

WESTERN PIEDMONT COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

SEPTEMBER 2017



Introduction

The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is an important tool used to encourage and equip the region's counties and communities with strategies to improve economic conditions and the quality of life for residents. The CEDS for the Western Piedmont region was created by the 2017 CEDS Committee appointed by the Western Piedmont Council of Governments (WPCOG) Policy Board in November 2016. Its 15 members represent community leaders from Alexander, Burke, Caldwell and Catawba Counties (the four counties in the Western Piedmont region).

The CEDS includes a summary background, the results of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT), regional resiliency analysis, CEDS Strategies by topic and CEDS Performance Measures. Additional information pertaining to the 2017 CEDS, including the regional profile, a summary of the CEDS process, CEDS survey and stakeholder interview results, CEDS performance measures spreadsheet, and the CEDS Committee meeting minutes, can be found on the WPCOG website in the CEDS report appendices.

Summary Background

The Western Piedmont (also known as the Hickory-Lenoir-Morganton Metropolitan Statistical Area or Hickory MSA) region's population fell less than 0.1% from 365,497 in 2010 to 365,471 in 2015 (Table below). Alexander County had the fastest growth rate over the past 5 years (2.0%), followed by Catawba County (1.0%). Since 2010, the population in Burke and Caldwell Counties has decreased. The lack of population

growth in the Western Piedmont region compared to other regions in North Carolina is most likely due to substantial employment losses suffered in the region between 2007 and 2010 and a lack of net in-migration of younger households into the region. The North Carolina Office of Management and Budget (NCOMB) predicts slow population growth for the region through 2035 with an increase from 365,491 to 374,383. This population growth of 8,912 persons represents only a 2.4% increase over the next 20 years.

CEDS by the Numbers



Western Piedmont Region (MSA) Population Growth (2010-2035)

County	Census 2010	2015 Estimate	Growth 2010-15	% Growth 2010-15	2025	2035	Growth 2015-35	% Growth 2015-35
Alexander	37,198	37,952	754	2.0%	38,745	39,189	1,237	3.3%
Burke	90,912	89,114	-1,798	-2.0%	90,002	90,179	1,065	1.2%
Caldwell	83,029	82,577	-452	-0.5%	83,411	83,666	1,089	1.3%
Catawba	154,358	155,828	1,470	1.0%	158,588	161,349	5,521	3.5%
Region Total	365,497	365,471	-26	< -0.1%	370,746	374,383	8,912	2.4%

Source: 2010 Census, US Census Bureau and NC Office of Management and Budget, 2016.

SWOT Analysis

CEDS Committee members completed a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis for the Western Piedmont Region. The following SWOT comments received the most votes from committee members:

Strengths of the Region

- Lower cost of living/taxes
- Physical assets - mountains, rivers, trails
- Proximity to Charlotte, Asheville, coast, mountains, etc.
- Educational opportunities (public education, private schools, early college, community college and Lenoir Rhyne University)
- Family friendly
- Philanthropy (private and community)

Weaknesses of the Region

- Lack of entertainment outlets for 21-40 year olds
- Lack of high paying jobs
- Lack of an iconic attraction
- Lack of new housing
- Out-migration of our young people leads to loss of future leaders and workforce talent

Opportunities of the Region

- Development of a collaborative regional marketing plan
- Recruit/retain employable and diverse workforce
- Job training to fill vacant job openings
- Surveying young people for what they want
- Construct shell buildings
- Business development/expansion

Threats to the Region

- The Region's inability to solve long-standing problems
- Not responding to migration of young adults
- The region not developing a regional marketing plan for another 15 years
- Over-reliance on manufacturing
- Major businesses leaving the area
- National trend of automation of jobs
- Void in skill sets for manufacturing jobs

Regional Resiliency

As part of the CEDS process, Committee members discussed “resiliency” in the Western Piedmont Region. Below are the committee’s answers to questions concerning regional resiliency.

How are we resilient now?

- Aggressive EDC offices (good talent)
- Community foundation/philanthropy work across counties
- Establishment of early college/high school programs
- Local governments streamlining their operations in response to lower revenue and property values
- Businesses adapted to shifts in the economy
- Passed 40 million dollar bond (Hickory)
- Pull yourself up by bootstraps mentality of citizens
- Strong efforts in protecting the natural environment
- Re-tooling people who were laid off during the recession
- Continuing to seek opportunities to replace what we lose
- Diversifying our types of businesses
- Finding great ways to revitalize some of our downtowns
- Re-purposing our vacant buildings
- Maintaining manufacturing employment of three times the national average
- Willingness of our people to get re-training

How can we improve resiliency for our region?

- Being proactive in planning
- Not waiting another 15 years for a marketing plan
- Increasing availability of shell buildings
- Accepting individual diversity
- More incentives to revitalize and renovate
- Public/private cooperation

CEDS Vision Statement







The CEDS will maintain and enhance vibrant, healthy, and prosperous communities in the Western Piedmont Region. The vision will be achieved by robust and aggressive economic development, desirable and affordable housing, successful marketing of regional assets, inclusive and flourishing community life, retention and recruitment of a talented workforce, and efficient and well-maintained infrastructure.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The economy in the Western Piedmont region historically relied on the furniture, textile and fiber-optic industries. Changes to these industries have resulted in the entry of new employers and created opportunities to strengthen existing industry sectors and raise income levels. Efforts are underway to embrace and accommodate new state educational institutions, international product testing and business development centers.

The strategies found in this portion of the CEDS lead to economic development and job creation opportunities for the region. These include constructing additional shell buildings and pad-ready sites, increasing capacity for economic development projects and grant development, maximizing building reuse and site development (such as Transportation Insight in Hickory) and promoting economic development assets including the Manufacturing Solutions Center, the Morganton Campus of the NC School of Science and Math, and the NC Center for Engineering Technologies.

Western Piedmont Region (MSA) Employment Distribution

	2000	2015
Services 	43%	48%
Manufacturing 	34%	28%
Trade 	14%	16%
Administration 	5%	5%
Construction 	3%	2%
Other 	1%	1%

Number of Employed Persons

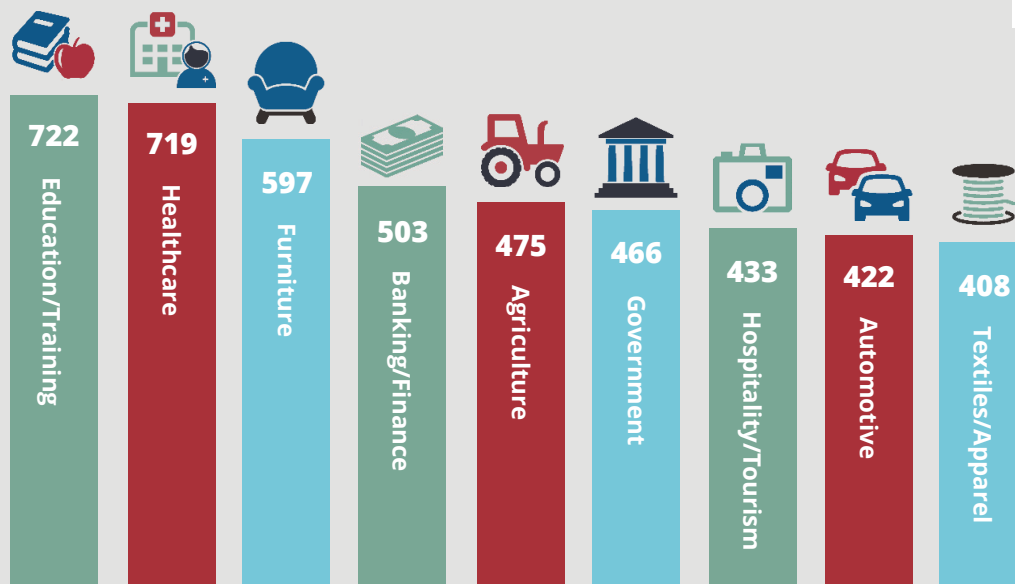
2000
185,093

2015
144,880

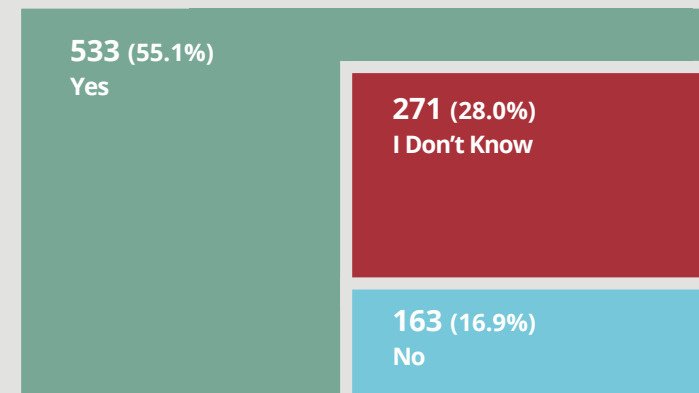
Source: Labor and Economic Analysis Division, NC Dept. of Commerce.

