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November 2020

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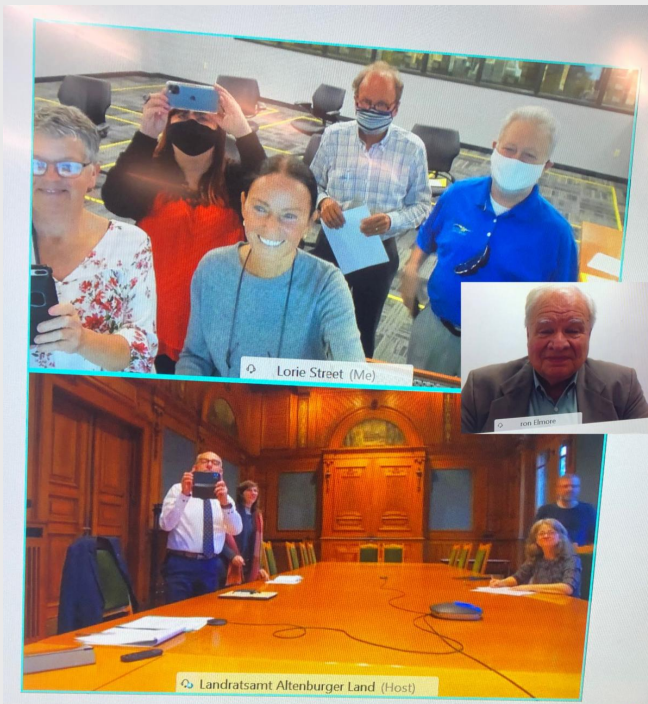
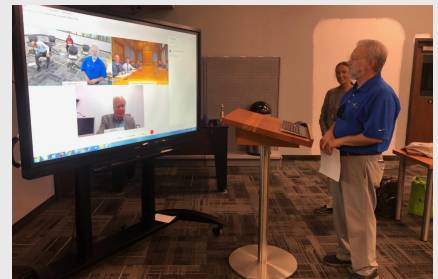
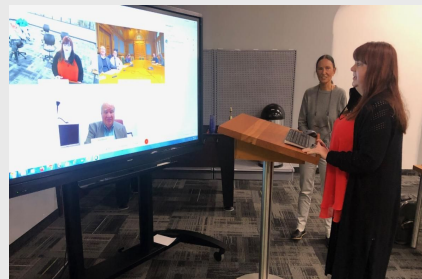
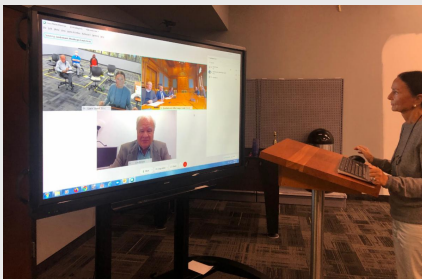
Workforce Development Board

