**Minutes**
**Western Piedmont Council of Governments**
**Bimonthly Policy Board Meeting**
**Tuesday, November 25, 2025**
**Hickory Metro Convention Center, City of Hickory**

| 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 |
| Marla Thompson, At-Large | Long View |
| Ronnie Setzer | Cajah's Mountain |
| Bob Floyd | Cedar Rock |
| Johnny Berry | Connelly Springs |
| Joie Fulbright | Conover |
| Dennis Anthony | Drexel |
| Barbara Pennell | Gamewell |
| Dr. Caryl Burns | Granite Falls |
| Tracy Townsend, Alternate | Granite Falls |
| Charlotte Williams, Alternate | Hickory |
| Ben Honeycutt | Hildebran |
| Phyllis Pennington, Alternate | Long View |
| Jerry Hodge | Newton |
| Allen Spencer | Rhodhiss |
| Bobby Mosteller | Sawmills |
| Kimberly S. Brown Alternate | Taylorsville |
| Charlie Watts | Valdese |
| Amparo R. Alfaro | Appointed |
| Mark Transou | Appointed |
| Tommy Luckadoo | Appointed |
| Tonia Stephenson | Appointed |

| Members Absent | |
|---|---|
| Mike LaBrose, At-Large | Caldwell County |
| Larry Yoder, At-Large | Alexander County |
| Cole Setzer, At-Large | Catawba County |
| Josh Lail, Alternate | Alexander County |
| Kelvin Gregory | Brookford |
| Jeff Brittain, Alternate | Burke County |
| Lloyd Robbins, Alternate | Cajah's Mountain |
| Robbie Wilkie, Alternate | Caldwell County |
| Donald Robinson | Catawba |
| Carroll Yount, Alternate | Catawba |
| Barbara Beatty, Alternate | Catawba County |
| Dale Sherrill | Claremont |

| | |
|---|---|
| Ramona Duncan, Alternate | Connelly Springs |
| Brenda Powell, Alternate | Conover |
| Ron Lackey, Alternate | Gamewell |
| Sheila Perkins | Glen Alpine |
| Mike Smith, Alternate | Hildebran |
| Jim Engelman, Alternate | Hudson |
| Ralph Prestwood, Alternate | Lenoir |
| Holly Crafton-Lay | Maiden |
| Ronnie Williams, Alternate | Maiden |
| Chris Jernigan | Morganton |
| Ronnie Thompson, Alternate | Morganton |
| Beverly Danner, Alternate | Newton |
| Kendra Edwards, Alternate | Rhodhiss |
| Carroll Hoyle | Rutherford College |
| Yates Jensen, Alternate | Rutherford College |
| Joe Wesson, Alternate | Sawmills |
| Rexanna Lowman, Alternate | Valdese |
| Erisha Lipford | Appointed |
| Helen Chestnut | Appointed |
| Malla Vue | Appointed |

**Guests/Others Present**

| | |
|---|---|
| Randy Feierabend | Cajah's Mountain |
| Tamara Stamey | Connelly Springs |
| Bill Carroll | Drexel |
| Holly Jones | Governor Stein's Office |
| Daniel Cobb | Granite Falls |
| Hank Guess | Hickory |
| Kate Van Sickle | Hickory |
| Scott Hildebran | Lenoir |
| Keith Warren | Sawmills |
| Keith Huffman | Valdese |

**WPCOG Staff Present**

Anthony Starr, Executive Director
Andrea Roper, Director of Finance
Ben Willis, Director of Community and Economic Development
Alison Adams, Director of Community and Regional Planning
Jason Toney, Communications Manager
Tasmin Mack, HR Manager
Elizabeth Hilliard, Executive Administrative Assistant
Duncan Cavanaugh, Senior Data Analyst
Averi Ritchie, Manager of Transportation
Andrew Webb, GIS Specialist

**Call to Order/Welcome**
A regular meeting of the WPCOG Policy Board was called to order at 6:34 pm by Chair Gibbons. Chair Gibbons thanked the City of Hickory for hosting. The Honorable Hank Guess, Mayor for the City of Hickory, welcomed the Policy Board to Hickory.

**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 September 23, 2025 meeting and Ms. Jill Patton offered a second. The motion passed unanimously.

