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Western Piedmont Council of Governments

Creative Regional Solutions Since 1968

February 2017



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Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Community Survey Now Live!

The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) process is a locally-based, regionally-driven economic development planning process. Economic development planning as implemented through the CEDS can successfully serve as a means to engage community leaders, leverage the involvement of the private sector and establish a strategic blueprint for regional collaboration. The CEDS can provide a capacity-building foundation by which the public sector, working in conjunction with other economic actors, can enhance the environment for regional economic prosperity.

Your input in this process is important. Your responses inform our CEDS Committee of the positives and negatives both real and perceived for the Western Piedmont region. Furthermore, your responses provide valuable information that helps to guide the CEDS process and helps the Committee formulate measurable goals and objectives to make our community more economically competitive. If you are a resident or work in this community, you have a stake in its future success.

We appreciate your involvement and look forward to your feedback during this survey process. The survey will be available until 5:00 PM Friday, March 10, 2017.

Please take an opportunity to not only take the survey, but share the link on your social media pages, newsletters or website. Help us share this with everyone who lives, works or plays in Alexander, Burke, Caldwell and Catawba Counties.

Take the CEDS Survey - [English](#) | [Espanol](#)

Regional Housing Authority

Success Story: Family Self-Sufficiency

FSS is a program that assists Housing Choice Voucher Program Families in meeting goals to improve their quality of life by reducing their dependency on public assistance. The Regional Housing Authority (RHA) offers families the opportunity to achieve economic independence through community resources with the help of an FSS coordinator. FSS coordinators provide the head of household or other adult members with resources on how to obtain an education, job training and counseling. Participants identify their obstacles and then set goals to overcome those barriers. Families potentially can save thousands of dollars in an FSS deposit account that become available upon completion of the program. Currently, the RHA has 48 Housing Choice Voucher families enrolled in the FSS program.

Ms. Cook has been an FSS participant since June of 2012. She is diligently working toward her expected graduation in June, with more than \$20,000 in her escrow savings account. Shortly after committing to FSS, Ms. Cook obtained full-time employment. As her income increased, the RHA began depositing funds into her escrow savings account. Recently, a promotion at work increased her earnings, increasing her escrow savings deposit once again.

With the help of community resources and the FSS program coordinator, Ms. Cook has worked to repair her credit. To meet one of her program goals, Ms. Cook was also able to receive a one-time withdrawal of funds from her escrow savings account. The funds were used to pay for an expungement of her criminal record. Any withdrawal of funds before graduation is at the discretion of the RHA Director and decided on a case-by-case basis.

Ms. Cook has done an excellent job overcoming her obstacles to achieve her goals toward self-sufficiency. We look forward to her graduation in June 2017!

If you would like to know more about this federally funded, asset-building program, please contact FSS Coordinator Autumn Hight at 828.485.4229 or autumn.hight@wpcog.org.

Article by Kala Guido

Workforce Development

Recruitment Events Increase

Good news! We are still seeing a rise in recruitment events being held in our NCWorks Career Centers. Since July 2016 we have provided 114 Job Fair and/or Recruitment event services to employers throughout the Western Piedmont Region. In the [February 2017 Labor Market Overview](#) 8 projects were announced which will result in the creation of 338 new jobs.

On-going recruitment events and labor market updates can be found at www.westernpiedmontworks.org. Follow our hashtag [#wegotjobs](#)

I would also like to recognize our workforce partners at Lenoir Rhyne University, and help share information about their online job board. Employers can post jobs and match internships or employment opportunities with LRU job seekers. Visit them at www.collegecentralnetwork.com/lr/

We hope you will share the Western Piedmont Workforce Development news and events with your social media contacts and colleagues.

Article by Wendy Johnson



Medicare is a federal health insurance program. It covers most people age 65 and older, some people younger than 65 with disabilities, and people with end-stage renal disease often referred to as ESRD.

It is important for everyone becoming eligible for Medicare to get accurate information about coverage and delivery options including supplemental health insurance, Medicare health plans and prescription drug coverage. Attention to these issues will help you avoid serious and costly problems later.

