Minutes
Western Piedmont Council of Governments
Bimonthly Policy Board Meeting
Tuesday, March 24th, 2026
Living Hope Church – Town of Cajah's Mountain & Caldwell County

Members Present	Local Government/Agency
Randy Burns, Chair	Burke County
George Holleman, Treasurer	Taylorsville
Larry Chapman, Secretary	Hudson
Joseph Gibbons, Past Chair	Lenoir
Mike LaBrose, At-Large	Caldwell County
Cole Setzer, At-Large	Catawba County
Jill Patton, At-Large	Hickory
Chris Jernigan, At-Large	Morganton
Ronnie Setzer	Cajah's Mountain
Lloyd Robbins, Alternate	Cajah's Mountain
~~Robbie Wilkie, Alternate~~ RB	Caldwell County
Donald Robinson	Catawba
Joie Fulbright	Conover
Brenda Powell, Alternate	Conover
Dennis Anthony	Drexel
Barbara Pennell	Gamewell
Tracy Townsend	Granite Falls
Charlotte Williams, Alternate	Hickory
Mike Smith, Alternate	Hildebran
Holly Crafton-Lay	Maiden
Beverly Danner	Newton
Scott Gilleland, Alternate	Newton
Carroll Hoyle	Rutherford College
Kimberly S. Brown Alternate	Taylorsville
Keith Huffman	Valdese
Helen Chestnut	Appointed
Mark Transou	Appointed
Tommy Luckadoo	Appointed
Tonia Stephenson	Appointed
Wes Christopher	Appointed

Members Absent	
Larry Yoder, Vice Chair	Alexander County
Josh Lail, Alternate	Alexander County
Ben Honeycutt	Hildebran
Jeff Brittain, Alternate	Burke County
Kelvin Gregory	Brookford
Johnny Berry	Connelly Springs
Ramona Duncan, Alternate	Connelly Springs

Bob Floyd	Cedar Rock
Sheila Perkins	Glen Alpine
Yates Jensen, Alternate	Rutherford College
Ronnie Thompson, Alternate	Morganton
Bobby Mosteller	Sawmills
Joe Wesson, Alternate	Sawmills
Ron Lackey, Alternate	Gamewell
Ritch Bolick, Alternate	Granite Falls
Jim Engelman, Alternate	Hudson
Ralph Prestwood, Alternate	Lenoir
Kendra Edwards, Alternate	Rhodhiss
Barbara Beatty, Alternate	Catawba County
Carroll Yount, Alternate	Catawba
Dale Sherrill	Claremont
Allen Bumgarner	Long View
Phyllis Pennington, Alternate	Long View
Fore Rembert, Alternate	Maiden
Rexanna Lowman, Alternate	Valdese
Amparo R. Alfaro	Appointed
Erisha Lipford	Appointed
Allen Spencer	Rhodhiss

Guests/Others Present

Randy Feierabend	Cajah's Mountain
Bill Carroll	Drexel
Bonnie Caudle	Gamewell
Scott Hildebran	Lenoir
Randy Church	Caldwell County
Richard Andrews	Cajah's Mountain
Jonathan Greer	Hudson
Holly Jones	Governor Stein's Office
Daniel Cobb	Granite Falls
Danny Hipps	Catawba
Logan Shook	Hildebran
Scott Hildebran	Lenoir
Lake Silver	Office of the State Auditor
Tin Zen	Thompson, Price, Scott, Adams & Co, P.A.
Arthur Salido	Three Notch Group

WPCOG Staff Present

Anthony Starr, Executive Director
Alison Alexander, Assistant Executive Director
Sarah Watson, Administrative Services Manager/Clerk to the Board
Andrea Roper, Director of Finance

Ben Willis, Director of Community and Economic Development
Stephanie Hanvey, Director of Regional Housing Authority
Averi Ritchie, Director of Transportation Planning
Ashley Adkins, Assistant Finance Director
Sarah Evitt, Area Agency on Aging Manager
Jason Toney, Communications Manager
Tasmin Mack, HR Manager

Call to Order/Welcome
A regular meeting of the WPCOG Policy Board was called to order at 6:45 pm by Chair Burns. Chair Burns thanked the Town of Cajah's Mountain and Caldwell County for hosting. Town of Cajah's Mountain Mayor, Ronnie Setzer, welcomed the Policy Board.

