



YEAR IN REVIEW

SOUTHWESTERN COMMISSION BOARD & STAFF

BOARD ELECTIONS

On November 23, 2020, the Southwestern Commission Board of Directors held their bi-annual nominations and elections for the Executive Committee seats. Canton Mayor Zeb Smathers became the Board's new Chairman, while Macon County Commissioner Ronnie Beale took over as 1st Vice-Chair. The Board nominated and elected Graham County Commissioner Connie Orr for the 2nd Vice-Chair position, and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians Principal Chief Richard Sneed was elected as Treasurer. Outgoing Chairman, Hayesville Mayor Harry Baughn, was presented with a plaque and Commission jacket upon completion of his two-year term.

RETIRED

In October 2020, Roger Wiggins retired after working as the Commission Finance Officer for 34 years.

Larry Reeves, the Commission's Regional Long Term Care Ombudsman, retired at the end of 2020 after 7.5 years with the Area Agency on Aging.



Incoming Commission Board Chairman Zeb Smathers, Mayor of Canton, presents a plaque of appreciation to outgoing Chairman, Hayesville Mayor Harry Baughn.



Roger Wiggins



Larry Reeves

SOUTHWESTERN COMMISSION'S ROLE DURING THE PANDEMIC

The year 2020 was not business-as-usual. When 2020 was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Southwestern Commission transformed the way in which we did our work throughout the region, focusing on our goal of being a regional convener and providing assistance to local governments, nonprofits, businesses, older adults, and the region's workforce. In the first few months of the pandemic, useful information about relief programs, safety protocol, and other pertinent topics was flowing from every direction. To assist the region in making sense of it all, we created a **COVID Resource Guide**, which was updated regularly on our website regiona.org.

Access to high speed internet was a big issue before the pandemic. It quickly became evident that our lives would move online during the pandemic, and that our region's broadband challenges would create a real barrier, particularly in the areas of telehealth and education. We created and published an interactive **map of free public wifi hotspots** throughout the region, which has been viewed thousands of times. At one point, a local doctor's office had recorded a voicemail message directing patients to our website to access the map to help their patients connect to the internet for their appointments. This map will remain on our website as a useful tool.

Broadband expansion was a major focus of state and federal efforts to respond to the COVID crisis, with a push to fund **broadband projects** through multiple grant programs. We worked directly with Internet Service

Providers to write grants for funding to expand broadband service in underserved areas of the region, bringing over \$7 million to the region in **grant funding**.

Early in the shutdown, our Workforce Development Department began working with NCWorks Career Centers in the region to assist with the inundation of **unemployment benefit applications**. We gathered feedback from businesses in the region on how they were being impacted by the pandemic through a **Business Impact Survey**. We also created a list of companies in the region who were hiring, and this list is updated regularly and featured on the COVID Resource Guide as well as our monthly newsletters.

The Area Agency on Aging immediately began assisting efforts to disseminate information and resources to the network of aging service providers for older adults and their caregivers, including assistance in distributing **personal protective equipment**. The Family Caregiver Support program was even more important this past year, providing resources for those who found themselves filling the role of **caregiver** for their loved one. This role can often lead to burnout and other challenges, which were compounded by the pandemic. The Legal Program was also very busy connecting older adults to attorneys to prepare **legal documents**, free of charge to income-qualifying seniors.

Residents of **Long-Term Care facilities** were especially affected by Covid. Window visits, social isolation, covid testing, quarantine, and vaccines are a few of the obstacles that families, residents, and staff faced over the past year. Our Long-Term Care Ombudsman helped facilities and families navigate through policies and information and served as a valuable resource. To best distribute the information, we created an **instructional video series** to serve as a resource for Long-Term Care Facilities, family caregivers, and individuals considering long-term care placement.

Nutrition, via **home delivered meals**, was on the forefront of everyone's minds when quarantine began. Departments on Aging and Senior Nutrition Sites went above and beyond to ensure that every older adult was served. Through it all, the AAA played a vital role in navigating, coordinating, and funding efforts to provide support and services throughout the region.

