



Informal Report to the Board of Commissioners

Avril Pinder
County Manager

1/03/2023

To the Chair and Members of the Commission

SUBJECT: Selected Economic Indicators Update

Please see the following items of interest brought forward for staff to research during the August 2nd, 2022 Board Briefing.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The county has undertaken multiple initiatives as part of the Buncombe 2025 Strategic Plan and others as directed by this Board to address the issues contained within this memorandum. These initiatives include targeted job growth in high wage sectors, support for Pre-K programs and childcare centers, workforce development programs and collaborations, and investments in affordable housing and broadband.

Additional information will be gathered through the Buncombe County 2043 Comprehensive Plan development cycle that will inform departmental business plans allow them to evolve to meet the needs of the community.

Requested Metric	Summary
Median wage for County vs State	This data is variable depending on the data source so multiple ways of viewing it are provided, but they all tell the same story: Buncombe County wages track just below North Carolina broadly. The most recent data suggests that Buncombe County (and Asheville MSA) average wages are flattening while North Carolina average wages are continuing to rise.
Deep dive into the volume of low-wage jobs	For purposes of this analysis, Low Wage jobs are defined as those that are below the Just Economics Living Wage for 2021 (since the data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics is also vintage 2021). Details are provided below, but an example of a low wage job in the Asheville MSA is Waiters/Waitresses with a Median Hourly Wage of \$8.88.
Take the affordable housing graph and build something similar for wages by industry	This data is organized by Major Occupation Sector (North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) nomenclature). The lowest wages for the Asheville MSA are typically found in the Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations while the highest wages are in the Management Occupations.



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Requested Metric	Summary
What % of people in poverty are working, how many are disabled, how many are seniors (65+)	There are different levels of poverty and statistics are included for all three. It is important to note that the "poverty line" is a variable determined by household size. In Buncombe County, at the 100% level, 11.1% of working residents between the ages of 16 & 64 are in poverty. That number increases to 19.2% for the disabled of all ages and decreases to 9% for seniors (seniors are defined here as those residents aged 65 and older).
Impact of working mothers leaving workforce	There are more women than men nationally and the same is true for Buncombe County. However, the labor force participation rate for women, both nationally and in Buncombe County is lower, 12% lower nationally and 7.8% lower in Buncombe County.
Impact of limited childcare on poverty	Currently, 29% of all children birth through pre-kindergarten in Buncombe County are enrolled in licensed care. Approximately 1,200 children are currently enrolled in the Child Care Subsidy program. There is a correlation between poverty and households with children, particularly in single female householder households.
Look at poverty by race/ethnicity	Persons who identify as 'White' make up the largest share of persons in poverty in terms of a percentage of the population. However, poverty is more acute on a per capita basis within the BIPOC community. As before, the level of poverty makes a difference in the precise count and all three poverty levels are detailed below.
Look at cost burdens for community members	Drivers for cost burdened households are housing costs and utility costs. The data below examines those by income level and by rental vs. home ownership. Rental households are more likely to be cost burdened on a per capita basis in Buncombe County. More information regarding this topic will be available through the Affordable Housing Committee Goals Dashboard in the near future.
Vehicle miles traveled and how to focus development where less driving is needed in comp plan and future strategic plans	The 2043 Comprehensive Plan will provide the greatest insight into traffic patterns, congestion, and its effects on further development. The results and information gathered through the Comprehensive Plan will be one element that shapes the next iteration of the Strategic Plan. Data from the Bureau of Transportation Statistics indicates that trips within Buncombe County have become shorter post-pandemic.



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DETAILED DATA

1. Median wage for County/MSA vs State

- Median Wage* for the **Asheville MSA** and State:
 - AVL MSA: **\$37,356.80**
 - North Carolina: **\$38,376.00**
 - The Asheville MSA includes the counties of Buncombe, Haywood, Henderson, Madison, and Transylvania

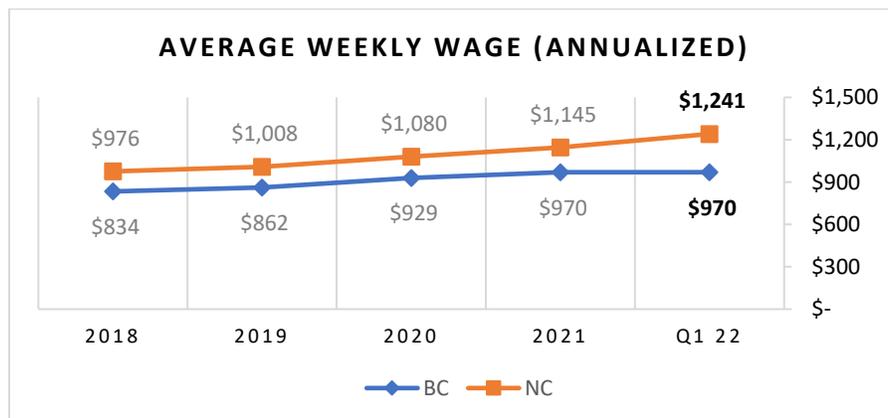
**This number is calculated from the Hourly Median Wage for the most recent reporting period (May 2021). Median Hourly Wage X 2080 (hours)*