CEDS Public Survey Responses

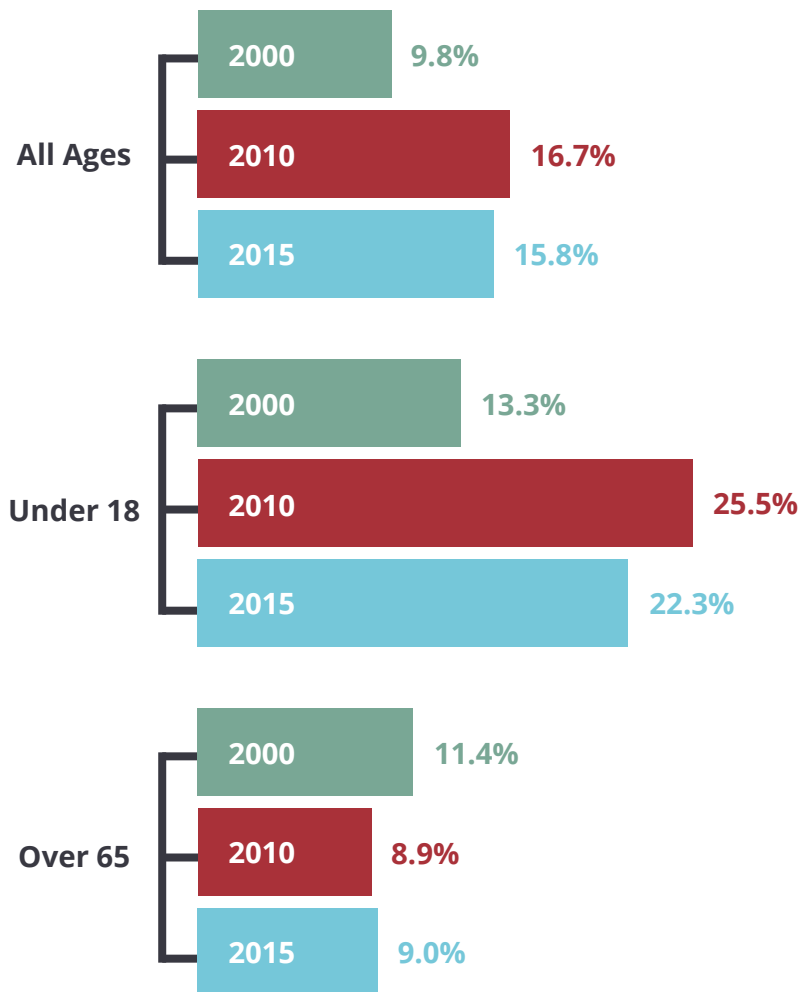
What economic opportunities exist or are developing in your county?
(963 Responses - This question allowed for multiple answers)



Does your local government encourage small businesses to locate and grow in your community?
(971 Responses)



Western Piedmont Region (MSA) Poverty Rates 2000-2015



Source: 2000 Census and Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates, US Census Bureau.



Conover, NC



Gildan - Hildebran, NC



Hickory, NC

STRATEGY - Construct additional “shell buildings” and “pad-ready sites” throughout the region

- Educate and motivate communities to develop 50,000 to 100,000 square foot buildings and pad-ready sites
- Regionally, at least one shell building should be “move-in” ready, at least one should be under construction, and at least one should be in the planning process at all times
- Identify public/private partnerships for shell building construction
- Identify the number and size of needed pad-ready sites in the region
- Increase the number of NC Department of Commerce’s “Certified Sites” in the region
- Evaluate rail corridors and railroad rights-of-way for potential economic development opportunities
- Encourage local governments to add website links to NC Department of Commerce site inventory map (webpage)

METRICS

- At least 10 new shell buildings constructed in the region with an average employment of 40 jobs per 50,000 square feet
- Number of pad-ready sites available/created
- Number of “Certified Sites”

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

- Local governments, EDCs, private partners, federal and state grant agencies

STRATEGY - Enhance capacity for project and grant development

- Hire additional Community and Economic Development staff to increase grant writing capacity and grant administration for the region
- Encourage EDCs to have a policy support role with additional project and grant development to ensure proper coordination

METRICS

- Additional grant writing and administrative staff is hired
- Number of grants awarded
- Grant funding amounts and jobs created

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

- Local governments, federal and state grant agencies, WPCOG

STRATEGY - Maximize building reuse and site redevelopment opportunities

- Identify locations in the region that are ideal targets for building reuse or site demolition grants
- Prepare successful demolition/building reuse grant applications

METRICS

- List of best building reuse/demolition sites created
- Number of building reuse/demolition grants awarded
- 40 grants over a 5-year period with an average of 15 jobs created per project

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

- Local governments, EDCs, federal and state grant agencies, WPCOG

STRATEGY - Promote and support the Manufacturing Solutions Center (MSC), Morganton Campus of the NC School of Science and Math (NCSSM), the NC Center of Engineering Technologies (NCCET) and other critical economic development assets in the region

- Develop a marketing plan to inform the community of the importance of MSC regionally
- Support MSC's mission to improve, develop and create innovative products in furniture, hosiery and other industries by creating strategies for expansion and growth
- Continue to track the annual MSC company contacts
- Inform the community of the importance of NCSSM to the region
- Develop a newcomer welcome plan for students, faculty, parents and visitors to NCSSM
- Create new economic development opportunities near the NCSSM campus such as retail (shopping and restaurants), hotels, housing, sidewalks, greenways, recreation and transit
- Support NCCET's mission to educate and train in engineering-related fields and to bring ideas and innovation to the marketplace
- Assist to align/coordinate the missions and funding sources of these entities to ensure short- and long-term support

METRICS

- Increased promotion of the MSC as an important regional asset
- The number of MSC company contacts
- MSC expansion
- Assistance in ensuring the Morganton Campus of NCSSM opens as scheduled
- Assess new housing, retail/hotels and recreational opportunities and development near the NCSSM Morganton Campus
- Assess sidewalks/greenway and transit opportunities created for students, faculty and visitors to the NCSSM Morganton Campus
- Assess new economic development opportunities for downtown Morganton due to NCSSM
- Expansion of programs at NCCET

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

- MSC, NCSSM, NCCET, EDC's, local industry, local governments, chambers of commerce, NC Department of Commerce, regional community colleges, Appalachian State University, Lenoir-Rhyne University, Western Carolina University, UNC-Charlotte, and other 4-year universities, Greater Hickory Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), Greenway Public Transportation, federal and state grant agencies



Granite Falls Water Tower



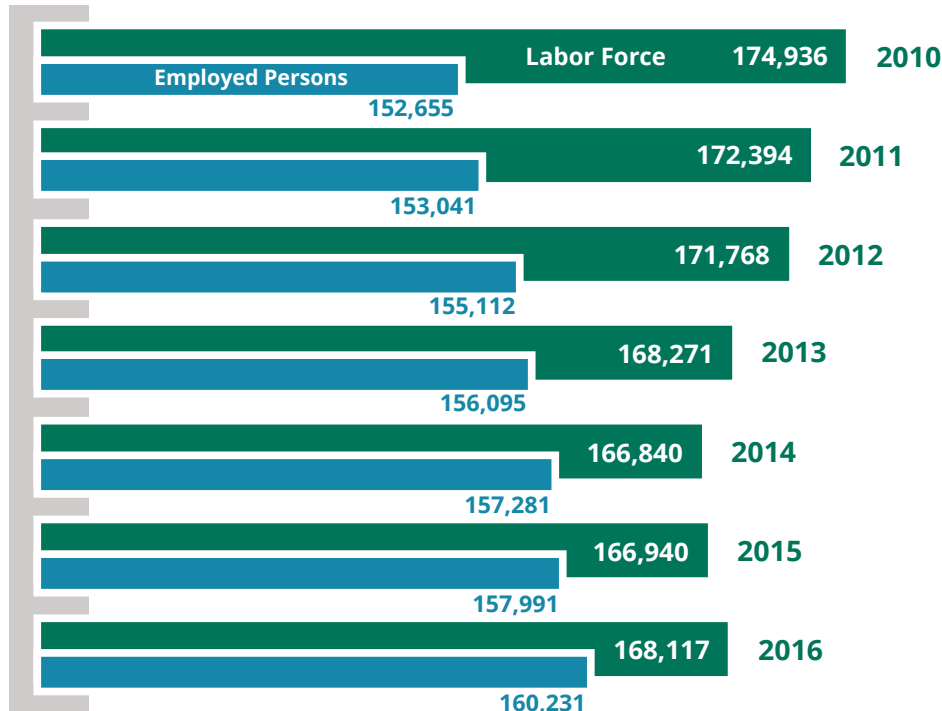
Alexander County Industrial Park

WORKFORCE

Business, industry and public employers in the Western Piedmont region depend on the education, training and skill development of the workforce. Critical elements to workforce development success are the programs that synchronize educational resources with job demand and availability, incorporation of social media in communicating employment and training opportunities for the workforce, and providing current analysis of wage and labor market information.

