

November 2021

East Central Iowa Council of Governments

ecicog.org

Newsletter

[ECICOG Secures Over \\$600,000 for Housing Rehabilitation](#)

ECICOG submitted applications for owner-occupied housing rehabilitation Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) for three cities in the region. Anamosa, Brighton, and North Liberty received word on November 5 that they were funded! North Liberty and Anamosa each received \$207,495 to rehabilitate 5 homes, and Brighton will be able to rehabilitate 6 homes with \$244,994. ECICOG will be working with the cities to administer the funds. If you have additional questions about CDBG funds or housing rehabilitation efforts, contact Housing & Community Development Director Tracey Achenbach at tracey.achenbach@ecicog.org.

[Washington County Minibus Expands Facility](#)

ECICOG helped secure over \$472,000 from the Iowa DOT Public Transit Infrastructure Grant (PTIG) program for Washington County Minibus. Minibus is using these funds to remodel and expand its current facility. Local contractor Greiner Buildings is serving as the general contractor and construction is underway. As of November 3, new concrete has been installed and walls for the addition are starting to take shape. Minibus hopes to have the addition enclosed prior to winter to meet the project completion goal of Summer 2022. ECICOG has also worked with Jones County and Benton County Transportation to secure similar funding for facilities projects. For more information, please contact Transit Administrator Brock Grenis at brock.grenis@ecicog.org.

[Oxford and Mount Auburn Complete City Code Updates](#)

ECICOG staff assisted the cities of Oxford and Mount Auburn with updating their city codes. Through the code update process, local leadership and ECICOG staff are able to make sure that the code is organized in a consistent, logical manner and reflects best practices and recent case law. Using a model code developed by the Iowa Association of Councils of Governments (ICOG), ECICOG staff are also able to identify items or issues that may be missing from the existing city code. In the end, the code becomes a more useful tool for staff, elected officials and residents. Not regularly updating city codes can put a community at risk for legal challenges. To learn more about how ECICOG assists with code updates, contact Community Development Specialist Tom Gruis at tom.gruis@ecicog.org.

[City of Palo Uses TIF Funding for Housing Rehabilitation](#)

Throughout the past decade, the City of Palo has accumulated residential Tax Increment Financing (TIF) funds dedicated to low- and moderate-income households. The City is dedicating about \$250,000 to housing rehabilitation, to be used for exterior or energy efficiency improvements by households earning at or below 80% of the median income. Not wanting to hire additional full-time staff, the City of Palo partnered with ECICOG to administer the program. ECICOG's experience administering numerous housing rehab programs led to a quick program design and implementation. ECICOG staff is handling applicant qualification, inspections, scope of work development, contractor procurement, and project oversight. For more details on Palo's program or housing rehabilitation, contact Planner/Grant Specialist Paula Mitchell at paula.mitchell@ecicog.org.



[Share Your Ideas on the Envision East Central Iowa Discussion Boards](#)

Interested in the region's future but unable to attend an Envision East Central Iowa event? Discussion boards were just launched on the project page at talkto.ecicog.org/eeci! We strongly encourage you to post your ideas and share the page with other economic development stakeholders, elected officials, and local government staff. Discussion topics include:

- Workforce Gap and Workforce Transformation
- Demographic Diversity and Regional Social Values
- Housing Affordability and Options
- Food Production Capability and Concentration
- Development Patterns and Growth Models
- Regional Collaboration
- Business Attraction and Entrepreneurship

The project page also includes a detailed report on the regional survey and Community Think-Tank results. The report provides an in-depth look at four plausible future scenarios for the future of our region, as well the expected versus preferred scenarios. Since the Community Think Tank in late September, over thirteen county and industry-specific focus groups have been held. The data culled from the focus groups and discussion boards will help to build strategies to move the region forward. The final report is expected to be completed early next year. Contact Executive Director Karen Kurt at karen.kurt@ecicog.org to learn more.

