

**Land of Sky Regional Council**  
**February 23, 2022**  
**Regular Meeting**



When joining the virtual meeting, Delegates are requested to mute themselves and to un-mute for discussion or moving on orders of business.

Delegates are requested to state their names when moving on orders of business. Thank you!

**AGENDA**

- I. Call to Order (12:30pm)**
- II. Invocation**
- III. Pledge of Allegiance**
- IV. Roll Call**
- V. Consent Agenda**
  - A. Modification/Approval of Agenda
  - B. Approval of the Previous Minutes (January 2022)
- VI. Comments by the Chair and Delegates Roundtable**
- VII. Public Comment**
- VIII. Presentations/Recognition**
  - A. Hometown Strong Update, Anderson Miller, Director of Public Policy
  - B. LOSRC Years of Service Recognition
  - C. How does Land of Sky Regional Council leverage your local government dues?, Nathan Ramsey, Charlotte Sullivan, Erica Anderson and LeeAnne Tucker
  - D. WNC Innovation Park, EDA Build Back Better, Erica Anderson
  - E. Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, Erica Anderson
  - F. EDA Good Jobs Challenge, Emily Nicholson
- IX. Executive Director's Report**
- X. Important Dates**
  - A. Next regularly scheduled Board meeting is planned for March 23, 2022.
- XI. Adjournment**



## BOARD OF DELEGATES AGENDA ITEM

- Subject:** Consent Agenda
- Item Number:** V. Consent Agenda:  
A. Modification/Approval of the Board's Agenda for February 23, 2022  
B. Approval of Minutes from the January 26, 2022, Regular Meeting
- Responsible Party:** Zia Rifkin, Administrative Services
- Attachment(s):** Minutes from the December 2021 Regular Meeting
- Background:** Item B. January 26, 2022 Regular Meeting Minutes Recap:  
Quorum was present to conduct business at the January 2022 meeting and the minutes provide a recap of the Delegates' updates from around the region. The meeting also included recognition for State Representatives Susan Fisher, John Ager, and Brian Turner, who are not seeking another term in the General Assembly. Presentations were provided by Department of Natural and Cultural Resources Secretary D. Reid Wilson and Commissioner Josh Dobson with the the NC Department of Agriculture.
- Staff Recommendation:** Recommend approval of the Consent Agenda
- Suggested Motion(s):** Move to approve the Consent Agenda, as presented.

**Land of Sky Regional Council  
Board of Delegates  
Regular Meeting**

**January 26, 2022**

**Minutes**

- I. Call to Order – Chair Volk called the meeting to order at approximately 12:30pm.
- II. Invocation – Mayor Harris gave the invocation.
- III. Pledge of Allegiance – Chair Volk led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance.
- IV. Roll Call – Nathan Ramsey called the roll. The following members were present: Sandra Kilgore, Barbara Volk, Larry Harris, Norris Gentry, Bob Tomasulo, Daniel Cobb, George Morosani, Jason Chappell, Maureen Copelof, Nathan Bennett, Tim Love, William Lapsley, Michael Garrison, Jonathan Kanipe, Terri Wells, Jane Alexander, Preston Blakely, and Deb Bridges

Guests Present – Drew Christy, Brian Turner, Deans Eatman, John Ager, Josh Dobson, Keith Tomson, Marissa Turner, Brad Guth, Robin Ramsey, Susan Fisher, April Riddle, D. Reid Wilson, and Christopher Todd

A quorum was present to conduct business.

- V. Consent Agenda – The consent agenda, consisting of the Board’s January agenda and the minutes of the December 1, 2021, meeting was presented for approval.

***George Morosani moved to approve the consent agenda as presented. Maureen Copelof seconded, and the motion carried upon a roll call vote, and without further discussion.***

- VI. Chair’s Comments and Delegates Roundtable

Chair Volk requested that Delegates share updates and news of interest in their jurisdictions.

Delegates Roundtable

Commissioner Terri Wells – Shared that Buncombe County is in the middle of the Comprehensive Plan and seeking community input and comment. She shared a link in the chat for folks to get involved.

Planning Director Christopher Todd – Shared that Henderson County is going to be involved in its comprehensive plan and is looking at an expansion for the jail and courthouse.

