**Minutes**
**Western Piedmont Council of Governments**
**Bimonthly Policy Board Meeting**
**Tuesday, September 23, 2025**
**William B. Shuford Recreation Center, Granite Falls**

| 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 |
| Mike LaBrose, At-Large | Caldwell County |
| Cole Setzer, At-Large | Catawba County |
| Marla Thompson, At-Large | Long View |
| Ronnie Setzer | Cajah's Mountain |
| Donald Robinson | Catawba |
| 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 |
| Tracy Townsend, Alternate | Granite Falls |
| Ben Honeycutt | Hildebran |
| Ralph Prestwood, Alternate | Lenoir |
| Phyllis Pennington, Alternate | Long View |
| Holly Crafton-Lay | Maiden |
| Allen Spencer | Rhodhiss |
| Carroll Hoyle | Rutherford College |
| Bobby Mosteller | Sawmills |
| Erisha Lipford | Appointed |
| Helen Chestnut | Appointed |
| Mark Transou | Appointed |
| Tommy Luckadoo | Appointed |
| Tonia Stephenson | Appointed |

| Members Absent | |
|---|---|
| Larry Yoder, At-Large | Alexander 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 |
| Carroll Yount, Alternate | Catawba |

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|---|---|
| Barbara Beatty, Alternate | Catawba County |
| Dale Sherrill | Claremont |
| Ramona Duncan, Alternate | Connelly Springs |
| Ron Lackey, Alternate | Gamewell |
| Sheila Perkins | Glen Alpine |
| Charlotte Williams, Alternate | Hickory |
| Mike Smith, Alternate | Hildebran |
| Jim Engelman, Alternate | Hudson |
| Ronnie Williams, Alternate | Maiden |
| Chris Jernigan | Morganton |
| Ronnie Thompson, Alternate | Morganton |
| Jerry Hodge | Newton |
| Beverly Danner, Alternate | Newton |
| Kendra Edwards, Alternate | Rhodhiss |
| Yates Jensen, Alternate | Rutherford College |
| Joe Wesson, Alternate | Sawmills |
| Kimberly S. Brown Alternate | Taylorsville |
| Charlie Watts | Valdese |
| Rexanna Lowman, Alternate | Valdese |
| Amparo R. Alfaro | Appointed |
| Malla Vue | Appointed |

**Guests/Others Present**

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|---|---|
| Randy Feierabend | Cajah's Mountain |
| Wayne Rash | Caldwell County |
| Danny Hipps | Catawba |
| Tamara Stamey | Connelly Springs |
| Bill Carroll | Drexel |
| Robin Nicholson | Duke Energy |
| Bonnie Caudle | Gamewell |
| Brine Branham | Granite Falls |
| Crystal Bollinger | Granite Falls |
| Jim Mackie | Granite Falls |
| Jonathan Cook | Granite Falls |
| Kara Calloway | Granite Falls |
| Katie Davis | Granite Falls |
| Larry Knight | Granite Falls |
| Martin Townsend | Granite Falls |
| Mike Mackie | Granite Falls |
| Ritch Bolick | Granite Falls |
| Scott Hildebran | Lenoir |
| Keith Warren | Sawmills |
| Janice Boger | WPCOG (Starts November 3, 2025) |

**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
Stephanie Hanvey, Director of Regional Housing Authority
Charity Patterson Hamber, Director of Workforce Development
Lucas Bentley, IT Manager
Tasmin Mack, HR Manager
Elizabeth Hilliard, Executive Administrative Assistant

**Call to Order/Welcome**
A regular meeting of the WPCOG Policy Board was called to order at 6:43 pm by Chair Gibbons. Chair Gibbons thanked the Town of Granite Falls for hosting. Town of Granite Falls Mayor, Dr. Caryl Burns, welcomed the Policy Board to Granite Falls.

**Introductions**
Introductions were made by everyone in attendance.

**Minutes of Previous Meeting**
Minutes of the previous meeting were considered. Ms. Jill Patton made a motion to approve the minutes from the July 22, 2025 meeting and Mr. Larry Chapman offered a second. The motion passed unanimously.