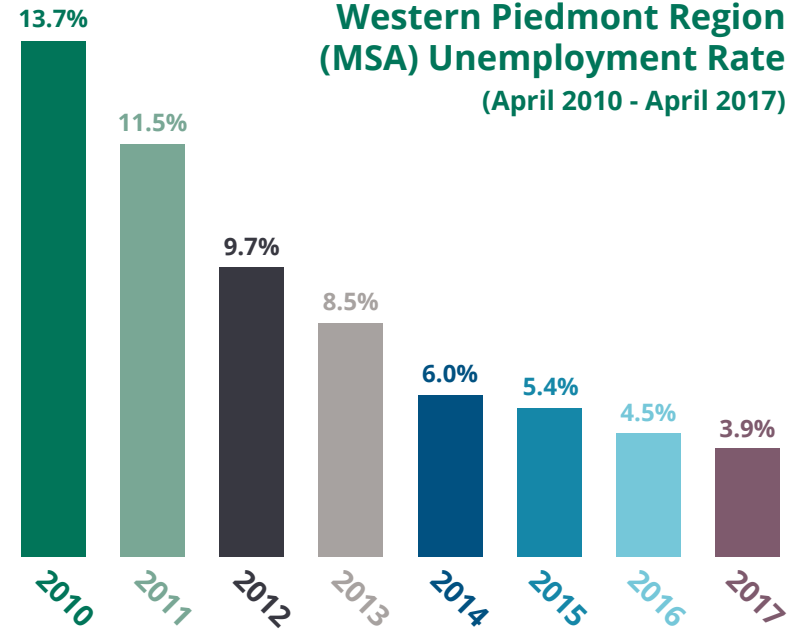
The strategies described in this portion of the CEDS intend to build upon the region's efforts to improve and update the Western Piedmont Industry Growth Analysis (IGA); align career pathways with education and training opportunities to meet industry needs; maintain consistent, coordinated, long-term marketing of workforce development activities across and within the region collectively (social media, new and emerging media); and ensure availability of competitive wage information and its impact on job recruitment and retention in the region.

Western Piedmont Region (MSA) Labor Force and Number of Employed Persons (April 2010 - April 2016)



Source: Labor and Economic Analysis Division, NC Dept. of Commerce.

Western Piedmont Region (MSA) Unemployment Rate (April 2010 - April 2017)

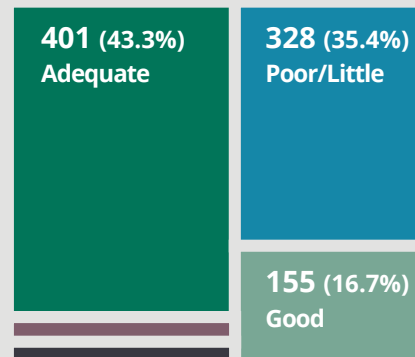


Source: Labor and Economic Analysis Division, NC Dept. of Commerce.

CEDS Public Survey Responses

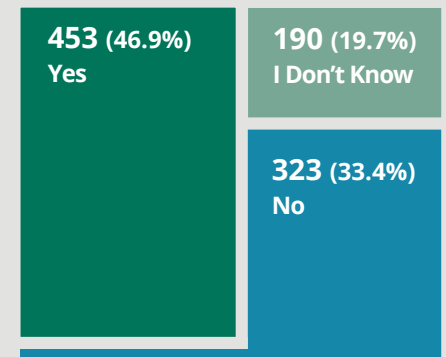
How well does your community work to maintain a skilled workforce?

(927 Responses)

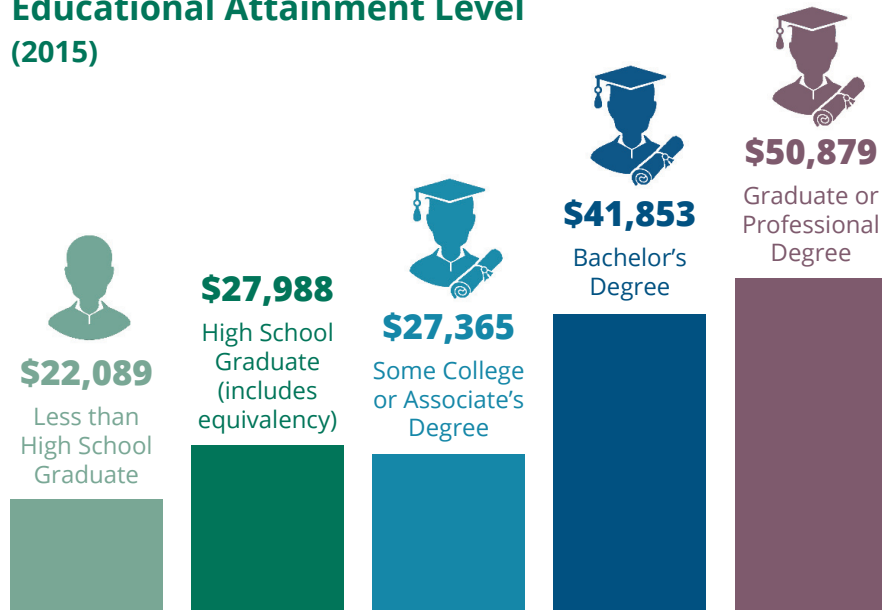


Do you believe there are gaps in educational resources?

(966 Responses)

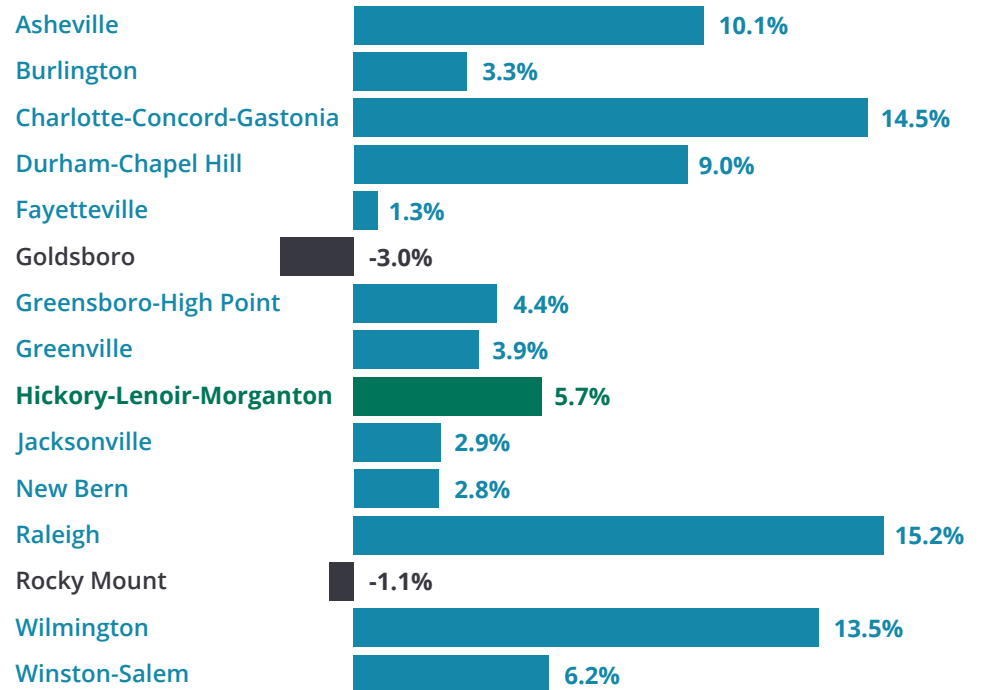


Western Piedmont Region (MSA) Median Earnings for Population Over 25 by Educational Attainment Level (2015)



Source: 2015 American Community Survey, US Census Bureau.

NCMSA Percentage Employment Change (2012-2016)

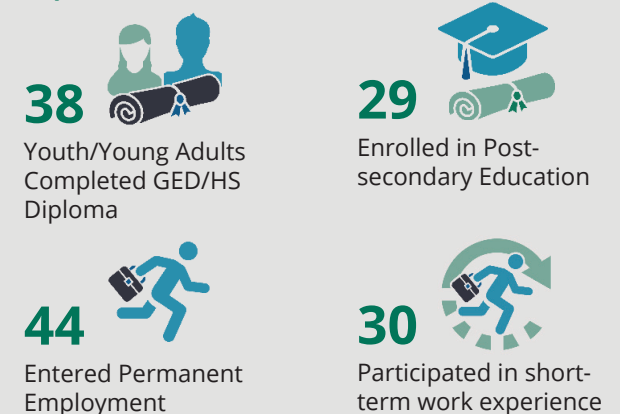


Source: Labor and Economic Analysis Division, NC Department of Commerce.