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 February 4, 2026 meeting and Mr. Joie Fullbright offered a second. The motion passed unanimously.

Unfinished Business/Reports
There was no unfinished business.

New Business
FY 2024-2025 Audit Presentation
Mr. Tin Zeng with Thompson, Price, Scott, Adams & Co, P.A. presented a report to the Board regarding the financial audit of the Western Piedmont Council of Governments for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025. The audit is required by State Law and various regulations of funding entities.

The auditor reviewed the highlights that were included in the agenda packet.

Staff requested that the Policy Board review the attached audit information.

Mr. Larry Chapman made a motion to accept the audit report as presented and Mr. Chris Jernigan offered a second. Motion passed unanimously.

Workforce Development Board Appointment
Ms. Alison Alexander, Assistant Executive Director, presented the Policy Board with information to appoint Dr. Paul Holden, Regional Director at Partners Health Management, to the Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board in order to meet one of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) private sector openings, representing Burke and Catawba Counties.

Staff requested that the Policy Board appoint Dr. Paul Holden, to the Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board membership for an unexpired term from March 24, 2026 through June 30, 2026.

Mr. Tommy Luckadoo made a motion to appoint Dr. Paul Holden to the Workforce Development Board for an unexpired term from March 24, 2026 through June 30, 2026 and Mr. Donald Robinson offered a second. Motion passed unanimously.

Burke County Career Office Facility Use Agreement– WPCC

Ms. Alison Alexander, Assistant Executive Director, stated that in late 2025, the NC Works Career Center for Burke County relocated to the K Building at Western Piedmont Community College. The State of North Carolina is leasing the space for the center, which is one large room with shared common areas. After moving, it became evident there is a need for a separate office, with WPCOG as the lessee.

The initial lease term is through June 30, 2027, with an annual renewal, at a cost of $100.00 per month, with a 30-day termination notice.

An agreement for the additional office was included in the agenda packet, as well as a diagram of the facility.

Staff requested that the Policy Board approve the facility use agreement for one office with WPCC.

Mr. Larry Chapman moved to approve the facility use agreement with Western Piedmont Community College, and Mr. Joie Fullbright offered a second. Motion passed unanimously.

NCARCOG 2026 Policy Agenda

Mr. Anthony Starr, Executive Director, said each year the NC Association of Regional Councils of Governments (NCARCOG) adopts a policy agenda to use as a guide for its efforts to seek state and legislative changes. The goals are intended to assist councils of governments (COGs) and their local governments on a variety of topics. He serves as the chair of the legislative committee for the NCARCOG.

The 2026 NCARCOG Policy Agenda includes goals for the following:

- A requested appropriation for the General Assembly to COGs to fund 32 new finance positions across the state to assist local governments with financial administration.
- Provide ongoing funding for COGs to continue disaster resiliency efforts for communities and establish COGs as the entity to develop regional pre-disaster hazard mitigation plans.
- A request to modify the Prosperity Zones in NC to conform to COG regional boundaries.
- Enact Clarifying Legislation to Clarify the Authority of COGs to Serve Local Governments.
- Using COGs as the default mechanism for the regional delivery of services instead of creating new organizations or divisions within the state government.
- Designating COGs as eligible entities for receiving grants on behalf of local governments when regional collaboration on certain projects makes sense.

Staff requested that the Policy Board review the info, share it with other elected officials, and provide feedback. No action was required by the board.