SOURCE: BLS - Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics --- The OEWS survey is a semi-annual mail survey of non-farm establishments and is considered amongst the most reliable sources for wage data.

- Median **Household** Wage for County and State:
 - Buncombe: **\$ 55,032.00**
 - North Carolina: **\$ 56,642.00**

SOURCE: US Census – QuickFacts (ACS 2020, 5-year estimate) --- The US Census wage data is self-reported by households and is typically framed in terms of income as opposed to wages making it somewhat less reliable than BLS data.

- **Average** Weekly Wages for County and State:
 - Buncombe Q1 2022: **\$ 907.00**
 - North Carolina Q1 2022: **\$ 1,241.00**
 - Most recent data available
 - Full years have been annualized



SOURCE: BLS - Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages --- QCEW produces a comprehensive tabulation of data on the number of establishments, monthly employment and quarterly wages for workers covered by State unemployment insurance (UI) laws and Federal workers covered by the Unemployment Compensation for Federal Employees (UCFE) program.



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2. Deep dive into the volume of low-wage jobs in the AVL MSA (2021 data):

- Estimated Gross Employment (EGE): **187,260 persons**
- EGE below Just Economics (JE) Living Wage: **74,510 persons**
- Percent below JE Living Wage: **40%**
- Number of Major Occupation Sectors (MOS): **22**
- Number of Low Wage MOS: **7**
- Percent MOS Low Wage: **32%**

**These statistics do not include wages derived from occupations that are masked by the BLS or are otherwise not reported in a way that is conducive to an apples-to-apples analysis. Examples of such occupations include Teachers (broadly) and medical doctors (broadly). Reasons why these would unreported include that the occupation does not generally work year-round, the median hourly wage is greater than \$100, or that the estimate was not released for some other governmental interest or lack of data. The Just Economics Living Wage for 2021 (same year as data analyzed) was \$17.30/hour.*

Note: Wages for the OEWS survey are straight-time, gross pay, exclusive of premium pay. Base rate; cost-of-living allowances; guaranteed pay; hazardous-duty pay; incentive pay, including commissions and production bonuses; and tips are included. Excluded are overtime pay, severance pay, shift differentials, nonproduction bonuses, employer cost for supplementary benefits, and tuition reimbursements. [See BLS OEWS Technical Notes.](#)

SOURCE: BLS - Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics

SOURCE: Just Economics Western North Carolina

The following tables show a breakdown of Low Wage Major Occupation Sectors (Table 1), Example Occupations that fall below the Just Economics Living Wage across multiple MOS (Table 2), and the Top 5 Low Wage Occupations in the Asheville MSA by Total Employment (Table 3).

Low Wage MOS include those Major Occupation Sectors that in aggregate have a Median Hourly Wage lower than the Just Economics Living Wage.

Table 1.

2021 Low Wage MOS	2021 Median Hourly Wage	2021 Employment
Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations	\$11.32	21,780
Personal Care and Service Occupations	\$13.57	4,030
Sales and Related Occupations	\$13.91	19,800
Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance Occupations	\$13.86	6,100
Healthcare Support Occupations	\$14.28	8,920
Transportation and Material Moving Occupations	\$14.82	15,310
Farming, Fishing, and Forestry Occupations	\$13.44	520



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Low wage jobs are not exclusively within Low Wage MOS. The following table gives examples across multiple MOS. Some of which are not identified as Low Wage MOS.

Table 2.

MOS	Example Occupations	2021 Median Hourly Wage	2021 Employment
Office and Administrative Support Occupations	Hotel, Motel, and Resort Desk Clerks	\$11.36	770
Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations	Cooks, Fast Food	\$10.75	3,970
Sales and Related Occupations	Cashiers	\$10.96	6,150
Healthcare Support Occupations	Nursing Assistants	\$14.28	3,050
Protective Service Occupations	Firefighters	\$15.03	810
Educational Instruction and Library Occupations	Preschool Teachers, Except Special Education	\$13.71	600
Personal Care and Service Occupations	Childcare Workers	\$11.26	560

The table below shows the 5 Low Wage jobs in the Asheville MSA by number of employees in those jobs.

