Western Piedmont
Council of Governments

Creative Regional Solutions Since 1968

2015
ANNUAL REPORT

We are a region of four counties, twenty-four municipalities and 365,304 residents. The Western Piedmont Region continues as one of the major manufacturing and economic hubs of our state. Employment opportunities are increasing and demand for good workforce talent continues to increase. While we face new and ongoing challenges, we possess many great attributes that position our area for success.

We remain a region with strong cooperation between our local governments. That cooperation leads to better and more efficient service to our citizens. The Western Piedmont Council of Governments (WPCOG) continues its mission to serve our region and its local governments to improve the economy, support our local governments and enhance the quality of life through a variety of services and programs. The WPCOG remains one of the best Councils of Governments in the state. Its 50 employees work very hard on behalf of our local governments. The WPCOG serves as the best mechanism for intergovernmental cooperation and multi-jurisdictional service delivery.

As you review this year's annual report, you will see a glimpse of the numerous ways that the WPCOG serves our region. The strong service of the WPCOG is a reflection of the quality leadership of our local governments. I challenge all of our leaders to seek new opportunities for collaboration using the WPCOG. Our strength as a cooperative region is greater than the sum of our individual efforts.

George Holleman

George Holleman
Chair, Western Piedmont Council of Governments
Mayor, Town of Taylorsville

The WPCOG is governed by a Policy Board which includes delegates and alternates appointed by each of the 28 municipal and county member governments. Each city and county member government has one vote. The Policy Board also includes seven non-elected members who represent the private sector.

An Executive Committee including a Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer, Past Chairman and four at-large members is elected annually by and from the Policy Board at their November meeting. Officers are installed at the January Policy Board Meeting.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

George B. Holleman, Chairman - Town of Taylorsville

Larry Yoder, Vice-Chair - Alexander County

Barbara Pennell, Secretary - Town of Gamewell

Bob Floyd, Jr., Treasurer - Village of Cedar Rock

Robert L. Smyre, Past Chairman - Town of Maiden

Johnny E. Berry, Member At-Large - Town of Connelly Springs

Kitty Barnes, Member At-Large - Catawba County

Wayne F. Abele, Sr., Member At-Large - Burke County

John "Chip" Black, Jr., Member At-Large - Town of Valdese

POLICY BOARD DELEGATES

Dr. Caryl B. Burns - Town of Granite Falls

Larry Chapman - Town of Hudson

Forrest A. Flemming - City of Morganton

Joie Fulbright - City of Conover

Jerry Hodge - City of Newton

Rick Justice - Town of Rhodhiss

Barbara Lowman - Town of Hildebran

Mike Labrose - Caldwell County

Gary McClure - Town of Rutherford College

Vernon Moyer - Town of Long View

Benny Orders - Town of Drexel

Jill Patton - City of Hickory

Cheryl Pritchard - Town of Cajah's Mountain

Donald Robinson - Town of Catawba

Dale Sherrill - City of Claremont

Jimmy Wakeford - Town of Glen Alpine

Ben Willis - City of Lenoir

Jeff Wilson - Town of Sawmills

NON-ELECTED DELEGATES

Amparo Alfaro

Nicky Setzer

Merlin Perry

Deborah Ashley-Smith

Pat Hatley

Tommy Luckadoo

Mary Bess Lawing

Administration & Finance

Administration

Administrative support services enables the WPCOG staff to perform their jobs with ease and greater efficiency. In addition to providing daily support services, the administrative staff coordinates activities of the Policy Board, Executive Committee, several regional committees of elected and appointed officials, annual updates and distributes the Western Piedmont Local Government Directory and also includes public outreach and communications.

Administration coordinates regular meetings with member government staff and elected officials. On occasion, a speaker is invited to present a topic of interest to the group. These meetings provide an opportunity for the participants to discuss mutual concerns or new programs and initiatives.

Communications

During the year, work was completed on an updated logo and brand for the WPCOG and encompassed a multi-phase implementation of updated materials including letterhead, business cards, signage, etc. Work was also completed on a new website for the WPCOG, which allowed easier update capabilities, a new look (inline with new "brand" materials) and concise browsing experience. Design work was completed for the Newton Strategic Growth Plan, Area Agency of Aging multi-piece brochures and promotional materials, the launch of a new website for Workforce Development, promotional materials for Workforce Development and the regional NCWorks Career Centers (Alexander, Burke, Caldwell and Catawba), regular monthly Impact Reports and Newsletters and other promotional materials.

WPCOG Web Stats

126,664 Total Views 2015	**10,555** Average Monthly Views	**1min 23 sec** Average Time on Page

WPCOG Twitter Stats

241 Total Posts	**18,566** Total Reached	**650** Page Visits	**123** Followers

WPCOG Facebook Stats

34,696 Total Views	**227** Total Posts	**153** Average Views	**109** Followers

109 Facebook Followers Demographics

| | Women | 61% |
| | Men | 38% |

	13-17	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Women	0.3%	2%	10%	15%	20%	8%	5%
Men	0%	0.8%	7%	12%	12%	5%	2%
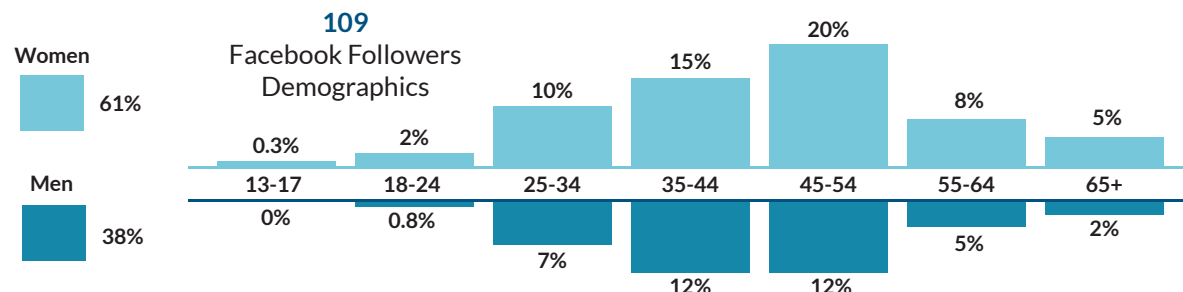
Facility Usage

