

GOP RELIEF PROPOSAL 'MISSES THE MARK'

by **Charlie Ban**
 senior writer

As the Biden Administration works to advance its \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan, a group of 10 Senate Republicans released a proposed \$618 billion competing package that does not include direct aid to states or local governments.

"We are encouraged that there is a desire for bipartisan negotiations on COVID-19 relief, but this plan unfortunately misses the mark by omitting much-needed investments in the frontline heroes of the county workforce," NACo Executive Director Matt Chase said of the GOP-proposed plan.

Counties anticipate a \$202 billion impact to budgets through FY2021.

President Biden is hoping to get Republican support for his plan, which includes \$350 billion for state and local governments.

Asked last week whether funding for state and local governments was negotiable, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said: "I would suggest, given that they also supported \$160 billion or \$180 billion in a package that moved forward under the Trump ad-

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Staff from the Josephine County, Ore. Public Health Department administer a COVID-19 vaccine to a stranded motorist during a snowstorm after being unable to deliver the doses to intended recipients. Photo courtesy of Josephine County

COVID-19 vaccines: Don't waste a single drop

by **Rachel Looker**
 staff writer

It was an obvious choice for Josephine County, Ore. Public Health Director Mike Weber.

"Wasting vaccine really wasn't on the table," he said.

Weber found himself and staff members from the Josephine County Public Health Department stranded on Highway 199 after a snowstorm stopped them in their tracks. The group had just finished a vaccination event at a local high school

and had six unused doses. The storm prevented Weber and his staff from transporting the vaccines to intended recipients in the county seat of Grants Pass before they would expire.

After approaching over 40 vehicles, all six of the vaccines

were in someone's arm.

"People don't anticipate somebody knocking on your car window in a snowstorm and saying would you like a needle in the arm so that uniqueness

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County officials face threats amid divisiveness

by **Rachel Looker**
 staff writer

The divisiveness created from last year's election that culminated in the storming last month

of the U.S. Capitol, coupled with the public health crisis, continues to reverberate in counties across the country.

While county officials focus on serving the public in the wake of these events, many have been met with comments and actions that have made their jobs challenging, to say the least.

In Grayson County, Ky., the county's Public Health Director Joshua Embry received a death threat last fall in the form of a comment on a Facebook video. In the video, he was providing

county residents with pandemic updates, the *Lexington Herald Leader* reported.

Last month in Maricopa County, Ariz., the Board of Supervisors received a threat that was posted on a local political website, according to the *Arizona Republic*.

In Washington state, Okanogan County Community Health Director Lauri Jones received death threats throughout the pandemic, *Methow Valley News* reported.

These type of threats are

something Knox County Commissioner Chair Larsen Jay said he never guessed he would have to think about as a locally elected official.

Right before the holidays, members of the board of commissioners in Knox County, Tenn. received a death threat via email.

Jay said the threat was generic and likely sent to multiple people. The commissioners passed the information on to the sheriff

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County officials face threats due to divisiveness

From THREATS page 1

and law enforcement officials who launched an investigation. “It was pretty unfortunate,” he said.

Jay said he wouldn’t pin the cause of the threats to one particular subject but cited the pandemic and the escalated divisiveness throughout the country as a likely cause.

“I think it’s really sad that as an elected official, you have to even think about your safety or safety of your family and their well-being,” he said. “It’s a sad state to be in when you can’t even disagree on policy things without people turning it into personal attacks.”

Around East Tennessee, other local officials have found themselves in similar situations. Staff from the Knox County Health Department found the word “death” spray-painted on the back door of a building with a similar message spray-painted on Knoxville Mayor Indya Kincaannon’s home, a local NBC affiliate reported.

“As an elected official on a local level... you’re in the community all the time volunteering,



Larsen Jay

you’re in the trenches, you’re very accessible, you’re constantly out amongst the public,” Jay said. “You’re just trying to help the neighbor down the street and help with the bake sale and help pave the road. So, it’s an interesting position to be in.”

In California, to keep local officials and the community safe, the Santa Clara County Sheriff’s Office assembled a special task force Jan. 12 to combat domestic terrorists.

The task force includes sheriff’s deputies, detectives and other law enforcement personnel who will investigate any terror groups that may have intentions to harm public officials or damage government facilities.

The task force will work with the FBI and the Northern Cal-

‘I would say the thing that combats anger is relationships within the community.’

ifornia Regional Intelligence Center to collaborate on any investigations.

“We have zero tolerance for violence and terrorism in our community and value our partnership with the community to achieve this goal,” the task force said in a statement.

Jay said he sees face-to-face direct dialogue as a solution to calm the divisiveness many across the country are feeling. With virtual meetings and events, the lack of in-person engagement with community members has prevented genuine relationships and understanding, he said.

“I would say the thing that combats divisiveness and anger and vitriol is relationships within the community,” he said. “It’s really hard to demonize somebody when you know them, when you know their family, when you interact with them face to face.”

Jay said he is hoping to soon get back to more in-person events where he can meet with constituents face to face, have direct conversations at events like town halls and create more engagement to “agree to disagree” on issues without resulting in personal attacks.

“I do think we’re in a little bit of a ‘perfect storm’ right now between the pandemic and the national election and the sort of dominance of technology and 24-hour noise,” he said. “We’ve lost that ability to connect with the community in a meaningful way where we work on solutions instead of identifying problems all the time.” **CN**

A look at American Rescue Plan

From LEGISLATION page 1

ministration, that that’s a place where we would certainly welcome an offer from their end on what state and local funding they’d support.” Psaki made her comment in response to a reporter’s question at a press briefing.

The American Rescue Plan includes a series of provisions of interest to counties:

- \$20 billion to state, local, and tribal governments to launch community vaccination centers and deploy mobile vaccination units to remote areas
- \$50 billion to assist local

governments and schools with regular COVID-19 testing

- Additional funding to respond to and mitigate COVID-19 outbreaks in long-term care facilities
- \$5 billion in emergency rental, utility and homeless prevention assistance
- Expanded paid leave and reimbursements to public sector employers
- \$1 billion to the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program
- \$20 billion for public transit
- An additional \$3 billion in nutrition assistance and offers \$170 billion to safely reopen schools. **CN**

FEMA increases federal cost share for COVID-19 relief to 100 percent

by Brett Mattson

President Biden issued a memorandum Feb. 2 directing the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to increase the federal cost share for COVID-19 Public Assistance funding from 75 percent to 100 percent.

This memo builds on a previous memo issued by President Biden on Jan. 21 and includes specific language making the increase to 100 percent retroactive to Jan. 20, 2020. This includes eligible work under existing COVID-19 policies, such as increasing medical capacity, non-congregate sheltering and emergency food distribution.

For projects that have already been approved, there will be no action required by applicants as FEMA will amend existing awards to adjust the federal funding amounts.

The action also allows FEMA to expand the activities that are eligible for 100 percent federal reimbursement for work conducted from Jan. 21, 2021 through Sept. 30, 2021.

These would include costs associated with the safe reopening and operation of schools, child-care facilities, healthcare facilities, non-congregate shelters, domestic violence shelters and public transit systems. Increasing the federal cost share for FEMA COVID-19 funding has been a key priority of NACo’s since the beginning of the pandemic.

In September 2020, NACo — along with state and local association partners — sent a letter of support to House leadership urging swift passage of legislation that would have accomplished this same goal of increasing the federal share.

NACo worked to regain eligibility for personal protective equipment and disinfectants for public schools, transit systems and courthouses after they were removed as eligible activities as a result of a September change in FEMA guidance.

Increasing the federal cost share for FEMA COVID-19 Public Assistance funding will allow counties to continue providing critical services. **CN**

SNAP/STATS

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

U.S. population:	48.2 million
Black-owned employer businesses:	124,004
Black military veterans:	2.1 million
Highest population per capita:	Mississippi
Highest population by county:	Cook County, Ill.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

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Waitlists and coordination key to using all COVID-19 vaccines before expiration

From VACCINES page 1

made it memorable and frankly, a little bit fun,” Weber said.

Other counties across the country are taking these extra measures to ensure every dose of the vaccine is used without being discarded or wasted.

In Tuscarawas County, Ohio, the health department launched the “No Waste Waitlist” to ensure all vaccines get into someone’s arm.

Tuscarawas County Health Commissioner Katie Seward explained how both the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines have a shelf life. With the Moderna vaccine specifically, Seward said they use 10-dose vials. As soon as the vial is punctured for the first dose, it has six hours to be used before it expires.

While the county tries to schedule in groups of 10 for vaccinations to use the entire vial, Seward said they have been experiencing no-show rates between 5 and 10 percent.

County residents can sign up on the No Waste Waitlist to potentially receive a leftover vaccine. If they receive a call from the health department, they have 40 minutes to arrive for a drive-up appointment to receive the shot.

“It’s really about ensuring that everyone gets the vaccine at some point and so we’re going to do that as efficiently as possible and make sure that we’re not wasting a single drop,” Seward said.

More than 4,000 people have signed up on the list. As of the last week of January, six individuals who were on the list received vaccines and scheduled appointments to come back for the second dose.

With the health department’s weekly allotment of 100 vaccines, Seward said she has a few other lists to help with distribution—one for those who are 75 years or older and one for no-show rates for those who missed an appointment for the second dose.

“We have a real responsibility to be as transparent with the public as possible to gain their confidence that we’re doing everything we can to be responsible with the doses we have,” she said.

The Vanderburgh County, Ind. Health Department also established a COVID-19 vaccine back-up list.

The online form asks for names, ages, birthdays and co-morbidities and stores all information in a database



Josephine County Public Health Director Michael Weber (left) and county health department staff administer COVID-19 vaccines after being stuck with leftover doses in a snowstorm. Photo courtesy of Josephine County

managed by the department, Vanderburgh County Health Department Administrator Joe Gries said.

Staff can sort through the database by age to identify those closest to the current phase to administer leftover doses. Around 20 to 25 people on the list received a call to come to the clinic and receive a vaccine, Gries said. They are then set up with an appointment for the second dose.

“We don’t want to make anything go into the waste can because it’s too valuable right

now,” he said.

Coordination is key in ensuring no vaccines are wasted. Gries described how the health department works with local hospitals, vaccination team leaders, local health departments and the state health department to ensure an efficient vaccine distribution process.

“As long as we’re following the protocols making sure that we have everything in place here locally, we’re not going to ever really have to worry about discarding vaccines or having doses go to waste,” he said.

It also takes a coordinated effort for distribution in Kittitas County, Wash., where the county health department has not wasted any vaccines.

Kasey Knutson, Kittitas County Public Health Department Special Programs coordinator, said the department works closely with the local hospital and the county incident management team to utilize waitlists and ensure all vaccines are administered.

The waitlist, which is online, is for individuals who meet the phases released by state guidance. At its peak, 4,100 individuals had signed up and Knutson said they have started vaccinating those on the list and setting up appointments for others.

The incident management team, which is experienced in responding to other emergencies throughout the county, handles the vaccine distribution working with partners and volunteers to distribute all vaccines.

