

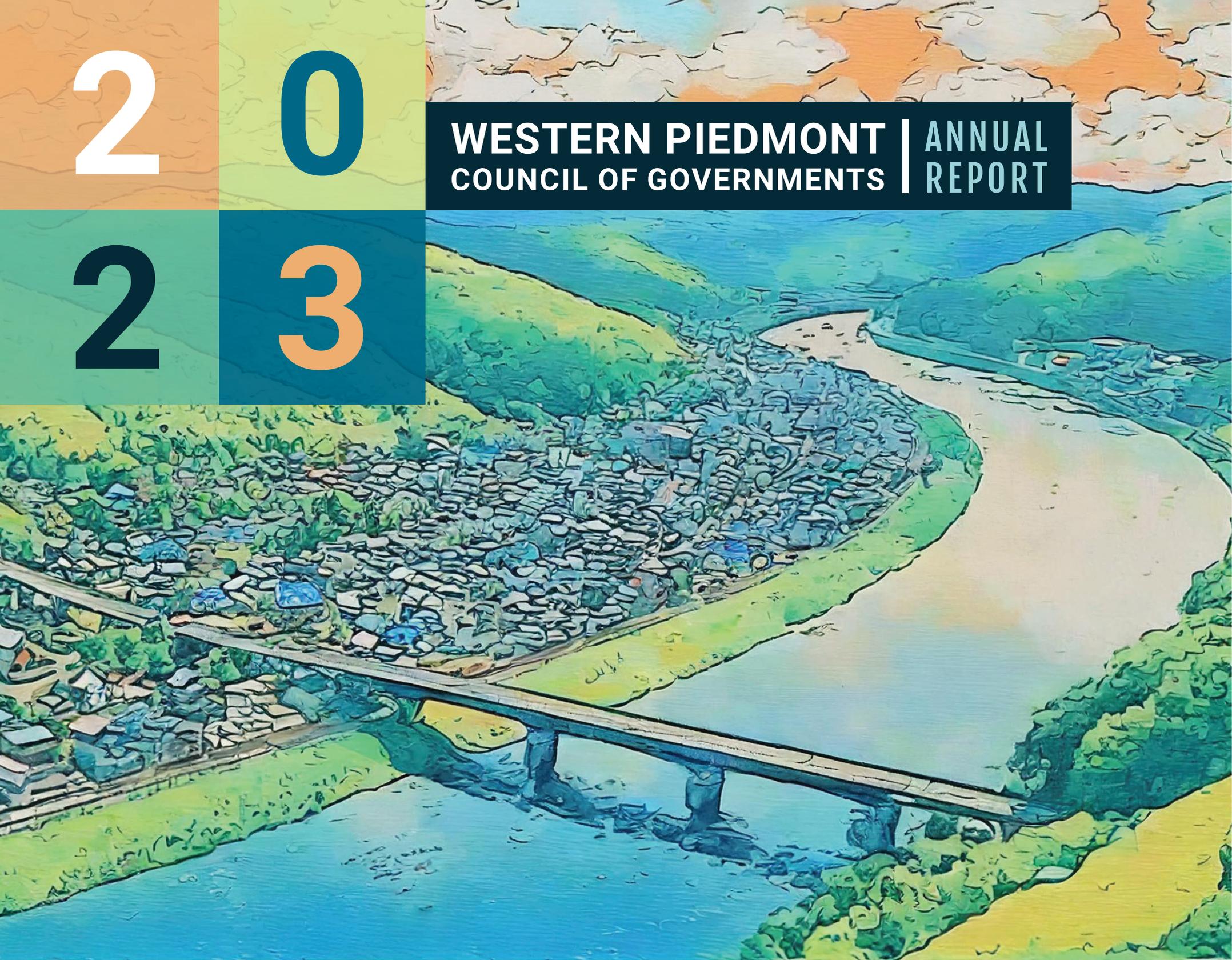
2

0

**WESTERN PIEDMONT
COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS | ANNUAL
REPORT**

2

3





The Western Piedmont Council of Governments (WPCOG) began serving our region's local governments in 1968, and it continued in 2023 with a legacy defined by collaborative excellence. Sharing resources to achieve goals effectively has long been a staple of regional organizations like the WPCOG. A key to maintaining success is more than leveraging our resources; it is understanding how to position ourselves strategically. There is no other collective body of elected officials, staff, and stakeholders

who understand the path to fostering prosperity better than our Council of Governments.

Our region continues to experience growth in recent years. However, creating the right formula to achieve and continue prosperity takes time and effort. As local governments, we possess limited resources. Those limits are why ensuring a focus on regional partnership is paramount for our counties and municipalities to grow. The WPCOG continues to facilitate success through our partnerships that positively affect all aspects of our lives, including housing, infrastructure investments, job creation and workforce development, outdoor recreation, caring for our senior adults, and protecting our natural resources.

The 2023 Annual Report reflects the success of the WPCOG, emphasizing its value to the region across various sectors. Maintaining a collective vision over time is truly an accomplishment worth celebrating, and having one of the nation's strongest, most dedicated, and most creative councils of governments continues our legacy of leadership. Our success in regionalism takes the best aspects of our local governments and generates new opportunities for prosperity. Strategic growth is a high priority for our communities to continue to thrive, and the Western Piedmont Council of Governments is vital and a leader in serving this purpose for our region.

Joseph L. Gibbons
Board Chair, Western Piedmont Council of Governments
Mayor, City of Lenoir



Over 55 years ago, the local governments in our region recognized the opportunity and value of creating the Western Piedmont Council Governments. They imagined the benefits of working together and sharing resources to promote the prosperity and success of their communities. The WPCOG exists to serve the needs of its local governments. We accomplish this mission by providing services to counties and municipalities and providing certain services on behalf of our local governments.

The WPCOG focuses on meeting the needs of our local governments and partners. The success of our region is dependent on intentional actions and effective partnerships. Cooperation requires proactive effort to cultivate relationships and the WPCOG is a mechanism for those enduring bonds. The success of our region also requires planning, wise policy, smart investments, and effective actions by local governments and many other partners. The WPCOG is proud to facilitate and support those efforts.

The success of the WPCOG requires the labor of our incredibly talented and motivated staff. We invest in our employees, and they invest their time and talent in our organization and this region. The WPCOG staff provides the very best examples of public service and collaboration. It is my honor to work alongside them, and it is an honor for everyone at the WPCOG to serve our region.

Anthony W. Starr, ICMA-CM, AICP
Executive Director, Western Piedmont Council of Governments

Chair	 Joseph L. Gibbons Lenoir	Vice Chair	 Randy Burns Burke County	Secretary	 Larry Chapman Hudson	Treasurer	 George B. Holleman Taylorsville	Past Chair	 Jill Patton Hickory	Member At-Large	 Mike LaBrose Caldwell County	Member At-Large	 Cole Setzer Catawba County	Member At-Large	 Marla Thompson Long View	Member At-Large	 Larry Yoder Alexander County
 Wayne Annas Rutherford College	 Dennis Anthony Drexel	 Dr. Caryl B. Burns Granite Falls	 Ramona Duncan Connelly Springs	 Bob Floyd, Jr. Cedar Rock	 Joie Fulbright Conover	 Holly Crafton-Lay Maiden	 Jerry Hodge Newton	 Ben Honeycutt Hildebran									
 Chris Jernigan Morganton	 Barbara Pennell Gamewell	 Donald Robinson Catawba	 Ronnie Setzer Cajah's Mountain	 Dale Sherrill Claremont	 Allen Spensor Rhodhiss	 Bobby Mosteller Sawmills	 Charlie Watts Valdese										
 Amparo Alfaro	 Tonia Stephenson	 Helen Chestnut	 Tommy Luckadoo	 Erisha Lipford	 Mark Transou	 Malla Vue											

LEGEND

- Executive Committee
- Elected Delegates
- Appointed Delegates

NOT PICTURED ABOVE:
Elected Delegates - Sheila Perkins for Glen Alpine and Kelvin Gregory for Brookford.

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 appointed members who represent the private sector.

Current membership of the WPCOG is 100% of the eligible counties, cities and towns located within the area designated including: Alexander, Burke, Caldwell and Catawba Counties, and 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.

An Executive Committee including a Chair, Vice-Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, Past Chair 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.