**Unfinished Business/Reports**
There was no unfinished business.

**New Business**
National Association of Development Organizations' Awards
Mr. Anthony Starr, Executive Director, stated the National Association of Development Organizations' (NADO) is a Washington, DC-based association that promotes programs and policies that strengthen local governments, communities, and economies through regional cooperation, program delivery, and comprehensive strategies.

The association's Aliceann Wohbruck Impact Awards program recognizes regional development organizations and partnering organizations for improving the economic and community competitiveness of our nation's regions and local communities. Award-winning projects were recognized during NADO's 2025 Annual Training Conference in Salt Lake City, UT on October 10th through the 17th. Western Piedmont Council of Governments received the Aliceann Wohbruck Impact Award for the Western Piedmont Council of Governments, Creative Catawba Cultural Plan LifeMode Tapestry Analysis, the STEM-based Learning: Tree Canopy Analysis and Tree Planting Plan; and the Western Piedmont Regional Housing Initiative Roadmap at the conference.

**Creative Catawba Cultural Plan LifeMode Tapestry Analysis**
The LifeMode Tapestry Analysis examined the spending habits and arts/cultural interests of different household types in Catawba County. The analysis revealed that Arts Culture Catawba and its affiliate organizations have great potential to reach new markets in Catawba County. Based on tapestry analysis results and current patron/donor data, less than 30% of residents have been reached in all LifeMode tapestry census tracts in Catawba County, except for the one Census Tract that is designated as Affluent Estates. Arts Culture Catawba staff and its affiliate organizations will use the results of the analysis for marketing to new patrons in the County as well as to promote the importance of the arts in Catawba County. The analysis is currently being used to assist Arts Culture Catawba in meeting its fundraising goals and adding new supporters to their affiliate organizations."

**STEM-based Learning: Tree Canopy Analysis and Tree Planting Plan**
Western Piedmont Council of Governments staff secured grant funding from the North Carolina Forestry Service's Urban and Community Forestry Program for the completion of a STEM-based educational project that focused on tree canopy cover and heat islands for 5th and 8th-grade students.

Working with school district staff and teachers, Western Piedmont Council of Governments staff conducted four lessons that provided students with a broad range of hands-on outdoor and indoor learning activities. The lessons included on-site drone flights conducted by Western Piedmont Council of Governments' FAA-certified drone pilots that used thermal imagery to show students surface temperature differences between areas with trees and those without. In addition, the lessons focused on future careers for the students, including arborists, foresters, drone pilots, and environmental scientists. As a part of the grant-funded project, each school received new equipment that was used during the lessons, including computers, trail cameras, thermal heat guns and other supplies. Lessons culminated with the creation of a tree planting plan for each school (Heritage Middle School in Burke County, William Lenoir Middle School in Caldwell County, and Longview Elementary School in Hickory). Western Piedmont Council of Government staff reached a total of 411 students during the project.

**Western Piedmont Homelessness Outreach Program**
Designed to enhance regional economic resiliency, the Regional Housing Initiative Roadmap website analyzes the region's current housing landscape by focusing on market demographics, barriers to new housing development, and building permit trends from the last 10 years. In addition, the site includes the results from a "Visual Preference Survey," which summarizes respondents' preferred housing types. Western Piedmont Council of Government staff also created a developability that shows parcels within each local government's jurisdiction that are suitable for development based on set criteria. The website can be accessed by navigating to https://www.wpcog.org/homebase and then selecting the Western Piedmont Housing Growth Roadmap link.

The Regional Housing Initiative Roadmap also provides links to case studies relevant to the region's goals of stimulating housing growth and breaking down barriers to new housing development. Additionally, the website showcases housing success stories from across the region. Public education materials are available for all local governments to use to help address housing stigmas and stimulate demand for new housing. Recommendations included on the site have been designed to help support population and housing growth throughout the region.

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

Introduction of NCARCOG Executive Director Todd McNeill
Mr. Anthony Starr, Executive Director, introduced Mr. Todd McNeill, Executive Director of the North Carolina Association of Regional Councils of Government. Mr. McNeill thanked everyone for having him at the meeting. He is six weeks into his employment and is looking forward to working with the 16 Councils of Government in North Carolina.

Charlotte IBT Update
Mr. Starr 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 (EMC) within the NC Department of Environmental Quality. At the request of local governments, the Western Piedmont Council of Governments is coordinating our region's response.