Western Piedmont NCWorks Career Centers (2016)



Workforce Youth/Young Adult Programs (2016)



Source: 2016 WPCOG Annual Report

STRATEGY - Align career pathways with education and training opportunities to meet industry needs

- Develop broader Business, Industry and Agency Career Pathways as needed
- Identify pathways that impact the region now and in the future, increasing intern and apprenticeship opportunities across all four counties
- Research the number of 4-year universities sending students to our region for internships/apprenticeships
- Broaden outreach efforts through the STEM West program and other Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) initiatives
- Involve K-12 and BIA in determining the paths from education to the workplace (Career pathways should not end at K-16.)
- Identify Career and Technical Education (CTE)/Vocational opportunities to line up with high school and community colleges
- Identify educational/training opportunities for higher-level (Academically Intellectually Gifted) students
- Strengthen partnerships between regional high schools, community colleges, EDCs and the Workforce Development Board (WDB)
- Continue to expand high school course offerings that give college credit or lead to industry certifications
- Ensure students and parents are aware of career opportunities available in the region and educational programs that align with those careers
- Evaluate effectiveness of Catawba County's K-64 initiative and encourage similar programs in other counties in the Western Piedmont region

METRICS

- Develop career pathways & apprenticeship opportunities that extend within an organization (not just K-16)
- Define and develop at least four regional industry level career pathways (i.e. Manufacturing, Healthcare, Transportation & Logistics, Retail/Hospitality)
- Assemble local and regional Business & Industry Alliance (BIA) groups, including high schools, community colleges and EDCs, to ensure pathways are current
- Develop marketing material to advertise and demonstrate the benefits of career pathways (input from BIA will be needed to ensure relevancy and continued usefulness)
- Increase number of high school classes that offer college credit or lead to industry certification

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

- Workforce Development Board, Workforce Development Board partners, K-16 groups (including high schools and community colleges), business & industry, Appalachian State University, Lenoir-Rhyne University and other 4-year universities, STEM West, WPCOG

STRATEGY - Ensure sharing of competitive wage information (wage variances) and its impact on job recruitment and retention in the region

- Analysis of comparable wages to be competitive with other regions (by sector)
- Make wage variances consistently available to assist the region with recruitment and retention efforts

METRICS

- Data tool created that reflects county and regional wage variances by industry
- Additional information on wage variances added to the Economic Indicator Newsletter (EIN) and focus on it in the upcoming Industry Growth Analysis (IGA)

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

- WPCOG, NC Department of Commerce, EDCs

STRATEGY - Maintain consistent, coordinated, long-term marketing of workforce activities across and within the region (social media, new and emerging media)

- Promote workforce system activities via a central website and applicable social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram...and new media that may arise)
- Strengthen workforce partner relationships to share all job/employment related media to promote the region
- Collect and analyze social media followers and shares of information can be collected and analyzed
- Generate a daily/weekly/monthly post and repost of workforce labor activity (Example: Hootsuite Application)

METRICS

- Increase social media followers by 20% by December 2018 to reflect the impact of jobseeker and employer engagement
- Increase advertising budget to boost posts on Facebook (track) furthering the outreach of jobs and recruitment event opportunities not only within the region, but across the state and beyond
- Increase postings of jobseeker success stories particularly where the local workforce system as a whole was part of the impact
- Collect data from employers on success of recruitment events based on social media/advertising flyers

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

- WPCOG Communications, Workforce Board, NCWorks Career Centers

STRATEGY - Update the Western Piedmont Industry Growth Analysis (IGA) and shape it as a tool designed for business recruitment efforts

- Ensure Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board (WDB) members and key stakeholders help shape the information that is needed in the IGA
- Add increased narrative with relative data sets (WDB members quoted throughout the IGA)
- Add links to online tools developed by NC Commerce Labor & Economic Analysis Division (LEAD)
- Meet with EDCs to determine how the IGA can be developed into a usable format/tool for economic development
- Increase exposure of the IGA results throughout the region

METRICS

- Gain input from private sector workforce development board members whose industries are targeted for increase or decrease
- Prepare an IGA that is precise, focused and digestible by both industry, agencies and government
- Increased promotion and public outreach of the IGA results

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

- Workforce Development Board, EDCs, community colleges, Appalachian State University, Lenoir-Rhyne University and other four-year universities, WPCOG Data group, NC LEAD

INFRASTRUCTURE

Economic development is greatly influenced by infrastructure. The availability and overall condition of a region's infrastructure (water, sewer, broadband, roads, sidewalks and greenways) are critical elements in both the retention of existing businesses and the recruitment of new businesses and industries. Infrastructure also significantly impacts community development.

The strategies described in this section of the CEDS are designed to ensure that the region has widespread access to high-quality infrastructure. Transportation infrastructure strategies include developing and expanding the bicycle and pedestrian network; expanding fixed route public transportation to municipalities in all four counties; and developing transportation projects that rank well in NCDOT's project prioritization system. Water, sewer and broadband infrastructure strategies include encouraging and assisting local governments to develop and maintain asset management and capital improvement plans; exploring opportunities for coordination and consolidation of utility systems; improving broadband access to rural areas and improving broadband speed of service.

Regional Projects Completed, Jobs & Investments (2016)



\$10 Million
Grant
Amount



30
Projects
Completed



\$74.4 Million
Private
Investment

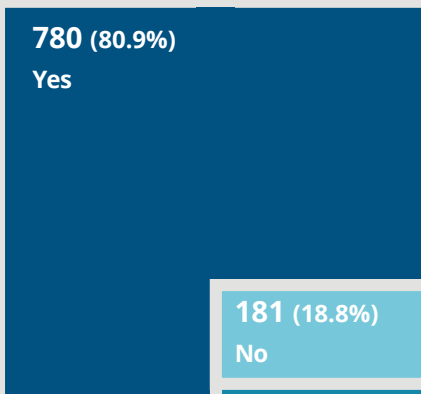


296
Jobs
Created

Source: WPCOG 2016 Annual Report.

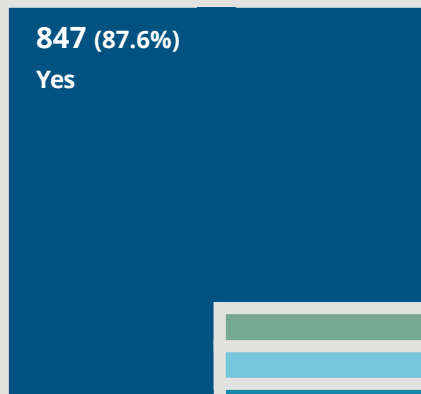
CEDS Public Survey Responses

Do you have adequate high-speed Internet access at home?
(964 Responses)



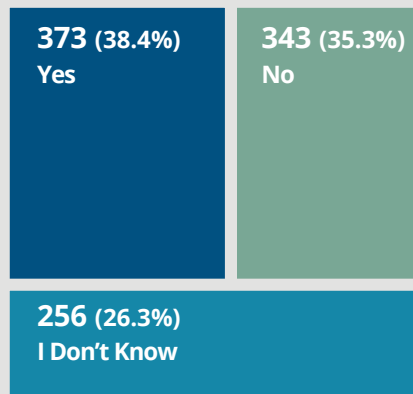
3 (0.3%)
I Don't Know

Do you have adequate high-speed Internet access at work?
(967 Responses)



59 (6.1%) I Don't Work
57 (5.9%) No
4 (0.4%) I Don't Know

Do you have adequate high-speed Internet access at public spaces?
(972 Responses)



Transportation Projects Completed Since 2012

- Completed portion of 13th Ave Dr SE between McDonald Parkway and 21st St Ln (Hickory)
- Constructed new Interchange on US 321 and Connelly Springs Rd (Lenoir)
- Finished connector from Grace Chapel Rd to US 321 (Behind MDI)
- Upgrades completed to Lovelady Rd in Valdese and Rutherford College
- Constructed I-40/NC 18 (S Sterling St) interchange (Exit 105) in Morganton
- Constructed I-40/Enola Rd interchange (Exit 104) in Morganton

STRATEGY - Encourage, plan, and construct transit-oriented development that creates compact, walkable, pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use communities centered around public transportation

- Work with developers to identify appropriate locations for mixed-use and transit-oriented developments
- Construct pedestrian facilities that make it more viable for transit stops
- Connect Greenway fixed routes with transit-oriented developments

METRICS

- New transit-oriented developments
- List of possible locations and criteria for transit-oriented developments
- Map possible locations for transit-oriented developments

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

- Public/private partnerships, Greenway Public Transportation, Greater Hickory MPO, Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and local governments

STRATEGY - Develop and expand the bicycle and pedestrian network in the region

- Apply for Surface Transportation Block Grant-Direct Attributable (STBG-DA) and Congestion Mitigation Air Quality (CMAQ) funding – Annually or Biennial when grants are available
- Identify opportunities to connect communities and counties to each other
- Retrofit and add bicycle and pedestrian facilities to existing roads where feasible to allow safe travel for cyclists, pedestrians and automobiles
- Encourage local governments to form a regional bike and pedestrian task force

METRICS

- Additional linear footage of bicycle and pedestrian facilities
- Connection between communities and counties
- Creation of regional bike and pedestrian task force

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

- Local governments, North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT), Greater Hickory Metropolitan Planning Organization (GHMPO), state and federal agencies

STRATEGY - Expand fixed route public transportation to the municipalities in all four counties

- Apply for various funding sources – Look for opportunities annually

METRICS

- Additional public transportation service
- Fixed route connection between counties

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

- Greenway Public Transportation, Greater Hickory MPO, local governments, non-profits, public/private partnerships, NCDOT and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA)

STRATEGY - Develop transportation projects that rank well in NCDOT's project prioritization system (SPOT 5.0) to promote and maximize economic development

- Work with NCDOT to update the regional list of needed transportation projects to maximize and promote economic development

METRICS

- List of updated viable transportation projects
- Additional transportation projects that promote economic development in the State Transportation Improvement Plan

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

- Local Governments, EDCs, NCDOT and Greater Hickory MPO and Private Sector

STRATEGY - Improve broadband access to rural areas and improve broadband speed

- Identify service providers of broadband in the region
- Identify broadband providers in areas needing faster service
- Identify broadband coverage areas and note areas lacking service
- Survey local businesses to determine areas needing increased broadband speed to increase profitability and/or create new jobs
- Work with school systems to conduct a survey of students to identify gaps in broadband availability
- Convene service providers and local governments to discuss the areas needing coverage and/or faster service and develop a plan to serve those identified areas