WITH A LITTLE PLANNING

VIRTUAL FUNDERS FORUM
OCTOBER 27, 2020

We had planned a Funders Forum for March 2020, where representatives from local, state, and federal funders would provide information about their programs and meet our region's local government and non-profit leaders. The week before the summit was to take place, the pandemic forced us all into quarantine, and we postponed the event. However, we were able to reschedule and pivot to a recorded *Virtual Funders Forum*. The video, which is available on our YouTube Channel, has been viewed over 300 times.



THE FEDERAL CARES ACT PROVIDES \$1.8 MILLION IN LOW INTEREST LOAN FUNDING TO THE REGION FROM THE US ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

The Southwestern Commission was the recipient of federal CARES Act funds intended to boost the economy by capitalizing a low interest loan program. The funding is available to businesses, non-profits, and governmental units in the Commission's 7-county service area. Eligible uses of the loan funds are machinery and equipment, construction and renovation, land and property acquisition, and working capital. Introductory interest rates are as low as 1%.

Once lent out through the CARES Act program, the funds will forever revolve in the Commission's existing Revolving Loan Fund Program, significantly increasing the pool of available funds.

Has your **business** or **organization** been **IMPACTED** by **COVID-19**?

You may qualify for a low interest loan!

- Funds used must create or retain jobs
- Interest rates as low as 1%
- Credit restrictions will apply



Visit regiona.org/COVIDLOAN to apply today!

NOTABLE ACHIEVEMENTS

Executive Director **Sarah Thompson** was named Chair of the Board of Directors of the North Carolina Rural Center.

Senior Planner **Rose Bauguess** was chosen to serve as Vice President of the North Carolina Association of Rural Planning Organizations.

Workforce Development Director **David Garrett** was chosen to serve as Chair on the Nantahala Health Foundation Board.

Office Manager and Clerk to the Board **Debra Ivey** was chosen to serve on the Board of Directors for the North Carolina Association of County Clerks.

COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

HOME CONSORTIUM: REGION A COUNTIES AND TOWNS JOIN TOGETHER TO ADDRESS REGIONAL HOUSING CRISIS

The first step in addressing issues in the region is to first understand the size and scope of the issue. With that in mind, the Southwestern Commission conducted a study of the region's housing issues in 2019. That report showed an unmet demand of close to 5,000 affordable and subsidized housing units across the region.

The next step is to look for solutions to address the problem. *HUD Home Funds* are programmatic funds primarily available to densely populated urban areas to provide housing assistance to those living at or below the poverty level. Rural communities are only eligible to participate if they join together to form a *HOME Consortium*. The Southwestern Commission began the process of forming the Southwestern NC HOME Consortium in 2020. Haywood, Jackson, Macon, Swain, Clay, and Graham Counties and the towns within those

counties agreed to participate in the consortium, giving the region access to an annual allocation of \$542,000 which can go to a wide variety of housing activities including land purchases, construction, rental and down payment assistance, and repairs.

Throughout the year, the Commission worked on a *Consolidated Housing Plan* for our region to ensure the HUD funds are used as effectively and efficiently as possible. This process engages stakeholders to determine the needs and priorities of the region and to develop an action plan for deployment of the HUD HOME funds, which is expected to begin in fall/winter of 2021. Many partners have come together to make this project possible, including the Dogwood Health Trust, which contributed financial resources to pay for planning, matching funds, and training.

REGION WINS TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE GRANT

In September 2020, our region was named as a CREATE BRIDGES region by NC State University. The CREATE BRIDGES project is a 30-month regional strategic planning initiative designed to strengthen the *retail, accommodation, tourism, and entertainment* sectors. The process is being led by the Southwestern Commission and the Mountain West Partnership in collaboration with NC State University. Participating communities from the region include Jackson, Swain, Macon, and Graham Counties as well as the Qualla Boundary.



The purpose is to pilot a process for helping rural communities build their capacity for strengthening the retail, tourism, hospitality, and entertainment sectors. These sectors, which have been particularly hard hit by the coronavirus pandemic, provide jobs and business opportunities that frequently boost rural economies. CREATE BRIDGES provides opportunities to customize implementation according to community needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Partners include NC Cooperative Extension, NC State University, the Institute of Emerging Issues, and the NC Association of Councils of Government.

