Minutes
Western Piedmont Council of Governments
Bimonthly Policy Board Meeting
Tuesday, July 22, 2025
Town of Maiden at Klutz Memorial Library

Members Present	Local Government/Agency
Joseph L. Gibbons, Chair	Lenoir
Randy Burns, Vice Chair	Burke County
George Holleman, Treasurer	Taylorsville
Larry Chapman, Secretary	Hudson
Jill Patton, Past Chair	Hickory
Larry Yoder, At-Large	Alexander County
Cole Setzer, At-Large	Catawba County
Marla Thompson, At-Large	Long View
Ronnie Setzer	Cajah's Mountain
Bob Floyd	Cedar Rock
Johnny Berry	Connelly Springs
Joie Fulbright	Conover
Brenda Powell, Alternate	Conover
Dennis Anthony	Drexel
Barbara Pennell	Gamewell
Dr. Caryl Burns	Granite Falls
Charlotte Williams, Alternate	Hickory
Ralph Prestwood, Alternate	Lenoir
Phyllis Pennington, Alternate	Long View
Holly Crafton-Lay	Maiden
Ronnie Williams, Alternate	Maiden
Chris Jernigan	Morganton
Ronnie Thompson, Alternate	Morganton
Allen Spencer	Rhodhiss
Carroll Hoyle	Rutherford College
Bobby Mosteller	Sawmills
Kimberly S. Brown Alternate	Taylorsville
Charlie Watts	Valdese
Erisha Lipford	Appointed
Helen Chestnut	Appointed
Malla Vue	Appointed
Mark Transou	Appointed
Tonia Stephenson	Appointed

Members Absent	
Mike LaBrose, At-Large	Caldwell County
Josh Lail, Alternate	Alexander County
Kelvin Gregory	Brookford
Jeff Brittain, Alternate	Burke County

Lloyd Robbins, Alternate	Cajah's Mountain
Donald Robinson	Catawba
Carroll Yount, Alternate	Catawba
Barbara Beatty, Alternate	Catawba County
Dale Sherrill	Claremont
Ramona Duncan, Alternate	Connelly Springs
Ron Lackey, Alternate	Gamewell
Sheila Perkins	Glen Alpine
Tracy Townsend, Alternate	Granite Falls
Ben Honeycutt	Hildebran
Mike Smith, Alternate	Hildebran
Jim Engelman, Alternate	Hudson
Jerry Hodge	Newton
Beverly Danner, Alternate	Newton
Kendra Edwards, Alternate	Rhodhiss
Yates Jensen, Alternate	Rutherford College
Joe Wesson, Alternate	Sawmills
Rexanna Lowman, Alternate	Valdese
Amparo R. Alfaro	Appointed
Tommy Luckadoo	Appointed

Guests/Others Present

Randy Feierabend	Cajah's Mountain
Tamara Stamey	Connelly Springs
Bonnie Caudle	Gamewell
Daniel Cobb	Granite Falls
Scott Hildebran	Lenoir
Max Bumgarner, Jr.	Maiden
Rick Justice	Rhodhiss
Keith Warren	Sawmills
Todd Herms	Valdese

WPCOG Staff Present

Anthony Starr, Executive Director
Alison Alexander, Assistant Executive Director
Andrea Roper, Director of Finance
Ben Willis, Director of Community and Economic Development
Alison Adams, Director of Community and Regional Planning
Charity Patterson Hamber, Director of Workforce Development
Jason Toney, Communications Manager
Tasmin Mack, HR Manager
Taylor Dellinger, Senior Data Analyst
Elizabeth Hilliard, Executive Administrative Assistant

Call to Order/Welcome

A regular meeting of the WPCOG Policy Board was called to order at 6:42 pm by Chair Patton. Chair Patton thanked the Town of Maiden for hosting. Town of Maiden Mayor, Max Bumgarner, Jr., welcomed the Policy Board to Maiden.

Introductions
Introductions were made by everyone in attendance.

Minutes of Previous Meeting
Minutes of the previous meeting were considered. Mr. Joie Fulbright made a motion to approve the minutes from the May 27, 2025 meeting and Ms. Jill Patton offered a second. The motion passed unanimously.

Unfinished Business/Reports
There was no unfinished business.

New Business
Workforce Board Appointment
Ms. Charity Patterson Hamber, Director of Workforce Development, asked the Policy Board to appoint Hope Hopkins, Director of Business Retention and Expansion for Burke Development, Inc., to meet one of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act board public sector openings, representing Burke County.

Staff requested the Policy Board appoint Hope Hopkins, to the Workforce Development Board membership for a two-year term from July 2025 through July 2027.