246 Events
3,654 Attendees

214 Meetings
3,050 Attendees

20 Trainings
383 Attendees

11 Webinars
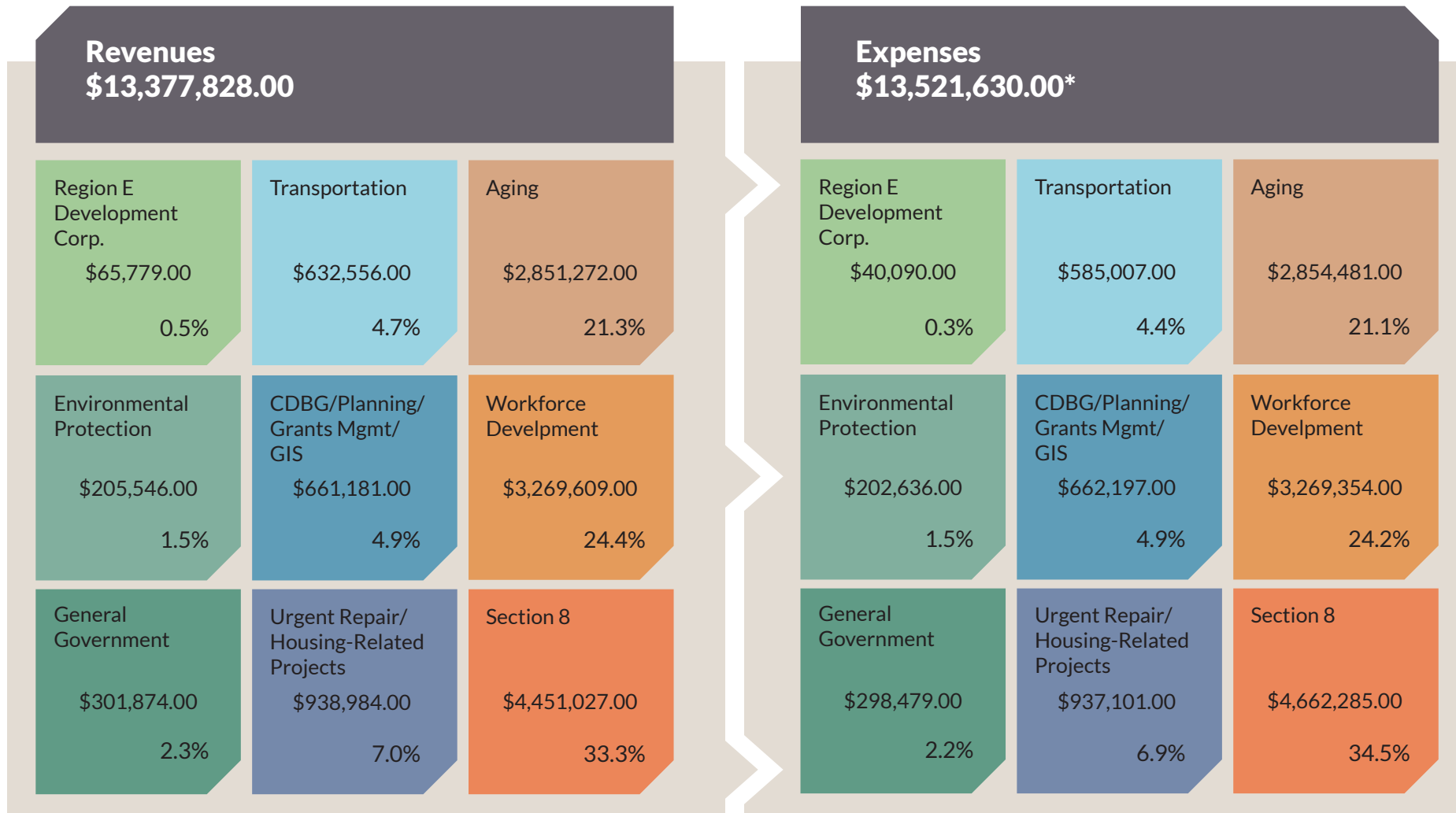**121 Attendees**

1 Conference
100 Attendees

FINANCE

The Finance department manages the agency's pass through funds totaling more than $13 million and supervises the intricacies of a $15 million budget, which includes 100 different contracts with local, state and federal agencies and private firms.

In Fiscal Year 2014 - 2015, the General Fund had an increase in fund balance of $51,559, totaling $1,081,514. Out of total budgeted expenses, Federal awards paid $10,532,081 (77%) and State awards paid $1,393,970 (10%). The remaining expenses of $1,595,579 (13%) were paid with local/assessment dues, local government contracts and deferred revenues.

The Finance department also offers financial administration for local governments.

This service:
- Increases accountability
- Provides continuity of staff
- Saves limited tax dollars
- Provides technical expertise and segregation of duties

Revenues
$13,377,828.00

Region E Development Corp.	Transportation	Aging
$65,779.00	$632,556.00	$2,851,272.00
0.5%	4.7%	21.3%
Environmental Protection	CDBG/Planning/ Grants Mgmt/ GIS	Workforce Develpment
$205,546.00	$661,181.00	$3,269,609.00
1.5%	4.9%	24.4%
General Government	Urgent Repair/ Housing-Related Projects	Section 8
$301,874.00	$938,984.00	$4,451,027.00
2.3%	7.0%	33.3%

Expenses
$13,521,630.00*

Region E Development Corp.	Transportation	Aging
$40,090.00	$585,007.00	$2,854,481.00
0.3%	4.4%	21.1%
Environmental Protection	CDBG/Planning/ Grants Mgmt/ GIS	Workforce Develpment
$202,636.00	$662,197.00	$3,269,354.00
1.5%	4.9%	24.2%
General Government	Urgent Repair/ Housing-Related Projects	Section 8
$298,479.00	$937,101.00	$4,662,285.00
2.2%	6.9%	34.5%

*Expenditures exceeding revenues is a reflection of HUD's reduction of Section 8 surplus funding.

Area Agency on Aging

The Area Agency on Aging (AAA) is an organization working within a federal mandate to inform, advocate and plan for community services on behalf of older adults and caregivers. The agency is part of the National Network set in place by the Older Americans Act of 1965. There are 623 AAA's in the US and 16 in North Carolina. The Western Piedmont AAA works with Alexander, Burke, Caldwell and Catawba Counties.
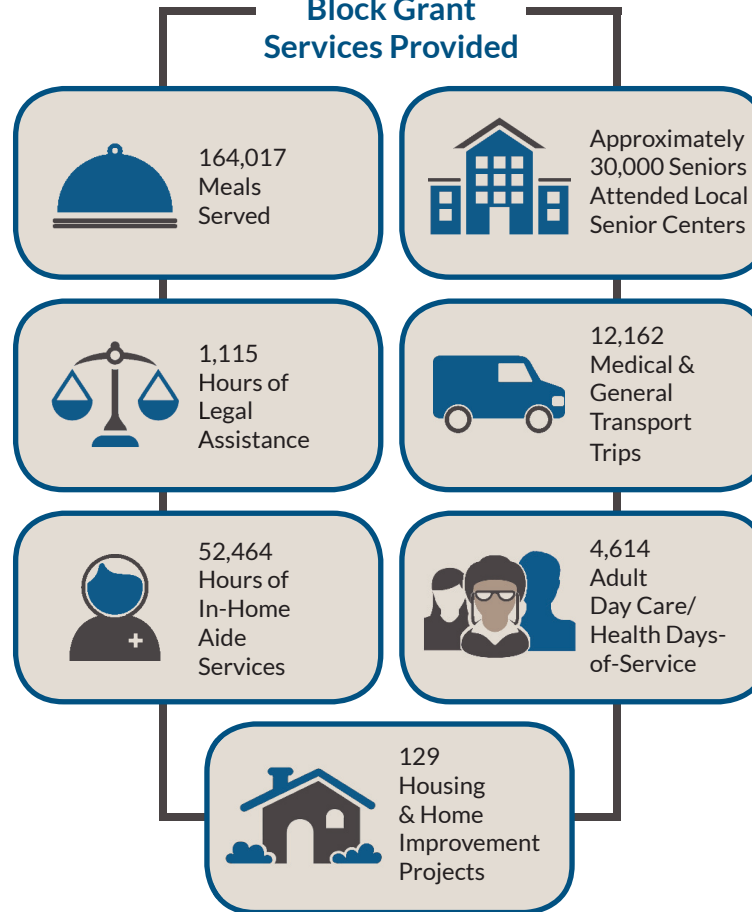
SERVICES

- Resource Directory for Older Adults
- Regional Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program
- Family Caregiver Support Program
- Technical Assistance to Agencies Serving Older Adults
- Reverse Mortgage Counseling
- Senior Tar Heel Legislature Support
- Operation Fan/Heat Relief
- Medicare Information for Patients and Providers Act Grant
- Local Contact Agency
- Evidence-Based Health Promotion Classes
- Presentations on Aging Issues

2015 SPECIAL EVENTS AND HIGHLIGHTS

- 2,861 hours of In-Home Respite services from the Family Caregiver Support Program
- 30 complaint cases handled by the Ombudsman Program on behalf of long-term care residents
- 24 referrals handled by the Local Contact Agency Program for long-term care residents who requested to be transitioned back into the community
- 67 Reverse Mortgage Counseling Sessions
- 61 served through Evidence-Based Health Promotion Classes (Living Healthy, Living Healthy with Diabetes, Matter of Balance: Fall Prevention, Powerful Tools for Caregiving, and Tai Chi for Arthritis and Fall Prevention)
- 166 Community Presentations/Trainings

