

# ECICOG

East Central Iowa Council of Governments  
2019 Annual Report

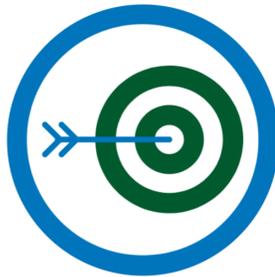


# ECICOG

The East Central Iowa Council of Governments helps build vibrant, forward-thinking communities and a collaborative and resilient region.



Sharing  
Technical Skills



Planning for  
the Future



Leveraging  
Resources



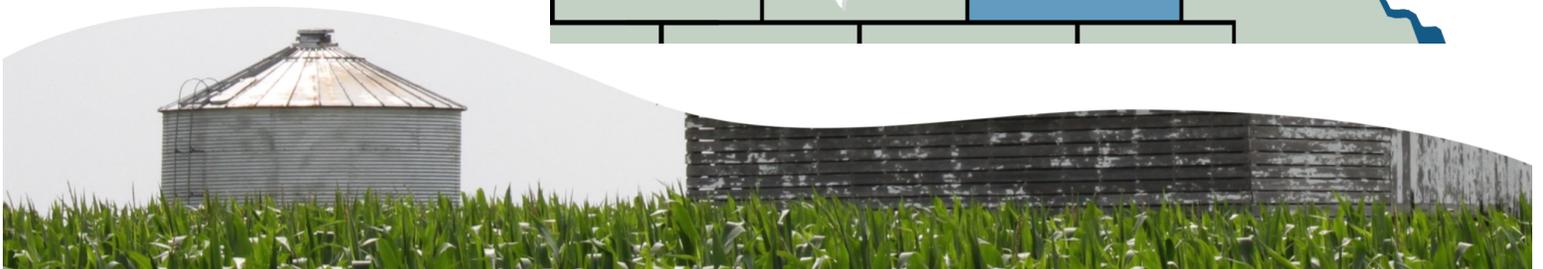
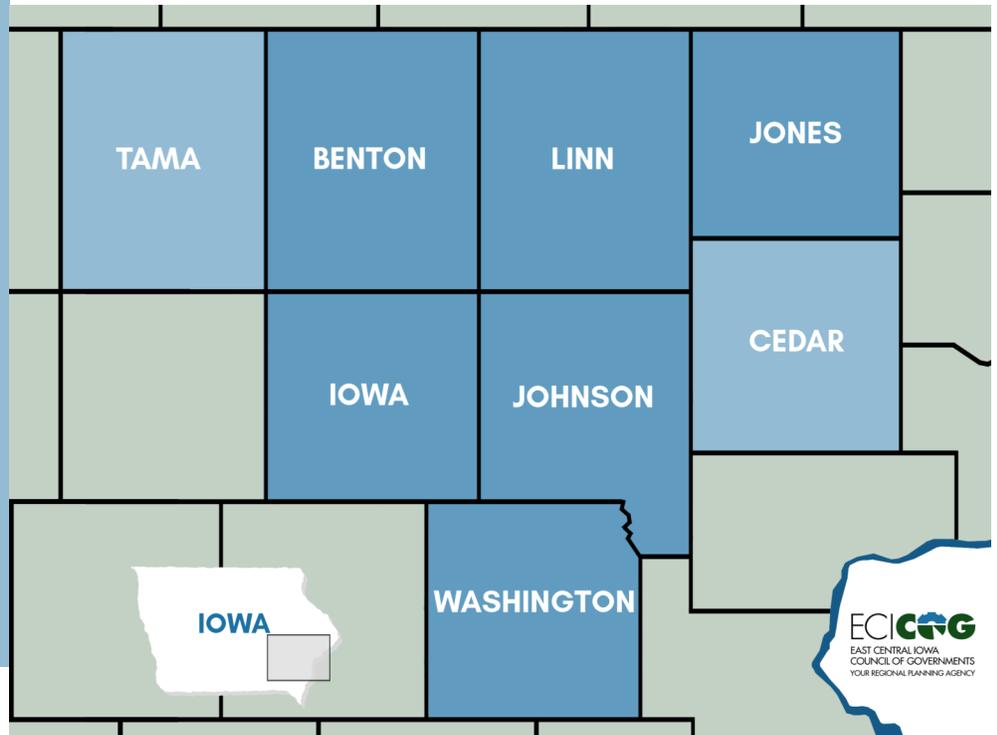
Promoting  
Collaboration

## About Us

Created more than 45 years ago by visionary public leaders, Iowa's Councils of Governments (COGs) provide professional planning, programming, and technical assistance to Iowa's cities, counties, businesses, community organizations and Iowans of all ages.

