

**Minutes**  
**Western Piedmont Council of Governments**  
**Bimonthly Policy Board Meeting**  
**Tuesday, July 23, 2024**  
**Community House in Morganton**

**Members Present**

Joseph L. Gibbons, Chair  
Randy Burns, Vice Chair  
George Holleman, Treasurer  
Larry Chapman, Secretary  
Jill Patton, Past Chair  
Larry Yoder, At-Large  
Marla Thompson, At-Large  
Johnnie Carswell, Alternate  
Ronnie Setzer  
Donald Robinson  
Barbara Beatty, Alternate  
Bob Floyd  
Ramona Duncan  
Johnny Berry, Alternate  
Joie Fulbright  
Brenda Powell, Alternate  
Dennis Anthony  
Barbara Pennell  
Dr. Caryl Burns  
Tracy Townsend, Alternate  
Charlotte Williams, Alternate  
Ben Honeycutt  
Phyllis Pennington, Alternate  
Chris Jernigan  
Ronnie Thompson, Alternate  
Jerry Hodge  
Erisha Lipford  
Helen Chestnut  
Malla Vue  
Mark Transou  
Tonia Stephenson

**Local Government/Agency**

Lenoir  
Burke County  
Taylorsville  
Hudson  
Hickory  
Alexander County  
Long View  
Burke County  
Cajah's Mountain  
Catawba  
Catawba County  
Cedar Rock  
Connelly Springs  
Connelly Springs  
Conover  
Conover  
Drexel  
Gamewell  
Granite Falls  
Granite Falls  
Hickory  
Hildebran  
Long View  
Morganton  
Morganton  
Newton  
Appointed  
Appointed  
Appointed  
Appointed  
Appointed

**Members Absent**

Mike LaBrose, At-Large  
Josh Lail, Alternate  
Kelvin Gregory  
Lloyd Robbins, Alternate  
Robbie Wilkie, Alternate  
Carroll Yount, Alternate

Caldwell County  
Alexander County  
Brookford  
Cajah's Mountain  
Caldwell County  
Catawba

Cole Setzer, At-Large	Catawba County
Dale Sherrill	Claremont
Ron Lackey, Alternate	Gamewell
Sheila Perkins	Glen Alpine
Mike Smith, Alternate	Hildebran
Jim Engelman, Alternate	Hudson
Ralph Prestwood, Alternate	Lenoir
Holly Crafton-Lay	Maiden
Ronnie Williams, Alternate	Maiden
Beverly Danner, Alternate	Newton
Allen Spencer	Rhodhiss
Kendra Edwards, Alternate	Rhodhiss
Wayne Annas	Rutherford College
Yates Jensen, Alternate	Rutherford College
Bobby Mosteller	Sawmills
Joe Wesson, Alternate	Sawmills
Kimberly S. Brown Alternate	Taylorsville
Charlie Watts	Valdese
Rexanna Lowman, Alternate	Valdese
Amparo R. Alfaro	Appointed
Tommy Luckadoo	Appointed

**Guests/Others Present**

Alan Glines	Burke County
Randy Feierabend	Cajah's Mountain
Ashley Bolick	Caldwell EDC
Danny Hipps	Catawba
Tamara Brooks	Connelly Springs
Melenie Jordan	Conover
Tom Hart	Conover
Bonnie Caudle	Gamewell
Scott Hildebran	Lenoir
Kate Starr	Lenoir
Butch McSwain	Morganton
Chris Hawkins	Morganton
Scott Mulwee	Morganton
Wendy Cato	Morganton
Rick Justice	Rhodhiss

**WPCOG Staff Present**

Anthony Starr, Executive Director  
David Pugh, Director of Administrative Services and Human Resources  
Ben Willis, Director of Community and Economic Development  
Alison Adams, Director of Community and Regional Planning

Stephanie Hanvey, Director of Regional Housing Authority  
Jason Toney, Communications Manager  
Averi Ritchie, Transportation Planning Manager  
Curt Willis, Code Enforcement Manager

### **Call to Order/Welcome**

A regular meeting of the WPCOG Policy Board was called to order at 6:42 pm by Chair Gibbons. Chair Gibbons thanked Burke County for hosting. Mr. Scott Mulwee, Vice Chair of Burke County Commissioners, welcomed the Policy Board to Burke County.

