

NIACOG NEWS

Vol. 22 No. 7

NORTH IOWA AREA COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

July-August 2011

ASSISTANCE TO FIREFIGHTERS GRANTS

The primary goal of the Assistance to Firefighters Grants (AFG) is to meet the firefighting and emergency response needs of fire departments and nonaffiliated emergency medical service organizations. Since 2001, AFG has helped firefighters and other first responders to obtain critically needed equipment, protective gear, emergency vehicles, training, and other resources needed to protect the public and emergency personnel from fire and related hazards.

NIACOG has assisted numerous fire departments in our region with these grants. No details on this year's application requirements or funding guidelines have been released except to expect the release in late June to early July. Examples of projects that have been funded in the past are listed below:

- Personal protective equipment, such as turnout gear and SCBA's
- Firefighting equipment, such as hoses, ventilation fans, thermal imagers, hand tools, and compressors
- Communication equipment that allow for interoperability, including new narrow banding communications equipment now being required
- New, used, or replacement of fire and rescue vehicles
- Basic training, such as all firefighters to Firefighter I and II levels
- EMS and rescue equipment for fire department-based EMS or rescue services

If you are interested in developing an application for the Assistance to Firefighters Grant program or have questions about a particular project, please contact the NIACOG office, 641-423-0491.



HOUSING ACTIVITY IN THE NIACOG REGION

2011 Home Program

The Iowa Finance Authority (IFA) Board of Directors announced, at its June board meeting, the approval of \$3.534 million to assist 11 homeownership and rental projects throughout the state. These were State Home Non-Tax Credit awards. Two of these projects were awarded to recipients in the NIACOG Region. Common Ground Duplexes, LLC., was awarded \$480,000 in HOME assistance for the construction of eight new apartment units in Osage. Liberty Ridge, LLC., was awarded \$240,000 in HOME assistance for the construction of four new apartment units in Riceville. The awards to both recipients were conditional awards. Both will receive their official award letters after IFA receives its 2011 HOME Partnership allocation from HUD.

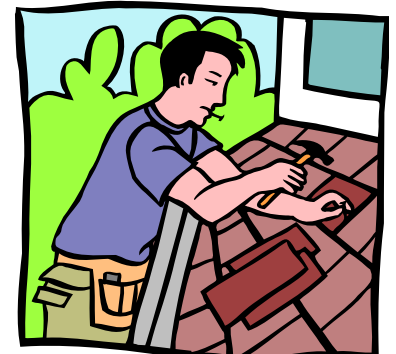
NIACOG staff assisted both recipients earlier this year in submitting their 2011 HOME applications and looks forward to assisting them with the administration of their projects.

Owner-Occupied Rehabilitation Programs Completed

In May, two cities in the NIACOG region, Forest City and Riceville, completed their owner-occupied rehabilitation programs. Both cities were awarded Iowa Housing Fund grants in 2008 from the Iowa Department of Economic Development (IDED) to assist in the rehabilitation of owner-occupied homes for low-to-moderate income households. Each city completed the rehabilitation of nine homes.

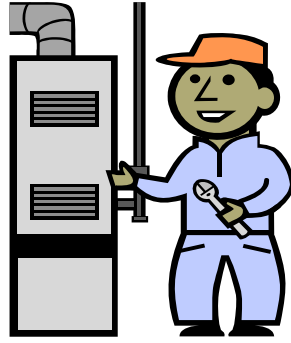
NIACOG staff assisted in the general administration and technical services administration of the Forest City and Riceville programs and is now completing the IDED close-out process for both cities.

Congratulations to these two cities for enhancing their affordable housing stock by providing nine homes for their low-to-moderate income residents that are now more safe, sound, and livable.



NIACOG HOUSING TRUST FUND

Sixty percent (60%) of Cerro Gordo County's housing stock was built more than 50 years ago, which plays a major role in the frequency and degree of housing repairs needed. Comparing the County with the U.S. as a whole, the County has twice as much housing over 70 years old. Although housing trust funds can assist with repairs, unlike the other counties in our region, Cerro Gordo County isn't currently covered by a housing trust fund. Floyd County has its own Housing Trust Fund which funds furnace repair. The remainder of our region is covered by the Homeward Housing Trust Fund based out of Clarion, which includes 11 counties.



In the interest of time, we will be developing the trust fund for Cerro Gordo County and will later invite the remaining counties in our region to join at their discretion. It should be noted that the State Housing Trust Fund rules limit counties to being a member of only one trust fund, so a respective county would have to opt out of their current trust fund to participate in the one we are establishing. We have seen the most need for a trust fund in three areas: emergency repairs, general housing rehabilitation, and rental housing repairs. The trust fund programs will target these major issues in the initial years of funding.