The East Central Iowa Council of Governments (ECICOG) is an intergovernmental council established in 1973 to provide regional planning and technical assistance to local governments and the communities in our region.

## Our Region





# ECICOG



Greetings,

One of the biggest changes for ECICOG in 2019 was the retirement of well-respected Executive Director Doug Elliott and the beginning of my tenure in September. Like any new leader, much of my time has been learning the basics and getting to know our region. I was lucky to have a head start, having grown up in Northeastern Iowa with extended family in Jones, Linn and Johnson counties.

I am incredibly fortunate to be working with staff who are considered state-wide experts in their respective fields. During my travels across the region, I have also been impressed by the passion and creativity of our local leaders. As a self-proclaimed local government and community development geek, I am truly excited about the work that ECICOG is doing in helping to advance our communities and region.

If you want to learn more about our services, or explore an idea or challenge, don't hesitate to contact me or any member of our team. We want to hear from you!

Karen M. Kurt

## Note from the Executive Director



# Impacting Our Region



## The East Central Iowa Housing Trust Fund

*The East Central Iowa Housing Trust Fund (ECIHTF) is a community-based non-profit organization dedicated to improving quality of life by offering innovative and flexible funding in order to expand affordable housing opportunities within Benton, Iowa, Jones, and Washington Counties.*

ECIHTF awarded \$332,885 in 2019 for housing projects. Of those served:

- 15 were homeowners and 14 were renter households
- 9 households had incomes below 30% of area median income (AMI) and 21 households had incomes of 30-80% AMI
- 10 households were provided down payment assistance
- 20 homes were rehabilitated

ECICOG prepared and submitted a Federal Home Loan Bank (FHLB) application in 2018 on behalf of the ECIHTF and was awarded a grant in January 2019. The program leverages \$403,800 in FHLB grant funds and \$136,983 in ECIHTF funds to rehabilitate homes in Benton, Iowa, Jones and Washington Counties.



## 380Express Commuter Service

*In addition to VanPool services available throughout the six-county region since 2018, 2019 was the first year of service for the 380Express; ECICOG's commuter bus service between the Cities of Cedar Rapids and Iowa City.*

The year-end report shows just under 35,000 total rides (34,843). While this averages out to about 140 rides per day, this number has increased dramatically during the year as people have become more familiar with the program. The number of riders averaged around 70 per day at the beginning of the year and ended averaging 350 per day by the end of the year.

With steadily increasing ridership and positive reviews, the 380Express is poised for continued success to help mitigate traffic as construction on I-380 continues.



## Watershed Management

Since 2016, the Iowa Watershed Approach grant, administered by ECICOG, has resulted in over \$20 million of investment to make three watersheds in our region healthier and more resilient to floods. Some project highlights include:

- Farm ponds, wetlands and water & sediment control basins are being built in the Middle Cedar, English River and Clear Creek watersheds.
- The Soil Health Partnership grant in the Indian Creek watershed supports a staff person to make soil health a priority for farmers in the watershed.
- The Indian Creek Watershed Management Authority began a partnership with Iowa BIG to have high school students design and build rain gardens in a neighborhood in the City of Marion.



## Iowa Waste Exchange

ECICOG covers two of the six Iowa Waste Exchange Regions. The Iowa Waste Exchange is a free, confidential, and non-regulatory waste consultation service for businesses and organizations. Services include waste consultation, audits, grant application assistance, and online database. The program is offered statewide by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

### Area 4 Statistics:

- In-house assistance: 305
- On-site assistance: 96
- Diversion: 18,550 tons
- Matches: 71

### Area 6 Statistics:

- In-house assistance: 426
- On-site assistance: 45
- Diversion: 6,654 tons
- Matches: 11

**IOWA** DNR  
**WASTE**   
**EXCHANGE**



## REGIONAL VISIONING

OUR VISION: In 2040 we will achieve sustainable and equitable prosperity in Iowa.



