

WESTERN PIEDMONT COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS NEWSLETTER NOVEMBER 2021



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Previously Committed Transportation Projects at Risk of Losing Funding

Article by: Brian Horton

Earlier this year, the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) announced that the latest round of Prioritization (P-6.0), the process of scoring new projects to be considered for funding, would not result in any new projects. This unusual development was featured in the August WPCOG newsletter. More recently, our region is learning that even existing projects now appear at risk of losing their committed funding status.

NCDOT recently updated cost estimates for most projects in the current State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). The STIP serves as the 10-year funding document for all major transportation projects. Adding up all new project cost estimates, the total STIP of previously committed projects now exceeds available funding by more than \$11 billion across the entire state of North Carolina. Within the WPCOG four-county region, committed projects have thus far seen a combined total cost increase of over \$272 million, or roughly 2.5% of these latest cost increases across North Carolina.

At this point, fewer projects are expected to remain funded in the next STIP (2024-2033) than what is funded within the current STIP (2020-2029). Normally, new projects would result from the Prioritization process. In light of NCDOT's financial challenges, our region must now focus on how to retain as many existing projects as possible. WPCOG and area local governments have already begun meeting with NCDOT to determine if any cost savings are possible by re-thinking the design of some major projects. If any new concepts seem promising for actually lowering costs, those strategies will ultimately seek new community input.

To learn more, visit the WPCOG/GHMPO Prioritization web page at: www.wpcog.org/spot-prioritization.

Build Back Better Regional Challenge

Article by: Paul Teague

Through the passage of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), the Economic Development Administration (EDA) has made \$3 billion available to communities nationwide through a series of grant programs. The largest of these programs, the Build Back Better Regional Challenge (BBB), is a two-phase competition with \$1 billion in grant funding available to help local economies build resilience in the face of the coronavirus pandemic and other economic disruptions. Applicants to the BBB program are encouraged to form regional coalitions with public and private partners in support of a regional economic cluster.

Given the region's strong manufacturing heritage and the local ecosystem of innovation in textiles and furniture supply chains, the local coalition has rallied behind a holistic vision to create bottom-up opportunities for textile workers and start-up companies, building long-term resilience, generating economic opportunities, and providing societal/environmental benefits. In October 2022, WPCOG Staff worked with key coalition members—including The Industrial Commons, Town of Valdese, City of Morganton, PODER Emma, VEDIC, and the Carolina Textile District—to develop and submit a proposal that would be transformative to the region. If funded through the Phase 1 application, the WPCOG proposes to hire Dan St. Louis (a longtime textile advocate who led the Manufacturing Solutions Center for 20 years) as the Regional Competitiveness Officer to coordinate with the different coalition members.

Nationally, the EDA received 529 applications with Phase 1 proposals, and the agency expects to provide \$500,000 in grant funding with no required match to 50-60 communities across the U.S. If awarded, Phase I funds will be used to develop larger and more detailed Phase 2 proposals. Phase 2 proposals will be due in March 2022, and awards will range from \$25 million to \$100 million in grant funding.



National Caregivers Month 2021

Article by Mary Mitchell



November is National Family Caregivers Month, a time when family caregivers are recognized and honored for giving selfless care to a parent, spouse, relative or friend each and every day. National Family Caregivers month offers the opportunity to raise awareness of caregiving issues, and increase support for caregivers across North Carolina and the United States.

The 2021 theme for National Caregivers Month, #CaregiverAnd is all about remembering the passions and identities that make caregivers who they are. Being a family caregiver is important, but so are the other passions that make up a caregivers' life. The role as a caregiver can be very rewarding, but can also overshadow their own identity, while giving care.

It is critical for caregivers not to lose sight of who they are. This is an essential part of self-care that can ultimately prevent caregiver burnout or depression. #CaregiverAnd encourages caregivers to pause and self-reflect on who they are and stay connected to their own identities and interests that enhance their lives. National Caregivers Month celebrates these passions and interests that enrich an individual's life beyond caregiving.

Caregivers can reach out to WPCOG Area Agency on Aging Family Caregiver Support Program for resources to assist their caregiving and provides the following services:

- Information about available services and resources to help families in their caregiver roles.
- Assistance to families gaining access to services.
- Caregiver support to help families cope with the emotional and physical stress associated with caregiving.
- Respite care to enable caregivers to be temporarily relieved from their caregiving responsibilities.
- Limited supplemental services to complement care provided by caregivers.