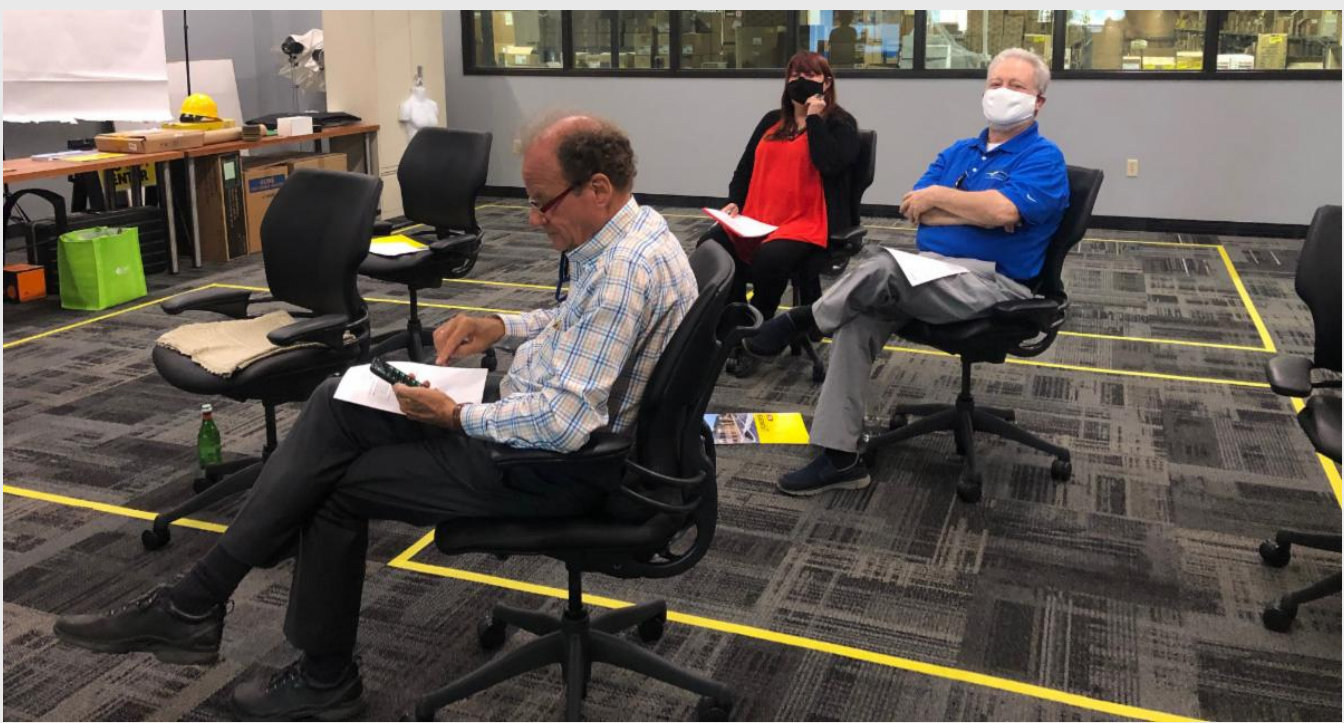
- Job Getting Workshops

Western Piedmont Sister Cities Update

Western Piedmont Sister Cities Association (WPCSA) recently hosted a virtual meeting with their sister region Altenburger Land, Germany. Their in-person visit was previously scheduled to coincide with Hickory's Oktoberfest celebrations this year but had to be postponed due to COVID-19. "We were really looking forward to hosting our friends and colleagues from Germany and showing them everything our region has to offer", said Tracey Trimble, Executive Vice President & General Manager at Hickory Furniture Mart and WPCSA volunteer. "Unfortunately, our plans had to change this year like so many other things and we wanted to meet virtually on the same day they were scheduled to arrive to continue planning their October 2021 visit together."

Ron Elmore with the NC Small Business & Technology Development Center based in Hickory, NC also joined the group remotely to discuss a variety of topics of interest to the group, including counseling for startup businesses and entrepreneurs, business assistance through COVID and the Small Business Disaster Assistance funding for area businesses. The two groups are discussing a future economic development business exchange between the two regions in addition to future cultural, administrative, sport, educational and student exchanges. WPCSA is also working on a new website (www.westernpiedmontsistercities.org -under construction now) and a new logo to represent the partnership and to share all upcoming meetings and exchanges with the public. A follow-up virtual meeting is scheduled with Altenburger Land in December to further discuss these future exchanges and partner initiatives. If you would like to participate in this upcoming meeting or any future WPCSA monthly meetings, please contact WPCSA volunteers Lorie Street at lstreet@westernpiedmontsistercities.org or Tracey Trimble at ttrimble@westernpiedmontsistercities.org.





WPCSA would like to express their thanks to Altenburger Land who arranged and hosted the virtual meeting for the group via WebEx; to Christoph Klingspor (owner of Klingspor Abrasives) for hosting the US meeting at the Klingspor Abrasives Training Center; to Rosi Klingspor (long-time WPCSA volunteer) for being the moderator and interpreter for the meeting; and a special thanks to Ron Elmore for sharing his small business knowledge and resources with the group. Other Western Piedmont meeting participants included Danny Seaver (City of Hickory); Lorie Street (The Hub Coworking Community & Klingspor Abrasives), and Tracey Trimble (Hickory Furniture Mart). Altenburger Land meeting participants included Uwe Melzer (County Commissioner of Altenburger Land), Angela Kiesewetter-Lorenz (Uwe Melzer's Executive Assistant), Micheal Apel (Director of Economy and Culture), Karsten Siegel (Administration) and Ms. Krischke (Administration).

