

Highway plan input sought

Local residents can still weigh in on the 2018 survey that is compiling the transportation needs for the Unifour area, including Alexander County, for the next three decades.

The Greater Hickory Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and the Western Piedmont Council of Governments are compiling survey responses in the Unifour to submit later to the N.C. Dept. of Transportation. An open house with maps and planning data was held Thursday, June 7, at the CVCC-Alexander Center for Education in Taylorsville.

The planning process
Under federal law, all metropolitan areas with a population greater than 50,000 must have a long-range transportation plan in order to access federal funds. Long-range transportation planning allows the region to plan for the infrastructure needed to handle increases in popula-

tion, employment and travel demand and to help mitigate congestion, air pollution and other associated issues.

As a result of the 2010 Census the Greater Hickory MPO was designated a Transportation Management Area (TMA), having surpassed an urbanized area of greater than 200,000. Subsequently, future renditions of the 'Long-Range Transportation Plan' will be known as the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP).

Under state law, MPOs and municipalities are directed to develop a Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP) in cooperation with the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT). By comparison to the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP), the CTP is not required to be fiscally constrained and no minimum horizon year or update timeframes are

specified. The MTP is the fiscally constrained subset of the CTP.

Future funding: \$100M over 30 years

Over the next 30 years, the draft MTP recommends \$102 million in highway projects serving Alexander County (\$27 million in projects fully within the County, plus another \$75 in multi-county projects overlapping Alexander County):

- \$31 million to widen NC 127 between Cloninger Mill and Richey Roads, plus widen Catawba River crossing by 2025.
- \$1 million to add left turn lanes on both US 64 at Church Rd and NC 127 at Bethlehem School Rd by 2025.
- \$2 million to modernize Sulphur Springs Rd in Hiddenite between NC 90 and Lackey Rd by 2025.
- \$7 million to upgrade NC 16 between Catawba River and Taylorsville by 2035.
- \$15 million to upgrade US 64 between Lenoir and Taylorsville by 2035.
- \$8 million to upgrade NC 127 between Richey Rd and US 64 by 2035.
- \$30 million to modernize Hubbard Rd (SR 1751) between Grace Chapel Rd in Caldwell County and NC 127 in Alexander County by 2045.
- \$10 million to modernize NC 16 between Taylorsville and Wilkes County by 2045.

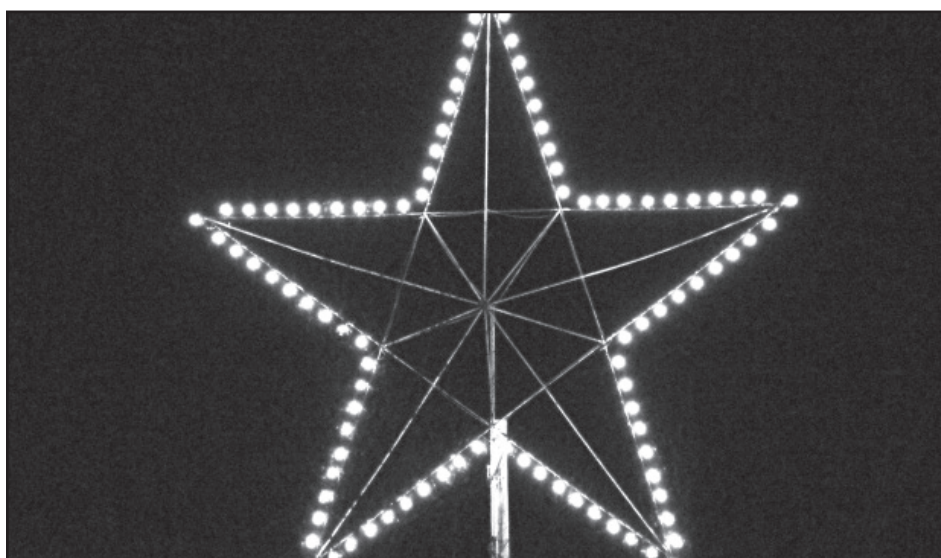
Project recommendations to upgrade or modernize, but not widen, often include straightening curves and/or adding four-foot shoulders, rumble strips, and/or left turn lanes at select locations.

Comments received at the open house in Taylorsville included:

- Ensure NC 127 widening isn't delayed beyond current programmed years (right-of-way starting in 2021; construction starting in 2023).
- Consider upgrading Rink Dam Rd. and/or Teague Town Rd. as east-west connection(s) between NC 16 and NC 127.
- Support state paving of Lackey Rd. between Hiddenite Church and Sulphur Springs roads.
- Evaluate alternate access to Barrett Mountain from Blankenship Rd.
- Realign intersection of Alspaugh Dam Road and NC 16.
- Consider safety improvements to Bethlehem School Road.