METRICS

- Completed inventory
- GIS maps showing areas lacking service and areas requiring added speed
- Number of new areas served with broadband
- Number of businesses served with improved broadband

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

- WPCOG, local governments, broadband providers, EDCs, NC Information Technology Broadband Infrastructure Office, federal and state agencies

STRATEGY - Encourage and assist local governments to develop and maintain asset management and capital improvement plans

- Develop a water and sewer asset inventory for the region
- Submit assessment inventory and assessment grant applications to NC Division of Environmental Quality for local governments
- Utilize the WPCOG GIS Department to map utilities for better maintenance and planned growth

METRICS

- Completed inventory of water and sewer infrastructure
- Number of grants submitted to NC Division of Environmental Quality
- Number of grants awarded by the NC Division of Environmental Quality
- Number of local governments utilities mapped

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

- WPCOG, local governments, other local utility providers, federal and state agencies

STRATEGY - Explore opportunities for coordination and consolidation of utility systems

- Convene local governments and other local utility providers to identify regional needs and issues
- Evaluate cost effectiveness of consolidation of smaller systems
- Seek funding to aid utility providers willing to consolidate systems

METRICS

- Completed report for possible consolidation of small and non-government systems
- Number of systems consolidated
- Number of grants submitted
- Number of grants awarded

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

- WPCOG, local governments, local utility providers federal and state agencies

Widening of US 321 through Caldwell County to improve traffic flow



Rhodhiss, NC



Greenway Transit, Hickory, NC

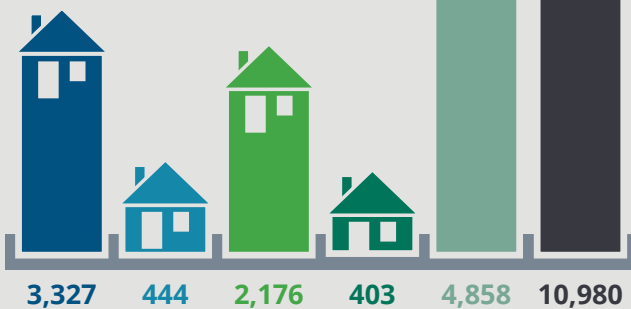
Housing

Housing stock plays a key role in a region's overall economic development. When a region offers a wide range of housing options, it becomes more competitive in its efforts to attract new residents, businesses and industry. Providing a variety of housing stock requires the participation and cooperation of many groups including private developers, the construction industry, realtors, and local governments. Finding the right balance to meet local housing needs and strategies should be a goal in every community.

The strategies described in this portion of the CEDS intend to build upon the region's efforts to improve housing conditions. The strategies include reducing the number of vacant/substandard housing units, increasing the number of affordable housing choices for current and new residents and adding new market-rate housing stock throughout the region, including downtown areas.

22,188 Western Piedmont Total Vacant Housing Units (2015 American Community Survey)

-  For Rent
-  Rented, Not Occupied
-  For Sale Only
-  Sold, Not Occupied
-  For Seasonal, Recreational or Occasional Use
-  Other Vacant



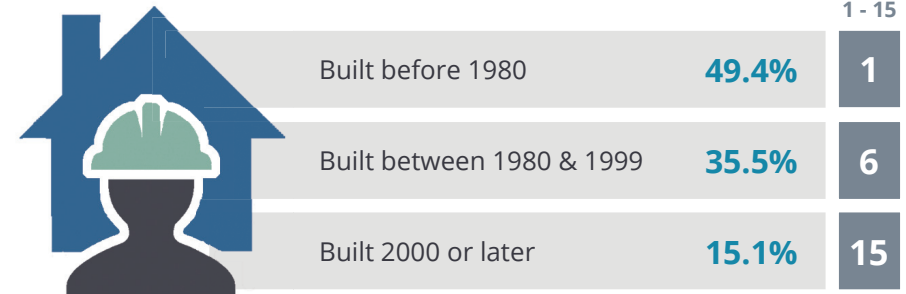
CEDS Public Survey Responses

How well does your community support affordable housing choices?
(933 Responses)



Western Piedmont Age of Housing Stock (2015 American Community Survey)

NC
MSA
RANK
1 - 15



The Western Piedmont/Hickory-Lenoir-Morganton MSA consists of Alexander, Burke, Caldwell and Catawba Counties. Among the 15 North Carolina MSA's, the Hickory MSA/Western Piedmont has the highest percentage of homes built before 1980 and the lowest percentage built after 2000.

Year	Units	% of Units
2010 - 2015	2,391	1.4%
2000 - 2009	22,158	13.7%
1990 - 1999	31,553	19.4%
1980 - 1989	26,192	16.1%
1970 - 1979	29,187	18.0%
1960 - 1969	20,549	12.7%
1950 - 1959	13,515	8.3%
1940 - 1949	7,395	4.6%
1939 or Earlier	9,345	5.8%

Regional Housing Trends (2000-2015)

	2000	2010	2015
Owner-Occupied Housing Units	99,497 (68.7%)	103,966 (63.9%)	98,480 (60.7%)
Renter-Occupied Housing Units	34,469 (23.8%)	40,538 (24.9%)	41,617 (25.6%)
Vacant Housing Units	10,908 (7.5%)	18,109 (11.1%)	22,188 (13.7%)

The number of vacant housing units in the Western Piedmont has more than doubled since 2000.

Source: American Community Survey (ACS), US Census Bureau.

STRATEGY - Reduce the number of vacant and substandard homes throughout the region

- Continue discussions and increase coordination of efforts to reduce vacant and substandard housing through the Western Piedmont Vacant & Substandard Housing Task Force.
- Assist and encourage local governments to seek grants to fund removal of vacant housing. Work with local governments to implement model minimum housing codes.
- Evaluate the impact of the creation of a regional code enforcement agency within the WPCOG.
- Assess potential legislative actions to fund local efforts to reduce vacant housing.

METRICS

- Number of vacant homes removed
- Number of substandard homes rehabilitated
- Reduction in the percentage of vacant homes (excluding for rent/sale & seasonal homes)
- Creation of regional code enforcement staff position(s) at WPCOG
- Number of minimum housing codes reviewed, revised or adopted by local governments
- Completed assessment of any needed legislation

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

- Local governments, WPCOG, WPCOG Vacant & Substandard Housing Task Force, building inspection departments, banks, property owners, NC General Assembly

STRATEGY - Increase the amount of new market-rate housing especially within and near downtowns

- Identify strategies and incentives for downtowns and infill housing construction to bolster the health of community cores.
- Evaluate the benefit of using the Housing Choice Voucher program to create project-based vouchers in and near downtown areas that include 25% subsidized units and 75% market-rate units.
- Convene regional discussions and training with local governments, developers and lenders to develop market-rate housing and redevelopment

METRICS

- Number of housing units created within and near downtown areas
- Number of project based vouchers issued by the WPCOG
- Number of workshops, training events and meetings held for this issue

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

- Local governments, WPCOG, banks, property owners, real estate brokers and developers

STRATEGY - Increase the availability of affordable homes within the region

- Identify regulatory barriers to development of affordable housing in the region.
- Identify and leverage federal and state programs, like the HOME Program, to create new affordable housing.

METRICS

- Number of affordable homes created through the HOME program tax credit, and other programs
- Completion of a regional analysis of impediments to development of affordable housing

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

- Local governments, WPCOG, USDA, NC Housing Finance Agency, Habitat for Humanity, HOME Consortium, banks, private developers, property owners

MARKETING

A healthy economy relies on growth in working-age segments of the population in order to meet the needs of current and future employers. In light of recent out-migration trends in the WPCOG's 18 to 45 year old population, an opportunity and challenge exists to target and attract new members of this age group through our marketing and branding efforts.

Strategies described in this portion of the CEDS intend to build upon the region's efforts to convene a regional marketing task force, develop a regional approach to marketing, and identify and promote regional attractions, events and natural resources that would appeal to the 18 to 45 year old population.

Western Piedmont Region (MSA) Population Change by Generation (2009-2014)



Millennials
-4,339 (-4.8%)



Gen-X
-1,786 (-2.4%)



Baby Boomer
-3,028 (-2.9%)

Source: US Census Bureau and Syneva Economics.

CEDS Public Survey Responses

Does your county currently market its assets?

(961 Responses)

456 (47.5%)
I Don't Know

330 (34.3%)
Yes

175 (18.2%)
No

Does the community you live in have a specific brand it uses for promotion of the area?

