

# 2021



ECICOG

EAST CENTRAL IOWA COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

## Year in Review





## FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

As 2021 draws to a close and I complete my second year as Executive Director, I continue to be energized by the “can do” spirit of our region. This became especially evident as we gathered input for Envision East Central Iowa. I am very excited about regional priorities identified by our strategic committee; Envision East Central Iowa will ground ECICOG’s work for the next several years.

Like all our partners this year, we continued to support recovery from both COVID-19 and the August 2020 derecho. The PATCH program received donations to continue derecho-related housing repair for low-to-moderate income families. We worked hard to educate and assist our communities with the myriad of new funding streams available. We introduced webinars on several topics to aid with our outreach efforts, including a session on the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), tailored for small cities.

Of course, as planners, we believe a good roadmap paves the way to a bright future! We were excited to work on comprehensive plans for the cities of Lisbon, Wyoming and Bertram, an economic development assessment for Shellsburg, and a capital improvement plan for Alburnett. We are continuing to refine our online citizen engagement site, [talkto.ecicog.org](http://talkto.ecicog.org), to ensure that our planning efforts are accessible to all.

We can’t end a year without thanking our Board of Directors, volunteers, and partners who support our work – the successes outlined in this annual report are your achievements too! We are also grateful to our region’s legislators for increasing the funding available to Housing Trust Funds. Housing is a critical need, and we are anxious to put these new resources to work.

**We are here to serve - let us know how we can help you build a thriving, resilient East Central Iowa in 2022.**

**KAREN KURT**  
**-ECICOG EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

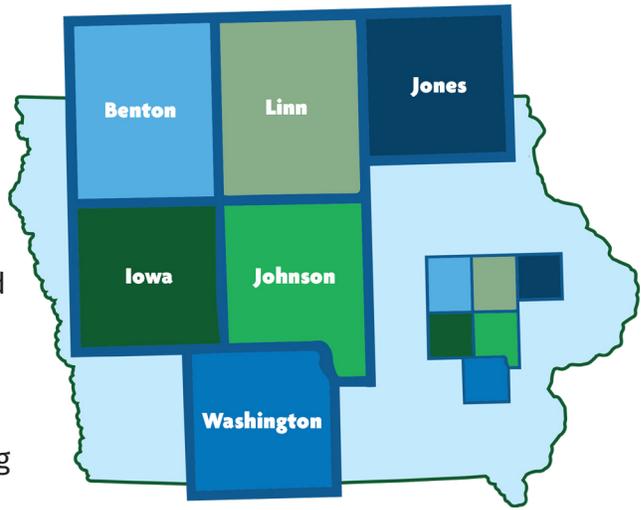


## WHO WE ARE

The East Central Iowa Council of Governments (ECICOG) is an intergovernmental council established in 1973 under Chapter 28E and provided for under Chapter 28H of the Code of Iowa.

We provide professional planning, programming, and technical assistance to the local governments and their communities in our region: Benton, Iowa, Linn, Johnson, Jones, and Washington counties.

Our mission is to help build vibrant, forward-thinking communities in a collaborative and resilient region.



## WHAT WE DO

**PROMOTE REGIONAL COLLABORATION**

**PLAN FOR THE FUTURE**

**SHARE TECHNICAL SKILLS**

**LEVERAGE STATE & FEDERAL RESOURCES**

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Tracy Seeman - *Benton County Supervisor*