“I think the keys are the partnerships and having that system in place so having the personnel ready to respond and knowing who’s getting the dose, when are they getting the dose, making sure you have vaccinators to provide that,” she said.

Counties for Kids campaign offers early childhood resources

by Arabella Pluta-Ehlers

The National Association of Counties Research Foundation (NACoRF) recently launched the Counties for Kids initiative, a public awareness campaign and website with resources for county leaders who are committed to making investments in young children from prenatal to age three (PN-3). Through Counties for Kids, counties can access tools and resources and join educational events to connect with peers and national experts to learn strategies for moving the needle for young children.

Counties are critical actors in ensuring healthy beginnings for our youngest residents, working daily to shape early childhood systems, influence policy and provide core services to an estimated 16 million infants and toddlers across the



United States. Research shows that the most rapid period of brain development occurs within the first three years of life, with 1 million new neural connections formed every second. A child’s experiences during the PN-3 period shape their development, laying the foundation for all future learning, behavior and health.

During the COVID-19 pan-

demic, counties are adjusting service delivery and strengthening early childhood systems to meet families’ needs. According to the University of Oregon, about 42 percent of households with young children are worried about paying for at least one basic need like food, rent or utilities and nearly half of parents are concerned about being able to return to

work due to lack of child care.

These findings underscore how COVID-19 is impacting the lives and development of infants and toddlers. In response, county leaders have shown dedication and commitment to early childhood by approving local budgets, advancing county-based systems and leading ballot initiatives to expand services for infants and toddlers.

NACoRF encourages all counties, no matter where you are on your early childhood journey, to become a Counties for Kids champion and join a national movement of county leaders dedicated to improving outcomes for infants and toddlers. The Counties for Kids website hosts educational materials, resources and toolkits with customizable templates to help county leaders start and champion a local PN-3 initia-

tive and learn key strategies for advancing county-based PN-3 policies, programs and systems.

- The ABCs of Prenatal-to-Three is a one-pager that offers county elected officials a range of ideas for prioritizing investments that set young children on a path to success.

- Counties Getting Started is a self-guided tool that county government administrators and non-profits leaders can use to develop and launch a PN-3 initiative.

- The Prenatal-to-Three County Leader Toolkit contains resources and strategies for building awareness and bolstering support for infants and toddlers at the county level.

For more information, visit www.countiesforkids.org or email Arabella Pluta-Ehlers at aplutaehlers@naco.org.



PANDEMIC FUNDAMENTALLY ALTERS TRANSIT SYSTEMS

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

Schedules are everything in public transportation, and for St. Clair County, Ill., the pandemic's timing wasn't great, but it could have been worse.

Studying the shifts in the population and employment centers over two decades, a consultant found that the St. Clair County Transit District could



Lucey

attract new riders with a service expansion to better meet the needs of residents across the Mississippi River from St. Louis.

"We were trying to get it going for March, so the timing ended up being a blessing in a way," said Ken Sharkey, a county Board member and managing director of the agency. "We had hoped that expansion would help us gain ridership with more robust service, but demand is anything but robust right now. So, we were able to save \$4 million on the expansion." But questions will remain as to exactly how accurate that once state-of-the-art \$400,000 study will be in a post-pandemic world.

County transit systems across the country have watched their ridership plummet in the face

of the COVID-19 pandemic, with the National Transportation Database showing the biggest dip in April 2020 — an 81.3 percent drop in ridership from April 2019. While ridership has rebounded, the national average has seen a 50 percent drop from a year prior. And there's no question why.

"The bread and butter of public transit is putting a bunch of strangers into a confined space, which is exactly the opposite of what you're supposed to do during a pandemic," said Adam Brandolph, spokesman for the Port Authority of Allegheny County in Pennsylvania.

But while many of those missing riders were able to work from home, there are those who depend on public transit to reach work, grocery stores and doctors' offices during the pandemic.

Those systems have been adjusting their service to keep their counties moving, serving as a lifeline until life returns to normal.

"We kept all of our vehicles running, albeit on a reduced schedule, for the whole pandemic," Brandolph said, noting a 90 percent drop in ridership in

late March. "That's a testament to the importance of public transit."

Washoe County, Nevada's geography, like Allegheny County's rivers and hills, makes it difficult to provide a substitute for transit service.

"Transit has always been a challenge because we don't have a dense downtown core and most people drive to their jobs," said Bob Lucey, chairman of the Washoe County Commission and chairman of NACO's Transit and Rail Subcommittee.

"Because we're a dry urban mountain region, we have these pockets of development. We can't do a grid system," that would allow for service by several routes.

"We have a very prominent working class that relies heavily on our buses and we have some food deserts, so they rely on us to reach those basic services," said Lucey, who is the immediate past chairman of the Regional Transportation Commission of Washoe County and is the president-elect of the Nevada Association of Counties.

"We were definitely not going to cancel or put on hold any of our routes," he noted.

"If we stopped providing the service, it would be very difficult to reinvigorate it. We will scale it back, do everything we

SPEEDREAD

DECEMBER 2020 RIDERSHIP
COMPARED TO PRE-PANDEMIC

Frederick County, Md. ..75%

Twelve Atlanta-area
counties, Ga.70%

Allegheny County, Pa....66%

Washoe County, Nev.....65%

St. Clair County, Ill.....60%

can do to keep people safe, but don't let it die."

Rider safety has topped agencies' agendas, with most suspending fare collection to minimize interactions between riders and drivers, who were often protected by a transparent barrier, while riders often entered the bus from the rear. In addition, buses are deep cleaned daily, ventilated and seats are marked "off limits" to promote physical distancing.

Those were not without costs, both real and opportunity. Sharkey said the operational changes necessary to ensure every bus could be cleaned add up to an extra \$75,000 per month.

Kendall Tiffany, spokeswoman for Frederick County, Md. Transit, said that through the end of 2020, forgoing fare collection has meant a loss of \$600,000. That revenue for the system has been coupled with

a 20 percent loss in state transportation grants as a result of sales tax revenue losses during the recession.

Federal stimulus funding has been crucial to filling budget holes, to the tune of \$39 billion (\$25 billion from the CARES Act, \$14 billion from the December stimulus) before the American Rescue Plan's proposed additional \$20 billion, but systems have had to set different priorities to make that funding last. The Atlanta-Region Transit Link Authority, which serves 12 counties, has halted underperforming routes and reallocated those buses to the more heavily used routes to allow for more physical distancing.

"It's not the perfect solution because there were some people on those [discontinued] routes who needed service, but there was really no way to do it," said Cain Williamson, the Atlanta agency's chief planning officer.

"Even with running routes that are relatively productive, they still aren't producing the same level of ridership that they were producing pre-pandemic, and so at some point that has longer-term financial and structural consequences that people are starting to grapple with now.

See *TRANSIT* page 5

From TRANSIT page 4

How do we remain solvent until life returns to normal?

But what will normal look like?

The pandemic has been devastating for long-term planning efforts. Allegheny County saw system-wide ridership increases in 2018 and 2019 before the pandemic. The agency will still assemble its scheduled 25-year plan, but it will be informed largely by in-depth input from public meetings instead of ridership numbers.

"We want to serve as many people as possible, and that comes down to numbers, but at the same time, some decisions make sense whether you have the numbers to back it up or not," Brandolph said. "When you look at these numbers from 2018 and 2019, it seems like a long time ago, but they're the last two years we've had normal ridership. It's so hard to estimate what it will be like two years from now."

"The vaccine is the light at the end of the tunnel, but we don't yet know what's in store for employees and employers, even

when the majority of the population is vaccinated."

Likewise, Washoe County is planning to go ahead with assembling a five-year plan. The county's residential and commercial growth has not slowed with the pandemic, which may leave the county with greater transit service needs when all is said and done.

St. Clair County is still planning on that expansion, someday.

"The plan still makes sense, it's just a matter of when you pull the trigger and implement it, depending on what's going on," Sharkey said. "What I'm expecting are some shifts in people's education plans and we expect there will be some permanent [worker] displacement."

Sharkey said his system may offer more on-demand transportation options in the event of waning service demand.

The Atlanta counties' system is communicating with large employers and business improvement districts to anticipate changes in employee traffic.

"I think employers have seen

productivity in white-collar jobs not suffer too much for not being in the same place," Williamson said. "But I think there are internal corporate cultural consequences for folks not being together on some sort of regular basis. My guess is employers are going to wind up having to balance those against one another and the demand for commuter transit will return, perhaps on a few-days-a-week basis."

"I think there will be some sort of return to normalcy in the office, but I don't think employers know exactly how much or when, either."

Brandolph said that in lieu of heavy commuter service to downtown Pittsburgh, his agency is adjusting service to operate in evenings and on weekends to further meet the needs of essential workers.

"On most of our routes, prior to November, we didn't run a lot of late night or weekend service; we're starting to transition more to do that, to cater to those who are continuing to ride public transit," he said. "It's not necessarily a bad thing that we're forced to make changes based on those who are riding and

who rely on our service."

Throughout the pandemic, Lucey has seen the Regional Transportation Commission as a canary in a coal mine, indicating how safe people feel the community is.

"If people see empty buses, if they don't see people riding the buses, they won't feel like it's safe yet," he said. "We had to make sure we were allowing for buyer confidence. If you see your bus driver being safe, if they're smiling with their eyes, they are comfortable, but it's a result of a lot of agencies working together to make that happen."

Safety means turning away some customers who could crowd out the foundational transit riders. When the pandemic restrictions in California took their toll on residents, many fled to Northern Nevada, prompting the Regional Transportation Commission to cancel promotions like free rides on the Fourth of July, which would otherwise encourage new riders.

"We were worried that people were going to come to our community to ride our transit.

We canceled the 'free rides' so we could maintain safe distancing and make sure our drivers could get work and our essential workers could get to their jobs without overloading the buses with people," said Mark Maloney, RTC's director of public transportation. "It makes it a little difficult, but we were strict and had to adhere to our safety campaign."

Likewise, St. Clair County is holding off on restoring its "Redbird" bus service to St. Louis Cardinals games.

"It was good for the residents, and the drivers love the overtime, but I'm not sure it would be prudent to pack a 43-seat bus with mainly older people right now," Sharkey said. "That service may take another year off."

The most important trait these agencies can identify during the pandemic is flexibility, seasoned with the willingness to meet the needs of the riders who need them.

"We're making small changes but, for the individual, they're really life changing," Brandolph said. "That's what we're here for and what we're here to support." **CN**

NACo 2021 | VIRTUAL LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE

MARCH 8-26 » BONUS CONTENT THROUGHOUT APRIL

SCHEDULE AT A GLANCE

MARCH 8-12	Policy Steering Committee Meetings Caucus, Advisory Committee and Standing Committee Meetings
MARCH 17-19	Board of Directors and other NACo Governance Meetings
MARCH 24-26	Workshops and Plenary Sessions Virtual Hill Days

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GET TO KNOW...

Natchitoches Parish, La.

Welcome, Natchitoches Parish, La.