Regional Housing Authority Program Highlight - HOMEOWNERSHIP

Did you know the Regional Housing Authority offers Homeownership opportunities to active Housing Choice Voucher (Section 8) participants? Housing Choice Voucher participants interested in Homeownership could use their rent subsidy toward their mortgage each month.

Reasons to consider Homeownership through the Housing Choice Voucher program:

- **Investment opportunity:** Making monthly mortgage payments also builds home equity. As you pay down your loan, your debt decreases, which in turn increases the portion of the home that you own free and clear - that is, your equity. When or if you sell your home, your equity becomes cash.
- **Interest rates are historically low:** buying a home with the low-interest rates currently available could be an excellent investment for your family. What may seem like a slight difference in your mortgage rate can make a huge difference in your monthly payment.
- **Down payments can be as little as zero dollars:** The RHA can refer you to down-payment and closing cost assistance programs. You can trust our partners!
- **Tax deduction:** Being a homeowner does not have to be a long-term aspiration. Enjoy short-term savings each year during tax season. Take advantage of an annual tax write-off and mortgage interest payment deductions, along with other deductions based on your situation. These deductions can amount to significant savings, and they are not available to renters.

Are you a Housing Choice Voucher participant? With all the benefits of owning a home, you owe it to yourself to determine whether owning or renting is best for you and your family. Start with simple steps today by contacting Elizabeth Moncrief to find out more. If you are ready, you can also begin working on your credit and housing

Thinking About Homeownership?

Homebuying 101 | What You Need to Know!

Housing Choice Voucher Homeownership Program:

Any newly admitted or existing Housing Choice Voucher (Section 8) participant may utilize the subsidy toward their mortgage.

- The HCV Homeownership Program will pay a portion of your mortgage every month.
- You must be able to qualify for a home mortgage through a bank.
- You will need savings. A 1-3% down-payment is required.
- You must be working at least 30 hours per week and continuously employed for the past year. This does not apply if you are elderly or disabled and receive Social Security Income.
- The home must meet Housing Quality Standards.
- The home cannot be a manufactured or mobile home.
- Generally, assistance is limited to 15 years. This does not apply to elderly and/or disabled participants.
- Credit counseling and first-time home buyer counseling is free and available locally.



For more information or questions,
contact Elizabeth Moncrief.
elizabeth.moncrief@wpcog.org
828-485-4244

Transportation

Re-Route 2021 Advances in Scenario Development

WPCOG is assisting Greenway Public Transportation on a community-led effort to re-design their fixed-route bus system in Hickory, Conover, and Newton. Branded "Catawba Re-Route 2021," the year-long project follows a community-led process to recommend the first potential bus system overhaul in over ten years. Recently, over 100 surveys were completed providing direction on where area residents would like to take transit.

From August through October 2020, survey methods included online forms, paper copies at major bus stops, and in-person questions aboard buses. Comments received included requested new destinations across Hickory, Conover, Newton, Long View, Hildebran, Granite Falls, Claremont, Maiden, Catawba, and Sherrills Ford area. WPCOG staff will now assist Greenway in developing both cost-neutral and cost-enhanced scenarios that address these comments received. For example, Conover and Newton's most popular comments were for new service to shopping and destinations along Highways 70 and 321 Business. To address this popular request, scenarios may look at changing Routes 3 and 4 from traveling Interstate 40 and Business 16 between the Fairgrove area and Newton to instead travel and serve Highway 70 and 321 Business.

Any cost-neutral scenario will directly involve the Cities of Hickory, Conover, and Newton, plus Catawba County. Each of these local governments provides financial support for the fixed-route bus system. However, WPCOG and Greenway's staff have reached out to surrounding communities to consider cost-enhanced scenarios by potentially adding new funding partners. Ultimately, a draft plan will go out for public comment this winter. Special focus will be given to existing riders and community organizations. The end goal remains a newly enhanced system to be implemented in the summer of 2021. To learn more and stay involved, please visit the study online at www.mygreenway.org/catawba-re-route-2021.