In recognition of National Caregivers Month, consider providing assistance for someone you know who cares for a loved one. Something as simple as spending time with them or helping in some small way can make a huge difference with supporting their identity and their role as a caregiver. Recognize their commitment and dedication to a loved one and show your support during the month of November and throughout the year.

The State of North Carolina encourages people to acknowledge and support family, friends, and neighbors who help those who are aging or have disabilities; support of family caregivers is not only the right thing to do, but an essential investment in a better future for North Carolina's older adults and individuals with disabilities.

(North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper, Governor's Proclamation—National Family Caregiver Month, 2021)

For additional information, visit WPCOG Area Agency on Aging website: www.wpcogaaa.org or call The Family Caregiver Support Program at (828) 485-4256.



By Khang Celebrates 30 Years with Regional Housing Authority

Article by Kim Duncan



Despite the difficulty of his job, the Regional Housing Authority's Housing Inspector, By Khang, 63, radiates a positivity that emanates from his kind heart and strong faith. Never one to cut corners, By's thoroughness and attention to detail are essential to the safety of the RHA's tenants.

A winding path of diverse experiences led By (pronounced Be) to WPCOG. Born in Laos, the second of 10 children, his family moved often throughout Laos before fleeing to a refugee camp in Thailand. With little to do in the camp, By soon decided to move, without his family, to France and lived there for two years. In the interim, his family was allowed to settle in the US and, under their sponsorship, By joined them in Providence, Rhode Island.

By said once he arrived in the US, his initial goals were to go to school, have a job, and buy a house.

"I wanted to make money for my family, but I have trouble with the language," he said.

By attended high school and community college in Rhode Island. Also during this time, By reconnected with his future bride, May. They had met in France, but May settled in Seattle when she and her family moved to the US. The courtship endured a few premarital bumps before May agreed to marry him. By now describes their union of 39 years as "a very happy marriage." In 1989, By followed his parents and moved his family to North Carolina. Once settled, education again became a priority for By, May, and their three children.

"We would never have a chance to go to school in my country," he said.

By attended Gardner Webb University and received a B.S. in Criminal Justice. May obtained her Ed.D from Walden University. Based on the belief that having a bachelor's degree is an essential foundation for success in life, By encouraged his three children to go to college. He told them if they completed their degree, he would pay all their tuition and buy them a car. All three children took him up on his challenge and received their diplomas. With a laugh, By says, "That's why I'm still working."

Despite his positive demeanor, By and his family have experienced some extremely difficult times. When his oldest son died in a drowning accident in Lake Hickory, By said he had to hold tight to his faith. When his wife was diagnosed with breast cancer, "it hit us hard," By said. He said he read a lot on how to help her through it. May is in remission now and each year By takes orders for the eggrolls she makes and sells. They donate all the proceeds to the cancer society.

This year marks By's thirtieth anniversary as a WPCOG employee, working 26 of those years as a Housing Inspector. Even though he did not achieve the career goal he dreamed of when he came to the US - working for the FBI as White House security - By says he enjoys his work and the RHA team who help him and treat him well.

To strengthen his skill set for his job, By has worked hard to become certified as Professional Quality Standards Inspector. In addition he earned specialized certifications in Lead Hazard Awareness, Professional Housing Occupancy, and HCV Housing Quality Standards among others.

By says the best part of his job is helping people, especially those who are homeless, to find a home. "The landlords and the tenants are so proud to pass inspection and get a home," he said.

The downside of his job comes when tenants damage a house. "It hurts me when people don't care."

By believes he has another major calling for his life outside of family and work.

By says he has survived a lot and God brought him here for a purpose - missionary work. He attends True Life Church, which has a Hmong and an English-speaking congregation, and he participates in service activities there.

When he is ready to retire, By says he will use his time to serve God full-time by doing mission work, and helping in his community. He says whatever is needed - cutting trees, picking up garbage, participating in a small group - he wants to do to help "make his community beautiful."

Regional Housing Authority Director, Stephanie Hanvey, says of By and his work, "By puts his heart and soul into his work. In a position that deals with complaints as commonplace regarding problems with housing, By always seems to keep a smile on his face and have a positive attitude toward his role as a Housing Inspector.