Table 3.

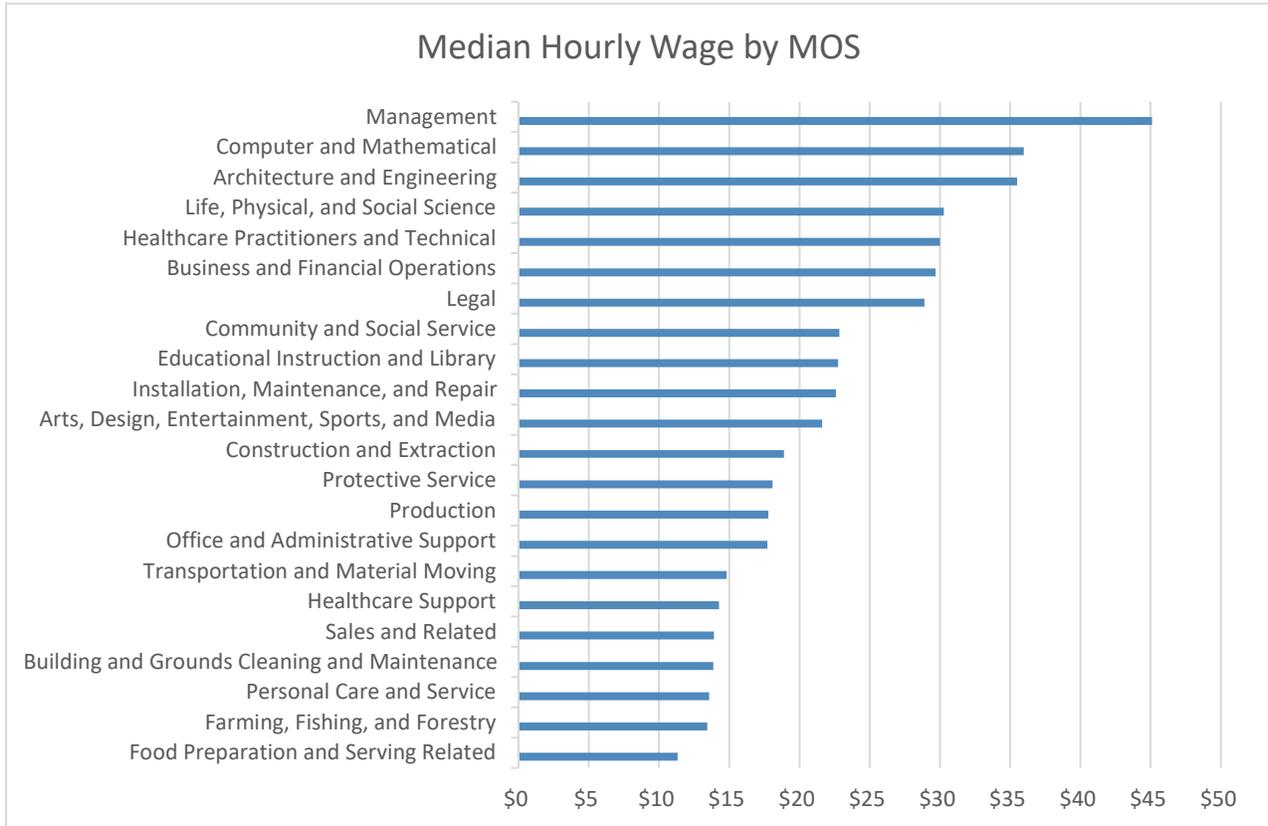
MOS	2021 Top 5 Low Wage Occupations	2021 Median Hourly Wage	2021 Employment
Sales and Related Occupations	Cashiers	\$10.96	6,150
Sales and Related Occupations	Retail Salespersons	\$13.02	5,800
Transportation and Material Moving Occupations	Stockers and Order Fillers	\$13.93	4,130
Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations	Cooks, Fast Food	\$10.75	3,970
Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations	Waiters and Waitresses	\$8.88 (Tips included)	3,930



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3. Median Hourly Wage Visualization



SOURCE: BLS - Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics

4. Percent of persons in poverty that are working*:

Poverty Level	Population Estimate	Percentage of Population
Less than 50 percent of the poverty level	7,098	4.4%
Less than 100 percent of the poverty level	17,905	11.1%
Less than 125 percent of the poverty level	25,487	15.8%

*Between the ages of 16 and 64.

NOTE: The population in Buncombe County for which poverty status is determined is 252,803.

