
NIACOG

NEWS

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FREE ~ 2005 Iowa Code Books ~ FREE

The Second Judicial District recently contacted our office asking if we had any interest in several copies of the 2005 Iowa Code. We accepted their offer and said we would notify our member governments as to any interest they might have in a hard bound copy of the Code. As such, we have five complete sets of the 2005 Iowa Code and are available at no cost on a first come first serve basis. Although they are technically outdated and you can go on-line to find the 2007 Code, they are a handy resource. If you are interested, simply contact our office and we will reserve a set for you!

Assistance to Fire Fighter Grant Program application period postponed

The grant application period was set to open on March 5, 2007, but the application period start has been temporarily postponed. The United States Department of Homeland Security is in the process of finalizing the Fiscal Year 2007 Assistance to Firefighter Grants guidance and application review.

For more information on applying for the firefighter and emergency response grant opportunities, please contact the NIACOG Office.

IFA Announces New State Revolving Fund Financing Option

Iowa recently adopted new water quality standards to comply with the Clean Water Act, which will require many communities to make improvements to their wastewater systems. The Iowa Finance Authority (IFA) is pleased to announce a new, extended financing term; one more way to help communities become compliant without causing undue financial hardship on their citizens.

The Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF) provides the lowest cost funds for financing wastewater infrastructure projects. IFA and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources jointly administer the program, which loaned nearly \$57 million to 25 Iowa communities in fiscal year 2006.

Community leaders around Iowa rely on the CWSRF because it offers a low 3 percent interest rate and does not require a reserve. Now the CWSRF is even more attractive, as the Environmental Protection Agency recently approved IFA to offer 30-year terms on CWSRF loans; previously communities could borrow money for a maximum of 20 years. Any public wastewater system can apply for a 30-year term, and there are no income requirements. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) does stipulate that the useful life of the project, as determined by each city's engineer, must match the loan term. This option is also only available for communities issuing revenue bonds for Clean Water or Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loans. Iowa law limits the term of general obligation debt to 20 years.

How can cities benefit from the 30-year loan? The extended financing terms can lower a community's annual debt service, which translates into lower monthly utility bills for ratepayers.

Here is an idea of how much a community can save - an average community borrowing \$1 million for wastewater infrastructure would save \$267,000 over 20 years if they borrowed through the CWSRF instead of borrowing on their own. If the term is extended to 30 years, the savings increase to \$390,000 compared to a 30-year bond sold in the market.

The Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF) also offers 30-year terms for loans to public drinking water systems specifically to "disadvantaged communities. Federal regulations stipulate a disadvantaged community has at least 51 percent of the community's population at low-to-moderate income. The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program uses the same criteria because many applicants seek funds from both CDBG and the DWSRF.

The Iowa Legislature created The Iowa Finance Authority (IFA), the state's housing finance agency, in 1975 to undertake programs to assist in the attainment of housing for low-and moderate-income Iowans. IFA also administers the State Revolving Fund (SRF) in cooperation with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. The SRF assists communities with the costs of upgrading or constructing local wastewater and drinking water infrastructure projects. IFA's mission is to finance, administer, advance and preserve affordable housing and to promote community and economic development for Iowans. It is a self-supporting public agency. To learn more about the SRF, visit www.iowaFinanceAuthority.gov and click on the State Revolving Fund link.

Iowa Housing Fund Awards Announced

Last month, the Iowa Department of Economic Development announced the Iowa Housing Fund Awards for Program Year 2007. The Iowa Housing Fund provides funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in order to expand or retain the supply of decent and affordable housing for low-income Iowans. Eligible Activities under the Iowa Housing Fund include owner-occupied housing rehabilitation, rental housing rehabilitation and rental new construction (including transitional housing), and tenant-based rental assistance.

IDED received 116 Housing Fund applications throughout the State of Iowa for Program Year 2007, and 41 were awarded funds. The total amount awarded for these 41 projects was \$12.04 million. Of this total, \$1.53 million was awarded to five applicants who were assisted by NIACOG in the preparation and submission of their applications. These successful applicants from the NIACOG region were:

Lake Mills - \$199,875 (Assistance for 5 first time homebuyers); Sheffield - \$278,000 (Rehabilitation of eight single family homes); Thompson - \$278,000 (Rehabilitation of eight single family homes); Whittemore - \$278,000 (Rehabilitation of eight single family homes); Common Ground Duplexes LLC - \$500,000 (Construction of 10 new rental units in St Ansgar)

For other communities and other interested applicants the NIACOG region who are considering applying for Iowa Housing Fund assistance for Program Year 2008, please contact the NIACOG staff immediately. It's not too early to begin the grant application planning process.

Iowa's Living Roadways Community Visioning Program

For the past decade, the Visioning Program has provided opportunities for Iowa communities with populations of fewer than 10,000 to access professional landscape planning and design assistance. Funds administered by the Iowa DOT are used for the program, which focuses on transportation-related community enhancements.

