Western Piedmont
Council of Governments

2018
ANNUAL
REPORT

50TH

Western Piedmont
Council of Governments

Creative Regional Solutions Since 1968

The economy is strong for our region of four counties, twenty-four municipalities and 373,126 residents. Our status as one of the major economic and manufacturing hubs of the state, continues to grow. Many of our communities are experiencing exciting improvements and enhancing the quality of life for their residents. Sound leadership at the local and regional level facilitate those successes.

Throughout the last 50 years, and continuing today, our local governments look to the Western Piedmont Council of Governments and the entrepreneurial efforts of our citizens to build a better community now and for future generations.

The Western Piedmont Council of Governments is not just a collection of 28 member governments, but also an idea of cooperation and collaboration driven by member support and built by a staff of dedicated and knowledgeable professionals. As we celebrate our 50th year as an organization, each of our communities can point to a project or service, provided by the WPCOG that has improved the quality of our region. I take great pride in our staff, as they provide insightful, timely and concise solutions to the tasks presented by our members. We should continue to look to our Council of Governments for guidance in shaping a positive future for the Western Piedmont, and we are counting on those efforts.

Within this Annual Report, you will see some of the work and successes that happened in 2018 and over the last 50 years. Through the strong leadership of our local governments, the WPCOG established itself as one of the most esteemed Councils of Governments in North Carolina and the nation. I encourage each of our local governments to strive to maintain a spirit of cooperation when tackling the issues our region faces and look to the Council of Governments for guidance and assistance.

Barbara Pennell
Chair, Western Piedmont Council of Governments
Councilwoman, Town of Gamewell

The WPCOG completed 50 years of service to our region this year. Our region's local governments continue many exciting projects and initiatives to better our economy and the lives of all residents. The WPCOG is grateful to assist our local governments in many of these efforts. This special edition of our annual report highlights some of the WPCOG's history over the last 50 years in addition to the achievements during 2018.

Several things come to mind when considering the history of this great organization. The trust of the WPCOG by its local governments is apparent through the many ways in which we are called upon to support their work. Cooperation is a competitive advantage. One can compare the circumstances of intergovernmental relationships in most other areas and quickly realize that the bonds in our region are unusual and beneficial. The successes of the WPCOG are the result of the talented, team-oriented, selfless, and dedicated staff of this organization. I count myself blessed to lead such a fine group of men and women. Steady, long-serving, and intelligent leadership by previous executive directors, Doug Taylor and Dee Blackwell, built a legacy of achievement and trust within our region. They assembled talented staff and leaders and also deftly implemented the goals of visionary board chairs and Policy Board delegates.

Finally, the support of the local government elected officials, municipal and county managers and their staff, and so many of our regional partners built one of the most successful Councils of Governments in the nation. We all look forward to the opportunities and future of this organization as we pause to celebrate many successes since 1968.

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

Chair — Barbara Pennell — Gamewell

Vice Chair — Bob Floyd, Jr. — Cedar Rock

Secretary — Jill Patton — Hickory

Treasurer — Johnny E. Berry — Connelly Springs

Past Chair — George B. Holleman — Taylorsville

Member At-Large — Kitty Barnes — Catawba County

Member At-Large — Wayne F. Abele, Sr. — Burke County

Member At-Large — John "Chip" Black, Jr. — Valdese

Member At-Large — Robert L. Smyre — Maiden

Dennis Anthony — Drexel

Dr. Caryl B. Burns — Granite Falls

Larry Chapman — Hudson

Forrest A. Flemming — Morganton

Joie Fulbright — Conover

Jerry Hodge — Newton

Ben Honeycutt — Hildebran

Mike Labrose — Caldwell County

Gary McClure — Rutherford College

Donald Robinson — Catawba

Ronnie Setzer — Cajah's Mountain

Dale Sherrill — Claremont

Marla Thompson — Long View

Keith Warren — Sawmills

Ben Willis — Lenoir

Larry Yoder — Alexander County

Amparo Alfaro

Helen Chestnut

Elle Engstrom

Tommy Luckadoo

Sara Moses

Casey Pope

Malla Vue

Executive Committee

Elected Delegates

Appointed Delegates

Not pictured above:
Elected Delegates, Bob Benfield for Glen Alpine, Rick Justice for Rhodhiss, and James Weaver 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.

Council By-Laws discussion at WPCOG Meeting in Granite Falls, 1971

The beginnings of the Western Piedmont Council of Governments can be found in research first published in the Greensboro News & Record in 1967 by Dr. David H. Shelton, Professor of Economics at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Dr. Shelton's study concluded that four distinct urban areas were emerging in North Carolina, including the Metrolina (Area surrounding Charlotte), the Golden Triangle (Greensboro, Winston-Salem, and High Point), The Triad (Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill), and the Unifour (Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, and Catawba Counties). Specifically, these emerging areas shared common economic, geographical and social characteristics. In the case of the Unifour, a bond had formed through furniture, hosiery, and allied industries, and strengthened by the most significant geographical feature, the Catawba River, and a network of well-established highways.

In late 1967, the Western Urban Complex Commission (WUCC) (Local Chambers of Commerce and government representatives) was formed as a committee to spearhead efforts to establish a Regional Council of Governments. After numerous public meetings and input, and a naming contest a regional name was settled on, "Unifour Complex."

On November 20, 1968, at the organizational meeting of the WUCC, a motion was made and carried to create and officially name the organization the "Western Piedmont Council of Governments (WPCOG)." The newly formed Council Charter Members included the four counties (Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, and Catawba) and the municipalities of Conover, Granite Falls, Hickory, Hudson, Lenoir, Longview, Morganton, Rhodhiss, and Valdese (Dues were set based on the 1960 Census at $.25 per capita).

The efforts by the WUCC were in part to connect and define the Western Piedmont as Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, and Catawba Counties under a Council of Governments before the State set the composition of counties for each planning region as outlined in legislation

WPCOG Offices at the Catawba Professional Building located at 115 5th Ave NW in Hickory (1972-1977)

passed in 1969 by the General Assembly. In June 1970, Governor Robert Scott, by executive order, announced 17 planning regions from North Carolina's 100 counties, and gave each a letter of the alphabet. Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, and Catawba officials quickly petitioned the Governor to keep our region intact as the Catawba Valley in which the land areas of the Western Piedmont Council of Government lie is a distinct region from the standpoint of geography, transportation, development, commuting, employment, and population. Governor Scott recognized the significance of the regional cooperation already in place and accepted the request, defining the four-county region as NC Multi-County Planning Region E.

WPCOG Staff 1973 - Seated left to right: Marvin Vierra, Marjorie Lail, Lennie Seaver, Dana Bolch. Standing left to right: Ken Pruitt, Ed Griffin, Doug Taylor, Charles Jeffers, Bill Buchanan, Janeen Smith. Absent: Mary Gregg

The WPCOG's founding principles as stated by the WUCC would be, "to develop and formalize policy recommendations concerning matters having an area-wide significance." The commission would further outline the WPCOG's regional importance, "it is believed that the Council of Government will become a major force for the public good in the four-county region." Outlined in the beginning, the WPCOG's development of policy recommendations would

reach government, human resources, human and social relations, housing, health, education, recreation, aesthetics and beautification, culture and entertainment, development, sanitation, communication, transportation, energy sources, water, air pollution, sewer, industry, commerce, conservation, agriculture, forestry, natural resources, police, tourism, welfare, fire and rescue, land use planning, codes and ordinances, and governmental service facilities.

WPCOG Executive Staff 1988 - left to right: Dana Lingerfelt, Jim Chandler, Doug Taylor, Dee Blackwell, Robert White.

Furthermore, the organization would serve as a clearinghouse for state and federal grants, study and make recommendations for area-wide problems and goals, prevent unplanned, rapid urbanization and industrialization, serve as a forum for debate on regional issues, and set approved projects in motion with minimal government acrimony.

The WPCOG's mission and partnership with local governments could be summarized no better than by past WPCOG Chairman Glenn P. Deal before NC Senate Study Commission on Regionalism in 1973,

"We look upon ourselves as a service arm to local governments--not as another level of government. Some functions of local government can be better accomplished collectively and accomplished more economically. We look upon our Council of Governments as a vehicle to strengthen local government, rather than to interfere with local governments rights..."

A JOURNEY OF GROWTH AND LEADERSHIP

Doug Taylor
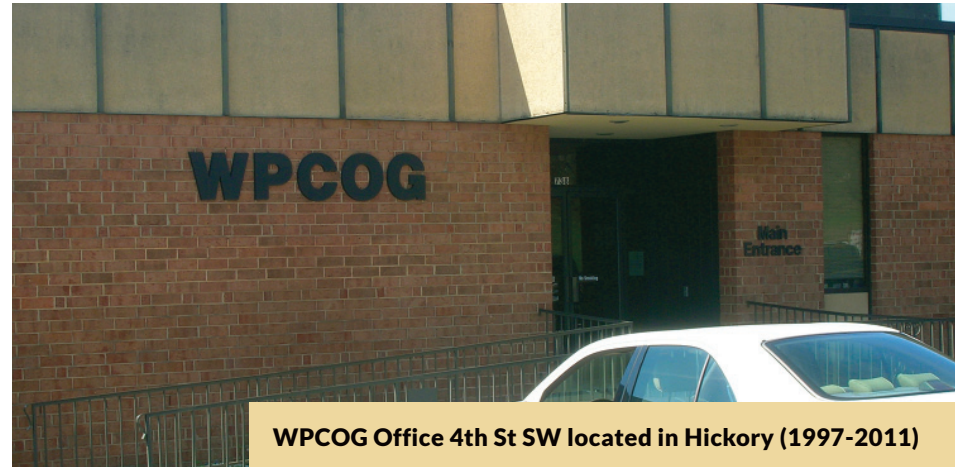Exec. Director
1970 - 2007

Dee Blackwell
Exec. Director
2008 - 2014

Anthony Starr
Exec. Director
2015 - Present

As the Western Piedmont Council of Governments marks its Golden Anniversary, the shared bond among the four counties and the 24 municipalities remains stronger than ever.

WPCOG Office 4th St SW located in Hickory (1997-2011)

Actively connected even before the North Carolina General Assembly called for the development of regional councils of government, the WPCOG area and its officials were already engaged in serving the interests of local governments and the broader region.

With the original points of focus centering on regional planning, human services and housing, the WPCOG's areas of interest have increased to include aging, code enforcement, community and economic development transportation, community finance, GIS mapping, and workforce development.

Along the way, the WPCOG has enjoyed an era of remarkable leadership stability thanks to three executive directors in its history: Doug Taylor, Dee Blackwell, and Anthony Starr.

Blackwell, who retired in 2014 after 40 years at the WPCOG – including the final six as executive director – said the key to the region's success has been the buy-in from all the counties and municipalities.

"There is a real spirit of cooperation, and a unified determination for problem solving, along with the continuous sharing of ideas, goals and experiences."

Perhaps it should not be surprising that the counties and communities of Alexander, Burke, Caldwell and Catawba would want to stick together. Connected by shared highways and waterways, the region also forged a rich manufacturing legacy – particularly with furniture and textiles. Furthermore, be it through water quality, transportation, education, workforce, et cetera, what impacts one part of the region will in many ways affect others.

One of the biggest impacts of regionalization has been the formation of the Greater Hickory Metropolitan Planning Organization that focuses on transportation issues and construction plans with the North Carolina Department of Transportation. Through the work of representatives from each municipality and county, transportation priorities are established and communicated via one voice.

WPCOG Planning Staff Public outreach, 2004. Sitting left to right: Doug Taylor, John Tippett, John Marshall, Judy McGuire. Standing left to right: Dee Blackwell, Sam Irvin.

"They have a prioritized, organized system for road construction," Blackwell said. "The MPO has the voice to tell the state what the priorities are. That is the voice of the region."

Meanwhile, the WPCOG has been at the forefront in assisting individuals in obtaining affordable housing. Since 1977, the WPCOG began administering the Section 8 housing program with 100 units 40-plus years ago, the WPCOG now provides vouchers for more than 1,100 units in the four-county region, with a waiting list of individuals seeking housing nearly twice as large as the number of available vouchers.

