153,418**  
Number of Jobs

**171,401**  
Number of Housing Units

**\$64,059**  
Median Income

*Sources: NC Office of Management and Budget, NC Labor and Economic Analysis Division, 2024 American Community Survey*

## Code Enforcement

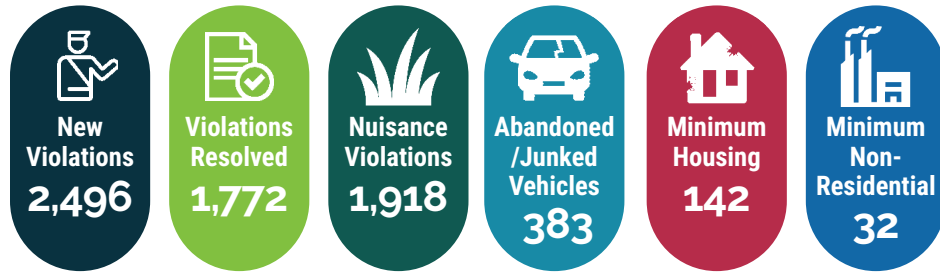
In 2025, 15 local governments—Brookford, Caldwell County, Cahaj's Mountain, Catawba, Cedar Rock, Drexel, Gamewell, Glen Alpine, Long View, Hildebran, Hudson, Maiden, Newton, Rhodhiss, and Sawmills—contracted with the Western Piedmont Council of Governments for code enforcement services.

WPCOG's compliance-focused approach emphasizes education and consultation, helping residents and property owners achieve voluntary compliance. An in-house GIS application supports this work by providing a real-time, municipality-specific information database and enabling staff to instantly generate documents and reports.

Municipalities experienced cost savings and increased property development as owners brought properties into compliance following enforcement notifications.

Code Enforcement Officers also partnered with local governments to support the development and adoption of new ordinances addressing homelessness, complementing the work of the WPCOG Homeless Outreach Program.

## Code Enforcement by the Numbers



### Stormwater Program Support

The Code Enforcement Program strengthened WPCOG's Stormwater Program by conducting Illicit Discharge Detection and Elimination (IDDE) investigations.

- 40 illicit discharge reports were made and all were resolved
- Officers will continue performing waterway inspections—by boat—to identify and eliminate illegal discharges, promoting cleaner waterways and healthier ecosystems

### Homeless Outreach Support

Code Enforcement Officers provided critical on-the-ground knowledge of rural areas and accompanied the homeless outreach specialists into hard-to-reach locations to connect individuals with services. Officers also met with local governments to discuss ordinances aimed at reducing the impacts of homelessness on communities.

## Geographic Information Systems (GIS)

### Local Government GIS Maintenance Services

- Provided services for 7 local governments - Claremont, Drexel, Maiden, Rutherford College, Sawmills, Taylorsville, and Valdese

### Stormwater

- Provided stormwater mapping for Cahaj's Mountain, Conover, Gamewell, Granite Falls, Hudson, Lenoir, and Sawmills

### Geocoding

- GPS-located 1,937 stormwater features for Cahaj's Mountain, Gamewell, Granite Falls, Hudson, Lenoir, Maiden, and Sawmills.
- Geocoded 5,653 features and produced 40 maps for Carolina Textile District, Manufacturing Solutions Center, and referral companies.

### Mapping

- Completed work on the Regional Housing Initiative and the Caldwell County Housing Plan
- Provided maps for \$7.5 million grant application to NCDEQ for septic system replacements to help Hurricane Helene survivors facing financial hardship
- Mapped Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba counties' building permit locations
- Completed mapping for Brookford Recreation Plan
- Provided mapping for Valdese Recreation Plan
- Began mapping for Long View Recreation Plan
- Completed work on Taylorsville wastewater mapping project
- Compiled Greenway transit data layers and maps

### Online Applications

- Developed beta version of Homelessness Task Force application
- Completed Caldwell County water application
- Online application mapping support to Code Compliance Division

### Awards

- Received the Aliceann Wohlbruck Impact Award from the National Association of Development Organizations for three initiatives: the Creative Catawba Cultural Plan LifeMode Tapestry Analysis, the Western Piedmont Regional Housing Initiative Roadmap, and the STEM-based Tree Canopy Analysis & Tree Planting Plan delivered in Burke, Caldwell, and Hickory City Schools.

Maps/  
Spatial Data

499

Geocoded  
Points

23,222

Support  
Requests

314

Drone  
Flights

19

GIS Specialists, Kelly Christensen and Andrew Webb conduct drone preflight check.



## Emergency Management

In 2025, the Emergency Management Program continued expanding the Community Health and Disaster Mitigation Explorer (CHADME) database—an interactive, metrics-based mapping solution that allows users to collect, store, and visualize critical regional information. The tool now includes a field map collector, a grant-writing dashboard, and an Emergency Management dashboard, strengthening data-driven decision-making across the region.

Staff conducted numerous LiDAR mapping flights over areas vulnerable to flooding. These pre-Helene datasets proved essential for FEMA Public Assistance reimbursement and will continue supporting future restoration, mitigation, and resiliency grant applications.

Emergency Management personnel also hosted and attended multiple FEMA training courses, maintaining continuing education requirements for the financial administration of FEMA reimbursements. Staff participated in dozens of meetings with FEMA and local governments, providing technical expertise during reimbursement discussions, coordinating damage assessments, mapping impacts, collecting data, and supporting the management of contracted consultants.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Helene, staff completed 40 drone flights to document damages and supported three joint training events with the Caldwell County Sheriff's Office and local fire departments. These training opportunities relied on strong partnerships with local governments, Code Enforcement, and property owners.

Emergency Management personnel assisted the Valdese Housing Authority with FEMA Public Assistance reimbursement, debris removal, and the mitigation-focused removal of 78 hazardous trees. Staff completed damage assessments, mapping, and coordination with FEMA representatives and contractors. To date, more than \$8 million in damages have been assessed and inventoried for local communities.

## Accomplishments

- Provided FEMA Public Assistance financial administration support to 12 local governments
- Expanded the Community Health and Disaster Mitigation Explorer (CHADME) tool
- Completed LiDAR and multispectral data collection and processing for Granite Falls Lakeside Park damages from Tropical Storm Helene
- Conducted drone assessments of damaged sewer lines and streams for municipalities
- Performed in-house LiDAR data collection and processing
- Added multispectral imaging capabilities to drone services

## Natural Resources

### Western Piedmont Water Resources Committee

The Water Resources Committee remains the primary forum through which WPCOG collaborates with local governments on regional water-resource issues. The committee brings together representatives from local governments, nonprofit organizations, educational institutions, and businesses across Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, and Catawba Counties.

In 2025, the committee met three times to explore emerging and complex water-quality topics, including PFAS detection methods, interbasin transfers, and the effects of hurricanes on water quality. These discussions strengthened regional understanding and supported informed decision-making among member governments.

