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WPCOG - Newsletter

June & July 2021

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WPCOG Meetings Calendar

UNC-Chapel Hill School of Governments - Municipal and County Administration Course Graduates



WPCOG would like to congratulate Alison Adams, Community & Regional Planning Director, and Ashley Bolick, Director of Administrative Services & Human Resources, for their recent completion of the UNC-Chapel Hill School of Government course, Municipal and County Administration. The Municipal and County Administration course is a comprehensive eight-month program for local government staff whose responsibilities require an understanding of local government functions beyond individual areas of specialization. Major subject areas include:

- Local government law;
- Organization and management;
- Finance and budgeting;
- Public employment law;
- Planning and regulation of development;
- And, municipal and county services.

Staff Service Awards for 2019/2020



WPCOG Staff Members Left to Right: Laure Powell, Andrea Roper, Teresa Kinney, Wendy Johnson, Anthony Starr, Jennifer Cannon, Mary Mitchell, Rick Oxford, Anita Roberts, and Ashley Bolick.

During the WPCOG May Policy Board members of the staff were recognized for their years of service. Typically done during the Annual Meeting each year, COVID-19 protocols prevented in person recognition at last year's and this year's annual meeting. Staff were verbally recognized for anniversaries in 2019 and 2020 at the annual meeting, and then in person, at the May Policy Board Meeting.

Sixteen staff members celebrated anniversaries at the WPCOG, and represent 170 years of combined experience.

Rick Oxford	35 Years	Ashley Bolick	5 Years
Laurie Powell	30 Years	Christina Franklin	5 Years
Jennifer Cannon	20 Years	Kala Guido	5 Years
Kim Duncan	10 years	Teresa Kinney	5 Years
Wendy Johnson	10 years	Anita Roberts	5 Years
Mary Mitchell	10 years	Andrea Roper	5 Years
Anthony Starr	10 years	Erin Schotte	5 Years
		Sarah Stamey	5 Years
		Jason Toney	5 Years

Community & Economic Development
Companies Closing Out Projects After Creating More Than 180 Jobs

Two Catawba County companies are having their North Carolina Department of Commerce Building Reuse Grants successfully closed out after creating more than 180 new, full-time jobs.

Design Foundry, a furniture manufacturer in Hickory, and OneH2, a hydrogen processor and supplier in Long View, both received grant awards from Commerce's Rural Economic Development Division in 2018 in order to renovate vacant manufacturing sites.

The companies are required to create and maintain their jobs for a specified period in order to be eligible for payments that offset some of their renovation costs.

WPCOG Staff worked with both companies, along with the City of Hickory and the Town of Long View, in order to facilitate the applications, monitor the projects' progress, and provide administrative and reporting services.

Design Foundry has created more than 150 full-time jobs - well above the 109-job target as set forth in the grant. The company is eligible to receive up to \$500,000 from its grant.

Meanwhile, OneH2 has created over 30 full-time jobs - above its target of 21 - and the company is eligible to receive up to \$250,000.



Article by Paul Teague

Community & Regional Planning

Summer 2021 EIN - Highlights Hickory Metro Migration and Export Trends

The latest issue of the Economic Indicators Newsletter (EIN) was released addressing Hickory Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) unemployment rates, Hickory Metro per capita personal income (PCCI), Hickory MSA migration results and Hickory MSA exports by industry.

Here are a few key highlights of the EIN:

