

NIACOG NEWS

Vol. 24 No. 4

NORTH IOWA AREA COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

Oct. – Nov. 2013

NIACOG REACHES ANNIVERSARY MILESTONE

On September 1, 2013, NIACOG successfully completed its 40th year of serving the eight-county, sixty-seven city region. Originally established for the purpose of promoting intergovernmental cooperation and strengthening local units of governments through professional planning, programming and technical assistance, NIACOG has grown into a multi-million dollar agency providing a wide range of services from a first time homebuyer down-payment assistance program to serving as the regional transit provider responsible for approximately 450,000 rides annually throughout the region.

Over the course of 40 years, NIACOG has relocated offices 5 times and employed 6 different executive directors. Today, NIACOG accesses over 30 different local, state and federal programs, has an annual budget in excess of \$5M, and employs over 40 staff. We are proud of what we have accomplished since our inception, and we are eager going forward to provide even better service to the region in the future.



COMMUNITY VISIONING

Iowa's Living Roadways Community Visioning program applications are currently available for communities under 10,000 in population. The program assists communities in developing a vision and plan for landscaping along roadsides, entranceways, and trails. Through a series of planning meetings, a local volunteer committee works with a Trees Forever facilitator and professional landscape designer to identify potential landscaping projects and to create images of what finished projects might look like. The program is a collaboration involving the Iowa Department of Transportation, the Living Roadway Trust Fund, Iowa State University, and Trees Forever. Potential planning projects include the following:

- Trailhead enhancements
- Protection/enhancement of natural areas adjacent to trail
- Natural resource and cultural interpretation (e.g. kiosks)
- Trail user safety and comfort (e.g. rest stops)
- Directional signage
- Visual appeal and aesthetics
- Stormwater management methods

Applications are due by November 1st, 2013. Applications can be found at www.treesforever.org or www.communityvisioning.org. You can contact Trees Forever at 1-800-369-1269, ext. 110 if you would like to receive a hard copy of the application. The applications must include an aerial image of the area you wish to address and can include no more than 6 photographs

NEW NIACOG EMPLOYEE

Matt O'Brien started as the new regional planner at NIACOG on July 25. He has a Master of Community and Regional Planning degree and Graduate Certificate in Geographic Information Systems (GIS) from Iowa State University. He also studied environmental science and business administration at the University of Dubuque. Previously in his career, Matt was an assistant planner in Franklin County and planning and zoning services intern for the City of Dubuque, IA. Now at NIACOG, Matt is the point of contact for several hazard mitigation planning projects. He also handles the GIS, mapping, and website updating tasks at NIACOG.



Matt was born and raised in Dubuque, but proudly calls Mason City and the region home. So far, he has visited with several towns within NIACOG's service area and continues to look forward to visiting with many more. Matt can be contacted at mobrien@niacog.org or 641-423-0491, ext.14.

HOUSING ACTIVITY

In December, four cities in the NIACOG region will be submitting CDBG Iowa Housing Fund grant applications that would fund owner-occupied housing rehabilitation programs. These are the Cities of Bancroft, Britt, Forest City, and Meservey. Ten homeowners in Britt; eight homeowners in the Cities of Bancroft and Forest City; and six homeowners in Meservey would be given rehabilitation assistance. These grant applications are for the Housing Fund Program Year 2014. The 2014 grant awards are tentatively scheduled to be announced by the Iowa Economic Development Authority in late March of next year. NIACOG staff is assisting these cities in the preparation and submission of their 2014 grant applications.



The housing committees in all the communities are spending many hours in helping to develop their respective grant applications, and NIACOG staff appreciates their efforts.

The CDBG Housing Fund provides funding from the U.S. Department of HUD in order to expand and preserve the supply of decent and affordable housing for low and very low-income households in Iowa through owner-occupied rehabilitation programs.

For other communities in the NIACOG region who are considering applying for Iowa Housing Fund assistance for Program Year 2015, please contact NIACOG if you have not done so already. It's never too early to begin the grant application planning process.

