

NIACOG NEWS

Vol. 23 No. 1

NORTH IOWA AREA COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

January-February 2012

TRAFFIC SIGN REPLACEMENT DEADLINE CHANGED



Cash-strapped state and local governments no longer will have to replace their traffic signs by a

specific deadline, but may wait until the signs wear out. The U.S.

Department of Transportation recently eliminated more than 40 deadlines that were mandated by federal traffic control regulations.

The regulations establishing deadlines for street and traffic sign replacement came from the Manual of Traffic Control Device (MUTCD), which is compilation of national standards for all pavement markings, street signs and traffic signals. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), which has published the manual since 1971, updates it periodically to accommodate changing transportation needs and address new safety technologies, traffic control tools, and traffic management techniques.

The deadlines requiring that certain street name signs be replaced by 2018 to meet minimum retro reflectivity standards and requiring larger lettering on those street name signs are among the deadlines eliminated. Deadlines for increasing the size of various traffic signs were also eliminated. State and local governments will now be able to replace and upgrade these signs when they reach the end of their useful life.

FEDERAL FUNDING AVAILABLE FOR NEW HOMES

The State of Iowa has allocated an additional \$2 million to NIACOG to fund the down payment for at least 50 new homes through the Single-Family New Construction program. We are now accepting additional proposals for new builders/lots to add to the Single-Family New Construction program. This fourth round is expected to be the final round of the program.

The concept of the program is to replace housing stock lost from buyouts resulting from the flooding of 2008. The program doesn't, however, assist with construction cost, but instead provides a 25% down payment for homebuyers, which makes the homes highly attractive to potential homebuyers and allows builders to turn a profit. Please share this news with both builders and homebuyers in your area. The program is limited to cities within the NIACOG region.

To be eligible proposed homes must have a purchase price of no more than \$150,000 and only households under 80% of Area Median Income are eligible to participate. The homes must be under construction by March 15, 2013. Proposals from builders are due on February 1, 2012 at noon. There is currently no deadline for homebuyer applications.

For more information, check out our webpage for this program at niacog.org/home.

Application packets can also be mailed by contacting Myrtle Nelson at mnelson@niacog.org or 641-423-0491 ext. 16. Thank you for your interest.

NIACOG Housing Trust Fund Now Available



Applications are now being accepted from home owners to repair their homes with financial help from the new NIACOG Housing Trust Fund. The Trust Fund was created primarily to address emergency repairs for issues like leaking roofs, non-functioning plumbing, handicapped accessibility, etc. However, some funds will also be available for general rehabilitation of homes (rental and owner-occupied) especially for projects that improve the appearance of neighborhoods.

The Trust Fund is limited to no more than \$10,000 per repair or rehabilitation project. Any expenses over and above that will be the responsibility of the home owner. Additionally, *rental* rehabilitation projects will require a match equal to the amount of assistance provided. (Continued on page 2)

For owner-occupied housing, the program will be limited to households with incomes of \$40,540 for 1-2 person households and \$46,620 for 3+ person households. For rental housing, the program will be limited to homes where the tenant's income is no more than \$13,200 to \$24,850 depending upon household size. Additionally, to be eligible occupants can have no more than \$50,000 in cash assets. The assistance will be provided in the form of forgivable loans with repayment being required only if the owner sells the home within 5 years.

Several agencies and business made this trust fund possible through their generous financial support. Funding was awarded to the Trust Fund by the Federal Home Loan Bank of Des Moines (\$150,000) and the State Housing Trust Fund (\$74,151), as well as, lenders and Realtors® that are providing \$33,750 and satisfying the required local match.

In this first round for funding (2012) only homes in Cerro Gordo County will be eligible for assistance; however, other counties within the NIACOG region will be invited soon to join the NIACOG Housing Trust Fund in preparation for the 2013 funding year. If other counties do choose to join, the state's funding will approximately triple automatically. We also anticipate applying for more funding from the Federal Home Loan Bank.

The Trust Fund was limited to Cerro Gordo County this first year for two reasons. First, Cerro Gordo County is the only county in our region not currently in a trust fund. Second, we had to put the trust fund together in record time to receive funding for this coming year, which didn't allow time to coordinate with additional counties and the cities within them.

Applications are being taken now and will be followed by application processing, environmental clearance, and bidding out work. Construction work is anticipated to begin in the spring.

Additional information, brochures, and application forms are available on the NIACOG Housing Trust Fund's webpage at www.niacog.org/trustfund or by contacting Myrtle Nelson (641-423-0491 ext. 16 or mnelson@niacog.org).