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

**New Business**
Duke Energy Update on Helen Response and Recovery
Ms. Robin Nicholson, District Manager for Duke Energy for our region, plus McDowell and Lincoln Counties, shared information from Duke Energy about Hurricane Helene. It included what they anticipated, what they did to plan, and what actually happened. She covered information from the delivery of electricity through transmission and distribution channels as well as how Duke Energy hydro operations were impacted. The presentation included impacts to business and customers from a statistical and human perspective.

No action requested. This item was for informational purposes.

Homelessness Response Team Update
Mr. Ben Willis, Director of Community and Economic Development, introduced the new Homelessness Response Team Manager, Amber Brafford, to the board. Ms. Amber Brafford provided an update on the Western Piedmont Council of Governments' efforts to address homelessness in the region, including the results of the recent Summer Point-in-Time count completed in August.

No action requested. This item was for informational purposes.

WPCOG Weatherization Service Agreement

Mr. Ben Willis, Director of Community and Economic Development, stated on May 7, 2025, the NC Department of Environmental Quality granted $6 million to the Western Piedmont Council of Governments for weatherization related home repairs using Hurricane Helene Disaster funds. This document is an agreement between the Western Piedmont Council of Governments and JCN Partners, dba Everblue, to support a home weatherization and repair program for areas impacted by Hurricane Helene.

The agreement, which is in effect from September 1, 2025, to September 5, 2029, outlines the responsibilities of both parties to help implement a state grant from the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality.

**Program Goals**

The program's primary goal is to perform essential repairs and weatherization on at least 275 homes to improve energy efficiency, health, and safety for residents. The focus is on "repair" rather than "rebuilding" to address issues that prevent a home from being weatherized.

**Roles and Responsibilities**

Western Piedmont Council of Governments: Will be the lead agency and will coordinate with other regional Councils of Governments and the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality. Their responsibilities include ensuring timely approvals and fund drawdowns from the grant, as well as providing staff to ensure the program runs smoothly.

Everblue: Their role is to handle the operational and technological aspects of the program. This includes managing a contractor network, providing the program's website and application portals, conducting property inspections, overseeing repairs, and paying the contractors directly.

**Key Contract Details**

Scope of Work: The program focuses on repairs such as roofs, plumbing, electrical, and HVAC systems. The grant is intended to leverage other funding sources to maximize the benefit to residents.

Funding and Rates: The agreement uses the pre-approved rates established in Everblue's existing contract with North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality.

Insurance and Termination: Everblue is required to maintain several types of insurance, naming the Western Piedmont Council of Governments as an additional insured. The contract can be terminated by either party with 30 days' notice if there is a breach.

Compliance: The agreement includes standard non-discrimination clauses and requires both parties to retain records for three years for audit purposes.

The WPCOG Attorney, David Hood, reviewed the agreement.

Staff requested that the Policy Board approve the contract between Western Piedmont Council of Governments and JCN Partners, dba Everblue.

Mr. George Holleman made a motion that the policy board approve the Western Piedmont Council of Governments Services to Support Home Weatherization Contract with JCN Partners, dba Everblue, as presented and Ms. Jill Patton offered a second. Motion passed unanimously.

Housing Choice Voucher Funding Increase

Ms. Stephanie Hanvey, Director of Regional Housing Authority, stated In August 2025, the Western Piedmont Council of Governments Regional Housing Authority received an additional $913,939 in Housing Assistance Payment funding from HUD. Based on the current average per-unit cost of $594, this funding will allow the Regional Housing Authority to serve approximately 128 additional families over the next year.

In July 2025, HUD transferred the administration of the Hickory Housing Authority's Section 8 Housing Voucher Program (556 vouchers) to the Western Piedmont Council of Governments Regional Housing Authority. At the time of transfer, the Hickory Housing Authority had 247 regular and 25 Mainstream vouchers in use; however, the Hickory Housing Authority had already exceeded its budget authority for the year due to mismanagement. This temporarily prevented the Western Piedmont Council of Governments Regional Housing Authority from leasing additional vouchers.

With the new HUD funding allocation, the Western Piedmont Council of Governments Regional Housing Authority will resume leasing operations, starting with offers of assistance to the 91 Choice Mobility Voucher applicants (current residents of Nu-Dimensions properties) and to applicants previously chosen from the Western Piedmont Council of Governments Regional Housing Authority waiting list before leasing activities were halted. Once the new vouchers are issued, the Western Piedmont Council of Governments Regional Housing Authority will seek additional funding to utilize all of the 556 vouchers received from the Hickory Housing Authority transfer.