- The COVID-19 pandemic caused the Hickory MSA unemployment to equal 17.8% in April 2020.
- As of the April 2021, the region's unemployment rate has fallen to 4.2%.
- Between April 2020 and April 2021, the estimated number of employed persons increased from 136,288 to 165,388 (29,100), while the civilian labor force grew from 165,770 to 172,727 (6,957).
- Hickory MSA Per Capita Personal Income (PCPI) increased from \$36,649 in 2016 to \$40,826 in 2019.
- Current Results from the (5-year) American Community Survey reveal that all four Hickory MSA counties had net in-migration between 2014 and 2018.
- In the previous (5-year) ACS (2009-2013), only Burke County had positive net in-migration, while Alexander, Burke, and Caldwell Counties had net out-migration.
- All Hickory MSA counties had significant net in-migration from several North Carolina counties in both the western and eastern side of the State.
- ACS data results for 2014-2018 indicate that out-migration continues from Hickory MSA counties to several counties in larger North Carolina metropolitan areas, including the Charlotte and Raleigh MSAs.
- Between 2010 and 2019, Hickory MSA exports increased from \$1.281 billion to \$1.735 billion as an economic recovery occurred across the region, the US, and globally.
- Hickory MSA manufacturing exports come from a variety of different industry groups. The largest industry exporter in the Hickory MSA was electrical equipment, appliance, and component manufacturing. About 37% of all Hickory MSA exports are from this industry sector, including co-axial and copper wire manufacturing.
- As of 2019, the Hickory MSA ranked 109 out of 386 MSAs in the US in terms of total exports overseas.

Within the state of North Carolina, the Hickory MSA had the fifth-highest exports of any metro area.

See the selected figures below for additional information. The EIN is produced quarterly and is a publication of the Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board. To subscribe to the EIN, [click here](#).

Figure 9. Percentage of Hickory Exports by Industry, 2019

Source: International Trade Administration, 2021.

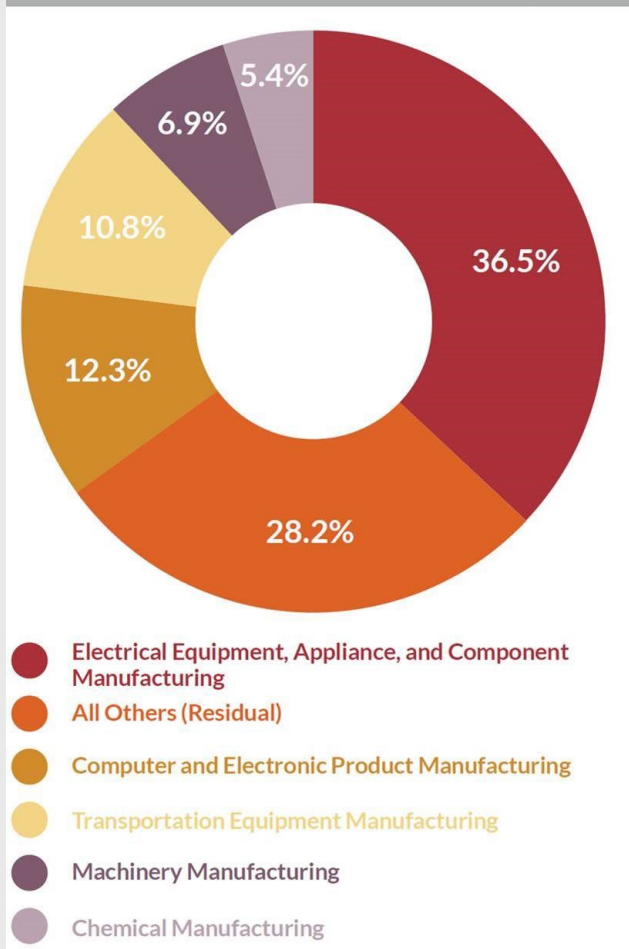
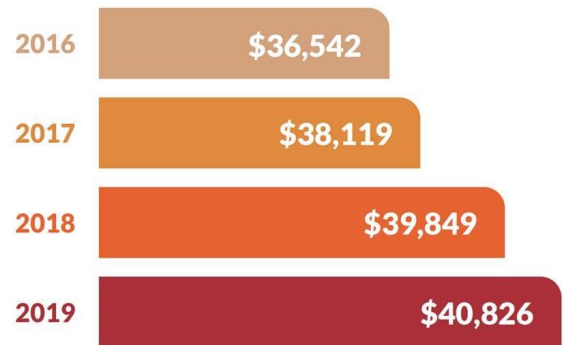


Figure 2. Hickory MSA Per Capita Personal Income, 2016-2019

Source: US Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2021.