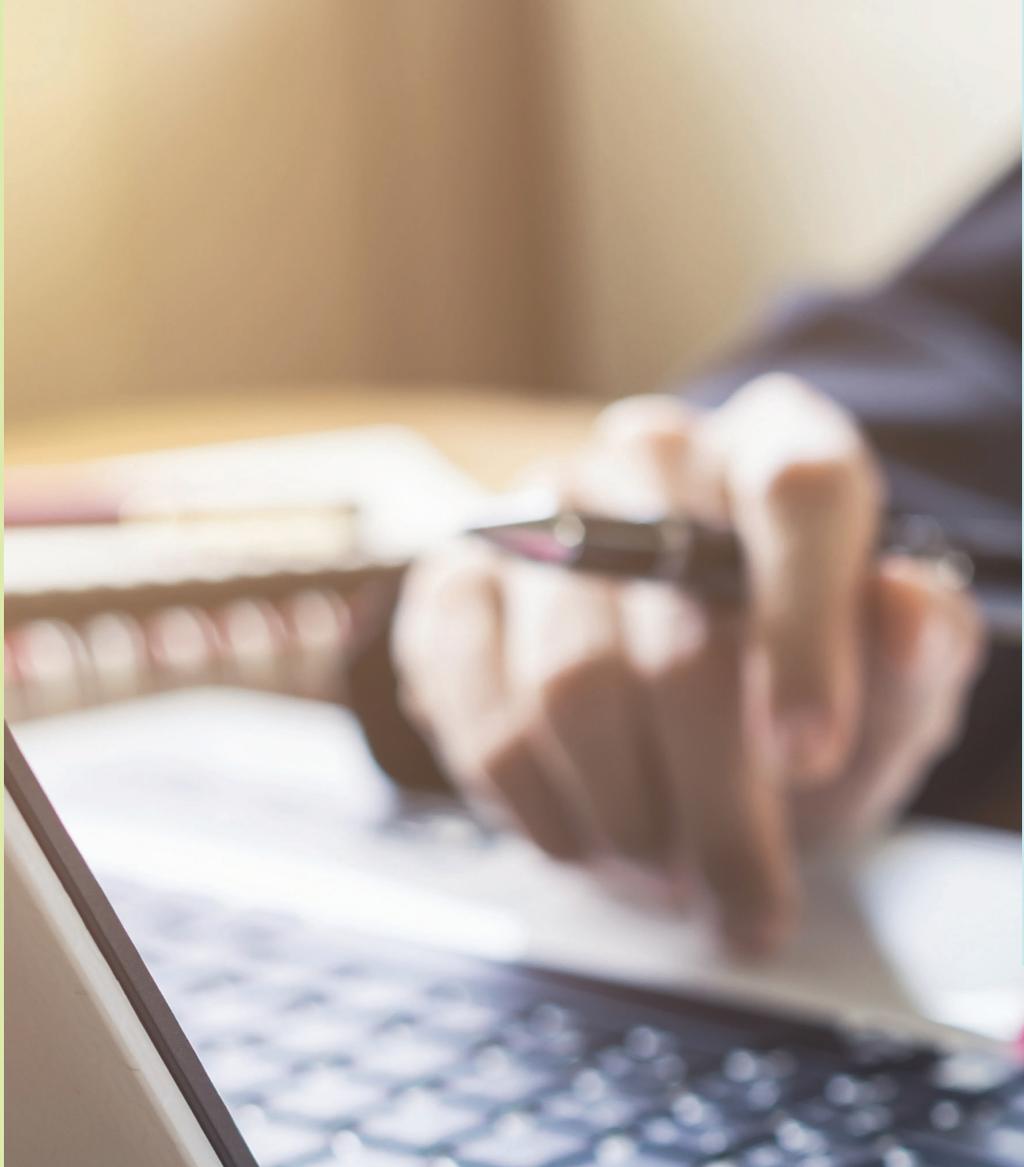
ADMINISTRATION & FINANCE

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 support the WPCOG Policy Board, Executive Committee, and several other regional committees. The WPCOG continued to help strengthen the region through more staff outreach, especially assisting with the significant influx of funding received through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).

Executive Searches

WPCOG Administrative staff, led by the Executive Director and Administrative Services & Human Resources Director, 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 2023, the WPCOG completed the executive searches for the Alexander County Manager, Caldwell County Department of Social Services Director, the Town of Drexel Clerk and Town Manager, the City of Hickory Attorney, and the Long View Finance Director.

“One of the most significant decisions elected officials can make is whom to hire for their county or municipality. In 2023, the Town of Drexel completed its process of hiring a new Town Manager with the assistance of the WPCOG. The high level of professional expertise provided by WPCOG staff made the process easy, so our Board could focus on hiring the best possible candidate. I would recommend this great service to any of our fellow governments in the WPCOG Region.” – Dennis Anthony, Town of Drexel Mayor.



2023 SOCIAL MEDIA & SITE USAGE



Sessions
54,125

Visitors
28,494



Reaches
52,625

Posts
576



Reaches
22,852

Tweets
265



Reaches
240

Posts
68



Meetings
288

Attendees
3,344

FINANCE

The focus of the Council’s governmental funds is to provide information on near-term inflows, outflows, and balances of usable resources. Such information is useful in assessing the Council’s financing requirements. The finance department manages a total budget of \$24.9 million.

The General Fund is the chief operating fund of the Western Piedmont Council of Governments. At the end of the current fiscal year, the Western Piedmont Council of Governments’ fund balance unassigned in the General Fund was \$522,164, while the total fund balance reached \$2,288,304. The Council currently has an unassigned fund balance of 6.5% of total General Fund expenditures and transfers out less lease liabilities issued, while the total fund balance represents 28.5% of that amount.

On June 30, 2023, the governmental funds of the Western Piedmont Council of Governments reported a combined fund balance of \$3,410,200, with a net increase in fund balance of \$88,543. Included in this change in fund balance is an increase in the General Fund of \$107,189, a decrease in the WIOA Fund of \$1,081, an increase in the Aging Fund of \$591, a decrease in the Section 8 Fund of \$188,652, and an increase in the Capital Reserve Fund of \$171,216.

During 2023, the finance department has assisted two local government entities and one non-profit with full financial services. Full financial services include accounts payable, accounts receivable, and payroll.

GENERAL FUND

DEPARTMENT	REVENUES	EXPENSES
General Government	\$114,243	\$104,003
Area Agency on Aging	\$994,329	\$1,072,968
Community & Regional Planning	\$905,887	\$846,817
Environmental Services	\$555,876	\$543,121
Transportation Planning	\$968,470	\$884,429
Community Development	\$1,452,473	\$1,386,396
Economic Development	\$713,759	\$855,435
Regional Public Housing	\$1,353,006	\$1,302,341
Workforce Development	\$731,460	\$717,440
Mis/Local Dues/Fringe & Indirect	\$334,302	\$132,450
Totals	\$8,123,805	\$7,845,400
Total other financing sources	(\$171,216)	
Net Change in Fund Balance	\$107,189	
AGING	\$3,243,605	\$3,243,014
Net Change in Aging FB	\$591	
BURKE RIVER TRAIL	\$105,311	\$105,311
Net Change in BRT FB	\$0.00	
SECTION 8	\$6,727,626	\$6,916,278
Net Change in Section 8 FB	(\$188,652)	
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT	\$1,165,389	\$1,167,190
Net Change in WIOA FB	(\$1,801)	

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 622 AAA's in the United States and 16 in North Carolina. The Western Piedmont AAA serves 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
- Senior Tar Heel Legislature Support
- Operation Fan/Heat Relief
- Medicare Information for Patients and Providers Act Grant
- Project C.A.R.E. (Caregiver Alternative to Running on Empty)
- Evidence-Based Health Promotion Classes
- Presentations on Aging Issues
- Vaccine Information and Outreach

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 priorities. Services are provided to older adults age 60+ and are based on need.

