

House passes COVID relief with direct county funding

by Rachel Mackey

The U.S. House of Representatives passed the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 Feb. 27 on a 219-212 vote. It includes \$65.1 billion in direct aid to counties to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, part of the \$350 billion in total aid to state and local governments.

The bill was scheduled to go (after press time) straight to the Senate floor, where the budget reconciliation process allows the Senate to bypass the filibuster and pass legislation with a 50-vote threshold if it meets a series of budgetary requirements. The House must pass the updated legislation before sending it to the president's desk, which the majority in both houses aim to do by March 14, when existing unemployment insurance provisions expire.

"Local government aid outlined in the American Rescue Plan offers a surefire way to advance our shared national goals of ending this pandemic and rebuilding our local economies," said NACo President Gary Moore, judge/executive of Boone County, Ky., ahead of the bill's passage.

The American Rescue Plan would allocate funding to all

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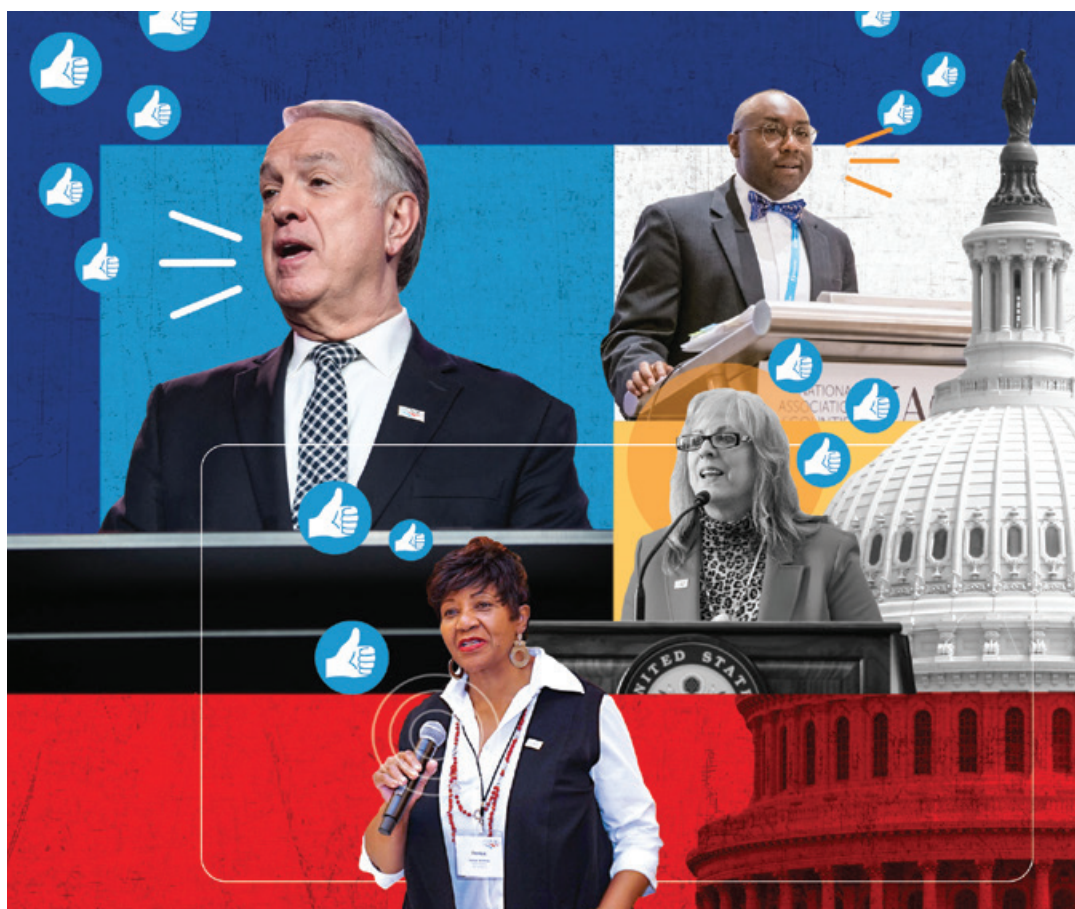


Photo illustration by Leon Lawrence III

2021 NACo Virtual Legislative Conference Kicks Off

Nearly 1,500 county officials are registered for the 2021 NACo Virtual Legislative Conference set to kick off March 8.

More than 100 workshops, committee meetings, seminars and plenary sessions are planned for the conference which will take place online-March 8-26 with bonus content in April.

Attendees will hear from representatives from the White House, the U.S. Senate, the House of Representatives and a number of advocacy groups

and federal agencies.

Here's a look at the schedule:

- March 8-12: Policy steering committee meetings (all committee meetings are open, even if you're not a member of that committee)

- March 17-19: Governance meetings

- March 24-26: Workshops and seminars

All events on the schedule will be presented virtually.

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COUNTY EYES MICROGRID AS BUSINESS BENEFIT, ATTRACTION

by Charlie Ban
senior writer

More than 17 years later, the 2003 blackout continues to loom large over Cuyahoga County, Ohio. When tree limbs south of Cleveland knocked out some power lines, it kicked off a cascade of errors that left much of the Northeast, Midwest and parts of Canada without power for several hours.

Looking back, County Executive Armond Budish wanted to avoid some of that heartburn, even before the Texas grid failure in February. While individual residents can handle a few hours without electricity, many businesses can't.

The promise of uninterrupted electricity is driving Budish's effort to create a series of county-owned microgrids, ones that will be able to keep the power going despite what happens with the national power infrastructure.

Rural counties: Close-knit communities help aid COVID vaccine distribution

by Rachel Looker
staff writer

One seasonal mountain community in San Juan County, Colo., is seeing the benefits of having a small population and close-knit community when it comes to vaccine distribution.

Over one-third of the county's 700 winter residents have received both doses of the

COVID-19 vaccine with a total of 298 vaccines administered as of Feb. 17.

"Part of our success is because we're a small community and we have to all volunteer for our first responder infrastructure," said DeAnne Gallegos, public information officer for the San Juan County, Colo. Public Health Department.

As the least populous county

in the state, Gallegos said county residents have to wear many hats.

"We have business owners who are search and rescue or volunteer EMS or school teachers who are part of our volunteer fire department," she said. "A big portion of our community has been eligible through

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American Rescue Plan would allocate funding to all counties

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counties. The CARES Act only provided direct funding to counties with 500,000 residents or more.

In addition to the direct funding for counties, the American Rescue Plan Act includes hundreds of billions of dollars for public health and vaccines, assistance for vulnerable populations, education, housing stabilization and more.

"This bill recognizes counties' vast responsibilities to care for our most vulnerable residents — our sick, unemployed, elderly and youth," said NACo Executive Director Matt Chase.

"Counties face a constant struggle to secure the resources necessary to serve our residents and support our frontline heroes fighting the pandemic. After a year of this crisis, far too many counties have received no or very limited, direct fiscal relief.

"Our costs have skyrocketed, we have dug into our reserves

and made difficult decisions to reduce our workforce," he noted.

"While we have experienced record demand for essential services, we have shed jobs at rates far outpacing the rest of the economy," he noted.

"Responsible investments from our federal partners would better equip counties to help end the COVID-19 pandemic and drive economic recovery," he said. "Every dollar of local government aid amounts to at least a dollar increase in GDP growth."