The WPCOG was designated as an Area-wide Agency on Aging (AAA) as early as 1978 by the North Carolina General Assembly to administer the Older Americans Act at the regional level per the 1973 amendment to the Older Americans Act. Since that time, the AAA has administered federal, state, and local funds to agencies serving older adults and serves as a resource for

AAA Staff 2002. Left to right: Virginia Parrish, Tina Miller, Karen Thomas, Sheila Weeks, Tom Bell.

WPCOG Staff at the Annual Putt Putt Tournament, 2003.

information and services. The AAA continues to advocate for caregivers and older adults through media, legislation and public forums, educate and train caregivers and professionals, and provide numerous professional services including: Ombudsman, Family Caregiver Support, Health Promotions, Local Contact Agency, Reverse Mortgage, and Project C.A.R.E. (Caregiver Alternatives to Running on Empty) programs.

In the area of economic development, the WPCOG has worked with communities and businesses to obtain grants through the Appalachian Regional Commission, the Economic Development Administration, Community Development Block Grants, and the North Carolina Department of Commerce. One key to the redevelopment of the region since the Great Recession was the success of the N.C. Commerce's Building Re-use Grant program. This program encourages investment in vacant or underutilized buildings and ties grant funding with verified job creation.

Over the past 50 years, WPCOG's Community and Economic Development Department has brought $2.1 billion (2018 dollars) in grants, local match and business investment to the region.

As economic trends change, so too do the effects on the region's workforce. The WPCOG has served the Workforce Development Board to assist individuals and businesses with employment needs. From job recruitment events to seminars that help displaced members of society re-enter the workforce, the WPCOG has been a leader in regional workforce development since 1972.

John Kinney (retired), WPCOG Senior Planner, facilitating public meeting 2009.

Geographic Information System (GIS) services became a central resource of geographic information for the region since its introduction as a service through an Appalachian Regional Commission grant awarded in 1992. Mapping services would enhance the WPCOG's ability to produce impactful regional change including the 1993 US Hwy 321 Study, the 1995 Hwy 64/70 Study in Alexander County, on-site services for the city of Hickory beginning in 1997, and numerous other projects through the years. As the computer age took hold, GIS services were expanded to include Information Technology (IT) services and functions. The WPCOG purchased its first personal computer in 1988, and employees had to sign-up for times to use it.

WPCOG Staff - John Marshall, Transportation Planner, and By Khang, Section 8 Housing Inspector at the WPCOG 40th Anniversary Celebration.

After the 1980 Census, the WPCOG became an affiliate of the State Data Center and the official depository for the region's Census data. The WPCOG answers over 600 demographic and economic data requests each year and conducts statistical analysis of local economic, educational and employment trends.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

The 50-year legacy of the WPCOG is the unique attitude and determination of its local governments' elected officials to collaborate and cooperate to resolve the region's challenges. As the WPCOG enters into its sixth decade, the key to its future successes will be the same spirit of cooperation by local governments that defined the region's past. The continued spirit of cooperation and determination will be critical for solving problems in such critical areas as the economy and community development, housing, transportation, workforce, environment, and the aging of our citizens.

A rapidly changing world will require greater collaboration and regional approaches to solve emerging challenges and seize opportunities. The WPCOG serves as that mechanism for local governments to work together, and as a result communities prosper. Programs may change over time, but the WPCOG will continue to be relevant, innovative and an effective means for area governments to serve citizens.

## LOCAL GOVERNMENTS – DATE OF WPCOG MEMBERSHIP

Charter Members		Second / Third Group	
Catawba County	1968	Granite Falls	1970
Conover	1968	Hudson	1970
Morganton	1968	Newton	1970
Hickory	1968	Taylorsville	1970
Rhodhiss	1968	Brookford	1970
Burke County	1969	Claremont	1972
Valdese	1969	Glen Alpine	1972
Long View	1969	Hildebran	1974
Lenoir	1969	Rutherford College	1977
Alexander County	1969	Cajah's Mountain	1983
Drexel	1969	Gamewell	1983
Maiden	1970	Sawmills	1988
Caldwell County	1970	Connelly Springs	1990
Catawba	1970	Cedar Rock	1997

■ Charter Members

■ Second Group of Members

■ Third Group of Members

WPCOG CHAIRS 1968 – 2018

J. Arch Laney
1968
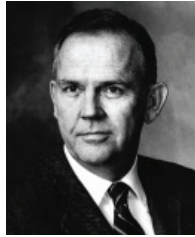
T. Cass Ballinger
1969-1970

Donald C. Lambeth
1971-1973

Charles W. Johnson
1974-1975

Dr. Glen P. Deal, Sr.
1976-1978

C. Robert Wanzer
1979-1980

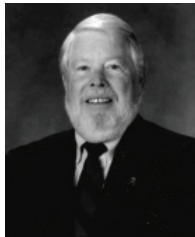**Andrew M. Kistler II**
1981-1982

Kenneth E. Martin
1983

Alden Starnes
1984-1985

Robert T. Hibbitts
1986-1988

Guy Barriger
1989

George Reid
1990-1991

Barry Hayes
1992-1993

Craig Mayberry
1994-1995

Bruce Meisner
1996-1997

Carl Evans
1998-1999

Jack Roberts
2000-2001

Barbara Hughes
2002-2003

Alden Starnes
2004-2005

Nicky Setzer
2006-2007

Kitty Barnes
2008-2009

Wayne Abele
2010-2011

Chip Black
2012-2013

Bob Smyre
2014-2015

George Holleman
2016-2017
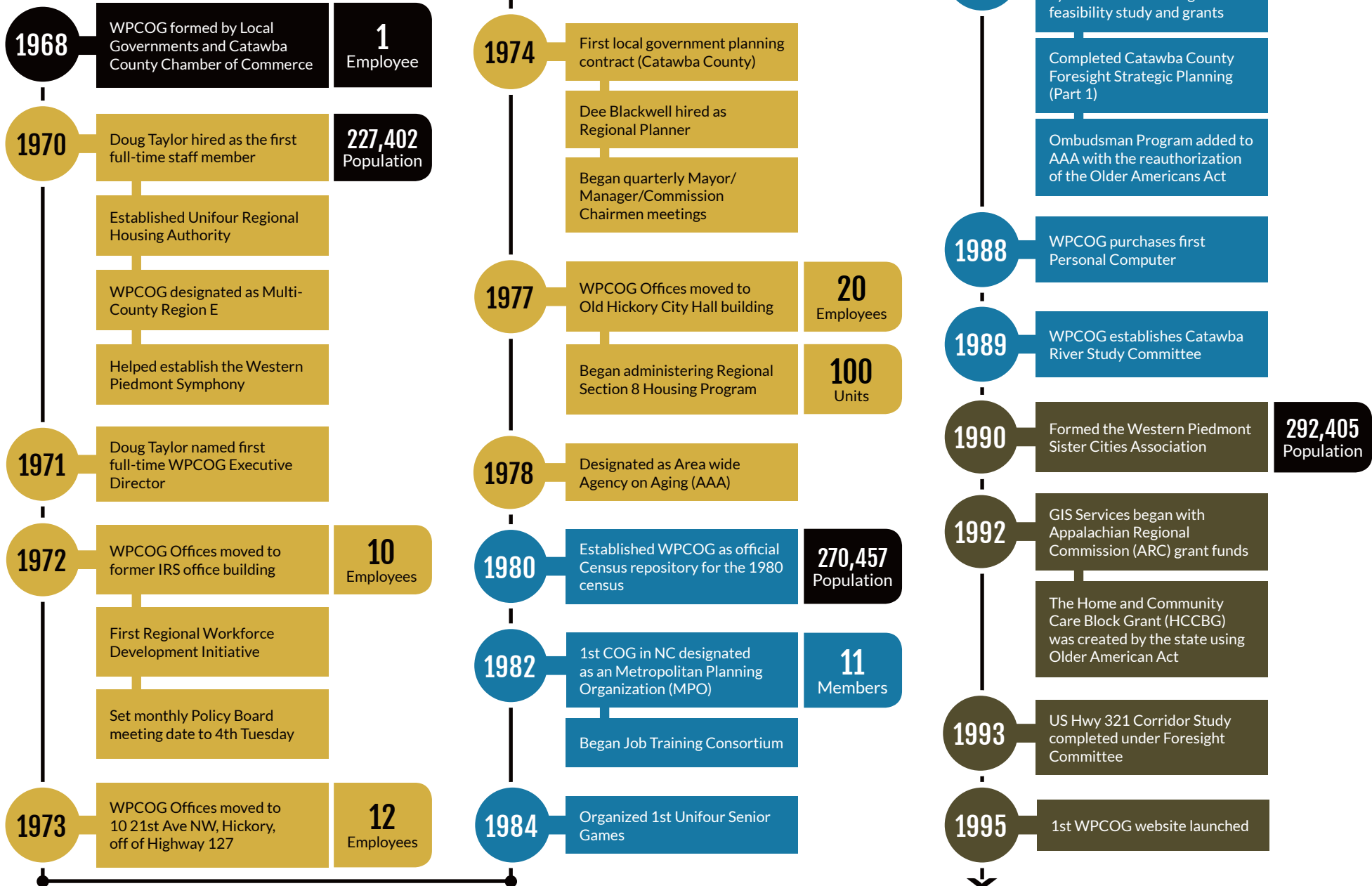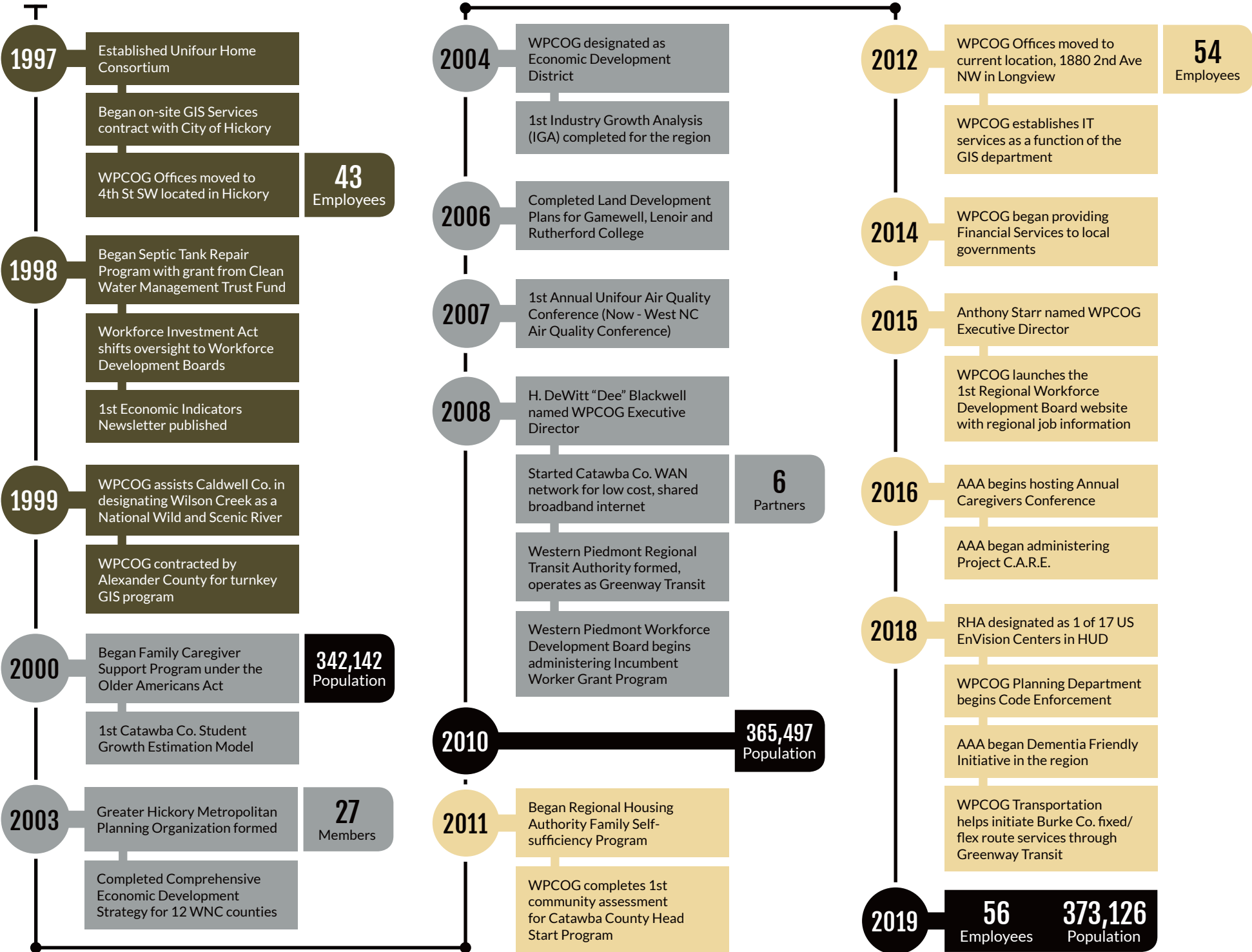
Barbara Pennell
2018-Current