NOTE: Persons in more extreme poverty are also included in the poverty calculations at higher levels of poverty. **The Poverty Level is determined by the size of the household, so it is impossible to reduce it to a single number here**, however as an example, the poverty line for a family of 4 in the contiguous 48 state and the District of Columbia is \$27,750 for 2022 per the US Department of Health and Human Services. For context, to be eligible for food assistance a household must earn less than 133% of the federal poverty level.

SOURCE: US Census –ACS 2020, 5-year estimate Subject Tables. **Working is defined as full time or part time.**



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5. Percent of persons in poverty are disabled:

Poverty Level	Population Estimate	Percentage of Population
Less than 50 percent of the poverty level	1,588	4.7%
Less than 100 percent of the poverty level	6,487	19.2%
Less than 125 percent of the poverty level	8,887	26.3%

SOURCE: US Census –ACS 2020, 5-year estimate Subject Tables

6. Percent of persons in poverty are seniors:

Poverty Level	Population Estimate	Percentage of Population
Less than 50 percent of the poverty level	849	1.7%
Less than 100 percent of the poverty level	4,494	9.0%
Less than 125 percent of the poverty level	7,390	14.8%

SOURCE: US Census –ACS 2020, 5-year estimate Subject Tables

7. Impact of working mothers leaving the workforce:

- Nationally, while women have a greater total share of the population (50.5%), there are 12% more men than there are women who participate in the labor force. Buncombe County follows this trend with a labor force participation rate of 81.3% for men and 73.5% for women (a difference of 7.8% in favor of men). The impacts of this disparity are difficult to quantify.

SOURCE: US Census –ACS 2020, 5-year estimate Subject Tables

8. Impact of limited childcare on poverty:

- Buncombe County has 112 licensed childcare facilities 83 (74%) of which are enrolled in the Subsidized Child Care Program. However, not all 83 providers currently have subsidy children enrolled.
- Currently, 29% of all children birth through pre-kindergarten in Buncombe County are enrolled in licensed care. Approximately 1,200 children are currently enrolled in the Child Care Subsidy program.
- Access to childcare is limited by factors such as: staff to children ratio requirements; workforce shortages; high demand for infant/toddler care; limited hours of care available; strict eligibility criteria for financial support programs such as childcare subsidy and NC Pre-K.
- Childcare subsidy voucher values vary depending upon the provider's star level, the provider's approved subsidy rate, the age of the child, and the level of care, however, \$686 is an average monthly payment per child (across all criteria) for the children paid/vouchers being used.



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- For North Carolina, the average cost for an infant is \$790/month (\$9,480 annually). This cost drops as a child ages until at four years old the average cost is \$676/month (\$8,113 annually). However, the subsidy rate drops as well.
- Subsidy rates only cover up to the 75th percentile of private rates, the intention being to grant childcare access to recipients for a majority of childcare options within a county. This still limits the available childcare options for subsidy recipients when they cannot pay the difference between the subsidy market rate and the private market rate.
- The issue is more acute for parents of very young children who are typically in prime working years, but early in their careers.
 - It should be noted that many factors can lead to poverty and that this issue may not apply in many situations.
- Increased poverty is positively correlated to households with children, particularly when the household is a female only householder.

Category	Married Couple - Total	Percent below poverty level	Female Householder Only - Total	Percent below poverty level
Families	48,377	4.1%	8,914	18.2%
With related children of householder under 18 years	16,861	7.0%	5,327	25.3%
With related children of householder under 5 years	3,612	2.8%	714	25.4%

SOURCE: US Census – ACS 2020, 5-year estimate Subject Tables

SOURCE: NC DHHS – Division of Childhood Development and Early Education – August 2022 Statistical Report (9/2/2022) and NC Child Care Market Rate Study (7/20/22)

SOURCE: Administration for Children & Families

SOURCE: The Economic Policy Institute

9. Poverty by Race/Ethnicity:

Race/Ethnicity	Estimate	Less than 50 percent of the poverty level	Percent of Population
White	8,007	3.6%	3.2%
Black or African American	798	5.2%	0.3%
American Indian and Alaska Native	4	0.5%	0.0%
Asian	131	4.1%	0.1%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	-	0.0%	0.0%
Some other race	533	16.8%	0.2%
Two or more races	340	4.5%	0.1%
Hispanic or Latino origin (of any race)	1,209	7.1%	0.5%



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Race/Ethnicity	Estimate	Less than 100 percent of the poverty level	Percent of Population
White	23,353	10.5%	9.2%
Black or African American	2,809	18.3%	1.1%
American Indian and Alaska Native	60	7.7%	0.0%
Asian	182	5.7%	0.1%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	-	0.0%	0.0%
Some other race	962	30.3%	0.4%
Two or more races	1,774	23.5%	0.7%
Hispanic or Latino origin (of any race)	5,264	30.9%	2.1%