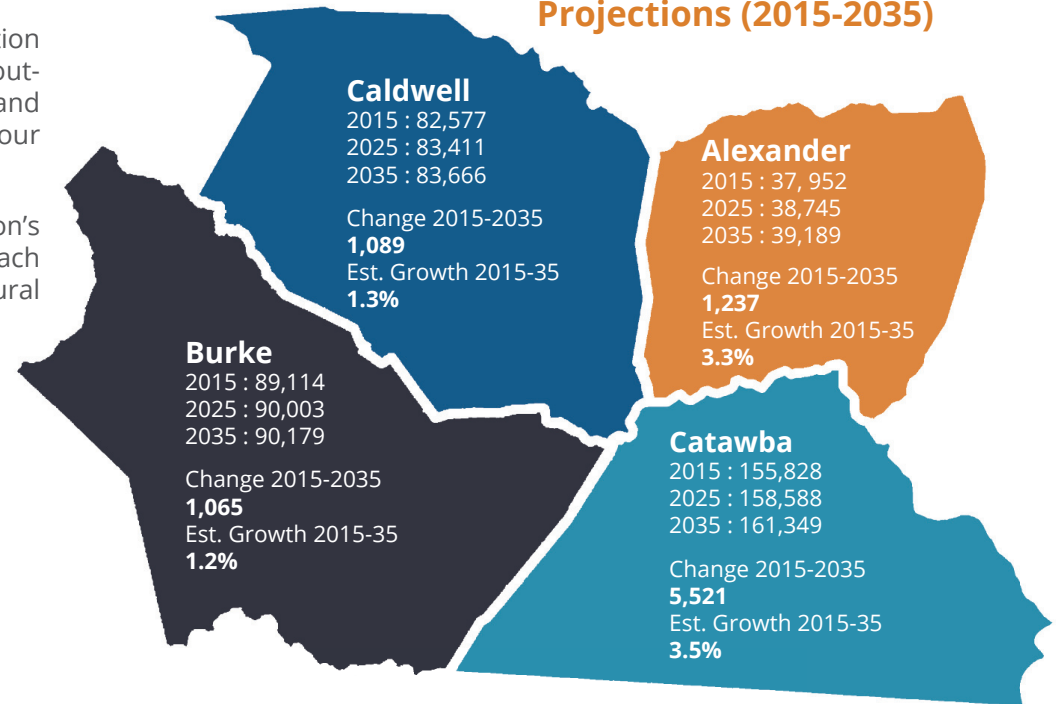
(959 Responses)

477 (49.7%)
I Don't Know

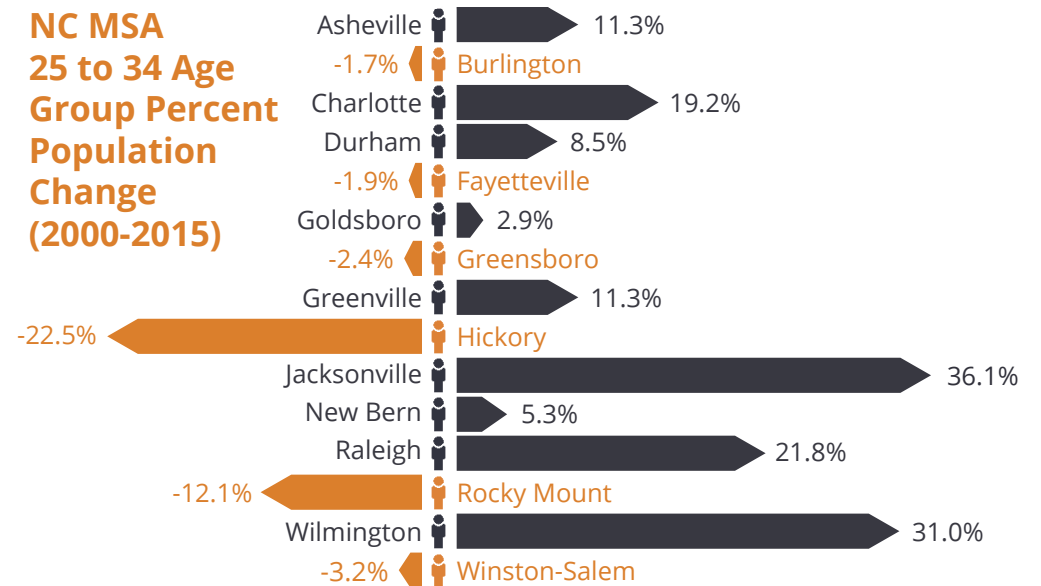
239 (24.9%)
Yes

243 (25.3%)
No

Western Piedmont Region (MSA) Population Projections (2015-2035)



NC MSA 25 to 34 Age Group Percent Population Change (2000-2015)



Source: NC Office of Budget and Management.

STRATEGY - Convene Regional Marketing Task Force

- Present preliminary pilot concept for regional marketing approach
- Integrate communications and marketing cooperation regionally
- Oversee development of regional marketing approach
- Identify those characteristics and assets of the region that represent a “family-friendly” environment
- Develop information targeting each identified audience regarding the region and regional assets. (Visitors, current residents and businesses, new and prospective residents, new and prospective businesses)
- Emphasize addressing Millennials’ preferences and needs five to ten years out and “Aging in Place” markets

METRICS

- Number of participants (Organizations, Local Governments, etc.)
- Implement of pilot concept
- Quantify distribution (electronic & print) and outreach numbers (presentations)
- Completed targeted information for the various audiences

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

- Regional Marketing Task force, WPCOG, local governments, federal grants, private and non-profit partnerships and tourism development resources

STRATEGY - Develop a regional approach to marketing (Inclusionary Marketing)

- Develop pilot concept for regional marketing approach
- Create centralized portal (web-based) for regional information
- Avoid developing a region-only Marketing Plan – Marketing approach driven by local determined interests. This is not a one-size fits all marketing plan – instead offering promotion of individual community-based objectives
- Link the proximity of the region to the idea that we are a region with everything. Proximity to the assets and attractions of Western North Carolina and the Piedmont (Asheville, Boone, Charlotte and Winston-Salem)

METRICS

- Build web-portal
- Creation of marketing materials
- Number of participants (Organizations, Local Governments, etc.)

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

- Regional Marketing Task force, WPCOG, local governments, federal and state agencies, private and non-profit partnerships and tourism development resources

STRATEGY - Identify and promote regional attractions, events and natural resources

- Identify attractions, events and natural resources each county/municipality wishes to promote
- Identify which attractions will be included in an interactive map, centralized on a web-based platform/mobile application and updated by request by each county
- Develop platform (such as an asset web map) to deliver the content including a central calendar of events, region and trail maps

METRICS

- Analytics from web browsers
- Sampling of site attendance (Picked from random grouping in each county)
- Survey of users on the website

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

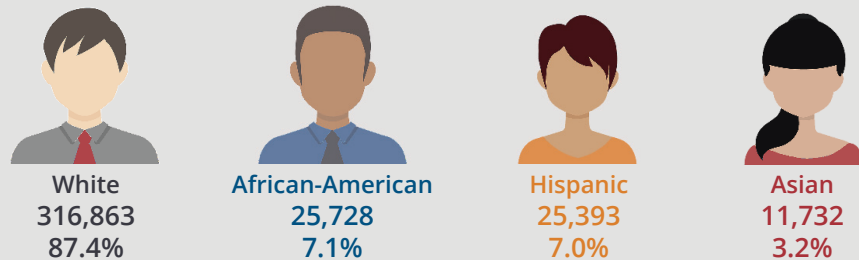
- Regional Marketing Task force, WPCOG, local governments, federal grants, private and non-profit partnerships and tourism development resources

COMMUNITY LIFE

Economic development has a direct relationship to enhancing community life in a region. A growing, healthy economy should encompass opportunities for inclusive public participation in decision-making processes; pathways to economic success for all members of the workforce; and downtown revitalizations made with an eye toward the needs of the region's growing senior population, and attracting younger residents.

The strategies described in this section of the CEDS intend to build upon the region's efforts to improve community life. These strategies include cultivating the next generation of community leaders, creating robust downtowns throughout the region, promoting healthy living initiatives, and developing methods to encourage active senior citizen participation.

Western Piedmont Region (MSA) Population by Race/Ethnic Group, 2015

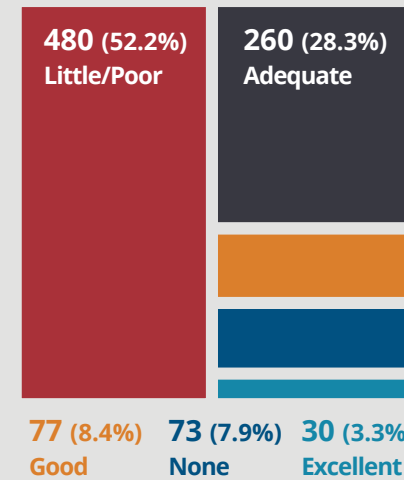


Source: 2015 Census Population Estimates, US Census Bureau.

CEDS Public Survey Responses

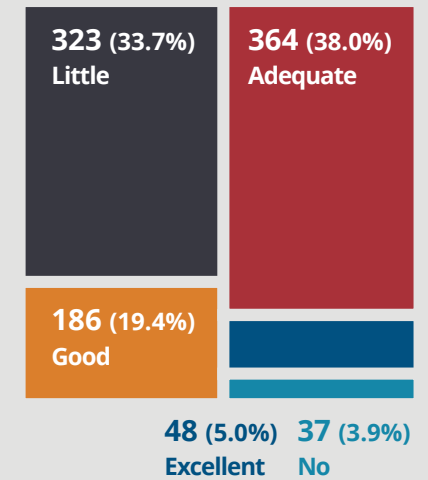
Are there opportunities for minorities and low wealth individuals to engage in community planning?