WPCOG STAFF

First Row (left to right): Ashley Bolick, Tina Miller, Anthony Starr, Sherry Long, Scott Miller, Andrea Roper. **Second Row** (left to right) - Lori Dixon, Jennifer Cannon, Kim Duncan, Mary Mitchell, Joann Parlier, Alison Adams (sitting), Rick Oxford, Stephanie Hanvey (sitting), Helen Whisnant, Ashley Atkins, Laurie Powell, Sandy Jones, Matthew Xiong, April Lail. **Third Row** (left to right): Ashley Dale, Erin Schotte, Averi Ritchie, Ashley Kale, Vicky Abernethy, Lisa Helton, Donna Gilbert, Anita Roberts, Taylor Dellinger. **Back Row** (left to right): Billy Rickles, Trey Schweitzer, Duncan Cavanaugh, Todd Stroupe, Jason Toney, Brian Horton, Tom Bell, Hunter Nestor, Elizabeth Hilliard, Paul Teague.

Not Pictured: Judy Caldwell, Kim Eckard, Daniel Ezell, Leslie Farris, Christina Franklin, Kala Guido, Joel Herman, Wendy Johnson, By Khang, Teresa Kinney, Elizabeth Moncrief, Karen Phoenix, Sarah Stamey, Johnny Wear.

WPCOG TIMELINE

1968 — WPCOG formed by Local Governments and Catawba County Chamber of Commerce | **1** Employee

1970 — Doug Taylor hired as the first full-time staff member | **227,402** Population

Established Unifour Regional Housing Authority

WPCOG designated as Multi-County Region E

Helped establish the Western Piedmont Symphony

1971 — Doug Taylor named first full-time WPCOG Executive Director

1972 — WPCOG Offices moved to former IRS office building | **10** Employees

First Regional Workforce Development Initiative

Set monthly Policy Board meeting date to 4th Tuesday

1973 — WPCOG Offices moved to 10 21st Ave NW, Hickory, off of Highway 127 | **12** Employees

1974 — First local government planning contract (Catawba County)

Dee Blackwell hired as Regional Planner

Began quarterly Mayor/Manager/Commission Chairmen meetings

1977 — WPCOG Offices moved to Old Hickory City Hall building | **20** Employees

Began administering Regional Section 8 Housing Program | **100** Units

1978 — Designated as Area wide Agency on Aging (AAA)

1980 — Established WPCOG as official Census repository for the 1980 census | **270,457** Population

1982 — 1st COG in NC designated as an Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) | **11** Members

Began Job Training Consortium

1984 — Organized 1st Unifour Senior Games

1987 — WPCOG helps initiate Piedmont Wagon Transit System Service through feasibility study and grants

Completed Catawba County Foresight Strategic Planning (Part 1)

Ombudsman Program added to AAA with the reauthorization of the Older Americans Act

1988 — WPCOG purchases first Personal Computer

1989 — WPCOG establishes Catawba River Study Committee

1990 — Formed the Western Piedmont Sister Cities Association | **292,405** Population

1992 — GIS Services began with Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) grant funds

The Home and Community Care Block Grant (HCCBG) was created by the state using Older American Act

1993 — US Hwy 321 Corridor Study completed under Foresight Committee

1995 — 1st WPCOG website launched

1997
- Established Unifour Home Consortium
- Began on-site GIS Services contract with City of Hickory
- WPCOG Offices moved to 4th St SW located in Hickory

43 Employees

1998
- Began Septic Tank Repair Program with grant from Clean Water Management Trust Fund
- Workforce Investment Act shifts oversight to Workforce Development Boards
- 1st Economic Indicators Newsletter published

1999
- WPCOG assists Caldwell Co. in designating Wilson Creek as a National Wild and Scenic River
- WPCOG contracted by Alexander County for turnkey GIS program

2000
- Began Family Caregiver Support Program under the Older Americans Act
- 1st Catawba Co. Student Growth Estimation Model

342,142 Population

2003
- Greater Hickory Metropolitan Planning Organization formed
- Completed Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for 12 WNC counties

27 Members

2004
- WPCOG designated as Economic Development District
- 1st Industry Growth Analysis (IGA) completed for the region

2006
- Completed Land Development Plans for Gamewell, Lenoir and Rutherford College

2007
- 1st Annual Unifour Air Quality Conference (Now - West NC Air Quality Conference)

2008
- H. DeWitt "Dee" Blackwell named WPCOG Executive Director
- Started Catawba Co. WAN network for low cost, shared broadband internet
- Western Piedmont Regional Transit Authority formed, operates as Greenway Transit
- Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board begins administering Incumbent Worker Grant Program

6 Partners

2010
365,497 Population

2011
- Began Regional Housing Authority Family Self-sufficiency Program
- WPCOG completes 1st community assessment for Catawba County Head Start Program

2012
- WPCOG Offices moved to current location, 1880 2nd Ave NW in Longview
- WPCOG establishes IT services as a function of the GIS department

54 Employees

2014
- WPCOG began providing Financial Services to local governments

2015
- Anthony Starr named WPCOG Executive Director
- WPCOG launches the 1st Regional Workforce Development Board website with regional job information

2016
- AAA begins hosting Annual Caregivers Conference
- AAA began administering Project C.A.R.E.

2018
- RHA designated as 1 of 17 US EnVision Centers in HUD
- WPCOG Planning Department begins Code Enforcement
- AAA began Dementia Friendly Initiative in the region
- WPCOG Transportation helps initiate Burke Co. fixed/flex route services through Greenway Transit

2019
56 Employees **373,126** Population

ADMINISTRATION

Staff of the Administration Department support the efforts of all WPCOG departments including general office support, facility management and communications. Additionally, the Administration Staff support the activities of the WPCOG Policy Board, Executive Committee and several other regional committees. Administration strives to delivery courteous and timely service to government officials and staff, the public as well as fellow WPCOG staff.

EXECUTIVE SEARCHES

The 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. Staff have extensive experience facilitating the hiring of personnel including Town Managers, Town Administrators, Community and Regional Planners and more. In 2018, WPCOG facilitated the Town Manager search for the Town of Rhodhiss and the City of Claremont. This service is conducted with the highest level of integrity and confidentiality. Staff are available through every step of the process including: writing and distributing job announcements, reviewing incoming resumes, focusing the potential candidate list, interviews and providing an objective and non-bias assessment of final candidates.

RETREAT & MEETING FACILITATION

In 2018, Local governments called upon the WPCOG Executive Director and other WPCOG staff to facilitate various planning retreats and meetings. Having a trusted impartial third party facilitate these types of events, often allows for discussion that is more open and the development of action plans.

Bimonthly meetings are scheduled for Municipal and County Managers and Clerks, as well as County Commission Chairmen and Managers. Staff meets quarterly with Mayors/Chairmen/City-County Managers and Economic Developers, and periodically with Finance Officers and Planners.

2018 FACILITY USAGE

Event	Count	Attendees
Meetings	237	3,150 Attendees
Trainings	24	412 Attendees
Webinars	11	65 Attendees
Conferences	2	100 Attendees
274 Total Events		3,727 Total Attendees
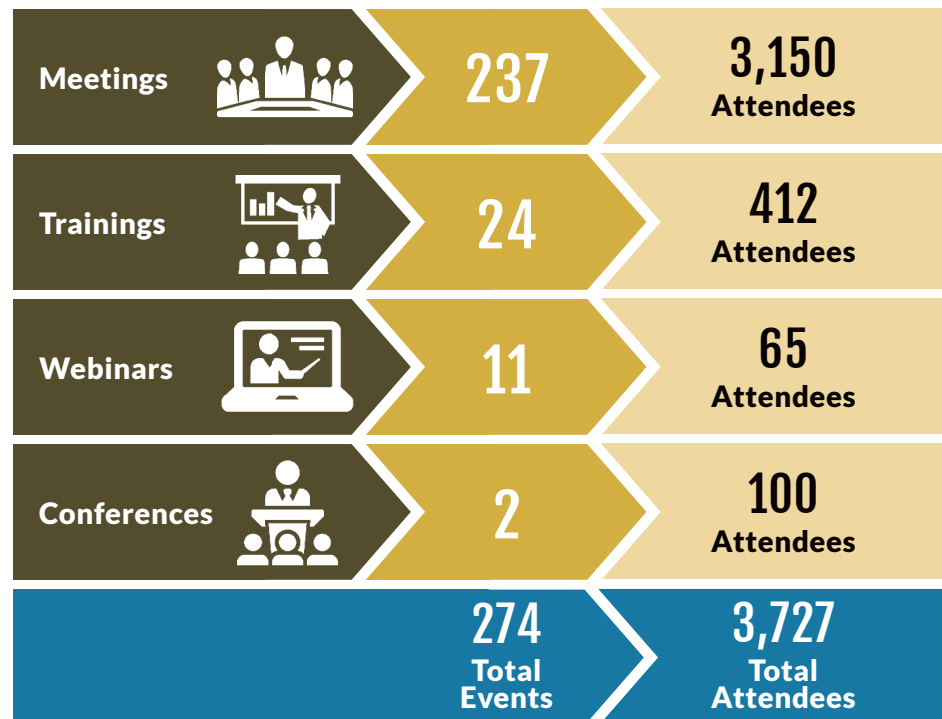
Mark Whisenant, ADA Program Manager, NCDOT Office of Civil Rights, presentation on Self-Evaluation & Transition Plans to local municipalities.

COMMUNICATIONS

In 2018, the Town of Long View met with the WPCOG to address their needs for an updated web presence. The process included incorporating the Fire Department and Police Department websites into the Town's site and creating a more user-friendly experience. Also, the WPCOG agreed to help maintain the site for future content updates and services, renewed on an annual basis. Work began in March, and a newly designed website was completed and launched in July.

Web design services were also completed for NC4A (NC Area Agencies on Aging). The statewide agency needed to replace an old website that had shut down with a new and up-to-date web presence. The new site offers easy access to regional AAA's and provides both statistical and practical information on aging services for older adults statewide.

The City of Hickory contracted with the WPCOG in April to produce a marketing piece highlighting the upcoming details of the proposed Hickory Trail. Communications and Data Center worked closely with the City to develop a 20-page document showing potential outcomes and investment as a result of the proposed development zone.

The Economic Indicators Newsletter was also a priority in 2018, bringing a fresh look to the publication and moving to digital distribution. The updated version and distribution allows the material to reach a broader audience and deliver high-quality content in a more visual and digestible style.

Marketing efforts continued for the Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board, which launched a new Annual Job Fair in connection to a new youth-focused program called NEXTGen, focused at 16 to 24-year-old job seekers. Materials including the creation of new flyers, posters, calling cards and banners to market to young job seekers in Alexander, Burke, Caldwell and Catawba Counties.

The NCWorks Career Centers received eight newly updated and individualized recruitment and announcement templates for each county (total of 32 templates). Furthermore, efforts continued on social media and the Development Board website to promote recruitment events, job openings, and resources available for both job seekers and business.