### Stormwater Planning and Administration

This program helps 9 municipalities meet EPA requirements while maintaining high water-quality standards in a cost-effective manner. The program focuses on the measures required under NPDES MS4 permits and currently administers full stormwater programs for Conover, Newton, Lenoir, Granite Falls, Hudson, Gamewell, Sawmills, Cahaj's Mountain, and Valdese. Educational programming continues in Hickory, Maiden, and Morganton.





The program leverages the diverse skill sets of the WPCOG team:

- Code Enforcement supports illicit discharge detection and enforcement
- GIS manages stormwater utility data collection and monitoring
- Natural Resources Division (includes Community and Regional Planning Director, Natural Resource Program Manager, and Natural Resource Administrator) oversees program management, outreach, public participation, and post-construction requirements)

### Public Education, Outreach, and Participation

The Natural Resources Division expanded its outreach in 2025, taking part in 42 education events that reached nearly 3,500 residents through festivals, school programs, and hands-on activities about water quality and stormwater management. Staff also delivered presentations at the Catawba Science Center, public libraries, and schools across the region.

Public participation stayed strong with 10 cleanup events, where 125 volunteers removed over 3,000 pounds of litter from local waterways.

Staff were visible at many of the region's major community events—from STEM Trek and Earth Fest to the Hudson Butterfly Festival, the Waldensian Festival, and National Night Out—helping strengthen public awareness and engagement. WPCOG also hosted five Water Resources Committee meetings, continuing to support regional collaboration on water-quality issues.

### Accomplishments

- Completed Stormwater mapping for Cahah's Mountain, Conover, Gamewell, Granite Falls, Hudson, Lenoir, and Sawmills
- Completed environmental reviews and mapping for the Sawmills Evergreen site and the Drexel industrial site
- Engaged 125 volunteers for regional cleanup events, removed more than 3,000 pounds of litter
- Supported regional coordination efforts responding to Charlotte's interbasin transfer request
- Delivered stormwater education and outreach for all Stormwater Partnership communities, (Hudson Butterfly Festival, Catawba Science Center SPARK Showcase, & Sawmills Spring in the Park
- Partnered with High Country Council of Governments to secure \$7.56 million for Helene-damaged wastewater systems
- Completed the Hunting Creek Watershed Plan
- Finalized the Coastal Area Management Plan component of Peletier's Comprehensive Plan
- Provided audit support to Caldwell municipalities and Newton during their state stormwater audits
- Updated stormwater management plans and submitted drafts for six Caldwell municipalities, Newton, and Valdese to the Division of Natural and Environmental Resources



Stormwater  
Plan Review  
**15**

IDDE Issues  
Reported  
**101**

SCM  
Inspections  
**117**

Facility  
Inspections  
**28**

Outfall  
Inspections  
**34**

Outreach  
Events  
**47**

Ourtrach  
Attendance  
**3,548**

Distributed  
Materials  
**2,477**

## Special Projects

### Digital Access Planning

- Supported Burke County's digital access initiatives through grant administration for Dogwood Health Trust funding
- Secured an NC Rural Center grant to advance broadband expansion and digital inclusion in Burke County
- Continued implementation of the \$473k Digital Champion Grant, focused on senior digital literacy. In partnership with the Area Agency on Aging, produced a digitized Resource Guide for caregivers. 737 senior citizens students were served in Burke, Caldwell and Alexander.
- A sampling of classes included Artificial Intelligence (AI), online safety, and virtual meetings.
- Distributed 110 laptops to Helene survivors and residents in need

### Professional-Based Learning

- Delivered tree-canopy & heat-island STEM programming through an NC Forestry Service grant at Heritage Middle (Burke), William Lenoir Middle (Caldwell), & Longview Elementary (Hickory)
- Continued collaboration with K-12 schools, community colleges, and universities to promote the NC Foothills Experience web tool through hands-on learning
- Partnered with CVCC to develop NC Foothills Experience marketing materials, including a regional day-trip itinerary

### Economic Development Initiatives

- Completed the Caldwell Economic Development Feasibility Study
- Advanced master planning for southern Caldwell County
- Provided financial services support to the Village of Cedar Rock
- Submitted Letters of Intent for Hazard Mitigation Infrastructure and Advance Assistance grant applications for Cedar Rock

### Housing Efforts

- Advanced the Regional Housing Roadmap (NADO award winner), providing a comprehensive housing assessment for the region
- Selected as 1 of 16 teams statewide to participate in the UNC School of Government's Carolinas 100 – Homes initiative to address affordable housing
- Developed the WPCOG HomeBASE website to support regional housing needs ([www.wpcog.org/homebase](http://www.wpcog.org/homebase))





Research & Data Analytics Center Manager Duncan Cavanaugh leads public meeting for the Brookford Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Plan.

# FINANCIAL SERVICES



## Governmental Funds Overview

The Council's governmental funds focus on reporting near-term inflows, outflows, and balances of resources that are available for current use. This perspective helps readers evaluate the Council's short-term financing needs and its capacity to meet ongoing obligations.

### General Fund

The General Fund serves as the primary operating fund of the Western Piedmont Council of Governments. At the close of the fiscal year, the General Fund reported an unassigned fund balance of \$648,958, with a total fund balance of \$3,296,532. The Council's unassigned fund balance represents 6.41% of total General Fund expenditures and transfers out, less lease liabilities issued. Total fund balance represents 31.15% of that same amount.

### Fund Balance Highlights

At June 30, 2025, the governmental funds of the Western Piedmont Council of Governments reported a combined fund balance of \$5,783,167, reflecting a net increase of \$1,421,211 for the year. This overall change includes an increase of \$320,746 in the General Fund, \$890 in the Aging Fund, \$304,574 in the Section 8 Fund, \$124,598 in the Building Expansion Capital Project Fund, \$212,789 in the State Capital Infrastructure Grant Fund, and \$457,614 across the Council's non-major funds.

### Local Government Finance Services

The WPCOG Finance Department provides professional financial services to support local governments across the region. These services offer continuity through standardized processes and shared expertise, reducing the impact of staff turnover or vacancies. The WPCOG's experienced finance staff help improve accuracy, ensure compliance, and reduce errors through consistent procedures and multiple levels of review. Centralized financial services also strengthen internal controls, helping mitigate fraud risk while allowing local governments to operate more efficiently and focus on core services.