HCCBG Services Funded in Region E

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

126,009
Meals Served 

30,597
Hours of
In-Home Aide Services 

133
Housing &
Home Improvement
Projects 

7,721
Medical &
General Transport Trips 

3,270
Adult Day Care
/ Health Days-of-Service 

532
Hours of Legal
Assistance 

1,000+
Resource Directories
distributed 

122
people reached through
Vaccine Outreach 

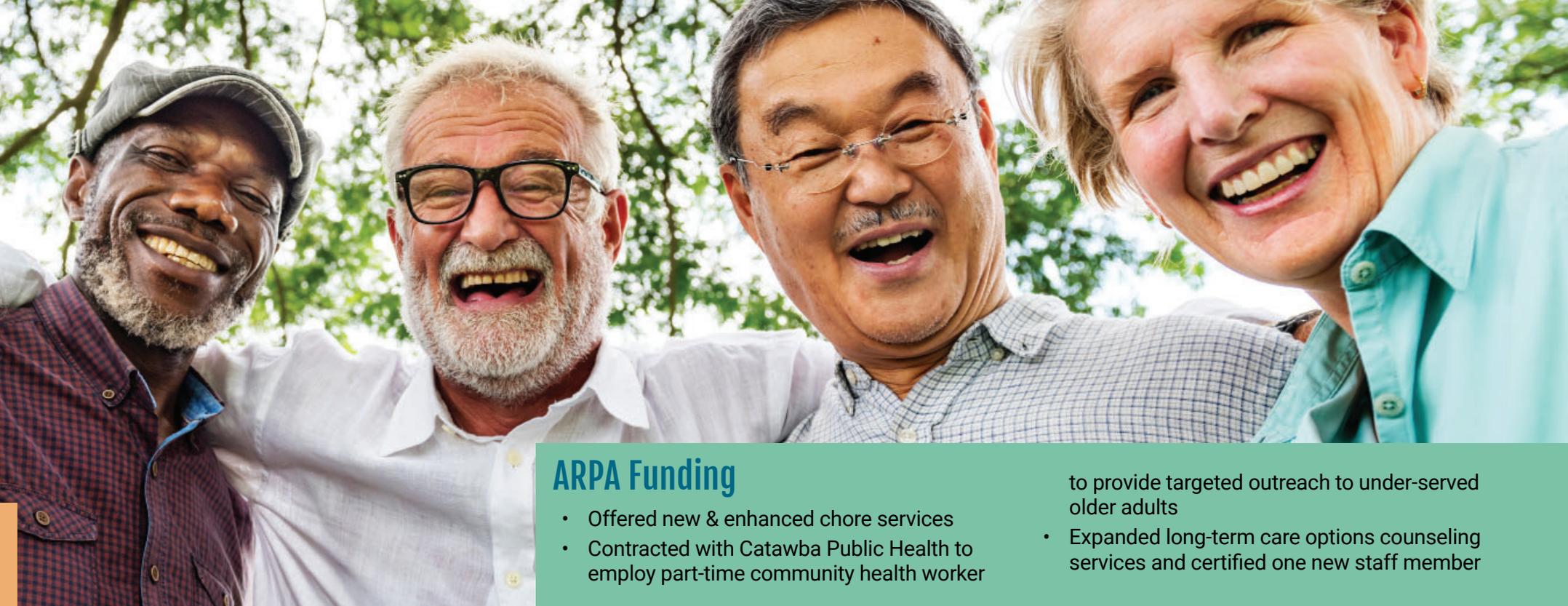
55
community presentations
on aging topics/issues 



Regional Long-Term Care Ombudsman
120 | long-term care complaints resolved
255 | technical assistances to the community

Project C.A.R.E.
The Caregiver Alternatives to Running on Empty (C.A.R.E.) program serves 16 counties; provides services to caregivers of people living with Alzheimer's, dementia, and related cognitive disorders; and offers information, education, care management, and respite vouchers.

124 assessments	35 Dementia training sessions (General Public, including presentations to safety officials, local Police, Firemen, Emergency medical, and Rescue Personnel)
43 reassessments	
156 home visits	
144 vouchers	
1,420 reached with info & referrals	96% of funding utilized



ARPA Funding

- Offered new & enhanced chore services
- Contracted with Catawba Public Health to employ part-time community health worker
- to provide targeted outreach to under-served older adults
- Expanded long-term care options counseling services and certified one new staff member

Family Caregiver Support Program

- Continued Caregiver Directed Voucher program, offering caregivers the option of choosing their respite caregivers from their caregiving responsibilities
- Provided school supplies to grandparents raising grandchildren in Alexander, Burke, and Catawba Counties
- Coordinated with Catawba County School nurses, offering quarterly meetings for grandparents raising grandchildren during the school year
- Expanded coordination with regional HR staff, visiting businesses and organizations to provide employees caregiver information
- Facilitated five regional caregiver support groups
- Partnered with Alexander Early Head Start program and Alexander County Law Enforcement to offer Grandparents Celebration in recognition of grandparents raising grandchildren

Outreach & Support

- Responded to 314 Information & Assistance Referrals calls and provided Options Counseling to 165 individuals/families
- Served as administrative agency for SIR (Senior Information Resources)
- Completion of partnership with Wake Health School of Medicine on D-CARE Research Study Project
- Working with NC Center for Health and Wellness grant for Medicare accreditation, allowing for reimbursement for certain classes AAA teaches

Events & Conferences

- Raised awareness and funds for Alzheimer's by attending "Walk to End Alzheimer's" in October
- Family Caregiver Program and the Regional Ombudsman offered Guardianship & Alternatives: What You Should Know program open to the community
- Family Caregiver Support program partnered with Carolina Caring to offer two caregiver mini-retreats in Burke and Catawba counties

COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

In 2023, staff developed applications that accrued grant funding for 26 projects totaling \$6,878,148. The funding ranged from \$10k each to provide charging stations in three communities to \$1 million in Appalachian Regional Commission funds for an industrial road project. Private sector investments for economic development projects totaled \$3,150,000, creating 49 full-time jobs and affecting 33 housing units. In addition, staff secured two N.C. Commerce Building Reuse grants, eight Appalachian Regional Commission grants, four Rural Transformation grants, and continued to administer 80+ community and economic development grant projects.

Grant highlights include \$1 million for an industrial access road project in **Hickory**, \$513,425 for sewer and water access to the Evergreene Industrial Park in **Sawmills**; \$300k for improvements to the HUB Station in **Hudson**; \$300k for auditorium renovations in **Hildebran**; \$531k for **Catawba Valley Community College** to assist with the development of a new training facility at the **Hickory Airport**; \$60k for equipment **Valdese** for the Old Rock School; and \$222,375 to **Alexander County** for an economic development project with Paragon Films that will create 14 jobs.

Additionally, a \$200k Building Reuse grant was awarded for Chaddock Furniture's expansion in **Morganton** that features over \$1 million in investment and the creation of 25 full-time jobs; \$50k for Backstreets expansion in **Newton** for a project that will invest \$2.35 million and create ten jobs; \$396k in combined Urgent Repair Program funding for **Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, and Catawba Counties**. When combined with local government match commitments, Community & Economic Development staff assisted in project development totaling \$12,736,198 million.

26 Projects totaling
\$6.8M in funding



\$3.2M in private funding



49 New Full-time Jobs Created



80 Administered Projects



\$12.7 Assisted Project Development



33 Affected Housing Units



Housing Counseling

110 individual clients, representing 252 household residents, received \$1,475,446 of grant funding utilized from the North Carolina Homeowner Assistance Fund (NCHAF) in 2023. These funds brought mortgages current, paid delinquent property taxes and/or homeowners' insurance, if not escrowed in their mortgage, and paid three forward payments on the mortgages to give the homeowner ample time to prepare for resuming timely monthly mortgage payments so these families could remain stably housed.

In total, 153 individual clients representing 339 total household residents were able to successfully avoid foreclosure through our various housing counseling services. Total funding utilized for households through NCHAF in our WPCOG Region in 2022 and 2023 was \$2,275,0590.

HOME Consortium Loans

- Pine Crossing apartments (Valdese) is near completion on a \$300K loan from the HOME Consortium to assist with a \$9.6M project leading to a 66-unit apartment complex.
- Fern Hill apartments (Conover) is near completion on a \$320K loan from the HOME Consortium to assist a \$10.6M project leading to a 70-unit apartment complex.

Housing Rehabilitation

A combined total of 56 residences underwent restoration in the WPCOG area through the Urgent Repair Program and Essential Single Family Repair initiatives. The breakdown of completed projects by county is as follows:



URGENT REPAIR PROGRAM



ESSENTIAL SINGLE-FAMILY REPAIR PROGRAM

Alexander	2	Alexander	2
Burke	12	Burke	3
Caldwell	15	Caldwell	8
Catawba	5	Catawba	9



HOME Consortium

In 2023, the HOME Program provided 47 first-time homebuyers with \$1,104,732 in assistance, through the Unifour Consortium Down Payment program, and by leveraging approximately \$8,063,085 million in lender financing. HOME program funded:

- Alexander County Habitat for Humanity with a \$150K loan for the construction of six homes
- Burke County Habitat for Humanity with a \$150K loan for the construction of six homes
- Caldwell County Habitat for Humanity with a \$200K loan for the construction of eight homes
- Olive Hill Economic Community Development with a \$40K loan for the construction of one home
- Open Hearts Project in Burke County with a \$300K loan for the construction of three homes for use as transitional rental housing
- Open Hearts Phase II Project in Burke County with a \$320K loan for the construction of three homes for use as transitional rental housing



Pine Crossing, Valdese - funded through efforts of the HOME Consortium program.

