

NIACOG NEWS

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NORTH IOWA AREA COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

July-Aug. 2020

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AN IMPORTANT UPDATE: OUR RESPONSE TO COVID-19

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) granted NIACOG \$2,342,150 through the CARES Act for operational expenses in response to the coronavirus. These funds were allocated to the state who in turn apportioned the funds to Iowa's transit systems based on the formula to allocate the agency's FY '20 funding. The funding is provided at 100% with no local match required and will be available to support capital, operating and other expenses generally eligible under those programs to prevent, prepare for, and respond to COVID-19. Another key aspect of the funding is that it does not have an expiration date as to when the funding needs to be spent so it can be spent judiciously over time.

As an essential service, Region 2 Transit has continued to operate throughout this pandemic without interruption. The agency was informed early on by FTA that transit performs a critical function and that it was imperative during the response to the COVID-19 emergency for the agency to continue to operate to get people to work, doctor appointments, grocery stores, pharmacy's, etc. Certain critical industries have a special responsibility in these times to continue to operate and transit is one of those.

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AGENCY'S REPOSE CONTINUED

Although the agency will see a significant shortfall in fare box revenue as a result of the pandemic due to an 80% reduction in ridership and a significant reduction in State Transit Assistance (STA) (based on receipts from automobile sales), the CARES Act funding will make the agency whole. The agency remains on a solid foundation and we will continue to serve our members and clients to the best of our abilities.

NIACOG too, has continued to keep its doors open through this pandemic with social distancing being paramount during these unprecedented times. Staff continues to perform its regular functions of providing assistance to our cities and counties, including preparing several grant applications for housing, community attraction and tourism, CDBG water/sewer applications, urban revitalization plans and urban renewal plan amendments, several city code updates, etc. In addition, the agency prepared two funding applications to the U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration (EDA) for planning dollars to hire additional staff to orchestrate the region's response to the pandemic including technical assistance to our local governments, businesses and other stakeholder organizations. If funded, this individual will also take the lead on developing an

economic recovery and resilience plan for the region as part of the region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS).

The agency has also applied for a \$500,000 grant to recapitalize the agency's revolving loan fund with the idea to provide micro-loans to small businesses recovering from the coronavirus. The agency proposed making loans up to \$25,000 over 7 years without interest or payment the first two years with repayment beginning in year 3 at 75% of the prime rate. The agency hopes to hear back on its EDA grant applications in the very near future to assist in the region's recovery.

The agency is constantly trying to identify resources and new funding opportunities for our members. Should Congress come to an agreement on another Stimulus package that includes an infrastructure component, those entities that have completed preliminary engineering/architectural reports and are ready to proceed should funding become available will have a leg-up on the competition. We cannot stress enough how critical good planning is for a successful project.

If you have a project in mind, please do not hesitate to contact us to discuss funding opportunities. It is never too early to start planning!



Calendar of Events

July

3rd	Holiday - NIACOG OFFICE CLOSED	
8th	HAZMAT Mtg.	1:00 pm @ Fire Station
8th	Trans. Policy Brd.	2:30 pm @ NIACOG Office

August

10th	Exec. Cmte.	Noon @ NIACOG Office
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WINNEBAGO COUNTY TRANSIT SERVICE CHANGE

Effective July 1st operation of the Winnebago County Transit will be performed by the Region 2 Transit System, a program of the North Iowa Area Council of Governments. The service has previously been operated by the Mosaic in northern Iowa for many years.

For passengers needing to reserve trips from July 1, 2020 on, they will need to contact the Region 2 Transit System at (641) 423-2262. The dispatch center is open from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. every weekday. 24-hour advance notice is required to book trips and trips can be booked up to 14 days in advance.

Fares will remain the same: One-way trip within Winnebago County - \$2.00 per ride for seniors/disabled; \$4.00 general public; One-way trip to another county - \$3.00 per ride for seniors/disabled; \$5.00 general public. The service also accepts Region 2 Transit System tickets, and Medicaid sponsored transportation.

The service is open to the general public and is available for commuters, shoppers, students, seniors, persons with disabilities and travelers of all types. The bus will pick you up at your door and deliver you to the door of: your job; medical appointment; meal site; school; or favorite shopping center.

More information on the Region 2 Transit System can be found at: www.R2BUS.org



VISIT IOWA PARKS



To help celebrate the 100th anniversary of Iowa state parks and also to support tourism attractions and businesses impacted by the coronavirus health crisis, the state's tourism and natural resources department have teamed up to offer a free 'digital passport' that encourages Iowans to discover new state parks and enjoy the outdoors. State park visitors can sign up online for the passport and receive prizes for visiting multiple parks across the state. The digital passport also will provide discounts to restaurants and tourist attractions near each state park.



The Digital Passport encourages visitors to explore Iowa's state parks and forests during their centennial year. For each park visit, travelers earn a digital stamp in the Passport app that qualifies them for prizes and enters them in a grand prize drawing for two-night stay at Honey Creek Resort in Moravia. You can sign up for the passport at explore.traveliowa.com/PARKS via email or text PARKS to 515-531-5995.



