Executive Director's Report

I am pleased to present my Executive Director's report for October 2025. The purpose of the Executive Director's Report is to highlight CPRC activities and offer insights into how other regional councils in similar-sized regions across the United States operate.

I would ask that you share this report with your colleagues in your respective Boards for your jurisdiction. I will also send this to the region's local government managers and assistants.

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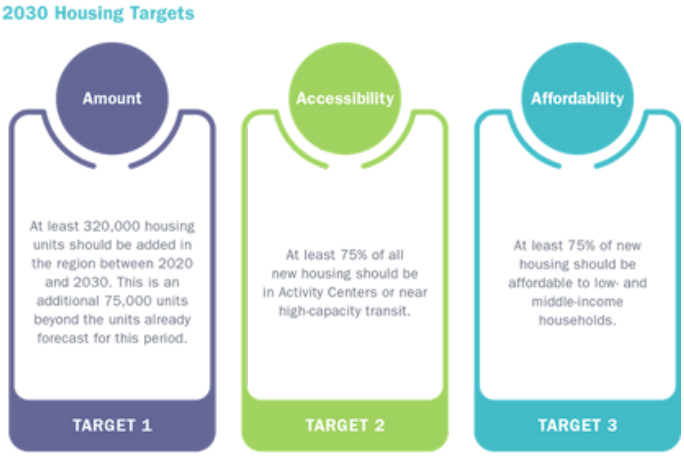
Major Metro Regional Council Highlight

Each month, this segment of the Executive Director's Report will include some interesting items from other regional councils that I think are worth the Board's attention and review because they are applicable, innovative, or inspiring. Learning from our peer regional councils across the country is a great way for member governments to see other regional initiatives underway and worth attention.

Metro Washington (DC) Council of Governments

The Metro Washington (DC) Council of Governments does significant work in the area of housing and homelessness. In 2019, the Board of the Metro Washington DC COG endorsed a set of regional targets around housing for 2030. The targets were established as a result of work from the Metro Washington COG, initially sparked by the COG MPO's work on their 2045 Long Range Transportation Plan.

Here is a visual representation of the targets:



With respect to Central Pines, staff have recognized the need for a Regional Planning Framework like Washington COG. Additionally, Central Pines could do similar housing work as highlighted if asked by the MPOs in the region. Currently, the region is taking a more decentralized approach to planning for the housing needs. CPRC could add significant value in these areas but will need the support of our local government members and the necessary resources to do this type of work in a meaningful way.

Here is a link to the Washington DC COG's work on this topic.

DC COG Housing Target Work

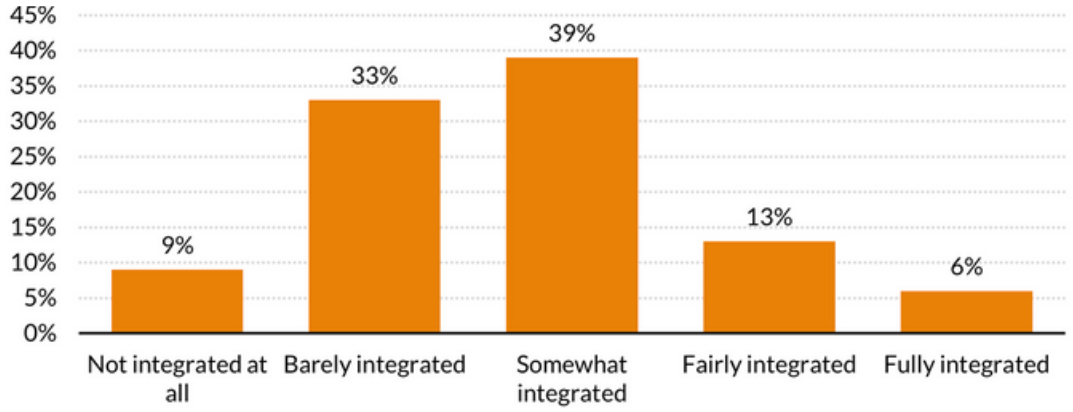
Speaking of Housing...

I would encourage you to take a look at the following two reports, published recently. The first is a report published by the Urban Institute, titled "Planning for Housing in a Regional Context."

