



FROM THE CHAIRMAN

2018 was another great year of service by the Southwestern Commission to the Western North Carolina counties known as Region A. Before going any further, accolades for accomplishments go first to our Director, Sarah Thompson, as well as the previous Board Chairman, Cal Stiles. Cal has served for the past two years and worked very closely with Sarah.

The Commission funneled over 6 million dollars into our counties through a multitude of programs, the two largest of which were for Workforce Development and Older American programs. Many business start-ups as well as small business expansions were aided through our Revolving Loan Fund. The Commission has also been working with all of our counties on the need for more broadband services. This is a prime example of taking a regional approach on a major issue.

Lastly, I would like to note the growth of all of the small towns in our seven-county region and the success that is being made in revitalization and expansion in our

downtowns. The statistics in North Carolina show that the majority of jobs are within city limits, so growth with our towns benefits the county not only through jobs but also increased tax revenue and sales revenue to the county. A good city-county partnership benefits everybody.

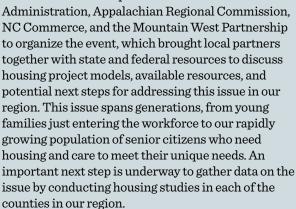
Harry Baughn Chairman



As we travel around the region to work with local governments, non-profits, and citizens, there are two topics that keep coming up: broadband and housing. It's very difficult to attract and retain businesses if there isn't sufficient housing available for their workforce. Furthermore, the importance of highspeed broadband has infiltrated every aspect of our lives. We certainly cannot educate and train a workforce without it. The lack of broadband in rural regions such as ours has quickly become the number one economic development issue of our era.

In 2018 we completed our first phase of regional broadband planning and began preparations for phase two. Our region has very good "middle mile" infrastructure, with the fiber that connects our schools, major employers, and institutions. What we lack is quality "last mile" infrastructure to the home. Due to our mountainous terrain, we are taking the advice of experts in the field and focusing on opportunities for wireless propagation. Policies regarding public sector involvement in broadband infrastructure are evolving, and we are laying the groundwork for expansion of service by supporting internet providers, public-private partnerships, as well as advocating for state and federal policy changes that will clear the way for the expansion of rural broadband.

Also in 2018 we hosted an informative and wellattended summit called "Housing and Economic Development, Bridging the Gap". We partnered with the US Economic Development



The Southwestern Commission departments and staff are structured to address regional issues with local solutions, of which housing and broadband are just two of many. We work every day for the overall health of your community, always seeking the appropriate channels of collaboration needed to achieve our collective goals.

Sarah Thompson **Executive Director**



SOUTHWESTERN COMMISSION



ANNUAL DINNER

The Southwestern Commission held it's 2018 Annual Dinner on July 30 at the Historic Clay County Courthouse Beal Center in Hayesville, NC. This was the first event held in the newly restored courthouse. Built in 1888, this unique historical structure is the center piece to downtown Hayesville. Elected officials, municipal and county managers, community partners, commission staff, and guests, enjoyed an evening full of wonderful food and the best of company.

Key-note speaker for the event was Scott Hamilton, Executive Director with the Appalachian Regional Commission.

EBCI JOINS SOUTHWESTERN COMMISSION

The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI) has worked with our local governments for years on issues affecting the region. On March 26, 2018, the Southwestern Commission Board voted unanimously to add the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians as a voting member of the Southwestern Commission Council of Governments.

We are thrilled to have the EBCI as a member of our organization!



NOTABLE ACHIEVEMENTS

Southwestern Commission employees are continuously serving on boards and committees, obtaining certifications, and furthering their education. In 2018, we noted these accomplishments:

Executive Director Sarah Thompson served on the board of the North Carolina Rural Center. She was also named Board Chair of Thread Capital, a newly formed Community Development Financial Institution housed at the NC Rural Center.

Community and Economic Development Director Russ Harris received his Master of Public Affairs from Western Carolina University and was a graduate of the School of Government Community Development Academy. He also served on the Board of Mainspring Conservation.

Area Agency on Aging Administrator Sarajane Melton chaired the North Carolina Area Agency on Aging Association, NC4A.

Workforce Development Director David Garrett was chosen to serve as Vice-Chair of the newly formed Nantahala Health Foundation.

Senior Planner Rose Bauguess was chosen as secretary to the North Carolina Association of Rural Planning Organizations.

Senior Project Manager Becca Scott graduated from the North Carolina Rural Center Rural Economic Development Initiative XXVIII.