Article by Taylor Dellinger

Community & Regional Planning

Burke County Quality of Life Explorer Data Update

Western Piedmont Council of Governments (WPCOG) Planning and GIS staff have updated the Burke County Quality of Life (BQoL) Explorer's datasets. Updates include the most recent disease rates (cancer, COPD, diabetes, hypertension, kidney disease) obtained from Carolinas HealthCare System Blue Ridge, as well as several key demographic measures from the Census Bureau's 2015-2019 American Community Survey. **Two new datasets were added during this year's update:**

- Opioid overdose rates
- Land surface temperature (heat island data)

The BQoL is a free online interactive map tool that allows users to examine many of the county's social determinants of health. Users can access and download key health indicators and demographics across multiple categories, including:

- Disease Rates (cancer, COPD, diabetes, hypertension, kidney disease)
- Census demographics (median household income, vehicle access, age, gender, vacant housing units,

- residents lacking health insurance, and residents living with a disability etc.)
- Food Sources (food deserts, farmers markets, grocery stores, gas stations, etc.)
- Health Care (doctors' offices, mental health care providers, etc.)
- Community (schools, child care centers, churches, shelters, etc.)
- Recreation (playgrounds, parks)
- Transportation (transit routes, traffic counts)

WPCOG staff will offer training opportunities to help area nonprofits incorporate the BQoL into their own project decision making efforts. If you would like to schedule a BQoL training session, please contact Duncan Cavanaugh at duncan.cavanaugh@wpcog.org. The BQoL can be accessed through the Western Piedmont Council of Government's website at www.wpcog.org.

Article by Duncan Cavanaugh

Regional Housing Authority Emergency Housing Vouchers, NC HOPE 2.0

On May 7, 2021, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) notified the Western Piedmont Council of Governments Regional Housing Authority (RHA) of its selection to receive 30 Emergency Housing Vouchers (EHVs). These specialty vouchers were authorized by the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) of 2021. The voucher allocation was based, in part, on the January 2020 Continuum of Care (CoC) Point-in-Time (PIT) homeless data and the 2013-17 American Community Survey data.

EHVs provide tenant-based housing assistance payments to individuals and families experiencing homelessness.

Eligibility Criteria to qualify for an EHV, individuals and families must be:

- Homeless;
- Recently homeless;
- At risk of homelessness;
- or Fleeing or attempting to flee, domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, or human trafficking.

In July, when the vouchers become available, the WPCOG RHA will partner with the regional Continuum of Care to coordinate intake assessment, provide referrals, and offer additional support to participants. Services provided may include housing search assistance, security/utility deposit assistance, and case management.

NC HOPE 2.0

The NC HOPE Program application cycle reopened mid-May, with the first payments beginning on June 1. Residents of Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, and Catawba counties may qualify for additional rent and utility assistance.

Eligible applicants include very low-income renters who have missed a rent or utility payment since April 1, 2020. Other possible recipients include those who have faced homelessness or possible eviction, lost income, or became unemployed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, or experienced high costs or financial hardship due to the pandemic. Applicants can receive up to 12 months of rental assistance, paid directly to the landlord.

Housing Choice Voucher participants may utilize HOPE assistance. The WPCOG - RHA, however, will not be administering this program.

Call (888) 9ASK-HOPE for details or go to www.hope.nc.gov to apply.

Article by Elizabeth Moncrief

Regional Housing Authority Housing Choice Vouchers Waiting List Taking Applications

Western Piedmont Council of Governments' (WPCOG) Regional Housing Authority recently tried a new approach to opening its Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) waiting list for applications. From June 4 through June 18, 2021, applications were accepted electronically through the RHA's new software system. Apart from the occasional technical glitch, the opening was quite successful.

The RHA determined 618 families eligible for housing assistance. Eligibility criteria include qualifying income, sex offender registry check, and student status. By June 30, the RHA sent letters to these applicants confirming they met the initial requirements.

Waiting list position is determined by a points system, with points assigned by:

- * **Residency** (greater ranking given to those in Alexander, Caldwell, Burke, Catawba)
- * **Disability** (certified through a knowledgeable professional or SSA paperwork)
- * **Veteran status** (documented with DD214)
- * **Homelessness** (verified by an agency assisting the homeless)

No documentation was needed for the application to be accepted. However, documents will be requested when the applicant reaches the top of the waiting list.