Mr. Larry Yoder made a motion that the Policy Board appoint Hope Hopkins, to the Workforce Development Board membership for a two-year term from July 2025 through July 2027 and Mr. Larry Chapman offered a second. The motion passed unanimously.

Charlotte IBT Update
Mr. Anthony Starr, Executive Director, stated in 2024, Charlotte Water filed a notice of its intent to request an increase from 33 million gallons per day (MGD) up to 63 MGD regarding the water it transfers from the Catawba River Basin to the Rocky River Basin, a tributary of the Yadkin/Pee Dee River.

Interbasin transfers (IBTs) are regulated and approved by the state through the Environmental Management Commission within the NC Department of Environmental Quality. At the request of local governments, the WPCOG is coordinating our region's response.

The WPCOG uses a steering committee consisting of staff from counties and certain municipalities (water producers) within the five-county coalition. At the board's direction and with local government support, the WPCOG hired teams for lobbying, legal and engineering, and public relations to represent the interests of our coalition.
The steering committee and team developed a series of proposed changes to the state law regarding IBTs. Through our efforts, legislation was passed placing a moratorium on large IBTs until March of 2027

(this information was included in the agenda packet). The legislation also requires the UNC Collaboratory to study the issue and provide information and recommendations. This represents a win and a good initial step for the state to address the problem of large IBTs.

Staff will provide an update regarding the IBT issue and what is expected in the coming months.

Staff requested the Policy Board review the information and provide feedback.

No action requested. This item was for informational purposes.

Hurricane Helene Recovery and Resiliency Update

Mr. Ben Willis, Director of Community and Economic Development, presented an overview of the Western Piedmont Council of Governments' sustained engagement in Hurricane Helene recovery. He provided the policy board with an update on our ongoing role in the region's rebuilding initiatives and a brief summary of current funding opportunities.

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

Hickory MSA Economic Update

Mr. Taylor Dellinger, Senior Data Analyst, presented the Hickory MSA Economic Update. Topics covered in the presentation included Hickory MSA Unemployment and Labor Force Trends, Hickory MSA Employment by Industry and Recent Employment Trends, Current Hickory MSA Job Market, Hickory MSA Educational Attainment and Income Trends, Hickory MSA Housing Profile, and Hickory MSA Population Growth.

No action requested. This item was for informational purposes.

Alexander, Burke, and Caldwell County Urgent Repair Program 2026 Assistance Policy/Procurement and Disbursement Policy

Mr. Ben Willis, Director of Community and Economic Development, stated Western Piedmont Council of Governments has been awarded $330,000 by the North Carolina Housing Finance Agency (NCHFA) under the 2026 cycle of the Urgent Repair Program ("URP2639"). This program will be used to provide urgent repair funds to twenty-two (22) homes scattered throughout all municipalities and counties in Alexander, Burke and Caldwell in the 2025/2026 and 2026/2027 fiscal years. This program provides funds to assist very-low and low-income households with special needs in addressing housing conditions which pose imminent threats to their life and/or safety or to provide accessibility modifications and other repairs necessary to prevent displacement of very-low and low-income homeowners with special needs such as frail elderly and persons with disabilities and veterans. The project will begin August 1, 2025, and will be closed out by February 15, 2027.

The assistance is in the form of a forgivable loan up to $15,000 per home. The NCHFA requires certain procedures and policies for the grant and these policies require adoption by the Policy Board.

The Assistance Policy explains what the program requirements are and how the program will operate during the funding cycle. The Procurement and Disbursement Policy provides procurement and disbursement guidelines.

Staff requested that the Policy Board review and approve the 2026 Alexander, Burke and Caldwell County URP 2026 Assistance Policy and the Procurement and Disbursement Policy.

Mr. Randy Burns made a motion that the Policy Board approve the Alexander, Burke and Caldwell County URP'26 Assistance Policy, and the Procurement & Disbursement Policy as proposed and Mr. Larry Yoder offered a second. The motion passed unanimously.

1st Amendment of the FY2025-26 Budget

Ms. Andrea Roper, Director of Finance, stated the 1st Amendment of the FY2025-26 budget reflects a total budget of $47,465,631 and an operating budget of $11,350,548 which represents an increase of the total budget from the May 27, 2025 budget adoption of $7,254,788.