1. **Emergency Repairs** - We have seen the need for this program in our work with families who suddenly need roof replacement, need furnace replacement, have non-functioning plumbing/electrical, or can't access parts of their home due to a disability. Unfortunately, the homeowners simply don't have the assets or income to pay for the improvements or cover loan payments. The people who call most frequently with emergency repair and rehabilitation needs are the elderly, especially widows. Frequently, the widows were housewives who no longer have their spouse's pension or social security to fund monthly expenses.
2. **General Rehabilitation** - We have also seen a need for funds for general structural rehabilitation elements that sustain the area's housing stock and revitalize neighborhoods like window, siding, and door replacement. In addition to the benefits for needful residents, the proposed project will also revitalize neighborhoods. The 'broken window theory' is touted by law enforcement officers. The theory says that if one window is broken, it is much more likely that another window in the area will be broken because it is then seen as 'acceptable'. So, fixing up that broken window is important to the condition of the overall neighborhood. Likewise, if an adjacent home is in poor condition, the owner will be less likely to maintain his property much less improve it. However, we have also found the opposite to be true. If a home in a neighborhood is rehabilitated, other homeowners in the block will likely improve their properties as well.

3. **Rental Housing Rehabilitation** - Rental housing is often the most poorly maintained of the homes in our older neighborhoods. An incentive for landlords to make improvements would promote rehabilitation of these units and mitigate blighted homes for neighborhoods. It also creates an improved living environment for the rental occupants in our older neighborhoods who tend to have the lowest incomes and would benefit them by reducing the need of landlords to increase rents to cover rehabilitation costs.

Assistance is limited to housing with residents under 80% of the area median income. Matching dollars are required for homeowners over 60% of the area median income and for landlords. Assistance is capped at \$10,000 per applicant. We are now in the process of creating the housing trust fund which includes: obtaining funds to capitalize the trust fund, establishing the trust fund board and entity, developing partnerships with social service agencies for referrals, developing a housing assistance plan, and obtaining a tax exempt status from the IRS for the fund. A two-year budget of \$372,000 is estimated with funding sources potentially including: the State Housing Trust Fund, the Federal Home Loan Bank, Farmers State Bank, and several other local and national banks who are generously committing their community reinvestment dollars to assist with funding the match.

IOWANS HELPING IOWANS APPLICATION DEADLINE

Homeowners in the NIACOG region affected by the 2010 natural disasters had through June 30, 2011, to apply for housing, business and unmet needs financial assistance through the lowans Helping lowans program.

The lowans Helping lowans program is a three-tier initiative that was created in August 2010 to provide housing, small business, and unmet needs assistance in the 38 presidentially declared disaster areas for Individual Assistance after the storms and flooding of 2010.

NIACOG is administering the Housing Assistance portion of the program for Franklin and Kossuth Counties within our region. Housing assistance is available to homeowners whose homes were damaged by the 2010 natural disaster and are not proposed for buyouts. Homeowners may receive up to \$25,000 for the cost of eligible repair expenses for a disaster-affected home. Down payment assistance for the purchase price of a replacement home outside the 100-year flood plain is also available to homeowners whose homes were destroyed or damaged beyond repair. This assistance may not exceed the lesser of 25% of the purchase price of the home or \$25,000. Eligible homeowners may receive only one kind of assistance through this program. Homeowners must live in a county declared as a presidential disaster area for Individual Assistance and must have registered with FEMA and have been awarded FEMA housing assistance. In total, nearly 150 applications have been approved across the state, totaling more than \$1.8 million in awards for disaster affected homeowners.

REAP CITY PARKS & OPEN SPACE

The REAP City Parks and Open Space grant application is due August 15th. Money is available to cities through competitive grants. Three (3) city size categories have been established to assure grants are distributed to all sizes of cities. The categories are cities with populations: less than 2,000; from 2,000 to 25,000; and greater than 25,000. Annual grant amount ceilings are also in effect based on size of cities to help assure that funds are distributed for projects located throughout the state.

These grants are 100%, so local matching funds are not required. This grant program is extremely competitive. Funds are not available for single or multipurpose athletic fields, baseball or softball diamonds, tennis courts, golf courses, and other organized sport facilities. Swimming pools and playground equipment are also ineligible. Parkland expansion and multi-purpose recreation developments are typical projects funded under this REAP program.

The amount of REAP grant money available to a city in any one year depends on its population. The population categories and respective grant amount ceilings are shown below:

| Population | Maximum |
|-----------------|-----------|
| 0 - 1,000 | \$ 50,000 |
| 1,001 - 5,000 | \$ 75,000 |
| 5,001 - 10,000 | \$100,000 |
| 10,001 - 25,000 | \$125,000 |
| 25,001 - 50,000 | \$150,000 |
| 50,001 - 75,000 | \$200,000 |
| Over 75,000 | \$300,000 |

If your community is interested in applying for a REAP grant and would like assistance in the application preparation, please contact Dan Schroeder at the NIACOG office.

NEW ARRIVALS FOR CITY TRANSIT SERVICES

City transit services in Northwood and Lake Mills have recently taken delivery on the first "Flex Fuel" powered transit vehicles in the Region 2 Transit System. The vehicles are able to operate on either ethanol blended gasoline or E-85.