Prior to accepting new applications, the RHA offered assistance to every applicant on its previous waiting list, which closed in December 2019. Since that time, WPCOG has offered assistance to over 2,000 households, even though WPCOG offices were closed to the public for a portion of 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In preparation for the waiting list opening, WPCOG conducted outreach to the four-county region. Public announcements were published in the Hickory Daily Record, Morganton News Herald, Lenoir News-Topic, and the Taylorsville Times. Announcements were also posted to the WPCOG website and social media platforms Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

Applicants can check their waitlist status at housing.wpcog.net or contact Sharday Black at (828) 485-4241 or by email at sharday.black@wpcog.org with any additional questions.

Article by [Elizabeth Moncrief](#)

Transportation

Coordinated Public Transportation Survey, Workshop, and Plan Update

Every four years, the Greater Hickory Metropolitan Planning Organization (GHMPO) assists the Western Piedmont Regional Transit Authority (WPRTA) in updating the Local Coordinated Public Transportation Plan for the Greater Hickory Urbanized Area. The Plan is developed to provide strategies for coordinated public transportation and mobility management between multiple service providers, including the four-county region's lead transit provider, WPRTA, doing business as Greenway Public Transportation. The Plan identifies transit needs and strategize potential services and procedures for increased mobility, improved service delivery, and enhanced connections to social services. The Plan also helps guide Federal Section 5310 funding for capital and operating assistance projects submitted by area sub-recipient agencies.

Over 20 attendees attended a public workshop hosted at the WPCOG offices on July 20. Breakout exercises resulted in a lot of creative ideas to make using transit more attractive and better serve area resources. To see materials from the workshop and learn more about the Coordinated Plan, visit the WPCOG Public Transportation web page at: www.wpcog.org/public-transportation

Interested community members, area human service providers, and other public transportation stakeholders are encouraged to take a quick interactive survey online at: mygreenway.metroquest.com.

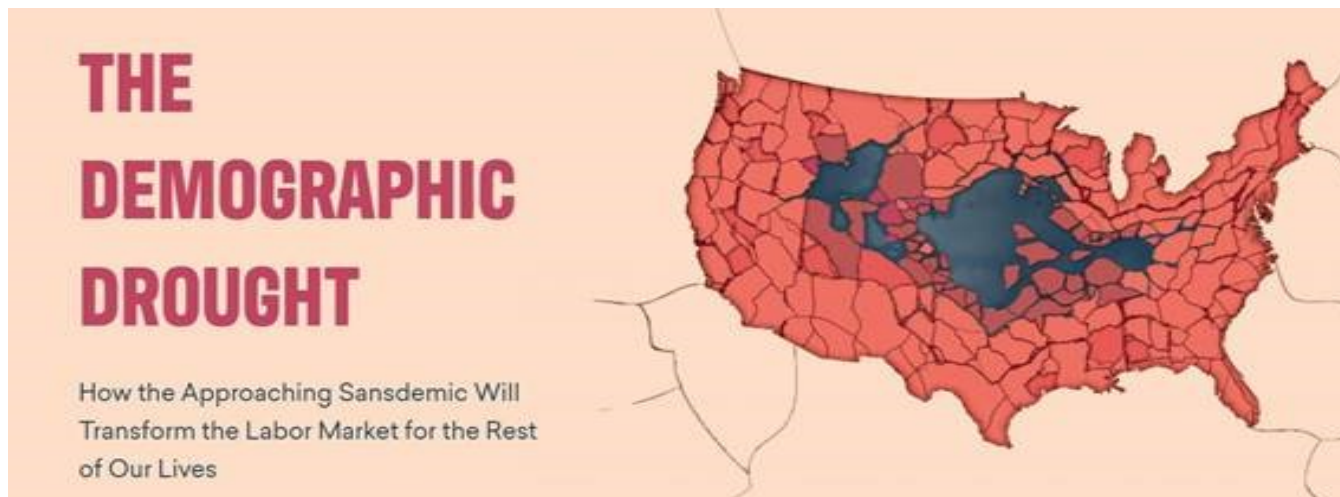
Article by [Brian Horton](#)

Workforce Development Board Pandemic to Approaching Sansdemcic

If you do not read any other workforce development report this year, read EMSI's "[The Demographic Drought](#)"

report. This report was released a few weeks ago, and emphasizes what we have known for the past few years. Sansdemic: sans-without, demic-people.