Only twelve communities were selected statewide for the program. In 2006, the communities of Algona and Northwood took part in the Visioning Program and are featured in the 2006 Iowa's Living Roadways Community Visioning Program annual report. This year's participants include the cities of Manly and Marble Rock. The Community Visioning component of the Iowa's Living Roadways program is a process that encourages visionary and strategic thinking about community-wide landscape improvements that enhance transportation corridors. Volunteers representing a cross-section of their communities work together to create a new vision by beautifying entranceways, roadsides, recreational trails and other highly visible areas.

The program provides planning and landscape design assistance including an on-site community design workshop and computer-aided visualizations. At the end of the visioning process, the community receives a series of display boards that include conceptual drawings of what finished projects could look like. Implementation strategies are then developed that allow the community to carry out projects, step by step, as resources become available.

Copies of the 2006 Iowa Living Roadways Community Visioning Program Annual Report highlighting the communities of Algona and Northwood and the 2007 visioning applications are available at www.treesforever.org or at the NIACOG office.



DIRECTOR'S NOTES

There has been a lot of discussion this year about the condition of Iowa's transportation infrastructure and the need for additional funding. With nearly 114,000 miles of highways, roads and streets in our state, it is difficult to fathom nearly \$2 billion spent annually maintaining our transportation infrastructure. Throw into the mix 31.5 billion vehicle-miles driven each year and you begin to understand the pressure put on our transportation system.

A recent report on Iowa's public roads system describes in detail several challenges Iowa is facing which collectively are contributing to the transportation infrastructure problems. With increased traffic demand and freight movements, particularly with the increased biofuels production, an aging infrastructure and deferred investment in maintenance and preservation activities, increased construction and maintenance costs resulting in a loss of buying power not to mention flattened revenues (last fuel tax increase was in 1989), one can begin to see the challenges that lie ahead.

The road use tax fund study identified the need for a minimum of \$200 million per year of new revenues to support and enhance the critical roadway needs of the state over the next twenty years. I commend the NIACOG Board of Directors, who, at their March meeting adopted a resolution supporting the road use tax study and requested the Iowa Legislature to enact changes to the Iowa Code that will generate a minimum of \$200 million in new revenues in support of the public road system that will directly benefit our cities and counties.

I personally don't think the general public realizes what impact a small increase in the per-gallon tax on motor vehicle fuels will have on increasing revenue. Each additional cent will generate approximately \$22 million annually. Do you really think you will notice a few extra cents at the pump when we have seen fuel prices fluctuate the way they have over the past year? I'm also a big supporter of increasing the registration fee for pickup trucks so they become equivalent to automobiles (i.e. vehicle weight and value). This would generate approximately \$56.6 million annually, if applied to all pickup trucks. Why shouldn't pickup trucks and automobiles be treated equally? Don't they drive on the same roads and have a similar impact (or worse) as automobiles? Plain and simple-this is an equity issue and needs to be addressed.

Our local legislators are doing a terrific job, they're easily accessible and wanting to hear from their constituents, particularly when talking about raising taxes. Again, I commend the action of our Board of Directors and encourage our membership to do the same. Contact your legislators and let them know that you support changes to the Iowa Code that will generate new revenues in support of our public road system.

REMINDER - Passenger Assistance Training. "Train-the-Trainer"

The Iowa DOT will be sponsoring a Passenger Assistance Techniques 'train-the-trainer' course to be held on June 25-27, 2007. The training will be held at the North Iowa Joint Use Transit Facility in Mason City. For more information, contact: Teresa Collins, Operations Manager by phone (641) 423-0491 ext.22, or e-mail: tcollins@niacog.org

Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)

The following are summaries of recently submitted CDBG projects that NIACOG staff prepared and the funding results.

City of Carpenter - The City of Carpenter requested \$130,000 for the construction and installation of a sanitary sewer collection and treatment system with a total project cost of \$975,000. The \$130,000 request will be matched with \$345,000 in USDA grant and loan funds as well as a \$500,000 Iowa Watershed Review Board grant awarded to the City in the Summer of 2006.

Carpenter was not funded based on IDED's assertion that the community can afford to fund this project without CDBG dollars.

City of Scarville - The City of Scarville requested \$97,000 for the construction and installation of a municipal water system at a total project cost of \$460,800. This is part of a larger project of Xenia Rural Water which is proposing to build a water treatment plant to serve the Worth and Winnebago county areas. The overall project cost for the treatment plant and distribution system is estimated at nearly \$2.5 million dollars.

Scarville was not funded as this project is reliant on the completion of the proposed Xenia Rural Water project, including a water treatment plant in Worth County which will provide treated water to the community.