Greater Hickory MPO Overview

Ms. Averi Ritchie, Transportation Planning Director, stated that the Greater Hickory Metropolitan Planning Organization (GHMPO) is the regional transportation planning body for the Greater Hickory planning area and has been part of the WPCOG since its creation. Federal law requires urbanized areas with populations over 50,000 to have an MPO in order to receive federal transportation funding. The MPO brings together local governments, state transportation agencies, transit providers, and federal partners to collaboratively plan for the region's transportation future. Through a continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive planning process, the MPO works to identify transportation needs, evaluate solutions, and ensure that community priorities are reflected in transportation decisions.

The MPO's primary role is planning and coordination rather than construction. It develops long-range transportation plans, maintains the region's Transportation Improvement Program (which identifies projects scheduled for funding), evaluates and prioritizes transportation projects, and facilitates public involvement in transportation decisions. The MPO also helps direct federal transportation funding to local projects and works closely with partners such as NCDOT, local governments, and transit providers to ensure transportation investments improve mobility, safety, and economic opportunity across the region.

Ms. Ritchie also highlighted the Greater Hickory MPO's annual call for Locally Administered Projects (LAP). Through this program, the GHMPO manages a discretionary allocation of federal transportation funds, which are made available to local governments within the region for eligible transportation projects.

Each year, MPO staff coordinate the call for projects and provide technical assistance to local jurisdictions throughout the application process. This includes helping to identify eligible projects, aligning proposals with federal and regional priorities, and ensuring applications are competitive for funding consideration.

In addition to project selection, MPO staff also support local governments during project administration, assisting with federal requirements, coordination with NCDOT, and overall project delivery. This program plays a key role in advancing locally driven transportation improvements and ensuring that federal funding is effectively utilized to address regional needs.

No Board action was requested, as it was for informational purposes only.

Valdese Public Housing, Five Year Capital Fund Program Action Plans

Ms. Stephanie Hanvey, Regional Housing Director, stated that the US Department of Housing and Urban Development requires all public housing agencies (PHAs) to prepare and adopt a Five-year Capital Fund Program (CFP) Action Plan. The CFP action plan is a document that serves as a strategic plan for the Public Housing Agency's (PHA) capital funding. The plan prioritizes the PHA's physical needs including

improvements and modernization to dwelling structures, sites, mechanical systems, and costs associated with operations and administration of the CFP program.

The proposed Capital Fund Program Action Plan revisions/plans for Fiscal Year (FY) 24 – 28, FY 25 – FY 29, and FY 26 – FY 2030 are included in the agenda packet for board approval. Staff would like to send
the approved plans to HUD by April 15, 2026. The required public hearing for the Valdese Public Housing's Capital Funds Program Action Plans was held at 10:00 am on Tuesday, March 17, 2026. Upon approval of the Valdese Public Housing's Capital Funds Program Plans, the RHA will submit the approved CFP plans to HUD no later than April 15, 2026.

Staff requested that the Policy Board approve Valdese Public Housing's Five-Year Capital Fund Action Plans for FY 24 – FY 28, FY 25 – FY 29, and FY 26 – FY 30.

Mr. George Holleman made a motion that the Policy Board approve action plans as presented and Mr. Larry Chapman offered a second. Motion passed unanimously.

Offer to Purchase 941 11th Ave Blvd SE, Hickory, NC

Ms. Alison Alexander, Assistant Executive Director, stated that The Hickory Housing Authority (HHA) through Advent Housing Group, owned a 4.36-acre vacant parcel located at 941 11th Ave Blvd SE, Hickory, NC (parcel 371213142068) located within the city limits of Hickory. With the absorption of the HHA, the property came under the ownership of the WPCOG. The current tax value is $387,400 (2023 county appraisal).

In August, the Executive Committee approved the sale of the above parcel via the upset bid process, as outlined in G.S. 160A-269, with the proceeds to be used to reduce the HHA debt covered by the City of Hickory as part of the transfer of HHA voucher program to the RHA, with any remaining funds to be used as part of the RHA as whole.