Work began this past year on marketing new partnership resources provided by the Regional Housing Authority, which has been designated as 1 of 17 EnVision Centers in the United States. Work

2018 SOCIAL MEDIA/PUBLIC OUTREACH STATS

Publications				
WPCOG Newsletter	**11** Issues	**1,446** Subscribers	**34%** Open Rate (19% higher than industry average)	
WDB Newsletter	**4** Issues	**436** Subscribers	**39%** Open Rate (24% higher than industry average)	
Impact Report	**12** Issues	The Impact Report is distributed via Email and physical copies available at the WPCOG office and freely shared. Primary distribution includes Mayors, Managers, Commissioners, and WDB and WPCOG Board Members. Estimated distribution is around 400.		

Website			
	53,928 Users	**9,319** Average Monthly Views	**111,827** Views

Twitter				
	595 Followers	**205** Tweets	**365** Average Views per Tweet	**74,830** Views

Facebook				
	715 Followers	**227** Posts	**309** Average Views per Post	**70,213** Views

included a press conference in June at the WPCOG offices, a new web portal connected to the main WPCOG website, and various promotional and marketing materials for EnVision Center programs and services.

Other Communication activities included marketing work for Planning and IT/GIS services, Adult Caregivers of Aging Parents (ACAP) Conference promotions and ACAP logo design on behalf of the Area Agency on Aging, and several internal updates to the organizational marketing and digital media.

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 US and 16 in North Carolina. The Western Piedmont AAA covers Alexander, Burke, Caldwell and Catawba counties.
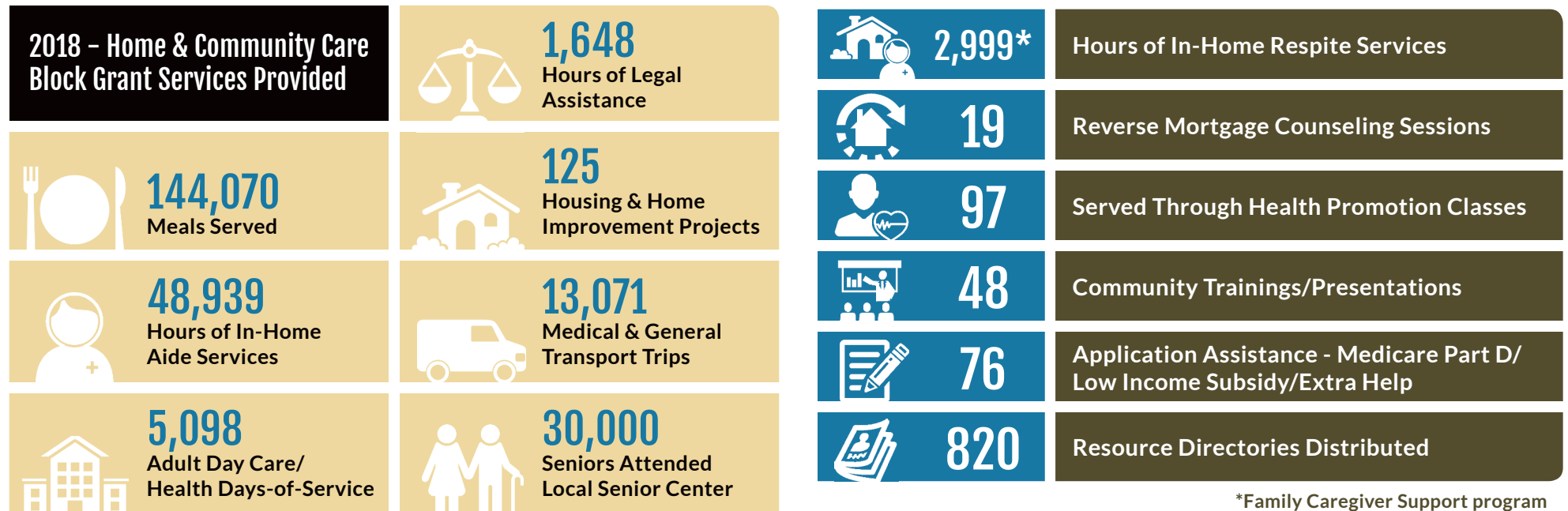
The AAA administers the Home and Community Care Block Grant (HCCBG) for the region. This grant funds an array of in-home and community-based services to help seniors stay in their homes. The HCCBG allows counties the flexibility to determine which services to fund based on community need. Services are provided to older adults age 60+ and are based on need.

SERVICES

- Evidence-Based Health Promotion Classes
- Family Caregiver Support Program
- Local Contact Agency
- Medicare Information for Patients and Providers Act Grant
- Operation Fan/Heat Relief
- Presentations on Aging Issues
- Project C.A.R.E.
- Regional Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program
- Resource Directory for Older Adults
- Reverse Mortgage Counseling
- Senior Tar Heel Legislature Support
- Technical Assistance to Agencies Serving Older Adults

HOME & COMMUNITY CARE SERVICES FUNDED IN WESTERN PIEDMONT

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

2018 – Home & Community Care Block Grant Services Provided

1,648 Hours of Legal Assistance	
144,070 Meals Served	**125** Housing & Home Improvement Projects
48,939 Hours of In-Home Aide Services	**13,071** Medical & General Transport Trips
5,098 Adult Day Care/ Health Days-of-Service	**30,000** Seniors Attended Local Senior Center

2,999*	Hours of In-Home Respite Services
19	Reverse Mortgage Counseling Sessions
97	Served Through Health Promotion Classes
48	Community Trainings/Presentations
76	Application Assistance - Medicare Part D/ Low Income Subsidy/Extra Help
820	Resource Directories Distributed

*Family Caregiver Support program

FAMILY CAREGIVER SUPPORT PROGRAM

- Continued partnership with YMCA of Catawba County to offer Parenting The Second Time Around support group during the months of September-June for grandparents raising grandchildren
- Collaborated with local agencies and organizations in Burke, Caldwell and Catawba counties to offer programs for diverse populations
- Continued partnership with Catholic Diocese Elder Ministry to increase outreach to Hispanic & faith-based community older adults and caregivers. FCSP is working to update printed materials in Spanish
- Provided school supplies to grandparents raising grandchildren in Alexander County for 2018-19 school year
- Summer Fun Camp Packets for grandparents raising grandchildren distributed in Alexander, Burke, Caldwell and Catawba counties in partnership with local schools and DSS
- Collaborated with CARE Foundation of Western North Carolina with two community events in Burke and Catawba counties
- Joined ACAP (Adult Children of Aging Parents) leadership team to provide monthly programming to the community

REGIONAL LONG–TERM OMBUDSMAN PROGRAM ACTIVITY

181 Facility Visits	24 Presentations	98 Complaint Investigations	94 Closed Cases

LOCAL CONTACT AGENCY

60 *Referrals	8 Resident Transitions

*Referrals are residents who indicate an interest in exploring their options to return to community living.

PROJECT C.A.R.E.

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

PROJECT C.A.R.E. ACTIVITY

124 Assessments	49 Reassessments	128 Home Visits
173 Vouchers Issued	63 Agency Outreach Visits	872 People Reached/ Outreach

DEMENTIA FRIENDLY INITIATIVE

5	Site Visits
133	People Trained

OUTREACH AND SUPPORT

- AAA staff responded to 201 telephone calls for Information and Assistance Referrals and provided Options Counseling to 11 individuals/families
- AAA staff volunteered with Foothills Service Project and built stair rails for an older adult in Caldwell County
- Offered training in 2018 to Aging Service Providers on Blind, Deaf, and Hard of Hearing Services; Housing Program Assistance; and Dementia Friends

EVENTS & CONFERENCES

- Participated and sponsored the 2018 Walk to End Alzheimer's, and raised $730 for Alzheimer's research
- Sponsored and volunteered at the 2018 Unifour Senior Games
- Hosted 4th annual Caregiver Conference at WPCOG in partnership with ACAP and Carolina Caring
- FCSP and Ombudsman program offered 2nd annual Taking Charge – Knowing Your Long Term Care Options
- AAA staff presented at the National Conference
- Dementia Friendly event in Newton
- Sensitivity Training at Banoak Elementary school in Catawba County.
- FCSP and Ombudsman program collaborated with Lenoir-Rhyne University Colleges of Health Sciences with the showing of CARE Documentary
- Coordinated Elder Abuse Awareness event in June 2018. Distributed 5,000 awareness bracelets, posters, table tents, encouraged everyone to wear purple on June 15th and submit photos, and delivered breakfast to all four DSS Adult Protective Services' staff as a token of appreciation

COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Community and Economic Development works with local governments to provide affordable, decent and safe housing, and prepares and administers local and state grants for infrastructure improvements in the Western Piedmont region. In addition, Community and Economic Development serves as a catalyst for new job creation by assisting local industries with NC Commerce Building Reuse grants, as well as assisting first-time homebuyers through counseling and grants, and preventing mortgage foreclosure by working with homeowners and lenders.

GRANT DEVELOPMENT AND ADMINISTRATION

In 2018, staff developed applications that resulted in grant funding for 27 projects totaling $12,327,625, which is a 27.8% increase in overall funding from a year ago. The funding ranged from $43,575 through the N.C. Parks and Recreation Trust Fund for a new park in Cajah's Mountain to more than $5.5 million combined from various state and federal sources to make improvements to water and wastewater systems throughout the region.

New private sector investment for economic development projects in 2018 totaled $38,293,287, in addition to the pledged creation of 206 new, full-time jobs from 7 NC Commerce Building Reuse grants. Along with the new grants, staff continued to administer more than 60 community and economic development grant projects.

2018 GRANT HIGHLIGHTS

27 New Projects

$12.3 Million Grant Amount

206 Jobs Created

$38.3 Million Private Investment

286 Housing Units

60 Administered Grants
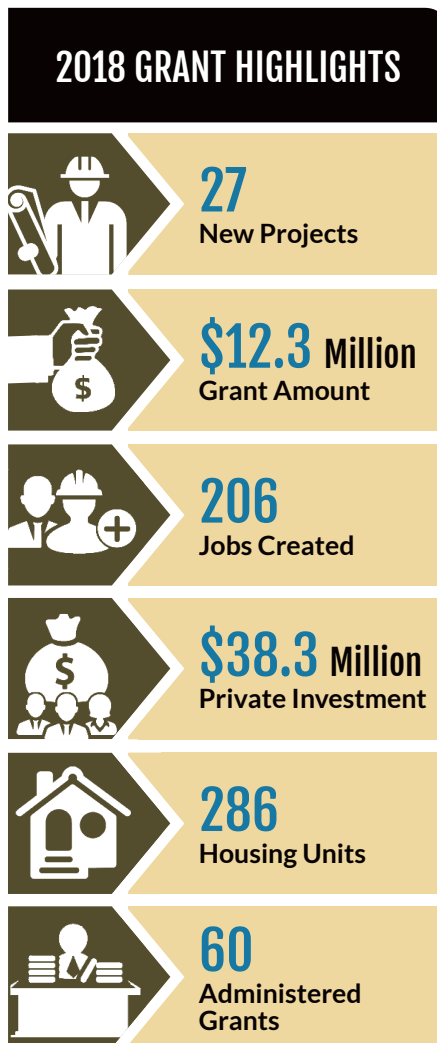
HOME CONSORTIUM

Since 1996, the HOME Consortium Program has received $23,394,344 in U.S. Housing and Urban Development funding for 194 senior/family housing units in Lenoir. In addition, the HOME program has provided tax credit assistance of $3,575,064 that leveraged $87,667,687 for 845 multi-family units across the region.

In 2018 the HOME Program provided assistance to 82 first-time homebuyers and leveraged more than $6.5 million in lender financing. In addition, the HOME program funded $312,868 to 4 different Community Housing Development Organizations for the construction of 9 Habitat for Humanity homes.

HOUSING REPAIRS, FORECLOSURE PREVENTION

For an eighth consecutive year, the WPCOG's housing counselors worked with the NC Housing Finance Agency to prevent home foreclosures. The Mortgage Payment Program used $1,453,811 in assistance to halt actions against 56 residences in 2018. Since 2010, the WPCOG counseling program has helped more than 900 families secure $16.5 million in assistance.

