

# Flu shots 'rehearsal' for COVID vaccine

by **Rachel Looker**  
staff writer

It's that time of year again — the start of flu season — and this year, public health officials already have a lot on their plates.

As COVID-19 cases climb in recent weeks at the same time flu activity peaks, counties are fighting to ward off a "twin-demic" situation battling two viruses at once.

While counties encourage residents to receive a flu shot every year, getting a vaccine now may be more important to avoid overwhelming health-care systems. Counties are using this opportunity to test mass distribution plans for a possible COVID-19 vaccine on the horizon.

Yolo County, Calif. recently held its first mass drive-thru clinic to administer flu vaccinations for county residents.

Emergency Services Manager Dana Carey said there's a prioritization to get as many individuals vaccinated for seasonal influenza every year, but with medical resources already focused on COVID-19 response, the county is encour-

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**Emily Seibert inserts her ballot into an official Salt Lake County, Utah ballot drop box Tuesday, Oct. 20. Counties across the country are seeing large turnout in early voting for the Nov. 3 presidential election. Photo by Rick Bowmer, Associated Press**

# Counties grapple with fall COVID spike

by **Mary Ann Barton**  
editor

Counties in nearly half the country are battling with a spike in COVID-19 cases, according to the latest updates last week from the Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center.

In Grand Forks County, N.D., a bump from 532 active cases in August to 632 last week moved the county from a self-described "orange" high risk level to the "red" severe risk category. County health workers' biggest challenge? Identifying people who may have come in contact

with those who are infected.

"This is really going to tax our capabilities to make sure that we reach everybody and their contacts," county public health director Debbie Swanson told the *Grand Forks Herald*.

The uptick in cases this fall is also impacting some medical facilities. In Mecklenburg

County, N.C., Dr. Raynard Washington, the county's deputy health director, said the county was seeing a strain on its hospitals. "We've seen this happening really quickly — really quickly. A number of the hospitals in the counties around us have reached capacity, and they're starting to divert

patients from their county to Mecklenburg County."

County health inspections of businesses are more important than ever, but made even more difficult when businesses are trying to stay afloat. In Allegheny County, Pa., the county was

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# More than 1,000 engage in NACo Virtual Federal Policy Summit

by **Rachel Looker**  
staff writer

The coronavirus pandemic and lack of in-person events didn't stop county officials from meeting virtually last week to discuss pressing challenges facing county governments at NACo's first-ever virtual Federal Policy Summit.

NACo members met Oct. 21 and Oct. 22 to hear from policy experts, NACo leaders, members of Congress, federal agency partners and other thought leaders on a wide range of topics stretching beyond the COVID-19 response.

More than 1,000 participants registered for the two-day summit which included 14 hours of

programming with sessions on federalism, intergovernmental partnerships, elections, infrastructure, broadband, health and human services and disaster response, among others.

NACo President and Boone County, Ky. Judge/Executive Gary Moore kicked off the pro-

*See SUMMIT page 2*



# FDA offers updates for COVID-19 vaccine next steps

by **Blaire Bryant**  
and **Sarah Gimont**

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has issued guidance on the conditions under which a COVID-19 vaccine would be granted an emergency use authorization (EUA). The Oct. 6 guidance outlines both expectations and guidance for vaccine manufacturers while also providing the public with an understanding of the process by which the vaccine will be evaluated for authorization or approval.

The guidance provides counties with essential information to instill public confidence in a COVID-19 vaccine, which will be critical to the success of any distribution strategy. As the providers of frontline health care, counties are critical to the success of any vaccine distribution

strategy.

Currently, five out of six vaccine candidates are in advanced-stage clinical trials, though trials sponsored by Johnson & Johnson and AstraZeneca/Oxford are currently paused. The FDA and vaccine manufacturers are anticipated to expand trials later this year based on the “immune correlates of protection,” or the clinical performance of the vaccine and its ability to provide protection from infection.

State and local vaccine distribution strategies are beginning to come together, although the Trump administration does not have a specific timeline for vaccine development because authorization will depend on data availability as well as the complexity of applications. On Oct. 16, each state submitted the first iteration of their vaccine distribution

plans to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). CDC is expected to make executive summaries available for each plan but is unlikely to publish them in their entirety, given their evolving nature (though some states have already put their plans online).

Vaccine distribution is likely to take a phased approach that includes the following steps:

**Phase 1:** A potentially limited supply of COVID-19 vaccine doses

**Phase 2:** Large number of vaccine doses available

**Phase 3:** Sufficient supply of vaccine doses for entire population.

Counties are integral to the success of each of these phases because they are responsible for vaccine distribution and leveraging community partnerships to share information and identifying critical populations.

Distributing the vaccine is expected to be resource-intensive for state and local governments. Technological concerns are likely to be consistent and may put a financial strain on counties, testing county resources. In addition, most vaccines will require two dosages, meaning tracing at the local level will play a large role in the distribution strategy. While the CDC has provided states with approximately \$200 million in planning grants, state health officials have estimated that over \$8 billion will be needed in total for planning and distribution efforts.

Confidence in a vaccine will be essential to ensuring equitable and widespread uptake. CDC’s strategy to build confidence in a vaccine takes a three-pronged approach:

1. Reinforcing trust by regularly

sharing clear and accurate information

2. Empowering healthcare providers to recommend vaccination to their patients

3. Engaging community stakeholders.

The CDC plans to support local, state and regional planning for the successful implementation of a national vaccine distribution program. However, county public health officials must spearhead tailored messaging, community engagement and culturally sensitive appeals at the local level to ensure equitable utilization of the vaccine.

For more information, visit NACo’s COVID-19 resource hub at <https://www.naco.org/resources/covid19>. **CN**

*Blaire Bryant is an associate legislative director and Sarah Gimont is a legislative assistant.*

## County officials come together to hear about federal resources at Policy Summit

From **SUMMIT** page 1

gram.

“Our goal is to provide you



### TOP 6 TURKEY PRODUCING STATES

1. Minnesota
2. North Carolina
3. Arkansas
4. Virginia
5. Missouri
6. Indiana

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

with the tools to access federal resources designed to help you and achieve your priority at the local level,” Moore said.

NACo held the summit on the NACo Knowledge Network, a new platform which features virtual content such as town halls, membership calls, webinars and live events.

The platform provides a virtual forum to connect county officials. Members can create a profile to use for future virtual events.

Participants tuned into live sessions on the platform’s “main stage” which featured an accompanying attendee chat lounge for members to communicate and interact with each other in real time.

Attendees also visited NACo’s “backstage” to network with one another, federal policy partners and other thought leaders.

During the summit’s kickoff,



**NACo President and Boone County, Ky. Judge/Executive Gary Moore welcomes attendees to NACo’s Federal Policy Summit.**

Rep. Gerry Connolly (D-Va.) discussed the importance of local government funding and urged county officials to make their voices heard to their representatives on Capitol Hill.

“We need your advocacy because the local government perspective is sorely lacking in Congress,” he said.

“Everyone knows the critical services your local governments are being required

to provide in order to stem the tide of this crisis — going through bankruptcy is not an option, legally or practically, and cutting critical services is also not an option if we can avoid it,” said Connolly, who is a former county supervisor and chair of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors in Virginia.

Participants also heard from NACo CEO/Executive Director

Matt Chase on the first day of the summit. Chase shared NACo’s focus on ensuring federal COVID-19 aid provides a fair and simple formula for local response and litigation.

“Counties are on the frontlines protecting our communities and residents from the COVID-19 virus and dealing with the economic fallout with mounting unemployment, business closures, growing mental health and substance abuse issues and challenges with local school openings as well as our local business re-openings,” Chase said.

“We are counties, we are a family,” Moore said. “We’re united in our mission to strengthen America’s counties.” **CN**

*Look for in-depth coverage of sessions from the Federal Policy Summit in the Nov. 9 issue of County News.*



# 'This is not over yet, we're in this for the long haul'

From COVID SPIKE page 1

put in a tough position of having to close several bars for not complying with safety rules, as its health inspectors checked for compliance.

Judgement calls about openings and closings between state and county officials due to safety concerns are also challenging. Prince George's County, Md. County Executive Angela Alsobrooks called for a branch office of the state department of motor vehicles to be closed after an employee died from COVID and four others there tested positive. "I'd like to see it shut down until we can make everyone there comfortable including the employees," she said. But the state is keeping it open, saying it is following all safety protocols.

The virus has hit close to

home for some county officials. Prince George's County, Md. Councilmember Deni Taveras has seen the virus ravage her extended family with eight members dying and 14 becoming infected. "I'm concerned this is not over yet and we're in this for the long haul," she told WJLA-TV.

And while some counties are seeing an uptick in the virus this fall and possibly more cases on the way come winter, Dr. Malcolm Butler, health officer for Chelan and Douglas counties in Washington state, noted that there are signs that mask-wearing and social distancing are working there, especially at schools and in offices. But the area is still seeing a spike in cases, he noted.

"So if transmissions are not happening in the schools, and not happening (very much)

## SPEEDREAD

THE TOP 10 COUNTIES BY NUMBER OF COVID-19 DEATHS, PER JOHNS HOPKINS:

|                             |       |
|-----------------------------|-------|
| Los Angeles County .....    | 6,912 |
| Queens Borough, N.Y.....    | 6,058 |
| Kings County, Calif.....    | 5,729 |
| Cook County, Ill.....       | 5,369 |
| Bronx Borough, N.Y.....     | 4,048 |
| Miami-Dade County, Fla..... | 3,561 |
| Maricopa County, Ariz.....  | 3,519 |
| Wayne County, Mich. ....    | 3,025 |
| Harris County, Texas.....   | 2,735 |
| New York Borough.....       | 2,545 |

at work sites, where must it be happening?" Butler asked. "It must be happening in private homes or private gatherings or rallies or churches or parks or somewhere that masking and other safety measures may be relaxed."

With fatigue setting in from people losing their jobs or working from home, businesses being shut down and schools being closed or families managing new routines, people need to think about their mental health and self-care, he said.

Nationwide, there have been more than 8 million people infected and more than 220,000 who have died from COVID-19, since the pandemic began. As of mid-October, California, Florida and Texas surpass New York for total cases to date, though New York still has the highest death total. **CN**

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## Mass drive-thru flu shot distributions test plans for disbursing COVID-19 vaccines

From VACCINE page 1

aging preventative measures to ensure they're not stretching resources too thin.

"We're really trying to conserve our medical capacity by doing every single mitigation effort that we can, and the seasonal influenza vaccination would be considered a mitigation effort against seasonal flu," she said.

While the county has practiced plans to distribute a vaccine or pill in the case of a bioterrorism event such as anthrax, most of the plans take place in walkthrough types of settings such as gymnasiums or other open spaces.

The county held its first mass point of dispensing influenza vaccines via drive-thru and will hold more to test its plans for future drive-thru processes.

Carey described the added complications of a drive-thru clinic including additional equipment and added labor of setting up, running and tearing down the drive-thru all in one day. Other complications include on-site operations such as blocking the traffic to avoid impeding city roadways.

"It's a really labor-intensive thing, but it allows us to move

those resources pretty much anywhere we need them to be so we're testing some of the larger sites," Carey said.

The mass drive-thru clinics allow the county to test a variety of scenarios for future mass vaccine distributions.

This year, the county tested a digital system that calls volunteer staff the night before a clinic to remind them about their commitment and what time they need to arrive.

The county tests other procedures such as patient forms and advertising methodologies used to ask participants how they heard about a clinic to best reach the public.

The county will also be testing how to transport vaccines, Carey said, adding that the COVID-19 vaccine may need to be transported at a certain temperature which requires specific logistics to ensure it stays within the proper temperature range.