[380 Express Bus Ridership Exceeds Pre-Pandemic Levels](#)

The 380 Express Bus ridership has grown steadily following the pandemic. Last month, the 380 Express's ridership exceeded 2019 levels for the first time – 6,059 in Sept. 2019 and 6,299 in Sept. 2021. Masks continue to be required to ride the bus, and each bus is sanitized daily. In addition to the ridership growth, the 380 Express is seeing success in its partnership with Kirkwood Community College. Students often need to travel to Kirkwood's Cedar Rapids campus from Iowa City, due to programs available only at the Cedar Rapids campus. The community college worked with ECICOG to purchase discounted bus passes for the fall semester. With 59 students involved, the program has had robust use and positive feedback since it began in August. Kirkwood is seeking opportunities to expand the program. Finally, ECICOG Transit Administrator Brock Grenis presented about the 380 Express at the National Rural and Intercity Bus Conference on October 25. The panel, "Intercity Bus: The Industry, the Network and a Solution," had over 50 engaged attendees. ECICOG secured the grants, administers the contract, and oversees Windstar Lines' planning and operation for the 380 Express service between Cedar Rapids and Iowa City. Contact Brock with questions at brock.grenis@ecicog.org.

[City of Springville Begins Nuisance Enforcement](#)

The City of Springville has joined Central City in utilizing ECICOG for assistance with nuisance enforcement. For cities that want to more proactively keep properties compliant with city code, ECICOG can help manage inspections and send letters to relieve city staffing that would be required to do so. The City of Springville established priorities such as debris laying in the yard (old tires, garbage, etc.), trees or bushes blocking sidewalks, dangerous building conditions, and other similar violations. ECICOG began Springville's inspections in July 2021, and have sent 21 property inspection letters with a 75% correction record thus far. To learn more about the nuisance enforcement programs, contact Mark Culver at mark.culver@ecicog.org.

[Congratulations to Bertram for Comprehensive Plan Update](#)

ECICOG served as the consulting team to update Bertram's comprehensive plan. Comprehensive plans present current community values and goals based on citizen input. Based on community input, comprehensive plans express a community's vision for the future and provide a strategic map to reach that vision. A critical component is the land use map, which outlines how the community will grow in future years. Bertram's plan reflects the community's interest in preserving their small-town atmosphere, while providing guidance for future housing development, and water/wastewater infrastructure.

To learn more about how ECICOG assists with comprehensive planning, contact Community Development Specialist Tom Gruis at tom.gruis@ecicog.org.

Funding Opportunities

[Recreation Economy for Rural Communities](#)

Due November 22

The Recreation Economy for Rural Communities grant program pairs a planning team with a rural community to determine how best to grow local outdoor recreation. The planning process will include bringing together residents and local stakeholders, holding a community workshop, and identifying a vision, goals, and specific action items. Local governments, tribes, and nonprofit organizations representing a community can apply. Visit [the Environmental Protection Agency \(EPA\)'s website](#) for more details or contact Environmental Services Director [Jennifer Fencel](#) with questions.

[Rural Housing Assessment Grant Program](#)

Due December 1

The Rural Housing Assessment Grant helps communities assess current development environment and enact changes toward policies and procedures attractive to potential developers. Grant amounts are \$10,000 with a cash match of \$5,000. Cities of 20,000 or fewer not contiguous to a city at least 40,000 are eligible. Visit the Iowa Economic Development Authority (IEDA) [Rural Housing Assessment Program website](#) or contact Community Development and Housing Director [Tracey Achenbach](#) for more information.

[Rural Innovation Grant Program](#)

Due December 1

The Rural Innovation Grant program supports creative, non-traditional ideas about rural communities' challenges with community investment, growth and connection. Iowa businesses, colleges, universities, city and county governments, and private 501(c)3 nonprofit agencies and foundations are eligible. Maximum grant amount is \$20,000 with a 1:1/2 cash match requirement. Visit the IEDA [Rural Innovation Grant Program website](#) or contact ECICOG Senior Planner / Economic Development Specialist [Adam Bentley](#) for more information.

[Rural Return Grant Program](#)

Due December 1

The Rural Return Grant program supports creative programming to attract new residents to rural communities. Incentive programs can be targeting a specific profession, supporting a specific demographic, or celebrating local assets. Iowa businesses, schools, city or county governments, and private 501(c)3 nonprofit agencies or foundations are eligible to apply. Visit the IEDA [Rural Return Grant page](#) or contact ECICOG Senior Planner / Economic Development Specialist [Adam Bentley](#) for more information.