In addition to the direct funding for counties, other provisions would support local efforts to control the pandemic and other county efforts related to the pandemic. They include:

- \$7.5 billion for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to support state, local, tribal and public health departments and community health centers in the distribution of vaccines through information technology and data enhancements, fa-

cility enhancements and public communications.

- \$46 billion to the Department of Health and Human Services to support state and local health departments' distribution and administration of tests, PPE and other supplies, expand contact tracing capabilities and sustain the nation's public health workforce.

- \$3.5 billion for the Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment block grant

- \$1 billion to the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Pandemic Emergency Fund program for temporary cash assistance

- \$26 billion for emergency rental assistance for county governments with populations over 200,000

- An extension for the recently enacted 15 percent Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefit increase through Sept. 30, 2021 from the current June 30 expiration

- An extension for federal unemployment benefits through

Aug. 29, 2021 and a benefit increase to \$400 from \$300 beginning March 14, 2021

- An extension for the Families First Coronavirus Response Act emergency paid leave program through Sept. 30, 2021, providing up to 12 weeks of paid sick and family medical leave related to the COVID-19 pandemic and a provision making county employers eligible for a corresponding payroll tax credit.

- \$1.4 billion in emergency Older Americans Act program funding

- \$130 billion in emergency funds to support K-12 schools in safely reopening, including addressing learning loss

- \$7.25 billion for the Paycheck Protection Program and \$15 billion for the Economic Injury Disaster Loan Advance program for small businesses

- \$30.46 billion available through FY 2024 for public transit

- \$50 billion for FEMA's Disaster Relief Fund. **CN**

Nearly 1,500 registered for conference

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Registered attendees will have access to all posted events. Viewing information will be sent via email to all registered attendees no later than 24 hours before an event.

NACo 2021 VIRTUAL LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE

For an in-depth look at the conference schedule, visit: <https://www.naco.org/events/2021-virtual-naco-legislative-conference>. Registration is available for individuals or groups at www.NACo.org/leg.

Have a question? E-mail: nacomeetings@naco.org. **CN**

Look for full reports of the conference beginning March 8 on the NACo website under County News and in the March 22 issue of County News.

SNAP/STATS



STATES PEOPLE ARE FLOCKING TO

STATES RANKED BY MIGRATION GROWTH IN 2020

- #1.....Tennessee
- #2.....Texas
- #3.....Florida
- #4.....Ohio
- #5.....Arizona

Source: U-Haul

2021 NACo

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Rural health department's 'grassroots effort' spreads vaccine information

From VACCINES page 1

the phased system because we all do multiple things for a small community."

Gallegos said they have received a regular delivery of vaccinations and even found themselves in a position to distribute vaccines to neighboring counties.

Others have traveled to San Juan County from as far as Denver, a six-hour trek, to get a vaccine.

"We are sharing with our friends and neighbors not only putting needles in arms and vaccinating those folks from those counties, but literally delivering vaccines to our neighboring counties," she said.

Gallegos credits the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment for the support it has provided to the county's small public health department through constant communication, rollout plans and delivery systems.

"It's really been a very tight partnership, so I really think that that is a reflection of the success of the system that the state of Colorado put into place," she said.

The public health department administers vaccines at the county public health building, which serves as the only distribution site in San Juan County.

Residents can make an appointment for their vaccine through an online scheduling



A San Juan County, Colo. resident arrives at the public health building to receive a COVID-19 vaccine. Photo courtesy of San Juan County Public Health

**NACo RELEASES NEW BRIEF ON
VACCINE MANAGEMENT SOLUTIONS FOR COUNTIES.**
<https://www.naco.org/vaccine-management>

system the health department established.

San Juan County has seen 42 positive COVID-19 cases throughout the pandemic, with 10 cases confirmed after New

Year's, resulting in a quarantine period for 60 county residents who were identified after contact tracing.

"It has been pretty amazing to watch us go through the pan-

demical compared to our neighbors because we literally are a small petri dish so we would see cause and effect immediately," Gallegos said.

An added benefit in the small county is the preparations already in place from other natural disasters.

According to Gallegos, the public health department utilizes already established lists of contact information for county residents.

Staff members are assigned to contact certain residents on the list in a "grassroots effort" to ensure information is spread regarding the vaccine.

But despite the success, Gallegos said they are facing challenges with a limited number of staff running the public health department.

"Just the amount of work that it takes to organize, schedule, maintain, remind and track is underestimated when you only have a one to five-person staffed public health department in these little rural communities," she said.

While Gallegos said they respect the state's rollout plan for vaccines, it would be beneficial for smaller communities to have more freedom in making decisions as to who to vaccinate, she said.

"What would truly benefit our rural, mountain, tourism community would be to have some flexibility to pitch who we think should be receiving the vaccination right now," she

said. "What would truly protect our community is to be able to have the freedom to vaccinate those that would actually be interfacing with outsiders that would bring COVID into our community."

Gallegos described the situation as a "double-edged sword," saying the county department understands the importance of having everyone across the state who meets the criteria receive a dose of the vaccine.

"These rural, mountain ski communities are very fluid so of course we want our friends and neighbors to also be vaccinated because we all fluidly move amongst each other's communities," she said.

In Banner County, Neb., a rural county with a population of 745, the lack of a vaccination distribution point and no medical facilities hasn't stopped vaccines from getting into county residents' arms.

"It's progressing pretty well here," Banner County Commissioner Robert Post said.

Banner County is one of 12 counties included in the Panhandle Public Health District which has been spearheading vaccine distribution.

Post said he thinks the county's smaller population has helped expedite vaccine distribution.

"We're scheduled to get more vaccines out in the panhandle and so that will speed it up more and it's just flowed really well," he said. **CN**

'We're looking to create the most reliable energy in the world'

From MICROGRID page 1

"There's all kinds of reasons why people might lose power, it could be a tree branch or it could be a cyber-attack," he said. "Many companies can't afford to have their electricity turned off for an hour let alone a day or a week. If they're manufacturers, they're paying people to work but they can't produce anything."

He views it as a necessity for economic competitiveness, something that can attract businesses to Cuyahoga County.

"You could wipe out millions



Budish

of dollars of research with a power outage," he said. Although the 2003 blackout was resolved quickly, the crisis in Texas lasted several days for many.

"We're looking to create the most reliable energy in the world, with a maximum outage of five minutes over an entire year," Budish noted.

The County Council is in the process of approving legislation that will allow the county's public works department to oversee the creation of the microgrids, through the Cuyahoga County Utility, which would be primarily managed by private developers/operators/investors.

"We don't have any experience running an electric utility company," said Mike Foley, the county's director of sustainability. "The operator will be doing the bulk of the work, but we'll be the conduit to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission."

Foley said he hoped the Council would allow for the utility's creation in April, and the county could identify three locations for microgrids by mid-summer or early fall and begin issuing requests for proposals.

"We're identifying locations where there are businesses that are interested, that will make it more appealing to potential operators, to have built-in custom-

ers," he said. "We're not taking over the whole grid. Starting off, this will be small, defined projects and if that goes well, we can expand a few years down the road."

Though the microgrids would be intended for commercial use, they could be used to power streetlights and electric vehicle charging stations.

Budish sees the county-owned model as a selling point for developers, operators and investors.

"Under Ohio law, we can create a microgrid that won't be subject to the onerous regulations that other companies have to follow, so we could be much

more flexible," he said.

Though abundant natural gas sources would figure to power much of the microgrids, the county's success in generating power from a solar panel installation on a landfill site and power generation that has exceeded projections could usher in more use of renewable energy.