(920 Responses)



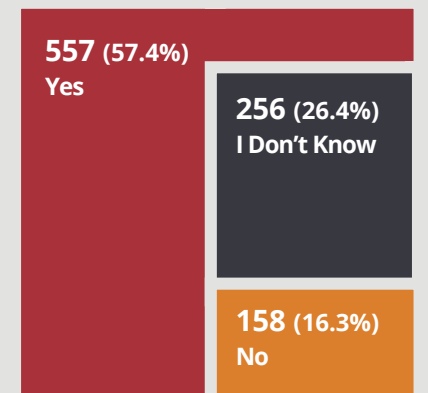
How well does your Community invest in healthy, safe and walkable communities?

(958 Responses)

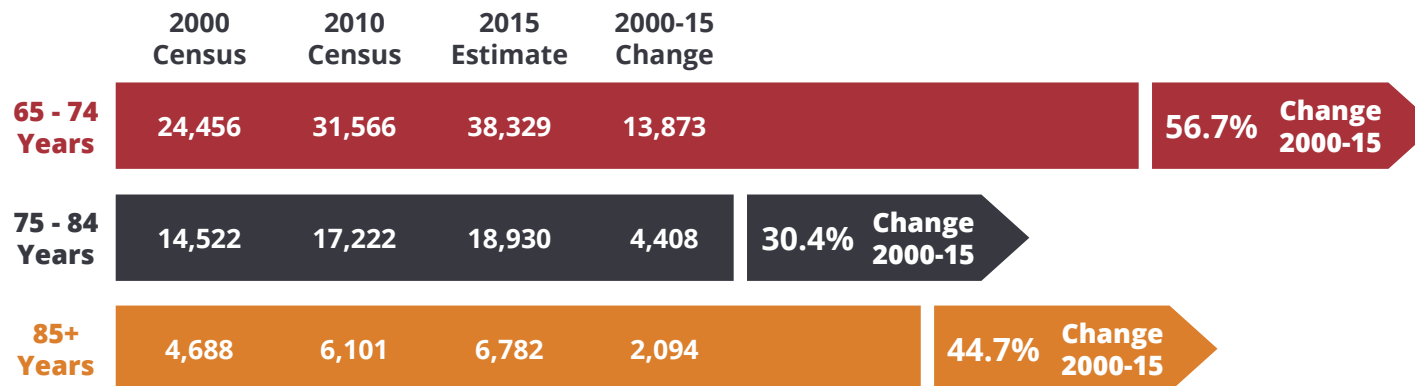


Do the municipalities within your county promote the restoration of their downtown areas?

(971 Responses)



Western Piedmont Region (MSA) Population by Age Group, 2000 - 2015



Source: 2000 and 2010 Census, US Census Bureau and NC Office of State Planning.

STRATEGY - Cultivate the next generation of community leaders

- Encourage diversity and inclusion in the community decision making process
- Bolster diversity participation by conducting sustained local government outreach to underrepresented populations
- Work with community group leaders to determine effective outreach methods
- Determine if local governing boards need succession planning assistance
- Reach out to public and private sector leaders who can identify upcoming talent
- Create opportunities for young professionals to offer development input through “lunch and learn” meetings, forums or other on-going conversations

METRICS

- Number of minorities on local government and community boards
- Number of governing boards contacted and the number that received assistance
- Number of public and private leaders contacted
- Number of young professional meetings/ forums

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

- WPCOG, local governments, community groups, private sector

STRATEGY - Create robust downtowns throughout the region

- Determine available resources for downtown development programs/projects/plans (downtown housing, streetscapes, sidewalks, etc.)
- Assist member governments with locally-approved initiatives
- Support community groups in development of new cultural festivals and events

METRICS

- Number of projects and plans completed
- Amount of grant funding awarded
- Number of new cultural festivals and events

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

- Local governments, downtown development associations, EDCs, tourism agencies, WPCOG, private sector, community groups

STRATEGY - Promote regional healthy-living initiatives

- Determine available resources for recreation, sidewalk, streetscape and farmers market plans/projects
- Assist member governments with locally-approved initiatives
- Assess potential for a regional farmers market similar to the WNC Farmers Market in Asheville
- Support methods to address the region’s opioid and illicit drug epidemic. Support public health initiatives to develop an inpatient, outpatient or virtual behavioral health facility to address the opioid and illicit drug epidemic by researching potential grant opportunities, providing data/GIS analysis and attending meetings upon request.

METRICS

- Number of projects and plans completed
- Amount of grant funding awarded
- Assessment of the need for a regional opioid epidemic task force
- Response to local health department needs for research including grant opportunities, GIS analysis and attending meetings

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

- WPCOG, local governments, nonprofits, NC Department of Agriculture, county public health departments, local mental health agencies, local law enforcement state and federal Department of Human Services (DHS)

STRATEGY - Develop methods to encourage active senior citizen participation

- Determine available resources for “aging in place” programs/ plans/projects
- Encourage the development of the active retiree market
- Assist member governments with locally-approved initiatives

METRICS

- Number of “aging in place” projects and plans completed
- Number of new active retiree residential developments
- Amount of grant funding awarded

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

- Area Agency on Aging, local governments, real estate developers

Lowes Foods City Park - Hickory, NC



Alexander County



Morganton, NC



CEDS PERFORMANCE MEASURES

As part of the CEDS process, EDA suggests a list of performance measures (or benchmarks) on the overall economic health of the region. The performance measures, which are obtained from a variety of federal, state, and local data sources, are updated annually as part of the yearly CEDS update sent to EDA. The performance measures are a tool to measure the impact that the CEDS strategies are having on the region.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- Total Number of Business Establishments
- Taxable Retail Sales
- The Number of Building Reuse and IDF (Industrial Development Fund) Grants
- Building Reuse and IDF Grant Project Totals
- Jobs Created through WPCOG Grants
- Percentage Living Below Poverty Level-All Individuals
- Percentage Living Below Poverty Level-Children (ages 0-17)

WORKFORCE

- Resident Labor Force
- Resident Number of Employed
- Resident Number of Unemployed
- Unemployment Rate
- Total Number of Jobs in the Region by Type (Manufacturing, Construction, Health Care, Education, Wholesale/Retail Trade, Other Services, Public Administration, Other Employment)
- Average Weekly Wages
- Percentage of Population 25+ with a High School Diploma or Equivalent
- Percentage of Population 25+ with a Four-Year Degree or Higher
- Percentage of Students (Grades 3-8) Passing End of Grade Tests (EOGs)
- Percentage of Students (Grades 9-12) Passing EOC Tests
- Percentage of Students Graduating from High School in Four Years

INFRASTRUCTURE

- The Number of Water, Sewer and Broadband Grants
- Water, Sewer, and Broadband Project Totals
- The Number of Transportation Grants
- Transportation Project Totals

HOUSING

- Number of Housing Units
- Number of Vacant Housing Units
- Owner-Occupied Housing Units
- Renter-Occupied Housing Units
- Median Housing Value
- Median Home Owner Monthly Costs (Housing Units with a Mortgage)
- Median Gross Rent
- Percentage of Home Owners Whose Monthly Expenses Exceed 35% of Household Income
- Percentage of Renters Whose Monthly Expenses Exceed 35% of Household Income
- Civil Foreclosure Cases
- Number of New Site-Built Single-Family Permits
- Number of New Multi-Family Permits (Units)
- Estimated Construction Value of Site-Built Single-Family and Multi-Family Permits
- Number of Homes Addressed through WPCOG Grant Programs

MARKETING

- Total Population
- Total Population Under Age 18
- Total Population age 19 to 24
- Total Population age 25 to 44
- Total Population age 45 to 64
- Total Population age 65 and Over
- Tourism Expenditures
- Tourism Related Employment
- Local Tourism Related Tax Receipts

COMMUNITY LIFE

- Regional Population without Health Insurance Coverage
- Percentage of Regional Population without Health Insurance Coverage
- Households Age 65 and Over
- Life Expectancy at Birth

AMENDMENTS

2018

INFRASTRUCTURE

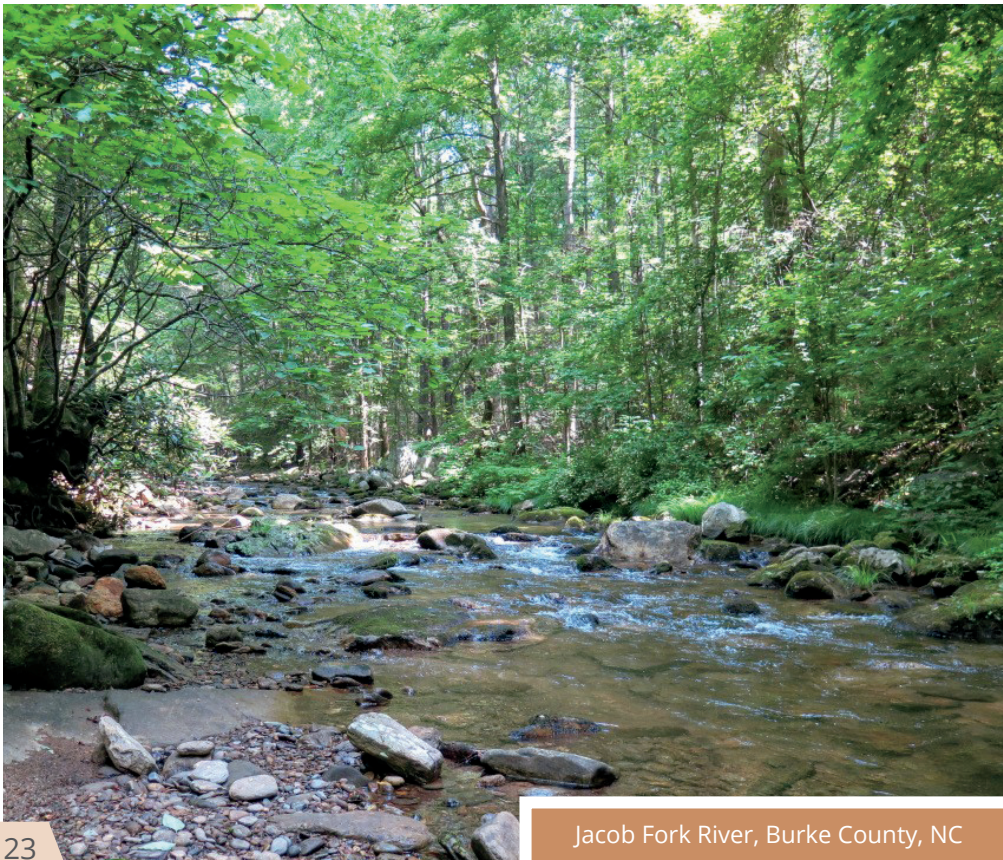
STRATEGY - Extend access and improve service and capacity for necessary utilities, including water, sewer, and broadband, to businesses, schools and community facilities, low income households and other underserved neighborhoods and communities.