"Thank you By Khang for your thirty years of service to our agency and the Regional Housing Authority. You are a pleasure to have on our team."

WPCOG Air and Water Quality Conferences Highlight Critical Issues

Article by Scott Berson

The Western Piedmont Council of Governments hosted the 2021 Western North Carolina Air and Water Quality Conferences in late October, bringing together experts and officials to discuss some of the most critical components of a healthy and sustainable region: clean air and water. The conferences regularly attract attendees representing local municipalities, local industries, public health organizations, public education agencies, environmental advocacy groups, state and federal agencies staff and other public groups and private citizens.

"The conferences offered an insight into what was going on in the region for both air and water quality while allowing for professionals, students and citizens to hopefully utilize information given to inform their future projects," said Caren Shorthouse, Environmental Education and Outreach Coordinator for the WPCOG. Water and air quality are so important to talk about and think about, especially as we go into the future."

The conferences began in 2007, making this the 14th annual event. Each conference took one day, with the Water Quality Conference on October 28th and the Air Quality Conference on October 29th. Nearly 140 people registered across both days for the conferences, which were held virtually to ensure the widest and safest range of participation. AICP certificate maintenance credits were available for certified planners.

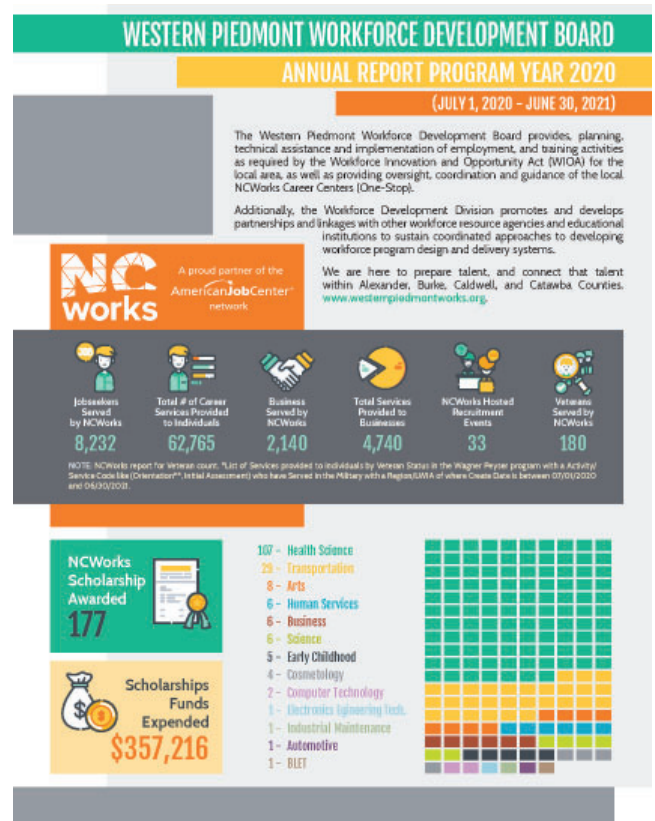
The topics and speakers were diverse. Air quality speakers ranged from North Carolina Director of Air Quality Mike Abraczynski to meteorologist Bradley McLamb to NCDOT multimodal special projects engineer Stephanie Sudano and more. Much of the discussion focused on clean transportation and alternative fuels, as well as new tools for reporting and monitoring ambient air quality. Water quality speakers included figures like Water Supply Watershed Protection Coordinator Paul Clark from the Department of Environmental Quality, Dr. Jeff Wilcox from the University of North Carolina Asheville, Melissa Patton, executive director of Carolina Land and Lakes, and several other speakers. Topics ranged from regional updates, new research regarding stormwater monitoring, and innovative stormwater projects that have been taking place in the area.

Workforce Development Releases PY2020 Annual Report

Article by Wendy Johnson

While numbers were low due to the continued impact of COVID-19, successes were high! Our NCWorks Career Center staff stepped up and embraced virtual career services and outreach to help jobseekers and businesses. We were able to administer over 150 NCWorks Scholarships, 40 Paid Internships, and increase attendance in our virtual job getting workshop.

The full report can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/nxa99exr>





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