Whether practically or metaphorically, the sun will figure into how Cuyahoga County proceeds with its microgrid project. The scope will remain focused on reliability rather than size, so while you may see the microgrids powered by the sun, the county won't get so close that it gets burned. **CN**

To max out opioid settlements, counties must unify

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

If counties and states are going to get the most out of the settlements from lawsuits against the manufacturers and distributors of opioid-based painkillers, they'll need to work together both in negotiating and using whatever money comes from the suits.

While the federal multi-district litigation combines more than 2,600 plaintiffs, state attorneys general are suing pharmaceutical companies in their state courts, which involves counties in a more active way as those settlements loom.

The federal suit has resulted in a proposed \$26 billion settlement with McKesson Corp., Cardinal Health Inc., AmerisourceBergen Drug Corp. and Johnson & Johnson. Forty state lawsuits are reported to total \$600 million.

"We hold some very powerful cards in this negotiation," said NACo President Gary Moore, who as judge/executive of Boone County, Ky. served as co-chair of the NACo/National League of Cities Opioid Task Force in 2016.

"In Kentucky, if the counties don't work with our attorney general, the attorney general will settle for 46 percent of what the state might get," Moore noted.

Steve Acquario, executive director of the New York State Association of Counties, was even more to the point.

"When we unite, we have power, when we come together, we can bring attention to a particular issue," he said during a Feb. 18 NACo webinar about the lawsuits.

The 1998 Big Tobacco settlement yielded a \$206 billion payout, and all of it went to state governments. With that in mind, state associations of counties are eyeing a cooperative approach with their state attorneys general, while still asserting their roles as the social service, law enforcement and corrections providers who have shouldered the workload responding to the addiction epidemic that moved on to street drugs like heroin and fentanyl.

The tobacco settlement still stings for Tom Liddy, Maricopa County, Arizona's litigation bureau chief.

"Some of it went to fix pot-holes and not for abatement of harm caused to Arizonans by tobacco," he said. "The counties were adamant that that wasn't going to happen again."

The default settlement allocates 15 percent to local governments, 15 percent to the states and 70 percent to abatement funds, but state associations have negotiated different splits. Arizona's memorandum of understanding will give local governments 56 percent and the remainder to the state.

As the largest county in the state, Maricopa County took the lead, but Liddy said relative populations didn't figure in during discussions.

"We have far more than 50 percent of the population in one county, however a key to our success is that we treated every county as an equal partner," he said. "We made sure that the smaller counties weren't feeling like they were bullied by the larger counties. Our goal from day one was to make sure all counties spoke with one voice. You don't want to allow the attorney general or the defendants to divide and conquer counties."

Liddy said the counties also adopted the view the proportion of the settlement going to the state wasn't necessarily a loss for counties.

"Our unifying theme was that we're not all going to get what we want, but at the end of the day please bear in mind that every dollar that comes in the form of settlement funds will be used to help an individual in Arizona who has been harmed directly or indirectly from opioids," he said. "We kept the relationship professional and



Acquario



Burrress



Leonard

respectful with the attorney general. We praised him for his leadership and treated him like a teammate."

Maricopa County set up a clearinghouse for all questions related to the lawsuit, from which they would get answers from the outside counsel.

Arizona is primed for a 40 percent increase in its settlement because it got all local governments on the same page and kept distributors and manufacturers from having to negotiate piecemeal settlements with individual counties.

"That was what we sold the counties on," Liddy said. "It's a much bigger pie — you may not get the exact piece of the pie that you want but we'll all do better if we get a bigger pie. They want to go one state at a time."

The North Carolina Association of County Commissioners formed a 15-person negotiating committee after the state's attorney general reached out about the state's settlement. That committee, with five county attorneys, five county managers and five county com-

missioners, has met monthly for more than a year, with each group bringing their expertise to the table to describe how the addiction crisis has affected counties.

"We had to educate the AG's team about how counties operate," said Executive Director Kevin Leonard. "Everyone is playing with different variables."

The remote committee meetings helped the participants hone their skills with Zoom before the COVID-19 pandemic made it a household name.

"These are passionate people who are interested in this subject matter, several of them have very close relations and stories to tell about their experiences with opioids," Leonard said. "So these are some emotional meetings and they bring a different level of context when we're talking about these things."

Kyley Burrress, legislative and policy advocate at Colorado Counties, Inc. said the association's two biggest challenges were trying to get all of its counties on board while the attorney general was talking to them individually and bridging a wide gap between urban and rural counties.

A working group of 30-40 county officials formulated policy for the negotiating group, and by that point, the association had settled differences with the attorney general. "Once we established our goals and had our unified voice, he

really worked alongside us and not against us," Burrress said.

The Colorado settlement MOU allocates 20 percent to counties and cities, 60 percent to different regions, 10 percent to the state and 10 percent for infrastructure projects in rural counties. Burrress said that set-aside for rural infrastructure helped ease tensions.

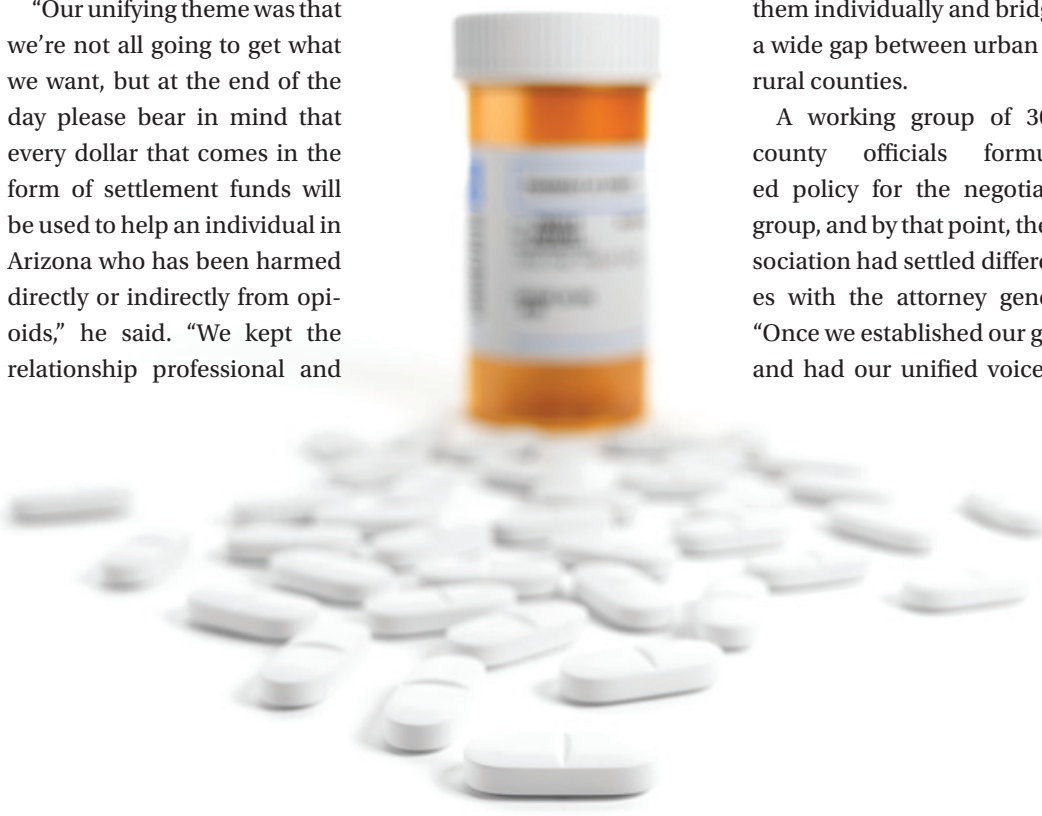
"And we let counties choose which regions they wanted to be in or if they wanted to be in one at all," Burrress said. "The regions will help get funding to where it's needed most and would have protections in place to make sure the governor and legislature can't tap into these funds. It's organic, homegrown; counties established relationships that they'd carry on to the opioid abatements."