The Western Piedmont Council of Governments 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 Western Piedmont Council of Governments hired teams for lobbying, legal and engineering, and public relations to represent the interests of our coalition.

Work continues regarding the next phase of this initiative. Our team engaged with the UNC Collaboratory and experts who might participate in the study. The study is required by the General Assembly to be completed before the moratorium expires in March 2027. It is expected the UNC Collaboratory will publish recommendations for changes to the state IBT law in early 2027.

The IBT team also continues its ongoing work to keep our coalition informed and engage with legislators and other key stakeholders. Our engineering experts are developing and compiling information about the Catawba River and the potential impacts of IBTs. Charlotte is expected to publish its environmental impact statement (EIS) in late 2026 or early 2027. Submission of its EIS to the EMC allows Charlotte to proceed with requesting its very large IBT increase after the moratorium ends.

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

Staff requested the Board review the information and provide feedback.

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

CEDS Accomplishment Update

Ms. Alison Adams, Director of Community and Regional Planning, stated Western Piedmont Council of Governments was designated as the Economic Development District (EDD) for our region in 2004 by the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA). WPCOG is required to develop and maintain a regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) every five years. The last CEDS was adopted in September 2022.

The 2022 CEDS represents a document to lead the region and Western Piedmont Council of Governments in several key directions, including:

- Robust and aggressive economic development
- Construction of desirable and affordable housing
- Successful marketing of regional assets
- Development of an inclusive community

- Retention and recruitment of a talented workforce
- Development of an efficient and well-maintained infrastructure system

These objectives are aimed at ensuring an equitable and resilient future for the entire region. EDA requires the Western Piedmont Council of Governments to submit an annual progress report and to provide an update to the Policy Board outlining achievements.

**CEDS Accomplishments Update from 4/1/2025 – 9/30/2025 (6 months)**

**Economic Development**

**Strategy 2 – Enhance and maintain capacity for project and grant development.**

- Western Piedmont Council of Government staff provided technical assistance to local governments, leading to the development and submission of 23 grant applications. These efforts resulted in 12 successful awards totaling $9,986,290, 8 currently pending, and 3 declined.

**Strategy 3** – Maximize building reuse and site redevelopment opportunities.

- Western Piedmont Council of Government staff provided technical assistance to Alexander County by developing an application resulting in $175,000 in funding from the North Carolina Department of Commerce Building Reuse State Rural Grants for the Urgent Care of Mountain View.

**Strategy 5** - Work with federal, state, and local officials to assist existing businesses with expansions, while also recruiting new companies to the region to further the growth of diverse, well-paying jobs across a broad spectrum of industries companies to the region to further the growth of diverse, well-paying jobs across a broad spectrum of industries.

- Western Piedmont Council of Governments staff provided technical assistance to the City of Morganton for boardwalk repair and replacement due to Hurricane Helene damage, which resulted in a $1,000,000 North Carolina Department of Commerce Small Business Grant.

**Strategy 6** - Promote & support regional assets such as the Manufacturing Solutions Center (MSC), Morganton Campus of the NC School of Science and Math (NCSSM), Appalachian State University - Hickory, the NC Center of Engineering Technologies (NCCET), community colleges, LRU, & other critical economic development assets.

- Western Piedmont Council of Governments staff provided technical assistance to CCCTI for the Caldwell-Watauga Educational Attainment Initiative, resulting in a $300,000 ARC-AD Grant.
- Western Piedmont Council of Governments also helped CVCC obtain a $300,000 ARC-AD Grant for their Enhancing Trades Program for the purchase of technical equipment.

***Infrastructure***

**Strategy 1** - Improve and expand the bicycle and pedestrian network in the region to include greenway opportunities adjacent to existing, connecting to, or creating a connection to economic opportunities.

- $100,000 grant awarded for Blueway planning in Burke and Catawba counties.
- Completed draft Western Piedmont Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan

**Strategy 2** –- Extend access and improve service and capacity for necessary utilities, including water, sewer, and broadband, to businesses, schools and community facilities, low-income households and other underserved communities to businesses, schools and community facilities, low-income households, and other underserved communities.

- 484 senior learners reached by the Western Piedmont Council of Governments Digital Navigator's digital literacy classes; project was funded through $473,000 in grant funding from the North Carolina Department of Information Technology to establish a Digital Navigator role.

**Strategy 5** – Promote water and air quality initiatives, erosion mitigation, contaminants, and management of water resources to protect drinking water sources, support the outdoor economy, and encourage climate resiliency.