In December 2020, three public forums were held to gather community insights about the strengths, challenges, and opportunities for the region. Forum feedback suggests that the region's natural beauty is its greatest asset, which makes tourism a significant driver of economic opportunity. However, businesses in the region struggle to find a suitable workforce to service this demand.

In 2021, the process will include starting a Business Retention and Expansion program customized to businesses in the retail, accommodation, tourism, and entertainment sectors. Another component of the project is an employee engagement survey to learn how to better attract and retain workers in these sectors.

STEADY PROGRESS ON BROADBAND EXPANSION

2020 was a year that saw continued progress with the expansion of broadband service in our region. Unfortunately, it was also a year when we became painfully aware of just how critical broadband infrastructure is to our region. When schools shifted to remote learning in March due to COVID-19, many students were left without the ability to attend remote classes or to complete online assignments. Local broadband companies stepped up and provided free wi-fi hotspots across the region to help address the issue, and the Southwestern Commission mapped these locations to make that information easily accessible for the public.

The Southwestern Commission continued to have success expanding broadband service in the region through the Growing Rural Economies with Access to Technology (GREAT) Grant Program. The first round of the state's GREAT grants for broadband expansion were funded in 2019, with our region winning awards for projects in Jackson, Macon, and Swain Counties. Commission staff assisted by writing and administering the grants for several of the Internet Service Providers.



Region A Wi-Fi Hotspots

Round 2 of GREAT in 2020 saw successful applications in Swain and Graham Counties. These projects totaled over \$1 million in grant dollars and were leveraged by \$513,000 in private investment, providing broadband access to 1,106 eligible households.

In response to the pandemic, the state announced a Round 3 of GREAT grants in September of 2020. Three projects from the region were funded during this round, adding 1,414 households in Cherokee, Clay, and Haywood Counties with over \$3.6 million in grant funds and \$1.5 million in leveraged private investment.

Other successful projects and developments in 2020 include a \$100,000 grant to Haywood County and the Education Research Consortium (ERC) from the Appalachian Regional Commission to expand broadband, and a \$580,000 award from Macon County to Balsam West to expand broadband service.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT:
www.ncbroadband.gov/grants/great-grant

THE SOUTHWESTERN COMMISSION HAS PROVIDED GRANT WRITING ASSISTANCE FOR INTERNET SERVICE PROVIDERS IN THE REGION.

HERE'S A LOOK AT THE IMPACT



WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) provides funding for local programs and services to enrich the local workforce through education and training to meet the needs of area businesses. Case Managers work with youth and adults with barriers to employment, and with dislocated workers (people who have lost their job through no fault of their own), to help them gain success within the workforce.

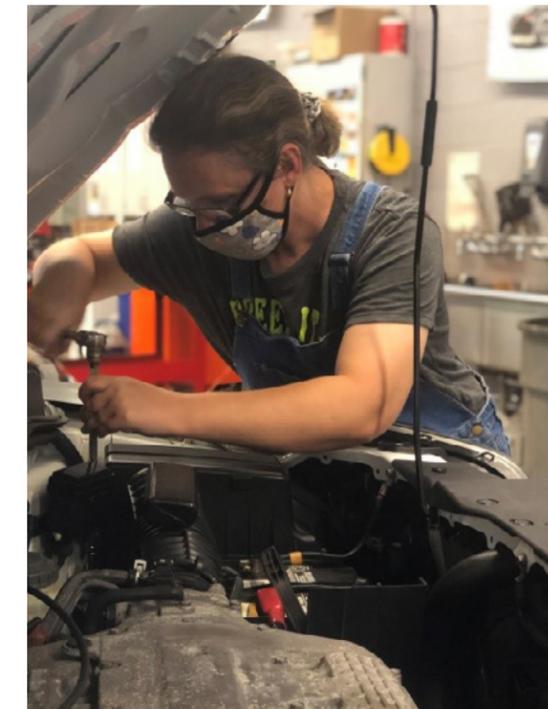
PHOTO: WIOA work experience participant Caroline Nations assists at the Jackson County Animal Shelter.