For this year's drive-thru flu clinics, she said they are testing the best ways to gather more contact information from participants. With the COVID-19 vaccine possibly coming in a two-shot series, the county may need to contact patients to come back for the second



Cars line up for their drivers to receive an influenza vaccine at Yolo County, Calif.'s first mass drive-thru vaccine distribution at the West Sacramento City Hall. Photo courtesy of Yolo County, Calif.

vaccine.

"It's definitely training hundreds and hundreds of personnel on how we may have to do it," she said.

During the first mass drive-thru held in October, the county administered nearly 300 flu vaccinations in about two-and-a-half hours. The drive-thru closed early because they ran out of vaccines. While Carey doesn't attribute

this to the coronavirus, she said the county has been heavily advertising the flu vaccine drive-thrus to have more people to test the system.

"We want to make sure our designs work and that our staffing plans work and it's really hard to test something that large without having the patient throughput needed," she said.

Carey said her message to

county residents is no different than every year and stressed the importance of receiving a flu shot.

"It protects you, it protects your family, it protects the people around you and," she noted, "especially this year it'll help alleviate some of the stress on our medical system so that we can keep dealing with COVID side by side with the flu season." **CN**



## SPONSORED CONTENT

# 10 Ways to Boost the Bottom Line Through County Real Estate

Across the United States, battling the COVID-19 pandemic has stressed county government workers and strained public resources. Ensuring employee and public health is a continuing priority, as counties seek ways to conserve resources and support constituent services. One of a county's most valuable resources is its real estate—and it can be a powerful tool for reducing costs, preserving vital programs and even generating revenues.

Across the country, local governments are transforming their real estate management with innovative new approaches to free up resources for the mission of government. At the same time, non-traditional means of revenue generation and economic development can help you conserve resources and preserve vital programs. By adopting some of these strategies today, your county will become better positioned to implement long-term strategies for tomorrow.

**1. Analyze your real estate portfolio to uncover hidden costs.** Your portfolio data, including facilities management, operating and maintenance expenses, will reveal hidden costs beyond mortgage or lease payments—and savings opportunities. For example, learning that a building consumes an above-average amount of energy is an opportunity to determine the root cause of the large energy expense.

**2. Reduce excess space.** How much space do you own and lease today? Your portfolio data will show you. How much will you need in the one, two or five years ahead? If you continue remote work policies adopted during the pandemic, you could reduce occupancy costs by as much as 10% to 20%.

**3. Reduce leasing costs.** Nationwide, space and sublease vacancies are growing by leaps and bounds, creating a tenants' market. You may be able to "blend-and-extend" early lease renewals, extending the lease length in return for a lower rent rate, additional capital improvements, fewer rentable square feet or other concessions.

**4. "Mothball" buildings that are temporarily underutilized**



**or unoccupied.** If your county government has adopted remote work during the pandemic, your portfolio may include facilities that are currently underutilized. Data-driven analysis can help you decide whether to fully pause certain buildings for the time being. To keep mothballed buildings functional, one option is to use outsourced facilities management services instead of full-time staff.

**5. Leverage your property data to uncover space utilization opportunities.** By combining your real estate data with business intelligence and analytics tools, you can open the door to continuous portfolio savings through smart space utilization. While some upfront investment may be required, you also have the option of accessing leading real estate technologies through a real estate service provider.

**6. Leverage variable capital project management.** By using outsourced project/program management and development services, you can avoid ongoing capital staffing costs when major projects are put on hold for economic or political reasons. When a project is primed to move forward, a private sector partner can help you procure qualified contractors, monitor contracts and manage the

project on a limited-term basis.

**7. Reduce facility management costs through outsourcing.** Facilities management (FM) outsourcing can be a powerful means of achieving savings and flexibility. Savings arise not only from greater efficiency and volume purchasing, but also transferring long-term pension liabilities to the private sector partner. One pioneering state has saved more than \$50 million over five years through FM outsourcing. One important aspect of the partnership is that the FM service provider hired the majority of the state's FM personnel to continue working in their facilities.

**8. Leverage public-private partnerships (P3s) to fund infrastructure.** In the new normal of dramatic fiscal constraints, a P3 offers a creative option for funding and delivering planned core infrastructure projects, while transferring risk to a private sector partner who assumes responsibility for long-term maintenance and capital renewal. Government organizations are using revenue-producing P3s to invest in toll roads, bridges, parking facilities, airports and other infrastructure projects. Typically a government agency receives a lump sum, annual payments or a share of

revenue streams in exchange for allowing a private sector partner to build, operate and maintain an asset.

Fairfax County, Va., for instance, has forged multiple P3s to improve public amenities and infrastructure, support transit-oriented development and provide workforce, affordable and senior housing in mixed-use communities—while saving more than \$2 million to direct toward ensuring quality of life for all.

**9. Monetize your real estate assets.** Monetizing your real estate assets can create additional revenue streams and unlock capital for alternate uses, sustainability and other policy goals. Infrastructure options include leasing land or rooftops to solar power developers, leasing air rights or renting out space for telecommunication uses such as antennas. For example, one of the five largest U.S. transit agencies, Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority is partnering with a solar energy provider to install 17 acres of photovoltaic solar panels at four Metrorail stations.

**10. Revitalize underutilized land through ground leases.** Whether it's a vacant piece of land, an aging and neglected building or a site better suited to

other public uses, a legacy real estate asset can become a drain on resources. By ground leasing an underutilized asset to a private sector developer, you can generate long-term rental income, jobs, property and sales tax revenues—while protecting your mission and serving the public.

Thriving during and after the pandemic will test county governments as never before—and new real estate strategies can help bridge the gap between surviving and thriving. There's no time like a fiscal challenge to spur new thinking and reimagine county government real estate. To learn more about how real estate can help you reduce costs and recapture revenue, visit [www.us.jll.com/government](http://www.us.jll.com/government).

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# Ruling in Georgia sheds light on home rule authority

by **Rachel Looker**  
staff writer

A judge's ruling in favor of Glynn County, Ga. has shed light on Georgia's home rule authority and the constitutional inherent powers of counties throughout the state.

Glynn County commissioners filed a lawsuit against the Georgia Secretary of State and members of the Glynn County Board of Elections at the end of August. The lawsuit challenged the constitutionality of two state Senate bills that would put the fate of the county police department in voters' hands.

The first bill allows constituents in the county to vote on a referendum to choose to abolish the county police department and turn control over to the sheriff. The second bill called for the Glynn County election superintendent to conduct an election for voters to approve or reject the abolishment referendum for the county police department.

Policing rights are an inher-

ent power of Georgia counties per the state's constitution, said Debra Nesbit, associate legislative director at the Association of County Commissioners Georgia.

"We felt like what they were doing was going around the constitution in home rule to try to pass a bill to abolish the police department without the county's approval," she said.

In home rule states such as Georgia, the state constitution grants counties the ability to pass laws to govern themselves. Georgia boards of commissioners can choose to fund both the sheriff and county police department to do policing in the community. In Glynn County, which has had a police department for more than 100 years, commissioners have always decided to fund a police department.

While every county in Georgia is required to have an elected sheriff per the state constitution, sheriffs do not automatically receive policing powers, although it is more



A Glynn County, Ga. police car. Photo courtesy of Glynn County, Ga.

common. Out of Georgia's 159 counties, Nesbit said only 12 have county police departments and most are concentrated in metro areas.

The county's lawsuit addressed two issues, according to Glynn County Commissioner Michael Browning, who chairs the Board. The first is the constitutionality of the Senate bills themselves and the second is the legality of placing the questions on a general referendum ballot.

Election laws in Georgia state that a referendum has to be advertised 90 days prior to the election. Gov. Brian Kemp (R) signed the bills on the 90th day before the election.

"It was a week later before the local board of elections even got it, and so legally they couldn't place it on the ballot," Browning said.

The board of elections had the option to hold a special election, when it would not be required to meet the 90-day

public advertising law. However, the board of elections faced many logistical challenges to run a special election and lacked resources including voting machines and poll workers to hold a special election during the presidential election year, Browning said.

"The judge only ruled on the constitutionality of the bills," Browning said. "When he ruled that they're unconstitutional,

See **RULING** page 6

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## Georgia ruling

From RULING page 5

that meant that they couldn't go on the ballot so he didn't have to rule on whether they should or shouldn't be on the ballot."

Nesbit said she does not think state legislators intended to take away county powers statewide, but local legislators may have thought they needed to act after some incidents happened in the county, including the shooting of Ahmaud Arbery.

"I think this was those local legislators trying to figure out a way to deal with the problems in their home police department without giving any consideration to what kind of precedent it might set," she said.

Nesbit said if the judge ruled the referendum was constitutional, there would be concerns over what other home rule provisions may be circumvented.

"By doing that statewide bill, you opened up an avenue for legislators in other areas of the state to go in and get local legislation to have a referendum to abolish additional county police departments," she said. "Or what's next? It could be any number of things that they would be able to do and then you would be able to do local legislation to overrule counties and their operation from their inherent powers."

Specifically in Glynn County, Browning said the abolishment of the county police department would lead to no "official oversight of policing in this community."

"There would be nobody to address any issues in their local police department and so that's why we were so adamant and determined to protect the right given in the Constitution to the board of commissioners to determine who's going to police their community," he said. "This was about taking the power away from the board of commissioners who were duly elected by the individuals in this county to govern."

"We really did try to just stay focused on the constitutional inherent powers of the counties and that this was just an avenue to set a precedent for the legislature to go around that," Nesbit added. **CN**

# Nonprofit helps set up self-sustaining veteran support group in Arizona



Apache County, Ariz. veterans work with volunteers from the Focus Marines Foundation in 2019. Photo by Doyel Shamley

by **Charlie Ban**  
senior writer

A privately funded nonprofit has stepped in, and flown in, to help the underserved veterans in an Arizona county with a significant Native American population.

The partnership with the St. Louis-based Focus Marines Foundation followed the independent efforts by a former Apache County supervisor and current contractor in working toward building the capacity for the county's veterans, particularly Native Americans, to continue that programming on their own.

Appalled at the disparity between the resources the U.S. military puts into recruiting in Apache County versus the resources available to them after discharge if they came back home, Doyel Shamley spent some of his free time while in office in 2017 as an Apache County supervisor pursuing resources from the myriad veterans support nonprofits.

"The veterans so-called clinic in Fort Defiance is a vandalized doublewide trailer on stilts that isn't manned," he said, representing an example of resources available to veterans in Apache County.

"They share their story, but we also try to figure out if there are things they can leave behind, to try and drop some of their burden."

- Jennifer Jefferson

"That's what was moved in from the feds. It's a building surrounded by weeds with broken windows."

Apache County is large, poor and mostly either reservation or federally managed; it takes hours to drive to a manned Veterans Administration clinic.

"It's no wonder a lot of veterans come home here and have trouble," Shamley said. "They get a day of preparation when they're about to go back to civilian life, nothing like basic training when they entered the service."

At one large national gathering of military organizations, a representative of Focus Marines Foundation contacted Shamley and their discussion led to the foundation, in a somewhat rare move, bringing its program staff out to Apache County for a first training in October

2019, rather than bringing participants to its St. Louis farm where it usually conducts group training. The entire process was funded by the foundation.

The foundation's programming follows a seven-day schedule of orientation, bonding, introduction, guest speakers, resume workshops and classes on relationship-building and maintenance. The main event, according to volunteer and team leader Jennifer Jefferson, is a two-day process of self-examination that forms the basis for growth.

"They talk about who they are, where they come from, what they want their outcome to look like and we figure out how we get them there from here," she said. "They share their story, but we also try to figure out if there are things they can leave behind, to try and drop some of their burden."