Awarded Grants & Projects

Government (County, City, Regional)	Funding Source (ARC, EDA, etc)	Grant Amount	Local Match	Private Sector \$	Project Total	Jobs Created	Housing Units
Alexander County	Housing & Urban Development (HUD)	\$222,375	\$217,625		\$440,000	14	
Alexander/Burke/Caldwell	NC Housing Finance Agency (NCHFA)	\$264,000					20
Caldwell County	NCHFA	\$162,000					3
Caldwell County	Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC)	\$513,425	\$513,425		\$1,026,850		
Catawba County	NCHFA	\$132,000					10
CVCC	ARC	\$531,000					
CVCC (MSC)	ARC	\$300,000	\$300,000		\$600,000		
Hickory	ARC	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000		\$2,000,000		
Hickory	Golden Leaf	\$200,000					
Hildebran	Rural Transformation Grant/NC Commerce	\$49,500					
Hildebran	Rural Transformation Grant/NC Commerce	\$300,000					
Hudson	ARC	\$300,000	\$317,000		\$617,000		
Hudson	Rural Transformation Grant/NC Commerce	\$250,000					
Lenoir	HUD	\$1,200,690					
Lenoir	HUD	\$142,691					
Long View	Rural Transformation Grant/NC Commerce	\$49,999					
Morganton	HUD	\$198,338					
Morganton	NC Commerce	\$200,000		\$800,000	\$1,000,000	25	
Newton	Rural Economic Development Division (REDD)	\$185,000			\$900,000		
Newton	ARC	\$300,000	\$300,000		\$600,000		
Newton	NC Commerce	\$50,000		\$2,350,000	\$2,400,000	10	
Valdese	ARC	\$60,000	\$60,000		\$120,000		
WPCOG	Dogwood Trust	\$100,000					
WPCOG	Dogwood Trust	\$47,130					
WPCOG	Community Foundation of Burke County	\$10,000					
WPCOG	Burke Charitable Properties	\$10,000					
WPCOG	ARC	\$100,000					
		\$6,878,148	\$2,490,425	\$3,150,000	\$12,736,198	49	33

Homelessness Response Team (HRT)

The formation of the Homelessness Response Team commenced in July 2023 and achieved full staffing in November 2023. Despite being in its pilot stages, the team has garnered significant support and witnessed a substantial demand in the region. The positive impact of the team is already evident, contributing to our ability to achieve the goals of effectively navigating homeless individuals to local resources and engaging in outreach to the communities and local governments we serve.

The team brings a vast amount of knowledge and experience to our serve our region including:

- 26 years of HUD affordable housing experience
- 16 years of substance abuse counseling
- 6 years of mobile crisis assistance
- 6 years of public health expertise
- 5 years of career coaching experience
- Lived experience of homelessness
- Certified domestic violence and sexual assault advocate
- Certified affordable housing management and housing choice voucher
- Ministerial experience
- Volunteer experience

The team will be fully engaged with the region in 2024.

“Through our planning and outreach, our region’s two most significant needs included street outreach for persons experiencing homelessness to connect them to our resources and providing regional coordination of the various organizations serving our homeless population. We need all our resources and community partners pulling in the same direction to address this need.” - Mayor Joe Gibbons who serves as the WPCOG Board Chair.

Key Principles & Practices

- We work for local governments
- We will be supportive of law enforcement
- Regional coordination is essential for effectiveness to help mitigate this problem
- Promote best practices
- Addressing emerging needs strategically with new services, ensuring a positive impact without worsening existing issues



Caldwell County - HRT members conduct outreach assessment.

COMMUNITY & REGIONAL PLANNING

The Regional Planning Department provides member governments with various types of current and long-range planning support. Current planning consists of daily permitting and inquiries, text amendments, rezonings, special use permits, plan (residential, commercial, and industrial) reviews, and action plans.

The department provided planning support services for 12 local governments in 2023. Clients included Cedar Rock, Drexel, Town of Catawba, Gamewell, Hildebran, Hudson, Maiden, Morganton, Rhodhiss, Rutherford College, Sawmills, and Caldwell County.

Long-range planning consists of strategic, comprehensive, small area, downtown, neighborhood, and corridor plans. During 2023, the planning department provided long-range planning services to the following local governments: comprehensive plans for Catawba County, Catawba (town of), Hildebran, and Maiden; land use plans for Taylorsville and Connelly Springs; and a small area plan for Conover.



12
Municipalities with
Planning Administration

3,750 hrs.
Provided to
Local Governments

115 
Major, Minor, & Exempt
Subdivisions (Plats)

15 
Major Subdivisions
(Plan Reviews)

105 
Site Plan Reviews
(Commercial or Industrial)

38 
Text
Amendments

428 
Zoning Permits (ex. home
occupation, clearance, sign, etc.)

213 
Zoning Violation
& Compliance Letters

18 
Rezoning
Cases

4 
Appeals

3 
Special Use
Permits

4 
Annexations

1 
Variance

149 
Other (typically alcohol
permits or zoning verification)

12

48 
Planning Board
Meetings

10 
Board of Adjustment
Meetings

225 
Council & Municipal
Meetings

Special Projects

- Received NC-APA's Marvin Collins Award for the Regional Housing Growth Tool Kit
- Completed digital access plans for Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, and Catawba Counties
- Awarded three NC Forestry tree canopy curriculum grants for Burke, Caldwell, and Hickory City Schools (\$125k), and three tree canopy cover assessment grants (Hickory, Lenoir, and Valdese) from NC Forestry
- Developed ASU-Hickory/ASU/CCC&TI NC Foothills Experience marketing materials
- Completed Caldwell Co. Economic Development Feasibility Assessment
- Assisted with the completion of the Western NC Affordable Housing project (Burke County) funded by the Dogwood Health Trust



that may attract criminal activities. Code Enforcement improves the health of neighborhoods and communities by decreasing the negative impacts of substandard properties.

Code Enforcement also supports the WPCOG Stormwater Program by providing illicit discharge detection and elimination investigations (an illicit discharge is any non-stormwater discharge to a storm system including natural waterways that damages water quality). In 2023, officers resolved 23 illicit discharge and detection reports. In 2024, the Code Enforcement Program plans to conduct waterway inspections by boat to eliminate illegal discharges and promote a cleaner environment.

Code Enforcement supports the WPCOG Homeless Outreach Program by providing knowledge of rural areas of concern and escorting outreach specialists into these areas to contact individuals needing assistance. Code Enforcement officers are supporting local governments' ordinance amendments to mitigate the impact of homelessness on the community.

Finally, Code Enforcement supports WPCOG emergency management planning by monitoring flood-prone areas, collecting data to support grant writing, and assisting with drone operations.

CODE ENFORCEMENT

Brookford, Cahah's Mountain, Catawba (town of), Cedar Rock, Claremont, Drexel, Gamewell, Hildebran, Hudson, Maiden, Newton, Rhodhiss, Sawmills, and Caldwell County utilized the WPCOG for code enforcement services in 2023. WPCOG's Code Enforcement Program is compliance-focused, using education and consultation to help citizens become compliant. An in-house GIS application allows for the creation of a real-time database and printing of documents as needed, with instant access to pertinent information for each local government. In 2023, Officers resolved 1,061 violations and have significantly impacted local communities by mitigating deterioration and creating healthier neighborhoods for citizens. Officers issued 116 violations for structures (residential and non-residential) not meeting minimum standards, reducing the locations

1,424
New
Violations



1,078
Nuisance
Violations



230
Abandoned/
Junked Vehicles



91
Minimum
Housing



25
Minimum
Non-Residential



1,061
Violations
Resolved

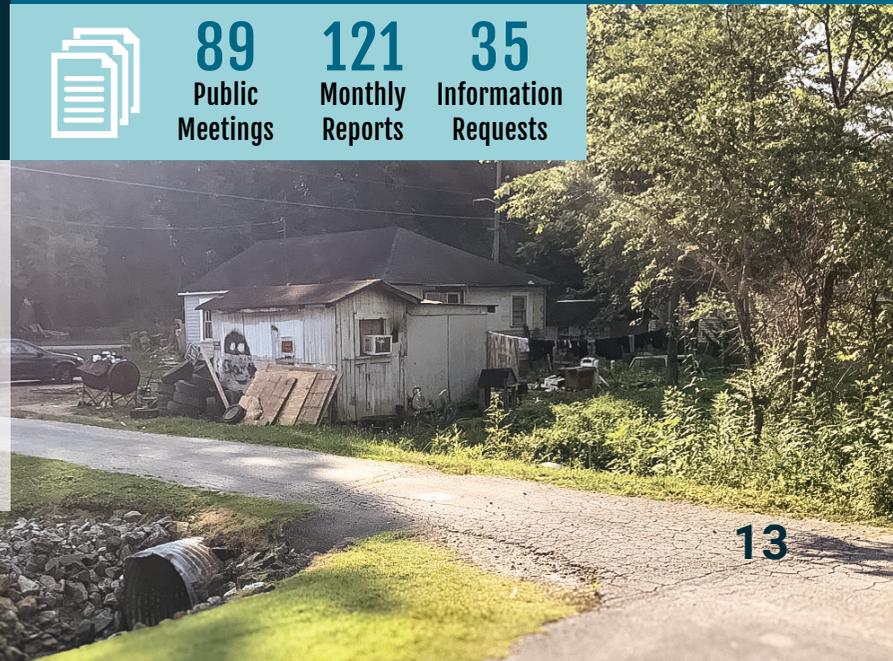


89
Public
Meetings

121
Monthly
Reports

35
Information
Requests

Caldwell County - Resolved nuisance property. Now a church basketball court.



CENTER FOR RESEARCH & DATA ANALYTICS

A Lead Regional Organization (LRO) Affiliate of the North Carolina Data Center, the WPCOG Center for Research & Data Analytics assists in locating and analyzing information for local governments, nonprofits, and the private sector. Staff also produce specialized data products, including community assessments, economic indicators newsletters, industry growth analyses, project research, and student growth estimation models.