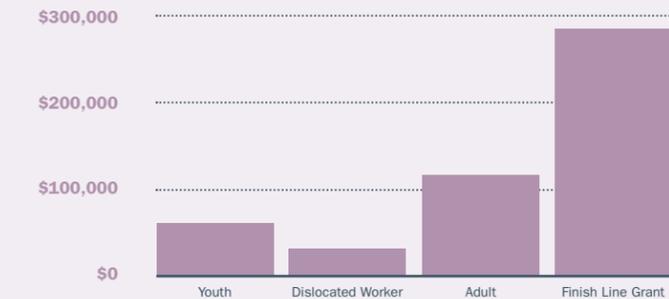
WORKFORCE STORIES

Stephanie participated in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) program that is facilitated by Mountain Projects and operated out of the Haywood County NCWorks Career Center. WIOA helped Stephanie with tuition, transportation, and supportive services as she completed her AAS degree in Automotive Systems Technology at Haywood Community College. WIOA also provided Stephanie with emergency Finish Line Grant assistance to help with her bills as she completed training. Stephanie graduated with honors in May 2021.

I felt like I had to try harder because it's a male-dominated field. If it was back in the 1960s, this would never fly. I would be shunned! I'm the kind of person that if someone tells me I can't do something, I'm going to prove them wrong. By the end of it, I earned the respect from the guys. They trust me more than I trust myself sometimes. The help of WIOA and the Finish Line Grant allowed me to not have to worry so much financially so I could really focus on my classes and being the best I can be.

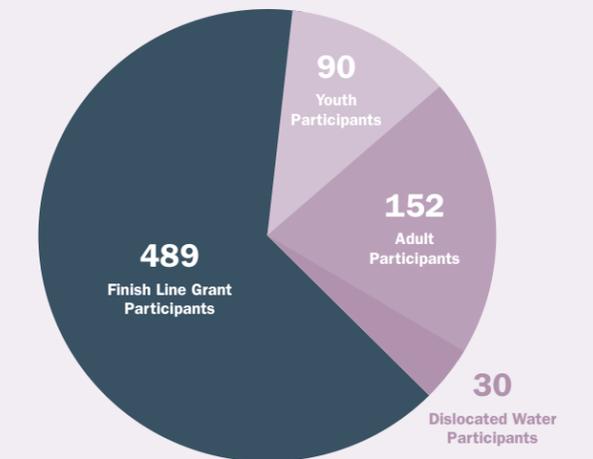


A LOOK AT OUR NUMBERS 2020 IMPACT ON OUR REGION



\$494,378.61 in state and federal dollars spent on workforce participants

IN 2020, WE WERE ABLE TO ASSIST A TOTAL OF 761 PARTICIPANTS THROUGH OUR STATE AND FEDERAL PROGRAMS.



NC WORKS

The local NCWorks Career Centers continued to offer valuable services to individuals and employers throughout the region during the pandemic. The NCWorks team found creative ways to connect with people and businesses, such as drive-thru job fairs, and outdoor hiring festivals targeted to specific industries. They also worked with community partners to offer needed resources and supportive services to individuals and employers impacted by COVID-19.



AREA AGENCY ON AGING

FILLING THE GAPS, CONNECTING THE DOTS

The Southwestern Commission Area Agency on Aging serves as an umbrella organization bridging the vast network of senior programs and resources across the seven-western counties. Staff of the Area Agency on Aging wear many hats: connecting the public with services in their communities, advising and supporting partner agencies, overseeing state and federal programs at the local level, and advocating for senior resources.

The scaffolding provided by the AAA took on new importance during the pandemic, as general awareness for the well-being of seniors took center stage.

“When COVID happened, there was a huge emphasis on ‘Are we taking care of our seniors?’” said Sarajane Melton, director of the Southwestern Commission AAA. “There was a heightened awareness over the safety and security of older adults.”

AAA stepped up to the plate by serving as a bridge—something it was perfectly positioned to do given its decades of experience.

“I’m not saying it wasn’t a scramble, but the foundation was already there,” Melton said.

One of the initial challenges was figuring out how to transition from in-person to no-contact services. AAA worked with senior centers and senior meal sites in each county to help formulate plans and ensure continuity.

“We got a lot of calls from our providers asking ‘What do we do? How do we make this work?’” Melton recalled.

Figuring out how to provide senior meals was one such example. Senior meal sites could no longer host congregate meals, and meanwhile, some volunteers providing home-delivered meals—many of them seniors themselves—were hesitant about going out. Some counties tapped transit drivers to fill the gap.