During 2018, 33 homes received needed repairs thanks to a combined $325,000 from the NCHFA's Urgent Repair Housing and Essential Single Family Rehabilitation grants.

56 Mortgage Payment Program Loans	232 Homeowner Foreclosure Preventions	82 First-Time Homebuyers	33 Housing Rehab(s) Completed	845 Multi-Family Units Funded
$1.45 Million in Mortgage Assistance	Since 2010, $16.5 Million in Assistance	$6.5 Million in Lender Financing	$325,000 in NCHFA URP Funds	$3.6 Million Tax Credit Assistance
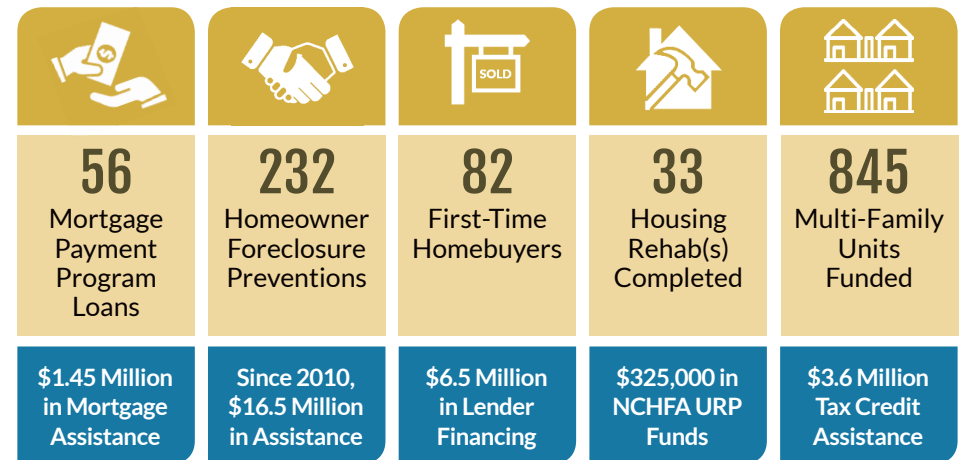
PROJECTS FUNDED IN 2018	GRANT AMOUNT	JOBS CREATED	HOUSING UNITS AFFECTED	PRIVATE SECTOR INVESTMENT
Alexander County-ARC(1)-Industrial Park Road Project	$1,500,000			
Alexander County-DEQ(2)-Stony Point Elementary Sewer Project	$894,750			
Alexander, Burke & Caldwell Counties-NCHFA(3)-URP(9) Housing Grant	$150,000		27	
Burke County-NC Commerce-JP3 Building Reuse	$500,000	42		$12,029,961
Burke County-NCHFA(3)-Essential Single Family Rehab	$175,000		6	
Cajah's Mountain-Part F-Town Park	$43,575			
Catawba County-NCHFA(3) Urgent Repairs for housing	$100,000			
Catawba County-NC Commerce-Bradington Young Building Reuse	$162,000	13		$4,105,927
Catawba County-Part F-Catawba River Soccer Complex, Phase III	$385,000			$289,210
Claremont-DOC-WWTP(5) Upgrade	$2,000,000			
Drexel-NC Commerce-Drexel Plant 1 Demolition Project	$500,000			
Hickory-NC Commerce-PTI (Plastic Technologies Inc. - HSM) Building Reuse	$187,000	15		$1,040,000
Lenoir/Regional-HUD HOME Consortium	$1,152,451		82	
Lenoir-HUD CDBG Entitlement	$137,666			
Long View-NC Commerce OneH2 Building Reuse	$250,000	21		$250,375
Morganton-HUD CDBG Entitlement	$165,045			
Morganton-NC Commerce-Healthcare Building Reuse Grant	$230,000	23		
Morganton-NC Commerce-VECA East Building Reuse Project	$500,000	80		$19,577,814
Newton-RIA-James River Equipment Building Reuse	$60,000	12		$1,000,000
Regional-Expanding STEM(8) West	$75,000			
Regional-HUD Housing Counseling Grant	$45,635		115	
Regional-Mortgage Payment Program	$1,453,811		56	
Rhodhiss-DEQ-WWTP(5) Improvements	$300,000			
Taylorsville-ARC-WWTP(5) Upgrade	$150,000			
Valdese-Alba Waldensian Demolition Project	$500,000			
Valdese-DEQ(2)-2018 Water System Upgrades	$500,000			
Valdese-DEQ(2)-Water Plant Upgrades	$210,692			
Totals	**$12,327,625**	**206**	**286**	**$38,293,287**

(1) ARC – Appalachian Regional Commission

(2) DEQ – Division of Environmental Quality

(3) NCHFA – North Carolina Housing Finance Agency

(4) SFR – Single Family Rehabilitation

(5) WWTP – Wastewater Treatment Plant

(6) HUD – US Department of Housing and Urban Development

(7) CDBG – Community Development Block Grant

(8) STEM – Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics

(9) URP - Urgent Repair Program

PLANNING

WPCOG Community and Regional Planning provides a variety of current and long range planning support to member governments. 2018 planning contracts consists of daily permitting and inquiries, text amendments, rezoning, conditional use permits, plan (residential, commercial and industrial) review and action plans. Planning contracts include Drexel, Hudson, Hildebran, Catawba, Sawmills, Gamewell, Conover, Rutherford College and Valdese. Long range planning contracts in 2018 included Caldwell County, Bethlehem, Sawmills, Gamewell, Rutherford College, and Claremont.

Long range planning consists of visionary plans, such as Comprehensive plans, small area plans (Downtown, neighborhood, commercial nodes), and corridor plans.

To ensure the department is using best practices, 14 training events were attended and/or facilitated at the WPCOG. Training for the region and planning staff is important, and include numerous partners including the NC Department of Transportation, NC School of Government, Carolina Thread Trail, NC Association of Zoning Officials, International City/County Management Assoc., Catawba County Chamber of Commerce, Western Piedmont Air/Water Quality Conferences, NC Chapter of the American Planning Association, NC Main Street, and NC League of Municipalities.

In 2018, a new Planning Director, Transportation Planner, Community and Regional Planner, and Code Enforcement Officer were hired. Code Enforcement is one of the newest programs being offered. In partnership with WPCOG GIS department, a state-of-the-art application has allowed effective and efficient means to collect data, document code violations and achieve abatement. The COG is providing service to 6 municipalities (Cedar Rock, Drexel, Hildebran, Hudson, Maiden and Rhodhiss). The Code Enforcement officer specializes in abandon, junk and nuisance motor vehicles, residential and commercial minimum standards, nuisance abatement, and abandoned manufactured homes.

Beyond long range planning, current planning and code enforcement staff continues to offer support.

- Support Economic Development Corporations within the region
- Site analysis and selection for development
- Burke County Quality of Life Explorer
- Hazard mitigation representation
- Coordination with NC Dept. of Environmental Quality to ensure compliance
- Code Rewrite (Zoning, Town/City/Village, Subdivision)

2018 PLANNING HIGHLIGHTS

	3,650 Planning Hours (Provided to Local Governments)		**4** Major Subdivisions Reviewed		**5** Conditional Use Permits		**10** Text Amendments		**14** Trainings	
	159 Meetings (Commission, Council & Planning Boards)		**247** Code Enforcement Violations		**3** Annexations		**1** Appeal		**8** Long Range Planning Contracts	
	48 Minor Subdivisions Reviewed		**189** Permits Issued		**4** Rezonings		**1** Variance Issued		**9** Municipal Planning Contracts	

TRANSPORTATION

Designated as the Lead Planning Agency for the Greater Hickory Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), the WPCOG is responsible for our region's transportation planning. The MPO evaluates transportation system performance, identifies project needs, develops long-range plans, prioritizes projects, and recommends funding. The WPCOG is the primary local recipient of the transportation planning funds received from the state and federal governments. The MPO is governed by a Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) comprised of elected officials from each of the 28 local governments in the region.

Greenway Transit rider loads bike, Burke County Route. Photo by Camille Sterling.

FUNDING & PLANS

- Over **$2 Billion** in projects in the 2045 Metropolitan Transportation Plan
- Over **$260 Million** in Prioritization (STI-P-5.0) projects
- **$409,000** in private funding for new Burke flex bus routes
- **$240,000** in Section 5310 funding for Catawba DSS transportation

Local Administered Project Program – $17,345,546

12 projects across the region

- 5 projects in Hickory (**$10,840,000**)
- 1 project in Morganton (**$2,649,600**)
- 1 project in Newton (**$1,131,000**)
- 2 projects with Greenway Transit (**$1,053,586**)
- 1 project in Conover (**$791,600**)
- 1 project in Claremont (**$479,760**)
- 1 project in Burke County (**$400,000**)

MEETINGS & PRESENTATIONS

10 - MPO TCC/TAC Joint Board Meetings

11 - WPRTA Full Board Meetings

3 - WPRTA Transit Advisory Board Meetings

2 - County Commissioner Meetings (Burke & Catawba)

6 - City/Town Council Meetings (Drexel, Rutherford College, Valdese, Conover, Morganton, Newton)

2 - Planning Boards (Gamewell, Rutherford College)

DATA CENTER

A Lead Regional Organization (LRO) affiliate of the North Carolina State Data Center, WPCOG Data Center staff provide assistance in locating and analyzing demographics for local governments, nonprofits and the private sector. Data Center staff also produces specialized data products including community assessments, economic indicators newsletters, industry growth analysis, and student growth estimation models.

Completed Projects for 2018

- Economic impact of Hispanic residents in Burke County and Hispanic population trends in Burke County
- Analyzed results of 2017-18 Catawba Chamber Survey and Catawba County Economic Outlook survey
- Demographic/economic data analysis of the proposed Fonta Flora Trail (Burke County)
- Monthly and annual estimates for Greenway of unlinked passenger trips (UPT), passenger miles traveled (PMT) and average passenger trip length (APTL)
- 2017-18 Greenway Passenger Sampling Report and the 2018-19 Greenway Passenger Sampling Methodology Report
- New passenger sampling methodology with the addition of Burke County transit service
- Methodology for commercial and residential growth potential for the "Hickory Trail" report
- Demographic, economic and job flow comparisons between Alexander, Burke, Caldwell and Catawba Counties for Bernhardt Furniture
- Vehicle Occupancy Rate (VOR) data for the Greater Hickory MPO
- Hudson Town Hall Radius Analysis including 50 or more job employers within 5, 10 and 15 Miles of Hudson Town Hall
- Environmental Justices and Economic Development scores for 7 Locally Administered Projects Program (LAPP) Projects
- Analysis and map of high unemployment census tracts and postal routes for Workforce Development Board Career Pathways Mail-Out Cards
- 2010-2017 Hickory MSA population change analysis
- Education attainment ranking for all MSAs in the US with comparisons to the Hickory MSA

- Analysis of 60 and over age groups for the region, 2008 - 2028
- Demographic chapters for the Rutherford College Recreation Plan Bethlehem Community Plan, and Caldwell Co. Comprehensive Plan
- Analysis of NC MSA Poverty and Education Attainment Rankings
- Analysis of rental vacancy rate information for Catawba County/ Catawba County Census Tracts
- Updated 2017 traffic count maps for the region
- Demographics for all schools in the STEMWest footprint Demographic and economic updates for Catawba Chamber MADE Magazine
- Past 5 years of Migration patterns to and from Catawba County
- Updated Community Profiles for the Morganton and Alexander County fair housing plans
- Updated building permit census tract data for Alexander, Burke, Caldwell and Catawba Counties

Data Center Publications

4 Economic Indicators Newsletters	4 Hickory Economic Indicators Reports

2018 Catawba County, Hickory, and Newton-Conover Schools Student Growth Estimation Model

670 Data Requests	14 Data Presentations*

*Data Presentations - Demographic/economic data at Sawmills Council Retreat, Hickory Public Schools subcommittee on CTE programming, April Mayors/Manager Meeting, Catawba County Commissioners, Hickory City Council, Rutherford College Council, Conover City Council, HUD staff, Leadership Catawba, Catawba Habitat for Humanity, CVCC Board Retreat, Catawba EDtalks principal meeting. Census Presentations at North Lincoln High School. Traffic Count trend presentations to Greater Hickory MPO and Greenway Transit.

ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING

The Western Piedmont Water Resource Committee is the key interface used by the Western Piedmont Council of Governments (WPCOG) to interact with local governments on the issue of water resources. Formed in 1986, this Committee is staffed by the WPCOG and serves in an advisory role for 28 local governments within the Greater Hickory Metro on issues including water quality, water supply, water safety and recreation, and watershed issues within the Upper Catawba River Basin.

The Western Piedmont Air Quality Committee (WPAQC) is comprised of stakeholders from the private and public sector that are dedicated to improving the air quality in the region. The Western Piedmont Air Quality Oversight Committee (WPAQOC) was formed to make policy and financial decisions for regional air quality activities. Staff support for the WPAQC and WPAQOC is provided by the Western Piedmont Council of Governments and meets four times per year.

2018 SEPTIC TANK REPAIR PROGRAM

20	$112,732	$5,637
Projects	Project Totals	Average Assist. per Project

In 2017, the WPCOG was awarded a $220,000 grant from the US Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA) 319 Grant Program to help address the regional need for septic repairs. The grant established a no-interest, revolving loan program for repairing failing septic systems and straight piping in Alexander, Burke, Caldwell and Catawba Counties. The goal of the project was to repair or replace thirty septic tanks. This is the third round of funding that the WPCOG administered for this program. Thirty septic tanks have already been repaired, and twenty-five percent of the funding remains.

The Unifour Septic System Repair Program is beneficial for multiple reasons including helping low-income individuals with a much-needed and costly expense, the public health benefits from preventing septic run-off, and the environmental benefits for water quality.

STORMWATER PARTNERSHIP OUTREACH

8	630	58
Presentations	Students	Teachers
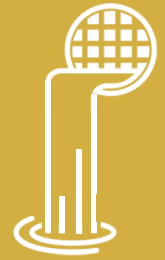
The Western Piedmont Stormwater Partnership, now in its eighth year, was formed to assist the local governments in our region who are obligated to manage stormwater runoff under a federal Phase II NPDES Stormwater permit.

Outreach - Education Matters Extreme STEM Tours include sessions on the relationship between stormwater and water quality. Students visit business locations in Catawba County for a behind-the-scenes look at how Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math are used in their industry.

Workshop - Aided STEMWest with a week-long workshop that included presentations on Water Quality and Stormwater. Teachers from Alexander, Burke, and Caldwell counties participated in a contest to design posters with Stormwater outreach/education.

The Western NC Air and Water Quality Conferences were held on Thursday, July 26, 2018, and Friday, July 27, 2018. The Reese Institute for the Conservation of Natural Resources and the Western Piedmont Council of Governments hosted these Annual Conferences at Lenoir-Rhyne University in Hickory, NC. The purpose of the conference is to educate the public, government officials and the private sector on current air and water quality issues important to the Western Piedmont region and beyond.

Mitch Woodward, Area Specialized Agent - Watersheds and Water Quality, NC Cooperative Extension

FINANCE

The Finance Department manages the agency's pass-through funds totaling more than $10 million and supervises the intricacies of a $15 million budget, which includes over 100 different contracts and programs with local, state and federal agencies and private firms.

WPCOG REVENUE SOURCES

- **Federal Awards**
- **Local Dues/Contracts/ Appropriated Fund Balance**
- **State Awards**

9%
21%
70%
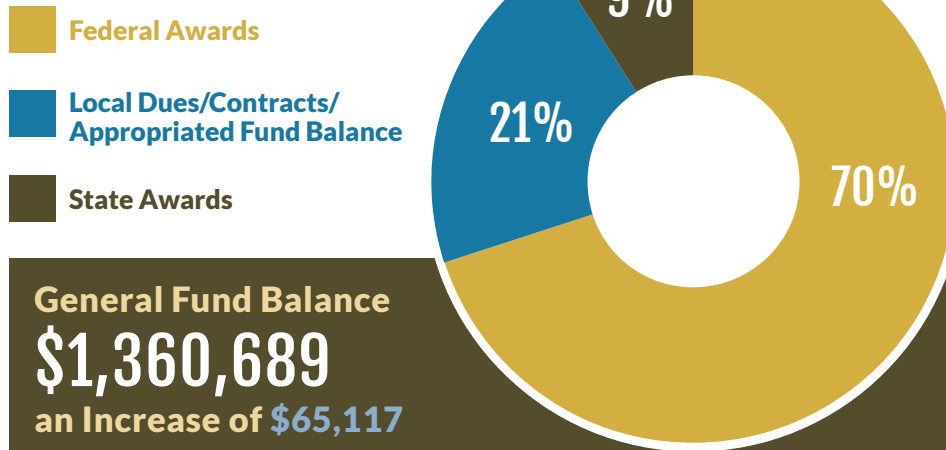
General Fund Balance
$1,360,689
an Increase of $65,117

In Fiscal Year 2017-18, the General Fund had an increase in fund balance of $65,117, totaling $1,360,689. Out of total budgeted expenses, federal awards funded 70% and State awards 9%. The remaining 21% of expenses were funded with local/assessment dues, local government contracts, appropriated fund balance and deferred revenues.

The focus of WPCOG's governmental funds is to provide information on near-term inflows, outflows, and balances of unusable resources and is useful in assessing WPCOGs' financing requirements.

The General Fund is the primary operating fund of Western Piedmont Council of Governments. At the end of the current fiscal year, Western Piedmont Council of Governments' available General Fund balance was $476,443 while total fund balance reached $1,360,689. The current available fund balance is 9.44% of General Fund expenditures ($5,048,688), while total fund balance represents 26.95%.

	REVENUES	EXPENSES
GENERAL GOVERNMENT	$429,944	$417,266
TRANSPORTATION	$700,439	$698,888
ENVIRONMENTAL	$209,446	$155,923
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT	$747,600	$786,654
AREA AGENCY ON AGING	$3,331,771	$3,310,255
COMMUNITY & REGIONAL PLANNING	$318,246	$284,359
REGIONAL PUBLIC HOUSING	$6,464,450	$6,268,210
GIS & IT SERVICES	$342,474	$364,581
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	$190,254	$190,154
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT	$3,034,162	$3,032,977
MISCELLANEOUS	$5,570	$3,276
TOTALS –	$15,774,356	$15,512,543

As of June 30, 2018, the governmental funds of Western Piedmont Council of Governments reported a combined fund balance of $2,085,031, with a net increase in fund balance of $261,813. Included in this change in fund balance is an increase in fund balance in the General Fund of $65,117 and the Aging Fund of $160, the Section 8 Fund of $196,239 and the WIOA Fund of $297.

WPCOG Combined Governmental Fund Balance

$2,085,031

Net Increase of $261,813

The Finance Department provides cost-effective services to our local governments and other local governmental organizations. With over 47 years of governmental accounting experience, one staff member who holds the NC Government Financial Officers of Accounting (NCGFOA) certification and two staff members with master's degrees in accounting, the Finance Department is dedicated to providing exceptional financial administration services.

During the past year, the Finance Department was able to assist two local governments with financial administration services. With these services, the local governments were able to continue operations without any interruption of financial services. These services were extended on various time frames and made to fit the need of the municipality. One local government was served with full financial administration, meaning WPCOG provided a finance officer for the local government. The Finance Officer was housed at the COG and provided all financial services from the COG office. The second local government was assisted on a temporary basis. Several services were offered to this municipality on a temporary basis, including payroll administration, new software implementation and assisting with new job duty training. The Finance Department was able to customize what services were offered based on the local governments need.

Not only is WPCOG providing services to our local governments; we are also helping other organizations in our region that need help administering their financial services. In December of 2018, WPCOG entered into a contract with a local non-profit to administer all of their financial services.

BENEFITS OF THE WPCOG ADMINISTERING YOUR LOCAL GOVERNMENT'S FINANCES

- Avoid difficulties of recruiting and retaining trained and experienced financial staff
- Avoid expensive accounting software fees
- Expertise of staff that comes with a larger organization, including NCGFOA certified staff
- Cheaper than hiring your own staff
- Continuity of service that is difficult for single-person or small financial operations in local governments
- Greater protections from fraud and misuse of funds
- Seamless service to your board or council, staff and the public
- Segregation of duties eliminates that annual finding in your audit

FINANCIAL ADMINISTRATION SERVICES

- Accounts payable
- Accounts receivable
- Assistance in budget development and amendments
- Cash management
- Coordination with the local government's independent auditor
- General ledger accounting
- Monthly account reconciliations
- Monthly finance reports
- Payroll administration
- Powell Bill reports to NCDOT
- Purchase order processing
- Quarterly reports to IRS, LGC, etc.
- Review and preparation of audit-related records and material
- Sales tax refund reports
- Other financial duties as needed

WHAT IS THE COST?

The cost is based on the time required to provide the best level of service for your local government. Some factors that affect the cost include number of employees, number of monthly account transactions; number of general, special revenue and enterprise funds; collection method of taxes; and the number of customer transactions.

IT/GIS SERVICES

sUAS "DRONE" SERVICES PROGRAM

In 2018, the IT/GIS Department launched the WPCOG sUAS "Drone" Program after more than two and a half years of due diligence. Two WPCOG staff members earned their FAA Part 107 licenses for drone operation. The sUAS program allows the agency to utilize new technologies in data collection and geographic analysis as well as video production. We conducted over 20 flights last year with missions ranging from promotional and memorial video production, progress tracking of projects, infrastructure inspections and updating aerial photos of small areas. Examples include:

- **Promotional Videos:** Town of Hudson- Butterfly Festival; Town of Drexel - Community Fair
- **Memorial Video:** Town of Rutherford College – Rutherford College Elementary School Closing
- **Video Analysis:** City of Hickory Fire Department – analysis of ladder truck's turning radius
- **Infrastructure Mapping & Inspection:** Town of Valdese – sinkhole analysis and water tower inspection

NCDEQ AIA GIS GRANT SUPPORT

- **Drexel** - Completed collection (5,624 features in 2018, 11,199 features for the entire project) of water, sewer and electric infrastructure. Created online viewer web-app, water/sewer and electric editor GIS interfaces, and trained staff. Partnered with Town Engineering Firm in Manhole Inspection
- **Sawmills** - Completed the first half (six months) of the Sawmills water and wastewater GIS project (3,572 features between July and December 2018)
- **Claremont** - Created brand-new online water and wastewater GIS interface for the City of Claremont, including a work-order system. Also placed 105 infrastructure drawings into City GIS
- **Long View** - Wrote and submitted AIA Water & Sewer GPS grant applications for Town of Long View

MUNICIPALITY'S COLLECTED GPS FEATURES

Water	Electric	Sewer	Total Features
6,599	273	2,324	9,196
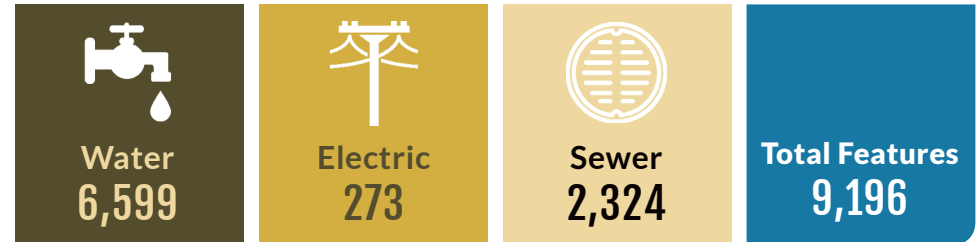
SUPPORT FOR EXISTING UTILITY-BASED GIS

