



Improving
the Quality
of Life in
West
Alabama



WEST ALABAMA
REGIONAL COMMISSION

2017
ANNUAL REPORT

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These are exciting times of growth in the West Alabama region, and the West Alabama Regional Commission is proud to be a part of the successes in our area and for our communities. Currently, the regional population in West Alabama is estimated to be 302,907. By 2040 that number is expected to rise to 333,357. With this increase comes opportunity.

WARC has a strong presence in many areas of the West Alabama community. Through our Area Agency on Aging we are helping maintain the dignity, independence and overall quality of life for the aging and disabled population.

Our Community and Economic Development staff provides a variety of valuable resources to locals in the form of grant writing, the Revolving Loan Fund, the West Alabama Economic Development Playbook and a variety of other documents all available on our website www.warc.info.

Transportation Planning has helped the region to maintain mobility. Passengers can track public transit vehicles in real-time thanks to a new mobility app created with data collected by the WARC Transportation Department. The Department's successful update of the Coordinated Transit Plan will allow local transit providers to access Federal Transit Administration funds.

As we look into 2018, the staff at WARC is focused on gaining achievements and success for the rapidly evolving West Alabama community around us.

Robert B. Lake, Executive Director

October 2017



WEST ALABAMA REGIONAL COMMISSION

The West Alabama Regional Commission (WARC) is one of the 12 regional councils in the State of Alabama. The councils serve local governments and citizens by coordinating region-wide projects and services, promoting cooperation among the local governments and carrying out state and federal programs on a regional basis. The West Alabama area is designated Planning District 2, or Region 2.

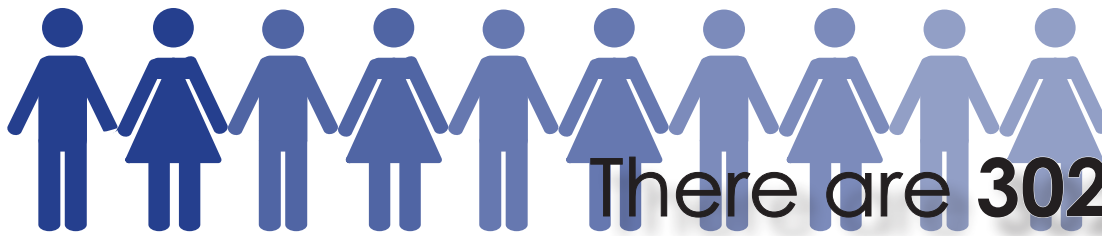
The WARC covers Bibb, Fayette, Greene, Hale, Lamar, Pickens and Tuscaloosa Counties. The commission is governed by an executive committee and a board of directors, made up of representatives from each of these seven counties and 35 municipalities, who annually elect a chairman and a vice-chairman. The board is composed of citizens and policy-making elected officials from the member governments. It is with the board's participation the WARC staff are enabled to carry out WARC's mission of improving the quality of life in West Alabama.

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VALUES

- Accountability
- Advocacy
- Confidentiality
- Honesty
- Integrity
- Respect
- Responsibility



There are **302,907**
people in West Alabama

(Bibb, Fayette, Greene, Hale, Lamar, Pickens & Tuscaloosa Counties)

WARC AT WORK IN OUR COMMUNITIES

Area Agency on Aging

- Counseled 3,278 SHIP clients resulting in a savings to individuals of over \$1 million during FY 2017
- 123,726 meals delivered to participants on the Homebound Meals Program
- 135,974 meals served to Senior Activity Center patrons
- Maintained more than 700 individuals in their homes as opposed to an institution at an average monthly cost of \$665 per person



Community & Economic Development

- \$702,000 provided through Revolving Loan Fund to 5 area businesses
- RLF created 31 jobs and retained 66
- Received ARC grants for water & sewer projects totaling \$365,769 and impacting 1,120 households and 128 businesses
- There are 2 projects in progress through CDBG grants that will impact 2,615 people upon completion



Transportation Planning

- The Tuscaloosa Transit Authority provided 323,254 round trip transports through public transportation
- WARC staff prepared a \$2.4 million grant that enabled the Tuscaloosa Transit Authority to continue providing transportation service and renovate the Tuscaloosa Intermodal Center





AREA AGENCY ON AGING

Managing the Medicare Maze

The State Health Insurance Program (SHIP) provides unbiased, one-on-one counseling on all Medicare parts and options. During FY 2017, SHIP counselors assisted 3,278 clients and saved them nearly \$1.5 million dollars.