“Our partners on the ground had to shift, and wore different hats and took on different responsibilities,” Melton said.

AAA was able to share solutions and best practices across county lines.

“It was a collaborative effort. If something was working in one county, it was ‘Tell us what you’re doing, and we’ll see if it could work in another county,’” Melton said. “We were that bridge across the region. All those things that AAA does all the time provided the foundation for heightened response in crisis mode.”

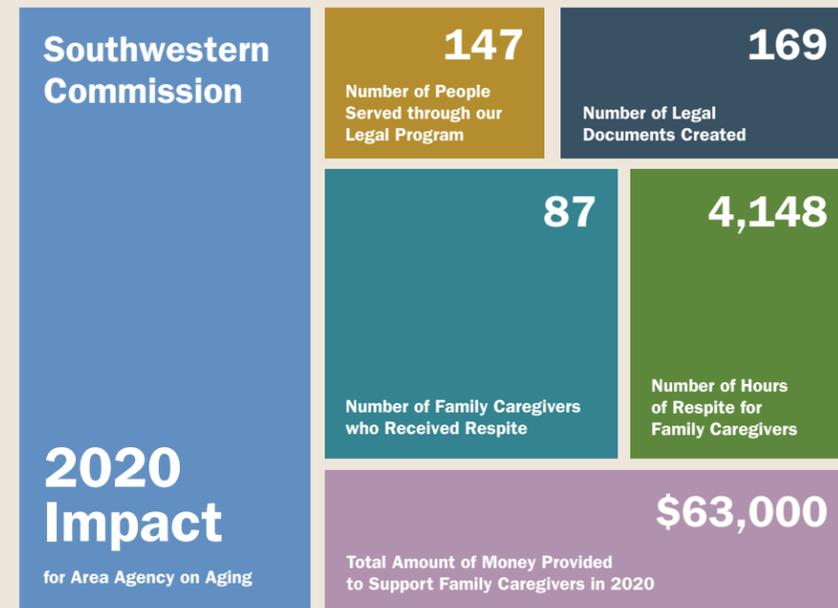


Chart shows AAA Legal and Caregiver program impacts.

TRANSITION TO SUCCESS

written by AAA staff member Jeanne Mathews



Money Follows the Person (MFP) is a state project that helps Medicaid-eligible North Carolinians who live in inpatient facilities move into their own homes and communities with supports.

The Southwestern Commission Area Agency on Aging (AAA) became the regional MFP coordinating agency in 2014. There have been many transitions over the years, and we would like to share one of those with you.

I met Dollie “Beth” Seagle, a resident of a long-term care facility in Haywood County, in February of 2015. She was living in the facility recovering from 2nd and 3rd degree burns due to an apartment fire, along with other health issues she already had that had been exacerbated by the fire. It was very apparent that Beth was an independent and motivated person who was ready to move back into the community.

We spent several months investigating housing options. Beth was approved for a Section 8 Housing voucher, and we were able to find a small trailer for rent that she could afford. Mountain Projects *Housing and Home Improvement* volunteers added a ramp and rails to assist in the accessibility of the home. Haywood County Health and Human Services *Community Alternatives Program (CAP)* was instrumental in the transition as well, providing Beth with the daily in-home care she needed. One of the things Beth missed dearly was her beloved dog that perished in the fire. Once she transitioned to her new home, she was able to adopt a dog!



Beth just after transitioning to her new home from the facility.

Here is what Beth has to say directly:

I want people to know that life can change. Things don’t seem like they’ll ever be different, but it can be. It takes work and having people believe in you.

How did being a participant in MFP help you?

Being part of this program allowed me to start over. I lost everything in the fire and starting over in a new place would have been much more difficult without this help. It allowed me to leave the long-term-care facility and enroll in the county’s CAP program.

Share a little about what you’ve been up to since your MFP transition, how has your life changed?