## Fiscal Year 2024-2025

DEPARTMENT	REVENUES	EXPENSES
General Government	\$93,680	\$108,095
Area Agency on Aging	\$1,290,057	\$1,272,758
Community & Regional Planning	\$1,086,254	\$1,044,299
Environmental Services	\$1,056,740	\$843,927
Transportation Planning	\$1,083,191	\$1,036,594
Community Development	\$2,441,021	\$2,341,348
Economic Development	\$335,414	\$534,989
Regional Public Housing	\$1,756,150	\$1,616,540
Workforce Development	\$897,975	\$842,568
Mis/Local Dues/Fringe & Indirect	\$411,342	\$132,450
<b>Totals</b>	<b>\$10,451,824</b>	<b>\$9,773,568</b>
Total other financing sources	(\$357,510)	
Net Change in Fund Balance	\$320,746	

## Special Revenue Funds

	REVENUES	EXPENSES
AGING	\$2,884,973	\$2,844,083
Net Change	\$890	
PUBLIC HOUSING	\$9,675,056	\$9,370,482
Net Change	\$304,574	
BUILDING EXPANSION CAPITAL PROJECT FUND	\$1,725,102	\$1,600,504
Net Change	\$124,598	
STATE CAPITAL & INFRASTRUCTURE FUND	\$212,789	\$0
Net Change	\$212,789	
*Non-Major Funds	\$1,177,876	\$1,149,624
Transfers Out	\$429,362	
Net Change	\$457,614	

\*Non-Major Funds Include:  
WIOA, SFRF Disaster  
Recovery, Burke River Trail  
Project, and Capital Reserve  
Fund.

# REGIONAL HOUSING AUTHORITY



The Regional Housing Authority marked significant progress this year. HUD approved the consolidation of the Hickory Housing Authority's program effective July 1, 2025, increasing our jurisdiction's available vouchers by 556, a 37% rise from 2024. The agency also advanced mobility efforts through the Choice Mobility Voucher initiative.

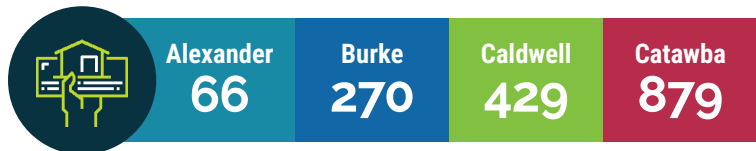
RHA completed its second year as the Region 3 Coordinated Entry Lead, working with the Homeless Response Team and the NC Balance of State to support Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, and McDowell counties. To sustain program growth, the department restructured leadership, promoting Elizabeth Moncrief to Assistant Director and adding three Program Managers.

A comprehensive Waiting List purge reduced the list from 2,213 to 1,273 applicants, improving accuracy and shortening wait times. Additionally, the Assistant Director contributed to statewide coordination through participation in Governor Josh Stein's Interagency Council for Coordinating Homeless Programs.

## Housing Choice Voucher Program

The Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program is the federal government's primary tool for helping low-income families access safe, affordable housing in the private market. Participants may choose any housing that meets program requirements, giving families flexibility and choice in where they live.

At the end of 2025, the Regional Housing Authority had the following HCV's by county:



These figures reflect the continued demand for affordable housing options and the essential role the HCV program plays in supporting families across all four counties.

## RHA by the Numbers

# of Families Assisted  
**1,881**

Families with Children  
**536**

## Client Demographics

Male Head of Household  
**20%**

Female Head of Household  
**80%**

Elderly  
**68%**

Disabled  
**56%**

## Clients by Race

White  
**68%**

Black  
**41%**

Other  
**1%**

## Fraud Collection

Families assisted through the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program who inaccurately report income are placed on a repayment agreement. When repayment cannot be collected directly, the Regional Housing Authority (RHA) submits the debt to the NC Debt Setoff collection system.

In 2025, the RHA collected \$823 directly from clients and \$3,392.64 through the NC Debt Setoff program, for a combined total of \$4,215.64.

Collected from Clients  
**\$823**

Collected by NC Setoff  
**\$3,393**

Total Funds  
**\$4,215**

## Inspections

The RHA conducts annual inspections for all occupied units, along with pre-move-in inspections and special inspections as needed.

In 2025, the RHA's two inspectors completed 2,803 HCV inspections, with a 55% pass rate. This volume reflects both the scale of the program and the continued emphasis on ensuring safe, quality housing for participating families.

Completed Inspections  
**2,803**

Pass Rate  
**55%**

## Landlord Engagement

In 2025, the RHA partnered with 486 active landlords across Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, and Catawba Counties to provide private-market rental assistance through Housing Choice Vouchers.

Landlord recruitment remains a priority to increase utilization of issued vouchers, and in 2025 the RHA executed Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) contracts with 30 new landlords who had not previously participated in the program.

Active Landlords  
**486**

New Landlords  
**30**

## Special Programs

The RHA enhances the quality of life for participating families by offering a range of specialized housing programs tailored to unique needs. These include Housing Choice Voucher Homeownership, Mainstream Vouchers, Family Unification Vouchers, Foster Youth to Independence Vouchers, HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing, Project-Based Vouchers, Emergency Housing Vouchers, Housing Stability Vouchers, and the REACH-Family Self-Sufficiency Program.

### Housing Choice Voucher Homeownership Program (HCVH)

The Homeownership Program lets Housing Choice Voucher participants use their subsidy toward a mortgage, helping families achieve stable, long-term homeownership they may not otherwise afford.

In 2025, the RHA assisted 17 families each month, an increase of six households from 2024, providing \$80,790 in mortgage assistance.

### Mainstream Vouchers

Mainstream Vouchers support households that include a non-elderly disabled adult between the ages of 18 and 61. While the program follows the same rules as standard Housing Choice Vouchers, it is funded and reported separately.

### Family Unification Program (FUP)

The Family Unification Program helps families whose children have been displaced—or are at imminent risk of displacement—due to inadequate housing. FUP also supports former foster youth transitioning to independence. The RHA partners with Public Child Welfare Agencies to identify eligible households.

### Foster Youth Initiative (FYI)

The Foster Youth Initiative provides housing assistance and supportive services to young adults ages 18–24 who are leaving foster care and are at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

### Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH)

The HUD-VASH program pairs Housing Choice Voucher rental assistance with case management and clinical services provided by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Veterans receive support through VA medical centers, community-based clinics, contractors, or other designated providers.

In 2025, the RHA participated in a VA Surge event at the Hickory Soup Kitchen, where multiple Veteran Services organizations collaborated to house unsheltered veterans within 24 hours. Two veterans were housed with VASH vouchers during the event—a process that typically takes 30–90 days.



**Mainstream**  
319



**HCV-Homeownership**  
17



**FUP**  
77



**FYI**  
11



**VASH**  
64



**PBV**  
42



**EHV**  
30



**HSV**  
10



**HOPWA**  
14

### Project-Based Vouchers (PBV)

Project-Based Vouchers are part of the Housing Choice Voucher program, allowing PHAs to attach voucher assistance to specific units rather than individual households. No additional funding is provided; PHAs allocate a portion of their tenant-based vouchers to PBV projects.

The RHA operates three PBV projects:

- Two in Catawba County serving the hardest-to-serve population
- One in Burke County serving adults 62 and older

### Emergency Housing Vouchers (EHV)

Funded through the American Rescue Plan Act, Emergency Housing Vouchers assist individuals and families who are homeless, at risk of homelessness, fleeing domestic or sexual violence, stalking, or human trafficking, or who were recently homeless and face housing instability.

The RHA was awarded 30 EHV vouchers in July 2021. As of October 1, 2023, these vouchers could no longer be reissued, and the RHA maintained a 100% leasing rate. Through strong partnerships with landlords and service agencies, the program has provided stable housing for chronically homeless families. At the end of 2025, 11 vouchers remained actively utilized.

