

# May 2022

## East Central Iowa Council of Governments

[ecicog.org](http://ecicog.org)

### Newsletter

#### [Disaster Recovery Funds to Be Spent in Linn and Benton Counties](#)

The State of Iowa was awarded \$57.5 million in Federal Disaster Recovery Funds as a result of the August 10, 2020 derecho storm. The Iowa Economic Development Authority (IEDA) is currently taking public comment on a draft plan for these funds. The State intends to use 80 percent of the funds (over \$47 million) in Linn County and 20 percent (over \$16 million) in Benton, Marshall, and Tama Counties. The draft plan proposes a majority of these funds be used to create or rehabilitate housing, with additional portions going toward tree replacement and generator purchases for critical facilities.

A virtual public hearing will be held on Thursday, May 26 at 6:00 p.m. The Draft Action Plan, information about the hearing, and opportunity to provide comments are all available on the IEDA [website](#). Contact Housing & Community Development Director Tracey Achenbach ([tracey.achenbach@ecicog.org](mailto:tracey.achenbach@ecicog.org)) or Grant Specialist Paula Mitchell ([paula.mitchell@ecicog.org](mailto:paula.mitchell@ecicog.org)) if you have questions or potential projects in Linn and Benton Counties.

#### [Take a Tour of Iowa Watershed Approach Projects!](#)

On June 14, the Iowa Watershed Approach (IWA) is hosting a bus tour of projects in Benton County. Elected officials and media representatives are encouraged to attend and celebrate IWA's successes. The tour will begin at 11:45 at Kacena Farms in Vinton with a panel discussion and catered lunch, concluding at 4:30. Event organizers include: IEDA, Iowa Flood Center, ISU, WHKS & Co., and local Middle Cedar River Watershed stakeholders. ECICOG provides CDBG administration for the Middle Cedar Watershed.

The IWA was funded by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in 2016 to reduce flooding and improve water quality throughout the state. The Deputy Assistant Secretary for Grant Programs at HUD is planning to join the tour. Register for the event [here](#) or learn more about the IWA [here](#). Contact ECICOG Environmental Services Director Jennifer Fencl at [Jennifer.fencl@ecicog.org](mailto:Jennifer.fencl@ecicog.org) with questions.

#### [Johnson County Purchasing Flood-Prone Properties](#)

Johnson County was awarded 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. Purchase offers are currently being written, thanks in part to additional funding to assist with a fair purchase price in the current housing market.

To qualify for Hazard Mitigation Assistance funding, a county, city, or school district must have a project included in a FEMA-approved hazard mitigation plan. If you have a potentially qualified project or questions about your county's hazard mitigation plan, contact Environmental Specialist Alicia Presto at [alicia.presto@ecicog.org](mailto:alicia.presto@ecicog.org).



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## [Calling All Commuters and Employers: CorridorRides Can Save You Money!](#)

Gas prices, maintenance costs, insurance premiums – commuters are seeing the cost of their drive increasing across the board. ECICOG has two ways to help relieve commuting costs: the 380 Express and the VanPool program. The 380 Express bus runs Monday through Friday, with six stops in Cedar Rapids, Coralville, and Iowa City to provide an alternative for I-380 commuters. [Learn more here.](#)

## [Envision East Central Iowa Future Summit Scheduled for March 1](#)

Save the date! On March 1, the Envision East Central Iowa Strategy Committee will host a future summit to share details about the draft economic development strategy for the region. This exciting event represents the culmination of months of work and input from hundreds of stakeholders. The planning process is just the beginning. At the summit, we begin to discuss the next steps to move our strategy from ideas to action. Stay tuned for more details! To learn more about Envision East Central Iowa, visit [talkto.ecicog.org/eeci](http://talkto.ecicog.org/eeci).

The CorridorRides Vanpool program is another option – a simple, sustainable and cost-effective method of commuting to work. Vehicles are provided for groups of 7-15 commuters to ride together at a reduced rate. These vehicles come with maintenance packages, paid insurance costs, and roadside assistance. In March, ECICOG announced that new VanPool groups formed by September 2022 will receive two months free! Two companies are in the process of forming CorridorRides VanPools, making nearly a dozen commuters' lives easier.

If you are a commuter or if you employ commuters, the VanPool program can help you! [View the webinar recording here](#) or contact Transit Administrator Brock Grenis at [brock.grenis@ecicog.org](mailto:brock.grenis@ecicog.org) to learn more about the VanPool program.

## [City of Coggon Adds Urban Agricultural District](#)

ECICOG recently partnered with the City of Coggon to amend their zoning ordinance. The City is adding an urban agricultural district, an appropriate use of land not yet incorporated into urban uses (housing and commercial buildings). The district's requirements are more conducive to farming operations while maintaining compatibility with neighboring urban development – e.g. allowing larger accessory buildings but restricting livestock. This is consistent with Iowa Smart Planning Principles, which call for the protection, preservation, and restoration of agricultural land. The City of Coggon also added an updated zoning map which is easier to read and includes the urban agricultural district.

Contact Community Development Specialist Tom Gruis at [tom.gruis@ecicog.org](mailto:tom.gruis@ecicog.org) to learn how to make your city code more useful for staff, elected officials, and residents.

## [Celebrate Your Community and Submit to the #lowansUnite Video Contest](#)

Iowa communities are invited to participate in the #lowansUnite video contest by the Iowa Economic Development Authority and Iowa Finance Authority. Cities, municipalities, and economic development organizations are encouraged to submit videos celebrating the importance of small businesses within their community. Videos must be a minute or less, feature local residents, and incorporate elements of the community such as storefronts, landmarks, or main street districts.

[Click here](#) to read submission instructions and video guidelines. Videos will be accepted May 16 through June 21. The winning community will receive a custom mural designed and installed by Iowa-based artist Ben Schuh.