 **656**
Data Requests

 **173**
Meetings/
Presentations

Publications

 **4**
Regional Economic
Indicators
Newsletters

 **4**
Hickory Economic
Indicator
Reports

 **1**
Catawba
County Schools
Early Head Start
Community
Assessment

14

Example Projects Include:

- Completed demographic, economic data estimates, and projections for 2023 - 2033 Hickory planning project
- Completed labor market analysis for Morganton
- Updated regional & county level 2020 center of population maps
- Local jobs vs. housing needs for Catawba County analysis
- Analysis for projected population growth for Hickory's four quadrants
- 2023 - 2024 Transit Passenger Sampling Methodology Report
- Completed analysis of site-built single-family permits for Burke County
- Completed educational attainment, employment and job flow analysis for Catawba County Chamber
- Demographic and school enrollment data updates provided for STEM West
- Conducted Vehicle Occupancy Collection (VOR) samples in Hickory and Newton and 2023 Report for NCDOT
- Completed 48 population radius analyses for a potential grocery store in the Newton/Conover area
- Completed a new strategic plan survey for the Catawba County Arts Council
- Provided Appalachian State University a list of top regional manufacturing employers by industry type

Regional Snapshot

Population Estimate: 371,537

Number of Jobs: 154,229

Number of Housing Units: 166,731

Median Household Income: \$60,209

Median Sales Price: \$275,000

Average Sales Price: \$324,055

Unemployment Rate: 3.3%

Poverty Rate: 13.8%

Mean Travel Time to Work: 24.6 minutes

Sources: NC Office of Management and Budget, NC Labor and Economic Analysis Division, 2022 American Community Survey, Canopy Multiple Listing Services Inc. (Canopy MLS), 2024.



GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEMS (GIS)

WPCOG GIS Services is the Western Piedmont Region's central geographic information resource. The WPCOG's GIS group maintains an extensive library of local, county, regional, and statewide datasets. The GIS group provides various digital mapping solutions and geospatial data services for member governments and other public and private agencies. WPCOG GIS staff also designs spatial GIS-based applications that users can access easily on PCs, tablets, and smartphones. These applications can allow local workers to view and edit utility or other data in the field as infrastructure is updated. WPCOG hosts and maintains spatial data servers and delivers the information to PCs and mobile devices using ArcGIS Online (AGOL).

 **731**
Map & Spatial
Data Requests

 **31,541**
Geocoded Points
(Office & Field)

 **110**
Support/Maintenance
Requests
(Contract & Internal)

Local Government GIS Maintenance Services include:

(Claremont, Drexel, Maiden, Rutherford College, Sawmills, Taylorsville, and Valdese)

- Provided GIS and AGOL support to all GIS maintenance contracts and internal online applications including audits, support, training, and maintenance

Stormwater:

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

Geocoding:

- 19,000+ stormwater features for Caldwell County stormwater mapping, and 15,000 water features for Caldwell County's water system
- Mapped Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba Counties, and Morganton Building Inspection Department building permit locations
- Geocoding and maps for Carolina Textile Districts clients and members, Manufacturing Solution Center customers, and referral companies impact mapping

Mapping:

- Provided maps for Catawba County, Claremont, Connelly Springs, Maiden, Taylorsville, and Town of Catawba comprehensive/land use plans
- Completed mapping for Metropolitan Transportation Plan (Bike/Pedestrian, MTP projects, Title VI, Environmental Justice, Traffic Analysis Zones)

Caldwell County - Johnny Wilson Farm, used for school outreach on agricultural education. Photo by Drone Services.



- Provided Community Development with grant maps for Granite Falls and Sawmills
- Updating zoning maps for Rhodhiss, Sawmills, and Valdese
- Created mapping tool for Caldwell EDC for future development site selection
- Compiled Greenway transit data layers and maps
- Mapped new urbanized area Hickory MSA boundaries and census tract changes between 2010 and 2020
- Provided Burke County GIS data for ARC area housing assets inventory

Online Applications:

- Began Community Health and Disaster Mitigation Explorer (CHADME) Tool for emergency management personnel
- Developed Caldwell County water and stormwater applications
- Updated Code Enforcement online mapping application, Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) viewer, updated Burke River Trail viewer, and Greenway Transit Bus application, and NC Foothills Experience map application
- Completed Survey123 application for ADA bus stop data collection to support a future transition plan

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT (EM)

In 2023, Emergency Management (EM) staff purchased an L1 LiDAR sensor, a P1 mapping sensor, and a real-time kinematic (RTK) base station. These sensors attach to the WPCOG's Matrice 300RTK drone to collect high-quality LiDAR and other mapping data. A hydrologic model uses this data to create elevation and watershed renderings. These maps are forwarded to local government partners to aid in deciding which mitigation and resiliency projects are feasible. The maps are also used in grant applications to add technical weight by providing a visual perspective of flood-prone areas. A second drone (Mavic 3 Pro) was purchased with a cinematic sensor to collect better quality before and after photogrammetry of these areas.

With guidance from regional Emergency Managers, staff is developing the Community Health and Disaster Mitigation Explorer (CHADME) tool. The tool will allow a one-stop approach to accessing data for emergency management purposes. EM staff can use the data to support data collection, grant writing capabilities, hazard/threat identification, and risk assessments to support recovery efforts. CHADME is both a desktop dashboard and a field map collection tool for tablets and phones, providing real-time information, including demographics, income/poverty data, and social determinants of health. The CHADME tool is expected to be completed by May 2024.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Western Piedmont Water Resources Committee

The Western Piedmont Water Resources Committee is the key interface used by the WPCOG to interact with local governments on the issue of water resources. The Committee consists of individuals representing local governments, nonprofit organizations, educational institutions, and businesses from Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, and Catawba Counties in western North Carolina.

In 2023, the committee discussed updates to stormwater management plan standards; past, ongoing, and future stormwater outreach; and education projects in the region.

Stormwater Planning & Administration

Stormwater Planning & Administration assists local governments with NC Department of Environmental Quality requirements and ensures the quality of local municipal waterways. The program focuses on measures required by EPA municipal stormwater permits. Current stormwater program clients include Cahah's Mountain, Conover, Gamewell, Granite Falls, Hudson, Lenoir, Newton, Rutherford College, Sawmills, and Valdese. In addition, staff facilitate educational programs for Hickory, Maiden, and Morganton.

The program capitalizes on various skill-sets of WPCOG staff to fulfill the requirements of the MS4 Permits. The Code Enforcement program enforces illicit discharge with support from the GIS program, oversees the collection and monitoring of stormwater utility data. WPCOG Natural Resources oversees the program's management, providing outreach, public participation, and post-construction management.



10
Photogrammetry
Flights

25
Drone
Flights

15
LiDAR
Flights

12
Monthly
Reports

23
Meetings

Catawba County - Drone Services staff prepare for LiDAR drone flight flood mitigation and mapping.



Western NC Air & Water Quality Conferences

The WPCOG hosted the 2023 Western North Carolina Air & Water Quality Conferences, 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.

Air quality conference speakers included the NCDEQ Chief of the Division of Air Quality Planning Section, Senior Project Manager from the NC Clean Energy Technology Center, and Friends of the Valdese Rec President and Founder. Topics ranged from statewide air quality planning to local river trail updates. Water quality conference speakers included figures like Aquatic Ecologist from Stantec, Wake Forest University, and the Director of the Lenoir-Rhyne University Reese Institute for Conservation of Natural Resources. Speakers shared regional updates, new research in water quality monitoring, and innovative stormwater studies taking place in NC.

The River Trail of Burke County

The River Trail of Burke County Feasibility Study, funded by the NC General Assembly and created by the WPCOG, analyzed potential non-motorized trail alignments extending from Morganton to Hickory. Developing a trail in Burke County along the Catawba River creating connections between three state trails: the Fonta Flora Trail, the Mountains to Sea Trail, and the Overmountain Victory Trail.

The river trail study examined trail alignment opportunities, constraints, environmental factors, and cultural histories. Staff discussed potential trail alignments with local governments and collected public input as a vital part of this study's completion. A key priority of this study was to ensure that the final recommended alignment would be appealing to users and provide direct connections, while also limiting the disturbance of culturally significant and environmentally sensitive areas. The study concluded by suggesting a trail alignment directly informed by public input and an extensive review of on-the-ground challenges and opportunities.