When I was discharged, I was on 4 liters of oxygen, a bi-pap, 28 prescriptions, a walker, and I weighed about 380 lbs. That first year, I had many ups and downs. I was in the hospital a number of times. In May 2016, I began seeing a new urologist. I mention him because he was a big part of what led to my life changing. With his support and encouragement, I contacted Mission Weight Management. Before I went the first time, I began to change everything I ate and drank. By

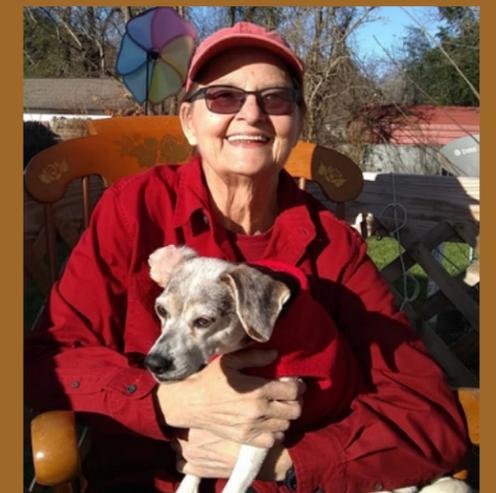
the time I went for my first appointment with a doctor, I had lost about 70 lbs. I continued in the program and had a gastric bypass in April 2017. I now maintain my weight between 155-165 lbs. I am no longer on oxygen, a bi-pap and take five or six prescriptions. That doctor told me that when he first saw me he figured I had about 1 year left to live because my body was shutting down from the weight.

I have learned to love myself and learned more about who I am. I discovered things that kept me from having a relationship with my mom. I now have the best relationship I have ever had with my mom. I have a freedom now I would have never thought possible.

I now go to a primary care doctor that has helped me come off medication. I never thought I’d come off of some of it, but I have.

Would you recommend Money Follows the Person to others? Why or Why Not?

I would recommend the MFP to others who are looking to come out of a long-term care facility and live independently. Once Jeanne took the reins, the program changed for me. If someone is able to function out of a facility, they should have the best chance of success.



Happy and Healthier Beth, enjoying her newfound freedom!

SOUTHWESTERN RURAL PLANNING ORGANIZATION (RPO)

The Southwestern Rural Planning Organization (RPO) includes Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Jackson, Macon, and Swain counties. The core duties of the RPO include: develop local and regional multimodal transportation plans, provide a forum for public participation in transportation planning processes, develop and prioritize projects the organization believes should be included in NCDOT's State Transportation Improvement Program, and provide transportation-related information to local governments.

TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

Southwestern RPO staff work collaboratively with NCDOT and local governments to develop transportation plans for each county, called Comprehensive Transportation Plans (CTPs). These plans forecast the transportation needs of a county about 30 years into the future, based on the vision for growth that the county has identified in local land use plans. In 2020, RPO staff continued to focus on updating Macon County's Comprehensive Transportation Plan, which is scheduled to be adopted in 2021.

PRIORITIZATION

Our Annual Report has touched on the challenges of 2020, and the transportation sector had its own challenges.

In 2020, RPO staff worked with local governments and NCDOT to identify potential projects for *Prioritization*, a statewide process that identifies projects to be scheduled for funding. Due to NCDOT funding issues, these results are now expected to be released in August 2022.

PUBLIC INPUT

The Southwestern RPO continues to reach out to the public to increase public involvement and input on transportation issues. Traditionally, public input is collected after a document is uploaded to a website or becomes available to view at a physical location, and members of the public have a certain period of time to view it and respond.

Staff utilizes online surveys (in English and Spanish), Facebook advertisements, and other print and online methods to reduce barriers to public involvement. This work really paid off in 2020 when public meetings were not possible due to the pandemic and projects and plans had to be shared virtually. Through Facebook advertisements alone, we were able to reach over 9,000 people in 2020!

While not everyone chooses to provide input, we know that the information is being circulated and more residents have access to the projects planned for their communities. As always, our partners are essential in helping us spread the word, and we appreciate your support in these efforts.

BIKE PLAN

In 2020, RPO used updated bicycle maps of Cherokee, Clay, Graham, and Macon counties and created brochures for public distribution. The brochures include maps of bicycle routes, traffic laws, skill levels for routes, and bicycle safety tips. Contact Rose Bauguess at rose@regiona.org if you want maps to distribute.