- $75,000 grant awarded for Septic Repair Program; 10 applicants served.
- 1,000 lbs. of litter collected during volunteer litter clean-up events.

**Strategy 6 -** Promote the development of a comprehensive, affordable public transportation network to improve labor force participation**.**

- Assisted with Micro transit zone expansion, development of interactive mapping tools and Locally Coordinated Plan for Greenway Public Transportation

**Strategy 8 -** Explore potential rail and air service improvements for job creation and economic development.

- 6 aviation improvement projects identified and submitted to NCDOT for Project Prioritization Process

**Workforce**

**Strategy 2** – Align career pathways with education and training opportunities to meet industry needs.

- 1,281 customers entered the NCWorks Career Centers for employment services.
- 23 jobseekers received job placement through the WIOA On-the-Job-Training Program and/or the Youth Work Experience Program.
- 48 Educational scholarships were awarded through the WIOA program.
- 809 jobseekers were provided Resume development and update assistance.

**Housing**

**Strategy 1** - Increase the amount of all types of housing (market-rate, work force, affordable, rental assistance, aging in place, and mixed-use) and mixed-use)

- Western Piedmont Council of Governments staff provided $46,000 in down-payment assistance to 23 first-time homebuyers.
- Established the regional Home BASE housing program (Building Access for Strategic Expansion) to develop housing systems that are adaptable, inclusive, and scalable to meet changing housing market preferences.
- Awarded grant from UNC Chapel Hill to participate in the Our State, Our Homes cohort program, to address access to and availability of affordable housing on a regional level.

**Strategy 2** – Reduce the number of vacant and substandard homes throughout the region.

- Staff completed Urgent Repair and Essential Single-Family Repair on 22 homes throughout the region.
- Conducted 67 minimum housing inspections.
- Partnering with NC Department of Environmental Quality to administer a $6 million Weatherization program for Western NC that will improve homes affected by Hurricane Helene.

**Strategy 4 - Develop a Regional Housing Plan**

- Completed the regional Western Piedmont Housing Growth Roadmap Initiative, an interactive online plan designed to address need for increases in all housing types. It includes a developability map and Visual Preference Survey, and focuses on market demographics, barriers to new housing development, and building permit trends. Plan covers all 28 local governments.

**Community Life**

**Strategy 1 -** Work to achieve 1 to 2 % regional population growth annually to avoid population loss and maintain healthy community growth.

- Latest population growth data indicated continued to show improvement, with only one local government experiencing population loss since 2020.

**Strategy 2 -** Create robust downtowns throughout the region.

- $1,000,000 grant funding awarded to Town of Hudson for streetscape/road design project; conceptual plans were created by Western Piedmont Council of Governments staff.

**Strategy 4 -** Promote regional healthy-living initiatives.

- GIS application for Western Piedmont Council of Governments Homelessness Response Team in development; application will track overall population numbers and provide location analytics data.

**Strategy 5** – Support emergency management efforts to enhance community and regional resiliency.

- Supported 7 local governments with FEMA reimbursement and recovery efforts.

**Strategy 7 –** Develop methods to encourage relocation to the region.

- Western Piedmont Council of Governments staff worked with CVCC design students to create a four-day stay-cation promotional booklet to be posted to NC Foothills Experience website.

**Marketing**

**Strategy 2** – Maintain & market the NC Foothills Experience.

- Partnered with Catawba Valley Community College Marketing and Graphic Design Class to create visuals and marketing materials for each of the counties in the region. All to be housed on the NC Foothills Experience.

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

Bridging the Digital Divide for Seniors: Digital Champion Grant and Laptop Distribution Program Update
Ms. Alison Adams, Director of Regional and Community Planning, stated after completing Digital Access Plans for Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, and Catawba counties, Western Piedmont Council of Government's Community and Regional Planning Department received $473,000 in competitive funding from the North Carolina Department of Information Technology (NCDIT) to launch a digital literacy program for seniors.

Older adults are gaining confidence and independence in free digital literacy classes, learning to use devices, communicate online, access telehealth services, and manage digital accounts.

The Digital Navigators collaborate with the Area Agency on Aging and other community groups to hold classes at senior centers, schools, libraries, community centers, churches, recreation centers, and nonprofit offices—addressing digital literacy needs within Burke, Caldwell, and Alexander counties.