### Housing Stability Vouchers (HSV)

Stability Vouchers support individuals experiencing or at risk of homelessness, survivors of domestic violence or human trafficking, and veterans facing barriers to stable housing.

The RHA administers 10 Housing Stability Vouchers, partnering with the NC Balance of State for utilization and maintaining an MOU with Shelter Home of the Foothills to accept referrals for survivors of domestic violence.

### Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS (HOPWA)

HOPWA vouchers are provided through the AIDS Leadership Foothills-Area Alliance (ALFA). ALFA contracts with WPCOG to administer tenant-based rental assistance, while ALFA provides ongoing case management.

## REACH (Family Self-Sufficiency Program)

REACH is the Regional Housing Authority's Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) program for Housing Choice Voucher participants. Through individualized coaching, each family works with an FSS Coordinator to set goals, access community resources, and build the skills needed to achieve long-term stability. HUD requires that all participants pursue suitable employment as their final goal, and as families increase earned income, RHA deposits a portion of their rent savings into a dedicated escrow account. Families receive these savings upon completing their goals and graduating from the program.

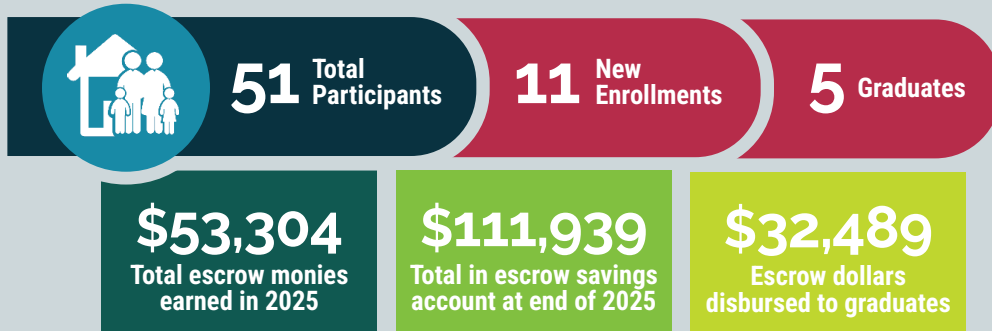
### > REACH Program Participation

- 51 families participated in REACH during 2025
- This included 11 new enrollees, 8 participants transferred from the former Hickory Housing Authority, and 5 graduates who successfully completed their goals

### > REACH's Financial Impact 2025

- Participants earned \$53,304 in new escrow savings
- By the end of 2025, the program's escrow accounts held a combined \$111,938.80 in savings for participating

## REACH Program by the Numbers



## Public Housing Program

The Public Housing Program provides safe, affordable rental housing for low-income families, seniors, and individuals with disabilities. Unlike the private rental market, these units are owned and managed directly by the Public Housing Authority to ensure long-term affordability, regulatory compliance, and consistent property standards.

## Valdese Public Housing Overview (VPH)

Valdese Public Housing includes 121 rental units owned by the Western Piedmont Council of Governments and operated by the Regional Housing Authority. The property is staffed by a Public Housing Program Manager, Maintenance Supervisor, Maintenance Technician, and Administrative Assistant, who oversee daily operations, resident support, and property upkeep.

### Property Improvements

In 2025, the RHA advanced a series of modernization efforts as eight units became vacant, allowing staff to install new flooring, updated appliances, and fresh interior paint. These improvements were complemented by the completion of an ongoing Capital Funds project in partnership with Stogner Architecture, PA, strengthening the long-term condition and functionality of the property.

### HUD Real Estate Assessment Center Inspection Achievement

In early December, the property successfully completed its required HUD Real Estate Assessment Center inspection, earning an exceptional score of 98 and achieving High Performer status. This designation extends the inspection cycle to three years and reflects the property's strong performance in maintenance, management, and regulatory compliance. The result highlights the dedication and teamwork of the Valdese staff and their commitment to providing high-quality housing for residents.

### 2025 Public Housing Highlights

- > Processed 85 applications for one- to four-bedroom units
- > Transitioned all remaining paper applications into the digital system for accurate waiting list management
- > Completed 783 work orders
- > Performed 65 NSPIRE inspections
- > Launched a weekly Walking Club for resident health and engagement
- > Completed a full revision of the ACOP to align with current HUD requirements
- > Conducted records cleanup to improve document management
- > Purged the Waiting List from 269 to 121 applicants, which helps to shorten wait times
- > Hosted a Children's Christmas Party at the VPH office

# TRANSPORTATION PLANNING



## Regional Transportation Planning Leadership

The Western Piedmont Council of Governments (WPCOG) serves as the Lead Planning Agency for the Greater Hickory Metropolitan Planning Organization (GHMPO), coordinating transportation planning across a four-county region. Through the MPO, local governments work together to evaluate system performance, identify needs, develop long-range strategies, and prioritize investments across all modes of transportation. WPCOG also manages the region's allocation of state and federal transportation planning funds, ensuring they are used effectively and equitably.

### Governance and Regional Collaboration

The MPO's decision-making structure brings together both elected leaders and technical experts:

- 11 TAC Meetings**
  - **Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC)** — Comprised of elected officials from all 28 member governments, the TAC sets regional transportation priorities and adopts MPO plans and programs.
- 11 TCC Meetings**
  - **Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC)** — Made up of local government and partner-agency staff, the TCC provides technical review and recommendations to the TAC.

Both committees meet monthly, creating a consistent forum for collaboration, data-driven decision-making, and regional coordination.

## Locally Administered Projects Program (LAPP)

The GHMPO oversees the Locally Administered Projects Program (LAPP), which provides a critical funding source for locally led bicycle, pedestrian, and small roadway projects including:



These investments help local governments deliver high-impact, community-scale projects that improve safety, mobility, and quality of life.

## Regional Planning & Strategic Frameworks

- Adopted the Western Piedmont Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan, a forward-thinking, web-based, interactive tool that functions as a continuously updated, regional living document. The plan supports project development across Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, and Catawba counties and enables local governments to pre-score LAP projects using shared mapping and data resources.
- Adopted the 2026–2035 Transportation Improvement Program, establishing the region's next decade of transportation investments.
- Adopted the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP), setting the annual budget and work priorities for the GHMPO.
- Adopted the Western Piedmont Transportation Safety Plan, developed through a Highway Safety Division grant. The plan identifies high-risk locations using crash and safety data and served as the foundation for four regional safety funding applications.

### Project Prioritization, Scoring, and Submittals

- Completed Vehicle Occupancy Rate (VOR) data collection, the region's oldest continuous dataset, initiated in 1984 and now 42 years strong.
- Coordinated with local governments and NCDOT to identify, refine, and submit highway, bicycle/pedestrian, and aviation projects for Prioritization 8.0.
  - Test-scored 150 projects to determine regional priorities.
  - Submitted 42 projects, including:
    - 18 highway projects
    - 18 bicycle & pedestrian projects
    - 6 aviation projects
- Analyzed and submitted four highway projects for express design review within NCDOT.
- Hosted workshops for NCDOT Divisions 11, 12, and 13, connecting municipalities with state partners to support high-quality project submittals.