NIACOG HOUSING TRUST FUND PARTNERS WITH OPPORTUNITY VILLAGE

The NIACOG Housing Trust Fund funded its first housing repair project in 2012 and is now branching out to assist with funding the construction of a community-based housing project by Opportunity Village. Opportunity Village is in the process of decentralizing its campus and is under mandate to do so. However, because much housing in the community does not work well for wheel chairs, they found a need to build a few fully accessible homes. The NIACOG Housing Trust has reserved its State Housing Trust Fund allocation for 2014 to assist with the project. The overall budget for the 4-unit home we will be assisting is about \$240,000, and our program will assist with funding about \$96,000 of the cost. Funding projects with our community partners has always been included in our Housing Assistance Plan as a future option to be pursued once the repair program was fully functioning. Now that we are at capacity with other funding sources for our repair program, we were in a prime position to branch out to this new avenue.





NORTH IOWA COMMUTER EXPRESS (NICE) IS UP & RUNNING

The first North Iowa Commuter Express (NICE) began operating on August 12th. It began with four riders, plus a driver and has seen as many as twelve (full capacity) riders.

The first vanpool is meeting at the Mason City Transit transfer station in Central Park at 5:00 a.m. en route to Winnebago Industries in Forest City. Winnebago Industries performed an in-house survey of their employees in certain area codes and had fifty respondents that want to use NICE for their daily commute.

With the start of the first vanpool, we have seen interest from other communities and employers to start a vanpool in their area. For a pool to begin we must have four riders and a qualified driver to start. As a pool grows in participation, the weekly fee is reduced per rider. This encourages promotion by the pool participants.

For more information on the NICE program, you can visit our website at www.R2BUS.org or call Region 2 Transit at (641) 423-2262. If interested in joining a vanpool, complete the survey, linked on our website, or go to: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/73HSDZN>.



CLERKS TOUR MASON CITY

The North Iowa Area City Clerk Association held their fall meeting on Friday, September 20th at NIACOG. Following a brief discussion of current issues, the clerks boarded a Region 2 transit bus to downtown Mason City for a walking tour of the “River City Sculptures on Parade.” This idea was started back in May after Brandi Evers, with the Mason City Chamber of Commerce, presented a program on “How to transform your downtown through outdoor art sculptures.” River City Sculptures on Parade is a 1.6 mile walk designed to lead participants on a looping route to the Cultural Crescent and back to the central core of Mason City. The 26 sculptures are owned by the artists and loaned to the exhibit for one year. The sculptures can later be bought or leased. It was a great opportunity to see what other cities have done to help create tourism and add a touch of art and creativity to their city.



DERELICT BUILDING PROGRAM

IDNR continues to promote the Derelict Building Grant Program for cities under 5,000 populations. The purpose of the program is to assist small communities and rural counties in improving the attractiveness and appearance of their jurisdictions by providing them financial assistance to address derelict buildings. The eligibility requirements require the building to be owned or in the process of being owned by the town or county. Up to \$50,000 is available for offsetting costs related to renovation with recycled materials or deconstruction. Applications are due February 28, 2014.

For more information, please contact the NIACOG office or go to <http://www.iowadnr.gov/Environment/LandStewardship/WasteManagement/DerelictBuildingProgram.aspx>.



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CALANDER OF EVENTS



October

- 7th – NIACOG Executive Committee Meeting NIACOG Office 11:30am
- 16th – HAZMAT Meeting – NIACOG Office 1:00pm
- 16th – Transportation Policy Board Meeting – NIACOG Office 2:30pm

November

- 11th – NIACOG Board of Directors Meeting - Bennigan's Grill, Clear Lake 7:00pm
- 11th – Veterans Day – NIACOG Office closed
- 15th – North Iowa City Clerks Meeting – 9:30am
- 28th & 29th - Happy Thanksgiving!!! – NIACOG Office closed

wastewater treatment facilities, and storm sewer projects related to sanitary sewer system improvements.

The community facilities and services fund offers grants to assist communities for a variety of projects including day care facilities, senior centers, vocational workshops and other community services such as stormwater projects

NIACOG prepares CDBG grants at no cost to its member governments. If you have a project in mind or have questions, please contact the NIACOG office.

CDBG DEADLINE FAST APPROACHING

If you are interested in applying for a CDBG infrastructure project or community facilities and service fund grant, and you have not yet contacted us, please do so immediately. The application deadline for the water/sewer fund is November 13th and the community facilities and services fund is due January 15th.

These annual competitive programs offer grants to assist cities and counties with sanitary sewer system improvements, water system improvements, water and

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