Maintaining solidarity publicly was crucial, and all it cost was long weekly meetings to ensure counties were on the same page before negotiating.

"If we had an internal disagreement, we never fought about it in front of the attorney general," Burrress noted.

Even as controls and prescription guidelines help cut down on profligate distribution of painkillers, the impact on county services continues, making it crucial for county officials involved in these teams negotiating for the distribution of the settlements to stay abreast of where help is needed.

"The role of the counties is critical," NYSAC's Acquario said. "We cannot get this done without counties' direct engagements. Whether they litigated or not, they are part of the solution for bringing services to those most in need. We are seeing spikes with fentanyl derivatives through the pandemic, we're seeing spikes of overdose and deaths returning again to our state. Now more than ever, we've got to get a handle on how to abate this problem. The counties working together with their state attorneys general is absolutely critical. The state cannot settle these lawsuits with the distributors because they simply won't settle them without the counties being engaged." **CN**



County health departments seek more vaccines through state allocation process

by Rachel Looker
staff writer

The nation is undertaking its biggest vaccine effort in history and the process for allocating doses to counties has proven to raise some challenges.

Specific amounts of COVID-19 vaccine doses are made available to states and jurisdictions with weekly allocations, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The allocation process then varies for how states distribute vaccines to counties.

In Maryland, equitable vaccine distribution was developed using a pro rata formula based on county populations, according to the Maryland Department of Health.

Vaccine allocation to jurisdictions is based on critical populations, current local spread of COVID-19, vaccine production and availability, according to the state's COVID-19 vaccination plan.

But for Maryland public health officers, there's been frustration with the rollout, Carroll County Public Health Officer Edwin Singer said.

"We send up a request every week and there's a mystery about who's making the decisions and we get back a magic number," Singer said.

Singer, who is also president of the Maryland Association of County Health Officers, said local health departments have only been getting 30 percent of the allocation of vaccines statewide with the rest going to private pharmacies, hospitals and mass vaccination sites.

"We've been very concerned because the state has put a lot of emphasis on mass vaccine distribution sites and trying to stand up more points of distribution and we feel like they've got the cart before the horse," he said.

Maryland is in phase 1C of its vaccination rollout, which includes adults ages 65 to 74 and essential workers in lab services, agriculture, manufacturing and similar industries.



A woman receives a COVID-19 vaccine at one of the Carroll County, Md. age 75-plus clinics at the end of January. Photo courtesy of Carroll County Health Department

Although the state has progressed to 1C, Singer said the county health department still hasn't reached half of county residents over the age of 75 who were included in the 1B category. The county only receives around 1,000 doses per week and has over 11,300 individuals in the 1B group.

"We haven't moved on to 1C because we feel like we need to concentrate on our most vulnerable citizens and we just don't have enough supply," he said.

Jurisdictions and health officers throughout the state signed a letter to the governor calling for more transparency in the state's vaccination plan and stated that local health departments should be given more priority when it comes to vaccine allocation.

"We all agree that the state is doing this wrong and they ought to be letting the locals figure out how to get this to the people who most need it in our jurisdictions," Singer said. "All we're doing is spreading a small amount of vaccine over a

very large number of providers and it's not helping us reach the people who need it the most."

In Texas, there is no set formula for vaccine allocation, but the goal is to allocate equitably throughout the state, according to the Texas Department of State Health Services.

The Texas Commissioner of Health appointed an Expert Vaccine Allocation Panel that makes recommendations, according to the department. A few factors influence the commissioner of health's decision on allocation including mitigating health inequities, data-driven allocations and geographic diversity.

"It's kind of like making sausage, it's done somewhere out of sight and we really don't have the ability to understand exactly what that worksheet looks like," Tarrant County, Texas Judge Glen Whitley said of the allocation process.

Texas has three Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) vaccine sites with one located in Tarrant

County bringing an additional 21,000 vaccines to the area per week.

Whitley said the county was under the impression that the FEMA site would not reduce the county's weekly allocation from the state, but the number of doses decreased by around 11,000.

"It's more inconvenient, because now a lot more people are going to have to drive a further distance to get to the vaccine site," he said.

Whitley said the county has three hubs and nine other locations that receive vaccines from the state.

"What I would say to the state is instead of allocating to so many different players within a certain county, send it to the county and let the county be the arm of the state in getting those vaccines out," he said.

In Washington, the Washington State Department of Health uses several factors to determine allocation to counties including available vaccines, county level pro-rata data, equity, site-specific information,

distribution channels, partner input and compliance with the state's 95 percent requirement that vaccines must be used within seven days.

In Lewis County, Wash., Director of Public Health and Social Services JP Anderson said there are 13 eligible providers approved by the state to receive vaccines.

The county has only received enough doses to vaccinate 7 percent of the population, compared to the state average of 14 percent.

Anderson said he is unsure what formula the state is using to allocate vaccines to his county.

"We're seeing growing disparities between counties presumably shared on a state formula but that has not been shared with us," he said.

As of Jan. 18, the state moved to its 1B, tier 1 phase, which makes all people over the age of 65 and all people over the age of 50 living in multigenerational households eligible for a vaccine.

Anderson said this decision created a lopsided supply and demand dynamic with only 100,000 doses coming in per week. His main concern is related to throughput.

"The more you get, the more you're able to demonstrate throughput and so it seems that the equation would start to favor those who were favored initially who were able to demonstrate throughput because of larger allocations to begin with," he said.

Mass vaccination sites also posed similar challenges in Lewis County, Anderson said.

"Although they've been good at getting lots out, they've done a poor job of doing it equitably," he said. "This is a case where you really need to listen to the local health directors... because it's our job to advocate for the people in our community. I understand the strategies of the state, but if you don't take into account those voices, you end up having people who aren't represented at the table."

CN

NEVADA 'SMART CITY' PROPOSAL WOULD AMPUTATE COUNTY LAND



An artist's conception shows Blockchains LLC's plan for a "smart city" in Storey County, Nev. Artwork by Ehrlich Yanai Rhee Chaney Architects

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

There's a lot that Storey County officials like about the concept for a Nevada "smart city" inside its borders. There's a lot more that concerns them about a proposed measure that would remove almost 40 percent of its land, 12 miles east of Reno, to create a new local government for that development, while hoisting the administrative duties on the county until the new government is ready to operate.

Gov. Steve Sisolak's (D) proposal calling for "innovation zones" created by private businesses has yet to reach the Legislature, but both Sisolak's economic team and the county in the crosshairs started talking about it in late February and early March.

Sisolak hinted at the plan during his State of the State address in January, touting Blockchains LLC's investment in Storey County.

A draft calls existing forms of government "inadequate alone to provide the flexibility and resources conducive to making the state a leader in attracting and retaining new forms and types of businesses and fostering economic development in

emerging technologies and innovative industries."

Storey County, however, disputes that characterization.

"I don't find that this assertion has merit," Commission Vice Chairman Clay Mitchell said during a March 2 meeting. "I don't want to speak for them, but I think Google, Switch, Tesla, some of the other innovative tech companies that are in our county would beg to differ as well. Somehow, these emerging industries and innovative technologies have found a way to work with our local government model."

