NACo’s Broadband Task Force releases report

by Rachel Looker
staff writer

In an effort to bridge the digital divide in counties both rural and urban across the country, NACo’s Broadband Task Force released a report, "High-Speed Internet is Essential for All Counties." July 12 during the 2021 NACo Annual Conference outlining nine specific themes that address communities seeking broadband.

Task Force Co-Chair and Montgomery County, Md. Councilmember Craig Rice said the pandemic has further highlighted the need for affordable, accessible, high-speed broadband access.

"This is a starting point," he said. "There is so much more that needs to be done."

Co-Chair of the task force and Wise County, Texas Judge J.D. Clark said the task force formed four subcommittees to address the digital divide. Members of the subcommittees focused on preparing for broadband, barriers to build-out, the digital divide and future-proofing the local economy.

"Don’t view this as a stopping point today, this is where we start," Clark said.

See BROADBAND page 5

Larry Johnson, Georgia commissioner, takes the lead as NACo president

by Mary Ann Barton
editor

DeKalb County, Ga. Commissioner Larry Johnson was sworn in as NACo’s new president July 12 at NACo’s 2021 Annual Business Meeting in Prince George’s County, Md.

Johnson began his journey to the top spot when he was elected second vice president of NACo in 2019 at the Annual Conference in Clark County, Nev.

“Don’t imagine being here today,” Johnson said in his acceptance speech. “I’m the product of two teenage parents and sometimes it seemed like the world was against me. But I never would give up. I wish my mom could be here to see me now.”

Delegates at the association’s 86th Annual Conference elected Johnson to lead the executive team along with Boone County, Ky. Judge Executive Gary Moore, immediate past president; Will County, Ill. board member Denise Winfrey, who becomes NACo’s first vice president and Ramsey County, Minn. Commissioner Mary Jo McGuire, who was elected second vice president in a three-way election.

Johnson laid out his vision for his year ahead in a speech to county officials. "I am pleased to announce that I will focus on the theme ‘Counties thrive,’”

See BROADBAND page 5

Optimism and drive power Johnson

by Charlie Ban
senior writer

Ask Larry Johnson how he’s doing, and chances are you’ll get the same reply every time.

"Best day of my life!"

That was as true years ago as it was when he was sworn in July 12 as NACo’s president. The DeKalb County, Ga. commissioner is bringing a background in public health and public service to lead the association, but also a backbone built of optimism.

"Every day is an opportunity,” he said. "An opportunity to help somebody, make somebody smile, help your family, be the best father, the best husband and you have to take that attitude on, otherwise with all the doom and gloom going on around us, it’s easy to get depressed."

"You have to choose to make this the best day of your life, and that’s what I do."

He assumed the NACo presidency at a pivotal time in the nation’s history, at a largely in-person Annual Conference in Prince George’s County, Md. The conference was possible because of a tremendous COVID-19 vaccination program that counties played a large part in administering after more than a year of serving as a life-
line for millions of Americans during the pandemic.

The only son of teenage par-
ents, Johnson grew up in Cook
County, Ill., where he spent a
summer running a Little
League baseball team that he
endowed to make more than
just a sport.

“I wanted to deter them from
crime and gangs,” he said. “We
played baseball all day, but I’d
send them off with homework —
writing a few paragraphs
about sportsmanship and citi-
zenship.”

Decades later, he keeps in
touch with some of the young
men he once coached, and
takes pride in their growth, both
personal and professional.

After earning a Master of
Public Health (MPH) degree,
he moved to DeKalb County,
working in health education
and pedestrian safety.

“A lot of people didn’t know
what an MPH was, they joked
that it stood for ‘miles per hour,’”
Johnson said.

That wasn’t too far off, be-

cause Johnson soon found him-
sel working on pedestrian safety
issues, focusing on a part of
the county that saw a high rate
of deaths among African Ameri-
cans attributable to poor pe-
destrian infrastructure.

“We had no sidewalks, no
crosswalks, kids had to walk to
school on dangerous streets and
buses would stop in the middle
of blocks and make it hard for
people to reach them,” he said.

“Transportation systems were
an afterthought in these neigh-
borhoods.”

In solving these problems,
Johnson started to see an open-
ing to make changes. While
working with the state govern-
ment and local community
groups, he realized that despite
living about 15 minutes from
the state capitol in Atlanta,
many of his neighbors had nev-
er been there. He was successful
in having the third week of Oc-
tober designated “Pedestrian Safety Week,” a significant time
given the safety challenges en-
demic to earlier sunsets and re-
duced visibility in mid-autumn.