### **Introductions**

Introductions were made by everyone in attendance.

### **Minutes of Previous Meeting**

Minutes of the previous meeting were considered. Mr. Joie Fulbright made a motion to approve the minutes from the May 28, 2024 meeting and Mr. Jerry Hodge offered a second. The motion passed unanimously.

### **Unfinished Business/Reports**

There was no unfinished business.

### **New Business**

#### Public Hearing Regarding WPCOG Installment Financing for New Building Expansion

Mr. David Pugh, Director of Administrative Services and HR, stated as required by the NC Local Government Commission (LGC), the Western Piedmont Council of Governments (WPCOG) must hold a public hearing regarding the intention to enter into installment financing for the new building expansion project.

The amount for the installment financing is up to \$2,750,000. It should be noted that WPCOG does not have to borrow the full amount. The amount listed is to ensure coverage in case bids come back higher than expected.

A motion to open the public hearing for any persons wishing to speak regarding the WPCOG installment financing for the new building expansion was made by Mr. George Holleman and Ms. Jill Patton offered a second. The motion passed unanimously.

No one spoke during the open public hearing regarding the WPCOG installment financing for the new building expansion.

A motion to close the public hearing was made by Mr. George Holleman and Mr. Jerry Hodge offered a second. The motion passed unanimously.

### Charlotte Interbasin Transfer Update and Cost Distribution

Mr. Anthony Starr, Executive Director of WPCOG, stated Charlotte Water filed a notice of its intent to request an increase from 33 million gallons per day (MGD) up to 63 MGD regarding the water it transfers from the Catawba River Basin to the Rocky River Basin, a tributary of the Yadkin/Pee Dee River.

Interbasin transfers (IBTs) are regulated and approved by the state through the Environmental Management Commission within the NC Department of Environmental Quality. In 2002, Charlotte Water received approval to transfer 33 MGD from the Catawba River to the Rocky River Basin. In 2005, Concord and Kannapolis requested 36 MGD from the Catawba River Basin to the Rocky River Basin. The compromise approved in 2007 allows for 10 million gallons per day from the Catawba but reduces that number during drought. This occurred after extensive public debate and the state law was amended to further define the interbasin transfer approval process. Concerns were raised about the negative impacts on the Catawba River and the communities it serves.

At the request of local governments, the WPCOG is coordinating our region's response. WPCOG staff have begun the process of identifying and contacting specialized attorneys, engineering firms, and lobbyists to advance the interests of our local governments to protect our future prosperity.

The cost of the services provided by the specialized attorneys, engineering consultants and lobbyists is estimated to be approximately \$418,000. This cost could be shared by the local governments in the WPCOG region and other participating local governments. This cost does not include conducting our own environmental assessment or modeling. Engineering firms are unable to provide an estimate based on limited available information at this time. The cost also does not include potentially contracting with a public relations consultant.

Charlotte Water held an additional public input meeting on July 15 in Morganton. About 400-500 people attended. Staff will provide an update on activities related to the Charlotte IBT request.

A draft of the proposed cost distribution for the local governments was reviewed and included in the agenda packet. The method distributes half of the cost based on population and half based on the size of local government utility budgets. The WPCOG Policy Board could choose to approve a special assessment with half for the current fiscal year and half assessed in FY26. The Policy Board could make the assessment voluntary.

The following questions were asked:

Commissioner Barbara Beatty asked about the WPCOG staff cost being covered by dues. Mr. Starr said that local government dues cover about 2% of our budget and the WPCOG charges to each program or contract based on the cost of that service. Our dues are committed to existing services. Using those funds for the IBT would require us to reduce our services to local governments for other functions. The IBT costs reflect the increase in staff time needed for the WPCOG and are small portion of the project cost compared to the other professional services provided by the attorney, lobbyist, engineers, etc.