- Worked with 50+ Volunteers
- Distributed over 800 copies of the Resource Directory for Older Adults
- Grandparent Raising Grandchildren workshops: Parenting with Love & Logic – Bethlehem Elementary and Stony Point Elementary
- Caregiver Appreciation Reception – Alexander Senior Center
- Alive Inside: A Story of Music and Memory – Lenoir Rhyne University. Partnered with Lenoir Rhyne University to present the documentary "Alive Inside: A Story of Music and Memory". A total of 370 people attended the two showings on February 5, 2015. The film highlights the profound effect music can have on those suffering with dementia and other cognitive impairments by providing personalized music to individuals through iPods and other digital devices.
- Caregiver Luncheon – Neighbor's Network, Conover
- Your Health Your Greatest Wealth – Ridgeview Recreation Center, Hickory. Partnered with local organizations and NC A&T University, Center for Outreach in Alzheimer's, Aging and Community Health to present program and luncheon with focus on healthy eating and lifestyle for 55 older adults and caregivers.
- Distributed information to 2,000 seniors to promote Elder Abuse Awareness
- Summer Fun Camp Packets for Grandparents raising Grandchildren – Caldwell County. Partnered with Caldwell County Schools to distribute packets to school counselors for families where grandparents/relatives are raising grandchildren.
- Staff attended the Western NC Air & Water Conferences and distributed information to over 500 seniors on air quality from materials collected at the conference
- Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Back to School Program – 50 Backpacks & Supplies-Alexander County. Partnered with Alexander DSS to provide grandparents/relatives raising grandchildren with back to school supplies for their children.
- Powerful Tools for Caregivers Six Week Class – HealthFirst Center, Hickory

- Mind Over Music-Morning & Evening Symposium – Foothills Higher Education Center, Morganton. The symposium provided valuable information and motivation on the power of music and its positive effects for family caregivers and healthcare professionals when caring for someone with Alzheimer's or dementia (500 attended).

- Your Health Your Greatest Wealth – Martin Luther King Jr. Center, Lenoir. FCSP, Caldwell Partnership and NC A&T University-Center for Outreach in Alzheimer's, Aging and Community Health partnered together to present programming and luncheon featuring the importance of healthy lifestyle for 50 caregivers and older adults.

- Motivated & Informed-Seniors & Caregivers Lunch and Learn – Mt. Herman Baptist Church, Alexander County. FCSP partnered with Alexander Hospice to present luncheon and program featuring community resources for caregivers.

- I am a Caregiver and I Need Help Program – Neighbor's Network, Conover

- Aging Sensitivity Training - Granite Falls Middle School. Partnered with Fairfield Furniture in Lenoir to present Aging Sensitivity training to middle school students during their career day events. Fairfield Furniture manufactures furniture targeted for older adults.

- Assisted regional senior centers with 51 hours during Medicare Open Enrollment, providing one-on-one counseling to 41 seniors

Home & Community Care Block Grant Services Provided

164,017 Meals Served

Approximately 30,000 Seniors Attended Local Senior Centers

1,115 Hours of Legal Assistance

12,162 Medical & General Transport Trips

52,464 Hours of In-Home Aide Services

4,614 Adult Day Care/ Health Days-of-Service

129 Housing & Home Improvement Projects

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

FORECLOSURE PREVENTION

In 2015, WPCOG housing counselors saw a 17.5% increase from the previous year in the number of clients they served through North Carolina Housing Finance Agency's (NCHFA) Foreclosure Prevention Fund (FPF).

In all, 87 clients were served using three different segments of FPF funding. Eighty-one of WPCOG's 2015 clients received assistance through the Mortgage Payment Program. This program has been the mainstay of NCHFA's foreclosure program as it primarily serves clients who have lost their jobs or have experienced other hardships that affect their work or household income such as illness, death of spouse, separation and divorce.

Two lesser utilized programs rounded out the FPF assistance in 2015. Two clients received assistance through the Second Mortgage Refinance Program (SMRP) and 4 received funding through the Principal Reduction Recast/ Lien Extinguishment Program. (PRRLE) Homeowners received $1,542,955 as a result of staff efforts.

In addition, 218 homeowners received mortgage default counseling which allowed 160 to avoid foreclosure by resolving their mortgage default.

HOME CONSORTIUM

The HOME Consortium Program assisted 90 first-time homebuyers. Leveraging over $8.1 M in lender financing. The HOME Consortium Program provided a $200,000 multi-family loan to Viridian Homestead, LLC for the development of a 64-unit affordable complex in Lenoir. The developer's total investment in the project is $7,437,228.

GRANT DEVELOPMENT

Staff developed applications and received funding for 23 projects totaling $6,323,919. Projects varied in amount from $16,156 for a HUD Housing Counseling grant to $1,542,955 for mortgage payment assistance for homeowners who lost their jobs due to changes in economic conditions. In addition to the 23 new projects funded in 2015, the WPCOG administered 52 additional projects.

Eight Building Reuse Grants, spearheaded by WPCOG staff, were funded by the NC Department of Commerce in 2015 totaling $1,891,700. These 8 businesses will invest $12,740,386 in the region and create 122 jobs. Also, the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) made a significant investment in the region. Four grants totaling $1,151,640 will improve infrastructure in Alexander County, Lenoir, Rutherford College and Taylorsville.

Projects Funded in 2015	Grant Amount	Jobs	Housing Units Affected	Private Sector Investment
Alexander County ARC[1] - Shurtape Sewer	$278,640			
Burke County NCDC - Bldg Reuse[2] - SpartaCraft	$200,000	20		$200,000
City Claremont IDF[3]	$120,975			
City of Claremont Prysmian NCDC - Bldg Reuse[2]	$240,000	20		$5,130,795
City of Conover West Penn NCDC - Bldg Reuse[2]	$40,000	8		$1,015,657
City of Hickory Blue Bloodhound NCDC - Bldg Reuse[2]	$259,200	21		$272,370
City of Lenior - CDBG[4]	$144,353			
City of Lenior - HOME	$749,490		90	$15,637,228
City of Lenior ARC[1] - Downtown Sewer Project	$273,000	12		$150,000
City of Morganton CDBG[4]	$149,250			
Long View NCDC - Bldg Reuse[2] - Century	$500,000	50		$5,187,809
Morganton NCDC - Bldg Reuse[2] - Amer Hosp	$212,500	22		$212,500
Morganton NCDC - Bldg Reuse[2] - Duralee	$410,000	41		$410,000
Rutherford College ARC[1] - Water Project	$300,000			
SFR Burke County - NCHFA[5]	$180,000		3	
Town of Taylorsville ARC[1] - Sewer Plant Upgrade	$300,000			
Town of Valdese NCDC - Bldg Reuse[2]	$30,000	3		$311,255
Urgent Housing Repair NCHFA[5] - Alex., Burke & Cald.	$180,000		22	
WPCOG DHUD[6] Counseling Grant	$16,156		100	
WPCOG Duke Energy STEM West	$100,000			
WPCOG MPP[7] - NCHFA[5]	$1,542,955		87	
WPCOG NCHFA[5] NFMC 9[8]	$77,400		129	
WPCOG NCHFA SHFPP[9]	$20,000		89	
TOTALS	**$6,323,919**	**197**	**520**	**$28,527,614**

NOTES:

[1]ARC = Appalachian Regional Commission

[2]NCDC - Bldg Reuse = NC Department of Commerce

[3]IDF = Industrial Development Fund

[4]CDBG = Community Development Block Grant

[5]NCHFA = North Carolina Housing Finance Agency

[6]DHUD = US Department of Housing and Urban Development

[7]MPP = Mortgage Payment Program

[8]NFMC 9= National Forclosure Mitigation Counseling

[9]SHFPP = State Home Foreclosure Prevention Counseling

PLANNING

Planning staff provides strategic planning guidance and project facilitation for local governments desiring a focused look at options for growth in both the present and forthcoming years. Working with citizen committees, COG planners facilitate the discussion process, producing strategies designed to position local governments to capitalize on opportunities and offset challenges as communities in the region continue to grow and develop.