The report summarizes a national survey of regional planning organizations (COGs) and MPOs with respect to coordination of transportation and housing planning. Both of these areas have been identified as strategic focus areas for CPRC, and it has come up very clearly as a priority as we have been speaking with local government managers across the region. It again surfaced as a significant strategic issue during a discussion with our Executive Committee last month as we began to prepare for our CPRC Strategic Plan refresh.

The survey reveals that many regions are struggling with the same issues and have yet to find effective ways to coordinate transportation and housing planning. As Executive Director, I think this is an important topic to investigate further as we develop our strategy for 2026-28.

Less Than One Fifth of Metropolitan Governance and Planning Organizations Report Having At Least "Fairly Integrated" Housing and Transportation Planning



Source: Urban Institute author analysis of 2024 metropolitan governance and planning organization survey data.

Full Report

More on Housing

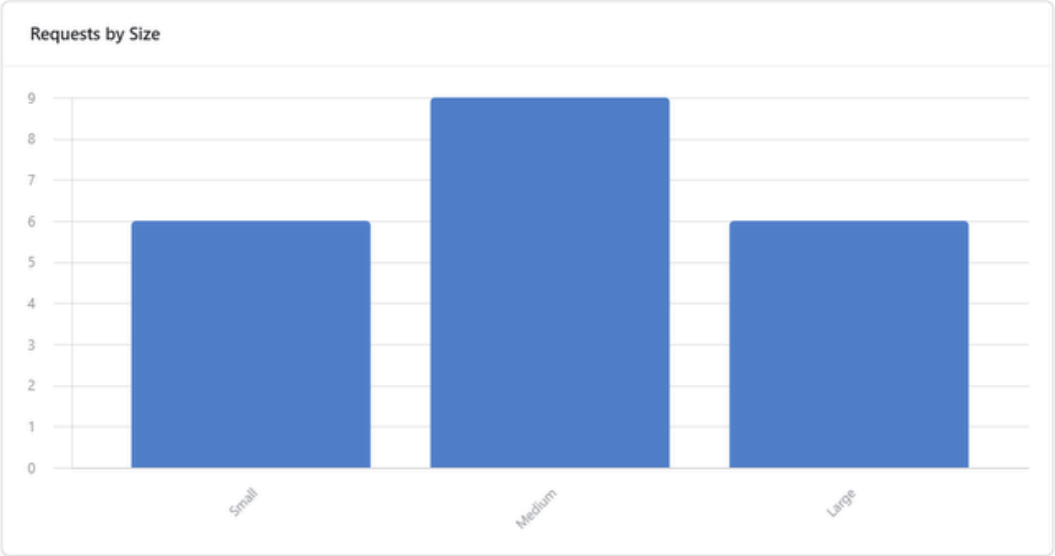
Additionally, NARC recently distributed information on an additional Urban Institute report around the housing shortage. It includes cases studies (including the Washington DC COG that I highlighted earlier). This may also be helpful as we continue to develop our strategic priorities for the next several years.

New Report: Targeting the Housing Shortage
The Urban Institute's recent report "Addressing Housing Supply Challenges through Target Setting" offers a new framework for how local and state governments can understand and adopt housing production targets. Drawing on case studies and interviews from Massachusetts, New Jersey, Oregon, and the Washington, DC region, researchers identified eight best practices and key considerations such as using data-driven methodologies, setting clear and measurable targets, and incorporating equity considerations. The researchers highlighted the necessity of house target-setting programs to ensure local planning development decisions are guided by broader regional and state goals, and to promote long-term housing affordability in communities.

