

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Greetings Fellow Northeast Georgians and Friends of the Region,

Hints of Fall are beginning to appear and with them a bounty of new projects, initiatives, and activities. From the Advanced Rolling Career Awareness & Development Experience (“ARCADE”) hitting the road, to the kick-off of the region’s Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy update, to a new bundle of GIS service offerings for our local governments, this quarterly is packed with exciting things happening here in Northeast Georgia.

Over the past few months, we’ve witnessed inspiring on-the-ground work of communities and community members. The Winder Housing Authority (WHA) held a recent ribbon cutting for the first set of homes ever constructed by the WHA. The project was supported by HUD/Georgia DCA Community HOME Investment Program (CHIP) grant funding, which NEGRC Planning & Government Services staff were honored to assist the WHA with applying for and administering. (Check out the article herein to learn more about that crucial project!)

Speaking of on-the-“ground,” Workforce Division staff recently visited local coffee roaster, Jittery Joe’s, to learn about their operations and discuss small business workforce needs as part of Workforce Development Month. AAA staff also connected with local businesses, partnering with four local farmers to provide our senior residents access to freshly grown produce. As your regional commission, we strive to serve as a convener, so any opportunity to connect with and better understand pieces of our economy and community is invaluable. In fact, it’s those types of connections that led to a partnership with Athens Technical College and Georgia Power to offer ten students industrial maintenance pre-apprenticeships. I think you’ll find each of those stories inspiring as you explore this quarterly.

As we approach this November, I would like to thank each of our elected officials and those running for election, at the local, state, and federal levels, for their time and the mental and physical effort that they have committed to serving their constituents. I encourage you to do the same when you have the chance.

Eva Kennedy
Executive Director



*NEGRC Executive Director,
Eva Kennedy*

NEGRC GIS: NEW SERVICE OFFERINGS

The NEGRC Planning & Government Services (PGS) Division is now offering contractual GIS services for local governments.

If you have a need to map infrastructure assets, manage future land use and zoning maps, or create digital workflows to keep data up-to-date, you can now gain that ability. GIS can help your local government streamline operations and provide the insight needed to make data-driven decisions, saving time and resources. The GIS service tiers are as follows:

NEGRC GIS Service Tiers (Annual Fee Rate)			
Tiers	Hours From	Hours To	Total Annual Cost
Tier 1	0	50	\$5,000
Tier 2	50	100	\$9,750
Tier 3	100	150	\$14,250
Tier 4	150	200	\$18,650

Depending on the scope of your needs, an additional geospatial strategy may be required to establish a starting point and plan forward. If you'd like to explore this further and determine what the best fit is for you, contact **Mark Beatty, PGS Director**, at mbeatty@negrc.org or 706-530-2748 to schedule a meeting!

2026 NORTHEAST GEORGIA SENIORS FARMERS MARKET NUTRITION PROGRAM

The Northeast Georgia Area Agency on Aging (AAA) Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP) Farmer Markets began on June 8, 2026. **Quality Assurance Senior Manager, Toshia Lewis**, coordinated the farmers markets at each Senior Center in the Northeast Georgia Planning Service area, partnered with Public Health, and held markets at other locations in the community such as churches and senior housing.

The farmers markets provide access to locally grown fruit and vegetables to eligible senior center participants and community members. The AAA worked with four farmers this year: **Larry Doolittle, owner of The Garden Market; Joseph Nesbit, owner of Red Clay Produce; Traves Hyman, owner of Hyman Agriculture and Consulting; and Kenneth Ford, owner of KLF Farms.**



Seniors enjoyed fresh produce options from local farmers.

The funding allotted for the SFMNP was reduced by 51% this year, but the AAA was still able to serve 1,540 participants, and cash markets were offered at sites in which the participants expressed interest in purchasing produce from the farmers after the SFMNP participants were served. Often, the SFMNP participants are only able to access fruit and vegetables through the Congregate and Home Delivered meals programs. The SFMNP offers unique access to and variety of fresh fruits and vegetables for those it serves.

If you or if you know any seniors that need nutrition support, please contact your local senior center for resources or the Aging and Disability Resource Connection at 1-888-808-8020.



The AAA partnered with four farms for the 2026 season: The Garden Market, KLF Farms, Hyman Agriculture and Consulting, and Red Clay Produce.

ARCADE COMMUNITY SHOWCASE: First Public Showing!

We were excited to open the doors of the ARCADE — Advanced Rolling Career Awareness & Development Experience for its first public showcase!

ARCADE was created with one goal in mind: give students the opportunity to experience careers—not just hear about them.

Through hands-on, arcade-style career exploration, students can discover high-demand career pathways using interactive technology including:

-  Robotics & Automation
-  Advanced Manufacturing
-  Virtual Welding
-  Heavy Equipment & Construction Simulation
-  Healthcare Career Exploration
-  3D Scanning, Design & Printing
-  STEM & Technology Careers

This initiative has truly been built through regional collaboration.



Students explore high-demand career pathways using interactive technology in the ARCADE.



Jami Cash, Vice President of Workforce Development at the Walton County Development Authority, in front of the mobile ARCADE.