Mayor Dennis Anthony asked if there were any alternatives from the other side to avoid this IBT. Mr. Starr stated no other alternatives have been mentioned by Charlotte at this point.

Mr. Anthony Starr stated the process includes legally using the EMC process to reduce the IBT and its impacts on our region. It will also include pursuing changes to state law regarding IBTs.

Mr. Tracy Townsend asked about those downstream of our region and if they are talking about this issue. Mr. Starr said "yes" those conversations are happening in South Carolina.

Mr. Anthony Starr clarified that EMC makes a decision then it goes to the courts if needed.

Staff requested that the Policy Board provide direction regarding the assessments and approve the cost distribution method proposed.

A motion that the Policy Board approve a special assessment for the IBT costs as presented on a voluntary basis was made by Ms. Jill Patton and Mr. Larry Chapman offered a second. Motion passed unanimously.

#### Emergency Management Grant Project

Mr. Curt Willis, Code Enforcement Manager, presented updates on and products created for the Emergency Management Grant, including the Community Health and Disaster Mitigation Explorer (CHADME), and online metrics-based, mapping tool specific to our regional disaster resiliency.

In 2021, the North Carolina Association of Regional Councils of Government (NCARCOG) received a grant from the state. The mandates for this grant were to improve regional resiliency, recovery, and mitigation efforts through the facilitation of grant acquisitions, administrative support, technical assistance, and pre-disaster training for our regional partners. The grant was distributed evenly amongst the 16 councils. The funding received by the WPCOG was supplemented by an additional federal economic development grant.

The results of this funding include:

- Better recovery/mitigation planning using LiDAR modeling of flood risk areas.
- The creation of a GIS based tool with up-to-date flood risk data.
- Data collection capabilities to improve recovery funding efforts.
- Data featuring a hierarchy of variables, including socioeconomics, high-risk health populations, the locations of populations with limited or no means of transportation, proximity to natural features, and other social determinants of health.

Local governments now have access to the type of information that will allow them to make mitigation planning decisions based on established data metrics and can back that up with the most up-to-date drone imagery and LiDAR in hopes of making our regions grant applications more appealing to boards.

This item was for informational purposes only. No board action requested.

#### Valdese Public Housing Consolidation Update

Ms. Stephanie Hanvey, Director of Regional Housing Authority, stated on Friday, June 28, 2024 the legal closing was held to officially consolidate the Valdese Housing Authority (VHA) into the WPCOG. All documents, including the deeds of trust on the VHA properties, as well as all other assets and liabilities were transferred to the WPCOG as of July 1, 2024. Executive Director, Anthony Starr and the WPCOG board chair, Joe Gibbons as well as the VHA's board chair and director signed all necessary documents to complete the transaction. All banking account signature cards were changed effective July 1, 2024 and the WPCOG has begun the administration of the Valdese Public Housing Authority.

Four new staff members were added to the WPCOG with this consolidation. The WPCOG's Regional Housing Authority will be taking the next steps to complete this transition by working with HUD to make for a smooth transition of the funding that is to be received from HUD monthly. Staff will continue to give updates on the consolidation as we continue to transition.

This item was for informational purposes only. No board action requested.

#### Homelessness Response Team Summer Update

Mr. Ben Willis, Director of Community and Economic Development, provided an update on regional homeless data, the launch of our new website, and the summer Point-In-Time (PIT) Count that will take place at the end of July.

From January 1 to June 30, 2024, the team:

- Conducted 17,277 outreach contacts.
- Delivered 17 community presentations on homelessness.
- Placed 8 clients in housing.
- Facilitated detox entry for 2 individuals.
- Issued 14 housing vouchers.
- Dedicated 1,510 hours to client intake procedures.

This item is for informational purposes only. No board action requested.

#### Digital Champion Grant Program Award

Ms. Alison Adams, Director of Community and Regional Planning, stated the WPCOG's Community and Regional Planning Department recently received \$473,000 in grant funding through the North Carolina Department of Information Technology's competitive Digital Champion Grant Program. The funding will be used to hire a digital navigator, who will be housed in the Community and Regional Planning Department and work with the Area Agency on Aging (AAA), senior centers, school systems, and community groups on digital literacy issues that are relevant to the area's senior population.