Rod Sullivan - *Johnson County Supervisor*

Bethany Sarazin - *City of Alburnett Mayor*

Jon Zirkelbach - *Jones County Supervisor*

Bob Yoder - *Washington County Supervisor*

Vicki Pope - *Iowa County Supervisor*

Louise From - *City of University Heights Mayor*

Rod Smith - *City of Anamosa Mayor*

Dave Fish - *City of Belle Plaine Mayor*

Lauren Whitehead - *City of Solon Mayor ProTem*

Tony Hocamp - *Iowa County Citizen*

Kathleen VanSteenhuysen - *Benton County Citizen*

Darrin Gage - *Linn County Policy & Administration*

Ben Rogers - *Linn County Supervisor*

Kevin Heitshusen - *Iowa County Supervisor*

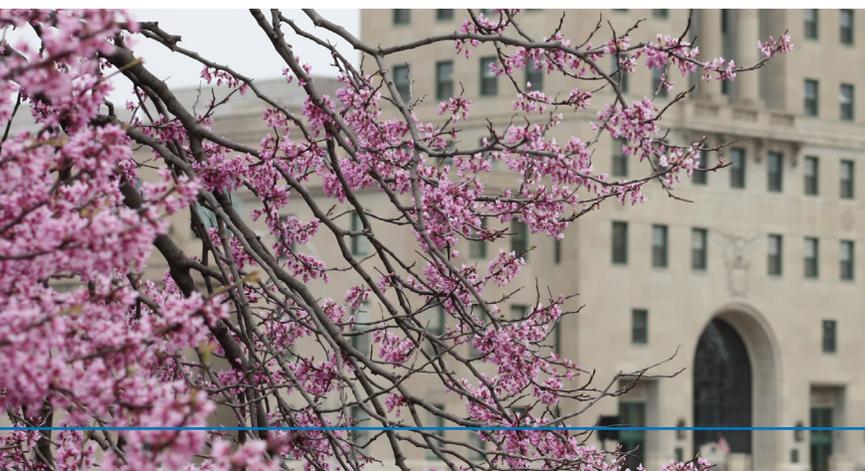
David Connolly - *Linn County Citizen*

Donna Brooks - *Johnson County Citizen*

Derek Lumsden - *Jones County Citizen*

Mary Audia - *Washington County Citizen*

Adam Griggs - *City of Central City Mayor*





# PROMOTE REGIONAL COLLABORATION

## Began Regional Economic Development Planning



Envision East Central Iowa is the process to update to our region's six-county economic development strategy. Over the past few years, the pandemic and evolving economic conditions have provided us with an opportunity to reimagine our region's economic future. ECICOG is working with consulting firm Future IQ and a twenty-member strategy committee to guide strategy

development. To date, over 600 participants have taken part in the process through surveys, online discussion boards, focus groups, and a region-wide workshop. The plan is expected to be completed in the spring of 2022. Plan updates and participation tools can be found at [talkto.ecicog.org/eeci](http://talkto.ecicog.org/eeci).



## Received \$3.5 Million for Derecho Housing Repairs

In December 2020, the Housing Fund for Linn County (HFFLC) and ECICOG partnered with a number of area non-profits to help homeowners with repairs after the August derecho. They launched a program called Providing Assistance to Community Homeowners (PATCH). The PATCH program has been expanded thanks to \$3.5 million in donations by the Greater Cedar Rapids Community Foundation, United Way of East Central Iowa, the City of Cedar Rapids, and Linn County. PATCH provides support, referrals, and financial assistance to low-to-moderate income homeowners in Linn County impacted by the storm. There has been and continues to be strong demand for the program. To date, PATCH has received 63 applications. Of these, 60 applications have been approved, 30 loans have closed, and 19 projects have been completed. PATCH received two awards this year: a 2021 Impact award from the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) and the 2021 HousingIowa Innovation Award.





## Helped Place Five Homes for Iowa Houses

*Homes for Iowa*, created in part by the Iowa Association of Councils of Governments (ICOG), provides inmates at the Newton Correctional Facility the opportunity to learn construction trades. They receive this training while producing “stick-built” homes, which are sold and transported throughout the state once completed. ECICOG provides application assistance and delivery coordination for the program. Individuals, developers, or non-profits can apply for these affordable homes. In 2020, ECICOG assisted AM Management with the region’s first *Homes for Iowa* applications. This year, four homes have been delivered and one more is scheduled for delivery. Six applications were submitted for 2022 deliveries, including the first application from Washington County.