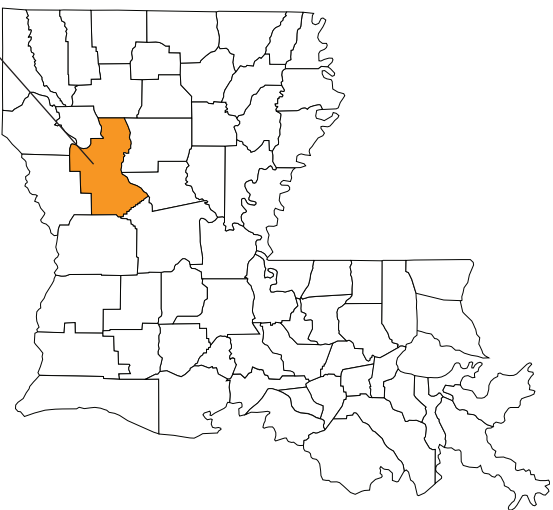
Natchitoches Parish was the first permanent settlement in the Louisiana Purchase territory. It was formed in 1805 and named after the indigenous Natchitoches people. Located in western Louisiana, its population is around 38,000.

The parish seat of Natchitoches was established in 1714 as part of French Louisiana, making it the oldest permanent settlement in the Louisiana Purchase territory. **Natchitoches is home to the Steel Magnolia House, the location of the 1989 movie *Steel Magnolias*.**

Also located in the parish seat, the Natchitoches National Historic Landmark District features 33 blocks of historical buildings dating back to the 1700s with a variety of architectural styles including Queen Anne-style mansions, Art Deco and French Creole homes.

Key industries in the parish include forestry, building materials production, poultry production and processing and manufacturing.

One of the official state foods, the Natchitoches Meat Pie, is a regional dish from the area.



Steel Magnolia’s Cast, 1989 IMDb

“Get to Know” features new NACo member counties.

ON THE MOVE

NACo OFFICERS

- NACo President **Gary Moore**, Boone County, Ky. judge/executive, made a virtual presentation Feb. 2 to the V.G. Young School for County Commissioners Court in Brazos County, Texas. NACo Membership Director **Kim Hall** shared NACo updates with county officials at the meeting.



Moore

NACo STAFF

- Arabella Pluta-Ehlers**, program manager, Children, Youth and Families, hosted NACo’s Early Childhood Peer Learning Network virtual convenings Jan. 25 for rural, urban and suburban counties. They were led by Harris County, Texas, Missoula County, Mont. and Otter Tail County, Minn. and featured Linda Smith, director of the Early Childhood Initiative at the Bipartisan Policy Center, to discuss strategies for expanding childcare at the county level.
- At the NACo South Region Meeting Jan. 26, NACo Chief Public Affairs Officer **Brian Namey** made a virtual presentation on National County Government Month and its events. Associate Legislative Director **Blaire Bryant** provided the latest on the COVID-19 vaccine distribution situation and Associate Legislative Director **Arthur Scott** shared an update on the broadband task force and broadband issues nationwide.
- Pluta-Ehlers** hosted a #CountiesForKids social media day on Jan. 27.
- At the Northeast Region Meeting Jan. 27, **Bryant** presented a virtual presentation on vaccine distribution and **Namey** encouraged the region’s leaders to apply for NACo Achievement Awards and promoted the 2021 Virtual Legislative Conference.



Hall



Pluta-Ehlers

PROFILES IN SERVICE



Smith

DOUG SMITH

NACo Board Member
County Commissioner
Martin County, Fla.

Number of years active in NACo: 20

Years in public service: 20

Occupation: County Commissioner

Education: High school, NACo Leadership/first class, FAC, CCC, ACC Certification program

The hardest thing I’ve ever done: Being chair of my county commission during the two back-to-back hurricanes of Frances and Jeanne one month apart in 2004 with the eye landing a mile apart directly on or at our inlet in Martin County.

Three people (living or dead) I’d invite to dinner: Abe Lincoln, Amelia Earhart, all my great grandparents.

A dream I have is to: Complete all the major water quality projects in South Florida that will save our rivers, estuaries and the only continental coral reef in the United States.

You’d be surprised to learn: I just became a dad to our beautiful little girl.

The most adventurous thing I’ve ever done: Jump out of a perfectly good airplane.

My favorite way to relax is: Work on my car and boat restorations.

I’m most proud of: My wife.

Every morning I read: The news of the day on my iPhone.

My favorite meal is: Lobster.

My pet peeve is: Lack of follow up.

My motto is: “No’ isn’t acceptable; everything is possible!”

The last book I read was: *Wind from the Carolinas* by Robert Wilder

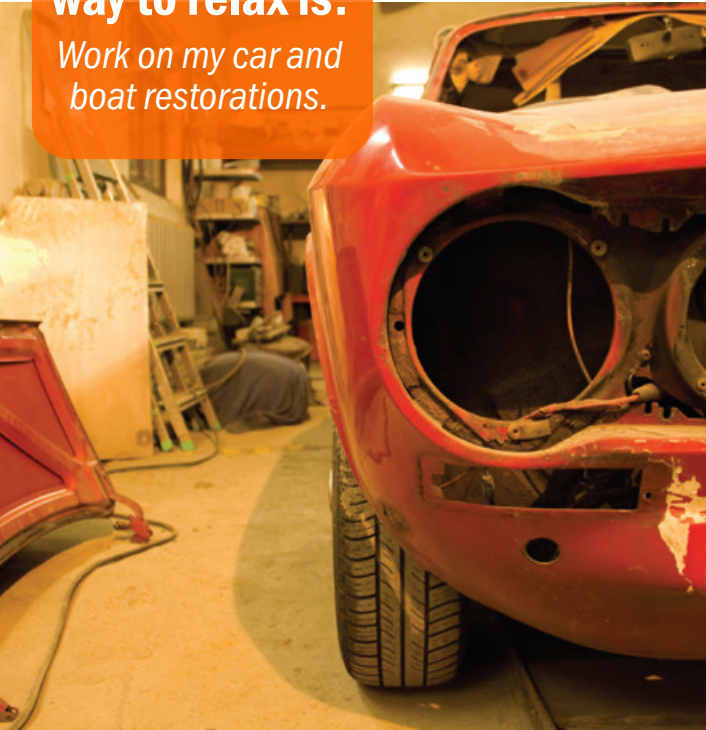
My favorite movie is: *Dr. No*

My favorite music is: Steely Dan and the Dave Matthews Band

My favorite U.S. president: I have two — George Washington and Abraham Lincoln

My county is a NACo member because: It offers us the opportunity to include our county and state policy issues on the national level.

My favorite way to relax is:
Work on my car and boat restorations.



CountyNews

HOT

topics

ECONOMIC RECOVERY

W. Va. counties embrace
outdoor tourism. pg. **H4**

Honolulu County moves to
diversify economy. pg. **H6**

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION *of* COUNTIES

FEBRUARY 8, 2021

BACK TO THE NOT SO FAMILIAR

Counties forge
a way forward in
this new frontier.



LOCAL COUNTY EFFORTS ADD UP IN AN ECONOMIC COMEBACK



by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

Kittitas County can feel like a child of divorce.

At times, Washington state's regional system lumps it with counties to the east. Other times, it's lumped in with counties to the west. It rarely has control of its destiny for the most part as it seeks to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting economic contraction, so county leaders have instead focused on what they can control.

In addition to the business and social service assistance various county departments administer, the elected officials take their roles to heart in supplying leadership that Commissioner Brett Wachsmith said has been lacking on the state and federal levels.

"We try to give people hope, and that's important because nobody has been through something of this magnitude before," he said. "We're doing that by being consistent in our efforts, being reliable and supporting businesses that have been modified or closed."

But just as important, Wachsmith said, is being accessible.

"A lot of times, people are just angry at the situation, and if you're there to be able to speak truth to them, or even just listen to their concerns, that goes a long way," he said.

A year ago, February 2020, the country saw the lowest unemployment rates since 1969 at 3.5 percent, the economy was maintaining a 128-month period of expansion



Wachsmith

sion and the Congressional Budget Office projected gross domestic product — a measure of production and output within an economy — to experience 4.2 percentage point growth throughout 2020. By the end of March, the novel coronavirus had swept across the United States, with over 1,000 deaths and more than 50 percent of counties reporting at least one case.

Research from the Opportunity Insights group out of Harvard University suggests the number of small businesses which are open for business as of Jan. 4, 2021 to be down 29.7 percent compared to January 2020; the Yelp: Local Economic Impact Report published in September estimated nearly 98,000 businesses had permanently closed since April. Other indicators echo the implied sentiment of these figures: there will be a long road to economic recovery.

December county-level unemployment figures remind economists of the local impacts: the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported 64 percent of counties experienced unemployment levels above a healthy level, as defined by the Federal Reserve to be a maximum of 4.5 percent.

These impacts are not unrelated. A county heavily reliant on restaurants and

'We try to give people hope and that's important because nobody has been through something of this magnitude before.'

retail relies on counties heavily reliant on manufacturing and agriculture to produce goods and vice versa. These counties rely on others who have strong transportation businesses to support their supply chains and ensure their products can be sold in a timely manner. Each county economy, working independently, fits together like pieces in a puzzle to form the national economic picture. As such, national economic impacts, when brought down to the ground, become friends and neighbors within counties across the nation losing jobs, suffering hardships, facing the fear of losing their homes or their livelihoods. National economic trends are the amalgamation of county economic situations; national impacts are real in county communities, impacting real people, real families and producing real long-term consequences for economic health.

With no crystal ball to anticipate the future, individual county economies expanded and contracted along the contours of the virus' progression, with some workers staying home, but others unable to keep themselves out of harm's way. For more than 400,000 Americans, that has proven fatal, and many others are contending with at least short-term health complications

from COVID-19.

"We were ready for a wildfire," Wachsmith said. "We weren't ready for this. Nothing really existed for a game plan, so we were really starting from square one."

That meant coordinating with local mayors, chambers of commerce, downtown associations, schools, Central Washington University and more. The county formed two committees — one for businesses, another for social service providers — and those stakeholders addressed how Kittitas County would recover. They eventually merged, and fielded questions from the public.

"These committees gave us a chance to meet and give us a pulse on what's going on," Wachsmith said. "There's a ton of misinformation out there so it's good to hear directly from the people making decisions and hearing what's going on, the resources that are out there, where to access them."

Wachsmith noted that the flow of questions, and the audience, eventually waned. "More people were working, and that was a good sign," he said. "That coincided with when we moved from phase one to phase two, then phase two to phase three."

The halting pace of recovery in different regions can make Kittitas County business owners feel like their car is stalling out while climbing a hill.

"We'd love to control our own destiny and our own fate," Wachsmith said. "It builds a lot of uncertainty for business owners — uncertainty has been a huge hinderance. We want to be data-driven, but we don't see data driving these decisions."

Aside from its relatively successful defense from COVID-19 in the community thus far, Kittitas County has managed a few bright spots. After compiling 20 years' worth of data, the county has seen remarkably level property tax collection, particularly in comparison to 2008-2009, and the local collection of online sales taxes brought the 2020 figures in at \$6 million, 50 percent above what was budgeted.