Office Manager and Clerk to the Board Debra Ivey attained her North Carolina Municipal and County Clerk certifications.



Special guests at the annual dinner. Left to right: Representative John Hardister, Representative Kevin Corbin, Chairman Cal Stiles, Executive Director Sarah Thompson, Representative Mike Clampit,

AREA AGENCY ON AGING



BLUE CROSS BLUE SHIELD INVESTS IN REGION'S FOOD INSECURE

In September 2018, Tier 1 counties across the state received an investment of \$2.6 million from Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina (BCBSNC) to help fight hunger. BCBSNC is giving all Tier 1 counties \$10,000 per year for three years for the Meals on Wheels program. This investment will help close the wait list gap for the thousands of seniors in North Carolina, many of those in Region A, currently waiting to receive home delivered meals.

Southwestern Commission Area Agency on Aging administers federal and state funds from the *Older Americans Act* that provides for Home Delivered Meals. SWC AAA contracts with local service providers in every county within the region to provide a meal to older adults who meet the criteria for the service.

FAMILY CAREGIVER SUPPORT PROGRAM- THELMA'S STORY

Southwestern Commission Area Agency on Aging administers the Family Caregiver Support Program with funds from the Older Americans Act. The Family Caregiver Support Program provides technical assistance, information, support, and respite dollars for family caregivers. Here is the story of one of our caregivers and their loved one.

Thelma cares for her 83-year-old husband, Larson, who has dementia and multiple physical ailments. Before signing up for her first Family Caregiver Support Program voucher in 2017, Thelma and her daughter had cared for Larson for two years without any paid help. Because his dementia often causes him to get confused and wander, he needs constant supervision. She assists him with most of his activities of daily living so that he can continue living comfortably at home in rural Jackson County.

Caregiving is nothing new to Thelma. She has been a caregiver to several others, including both her parents and numerous family members. Her claim to fame is that she has "helped raised half the county!". She takes pride in this but admits that she needs rest from time to time, proving even the most seasoned caregivers need assistance. She explains that "things start to close in on you after you go awhile without any kind of break".

Vouchers from the Family Caregiver Support
Program have allowed Thelma to hire part-time
help, so that she can take short breaks, or "respite".
Respite is vital to preventing caregiver burnout. In
Thelma's experience, respite is beneficial to both
the caregiver and care recipient. As she puts it, "if a
caregiver gets upset and exhausted, the care recipient
feels it too." This arrangement allows Larson to
stay at home where he is most comfortable.

While someone is with Larson, Thelma can attend to her own needs. She can do her grocery shopping without having to rush home in fear of Larson being alone. She can take care of her own health and visit her doctors. Most importantly, she can get outside and do the things she loves like gardening and yard work.

While things are still not easy for her, she takes it day by day and looks forward to those short breaks she gets through assistance from the *Family Caregiver Support Program*.



SENIOR CELEBRATION 2018

Over 480 seniors from around Region A gathered in the Ramsey Center at Western Carolina University on September 7, 2018 to celebrate themselves. With music, laughter, food, and fun, our region's seniors were treated to a day dedicated to showing them how important their generation is to us. Senior Celebration is a way to show our older population that they are valued and respected, and that we're committed to making their lives as comfortable and rewarding as possible. Thanks to great sponsorship, community support, an outstanding event planning committee, senior center participation, and numerous volunteers, the event was a huge success.

HAYDRE FORMATION

For almost twenty years, Larry Reeves/Region A Long-Term Care Ombudsman, has been involved in working with folks in Haywood County that are making a journey through life that is shaped by the challenges of dementia. Currently, he is the co-facilitator of a "Dementia Caregivers' Support Group" that meets monthly at the Haywood Senior Resource Center. Under Larry's leadership, a new organization has been formed to raise funds for the support and assistance of the 3,000 + residents of Haywood County living with dementia, Alzheimer's, and related disorders. **HayDRE** is managed under the financial guidelines of Mountain Projects, Inc., as a non-profit (501c.3) agency.

The Long-Term Care Ombudsmen assists residents of long-term care facilities in exercising their rights and attempts to resolve grievances between residents, families and facilities.

For more information: www.haydre@org



COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

ASSISTING LOCAL GOVERNMENTS WITH HOUSING CHALLENGES

Lack of workforce housing is a deterrent to economic development in the region. One of the key statistics that helps to assess the issue is the percentage of cost-burdened households in a county. This is defined as those households spending more than 30% of their income on housing. Families that spend over 30% of take-home pay on rent or mortgage have less money to provide quality meals, healthcare, and education, among other goods and services that contribute to quality of life.