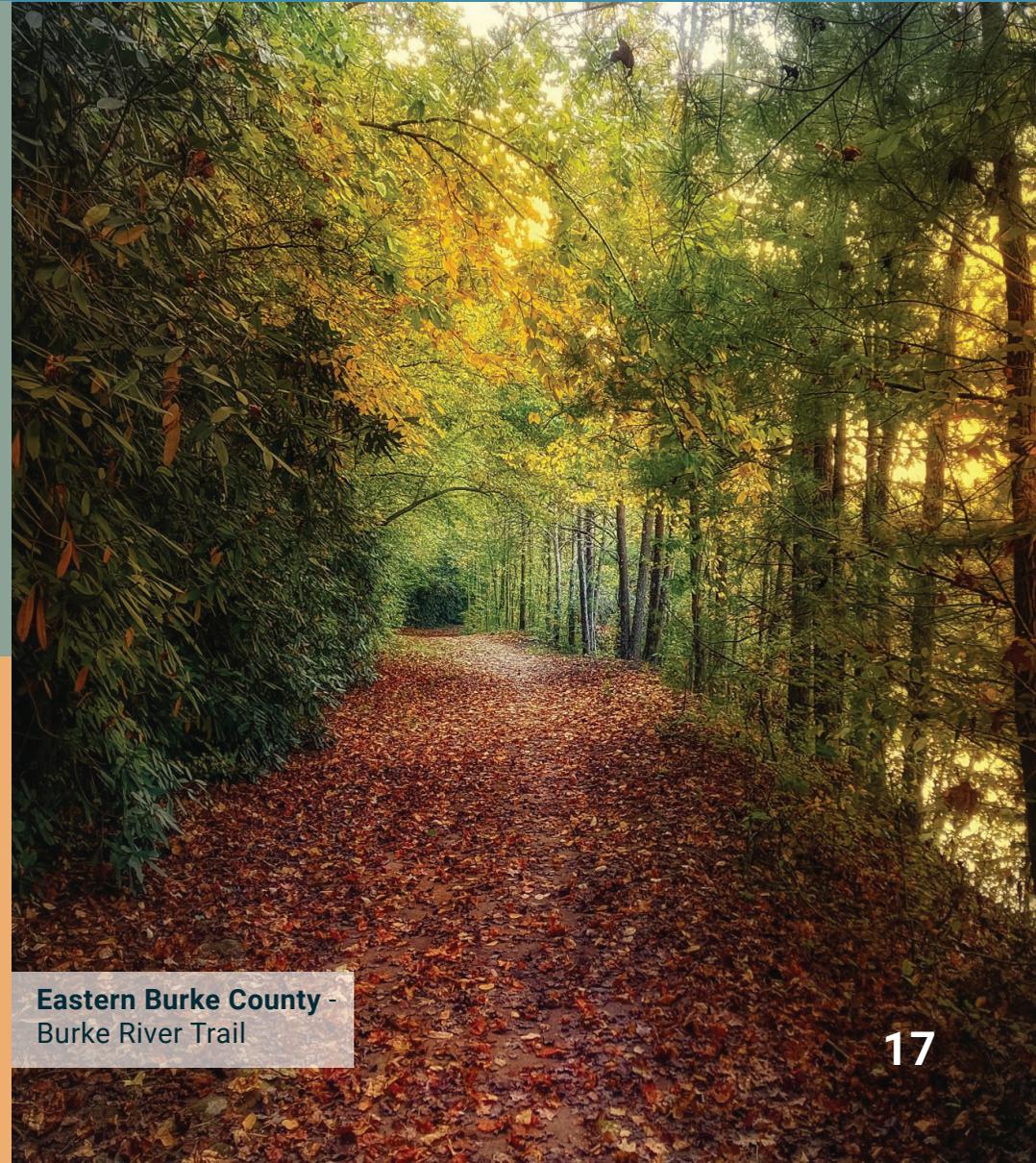
Natural Resources by the Numbers

17 Stormwater Plan Reviews	33 Illicit Discharge Issues Reported	34 SCM Inspections	58 Facility Inspections	156 Outfill Inspections
---	---	---------------------------------	--------------------------------------	--------------------------------------

17 Outreach Events	1,706 People Reached
---------------------------------	-----------------------------------



14,000 Stormwater Features Cataloged



Eastern Burke County -
Burke River Trail

TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

Designated as the lead planning agency for the Greater Hickory Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), the WPCOG is responsible for regional transportation planning. The MPO evaluates transportation system performance, identifies project needs, develops long-range plans, prioritizes projects, and recommends funding. The MPO evaluates the needs of all modes of transportation. The WPCOG is the primary local recipient of transportation planning funds from the state and federal governments. The MPO is governed by the Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC), comprised of elected officials from each of the 28 local governments in the region. The Technical Coordinating Committee provide recommendations to the TAC.



36

Workshops/
Training



340

Meetings
(TCC, TAC,
Walkability, etc.)



6

Walking
Audits



325

Passenger
Samplings



248

Catawba
County

77

Burke
County

Accomplishments

- VOR (vehicle occupancy rating) collection completed – oldest data set in the region collected by WPCOG (collection began in 1984)
- Adoption of the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP), March 2023; beginning work for the 2024 UPWP
- Continued planning for US 321 bike, pedestrian/sidewalks, and roadway improvements
- Administered local administered projects grant process and awarded three projects for local communities
- Completed the 2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP), a federally required long-range transportation plan that includes multi-modal coverage and demographic data to convey the region's long-term goals for all modes of transportation over the next 20 to 30 years
- Completed the Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP), a state-required long-range transportation plan that includes local travel demand models and future areas of concern for MPOs that includes multi-modal coverage and covers all projects, including those beyond the 30 years
- Completed the Congestion Management Process, a systematic and regionally-accepted approach for managing congestion that provides accurate, up-to-date information on transportation

18



system performance and assesses alternative strategies for congestion management that meet state and local needs

- Updated the Public Involvement Plan, which guides how the MPO communicates with the public about current and new projects
- Adopted the health equity mapping assessment, which integrates equity and public health metrics to support transportation planning and project prioritization
- Began work on the regional bicycle and pedestrian plan update that identifies needs across the region
- Approved the Regional Comprehensive Highway Safety Plan scope that identifies areas of concern and high-risk areas using crash location and other safety data for all modes of transit, which helps with safety funding opportunities
- Met with all local governments and submitted 50+ projects through NCDOT's prioritization system for funding
- Finalized new micro-transit service area for Greenway Transportation, which serves residents in Burke County
- Engaged in early planning for new passenger rail service for western NC from Asheville to Salisbury
- Hosted workshops for NC DOT Divisions 11, 12, & 13 to meet with municipalities and discuss potential projects for funding
- Coordinated discussions regarding Hickory Regional Airport and Foothills Regional Airport improvements
- Facilitated walk audits in downtown Hickory, Granite Falls, along Lenoir Rhyne Boulevard, and at the NC School of Science and Math (Morganton) to improve pedestrian safety

ADA Title II for State & Local Governments

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is federal legislation passed in 1990 that prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities. Title II of the ADA applies to state and local government entities, and subtitle A protects qualified individuals with disabilities from discrimination on the basis of disability in services, programs, and activities provided by state and local government entities.

WPCOG ADA Planning Services partners with local governments to develop ADA policies, improve existing facilities, and develop transition plans. The mission is to ensure local government programs, facilities, policies, and procedures comply with ADA regulations. The WPCOG maintains current information regarding state and federal ADA regulations and adhere to best practices regarding the rights of persons with disabilities. Staff is also responsible for reviewing ADA-related grievances and appeals. The goal is to improve the accessibility of local governments, including existing facilities, sidewalks, parking lots, bus stops, intersections, programs, and activities for individuals with disabilities.

The staff developed a pedestrian right-of-way GIS collector application to document mobility hazards within each client municipality's pedestrian rights-of-way, which can inventory each pedestrian amenity and sidewalk mile within the municipality. Because ADA covers a broad range of criteria, the application was designed to address non-compliant sidewalks, curb ramps, driveway cuts, intersections, railroad crossings, bus stops, crosswalks, and pedestrian islands.

While the pedestrian right-of-way collector application documents all mobility barriers and prioritizes them by severity, the ADA Transition Plan documents hazardous and time-sensitive mobility barriers. Possible improvements to these barriers are addressed in consultation with NCDOT. The plan shows suggested improvements using a combination of drone imagery and 3D renderings.

ADA Maintenance

In 2023, WPCOG provided ADA maintenance to the completed ADA transition plans in Granite Falls and Conover. A draft ADA transition plan is currently underway for Sawmills. Staff developed an application for the inventory and assessment of conditions at Greenway Public Transportation bus stops. Staff conducted six walk audits to reduce mobility barriers and surveyed five facilities for ADA compliance.

Movability Advisory Committee (MAC)

The MPO staff will oversee the completion of a Regional Comprehensive Highway Safety Plan (CHSP). The Highway Safety Division of NCDOT approved plan funding for MPO staff. The CHSP aims to identify areas of concern and high-risk areas using crash location and other safety data. It covers all modes of transportation. Once completed, the CHSP will open the region to safety funding opportunities.

The Movability Advisory Committee documents safety concerns and guides funding opportunities to enhance regional safety. The committee covers all modes of transportation and meets quarterly. The group conducts and assists with walk audits, forms reports that help investigate mobility barriers, and improves safety for all modes of travel.