The next year, he pushed for
a law giving pedestrians the right
of way in crosswalks.

“I became an advocate for the
community in the political pro-
cess,” he said. “I wasn’t thinking
about going into politics, I just
wanted results.”

Seeing those legislative suc-
sesses early in his career, before
he might become jaded by legis-
lative inaction, helped him to
keep looking up.

“I started seeing how to get
residents involved and engaged
in the process,” he said. “They
can make changes in their gov-
ernments, take steps to move in
a positive direction and save their
life.”

He spent a few years working
on local community-building
efforts with President Jimmy
Carter, gaining an influential
mentor in First Lady Rosalynn
Carter, then ran for the DeKalb
County Commission in 2000.

Though he lost, he set his ego
aside and worked as a com-
mision aide for the victorious
Hank Johnson. When redistrict-
ing opened up a congressional
seat Hank Johnson was going
to pursue, it offered another
County Commission opportu-
nity for Larry Johnson, one he
was reluctant to take.

One of the prevailing voices
was one of his old Little League
players, along with Johnson’s wife,
Tanisha.

“I used to encourage them to
be all they could be, and it came
full circle,” he said.

His background as a commis-
son aide helped him become
effective quickly upon taking
office in 2005, when his involve-
ment with NACo began.

“We were able to bring in
some sidewalks, make school
zones safer, build better bus
shelters,” Johnson said. “I had
the training ground for what it
took to get things done. Having
a chance to make a difference
for people allowed me to be
who I am today.”

As the country emerges from
the COVID-19 pandemic, John-
son sees a bright spot in public
health getting recognized.

“People are gaining a greater
appreciation for how messaging
is done, working from the bot-
tom up to connect with people
to get them to adopt behavioral
changes,” he said. “Now people
understand how important pre-
vention is.”

“Now it’s in vogue, it’s great to
see people going into it and put
resources into public health,”

he said. “It’s a very noble cause.
It’s a field that allows me to do
a lot, it allows you to evolve into
many public policy spheres that
just one field might now allow
you to go into.”

He also wants to orient coun-
ties toward growing and pro-
spering, coming out of survival
mode from COVID to THRIVE —
the theme of his NACo presi-
dency:

• Technology
• Health
• Readiness
• Infrastructure
• Working with Vulnerable communities
• Economic impact

“Counties have excelled in
COVID, doing what we always
do,” he said. “Let’s not stop
there.”

Part of that involves calling
on counties to do more. If they
aren’t NACo members, Johnson
wants them to understand that
membership has its privileges,
including being a party to the
strengthening federal-state-lo-
cal partnership. If they are
members, Johnson said their
ideas and participation are what
NACo needs to get stronger.

“Don’t just be a spectator, get
on the field,” he said. “Take the
next step,” and join a steering
committee.

Johnson looks to former
Chicago Mayor Harold Wash-
ington, Frederick Douglass,
Harriet Tubman and Presidents
Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt,
Franklin Roosevelt as leader-
ship role models.

“Those are the folks I look at
in terms of tenacity, determina-
tion and resiliency,” he said.

All qualities county officials
have shown during the pan-
demic, and what will be neces-
sary to take the next steps for-
ward every day.

“Counties need to make sure
our residents have what they
need,” he said, “so they can
make this the best day of their
life.”

Don’t just be a spectator, get on the field’
Investment, cooperation needed to deter wildfires

by Charlie Ban
senior writer

With droughts and record-high temperatures already hammering the West, the 2021 wildland fire season is looking worse than 2020. That’s apparent from the June 22 National Interagency Fire Center declaration of a Level 4 Preparedness Level, the second highest designation. U.S. Forest Service Chief Vicki Christiansen pointed out to the Public Lands Steering Committee July 9 that 2002 was the last time the country reached Level 4 in June, and the loss of moisture in wildfire fuels is a month ahead of 2020’s progress.

“I’ve been, in some form, a wildland fire manager or line officer for 20 years and it’s not the same, it’s not the same,” she said. “The resistance to control the fires, the intensity of our fires has changed and we must do something different. It’s not just working harder to treat more acres, we also need to treat the right acres.”

Christiansen is due to retire in August after a 40-year career and three years as Forest Service chief. “These changes to our wildland fire systems are rooted in extraordinary drought, a legacy of fuel builds and legacy of fire exclusion, compounded by a changing climate,” she said.