Rural Child Care Market Study Program

Due December 1

The Rural Child Care Market Study Grant program seeks to provide rural communities with the means to determine specific childcare needs and solutions in their area. In partnership with [First Children's Finance](#), funding from the program will empower communities to assess their current child care market environment and develop strategies. The study must take place in and benefit an Iowan community of 20,000 or fewer and not contiguous to a city of 40,000 or greater. For additional eligibility specifications, visit the [IEDA website](#). Contact Economic Development Specialist [Adam Bentley](#) for additional assistance.

Brownfield Assessment Grant

Due December 1

Assessment Grants provide funding for a grant recipient to inventory, characterize, assess, conduct a range of planning activities, develop site-specific cleanup plans, and conduct community involvement related to brownfield sites. The performance period for these grants is three years. Learn more at the [EPA's website](#). With additional questions, contact Environmental Services Director [Jennifer Fencil](#).

Brownfield Clean Up Grant

Due December 1

Cleanup grants provide funding for a grant recipient to carry out cleanup activities at brownfield sites. Due to budget limitations, no entity can apply for funding cleanup activities at more than three sites. These funds may be used to address sites contaminated by petroleum and hazardous substances, pollutants, or contaminants (including hazardous substances co-mingled with petroleum). Learn more at the [EPA's website](#) or contact Environmental Services Director [Jennifer Fencil](#).

Community Catalyst Building Remediation

Pre-application due January 28

The Community Catalyst Building Remediation Program assists communities with the redevelopment or rehabilitation of buildings to stimulate economic growth or reinvestment in the community. Cities can apply for the rehabilitation of one commercial building two adjacent buildings with same owner. Visit the [IEDA website](#) or contact Community Development and Housing Director [Tracey Achenbach](#) for more information.

Downtown Housing Grant

January 31

The Downtown Housing Grant supports local downtown revitalization for communities under 30,000. This funding will go towards building rehabilitation projects to increase local upper floor housing options. Projects creating or improving under 10 housing units are eligible for \$100,000 to \$300,000; projects creating 10 plus units are eligible for \$100,000 to \$600,000. The City must be the applicant. Visit the [IEDA website](#) or contact Community Development and Housing Director [Tracey Achenbach](#) for more information.

Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Water and Sewer

Typically, the CDBG Water & Sewer grant would be due January 1, but the **IEDA is not accepting applications** for this period.

[Solid Waste Alternatives Program](#)

January 2

The Solid Waste Alternatives Program (SWAP) works to reduce the amount of solid waste generated and landfilled in Iowa. Financial assistance is available for a variety of projects, including source reduction, recycling and education. Funds can be used for such items as equipment for waste reduction or recycling, educational materials or workshops, recycled content products, and more. Any unit of local government, public or private group, or individual is eligible to apply. Visit the [Iowa Department of Natural Resources \(DNR\) website](#) or contact ECICOG Planner/IWE Resource Specialist Area 4 [Alicia Presto](#) for more information.

[Land and Water Conservation Fund \(LWCF\)](#)

January 15

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Program provides match funds of 50% for outdoor recreation area development and acquisition. Popular projects in recent years have included skate parks, playgrounds, new and renovated swimming pools, sport complexes, campgrounds, and multipurpose trails. Iowa's cities and counties are eligible to participate. Visit the [Iowa DNR website](#) or contact ECICOG Environmental Services Director [Jennifer Fencil](#) for more information.

[Iowa Foundation for Parks & Recreation Mini Grants](#)

January 31

The Iowa Foundation for Parks & Recreation Mini Grants are to provide funding for leisure facilities, activities, events, or programs to promote and improve leisure opportunities and amenities for citizens in small Iowa communities. Park & Recreation Departments or local organized groups within an Iowa community with a population of 10,000 or less may apply. Visit the [Foundation's website](#) or contact Community Development and Housing Director [Tracey Achenbach](#) for more information.