In 2015 WPCOG Planners:

- Held multiple hearings for text amendments concerning street solicitation, panhandling, minimum housing standards, breweries, distilleries, sign ordinances, wineries, group home and family care facilities, nuisance, solid waste, and temporary health care structures
- Conducted planning tools presentation - Glen Alpine
- Participated in Sawmills Council retreat
- Prepared fundraising, advertising work, and edits for Catawba Veteran's Memorial
- Worked on Caldwell County Coves project
- Continued work on the Claremont Land Development Plan
- Attended the Locally Administered Project Plan (LAPP) workshop, a project for Hildebran, and submitted LAPP application for sidewalk project along North Center Street in Hildebran. Attended meetings with NCDOT and MPO staff for input on the proposal
- Newton Strategic Growth Plan
  - Held multiple planning sessions with city officials
  - Participated in four public outreach and input meetings
  - Compiled and processed data and statistical information
  - Concluded final design master document and executive summary
- Hosted Catawba County Education Matters Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) Tour for Arndt Middle School, which included learning sessions in transportation, planning, environmental and GIS

- Participated in Valdese and Rutherford College Pedestrian Plan Steering Committee meetings, conducted outreach for public input, and held an open house
- Adopted development standards for new commercial growth in Alexander County
- Began work on three different Comprehensive Plans for Claremont, Rutherford College and Sawmills
- Adopted a nuisance and solid waste ordinance in Alexander County
- Completed a large subdivision plat review in Sawmills
- Continued production of the Western Piedmont Bicycle Plan
  - Concluded and submitted first draft of plan, executive summary and appendix
  - Updated and amended arrangements based on NCDOT Division of Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation recommendations
  - Began conversations for adoption with the MPO and county commissioners
- Facilitated a Planning Board and Board of Adjustment training session and workshop in Gamewell

DATA SERVICES

Data Services provides assistance in locating and evaluating demographic and economic data for local governments, nonprofits and the private sector. As one of the 16 regional affiliates in the North Carolina Data Center network, Data Services staff also produces specialized data products including community assessments, economic indicators newsletters, industry growth analysis, and student growth estimation models.

In 2015 WPCOG Data Services:

- Answered 663 requests for data
- Completed 4 issues of the Hickory Metro Economic Indicators Newsletter (EIN)
- Finalized 4 quarterly Hickory Economic Indicators reports
- Completed the 2015 Catawba County Schools Student Growth Estimation Model (CGEM) report
- Completed the 2015 Caldwell County Schools Student Growth Estimation Model (CaldGEM) report
- Received NADO award for Newton-Conover Schools Redistricting project
- Provided assistance with collecting and analyzing demographic and economic data for the Burke County Asset Mapping Database (KB Reynolds Foundation Grant)
- Completed FY 2014-2015 Greenway Passenger Sampling Report

- Successfully completed 2015 Hickory MPO Vehicle Occupancy Rate (VOR) data calculations
- Updated Census Tract location information for Alexander, Burke, Caldwell and Catawba Counties and Morganton's building permits
- Calculated 2015 residential and nonresidential building permit activity in the region
- Completed a 2010-2014 Hickory Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) population change analysis
- Finished a student impact analysis of the Villages at Sherrills Ford proposed project
- Calculated the economic impact of 2015 Hickory Hops and Oktoberfest
- Provided information for Catawba County relocation guide
- Calculated Hickory Fire Department Demand Service Zones population, population density, number of housing units, and housing unit density
- Prepared and distributed press release of the 2014 American Community Survey (ACS) results for Burke County, Caldwell County, Catawba County, and the Hickory MSA.
- Tabulated the 2010-2014 American Community Survey (ACS) results for the Hickory Metropolitan Statistical Area and all counties and municipalities in the region
- Delivered Young Professional Survey presentation at the Future of Catawba County event

Environmental Planning

Environmental Planning consists of staffing regional air and water committees, drafting and implementing air quality and watershed and source water plans. Staff also administers and participates in various educational outreach programs throughout the year.

In 2015 Environmental Planning:

- Participated in monthly State Interagency Consultation Meeting (SICM) Transportation Conformity Conference calls
- Regularly updated ozone and Particulate Matter 2.5 data for the region
- Gave air and water quality presentations to Leadership Catawba
- Gave presentation on the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) proposed ozone standard rules and its impacts on the region during the joint meeting of the Unifour Air Quality Committee (UAQC) and the Unifour Air Quality Oversite Committee (UAQOC)
- Spoke at multiple high schools in the region for Stormwater and Air Quality Outreach
- Hosted the GreenGrowth Toolbox workshop
- Attended Morganton Earth Day for Stormwater and Air Quality Outreach
- Hosted the Community Forest Mitigation Workshop
- Attended Hickory Earth/Arbor Day for Stormwater and Air Quality Outreach
- Hosted the North Carolina Lake Management Society Workshop
- Facilitated the Lower Creek Advisory Team Meeting in Gamewell
- Visited schools and disseminated an environmental newsletter to promote upcoming conferences
- Coordinated the 2nd Annual Western North Carolina Water Quality Conference and the 9th Annual Western North Carolina Air Quality Conference
- Completed evaluations, summaries and presentations on the Western North Carolina Air and Water Quality Conferences
- Staff spoke on WHKY's Hal Rowe show regarding air quality issues, stormwater and recently held conferences
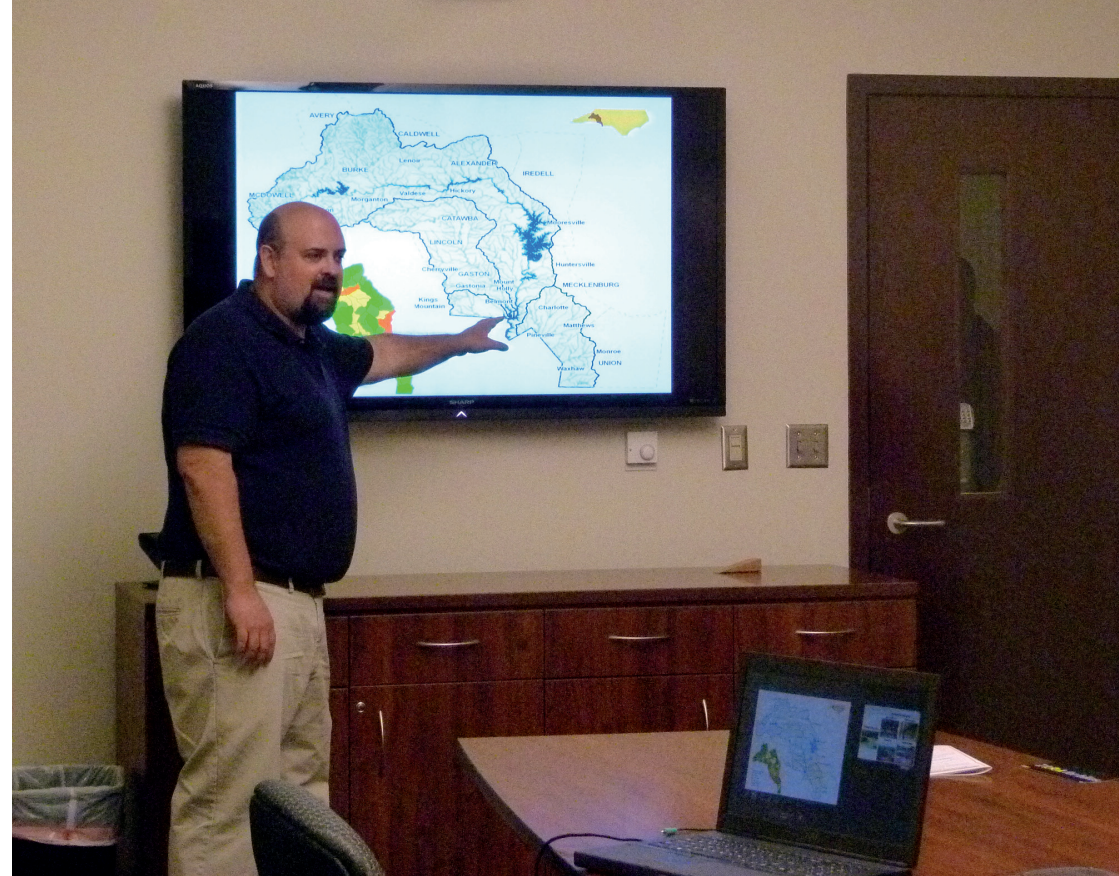
- Hosted the quarterly Water Resources Committee meetings
- Finished the annual Stormwater Partnership Report
- Had Carolina Land and Lakes Resource Conservation and Development provide presentation on wood pellet heating to the UAQC
- Participated in Duke Energy's Habitat Enhancement Program Grant selection Committee
- Provided a presentation on legislative changes concerning water quality and stormwater to the Water Resources Committee
- Hosted quarterly Unifour Air Quality Committee Meetings
- Participated in the Catawba County Health Assessment Advisory Committee
- Applied for and received a 205J grant to do a watershed plan for McGalliard Creek in Valdese