- **Valdese** - Updated GIS and the Valdese Public Cemetery viewer and data editor interface, and created new secure cemetery viewer web-app for Town use
- **Maiden** - Performed review of Maiden Utility GIS practices and regularly archived work-orders
- **Claremont, Drexel, Maiden, Rutherford College, Taylorsville and Valdese** - Added picture/video ability to their municipal GIS systems and trained municipal staff in its use
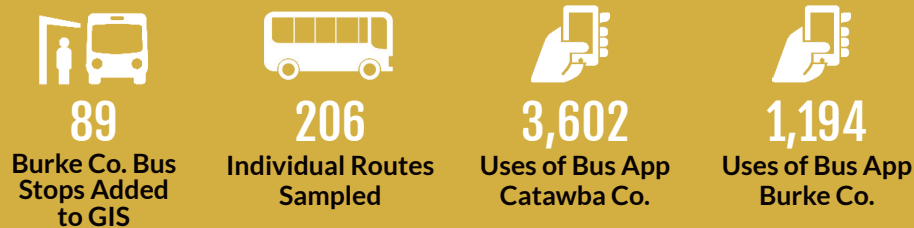
CITY OF HICKORY GIS SUPPORT

WPCOG provides full-time GIS support for the City of Hickory. This year, staff reviewed the Local Update for Census Addresses (LUCA) US Census process for residential address verification in the City Limits of Hickory. IT/GIS staff also created or upgraded the following GIS applications:

- › Updated an ArcGIS Online Application for Hickory's Vacant Building Inventory. The application now allows users to search by address and identify all vacant structures within one to ten miles, plus query buildings by square footage and ceiling height
- › ArcGIS Online Application allowing Hickory Fire Department to create and edit installed smoke alarms in residential and commercial builds throughout the City
- › ArcGIS Online Story Map for the 5.2 mile Hickory Trail Project. The Map Book starts with the full Trail and then is segmented by

Riverwalk, Old Lenoir Road, 9th St., and City Walk, with points of interest identified with a brief description and photograph
› ArcGIS Online web application for Hickory employees to create, edit, and manage a water-sampling site and grease trap data in the field or office

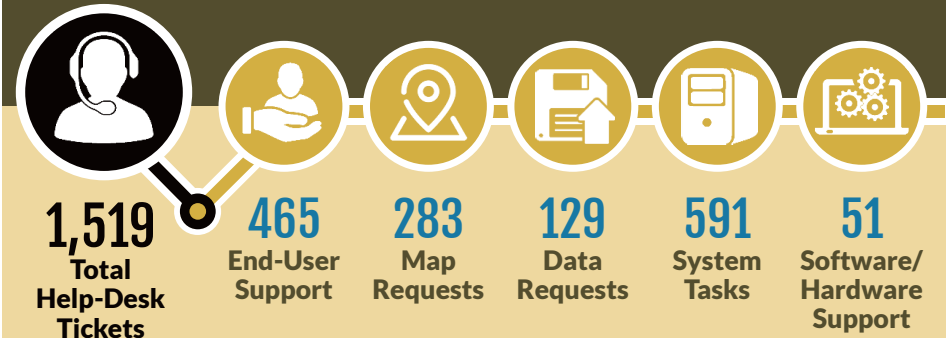## COMMUNITY & TRANSPORTATION PLANNING SUPPORT

89
Burke Co. Bus Stops Added to GIS

206
Individual Routes Sampled

3,602
Uses of Bus App Catawba Co.

1,194
Uses of Bus App Burke Co.

- **Greenway Transportation** - IT/GIS staff created a GIS webapp for Greenway Transportation's new routes in Burke County
- **PARTF Grant Applications** – Mapping of Cajah's Mountain Town Park and Morganton's Catawba River Complex Expansion
- **Manufacturing Solutions Center (MSC) & Carolina Textile District (CTD)** - Shared the locations of customers in North Carolina, the ARC region, the United States, and internationally, produced a series of 18 maps semi-annually, 9 for the MSC and 9 for CTD
- **Miscellaneous Planning Assistance** – Staff provided data and mapping services for various zoning, comprehensive plans, recreation plans, and grants to the municipalities of Claremont, Drexel, Gamewell, Glen Alpine, Hildebran, Hudson, Rutherford College, Sawmills, Town of Catawba and Valdese
- **Burke Quality of Life Explorer (BQofL)** – Staff verified and updated 60 BQofL data layers. Plotted 37,000 Burke County patients with cancer, cardiac, COPD, diabetes, hypertension, or kidney diseases and used data to calculate 2015-2017 Chronic Disease Rates
- **Unifour Septic System Repair Program** - Produced maps each quarter of "completed" and "In Progress" tank replacement project locations

GENERAL GIS EXTERNAL/INTERNAL

- IT/GIS personnel completed the initial version of WPCOG Code Enforcement mobile GIS application and trained field staff. The tool tracks violations for 6 municipalities in the field, and updates violations to the database in real-time
- Represent NCARCOG on GICC Local Government Subcommittee
- Hosted the NC Government GIS Symposium, and IT/GIS staff presented about working with surveyors in a municipal GIS project
- Provided GIS and mapping products for 2018 WPCOG Regional Housing Authority's SEMAP application
- WPCOG Community & Economic Development Support
  › Mapping services provided for 9 different ARC, CDBG, DOT, or HUD Environmental Reviews that included 5 Burke County, 3 Caldwell County, and 1 Alexander County projects
  › IT/GIS created site layout maps and recommendation maps for the Hudson and Rutherford College Recreation Plans

IT SERVICES

1,519
Total Help-Desk Tickets

465
End-User Support

283
Map Requests

129
Data Requests

591
System Tasks

51
Software/ Hardware Support

- Upgraded WPCOG phone system to an integrated VoIP structure
- Renewed, updated and transferred WPCOG IT antivirus service from an onsite server to cloud service
- Revised and Renewed the Catawba County Wide Area Network (WAN) shared internet agreement between WPCOG, Catawba County, Claremont, Conover, Long View, Maiden, and Newton

REGIONAL HOUSING AUTHORITY

The Regional Housing Authority (RHA) provided housing assistance to approximately 1,132 families throughout Alexander, Burke, Caldwell and Catawba Counties in the form of rent and utility payments during 2018. The RHA diligently seeks partnerships with property owners, community advocates and housing resource providers to ensure the fulfillment of the mission to provide residents access to quality, affordable housing.

SPECIAL PROGRAMS

REACH-Family Self-Sufficiency Program (FSS) is open to any family that is actively receiving Section 8 housing assistance payments. The FSS Coordinator supports families with referrals to community resources and services. Each participant is guided through a process to identify existing barriers in their lives. The coordinator helps those families create a plan and counsels families through steps to overcome those barriers and become self-sufficient.

In 2018, 50 families participated, with 20 new enrollments and 6 graduations. The RHA deposits money into an escrow account for each participant as they obtain employment, increase their household earned income and achieve their goals. At the end of 2018, a total of $93,049 had accumulated in FSS participant accounts.
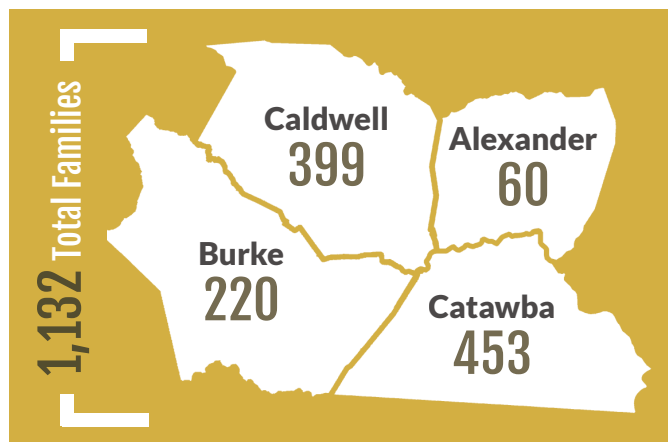
Through the **Homeownership Program**, Section 8 participants are able to use their rental subsidy toward their mortgage. In 2018, the RHA assisted 6 participants with their mortgage each month.

Family Unification Vouchers are designed to help families facing imminent threat of their children being placed in out-of-home care due to inadequate housing. These vouchers can also be used to help youth who are exiting the foster program to live independently. The RHA works in cooperation with Public Child Welfare Agencies to provide housing choice vouchers to families in need. In 2018, 21 families were assisted with Family Unification Vouchers.
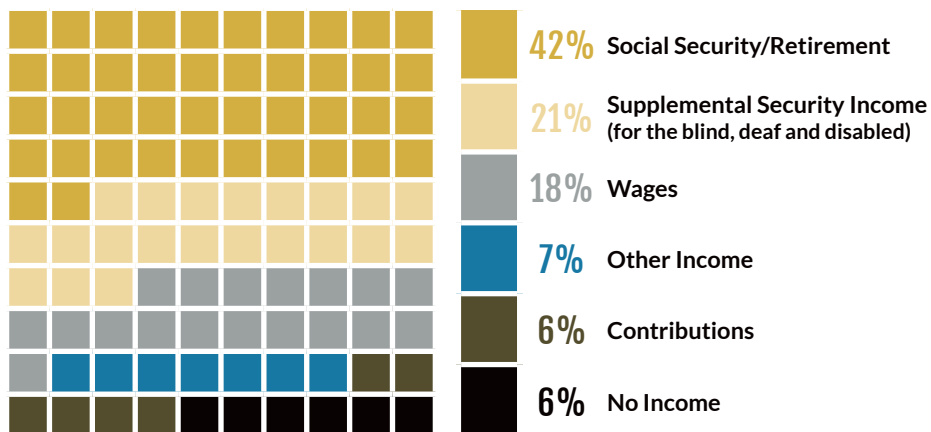
Omnibus Appropriations Acts in 2017 and 2018 made approximately $400 million available nationwide for new mainstream voucher assistance. This is the first available funding for new **Mainstream Vouchers** since 2005. HUD awarded over $98 million in funding to 286 PHAs on September 4, 2018. The RHA applied for the newly allocated Mainstream Vouchers to assist families with non-elderly persons with disabilities. HUD awarded 35 Mainstream Vouchers to the RHA to be used beginning November 2018. In less than 2 months, the RHA assisted 33 additional families with housing, based on this allocation.

Pre-applications Processed	1,300
Assistance Offered to Applicants	925
Vouchers Issued	422
New Leases/ Contracts	229
Inspections	2,193
Annual Re-certifications	915

2018 – NUMBER OF FAMILIES ASSISTED

1,132 Total Families

Caldwell 399
Alexander 60
Burke 220
Catawba 453

	2,337	Total family members
	689	Disabled and/or elderly
	21	Family Unification Program
	50	Family Self-Sufficiency
	33	Mainstream Voucher

2018 – CLIENT PRIMARY INCOME SOURCES

42% Social Security/Retirement

21% Supplemental Security Income (for the blind, deaf and disabled)

18% Wages

7% Other Income

6% Contributions

6% No Income

OUTREACH

In March 2018, over 60 partners attended the 3rd annual Housing Partnership Network (HPN) Seminar. The event helps to increase education on housing resources in the area to better assist the future self-sufficiency of our mutual clients through agency partnerships. Sixteen guest speakers presented from the four-county region.

The 5th annual Landlord Information Seminar was held in November 2018, with approximately 40 landlords in attendance. The RHA staff and two guest speakers presented information regarding fair housing, how to protect rental homes from damages, and tips for dealing with pest related issues. Information was also provided on resources and services landlords can utilize to help rent their properties.

ENVISION CENTER

On June 7, 2018, Secretary Ben Carson traveled to his hometown of Detroit to announce the first round of 'EnVision Center' designations in 17 communities across the nation. EnVision Centers will offer HUD-assisted families access to support services that can help them achieve self-sufficiency, thereby making scarce federal resources more readily available to a greater number of households currently waiting to receive HUD assistance. The RHA is honored to be designated as 1 of 17 EnVision Centers nationwide.

HUD is committed to reforming government services and expanding opportunities for more Americans to become self-sufficient. The RHA is currently in the development phase of the demonstration. The RHA is assessing the community regarding what needs, barriers and obstacles they face; as well as assessing local agencies that provide community services and resources. If gaps in the current services and resources exist, the EnVision Center strategy is to provide resolutions through results-driven partnerships with federal agencies, state and local governments, nonprofits, faith-based organizations, corporations, public housing authorities (PHAs), tribal designated housing entities (TDHEs) and housing finance agencies.