Medicare is divided into four parts:

- **Part A:** Hospital Insurance: Part A covers most hospital care, some limited skilled nursing home care, some home health care and hospice care.
- **Part B:** Medical Insurance: Part B covers medically necessary services or supplies that are needed to diagnose or treat your medical condition that meet accepted standards of medical practice, such as doctors' services, outpatient care, some home healthcare, ambulance services and some durable medical equipment (DME).
- **Part C:** Medicare Health Plans: Plans are offered by a private company that contracts with Medicare to provide Part A and Part B benefits to people who enroll in the plan. Medicare health plans include all Medicare Advantage Plans (see *Note below), Medicare Cost Plans and Demonstration/Pilot Programs, and Programs of All-inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE) organizations. PACE plans can be offered by public or private entities and provide Part D and other benefits in addition to Part A and Part B. (combines A, B and D into an HMO or a PPO with a private insurer).
- **Part D:** Medicare Prescription Drug Coverage: Each Medicare Prescription Drug Plan has its own list of covered drugs (called a formulary). Many Medicare drug plans place drugs into different "tiers" on their formulary. Drugs in each tier have a different cost. A Medicare drug plan can make some changes to its formulary during the year within guidelines set by Medicare. This plan should be reviewed each year to insure it meets the individual's prescription drug needs. (These are stand-Alone Plans with a private insurer).
- **Medigap:** Also called "Supplemental Insurance" with a private insurer: When you buy a Medigap policy, you must have Medicare Part A and Part B. You pay the monthly Medicare Part B premium. In addition, you will pay a premium to the Medigap insurance company. A Medigap policy is health insurance sold by private insurance companies to fill in the "gaps" in Original Medicare Plan coverage. Medigap policies help pay some of the healthcare cost that the Original Medicare Plan does not cover.

*Note: If you go to a Medicare Advantage plan and later try to return to traditional Medicare

and switch from a Medigap policy to a commercial company, the commercial company may reject you or charge a fee based on pre-existing conditions and age.

If you or your spouse have paid into the Social Security system for 10 or more years, you are eligible for premium-free Medicare Part A (Hospital Insurance) at age 65. If you have paid in fewer than 10 years, you can buy Medicare Part A coverage. Everyone pays a premium for Medicare Part B (Medical Insurance).

If you are already receiving Social Security benefits, Railroad Retirement benefits, or Federal Retiree benefits, your enrollment in Medicare is automatic. Your Medicare card should arrive in the mail shortly before your 65th birthday. Verify that you are entitled to both Medicare Parts A and B.

If you are not eligible for Automatic Enrollment, contact the Social Security Administration at 1-800-772-1213, or enroll online at www.socialsecurity.gov, or visit the nearest office located on US Hwy. 321 in Hickory to enroll in Medicare Part A and Medicare Part B. You have a seven-month window in which to enroll in Medicare without incurring a penalty. (Three months before 65th birthday, your birthday month and three months after the 65th birthday) If you do not enroll in Parts A and B during your seven-month window of eligibility, you cannot enroll until the General Enrollment Period, which is January 1 through March 31 each year and your Medicare eligibility will not begin until the following July 1. Your monthly Medicare Part B Premiums will increase to include a permanent 10% penalty for each year of delayed enrollment.

"New to Medicare seminars" are held quarterly at the Senior Centers located in each county in our region to give beneficiaries the most up to date information.

The **Medicare Savings Program (MSP)** helps qualified Medicare beneficiaries pay for their Medicare Part A and Part B health care costs, such as premiums, deductibles, and coinsurance. There are different levels of assistance through Medicare Savings Programs. Even if you don't qualify for full assistance (Full Medicaid), you might be eligible for coverage of some or your medical expenses. There are income and asset limits that determine eligibility. Contact your local Department of Social Services (DSS) office to apply.

The **Extra Help Program** or the **Low-Income Subsidy Program (LIS)** help qualified Medicare beneficiaries to pay for their Medicare prescription drug program costs, such as premiums, deductibles and coinsurance. Eligibility guidelines for LIS, which are based on income and asset limits, change from year to year. Applications are processed and the Social Security Administration (SSA) determines eligibility. SSA will notify you if you qualify for assistance and, if you do, at what level.

If you have questions or need additional information, contact the Seniors' Health Insurance Program (SHIP) at 1-855-408-1212 to speak with a specialist, visit the website at www.ncshiip.com, call or visit the Senior Center in your county to speak with a SHIP counselor, or contact **Anita Roberts**, WPCOG Aging Specialist at 828-485-4265.