"It's hard to cherry pick a few numbers and have that outshine what we're seeing all the time from businesses that can't operate in this environment and people who lose their jobs," Wachsmith said. "Kids are suffering, parents are, and everyone is, in between."

So, the local focus continues, delivering business aid and managing what has been a remarkably efficient vaccine delivery system.

"We've had people who have broken down in tears after they get their first shot, saying this feels like the first step in living normally again," Wachsmith. "That's a place we can start." ■

NACo Associate Economist Kevin Shrawder contributed to this article.



PANDEMIC KEEPS COUNTY TOURISM ON ITS TOES

The Florida Space Coast Office of Tourism in Brevard County, Fla. pivoted its promotions strategy to attract visitors to watch the record number of launches in 2020 after the pandemic shut down the cruising industry. Photo courtesy of the Space Coast Office of Tourism

by **Rachel Looker**
staff writer

Shutdowns, travel bans, mandates and closures have pulled the rug out from under the tourism industry.

As counties work to recover from economic losses incurred during the last year, county tourism agencies are rethinking marketing strategies to adjust to the new normal.

In Brevard County, Fla., the focus pivoted from cruising to space launches.

The Space Coast Office of Tourism, a department of Brevard County government, focused on beach experiences, cruising, the outdoors and the space program in its promotion strategy before the pandemic.

When COVID-19 hit the United States in March, Peter Cranis, executive director of the Florida Space Coast Office of

Tourism, said the county had to narrow its focus following the shutdown of the cruise industry.

The county found new promotion strategies last summer, highlighting the many space launches held in the area that could be viewed on the county's beaches.

"We've had some really high-profile launches which really helps us," Cranis said.

Brevard County saw a record number of launches in 2020, taking the reigns as the number one launch site in the world. Notable Space X launches lifting off from the county included the Crew-1 mission and Crew Dragon, which brought humans to the International Space Station from U.S. ground for the first time in nearly a decade.

"2021 is going to have even more launches so we're definitely playing that angle up," Cranis said. "We talk about great beaches and we talk about space launches and those are two big things that make up a lot of our communications."

He said more people traveled to the area in 2020 to witness some of the bigger launches.

"When people hear they can come

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HOTtopics

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OUTDOOR TOURISM OFFERS COVID-SAFE OPPORTUNITIES

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

Its birth announcement may have been buried deep in December's omnibus spending bill, but a quartet of West Virginia counties are welcoming New River Gorge National Park and preparing for visitors.

Though the timing of the designation was a surprise, it was not unexpected, because the four counties involved in planning — Fayette, Raleigh, Summers and Nicholas — have been working toward this goal for more than 30 years. And it's happening when outdoor recreation is seen as one of the safest options during the COVID-19 pandemic, making the glittering lure of a new national park, and its wide-open spaces, even brighter.

"The counties realize they could be inundated very soon," said Jina Belcher, executive director of the New River Gorge Regional Development Commission, which coordinates business development in the four counties. "Over the last three or four years, we have been trying to figure out how we capitalize on what that outdoor industry really looks like. Is it recruiting outdoor manufacturers? Is it focusing on the existing outdoor assets and infrastructure that we have? Is it positioning ourselves to be able to support the development of new and growing outdoor infrastructure such as our trails? Is it just business recruitment and site development? We found it's all of that. It takes all of that to cultivate a growing outdoors industry."

Though West Virginia, "Wild and Wonderful," has pivoted toward outdoor recreation for years to transition from coal mining, having the 70,000-acre park and preserve, complete with the grand bridge spanning the gorge — which appears on the state's quarter — puts it on a whole different map.

"I feel like it's going to get attention and eyeballs that it wasn't before," said Greg Duckworth, a Raleigh County commissioner. "Why pass West Virginia to go see the Great Smoky Mountains? We have plenty of mountains here."

His poke at the Smokies was purely in jest; Duckworth hopes that his county and the others in the region can capitalize on what other "gateway" counties have learned as he sees the two parts as complementary, rather than competitive.

"We'd like to make it easy for visitors to embrace the local flavor while they're



New River Gorge Bridge is the centerpiece of New River Gorge National Park. Photo by Taylor Napier

here," he said. "Eat at our local restaurants, stay in our hotels and we'll try to keep them around and into other parts of the county to see what else we have."

The Bureau of Economic Analysis estimates that outdoor recreation in 2019 accounted for \$459.8 billion, or 2.1 percent of current-dollar gross domestic product. More than a quarter came from accommodations, food services and more, with another one-fifth coming from retail trade.

Michelle Rotellini, president and CEO of the Beckley-Raleigh County Chamber of Commerce, eyes the region's growing outdoor recreation profile as the kind of setting that could attract new residents, now that a year's worth of remote work is proving to be more feasible for some sectors of the economy.

"Why live in Silicon Valley and deal with that cost of living and traffic when you can live and do your job and have all of these outdoor recreation opportunities right out of your back door?" she said. "The changes the pandemic has made in our lifestyles has opened up opportunities for West Virginia."

Over the next few months, Belcher's organization will identify local needs and develop a short-term strategy to handle the influx of visitors. That includes analyzing the region's stock of short-term housing rentals and infrastructure related to outdoor recreation and planning what

the counties need to maximize the benefits of the visitors. She'll consult with the Appalachian Regional Commission and the state for funding opportunities.

"It was very important that all four counties were really bought into this — it's really caused them to rethink their community strategies and their county strategies individually to figure out how they best complement this particular industry," Belcher said. "They recognize that a regional approach for economic development is what is going to move these counties forward. They're very different but they're all tied together with this component of the New River Gorge."

San Benito County, Calif. went through similar experiences in 2013, when Pinnacles National Monument became Pinnacles National Park. The park straddles the line with Monterey County to the west, the eastern gateway in San Benito leads to campsites and the visitor's center and draws the lion's share of visitors.

"We saw a major boost in visitors when the Pinnacles became a national park," said Jennifer Rodriguez, director of tourism and hospitality for the San Benito County Chamber of Commerce. "That alone helped us promote tourism and outdoor recreation, which we are relying on heavily right now. It's a blessing to have a national park in our backyard."

After the designation, the county's chamber of commerce shifted gears to

cater specifically to visitors.

"We started having conversations with the city and the county, having them provide funding toward tourism efforts," said Michelle Leonard, the chamber's president and CEO. "We really wanted to market the entire community to everyone who came to the park and that meant getting everyone on board." She hired Rodriguez to coordinate the county, city, park superintendent and businesses.

The businesses themselves changed.

"We noticed an increase in the type of business that would appeal to outdoor-daytrip enthusiasts — taprooms, breweries, wineries, adventure-based businesses," Leonard said. "Businesses are approaching their branding and offerings with more intentionality and cohesiveness, whether it's something on their menu or their décor that really pays homage to Pinnacles National Park. It's a deliberate effort to tie into what we have here."

While the "honeymoon phase" has ended and the initial rush of visitors abated, Rodriguez noted an increase in visitors in 2020, which she attributed to the pandemic.

"We've generally hit a new mindset where people want to get back to camping, hiking, being outside," she said. "There's a really big opportunity if you're a county with outdoor recreation opportu-

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From OUTDOORS pg H4

nities, or a national park.”

That said, not every county has a national park. Harlan County, Ky. doesn’t, but nearly 20 years ago, a group of off-road driving enthusiasts started building their own attraction.

“We were looking for a place to ride where we wouldn’t be trespassing on people’s property,” said Ken Crider, treasurer of the Harlan County Outdoor Recreation Board Authority, which the county’s Fiscal Court formed in 2005.

“We took the judge/executive to some off-roading events and he saw how many people came to those and he was interested in making sure we could make that happen in Harlan County.” With a 25-year lease on 7,000 acres, the authority developed 150 miles of trails using a network of former mining and logging roads on what became Black Mountain Off-Road Adventure Area. Crider manages the park’s operations, which include a zipline network.

“We were so happy to have people coming to Harlan,” Crider said. “Nobody ever thought people would come to this small mountain community. We’ve had hundreds of thousands of people come here over the last 15 years who wouldn’t have come here for any other reason.”

Crider said a cottage industry of retailers for ATV parts, campgrounds and rental properties has developed around the park, and hotels and restaurants have had a healthy stream of customers associated with the park.

“Last fall was the best we’ve had in years,” visitor-wise, Crider said. “You’re not getting infected [with COVID-19] riding off-road vehicles. You don’t have to come into contact with anyone, and you’re enjoying the outdoors.” While Gunnison County, Colo. does have the Black

Canyon of the Gunnison National Park in its boundaries, that’s not the main draw — the ski resort town of Crested Butte is.

An uptick in visitors to the county’s other public lands in 2015 was apparent from the waste and evidence of illegal campsites, which drew pushback from residents.

“Our residents were very clear that the reasons they live here were being impacted,” said Cathie Pagano, Gunnison County’s community and economic development director. “That got us thinking about how to create a tourism economy and mitigate those impacts to our community.”

The Board of Commissioners formed the Sustainable Tourism and Outdoor Recreation (STOR) Committee to create and carry out an outdoor recreation tourism strategy.

It gathered a cross-section of stakeholders to not only set policy regarding public land use and tourism efforts, but it also created an organization to recruit volunteers to improve trails, remove trash, obliterate illegal campsites, install toilets and otherwise work to make visiting Gunnison County attractive.

“There was a real need to have a collaborative approach across jurisdictions and agencies to address these issues,” Pagano said.

Municipalities, federal agencies, other stakeholder groups like land trusts, mountain bike groups, our ranching community... we’re fortunate to have all those folks at the table and willing to work together to come up with solutions — a lot of times it’s hard to get those folks to the table. The planning paid off.

“In September 2020, we had the highest lodging revenue since we started recording,” Pagano said. “People knew we were a safe place to be, but we also had plans in place to preserve our resources.”



Brevard County, Fla. was the number one launch site in the world in 2020. Photo courtesy of the Space Coast Office of Tourism

Counties promote drive-to destinations

From SPACE COAST pg H3

and have a beach experience and they can actually watch a launch from the beach, I think that’s a big selling point for coming to the Space Coast,” he said.

In 2020, the county lost around 19 percent in tourism development taxes after experiencing its highest revenue year in county history in 2019, according to Cranis. With an average income of \$1.8 billion each year from tourists, decreased rates impacted the county’s economy, sales tax and businesses.

While having a variety of beaches and outdoor experiences helped the tourism industry during COVID-19, summer business was still down 30 percent with a consistent loss of 25 percent each month, he said.

Cranis said the department also worked to send a new message to visitors that focused on the safety precautions established at hotels and restaurants.

The department also turned inward, increasing marketing throughout Florida to target those who were looking to get to a destination by driving. Ahead of summer 2021, Cranis said he plans to expand targeted marketing areas to the surrounding states in the southeast portion of the country.

Cook County, Minn. implemented a similar strategy.