Local Administered Projects Program (LAPP)

The WPCOG recognizes the regional need for technical assistance in the administration of Locally Administered Projects. The Greater Hickory Metropolitan Organization funds these projects through this discretionary grant program. The MPO's LAPP program funding enables local governments to plan, design, and construct highway, bike/pedestrian, and transit improvements. Local governments commonly use funds for sidewalk extension/expansion, intersection improvements, and multi-use path construction. Management and administration of LAPP projects require significant staff capability, as local governments or their administrating agency must manage the project through planning/design, right-of-way acquisition, and construction. To increase regional LAPP project management capacity, the WPCOG created a transportation projects coordinator position to provide technical assistance to local governments.

This service includes:

- Education and training sessions to increase local governments' internal capacity to administer LAPP projects
- Project assistance to directly support local governments with application development, procurement assistance, design management assistance, supplemental application scoping assistance, etc.
- Support local governments with project administration

REGIONAL HOUSING AUTHORITY

Housing Choice Voucher Program (HCV)

The Housing Choice Voucher Program is the federal government's primary program for assisting low-income families in obtaining affordable housing in the private market. Participants are free to choose any housing that meets the requirements of the program.

Since January 2018, HUD awarded the Regional Housing Authority (RHA) a total of 331 new vouchers (a 30.8% increase). Thirty Emergency Housing Vouchers, 30 Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing Vouchers, 246 Mainstream Vouchers, 20 regular Housing Choice Vouchers, and five Housing Stability Vouchers.



Highlights

- In 2023, increased capacity by 28 total vouchers, eight regular housing choice vouchers, 15 veterans vouchers, and five housing stability vouchers
- Received \$123k in extraordinary administrative fees for landlord and tenant incentive programs, placing RHA in the top 6% nationwide to receive funding
- Reached a leasing rate of 98%
- Spotlighted as speaker for two HUD webinars on voucher use due to the RHA's high utilization rates
- Presented at the regional HUD-VASH conference in Decatur, Georgia to showcase the strong partnership between the RHA and local veterans administration office in using veteran specific vouchers
- Began serving as the Region 3 Continuum of Care Coordinated Entry Lead, in partnership with the new WPCOG Homeless Response Team and the NC Balance of State as of December 1, 2023



Annual Landlord Seminar

The RHA held the 10th annual Landlord Information Seminar in November of 2023, with 39 owner and property managers in attendance. The RHA provided a new owner's handbook for everyone in attendance, an open Q&A session with RHA staff, and booths available to provide one-on-one guidance for common questions and challenges. The RHA announced a new initiative in landlord recruitment, with monthly landlord briefings and quarterly interest meetings in 2024.



EnVision Center

The RHA EnVision Center provides communities with a centralized hub for support in the following four pillars: (1) Economic Empowerment, (2) Educational Advancement, (3) Health and Wellness, and (4) Character and Leadership. The RHA continues to operate as one of the one-hundred unique EnVision Centers located across the country.

RHA Clients by Race



Special Programs

The RHA works to enhance the quality of life for participating families through several special programs.

» Housing Choice Voucher Homeownership Program

Allows housing choice voucher participants to use received rental subsidies toward mortgage payments. In 2023, the RHA assisted ten families with their monthly mortgages.

» Mainstream Vouchers

Assist families with a disabled person in the household between the ages of 18-61. Aside from serving a special population, the administration of mainstream vouchers adheres to the same rules as other Housing Choice Vouchers. Funding and financial reporting are separate from the regular tenant-based voucher program.

» Family Unification Program (FUP)

Helps families whose children have been displaced from their household or are at severe risk of displacement and facing the imminent threat of losing their children due to inadequate housing. These vouchers also assist former foster youth who are transitioning out of foster care. The RHA works in cooperation with public child welfare agencies to provide these vouchers to families.

» Veteran Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH)

Combines HUD's housing choice voucher rental assistance for homeless veterans with case management and clinical services provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The VA provides these services for participating veterans at VA medical centers (VAMCs), community-based outreach clinics (CBOCs), through VA contractors, or other VA designated entities. The RHA currently has a total of 30 VASH vouchers.

» Project-Based Voucher (PBV)

A component of public housing authority's (PHA's) Housing Choice Voucher program. The PHA uses its tenant-based voucher funding to allocate project-based units to a project. The RHA runs three (3) project-based voucher projects. Two (2) are in Catawba County for the "hardest to serve" population, with the third project located in Burke County for the elderly population age 62 and over.

» Emergency Housing Voucher (EHV)

Available through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), HUD awarded 30 EHV's to the WPCOG in July 2021. These vouchers are to assist families that are homeless; at risk of homelessness; fleeing or attempting to flee

domestic violence; dating violence; sexual assault; stalking; or human trafficking; or were recently homeless with a high risk of housing instability.

Effective October 1, 2023 these vouchers could no longer be re-issued to new applicants and the RHA maintained a 100% leasing rate.

Special Programs by the Numbers

 **1,096**
Housing Choice Vouchers

 **246**
Mainstream Vouchers

 **20**
Family Unification Program

 **30**
Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing Vouchers

 **46**
Project-based Vouchers

 **30**
Emergency Housing Vouchers

 **10**
Homeownership Program

Fraud Collection

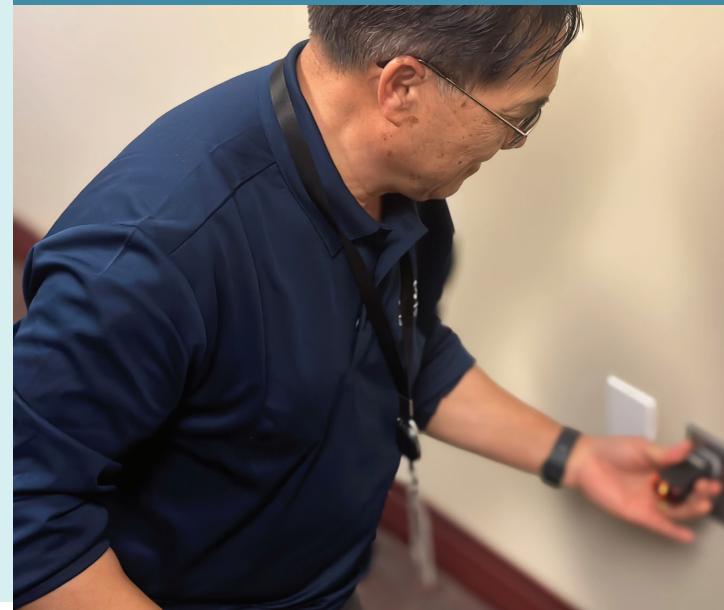
Families assisted through the RHA Housing Choice Voucher Program who inaccurately report their income are placed on a repayment agreement. If the RHA cannot collect the funds through an agreement, the family is entered into the NC Debt Setoff (NCDS) collection system. In 2023, The RHA collected \$1,657 from clients and \$3,880 through NCDS for \$5,537.

Inspections

RHA conducts annual inspections of all occupied units, including pre-move in inspections, and special requests.

 **2,544**
Inspections

 **66%**
Pass Rate



REACH (Family Self-Sufficiency -- FSS)

Offers participants the guidance of a FSS coordinator who provides referrals to community resources and services. Each participant, with the assistance of the FSS coordinator, sets goals and creates a plan to achieve them, with suitable employment being HUD's mandatory final goal. As families increase their household earned income, the RHA deposits funds into an escrow account. Participants receive their escrow savings by completing their goals and graduating from the REACH program.

REACH Success Story

Impressive and dedicated describe Alyson Galetta from the day she enrolled in REACH. She had overcome addiction, completed several certifications, and was working part-time, raising her daughter, while hoping to complete a degree. Once enrolled in REACH and given resources from the FSS coordinator, Alyson followed through with each referral. Through her committed approach to completing her goals, she earned a scholarship, completed her associate degree in human services with a concentration in addiction and recovery, and obtained an internship that led to a full-time clinician position. She is currently working with clients who need follow-up recovery services as they leave the hospital, while also taking classes part-time to complete her bachelor's degree. Alyson's advisor, career counselor, and FSS coordinator all commend her for her amazing dedication to completing her goals.



REACH by the Numbers

12	53	12
2023 New Enrollment	2023 Total Participants	2023 Graduates

\$55,715	\$73,164	\$60,236
2023 Total Escrow Monies Earned	Total in Escrow Savings Account at End of 2023	Escrow Dollars Disbursed to Graduates in 2023



WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD

The Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board (WPWDB) serves as the center of community and regional leadership; identifies workforce challenges and convene conversations to resolve them; champions workforce development; works in a collaborative partnership with key stakeholders; brings resources to bear on resolving the challenges; and, acts as the accountability agent to ensure the work's completion. The WPCOG houses the WPWDB and appoints the WPWDB members.