Article by Brian Horton

Workforce Development Board

Job Getting Workshops

The Western Piedmont regional NCWorks Career Centers opened to the public on 10/05/2020. However, in the spirit of offering safe job-getting opportunities due to ongoing pandemic challenges, NCWorks is offering many of its workshops virtually. Currently, we have three very important workshops scheduled for November.

- **RESUMES 101** (Learn tips to create a resume that will get you the interview!) Tuesday, November 10th @ 2 pm
- **EXPUNGEMENT** Instructor: Vanessa James, Regional Reentry Specialist, NC Dept. of Commerce: (Do you or someone you know qualify? Learn what you need to know about having charges removed from criminal records.) Tuesday, November 17th @ 2 pm
- **INTERVIEWING** (Learn tips on how to ACE a job interview! Tuesday, November 24th @ 2 pm

To learn more and to keep up with future workshops and hiring events, go to www.westernpiedmontworks.org and follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), and [Tik Tok](#).

Article by Wendy Johnson

Area Agency on Aging

November is National Family Caregivers Month!

November is National Family Caregivers Month, a time to recognize and honor family caregivers across North Carolina and the United States, giving care for a parent, spouse, relative, or friend every day. This month offers an opportunity to raise awareness of caregiving issues and increase support for caregivers. Adults of all ages are family caregivers



across our nation.

The 2020 theme for National Caregivers Month, Caregiving in Crisis, highlights the new realities family caregivers and their loved ones face during these uncertain times. Family caregivers provide meals, medication management, and transportation, manage health emergencies, juggle priorities, and live with isolation - and all that was before COVID. The pandemic brings even more challenges as family caregivers handle #CaregivingInCrisis.



As the world continues struggling with the virus, caregivers deal with the changes brought on by the pandemic, and they must still meet the needs of their loved ones every day. Appointments need to be kept, and medications must be picked up. Even before COVID-19, fulfilling this role was challenging. Now, it can feel even more overwhelming for caregivers.

Caregiving does have many benefits, and providing care for a loved one can be rewarding. However, caregivers may feel their schedule has no room for self-care, especially now. Maintaining a caregiver's health is crucial to help them successfully care for their loved ones. Many organizations connect caregivers with resources and tools to better support themselves and their loved ones.

Caregivers can reach out to WPCOG Area Agency on Aging Family Caregiver Support Program for resources to assist their caregiving and the following services:

- Information about available services and resources to help families in their caregiver roles.
- Assistance to families gaining access to services.
- Caregiver support to help families cope with the emotional and physical stress associated with caregiving.
- Respite care to enable caregivers to be temporarily relieved from their caregiving responsibilities.
- Limited supplemental services to complement the care provided by caregivers.

During November, consider providing a break for someone you know who cares for a loved one. Offer to spend time with them or offer to help in some way and make a difference for them. Take time to recognize their commitment and dedication to a loved one and show your support during November and throughout the year.

The State of North Carolina encourages people to acknowledge and support family, friends, and neighbors who help those who are aging or have disabilities; support of family caregivers is not only the right thing to do, but an essential investment in a better future for North Carolina's older adults and individuals with disabilities. (North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper, Governor's Proclamation-National Family Caregiver Month, 2020)

For additional information, visit WPCOG Area Agency on Aging website: www.wpcogaaa.org or call The Family Caregiver Support Program at (828) 485-4256.



Article by Mary Mitchell

Community & Economic Development 2020 Urgent Repair Program (URP)

The Western Piedmont Council of Governments (WPCOG) is seeking very-low income applicants (below 30% of Median Income) for the 2020 Urgent Repair Program (URP) in Alexander, Burke and Caldwell counties.

The WPCOG has been awarded \$200,000 by the North Carolina Housing Finance Agency ("NCHFA") under the 2020 cycle of the Urgent Repair Program. This program will provide urgent repair funds to 27 OWNER- OCCUPIED homes scattered throughout all towns, cities, and municipalities in Alexander, Burke, and Caldwell counties in the 2020/2021 fiscal year.