**322**  
Total  
Passenger  
Sampling  
Trips

**252**  
Catawba

**70**  
Burke

## Transit Planning, Coordination & Governance

- Provided ongoing GIS services to Greenway Transit, including interactive route mapping and service-area updates to reflect operational changes.
- Drafted and supported adoption of the 2025 Locally Coordinated Plan, aligning regional transit needs with federal Section 5310 funding requirements.
- Continued service as Clerk to the Greenway Board of Directors and Chair of the Greenway Transit Advisory Board, ensuring consistent governance and communication.

## Safety, Congestion, and System Performance

- Hosted quarterly Safety Subcommittee meetings with local law enforcement to guide regional safety strategies.
- Conducted Traffic Safety Outreach in all four counties, resulting in four county-level safety analyses.
- Met with NCDOT on the Congestion Management Process Report, identifying congested corridors and aligning them with potential funding opportunities.
- Conducted and/or attended walk audits across all four counties to assess pedestrian safety and infrastructure needs.

## Regional Coordination & Stakeholder Engagement

- Hosted and attended meetings with local governments and NCDOT on major corridor improvements, including US 321, NC 127, Connelly Springs Road, and other funded highway projects.
- Met quarterly with the Western NC Rail Committee to evaluate potential passenger rail operations, benefits, and costs.
- Supported local governments through ongoing collaboration on bike, pedestrian, transit, and roadway improvements.

## Data, Mapping, and Future Planning

- Initiated data collection for the 2055 Metropolitan Transportation Plan and Comprehensive Transportation Plan updates.
- Began development of an interactive Economic Expansion & Accessibility Tool integrating highway and bike/ped networks with traffic signal data, AADT, zoning, TAZ data, congestion findings, and disaster-relief resources to identify bottlenecks, evaluate signal delays, and support economic-development-focused project planning.

## ADA Title II for State and Local Governments

The WPCOG ADA Planning Services team partners with local governments to develop ADA policies, improve facilities, and prepare ADA Transition Plans that ensure local programs, buildings, and procedures comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Staff stay current on state and federal standards, apply best practices, and assist with ADA-related grievances and appeals.

The program's core goal is to improve accessibility across public infrastructure—buildings, sidewalks, parking lots, transit stops, intersections, and government services that support people with disabilities.

WPCOG uses a GIS-based Survey and Collector Application to inventory pedestrian amenities, transit stops, and sidewalks, identify non-compliant elements, and prioritize mobility hazards by severity. ADA Transition Plans then target the most urgent indoor and outdoor barriers, with recommended improvements developed with NCDOT and illustrated through drone imagery and 3D renderings.

In 2025, WPCOG maintained Transition Plans for Granite Falls, Conover, and Sawmills, and completed an inventory of 346 transit stops and two public facilities for Greenway Public Transportation. Data collection began in 2024 and concluded in 2025 alongside a draft Transition Plan. Once adopted, Greenway Transit will be eligible to use federal Section 5310 funds to upgrade its stops to ADA standards.

## Western Piedmont Safety Subcommittee

The Western Piedmont Safety Subcommittee guides implementation of the Western Piedmont Transportation Safety Plan and provides ongoing local input on regional safety needs. The committee—formerly the Movability Advisory Committee—serves as a forum for identifying mobility, traffic, and safety concerns and shaping investments that improve safety across all modes. In 2025, it met quarterly to conduct walk audits, document



23

ADA  
Maintenance  
Requests



346

Inventoried  
Transit  
Stops



2

Inventoried  
Public  
Facilities



12

Drone Shots  
of Priority  
Locations

mobility barriers, and advance strategies that protect pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and transit users. Membership includes a broad range of stakeholders and now incorporates local law enforcement, strengthening its ability to address roadway safety and community mobility issues.

- Quarterly reviews of high-injury data & roadway risk factors
- Provided input that shaped the WPTSP draft and final adoption
- Supported two SS4A applications and two NCDOT pedestrian safety applications
- Conducted two walk audits based on data and member input
- Assisted with four public engagement events during WPTSP development



**Inventoried Greenway Transit stops for ADA compliance standards. This stop was located at Western Piedmont Community College in Burke County.**

# WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD



## Purpose of the Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board (WPWDB)

The Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board serves as a central leader in advancing workforce solutions across our region. The Board:

- Identifies workforce challenges and convenes partners to address them
- Champions workforce development initiatives that strengthen the regional economy
- Works in collaborative partnership with key stakeholders
- Brings resources together to resolve workforce needs
- Acts as the accountability agent to ensure the work is completed

Through the planning, coordination, and oversight of the WPWDB, our local NCWorks Career Centers deliver:



The Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board invests strategically across Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, and Catawba Counties to expand training opportunities, strengthen support services, and assist workers impacted by layoffs or disasters. These targeted investments ensure residents throughout the region have access to the resources they need to skill up, find employment, and advance in today's workforce.

## National Dislocated Worker Grant Update

Through a National Dislocated Worker Grant from the US Department of Labor, the Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board created temporary disaster-relief jobs to support cleanup and humanitarian assistance following Hurricane Helene.

In addition to immediate recovery work, the program provides training and employment services that help individuals rebuild skills, return to the workforce, and strengthen local businesses.

In 2025, 55 participants contributed to recovery and community support efforts across the region, demonstrating the program's continued impact on both residents and local economies.

## NCWorks Scholarships

*(Total investment in training for Adults, Dislocated Workers & Youth)*

NCWorks Scholarships and Support Services provided direct assistance to Adults, Dislocated Workers, and Youth pursuing education and career advancement, while National Dislocated Worker Grant (NDWG) funding strengthened the region's disaster-recovery workforce and offered critical support services for individuals affected by economic and environmental disruption. Together, these resources reflect a coordinated regional effort to help residents gain skills, secure employment, and contribute to community resilience.

### NCWorks Scholarship Funding (Adults, Dislocated Workers, and Youth)

Alexander	\$3,101
Burke	\$35,510
Caldwell	\$43,385
Catawba	\$92,735

### NCWorks Support Services

Alexander	\$1,247
Burke	\$8,011
Caldwell	\$45,206
Catawba	\$83,339

### National Dislocated Worker Grant & Disaster Recovery Employment

Alexander	\$0
Burke	\$362,937
Caldwell	\$53,430
Catawba	\$17,569

### National Dislocated Worker Grant Support Services

Alexander	\$0
Burke	\$5,743
Caldwell	\$8,358
Catawba	\$200

## Riley Caldwell Success Story

Riley Caldwell's path into respiratory therapy wasn't something originally planned, but the calm, focused nature of the field—and its vital role in patient care—quickly sparked a deep interest. With a strong desire to help others, Riley found that respiratory therapy offered the chance to make a meaningful impact while working across different hospital units, meeting new patients, and experiencing something new each day.