- The people shortage is almost here (shrinking labor force);
- Post-Secondary enrollments have tanked to 13%. During the pandemic is decreased to 21%;
- Men are opting out of the labor force;
- Drug abuse is still on the rise;
- and video gaming is a huge negative impact to the workforce.



Picture credits from economicmodeling.com/demographic-drought

Article by Wendy Johnson

Workforce Development Board New Look for Regional Labor Marketing Overview

Thank you to the NC Department of Commerce, Labor and Economic Analysis Division for creating a new and improved look to our Workforce Development Boards, Regional Labor Market Overviews. You can use the "download icon at the bottom of the screen to print a copy, you can "share" a copy, and the County Tab for Labor Force numbers is in the top left corner. Soon we will have this information directly linked on our webpage at www.westernpedmontworks.org.

REGIONAL LABOR MARKET OVERVIEW

» Western Piedmont WDB | April 2021 Data*



MONTHLY TRENDS

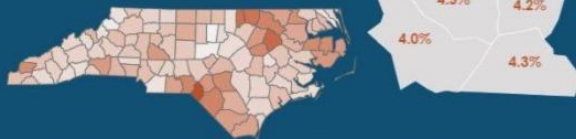
NC Department of Commerce | Labor & Economic Analysis | 919.707.1500 | lead@nccommerce.com

Unemployed Individuals **7,339**

4.2%

4.4% LAST MONTH

UNEMPLOYMENT RATES BY COUNTY



past 90 days from June 11, 2021

WHO'S HIRING

- Carolinas HealthCare System Blue Ridge **233**
- Frye Regional Medical Center, Inc. **226**
- Catawba Valley Medical Center **184**

WHAT JOBS

- Registered Nurses **419**
- Retail Salespersons **127**
- Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand **109**

Employed Individuals **165,388**

Labor Force
172,727

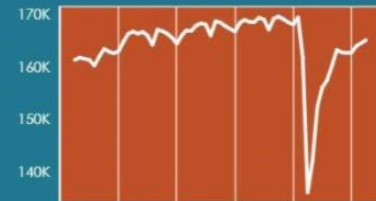
600

CHANGE IN EMPLOYED FROM PREVIOUS MONTH

29,100

CHANGE IN EMPLOYED FROM ONE YEAR AGO

NUMBER OF EMPLOYED OVER LAST 5 YEARS



2016 2017 2018 2019 2020 2021

METRO JOBS

Hickory MSA
151,100

400

TAXABLE RETAIL SALES

\$358,875,706

16.4%

CHANGE FROM ONE YEAR AGO

Article by Wendy Johnson

Area Agency on Aging



Since June 15, 2006, World Elder Abuse Awareness Day has continued to bring awareness to elder abuse, promote awareness of different types of abuse, and educate the community on ways it can help put an end to elder abuse. Elder Abuse Awareness Day also aims to provide individuals with the tools and courage to report an incident if they see one. Reports of elder abuse continue to increase annually. The National Centers for Elder Abuse reports that one in ten seniors may experience elder abuse, but only one in 23 incidents are reported. Most people assume this will never happen to them or someone they love. But the facts are, elder abuse is so underreported many do not realize it may already be happening to someone they love.

Elder abuse can come in many forms, such as physical abuse, sexual abuse, psychological abuse, financial abuse, neglect, abandonment, and verbal abuse and threats. Elder abuse can often be hard to recognize. The abuser can be a stranger, but most often is someone the victim knows, such as a spouse, family member, caregiver, or friend. It is crucial that we are all aware of those who are most at risk, including individuals with dementia, women, and "older" elders. At times the individual being abused may not be able to verbalize the abuse, so it is up to others to notice the signs of abuse and report it immediately.