GOT BUS? YOU DO. THANKS TO US

On Thursday, October 20, 2011, NIACOG/ Region 2 Transit's Regional Travel Navigator, Cindy Johnson launched the first of many promotional campaigns entitled "Region 2 Transit ~ Friends With North Iowa".



The presentation of the campaign was timed to coincide with a Fox 103.7-KLKK Wendy's promotion and some of their radio personalities.

The promotion with the KLKK radio station describes the friendly interaction with customers, dedication and perseverance of the Region 2 staff to provide first-rate service. The remainder of the 'Region 2 Transit ~ Friends With North Iowa' campaign encourages photographic documentation of the camaraderie with the citizens, businesses, and organizations in North Iowa.

If you know of acts of appreciation from passengers/customers, attendance of special events in the community, and holiday generosity by the transit staff, please contact Cindy Johnson at 641-423-0491 ext. 30 or email her at cjohnson@niacog.org, so that we may be on hand to acknowledge the occasions to be included in our promotions.

BRUSH UP ON WINTER DRIVING SKILLS

Along with the hats, mittens and boots, dig out your winter driving skills. Log on to www.511ia.org for the latest road conditions or <http://www.weatherview.dot.state.ia.us> for updated weather and travel information. Here are some tips for driving in winter weather:



- Focus your attention on the driving task and slow down. Do not use cruise control.
- Put your mobile phone away so you are not tempted to talk or text while driving.
- Keep a safe distance from vehicles in adjacent lanes as strong wind gusts could push a vehicle outside its lane of travel.
- Put a safe distance between your vehicle and the vehicle ahead in case sudden driving maneuvers are necessary.
- Take extra care if driving a high-profile vehicle such as a truck, van or sports utility vehicle, or when towing a trailer, as these vehicles are more prone to be pushed or even flipped by wind gusts. Your vehicle's headlights are a valuable asset when driving in winter weather. Turn them on to see and be seen.
- If conditions are severe enough to prevent safe driving, postpone your trip; or if en route, identify the nearest safe place to pull off the roadway, such as a rest area, truck stop, motel or other traveler service until the wind subsides and road conditions improve.
- Keep your windshield clear of ice. Allow extra travel time.

(Continued on page 3)

If the roads are icy:

- If your vehicle begins to slide, take your foot off the gas pedal and shift into neutral, or if you have a manual transmission, depress the clutch. While it may be a natural instinct to slam on your brakes, this may cause your vehicle to slide further and result in loss of vehicle control. Tap the brake pedal lightly.
- If you have an idea that there may be ice ahead (if you see vehicles ahead of you sliding, for example), downshift to a lower gear before you come onto the ice. The lower gear will force you to drive more slowly and give you better control of your vehicle.
- If your vehicle does begin to skid on the ice, turn the wheel in the direction of the skid. This should help to steer your vehicle back on the right track.
- Stay well behind the vehicle in front of you – this is definitely not the time to tailgate. Even if you feel confident that you know how to drive safely on ice, that does not mean the driver in front of you does. Be prepared in case other vehicles start to slide.
- Do not think you are invincible just because you drive a four-wheel drive truck or sports utility vehicle. Four-wheel drive vehicles have no advantage over other vehicles when it comes to driving on ice. Make sure you and your passengers are wearing their seat belts or other safety restraints.

Winter driving is always unpredictable, so be prepared for the unexpected.

HOUSING ACTIVITY

CDBG Housing Rehabilitation Program

Last month, three cities in the NIACOG region submitted CDBG Iowa Housing Fund grant applications to the Iowa Economic Development Authority (IEDA). These are the Cities of Charles City, Thompson, and Whittemore. All three of these communities would use the grant funds to carry out owner-occupied rehabilitation programs. The grant applications were for Program Year 2012. The grant awards are tentatively scheduled to be announced by the IEDA in mid-March. NIACOG staff assisted the three Cities in the preparation and submission of their 2012 grant applications. The 2012 application cycle marked the first time that Iowa Housing Fund grants were submitted online (through iowagrants.gov). However, all three communities adapted quite well to the new online requirements so that the "submit" button could be hit well before the online due date. NIACOG staff applauds their efforts in developing their respective grant applications.

HOME Partnership Program

The HOME Partnership Program (HOME), administered by the Iowa Finance Authority (IFA), and funded by the U.S. Department of HUD, provides funding for Homeownership Assistance, Rental New Construction, Rental Rehabilitation, and Tenant-based rental assistance.