READ MORE

Local Government Member Request Dashboard

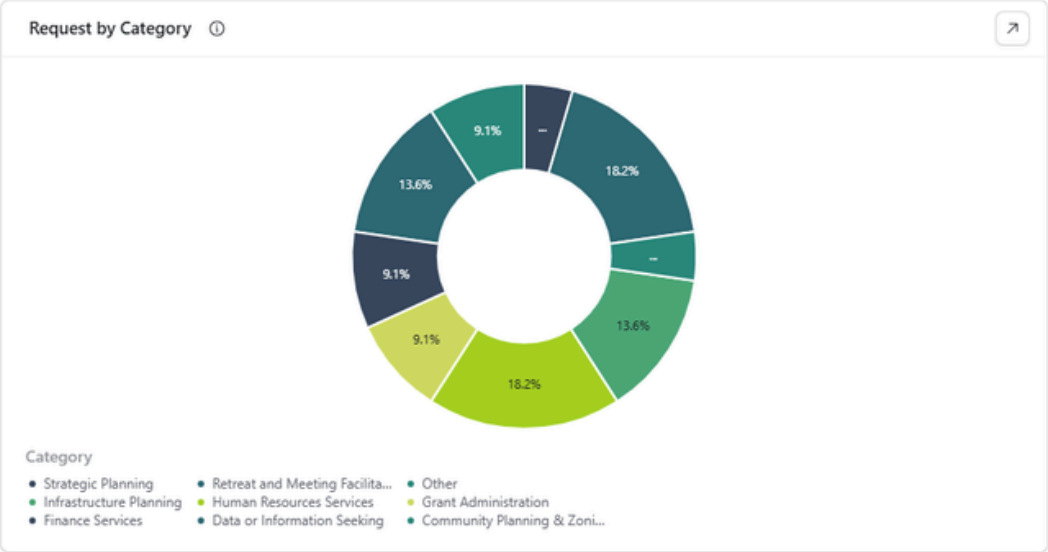
Our Member Services team has developed a Member Request dashboard to receive and track incoming requests from our local governments, areas of need trends, and disengaged communities.



25-26 Requests
22

24-25 Requests
60

25-26 Space Reservations
41

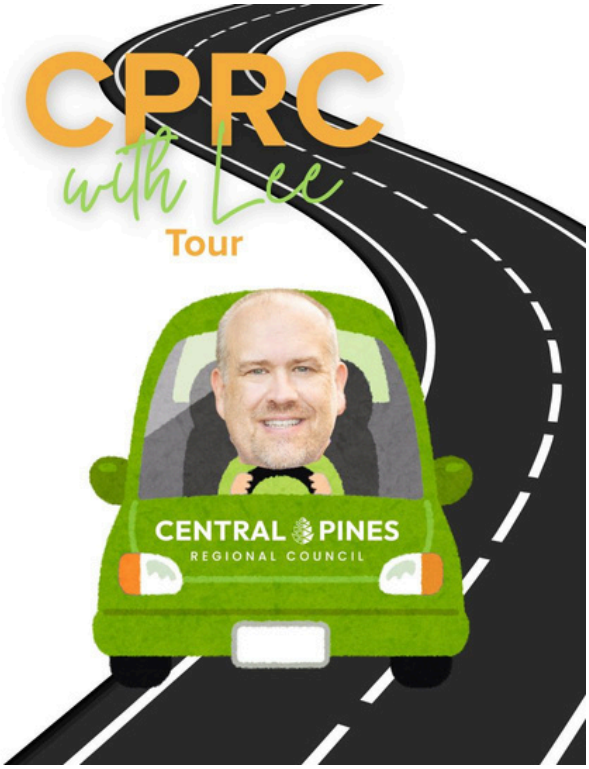


Request Assistance

CPRC with Lee Tour

As many of you know, I have a goal to visit all fifty local governments this year. I am beginning my tour by scheduling visits with local governments with a manager or administrator, and then will be turning to our Mayor-Council local governments next. You can follow along with the hashtag #CPRCwithLee.

Up to this point, I have visited Morrisville, Selma, Pinehurst, Holly Springs, Kenly, Chapel Hill, Sanford, Broadway, Carthage, City of Durham, Siler City, Archer Lodge, Apex, Wake Forest, Garner, Chatham County, Wilson's Mills, Wendell, Clayton. I also have upcoming visits scheduled with Hillsborough, Wake County, Angier, Cary, Whispering Pines, Johnston County, Smithfield, Raleigh.



NARC Updates

The National Association of Regional Councils publishes a Transportation Thursdays and an eRegions Update each week. Here is a selection of items from those newsletters that may be of interest.