## Grew 380 Express Bus Ridership

The 380 Express Bus ridership has grown steadily following the pandemic. In September, the 380 Express’s ridership exceeded pre-pandemic levels for the first time, with 6,299 in Sept. 2021 compared to 6,059 in Sept. 2019. Safety precautions continue, with masks required to ride the bus and each bus sanitized daily. The 380 Express is also seeing success in its partnership with Kirkwood Community College. Kirkwood College worked with ECICOG to offer discounted bus passes for students traveling between the Cedar Rapids and Iowa City campuses. The program began in August and currently has 59 student participants.



*I use the Kirkwood 380 Express because it saves me mileage, gas money, and it’s also provided me extra time in the day to either study, do homework, or enjoy the Iowa scenery.*  
-Kirkwood Nursing Student



## Diverted Over 17,000 Tons of Waste from Landfills

ECICOG provides delivery services for the Iowa Waste Exchange (IWE) in Benton, Iowa, Jones, Johnson, and Linn County. This no-cost, non-regulatory, and confidential program matches institutions’ byproducts and waste with other groups that can use or recycle those materials. ECICOG’s annual goal for the IWE program is to divert 12,048 tons of waste from landfills. ECICOG exceeded that in fiscal year 2021, with 17,158 tons diverted. To date in fiscal year 2022, ECICOG has diverted 19,661 tons of waste through the IWE program.



*Through the IWE program, ECICOG staff connected a company that had a semi-load of unused face shields with an aid organization. The face shields were sent to earthquake-impacted areas in Haiti and Guatemala.*

**BENTON**

**LINN**  
Grant Wood Trail Gap Connection

Extension of Old Dubuque Road  
**JONES**  
E-34 Paving

**IOWA**  
V-52 Resurfacing

**JOHNSON**  
E-44 Grading & Paving

**CEDAR**

**Awarded Regional Transportation Funding**

The Region 10 Regional Planning Affiliation (RPA), staffed by ECICOG, is responsible for transportation planning and programming in Benton, Cedar, Iowa, Johnson, Jones, Linn, and Washington Counties. Each year, the RPA accepts applications for transportation projects using funds targeted to the region by the Iowa Department of Transportation (DOT). The projects to the left were funded in 2021. These new projects, along with previously approved projects, were included in the RPA's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and submitted to Iowa DOT in July.

Clear Creek Trail: Half Moon Ave to Kent Park

**WASHINGTON**  
Lexington Boulevard Rehabilitation

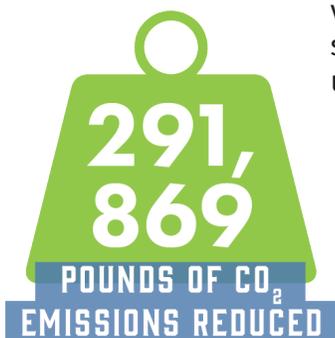
**Supported Marion Community Build Program**

ECICOG helped develop a payment assistance program for The Marion Community Build, a partnership between the Marion Economic Development Corporation and the Marion School District. Through the initiative, deteriorated single-family homes are purchased as tools to provide skills training. Marion students rehabilitate the homes, which are sold to low-to-moderate income buyers. After ECICOG income-qualification, the buyer can receive a forgivable loan through the program. The first home was completed and sold in 2021, and another is planned for the current school year.



**Provided Over 27,000 VanPool Rides**

ECICOG received grant funding in 2017 to start a vanpool program. In the last fiscal year, the vanpool program provided over 27,000 rides, covering over 261,000 miles. The program provides vehicles for groups of commuters looking to carpool. Costs are split among the group, and one group member volunteers as driver. ECICOG contracts with Commute by Enterprise for vehicle and operations management, paying a monthly subsidy to keep the service affordable to vanpool users.