The digital navigator will focus on the digital literacy needs of "Grandparents Raising Children," which is a rapidly growing segment of the region's senior population. This effort will focus on the safety aspects of internet usage, particularly on the social media outlets that are popular with children.

In addition, the funding will also be used to convert the AAA's highly popular 85-page Regional Resource Guide into an accessible and senior-friendly web-based tool, to purchase computers for digital literacy outreach efforts, and to purchase a license for "Get Set Up." Get Set Up is a virtual learning platform that focuses on the digital divide, social isolation, physical health, mental health and vocational health for older adults.

The navigator will travel to locations throughout the area to meet people where they are in order to facilitate easier learning outcomes associated with digital literacy, cybersecurity, and privacy.

- Digital Literacy is the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information, requiring both cognitive and technical skills.
- Cybersecurity and privacy. Ensuring that people know how to keep their data and identity safe and secure online is key to protecting people online and making sure individuals feel safe connecting to the internet and using a device.

For more information about the grant, contact Duncan Cavanaugh at [duncan.cavanaugh@wpcog.org](mailto:duncan.cavanaugh@wpcog.org).

This item is for informational purposes only. No board action requested.

#### Priorities of Existing Committed Transportation Projects

Ms. Averi Ritchie, Transportation Planning Manager, stated on June 25<sup>th</sup>, the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) State Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP) Unit staff (the unit charged with the financial programming of projects) reached out to the Greater Hickory Metropolitan Planning Organization (GHMPO) requesting feedback on the scheduling of committed (funded) projects with dates after 2026 for the FY 2026-2035 STIP. Due to currently programmed projects exceeding available NCDOT funding, NCDOT must adjust project schedules. Currently committed projects in the WPCOG/GHMPO region may become unfunded, forcing them to re-compete in future rounds of prioritization.

The NCDOT STIP Management office asked the GHMPO to rank currently committed projects in accordance with local priority, needs, project schedules, and project completeness. However, the GHMPO and the respective NCDOT divisions, division 11, 12, and 13, must be in agreement on project rankings, or the project ranking defaults to seniority of the projects – meaning the oldest projects will be ranked highest, without regard for data scores. Once the MPO provides this ranked list, NCDOT staff will consider MPO preference, but project schedules, and ultimately whether they remain funded or not, will be determined at the discretion of NCDOT STIP Unit staff to meet the financial needs of NCDOT.

GHMPO staff reached out to impacted municipalities and counties with projects on the list to discuss and receive input on the ranking of these projects. Project rankings are due to the STIP management office by August 30, 2024. This presentation conveys municipal, county, and division staff input. This is currently a draft list that will be opened for a 30-day public comment period. The GHMPO will provide this ranked list, if approved by the GHMPO boards, to the STIP management office, who will then either maintain or delay project dates at their discretion. The list of potentially affected projects was included in the agenda packet.

This item was for information purposes only. No board action requested.

1<sup>st</sup> Amendment of the FY 2024-2025 Budget

Mr. Anthony Starr, Executive Director of WPCOG, presented on behalf of Ms. Andrea Roper, Director of Finance. He stated the 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment of the FY 2024-2025 budget reflects a total budget of \$31,987,027 and an operating budget of \$10,445,783 which represents an increase of the total budget from the May 28, 2024 budget adoption of \$2,518,205.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment of the 2024-2025 Budget includes:

- An increase in General Government to reflect additional communication and human resource contracts.
- Transportation decreased due to the utilization of MPO CRRSAA funding in FY24.
- An increase in Community Development due to additional expenses associated with the homelessness response program.
- Community and Regional Planning increased to reflect the funding associated with a variety of new contracts.
- Economic Development decreased due to project funding being utilized in FY24.
- An increase in Regional Public Housing due to the additional administrative costs associated with the absorption of the Valdese Housing Authority.
- Staff salaries, incentive, retirement, and group insurance increased due to the addition of a digital navigator position along with multiple personnel changes.
- Contractual increased to cover anticipated costs within the Community and Regional Planning and General Government departments.
- Supplies increased to cover needs affiliated with the new projects/contracts across various departments.
- Advertising/subscriptions increased to reflect software subscription costs for the digital navigator project and advertising costs for the homelessness response program.
- Capital Outlay increased to reflect the anticipated purchase of a vehicle for the homelessness response team.
- Contingency increased due to the addition of multiple new contracts expected to be expended during the current fiscal year.
- Transfer to Capital Reserve Fund increased due to the increase in indirect funds generated by chargeable salaries.
- The Special Revenue Fund for HUD Housing Vouchers increased to reflect an increase in HAP payments, portability payments, emergency housing, and administrative costs.
- The Valdese Public Housing Special Revenue Fund increased to reflect additional administrative costs.
- Capital Reserve Fund increased due to an increase in transfers from the general fund.
- All other changes reflect normal programmatic needs.



Staff requested that the Policy Board review and approve the First Amendment of the 2024-2025 Budget.

A motion that the Policy Board approve the First Amendment of the 2024-2025 Budget as proposed was made by Mr. Joie Fulbright and Mr. Jerry Hodge offered a second. Motion passed unanimously.

## **Other Business**

### Executive Director's and Staff Reports

Mr. Anthony Starr, Executive Director of WPCOG, highlighted the following items in his Executive Director's Report which was included in the agenda packet.

### Administration

- The next Mayor-Chair-Managers meeting is Thursday, August 29<sup>th</sup>, at Cedar Rock Country Club.
- The NC General Assembly recently passed legislation allowing for the creation of a rail corridor transportation authority for the Caldwell County rail line. Discussions continue regarding the possibility of creating an authority and improving the rail line to facilitate economic development.

### Community and Economic Development (CED)

- Caldwell County was successfully awarded a Golden Leaf Site Program Due Diligence Grant for \$50,000. Funding will be utilized to complete due diligence on the Foothills Regional Airport.

### Community and Regional Planning

- Staff are applying for a blueways grant to create a plan to connect areas in Burke and Catawba Counties from South Mountain State Park and Henry River Mill Village to Newton and Hickory using the Henry Ford and Jacobs Fork Rivers.

### Finance

- Finance staff are working with the Village of Cedar Rock to provide financial services starting in October of 2024.

### Workforce Development

- OPT-IN Internship Program is a recipient of the 2024 Governor's NCWorks Awards of Distinction for Outstanding Innovative Partnership. OPT-IN is a great example of how community partnerships and engagement can assist in solving key problems, especially when implemented in an innovative way. This partnership between Work in Burke, Burke County Schools, Western Piedmont Community College, Burke Development Incorporated, NCWorks Career Center-Burke, and Western Piedmont Workforce Development addresses the critical need for skilled labor within our region.

This award will be presented during the Awards Banquet held during the NCWorks Partnership Conference.

Ms. Alison Adams, Director of Community and Regional Planning, announced the WPCOG is collecting public input to determine our region's preferred housing types, lot sizes, architectural styles, and amenities. This data will be used to develop a regional housing assessment for residents, local governments, and developers. The Housing Preference Survey will be open from July 23<sup>rd</sup> to August 23<sup>rd</sup>.

Ms. Stephanie Hanvey, Director of Regional Housing Authority, announced nearly 2,500 applications have been received since July 1<sup>st</sup>. The waiting list will be closed for applications on Friday, July 26, 2024 at 5:00 pm.

Mr. Ben Willis, Director of Community and Economic Development, announced that the regional managers should have received an email about various grant opportunities that included some remaining Covid CDBG funds that could be utilized for outdoor park projects. There is also another round of Rural Economic Development Enhancement Funds that are due at the end of August.


Next Meeting


The next Policy Board meeting is scheduled for September 24, 2024 and will be hosted by the Town of Drexel.

**Adjournment**

Chair Gibbons adjourned the meeting at 8:05 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

  
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Joseph L. Gibbons  
Chair

  
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Larry Chapman  
Secretary