Race/Ethnicity	Estimate	Less than 125 percent of the poverty level	Percent of Population
White	33,362	15.0%	13.2%
Black or African American	4,266	27.8%	1.7%
American Indian and Alaska Native	89	11.4%	0.0%
Asian	646	20.2%	0.3%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	-	0.0%	0.0%
Some other race	1,089	34.3%	0.4%
Two or more races	2,627	34.8%	1.0%
Hispanic or Latino origin (of any race)	7,223	42.4%	2.9%

SOURCE: US Census –ACS 2020, 5-year estimate Subject Tables

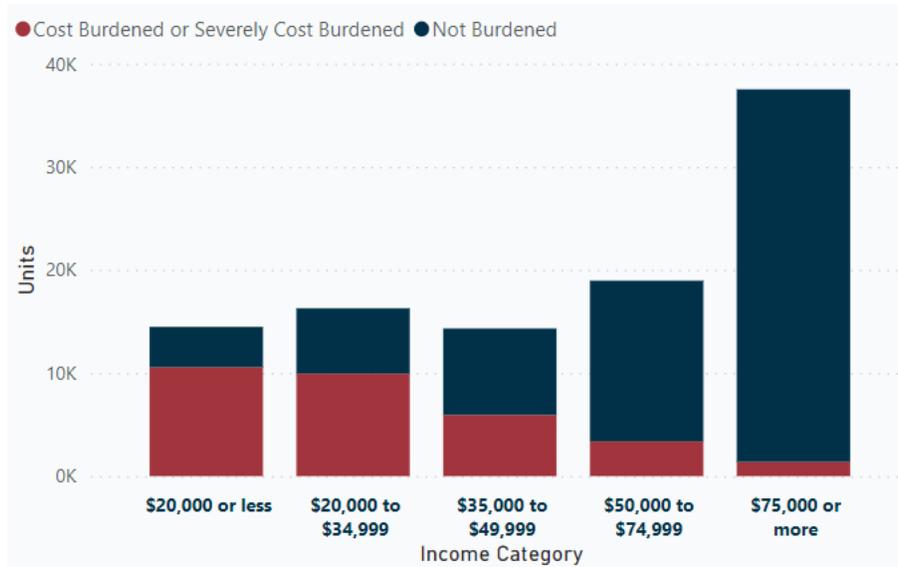
10. Cost burdens for community members:

- Cost burdened households are those who spend 30% or more of their income for housing and utilities, while severely cost burdened households have more than 50% of their income go towards housing and utilities.
- The National Housing Act Recommends that no more than 30% of a household's income be used to pay for housing and utilities.
- Through projected population growth alone (an estimated 11.7% by 2030), assuming the average household size stays the same, an additional 12,611 units will need to be created (not all of these will need to be classified as affordable housing units).

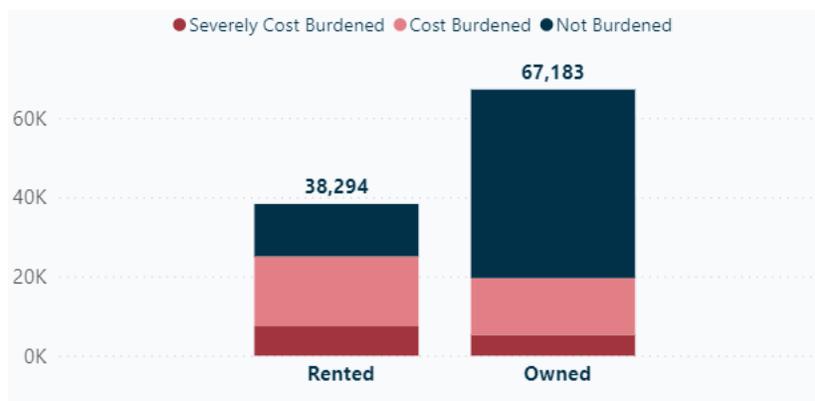


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- Cost burdened households are more prevalent amongst those who rent in Buncombe County on a per capita basis.



- Buncombe County has resourced and funded programs dedicated to increasing the affordable housing stock available to county residents and has a goal of increasing the number of affordable housing units available by 3,150 by 2030.

SOURCE: US Census –ACS 2020, 5-year estimate Subject Tables
SOURCE: NC Office of State Management & Budget - State Demographer



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Staff are available to assist should you have further questions or require additional analysis on this topic prior to the completion of the Comprehensive Plan or for FY 2024 budgetary deliberations.

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