**\$57,453**  
PER CAPITA GDP  
PEER RANK: 3

**3.0%**  
UNEMPLOYMENT RATE  
PEER RANK: 3

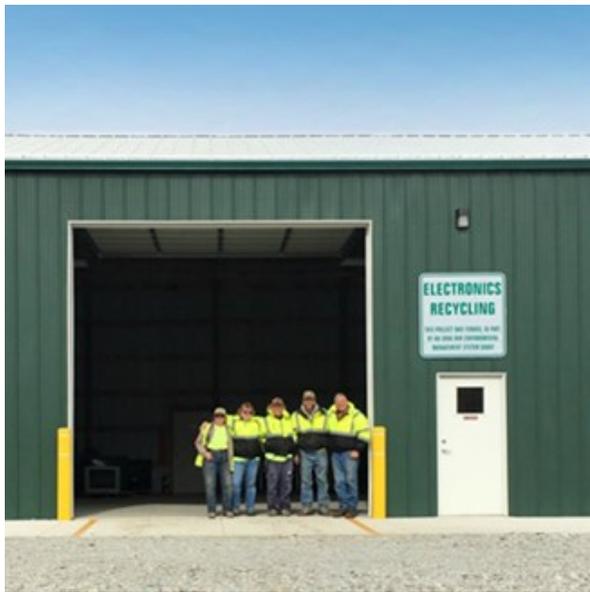
**\$61,335**  
MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME  
PEER RANK: 5

**11.7%**  
PERCENT BELOW POVERTY LEVEL  
PEER RANK: 2 (7th)

## Regional Visioning Scorecard

ECICOG worked with multiple regional stakeholders to create a scorecard assessing the strengths and weaknesses of our region compared with other areas across the country.

Learn more about the Regional Vision Strategy and view the Regional Vision Scorecard at <https://www.regional-vision.org>.



## Solid Waste Planning

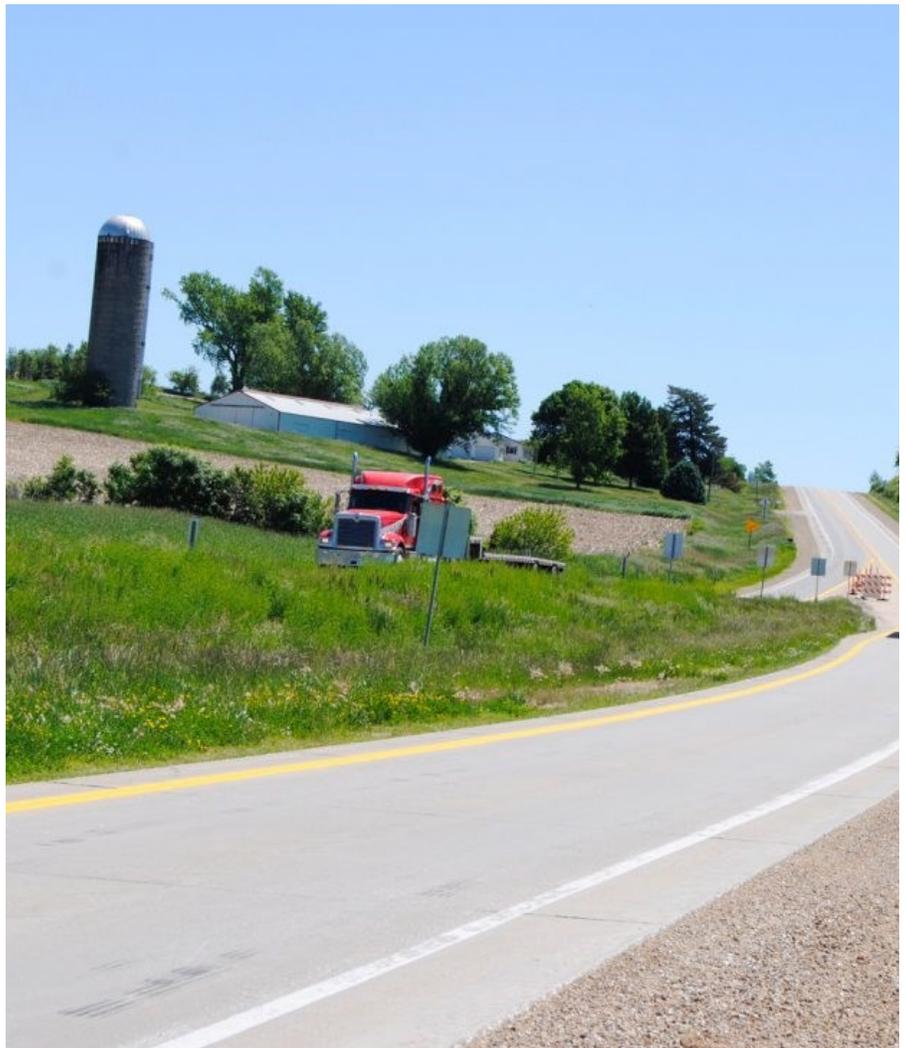
ECICOG's Environmental Services staff provides planning, training, support, and technical assistance for solid waste agencies in Benton, Iowa, Johnson, Jones, Linn and Tama Counties. A sample of solid waste projects completed in 2019 include:

- The Summer Library Reading Program and food waste composting school assemblies in Benton, Iowa, Jones, and Tama County
- Solid waste facility operations and safety training at the Benton County Landfill, Iowa County Landfill, and Jones County Transfer Station
- General Support and new landfill website for the Iowa County Landfill
- A \$24,500 Environmental Management System (EMS) grant for concrete pads to expand customer recycling area at the Iowa County Landfill
- Grant writing and technical assistance for the Regional Collection Center's new, compliant concrete pad to place the Household Hazardous Materials building in the customer recycling area

## Transportation Projects

The Region 10 Regional Planning Affiliation (RPA) is responsible for transportation planning and programming in Benton, Cedar, Iowa, Johnson, Jones, Linn and Washington Counties. ECICOG staffs the RPA. With federal monies targeted to the RPA, the following projects were funded in 2019:

- County road D-65 over Spring Creek in Benton County
- Safe Routes to Schools sidewalk project in the City of Urbana
- County road W-60, from North Liberty to Croy Road in Johnson County
- County Home Road, from North Center Point Road to Indian Creek Bridge in Linn County
- Safe Routes to School sidewalk project in the city of Riverside



# Highlighted Projects

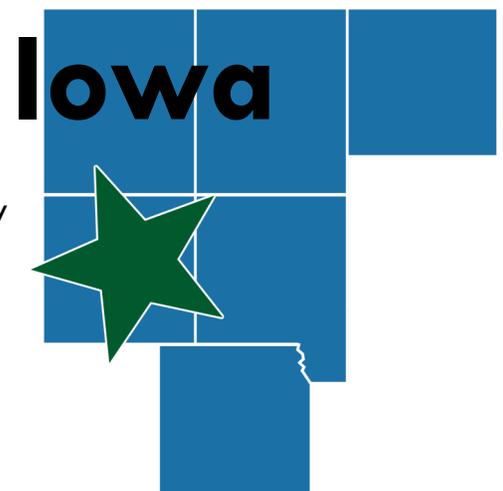


- Developed pilot household organics management program for Belle Plaine
- Provided one bus for Benton County Transportation
- Wrote Shellsburg zoning code and subdivision ordinance
- Updated Van Horne city code
- Wrote and administered Blairstown CDBG water/sewer grant
- Rehabilitated houses in the cities of Urbana, Vinton, Belle Plaine, Keystone and Blairstown

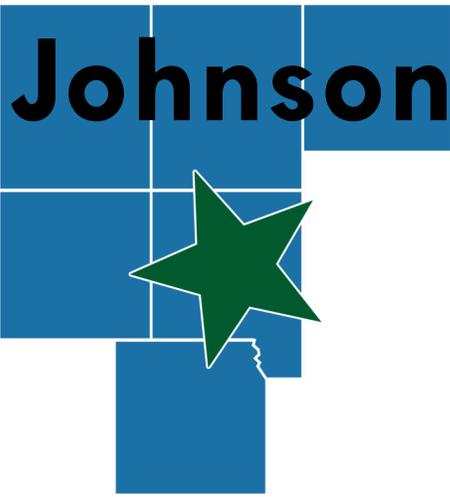


## Adding Affordable Housing

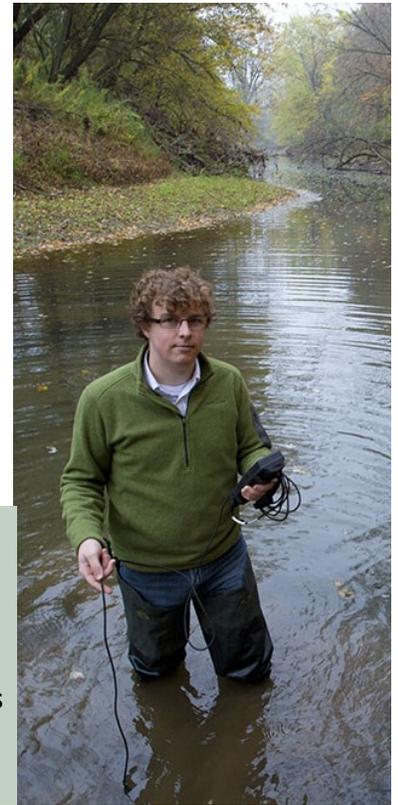
The East Central Iowa Housing Trust Fund awarded \$105,000 to Cedar Valley Bank & Trust, who will offer down payment assistance to nine low-to-moderate homebuyers in a new subdivision.