Commissioner Norris Gentry – Shared that Madison County is planning uses for the ARPA funds and the County has consolidated its services for zoning, economic and community development, etc. under one umbrella. He shared also that the Principal of Madison High School passed away suddenly yesterday. He was a real leader in the community and will be missed by all.

Commissioner Jason Chappell – Shared that Transylvania County has contracted with the Tag Office to have that service available once again in the County. The County staff will have the opportunity to provide exceptional customer service to the community.

Council Member Sandra Kilgore – Shared that the City of Asheville voted last night to approve conditional zoning for the Biltmore Avenue property (originally approved in 2019) and the City will be interviewing approximately 70 applicants for the ARPA funds. Last night, Council is trying to balance the needs of the community and to address the trash problem. Council is looking at potentially developing guidelines to serve the homeless and Council Member Kilgore noted that the City trying to clean up trash has nothing to do with neglecting the homeless. The Council and the community can find common ground to serve/protect the homeless and benefit the community.

Manager Jonathan Kanipe – Shared that Town of Biltmore Forest is working on ongoing projects (stream restoration, etc.) and pushing forward with stormwater projects. More work coming up in terms of the parks, such as walking trails, etc. since funding has been opened to more uses.

Mayor Larry Harris – Shared that the Town of Black Mountain staff did an exceptional job during the snowstorm clearing the roads and keeping everyone safe. He gave a shoutout to NCDOT for their work to clear highway 9 (Montreat to Bat Cave) the morning after the snowstorm and they did a great job, allowing students to return to the college on schedule.

Mayor Maureen Copelof – Shared that the City of Brevard has the new interim manager on board while the City looks for its next manager. The City was busy with snow removal last week and had so many staff out with Covid that it was a skeleton crew available to remove the snow. The Arts in March Festival (March 26, 27) includes small community events in the downtown. City Council retreat coming up soon.

Mayor Preston Blakely – Shared that the Town of Fletcher is involved in preliminary budgetary planning and the Council approved the selling agreement for a parcel of land in front of the Town Hall. Council has also appointed a new council member, Jonathan Reeds, to fill the seat left vacant. There's a 5k coming up instead of a chili cookoff.

Mayor Barbara Volk – Shared that the City of Hendersonville is fairly quiet but is especially pleased about the City's 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary as an incorporated municipality, and there will be various celebrations throughout the year to highlight City departments and commemorate the occasion. Check the City's website (<https://www.hendersonvillenc.gov/175th-anniversary>) for upcoming events and celebrations. Lastly, the City is asking the community to weigh in uses for the ARPA funds. A public input session is coming up next Tuesday and lots of involvement from all segments of the community is anticipated.

Manager Daniel Cobb – Shared that the Town of Mills River is busy with lots of residential development going on and proposed developments under consideration. There are a couple of projects the Town is working on and advertisements for bids for a new picnic shelter at the Park has been posted. The Riverbank Restoration project is beginning and like everyone else, the Town is working to figure out its budget for the next fiscal year and what good uses the ARPA funds could support. Looking at procuring higher quality equipment for Town Hall for video. He shared also that Sandra Goode is a new member on the Town Board.

Council Member Jane Alexander – Shared that the Town of Montreat would like to thank Mayor Harris because the entire Town and the college benefited from having the roads cleared. She shared that the Town is searching for a new administrator as Alex Carmichael is going to Laurel Park. Lastly, the Town is working to complete its Comprehensive Plan.

Bob Tomasulo – Shared that the Regional Aging Advisory Council (RAAC) meeting on January 13 received a presentation from Vicki Jennings, Director of Mountain Mobility.

Council Member Deb Bridges – Shared that the Town of Laurel Park has a new Town Manager (Alex Carmichael) the other big news is the Town had a successful snow removal and she gave a shoutout to Town staff who worked so hard to remove the snow and keep the community safe. The new Town Manager won't be starting until sometime in February and other projects include planning for the Town's Centennial (2025), a new town hall, and Parks and Greenways have been working a good bit with the Ecusta trail.

Council Member Sandra Goode – Shared that she is glad to be on the LOSRC Board and to be a newly elected member of the Town of Mills River Council.

VII. Public Comment -

Chair Volk called for public comments. Keith Thomson commended Nathan Ramsey and the LOSRC staff for being recognized on NCImpact on PBS Monday night.