New Legislation Calls for Study on Data Centers' Rural Impact

A bipartisan bill introduced by Reps. Blake Moore (R-UT) and Jim Costa (D-CA) would require federal agencies to conduct a joint study of the long-term impacts of AI and data center growth on rural energy infrastructure. The proposed legislation, Unleashing Low-Cost Rural AI Act would mandate the Department of Agriculture, Interior, and Energy to evaluate upgrades to energy infrastructure, consumer costs, and reliability. While AI data center demand is rapidly accelerating, it disproportionally diverts energy from surrounding communities, leaving rural customers to absorb the financial burden and manage an increasing strain on aging power infrastructure. The bill reflects a growing push for accountability and transparency in national infrastructure decisions.

READ MORE

The Ethical Risks of Artificial Intelligence in Urban Planning

While AI presents regional planners with a plethora of opportunities, it may undermine public trust on which the planning profession depends. A new paper explores the ethical concerns of using artificial intelligence in urban planning. The authors argue that responsible planning relies on public trust, yet this trust could be frayed by haphazardly adopting AI. To ensure public trust, planners must ensure that personal data remains anonymous and secure. Additionally, planners should work to prevent AI models from perpetuating biases and guarantee that planners themselves are accountable for their work products.

As AI continues to assist urban planners, humans must stay at the center of the profession and redouble their commitment to ethical planning standards.

The Speed to Power Initiative coincides with President Trump's Executive Orders, Unleashing American Energy and Removing Barriers to American Leadership in Artificial Intelligence with the goal of providing affordable, reliable and secure energy quickly. The DOE issued a Request for Information to gather input on project readiness, infrastructure complaints, and investment opportunities.

NARC Updates

US DOE Launches Speed to Power Initiative to Meet Rising Demands

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) launched the Speed to Power initiative, aimed to rapidly expand energy infrastructure projects and meet growing national energy and industrial demands. This initiative focuses on transmission and generation for large-scale grid infrastructure projects to ensure reliable power for AI data centers, supporting U.S. competitiveness in emerging technologies. According to a DOE analysis, the current pace of project development is inadequate to keep up with demand, creating challenges for the nation's energy supply.

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READ MORE

Rethinking the Advantages of One-Way Streets

One-way streets, once seen as the state of the art for transportation design, are being questioned by cities across America. The one-way arterial through a city's central business district blossomed during the post-WWII period. Planners, seeing city residents flock to suburbs, wanted to ensure that commuters could move in and out of employments centers as quickly as possible. One-way streets reduce the number of turning movements, allowing vehicles to move at higher speeds. While these goals served the commuting habits of mid-century suburbanites, today, city residents are rethinking these goals. Planners have shown that one-way arterials could reduce safety and depress business values. As more people in cities prioritize pedestrian safety and inviting public spaces, one-way streets may be phased-out in the future.

NARC Updates

States Turn to Road Use Fees to Fund Transportation Improvements

States across America are embracing alternative funding mechanisms to pay for the growing cost of maintaining and enhancing their transportation infrastructure. As construction costs rise and fuel-efficient vehicles gain traction, states are having difficulty stretching their gas tax revenue to fund transportation projects. In response, states have tested an array of policy solutions, including raising gas taxes, tolling, and imposing new EV and hybrid vehicle fees to fill the funding gap.

Fuel-efficient vehicles, including hybrids and EVs, contribute less in gas taxes than traditional vehicles, even though they are often heavier and cause more wear on roads. This has prompted policymakers to look for ways to make funding more balanced. State efforts to reform transportation funding are being mirrored at the federal level, with House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chair Sam Graves (R-MO) proposing EV and hybrid registration fees to supplement the Highway Trust Fund.

Atlanta Regional Commission Considers Moving Amtrak Station Downtown

The Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) is conducting a feasibility study to examine moving their historic Amtrak train station to the city's downtown core. The current station, located north of downtown and over a mile away from the nearest metro station, recorded a ridership of just 78,000 passengers last year. To attract more riders, ARC and the City of Atlanta are allocating $650 thousand to study the feasibility of moving the Amtrak station near a metro station downtown. Amtrak has estimated that the total project would cost $700 million.

NARC Updates

EPA Seeks Rescission of Select PFAS Rules in Court

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) filed in court last week, seeking to rescind portions of a prior Biden-era EPA rule on PFAS “forever” chemicals. The agency filed with the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit to vacate a portion of the rule, citing procedural errors when it both proposed and finalized the rule at the same time. The filing notes that leaving the rule in place would restrict opportunities for meaningful public participation in the process. The EPA seeks to vacate the portions of the rule that pertain to PFNA, PFHxS, GenX, and PFBS but plans to defend the rule for PFAS and PFOA, which it says followed administrative procedure.