“Homes spreading into fire-prone landscapes and the volatility of the wildland fuel itself contribute to the growing complexity of a broader wildland fire system. “We need to focus on the factors that we can control — the depth and quality of our working relationships and understanding how we really are involved in this together,” she noted. “We can’t do it without federal, state, local, tribal and private contractors, it takes all of us.”

Christiansen has some ideas on how to get the wildland fire system under control. Treating or breaking up the fuel continuity in 30 to 40 percent of the firesheds (an area where social and ecological concerns regarding wildfire overlap), that can confine fire to a more manageable and natural territory. She projected that would mean treating twice as much land as the service could currently.

“In most of our landscapes, fire is a necessary land component, we just have too much volatility to do this job correctly and it puts too many people at risk,” she said. Fixing this will cost money, because firefighters have not been working on a competitive pay scale, and they have been overworked over the past year, adding vaccination work after an exhausting 2020 fire season, with a harder year on the horizon.

While bonuses will help retention, Christiansen said it was a stopgap measure while personnel deal with exhaustion and mental health concerns. In short, it has to change.

“The only way we’re going to do this is to up our game and be very strategic about how we treat these landscapes and how we prepare these communities to become ‘fire adapted,’” she said.

“It’s a big call to action, it’s a big challenge, but I also think it’s a big opportunity.”

Ramsey County, Minn. Commissioner Mary Jo McGuire and supporters celebrate her election to the NACo second VP position July 12 at the 2021 Annual Business Meeting. Photo by Denny Henry
Investing in early childhood enables economic mobility

by Rachel Looker
staff writer

County leaders held a panel discussion July 10 at NACo’s Annual Conference on innovations and strategies for expanding services for children as part of Counties for Kids, a public awareness campaign that focuses on young children prenatal to three years old.

In Stearns County, Minn., the county reached an additional 1,000 infants and their parents during the pandemic through Women, Infants and Children (WIC) because of an increased number of telehealth visits.

The county began using community connectors who are paired with public health nurses to work with moms and teen parents throughout their pregnancy and post-delivery. Stearns County Commissioner Tarryl Clark told county officials.

In Pierce County, Wash., Council Chair Derek Young said about one-fifth of children in the county are in households that are below the poverty line.

Pierce County launched the Family Connects International Model to provide free nurse home visits to every household in targeted ZIP codes with the goal of expanding the visits throughout the entire county.

"The reason we’re doing that is it connects families to services that are already out there," he said.

He referenced the county’s 211 program, which connects residents to services over the phone, and a diaper bank program that provides free diapers to families.

"Not only did that provide a real, essential need for families, but also it gives us another shot to talk about what their other needs are and connect them to other services," he said.

Mecklenburg County, N.C. Manager Dena Diorio said childhood services started in the county with the goal of improving economic mobility.

The county created a task force to improve mobility and found early childhood education was key to improving economic mobility.

She explained how the county is working to implement universal pre-kindergarten and is the only county throughout the state implementing a universal pre-kindergarten program.

Mecklenburg County commissioners also invested $21 million to ensure that every child who was on a wait-list for childcare slots was able to access childcare and help working families.

“It’s a two-generational program that allows families to put their children in a place where they can be safe and allow them to go out and make a living,” Diorio said.

Additionally, Mecklenburg County created an Early Childhood Executive Committee to help guide efforts in the early childhood sphere. The county partnered with the Charlotte Executive Leadership Council to complete an early childhood education study that looked at how to advance the early childhood program and pre-kindergarten initiative.

“I think that was one of the biggest things that helped us enhance this,” she said.

The panelists also discussed making investments to expand services for children with American Rescue Act funding.

Diorio advised counties to go slow with the dollars.

“You want to make sure you leverage every pot of money that comes your way.”

Former Commissioner Jack Buell asked that a tree be incorporated into the seal to represent the timber industry.

A garnet in the center of the seal, requested by former Commissioner Norman McCall, represents the south end of the county and its proximity to the Emerald Creek Garnet Mine.

Former Commissioner Dave Johnson suggested wheat to depict the farming industry on the west side of the county.

A stream represents the many rivers and creeks that flow throughout Benewah County.