METRICS

- Number and funding amounts of water and sewer grants awarded
- Number of additional businesses, organizations and housing units with water and sewer access or improved service
- Number of additional businesses, organizations and housing units with broadband service with added or improved service

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

- Local Governments, EDCs, WPCOG, broadband service providers, other federal and state agencies



Jacob Fork River, Burke County, NC



Aerial View - Alexander County Industrial Park

ECONOMIC DEV.

STRATEGY - Work with federal, state and local officials to assist existing businesses with expansions while also recruiting new companies to the region in order to further the growth of diverse, well-paying jobs across a broad spectrum of industries.

METRICS

- The creation of at least 250 new jobs each year, Increased diversification of industries (manufacturing and nonmanufacturing) in the region, Wage growth that exceeds the rate of inflation

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

- WPCOG Staff, Economic Development Commissions, NC Commerce, Economic Development Partnership of NC, Appalachian Regional Commission, Economic Development Administration

WORKFORCE

STRATEGY - Utilizing the concepts outlined in the EnVision Center Initiative, identify and assist individuals in overcoming barriers – such as housing, childcare, transportation, drug-abuse recovery, post-incarceration transition – that are precluding their entry or re-entry into the regional workforce.

METRICS

- Assist 50 screened applicants each year to participate in the program, Achieve funding for the EnVision Center Initiative

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

- WPCOG Staff, WPCOG Regional Housing Authority, Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board, NC Commerce

INFRASTRUCTURE

STRATEGY - Promote the development of a comprehensive, affordable public transportation network in order to better serve individuals who face financial or logistical hardships within the contemporary mode of transportation throughout the region.

METRICS

- Maintain Burke County transit routes, Promote additional fixed-flex routes in Catawba and Alexander counties
- Explore fixed-flex route possibilities in Caldwell County

RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

- Greenway Public Transportation, Greater Hickory MPO, Local Governments, nonprofits, public/private partnerships, NCDOT and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA)

HOUSING

STRATEGY - Work with community and regional partners, along with HUD, to expand the housing choice voucher options for the area and alleviate the waiting list of qualified program applicants

METRICS

- Secure at least 100 more housing vouchers in the Western Piedmont Region by 2022

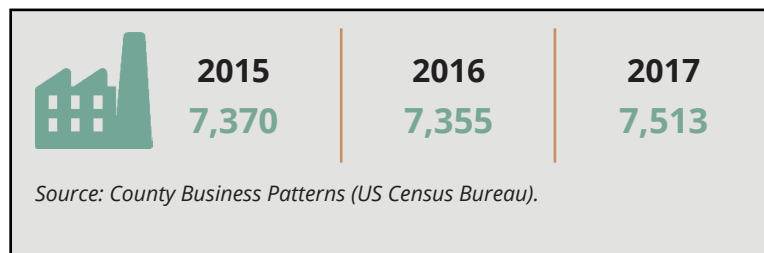
RESPONSIBLE PARTIES

- HUD, WPCOG Regional Housing Authority, area nonprofits and community groups

REGIONAL UPDATES (UPDATED DECEMBER 13, 2019)

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

TOTAL # OF BUSINESS ESTABLISHMENTS



TOTAL TAXABLE RETAIL SALES*



INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT FUND GRANTS

Benchmark	2016	2017	2018
The number building reuse and IDF* grants	10	8	8
Total building reuse and IDF* grant project totals	\$45 million	\$49 million	\$41 million
Jobs Created through WPCOG Grants	346	345	206

*Industrial Development Fund. Source: WPCOG and other organizations.

POVERTY LEVELS

Benchmark	2015	2016	2017	2018
Percentage Living Below Poverty Level-All Individuals	15.8%	15.8%	14.3%	14.3%
Percentage Living Below Poverty Level-Children (0-17)	19.4%	22.1%	18.7%	21.6%

Source: American Community Survey, US Census Bureau.

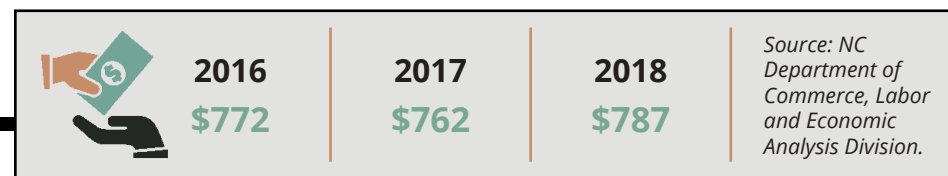
WORKFORCE

EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME

Benchmark	2016	2017	2018
Resident Labor Force	170,825	173,695	173,998
Resident Number of Employed	162,598	166,339	167,820
Resident Number of Unemployed	8,227	7,356	6,178
Unemployment Rate	4.8%	4.2%	3.6%

Source: NC Department of Commerce, Labor and Economic Analysis Division.


AVERAGE WEEKLY WAGES



EDUCATION Source: American Community Survey, US Census Bureau.


Educational Attainment	2015	2016	2017	2018
% of population 25+ with a high school diploma or equivalent	81.5	82.5	82.4	83.8
% of population 25+ with a four year degree or higher	18.5	17.0	17.9	19.7

INFRASTRUCTURE - WATER, SEWER & BROADBAND

	2016	2017	2018
	10 Projects	4 Projects	9 Projects
	\$1,353,524	\$2,866,347	\$5,805,442

Source: WPCOG and other organizations.

TRANSPORTATION

	2016	2017	2018
	9 Projects	1 Projects	16 Projects
	\$13,708,268	\$458,000	\$24,719,744

Source: WPCOG and other organizations.

HOUSING - AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY DATA

Benchmark	2015	2016	2017	2018
Number of Housing Units	162,285	162,990	164,528	165,129
Number of Vacant Housing Units	22,188	18,521	23,278	19,971
Owner-Occupied Housing Units	98,480	98,232	101,501	105,254
Renter-Occupied Housing Units	41,617	46,167	39,749	39,904
Median Housing Value	\$122,000	\$127,000	\$132,900	\$138,800
Median Homeowner Mortgage	\$962	\$962	\$977	\$999
Median Gross Rent	\$615	\$656	\$677	\$683
% of Home Owners with a mortgage whose month expenses exceed 35% of household income monthly	19.5%	18.8%	15.0%	17.0%
% of Renters whose month expenses exceed 35% of household income	36.8%	36.4%	28.6%	34.4%

Source: American Community Survey, US Census Bureau.

ADDITIONAL HOUSING BENCHMARKS

Benchmark	2016	2017	2018
Civil Foreclosure Cases	857	733	709
Number of new Site-Built Single-Family Permits	586	709	879
Estimated Construction Value of Site-Built Single-Family Permits	\$125.2 million	\$148.6 million	\$186.2 million
Number of Homes Addressed through WPCOG grant programs	437	250	286

Source: NC Administrative Office of the Courts, Western Piedmont Area Grant Agencies, WPCOG Community Development Department.

MARKETING - POPULATION CHANGE

Benchmark	2015	2016	2017	2018
Total Population	365,471	367,364	369,588	371,479
Total Population Under Age 18	78,784	78,257	77,617	76,844
Total population age 18 to 24	34,686	35,088	35,193	35,267
Total population age 25 to 44	84,287	83,673	83,843	84,379
Total population age 45 to 64	103,673	104,446	105,031	105,102
Total population age 65 and over	64,041	65,900	67,904	69,887

Source: NC Office of Management and Budget, NC Department of Commerce.

COMMUNITY LIFE - HEALTH INSURANCE

Benchmark	2015	2016	2017	2018
Population without Health Insurance Coverage	40,910	39,799	42,193	41,144
% of Population without Health Insurance Coverage	11.5%	11.1%	11.7%	11.3%
Householder Age 65 and Over	40,584	42,479	47,722	48,164

Source: American Community Survey, US Census Bureau.

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Committee

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Vice Chair

Nancy Taylor, Executive Director, The Community Foundation of Burke County

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