Lessons focus on practical, real-world applications such as staying safe online, finding reliable information, avoiding scams, and using social media to connect with family and friends. Participants can use provided laptops or their own devices for hands-on learning and personalized support. Demand has been strong, with 107 participants in August 2025 alone.

Western Piedmont Council of Governments also received $23,000 from NC State University's Institute for Emerging Issues to purchase 110 refurbished laptops for seniors in need and those affected by Hurricane Helene. All devices have since been distributed through class locations and the Western Piedmont Council of Governments office.

These efforts continue to bridge the digital divide—promoting lifelong learning and inclusion among older adults by giving them the skills and confidence to navigate today's digital world.

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

WPCOG Legislative Agenda
Mr. Anthony Starr, Executive Director, presented the Western Piedmont Council of Governments Legislative Agenda for Ms. Alison Alexander, Assistant Executive Director, as she was not able to attend the meeting. Mr. Starr stated at the June Executive Committee meeting, staff and the Executive Committee discussed the idea of exploring a legislative advisory program to assist Western Piedmont Council of Governments members in their conversations with state officials about policy issues of regional concern. A working group was created, with the goal of determining if this was a worthwhile effort and if so, determine what types of legislative goals might be of use to the region.

The goal is to provide a common policy agenda for use by Western Piedmont Council of Governments members and Western Piedmont Council of Governments staff in their future conversations and advocacy efforts, particularly at the state level. This would be in direct support of the Western Piedmont Council of Governments Charter, including, " ..to promote cooperative arrangements and coordinated action among its member governments; to make recommendations for review and action to its member governments and other public agencies which perform functions within the region…"

Much time was spent on determining the purpose of such an effort, as well as the guiding principles, with the result being the attached proposed legislative agenda. Additionally, the group reviewed regional representation on state boards and commissions, which showed we are currently underrepresented. The working group prioritized state boards for representation. We are performing further analysis of term limits, and appointing authorities to inform a long-term strategy for these efforts.

Staff requested that the Policy Board approve the Legislative Goals (as presented/amended) for utilization in 2026.

Mr. Jerry Hodge made a motion that the Policy Board approve the Legislative Goals as presented for utilization in 2026 and Ms. Jill Patton offered a second. Motion passed unanimously.

Alexander and Catawba County Essential Single Family Rehabilitation Loan Pool (ESFRLP) 2027 Assistance Policy/Procurements and Disbursement Policy

Mr. Ben Willis, Director of Community and Economic Development, stated Western Piedmont Council of Governments has been awarded $182,000 for Alexander County and $182,000 for Catawba County by the North Carolina Housing Finance Agency (NCHFA) under the 2027 cycle of the Essential Single Family Rehabilitation Loan Pool (ESFRLP2732 Alexander County and ESFRLP2733 Catawba County). This program will be used to provide housing rehabilitation to two (2) homes scattered throughout all towns, cities and municipalities in Alexander and Catawba Counties in the 2026/2027 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 assistance is in the form of a deferred loan up to $70,000 per home. Western Piedmont Council of Governments will receive soft cost and administration funds for each unit in addition to $70,000 per unit for rehabilitation. 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 board review and approve the 2027 Alexander and Catawba Counties Essential Single Family Rehabilitation Loan Pool (ESFRLP) Assistance Policy and the Procurement and Disbursement Policy.

Mr. George Holleman made a motion that the Board approve the Policy and Procurement & Disbursement Policy, as presented, and Ms. Marla Thompson offered a second. Motion passed unanimously.

4th Amendment of the FY2025-26 Budget

Ms. Andrea Roper, Director of Finance, stated the 4th Amendment of the FY2025-26 budget reflects a total budget of $50,266,753 and an operating budget of $11,948,665 which represents an increase of the total budget from the September 23, 2025 budget adoption of $615,123. This Amendment was included in the Policy Board agenda packet.