Article by Anita Roberts

Community & Economic Development

Success Story: Urgent Repair Project

A Caldwell County resident contacted Community Development Administrator, Lisa Helton with a request for assistance. The client's home was in need of repairs, specifically the flooring in a bedroom in which her husband who is bedridden stayed. The client had been trying for months to find an individual or organization that could help her. Their only income was her husband's Disability payment, which is \$635 a month. Due to the costs, they could not afford to fix the floor without help. The client expressed her worry about the floor in the bedroom where her husband spends the majority of his time because the floor was weak and had holes in some areas. She was afraid her husband's hospital bed might fall through the floor. After hearing the initial report, Lisa inspected the home and established the need for urgency. The inspection revealed the bedroom floor and the floor in the living room was in desperate need of repair.

Because of the Urgent Repair Program (URP), the Western Piedmont Council of Governments was able to replace the damaged floor and create a safe living environment for this family.

After repairs were complete, the client and her husband were thankful for the assistance. They also told us, "We did not know if we would have been able to stay in our house without the repairs." Their story shows how the URP helps people remain in their homes and prevents a home from being condemned or temporarily unlivable. The client's feelings on the project, "There's no place like home. We are so thankful for you helping us to stay here."



Before



After

[Article by Lisa Helton](#)

Community & Regional Planning

Unifour Septic Tank Repair Project

The Unifour Septic Tank Repair Project has received new funding for septic tank repair or replacement for the 2017-2018 year. We will be accepting applications in the coming months for septic tank repairs for those homeowners who meet the income qualifications for the project.

In the past, the Western Piedmont Council of Governments (WPCOG) has administered a no-interest, revolving loan program for qualifying homeowners for repairing failing septic systems. This program was a partnership involving the WPCOG, Alexander, Burke, Caldwell and Catawba Counties.

In 2013, the WPCOG was awarded a \$433,354.06 grant from the North Carolina Clean Water Management Trust Fund (NC CWMTF) 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 50 septic tanks. In the end, the project exceeded expectations, and 63 septic systems were replaced or repaired.



The new grant, which begins immediately, is a US Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA) 319 grant for \$220,000. We hope to repair at least 30 septic tanks with this funding in the coming year. The participating counties are providing an in-kind match for the program. This grant remains a no-interest, revolving loan program.

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

Qualifications for the program include being a homeowner, not exceeding 300% of Federal Poverty Guidelines and having visible or physical runoff pollution from the septic tank site. Preference is given to those, in some cases, that are more of an immediate threat to water quality. If you have any questions about the program, please contact [John E. Wear](#) at (828) 485-4283.

[Article by Johnny Wear](#)

IT/GIS Services

Staff Profile: Tom Bell, GISP, GIS Analyst

Tom Bell is a GIS Analyst in IT/GIS at WPCOG, specializing in creating GIS for local governments.

Raised in Morganton, Tom graduated from Freedom High School in 1987. He spent four years in the US Coast Guard, performing navigation and law enforcement duties in Kodiak, Alaska, attaining the rank of Gunner's Mate 2nd Class. After the military, Tom earned an AA from WPCOG and attended UNC-Chapel Hill, finishing with a B.A. in Classics. With the aim of serving older adults, Tom attended Baylor University, earning an MS in Gerontology.

In 1998, Tom was hired at WPCOG as an Aging Specialist/Long-Term Care Ombudsman. In this position, he worked with Nicole Thomas at WPCOG to coordinate a statewide survey of dental care for institutionalized adults with special needs. Together they testified to the NC General Assembly about the survey results.

Building upon his navigation experience, Tom coordinated with Scott Miller (WPCOG IT/GIS Director) to complete a GIS program at UNC-Charlotte. In March 2004, Tom changed positions to GIS Technician. In 2004, he worked with the City of Lenoir to map utilities and update the City's GIS. From 2005-09, Tom and Stephen Fox worked for the City of Morganton on GPS collection of all the City's water, wastewater, stormwater and electric assets. In 2007, Tom was promoted to GIS Analyst, and in 2009 attained GIS Professional certification (GISP).

Tom worked with Data Analyst Taylor Dellinger at WPCOG on a series of Western Piedmont Industry Growth Analysis reports, as well as assessments for Catawba County Early Head Start. In 2010, Tom led a study of youth gang activity in the 25th NC Judicial District. For this, he interviewed over 200 local law enforcement officials, teachers, clergy and gang members, and coordinated a survey of gangs for 8th and 11th-grade students in the region.