If passed as written, the proposal would remove 67,000 acres of Storey County's privately owned land, adding up to what County Manager Austin Osborne estimated could mean tax revenue losses ranging from \$48 million - \$64 million.

"We don't really believe it's necessary to create a separatist, local type of government," Osborne said. "Storey County is the poster child for this sort of (development)."

"We are the innovation zone. Most of the updates that we've done...2008 have been to deregulate, smooth out the zoning and make it easier to build things, not the other way around."

The Tahoe-Reno Industrial Center, which abuts and includes some of the Blockchains land, touts its seven-day turnarounds for grading permits and 30-day turnarounds for building permits.

Storey County is home to a little more than 4,000 residents, but Blockchains' proposals for

measures to mitigate the novel coronavirus.

It's "an economic crisis that hit Nevada hard, if not harder than any other state due to the frailty of our economic structure and of course our reliance on the tourism and hospitality industries," Sisolak said during a Feb. 26 press conference. "This state has

"We don't really believe it's necessary to create a separatist, local type of government. Storey County is the poster child for this sort of development. We are the innovation zone." – Austin Osborne

15,000 homes in the Innovation Zone would add roughly 36,000 new residents as part of the city's residential component.

Though the proposal has focused on Storey County, it's caught others' attention as well.

"At this time, all of Nevada's counties have concerns about this legislation and have expressed those to the proponents," said Dagny Stapleton, executive director of the Nevada Association of Counties.

Try anything

The proposal comes as Nevada's tourism and service-based economy continues to suffer from the COVID-19 pandemic

talked for years about economic diversification and expanding our economy into areas beyond casinos and gaming. Positive strides have definitely been made in recent years, yet Nevadans have once again found ourselves to be incredibly vulnerable in an economic downturn."

Sisolak's proposal currently would allow private businesses to create an innovation zone with 50,000 acres of uninhabited, unincorporated land in a single county, a \$250 million investment in the land and infrastructure before applying and a commitment to invest \$1 billion over 10 years. The program would operate out of the state

Office of Economic Development, and the applicants must involve the use of an innovative technology.

The applicant must also secure access to public utilities and necessary natural resources — The *Nevada Independent* reported that Blockchains LLC purchased water rights in a groundwater basin about 100 miles north of its property in Washoe County.

Existing governments cannot exercise eminent domain powers over an applicant's property. Applicants must have an industry-specific tax levied on it by the Legislature.

Upon approval, the governor would name a three-person Board of Supervisors with no interests in — but two nominated by — the applicant, with identical powers to county commissions but with authority that supersedes surrounding county government; but the surrounding county is responsible for county-level powers and services until the innovation zone has 100 residents and can assemble its own government and eventually take over services.

"It is not a 'company town,'" Sisolak said. "That's not what it is. They are subject to the same laws as other local government officials." None of that makes Storey County officials any more comfortable.

"This type of environment is unpredictable," Osborne said. "We have no say in the governance, but we're still expected to provide services to those areas, police, fire, management, clerk offices, recorder. We could go from 150 staff that includes fire, sheriff, everybody — to maybe six, seven, eight, nine thousand people like our neighboring jurisdictions, to provide services to this area. And the way it's written so far, at any given time it could just vanish — they then assume those staff, yet we've had to build office space and put infrastructure and those things into housing all of those people to that point."

Why not a county?

Storey County officials contend they provide the same outcomes as an innovation zone and would be willing to explore additional levels of autonomy.

See **SMART CITY** page 7

‘What if this thing, halfway through, doesn’t come to fruition?’

From SMART CITY page 6

Jeremy Aguero, principal of Applied Analytics, said the proposal shouldn’t be seen as a slight to county governments. Sisolak, formerly the chairman of the Clark County Commission, is the first Nevada governor to have served county government in a non-prosecutorial role since former Mineral County Assessor and Sheriff Fred Balzar left office in 1934.

“The structure of governments in the state of Nevada, we’re not talking about retrofitting a community with some type of innovative technology, we’re talking about building a city from the ground all the way up,” Aguero said. “This isn’t an indictment of any particular jurisdiction, be that Storey County in the case of Blockchains or anywhere else.

“Governance can evolve and be integrated into the function and needs to the community,” Aguero said. “You’re talking about orders of magnitude different in terms of that technology.”

“So much of what has been developed in the state of Nevada has been built to the scale of the automobile. This is the way that we’ve done it traditionally and the amount of resources, the amount of requirement, the amount that would ultimately and potentially transition the nature of any individual county is significant. You’re talking about a county that has relatively little in population and an innovation zone that would be substantially larger than that in terms of order of magnitude.”

As recently as 2018, Blockchains CEO Jeff Berns was pursuing county approval for his smart city, *The New York Times*, reported. He had spent \$300 million on land, offices, planning and staff.

“This will either be the biggest thing ever or the most spectacular crash and burn in the history of mankind,” *The Times* quoted him. “I don’t know which one.”

The latter concerns Osborne. “What if it doesn’t work?” he asked the Commission. “What if this thing, halfway through,

doesn’t come to fruition? Who takes this over? What if the land is a superfund site?”

“These old malls were built in the ’60s, ’70s and ’80s... hundreds of millions of dollars have been put into the properties to try to make them feasible and the local jurisdictions are stuck with blighted properties.”

Leave the bathwater, take the baby

Although the commission passed a resolution opposing “separatist governing control and carving up of Storey County,” it also resolved to push for outreach to pursue the innovation zone project without changing the form of local government.

“The majority of what they want to do is good by the county overall,” said Chairman Jay Carmona. “I believe Storey County is very capable of serving the needs of Blockchains.”

Though the 36,000 additional residents projected by the project and futuristic design may contrast with the aesthetic

of former mining town Virginia City, Osborne said the plan mostly falls within the county’s master plan, last updated in 2016. The residential component would be highly urbanized and dense, in a mixed-use environment common to new urban design.

“Things like stainless steel and high rises and glass, lots of very modern types of designs,” Osborne said. “The overall look of this is neotraditional, probably more New Urbanism in

the planning world. It’s very high density, it’s walkable, it’s a Generation Z-type, mixed-use residential environment and its really focused on incubating technology and ideas.... We’d love to see that sort of thing out in that area, even to the most extreme level of that design.

“We think at this point that those are good things. We know that’s the future of our world and we are certainly a county that’s all about creating the future.” **ON**

..... **ON THE MOVE**➔

NACo OFFICERS

NACo hosted a virtual Corporate Premier Networking Event Feb. 19 to connect corporate partners with NACo’s leadership. President **Gary Moore**, First Vice President **Larry Johnson**, Second Vice President **Denise Winfrey**, Executive Director **Matt Chase** and Director of Strategic Relations **Jack Peterson** presented on behalf of NACo.