Two bids were received in February 2026 and are presented to the Policy Board for review. Both bids were well below the tax value.

If a proposed bid is accepted by the Policy Board, public notice will be published announcing the proposed purchase price and provide that anyone may file an upset bid within ten (10) days of the notice. If a new upset bid is received, the notice will be re-advertised with the new price with another ten (10) days to file a new bid. To be considered, a new bid must raise the bid by not less than ten percent (10%) of the first one thousand dollars ($1,000) and five percent (5%) of the remainder. This procedure would be repeated until there are no more new bids. Once this process is complete, the Policy Board/Executive Committee will review the offer and may accept the offer as presented or may reject the offer.

With both bids representing amounts well below the tax value, staff request the Policy Board reject both bids to purchase 941 11th Ave Blvd SE, Hickory, NC (parcel 371213142068) from VFP, LCC and the Catawba County Council on Aging.

Mr. Donald Robinson made a motion that the Policy Board reject the bids received from the Catawba County Council on Aging and VFP, LCC regarding the sale of 941 11th Ave Blvd SE, Hickory, NC and Mr. Chris Jernigan offered a second. Motion passed unanimously.

7th Amendment of the FY2025-26 Budget

Ms. Andrea Roper, Finance Director, stated the 7th Amendment of the FY2025-26 budget which reflects a total budget of $51,039,610 and an operating budget of $12,445,469 which represents an increase of the total budget from the February 24, 2026 budget adoption of $204,121.

The 7th Amendment of the 2025-2026 Budget includes:

- Transportation increased to include a new transportation planner position.
- Environmental Protection decreased to true up actual anticipated expenses.
- Community Development increased to reflect new housing projects and anticipated contractual costs.
- Community & Regional Planning decreased to reflect actual project work for the current fiscal year.
- WIOA increased following additional grant funding for dislocated workers.
- Fund Balance Appropriated increased to recognize revenue recognized in FY25 for work still in progress within the environmental protection department.
- Salaries, retirement & group insurance decreased due to personnel changes across multiple departments.
- Contractual expenditures increased to cover contractor payments related to URP contractor costs.
- Supplies decreased to reflect actual anticipated costs across several departments.
- Capital Outlay increased due to the anticipated purchase of a vehicle for the aging department and a drone for the planning department.
- Contingency increased to anticipate expenditures for new projects and projected funding needs during the current fiscal year.
- Special Revenue Fund – Aging Fees & Services increased to reflect service work.
- Valdese Public Housing Special Revenue Fund increased to cover projected maintenance and contractual costs for housing unit renovations.

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

Mr. Carroll Hoyle made a motion that the Policy Board approve the Seventh Amendment of the 2025-2026 Budget as proposed and Mr. Larry Chapman offered a second. Motion passed unanimously.

1st Reading of the FY2026-27 Budget

Ms. Andrea Roper, Finance Director, stated the 1st Reading of the FY2026-27 budget reflects a total budget of $50,998,051 and an operating budget of $12,469,722 which represents an increase of the total budget from the February 24, 2026 budget amendment of approximately .32% or $162,562.

Some key parts of the budget are uncertain at this time and that is normal for the first reading. The 1st Reading of the FY2026-27 Budget includes:

- 80 full and part-time staff positions.
- WPCOG dues rate reflect no increase and remain at 98.1 cents per capita along with no increase for the required match for MPO as approved by the Board in January. Inflation increased 2.7% from December 2024 to December 2025, representing no increase.
- Financial administration services for two local governments and one local non-profit.
- Town planning services for 10 local governments.
- ADA planning services for 3 local governments.
- Code enforcement services for 16 local governments.
- Administration of several new community & economic development projects (disaster relief, infrastructure, home outreach, economic development, etc.).
- GASB 87 – Indirect Leases reflects the future value of lease payments funded with indirect funds.
- The budget includes an average merit increase of 3.75% effective in January 2027.
- A group insurance projected health insurance rate increase of 12%. We usually do not receive quotes until early May for FY27 and this number will be adjusted at that time.
- The decrease in contractual is attributed to the utilization of funding in FY25 for AARP disaster funds.
- Supplies decreased $160,486 due to the reduction in ARPA disaster funds and other specialized grant funding.
- Capital Outlay decreased $21,258. Excluding transfers to the Capital Reserve Fund, no major equipment purchases are planned at this time.
- Increase in contingency due to new project funds anticipated to be utilized in FY27.
- Compensated Absence Liability increased $8,784 due to an increase in fringe funds generated from salaries. The Compensated Absence Liability allocation may increase with the availability of funds. Funding the compensated absences liability improves the net position of the WPCOG.
- Increase in the Special Revenue Fund – Valdese Public Housing increased to recognize increased administrative costs and unit maintenance costs.
- The Capital Reserve Fund increased by $13,237 due to indirect funds generated by additional salaries in the General Fund.
- The proposed budget includes approximately $420,004 in anticipated contracts for FY26. This amount is $25,371 higher than the FY26 anticipated contracts amount at this time last year. The unfunded area at this point is within the Planning Department. A number of new projects are anticipated but not yet finalized.

Staff requested that the Policy Board review and approve the First Reading of the FY2026-27 Budget.

Ms. Jill Patton made a motion that the Policy Board approve the 1st Reading of the FY2026-27 Budget as proposed and Mr. Joe Gibbson offered a second. 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.

- Sarah Watson started March 16th as the Administrative Services Manager/Clerk to the Board.
- Building expansion project update: Significant progress continues, and we are currently on track for completion in May 2026. An Open House will be scheduled once we have confirmation of the project schedule.
- Anthony is continuing to make IBT presentations to city and county governing boards. We appreciate the time on the agenda for this important regional issue. The IBT team is reviewing the draft Integrated Water Resources Plan published by the Catawba Wateree Water Management Group as it could influence the IBT discussion. Anthony also presented information to the NC Collaboratory who is charged with studying this issue and providing recommendations for changes to the state law.
- We are waiting for the Lowdermilk Church CPA firm to complete the final audit of the Hickory Public Housing Authority. Once complete, we will schedule a presentation for the Policy Board.

- WPCOG Annual Meeting 2026 – email sign-ups have been sent. It will take place on Thursday, April 16, 2026 (evening) at the Hickory Metro Convention Center.

City of Lenoir/Caldwell County: The HRT is supporting the City's efforts to address the HHH Homeless Pods by helping facilitate discussions toward more workable solutions. Through these conversations, we are also identifying service gaps and engaging the faith-based community, which has presented several promising alternative supports.

City of Newton Veteran: The team connected the veteran with VA support (hadn't been active in a decade); he now has a VASH housing voucher and a place identified. He will be moving in soon to his own place with access to utilities.

Town of Long View - Hilltop Apartments: Approximately 40 residents (about 20 including children) attended a resource fair, with total participation reaching around 80 people when community partners were included. The meeting opened with an overview and resident discussion, followed by guidance from Legal Aid and partner representatives on legal rights, housing options, and available community resources. Multiple community agencies partnered with our team for the resource session, including behavioral health providers, food and financial assistance organizations, school representatives, and county services, all of whom shared available support opportunities. Several families also began applications for housing assistance programs, including the Family Unification Program (FUP).

Mr. Anthony Starr, Executive Director, also stated that Ms. Sarah Evitt has been promoted to Area Agency on Aging Director.

Next Meeting

The next Policy Board meeting will be Tuesday, May 26, 2026 and will be hosted by the Town of Drexel.

Adjournment
Chair Burns thanked the Town of Cajah's Mountain and Caldwell County for their hospitality. Meeting was adjourned at 7:54 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Randy Burns
Chair

Larry Chapman
Secretary