# PLAN FOR THE FUTURE



## Updated Comprehensive Plans for Three Cities



### City of Bertram Comprehensive Plan 2021 - 2041



Over the course of the year, ECICOG worked with Bertram, Wyoming, and Lisbon to update their comprehensive plans. A comprehensive plan is an expression of the community's vision for the future and a strategic map to reach that vision. The City of Bertram adopted their comprehensive plan this fall, and the City of Wyoming in December. The public engagement process with the City of Lisbon has concluded and the plan is being finalized.



## Created Five-Year Capital Plan for Alburnett

ECICOG staff assisted the City of Alburnett in developing its first five-year capital improvement plan (CIP) in the spring of 2021. Through the CIP development process, cities prioritize and plan for larger expenses such as road improvements, facility needs, or equipment replacement. ECICOG staff were able to identify areas where grants or other funding mechanisms could possibly be used to offset costs. ECICOG also worked with the City Council and staff on common goals for the next two years by identifying targets, timelines, and project champions. This project represents a new service ECICOG is offering its rural communities.



## Created Five-Year Passenger Transportation Plan

The Passenger Transportation Plan (PTP) was adopted in April. Creating the five-year PTP is part of ECICOG's role as the Region 10 RPA. "Passenger Transportation" can include public transit, taxi/transportation networks (Uber & Lyft), volunteer driving programs, and non-emergency medical transportation. ECICOG staff incorporated demographic data, provider inventory, and input from both transportation agencies and the general public into the plan. The goals of the PTP include:

- Improve services: increase coordination and eliminate overlap
- Create awareness of unmet needs
- Develop justification for future investments
- Aid understanding of available transportation options

## Passenger Transportation Plan

2021-2026



ECICOG

## Kicked off Lower Cedar WMA Planning

The Lower Cedar Watershed Management Authority (WMA) contracted with ECICOG and FYRA Engineering to complete a watershed management plan. The watershed spans 703,060 acres over Linn, Jones, Johnson, Cedar, Muscatine, Scott, and Louisa Counties and is generally thought to include the most biologically diverse landscape in Iowa. The WMA was created due to concerns such as flooding, high bacteria levels, excess nutrients, and erosion. The planning process is underway, and has so far included an online survey, focus groups, and educational materials.



## Conducted Shellsburg Economic Development Review

The Shellsburg Area Community Group (SACG) contracted with ECICOG to complete an economic development review. ECICOG staff hosted an economic development roundtable with the community, including members of SACG and the City Council. Using this input and the other data, ECICOG will provide economic development goals, recommendations, and potential grant opportunities to guide future work in Shellsburg. The project is expected to be completed in January of 2022 and represents a new service ECICOG is offering its rural communities.



Photo courtesy of the City of Shellsburg



# SHARE TECHNICAL SKILLS

## Created Housing Rehabilitation Program with Palo

The City of Palo dedicated \$250,000 from a residential tax increment financing (TIF) fund to establish an owner-occupied housing rehabilitation program. Palo turned to ECICOG's experienced housing team for assistance with program design and implementation. ECICOG is managing the new program from application to payment, enabling Palo's staff to focus on other priorities. The program provides eligible homeowners with grants of up to \$15,000 for exterior or energy efficiency improvements.



## Assisted Atkins with Fire Station Rebuild

The City of Atkins' fire station was irreparably damaged in the 2020 derecho. When the City began to consider its reconstruction, they found they needed assistance for capacity and technical expertise. ECICOG staff worked with city leaders to develop a request for proposals for architectural services. The staff are also ensuring federal grant requirements are being followed, to allow for potential reimbursement through Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)'s disaster-related Public Assistance program.





## Began City of Springville Nuisance Enforcement

The City of Springville has joined Central City in utilizing ECICOG for assistance with nuisance enforcement. ECICOG proactively manages inspections and sends non-compliance letters, relieving city staff of this time-consuming task. Springville's inspections began in July 2021. To date, 33 property inspection letters have been sent with a 75% correction record.