NACo STAFF

- **Maxx Silvan** has joined NACo as a membership associate. Prior to joining NACo, originally as a government affairs intern, he served as an intern with the National Pork Producers Council, House Republican Conference and Office of Rep. John Katko (R-N.Y.). Silvan earned a bachelor’s degree in political science and economics from George Washington University.
- Associate Research Director **Jonathan Harris**, Chief Public Affairs Officer **Brian Namey**, Chief Information Officer **Rita Reynolds** and Associate Legislative Directors **Blaire Bryant**, **Eryn Hurley** and **Adam Pugh** made presentations Feb. 18 on their subject areas to the Biden Administration.
- Chase provided a federal policy update Feb. 18 at the Legislative Conference of the Association of Minnesota Counties.
- Program Manager **Jack Morgan** was a guest Feb. 23 on the Partners for Better Communities podcast.
- Chase spoke at the newly elected county officials training Feb. 23 for the Wyoming County Commissioners Association.
- Morgan presented on SolSmart at the Montana Association of Counties Winter Conference, held Feb. 25-27.
- Chase presented on key county issues facing the Biden administration Feb. 26 at the Kettering Foundation Panel at the National Forum for Black Public Administrators Virtual Winter Summit.



Silvan



Harris



Morgan

WORD SEARCH

POLK COUNTY, Iowa
Created by: Mary Ann Barton

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

AIRPORT: Polk County Airport is owned by the Polk County Aviation Authority.

CAPITAL: The state capital of Des Moines is the county seat of Polk County.

COLLEGES: There are at least five colleges in the county and 26 within 100 miles.

COURTHOUSE: The county has built three courthouses; the latest, a Beaux Arts style, was built in 1906 with updates in the 1960s.

DATA: The county is home to several large data centers for companies that include Microsoft and Facebook.

FAIR: The Polk County Fair is in its 82nd year.

HISTORY: The county was formed on Jan. 13, 1846.

INSURANCE: The county is known for the many insurance companies headquartered there.

LEACHMAN: The late Emmy-award winning actress Cloris Leachman was a native of the county.

NEWSPAPER: The *Des Moines Register* newspaper began as the *Iowa Star* in 1849.

PINTEREST: The founder of the Pinterest image-sharing web site, Ben Silbermann, is a native of the county.

POPULATION: The county population is more than 490,000 as of 2019, the most populous county in the state.

PRESIDENT: The county was named for President James Polk.

REAGAN: Ronald Reagan, the 40th U.S. president, was chief sports announcer at WHO radio station before heading to Hollywood.

RIVER: The county is bisected by the Des Moines River.

A LETTER FROM A MEMBER

Dear Fellow County Leaders:

On behalf of the National Association of Counties (NACo), I want to encourage you and your county to join NACo. NACo unites America's 3,069 county governments to create a collective voice on national policy, exchange ideas and pursue transformational county solutions amongst others.

A NACo membership pays for itself numerous times. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the resources provided by NACo have been invaluable. As we know, counties are on the front lines of our nation's response to the pandemic. NACo has provided webinars and analyses regarding the CARES Act, rental assistance, key considerations for vaccine distribution plans and innovative ways to deliver public services during these unprecedented times. Because of these webinars, county and taxpayer resources and time have been saved due the analyses and up-to-date information that NACo staff prepared. It has allowed county leaders and staff to focus on serving their constituents during these extraordinary times while still acquiring the necessary information.

NACo continuously provides a sustained, respected presence for all counties on Capitol Hill and with the administration. Through NACo's We Are Counties campaign, we have been able to put a face on the local COVID-19 pandemic response. Counties across the country participated in the campaign. In Nevada, we created a Nevada-specific video that has been shared with Nevada's state and federal leaders. It has allowed us to demonstrate that talented public servants make public and essential services possible while also using it to advocate for funding and resources for counties. As a result of the entire We Are Counties campaign, NACo helped secure valuable federal resources for counties.

While every member's experience with NACo is unique, the availability of a multitude of resources is something that all members can take advantage of. I support membership in NACo, and I hope you will join us. United, we can strengthen America's counties and ensure healthy, safe and vibrant communities.

Sincerely,

Marilyn Kirkpatrick
Clark County Commission Chairwoman
President, Nevada Association of Counties (NACo)
Member, NACo Board of Directors
Member, NACo Large Urban County Caucus
Member, NACo Telecommunications & Technology Steering Committee



PROFILES IN SERVICE

BRENT JOHNSON

NACo Board Member
Assemblyman
Kenai Peninsula Borough, Alaska

Number of years active in NACo: First year

Years in public service: 22

Occupation: Commercial fisherman

Education: Completed 12th grade in 1973 and have taken a number of college classes.

The hardest thing I've ever done: Parenting.

Three people (living or dead) I'd invite to dinner: Both of my grandfathers and local pioneer schoolteacher, Enid McLane (all deceased). My wife would cook and we would record everything.

A dream I have is to: See teachers respected like doctors.

You'd be surprised to learn: I have been elected three times without ever accepting a campaign contribution.

The most adventurous thing I've ever done: Our 1975 honeymoon in Germany, Switzerland, France and Spain.

My favorite way to relax is: Play pool with friends.

I'm most proud of: My wife, Judy. She raised six children and has been wonderfully sweet, honest and caring.

Every morning I read: *The Washington Post*

My favorite meal is: Anything vegan including watermelon with lots of black seeds.



Johnson

My pet peeve is: People calling gravel roads "dirt roads." I grew up living at the end of a dirt road over two miles long and know the difference between gravel and dirt.

My motto is: "Panic early." In the commercial fishing industry, it's important to realize how bad things could go while there is still time to do something about it.

The last book I read was: *Sold American: The Story of Alaska Natives and Their Land 1867- 1959* by Don Mitchell

My favorite movie is: *My Fair Lady* starring Audrey Hepburn and Rex Harrison

My favorite music is: 1960s – 1970s rock 'n roll. Among my favorite songs are *Imagine* by John Lennon, *He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother*, by The Hollies and *Sounds of Silence* by Simon & Garfunkel.

My favorite U.S. president: Barack Obama

My borough is a NACo member because: Unifying with other boroughs in the Alaska Municipal League (AML) has saved our borough money by pooling insurance and it's a great way to learn how other boroughs solve problems. AML is a member of NACo because uniting with counties across America is a useful way to bring better government services to people in Alaska.

My favorite music is:
1960s – 1970s
rock 'n roll.



Simon & Garfunkel

GET TO KNOW...

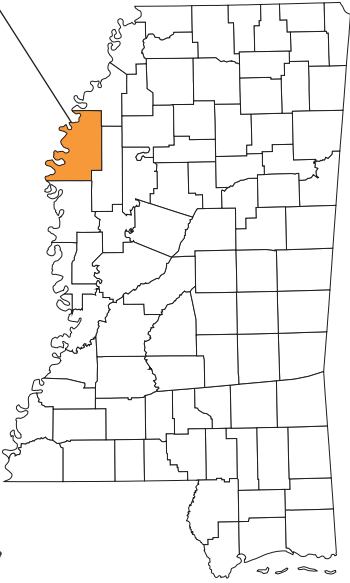
Bolivar County, Miss.

Welcome, Bolivar County, Miss.

Bolivar County is located on the western border of Mississippi in the Mississippi Delta. Established in 1836, the county was named for Simon Bolivar, aka "The Liberator," from South American. Its two county seats are Cleveland and Rosedale. The current population is around 34,000. The county's economy focused on agriculture in its early years and was once ranked 14th in the state for cotton production. The economy has now shifted to manufacturing with the development of industrial parks that have attracted over 25 manufacturing industries, employing over 3,000 people.

Bolivar county is home to the Grammy Museum Mississippi located in the county seat of Cleveland on Delta State University's campus. The museum focuses on continuing musical achievements of Mississippians and the history of the Grammy awards.

"Get to Know" features new NACo member counties.



The Fighting Okra
(Delta State's unofficial mascot)



BEHIND THE SEAL

DARE COUNTY, N.C.