If you suspect that someone you know is being abused, report it. If it is a life-threatening situation, call 911 immediately. Everyone has a responsibility to report abuse if they suspect it is happening. To report elder abuse, contact the Department of Social Services, Adult Protective Services, and/or local law enforcement in the county the adult resides. If you suspect abuse in a nursing facility, please contact your Regional Ombudsman or the Division of Health Service Regulations in North Carolina. Many resources within the Area Agency on Aging

can also help reduce an older adult's risk of being abused. To find out about these and other resources in your community, visit our webpage at www.wpcog.org.

On June 15, 2021, we asked the community to bring awareness to elder abuse by WEARING PURPLE.

To find out more information about World Elder Abuse Day, please visit: eldermistreatment.usc.edu/weaad-home.

To report elder abuse contact your local

Department of Social Services:

Alexander County

828-632-1080

Burke County

828-764-9600

Catawba County

828-695-5600

Caldwell County

828-426-8200

Article by Christina Franklin

Area Agency on Aging
Falls Can Be Prevented



According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), one out of four adults age 65 and older fall each year, but less than half talk to their healthcare provider. Among older adults (those 65 or older), falls are the leading cause of injury death. They are also the most common cause of nonfatal injuries and hospital admissions for trauma. Many view falls as a normal part of aging, when in fact, it is the complete opposite. Once an older adult experiences a fall, they often develop a fear of falling resulting in a decrease in their physical activity which can lead to missing out on the things they once enjoyed.

Ultimately, there can be many different causes for a fall: poor footwear, medication side effects, fall hazards in the home, or poor vision. The good thing is most falls are preventable. You can prevent falls by making your home safer, getting regular health checkups, and doing the right exercises. A great place to find falls prevention programs are at your local senior center. The Area Agency on Aging works with local senior centers to implement evidence-based health promotion programs such as A Matter of Balance, Tai Chi for Arthritis and Falls Prevention, and Walk with Ease.

A Matter of Balance is an evidence-based program that recognizes the risk of falling and highlights real-world coping strategies to reduce the fears of falls. In the workshop, participants will shift their thought about falls to see that falls can be controllable. Throughout the Matter of Balance workshop, participants will have an opportunity to establish realistic goals to increase their physical activity. In addition, the workshop will provide each participant with exercises that focus on balance and strength that can be done in the comfort of your home. A Matter of Balance also works with participants to change their views about falls and provides ways that older adults can reduce their risk for falls.

Tai Chi for Arthritis and Fall Prevention is recognized worldwide for its overall health benefits. Focusing on three main principles, which include movement control, weight transfer, and integration of mind and body, Tai Chi works to increase balance and reduce falls. The movement control principle in Tai Chi encourages slow, smooth, and continuous movements so that participants can improve their internal muscle strength without causing too much tension on their bodies and joints. The second principle, weight transfer, allows participants to focus on weight transfer with each step, therefore, helping improve overall mobility, coordination, and balance. Finally, as the third principle, the integration of body and mind encourages finding a balanced connection between their mind and body. With a balanced mind and body, participants can focus on relaxation and build confidence as they gain strength.

Walk with Ease is a group-walking program that encourages participants to start walking and stay motivated to keep active. During the six-week program, participants meet three times a week as a group. Each session begins with a health education session followed by stretching exercises then a 10 - 35 minute walk.

There are also great resources available online. If you feel you or a loved one are at risk for falls, you can complete Free Falls Check-Up by visiting www.ncoa.org. You will answer 12 short questions and receive a score. That score will help indicate if you are at risk for falls.

If you are interested in any falls prevention workshops, contact Aging Specialist **Sarah Stamey** at 828-485-4216 or find more information online at www.wpcogaaa.org.

Article by Sarah Stamey

WPCOG MEETINGS CALENDAR

- Bi-Monthly WPCOG Policy Board Meeting - July 27, 2021 - 6:00 pm - Newton Fire Department
- TCC Meeting - July 28, 2021 - 1:00pm - WPCOG Offices
- TAC Meeting - July 28, 2021 - 2:30pm - WPCOG Offices

Stay Connected



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