Visit Cook County’s Marketing and Public Relations Director Kjersti Vick said when the pandemic began, the agency realized there would be more of an emphasis on the county becoming a drive-to destination with people looking to travel closer to home.

After pausing marketing for two months, Visit Cook County relaunched a campaign with a new strategy: Market in their own neighborhoods.

“When you’re not blasting off the goodness of your area to the world, you turn

it inwardly and you work with your community and that really created a strong foundation for Visit Cook County as we moved into summer,” Visit Cook County Executive Director Linda Jurek said.

As an outdoor destination that has been branded as “socially distanced before social distancing was a thing,” camping, hiking, canoeing and exploring the wilderness were all activities that could be experienced in safe ways while staying at cabins and townhomes perfect for isolation.

‘When you’re not blasting off the goodness of your area to the world, you turn it inwardly and you work with your community.’

The strategy worked and led to one of the biggest summers on record.

Jurek worked in collaboration with county government, public health, businesses and the economic development agency to discuss best practices for operating and reopening safely at the beginning of the pandemic, implementing consistent safety protocols for all establishments.

“People who wanted to get away and wanted to be safe chose our area because they had heard that we were doing things the right way and I think that’s a big reason why we saw such success this summer,” Vick said.

Many businesses in the area were used to seeing repeat customers who traveled to the county from different areas of the country, but this year there were new faces from people within closer communities.

“We have to make sure it’s safe here and we positioned our organization to still be very valid and viable as a voice for tourism,” Jurek said. “It was just a different voice — and it worked.”

BEST PRACTICES FOR BUILDING OUTDOOR RECREATION ECONOMIES

The Outdoor Recreation Roundtable identifies the following principles for enabling community-centric, place-based sustainable economic development around outdoor recreation assets.

1. Identify and empower local champions	8. Provide professional development
2. Unify behind consistent messaging	9. Create a brand
3. Make outdoor recreation a “must have”	10. Identify funding partners
4. Build collaboratives	11. Achieve buy-in from the state
5. Guarantee buy-in and dependability	12. Plan for destination management
6. Identify one point of contact	13. Ensure value capture
7. Generate public support	14. Take on basic infrastructure needs
	15. Attract and support outdoor business

Learn more from the Outdoor Recreation Roundtable Rural Economic Development Toolkit: <https://recreationroundtable.org/rural-development-toolkit/>.

Honolulu County reimagines a resilient, sustainable economy

by Rachel Looker
staff writer

In a complete 180-degree flip, the state of Hawaii went from having one of the lowest unemployment rates in the nation to having the highest in 2020, revealing COVID-19's economic impact on the islands.

"We need to develop a clear vision for a more diversified and sustainable economy that is compatible with our culture and way of life," Gov. David Ige (D) said in his annual state of the state address in January.

The idea to expand upon the state's visitor-based economy has been on Honolulu County's radar. The city-county is aiming to focus on a green, resilient economy that can rely upon itself in times of a climate or health-related crisis.

Amy Asselbaye, director of the City and County of Honolulu's Office of Economic Revitalization, said COVID-19 has been a "real shock to the system" and attributes the high unemployment numbers to the lack of tourism.

"We know some of the structural underpinnings of our economy need to be reset for a more equitable recovery and a more diverse economy going forward," she said.

Matthew Gosner, executive director and chief resilience officer at the Office of Climate Change, Sustainability and Resiliency, said there is a clear connection between climate resiliency and improving the economy.

He said the pandemic "has presented an opportunity to think more holistically at the human aspects and the human consequences of where the economy was and the direction it was potentially going toward."

The county received \$387 million from CARES Act funding and began to



A car is loaded with bags of food purchased by consumers as part of the Honolulu County Office of Economic Revitalization's efforts to create new markets for farmers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Photo courtesy of the Hawaii Farm Bureau

focus on climate change, sustainability and resiliency as a means of economic revitalization.

"Our goal certainly along with sustainability and resiliency is that our place and our economy are more resilient to

who lost their jobs in various hospitality sectors. Over 2,000 people from the island participated in 10-week job re-training efforts and enrolled in free classes at the community college and the University of Hawaii.

Training included jobs in the health-care sector, the sustainable agricultural sector, ventilation and cooling systems, replacing cesspools and working to protect the county's watershed, fishponds and shore waters.

"Hopefully we can build out more sustainable, more living-wage jobs and it just reflects the way of living that is much more aligned with our values and also the practical realities of climate change here on our islands," Asselbaye said.

She described how a significant focus for the county in its economic revitalization is ensuring resiliency among food producers. With many food producers relying on hotels, restaurants and the visitor industry to market their produce, the COVID-19 pandemic was devastating for local growers, according to Asselbaye. The office worked to create new markets for locally produced fruits, vegetables and meats to sustain farmers.

These efforts included three programs: Farm to Car, Farm to Food and Fish to Dish — all of which helped food producers sell food to the local community and add to emergency food distribution systems.

"We think the more diversified our food producers are, the better they are going to be able to sustain themselves through the next economic or potential

climate difficulties," she said.

To aid small businesses struggling with shutdowns, the county launched innovation grants through the organization Hawaii Investment Ready to deploy smart water heater controllers to reduce monthly energy costs, create automated post-harvest processing equipment and train students and interns on ecosystem restoration.

"Small businesses shouldn't have to suffer from the consequences of legacy building codes or aging infrastructure," Gosner said.

To continue these efforts beyond the pandemic, the City and County of Honolulu's Office of Climate Change, Sustainability and Resiliency released a draft of a climate action plan that includes nine climate strategies to pursue in the next five years that focus on buildings, the energy sector, transportation and waste management.

"So much of climate action is economic and economic prosperity and local health as well," Gosner said.

Both Gosner and Asselbaye emphasized the need for federal leadership to capitalize on funding opportunities and initiatives to understand the connection between new economic opportunities around climate action.

"I think right now people are better understanding the consequences of inaction both on the economic front and on the climate action front and better recognizing that they are directly related and there is tremendous opportunity for prosperity into the future while acting on both," Gosner said. ■



Asselbaye

'Some of the structural underpinnings of our economy need to be reset for a more equitable recovery...'

outside forces like climate events or even our visitor count," Asselbaye said.

Honolulu County expedited the completion of two energy-saving performance contracts at the beginning of the pandemic representing renewable energy generation, energy and water conservation and electric vehicle-charging across facilities to keep individuals employed while investing in clean energy transformation.

"We know when there are moments of economic downturn that these kinds of sustained public investments really have outsized multiplier effects so that we can keep people in these jobs moving forward," Gosner said.

The Office of Economic Revitalization launched Oahu Back to Work and the Aina (meaning land in Hawaiian) Workforce Development programs for those

MEASURING ECONOMIC RECOVERY

Economic recovery is a large umbrella with multiple facets including recovery of the labor market, business and production, the service sector and consumer spending. Each industry has been impacted in different ways from the pandemic and resulting economic fallout and, as such, recovery across all markets and sectors is often hard to define.

by Kevin Shrawder

Labor market

Recovery within the labor market would mostly mean a return to healthy levels of unemployment, somewhere between 3.5 and 4.5 percent as defined by the Federal Reserve. Healthy levels of unemployment would also lead to most sectors returning to pre-recession employment levels, including county government workforces. Recovery within both of these indicators would imply a return to a tighter labor market such as the one experienced in early 2020.

Business and production

Business or production recovery would exist when businesses can safely reopen and sustain operations. Though some businesses producing goods such as masks, computer equipment and other high-demand items have expanded, many other businesses have seen revenues dwindle and production slow.

Service sector

Similarly, service sector recovery would imply companies such as airlines, hotels, resorts and casinos no longer need to lay off employees and can operate at full capacity. Recovery in this sector would also imply tourism returning to pre-recession levels as people become more comfortable taking business and personal trips. Service sector recovery may be harder to identify as some large companies have opted to allow employees to telework indefinitely, impacting both the commercial real estate market and the small service-based businesses such as restaurants and coffee shops in counties which support employees.

Consumer spending

Consumer spending indicators play an important role in tracking recovery. As of Jan. 3, 2021, national consumer spending was 2.5 percent below January 2020 levels, according to Harvard's Opportunity Insights economic dashboard. One signal that economic recovery has been achieved will occur when consumer spending patterns return to pre-recession trends. The current decrease in consumer spending is mostly driven by high- and middle-income individuals decreased spending, as spending for low-income individuals is greater than pre-recession levels.

Consumer spending by industry would also likely return to pre-recession levels. Spending on grocery, health care and retail industries is above January 2020 levels while spending on entertainment and recreation, restaurants and hotels and transportation have all significantly decreased. Normalization of consumer spending across industries and income levels is one piece of the puzzle to understanding economic recovery within counties.

County economic recovery

For counties, economic recovery would be a similar picture. Namely, recovery would mean the local government workforce would return to pre-recession levels, adding 1 million jobs. Hiring freezes and other mitigation techniques would cease, furloughed employees would return to their jobs providing services to communities and the outlook for local government employment would be stable. For stable employment to occur, counties would have to return to pre-recession levels of balanced revenues and expenditures as well without risk for further decline.

Budget impacts

In July, NACo estimated counties would experience a \$202 billion budget impact due to COVID-19 through FY 2021, derived by increased expenditures and losses within tax and non-tax revenue streams. Reports from the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) and the Brookings Institution are in alignment with NACo's initial projection, though a landscape view of impacts at the county level are not yet available.

Though the financial impact has varied by county, some experiencing more severe impacts than others, the majority of counties have incurred unforeseen expenditures brought on by the pandemic, according to a recent NACo survey. As such, stabilization of county budgets will be key in county economic recovery. The reduction of financial strain and increased workforce will allow counties to adequately staff services to meet residents' needs leading the services to no longer be overwhelmed by the level of need required.

Economic indicators

There are many economic indicators that can provide insight into recovery. Each month, the Bureau of Labor Statis-

tics releases the employment situation report which details many indicators such as unemployment rates and employment levels across all industries, as well as permanent job loss and labor force participation rates.

Another set of indicators that can help gauge economic recovery is the monthly release of the Local Area unemployment figures. The Bureau of Labor Statistics releases these figures on the county-level at monthly intervals. Local economic recovery progress will be reflected in these figures and positive movement on the local level will indicate positive movement on the national level.

Additional indicators to watch include consumer spending, unemployment insurance claims and the new home construction market.

Vaccination rate

Potentially one of the most important indicators to watch for economic recovery is the vaccination rate. The current state of the economy and the pandemic are strongly intertwined. Much of the economic fallout resulting from the pandemic has stemmed from measures taken to control the spread of the virus and protect public health. As such, businesses and economies will not return to full production levels until the worries of the pandemic have been put to rest for the majority of the public.

New businesses, population level

Two final indicators which could provide insight on economic recovery are the business formation statistics and population levels. Business formation statistics, also reported by the DOC on their economic indicators dashboard, illustrate confidence in the ability to start a business as it measures business applications by quarter.

Newly released fourth quarter estimates indicate business applications were down 28.5 percent compared to the third quarter. A consistent increase in business applications would indicate rebounding businesses and strength in the economy.