RPO STAFF

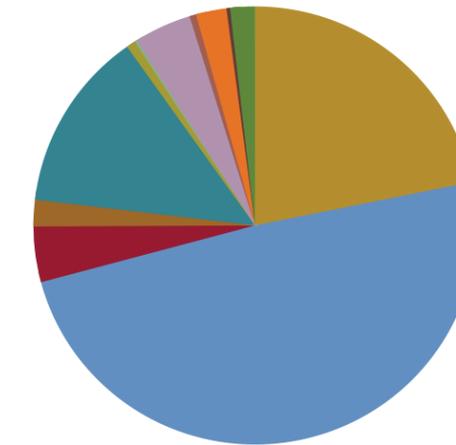
Southwestern RPO Administrator Rose Bauguess continues to be involved in statewide efforts by serving on the Executive Committee of the North Carolina Association of Rural Planning Organizations as well as several other steering committees with NCDOT.

The Southwestern RPO provides technical support in all issues related to transportation. In 2020, the RPO provided support as local governments in the region pursued funding for safety fencing at airports, explored options for electric vehicle charging stations, and pursued potential greenway options in their community. We encourage you to reach out to the Southwestern RPO if you have any questions about transportation-related projects in your community.



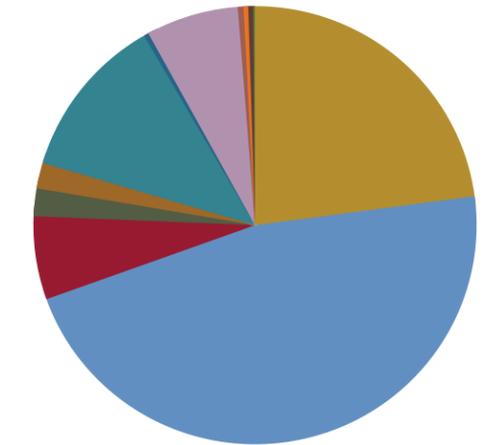
FINANCIALS

GENERAL FUND RECEIPTS
JAN-DEC 2020



WIOA	\$1,462,810.47
AGING	\$3,288,933.25
ECON DEV	\$274,595.00
RPO	\$131,564.42
JCPC	\$893,034.98
HOUSING	\$45,000.00
REG BIKE PLAN	\$5,256.48
FARMERS MARKET	\$2,054.00
RLF PMTS RECEIVED	\$292,618.49
RLF TRANS-IN	\$31,970.86
DUES	\$150,210.75
BROADBAND	\$17,171.37
OTHER	\$113,667.64
TOTAL	\$6,708,887.71

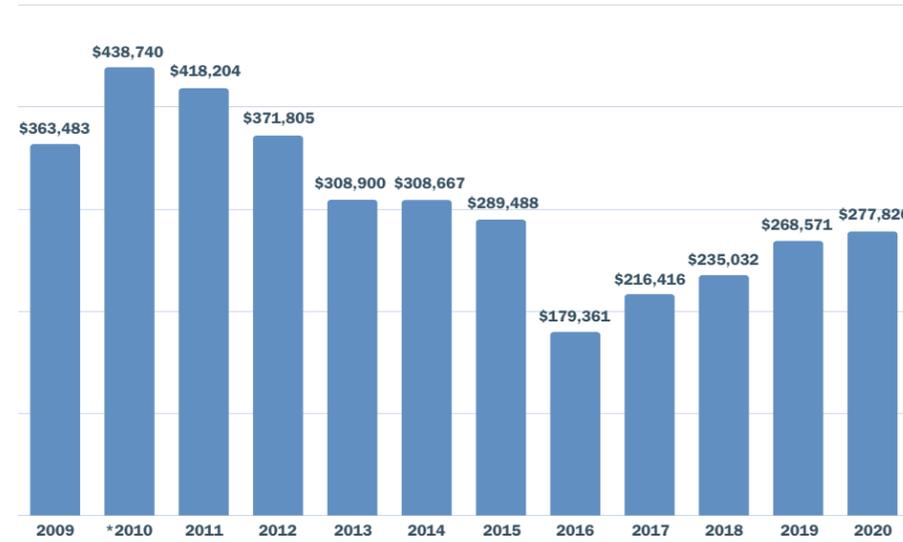
GENERAL FUND DISBURSEMENTS
JAN-DEC 2020



WIOA	(\$1,562,990.02)
AGING	(\$3,185,430.33)
ECON DEV	(\$418,918.54)
STEM	(\$139,952.08)
RPO	(\$129,314.20)
JCPC	(\$824,152.40)
FARMERS MARKET	(\$7,416.00)
RLF ADMIN	(\$23,473.90)
RLF TRANS-OUT	(\$461,643.60)
LOCAL	(\$27,854.03)
BROADBAND	(\$23,739.00)
OTHER	(\$25,834.88)
TOTAL	(\$6,830,718.98)