A special thank you to **Walton Works and the Walton County Development Authority** for their insight, ideas, collaboration, support, and guidance as we worked to turn the ARCADE concept into a career exploration experience that connects students with the opportunities available right here in our region.

We are also grateful for the support of **Georgia Power** and for the investment of the **Southern Crescent Regional Commission (SCRC)**, whose grant funding is helping make this work possible.

Through the SCRC grant, **WorkSource Northeast Georgia and the Northeast Georgia Regional Commission (NEGRC)** will initially bring ARCADE career exploration experiences to **middle school students in Clarke, Newton, and Walton counties.**

But our vision is bigger.

Northeast Georgia is a 12-county region, and we want ARCADE reaching students throughout all 12 counties.

With support from businesses, industries, educational partners, and community sponsors, we hope to expand ARCADE beyond the initial grant-funded communities and introduce even more students to the high-demand, high-opportunity careers available close to home.

The ARCADE Community Showcase is an opportunity for our community to step inside, try the experiences, meet the partners behind the project, and see firsthand how we are working together to build Northeast Georgia's future workforce.

Explore careers. Discover possibilities. Build our regional talent pipeline.

We are proud to show Northeast Georgia what's inside the ARCADE!

2027 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT APPLICATIONS

If your local government is interested in receiving assistance for a 2027 Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) application, you can contact the Planning & Government Services division at (706) 369-5650 or PGSAssist@negrc.org. CDBG applications are generally due April 1st each year. It takes several months to prepare a successful application. Therefore, it is encouraged that you submit a request for assistance to the NEGRC by October 31st to have adequate time to prepare the project.

The CDBG Program provides funding to assist a wide range of eligible activities, including housing improvement projects, public facilities (such as water and sewer lines), buildings (such as local health centers, senior centers, or head start centers), and economic development projects. All

projects must substantially benefit low- and moderate-income persons. The maximum amount available per applicant is \$1,000,000 for Single-Activity and \$1,250,000 for Multi-Activity during regular competition. More information can be found at [Georgia DCA's website](#).

CEDS UPDATE KICKOFF HELD AT BEN EPPS AIRPORT

The Planning & Government Services Division led the kick-off of the five-year update for the Northeast Georgia Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). Conversations focused around the region's strengths and challenges. Participants included elected officials, economic development leaders, and other decision-makers from each of Northeast Georgia's 12 counties.



Davin Welter, Ben Epps Airport Coordinator Airport Operations, welcomed the CEDS Committee.

The CEDS is a strategy-driven plan for regional economic development and is a prerequisite for designation by the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) as an Economic Development District (EDD). Similar to a comprehensive plan, a CEDS is updated every five years and serves as a guide for local and regional initiatives.

The Northeast Georgia Regional Commission serves as the administrator of the designated Northeast Georgia Economic Development District. As such, EDA provides grant funding to support capacity building and technical assistance to our member local governments.

The CEDS update will occur from August through December 2027. The CEDS Committee will work with PGS staff to craft an Action Plan for the following five-year planning period.

INDUSTRIAL MAINTENANCE PRE-APPRENTICESHIPS

WorkSource Northeast Georgia, powered by the Northeast Georgia Regional Commission, recently partnered with **Athens Technical College** and **Georgia Power** to provide a seven-week Industrial Maintenance training program for ten students using our Mobile Industrial Maintenance Training Trailer.

Through a combination of hands-on training and classroom instruction, participants developed practical, job-ready skills and earned industry-recognized credentials in OSHA safety, forklift operations, electrical systems, and programmable logic controllers (PLCs).



Industrial Maintenance program pre-apprentices and their sponsors.



Industrial maintenance pre-apprenticeship students with trainer, Kevin Rion, and Athens-Technical College Apprenticeship Coordinator, Marvin Nunnally.

The program was designed to prepare participants for entry-level careers in industrial maintenance while creating a foundation for continued training and career advancement in this high-demand field, giving them the tools and resources for an in-demand career path.

This initiative is a great example of what can happen when workforce development, education, and industry come together around a shared goal, building skills, creating career pathways, and expanding economic opportunity across Northeast Georgia.

SEPTEMBER IS WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT MONTH!

What better way to celebrate workforce development than by getting out into our community and learning firsthand about one of our region's homegrown employers?

On Monday, September 14, the **WorkSource Northeast Georgia** team, powered by the **Northeast Georgia Regional Commission**, took our Monday morning check-in on the road to Jittery Joe's Roasting Co. in Athens.



NEGRC Workforce Division staff toured Jittery Joe's Roasting Co.

Our team had the opportunity to tour the roasting facility, learn about the process that takes coffee from farm to cup, and, of course, enjoy a coffee tasting along the way! Jittery Joe's has been roasting coffee in Athens since 1994, sourcing beans from around the world while building a brand that has become a true Athens staple.



NEGRC Workforce Division staff with Charlie Mustard, Jittery Joe's Roastmaster (center).