Finally, population levels and migration patterns illustrate where jobs are, and where they are not. Many headlines during the pandemic pointed toward residents leaving large cities in search for more room for themselves or their families as teleworking became mainstream

for many businesses. These outmigration patterns meant business activity within urban counties decreased, while activities in some suburban or rural counties may have increased.

The Census Bureau releases estimates on population levels and migration patterns on a regular basis. High outmigration, or people leaving an area such as large counties, could indicate a tough path ahead for the affected communities in terms of recovery as members of the labor force and employers leave the area.

With high unemployment holding steady in December and future economic uncertainty rising as concerns surrounding the pandemic increase, economic recovery will likely be a long process. Moody's predicts, under the assumption of an additional relief package, real GDP growth could increase by 8 percent in 2021 and 4 percent in 2022. These estimates are similar to other sources.

Fannie Mae and the International Monetary Fund project 2021 US GDP growth to be 5.3 percent and 5.1 percent respectively – though neither noted that the estimates assume additional aid. Moody's also estimated full employment could return by late 2022 or early 2023, measured to be about 4 percent unemployment and labor force participation rates around 63 percent, assuming an additional aid package.

Economic recovery will likely be sluggish without additional county spending, as it was following the great recession. The Federal Reserve found that decreased state and local government spending slowed economic growth for 22 out of 26 quarters between 2008 and mid-2014, resulting in 3.5 percent less economic growth by 2015. This also emphasizes the important role that local economies play in the national discussion.

Though economic recovery will likely be a long-term, uphill battle, counties are committed to sustaining and recovering local economies. These efforts by county leaders to foster local economic recovery will be key to economic recovery at the national level. ■

To read more about NACo resources relating to COVID-19, including economic recovery and vaccination rate tracking, visit www.naco.org/covid19.

Kevin Shrawder is an associate economist in the NACo Counties Futures Lab.

ECONOMIC RECOVERY RESOURCES FOR COUNTIES

Small Business Administration

Paycheck Protection Program — Provides small businesses with resources to maintain payroll

<https://home.treasury.gov/policy-issues/cares/assistance-for-small-businesses>

Economic Injury Disaster Loan Program — Provides financial assistance to small businesses and non-profits impacted by COVID-19

<https://www.sba.gov/funding-programs/loans/coronavirus-relief-options/covid-19-economic-injury-disaster-loans>

Federal Reserve

Municipal Liquidity Facility — The Federal Reserve established the Municipal Liquidity Facility to help state and local governments better manage cash flow pressures in order to continue to serve households and businesses in their communities. <https://www.federalreserve.gov/monetarypolicy/muni.htm>

Department of the Treasury

Federal Emergency Rental Assistance Program — Provides funds to assist households unable to make rent and utility payments because of the pandemic

<https://home.treasury.gov/policy-issues/cares/emergency-rental-assistance-program>

Economic Development Administration

Economic Development Directory — State-by-state directory with links to economic recovery resources

<https://www.eda.gov/resources/directory/>

Federal Emergency Management Agency

Public Assistance Program — Funding for emergency protective measures taken in response to COVID-19

<https://www.fema.gov/news-release/2020/03/23/coronavirus-covid-19-pandemic-public-assistance-simplified-application>

Department of Agriculture

Coronavirus Food Assistance Program — Provides relief to agricultural producers impacted by the pandemic

<https://www.farmers.gov/cfap>

International Trade Administration

Offers export assistance to local businesses, help setting up web sites and finding regional representatives. <https://www.trade.gov/contact-us>

HIGHER CREDIT RATINGS EQUAL LOWER BORROWING COSTS: PATHWAY TO RECOVERY SERIES



by William Cherry
director, Public Partnerships,
three+one

If your municipality or university is considering refinancing existing debt or borrowing money during 2021, then you will want the bond-rating agencies to recognize your strengths. One sure way to do that is for you to have an accurate, precise picture of your organization's overall liquidity.

Having a cash-flow report on hand as you begin the borrowing process is not the same thing as bringing an accurate, up-to-date liquidity analysis.

Cash flow measures the surface, the "ups and downs" and "ins and outs" of daily transactions. A liquidity analysis does much more, measuring the true depths of your entity's overall financial resources. Imagine "cash flow" as the waves that roll and swell on the topmost surface of the ocean. The waves may have peaks and valleys, but they do not provide you with a picture of what lies beneath.

Now, think of "liquidity" as those ocean trenches that descend fathoms deep, all the way to the bottom. The deeper your "ocean," the stronger your finances. The bond-rating agencies recognize that having a precise picture of a public entity's liquidity can help them determine how much risk to assign to your borrowing. The stronger your liquidity, the lower the risk and, ultimately, the lower your debt-service charges.

As a longtime county treasurer and CFO, I participated over the years in many S&P and Moody's ratings discussions. I

can tell you that having accurate liquidity data at your fingertips can help reduce borrowing costs, and ultimately, save taxpayer's money.

Allegany County (N.Y.) Treasurer Terri Ross, a good friend and highly respected colleague, recently announced that she saved \$1.5 million in interest charges on a recent refinancing, thanks to three+one's liquidity data!

Our team here at three+one stands ready to assist your public entity by providing you with an accurate, precise measurement of your liquidity. We have the expertise, the professional staff, and the latest fintech tools to help you present the strongest possible position to S&P, Moody's, and Fitch Ratings the next time you issue debt.

NACo staff contact is Kyle Cline, National Director of Strategic Partnerships, NACo FSC, (317) 502-7415, kcline@naco.org

Financial tools from three+one include cashVest®, MC Forecast®, rfpPrep®, and direct client access to our team of liquidity and cash management professionals. Combined, these powerful tools provide public entities with the kind of accurate, reliable cash-management data that they need in order to make the best financial decisions for the funds in their care.

The author served for a total of 38 years in local government at the village, town and county levels, including 24 years as a county treasurer/CFO responsible for investing public funds and issuance of public debt. He can be reached by phone at 585-484-0311 or through <https://threeplusone.us>

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Photo Taken by Christian Willong of Willong Works

2021 NACo Second Vice Presidential Election




Leinbach

Christian Leinbach

County Commissioner
Berks County, Pa.

Why are you interested in serving as a NACo officer?

Since my first NACo Annual Conference in 2008, I've learned to appreciate the many ways NACo staff and members work to advocate for the benefit of county government, offer opportunities to develop as county officials, and learn from the experiences of each other every day. During my early service as commissioner, I used to think that being a County Commissioner was a stepping-stone to higher office, but I have come to appreciate that county government IS the higher office. It is the level of government that still works as intended and interacts and serves our residents every day.

I believe it is not just the big things but the sum of the small, daily, positive actions and decisions that define any organization. I want to help strengthen county government, model positive leadership and promote civility. Also, COVID-19 has had a significant impact on counties but also has opened doors for better communication with residents, legislators and peers. With that in mind, I hope to ultimately help us do a better job telling the wonderful story of what county government does for our county residents every day. I wholeheartedly endorse NACo's mission and would be proud to repre-

sent our members in Washington and across the country.

What do you consider to have been your most important contribution to the National Association of Counties to date? What do you consider to have been your most important contribution to your state association of counties?

I've had the privilege to play a role with a great team of people to help make NACo stronger. This began at that 2008 NACo Annual Conference in Kansas City when a group of county leaders started plans to form a Northeast Caucus. That meeting was the early planning to mirror the Western Interstate Region (WIR) in the Northeast, and this effort helped lead NACo to create the four Regional Caucuses that exist today.

I was elected by the members of the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania (CCAP) to serve on the NACo Board starting March of 2012, and I continued working with the NACo Executive Committee after my election as Northeast Region Representative in March of 2014. My involvement on the NACo Membership Committee and winning the 2013 NACo Membership Recruiter of the Year Award reflect my strongly held belief that we cannot lead our counties alone – we need the valuable support provided by our state associations, NACo and peers in county leadership throughout this nation.

NACo membership also provides a synergy that a county cannot achieve on its own. I've joined NACo colleagues on the Hill to testify about the proposed Waters of the U.S. regulation. I spoke at a press conference on the Hill regarding the Cadillac Tax. I've met with administration officials to discuss transportation initiatives and the problems with

ICE detainers. I've participated in NACo sponsored forums on the Hill to address mental illness in our county jails. These are all valuable opportunities to work with my NACo colleagues in support of counties. Because of these NACo efforts and many more like it I believe it is now the most effective local government association in Washington D.C.

At the state level, my response would be the same. "No man (or woman) is an island." Success is the result of a team of dedicated county leaders and state association staff. During my tenure as president of CCAP, I was able to promote several changes that our Board and in some cases our membership voted to support. For instance, I helped change the Veterans Affairs Task Force into a committee and to move our Academy for Excellence Committee (CCAP's certificate training program for county officials) to a Board level committee as well as work with the Academy Committee to begin an intensive annual county leadership program that continues today. I helped establish our current Elections Task Force, and I helped put in place an electronic voting system for the Association's policy resolutions that allowed every CCAP member in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania a chance to vote on resolutions and have a voice in our policy process. I currently serve on the CCAP Board of Directors. CCAP, like NACo, is one of the most effective associations in PA.

What do you consider to be the two or three most important challenges facing NACo in the near future on which the Officers/ Executive Committee/ Board of Directors should focus? Why?

1. The first challenge is strengthening the system of Federalism that treats county

government as a critical part of the policy making effort in DC. Too often our federal leaders, as well state leaders, forget or do not understand the role counties play, and without county knowledge or input in the decision-making process, changes often affect our ability to deliver critical programs and services, or worse, have unintended consequences for those we serve. Counties must have a seat at the table because we understand best the needs of our residents and can be a valuable partner to making government across all levels as effective and efficient as possible.

2. Secondly, we should be enhancing the ability of county leaders to tell the story of what they are doing every day to improve the lives of their county residents. Unless someone has a reason to use a county service, most individuals are not aware of all that counties do. We need to help NACo members engage and inform state and federal elected officials, their media, and residents about how counties interact and serve their lives every day. This kind of engagement can empower our county leaders with their residents and help create a more powerful voice for their state associations as well as NACo.

What measures would you recommend to increase and retain NACo membership and to encourage broad participation in NACo by elected officials and employees of NACo member counties? What specific role would you be willing to assume to help build and sustain membership in NACo?

The Value of Advocacy is the clear #1 need and value provided by NACo. I believe that one of the key steps was when NACo recently moved away from a focus on programs to save counties money to a focus based on determining what

counties want and need. It's not that these cost saving programs have no value, rather that federal level advocacy is something local leaders acting alone cannot do nearly as well as we can as we act together as NACo!

I also believe that we must continue to make certain that our membership retention efforts are always a top priority. That means connecting with newly elected officials in these counties as soon as they win their elections, providing information and testimonials on the value of NACo and, in particular, the value of participating in NACo functions and committees as a way to learn and build valuable relationships and strengthen their new role as a county elected official. It also means regularly surveying members to see how NACo is meeting their needs because that is job #1 of our organization. It's much easier to retain members than it is to bring on new members.