Before pursuing this career, Riley spent three years as a Certified Nursing Assistant at Catawba Valley Medical Center. That experience built a solid foundation for the transition ahead, reinforcing the importance of compassionate, patient-centered care, clear communication, and connecting with patients on a human level. The journey to becoming a respiratory therapist was demanding, filled with late nights, stress, and challenging exams—but ultimately deeply rewarding.

At the start of the training program, Riley applied for and was awarded a Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Scholarship. The scholarship covered tuition, scrubs, essential tools, and required exams. By easing the financial burden, this support allowed Riley to stay focused on training and fully committed to achieving professional goals.

Today, Riley is grateful to be working in a role that required so much dedication and perseverance. While challenges remain, each day brings growth and renewed confidence. Some of the most meaningful moments so far have come from offering comfort to patients' families during difficult times—serving as a calm, steady presence when it matters most.

For those considering a career in respiratory therapy, Riley describes the field as purposeful, varied, and deeply impactful. Looking ahead, Riley plans to continue growing professionally, pursue a bachelor's degree, and remain dedicated to providing excellent care in a field where a true sense of belonging has been found.

## NextGen Youth Program Kicks Off 2025 University Tour with an Unforgettable Start

The NextGen Youth Program kicked off its 2025 University Tour with a powerful first stop at American Underground and Duke University, launching a year of exploration and opportunity.



At American Underground, students stepped into Durham's dynamic startup scene, meeting founders and tech leaders who showed how creativity and innovation fuel real-world success. The experience sparked curiosity, confidence, and a sharper vision of what's possible.

At Duke University, students explored iconic landmarks—from the Sarah P Duke Gardens to Cameron Indoor Stadium and the Duke Chapel—and felt the inspiration of campus life and academic excellence.

Guided by dedicated NextGen advisors, this kickoff was more than a tour—it was a moment of discovery, empowerment, and belief in their future.

Work Experience Internships	25	Completed High School	18
Entered Post-Secondary	35	Diploma/Equivalent	23

## Western Piedmont NCWorks Career Centers Receive State Certification

The Western Piedmont NCWorks Career Centers were officially awarded NCWorks Career Center Certification on August 13, 2025, during the NCWorks Commission meeting in Raleigh.

NCWorks Career Centers undergo a rigorous certification process every three years to ensure they meet statewide standards for service quality, accessibility, and operational excellence. This recognition affirms the Western Piedmont centers' commitment to delivering



consistent, high-quality support to both job seekers and employers  
 All certified centers across North Carolina's 20 workforce development board areas were honored for their dedication to providing reliable, customer-focused workforce services that strengthen local communities and regional economies.

## Upskill: Incumbent Worker Training Grants

The Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board continued administering the Upskill Incumbent Worker Grant Program, a competitive training initiative that helps employers strengthen and advance their existing workforce. The program provides targeted training to address skills gaps, support employee retention, stabilize operations, and boost overall competitiveness. Through Upskill, participating businesses can:

- Improve productivity and increase competitiveness
- Retain key talent and institutional expertise
- Reduce employee turnover and strengthen workforce stability

In 2025, the Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board awarded Upskill Incumbent Worker Grants to support targeted training and workforce advancement at Auto Glass Experts and Universal Furniture.

These investments help local employers strengthen their workforce, address skills gaps, and enhance long-term competitiveness across the region.

## Recalibrate Recovery Group and Workforce Partnership

Trey Hedrick, Business and Virtual Services Coordinator with the Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board, recently met with participants enrolled in the Recalibrate Recovery Program in Alexander County. His presentation introduced the group to NCWorks services, available scholarship and NextGen opportunities, and a range of virtual workshops designed to support individuals preparing for workforce reentry.



Following the session, Lori Mason, Executive Director, shared the impact Trey's visit had on participants:

"Trey, I want to thank you again for taking the time to meet with the Recalibrate program group in Taylorsville. The group, made up of individuals working hard to build lives in SUD recovery, have a goal of workforce reentry but struggle to fill gaps in their experience and locate resources to help them. The entire group gained invaluable knowledge and resources from your presentation.

What was most appreciated was the encouragement you gave each of them. Many are working through shame and fear that people will not be open to giving a second chance. After your session, they felt more hopeful about their opportunities. They also learned how to write a Letter of Explanation that helps them demonstrate what they've learned.

We are enrolling one young lady in the NextGen program as a direct result of your presentation; she has begun her GED courses and is optimistic about the future for her and her son. Several others have already accessed employment. You made a huge impact on the group, and we look forward to your continued engagement with Recalibrate participants. Thank you!"

This partnership highlights the power of encouragement, practical resources, and second-chance opportunities in helping individuals rebuild confidence, gain skills, and move toward meaningful employment.

## Innovation Grant Comes to a Successful End

The Innovation Grant, a partnership among Work In Burke, Burke County Schools, Western Piedmont Community College, Burke Development Incorporated, NCWorks Career Center–Burke, the Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board, and other local partners, has successfully concluded.

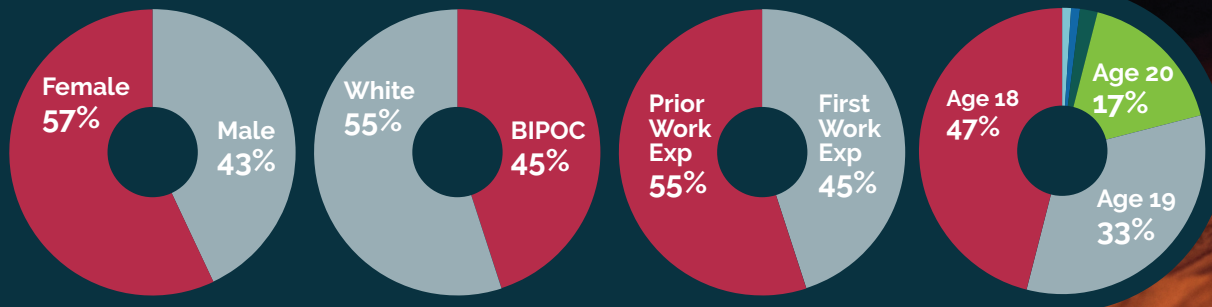
The initiative delivered measurable progress for Opportunity Youth, reducing their share in Burke County from 22.2% in 2022 to 17.4% in 2025 and helping more young people reconnect with education, training, and career pathways.

This work highlights the power of cross-sector collaboration and a shared commitment to expanding opportunities and building brighter futures for Burke County youth.

### Innovation Grant Cumulative Data (Fall 2023 - Summer 2025)

Certifications Earned by Participants	77
Employer Partners Actively Engaged	34
Participants Enrolled in WIOA Programs	48
Total Participants Served	58

### Cumulative Program Demographics





# HURRICANE HELENE RECOVERY



Hurricane Helene damage  
along Green Street Bridge,  
Morganton, NC.