VIII. Presentations/Recognition –

A. Recognition for Retiring Legislators – Representative John Ager, Representative Susan Fisher, and Representative Brian Turner are retiring from the General Assembly. LOSRC thanks these representatives for their service to the region.

Susan Fisher shared her pleasure at being at the meeting and she appreciated hearing all the reports from member governments. She shared her condolences for Madison High School's loss. Representative Fisher

shared her appreciation for Nathan Ramsey for the information he has conveyed about the region. She noted that she will miss being the representative For House District 114 after January 31.

Representative John Ager shared that it is an honor to represent Buncombe County and the western region in Raleigh, and he noted that he will stay on for the remainder of the legislative term. He affirmed the hard work of making a government effective and he shared his appreciation for the local officials, who work tirelessly to keep their communities strong and improve everyone's lives.

Representative Brian Turner shared that he would continue to serve through the end of his term, and he looks forward to benefitting the region during that time. He noted that Buncombe County and the City of Asheville's leadership have been instrumental in leading the region and he thanked Representative Fisher for her help over the years.

#### B. NC Department of Natural and Cultural Resources- Secretary D. Reid Wilson –

Secretary Wilson shared appreciation for the Representatives recognized at today's meeting, noting their huge investment of time and energy. He shared that these three representatives are great champions of the natural resources of WNC and have done so much for all the people of North Carolina. Secretary Wilson shared that the Department covers all the things that everyone loves about the State- Museums, Parks, Libraries, etc., along with many cultural boards and commissions. All of these give the citizens in the State a shared identity and common ground. He thanked LOSRC for the partnership on the Student Connect initiative, which created hot spots accessible to students throughout the western region (Regions A and B). exciting times at the Department (50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary) and events are planned around the State.

Additionally, Secretary Wilson shared that the new budget is transformational for parts of the Department- these funds will be allocated across the State, bringing investments in the Arts, economic development, and other endeavors to increase the quality of life. He noted the \$4.2 million to acquire and develop the Pisgah View State Park, located in Buncombe and Haywood Counties and the \$101 million additional dollars to the public parks trust fund. Most of the funding goes to State projects, but 30% goes to local governments for parks and recreation. There is also more funding for trails and for planning and capital investments on trails including the Mountains to Seas Trail, the Fonta Flora Trail, and the Ecusta Trail. Investments in biological and natural resources centers and more funding for historical sites maintenance (Vance Birthplace, etc.). The budget also allocates more funding for the NC Land and Water Fund, which provides funding to local projects. The budget also provided an \$11 million increase for local libraries in the State to sustain and allow them to thrive. There is also a long list of directed grants for a variety of things dispersed through local governments. The Governor recently signed an EO regarding climate change, transportation issues and environmental justice. He noted that 23 million more people visited State Parks over the past year, and it's been a healthy, healthy thing to do during the pandemic. Working to direct more funding towards areas of the State that have traditionally not had the important recreational resources.

#### C. NC Department of Labor – Commissioner Josh Dobson -

Commissioner Josh Dobson shared that its bittersweet being part of today's meeting where the Representatives are being recognized for their service. He noted their great advocacy for the entire western region, and that it has been an honor serving with them over the years. Regarding the Department of Labor (NCDOL), the NCDOL is also responsible for inspecting elevators and every amusement device in the State. Every time an amusement device is set up in the State, it must be inspected. This means that as devices move around the State, those are inspected every time those are set up. Additionally, the NCDOL is responsible for workplace safety for every worker in the State. NCDOL provides consultations through the Bureau of Occupational Safety and Health to any business requesting assistance. No citations can be given during the consultative process. The SHARP program is a safety program that provides a certification when criteria are met by public and private entities. He encouraged folks to reach out to him with any needs that the Department could meet.

#### IX. New Business

A. Resolution in Support of Land of Sky Regional Council's Application to Establish A Foreign Trade Zone to Serve Western North Carolina –

Nathan Ramsey shared that Western North Carolina is one of the few areas in NC that is not currently served by a Foreign-Trade Zone. A Foreign-Trade Zone (FTZ) offers the region another economic development tool. Several local businesses have already expressed an interest in taking advantage of the resources available to companies located in an FTZ.