FINANCIALS

FUND BALANCE



*This increase was due primarily to large grants from Golden Leaf and CPF for the EDNET Projects.



FROM THE CHAIRMAN



Though 2020 brought unparalleled challenges, it is with great pride as Chairman, that I can report the Southwestern Commission overcame these challenges with tremendous success and a renewed sense of optimism. As Chair, I do not have shoes, but a “big hat to fill” in succeeding Mayor Harry Baughn. Simply put, our region is stronger because of Harry’s leadership. Our Director, Sarah Thompson continues to be bold in her sincere desire to assist each local government from Canton to Murphy. I also want to thank our Southwestern Commission’s employees. Every day these men and women work tirelessly for each of us. They believe, and they are correct, their work matters in improving the lives of our constituents...no matter their age, background, or address.

Speaking of big shoes to fill, our current Finance Officer, Ryan Scaggs, replaced the retired Roger Wiggins who was our friend and finance officer for decades. Ryan and his team have done an amazing job shepherding a strong budget that protects taxpayer money and overseeing our revolving loan program which continues to create jobs and improvements in our mountain towns.

As we continue the walk back to normalcy, the Southwestern Commission will serve a vital role in the distribution of Federal funds from the CARES Act and American Rescue Plan. Our organization, with a 55-year history in administering and assisting with federal monies, will once again step up to make sure that each of our communities has the tools and resources to make these funds matter in the lives of our citizens.

As Chairman, I now want to thank each of you. Serving as an elected official, especially in these times, is at best a challenge...the never-ending meetings, the countless phone calls, the time away from our families. Many would look at us and wonder why we would have any desire to do what we do. I contend that we are not crazy, but that we have the sincere belief that we can make a difference. We may be from different towns, have different political opinions, and different goals, but what we can agree on is there is still a place for sincere leadership and cooperation.

The challenges ahead will require us to work together to find common solutions for our citizens; those who have been here for generations and the ones who just joined us. Finding those solutions and the resources to implement change is why the Southwestern Commission was created and will continue to be a central uniting force for all of us.

It is my hope for the next two years as Chair that we continue to succeed, work together, and change the conversation about the challenges of the past into the successes of tomorrow. If I can be of any assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

All my Best,

ZEB SMATHERS
Chairman

FROM THE DIRECTOR



It probably goes without saying that 2020 was a challenging year for all of us. Years from now we will be telling stories about that week in March of 2020 when everything started to shut down due to the COVID 19 pandemic. Meetings and conferences were cancelled, priorities shifted, home offices were hastily created, and ZOOM became a household name.

I spent the early days of quarantine creating work-from-home policies for our staff and making sure everyone had the equipment they needed to be productive in a home office environment. I’m proud to say that once the stress of the first couple of weeks passed the Southwestern Commission team hit our stride, not missing a beat.

Each department felt the pressure of being a regional leader in their respective fields, and eagerly filled the roles needed and expected of them. The AAA was helping transition the senior services network to a no-contact service model, to keep our older adults safe. The workforce department was there for the businesses that were forced to close or shift operations and the workers who lost jobs. Community and Economic Development ramped up ongoing efforts to get broadband out to our residents, who now needed it more than ever before... while putting together a federally funded housing program to help with the emerging affordable housing crisis.

It was the strength of the Commission’s local government and community partnerships that allowed us to navigate a very uncertain year gracefully and effectively, getting aid to the people and organizations in need. I am ever so grateful to serve this strong and resilient region alongside our dedicated staff.

SARAH THOMPSON
Executive Director

SINCE
1965

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.



125 Bonnie Lane. Sylva, NC 28779
828-586-1962 | www.regiona.org