

# NIACOG NEWS

Vol. 31 No. 3

NORTH IOWA AREA COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

May – June, 2020

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***We're here and still  
working for you!***

***So....with everything  
closed, what are we doing?***

### ADMINISTERING

- 7 Housing Rehabilitation Projects
- 4 Water and/or Sewer Projects
- H-2A Ag. Visa Foreign Labor Inspections
- Down payment Assistance First-time Homebuyer
- 5210: Healthy Choices Count Program

### WRITING

- 2 Community Attraction & Tourism Application
- 4 CDBG Homeowner Exterior Improvement Applications

- 1 Downtown Revitalization Application
- 1 Downtown Upper Story Housing Application
- 3 Comprehensive Plans
- 1 Zoning Ordinance Update
- Transportation Improvement Plan
- 2 Countywide Hazard Mitigation Plans
- Urban Renewal Plan Amendments
- Code Codifications

### OPERATING

- Continued Operation of our Regional Transit System

As we adjust to life with the COVID-19 pandemic, we are presented with many challenges that will certainly have immediate and long-term impacts on all of our communities and region. While this health emergency is causing serious anxiety and concern, we want our membership to know that we will continue to serve our communities by keeping you informed about resources available to you from our partners, locally, regionally, state and nationally.

We are all in this together so please do not hesitate to contact us with questions or if we can be of assistance. We are tracking the funding that's associated with the CARES Act and the potential next round of stimulus funding targeting infrastructure improvements. As program rules and funding opportunities become available, we will be reaching out to you. It's never too early to identify and start planning for those critical capital improvement projects. Please let us know if we can be of assistance.



## TRANSIT/MASON CITY FIRE DEPT PARTNERSHIP

On March 17 all our maintenance staff deep cleaned all Mason City fixed route, Midnight Special and Region 2 Paratransit buses (23 in all). The Mason City Fire Department came and sprayed them all with an electrostatic sprayer with the same cleaner/disinfectant that they use in the ambulances. We have since acquired our own equipment and are able to fog the inside of our buses on a regular basis.



## COVID-19 RESPONSE FUNDING FOR HOUSING NON-PROFIT

Habitat For Humanity of North Central Iowa contacted NIACOG with concerns about their clients who are having difficulty making mortgage payments in light of their COVID-related funding difficulties. They have already heard from several homeown-

ers who have been furloughed from their jobs or have reduced hours. It's incredibly difficult for anyone to catch up when a large payment of any kind is missed.

In 25 years of service to low-income families in North Iowa, 50 homes have been built by volunteers, and families, 13 critical home repair projects have been completed, and 7 modular ramps installed. Payments on all of these affordable loans make up the "Fund for Humanity," which is used on future projects through Habitat for Humanity of North Central Iowa. Without the monthly income received, less funding is available for the 4 families currently in the home construction phase.

The ReStore is the biggest fundraising arm of Habitat for Humanity of North Central Iowa, but they have had to close to keep their staff, volunteers, and shoppers safe. Habitat has also had to cancel their largest annual fundraising event, Hammers & Heels, which raised \$57,000 in 2019. A conservative estimate of Habitat's financial loss due to the COVID-19 pandemic is approximately \$100,000.

Habitat called our office to ask for assistance. Initially, we had to respond that we had no resources to assist with mortgage payments, but then Wells Fargo sent an invitation to us for COVID response activities. The Foundation invited the NIACOG Housing Trust Fund to apply for \$8,000 and made the funding parameters very flexible.

Many other granting organizations, even local foundations, are targeting COVID-related recovery. Although we can't make any promises on funding availability, inform NIACOG of your issues, and we will keep our eyes open for funding resources.

## Calendar of Events

### May

10th	Mother's Day	
11th	NIACOG Exec Cmte.	NIACOG Office/Zoom @ Noon
25th	Memorial Day	Office Closed

### June

8th	NIACOG Exec. Cmte.	NIACOG Office/Zoom @ Noon
14th	Flag Day	
18	NIACOG Housing Trust Fund	NIACOG Office/Zoom @ 11:30 am
20th	Summer begins	



In 1985, the Iowa Legislature adopted Main Street America's Main Street Approach model and established Main Street Iowa (MSI) as a program of the Iowa Economic Development Authority. Today, MSI is recognized as one of the most successful state Main Street programs in the nation. In the NIACOG region, currently the cities of Mason City, Hampton, and Charles City have adopted Main Street programming.