Renee Boyette, FTZ Administrator for LOSRC provided a presentation regarding establishing an FTZ for WNC, including the benefits of operating in an FTZ (duty savings, merchandise processing fee savings, zone to zone transfers, scrap/waste and logistic and operational improvements). She gave examples of manufacturing benefits by reviewing a production example and reviewed the zones currently serving NC. She reviewed the process to establish an FTZ for WNC including the Grant of Authority, the critical support necessary from LOSRC Board members, elected officials, municipal and county managers and economic development staff, the chambers of commerce, the business community and the CBP Ports of Entry. She concluded by noting that today's request is to adopt a resolution of support endorsing the application to establish an FTZ for WNC and authoring the Executive Direct to sign the application letter submitted to the US FTZ Board.

Nathan Ramsey shared that there is a cost associated with applying to become an FTZ, but once established, there would be no net cost to LOSRC. A request has been made to DHT for funding to support some of the costs associated with this initiative. Renee Boyette noted that once the FTZ is established, businesses could be charged a fee, which could allow LOSRC to recoup costs, but the organization would not be allowed to make a profit from the FTZ.

***Larry Harris moved to approve the Resolution In Support of Land Of Sky Regional Council's Application to Establish A Foreign-Trade Zone to Serve Western North Carolina. George Morosani seconded, and the motion carried upon a roll call vote, and without further discussion.***

X. Executive Director's Report

Delegates and guests were encouraged to reach out to Nathan Ramsey with any questions or comments regarding the report, which is available in the agenda packet.

XI. Important Dates

A. The next Board meeting is February 23, 2022.

XII. Adjournment – Chair Volk adjourned the meeting, as there was no further business.

Respectfully submitted by Zia Rifkin



## **BOARD OF DELEGATES AGENDA ITEM**

- Subject:** Executive Director's Report
- Item Number:** IX. Executive Director's Report
- Responsible Party:** Nathan Ramsey, Executive Director
- Attachment(s):** Executive Director's Report for February 23, 2022
- Background:** The Executive Director's Report provides updates and relevant information regarding projects and initiatives for LOSRC Departments/Agencies.
- Staff Recommendation:** N/A.
- Suggested Motion(s):** N/A

Land of Sky Regional Council  
Executive Director's Report  
Respectfully submitted by Nathan Ramsey  
February 23, 2022

1. Finance

- We are excited about MIP (finance software) training which is happening the first week in May.
- Our team has started working with Dr. Jim on Pivot tables and we are gearing up for the FY 22/23 budget.
- The auditors will be here in March to begin compliance work.

2. Economic & Community Development & Transportation Planning

a. Planning Services.

- We are excited to share that Sara Nichols, Regional Planner, presented at the Net Inclusion 2022 Conference on a panel about Coalitions and Digital Equity Planning. <https://www.digitalinclusion.org/net-inclusion-2022/>
- January 25 & 27 the Clean Cities team hosted a workshop series to educate local government and school personnel on how fleet and building decisions can improve air quality while strengthening public budgets. These sessions included AICP credits for sustainability and hosted over 50 people.
- We have released an RFP to seek a Creative Manufacturing Consultant. The RFP closed and candidates were interviewed by the selection committee. The project will be moving forward with a contract soon.
- The WNC Innovation Park was selected as a Duke Sanford School of Public Policy's Spring Consulting Project. We are working with staff and students as they begin their project. Staff continues to seek funding for a feasibility study/strategy to develop the WNC Innovation Park with the coalition of 5 COGS, Dogwood Health Trust, WCU, Montreat College, Community College System, and many other partners.
- We have kicked off a Regional Economic Collaboration and Analysis led by the Region's Chambers of Commerce and business sector. Ernst and Young was selected as the Consultant for this effort and is being funded by the EDA and Dogwood Health Trust.
- Staff continues working with several local governments and partners on applications for economic development, community development, transportation, and infrastructure implementation with BRIC/FEMA, EDA, and foundations. These projects will support transportation connections, resilience, job growth, industry expansion, and place-based development.
- Staff are working with several jurisdictions to support ARPA projects and administration. Please connect with Erica if you would like to learn more: [erica@landofsky.org](mailto:erica@landofsky.org) ARPA information can be found here: <https://www.nc.gov/agencies/pandemic-recovery-office/american-rescue-plan-act-information-and-resources>
- The NCGS 160D requires all Comprehensive Plans be updated to meet the new guidelines by July 1, 2022. Please contact [erica@landofsky.org](mailto:erica@landofsky.org) if you have questions or would like assistance updating your plans.