The 4th Amendment of the 2025-2026 Budget includes:

- Transportation increased due to additional work within the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSA) grant.
- Environmental Protection increased to incorporate additional funding for forestry grants.
- Community Development increased to reflect additional funds earned for urgent repair programs.
- Community and Regional Planning decreased as budgeted work was reallocated to the Transportation department.
- An increase in Economic Development reflects new project work.
- Area Agency on Aging increased to include the new GUIDE (Guiding an Improved Dementia Experience) grant.
- WIOA increased following additional grant funding for dislocated workers.
- Salaries, retirement & group insurance decreased due to personnel changes across multiple departments.
- Contractual expenditures increased to cover contractor payments related to the dislocated worker grant, as well as Environmental and Planning contractor costs.
- Supplies increased to support essential needs within the Planning department.
- An increase in Advertising/Subscriptions reflects additional subscription expenses in the Planning and IT divisions.
- Contingency increased to anticipate expenditures for new projects and projected funding needs during the current fiscal year.
- Transfer to Capital Reserve Fund increased following a reduction in indirect expenses.
- Workforce Development Special Revenue Fund increased due to additional funding for dislocated workers.
- Valdese Public Housing Special Revenue Fund increased to cover projected maintenance and contractual costs for housing units, as well as additional staff training and travel expenses.

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

Ms. Jill Patton made a motion that the Policy Board approve the Fourth Amendment of the 2025-2026 Budget as proposed and Mr. Joie Fulbright offered a second. Motion passed unanimously.

Nominating Committee Report, Election of Officers and Board Appointees

Chair Gibbons stated each year, the Board Chair appoints a nominating committee for the purpose of recommending persons for the Officers, Executive Committee and Appointed Delegates of the Policy

Board. Chair Gibbons appointed Jill Patton (Hickory), Randy Burns (Burke County), Larry Yoder (Alexander County), and himself (Lenoir) to serve as members of the 2025 Nominating Committee. Committee Chair Gibbons will present the recommendations from the Nominating Committee listed below:

| Position | Recommendation | Term Ends |
|---|---|---|
| Chair | Randy Burns | Dec. 2026 |
| Vice Chair | Larry Yoder | Dec. 2026 |
| Secretary | Larry Chapman | Dec. 2026 |
| Treasurer | George Holleman | Dec. 2026 |
| Immediate Past Chair | Joe Gibbons | Dec. 2026 |
| Executive Committee At-Large | Mike LaBrose | Dec. 2026 |
| Executive Committee At-Large | Cole Setzer | Dec. 2026 |
| Executive Committee At-Large | Jill Patton | Dec. 2026 |
| Executive Committee At-Large | Chris Jernigan | Dec. 2026 |
| Policy Board Appointed Delegate | Tonia Stephenson | Dec. 2027 |
| Policy Board Appointed Delegate | Mark Transou | Dec. 2027 |
| Policy Board Appointed Delegate | Wes Christopher | Dec. 2027 |
| Forum Representative | Larry Yoder | Dec. 2026 |
| Alternate Forum Representative | Mike LaBrose | Dec. 2026 |

Chair Gibbons said the Board is requested to elect the Officers, Executive Committee members, and Appointed Delegates for 2026

Ms. Marla Thompson made a motion that the Board approve the nominations as presented by the Nominating Committee and Mr. Jerry Hodge offered a second. Motion passed unanimously.

Recognition of Outgoing Board Members

Chair Gibbons recognized the following Policy Board members whose terms will end December 31, 2025 and thanked them for their service:

- Dr. Caryl Burns – 2008 – 2025
- Marla Thompson – 2018-2025
- Charlie Watts – 2022 – 2025
- Malla Vue (not present) – 2018 – 2025

Recognition of Outgoing Board Chair

Mr. Randy Burns expressed his sincere appreciation for Chair Gibbons time as Chair and thanked him for his service. It was noted that Chair Gibbons will remain on the Policy Board and serve on the Executive Committee as the Past Board Chair beginning in 2026.

Chair Gibbons said he has enjoyed serving as the Chair. The Western Piedmont Councils of Governments has wonderful staff and thanked everyone for everything they do.

**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.

Administration

- Larry Yoder's brother has passed. Please keep him in your thoughts and prayers.
- Congratulations to Averi Ritchie on her new role as Transportation Director. The Transportation Program was previously under the Community and Regional Planning Department and is now its own department.
- Janice Boger started on November 3 as Executive Assistant. As Janice gets acclimated to the Council of Governments and our work, Elizabeth Hilliard will transition from a direct role with Admin to Finance and also continue her work with Workforce. Elizabeth was thanked for her work over the years.
- Building expansion project update: Significant progress continues, and we are currently on schedule for completion in May 2026. HVAC unit installation was completed in mid-November, which included replacement of the units on the existing building. The drywall, electrical, and HVAC is mostly done.