## Completed Two City Code Updates

ECICOG staff assisted the cities of Oxford Junction and Mount Auburn with updating their city codes. These updates allow local leadership to ensure the code is organized in a consistent, logical manner and reflects best practices. Using a model code developed by ICOG, ECICOG staff are also able to identify items or issues that may be missing from the existing city code.

## Launched Webinar Series

With the COVID-19 pandemic, ECICOG has worked to provide new virtual resources for the region. In 2020, [talkto.ecicog.org](http://talkto.ecicog.org) was launched to allow for public participation online. This year, ECICOG kicked off a webinar series. Geared toward East Central Iowa, the webinars are a new way for staff members to discuss current grant opportunities, current projects, and services ECICOG offers. Topics have covered the revolving loan program, CDBG opportunities, and use of American Rescue Plan Act funds.

*Who:* **Business Owners & Economic Development Partners** in Benton, Iowa, Johnson, Jones, Linn, and Washington counties

*What:* **What's Next: How to start or grow your business with ECICOG's RLF program**  
ECICOG's Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) helps regional businesses with COVID-19 recovery, development and expansion. Attendees will learn about the program, hear directly from participants about their experiences with the RLF, and ask questions of ECICOG's RLF experts.

*When:* **March 24, 1-2 p.m. CT**  
Pre-registration is required, link in caption!

your regional planning agency's **ECICOG** webinars for and about our region




# LEVERAGE STATE & FEDERAL RESOURCES

## Distributed Housing Trust Fund Awards

ECICOG provides staff support to the Housing Fund for Linn County (HFfLC) and the East Central Iowa Housing Trust Fund (ECIHTF). HFfLC awarded \$484,000 to 11 different entities in 2021. These funds will assist over 100 low-to-moderate income households, supporting a variety of activities:

- acquisition/rehabilitation of existing housing
- new construction of rental and owner units
- renovation of a supportive housing facility
- creation of new supportive housing units
- homebuyer and rental assistance



In 2021, ECIHTF Board of Directors approved awards to five different applicants for projects proposed in Benton, Jones, Iowa, and Washington Counties. The awards include down payment assistance for five buyers, rehabilitating an upper story unit, and rehabilitation projects for both rented and owned homes. Both housing trust funds also contribute funds toward the Federal Home Loan Bank (FHLB) owner-occupied rehabilitation programs being done in their respective areas.



## Secured Funds for Johnson County to Buy Flood-Prone Properties

Johnson County was awarded \$654,750 in grant funding to purchase three repetitive loss properties in partnership with Iowa Homeland Security and Emergency Management and FEMA through the Hazard Mitigation Assistance Program. These properties repeatedly suffer from flooding due to their location in the Iowa River floodway. ECICOG wrote the County's application and is administering the grant. From appraisal to removal, ECICOG is working with homeowners while managing services, contracts, proposals, and grant timelines.

## Provided Gap Financing to 18 Businesses

In 2021, the ECICOG Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) received 20 applications and awarded 18 new loans. RLF funds are available to new or existing businesses in the ECICOG region as gap funding to assist in pandemic recovery or business expansion and development. These programs help create jobs and a more diverse and resilient regional economy.



## Administered Grant for Wastewater Treatment Facility Update

The City of Blairstown is working to improve their wastewater treatment facility. With ECICOG's assistance, they received a \$300,000 Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) grant for the project. ECICOG is also administering the grant, completing construction bids, approving contractors and sub-contractors, and overseeing construction progress. Construction is well underway. Staff are currently working on similar applications for the cities of Lisbon, Monticello, and Marengo.