If we will work to further empower current NACo member counties to better tell their story to their elected officials, media and constituents, we will establish NACo as the "go-to partner" every county official needs. I am willing to act as an ambassador, fortify relationships, and work with peers and NACo staff to fulfill the mission of the organization and assist leaders across the nation in understanding the critical services provided by counties and NACo, the National Association of Counties.

MEET THE CANDIDATES



McGuire

Mary Jo McGuire

County Commissioner
Ramsey County, Minn.

Why are you interested in serving as a NACo officer?

I first ran for public office because I wanted to help make a positive difference in people's lives. I was elected and served for 16 years in our State Legislature (14 in the House and two in the Senate) and have served for the past eight years as County Commissioner. I believe that these experiences have informed and prepared me for further leadership at NACo. My public service as a County Commissioner is greatly enhanced by my involve-

ment with NACo and the great opportunities that it provides for counties to come together, learn from each other and move effectively forward. I want to have a stronger voice in helping NACo, our counties and our residents thrive.

NACo presidents have initiated themes in the past that include serving the underserved and connecting the unconnected. I would like to follow in this pattern with engaging the disengaged and unengaged. This includes helping empower people to engage with their government (at all levels), their communities, their neighbors and with each other. I would also extend this to working with all counties to engage with NACo.

What do you consider to be your most important contribution to the National Association of Counties to date? What do you consider to be your most important contribution to your state association of counties?

I am an active member of both my state association (Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC)) and NACo and

have been since I became a County Commissioner eight years ago. One of the most significant ways that I contribute is to show up and do the work! I attend the conferences and participate on multiple committees. I actively recruit and encourage other county commissioners and staff to be engaged as well. I am also proud of the work that I did as NACo Chair of Healthy Counties in 2018-19, and my work on the Pritzker prenatal-three grant partnership. I am the current 2nd VP of my own state association (AMC) and look forward to helping lead AMC and NACo into the future.

What do you consider to be the two or three most important challenges facing NACo in the near future on which the Officers/ Executive Committee/ Board of Directors should focus? Why?

Some of the most important challenges include:

Increasing County Membership with elected and appointed officials: We are a stronger voice when there are more of us and when we have a greater representation from all counties.

Restoring the Partnership with Congress and the Administration: It is crucial that we have a strong working relationship with our federal government; this includes open communication and identifying common goals.

Increasing Partnerships on policy issues and enhancing our financial health through FSC (Financial Services Corporation): Engaging local government and non-profit partners in policy discussions will expand our influence and strengthen our voices with our elected officials. Our financial stability depends on expanding our for-profit and premier partners.

Bridging Divides: There is an unfortunate divisiveness that currently exists throughout our country. I believe that counties can model and lead the way to bridge these divides and find ways to come together for the benefit of the residents we serve. We have begun this work in Minnesota and, among other things, have enlisted the help of our State's Office of Collaboration and Dispute Resolution. I would work to mobilize people and resources toward continuing NACo's efforts in this area.

What measures would you recommend to increase and retain NACo membership and to encourage broad participation in NACo by elected officials and employees of NACo member counties? What specific role would you be willing to assume to help build and sustain membership in NACo?

I am proud of the fact that Minnesota is a 100% State. At AMC we do our best to help all of our members realize the benefits of being a NACo member and participating in NACo events.

It is important that we explore innovative and creative ways to engage counties of all sizes in NACo. This would include extended outreach and engagement to State Executives and State Associations. And also engaging more members on NACo committees. I would make it a priority to help individual members feel welcome, important, and necessary to NACo's work.

MEET THE CANDIDATES



Wenger

Tina M. Wenger
Councilwoman-at-Large
Elkhart County, Ind.

“Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success.” - Henry Ford

Why are you interested in serving as a NACo officer?

We live in a diverse America and no doubt our government both locally and/or nationally has seen the effects of this diversity, not just in ideas but in culture and relationships. NACo, as a representative of bipartisan within the workings of government, continues to promote what is best for the country's 3,069 counties. To be a part of this organization in a leadership role is a privilege and an honor. A well represented organization thrives better and serves better. Stronger Counties. Stronger America, through stronger diversified leadership roles.

I have been blessed to have served as county councilwoman since 2017 in a county that is predominantly conservative

and made history when I won my seat in 2016. One, I beat an eight-year incumbent within my own party, two, I am the only woman in Elkhart county council in 67 years; three, I am the only woman of Asian descent in county council in the entire State of Indiana consisting of 92 counties.

My interactive, effective, sincere experience with my constituents as well as with those I work with has been an inspiration for me and is a driving force to have this carry forward to a national level. As an assimilated Asian American female immigrant, the wealth of knowledge and diverse ideas I can bring to the table at NACo on a national level is yet to be presented and acknowledged. This is a step in the right direction for NACo to give this scenario a chance. We serve an ever-changing population with ever-changing needs. The demographics seem to change as fast as the speed of light. The time has come for me to give of my contribution willingly and without bias. NACo can make that happen.

What do you consider to have been your most important contribution to the National Association of Counties to date? What do you consider to have been your most important contribution to your state association of counties?

The importance of what I have done as a contribution to NACo is in direct proportion to what NACo has done to make me a better public servant. By

my attending the numerous seminars, meetings, conferences, NACo has equipped me with skill sets and tools to better serve my constituents. I have plugged in the importance of NACo to our counties every chance I get. My county has in some ways been seeing and acknowledging the benefits of belonging to NACo. We have adopted some of the ideas and other programs are being considered on a regular basis. I can say that I have placed NACo on our local county map.

My local AIC likewise has been a tremendous asset to the efficient performance of our county through attendance in various conferences, classes, seminars and meetings. The ideas I take home from attending these have been shared to those who are willing to listen with excellent success. Through this involvement, myself and the county continue to be an effective and relevant presence in our community. We continue to do an extraordinary job with an outstanding vision of the future. The exchange of ideas from other public servants/attendees has been and continues to be invaluable.

What do you consider to be the two or three most important challenges facing NACo in the near future on which the Officers/ Executive Committee/ Board of Directors should focus? Why?

While the lobbying of several issues affecting our member counties has been NACo's focus since inception, the out-

come has not been as effective or as successful as we should have expected. We need to be more aggressive and demanding of our legislators. Emphasizing that they pay higher attention to what are more pressing and relevant issues our counties face. It is not just about them offering monies, grants or funds to counties, it is more about coming up with legislation that sticks. The push needs to be harder. Legislation that needs not be revisited every year is legislation that is thought-of and are better for the nation overall. Doing it right the first time is recommended and is not impossible.

The issue of immigration reform will be a battle. The previous President has set some protective agenda/measures in this regard, while the newly elected President has other plans and ideas. This will be a long sorting-out phase and NACo needs to be prepared and decisive as to where it really stands and stick to it. Supporting what's best for the counties should always be on top of the priority list.

What measures would you recommend to increase and retain NACo membership and to encourage broad participation in NACo by elected officials and employees of NACo member counties? What specific role would you be willing to assume to help build and sustain membership in NACo?

I have already been doing this, by way of promoting NACo every chance I get. But

still, NACo must aggressively come out on a regular basis and speak to the local county organizations equipped with participation lists, enrollment forms and other informational presentation. NACo may offer incentives in many ways including but not limited to “free membership” for the first year (perhaps).

NACo may consider assigning/appointing an elected official to serve as a NACo representative for each county. Specifics can be sorted out between NACo and the appointees.

Leadership is about service, not power.

Thank you!

NEWS FROM ACROSS THE NATION

ARKANSAS

PULASKI COUNTY is serving as a research site for the national Advancing Pretrial Policy initiative to **improve its pretrial justice system**. The study aims to reduce discrimination based on wealth and race and ensure incarceration is only for individuals who jeopardize public safety. Improvements following the planning phase of the initiative may include streamlining the pretrial process, developing pretrial services and finding opportunities to divert individuals from traditional criminal justice processing.

CALIFORNIA

• Supervisors in **NEVADA COUNTY** launched a \$250,000 grant program as part of the county's **Last-Mile Broadband Grant program** to improve internet access for residents. The county is seeking applications from internet service providers to build infrastructure that supports telemedicine, distance learning and remote working. The board established the Last-Mile Grant program in 2019 which is funded with transient occupancy tax dollars. The \$250,000 grant is the second round of "last-mile" grants from the county.

• The **SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY** library launched a new service called the Read Crate program to **encourage children to read**. County residents can pick up a crate with a mystery pack of 10 books and a special incentive to encourage youth to read. The



library offers three different crates for children ages 11 years old and younger.

COLORADO

BOULDER COUNTY Community Services and Community Foundation Boulder County have launched the Wildfire Mental Health Program to **provide mental health services** to individuals impacted by the Cal-Wood and Lefthand Canyon wildfires from October 2020. The program assists those who are seeking crisis support after evacuating from the two fires that burned 11,000 acres and destroyed homes. Through the program, individuals receive benefits for mental health services and licensed mental health providers.

DELAWARE

NEW CASTLE COUNTY Executive Matt Meyer announced a pilot AmeriCorps program called **National Health Corps Delaware** in collaboration with Delaware's congressional delegation and healthcare nonprofits to combat the COVID-19 pandemic and health inequities. Service activities will focus on reducing health disparities and addressing ongoing needs from the pandemic. The pilot program will have 15 to 20 members in the initial phase and is funded using the county's CARES Act dollars.

FLORIDA

• The Sheriff's Office in **BREVARD COUNTY** is using a new mascot to **teach children safety tips**. The kid's safety program uses K9 'Junny,' beloved by many children in the county, to share important safety tips for the younger generation. Activity sheets featuring Junny and Sheriff Wayne Ivey can be printed off the sheriff's website and focus on home alone safety, school safety, internet safety, swim safety and gun safety.

FLORIDA

• **FLAGLER COUNTY** launched a **Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) training program** to provide



residents with an opportunity to learn basic disaster and emergency response skills. The free 24-hour program aims to improve overall community preparedness and educate residents on how to prepare for situations likely to affect the community such as fire safety, utility controls, basic first aid and disaster psychology.

• The sheriff's office in **MARION COUNTY** is proposing an ordinance to **curtail internet cafes** throughout the county. The ordinance states that cafes' computer-style games can deceive residents and negatively affect the quality of life of the community. According to the sheriff's office, internet cafes affect the health and safety of county residents, citing 13 armed robberies at Internet cafes in the last few years, *Ocala Star-Banner* reported.

HAWAII

KAUAI COUNTY has partnered with Airbnb to receive insights into how **short-term rentals** can help restore eco-

nomic growth. As an Airbnb City Portal partner, the county will receive tools and insights into the Airbnb community. The portal works with local governments to ensure a safe return to travel following the pandemic, provides tools to manage fair short-term rental policies and provides insights into the short-term rental market.

KANSAS

Commissioners in **SEDGWICK COUNTY** are considering legislation that would allow the **board of commissioners to choose the election commissioner** instead of the Secretary of State. In four counties including Sedgwick County, election commissioners are appointed by the Secretary of State, KSN News reported. Commissioner Lacey Cruse said the commission will consider adding the issue to the board's legislative platform following news that current Election Commissioner Tabitha Lehman would not be re-appointed for another term.