MSI offers a variety of training, leadership development and technical assistance opportunities to designated Main Street programs to build the capacity of the local revitalization effort.

Main Street's overall approach is centered around Transformation Strategies. Transformation Strategies are implemented through comprehensive work in four broad areas, known as the Four Points.

**ECONOMIC VITALITY** focuses on capital, incentives, and other economic and financial tools to assist new and existing businesses, catalyze property development, and create a supportive environment for entrepreneurs and innovators that drive local economies.

**DESIGN** supports a community's transformation by enhancing the physical and visual assets that set the commercial district apart.

**PROMOTION** positions the downtown or commercial district as the center of the community and hub of economic activity, while creating a positive image that showcases a community's unique characteristics.

**ORGANIZATION** involves creating a strong foundation for a sustainable revitalization effort, including cultivating partnerships, community involvement, and resources for the district.

If your community is interested in initiating a local Main Street program, contact Michael Wagler at 515.348.6184 or [maistreet@iowaeda.com](mailto:maistreet@iowaeda.com)



The State of Iowa is second only to Minnesota in the nation in Census Self-Response rates. Here is a summary of our region's response rates, by county as of 4/26/20:

**Cerro Gordo County** - 59.4%

**Floyd County** - 62.1%

**Franklin County** - 56.5%

**Hancock County** - 61.9%

**Kossuth County** - 61.7%

**Mitchell County** - 62.7%

**Winnebago County** - 63.0

**Worth County** - 61.0

To see how your community is doing in responding to the Census, check out the Response Rate Tracker and drill down by city at the following link:

<https://2020census.gov/en/response-rates.html>

City and county population totals directly impact funding received for roads and other infrastructure. It is important that we all respond since federal funds are apportioned based on Census data.





## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM



At the time of writing, EDA had not yet released the Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) regarding the Federal Funding Opportunity associated with the coronavirus;

however, staff has been informed by the Denver office of EDA that the NOFA will be released in the very near future. Local units of government will be able to apply for EDA's Economic Development Assistance Program to help communities and regions devise and implement long-term economic recovery strategies through a variety of non-construction and construction projects, as appropriate, to address economic challenges associated with the coronavirus.

Based on recent NOFA's, to be competitive, applications must clearly incorporate principles for enhancing the resilience of the relevant community/region or demonstrate the integration of resilience principles into the investment project itself. Resilience is an essential component of any strategy for mitigating the potential for future disaster-related losses and adverse economic impacts for communities. Therefore, inclusion of resilience principles in the project is a necessary step to improve the capacity of the region to recover more quickly from future disaster events. Applicants must include a narrative attachment as a part of their application materials, describing in detail the nexus between their proposed project scope of work and disaster recovery and resilience efforts. The strength of the nexus to the disaster is drawn from the consequences of the relevant disaster(s) and the intended project outcomes that fulfill the community's specific post-disaster needs.

Specifics surrounding the actual NOFA are yet to be seen; however, the criteria used in determining which projects receive Economic Adjustment Assistance grants are:

- The ability of the proposed project to realistically achieve the desired results and catalyze additional resources;
- The ability of a project to start quickly and create jobs faster;
- The extent to which the project will enable the community/region to become more diversified and more economically prosperous;
- The relative economic distress of the region;
- The comparative feasibility of the applicant to achieve the outcomes identified in the application.

If you have a project in mind, please contact Joe at the NIACOG office to discuss in greater detail.

### EDA FUNDING IN THE CARES ACT

The National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) successfully advocated for the inclusion of \$1.5 Billion in the US Economic Development Administration (EDA) funding in the CARES Act. The language states, "Economic Development Assistance Programs, \$1,500,000,000, to remain available until September 30, 2022, to prevent, prepare for, and respond to coronavirus, domestically or internationally, including for necessary expenses for responding to economic injury as a result of coronavirus."