City of Lake Mills - The City of Lake Mills requested \$500,000 for the construction and installation of a water treatment system and water main replacement with a total project cost of over \$1.4 million dollars. The project will provide treated water to the community and create redundancy in the system in the event of a failure of the other treatment system.

Lake Mills was not funded as according to IDED, the need for this project did not rate as high as other projects being considered.

City of Nora Springs - The City of Nora Spring requested \$500,000 for the construction and installation of a water treatment system and water main replacement with a total project cost of over \$1.1 million dollars. The existing treatment system has experienced corrosion which will lead to failure of the system.

Congratulations!! Nora Springs was funded at the requested amount of \$500,000.

City of Kanawha - The City of Kanawha requested \$140,000 for the replacement of 2" and 4" water main with 6" and 8" water main to be able to provide enough pressure to support the fire sprinkler system in the Kanawha Home, a senior living/nursing home facility with a total project cost of \$240,000. Without the new watermain, the facility will not be able to provide fire suppression as mandated by the state Fire Marshall's office.

Kanawha was not awarded funds as IDED determined that the need for this project did not rate as high as other projects being considered.

Cerro Gordo County/Comprehensive Systems, Inc. - Cerro Gordo County requested \$500,000 on behalf of Comprehensive Systems, Inc., to be able to purchase and renovate the facility currently utilized by Comprehensive Systems, Inc., with a total project cost of nearly \$1.4 million dollars. Comprehensive Systems, Inc. is currently leasing a portion of the facility and has invested a substantial amount of money to improve the facility for staff and clients. This project will allow Comprehensive Systems, Inc. to be able to utilize the whole facility and expand client services and activities.

Cerro Gordo County/Comprehensive Systems, Inc. was not funded as IDED determined that the need for the project did not rate as high as other projects being considered.

As can be seen above, only one of the very worthy projects submitted was awarded CDBG funding. Part of this was due to the ever decreasing amount of CDBG funds available. Many projects were turned down or had their awards reduced from what they were originally asking. This also illustrates the need to begin planning for next year's application cycle. The more planning and preparation, the better your chances for success. Some cities have already contacted NIACOG about preparing applications, and we are very anxious to begin the process. For those of you that are considering an application, NIACOG staff would be more than happy to assist you. Please contact the NIACOG office as soon as possible so that we can begin the application process.

Proposed Changes to the REAP Program

For over two decades, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources' Resource Enhancement and Protection Act (REAP) program has annually provided nearly \$2 million a year to cities in Iowa for outdoor recreation and natural resources development through a competitive grant process.

Changes to the grant process for 2008 are being considered. The proposal would modify the scoring criteria for REAP grants, and require a county REAP plan be submitted with the grant application. We will keep our membership apprised of any changes as we become aware of them.



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NIACOG Calendar of Events

APRIL

- 9- NIACOG Board of Dir., Bennagin's Clear Lake, 6:00 pm
- 10- Iowa Assoc. Of Reg Councils RLF Conf., Ames IA
- 11- HazMat Mtg., NIACOG office 1:30 pm
- 11- Transportation Policy Board Mtg., NIACOG, 3:00 pm
- 20- Top of Iowa Tourism, NIACOG office, 11:30 am

MAY

- 14- NIACOG Board of Dir., Whitetails, Marble Rock, 6:00 pm
- 18- N Iowa City Clerks Assoc., NIACOG Office, 9:30 am
- 28- Memorial Day Holiday, NIACOG Office Closed

NIACOG STAFF

Joe Myhre	Executive Director
Chris Digginz	Local Assistance Director
Kevin Kramer	Transit Administrator
Joshua Kohlhaas	Regional Planner
Steve Wendt	Community Development Planner
Jodi Wyborny	Administrative Assistant
Dale Moe	Lead Mechanic
Teresa Collins	Operations Manager

Busing Grants Now Available

What is a Bus Grant? - The Silos & Smokestacks National Heritage Area (SSNHA) Bus Grant Program is a grant initiative designed to help schools in the Heritage Area fund the transportation costs associated with field study trips to designated SSNHA partner sites. The program supports sites, attractions and events to help tell the story of American agriculture. The grant funds 75% of the total amount of transportation to and from the school and the selected SSNHA partner site for the field study trip, not to exceed \$350.

Who is Eligible? - Administrators or teachers who are employed by an accredited Pre K-12 public, private, or charter school within the Heritage Area are encouraged to apply. Only one grant per school building will be awarded.

When is the Grant Cycle? - The cycle begins August 1, 2007 and will last until the funding is depleted or until May 1, 2008. Grants must be used for the proposed field trip transportation costs in the current school year.

How Will Grant be Awarded? - Grants are awarded on a first-received, first-funded basis and must be received at least six weeks prior to the scheduled field study trip.

Where Do I Apply? - Download the application form at www.silosandsmokestacks.org or request an application by contacting Lynne Wagner at (319) 234-4567 or lwagner@silosandsmokestacks.org.