In the recent past, several NIACOG cities have been awarded HOME funds in order to implement

Homeownership Assistance Programs. Likewise several developers in the NIACOG region have been awarded HOME funds in order to construct or rehabilitate rental apartment units. NIACOG staff assisted these cities and developers in administering their HOME grant programs. Unfortunately, the 2012 HOME funding allocation to the state of Iowa was cut 38% from the previous year. In the 2011 funding year, IFA awarded approximately 3.5 million for homebuyer assistance and rental projects in the state of Iowa. IFA announced last month that only \$1.8 million will be available to the state in 2012 for these two activities. Furthermore, of this amount only \$300,000 is available for rental new construction or rental rehabilitation. Therefore, it is likely that for the first time in several years, there will be no rental grant application activity at the NIACOG office. These grant application would have been due next month (on February 3, 2012).

It is also noted that IFA made several changes to the Homebuyer Assistance program, beginning with the 2012 HOME applications. All applicants to the program are now classified as sub recipients of IFA. As such, any City that is awarded homebuyer assistance funds cannot contract with a third party for general administrative services. In other words, all general administration must be done internally by city staff or employees. For most cities in the NIACOG region, this is not something that can be done without hiring additional/specialized staff. However, IFA announced that a local nonprofit 501(c) organization could act as the applicant/recipient on behalf of any city in the NIACOG region that would want funding in order to implement a Homeownership Assistance Program. NIACOG would certainly like to act in this capacity, but it does not have 501(c) status. As of the writing of this article, IFA still has not made a determination as to if NIACOG is an eligible applicant in the Homeownership Assistance Program. Given this, and the fact that grants applications are due on February 3, 2012, NIACOG will not be applying for 2012 Homeownership Assistance funds on behalf of any of its cities. It is also noted that there are significant sub recipient obligations in the event of homebuyer default of the principle residency rule at any time during the 10 year period of affordability. NIACOG has concluded at this time that the potential for this default is great enough so that it cannot assume the risk. Therefore, in addition to no HOME rental grant application activity at NIACOG in 2012, there will also be no HOME Homebuyer Assistance application activity.



Although there will be no 2012 HOME activity at the NIACOG office this year, NIACOG staff looks forward to assisting two recipient of 2011 HOME funds in the NIACOG region. Common Ground Duplexes, LLC was awarded \$480,000 in 2011 HOME assistance for the construction of 8 new apartment units in Osage. Liberty Ridge LLC was awarded \$240,000 in 2011 HOME assistance for the construction of 4 new apartment units in Riceville. NIACOG staff assisted both recipients last year in submitting their 2011 HOME applications and looks forward to assisting them in the administration of their projects. The IFA contracts will be awarded on both of these projects soon, at which time NIACOG will begin the environmental review process.



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CALANDER OF EVENTS

- Jan. 2nd – New Years Day Recognized- NIACOG Office Closed
- Jan. 9th – NIACOG Board Meeting – Bennigans Grill Clear Lake 6:00 p.m.
- Jan. 11th – Hazmat Meeting – NIACOG Office 1:30 p.m.
- Jan. 11th – Transportation Policy Board – NIACOG Office 2:30 p.m.
- Jan. 16th – Martin Luther King Jr. Day – NIACOG Office open
- Jan. 20th – North Iowa City Clerks – NIACOG Office 9:30 a.m.
- Feb. 13th – NIACOG Executive Committee – NIACOG Office 11:30 a.m.

NIACOG STAFF 641-423-0491		
Joe Myhre	Executive Director	Ext. 11
Kevin Kramer	Transit Administrator	Ext. 17
Jodi Wyborny	Administrative Assistant	Ext. 10
Chris Diggins	Local Assistance Director	Ext. 15
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Laurel Clement	Planner	Ext. 27
Dana Heimbuch	Community Dev. Planner	Ext. 28
Cindy Johnson	Transit Clerk	Ext. 30
Email – first letter of first name followed by last name @niacog.org (i.e. jmyhre@niacog.org)		

ATTENTION! ATTENTION!

Do you know of a company in your area that is growing, expanding, and adding employees? If so, they may be eligible for funding through the NIACOG Revolving Loan Fund (RLF). This is a great gap financing tool for companies trying to finance an expansion plan. Funding is limited to industrial expansion, and applicants must be from NIACOG's eight-county region. For more information, please contact the NIACOG office.