George W. Harris is a Social Security attorney in Tuscaloosa. He has been referring clients for Medicare counseling at the West Alabama Area Agency on Aging for over 15 years. Harris also personally uses SHIP counseling since he turned 65. The following is an excerpt from a letter he sent to Alabama Senator Richard Shelby, advocating for the SHIP program. "As a Social Security disability attorney, I have referred many clients to this program for reliable advice when making decisions about Medicare options. Additionally, I have referred professionals, both in and outside the state, to this national program. This includes lawyers, physicians, educators, etc. who all agree that their advanced degrees are no match for the complexities of the Medicare system.

Because I have seen the value of this program first-hand, I turned to SHIP for guidance when I reached Medicare age." The West Alabama Area Agency on Aging is the local face for Medicare in the West Alabama community.

3,278

Number of clients throughout West Alabama assisted during FY 2017 by SHIP

\$1,495,342.19

Total saved by SHIP clients in West Alabama during FY 2017

Start Here: The ADRC

Many people may know about one program

offered through the Area Agency on Aging, but they may not know the wide variety of additional assistance they could be receiving.

The Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC) is a great place to learn what we can do for you. Trained counselors conduct in-depth screenings to determine which programs and services in the West Alabama area best suit clients. Counseling is available by phone, email or in-person for adults age 60 and older, individuals with disabilities, and their families or caregivers.



2,433

Individuals screened and assisted through one-on-one counseling of available support and services

14,102

People reached through general information and referrals

35,299

Total reached through public information efforts such as our Senior Resource Directories and advertisements

Keeping Clients Independent On Our Medicaid Waiver Program

How do you measure the value of being independent? Being able to stay in the comfort of your own home is just one of the goals of our Medicaid Waiver Program. It is a lifeline to independence and a buoy that keeps clients from having to enter a nursing home prematurely. This not only benefits the health and well-being of individuals, it also saves the state a considerable amount of money. The Medicaid Waiver Program provides in-home assistance to over 700 clients in the West Alabama region. The Medicaid cost for these clients to stay in a nursing home is over \$5,000. By being able to receive aid in their own home, the state saves over \$40 million versus institutionalized care. Where would you rather spend your "Golden Years"- in the comfort of your own home or an institutional setting?



For additional information about any of the services the West Alabama Area Agency on Aging provides, please visit us online at www.westalabamaaging.org and pickup a copy of the 2017-2018 Senior Resource Directory.



COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

West Alabama Economic Development Playbook Now Available

The West Alabama Economic Development Playbook is now available in print and online at www.warc.info/planning-development. The playbook is a five-year economic development plan for our region. It is vital to ensuring our counties and towns can apply for Economic Development Administration (EDA) funds.

The West Alabama Economic Development Playbook includes:

- Data about the entire region and its seven counties
- Resources and funding programs for community, economic and workforce needs
- An overview of activities and accomplishments taking place in the region

Community Progress

The Community and Economic Development Department is busy with many projects in the West Alabama region. The City of Reform recently received a grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission, with the help of the Community and Economic Development Department, to renovate and upgrade their 500,000 gallon water tank. The Department also administered the city's project to construct a new safe room that was completed in October.



These two projects have a combined value of \$214,862 and will benefit 771 households, 98 businesses and 80 people.

Other projects currently underway include grants for the City of Eutaw's new water tank, major repairs and upgrades to the Town of Carrollton's Waste Water Treatment Plant and water system upgrades in the City of Moundville.

New in Community & Economic Development

- Community Profiles for each county and municipality in the West Alabama region are now being maintained by WARC. The profiles contain current American Community Survey and other relevant socio-economic and labor force data. The Community Profiles will be updated annually.
- The Grant & Loan Guide has been updated for 2017. The guide provides information on the most commonly used grant and loan programs for community and economic development activities. The guide focuses on programs available to counties and municipalities and provides federal and state contacts, program details, grant cycles, and eligibility funding level information.
- The Business Preparedness Toolkits have updated emergency contacts and emergency shelter locations. The toolkits and presentations are meant to help area businesses prepare for the effects of a disaster. They are tailored to each county and provide a sample of preparedness and continuity of operations plan, support materials, and a listing of local emergency resources.