With the county's heavy Native American veteran population in mind, the foundation geared some of the programming to amplify cultural markers and emphasize issues and traditions that were important to them.

The gathering itself is significant, and Jefferson said

assembling with so many other veterans in a new and supportive environment gives them pause and a fresh perspective.

Part of the training involves helping the veterans learn to advocate for themselves while dealing with the VA system, a change in perspective from their military careers, when they were loath to challenge authority. They also leave with hefty binders full of resources and contacts.

In the year since that training, some Apache County participants have traveled to do additional training in St. Louis, along with new recruits. And Jefferson said the cohort is approaching the point where it will be able to conduct trainings at home.

Shamley said the participants' success has been telling in that year.

"We've been able to show that all attendees have not gone to jail, not died by suicide, have improved work performance, improved relationships, all the things that plague a combat veteran with no help," he said. "Those things are greatly improved, but once you're in that network, for the rest of their lives, they have a network to rely on." **CN**



Sign up for broadband webinar! **H3** ■ NACo launches broadband task force. **H5**

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THE PANDEMIC  
PUTS BROADBAND  
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# PANDEMIC CHANGES DYNAMIC AROUND BROADBAND

by Charlie Ban and Rachel Looker

**P**amela Carter was excited to have recently been named to the FCC's Intergovernmental Advisory Committee, where she is one of three county government representatives.

Except her own internet service at home is so poor, she has to drive to the Augusta County, Va. office building, where she is a county supervisor, to log into hours-long video meetings. And she knows that in Virginia's second-largest county by area, she is far from the only person with problems like that.

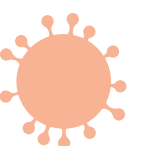
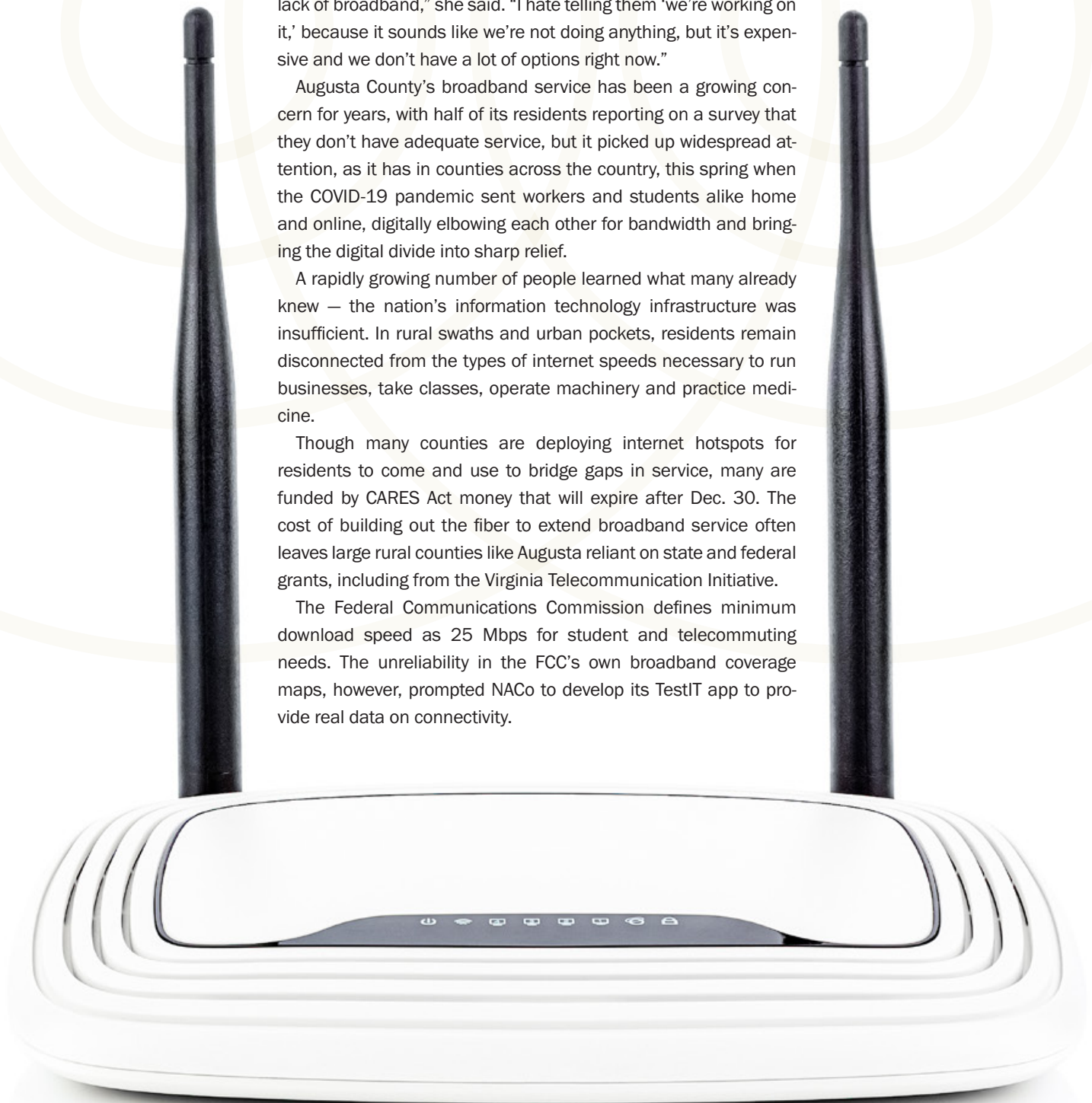
"I get emails from residents every day complaining about the lack of broadband," she said. "I hate telling them 'we're working on it,' because it sounds like we're not doing anything, but it's expensive and we don't have a lot of options right now."

Augusta County's broadband service has been a growing concern for years, with half of its residents reporting on a survey that they don't have adequate service, but it picked up widespread attention, as it has in counties across the country, this spring when the COVID-19 pandemic sent workers and students alike home and online, digitally elbowing each other for bandwidth and bringing the digital divide into sharp relief.

A rapidly growing number of people learned what many already knew — the nation's information technology infrastructure was insufficient. In rural swaths and urban pockets, residents remain disconnected from the types of internet speeds necessary to run businesses, take classes, operate machinery and practice medicine.

Though many counties are deploying internet hotspots for residents to come and use to bridge gaps in service, many are funded by CARES Act money that will expire after Dec. 30. The cost of building out the fiber to extend broadband service often leaves large rural counties like Augusta reliant on state and federal grants, including from the Virginia Telecommunication Initiative.

The Federal Communications Commission defines minimum download speed as 25 Mbps for student and telecommuting needs. The unreliability in the FCC's own broadband coverage maps, however, prompted NACo to develop its TestIT app to provide real data on connectivity.





## Education

Although much of the focus on broadband service needs centers on large rural counties, even in dense urban counties, broadband service can vary from block to block, and the number of users can be overwhelming.

When the majority of schools shut down in March, it was not as easy for many students as simply turning on a computer and joining a virtual classroom with a click of the mouse.

An analysis of census data revealed 3 million students lack home internet and an estimated 17 percent of students do not have access to computers, according to a report last year by the Associated Press.

In Cook County, Ill. the pandemic emphasized the county's own broadband challenges.

County Board President Toni Preckwinkle said the county's Bureau of Economic Development and Council on Digital Equity found a quarter of county residents lack high speed internet. Additionally, 17 percent of Black and Latinx families throughout the county lack computers.

To help bridge this digital divide, Cook County, Ill. recently launched two digital inclusion initiatives to provide students with the resources needed to complete e-learning.

The first initiative involved a partnership with the Housing Authority of Cook County (HACC) and Comcast through the Internet Essentials Partnership Program which provided no-cost broadband internet to housing authority households with school-age children.

The program is being offered to nearly 14,000 children residing in over 6,500 households throughout Cook County.

More than 1,100 HACC residents with children took advantage of the program. HACC covered the cost for the next 10 months, through the 2020 to 2021 school year.

After the partnership between HACC and Comcast helped fill the need for broadband access, it became apparent that many families also needed the equipment to access the internet.

This led to the county's second initiative to provide laptops for all school-age HACC students who needed e-learning devices. HACC pre-ordered 900 laptops for around \$300 per laptop.

"We provided the young people in the Housing Authority with free laptops that are theirs, period," Preckwinkle said. "They are not loans. They're theirs so that they can continue to do their work remotely as their school district requires."

Many families who signed up for the Internet Essentials partnership indicated that local school districts were not issuing laptops or had run out of devices, leaving children sharing a device within their family.

Preckwinkle added that some school districts provided laptops as long as there was e-learning, but as soon as some schools resumed in-person classes, students had to return the devices.

The laptop initiative helped fill these gaps allowing children to fully participate in any virtual learning and have the time to complete assignments.

Both the laptop program and Internet Essentials partnership are funded by CARES Act dollars.

While the county has been making efforts in the past to provide broadband access by investing in fiber optic cable to connect more residents, Preckwinkle said the pandemic emphasized the digital access inequity.

"We live in a country where there's tremendous inequity and a lot of it is race based and the extent to which we can help level the playing field by providing people first with access to internet and second with the tools they need to access the internet, that's all to the good," she said.

## Health

Back in Augusta County, Va., Carter teaches at Mary Baldwin College, and she has been recording lectures, not just so her nursing students can watch them at their convenience, but to ensure the kind of quality that she can't vouch for on her side or her students. In addition to being a large county, geographically, its topography, particularly in the western underserved region, is full of high, narrow mountain ridges making both cell service and internet services unreliable.

"That's the opposite of telehealth," she said. "When you're doing a telehealth visit, you want to be able to connect visually with your doctor, but in most parts of our county, the video freezes or you can't get good eye contact with the doctor and it defeats the whole purpose of video contact."

As concerns about crowding inside buildings during the pandemic has driven strict rules about occupancy, a desire to limit the number of vulnerable people in waiting rooms has driven much of the health care field to remote visits.

"I haven't had a telehealth visit from home that went smoothly," Carter said. "My experience is shared among a lot of our residents, and many of them would really benefit from an advance like this because they'd have to travel really far to see a doctor otherwise."

"It puts people living here at a disadvantage."

Counties that have the internet capacity to successfully use telehealth have seen boosts in their efficiency, particularly with regard to mental health support during the pandemic.

Sevet Johnson, behavioral health director for Ventura County, Calif., said that not having to drive among clients has freed up time among her county's clinicians and reduced the risk of traffic accidents en route to appointments.

Carter has been frustrated by the appar-

ent ineligibility of using CARES Act money to build out broadband capacity, even if it's done in the name of expanding access to telehealth, but she and the rest of the county's broadband committee will continue pursuing grants to entice internet service providers to build out fiber and fielding more complaints from residents.

Carter hopes, however, that her work on the FCC advisory committee will offer educational opportunities to help her strategize a way forward for Augusta County.

"I'm hoping this will open doors to knowledge I don't have now," she said. "We'll have to get creative with how we do this, but I have hope." ■

# BROADBAND WEBINAR SET FOR NOV. 18

**NACo will hold a webinar titled "Innovation: Fast Forward – Broadband" Nov. 18 from 12 noon to 3 p.m. The webinar is part of the NACo Tech Xchange CIO Forum Series. Presentations will be made by:**

■ **Russ Elliott**, director, Washington State Broadband Office, will share their efforts to address broadband in the state of Washington.

■ **Deana Perry**, executive director, Broadband, Georgia Department of Community Affairs and **Bill Price**, strategist, Georgia Technology Authority, will share broadband efforts in Georgia.