## Completed Rural Recovery Challenge Projects

In the fall of 2020, ECICOG launched the Rural Recovery Challenge using funds from an Economic Development Administration (EDA) CARES Act grant. The challenge sought proposals from our rural counties to assist with economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. The following projects were completed in 2021 in conjunction with our economic development partners:

- Capacity building for Feed Iowa First in their goal to expand new cultural produce offerings
- Childcare/Daycare Market Study for Jones County
- Video Tours/Interviews of Businesses in Jones County for Workforce Retention/Development
- Childcare/Daycare Market Study for Washington County
- Childcare/Daycare Market Study for Marengo Iowa



## Assisted Anamosa with \$500,000 CDBG Project

In 2020, ECICOG helped the City of Anamosa receive a CDBG grant of \$500,000 for a downtown revitalization project. The grant is funding a visual uplift to Anamosa's downtown, addressing blighting features in the City's Main Street Historic District. Architectural designs for nine facades covering ten buildings have been completed, bid out, and construction has begun. Work has included activities such as updating store entrances, brickwork, painting, replacing windows, and is expected to be completed in 2022. Anamosa residents have been pleased with the project.



## Administered Grants for New Bus Facilities

In March, Benton County Transportation moved into their new bus storage and administrative building. ECICOG secured a \$318,000 Iowa Public Transit Infrastructure Grant (PTIG) for the project. At 9,600

square feet, the Vinton building houses nearly all Benton County's CorridorRides buses, office space, a wash bay, and maintenance space.

ECICOG also secured a PTIG award of over \$472,000 to remodel and expand the Washington County Minibus facility. Construction is underway with expected completion in Summer 2022.

## Secured \$393,000 Grant for EdTech Collaborative

The Iowa City Area Development Group (ICAD) received a \$393,000 grant from the EDA with grant writing assistance from ECICOG. ICAD is using the grant money to support their Iowa EdTech Collaborative program, including the addition of a full-time director. The Iowa EdTech Collaborative is a group of businesses, economic development groups and other organizations focused on growing the education-technology industry in Iowa. Home to both national companies like ACT and Pearson and smaller startups like Higher Learning Technologies and College Raptor, the East Central Iowa region is uniquely positioned to capitalize on the heightened interest in education technologies after COVID-19.



## Awarded Over \$650,000 Housing Rehabilitation Funds

ECICOG successfully submitted three applications for owner-occupied housing rehabilitation CDBG grants for Anamosa, Brighton, and North Liberty. North Liberty and Anamosa each received \$207,495 to rehabilitate 5 homes, and Brighton will rehabilitate 6 homes with \$244,994. ECICOG is working through the process to secure release of the funds and will be working with the cities to administer the grants.

In addition to these new grants, ECICOG is continuing to provide administrative services to Central City, Coralville, Vinton, the City of Washington, and Washington County, all of whom received CDBG funding in 2020.



## Funded Thirty Owner-Occupied Housing Rehabilitation Projects

Three housing trust funds in our region worked with ECICOG to submit applications for FHLB grants. All were awarded, with funds totaling \$445,500. The East Central Iowa Housing Trust Fund (ECIHTF), Housing Fund for Linn County (HFFLC), and Housing Trust Fund of Johnson County (HTFJC) will each use the FHLB funds for rehabilitation on 10 owner-occupied, dedicating at least \$15,000 to each home.





# STAFF ACCOMPLISHMENTS

## Karen Kurt

Karen was elected Secretary of the Iowa Association of Council of Governments. She also presented on Making the Most Out of Federal Funding at the 2021 Rural Summit.

## Tom Gruis

Tom received his certification from the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP).

## Brock Grenis

Brock was elected Treasurer of the Iowa Public Transit Association. He also presented about the 380 Express Bus at the National Rural and Intercity Bus Conference in a panel titled "Intercity Bus: The Industry, the Network and a Solution."