HOUSING REHAB PROGRESS

Earlier this year, the Cities of Garner, Grafton, and Manly closed out their respective housing rehabilitation programs. The City of Garner was funded in 2018 through the Iowa Economic Development Authority's CDBG Housing Fund, also known as the CDBG Residential Housing Sustainability Program. Seven homes were rehabilitated altogether in the Garner Program. The Cities of Grafton and Manly were funded in 2017, also through the CDBG Housing Fund. Five homes were rehabilitated in Grafton and seven homes were rehabilitated in Manly. All three Programs were given administrative assistance by NIACOG staff. NIACOG congratulates these three communities in their efforts to make a portion of their housing stock more safe, sound, and affordable.

Good progress is also being made in the 2 remaining open CDBG housing rehabilitation programs in the NIACOG region. These are the City of Charles City and City of Whittemore programs. In both programs, application processing is well past the half way point with both communities intending to rehabilitate at least 6 homes. NIACOG staff is also assisting both of these programs.

NIACOG has also been working with 4 cities to submit grant applications for the coming round of funding for exterior rehabilitation of homes. The communities include: Corwith, Forest City, Hampton, and Garner. The program will provide approximately \$250,000 per city to rehabilitate 6 homes and administer the grant funding.

New funding has also been awarded to our NIACOG Housing Trust Fund as follows:

- USDA Housing Preservation Grant (\$162,699) – matched with State Housing Trust Fund dollars to rehabilitate 8 homes at \$24,000 per home in Cerro Gordo/Floyd counties
- United Way of North Central Iowa (\$23,000) for about 10 emergency repair projects – available throughout the NIACOG region
- Wells Fargo Foundation (\$8,000) for COVID relief for Habitat for Humanity
- First Citizens Bank (\$5,000) for operating funds
- Cerro Gordo County (\$5,000)

Thus far, the NIACOG Housing Trust Fund (HTF) has completed 10 projects and has 39 more in some stage of development. To date, the average repair cost per project is about \$14,000. The Federal Home Loan Bank has made possible this high number of large home repair projects with a very generous grant of \$987,840. The State Housing Trust Fund also provided over \$200,000 for the NIACOG HTF program.

Because of the large number of projects, we are constantly looking for quality construction contractors who are registered with the State of Iowa to complete work and are certified as lead safe renovators. If you know of a contractor in North central Iowa who might be interested in bidding on the projects, please talk to them about contacting Myrtle with their name, contact information, and qualifications.



HOUSING REHAB BEFORE & AFTER

Before:



After:





MIDAMERICAN RENEWABLE ENERGY IMPACTS IOWA

DES MOINES, Iowa – (May 12, 2020) – Renewable sources, mostly through wind energy, supplied 61.3% of the energy that MidAmerican Energy delivered to its Iowa customers last year, the Iowa Utilities Board verified in an order issued Thursday. The measure is a 19%, or 10 percentage point, gain from a year earlier. It reflects the amount of renewable generation, as a percent of total retail energy delivered, that MidAmerican provided to its customers in Iowa in 2019. In 2018 the percentage was 51.4. “We’re making significant inroads in our quest to provide 100% renewable energy annually to our customers,” Adam Wright, MidAmerican Energy president and CEO, said. “We continue to work hard every day on expanding our wind energy infrastructure,” Wright added. “We’re adding wind generation at no net cost to our customers while still providing reliable energy at some of the lowest rates in the country.”

MidAmerican leads nation in new wind generation

Last year, MidAmerican led the nation in wind project installations by adding more than a 1,000 megawatts of new capacity, according to the American Wind Energy Association. AWEA further reports that MidAmerican’s wind farms helped make wind energy the number one source of electricity generation in Iowa in 2019. Also last year, MidAmerican helped Iowa lead the nation in the percent of electricity generated by wind energy. “Despite all that has changed this year, what hasn’t changed is our commitment to providing our customers with more and more renewable energy,” Wright said. “We

remain focused on safely delivering clean energy to our customers.”

Economic benefits

In addition to providing clean energy at no net cost to its customers, MidAmerican’s wind energy provides significant economic benefits, particularly to rural Iowa. Through last year, MidAmerican has cumulatively invested \$11.9 billion in wind energy. In 2019, the company paid \$26.3 million in property taxes. County property taxes help pay for schools, roads and bridges, and county medical services. Additionally, MidAmerican paid rural landowners \$30.9 million through lease payments, helping these landowners weather this year’s extreme economic volatility.

Wind turbine technician: 2nd fastest growing job

MidAmerican’s wind energy projects currently employ hundreds of people across the state, both in short-term construction and long-term operations and maintenance jobs. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, a wind turbine technician is the country’s second fastest-growing job in the nation. Additionally, according to the agency, those technicians earned an annual mean wage of \$57,510 in Iowa in 2019, exceeding the median wage for all occupations in Iowa last year, which was \$47,330.

About MidAmerican Energy Company

MidAmerican Energy Company, headquartered in Des Moines, Iowa, serves more than 791,000 electric customers in Iowa, Illinois and South Dakota, and 771,000 natural gas customers in Iowa, Illinois, Nebraska and South Dakota. Information about MidAmerican Ener-

DID YOU KNOW?

Federal law states that the American flag should be displayed daily on or near the main administration building of every public institution, near every polling place on election days and during school days in or near every schoolhouse.