■ County presentation from **Mike Culp**, CGCIO, director of Information Technology for Albemarle County, Va. Culp leads a regional broadband cooperative and will share his experiences in how localities in Virginia have partnered to bring broadband to rural areas.

■ Representatives from **Comcast** and **Verizon** will discuss various efforts and activities to improve broadband delivery to counties and citizens.

■ NACo will share an update on broadband initiatives and priorities.

To register, visit: [naco.org/naco-tech-xchange-cio-forum-series-broadband](https://naco.org/naco-tech-xchange-cio-forum-series-broadband)



Cook County, Ill. Board President Toni Preckwinkle announces the county's digital inclusion initiatives to provide the tools needed for students to complete virtual learning. Photo courtesy of Cook County, Ill.



# CHANGES TO PUBLIC SAFETY SPECTRUM COMES AT MAJOR COST FOR COUNTIES

by **Rachel Looker**  
staff writer

**S**ince 2012, the countdown has been on for a major shift in county public safety communications that has a hefty price tag attached.

A provision in The Middle-Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act of 2012 (Public Law 112-96) requires the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to reallocate a spectrum associated with broadcast channels in the 470 to 512 megahertz band, commonly referred to as the T-Band. Counties rely on the T-Band for a variety of public safety purposes including emergency medical service, 911 communications, fire departments and law enforcement agencies.

The legislation calls for an auction to be held by Feb. 22, 2021 and would require all public safety operations on the band to close within two years.

According to the FCC, there are 925 public safety entities with licenses in the T-Band including 11 metropolitan areas: Boston, Chicago, Dallas/Fort Worth, Houston, Los Angeles, Miami, New York City, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, San Francisco/Oakland and Washington D.C.

The T-Band spectrum dates back to the early 1970s when the FCC allocated the 470 to 512 megahertz band to public safety in urban areas with large populations to alleviate shortages of radio channels.

In Nassau County, N.Y., which is located east of New York City on Long Island, the T-Band is the public safety network for law enforcement and covers all areas of the county.

Nassau County Police Chief Ron Walsh said the cost to move off the spectrum

The operations floor in Nassau County, N.Y. is one area in the country that will be making the shift off the T-Band following the FCC's auction. Photo courtesy of Nassau County, N.Y.

and rebuild a communications system is the main challenge for the county when it comes to the T-Band auction.

"We're at about \$120 million dollars that we're going to have to put into the system over the next couple of years to build it, but it's also happening in a year when COVID hit and all revenues across the county are dramatically impacted," he said.

Walsh said the cost to rebuild systems can vary depending on the geographical challenges of an area. Specifically, in Nassau County, Walsh said being surrounded by water and dealing with hills creates added complications.

Nassau County has already started working with Motorola to scope out an entire rebuild of the system to shift the county to the 700 to 800 megahertz band, which is available for public safety channels.

"You can't just rebuild these things overnight," he said. "It's a tremendous amount of work that goes into it and we don't own all the sites that we transmit and receive from, so we have to coordinate with site owners."

Walsh said the county is planning its transition in phases. There are already a few 700 to 800 megahertz sites available to serve as placeholders for licenses. Starting next year, the entire infrastructure will be replaced.

While proceeds from the auction are to be made available to jurisdictions with incurred costs from moving off the T-Band spectrum, Walsh said he is concerned

over the distribution of these funds.

"The only problem is that the estimates that we're getting from the agencies that track these things is that they're talking, if they're lucky, they'll get a few \$10 billion worth of proceeds," he said of the money that would be divided among jurisdictions that make the move off the T-Band.

The transition to the 700 to 800 megahertz band is not as simple as flipping a switch.

Walsh said the T-Band can't be shut off without having a 700 to 800 band to turn on. Both systems will initially need to run simultaneously, which requires purchasing dual band radios, new portables and new mobile radios for police vehicles. This comes with added costs and increased time needed to train users.

"You're talking about lives now and the lives of public safety officers and you want to be able to do that safely and all these things and equipment is a lot of money and a lot of time," he said.

Walsh said this mandate from the federal government is going to put counties further and further in debt.

"I just hope that the federal government recognizes the complicated nature of building these systems and being able to roll them out safely and they give us the time that we need to do it," Walsh said.

"Their entitled to mandate these things, but the funding to assist with this is really what we need and for them to give us a little more time and start to allocate some money to offset some of the costs would

be very much appreciated by the county governments," he added.

Across the river on the other side of New York City, Bergen County, N.J. is another jurisdiction that relies wholly on the T-Band spectrum.

"Our entire countywide trunked radio system operates off the T-Band at this point," Frank Del Vecchio, director of Communications and Public Safety Operations, said.

It would cost the county between \$15 million and \$20 million to move off the T-Band and replace subscriber equipment which includes portable radios, mobile radios and other infrastructure, according to Del Vecchio.


"This is going to have such a great impact on public safety communications throughout the nation and billions upon billions of dollars," he said.

Similar to Nassau County, Bergen County started taking steps to install three 700 megahertz sites around the county with plans to build more. Del Vecchio said this puts the county in a better position to be prepared for the T-Band auction.

He added that he wishes the federal government would recognize the investment that cities and counties have already made in their radio communications infrastructure.

"Leaving T-Band would have an impact on our services and our ability to provide public safety communications for our emergency responders," he said.

In September, the House passed the Don't Break Up the T-Band Act of 2020 to prevent the T-Band spectrum auction. The bill is now in the Senate for consideration.

"Police officers, firefighters, emergency medical technicians and paramedics are relying on this T-Band network in so many cities and areas across the country that it would just have a very negative impact on public safety," Del Vecchio said. 

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# NACo LAUNCHES NATIONAL BROADBAND TASK FORCE

by Arthur Scott

NACo President Gary Moore, Boone County, Ky. judge/county executive has launched the NACo Broadband Task Force in an effort to bring together county government officials from across the country to focus on the challenges and opportunities facing unserved and underserved communities and populations. The task force is starting with the premise that “if you can’t connect...you can’t compete.”

The NACo task force will examine the intersection of public, private and non-profit sector efforts to deploy and sustain advanced, affordable and accessible broadband and other communication technology solutions with the aim of eliminating the digital divide.

In addition to reviewing the current federal and state policy landscape, the group will research and showcase noteworthy practices and innovative solutions involving county governments as essential community partners, as conveners, collaborators, policy makers, regulators, investors and even operators.

At the leadership of the group’s co-chairs, and with the assistance of the NACo Advisory Council, the task force will identify and build on specific policy and practice solutions using the following framework to help draft a blueprint to broadband deployment. Ultimately, the task force will help develop an overall report as well as other products and resources to assist county officials throughout the various stages of broadband deployment.

The scope of work includes:

**A. Preparing for broadband**

- Complete and accurate data
- Broadband surveys and feasibility analytics and forecasting
- Partnership-building, including aggregating demand

**B. Barriers to buildout**

- Federal policy landscape
- State-imposed policies and pre-emption
- Local regulations and procedures
- Geography: Cellular vs. fiber vs. satellite vs. emerging technologies
- Adoption rates with accessibility, affordability and bandwidth for residential vs. commercial

**C. Digital divides (digital equity)**

- Urban/Suburban/Rural/Tribal
- Ethnic/racial disparities

**D. Future-proofing and the “Global” economy**

- Basic service to 5G to 10G future
- E-rate and remote learning/training
- Dig-once



Moore

### Timeline

The task force leadership will identify the best possible times to schedule the first meeting with a goal of mid-November with a goal of concluding the task force by late February – mid March. A very preliminary timeline includes:

**Mid-November: Virtual Convening**

**#1** Task force members will each provide a summary of broadband connectivity challenges and solutions from their respective counties and briefly discuss the scope and mission. Task force members will also use this session to divide the group into focus areas aligned with the scope and mission. This meeting with help the task force establish a baseline for the work ahead.

**Early January: Virtual Convening #2**

Task force members will hear from the Advisory Council representatives on a wide range of topics as it relates to the scope and mission established by the task force. This meeting will help ensure the work of the task force effectively captures the challenges and solutions provided by the private sector and other broadband stakeholders.

**Early-February: Virtual Convening**

**#3** Task force members will meet with a variety of federal and state representatives to discuss the unique challenges and solutions to broadband deployment across the country. Guest speakers will include representatives from the Federal Communications Commission, members of Congress and various federal and state agency representatives. Immediately following this meeting, task force members will begin assembling a report and related resources and tool-kits to be released during NACo’s 2021 Legislative Conference.

**Pre-Legislative Conference: Virtual**

**Convening #4** – Task force members and Advisory Council will meet to make final preparations for the release of the broadband report including key recommendations and findings. This includes sharing noteworthy practices with the federal policy makers, county officials, partners, the general public and media.

## NACo BROADBAND TASK FORCE MEMBERS

The following group of task force members (representing 21 different states) presents a balanced representation of geographic and demographic interests.

|   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| <b>NACo President Gary Moore</b> , County Judge/Executive, Boone County, Ky.        | <b>Jeffrey Earlywine</b> , County Treasurer, Boone County, Ky.        | <b>Deborah Lieberman</b> , Commissioner, Montgomery County, Ohio |
| <b>Nils Andreassen</b> , Executive Director, Alaska Municipal League                | <b>Craig Rice</b> , Council Member, Montgomery County, Md.            | <b>Jason Carini</b> , County Treasurer, Rogers County, Okla.     |
| <b>Joseph Wood</b> , County Judge, Washington County, Ark.                          | <b>Jim Storey</b> , Commissioner, Allegan County, Mich.               | <b>Jason Brinkley</b> , County Judge, Cooke County, Texas        |
| <b>John Peters</b> , Supervisor, Mono County, Calif.                                | <b>Terry Ocaña</b> , IT Director, Chippewa County, Minn.              | <b>J.D. Clark</b> , County Judge, Wise County, Texas             |
| <b>Terry Burroughs</b> , Commissioner, Okeechobee County, Fla.                      | <b>Mike Slavik</b> , Commissioner, Dakota County, Minn.               | <b>Glen Whitley</b> , County Judge, Tarrant County, Texas        |
| <b>Gregg Weiss</b> , Commissioner, Palm Beach County, Fla.                          | <b>Rich Sve</b> , Commissioner, Lake County, Minn.                    | <b>Renee Couch</b> , County Treasurer, Comal County, Texas       |
| <b>John Matelski</b> , Chief Innovation and Information Officer, Dekalb County, Ga. | <b>Tarryl Clark</b> , Commissioner, Stearns County, Minn.             | <b>Kim Halfmann</b> , County Judge, Glasscock County, Texas      |
| <b>George Emami</b> , Commissioner, Monroe County, Ga.                              | <b>Chuck Weed</b> , Commissioner, Cheshire County, N.H.               | <b>Bruce Adams</b> , Commissioner, San Juan County, Utah         |
| <b>Scott Johnson</b> , Manager, Columbia County, Ga.                                | <b>Will Calvin</b> , Commissioner, Chaves County, N.M.                | <b>Nathan Davis</b> , Commissioner, Ferry Couty, Wash.           |
| <b>Jonathan Pitts</b> , Commissioner, Jones County, Ga.                             | <b>Terry Buchanan</b> , IT Director, Robeson County, N.C.             | <b>Rick Hughes</b> , Councilmember, San Juan County, Wash.       |
| <b>Carol Moehrl</b> , Director of Public Health District, Nez Perce County, Idaho   | <b>Frank Williams</b> , Commissioner, Brunswick County, N.C.          | <b>Lauren Schoenfeld</b> , Commissioner, Sweetwater County, Wyo. |
| <b>David Zimmerman</b> , Chairman, Tazewell County, Ill.                            | <b>Ryan Moore</b> , County Administrator, Warren County, N.Y.         |  |
|   | <b>Benjamin Swanekamp</b> , Deputy Budget Director, Erie County, N.Y. |  |

As part of the virtual task force meetings, all NACo members will be invited to participate and listen to the task force events through MS Teams Live.

## ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBERS

In recognizing the importance of service providers, private industry, academic researchers, and other key stakeholders, the NACo Broadband Task Force will also have access to an advisory council of experts. The Advisory Council will have the opportunity to participate and present during Task Force meetings and other engagement opportunities throughout the course of Task Force efforts.

The list of advisory council members includes:

|  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| <b>Measurement Labs</b>                                  | <b>Farm Credit</b>                      | <b>UltraMontgomery</b>                        |
| <b>Land O’ Lakes</b>                                     | <b>Verizon</b>                          | <b>Student Internet Equity Coalition</b>      |
| <b>Rural Community Assistance Partnership</b>            | <b>Comcast</b>                          | <b>NRECA</b>                                  |
| <b>Rural LISC</b>  | <b>AT&amp;T</b>                         | <b>The Rural Broadband Association (NTCA)</b> |
| <b>National Association of Development Organizations</b> | <b>UnitedHealthcare</b>                 |   |
|  | <b>Netsmart</b>                         |   |
|  | <b>Consortium for School Networking</b> |   |

Arthur Scott is an associate legislative director in NACo’s Government Affairs Department. Zach George, a legislative assistant in the department, contributed to this article.



# COUNTIES TAKE LEAD TO BRIDGE DIGITAL DIVIDE, EXPAND ACCESS TO INTERNET

by Zach George

In March 2019 — almost a year before the COVID-19 pandemic forced most Americans to rely entirely on a broadband connection — NACo launched the “TestIT” mobile app aimed at shedding light on our nation’s digital divide. This crowdsourcing app underscores the importance of complete and accurate data by highlighting gaps in the Federal Communications Commission’s (FCC) broadband maps which are used by federal agencies and Congress to determine the funding needs for broadband investments.

The data collected by the app also helped NACo create a connectivity report titled “Understanding the True State of Connectivity in America.” This report, which can be found at [www.NACo.org/TestIT](http://www.NACo.org/TestIT), found that roughly 65 percent of all counties are experiencing the internet below the FCC’s definition of broadband. This digital divide widens in rural counties with over 77 percent experiencing broadband below the same benchmark — compared to only 19 percent of urban

counties.

The lack of reliable broadband is a major economic barrier and a leading driver of socioeconomic inequality in the 21st century.

The pandemic has underscored the critical utility of broadband infrastructure. From the homework gap and workforce adaptations, to essential healthcare services and e-commerce — broadband is now the keystone to our nation’s response to the global pandemic and imperative to building resilient and future-ready communities.


Many Americans rely solely on schools and libraries for access to high-speed internet. Unfortunately, as COVID-19 forced schools and libraries to close across the country, many Americans lost their only meaningful connection to high-speed internet. NACo stepped in and worked with Congress and the FCC to adapt the E-Rate program to allow eligible schools, school districts and libraries to purchase Wi-Fi hotspots, modems, routers, connected devices and advanced information and technology services. Now, schools and libraries

can creatively adapt these resources to provide internet services to Americans living outside of our nation’s broadband footprint throughout the pandemic.

Local governments are also facing state-imposed challenges to expanding access to broadband connectivity during this crisis. Twenty-two states have imposed barriers or outright restrictions preventing local governments from making investments in broadband networks. NACo is currently working with members of Congress to pass the “Community Broadband Act” (H.R. 2785 / S. 3649) which would remove these barriers and empower communities to provide connectivity solutions during this critical time.

Additionally, NACo is also advocating for legislation to further federal investments in broadband infrastructure and update existing resources like the FCC’s Rural Health Care Program to help cover broadband-related costs associated with tele-health services. These steps will not only allow county governments to navigate through the current pandemic but position local governments to better

serve residents in the 21st Century.

Lastly, to further highlight the county role in providing affordable, high-speed internet, NACo recently established the Broadband Task Force. This task force brings together county government officials from across the country to focus on the challenges and opportunities facing underserved communities. This new task force will spend the next few months examining the intersection of public and private sector efforts to deploy broadband networks with the aim of creating a blueprint for governments working to bridge the digital divide. Not only will this work help shape NACo’s broadband federal policy priorities, but also showcase best practices and innovative solutions to expanding broadband in underserved counties. 

*For more information about NACo’s efforts to strengthen federal broadband investments, visit [www.NACo.org/Broadband](http://www.NACo.org/Broadband).*

*Zach George is a legislative assistant in NACo’s Government Affairs Department.*

## BROADBAND RESOURCES FOR COUNTIES

The National Telecommunications and Information Administration at the Department of Commerce has created a searchable database of 50 federal broadband grants, loans and other resources.

“Consolidating these critical resources into a one-stop, easy-to-use resource provides an important tool in spurring efforts to expand our nation’s broadband infrastructure projects,” said Diane Rinaldo, acting assistant secretary for Communications and Information at NTIA.

The federal programs provide funding for state and local governments, schools, libraries, small businesses and other community groups interested in expanding broadband access. Applicants can search for programs by agency, program purpose and eligible recipients. The inventory includes well-known infrastructure efforts at the Department of Agriculture and the Federal Communications Commission.

For instance, the Commerce Department’s Economic Development

Administration provides economic development grants that can be used to support broadband infrastructure projects, digital skills training and smart cities development. The agency’s FY2018 funding of \$600 million was mainly targeted for weather-related disaster relief but also supported broadband projects.

Last year, U.S. Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross announced a \$1 million grant to St. Joseph County, Ind., to expand high-speed broadband infrastructure in a project expected to create 230 jobs and spur \$710 million in private investment.

Other programs in the NTIA inventory that recently made broadband grants including The Appalachian Regional Commission, which awarded a \$40,000 grant to the SEDA-Council of Governments (link is external) last October, a public development organization serving 11 central Pennsylvania counties, for a feasibility study of broadband access in Northumberland, Union, Lycoming, and Clinton counties.

As the federal government works to fill the gaps in connectivity that persist despite significant investments, NTIA is developing a new mapping platform that paints a more precise picture of

the current infrastructure and services that are available around the country. This will help policymakers make better decisions about how broadband funds should be allocated.

### SOURCES INCLUDE:

■ Appalachian Regional Commission: ARC is a regional economic development agency that represents a partnership of federal, state and local governments. 202-884-7700 or <https://www.arc.gov/>.

■ The Rural Health Care Program provides funding to eligible public or non-profit health care providers for broadband and telecommunications services necessary for the provision of health care. 202-418-7400 or <https://www.usac.org/rural-health-care/>.

■ The Department of Education, Small Rural School Achievement Program provides financial assistance to address lack of personnel and resources needed to compete for federal grants. 202-401-0039 or <https://broadbandusa.ntia.doc.gov/funding-guide/department-education-small-rural-school-achievement-program>.

Access more from the database here: <https://broadbandusa.ntia.doc.gov/new-fund-search>





# Digital inclusion partnerships connect the unconnected

County residents received hotspots and computers in Cleveland, Ohio as part of Cuyahoga County's partnership with PCs for People, which distributed over 5,000 hotspots and 10,000 computers to families lacking internet access throughout the county. Photo courtesy of Cuyahoga County, Ohio

by **Rachel Looker**  
staff writer

A series of digital inclusion initiatives in Cuyahoga County, Ohio is using the power of partnerships to provide internet access to the unconnected.

With one in four households in Cuyahoga County lacking internet access at home, county staff worked to better understand the problem, repurpose existing resources and partner with organizations through different initiatives to provide broadband for all.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the county partnered with the Cleveland Foundation, a local community group, to fund the "Connecting Cuyahoga" study which was completed in 2019.

The study analyzed what the digital divide looked like in the county and what return on investment the county could see by supporting digital inclusion.

The study revealed more than half of the county's households making less than \$20,000 in annual income lack home internet access and more than 37 percent of seniors over the age of 65 do not have a computer or internet access of any kind.

Cuyahoga County Chief Innovation and Performance Officer Catherine Tkachyk said while some areas lack infrastructure for broadband, the larger problem throughout the county is a lack of affordability.

"It [the study] really identified affordability as a big issue and then our senior population as being a big issue," she said.

The study also identified the percent-

age of each neighborhood without an internet subscription of any type. In the City of Cleveland, the largest city in Cuyahoga County, 36.9 percent of households lack internet access.

Tkachyk said the study allowed the county to identify community improvements around economic growth, full-time employment and government services.

"When you don't know how to use the Internet, there's a lot of jobs that aren't open to you," she said.

Data from the survey provided support for multiple digital inclusion initiatives throughout the county:

## DigitalC partnership

Cuyahoga County partnered with DigitalC, a non-profit, community-based internet service provider, to form a pilot project to provide low-cost, high-speed, in-home internet access to the Fairfax neighborhood in Cleveland where 40 percent of households lack internet.

The county worked with DigitalC to create a "fiber ring in the sky" by placing an antenna on top of the DigitalC building and a county-owned structure in the Fairfax neighborhood. Devices were then installed in homes throughout the neighborhood.

As part of the agreement to use the county building below market rate, DigitalC agreed to provide low-cost, high-speed internet access to the community at \$18 per month.

"They were looking at 'How can we create a sustainable, community internet service provider?'" Tkachyk said.

## Mobile hotspot lending programs

Through additional partnerships with the Cleveland Foundation, the Cleveland Public Library System, the Cuyahoga County Public Library System and the Huntington Bank, the county spearheaded a mobile hotspot-lending program.

Tkachyk said the program allowed county residents to borrow a hotspot from local libraries for in-home internet access.

The county used the Mobile Beacon program through Sprint, which lets libraries and educational institutions purchase hotspots with one year of unlimited internet service.

"That is a temporary solution, but during the pandemic, they were constantly checked out," Tkachyk said.

A total of 710 hotspots are available at Cuyahoga County Library branches.

## Repurposing unused county devices

When the Ohio governor issued an order in March closing all schools throughout the state, the county helped aid school districts with the transition to online learning.

The county assisted the Cleveland Metropolitan School District by re-purposing county-owned hotspots for students.

Because the pandemic caused the state's primary election to transition from voting in-person to mainly using mail-in ballots, the county was able to use 300 hotspots that were set aside for the elections and no longer needed.

"We turned those around as quick as we

could to get them out to families in need," Tkachyk said.

The county worked with AT&T to provide free, unlimited internet access with the hotspots through the end of the school year.

## Connecting the unconnected long-term


Tkachyk said more people understand that internet is a utility service that is needed throughout the community because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The county joined in another partnership with the Cleveland Foundation to establish a digital equity fund in which the county and foundation both contributed \$1.5 million.

One of the partnerships that came out of the fund involved PCs for People, which provided up to 5,000 hotspots and 10,000 computers to families throughout the county where qualifying families with a K-12 student could obtain a free computer and two years of free internet access.

"It'll get us through the pandemic and gives us some time to help solve this problem completely," Tkachyk said.

Cuyahoga County is working with around 50 partners to find long-term solutions to bridge the digital divide, she said.

"I think that one of the unique things is the fact that we've really been able to work on this as a community and a lot of different people have been able to bring what they have and their assets to the table to try to work and solve this issue," she said. 



# ‘Middle mile’ funding prospects vary for rural counties

by **Charlie Ban**  
senior writer

**W**estern San Miguel County, Colo. has gotten along for a while with its water dock system in the town of Egnar.

Without a useful aquifer, this retrofitted gas station tank is how everyone — residents, farmers, the volunteer fire department on the far western side of the state — gets what they need. If they’re lucky, people don’t lose their keys, their keys don’t break, and the one person who can repair the system, now nearing 80, will be around to help with any problems that might arise.