## Tracey Achenbach

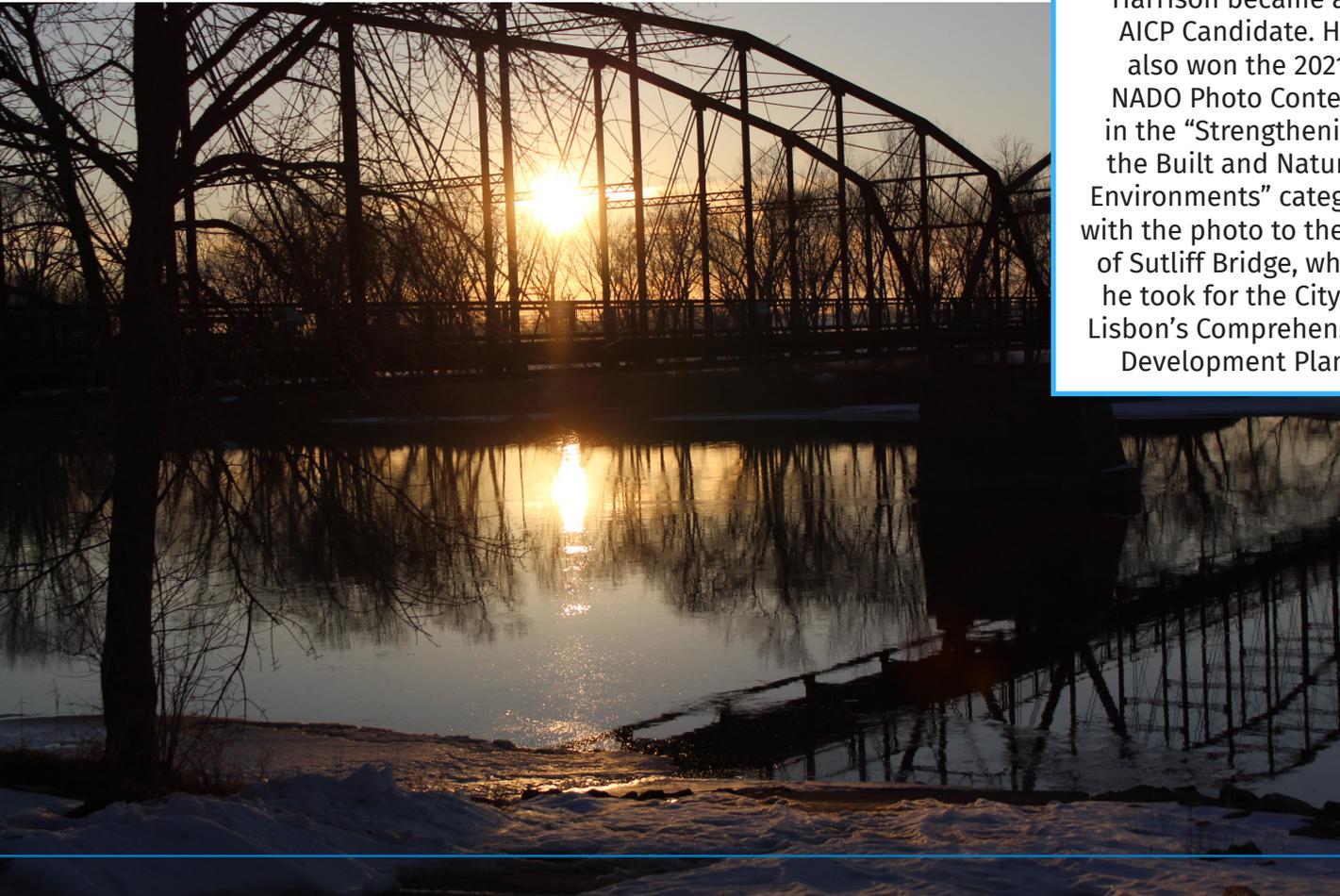
Tracey was elected Chair of the Cedar Rapids Affordable Housing Commission.

## Alicia Presto

Alicia presented on the Belle Plaine Organics Composting Program at the Iowa Solid Waste Conference.

## Harrison Freund

Harrison became an AICP Candidate. He also won the 2021 NADO Photo Contest in the "Strengthening the Built and Natural Environments" category with the photo to the left of Sutliff Bridge, which he took for the City of Lisbon's Comprehensive Development Plan.



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