A special thank you to **Charlie Mustard, Jittery Joe's Roastmaster**, for sharing his expertise with our team. Charlie has spent more than 30 years honing the craft of coffee roasting and has roasted millions of pounds of coffee right here in Athens.

Workforce development is more than connecting people to jobs. It's about understanding the businesses that drive our regional economy, building relationships with employers, learning about the people and skills behind their success, and creating connections between those employers and the communities they call home.

Sometimes that means meeting around a conference table, and sometimes it means starting a Monday morning surrounded by the smell of freshly roasted coffee!

Thank you, Jittery Joe's, for welcoming our team and giving us a closer look at the people, processes, and passion behind a Northeast Georgia success story.

Happy Workforce Development Month!

RIBBON CUTTING: Cottages on Maynard

The Winder Housing Authority (WHA) hosted a ribbon cutting on September 10, 2026, to celebrate the completion of the Cottages on Maynard, a seven-unit housing development funded by a \$600,000 Community HOME Investment Program (CHIP). This grant is provided by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and is administered by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA).



The Winder Housing Authority and project partners celebrate the Cottages on Maynard ribbon cutting.

Over the next several months, each unit will be sold to eligible low- to moderate-income homebuyers in the Winder area. Each homebuyer is required to complete a homeowner training and a screening process conducted by the WHA. This project will provide safe, decent, and affordable housing to seven families and seeks to create generational wealth for each.



Units centered around a shared courtyard at The Cottages on Maynard.

Planning & Government Services (PGS) Division staff helped write the grant application in 2021 and have continued to provide grant administration assistance to the WHA throughout construction.

The CHIP application is released annually in the fall and due in January. For guidance on CHIP and other

housing programs available through the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, you can contact **Mark Beatty, PGS Director**, at mbeatty@negrc.org or **Beth Eavenson, DCA Region 5 Representative**, at beth.eavenson@dca.ga.gov to schedule a meeting!

CREATING A CONNECTED COMMUNITY

While the Memory Café and Senior Day at the Mall serve different purposes, both programs share a common goal: connecting people to people and people to resources.



Memory café attendees participate in social activities.

The Memory Café, held on the first Monday of each month, except September, provides a welcoming

environment where individuals living with dementia can attend alongside their caregivers can develop supportive relationships and participate in social activities together. Senior Day at the Mall brings together a broader community of older adults, caregivers, and service providers, creating opportunities to learn about available resources while enjoying social interaction and participating in games. This event is held on the third Monday of February, June, and October.



Attendees celebrated Retro Day during Senior Day at the Mall.

Together, these programs demonstrate the value of creating opportunities for older

adults and any caregivers to remain engaged in their communities. Connection can help reduce isolation, strengthen support networks, and increase awareness of resources that can help individuals navigate the aging process.

By creating welcoming spaces for social engagement and providing access knowledgeable community partners, the Memory Café and Senior Day at the Mall help foster a community where older adults, individuals living with dementia, and caregivers know that they are not alone and that resources and support are available to them.

To get more information on these programs, please contact **Katrina Ogbe, Dementia Care Specialist**, at 706-583-2546 ext. 212.

MEDICARE OPEN ENROLLMENT, AND SCAMS TO BE AWARE OF

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) offers seniors, people with end-stage renal disease (ESRD), and people with disabilities several insurance options, including Original Medicare,

Medicare Advantage (MA), and Medicare prescription drug plans. The costs and covered benefits of different options can change from year to year. People with Medicare can review coverage choices and make changes during Medicare Open Enrollment from October 15, 2026, through December 7, 2026.

CMS provides price and quality information to empower people with Medicare to choose coverage options that are the best fit for them. While reviewing their healthcare coverage options, enrollees can consider new or different plans and possibly save money.

Things to consider when choosing or changing your coverage: coverage; costs; doctor and hospital choice; prescription drugs; quality of care; convenience and travel.

Health insurance scams happen year-round, but they pick up during Open Enrollment for Medicare. If you are looking to find a new plan, you might search online. But before you click on a search result, remember scammers and dishonest businesses sometimes pay to appear at the top.

Bad actors often use web addresses that look similar to government website addresses. They also use keywords and official-looking logos to make you think you are at the real Healthcare.gov or Medicare.gov when you are not. If you use the link or phone number in the ad, you might end up paying for a scammy plan that's not health insurance or expose yourself to medical identity theft.

For more information on Medicare Open Enrollment, Medicare changes, or if you suspect Medicare fraud, people can also call the **Georgia SHIP** for free, unbiased information and assistance at **1-866-552-4464, option 4**.

UPCOMING REGIONAL MEETINGS

October

13 th	8:30 a.m.	Workforce Development Board	Athens Career Center
15 th	Noon	NEGRC Council	Trumps Catering
21 st	1:30 p.m.	Aging Advisory Council	Elbert County Senior Center

November

17 th	10:00 a.m.	Northeast Georgia ADRC Advisory Council & CARE-NET	Virtual
18 th	1:00 p.m.	Solid Waste Authority	Athens-Clarke County Solid Waste Department
19 th	Noon	NEGRC Council	Trumps Catering

December

- No Scheduled Meetings -