### OTHER UPCOMING OPPORTUNITIES

**EDA:** \$1.5 Billion Economic Development Assistance Programs

**USDA-RD:** \$20.5 million for Rural Business Cooperative Service; \$100 million in grants for ReConnect Program

**HUD:** \$5 billion for the Community Development fund, enabling additional HUD support for CDBG

**DOT – FTA:** \$25 billion for public transportation operations, maintenance, capital, and administrative expense



## FEDERAL AND STATE RECREATIONAL TRAILS

Iowa DOT will accept applications for the State Fiscal Year 2021 (SFY 2021) application cycle of the State Recreational Trails (SRT) program on July 1, 2020. Due to COVID-19, the Legislature has not yet appropriated any funds toward the program for this fiscal year. If funds are provided when the Legislature returns to complete business of the session, applications received by July 1 will be reviewed and considered for SFY 2021 funding. As allowed by administrative rules, Iowa DOT may also announce subsequent applications deadlines as warranted.

Please see IDOT's website for application materials. Please feel free to contact Chris Diggins at the NIACOG office or Scott Flagg, State Recreational Trails Program Manager, at [scott.flagg@iowadot.us](mailto:scott.flagg@iowadot.us), phone 515-239-1252, if you have any questions or concerns.

### SRT Program

**Purpose-**The state recreational trails program (SRT) provides funds to establish recreational trails throughout Iowa for the use, enjoyment and participation of the public. The program is restricted to the acquisition; construction or improvement of recreational trails open for public use or trails which will be dedicated public use upon completion.

**Who can apply?** A state or local government agency, a municipal corporation, a county or a nonprofit organization is eligible to apply for and receive funds from the recreational trails program. A private business or developer is not eligible to apply directly for funds from the recreational trails program.

## WORKFORCE HOUSING FUNDING TAX CREDIT

The Iowa Economic Development Authority (IEDA) just announced it has opened a new application round for the Workforce Housing Tax Credit program. Approximately \$10 million in tax credits is available for this application round and is only open for the Small Cities' Set Aside component.

IEDA's Workforce Housing Tax Credit program provides tax benefits to developers to provide housing in Iowa communities, focusing especially on those projects using abandoned, empty or dilapidated properties. To be eligible for funding, projects must:

- Meet one of four criteria: housing development on a brownfield or grayfield or upper story housing or rehabilitation of dilapidated housing stock or new construction in greenfield space
- Include construction or rehab of at least four single-family homes or at least one multi-family building containing three or more units or at least two upper story units
- Total project costs for projects under the Small Cities set aside may not exceed \$215,000 per unit or \$250,000 for historic rehabilitation.
- Be completed within three years of award
- Be located in the 88 least populous Iowa counties

Applications can be submitted via [iowagrants.gov](http://iowagrants.gov) and will be accepted through 11:59 p.m. on June 8. However, applicants are strongly encouraged to submit applications as soon as possible and not wait until deadline to facilitate a timelier review of applications.

Applications for credits will be reviewed and scored on a competitive basis. Program information and evaluation and scoring criteria will be available at: [iowaeda.com/WHTC](http://iowaeda.com/WHTC)

IEDA expects to announce awards in mid-July. Please contact Myrtle Nelson at the NIACOG office or Dan Hansen, with IEDA, at 515.348.6212 or [daniel.hansen@iowaeda.com](mailto:daniel.hansen@iowaeda.com) with questions regarding this opportunity.



### FRT PROGRAM

**Purpose-**The Federal Recreational Trails program (FRT) provides grant funding for trails and trail-related projects. Funds are intended for recreational trails. They may not be used to improve roads for general passenger vehicle use or to provide shoulders or sidewalks along roads.

**Permitted Uses-** Maintenance and restoration of existing trails; Development and rehabilitation of trailside and trail-head facilities and trail linkages; Purchase and lease of trail construction and maintenance equipment; Construction of new trails (with restrictions for new trails on Federal lands; Acquisition of easements or property for trails; Operation of educational programs to promote safety and environmental protection related to trails (limited to 5 percent of a state's funds).

**Who can apply?** A federal, state and/or local government agency, private individuals and organizations (if co-sponsored by a government agency) are eligible to apply as well.