What the county really wants is to computerize the system, which will address a lot of those problems and allow more users to access the water, which is now limited by the number of physical keys. But without high speed internet to run it, that wouldn’t do much good.

“We’ve really gotten into a precarious situation,” said County Manager Mike Bordogna. “It’s a life safety issue, because people need water to live, and if there’s a fire, the volunteer firefighters are going to need to get it somewhere.”

In 2019, one user drove off with the valve still hooked up to his truck, leading the tank to “hemorrhage” water for four days before someone noticed and fixed it.

“That’s the kind of thing that an upgraded system would tell us immediately,” Bordogna said. “It could monitor for leaks and tell someone to go check it out.”

The lifesaving applications for broadband internet in western San Miguel County don’t end with water. In 2018, the county’s emergency dispatch went out of service four times because of connectivity issues, and the county’s mountainous topography doesn’t leave much room for rights of way along cliffside roads.

Low population density is the greatest impediment for rural counties seeking affordable broadband connectivity because the infrastructure costs per customer are so much higher over long distances. But San Miguel County, along with neighboring Dolores and Montezuma counties, could see some help coming their way, following a \$6.3 million grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s ReConnect

program that will provide “middle-mile” fiber to bring infrastructure closer to rural communities.

“This could be a big deal for us,” Bordogna said. “(The internet service provider) talked about their products with 100mb and 1GB service, at modest pricing due to the USDA grants, which are faster than most of the affluent east end of our county enjoys for internet service. This will be a game changer when it happens.”

The internet service provider that won the grant plans to get to Egnar in four or five years, so Bordogna hopes the town can keep its current water system going that long.

The overall program has allocated \$550 million in a combination of grants, low-interest loans and a blend of each nationwide for expanding high speed internet access. The first round of ReConnect funding awarded nearly \$700 million to 79 different entities.

The three counties in Colorado will be served by a \$6.3 million grant to a local telecommunications provider. That provider will deploy a fiber-to-the-premises network to connect 1,638 people, 91 farms, 52 businesses, three fire stations and two post offices.

None of them, however, is located in Montezuma County, in the state’s southwest corner.

“It won’t make it far enough for us,” said Jim McClain, Montezuma County’s IT director, noting that the funding will just be enough to get it to Dolores County, where the provider’s jurisdiction will end.

A 2017 engineering study found that supplying high speed internet to every house in Montezuma County could cost \$39 million.

“Obviously we can’t do that, but it shows how expensive providing service like that can be,” he said.

McClain commissioned that study as he started to notice the digital divide separating Montezuma County from the rest of the state.

“There’s a huge need, and it’s preventing people from exploring our county as a new home,” he said. “Once you get five miles away from Cortez (the county seat), you’re going to be dealing with speeds that aren’t any better than dial-up.”

If 2016 showed the digital divide ahead of McClain on a map, the COVID-19 pan-



The water dock system in Egnar, San Miguel County, Colo. Photo by Jack Mott

demic was the moment he drove off the cliff like Thelma and Louise (or Wile E. Coyote).

“Once we started sending people home and 80 percent of the 120 people live outside of the city, then we saw how much a problem this was,” he said. “They just can’t do their work at home with internet speed like this, and that doesn’t even figure in the kids trying to do schoolwork.”

McClain has tried to fashion internet hotspots, but the demand was so high, county employees might as well come back into the office.

“The way to accomplish this is as a public private partnership,” he said. “To have the county subsidizing and get some provider to step up and help, acquire the right of ways.”

ReConnect pays the provider to do a lot of that work, but it may come to counties to pitch in to keep it coming.

Access to reliable, high-speed broadband is essential for continued economic growth,” said Sallie Clark, who serves as the state director for USDA Rural Development Colorado and is a past NACo president and El Paso County commissioner.

“With the increasing use of telecommunication tools, good connectivity is vital for rural businesses, schools and health care facilities as they depend on reliable telecommunication systems to create and maintain jobs and provide necessary services to both residents and visitors,” she said. “This grant will not only assist residents in the counties served but will provide many positive spillover effects for the communities in the area.”

In Dolores County, Commission Chair Julie Kibel was pleased to hear that Emery, a Utah-based service provider, would do the work. The company’s familiarity with the geology figured to make it more reliable, after an eastern Colorado company’s work ended a mile short of the county seat of Dove Creek when it ran out of money.

“They were used to working in the clay soil in eastern Colorado, but the rocks out here were a lot tougher for them to work with,” she said. “The county ended up picking up that last mile.”

The prospect of expanded broadband access, and the size of the grant, excited her.

“That is what secures the dreams, when the funding is actually available,” she said. “Seeing the number of homes and businesses and post offices that will be connected was really encouraging. We have a lot of canyons, mountains and dead spots and this is just really going to open a lot of availability up to our constituents.”

Kibel said the pandemic has drawn some Dolores County natives home from Denver, and the promise of broadband could be enough to keep them here permanently.

“We’re still a frontier community, but it would be nice to have modern technology that advances life and lifestyles,” she said. “People like them coming home end up doing things like coaching sports teams and getting even more involved with the community.

“People like that settling here can give our community life.” **H**



# RURAL COUNTY WORKS TO STEM VETERAN SUICIDES

by **Charlie Ban**  
senior writer

Chris Lukasevich recognizes that success only happens when people show up. That makes the veteran suicide rate in Carbon County, Pa., where he is a county commissioner, so much more frustrating.

"We're seeing two-thirds of them fail to take advantage of services," he said. "How do you get deeper into the community to ensure you're communicating with veterans who might not have an association with VFWs, legions or any other social clubs. How do you let them know what's available?"

The veteran suicide rate was particularly noticeable to Christine LeClair when she started in 2019 as Carbon County's veterans' affairs director. After getting a few calls about the subject, she asked the county coroner to alert her when a resident who died from suicide happened to be a veteran. In the year ending August 2020, eight Carbon County veterans died by suicide.

"That number was surprising to me, and it became the number one concern I had as veterans' affairs director, even more than transportation," she said. "Veteran suicide is more of a concern than veteran homelessness in Carbon County."

It caught Lukasevich's attention, too, soon after returning to his native Carbon County following a career in the military. Though he has been retired for a few years, he hasn't shaken the lingo.

"We've identified the problem but so far, we hadn't been good at identifying potential courses of action, lines of operations to close that gap," he said.

As they started to figure it out, Lukasevich created a Facebook page for the county — he had been streaming meetings from his own before he took office — to reach more people on the medium they use more.

"That will nibble away at that segment of population that wasn't interacting," Lukasevich said. "We're working piece-meal while we create a holistic approach."

That holistic approach will

## BIPARTISAN BILL PROVIDES GRANTS FOR COUNTY VETERANS COURTS

by **Rachel Mackey**

On Aug. 8, President Trump signed into law the Veteran Treatment Court Coordination Act (P.L. 116-153), which offers new resources to state and local governments for veteran treatment courts. In a win for counties, the bipartisan bill specifically provides grants and technical assistance for state, local and tribal governments interested in starting or expanding veteran treatment court programs.

Veteran treatment courts work with the traditional criminal justice system to help rehabilitate veterans who have committed non-violent misdemeanors while transitioning to civilian life. Through these courts, veterans dealing with mental health and substance use issues may enroll in

recovery programs designed to set them on a path to success.

Counties serve as the entry point to the criminal justice system and will benefit from the funding and technical assistance resources outlined under the legislation, with which we can better address the veteran-specific issues that may contribute to an individual's criminal offense. The bill also supports veteran treatment court personnel, who are familiar with the VA, state VA systems and veteran service organizations in the community and can help connect justice-involved veterans with these resources.

*Rachel Mackey is an associate legislative director who staffs NACo's Veterans and Military Service Committee.*

likely come from the Together with Veterans program, a program that recruits veterans to reach out to others in hopes of reducing suicide. The program is based on the National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide 2018-2028, which acknowledges what Lukasevich sees in Carbon County.

"While the VA encourages veterans to seek and use its services and benefits, the reality is that many veterans do not engage with the VA," the strategy says.

The study also found that nationally, 20 veterans die of suicide daily, rates of suicide among veterans are highest

among veterans ages 18-29 and two-thirds of deaths result from firearm injuries.

Lukasevich and LeClair are starting by assembling a steering committee of representatives from many of the county's veteran groups to decide how they want to proceed.

Along with LeClair and her predecessor at the county, the steering committee includes a retired chaplain, the Disabled Veteran Outreach Program coordinator for three counties, representatives from hospitals, the state department of military and veteran affairs and a behavioral health specialist.

How exactly they go about

their strategy is up for discussion — the steering committee just finished organizing — but Lukasevich said the general approach will be to communicate the warning signs of people who might be having behavioral health issues to veterans organizations, who will disseminate that training to members, who will reach out to fellow veterans who don't participate as much in structured programming.

"We'll train our local organizations in the basic frontline defense: Question, persuade and refer," LeClair said. "Nobody should be at a loss for how to get help for someone."

Noting that most veterans die by suicide within months of visiting a medical facility, LeClair is exploring adding veteran resource centers in hospitals. Given the hourlong trip each way, it makes sense to her that more Carbon County veterans don't visit VA hospitals, but by perhaps bringing some resources closer to where they do access care, the county can achieve the same effect.

The Together with Veterans playbook offers a few strategies:

- Reduce stigma as a barrier to seeking help for suicide
- Promote firearms safety
- Improve access to quality care, and
- Enhance primary caregivers' understanding of suicide and the best practices for identifying and treating veterans at risk.

Lukasevich hopes the county's work will stem the tide that has changed public perception for the worse recently.

"Today it seems like we're desensitized to the idea that veterans would choose suicide," he said. "It should shock everyone. It shocks us." **CN**

*Carbon County, Pa. Commissioner Chris Lukasevich will speak on a Nov. 9 NACo webinar Veteran Suicide Prevention: Strategies for County Leaders, along with national experts and congressional staff members.*



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## BRIGHT IDEAS | BUNCOMBE COUNTY, N.C.

# County Points-Based Program Incentivizes Affordable Housing

### PROBLEM:

A limited supply of housing, high prices and geographic challenges creates a need and demand for affordable housing.

### SOLUTION:

Create a points-based program to incentivize developers to increase density and create more affordable housing options.

by **Rachel Looker**  
staff writer

There is a menu of options on the table for developers in Buncombe County, N.C. who are looking to create more affordable and workforce housing through the county's points-based incentive program.

Buncombe County's Community Oriented Development (COD) program incentivizes density and design flexibility to create affordable housing units, all while adding sustainability features and community amenities. Developers complete a scorecard-like rubric to earn points that lead to density bonuses.

County Planning Director Nathan Pennington said the program was borne out of the need to create more housing options throughout the county.

Buncombe County, which is home to the City of Asheville, is a popular gateway and tourist destination. The area faces a variety of challenges when it comes to housing such as a limited supply of housing units, high rent, lack of public infrastructure and topographic constraints.

Pennington said the 660 square-mile county has everything from valleys to mountain peaks to rivers and rural areas that lack infrastructure.

"If it's not part of a steep slope, if it's not in a floodplain, if it's not in an area that has soils that are not conducive to development, there's very limited areas that

can be developed that are all in competition for each other," he said.

The area has seen steady growth and demand over the years with many people coming to the county to leave more urban areas. U.S. News and World Report recently ranked Asheville the eighth best place to retire.

With the many different agencies competing for a small amount of land and the increased demand from residents, Pennington said the county needed to incentivize the creation of units.