TRANSPORTATION

The WPCOG is designated as the Lead Planning Agency for the Greater Hickory Metropolitan Planning Organization (GHMPO). The GHMPO is mandated and funded by the federal government, and acts as a policy-making forum for transportation improvements in the area. Staff administers and conducts monthly meetings with representatives from local governments in order to identify and endorse appropriate transportation investments. Transportation planners also work with the regional transit authority, providing staff to assist in meeting facilitation and administration of grant funds. Additionally, in July 2015, the GHMPO expanded to encompass all of the Hickory-Morganton-Lenoir Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). By doing so, the Unifour Rural Planning Organization was dissolved.

During 2015, Transportation Staff:
- Held Division meetings with NCDOT (Department of Transportation) staff to discuss Surface Transportation Program – Direct Attributable (STP-DA) funding
- Organized and hosted STP-DA funding workshop
- Produced Caldwell County railroad map
- Completed Title VI quarterly reports. (Title VI of the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin and applies to all programs receiving Federal financial assistance). Complied with Title VI regulations using social media for outreach and feedback
- Participated in quarterly North Carolina Association of MPO meetings
- Conducted bike reconnaissance for all four counties to support the Western Piedmont Bicycle Plan
- Participated in the Statewide Bicycle and Pedestrian Grant Awards Committee in Raleigh
- Hosted Pedestrian Crossing Assessment workshop
- Met with Burke County United Way to map possible transit routes for Morganton
- Convened with Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and NCDOT to discuss Air Quality Conformity of Draft State Transportation Implementation Program (STIP) projects
- Attended numerous meetings concerning US 321 multi-phase improvements
- Met with Burke County and municipal officials to discuss fixed route transit options
- Hosted meeting for Western North Carolina Board of Transportation Members

- Held public meetings for Draft State Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP)
- Hosted and organized Greater Hickory MPO Local Area Project Program (LAPP) workshop
- Attended quarterly Metrolina Region CommunityViz Initiative Steering Committee Meetings
- Awarded 5310 Grant to Catawba County for transit services
- Presented to the Community Foundation of Burke County
- Worked with Hickory on possible bond projects
- Conducted Vehicle Occupancy Rate Counts (CVOR) at 7 locations in the region
- Participated in NCDOT'S Strategic Prioritization Office of Transportation (SPOT) Training. Part of 2013's Strategic Transportation Investments (STI) legislation, the SPOT process is a data-driven operation aimed at maximizing North Carolina's existing transportation funding to enhance the state's infrastructure and support economic growth, job creation, and high quality of life
- Passed MPO Federal Certification Review with FTA and FHWA
- Presented to Hickory City Council on NC 127 and US 321 Connector
- Attended Household Travel Behavior Survey meetings with NCDOT and consultants
- Led Transportation presentations at Sawmills and Rutherford College
- Attended Western Piedmont Regional Transit Authority retreat
- Met with Sister Cities to discuss street signs
- Attended Sweetwater Road Extension public meeting

The WPCOG Information Technology/Geographic Information System Services (IT/GIS) Department is a central resource of geographic information for the region. The department provides a variety of digital mapping solutions, geospatial data services and demographic data for member governments as well as the public and private sector. The Department also maintains an extensive library of local, county, regional and statewide datasets that support a myriad of regional projects and information needs. Internal Information Technology support for the WPCOG is also provided by the IT/GIS Department, facilitating staff implementation of state-of-the-art technology in daily operations. GIS and IT support services are also provided to local governments on an as-requested basis, working toward solutions to common IT and data challenges.

CUSTOM APPLICATIONS

New advances in mobile geospatial technology allowed the IT/GIS department to build custom GIS applications for local governments. During 2015, the WPCOG worked with the Town of Valdese to create a mobile GIS application which enables local public works staff to view water, sewer and stormwater GIS data in the field using a tablet or smartphone. The technology also allows authorized Town staff to make live edits to utility infrastructure in the field on their mobile devices. This method of viewing and editing is much faster and more useful than older methods of GIS, wherein staff members needed to look up GIS data on a PC before going out into the field.

The IT/GIS also used mobile technology to improve accounting and viewing software for Valdese's public cemetery. Town staff can now make real-time edits to the graveyard database, including owner names and the sales status of individual plots. In addition, the WPCOG upgraded the public-viewer application which allows members of the public to view updated cemetery information, including plot ownership and photos of headstones.

The WPCOG IT/GIS and Planning departments have a long history of supporting Greenway Public Transportation in its mission to bring transportation services to residents. In 2015, IT/GIS conducted 238 passenger-sampling trips, where bus rider trends were observed. The WPCOG also created a new web-application for Greenway
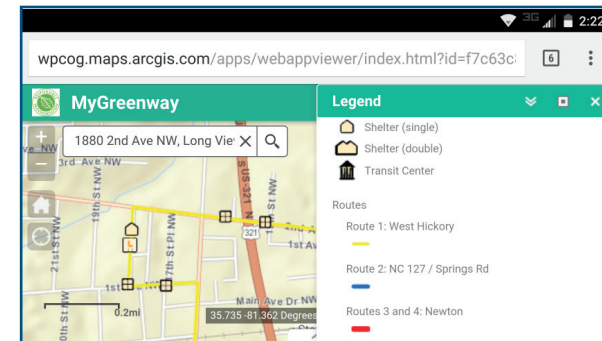
fixed-route services. This application can be viewed on mobile devices and allows users to reference information relating to bus routes, associated schedule times and individual bus stops. Using a smartphone's GPS, a user can determine which stops and routes are nearby and when the next bus will arrive at a particular stop. Greenway Transportation is actively advertising the application to the public, which is accessible at MyGreenway.org. The application won an "Innovation Award" at the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) Annual Conference in New Orleans.
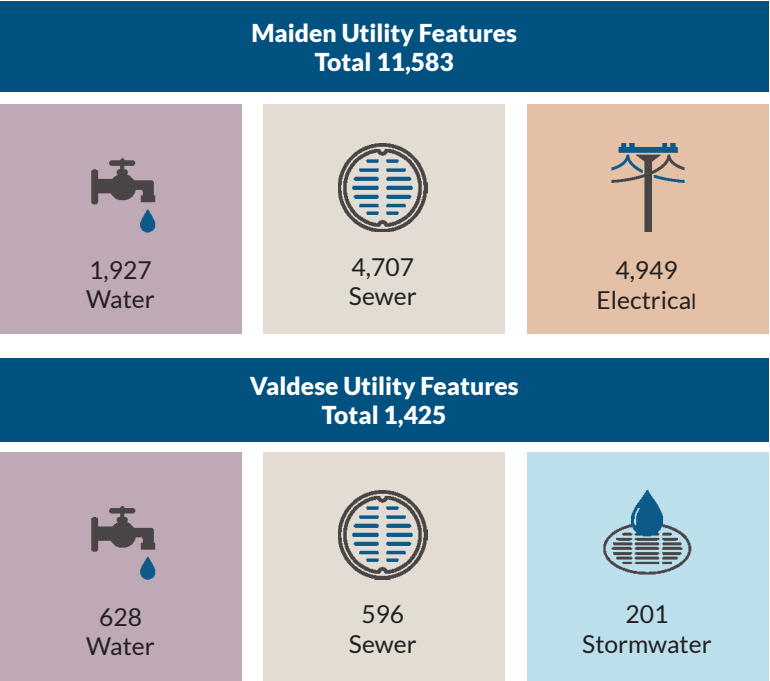
NC ARCGIS USERS GROUP SYMPOSIUM