Since 2011, Tom has teamed with local governments to map utilities and create tools allowing staff to view systems on mobile devices. He has also authored mobile apps for Greenway Transportation bus services.



In 2015-2016, Tom worked with WPCOG staff to collect the water, wastewater, stormwater and electrical infrastructure of the Town of Maiden. He then created a mobile GIS that displays the utilities and allows Town staff to update data themselves.

Tom has served as Vice-President and Conference Chair for the NC ArcGIS Users Group. Since 2008, he has coordinated the Western NC GIS Symposium, an annual gathering of around 100 local government workers who meet to stay up-to-date in GIS.

Currently, Tom and his coworkers are conducting utility GIS services for Taylorsville and Rutherford College. He continues to seek opportunities to serve local governments with GIS. If you would like to contact Tom, his email is tom.bell@wpcog.org. Tom currently lives in Dudley Shoals with his wife Gina, son Rudy and six happy hens.

Article by Scott Miller

Announcements

NC School of Science and Mathematics: Core Planning Team convenes for Western Campus

The turning of the calendar to 2017 represented a milestone for the planning process for the Morganton campus of the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics. Chancellor Todd Roberts recently charged a core planning team of 22 stakeholders to engage in advance planning efforts for the new western campus. The group includes representatives of the NCSSM community, ranging from alumni to faculty to trustees, the city of Morganton, K-16 institutions in Burke County, and the UNC System. The efforts of the core planning team will shape the educational program vision and design through concentrated listening sessions, research, and targeted engagement of constituents and peer institutions.

"Our Board of Trustees are extremely excited with the progress that has been made since the passage of the Connect NC bonds," says Tom Williams, chair of the NCSSM Board of Trustees and member of the planning team. "The detailed work of the core planning team is allowing us to engage a broader and deeper group of stakeholders in shaping the experience our students, faculty, and families will have with the addition of the NCSSM Morganton campus. We are so grateful for the current and new members of the NCSSM community for becoming so actively engaged and supportive of this important work."

The next steps in the advanced planning process will occur within six designated strands: academic program vision; technology infrastructure/physical structure; student life; business relations; community and government relations; and K-16 relations. The work within these strands will be supported by research and stakeholder engagement as facilitated by the Friday Institute, selected in December to lead planning efforts. Additionally, Duda | Paine Architects are continuing to investigate site options in Morganton for campus location. NCSSM will announce opportunities for constituents to participate in focus groups and surveys throughout the advance planning period.

Efforts are also ongoing to engage the Unifour region of North Carolina, comprising Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, and Catawba counties. Sally Sandy, city manager for Morganton and member of the core planning team, is pleased with how planning has gone so far, and excited for the new campus. "The planning meeting brought a true sense of reality to the tremendous positive impact this school will have on Morganton, Burke County, and indeed all of Western North Carolina," she says. "To say that our community is excited is actually an understatement; we are thrilled."

The core planning team will continue to meet throughout the next nine months with an ultimate goal of informing the final educational program vision and site selection to be presented to the NCSSM Board of Trustees in September 2017.

by Kevin Baxter, Director of Western Campus Planning and Project Management

WPCOG Calendar of Events

February	March	April
01 (Wed)- CEDS Meeting (3 PM)	21 (Tue)- Western Piedmont Air Quality Committee (10 AM)	05 - CEDS Meeting (3 PM)
13 (Mon)- Regional Aging Advisory Committee (12 PM)	22 (Wed)- MPO TCC (2 PM) & TAC (3:30 PM)	13 - Mayors/Chairmen/ Managers Meeting (6 PM)
22 (Wed)- MPO TCC (2 PM) & TAC (3:30 PM)	28 (Tue)- Policy Board (6 PM)	19 - Water Resources (12 PM)

23 (Thu)- Workforce Board
(8:30 AM)

28 (Tue)- Executive Committee
Meeting (6 PM)

19 - MPO TCC (2 PM)
& TAC (3:30 PM)

20 - Regional Managers
Meeting (12 PM)

24 - Regional Aging Provider
Meeting (2 PM)

25 - Executive Committee
Meeting (6 PM)

27 - Annual Meeting (6:30
PM)

27 - Workforce Board (8:30
AM)

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