READ MORE

How Synthetic Data is Reshaping Public Services

Governments are increasingly exploring synthetic data, which is data generated by algorithms to replicate the patterns and structure of real-world data without including any actual personal information. This allows agencies to analyze trends and train AI models while protecting individual privacy. It is already being used for tasks like traffic analysis and school performance modeling. Although interest is growing, many officials remain cautious. Experts emphasize the need for clearer definitions, ethical standards, and education to build trust. States like Utah are leading the way by formally recognizing synthetic data in privacy laws. As adoption expands, synthetic data could become a key tool for responsible innovation in public service.

READ MORE

NARC Updates

Tech Tools Advance ADA Compliance in Cities

Local governments are increasingly turning to GIS and AI technologies to improve accessibility in the built environment, particularly in meeting Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements. Cities like Lawrence, Kansas, and Douglas County, Nebraska, are using tools like lidar, Esri's ArcGIS, and deep learning models to map and assess thousands of curb ramps. These efforts help prioritize infrastructure upgrades, support ADA Transition Plans, and enhance transparency in public investment decisions, all while improving pedestrian experiences for residents of all ages and abilities.

In Douglas County, for example, AI models trained on aerial imagery are helping inventory over 30,000 curb ramps, a task that would otherwise take thousands of hours. The model initially had challenges, identifying shadows and road paint markings incorrectly, but staff oversight proved to be indispensable in training the model to identify curb ramps correctly. While human oversight remains essential, these technologies are proving to be powerful allies in reducing staff time needed to analyze and determine necessary improvements, leading to faster implementation for more inclusive communities.

READ MORE

Eno Center Releases Paper on Rising Highway Construction Costs

The Eno Center for Transportation, a non-partisan think tank, released a white paper on the causes and effects of the post-pandemic rise in highway construction costs. The paper examines supply chain issues, labor market shortages, petroleum price increases, and increased demand for contractors, among other factors contributing to rising costs during the implementation of the Infrasturture Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). Understanding the causes and effects of rising construction prices is essential for transportation policy leaders to accurately assess the power of federal infrastructure investment in the present day.

NARC Updates

New Data Shows US Transit Agencies Pay Too Much for Buses

A recent joint publication from Brookings and American Enterprise Institute reveals that U.S. transit agencies may be overpaying for new transit buses. The report concludes that higher transit prices compared to peer countries stem from a shortage of domestic suppliers, limited vendor competition, and "Buy America" policies. For example, Denver's RTD paid $432,000 per bus, while Cincinnati's SORTA paid $939,000 for nearly identical models because strict procurement specifications in Cincinnati limit vendor competition and drive-up prices. These costs place added strain on smaller agencies serving low-income or rural communities. The authors suggest creating a standardized federal procurement framework for transit buses to encourage economies of scale, which can reduce costs for transit agencies. Lower costs allow transit agencies to repurpose the savings and spend it on infrastructure improvements for transit.

READ MORE

Chicago Moves to Eliminate Parking Minimums

This week, Chicago voted to eliminate parking requirements in buildings near transit stations across the city. The zoning ordinance, which passed the City Council unanimously, bans parking minimums in buildings within a half mile of rail and a quarter mile of bus lines. The ordinance is part of an effort to encourage construction and make housing more affordable for the city's residents. Rethinking parking minimums has become a popular policy area in recent years, with cities from Hartford, CT to Santa Monica, CA enacting comprehensive reforms.

NARC Updates

State of Homelessness 2025 Report

In their recently released State of Homelessness report, the National Alliance to End Homelessness reveals an 18% increase in homelessness across the United States, with over 771,000 individuals counted in 2024. This is the highest number recorded since data collection began. Contributing factors include a shortage of affordable housing, stagnant wages, and reduced access to social support systems. Populations such as children, older adults, individuals with disabilities, and communities of color are disproportionately represented. Service providers continue to operate with limited resources, and recent changes in federal policy may impact future efforts. The report notes that targeted investment in housing, healthcare, and income support has been effective in reducing homelessness.