No action requested. This item was for informational purposes.

3rd Amendment of the FY2025-26 Budget

Ms. Andrea Roper, Director of Finance, stated the 3rd Amendment of the FY2025-26 budget reflects a total budget of $49,651,630 and an operating budget of $11,793,973 which represents an increase of the total budget from the August 26, 2025 budget adoption of $2,049,698. The budget summary sheets were included in the agenda packet.

The 3rd Amendment of the 2025-2026 Budget includes:

- Transportation decreased to reflect the actual assessments for MPO.
- Environmental Protection increased to include new forestry grants and to account for Interbasin Transfer (IBT) dues received from municipalities outside our region.
- A decrease in Community Development reflects the initiation of new project work within Economic Development.

- The Planning appropriation was reduced by $2,738 to align with revised contract amounts.
- An increase in Community & Regional Planning reflects the initiation of new projects and recent personnel changes.
- Regional Public Housing increased to reflect personnel changes and additional costs related to audit, legal, and credit card fees associated with prior Hickory Housing Authority expenses.
- An increase in the Aging program reflects higher PEAS (Providing Elders Additional Sustenance) food box costs along with other line-item adjustments.
- An increase in Workforce Development reflects the receipt of the Pathway Home 6 Grant and supplemental dislocated worker funding associated with Hurricane Helene recovery efforts.
- Salaries, retirement & group insurance increased due to personnel changes across multiple departments.
- An increase in Contractual expenditures reflects costs for the Pathway Home 6 Grant and contractor payments related to dislocated worker and Choosing Home grants.
- Travel funds increased due to new projects in Economic Development.
- An increase in Rent-Equipment reflects anticipated expenses for copier and mail machine leases.
- A decrease in Rent/Lease-Building reflects the reallocation of Day One homelessness program funding to supplies.
- An increase in Supplies reflects the acquisition of computers for Regional Public Housing, expanded PEAS food box distribution, and funding for several new Economic Development initiatives.
- An increase in Advertising/Subscriptions reflects additional subscription expenses in the Transportation and IT divisions.
- A decrease in Maintenance-Building/Grounds reflects the reallocation of indirect funds to other budget categories.
- An increase in Legal fees reflects projected legal expenses associated with the Interbasin Transfer Project and the Regional Housing Authority.
- An increase in Contingency reflects anticipated expenditures for new projects and funding projected for use during the current fiscal year.
- Transfer to Capital Reserve Fund increased due to additional indirect funds generated by additional salaries.
- An increase in the HUD Housing Vouchers Special Revenue Fund accounts for additional administrative expenses and increased HAP funding provided by HUD.
- An increase in the Workforce Development Special Revenue Fund accounts for the Pathway Home 6 Grant and additional funding related to Hurricane Helene.
- An increase in the Valdese Public Housing Special Revenue Fund reflects projected administrative expenses and maintenance costs for housing units.
- Septic Tank Repair Project Special Revenue Fund increased to reflect administrative salaries and additional contractor payments.
- An increase of $100,000 in the Capital Project Fund—Building Expansion reflects projected additional contractual expenses for architectural services.

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

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

Amendment to the Building Expansion Capital Project Budget Ordinance

Ms. Andrea Roper, Director of Finance, stated the amended WPCOG Building Expansion Capital Project Budget Ordinance, which was included in the agenda packet, shows the revenue and expenditure amounts reflecting the updated anticipated contractual costs and the SCIF 60142 grant received for the building expansion capital project. In accordance with North Carolina General Statutes, the amended ordinance is presented as balanced.

Staff requested that the Policy Board review and approve the Second Amendment Building Expansion Capital Project Budget Ordinance.

Mr. Randy Burns made a motion that the Policy Board approve the Second Amendment Building Expansion Capital Project Budget Ordinance and Mr. Cole Setzer offered a second. Motion passed unanimously.