- Staff is working with the EPA's Office of Research & Development to explore future growth scenarios for the region through 2045 based on land use, transportation, population and employment using UrbanSim. Contact Mary for more information: [mary@landofsky.org](mailto:mary@landofsky.org)
- LOS has been awarded a 205j grant to support continued development of the WNC Stormwater Program. LOSRC has launched the Regional Stormwater Services Program to support small MS4s and interested communities with stormwater management and MS4 stormwater compliance. Contact Mary for more information: [mary@landofsky.org](mailto:mary@landofsky.org)
- Staff is wrapping up stormwater system inventories and integrated MS4 reporting field app deployment with Fletcher and Woodfin.
- Staff has been working with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on a local GAC (Greening America's Communities) Project through a Pilot Program. The Project entails green infrastructure and stream restoration concept designs for A-B Tech's campus. Designs were completed and presented at 6 stakeholder and public meetings.
- Staff secured 319 funding for a new bioretention system for stormwater management in Black Mountain, part of the continued implementation of the Upper Swannanoa River Watershed Management Plan.
- Staff are wrapping up Student Connect- A partnership with NC Department of Natural and Cultural Resources and Southwest Commission to help reduce connectivity barriers for students across the state. This was a fast-moving effort with a tight timeframe to use CARES Act funds to distribute laptops, hotspots and materials throughout Regions A and B.
- Staff have contracted with the Department of IT to distribute and purchase service for 130+ hotspots for telehealth providers in the western region. The hotspots are being prepared to be distributed to the partner agencies.
- LOS partnered with NC DIT and the Division of Rural Health to distribute hotspots with 12 months service, for telehealth programs in WNC. To date 130 hotspots have been distributed to programs in three counties.
- LOS is partnering with the Institute of Emerging Issues and Dogwood Health Trust to assist develop and implement Digital Inclusion Plans in WNC.
- Clean Cities Program is assisting local governments prepare for VW Settlement projects. Please contact Sara Nichols with any questions or requests: [sara@landofsky.org](mailto:sara@landofsky.org)
- Staff are completing the survey, analysis and final products with Outdoor/Recreation Sector manufacturers to determine opportunities in supply chains, workforce and economic diversity in cooperation with High Country Council, Southwestern Commission and Riverbird Research. Final documents to be shared soon!
- Staff are working with several communities for planning and zoning assistance including Hot Springs, Mars Hill, Montreat, Woodfin, Flat Rock, Maggie Valley, Andrews. We are partnering with Region A staff to assist with communities in their region.

- We continue to partner with the Chambers of Commerce, Small Business Support Agencies, nonprofits, and economic developers to assist small businesses through COVID-19 impacts.
- Staff continues to serve as a Steering Committee member for the statewide RISE project for NC Department of Public Safety, NC Office of Recovery and Resilience.
- The TDM Coordinator is working with Workforce, Inspire, and employers to develop a vanpool for under-resourced individuals to access job sites.
- LOSRC's Waste Reduction Partners program is providing free water-use management assessments for large customers of the City of Asheville's Water Resources Department. These on-site assessments help identify utility costs savings for the City.
- LOS received CMAQ funding to continue support of air quality outreach initiatives in WNC.

b. Transportation Services

- MPO & RPO staff continue to work with local partners and NCDOT on project design and development.
- Staff is assisting in TAB, STIP and CTP development and Board meetings.
- RPO staff serving as NCARPO Association President, the NCARPO is the statewide organization representing Rural Transportation Planning Organizations in NC
- MPO and RPO staff are serving on the state's Prioritization Workgroup with other representatives from MPOs, RPOs, and NCDOT.
- The MPO is providing funding to several special studies in the region getting ready to being in FY 2022: Haywood County Greenway Master Plan, Reed Creek Greenway Extension Feasibility Study (City of Asheville), and the Buncombe County Multimodal Master Plan.
- The MPO has completed corridor studies on Hendersonville Road and Tunnel Road, in cooperation with the City of Asheville, Buncombe County, and NCDOT. The Studies can be found here: <http://frenchbroadrivermpo.org/local-plans/>
- The MPO recently accepted the Regional Transit Feasibility Study. More information is available here: <http://frenchbroadrivermpo.org/regional-transit-feasibility-study/>
- The MPO-supported Richland Creek Greenway Study was recently completed by the Town of Waynesville.
- The MPO-supported studies for McDowell/Biltmore Avenue (City of Asheville), Close the GAP (City of Asheville), and Bike/Ped Counters (City of Asheville) are on-going.