- Provided facilitation, technical assistance, and planning for the Iowa County Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan Update
- Provided environmental reviews, bid letting support and project administration for the English River Watershed Management Authority
- Purchased one bus for Iowa County Transportation
- Wrote CDBG water/sewer grant application for the City of Parnell



- Administered and provided construction management for Johnson County Housing Trust Fund rehabilitation programs
- Wrote, administered and provided construction management for Federal Home Loan Bank grant.
- Provided one bus to Johnson County SEATS



### Clear Creek Plan

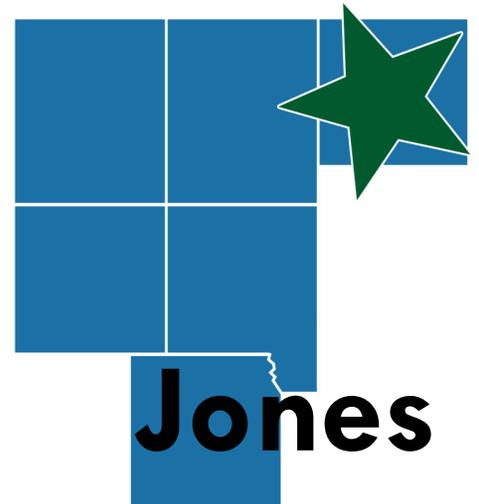
ECICOG has been managing the Clear Creek Watershed Management Plan process, which is nearing completion with a draft plan due out in the spring of 2020. The process has included several assessments of watershed conditions and public input on the improvements needed. Intensification of farming and urban development pressures on land use are the issues of concern in terms of flooding and water quality.



### Supporting Regional Transit Providers

When Jones County needed a new building to house the transportation provider, Jones County JETS, ECICOG was able to provide funding and management to advance the project.

ECICOG and Jones County partnered together to pursue a public transit infrastructure grant to construct a bus storage and administrative building in Monticello. This \$225,000 grant allowed Jones County to construct a building to store buses operated as part of the CorridorRides transit system that previously were parked outside.



- Rehabilitated houses in the cities of Anamosa and Olin
- Purchased two buses for the Jones County JETS
- Started preparing CDBG Downtown Revitalization Grant for the City of Anamosa



- Completed an application to Housing Trust Fund Program through the Iowa Finance Authority and awarded over \$380,000 state and local housing trust fund dollars
- Wrote and submitted a grant on behalf of the Housing Fund for Linn County, which began in January 2019, leveraging \$370,850 in Federal Home Loan Bank dollars and \$72,490 in housing trust fund dollars to rehabilitate 25 homes throughout Linn County.
- Managed Mount Vernon housing rehabilitation grant
- Administered CDBG water/sewer grants for the cities of Central City and Lisbon



### Preparing for Future Growth

The City of Mount Vernon contracted with ECICOG to update its Comprehensive Plan in 2016. A key objective of the plan was to support growth while maintaining the community's unique character.

To ensure Mount Vernon had the necessary land-use codes in place to support their goals, ECICOG prepared a new zoning code in 2017 and a new subdivision code in 2019.



### Connecting our Region Through Trails

The Kewash Nature Trail is a 14 mile former railroad right of way that connects the towns of Washington and Keota. ECICOG assisted with funding for this beautiful trail offering in Washington County.

In 2019 Washington County Conservation held a ribbon cutting ceremony to mark the official opening of the trailhead near Kirkwood. The opening was attended by ECICOG staff and board member Brent Hinson of the City of Washington cut the ribbon.

# Washington



- Managed \$151,200 grant from ECITF to the City of Washington to rehabilitate nine homes in 2019 and 2020
- Updated the City of Riverside city code
- Awarded contract administration for CDBG water/sewer grant in Brighton
- Rehabilitated houses in the cities of Wellman and Washington



EAST CENTRAL IOWA  
COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS  
YOUR REGIONAL PLANNING AGENCY

Every year ECICOG's impact on our region grows and changes. Our annual report is a great document which highlights much of this past year's projects, but we're always focused on carrying this work forward. We have some exciting goals for 2020 and are eager to continue serving our region.

If your community needs assistance in any of our impact areas, please get in touch; our staff is happy to help!

Facilitation



Data Analysis  
& Mapping



Project  
Management



Grant Writing &  
Administration



Planning &  
Technical Assistance



We're happy to work with your community in any of our program areas:

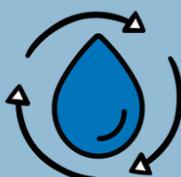
Housing



Transportation



Environmental  
Services



Business Loans



Community  
Development



Inspections &  
Enforcement



Learn more about ECICOG's work and our programs by visiting us at [ecicog.org](http://ecicog.org).

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# ECICOG

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We  