Nominating Committee Appointments

Chair Gibbons stated each year at the September Policy Board meeting, four Policy Board members are asked to serve on a nominating committee. Under the Western Piedmont Council of Governments Charter, the Policy Board Chair appoints the Nominating Committee. The Nominating Committee is responsible for presenting a slate of officers, Executive Committee members and appointed (non-elected) board members for the following year during the November meeting. The Nominating Committee includes a representative from all four counties. Traditionally, two county officials and two municipal officials compose the four-member committee.

The following board members have been appointed and have agreed to serve on this year's nominating committee.

- Jill Patton – City of Hickory Councilmember
- Joe Gibbons – City of Lenoir Mayor
- Larry Yoder – Alexander County Commissioner
- Randy Burns – Burke County Commissioner

Outgoing WPCOG Board Chair Gibbons will serve as the Nominating Committee Chair. Staff will assist with scheduling a committee meeting shortly after the November election.
No action requested. This item was for informational purposes.

**Other Business**

Executive Director's and Staff Reports

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

Administration

- Building expansion project update: Significant progress continues. HVAC unit installation is scheduled for early October, work which includes replacement of the units on the existing building. Offices will be closed to the public and to staff during this time, and we will notify local governments and affected persons soon. Most of the brick work is done and brick will be washed.
- The former Hickory Housing Authority Executive Director, Alonda Richardson, is suing the City of Hickory and the Hickory Housing Board (which no longer exists) as a result of her termination. Western Piedmont Council of Governments is not named in the lawsuit. However, Western Piedmont Council of Governments does have insurance to cover this if necessary and the City of Hickory has agreed to reimburse us in the event we are sued.
- A lot of work taking place on the Interbasin Transfer. Mr. Anthony Starr and Ms. Alison Alexander are working on messaging to be used.
- Janice Boger was introduced as the newly hired Western Piedmont Council of Governments Executive Assistant. Her start date is November 3, 2025.

Community and Economic Development

- WPCOG staff assisted in several grant application submissions in August. Staff worked closely with Western Piedmont Coummunity College to submit a Golden LEAF application for $479,949.05 to support the college's Heavy Equipment Operating Program and serve as matching funds for a previous application to the Appalachian Regional Commission. A Building Reuse Grant from the NC Department of Commerce in the amount of $175,000 was awarded to Alexander County to assist in the relocation of Urgent Care of Mountain View to a new facility.

Regional Housing Authority

- The WPCOG assumed two active lawsuits from the Hickory Housing Authority. One was regarding property near the former CommScope Headquarters in Hickory that the Hickory Housing Authoriy sought to obtain from an associated non-profit. The other lawsuit was regarding $279,000 owed by Nu-Dimensions to the Hickory Housing Authority/Western Piedmont Council of Governments. Both lawsuits were completed with default judgement in favor of the Western Piedmont Council of Governments. The Western Piedmont Council of Governments now owns the property and the Executive Committee authorized staff to proceed with the upset bid process to sell the parcel.

Workforce Development

- On August 13, 2025, the WPWDB Career Centers were officially recertified, with accreditation valid through 2028.
- Workforce Development received an additional $100,000 to support dislocated workers through the National Dislocated Worker Grant for Hurricane Helene.

- The Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board, in partnership with the NC Department of Commerce, Charlotte Works, and Foothills Workforce Development Board, has been awarded $4 million through the Pathway Home 6 Grant. The NC Department of Adult Correction will also collaborate with these partners to support and strengthen the initiative.
- The grant is intended to provide pre-release, post-release, and follow-up activities for people transitioning out of incarceration. Pre-release activities will be delivered through workshops, small-group and one-on-one instruction, career counseling, advisement in employment, and training activities. This project will also provide services to help participants reacclimate to their community, starting within the first 72 hours of their release from incarceration. Post-release activities will help participants to set goals, develop action plans, identify education and training needs, and learn new skills to work toward readiness for specific jobs. The NCWorks system will connect the individuals with apprenticeships and other types of work-based learning in collaboration with "second-chance" employers. Wrap-around support services will continue to follow the participant through the entire 24-month training period. Follow-up services will include monthly meetings with participants to determine their continuing needs for training, employment, and supportive services.

**Next Meeting**
The next Policy Board meeting is scheduled for November 25, 2025 and will be hosted by the City of Hickory at the Hickory Metro.

**Adjournment**
The meeting was adjourned at 7:56 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Joseph L. Gibbons
Chair

Larry Chapman
Secretary