RHA PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

The RHA is required to submit a performance assessment to HUD yearly. The Section Eight Management Assessment Program (SEMAP) measures the performance of the public housing agencies (PHAs) that administer the Housing Choice Voucher Program. In addition to 14 key indicators HUD uses to target and monitor assistance, PHAs are also allowed the opportunity to earn 5 bonus points. Those points can be earned by tracking Section 8 families with children within high poverty areas. The chart below was submitted to HUD, demonstrating those percentages.

Fiscal Year	# Section 8 Families in High Poverty Areas	Total Number of Section 8 Families	% Section 8 Families in High Poverty Areas
2017	323	640	50.1%
2018	200	454	44.1%

For three consecutive years, the RHA has received a 100% score on SEMAP and has maintained a High Performer Rating. Housing authorities that achieve an overall performance rating of high performer receive national recognition by HUD and are given competitive advantage under notices of funding availability.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD

The purpose of the Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board (WDB) is to:

- Be the center of community and regional leadership to identify workforce challenges;
- Be the convener of conversations to resolve the challenges;
- Be the champion for workforce development;
- Work in a collaborative partnership with key stakeholders, (especially economic development and education);
- Bring resources to bear on resolving the challenges;
- And acts as the accountability agent to ensure the work is completed.

Through the planning and oversight of the Western Piedmont WDB, in 2018 the local area NCWorks Career Centers delivered:

Employer Services	7,566
Jobseeker Services	59,433
Recruitment Events Held	127
Scholarships Awarded	151

The On-the-Job Training (OJT) program provided by the Western Piedmont WDB is a resource to assist businesses in acquiring skilled workers and helping eligible individuals gain employment. Many employers in our area have taken advantage of the On-the-Job Training

Total OJT Placements	29
OJT Wage Reimbursement to Businesses	$74,835
Average Hourly Wage Paid to Employee during OJT	$13.87

program as they add additional employees to their workforce. Wage reimbursement for OJT was paid out to employers to offset the extraordinary cost of training new hire employees.

NCWORKS

What an incredible day for the Western Piedmont Workforce Development Local Area. On May 23rd at the NCWorks Commission quarterly meeting held in Hickory, NC, the Western Piedmont Workforce Development Local Area received recognition from Governor Roy Cooper for their second NCWorks Certified Career Pathway in Nursing and Allied Healthcare. The full development of this career pathway was a collaborative effort between the workforce development board, educators and healthcare employers.

Career Center Staff celebrate Re-Certification by the NCWorks Career Center System.

On this same day, the Western Piedmont Workforce Development Local Area also received their NCWorks Career Center Re-Certification. To obtain re-certification, centers comprising the NCWorks Career Center System must address criteria in effectiveness including customer satisfaction, physical and programmatic accessibility, and continuous improvement. One-Stop Operations Guidance for the career centers also provides guidance and additional information specific to Career Center operations. Criteria, therefore, has been developed to evaluate the NCWorks Career Center system in the following categories: (1)

Customer-Centered Design and Accessibility, (2) Partnerships and Integrated Services, (3) Professional Staff, and (4) Performance and Customer Satisfaction.

NCWorks NEXTGEN
Your Future Starts Here

Our regions youth and young adults need work experience and valid career opportunities. On Saturday, June 23rd, 2018 from 10am – 12pm, the Western Piedmont Workforce Boards NCWorks Center NEXTGen program hosted a hiring event in each of the four counties (Alexander, Burke, Caldwell and Catawba).

The Western Piedmont WDB invited employers from across the four counties to participate in this inaugural NEXTGen Hiring Event for the Western Piedmont Region. This opportunity was at no cost to employers, and they understood that these future employees would come with little to no work experience. Partnering workforce agencies such as the community colleges, I-Care Inc., Vocational Rehabilitation, and Alexander EDC participated at the event to help encourage the region's young population. The WDB believes it is the region's responsibility to encourage youth and young adults to enter a career pathway, with endless possibilities for lifelong learning. The Western Piedmont WDB (NEXTGen) will host a youth focused hiring event every year going forward.

Youth and Young Adult NEXTGen program (16-24yrs old) delivered:

Internships (WEX)	Average Internship Wages Earned	Completed GED/HS	Enrolled in Post Secondary ED
46	$10.36	28	49

NEXTGEN SUCCESS

Lakaishia Swint came to NCWorks unemployed and seeking work. She soon found out about NCWorks NEXTGEN's scholarship and training program and the assistance she could receive to help her complete some additional schooling. Lakaishia was convinced she wanted to become some sort of Medical Office personnel and signed up for the MOA classes at CVCC and was connected with a paid internship to help ramp up her customer service and office skills. She quickly discovered that she wanted to be more hands-on with her career and she sparked an interest in truck driving after speaking to some friends in the field, as well as her Career Adviser at NCWorks. Lakaishia completed the 4-week training at Trans-Tech and was quickly employed and driving as in a team for Super Service LLC. After getting some experience under her belt, Lakaishia joined the Paschall Truck Lines Inc. in July and within two months became a trainer. She is now responsible for training new drivers and continues to drive as part of a team. NCWorks NEXTGEN is incredibly proud of this young lady and what she has been able to accomplish in the last year. Go Lakaishia!

The 1st Annual NEXTGen Job Fair was held June 23, 2018. In 2019, the 2nd Annual NEXTGen Job Fair will be held on May 11, and simultaneously at locations in Alexander, Burke, Caldwell and Catawba County.

NEXTGEN SUCCESS

Daniel Duckworth came into the Burke NCWorks Career Center seeking a career, and work skills support as he was having difficulty finding employment due to barriers and life challenges. Like many young people today, he also lacked any work experience. As part of the NCWorks NEXTGen Youth/Young Adult program, Daniel was placed in an internship opportunity with Blue Ridge Striping in Valdese where he found his niche driving the crash truck for the road painting crew. Over the past several months, Daniel has increased his literacy skills by over five grade levels. He has shown significant growth in his work skills, social skills, communication skills, problem-solving abilities, and conflict resolution. Daniel is also self-supporting. At the end of his work experience, he was hired on full-time with Blue Ridge Striping.

Thank you Blue Ridge Striping for providing Daniel this great internship and career opportunity.

VETERAN SERVICES SUCCESS

Mr. Jerry "Wayne" Burton was a Soldier in the North Carolina Army National Guard, assigned to the 731st Maintenance Company, Hickory, NC. At that time Wayne served under the command of Rodney Woody who is now an NCWorks Disabled Veterans Representative (DVOP) at the Catawba County NCWorks Career Center. As the years went by, Rodney and Wayne both continued their military careers but lost track of each other until November 2018.

On November 18th, 2018 Wayne came into the NCWorks Career Center in Catawba County and requested help finding suitable employment. This appointment is when Rodney saw Wayne for the first time in almost 20 years.

While discussing career options, Rodney shared with Wayne his duties and responsibilities as a NCWorks DVOP. Wayne shared with Rodney that after all the years in the military and all the physical strain the military had put on him, he was really looking for an office type job..." perhaps a job like yours, helping veterans." Right away, they both started working on Wayne's career services by assisting him in interview and office skills. We started his Individual Development Plan (IDP) where we created Short-term and Long-term goals. Wayne was very eager to get started and took control of his IDP by attending every Workshop assigned and kept staff up to date with job searches and any significant barriers he had encountered. After about a month into the career services process, Wayne contacted Rodney and told him that he had been "let go" from his current employer and he shared with Rodney that he really needed work fast. Rodney informed Wayne that we could find him "any" job, but if he continued with our plans, he could find a career.

During an Outreach event Rodney was attending, he learned that Goodwill Industries of NWNC had a Veterans Employment Specialist position coming open in Statesville, NC. After making a few phone calls and being supported through the process, Wayne was offed an interview for the position. On January 10th, 2019 Rodney received a call from Wayne where he informed him that he was now the new Veterans Employment Specialist for Goodwill. Mr. Wayne Burton found that career helping veterans.
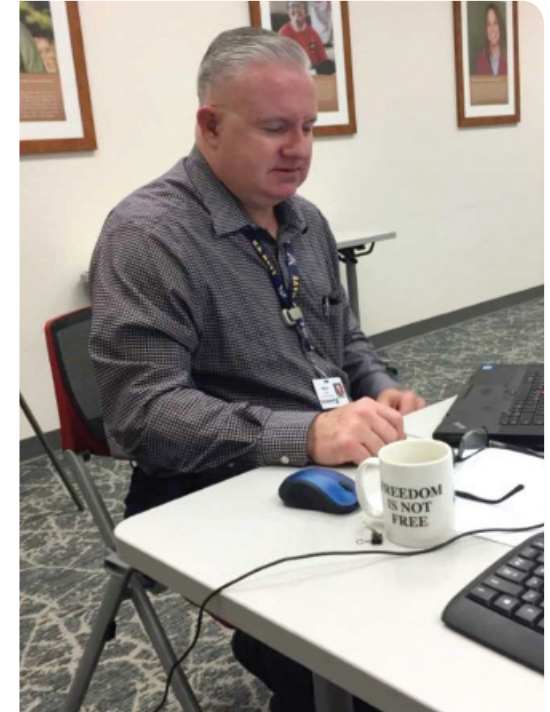
Administration

Anthony Starr - Executive Director
Sherry Long - Assistant Executive Director/ Community & Economic Development Director
Ashley Bolick - Director of Administrative Services & Human Resources
Jason Toney - Communications Specialist
Lori Dixon - Administrative Assistant
Judy Caldwell - Receptionist

Area Agency on Aging

Tina Miller - Director of Area Agency on Aging
Christina Franklin - Regional Ombudsman
Mary Mitchell - Family Caregiver Specialist
Karen Phoenix - Project C.A.R.E. Family Consultant
Sarah Stamey - Aging Specialist
Anita Roberts - Aging Specialist

Community & Economic Development

Sherry Long - Assistant Executive Director/ Community & Economic Development Director
Paul Teague - Community & Economic Project Developer
Rick Oxford - Housing Program Manager
Laurie Powell - Community & Economic Development Administrator
Lisa Helton - Community & Economic Development Administrator
Jennifer Cannon - Community & Economic Development Administrator
Erin Schotte - Community & Economic Development Administrator
Helen Whisnant - Housing Counselor
Joel Herman - Housing Inspector

Community & Regional Planning

Alison Adams - Community & Regional Planning Director
John Wear - Senior Planner & Natural Resources Administrator
Teresa Kinney - Community & Regional Planner
Hunter Nestor - Community & Regional Planner
Ashley Kale - Community & Regional Planner
Taylor Dellinger - Senior Data Analyst

Brian Horton - Transportation Planning Manager
Averi Ritchie - Transportation Planner
Duncan Cavanaugh - Transportation Planner/Data Technician
Billy Rickles - Code Enforcement Officer

Finance

Andrea Roper - Director of Finance
Sandy Jones - Financial Manager
Kim Eckard - Payroll Technician
Ashley Adkins - Accounting Technician

Information Technology/GIS

Scott Miller - Director of IT/GIS
Daniel Ezell - GIS Analyst
Tom Bell - GIS Analyst
Todd Stroupe - GIS Technician
Trey Schweitzer - GIS Technician

Regional Housing Authority

Stephanie Hanvey - Director of Regional Housing Authority
Vicky Abernethy - Housing Program Administrator
Kim Duncan - Family Self-Sufficiency Coordinator
Kala Guido - Housing Program Specialist
Elizabeth Moncrief - Housing Program Specialist
Ashley Dale - Housing Program Specialist
Joann Parlier - Housing Compliance Specialist
By Khang - Housing Inspector

Workforce Development Board

Wendy Johnson - Director of Workforce Development
April Lail - Financial Manager
Donna Gilbert - Program Administrator
Elizabeth Hilliard - Program Coordinator
Leslie Farris - Strategic Initiatives Coordinator
Matthew Xiong - Business Services Consultant

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50TH

Western Piedmont
Council of Governments

Creative Regional Solutions Since 1968

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