This program provides funds to assist 14 very-low and 13 low-income households with special needs in addressing housing conditions that pose imminent threats to their life and/or safety or provide accessibility modifications and other repairs necessary to prevent displacement. Eligible participants include very-low and low-income homeowners with special needs such as frail, elderly persons with disabilities, military veterans, single-parent households with one or more dependent children under 18, and large families of five or more immediate household members.

To be eligible for assistance under URP20, applicants must reside within the limits of Alexander, Burke, and Caldwell counties and own and occupy the home in need of repair. Applicants must have a household income that does not exceed 30% of each County's median income for the household size (see income limits below). Also, applicants must have a household member who has a special need (i.e., elderly - at least 62 years old, military veteran, handicapped or disabled, a single parent with at least one dependent child living at home, a large family with more than five household members or a household with a child below the age of six with an elevated blood lead level). Furthermore, they must have urgent repair needs such as roof replacement, heating/air replacement, handicap accessibility needs, floor repairs, or deck repairs.

URP20 Income Limits

Number in Household	30% of Median (very-low income)	50% of Median (low income)
1	\$14,700	\$24,500
2	\$16,800	\$28,800
3	\$18,900	\$31,500
4	\$21,000	\$35,000
5	\$22,700	\$37,800
6	\$24,350	\$40,600
7	\$26,050	\$43,400
8	\$27,700	\$46,200

**Income limits are subject to change based on annually published HUD and NCHFA Limits and will be updated as needed*

At this time, there is a waiting list for homeowners who fall between the 30% to 50% median income, but there is not a waiting list for homeowners who fall below 30% of the median income.

The form of assistance under URP20 provided by the WPCOG to homeowners whose homes are selected for repair/modification is in the form of a **loan**. Homeowners will receive an **unsecured deferred, interest-free loan**, forgiven at a rate of \$2,000 per year, until the principal balance is reduced to zero. The amount of the loan will depend on the scope of work necessary to address the identified imminent threats to life and/or safety, and will be determined by the WPCOG's Rehabilitation Specialist. There is no minimum to the amount of the loan; however, the maximum lifetime limit, according to the guidelines of URP19, is \$9,000.

For more information about the Urgent Repair Program in Burke and Caldwell counties, contact Lisa Helton at 828-485-4281. For the Urgent Repair Program in Alexander County, contact Laurie Powell at 828-485-4249.

Article by Paul Teague

Community & Regional Planning

Catawba River Trail Feasibility Study Completed

WPCOG released the most updated map of the Catawba River Trail (formerly known as the Burke River Trail) feasibility study. This study displays the most promising trail alignments in eastern Burke County, connecting the end of the Morganton Greenway to the proposed pedestrian infrastructure in Hickory. As the feasibility study came to a close, Friends of the Valdese Rec hosted a public input meeting on October 14. An impressive, socially distanced turn-out resulted in valuable input regarding easement information and alternative trail alignments.



The map link below features information received throughout the feasibility study process and public input meeting. The trail will stay south of the river and utilize existing routes, utility easements, and other pedestrian paths to go through (or connect to) Connelly Springs, Drexel, Hildebran, Long View, Rhodhiss, and Valdese in eastern Burke County. A conceptual map of the Catawba River Trail system can be accessed with this link. Important takeaways for post-feasibility study:

- It is up to each municipality to continue to work on their segment and hold trail easements.
- Beth Heile, Friends of the Valdese Rec President, is currently coordinating efforts among stakeholders.
- WPCOG will update the map as needed
- WPCOG is willing to help with grant assistance as long as administrative time can be programmed into the grant.

If you would like more information, please visit <https://friendsofthevaldeserec.org/catawba-river-trail>. If you know of other potential trail alignments and/or feasible properties, please contact Beth Heile at bzheile@gmail.com.

Article by Averi Ritchie

WPCOG CALENDAR

All scheduled meetings are currently being conducted electronically. For a listing of upcoming meetings and information on how to participate or

attend, please visit www.wpcog.org/electronic-public-meetings.

Stay Connected



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www.wpcog.org