READ MORE

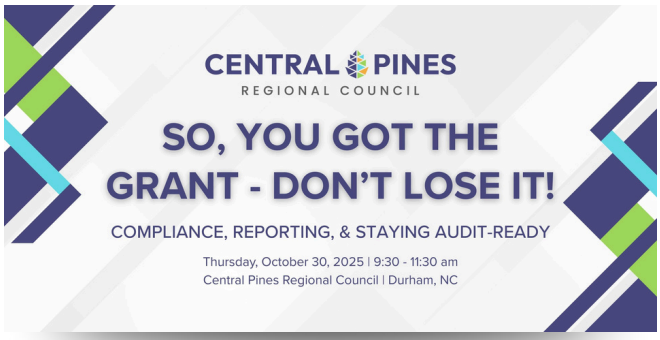
Regions Poised to Lead the Next Wave of Public Service

With federal support diminishing and resource demands growing, regional planning organizations are uniquely positioned to deliver public service and manage resources more efficiently. A recent commentary in Route Fifty highlights how these bodies are addressing cross-jurisdictional challenges with flexibility, scale, and local accountability. For example, at the National Association of Regional Council's Annual Conference this year, local and regional officials exchanged innovative solutions to regional issues. With traditional federal support waning, regionalism offers a promising path for innovation, collaboration, and civic renewal.

READ MORE

Upcoming Events

We have several upcoming events at CPRC over the next few weeks and we encourage you to join us for these events and share them with your communities.



So, You Got the Grant - Don't Lose It!
Thursday, October 30
9:30 - 11:30 am @CPRC
Registration is $25.00, or free for members of the Grant Assistance program.

REGISTER NOW

Opportunity Zones Roundtable
Wednesday, November 5
10:00 - 11:30 am @ CPRC

REGISTER NOW

Foreign Trade Zone #93 Summit
Wednesday, November 12
10:00 am - 2:30 pm @ CPRC
$25 or Free for FTZ #93 Board & Current/Pending Operators

REGISTER NOW

A Connected Region Conversation: Water Regionalization
Thursday, November 13
9:00 - 11:00 am @ CPRC

REGISTER NOW

In Memoriam

Lewis Weatherspoon

Central Pines has learned of the passing of former Central Pines Delegate Lewis Weatherspoon. Mr. Weatherspoon formerly was Mayor of Angier and was the Delegate to the Central Pines Regional Council for Angier when Angier joined Central Pines. Our condolences go out to Mr. Weatherspoon's family.

Dee Freeman

We are saddened to let you know that former Triangle J Council of Governments Director Dee Freeman passed away this week after a courageous battle with brain cancer. Dee made significant and lasting impacts to our region and to our organization. He served our organization for nine years as Executive Director (2000-2009) and then went on to lead the NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources under Governor Beverly Perdue. Dee also made important contributions as a local government manager. He served as manager in Shelby, Brevard, Hudson, and Maiden. We send our condolences to his wife Emily, his family, as well as his many friends and colleagues across North Carolina.

Obituary

CENTRAL PINES
REGIONAL COUNCIL

Golden Pinecone Awards

Award Descriptions & Nomination Details

Evergreen Excellence

Awarded to local government staff members. Can be nominated by anyone.

Recognizes an outstanding local government staff member - at any level - who demonstrates dedication, innovation, and a positive impact in their community.

Longleaf Leadership

Awarded to an elected official. Can be nominated by anyone.

Celebrates an elected official who has shown exceptional leadership, vision, and service to their community and the region.

Rooted in Results

Awarded to a project. Can be nominated by anyone.

Honors an outstanding project that strengthened two (+) communities or the region. Projects that cross county lines or partnerships with CPRC staff, member governments, or stakeholders, will be given preference.

Heart of the Pine

Nominated by CPRC Staff.

Selected by CPRC staff, this award honors an individual, organization, or partner who has been a strong advocate and supporter of Central Pines Regional Council and its mission.

DEADLINE FOR NOMINATIONS:

Thursday, November 6, 2025

AWARDS WILL BE PRESENTED:

Thursday, December 4, 6 pm at End of Year Celebration

CONTACT

919-549-0551
connect@centralpinesnc.gov
centralpinesnc.gov

HOW TO NOMINATE:

Click the Nominate button below!

Nominate!