The Dare County seal was first used in 1977. Known as the Land of Beginnings, the county was formed in 1870. Three symbols are used in the seal represent the county's history.

A ship on the left side of the seal symbolizes the ship that first brought English colonists to the area in 1587.



The lighthouse in the center of the seal depicts the Cape Hatteras Lighthouse, the tallest brick lighthouse in the United States. It is located on Hatteras Island in the Outer Banks off the coast of North Carolina.

The Wright Brothers National Memorial represents the site of the first powered flight by Orville and Wilbur Wright.

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

NEWS FROM ACROSS THE NATION



scholarships target families living below or near the federal poverty level and allow parents to enroll children ages 3 to 5 in early childhood programs, the *Arizona Daily Star* reported. Supervisors allocated \$10 million of the upcoming year's budget to be approved in the budget process for the programs.

ALABAMA

The LIMESTONE COUNTY Department of History and Archives has **digitized most of its public records**, photos, articles and documents to be accessible through a searchable database. The software provides county residents with access to a free online portal to view documents and videos related to the county's history. Students throughout the county plan to use the system and create exhibit projects based on what they learned from viewing the archives, News 19 reported.

ARIZONA

Supervisors in PIMA COUNTY voted to invest in **scholarships for early childhood education opportunities**. The

COLORADO

A proposed state bill would **prohibit county commissioners from sitting on county or regional boards of health**. State Rep. Cathy Kipp drafted the bill which aims to eliminate political considerations from public health, the *Sterling Journal-Advocate* reported. The bill gives county commissioners the responsibility of appointing local volunteers to boards of health and replaces a previous law that allowed county commissioners in counties with less than 100,000 in population to serve on or as boards of health. County commissioners across the state and political spectrum oppose the proposal, the *Greeley Tribune* reported.



FLORIDA

• SARASOTA COUNTY launched an **"Energy Coach" program** to provide training for volunteers who are interested in helping low-income residents save energy, water and money. Energy Coach volunteers work to make the county equitable and sustainable by completing 12 hours of training on home energy systems where they learn about energy and water-saving techniques and how to conduct virtual consultations.

FLORIDA

• A collaboration between ALACHUA COUNTY Fire Rescue and the Florida Department of Health in Alachua County launched an operation to **provide vaccinations to homebound seniors**. The Community Health Team delivers vaccines to elderly people in their homes who are referred to fire departments by the local health department. Fire rescue medics can vaccinate up to 11 people per day, WUFT News reported.

• Emergency dispatchers in VOLUSIA COUNTY are completing **mental health training** to aid in handling suicidal callers. During the pandemic, the county has experienced an increase in mental health distress calls, ClickOrlando.com reported. The training helps dispatchers learn what to say and who to best send to a caller as well as how to handle their own mental health.

INDIANA

The District Attorney's Office in FORT BEND COUNTY launched a community outreach initiative targeting **youth who are at risk** and in need of intervention. Through the Expose Excellence Youth Program, young people will have access to job skills and career training, business and entrepreneur workshops, recreational activities, tutoring services and mental health and substance abuse support, among other programs. The overall program is organized through the district attorney's office and run in collaboration with other agencies, according to the *Fort Bend Star*.

MINNESOTA

• HENNEPIN COUNTY launched a new **probation program to support young adults** transitioning back to the community. Through the Transition Age Youth unit, officers keep in constant contact with clients and solve problems related to education, employment and housing and family issues. The unit allows clients to stay in touch with officers until they are 24 years old, the *Star Tribune* reported.

• Commissioners in RAMSEY COUNTY approved the construction of man-made **wildlife islands** in Pigs Eye Lake in St. Paul, a backwater of the Mississippi River. The islands will create more natural habitats and be made using dredge material from the Mississippi River. The county owns more than 500 acres of property around the lake, which is mainly undeveloped parkland, the *Star Tribune* reported.

MISSOURI

• Gov. Mike Parson (R) has proposed adding to the state budget millions of dollars **owed to counties for holding inmates on state charges**. In Missouri, the state reimburses county jails for housing inmates accused of violating state law. One county sheriff said the state pays \$22 per day for each inmate, but the real cost for holding inmates is closer to \$60 per day, KY3 reported. Some counties are pulling money from general revenue funds to compensate for the difference.

NEVADA

• An off-duty WASHOE COUNTY sheriff's sergeant found a **missing California couple** while he was taking a weekend camping trip. The sergeant found them in their disabled vehicle in the rural northern part of the county and called in their location using his satellite phone.

NEW MEXICO

With support from the sheriff, detention center administrator and fire chief, DOÑA ANA COUNTY has required that **all first responders receive a COVID-19 vaccine**.

NEW YORK

• Aiming to combat price-gouging during the pandemic, ALBANY COUNTY has capped the fees that **third-party food delivery services** can levy on restaurants. Sites like GrubHub and DoorDash are limited to a 20 percent service fee on orders. The law limits those services to 15 percent of the original ticket price and a 5 percent fee for marketing and "other" services.

• HERKIMER COUNTY is looking for gems outside of its diamond mines. The county's industrial development agency is holding a countywide **"live pitch"** competition, in which entrepreneurs will be paired with judges tasked with helping them develop their business ideas. "Pitch Herkimer County" will be limited to start-ups or businesses that have been in operation for less than a year.

The Mohawk Valley Small Business Development Center will provide pro bono services for contestants. The grand prize winner will receive \$5,000 and pro-bono services and four other winners will each receive \$500 and pro bono services, *The Times Telegram* reported.

• With the prospect of warmer weather prompting plans for picnics, the WESTCHESTER COUNTY Department of Parks, Recreation and Conservation is now **taking reservations for county pavilions** for the upcoming months. All groups will be required to follow current coronavirus guidelines at the time of their events, including but not



GEORGIA

Former BALDWIN COUNTY Commissioner Tommy French and current Commissioner Kendrick Butts are holding **monthly county food distributions** for those in need. Food is distributed every third Wednesday of each month at a county facility. The commissioners helped distribute 14,000 pounds of food to 226 families and 737 individuals during the February distribution.

limited to capacity, social distancing and mask wearing.

SOUTH CAROLINA

• **BERKELEY COUNTY**'s new County Administration Building expansion, in what was once a Food Lion, will **consolidate several county and state departments and offices** into one 36,000-square-foot structure, including the DMV, emergency communications and operations centers, voter registration and elections, procurement, finance and engineering.

"The project will create a one-stop shop for Berkeley County citizens," County Supervisor Johnny Cribb told *The Post and Courier*.

"It's really going to be a much-improved venue for our citizens to go and do their business. The DMV and voter registration offices are going to be the most public components, and this will make that experience a lot more efficient."

• The **CHARLESTON COUNTY** Public Library is partnering with the Women in the South-East Telehealth Network to provide **telehealth services** for women. The library system's rural branches will increase healthcare access and address health disparities through direct provision and referral, offering care management and connecting women to available community and social services.



St. Louis County Library Director and CEO Kristen Sorth holds a GrandPad as part of the county's initiative to help underserved older adults access technology.

Photo courtesy of St. Louis County Library

MISSOURI

• The **ST. LOUIS COUNTY** Library launched the "GrandPads" initiative to **connect older adults to technology** during the pandemic. The GrandPads are devices designed to meet the needs of individuals over the age of 75. Each tablet comes preloaded with software for seniors who can make phone calls, send and receive photos and access information online. Eligible seniors can use the device for a year and then have the option to return it or take over subscription fees. The library purchased the tablets using CARES Act funds as part of the county's Digital Equity Initiative.