County	Percentage of cost-burdened households in 2018		
Cherokee	26%		
Clay	28%		
Graham	18%		
Haywood	29%		
Jackson	30%		
Macon	28%		
Swain	23%		

In August of 2018, the Southwestern Commission partnered with the US Economic Development Administration, Appalachian Regional Commission, NC Commerce, and the Mountain West Partnership to organize a regional summit, "Housing and Economic Development: Bridging the Gap." The summit brought local partners together with state and federal resource providers to discuss housing project models, available resources, and potential next steps for addressing this issue in our region.



SUPPORTING LOCAL BUSINESS THROUGH GRANT ADMINISTRATION

One of the primary roles that the Community and Economic Development Department plays on an ongoing basis is grant writing and administration. In 2018, the Southwestern Commission completed administration of an NC Department of Commerce Building Reuse Grant to help TekTone Sound and Signal expand its operations. TekTone Sound and Signal is a Macon County manufacturer of healthcare communications systems that are used in a variety of medical facilities around the globe. In exchange for creating 15 new jobs, TekTone received \$187,500 in Building Reuse Funds from the State of North Carolina. The company has called Franklin home since 1989 and employs more than 80 people.



GROWING OUTDOORS: A REGIONAL APPROACH TO EXPANDING WNC OUTDOOR INDUSTRY JOBS AND BUSINESSES

Funded by the Appalachian Regional Commission in 2018, the *Growing Outdoors* project is a regional collaboration among all the ARC counties in WNC aimed at expanding the region's outdoor industry. A primary focus is to attract, incubate, support, and grow outdoor gear manufacturers. The project will focus on workforce development, entrepreneurship and access to capital, growing markets, connecting supply chain clusters, and economic development.

The Southwestern Commission has staff members on the steering committee for this multi-year project, as well as on the advisory committee for the newly formed North Carolina Outdoor Recreation Industry Office. Both initiatives aim to leverage tourism from outdoor recreation into year-round business activity in the outdoor industry.

In 2018 Western Carolina University convened the region's first-ever conference devoted solely to the outdoor industry.

Demographic Highlights for Region A

KEY FACTS			EDUCATION			
204,101 Population 2.3 Average Household Size		46.8 Median Age 540,802 Iledian Household Income	High	9% a School aduate	33% Some College	25% Bachelor's/Grad/Prof
HOUSING STATS			ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD SPENDING			
\$182,707 Median Home Value	\$5,700 Average Spent on Mortgage & Basics	\$533 Median Contract Rent	\$1,407 Apparel & Services \$3,7	Com Hai	100 puters & rdware Us \$4,5 Health	52
	INCOME		Households By Income The largest group: \$50,00 The smallest group: \$200, Indicator <\$15,000 \$15,000 - \$24,999 \$25,000 - \$34,999 \$35,000 - \$49,999 \$50,000 - \$74,999 \$75,000 - \$99,999	0 - \$74,999 (18	Difference +3.8% +2.4% +1.6% +0.1% -1.5%	
\$40,802	\$24,156	\$78,647	\$100,000 - \$149,999 \$150,000 - \$199,999	7.8% 2.2%	-4.2% -2.3%	
Median Household	Per Capita Income	Median Net Worth	\$200,000+	2.1%	-2.5%	

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WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT



FINISH LINE GRANT

The WIOA-funded Finish Line Grant Program was initiated in 2018 to help community college students who face unexpected financial emergencies complete their training. The Southwestern Commission's Workforce Development Department was granted \$100,000 to assist students at Southwestern, Haywood and Tri-County Community Colleges. Finish Line Grants can be used for course materials, housing, medical needs, dependent care, or other financial emergencies that students face through no fault of their own.

CAREER CENTER MANAGEMENT CHANGES

2018 was a year of transition for our NCWorks Career Centers region-wide. Dale West retired as the Center Manager for Macon, Swain, Jackson and Haywood Counties, and Pam Dickey retired as the Tri-County Career Center Manager.

Both Dale and Pam were active participants on boards and committees throughout our region. They left us much stronger because of their dedication and commitment to the workforce.