The 1st Amendment of the 2025-2026 Budget includes:

- A decrease in General Government to reflect actual contract amounts for FY26.
- Transportation increased to account for anticipated expenses of MPO CRRSAA project in FY26.
- An increase in Environmental due to new North Carolina Forestry Service grants.
- Community Development increased to reflect a new weatherization grant from the NC Department of Environmental Quality (NCDEQ), which supports service delivery in western NC communities impacted by Hurricane Helene.
- Community and Regional Planning decreased due to the reallocation of staff salaries to help with projects within the Community Development department.
- Economic Development decreased due to personnel changes.
- An increase in Regional Public Housing due to the additional administrative costs associated with personnel changes.
- Aging decreased due to the utilization of ARPA funding and PEAS funding in FY25.
- Staff salaries, retirement and group insurance decreased due to personnel changes.
- Contractual decreased to reflect remaining funds from FY25 for the Aging Choosing Home Grant.
- Travel increased mainly due to the new projects within the Community Development and Aging departments.
- Advertising/subscriptions increased to reflect software subscription costs for GIS software and outreach for the Aging department.
- Contingency increased mainly due to a new grant from the Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD) within the Aging department.
- Transfer to Capital Reserve Fund decreased due to the decrease in indirect funds generated by chargeable salaries.
- The Special Revenue Fund for HUD Housing Vouchers increased to reflect an increase in HAP payments, portability payments, emergency housing, and administrative costs.

- The Valdese Public Housing Special Revenue Fund increased to reflect additional administrative and capital project costs.
- The Disaster Recovery Special Revenue Fund was adjusted to reflect additional funding from the NCDEQ Weatherization Grant to support eligible service delivery expenses.
- The Special Revenue Fund for the Burke River Trail Project increased to reflect unspent funds ($3,530) that must be returned to NC Office of State Budget & Management.
- Capital Reserve Fund decreased due to a decrease in transfers from the general fund.
- All other changes reflect normal programmatic needs.

Staff requested the Policy Board review and approve the First Amendment of the 2025-2026 Budget.

Mr. George Holleman made a motion that the Policy Board approve the First Amendment of the 2025-2026 Budget as proposed and Mr. Larry Chapman offered a second. The motion passed unanimously.

Other Business

Executive Director's and Staff Reports

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

Area Agency on Aging (AAA)

- The AAA received preliminary FY26 budget allocations from NC Division of Aging and is moving forward with local service providers to create budget forms to present to regional county commissioners in July for approval. The process has been substantially delayed this year which is attributed to the Division of Aging not sending the necessary information until recent days.
- The AAA received $75,000 grant from BCBS Foundation to provide food security assistance to older adults in the region.

Community and Economic Development (CED)

- WPCOG staff assisted in securing several CDBG awards, including $1.6 million for gap funding for the Drexel Heritage Industrial site. Morganton received a $1 million NC Commerce Helene Small Business award for their Boardwalk Repair and Replacement project. Gamewell also received an award of $87,290 to replace a pump station generator damaged during the storm.
- Blueway's Grant with the NC State Trails Program to connect South Mountain State Park along the Wilderness Gateway Trail following the river system to Jacobs Fork Park in Catawba County.

Finance

- Audit work has begun for WPCOG and all financial services clients.
- Hickory Public Housind Authority audit for 6/30/2025 will start as soon as the 9/30/2024 audit report is completed. This will be presented to the Policy Board at an upcoming meeting.

Regional Housing Authority (RHA)

- On January 22, 2025, the RHA began an administrative role with the Hickory Housing Authority. The WPCOG facilited the move of 556 Section 8 vouchers and files to the WPCOG location along

with three Section 8 staff from the old physical location of the Hickory Housing Authority. The RHA staff continues to work diligently to correct the files and management of the 556 vouchers. The RHA requested that HUD move the Hickory Housing Authority Vouchers to WPCOG and on May 1, 2025, we received HUD's approval letter. The WPCOG legally closed on the Hickory Housing Authority acquisition on June 30, 2025 with an effective date of July 1, 2025. It is anticipated that an additional three to four staff would need to be phased in with the consolidation over the next year.

- The WPCOG is assuming two active lawsuits from the Hickory Housing Authority (HHA). One is regarding property near the former CommScope Headquarters in Hickory that the HHA sought to obtain from an associated non-profit. The other lawsuit is regarding $279,000 owed by Nu-Dimensions to the HHA/WPCOG.

Workforce Development

- WD has hosted several hiring events across the region.
- WD has attended and participated in many community events across the region.
- WD currently has 42 individuals enrolled in the National Dislocated Worker Grant-Helene.

Next Meeting

The next Policy Board meeting is scheduled for September 23, 2025 and will be hosted by the Town of Granite Falls.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:52 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Joseph L. Gibbons
Chair

Larry Chapman
Secretary