3. Aging

Calendar of Events

- The Regional Aging Advisory Council will meet on Thursday, March 10, at 10:00am. Guest speaker will be Grant Weather, Low Vision Services and Outreach Coordinator with the Community Low Vision Center at Industries for the Blind.
- Save the date: Planning has begun for next year's Southeastern Area Agencies on Aging (SE4A) Conference to be held at the Grove Park Inn on August 27-30, 2023.

- Every May, the Administration for Community Living (ACL) leads the nation's observance of Older Americans Month. In 2022, ACL will be focusing on aging in place – how older adults can plan to stay in their homes and live independently in their communities for as long as possible. The [2022 theme is Age My Way](#), an opportunity to explore the many ways older adults can remain in and be involved with their communities.

#### Family Caregiver Support Program

- Staff is facilitating the Caregiver Harnessing Tech to Connect Committee which presented a webinar on February 15, 2022. Two local pharmacists discussed how caregivers can leverage technology options for safer and easier medication management.
- Staff is part of a Kinship Caregiver Stakeholder Roundtable that is working on improving delivery of services to Kinship Caregivers in Transylvania and Henderson Counties.
  - Staff is on a sub-committee to explore possibility of an all-inclusive facility where Kinship Caregivers can go to receive assistance with finding and signing up for services to help meet their needs.
- Staff is working with providers to assist family caregivers of those who have been affected by the closing of the adult day care facility in Transylvania County.

#### Ombudsman Program

- Donna Case has been hired as a new Ombudsman and will begin on 02/28/2022.
- Staff continues to await new Community Advisory Committee training plans and regulations.
- Staff is working with the state in order to create the new Community Advisory Committee training expectations.

Money Follows the Person (MFP) Community Inclusion Specialist: Carol Allison joined the MFP team as the new Community Inclusion Consultant. She is currently training on the many parts of MFP with the team out of Raleigh. The Consultant position will be responsible for promotion and education of the MFP program for the 37 western NC counties.

Senior Companion Program: The Senior Companion Program has a waiting list for referrals and most of our volunteers are back volunteering. Six volunteers retired recently but five new volunteers are completing the on-boarding process. Staff is in the process of volunteer annual reviews and updating our Volunteer Station Memorandums of Understanding. In March, staff will send out the annual survey to clients, to gauge the impact of the program.

American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA): Staff is still waiting on additional guidance from the Division of Aging and Adult Services (DAAS) before moving forward with the Nutrition contracts. However, award letters have been sent to providers. We are still waiting for approval from DAAS for the remainder of the proposed ARPA plan.

COVID-19 Vaccine Outreach: In mid-February, Jenna Sharrits joined the Land of Sky team as the Aging Program Specialist with a focus on outreach and education of the COVID-19 vaccine to homebound older adults. Jenna, a native of Henderson County, holds a bachelor's of science

degree from University of North Carolina at Asheville where she majored in Health and Wellness Promotion with a minor in Religious Studies. She also has a master's degree in Aging Studies with a focus in Public Health through Wichita State University. Previously, she was the Wellness Associate at Summit Hills Retirement Community in Spartanburg, South Carolina. She was also a wellness intern at Givens Estates. In her spare time, she loves being outside whether it's running half marathons, going on a hike, or being by the lake. Jenna will work remotely and can be reached at [jenna@landofsky.org](mailto:jenna@landofsky.org).