The 2011 Ford/EIDorado Aerolites are equipped with the following features: 16 seated or 2 wheelchairs and 10 seated passengers, 5.4 Triton FLEX FUEL engine – burns E85, all LED lighting, Hi-vis grab rails, Hawkeye back up detection, digital 2 way communications w/GPS locator, heavy duty transit seating, recycled plastic sub floor, Mor Ryde rubber spring suspension, high impact bumpers, 800lb wheelchair lift, front and rear "high mount" turn signals, rear "high mount" brake signals and rear and roof emergency exits. The vehicles were funded 80% by a grant through the Federal Surface Transportation Program. These funds are allocated to the transit system through the

Region 2 RPA Technical Committee and Policy Board. The remaining 20% local match was provided by NIACOG.

Also, Charles City Transit has just received delivery on three 2011 Ford / EIDorado Aerolite buses. These 25 foot buses are equipped with ethanol burning V-10 engines, but are otherwise equipped as the other buses and have greater seating capacity. These vehicles were acquired through an 83% grant from the Federal Transit Administration Capital Investment Project. These vehicles are replacing older units from six to twelve years old with as much as 200,000 miles on them that were in service in these cities.



(Kevin Kramer NIACOG Transit Administrator, Randy Severson Northwood Mayor, and John Anderson Northwood Bus Driver)

POPULAR QUESTIONS SPRINGING UP

Trees and fence's; it's summer time and questions such as these tend to arise every year. Chapter 359A of the Iowa Code is entitled Fences' and contains our state's laws regarding fence construction, maintenance, and fencing disputes. It also details the interesting role that cities and counties play in resolving controversies over fences. Tree-trimming also has its number of questions come up in the spring. The law regarding trees as nuisances is in section 657.2 of the Iowa Code. County government's power over residential trees is outlined in section 331.384; the cities power, as well as the homeowner's responsibility, can be found in code sections 364.12-364.13B. Willful injury to trees is covered in section 658.4. Please caution your citizens to always check the city code (if their property is within the city limits) or the county code (if they live outside the city limits) for any local ordinances concerning fences and trees that are more restrictive than state laws.

LEAD PAINT LAW WARNING

Starting September 1, 2011, the Iowa Department of Public Health is going to start enforcing the laws in regards to lead-based paint. The laws state that anyone, including volunteers, who do work to pre-1978 homes or child-occupied facilities, must be certified as a lead-safe renovator. There are very few exceptions to this law. Be sure to check to see if your community's painting program is compliant before you start applying the paint. If you have questions feel free to contact Kane Young with IDPH at 800-972-2026, or www.idph.state.ia.us/



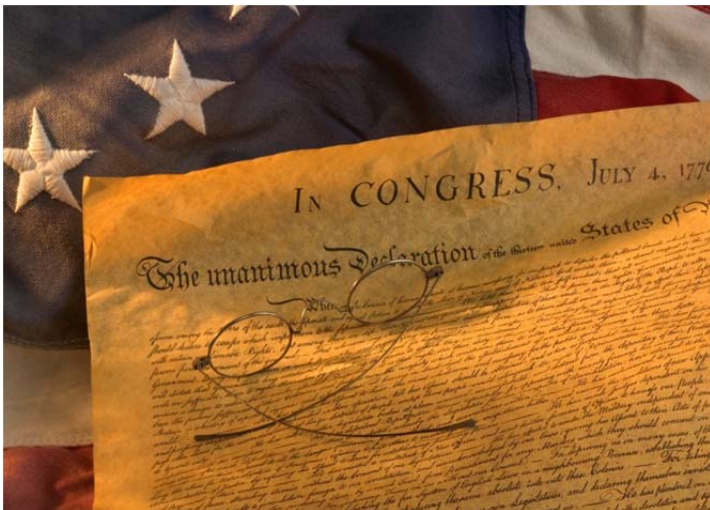
North Iowa Area Council of Governments
525 6th Street SW
Mason City, IA 50401-5058
641-423-0491 fax: 641-423-1637
www.niacog.org

Non-Profit Org.
US Postage
PAID
 Mason City, Iowa
 50401
 Permit No. 22
Return Service
Requested

Place Mailing Label Here

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- July 4 – NIACOG Offices Closed
- July 11 – Executive Board Meeting, NIACOG Office - 11:30pm
- July 13 – HAZMAT Meeting, NIACOG Office – 1:30pm
- July 13 – Transportation Policy Board, NIACOG Office – 2:30pm
- Aug. 8 – NIACOG Board of Directors Meeting, Bennigan's Grill, Clear Lake, 6:00pm



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 |
| Steve Wendt | Community Dev. Planner | Ext. 13 |
| Dale Moe | Lead Mechanic | Ext. 24 |
| Teresa Collins | Operations Manager | Ext. 22 |
| Bonnie Lettow | Fiscal Officer | Ext. 12 |
| Myrtle Nelson | Senior Planner | Ext. 16 |
| Dan Schroeder | Regional Planner | Ext. 14 |
| 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.