MARYLAND

The Arts Council of **CALVERT COUNTY** launched the Calvert Barn Quilt Trail to **promote the county's agricultural heritage and local history**. The trail is southern Maryland's first and promotes local artists who hand-paint wooden quilt squares. Each square tells a different story using either a traditional pattern or original design. The placement of the squares may include a barn of a multigenerational farming family, a small business, museum or a private home.

Photo by Hilary Dailey

will hold the title for two years, receive an annual \$7,500 stipend and be given opportunities within the community to teach and also connect with other poets.



NEW MEXICO

BERNALILLO COUNTY is offering **free groceries in a drive-through pick up service** for low-income residents age 60 and older. "These are difficult times for many in our community," said County Manager Julie Morgas Baca. "If you're a citizen in Bernalillo County experiencing food insecurity, please come and pick up some groceries."

NEW YORK

If **SUFFOLK COUNTY** high school students want to resume athletics, they and their coaches will have to be **tested weekly for COVID-19**, the first county to require testing for participation. The state has provided 20,000 rapid tests, which will be free of charge and administered weekly by the school nurses.

OREGON

MULTNOMAH COUNTY is expanding its legal clinic resources to provide **free legal services** to clients who've been

referred from community organizations and the county. The clinic handles a variety of legal matters for clients like reducing felonies to misdemeanors, reducing fines and fees, negotiations on debt forgiveness, landlord-tenant disputes, eviction defense, navigating court orders, immigration issues and more. Last summer, the Board of Commissioners expanded funding for legal services with a focus on Black, indigenous and communities of color.

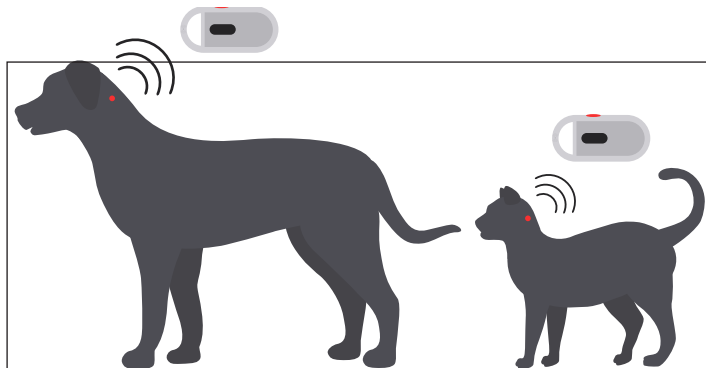
VIRGINIA

• **ALBEMARLE COUNTY** launched a public campaign to improve the **health of its local streams**. The county posted a recording of county staff sharing the benefits of healthier streams for the sake of water quality, flood prevention and infrastructure protection.

• The Board of Supervisors voted to prohibit **FAIRFAX COUNTY** employees from providing information about a person's **immigration or citizenship status** to federal immigration authorities unless required by law or court order. According to *The Tyson's Reporter*, it is the first policy of its kind in Virginia.

• With questions all over the place, **HANOVER, GOOCHLAND, NEW KENT** and **CHARLES CITY** counties have opened a call center to answer residents' **questions about the COVID-19 vaccine**. Operators can help callers determine when they will become eligible and sign them up for alerts and notifications.

• The **PULASKI COUNTY** Board of Supervisors voted to



UTAH

SALT LAKE COUNTY offered **free pet licensing and microchipping** for attendees of a county-run clinic. Attendees and their pets also received free licenses with proof of previous rabies vaccinations and license.

allow county **farmland to be leased for a new solar power plant** through a special use permit. The project gives farmers the option to lease their land to install solar panels on their property for 35 years. It will take up about 3 percent of the total agricultural land in the county, the local CBS affiliate reported.

WASHINGTON

When the pandemic first started, **KING COUNTY** was one of the first to buy a hotel to house homeless residents. In 2021, those efforts will escalate, with plans to **buy as many as a dozen hotels**.

"We have every reason to believe that homelessness will get a lot worse after this pandemic unless we take bold action," said Leo Flor, director of the King County Department of Community and Human Services.

The Health Through Housing initiative uses revenue from a .1 percent sales tax increase to develop a network of apartment-like shelters, with the goal of getting people out of tents, off of sidewalks and into safe, clean homes. The coun-

ty said it hopes to eventually house 2,000 people, 45 percent of its chronically homeless population of 4,500.



WISCONSIN

Punxsutawney Phil can't be expected to reflect national weather forecasts too far from his **JEFFERSON COUNTY, Pa.** home. So, the **MILWAUKEE COUNTY** Zoo's resident groundhog, Gordy, presented his own for the Great Lakes region. Gordy announced his **expert weather prediction** on the zoo's Facebook page: he did not see his shadow. The ceremony included animal facts and got kids fired up with a groundhog coloring sheet and a bingo card, bearing the words Zookeeper Joe was likely to say.



NEVADA

Following Amanda Gorman's reading at the Presidential Inauguration, **CLARK COUNTY** is recruiting prospective **candidates for the county poet laureate** position. The winner

VIRGINIA

• With nearly 8,000 older long-term care residents largely isolated in defense against the coronavirus, **HENRICO COUNTY** is **collecting homemade Valentine's Day cards** for long-term care facilities in the county from the local community. "The past year has been challenging for all of us, but especially for our loved ones living in long-term care facilities," said Sara Morris, the county's advocate for the aging. "We want to 'spread the love' to our friends in these facilities for the Valentine's Day holiday and invite everyone to create an original card to show their care for these members of our community."



News from Across the Nation is compiled by Charlie Ban and Rachel Looker. Does your county have news we should know about? Contact cban@naco.org and rlooker@naco.org.

BRIGHT IDEAS | CATAWBA COUNTY, N.C.

Library Resources Are on the Move

PROBLEM:

Residents lack connections to resources and often face challenges accessing brick-and-mortar library branches.

SOLUTION:

Create a mobile library that meets people in the community to improve outreach and provide connections.

by Rachel Looker
staff writer

Outreach Services Librarian Greta Caldwell drives through-out Catawba County, N.C. behind the wheel of a large white van with books, computers and WiFi hotspots in tow.

At locations ranging from parking lots to farmer's markets, she unloads the van at each stop unpacking bookshelves, chairs, coffee tables and computers to create an interactive library space as part of the county's Library to Go.

The service launched from the Catawba County Library's strategic plan to improve access to information and expand library services.

With the help of grants from the state library, Catawba County Library Director Siobhan Loendorf said the Library to Go program aims to provide resources outside of the library's physical walls and reach individuals who can't always visit a library branch in person.

"We were trying to bring empowering library resources out into the community to meet people where they are," she said.

The Library to Go van targets locations that do not have local library services where residents are able to access online resources and tools for learning or job seeking. Caldwell, also referred to as the Librarian to Go, stops at schools, nursing homes, childcare centers, after-school programs, farmers markets, remote communities, concerts, community festivals and even food truck rallies.



Catawba County, N.C. Library Director Siobhan Loendorf works with students at a Lunch and Learn session in 2019 as part of the Library to Go. Photo courtesy of Catawba County Library System

"It's all the same resources and all the same empowering activities that you get when you go to a regular library, but in your community," Loendorf said.

She described how the Library to Go has partnered with a career arts magnet school and an alternative high school, both of which do not have their own library. At each location, students can check out books, audiobook kits, computers and receive a library card that can be used at any of the county library branches.

With multiple resources aboard the van, Loendorf said the most important one is the librarian.

"She's the one that's going to connect people and help them make sense of the information they're getting," Loendorf said.

Caldwell's role extends further than driving and maintaining the vehicle. Her main focus is maintaining a community presence by providing connections and support.

"That's what the Library to Go's mission is — to connect with people in the community and support others' efforts that are already ongoing," she said.

Caldwell holds story times, helps individuals apply for jobs

and even connects people to social services.

She described one Library to Go stop in the town of Catawba, which does not have its own library. With the help of local community members, a church volunteered free space to hold the Library to Go. Every other week, Caldwell packs up the van, heads to Catawba and sets up the mobile library.

"I think another thing that we do is continue to reach out to other community organizations and the community itself," she said. "Let's connect together and learn more about this and then we can change the world little by little by just each connection."

Caldwell also forms connections with teachers by visiting schools and asking about the topics of future lesson plans. She then gathers related books, returns to the school and drops off book bags to aid teachers and provide additional resources for specific lessons.

"That's a resource they have in their classroom or just their room that they can supplement the stuff that they're already doing there," Caldwell said.

The Library to Go has shifted the way it provides services

during the pandemic, but Caldwell is keeping connected to the community through virtual and outdoor programming. She explained how instead of visiting senior facilities and offering a selection of books on a book cart, she now drops off bags of books to provide the same resources to residents.

Loendorf and Caldwell said similar Library to Go services don't need a fancy van or certain resources to get started. Caldwell said the most important resource needed is a passionate individual who can reach out and form connections in the community.

"Take advantage of the opportunities and different events that are coming up in your community and just be friendly and start small," she said. **CN**

For more information on Catawba County's Library to Go, contact Loendorf at sloendorf@catawbacountync.gov or Caldwell at gcaldwell@catawbacountync.gov.

Catawba County's Library to Go is the recipient of a best in category 2020 NACo Achievement Award in the Libraries category.

CN JOB MARKET

DEPUTY COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

SCHUYLER COUNTY, N.Y.

Salary: up to \$262,242

Application deadline:

February 12, 2021

Schuyler County, N.Y. is seeking to hire a Deputy County Administrator. Schuyler County is an attractive, growing community in the Finger Lakes Region of N.Y. state. The county is internationally recognized as a destination location, as the home of Watkins Glen International (NASCAR), Watkins Glen State Park and a burgeoning wine and craft beer industry. The county population is just under 18,000 residents who welcome over 3 million visitors annually. This is a key administrative position under the general supervision of the County Administrator. This position requires a high level of independent judgment in planning and carrying out the details of the work and includes supervising the delivery of county services with the goal of improving efficacy and efficiency, in compliance with all laws, rules and regulations. This position has been created as part of succession planning, in anticipation of the retirement of the Schuyler County Administrator in 2021. The successful candidate need not be a resident of Schuyler County at the time of hire but shall become so within ninety days of appointment and remain so during the term of employment. Salary commensurate with experience plus excellent benefit package. Successful candidates must have the following minimum qualifications: Either 1) Masters Degree in Business or Public Administration (preferred); AND two years of management experience in Public Administration; or 2) Bachelor's Degree in Business or Public Administration, AND three years of management experience in Public Administration. All candidates must submit a Civil Service application, along with a resume, and three (3) professional references. Information must be submitted to the Schuyler County Civil Service office.

HOW TO APPLY: Interested candidates may visit the Schuyler County website (www.schuylercounty.us) for the application form and job description or contact the Schuyler County Civil Service Office, 105 9th Street, Unit 21, Watkins Glen, New York 14891. Phone: 607-535-8190