The three new NCWorks Career Center Managers Tom Brownback (Tri-County), Lisa Morris (Haywood), and Paula Alter (Macon, Jackson, Swain) were promoted from within our local NCWorks Career Centers and understand workforce issues facing our region and communities.

Some of the important projects that are taking place in our NCWorks Career Centers are:

- job fairs in schools and local businesses
- employment testing for businesses
- career services
- tours for SOAR, Job Corp, and Haywood Vocational Occupation participants
- aligning transportation assistance for those in need of a way to work
- helping employees in businesses that are closing through Rapid Response

In August 2018, all five NCWorks Career Centers in our region were recognized by the NCWorks Commission as *certified centers*. The center certification process was established to ensure a consistent level of quality customer service throughout the career center system to promote an integrated delivery approach, and to maintain service expectations of the NCWorks Career Center brand.





SOUTHWESTERN RURAL PLANNING ORGANIZATION (RPO)



LOCAL PROJECTS

The Southwestern RPO staff works closely with NCDOT Division 14 staff, local governments, and public citizens during project development to make sure local plans and visions are incorporated into the final transportation project. Two of the most active projects during 2018 included Corridor K in Graham County and NC 107 in Jackson County.

PRIORITIZATION 5.0

Prioritization of transportation projects continues to be a major focus for the Southwestern RPO. RPO staff are responsible for submitting potential projects for scoring, developing a methodology for assigning local input points, coordinating with NCDOT Division staff and local officials on mutual priorities, and collecting public input. The use of an online public survey tool greatly increased public input for Prioritization 5.0, receiving over 1200 responses. The input was used by local officials to develop local priority rankings. Prioritization 5.0 concluded at the end of 2018, with the release of NCDOT's Draft 2020-2029 State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP).

REGIONAL BIKE PLAN

The Southern Blue Ridge Bike Plan was completed in 2018, covering Cherokee, Clay, Graham, and Macon Counties. The Plan includes recommendations for improving bicycling conditions in our region, as well as guide maps for each county to use when promoting their bicycling resources.

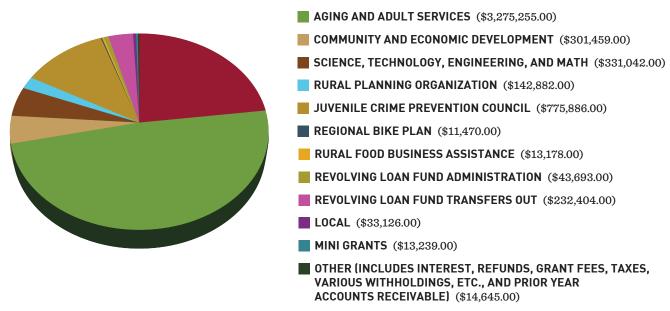
SOUTHERN BLUE RIDGE BICYCLE PLAN BICYCLE TOURISM ECONOMIC IMPACT Southwestern Commission Region \$189.66 Average per Person Daily Spending \$1,288 Annual Person Visits \$3.3 MILLION Income Generated \$3.3 MILLION Tax Revenues \$3.3 MILLION Tax Revenues \$3.3 MILLION Tax Revenues

FINANCIALS

GENERAL FUND RECEIPTS *JANUARY-DECEMBER 2018*



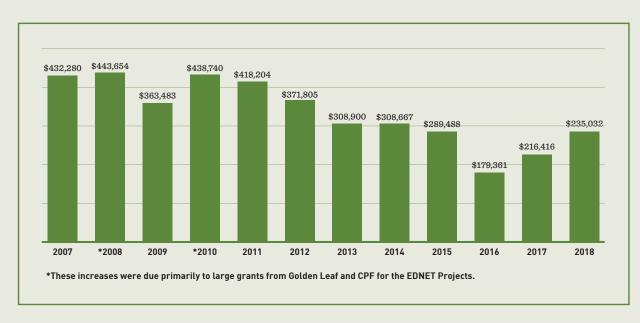
GENERAL FUND DISBURSEMENTS *JANUARY-DECEMBER* 2018



WORKFORCE INNOVATION AND OPPORTUNITIES ACT (\$1,548,450.00)

TOTAL (\$6,736,729.00)

FUND BALANCE







The mission of the Southwestern Commission is to improve the quality of life in its seven-county service area by assisting local governments in reaching their goals.

The Southwestern Commission is the council of government (COG) for North Carolina's Region A, covering the western most part of the state; Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Jackson, Macon, and Swain Counties, the Qualla Boundary, and the 17 municipalities therein.