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

Tarryl Clark, commissioner, Stearns County, Minn., Dena R. Diorio, county manager, Mecklenburg County, N.C. and Derek Young, council chair, Pierce County, Wash. discuss the benefits of early childhood programs July 10 at the 2021 NACo Annual Conference in Prince George’s County, Md. Photo by Leon Lawrence III
Broadband report provides policy recommendations

From BROADBAND page 1

The nine themes included in the report are:

1. Defining a “minimum standard” of broadband
   The policy recommends broadband systems are designed and constructed in ways that are scalable and meet community needs.
   “We have to have minimum standards,” Rice said.
   The committee is recommending the federal broadband definition should be scalable and meet a community’s needs.

2. Implementing “dig once” policies and including “rights of way” as public assets
   The task force recommends that federal “dig once” policies are established across agencies.
   “When we’re doing big projects, let’s think about how we can be proactive to digging once and getting conduit laid as well as part of that project,” Clark said.

3. Testing and deploying fiber, cellular, satellite and emerging technologies
   “You don’t just want to build for today, you have to build for tomorrow and future realities,” Rice said.
   He added that developing standardized processes and removing state and local government legislative obstacles will aid in the delivery of broadband services.

4. Focusing on local community engagement and partnerships
   Rice said collaboration with service providers, colleges, schools, small businesses and economic development groups is crucial to successfully expanding broadband.

5. Tackling the homework gap
   Rice emphasized how the pandemic revealed the number of young people who are disconnected and unable to access high-speed internet.
   “[The homework gap] affects our economic development and workforce development and so it’s incredibly important for us to advocate for making sure that we have a program that is there that sets aside resources for our children,” he said.

6. Removing bans on municipal broadband
   With some counties living in states where there are restrictions on local governments being involved in broadband, Clark said the task force identified that these restrictions should be removed.
   “For local governments to be able to encourage competition and to encourage internet service providers to expand, they have to be able to have a role and get involved on broadband,” he said.

7. Establishing a national grants and loans clearinghouse
   Restrictions and guardrails on how to use money in the infrastructure plan may place restrictions on how to use funds for broadband, Rice said.
   “Implementing a broad game plan program for some of our unserved and underserved areas is essential,” he said.

8. Regulating broadband as a utility
   “Broadband is not just a luxury, it is absolutely essential to our families and businesses,” Clark said.
   The task force recommends peer-reviewed mapping that ensures minimum speeds are met and that middle-mile systems should be an open network.

9. Committing to world-leading broadband data and mapping analytics
   “If that data is flawed, there’s no way we’re going to get to a possible solution,” Rice said.
   He said it is crucial to make sure data is accurate and referenced NACo’s TestIt App, which highlights the gaps in the FCC’s broadband maps that have been used by federal agencies to determine funding needs for investments.
   Both Clark and Rice told county officials the appendix of the report will grow as the report itself evolves and local governments use ARP funding for innovative broadband projects.
   “I hope that through this document, you’ll be able to get a synopsis of some of the challenges that we identified with all of your various communities,” Rice said. “They may not be exact, but certainly should be able to give you a framework for how you can possibly move forward.”

To his right is Task Force Co-Chair J.D. Clark, county judge, Wise County, Texas.

JULY 26, 2021
COUNTY NEWS  NATIONAL ASSOCIATION of COUNTIES
ARP architects stress importance of execution in recovery

by Charlie Ban
senior writer

For the Biden administration, properly addressing the nation’s economic needs in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic meant making up for what they missed during the Great Recession.

Several senior economic officials were Obama administration veterans determined not to repeat the history of an uneven recovery that saw many parts of the United States lag years behind others.

That meant passing the American Rescue Plan was only the beginning, and to ensure a full recovery, the Biden administration prioritized successful implementation of the $1.9 trillion stimulus, a task equal in importance to summing the Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund that they provided sufficient support to state and local governments,” Jacob Leibenluft told a July 11 joint meeting of NA- Co’s Large Urban County and Rural Action caucuses. He is the chief recovery officer and counselor for Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen.

The burden will be on counties to demonstrate that they have properly used the $65.1 billion in direct ARP funding in the Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund that they received to mitigate damage caused by the pandemic, including helping businesses, addressing learning losses in children, reducing health disparities and rehiring government employees. The direct funding was a departure from the 2020 CARES Act cutoff to counties with populations under 500,000 residents needed for direct funding.

“We needed to provide the resources to take on the public health crisis,” Leibenluft said, noting that states would hardly be a better judge of where money was most needed in each county. “And fiscal distress cannot only result in cutbacks but be a drag in a recovery.”