Area Agency on Aging

- Area Aging on Aging staff worked with aging service providers to navigate government shutdown to provide support to keep services continuing to older adults.

Community and Economic Development

- WPCOG staff assisted in several grant application submissions in September and October. Staff worked closely with the City of Newton and Caldwell County to submit Hazard Mitigation Grant Program applications for three projects to support water, sewer, and electric utility projects. A CDBG-Neighborhood Revitalization application was also submitted on behalf of the Town of Hudson and Caldwell Habitat for Humanity in the amount of $704,000 to support the construction of four homes in the community.
- A number of grant applications submitted earlier in the year were awarded recently including five projects funded by the Appalachian Regional Commission totaling $1,750,000. These investments included construction and workforce projects at Western Piedmont, Caldwell, and Catawba Valley Community Colleges as well as a water and sewer project in the City of Morganton and a small business loan fund at the Valdese Economic Development Investment Corporation (VEDIC). Additionally, Project Kettlecorn in Conover was awarded a $100,000 Building Reuse Grant through the NC Department of Commerce and Caldwell County was awarded $1,016,784 through Golden LEAF for development of the Evergreene Industrial Park in the Town of Sawmills.

Homelessness Response Team

Calls and Intakes:

- Calls Received – 3,473

- Caseload – 107

Community and Regional Planning

Planning projects within the region include:

- Brookford land use plan, zoning and subdivision ordinance update
- Long View zoning and subdivision update
- Taylorsville sewer mapping
- Granite Falls Cemetery expansion plan
- NC Forestry Service Grants Awarded – teaching 5th and 6th grade science curriculum related to tree canopy impact at Longview Elementary, William Lenoir Middle and Heritage Middle Schools. The first week of classes have been completed at Longview Elementary and Heritage Middle Schools.

Grants awarded:

- Blueway's Grant with the NC State Trails Program to connect South Mountain State Park in Burke County along the Wilderness Gateway Trail following the river system to Jacobs Fork Park in Catawba County.

Finance

- Finance continues to provide financial services for the Caldwell Chamber of Commerce, the Hickory-Conover Tourism Development Authority, and the Village of Cedar Rock.
- The audit for the Hickory-Conover Tourism Development Authority for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025, has been completed and was presented to their board on November 10, 2025.
- The audit for the Village of Cedar Rock for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025, has been completed and is currently under review before its final presentation to the board.
- Audit work for WPCOG is in the final stages.
- The audit for the Hickory Public Housing Authority for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025, is currently in progress.

Regional Housing Authority

- The Western Piedmont RHA absorbed the Hickory Public Housing Authority (HPHA) as of July 1, 2025. Letters were sent out to families on both the HPHA and the WPCOG waiting list and after the alloted time for responses, the two waiting list were combined. The RHA continues to serve our community and currently has approximately 1,351 families on our combined waiting list. The RHA continues to send out approximately 125 letters to families that reach the top of the waiting list each month.
- The Valdese Public Housing acquisition continues to go smoothly as we work to improve the units and surrounding areas. Staff continues to identify potential property improvements and future consideration by the Policy Board is expected. The RHA hired a new maintenance supervisor in October for Valdese Public Housing. Valdese Public Housing currently has approximately 120 families on the waiting list for assistance.

Workforce Development

- The NCWorks–Burke Career Center officially closed its previous location on October 31. The center will reopen in its new space on the Richardson Campus of Western Piedmont Community

College, located at 200 East College Drive in Morganton, on December 1. In the meantime, customers may continue to access services virtually, at any of our other NCWorks Career Centers, or through our many regional access points.

- On October 24, 2025, Governor Josh Stein announced that the U.S. Department of Labor released an additional $4 million to support North Carolinians in areas impacted by Hurricane Helene. The Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board received an additional $800,000, bringing the total allocation for the region to $1.5 million. To date, 53 individuals in the Western Piedmont region have participated in this program, contributing to cleanup, recovery, and community support initiatives across the area.

**Next Meeting**
The next Policy Board meeting is scheduled for January 27, 2026 and will be hosted by the Town of Rutherford College.

**Adjournment**
The meeting was adjourned at 7:53 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

| | |
|---|---|
| _____ | _____ |
| Joseph L. Gibbons | Larry Chapman |
| Chair | Secretary |