The COD program launched in 2015 as an element allowed by a countywide zoning ordinance.

Buncombe County Planning and Development staff designed the program to provide developers with greater flexibility in site design and housing types.

The program allows for the clustering of buildings, creation of useful open spaces and encourages constructions near designated transportation cor-

ridors, employment centers or available public water and sewer.

The program awards density bonuses up to 250 percent for developers who meet different criteria based on the density table rubric. Through the program, developments must set requirements for income eligibility and affordability rates for a minimum of 15 years.

"It's very much a program that pushes really good, high-quality design and it balances out the more expensive nature of that by incentivizing the density. I think it strikes a good balance," Pennington said.

Bonuses are awarded based on three categories: Community, environment/transit and economy with additional points available in the "added amenities" categories.

Examples include accessibility features, wetland conservation, Energy Star certification, community facilities like playgrounds and sidewalks, among others.

"To get the higher amounts

of density, you're given a menu of options to choose from that represent good project design," Pennington said.

Buncombe County has approved two COD projects that are already in the works and have a few others in the pipeline.

The first project, East Haven Development, is nearly completed and is a 95-unit tax credit development by a local housing non-profit organization. The units will remain affordable for a 30-year period. The project earned density bonuses through the COD program and was able to add 57 additional units.

The second project is a 255-unit apartment and townhome community which earned a 143 percent density bonus, equating to an additional 73 units. Thirty percent of units will be offered at workforce housing rates for a minimum of 15 years.

Buncombe County's COD program is just another step to solve affordable housing challenges. Other efforts by the county have included zoning ordinances to allow residents

to have up to two homes on a property and the Affordable Housing Services Program to provide funding assistance.

Pennington advises other counties to go slow when creating a similar COD incentive program and understand that each community may have its own unique challenges with differing needs.

"I think that a community that looks at our program and says 'we can do that too,' just make sure it's customized to your own jurisdiction," he said. "Make sure you understand that some of the successes here may not work for you." **CN**

*For more information on Buncombe County's Community Oriented Development Program, contact Planning Director Nathan Pennington at [nathan.pennington@buncombecounty.org](mailto:nathan.pennington@buncombecounty.org).*

*Buncombe County's Community Oriented Development is the recipient of a Best in Category 2020 NACo Achievement Award in the Planning category.*



**The East Haven Project utilizes Buncombe County's Community Oriented Development program and is a 95-unit tax credit development that received density bonuses to add 57 additional units which will remain affordable for a 30-year period. The project is nearing completion.** Photo courtesy of Mountain Housing Opportunities



PROFILES IN SERVICE

LISA BARTLETT

NACo Board Member  
Supervisor  
Orange County, Calif.



Bartlett

Number of years involved in NACo: Six

Years in public service: 14-plus

Occupation: Orange County supervisor, 5th District

Education: B.A. Finance, MBA

The hardest thing I've ever done: I had a wonderful cat for almost 15 years and I had to take her to the vet to have her put to sleep because she was at the end of her life with kidney disease. It was truly heartbreaking.

Three people (living or dead) I'd invite to dinner: Abraham Lincoln, Mother Teresa and Albert Einstein

A dream I have is to: Create a mental health ecosystem in my county to benefit all residents.

You'd be surprised to learn that: I am completely tone deaf and cannot sing a single note on key.

The most adventurous thing I've ever done: A whitewater rafting excursion that included underground caverns.

I'm most proud of: Being the first Japanese American elected to the Orange County Board of Supervisors.

Every morning I read: The Wall Street Journal

My favorite meal is: Anything Italian

My pet peeve is: Typos

My motto is: Make the right thing to do, the easy thing to do

The last book I read was: Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead by Sheryl Sandberg

My favorite movie is: Sleepless in Seattle

My favorite music is: Smooth jazz

My favorite U.S. president is: Ronald Reagan

My county is a NACo member because: NACo provides tremendous value to counties with a voice in Washington D.C.; collaboration on key issues and federal funding; represents counties in important legislative matters and effectively manages lobbying efforts to achieve results for counties. The outstanding advocacy and representation of counties by NACo is second to none. NACo, as an organization, is able to accomplish goals and objectives that counties alone cannot.

My favorite way to relax is:  
Get in the kitchen and cook or bake something new.



WORD SEARCH

FRANKLIN COUNTY, Ohio

Created by: Mary Ann Barton

H E L Y B M A P P A L A C H I A N P M T  
D V G I T C O L U M B U S U U S O N U B  
Y B L R L I E Y J S H C Q X E P O I S V  
C E A E A K S J H K T K E Y U B I M E O  
S L J Z J E B R I W Q T E L W J Y A U O  
T N A R U A T S E R R K A A L F K J M Z  
F X X I Q G I E A V C T X S N Z W N S R  
S F M Y D D X G R U I R N E L I W E I O  
E U X S D R Z X B O O N R M J U J B N C  
C F P R F N T U N R D U U I D Q D M F O  
I T D E C F M Y A P E N O D V G H N H U  
D Y S I R L D D L B L Y A A Q F E U I R  
M X D O Y V D F P K F L P L Q I J O W T  
I R E I F L I O F H H B F G T Q O Z I H  
V L K G T Y J S C K O Y Q J H D X G T O  
T O A R O K Z O O Q F P U B X Y N S U U  
A N N D S L W B P R H B M N C J R Q U S  
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R Z B F L R E R A N M N K M E Z Q C R O  
W D V Q F L A U T E Z T R D K E S H D F

APPALACHIAN: The county is located in the Appalachian Plateau and Till Plains.

BENJAMIN: The county was named after founding father Benjamin Franklin.

BILES: Olympic gymnast Simone Biles is a native of the area.

BUCKEYES: The Ohio State University is located in the county.

COLUMBUS: The county seat, state capital and largest city in Franklin County is Columbus.

COURTHOUSE: The Franklin County courthouse was built in 1991 for \$75 million.

FIERI: TV food maven Guy Fieri is a native of the area.

GRAETER: Be sure to try regional favorite Graeter's ice cream, which got its start in 1870 in Ohio.

LAND: The county is 544 square miles.

MUSEUMS: The county is home to the Columbus Museum of Art, the Ohio Historical Center and the Center for Ohio Science and Industry.

POPULATION: The county's population is about 1.3 million.

RESTAURANT: The oldest restaurant in the county, known for its burgers, is Ringside Café, which opened in 1897.

SUPERVISORS: The county Board of Supervisors is comprised of one member for each of the seven magisterial districts.

UNIVERSITY: Ohio State University is located in the county.

ZOO: Jack Hanna, director of the Columbus Zoo & Aquarium and TV personality, will retire this year after being hired 42 years ago. County residents receive half-price admission to the zoo.

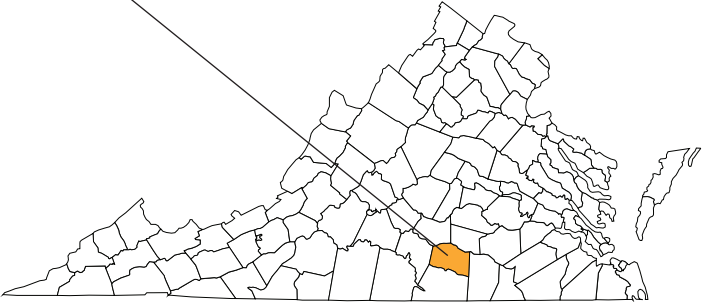
GET TO KNOW...

Lunenburg County, Va.

Welcome, Lunenburg County, Va.

Lunenburg County is located in the countryside of south-central Virginia and was formed from Brunswick County in 1746. The county is named after the former Duchy of Brunswick-Lunenburg in Germany. Its current population is around 12,000. The county seat of Lunenburg has a population of around 165.

Lunenburg County is often referred to as the "Mother of Counties" for providing the territory to form nine other counties throughout Virginia. The county is also referenced as one of the 13 "Hanover Counties" because its name is associated with individuals from the royal House of Hanover, a German royal house that ruled during the 17th and 20th centuries.



The county includes the historic town of Victoria which began as a railroad center and served as a point for railroad crew changes and the service of steam locomotives. Now,

visitors can stop at the Victoria Railroad Park to honor the town's history.

"Get to Know" features new NACo member counties.





# NEWS FROM ACROSS THE NATION

## ARIZONA

A new program in **MARICOPA COUNTY** is helping families who have lost a loved one during the coronavirus pandemic and are struggling to pay for burial expenses. The **Funeral Assistance Program** is in partnership with Valley of the Sun United Way and provides up to \$1,200 in financial assistance for burial or cremation services at participating funeral homes. The program is funded with CARES Act dollars.

## CALIFORNIA

Supervisors in **SANTA CLARA COUNTY** unanimously voted to declare **Juneteenth as a paid holiday for county employees**. The county is the first in the state to regard June 19 as "Juneteenth Day" to commemorate the end of slavery. Funding for the holiday will come from a \$2.3 million reserve approved by the board, *The Mercury News* reported.

The **SANTA CRUZ COUNTY** Board of Supervisors approved a plan to **create an Office of Recovery and Resiliency**. The office will coordinate response to the CZU Lightning Complex Fire which burned more than 86,000 acres last month, *Good Times* reported. It will be run under the county administrator who will assign three full-time employees to work in the office from the planning, public works and environmental health departments. The office will be prepared to respond to future disasters such as fires and earthquakes.

## GEORGIA

**DEKALB COUNTY** launched a new program to **improve access to emergency healthcare**. The Nurse Navigator Program aims to decrease ambulance response times, hospital wait times and improve patients' healthcare experiences. Calls will be triaged by 911 operators and if deemed

non-life threatening, will be transferred to a "nurse navigator" who will provide callers with available healthcare providers to meet their needs. The program will be used in place of ambulance transportation to a hospital for some of the county's one million annual E-911 calls.

## HAWAII

**MAUI COUNTY** has filed a lawsuit against 20 fossil fuel companies over the **impacts from climate change**. The county's complaint states

that corporate members of fossil fuel companies have known the impacts of fossil fuel products creating greenhouse gas pollution and concealed and discredited the threats of fossil fuel pollution. The county says the results of climate change have led to ocean levels rising and a year-round wildfire season in Hawaii.

## MARYLAND

**MONTGOMERY COUNTY**'s council passed a new bill that **bans balloon releases**. The environmentally harmful practice will now come with a

\$500 to \$750 fine for those who intentionally release balloons into the air, WTOP reported. Council Vice President Tom Hucker introduced the bill and said balloon releasees often end up harming animals when deflated balloons end up in their digestive tracts.

