

[\\$4.9M HUD grant targets action on regional growth](#) (Charlotte Observer – November 22, 2011)

By David Perlmutter

For two decades, cities, towns and counties in the Charlotte region have worked to blur boundaries to tackle issues and challenges they all increasingly share. Now that will be done in a bigger way after the federal Housing and Urban Development department on Monday awarded a \$4.9 million grant to the Centralina Council of Governments to pay for regional sustainability planning. It will pay to implement a plan by Centralina COG, the Catawba Regional COG and the Charlotte Regional Partnership that links officials and business leaders in 10 N.C. and four S.C. counties to develop well-managed growth. Among the identified issues: The region's population is expected to double by 2030. Natural resources are at risk. To compete globally, the region must regain strength with healthy cities. To get there, the "Connect" plan focuses on such vital concerns as reducing housing and transportation costs and environmental concerns; growing jobs and educational opportunities; and revitalizing communities hit by the poor economy by building a strong, diverse economy. It won't be used for a "massive planning exercise," but will use computer data from other regions to help implement ideas and allow communities hit hard by the economy to start to rebound, said Rebecca Yarborough, Centralina COG's assistant director. "We want to help our region solve problems that everybody agrees need to be solved, and begin to grow jobs and revitalize communities," Yarborough said. "We've lost too many jobs. It's hard to be sustainable if you don't have a job. It's hard to worry about the environment if you don't have a job." Getting people from the 14 counties involved will be the first step, said Martha Sue Hall, an Albemarle City Council member and Centralina COG's board chairwoman. "This is not just a Charlotte and Mecklenburg County plan, but one for the whole region," Hall said. "We've got to have elected officials and the private sector in the small towns and big cities look at the big picture and realize that what's good across that city and county line is good for them as well. "They've got to take the steps to make those lines invisible." U.S. Rep. **Mel Watt** of Charlotte agreed. "The more people you have sitting and talking to each other and planning on a regional basis, the more you have the capacity to overcome a lot of challenges we all face," said

Watt

, who pushed for the grant with fellow Democratic U.S. Rep. Larry Kissell of Biscoe in Montgomery County. The grant was announced by HUD's Shelley Poticha at a news conference in Charlotte. The region was one of 28 in the country to get a grant, and only a few got the maximum \$5 million. "This region made a really compelling case that it is ready to tackle the tough issues by aligning its investments and strategies for the future and engaging people in the region to do that," said Poticha, director of HUD's Office of Sustainable Housing

and Communities. "That's very unusual to have such a collaborative group. In order to implement big ideas, you have to have everybody involved."