According to Averi Ritchie, Transportation Planner for WPCOG, these comments are being considered. The Bethlehem School Road comment has been forwarded to a Safety Engineer.

Residents can still offer input on the MTP by completing the survey online at <http://www.wpcog.org/metropolitan-trans-plan-mtp>.



PLANS TO MAKE STAR SHINE AGAIN — Bethlehem Community leaders are making plans to replace the electric Bethlehem Star, above, which was damaged beyond repair by the October 2017 tornado. The star has been the focal point of the annual Bethlehem Star Lighting Christmas event for 40 years.

Plans to restore electric Bethlehem Star underway

Since 1977, the Bethlehem Star has graced the skyline as a treasured symbol of the Bethlehem community in Alexander County. On October 23rd of last year, the Star was damaged beyond repair by the EF2 tornado that passed through Bethlehem. Residents have expressed sadness of its loss as a special identifier for the community and the uniqueness it adds to one of the areas named Bethlehem in the

United States.

The Bethlehem Community Development Association (BCDA) approached Pastor Mike Stone and the council of Mt. Pisgah Lutheran Church, the physical home of the Bethlehem Star since repairs were made on the Star in 2009, for assistance with the raising of a new Bethlehem Star. Preliminary planning meetings have been held with Mt. Pisgah agreeing to

work to build the replacement along with active involvement by Bethlehem Community churches, clubs, groups, and citizens.

With assistance from Hollar Tree Service and Land's Electric, the damaged Star was removed. Plans include two meetings with community church leaders scheduled for June and July. Individuals, churches, clubs, and other groups who have strong historical ties to the operation of this community symbol will be asked to participate in planning and funding a new Star.

More detailed information for the planning, organizing, funding, and reconstruction of a new community Bethlehem Star will be forthcoming. It is necessary for the community to come together to pool fiscal and human resources to re-build this community symbol; opportunities will be provided for community residents to volunteer to work with the campaign to raise the Star. Any resident interested in taking a leadership or other role in the campaign may contact Pastor Stone at Mt. Pisgah Lutheran Church. Plans will be announced through the churches, newspapers, and online sources such as the Mt. Pisgah and other websites, Facebook, and Instagram.

Visit Mt. Pisgah Lutheran Church ELCA and experience the community of its warm and welcoming church family. Mt. Pisgah is located in front of the Lowe's shopping center on Route 127 in Bethlehem. For directions and further information, please call the church at 828-495-8251; visit our Facebook page at Mt. Pisgah Lutheran Church ELCA or our website at www.mtpisgahelca.org.

Summer Reading Program

"Libraries Rock" at Alexander County Library and branches

The county libraries are now signing up participants for the 2018 summer reading program. There are events for all ages – birth to adult. Preschool storytimes and opportunities to read to therapy dog Abby will be available at the main library, Bethlehem Branch, and the new Stony Point Branch at 431 Ruritan Park Road (old electric building).

Summer reading participants keep time read from Sunday, June 17, to Saturday, July 28. Patrons will receive a goody bag and stadium cup when they report time or attend a program. Many of the summer reading events have lunch provided for children 18 and under. Check the calendar for availability.

"Program events are optional to attend," says children's librarian, Mel Hager. "The most important part of summer reading is for students to keep up – or improve – their reading skills. It would thrill me if every child that signed up had reading time stickers on their name at

the end of the summer!"

To kick off main programming events for "Libraries Rock," the Green Room Community Theatre's Green Bean Players will present "Little Red Riding Hood" at Alexander Central Auditorium on Friday, June 22, beginning at 10 am. The event is sponsored by Alexander County Library and is free and open to the public for all ages.

Preschool Storytimes will kick off with the music group, Zephyr, on June 19, 10 am at CVCC-Alexander in the Commissioners Room. Zephyr will explore picture books through different styles of music. This program is for children ages birth to 5 and their families. Lunch will be served at the main library in Taylorsville after the program.

For a calendar of events or more information, go to alexanderlibrary.org/kids-page or call the library at 828-632-4058. Your local branch can be selected from the menu.

Halbert joins Hickory Real Estate Group

Hickory Real Estate Group is pleased to announce that Hope Halbert has joined its firm as a Realtor®/Broker. Hope specializes in residential property sales in Catawba, Caldwell, Alexander, and Burke counties.

Hickory Real Estate Group is a full service real estate brokerage company specializing in residential and commercial properties.

Since starting in 2010, Hickory Real Estate Group has continued to grow and now has 23 agents helping buyers and sellers in the Hickory area.

For more information, contact Halbert by phone (704) 477-3247, email: Hope@HickoryRealEstateGroup.com or visit online: HickoryRealEstateGroup.com.



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