#### Home and Community Care Block Grant: January 2022 Report of Services Provided

- Adult Day Care/Health Days = 2296
- Meals – delivered/congregate = 106,280
- In-home Aide hours = 7112
- Legal Services hours = 885
- Transportation trips – 29,389
- Home Improvement projects = 15

#### Money Follows the Person Transition Coordinator:

Western counties being served: Buncombe, Henderson, Transylvania, Polk, Madison, McDowell, Rutherford, Mitchell, Madison. The current caseload for the Western counties is seven.

- Four clients are waiting on housing before they can transition.
- Three clients are scheduled to transition April 1, 2022.

Central counties being served: Forsyth, Davidson, Surry, Davie, Stokes, Yadkin. The current caseload for the Central counties is 10.

- Four clients cannot locate housing.
- Four clients are scheduled to transition April 1, 2022.
- Two clients will be transitioning back home their loved ones.

#### Health Promotion and Disease Prevention

- Health Promotion and Disease Prevention staff welcomes Jenna Sharrits to the AAA team as the Vaccine Outreach Coordinator.
- Staff will co-present at the National Council on Aging Grand Rounds February 22, on behalf of the Advancing Equity and Inclusion in Evidence-based Health Promotion Programs Advisory Group. Topics will cover how to deliver evidence-based programs (EBPs) in the virtual/remote environment, successes of work, and lessons learned.
- Staff continues to work with Blue Ridge Pride and Generations Plus to bring content including the Rainbow Inspiration series and Pride Time to older LGBTQ+ adults.
- Staff will collaborate with Healthy Aging NC and UNCA to conduct future focus groups with former Tai Chi for Arthritis workshop attendees to learn how to better improve delivery and participation retention.

- Staff and Asheville Terrace Community Health Workers continue to partner with MANNA and OLLO volunteers to bring nutrition to residents. In January, 117 bags of groceries were distributed to residents.

#### Project C.A.R.E. (Caregiver Alternatives to Running on Empty)

- All Project C.A.R.E. State funds (\$46,337) have been distributed to caregivers in the 15-county region of the Western Project C.A.R.E. Office. Funds are distributed in the form of vouchers worth \$500 each. A caregiver may receive one to three vouchers per fiscal year. Caregivers pay for respite care services (in-home care, adult day care, overnight care in a facility) and are reimbursed upon submission of a request for reimbursement.
- 70% of the respite funds have been utilized so far.
- Project C.A.R.E. received federal funding this fiscal year. The Project C.A.R.E. Family Consultant is currently distributing \$11,000 in federal funds allotted for the Western Region.
- Staff is promoting the new North Carolina Caregiver Portal made available by the NCDHHS, Division of Adult and Aging Services. The NC Caregiver Portal is an educational website for caregivers that addresses the many aspects of caregiving.
- Staff is actively updating and sharing lists of dementia caregiver resources for each of the 15 counties in service area.
- Staff is participating in continuing education opportunities offered by MemoryCare, AARP, and Land of Sky's Family Caregiver Support Program.

#### Foster Grandparent Program

- Foster Grandparent Program begins a new partnership with Literacy Now that will allow Foster Grandparent Program to tutor kindergarten to third graders in their two new after school programs in the Asheville area. Seven Foster Grandparent volunteers will begin Literacy Now's 12-hour tutoring training the last week of February.
- Foster Grandparent volunteers continue to return to service. There are 11 volunteers that have been able to return to service at Eliada Child Development Center and Franklin School of Innovation. Staff has received confirmation that Buncombe County Schools will allow volunteers to return to the classrooms in the coming weeks.

#### 4. Administration

- We are following Buncombe County Public Health Guidance so face coverings are no longer mandated at our office but they are strongly encouraged. We have rescinded earlier office restrictions when COVID-19 cases were more prevalent. Staff may continue working remotely as allowed by their supervisor.
- Waiting for cost estimates from Buncombe County for office renovations related to the Healthy Opportunities pilot.
- Health Benefits Rep training with state health plan
- Property/Liability meeting with NC League of Municipalities.
- Participated in numerous Foreign-Trade Zone (FTZ) meetings and partner discussions.