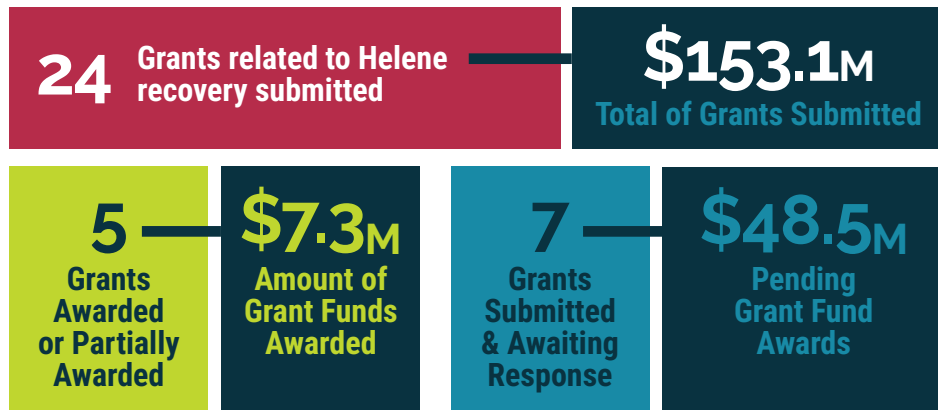


## Sustained Leadership in Long-Term Recovery

September 2025 marked one year since Hurricane Helene, and WPCOG staff have remained steady partners to local governments and fellow Councils of Governments. Beyond initial assessments and repairs, many communities now face years of project development, design, and funding needs—work that requires continuity, coordination, and technical expertise.

As the region's convener and funding resource, WPCOG helps local governments, state agencies, non-profits, and private partners navigate complex recovery programs. Staff remain engaged at every level to align funding opportunities and ensure member communities receive the greatest possible long-term benefit.

## Community & Economic Development Assisted in Grants for Recovery



## Area Agency on Aging Recovery Support

The Western Piedmont Area Agency on Aging (AAA) played a vital role in supporting older adults and community partners in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene. Through a combination of disaster-recovery funding, donated supplies, and coordinated outreach, the AAA helped restore safety, stability, and essential services for some of the region's most vulnerable residents.

### Targeted Use of Disaster Recovery Funds

AAA utilized \$14,000 in disaster-recovery funding to address urgent needs created by the storm. These funds were made possible through generous support from:

- > AARP Foundation – \$7,000
- > USAging – \$5,000
- > Southeastern Association of Area Agencies on Aging (SE4A) – \$2,000

### This combined investment supported:

- > Critical tree and debris removal, ensuring safe access to homes and driveways for older adults affected by the storm.
- > Cleanup efforts that helped restore mobility, reduce hazards, and stabilize living environments.
- > Essential supply replacement for Blue Ridge Community Action's Adult Day Care Center in Burke County, which suffered catastrophic flooding and lost all interior contents. Funding helped the center begin rebuilding its capacity to serve participants who rely on daily care and support.

### Coordinated Distribution of Donated Supplies

In addition to financial assistance, AAA coordinated the receipt and distribution of donated goods to help meet immediate health and wellness needs. Items included:

- > Over-the-counter medications
- > Incontinence supplies
- > Liquid nutritional supplements
- > Other essential personal-care items

These donations were delivered to older adults, caregivers, and partner agencies working directly with storm-impacted households, ensuring that critical supplies reached those who needed them most.

## Planning - Resilience in Action

Community and Regional Planning delivered a wide-ranging and deeply coordinated response throughout the year, advancing infrastructure recovery, strengthening emergency management capabilities, and supporting residents and local governments in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene. Through strategic partnerships, technical expertise, and on-the-ground field operations, the department helped communities stabilize, rebuild, and prepare for future challenges. The following highlights showcase the breadth of this work—from securing major infrastructure investments and expanding cutting-edge mapping tools to conducting drone assessments, guiding FEMA reimbursement, and ensuring residents maintained access to essential digital resources.

## Infrastructure, Housing, and Community Stabilization

- Partnered with the High Country Council of Governments to secure \$7.5 million from NCDEQ for septic system replacements, benefiting Helene survivors and households facing financial hardship.
- Assisted the Valdese Housing Authority with FEMA Public Assistance reimbursement, coordinating debris removal and mitigation activities—including the removal of 78 hazardous trees.
- Submitted Hazard Mitigation Infrastructure and Advance Assistance grant applications for the Town of Cedar Rock.

## Emergency Management, Mapping, and Technical Response

- Financial administration support for disaster recovery
- Expanded the Community Health and Disaster Mitigation Explorer (CHADME) Tool, integrating field data collection, a grant-writing dashboard, and an Emergency Management dashboard to support real-time decision-making
- Conducted extensive LiDAR and multispectral data collection for Granite Falls Lakeside Park and other flood-impacted areas, providing critical pre- and post-disaster datasets used for FEMA reimbursement and future mitigation grants
- Completed numerous LiDAR mapping flights over flood-prone areas, generating baseline data essential for resiliency planning
- Provided FEMA Public Assistance financial administration support to 12 local governments, guiding reimbursement processes and documentation

## Drone Operations and Field Assessments

- Deployed drone services to assess damaged sewer lines, streams, and flood-impacted areas for multiple municipalities.
- Completed 40 drone flights documenting Helene damages.
- Conducted three joint training events with the Caldwell County Sheriff's Department and local fire departments to strengthen regional response capabilities
- Supported Code Enforcement teams with damage assessments and inventory processes critical for FEMA reimbursement

## Regional Coordination and Technical Expertise

- Participated in extensive coordination with FEMA and local governments, providing technical guidance on reimbursement, mapping, data collection, and consultant management.

- Conducted comprehensive damage assessments and mapping efforts, resulting in over \$8 million in documented and inventoried damages for local communities.

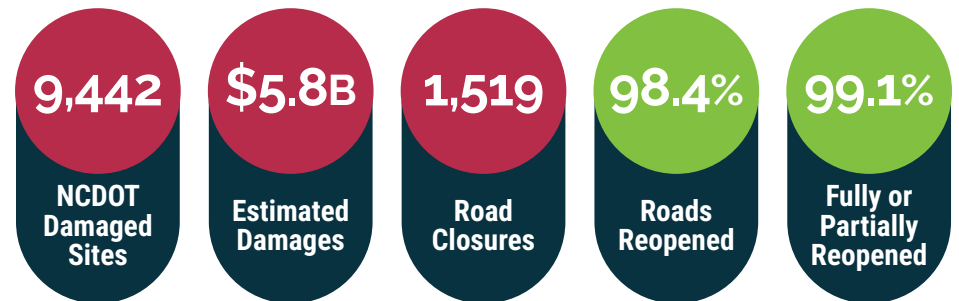
## Community Support and Digital Access

- Distributed 110 laptops to Helene survivors and other residents in need through the Digital Navigator Program, ensuring continued access to education, employment, and essential services during recovery.