TENNESSEE

The **KNOX COUNTY** Commission approved a resolution to build a new **video courtroom** at the Roger D. Wilson Detention Facility. The expansion, including six new hearing rooms, could cost up to \$1.5 million, but Sheriff Tom Spangler has said the video courtroom facility will

save the county millions of dollars in transportation fees, WATE News reported.

TEXAS

HARRIS COUNTY recently held an event to provide **renters at risk of eviction** with information about their rights under the Centers for Disease Control

and Prevention order preventing evictions for nonpayment of rent. Volunteer attorneys helped tenants determine if they qualify for protection under the CDC guidelines and helped those who qualify complete and sign the required declaration on the spot. Additional volunteers helped tenants apply for rental assistance through two new state and local government programs.

VIRGINIA

CHESTERFIELD COUNTY has started a multi-year **overhaul of its zoning ordinance**. The process will modernize land-use categories, make the ordinance more user-friendly and develop a new online zoning ordinance tool, among other improvements, Richmond BizSense reported.

WASHINGTON

KING COUNTY Elections and the Seattle Foundation will award nearly \$1 million in grants to 30 organizations working to **increase voter participation and civic engagement**. Focus communities include Black, Indigenous, people of color, people experiencing homelessness, people convicted of a felony, limited-English speaking communities, people with disabilities and youth of color. Grantees will work to educate, register, familiarize voters with the electoral process and provide culturally

appropriate technical assistance during the 2021-2022 election cycles.

WISCONSIN

• **WASHINGTON COUNTY** developed a new GIS application to **highlight development projects** over the last five years. The application compares 2020 orthophotos to 2015 orthophotos, narrowing in on major developments including brownfield projects, park developments, business expansions and subdivision growth. The app allows you to move a SpyGlass viewer over the recent development area to see what this area looked like approximately five years earlier.

• Gov. Tony Evers' (D) 2021-2023 state budget proposal will include a provision allowing counties, with approval from local taxpayers, the authority to impose an additional **half-cent county option sales tax**.

"For too long, counties have been forced to rely on property taxes to fund local services and state-mandated programs," said Wisconsin Counties Association Executive Director Mark D. O'Connell.

"Today's announcement from Governor Evers gives local taxpayers a voice in how they prefer to pay for services and is a recognition that Wisconsin must begin addressing its over-reliance on property taxes."

WYOMING

The **TETON COUNTY** Commission has declared the county a **"hate free zone."** The Commission's recent resolution affirmed the "values of diversity, equity and inclusion," the *Casper Star-Tribune* reported.

"This is a very important statement of our ideals and our values," Commissioner Mark Newcomb said during a recent meeting of the Teton County Board of County Commissioners. "It is a statement, it is a first step and I look forward to continuing to follow through both in action, word and deed."

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.

NEVADA

After a truck driver killed five cyclists in December, the **CLARK COUNTY** Commission has clarified **road rules around bicycles** in a new ordinance, reinforcing that cyclists may use the entire lane and that in Nevada, motorists must move to an adjacent open lane when passing. Cyclists must stay to the right of the road except when going the speed limit, turning left, passing a fixed object or when the right side is unsafe. There can be no more than two riders abreast on the road, front lights are mandatory at night with a reflector or light on the back of the bicycle, brakes are mandatory and a bike path must be used when one is available, Las Vegas' NBC affiliate reported.



A five-seat "ghost bike" memorial honors five bicyclists who were killed Dec. 10 by a truck driver. Photo courtesy of Save Red Rock

BRIGHT IDEAS | BERNALILLO COUNTY, N.M.

Community Outings Program Aids in Substance Abuse Intervention

PROBLEM:

Individuals with substance abuse issues often do not feel like members of the local community.

SOLUTION:

Form a partnership to focus on community reintegration for individuals living substance-free.

by Rachel Looker
staff writer

The Bernalillo County, N.M. Department of Behavioral Health Services teamed up with the county's Parks and Recreation Department to use community outings to help reintegrate individuals struggling with substance abuse back into the community.

The collaboration is through the Department of Behavioral Health Services' Supportive Aftercare Program, which opened in 2009.

Individuals struggling with addiction issues can use the transitional living communities as safe spaces to work on recovery through the program.

Located in Albuquerque's International District, the program uses a 24-week curriculum focusing on cognitive-behavioral substance abuse intervention where clients have access to community space and resources.

Behavioral Health Services Clinical Manager Megan Aragon said the main goal of the Supportive Aftercare Program is for individuals to successfully reintegrate as members of the community.

"We really want clients to realize that as much as they take from the community, they can give back to the community and become functioning again," she said.

Clients involved in the program from October 2016 to October 2017 experienced a significant decrease in local jail bookings from 4.19 percent

to .31 percent as well as a drop in the need for detox services, which decreased from 650 total times to 253 times.

Through the program, clients are encouraged to vote in local elections, learn about local community resources and participate as an active member of their own community while being substance free.

"We saw the need to get clients more engaged in the community in different ways," Aragon said.

Bernalillo County took the program one step further by forming a collaboration between the Department of Behavioral Health Services and the Parks and Recreation Department to provide clients with unique experiences to aid in reintegrating them into the community.

Recreation Coordinator Danielle Fast said Behavioral Health Services wanted to add a recreational side to enhance the Supportive Aftercare program.

The collaboration allows clients to experience events that they may have not been able to otherwise.

Parks and rec staff pick up clients from the program to participate in a variety of activities and outings including photography classes, quilting, ceramics, pottery making, cooking classes, archery and swimming.

Fast, who was one of the first instructors for the partnership, taught photography.

"Being in that place of sobriety totally enhances this experience because now they're actually solidified memories and good memories that they can actually pass on to their children and their children's children," Fast said.

Other outings include skiing, fishing, attending football and basketball games, going to the ballet and attending classes on topics such as meal planning.

"There's another spectrum of



Clients participate in a cooking program in 2019 as part of the Bernalillo County, N.M. Supportive Aftercare Program. Photo by Bernalillo County Parks, Recreation and Open Space staff

adults who are now transitioning their lives and we get to be a part of that and show them the healthy side of things," Fast said.

The collaboration has utilized local community centers throughout the county to diversify the experiences offered to clients.

"Let's expose them to new things in their recovery that show them that there's excitement outside of substance use and there's ways to utilize their time and engage in new hobbies or expose them to new experiences that some of them have never gotten to engage in," Aragon said.

Fast described the parks and recreation department's involvement with the Supportive

Aftercare Program as a "supporting leg" that enhances the curriculum.

"Now they're getting that social aspect in a fun way and not just trying to find themselves in society in general, but recreationally," Fast said.

The program adjusted during the COVID-19 pandemic with the departments holding activities outside with more limited events indoors while wearing masks and observing social distancing protocols.

Aragon advises other counties to reach out and collaborate with other departments to help individuals facing substance abuse issues reintegrate into the community.

"That's what it's about at the end of the day, is these clients

and getting them to change their perspective of what life and recovery can be," Aragon said.

Fast said other departments should think outside of the box to aid clients in transitioning back into society.

"We're constantly being innovative of how we alter our programs to suit their needs as well as meet our goal of just reaching out to our community in different ways," she said. **CN**

Bernalillo County's Supportive Aftercare Program: Community Reintegration, a Collaboration with the Parks & Rec Department, is the recipient of a Best in Category 2020 NACo Achievement Award in the Parks and Recreation category.