- Performed 3 new employee orientations.
- Performed 1 employee exit interview.
- Participated in HRSA funding meetings with community partners.
- Leadership Team Retreat held on February 2.
- Met with Weaverville Town Manager and Transylvania County Manager
- Assisted in interviews for 3 open positions.
- Hosted COG directors meeting and FORUM via our zoom account.
- Hosted DEI committee meetings
- Arranged meeting LOS and Buckeye Hills Regional Council, OH
- Our contract with Craft HR Solutions will transition to an as needed basis on July 1 with at an agreed upon hourly rate.
- We are overseeing ARC INspire Recovery to Careers and ARC POWER Early Childhood Workforce projects which are each over \$1 million serving 11 counties in Western North Carolina.
- We are in conversations with Dogwood Health Trust about increasing COG capacity in WNC. Funding available would enable COGs to provide more support for local governments and communities.

#### 5. Workforce

- Region's unemployment rate of 2.6% for December 2021 is the lowest in the region since September 1999 when it was 2.0%.
- We are hosting a federal, state, and local government job fair on Wednesday, March 23 at the Virginia Boone Building, WNC Agricultural Center in Fletcher.
- NC Department of Commerce, Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS) announced a Reduction in Force for the DWS staff as a result of declining WIOA funding for North Carolina. There will be reductions in staff at DWS in Raleigh and the NCWorks Career Centers across the state. There were sufficient number of DWS employees to take early retirement so there will not be involuntary separations.
- We are participating as one of 15 statewide collaboratives by ncIMPACT/UNC School of Government and my Future NC as regional efforts focused on increasing postsecondary credential attainment.
- We are supporting the workers at Continental as they announced several years ago this facility was closing and final operations will end this year.
- Our Board staff are working closely with multiple partners, including but not limited to the Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce, NC Community College System and AB Tech, to support the Pratt & Whitney project. We have received approval from our financial monitor for these expenditures and hopefully we will have the funding to support this project. We are committing \$50,000 to support virtual pre-employment training.
- The board received a grant from Appalachian Regional Commission to expand the number of early childhood educators in our region. This grant application was an effort to continue the work we have done supported by NCWorks Local Innovation Grant with Buncombe Partnership for Children and the Child & Family Resource Center. We are

partnering with the Southwestern Commission to expand the project to 11 counties and Dogwood Health Trust has graciously agreed to provide matching funds for this project.

- The board has around \$150,000 in NDWG funds to serve dislocated workers and the deadline for expending these funds has been extended to March 2023. The restrictions on these funds are more than contingency funds and we cannot use NDWG to pay for staff expense. A major focus of the board staff is to develop strategies on how to use these funds to support dislocated workers.
- We are applied for the EDA Good Jobs Challenge in partnership with Dogwood Health Trust, AB Tech and Blue Ridge Community College. The focus will be on the advanced manufacturing and healthcare sectors, the request is for \$10 million.
- The board is supporting incumbent worker training (Business Accelerator Grants) with 12 (twelve) local employers.

#### 6. Mountain Mobility

- Mountain Mobility was negatively impacted by January's inclement weather, forcing us to close the system for three days during the month. Those closures led to an overall reduction in passengers served and trips performed.
- On a positive note, our Enka-Candler Trailblazer route continued to perform strong, even with the inclement weather and the MLK holiday during the month of January. Enka-Candler continues to be the most consistent of the three routes throughout Buncombe County.
- \*Admin staff are spending several hours each week in cross-training as we have brought Sarah Marcin on full-time starting earlier in February. Sarah will take some of the responsibilities currently held by Vicki Jennings, who was recently promoted to Healthy Opportunities Transformation Manager. Vicki will continue to serve Mountain Mobility in a supervisory role. Sarah has been with the Admin staff for two years as the RIDE Program Coordinator. Sarah will continue her responsibilities to RIDE as well. Welcome, Sarah!

#### 7. NEMT

- We are submitting monthly reports to Buncombe County on the number of clients and caseload. It appears we did not lose as many Medicaid clients during the transition to managed care.
- Total trips scheduled and total trips taken have increased compared to one year ago but the total active cases have declined.

#### 8. Healthy Opportunities

- LOS has started the hiring process for a Transportation Finance Specialist to assist with the HOP project. We hope to have someone on board mid to late March.
- Work continues to build the network of transportation providers throughout the 18-county region. We are currently working with Impact Health to put together training and technical assistance plans for Human Service Organizations (HSOs) who want to be involved in this project. Over the next few weeks, we will begin sub-contracting with providers in our neighboring counties who would like to participate.