## MICHIGAN

The **MACOMB COUNTY** Office of Senior Services announced a partnership that will provide county residents over the age of 60 with a free one-year membership to an **online grocery service**. The partnership with Shipt grew out of a need to provide services to the

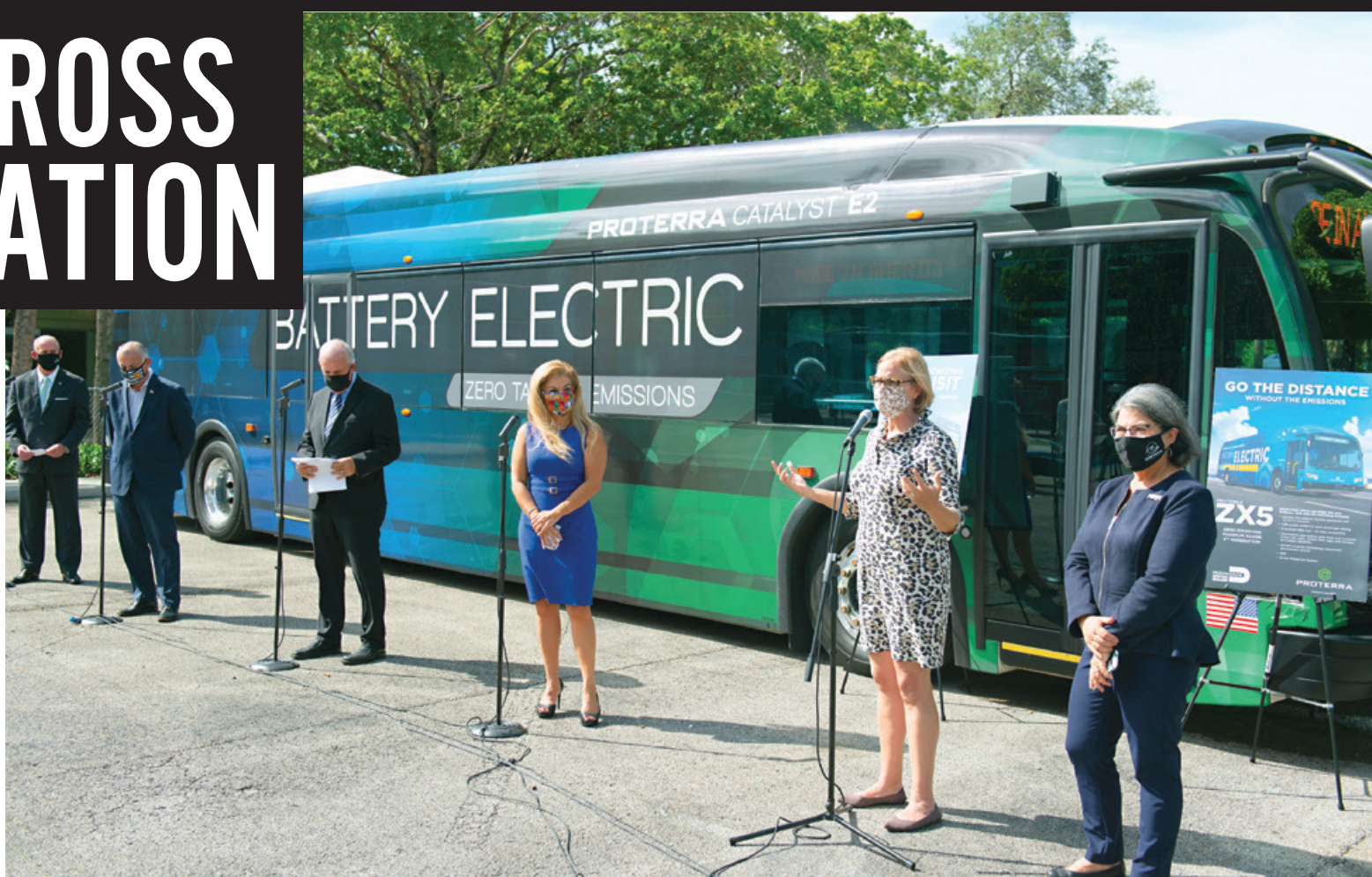


older population during the pandemic, *Macomb Daily* reported. The Shipt for Services program and delivery service aim to reduce exposure risk for seniors and provide a safe way to receive essential items.

• The **OAKLAND COUNTY**

## GEORGIA

Commissioners in **BALDWIN COUNTY** met for the first time in a **newly constructed government building**. The building houses offices for the board of commissioners, code enforcement, planning, GIS, engineering, tax commissioner, tax assessor, water department and elections. It was designed to make early voting easier for the public with a separate parking area and entrance to the election offices. The \$12 million project was paid for by a special purpose local options sales tax that was passed at the end of 2017. Photo courtesy of Baldwin County, Ga.



## FLORIDA

The Department of Transportation and Public Works in **MIAMI-DADE COUNTY** hosted a demonstration of a zero-emissions, **battery-electric bus** to mark the transition to alternative energy technologies in the department. County commissioners approved the purchase of 33 battery-electric buses and installation of depot chargers last year. Each zero-emission bus eliminates nearly 1,700 tons of carbon dioxide over a 12-year lifespan, the equivalent of taking 27 cars off the road. The vehicles will replace the county's diesel powered buses and the first is expected to arrive in the county next summer. Photo of courtesy Miami-Dade County, Fla.







Board of Commissioners is holding a **Native Plant Scatter and Grow event** to provide county residents with a free native plant starter kit. The goal is to have a positive impact on local pollinator populations that help the local environment. Commissioners launched the Native Plants initiative earlier in the year to teach residents about the importance of native plants in the county's ecosystem and increase the number of native plants throughout the county. Residents can pick up a kit curbside which includes 18 potted plants.

## NEVADA

**CLARK COUNTY** has launched a new website aimed at **providing relief** to residents affected by COVID-19. Debuting the same day as the state's eviction moratorium was set to expire, the site was built to provide housing and utilities assistance via CARES Act funding. A total of \$30 million has been allocated for the program, with the addition of \$20 million from the state. The financial assistance pays for housing and

the cost of utilities, including past due and late fees incurred as of March 1.

## NEW YORK

- Griffiss International Airport in Rome might soon no longer have its own **customs inspection** area, now that declining international flights are leading **ONEIDA COUNTY** to end its lease to U.S. Customs and Border Protection. The Board of Legislators' Airport Committee approved a measure ending the lease, and the recommendation will go before the full Board.

- The **TIOGA COUNTY** Legislature approved a measure to **get rid of recycling fees** as part of county taxes. Individual trash haulers would be the ones to add service fees.

- The state of New York will **withhold funding** from **ROCKLAND** and **ORANGE counties'** schools and local governments if they don't follow restrictions that seek to contain COVID-19 clusters. The restrictions shuttered schools and non-essential businesses and limited mass gatherings and religious services in a handful of areas experiencing COVID-19 clusters that outpace the rest of the state.

## TEXAS

The Texas Supreme Court ruled that **HARRIS COUNTY** cannot **send ballot applica-**

**tions** to all 2.4 million of its registered voters, citing state law that currently only allows certain individuals to vote by mail, and that there is no authorization for the county clerk to send applications to all voters.

Texas law only allows mail-in voting for people who expect to be out of the county when polls are open, people who are disabled, those who will be 65 years old or older on Election Day, people who are incarcerated when they submit a ballot application but are still eligible to vote and crime victims who have their addresses kept secret.

## UTAH

- The **SALT LAKE COUNTY** Council voted to sign on to a proclamation committing to responsible policies around **climate change and clean air**. The county officials are among more than 100 Utah leaders who signed the inaugural Utah Climate and Clean Air Compact — which encourages Utah to be a "pragmatic trailblazer" among conservative states in addressing climate change and clean air solutions.

- **WASHINGTON COUNTY** sheriff's deputies **assisted in a search** for a hiker who was lost for 12 days in Zion National Park before being found alive.

Deputies collaborated with a number of local and federal agencies during the search.

By the end of September, the county's search and rescue team had already responded to more calls than ever for an entire year, the local ABC affiliate reported. In 2018, the county responded to 132 calls. In nine months of 2020, it responded to 135 calls.

## VIRGINIA

- **ARLINGTON COUNTY** is considering new administrative guidance to streamline the process of **converting office buildings into residential buildings**, making the review and recommendation process easier.

Officials say that trends both local and national will lead to a wave of office building conversions, driven home by the pandemic and the shift to working from home, potentially leading to less demand for office space, ArlingtonNow.com reported.

- Ahead of the winter, **FAIRFAX COUNTY** streamlined the process for approving temporary changes to the process for setting up **hypothermia shelters**. The county's Housing Crisis Response System serves more than 1,000 people who seek shelter from cold between November and March.

The pandemic has reduced the number of faith-based organizations that typically provide space for shelters, RestonNow.com reported.

## WASHINGTON

A **KING COUNTY** judge ruled that a bill mandating county auditors to significantly increase the number of ballot drop boxes statewide was an **unfunded mandate** and the state must reimburse 10 counties. The process would have cost more than \$1 million plus yearly operating and maintenance costs.

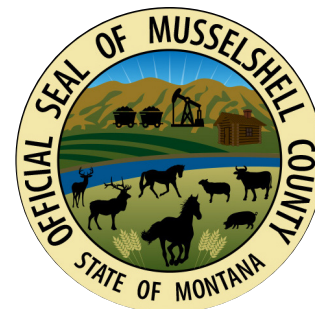
The Washington State Association of Counties was joined by co-plaintiffs **SNOHOMISH, WHITMAN** and **KITTITAS counties**.

*News From Across the Nation is compiled by Charlie Ban and Rachel Looker. Does your county have news that we should consider? Contact cban@naco.org and rlooker@naco.org.*



## MUSSELSHELL COUNTY, Mont.

**M**usselshell County is located in south-central Montana. The county seal has been in use since shortly after the county's founding in 1911. The seal includes symbols that represent the geography throughout the county and its economic drivers.



The background of the seal depicts the Bull Mountains, a mountain range of the Rocky Mountains.

The seal features the Musselshell River which crosses the middle of the county from the west to the east. The county is named after the mussel shells Lewis and Clark found when traveling on the river.

Oil wells, farming, ranching and wildlife symbolize the industries included in the county's economy.

If you would like your county's seal featured in "Behind the Seal," contact Rachel Looker at [rlooker@naco.org](mailto:rlooker@naco.org).



## NEW YORK

- The **OSWEGO COUNTY** Tourism Department has installed several billboards at areas around the county to remind anglers to **prevent the spread of COVID-19**. The billboards were produced by the County Department of Community Development, Tourism and Planning and Lamar Companies.

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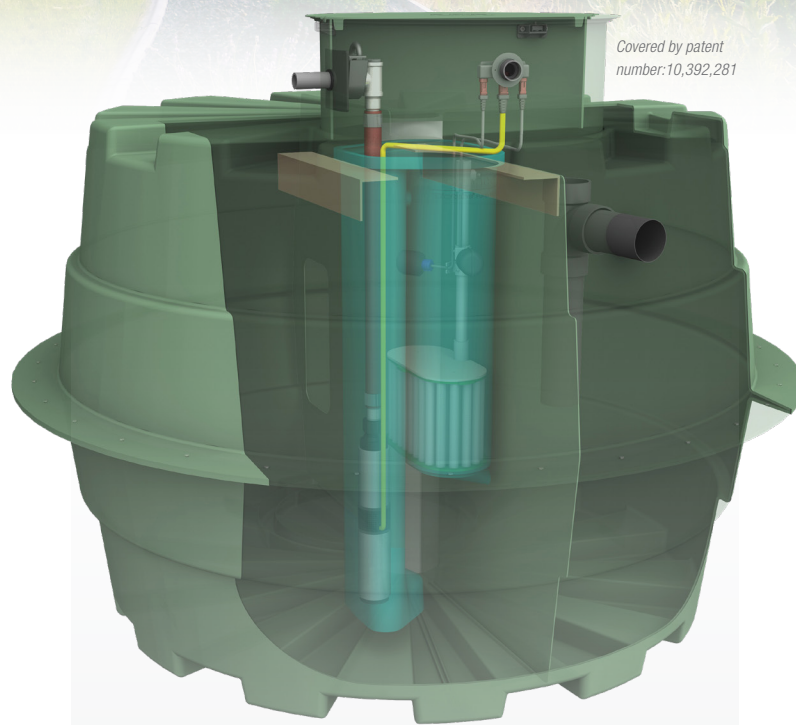
- Brundtland Report, United Nations, 1987

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- Shallow-buried systems
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\*WERF Fact Sheets C1, C2, & C3, “Performance & Cost of Decentralized Unit Processes,” 2010.



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