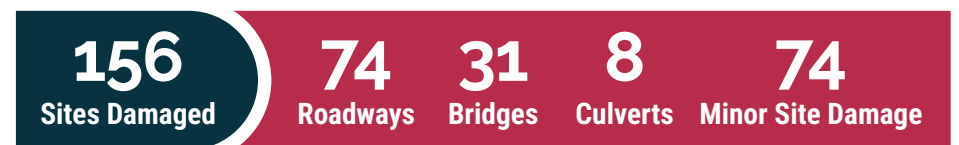
## Transportation Recovery Progress

NCDOT continues to make substantial progress in long-term recovery efforts following Tropical Storm Helene, working across Divisions 11–14 to restore mobility, repair damaged infrastructure, and strengthen the region's transportation network. With thousands of damage sites assessed and the vast majority of roadways now reopened, crews are advancing permanent repairs to roads, bridges, and culverts while coordinating design, engineering, and construction activities for the remaining sites.

### Overall Impacts Divisions 11–14 (Western North Carolina)



### Division 11 (Caldwell County)



#### Estimated repair costs to date:

- \$10,000,000 (Caldwell County)
- \$260,000,000 (Division 11 total)

7 remaining damaged sites with repairs scheduled or underway

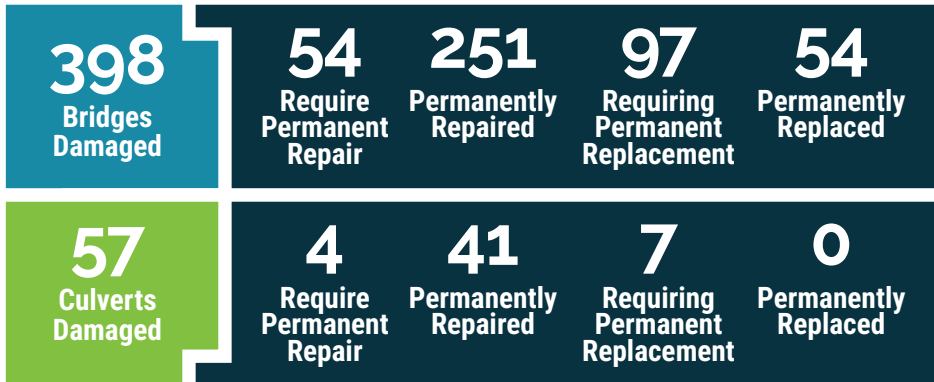


### Division 12 (Alexander and Catawba Counties)

- > Two bridge structures were washed out and are under contract for full replacement
- > Two bridge maintenance-pipes replaced, multiple pipe repairs/ replacements and slope washout repairs
- > **Bridge replacements:** Finger Bridge Road (Catawba County) – under construction; expected to reopen by summer 2026

### Division 13 (Burke County)

All roads in the affected areas— including those previously closed in Burke County—are now fully open to traffic.



Flooding damage from Helene at Adako Road (Collettsville General Store) in Collettsville, Caldwell County, NC.

# WPCOG STAFF

## Administration

Anthony Starr	Executive Director
Alison Alexander	Assistant Executive Director
Jason Toney	Communications Manager
Lucas Bentley	IT Manager
Tasmin Mack	HR Manager
Sarah Watson	Administrative Services Manager/Clerk to the Board
Cassie Nunn	Administrative Assistant/Reception

## Finance

Andrea Roper	Finance Director
Ashley Adkins	Assistant Finance Director
Brianna Wert	Financial Manager
Makayla Pannell	Financial Manager
Tamara Turner	Accounting Technician II
Kaley Nichols	Accounting Technician I
Delaney Parsons	Accounting Technician I

## Area Agency on Aging

Tina Miller	AAA Director
Sarah Evitt	Aging Program Manager
Mary Mitchell	Family Caregiver Support Administrator
Christina Franklin	Project C.A.R.E. Family Consultant
Michele Francois	Regional Ombudsman
Ashelin McCoy	Aging Specialist

## Community & Economic Development

Ben Willis	Community & Economic Development Director
Sherry Griffin	Senior Special Projects Manager
Kyle Case	Community & Economic Development Manager
Laurie Powell	Community & Economic Development Administrator
Lisa Acuff	Community & Economic Development Administrator
Paloma Garcia-Serrano	Community & Economic Development Administrator
Rob Howard	Community & Economic Development Administrator
Jennifer Cannon	Housing Program Manager
Rick Oxford	Community & Economic Development Administrator
Jeffrey Currie	Housing Counselor
Amber Brafford	Homelessness Response Manager
Cheri Bennett	Homelessness Outreach Specialist
Chae Moore	Homelessness Outreach Specialist
James Anders II	Homelessness Outreach Specialist
Shelby Zeilender	Management Fellow

## Community & Regional Planning

Alison Adams	Community & Regional Planning Director
Daniel Odom	Planning Manager
Teresa Kinney	Senior Planner
Ashley Young	Senior Long-Range Planner
Susan Matheson	Planner
Doug Wise	Natural Resource Manager
Carolina Conway	Natural Resource Administrator
Duncan Cavanaugh	Research & Data Analytics Center Manager
Taylor Dellinger	Senior Data Analyst
Kelly Christensen	GIS Specialist
Andrew Webb	GIS Specialist
Shelly Smith	Digital Navigator
Curt Willis	Code Enforcement Mgr/Emergency Mgmt.
Chad Powell	Code Enforcement Office
Kevin Wyatt	Code Enforcement Office

## Transportation Planning

Averi Ritchie	Transportation Planning Director
Casey Fullbright	Transportation Planner

## Regional Housing Authority

Stephanie Hanvey	Director of Regional Housing Authority
Elizabeth Moncrief	Assistant Director of Regional Housing Authority
Chasity Houck	RHA Program Manager
Jennifer Cater	RHA Program Manager - Alexander & Catawba
Kelley Hayward	RHA Program Manager
Kim Duncan	Family Self-Sufficiency Coordinator
Lori Dixon	Housing Specialist
Viveca Huffman	Housing Specialist
Marcia Medina	Housing Specialist
Kaleigh Reinhardt	Housing Specialist
Nicki Blackburn	Housing Specialist - Burke
Stacey Barnes	Housing Specialist - Caldwell
Robert Teague	Housing Inspector
Doug Woodall	Housing Inspector
Peggy Silver	Administrative Assistant - Valdese
Roger Phillips	Maintenance Technician - Valdese

## Workforce Development Board

Charity Patterson Hamber	Director of Workforce Development
Donna Gilbert	Workforce Program Manager
Elizabeth Hilliard	Workforce Program Coordinator
Trey Hedrick	Business and Virtual Services Coordinator





A publication of the  
**Western Piedmont**  
Council of Governments

*Creative Regional Solutions Since 1968*

**Mailing: P O Box 9026 | Hickory, NC 28603**

**Location: 1880 2nd Avenue NW | Hickory, NC 28601**

**Phone: 828.322.9191 | Fax: 828.322.5991**

**WWW.WPCOG.ORG**



[facebook.com/WPCOG](https://facebook.com/WPCOG)



[x.com/WPCOG](https://x.com/WPCOG)



[instagram.com/  
WPCOG1968](https://instagram.com/WPCOG1968)

*Some infograph icons throughout this document were designed and provided by freepik.com.*