Since 2007, the WPCOG IT/GIS Department has been the host and coordinator of the NC ArcGIS Users Group (NCAUG) Western NC GIS Symposium. The annual one-day event provides an affordable means for GIS professionals and planners to keep pace with the evolving field of GIS and share and learn the latest and most useful methods. The WPCOG, working with NCAUG, is proud to host this event and bolster local government GIS services throughout central and western North Carolina.

GPS CEMETERY & UTILITY MAPPING

The WPCOG IT/GIS staff assisted the Town of Maiden by mapping and updating databases for their two municipal cemeteries. Activities included: 1) administration of the cemetery management software (Pontem), 2) cemetery record and map research relating to grave and plot ownership, interment and location information, 3) GPS locations of existing headstones and markers, and 4) update of grave records in the Pontem database. A total of 1,966 identifiable grave locations were mapped.

The IT/GIS Department also participated in several other major GIS-related efforts for the Town of Maiden. The WPCOG staff worked to collect and update electric, water, sewer and stormwater utility features throughout the Town. As the project nears completion in June of 2016, authorized employees will have the ability to view, edit and maintain the utility information in real-time from mobile devices. As part of the process, the Catawba County Wide Area Network (WAN) was beneficial in facilitating document and application sharing.

Maiden Utility Features
Total 11,583

1,927 Water	4,707 Sewer	4,949 Electrical

Valdese Utility Features
Total 1,425

628 Water	596 Sewer	201 Stormwater

The WAN is a valuable asset when working with participating local governments. Real-time access to broadband data between entities leads to many avenues for sharing data, collaboration and resources without the need to leave the office or create unnecessary copies of information.

CONOVER IMPERVIOUS SURFACE DATA

The IT/GIS staff worked with the City of Conover to identify impervious surface within the municipal boundaries. The WPCOG staff acquired 2014 color infrared digital orthophotography for the study area from Atlas Geographic Data, Inc., the 2014 contractor for the State of North Carolina digital orthophotography project.

Using the Spatial Analyst extension of the Environmental Systems Research Institute's (ESRI) ArcGIS software, The staff performed a maximum likelihood image analysis process to identify several types of landcover, including impervious surface. Polygon data was extracted from the processed imagery to form an Impervious Surface GIS Layer that could be used as overlay for further analysis.
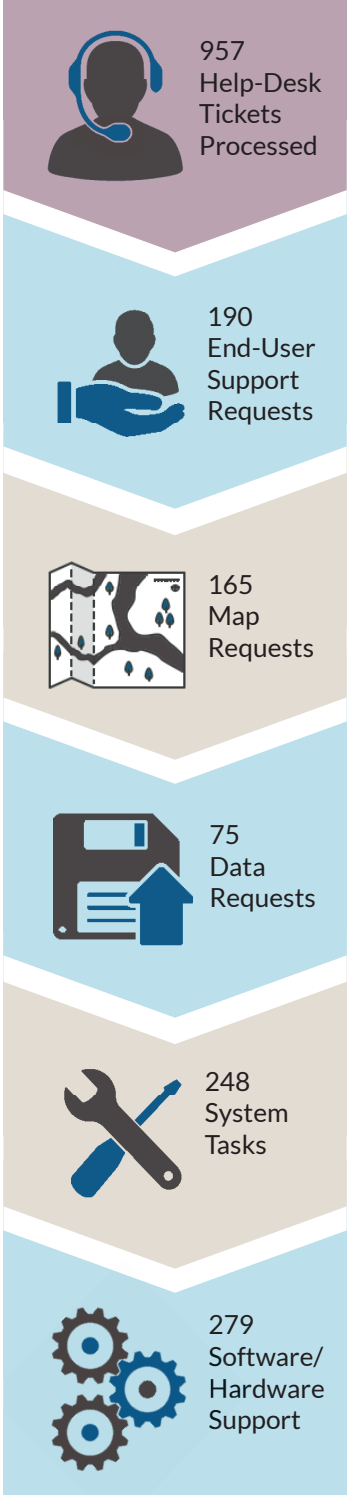
HICKORY GIS SERVICES

Since 1999, the City of Hickory has contracted the WPCOG to provide City-related GIS services. An employee is housed on-site at City Hall, where primary duties include fielding requests and needs for mapping, data, training and application development. Recently, the need for web-based mapping moved to the forefront of application development. Using ArcServer and ArcGIS Online, several applications were created, allowing City staff from various departments to view and edit data relating to the City's infrastructure. The WPCOG also houses Hickory's GIS data, which includes interest in all four regional counties. The Catawba County WAN is also crucial to this service.
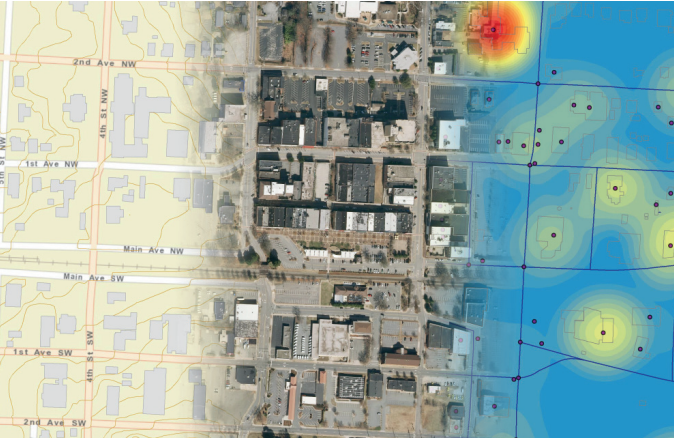
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (IT)

The IT/GIS staff performed many Information Technology related activities. Highlights include migrating out of several legacy Windows 2003 servers and numerous Windows XP workstations, implementing Hyper-V virtual server capabilities, facilitation of the Catawba County (WAN) Agreements and general day-to-day support for the WPCOG.

957 Help-Desk Tickets Processed

190 End-User Support Requests

165 Map Requests

75 Data Requests

248 System Tasks

279 Software/ Hardware Support

REGIONAL HOUSING AUTHORITY

The mission of the WPCOG Regional Housing Authority (RHA) is to promote adequate and affordable housing, free from discrimination, through diligent, courteous and fiscally responsible administration of the US Department of Housing and Urban Development's Section 8 Rental Housing Assistance Program.

SECTION 8 HOUSING PROGRAM

Section 8, the federal government's most important program for helping families find safe, affordable housing in the private market, is administered through the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. Participants are free to choose any housing that meets program requirements. The Section 8 program works with landlords willing to comply with program guidelines.

SPECIAL PROGRAMS

RHA works to enhance the quality of life for the people served, by offering active tenants opportunities to participate in special programs.

The Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) program provides Section 8 tenants the opportunity to help meet goals to become self-sufficient

NUMBER OF FAMILIES USING SECTION 8 BY COUNTY

347 CALDWELL

74 ALEXANDER

195 BURKE

423 CATAWBA

1,039 Regional Total
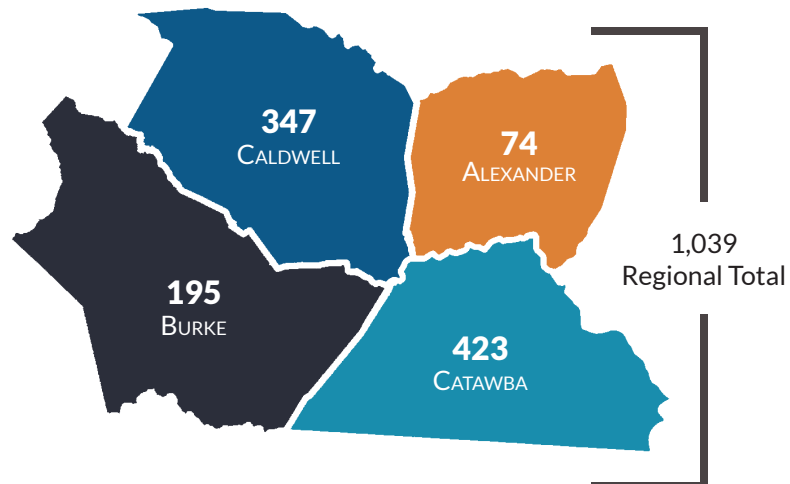
Of 1,039 households receiving Section 8 assistance, approximately 500 are disabled and/or elderly families

Processed 605 applications for Section 8 rental assistance

309 families were briefed and issued vouchers

158 new contracts/leases were executed

2,016 inspections were conducted

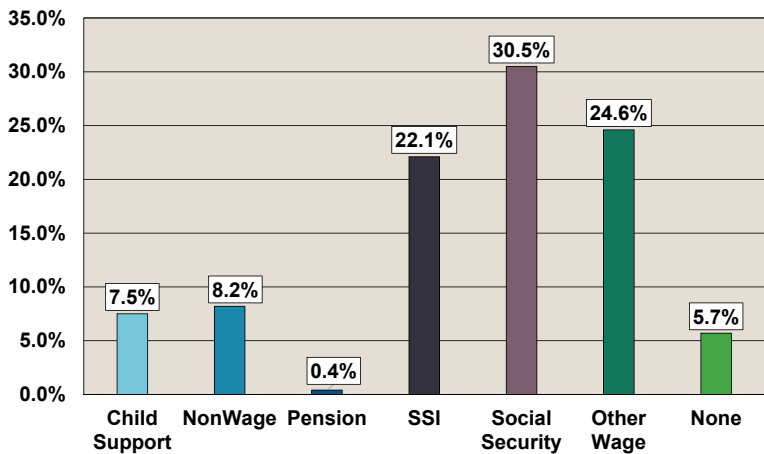900 annual re-certifications were performed

by using community resources. In 2015, the FSS program enrolled 9 new participants. An average of 40 families participated in the FSS program in 2015. As the family earns income, an escrow account is established by the RHA on behalf of the family. The total escrow savings for 17 active accounts was $28,358. The average savings per family was $1,668.

Regional Housing Authority (RHA)

In 2015, the RHA provided assistance in the form of rent and utility payments to over 1,000 families, with a budget that exceeded $5 million.

The Regional Housing Authority (RHA) provides rental assistance to income-eligible families in the region. The region includes Alexander, Burke, Caldwell and Catawba Counties. The RHA is allocated 1,074 vouchers within the region with more than 500 landlords currently participating in the program.

Section 8 Primary Income Data

Child Support: 7.5%
NonWage: 8.2%
Pension: 0.4%
SSI: 22.1%
Social Security: 30.5%
Other Wage: 24.6%
None: 5.7%

Total People Assisted = 2,251

1,034 Households

526 Families with Children

998 Children

416 Older Adults

612 Disabled

The second Annual Landlord Meeting was held with approximately 50 attendees. Information regarding the Section 8 program process was shared and attendees were able to ask questions relevant to the program.

HUD requires Section 8 programs to verify that the rent for a subsidized unit is reasonable. In 2015, The RHA implemented Go Section 8, a web-based program, as our methodology for confirming each landlord is asking a reasonable amount for rent. Go Section 8 allows us to stay in compliance with HUD regulations. This web-based design allows tenants to search from any location where they have access to the internet. Gosection8.com also allows landlords to list multiple properties on the website. Vacant properties will appear on the list available to tenants.

In 2015, 28 families were assisted through Project Based Vouchers. These 28 vouchers are designated for use at Millside Manor, a state of the art apartment complex for the elderly in Morganton. There was an average of 21 families assisted through the Family Unification Program (FUP). The main goal is stable housing. This eliminates the threat of children being placed outside their home. In 2015, 7 new families were accepted through FUP. Through our homeownership program, 11 families were able to use their Section 8 subsidy towards their mortgage each month.

In 2016, the RHA will continue to provide safe and sanitary housing throughout Alexander, Burke, Caldwell and Catawba Counties. The RHA aspires to be the leader in providing affordable housing to ensure that all area residents have access to high quality housing, while seeking partners and resources that will continuously enhance our region. The goal is to provide a foundation for improving quality of life and achieving self-sufficiency through realizing the housing voucher program's potential to enable families to move to better neighborhoods.
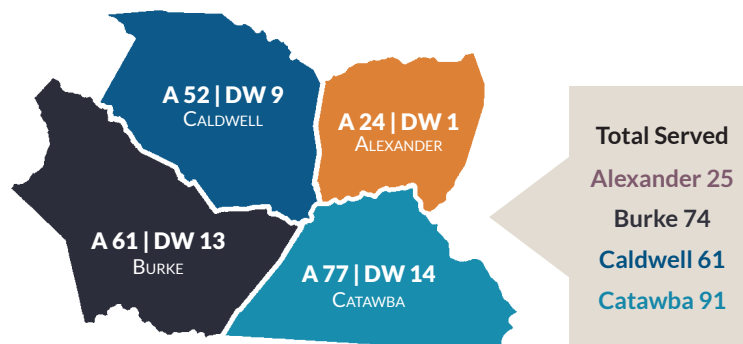
Workforce Development

Workforce Development staff provides oversight, coordination, guidance, planning, technical assistance and implementation of employment, and training activities. Additionally, the Workforce Development Department promotes and develops partnerships and linkages with human service and resource agencies and institutions to sustain coordinated approaches to developing workforce program design and delivery systems.

Many changes, challenges and successes to Workforce Development occured in 2015. New legislation to drive better access to employment, education, training, and support services in order to succeed in the labor market and to match employers with the skilled workers they need to compete in the global economy. Congress passed the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) by a wide bipartisan majority; it is the first legislative reform in 15 years of the public workforce system. WIOA supersedes the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 and amends the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, the Wagner-Peyser Act, and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

Staff and the NCWorks Career Centers have worked hard to adapt to the potential changes of WIOA, and are awaiting full interpretation from DOL by July 1, 2016 to put the requirements into successful implementation.

The federal funding provided through WIOA has allowed the local area to provide training scholarships in areas such as: Accounting, Nursing, Respiratory Therapy, Industrial Maintenance, Logistics, Mechanical Engineering, Medical Office Assistant, Nuclear Medicine Technology, Nurse Aide, Physical Therapy Asst., Sustainable Agriculture, Furniture Academy, Industrial Sewing, EMT Basic and several others.

On-The-Job-Training (OJT)

Workforce Development provided 99 On-the-Job-Training (OJT) placements, which are full-time employment positions, in industries like: Mechanic, Lathe Operator, Engineer Maintenance Tech, Boarder, Furniture Finisher, Upholsterer, CNC Machine Operator, Knitter, Mechanical Assembler, Packer, Customer Service, Material Handler and many others.