Through the planning and oversight of the Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board, the local area NCWorks Career Centers have delivered:

 **4,480**
Number of Employer Services

 **37,379**
Number of Jobseeker Services

 **322**
Number of Recruitment Events

 **164**
Number of Scholarships Awarded

In 2023, the Western Piedmont Workforce Development NCWorks Scholarships funding for adults, dislocated worker, and youth was awarded:

\$172,348
Alexander County

\$469,126
Burke County

\$201,152
Caldwell County

\$588,470
Catawba County

NCWorks NEXTGEN

Your Future Starts Here

Youth & Young Adult NEXTGEN program (16-24 years old) delivered:

 **15** Completed High School Diploma/Equivalency

 **33** Entered Post-Secondary

 **19** WEX Internships

In 2023, the WPWDB continued administration of the Incumbent Worker Grant program, branded as Upskill. The Upskill Grant offers competitive training grants to businesses in addressing skills gaps, improving employee retention, helping to stabilize the business, and increasing the competitiveness of the employee and the business. Through this effort, businesses improve productivity and increase competitiveness; retain key talent and expertise; and, reduce employee turnover.

Upskill

110 Trainees

2 Upskill Grants Issued
(Whiteside Machine & Vanguard Furniture)

\$13,995 Funds Awarded





2023 Governor's NCWorks Award of Distinction Winner – Outstanding Employer

Master Tech Auto – Hickory NC

Master Tech Auto has been and continues to be an integral partner in providing Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I Youth Services. Master Tech is a small family-owned business that values education and community. They recognize the value of a talented workforce and provide skill development opportunities in the community, as they continue to build their team to carry out their business mission of providing services with excellence, experience, and integrity.

Master Tech Auto is a leader in providing work-based learning opportunities and has trained 11 young adults through paid internships of Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board NextGen Program. They have been working with the NextGen Internship program for several years, giving real-world experience as they learn vehicle mechanics. This hands-on experience is critical to learning retention.

Annual Youth Summit

On March 23, 2023, the Western Piedmont Youth Council held its annual Youth Summit. It was the first in-person event since 2019 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Seventy-nine students attended, representing every school system in the region. In addition, there were approximately 20 adults who assisted with transporting the students and assisting the groups to each station throughout the day. The event was held at Conover Station in Conover and included the Beta Box Learning Team from NC State, sharing about autonomous vehicles and drones. A Manufacturing Solutions Center (MSC) tour included a close-up of the labs, learning about the Small Business Incubator and some of the products developed at the MSC. Youth learned about STEM jobs and the businesses in the region. Drones and autonomous vehicles were a big hit with the group.



Innovation Grant

WPWDB in partnership with the Industrial Commons and its affiliate program "Work in Burke," were awarded a \$225k grant to support innovative efforts addressing workforce challenges.

The OPT-IN and J.E.T.: Creating Opportunities for Opportunity Youth

Support "opportunity youth" (those who are currently neither in the labor force nor in school) and help meet Burke County's workforce needs by expanding the Opportunity Internship Program (OPT-IN) and launching the Jobs, Education, and Training Program (J.E.T.). OPT-IN serves recent high school graduates by matching them with local employers for an eight-week, paid exploratory internship. Participants also receive mentoring and professional development classes. Similarly, J.E.T. can serve any opportunity youth between the ages of 18-24, connecting them to local companies offering family-sustaining wages while providing mentoring and professional development. Both programs will focus on outreach to communities of color. Partners include Burke Development, Inc., Western Piedmont Community College, Burke County Public Schools, NCWorks Career Center - Burke County, N.C. Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and Meridian Specialty Yarn Group, Inc.

Governor Cooper's NC Job Ready workforce initiative is built on three core principles: skills and education attainment so North Carolinians are ready for jobs available now and in the future, employer leadership to remain relevant to evolving industry needs, and local innovation to take great ideas and apply them statewide.

The Local Innovation Fund's new grants will support North Carolina's First in Talent Plan, which seeks to prepare workers for career and entrepreneurial success; prepare businesses for success by growing and attracting a talented workforce; and, prepare communities to be more competitive.



Success Stories



Douglas J. Willoughby - In March 2023, a career advisor with the NCWorks Disabled Veterans Outreach Program (DVOP) was contacted by DVOP advisor at the Jacksonville NCWorks Career Center. The advisor shared that he had recently met with Mr. Willoughby, a transitioning service member from the United States Marine Corps. Mr. Willoughby and his family were looking to move to Catawba County, and he wanted to begin his search for employment.

A career advisor worked with Douglas to build an NCWorks account, complete Douglas's work assessments, create a development plan, and build a resume to professional standards. They also worked on interviewing skills and navigating the NCWorks platform to understand how to look for employment.

On June 21, 2023, Mr. Willoughby contacted his advisor at NCWorks to share that he was offered employment with Asheville-Buncombe Community Christian Ministries as a case manager.

Ingrid Vicente - The NCWorks NEXTGen program provided a scholarship to assist Ingrid Raymundo Vicente with gaining the skills she needed to obtain employment as a dental assistant.



When Ingrid came to NCWorks, one of the barriers to employment she faced was that her primary language is Spanish. One of the things that kept Ingrid motivated to complete her training program was her desire to help others. Ingrid stated the support services she received were helpful because she could get help with the cost of transportation while attending clinicals. She graduated from Western Piedmont Community College in May 2023 and accepted a position at Southern Family Dentistry.

Rapid Response

In September, the WPWDB and NCWorks Career Center hosted a multi-employer recruitment event for the dislocated workers of Mitchell Gold + Bob Williams in Taylorsville. Thirty-six businesses, five partner agencies 187 jobseekers attended the recruitment event.



WPCOG STAFF

Administration

Anthony Starr	Executive Director
Sherry Long	Assistant Executive Director
David Pugh	Director of Administrative Services & HR
Jason Toney	Communications Manager
Lucas Bentley	IT/Facility Manager
Tasmin Mack	HR Manager
Elizabeth Hilliard	Executive Assistant
Lori Dixon	Administrative Assistant/Reception

Finance

Andrea Roper	Finance Director
Ashley Adkins	Assistant Finance Director
April Bolick	Senior Financial Manager
Susan Matheson	Senior Financial Manager
Brianna Wert	Financial Manager
Makayla Pannell	Accounting Technician II
Tamara Turner	Accounting Technician II

Area Agency on Aging

Tina Miller	Area Agency on Aging Director
Sarah Stamey	Aging Program Manager
Mary Mitchell	Family Caregiver Support Administrator
Christina Franklin	Regional Ombudsman
Karen Phoenix	Project C.A.R.E. Family Consultant
Michael Layza	Aging Specialist/Regional Ombudsman
Ashelin McCoy	Aging Specialist

Community & Economic Development

Ben Willis	Community & Economic Development Director
Rick Oxford	Housing Program Manager
Jennifer Cannon	Community & Economic Development Administrator
Kyle Case	Community & Economic Development Administrator
Lisa Helton	Community & Economic Development Administrator
Laurie Powell	Community & Economic Development Administrator
Paul Teague	Community & Economic Development Administrator
Jeffrey Currie	Housing Counselor
Joel Herman	Housing Inspector
Stephen Pflieger	Housing Inspector
Chasity Houck	Homelessness Response Manager
James Anders II	Homelessness Outreach Specialist
Mary Kendrick	Homelessness Outreach Specialist
Chae Moore	Homelessness Outreach Specialist
Ric Smith	Homelessness Outreach Specialist

Community & Regional Planning

Alison Adams	Community & Regional Planning Director
John Wear	Assistant Community & Regional Planning Director
Averi Ritchie	Transportation Planning Manager
Curt Willis	Emergency Mgt Planner/Code Enforcement Mgr
Duncan Cavanaugh	Senior Community & Regional Planner
Teresa Kinney	Senior Community & Regional Planner
Ashley Young	Senior Community & Regional Planner
Taylor Dellinger	Senior Data Analyst
Dustin Millsaps	Community & Regional Planner
Katelyn Smith	Community & Regional Planner
Rachel Wooster	Community & Regional Planner
Daniel Odom	Transportation Projects Manager
Casey Fulbright	Transportation Planner
Haleigh Hopkins	Natural Resource Administrator
Andrew Webb	Natural Resource Administrator
Chad Powell	Code Enforcement Officer
Kevin Wyatt	Code Enforcement Officer
Dallas Goodnight	GIS Specialist
Trey Schweitzer	GIS Specialist
Kelly Christensen	GIS Technician

Regional Housing Authority

Stephanie Hanvey	Director of Regional Housing Authority
Elizabeth Moncrief	RHA Program Manager
Kim Duncan	Family Self-Sufficiency Coordinator
Lisa Acuff	Housing Specialist
Jennifer Cater	Housing Specialist
Grace Garnett	Housing Specialist
Kelley Hayward	Housing Specialist
Viveca Huffman	Housing Specialist
Kaleigh Reinhardt	Housing Specialist
By Khang	Housing Inspector
Doug Woodall	Housing Inspector

Workforce Development Board

Charity Patterson Hamber	Director of Workforce Development
Donna Gilbert	Workforce Program Manager
Elizabeth Hilliard	Workforce Program Coordinator

2

0

2

3



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



twitter.com/WPCOG



instagram.com/WPCOG1968

Infograph icons and stock images throughout this document were designed and provided by freepik.com.