All of the above, and additional resources, can be accessed at www.warc.info/planning-development.

\$702,000

Provided through Revolving Loan Fund to five area businesses

31

Jobs created by grants and/or Revolving Loan Fund

66

Jobs retained by grants and/or Revolving Loan Fund

\$365,769

Received in ARC grants for water and sewer projects

1,120/128

Households/businesses impacted by projects being completed with funding from ARC grants

2,615

People will be impacted upon completion of projects funded by two CDBG grants



TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

Brent Sewer System Mapping

No one spends a lot of time thinking about sewer systems until there is a problem and then the less time spent, the better. Any delay with a sewer issue could lead to big trouble and big fines. In 2017, the West Alabama Regional Commission completed a mapping project that will help the City of Brent respond to any future sewer trouble.

The WARC staff, working with the Brent Sewer Department, used GPS units to map all 24.6 miles of their system, including the 370 manholes, 8 pump stations, and 1 lift station. At the end of the project, WARC provided the town with map books, wall maps and a password-protected interactive online map.

- WARC also set up an interactive, online map allowing the public to search and locate their voting district in the City of Brent. The map is accessed through the city's website, www.cityofbrentalabama.com

New in Transportation:

- The Tuscaloosa Area MPO now has interactive, online maps available for their Long-Range Transportation Plan and Transportation Improvement Program.
- The WARC Transportation Department used GPS equipment to map all 184 bus stops for the Tuscaloosa County Parking and Transit Authority in 2017. The data was used for a mobility app that allows passengers to track vehicle locations in real-time.



Coordinated Transit Plan Ensures Federal Funding Available to Local Agencies

If you were unable to drive, how would you make your upcoming doctor's appointment or buy your next gallon of milk? Many of us would turn to a family member or a friend, or maybe call a taxi. What happens when you have no one available, there is no taxi company in your community, or you are short on cash? You might think you were out of luck. Thankfully there are publicly-funded transportation providers in our region that can help.

These agencies provide a safety net for the most vulnerable members of our community. They depend on local government support and federal transit grants to serve their communities. Federal regulations, going back more than 10 years, require the development of a coordinated human service transportation plan in order to be eligible for these grants. The West Alabama Regional Commission initially volunteered to develop the first plan but was later contracted by the Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT) to conduct the work.

During FY2017, the WARC staff, working with the West Alabama Transit Committee, a joint advisory committee of the Tuscaloosa Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and West Alabama Rural Planning Organization (RPO), updated the coordinate transit plan. In August, the MPO and RPO adopted the plan.



Results of the updated Transit Plan:

- Determined transit gaps and coordination opportunities among publicly funded, human services transportation programs in West Alabama
- Developed strategies to address the identified gaps and coordination issues

8,313

Estimated number of West Alabama households with no automobile available

(2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates)

21

Number of private-for-profit providers in West Alabama

17

Number of publicly-funded transportation providers in West Alabama

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Sharing Information



The Area Agency on Aging held a Town Hall Meeting in each of our seven counties during the month of March to engage with our communities and find out how we can better serve them. Based on these events, we found that many are not aware of how to access information and

services for the elderly or disabled population. One of our responses to these findings was to hold September Kickoff Cookouts in each of our West Alabama counties. The free, community based events, serve as the first in an informational series, "Get to Know YOUR Area Agency on Aging", which we plan to hold quarterly. They are a platform to get the word out that you can get connected to our agency through our various community senior centers. Did you know there are over 20 senior activity centers in the West Alabama area? Each center offers nutritious weekday lunches as well as a Home-Bound Meals Program. But did you also know that participation at these centers is NEVER income based? Rather, they are open to ALL residents age 60 and older and provide a variety of new opportunities for community connection through things like social activities, games, projects, volunteering and so much more!



Celebrating 30 Years of Honoring West Alabama Seniors

May is nationally recognized as Older American's Month. This year featured our 30th anniversary of celebrating the contributions made by seniors throughout West Alabama. Over 1,000 people attended the Area Agency on Aging's annual Senior Appreciation Day held at the Bryant Conference Center.



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