A total of $283,571 in wage reimbursement for OJT was paid out to employers to offset the extraordinary cost of training these new hire employees, while the average wage of $11.87 was paid to the OJT employees during their training time.

The OJT programs benefit both employers and jobseekers, and the following are success stories that took place in 2015:

"Adhezion Biomedical would like to express our sincere appreciation to the Business Services Representative and the On-the-Job Training (OJT) program sponsored by the Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board for your continuous support and significant contribution to Adhezion in terms of screening, interviewing, training on Adhezion's employees as well as financial assistance.

In the past several years, WPWDB has helped Adhezion in many ways, few of which are named in the following:

Adult (A) & Dislocated Workers (DW) Assisted by County

A 52 | DW 9
Caldwell

A 24 | DW 1
Alexander

A 61 | DW 13
Burke

A 77 | DW 14
Catawba

Total Served
Alexander 25
Burke 74
Caldwell 61
Catawba 91

- *Helped Adhezion hire 17 employees in the past 2 years*
- *Reduced Adhezion's recruitment cost and provided $93,400 in funding for Adhezion's employee training*
- *Provided on-the-job training to 17 employees*
- *Saved time and resources for Adhezion in terms of hiring and training*
- *Provided great pool of employees and developed a collaborative training plan*
- *Conducted numerous interviews with the purpose of screening for the best potential applicants*

Adhezion's experience with the OJT program was so rewarding that Adhezion will certainly continue its involvement in this program and look forward to further collaboration and support from Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board.

We thank you again for your help!

Sheng Zhang Sr., Director of R&D/QC Adhezion Biomedical
Rafael Ruiz, Sr., VP of Manufacturing & Technology"

Another highlight for the OJT program was having a success story with Hardware Direct highlighted in the Governor's SYNC newsletter for October 2015. In Hickory, Hardware Direct, a furniture supplier, doubled its business thanks to the Web Information Specialist the company found through business services of the Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board (WDB).

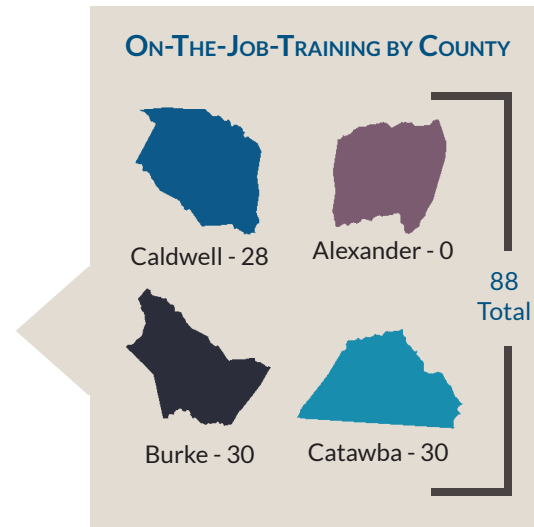## WORKFORCE INNOVATION & OPPORTUNITY ACT (WIOA)

The WIOA funding gives WDB the ability to provide scholarships to eligible jobseekers who need assistance with school payments, and we can also help with support services of transportation and/or childcare where needed.

A total of 284 people were provided scholarships and support services (transportation and/or childcare) for post-secondary education to upgrade their skill sets in order to compete in the job market.

Through in-school and out-of-school youth programs, 98 young people received services including: intensive career coaching, job preparations, skill assessments, resume building, career exploration and leadership development. 32 completed their HSD/GED, 6 went on to post-secondary education, 20 received their career readiness certificate. 57 participated in a work experience and/or job placement.

ON-THE-JOB-TRAINING BY COUNTY

Caldwell - 28   Alexander - 0

88 Total

Burke - 30   Catawba - 30

The Western Piedmont Youth Council held its Annual Youth Summit on March 24 & 26, 2015 at Sipe's Orchard Home in Conover. This year's theme was "Skills for Success". Students were divided into five groups, exploring various team and leadership building activities. The following schools and volunteer agencies helped make this annual event a winner: Students from South Caldwell, Bunker Hill, Maiden, St Stephens and Fred T Foard High School, Hickory High School, Hickory Career and Arts Magnet (HCAM), Newton/Conover High School, and Hallyburton Academy. Volunteers from the NCWorks Career Center-Catawba, NCWorks Career Planning and Placement Center-Caldwell, CVCC, Catawba County Schools, Hickory City Schools, Newton/Conover City Schools, Burke County Schools and The Cognitive Connection SMART Program helped facilitate the events. Sipe's Orchard Home offered the use of their grounds and catered lunch for the students, teachers and volunteers.

In efforts to reach those looking for a career or to make their next move, NC Commerce's Labor Economic and analysis division has provided workforce development and its partners with two great social media tools: NCWorks app finds jobs which align with a jobseekers skills sets, and can instantly be viewed on a smart phone, the NC Reality Check website where you can plan how you save and spend money and explore specific expenses and choices about your budget based on the county you live in.

The new regional website **www.westernpiedmontworks.org**, which is the hub for all workforce development activities in our region, provides up-to-date recruitment events, hot jobs in the region and labor market projections. The site continues to receive positive feedback. Also, www.westernpiedmontworks.org received a National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) Innovation Award, which recognizes innovative approaches to regional economic and community development.

ADMINISTRATION & FINANCE

Anthony Starr - Executive Director

Sherry Long - Assistant Executive Director/ Community & Economic Development Director

Ashley Bolick - Director Administrative Services & Human Resources

Tom Drum - Local Government Manager/Administrator

Jason Toney - Communications Specialist

Amanda Wallace - Administrative Assistant

Judy Caldwell - Receptionist

Andrea Biddix - Director of Finance

Deanna Butcher - Accounting Technician

Michelle Cheatham - Accounting Technician

AREA AGENCY ON AGING

Tina Miller - Director of Area Agency on Aging

Christina Franklin - Regional Ombudsman

Mary Mitchell - Family Caregiver Specialist

Sarah Evitt - Aging Specialist

Anita Roberts - Aging Specialist

COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Sherry Long - Assistant Executive Director/ Community & Economic Development Director

Leah Martin - Senior Planner, Infrastructure & Economic Development

Rick Oxford - Community Development Administrator

Laurie Powell - Community Development Administrator

Lisa Helton - Community Development Administrator

Ken Hollar - Community Development Administrator

Kim Duncan - Community Development Administrator

Melissa Grant - Community Development Administrator

Jennifer Cannon - Community Development Administrator

COMMUNITY & REGIONAL PLANNING

John Marshall - Director of Planning, Transportation & Environmental Programs

Cody Moneymaker - Transportation Planner

Taylor Dellinger - Data Analyst

John Wear - Senior Planner & Natural Resources Administrator

Elinor Hiltz - Community & Regional Planner

Teresa Kinney - Community & Regional Planner

Erin Schotte - Community & Regional Planner

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY/GIS

Scott Miller - Director of IT/GIS

Daniel Ezell - GIS Analyst

Tom Bell - GIS Analyst

Todd Stroupe - GIS Technician

Trey Schweitzer - GPS Technician

REGIONAL HOUSING AUTHORITY

Stephanie Hanvey - Director of Regional Housing Authority

Vicky Abernethy - Senior Housing Specialist

Autumn Hight - Family Self-Sufficiency Coordinator

Kala Guido - Housing Specialist

Joann Parlier - Housing Specialist

Elizabeth Moncrief - Housing Specialist

Mary Thomas - Housing Specialist

By Khang - Housing Inspector

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Wendy Johnson - Director of Workforce Development

April Lail - Financial Manager

Donna Gilbert - Program Administrator

Elizabeth Hilliard - Program Coordinator

Cynthia Conboy - Business Services Consultant

Matthew Xiong - Business Services Consultant

Carol Moore - STEM West Coordinator

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