Sperling pointed out estimates that more robust funding to help return governments to pre-recession employment levels could have meant a 3 percent rate of economic growth over four years, rather than 2.3 percent. That made direct funding to counties a priority.

“It’s on us not just to implement well, but to tell the world what was done,” he said. “We’re going to have to show that, because I don’t think there’s any in this room who wants the idea of direct county assistance after a recession to be one-and-done, so we have a lot of work going forward.”

Deputy Treasury Secretary Wally Adeyemo told the July 12 audience that the administration had thus far been impressed with initial plans for ARP spending, including investing in water infrastructure, investing in small businesses and bringing back employees.

“The president, in designing the American Rescue Plan, decided that he was going to give a historic amount of money to local, county and state officials for a very specific reason: Because the needs of each one of the people you serve is different and we knew that by providing the resources to you directly, that you would have the ability to meet those needs,” he said.

He predicted a 6 percent GPD growth, due in large part to the local investments that counties were making.

Leibenluft said ensuring counties had access to their own relief money was crucial to properly targeting that funding.

“We wanted to ensure that those resources went to every government,” he said, noting that states would hardly be a better judge of where money was most needed in each county.

When asked whether the Treasury Department could relax spending rules to give counties more latitude, Leibenluft pointed to statutory language that demanded those guide rails, and it would take congressional action to allow that, which would be unlikely.

“Those guard rails are there because of what the legislation requires,” he said. “It’s an approach that ensures accountability and transparency. That’s our ‘North Star’ in implementing relief at Treasury.”

The American Rescue Plan is the largest piece of federal spending in American history, but it was allocated with great intention. With counties largely still returning their staffing levels to what they maintained before the Great Recession 13 years ago, the funding was meant not only to restore those personnel but also to start to advance.

“There are 77,000 fewer workers in public schools teaching 2 million more students,” Leibenluft said. “Government jobs are still 1 million below the pre-pandemic levels.

“Our hope is that the passage of the ARP will finally allow us to do what most of us who came to govern came for,” to advance the cause of helping citizens.

Counties provide ARP feedback

Sperling said outreach to county governments on APR spending rules has been
White House answers county questions on American Rescue Plan spending

From ARP page 6

as valuable for the Biden administra- tion as for the counties seeking guidance.

“I can’t tell you how [often] I will be on a phone call and even though it may seem we don’t have the direct answer, that informs us,” he said.

“We recognized that the implementation of this... Do you have clarity? Do you have guidance? If there’s a place to resolve, can we get out new guidance? This is critical.”

The Treasury Department recently closed the comment period for the Final Interim Rule for the Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund. NACo fielded more than 1,000 comments, recommendations and case studies from counties, which were summarized and submitted to the Treasury.

The consensus was that current restrictions and limited clarity on eligible and ineligible uses of the Recovery Funds might inhibit counties’ ability to achieve an equitable economic recovery.

**Public health support and negative economic impacts**

- Explicitly allowing for addiction crisis services as an eligible use
- Permitting long-term equity endowments that address racial and ethnic disparities in healthcare access and outcomes
- Expanding eligible use of Recovery Funds for capital investment projects and the definition of public sector staff engaged in the COVID-19 response
- Clarifying activities addressing behavioral health and well-being to include both acute and chronic care as well as services, including support groups, that do not often directly accept insurance payments
- Clarifying expectations for services in Qualified Census Tracts
- Drawing on additional metrics as a proxy for disproportionate impact
- Allowing early learning facility construction and improvements
- Including Community Development Block Grant expenditures as an eligible use
- Permitting property acquisition
- Expanding definitions within affordable housing development
- Providing safe harbor for households receiving direct assistance, a definition of low-income and additional flexibility for expenses incurred prior to March 3, 2021
- Adjusting revenue loss calculation to ensure counties comply with the U.S. Treasury’s goals and the intentions of the IFR
- Incorporating additional eligible uses of Recovery Funds that will help support local and national recovery

**Other suggestions included:**

- Providing additional flexibility for Recovery Funds to ensure our nation’s preparedness and responsiveness continues
- Providing further clarity on eligible uses of Recovery Funds
- Clarifying clarity on eligible and ineligible uses of Recovery Funds
- Permitting property acquisition
- Expanding definitions within affordable housing development
- Providing safe harbor for households receiving direct assistance, a definition of low-income and additional flexibility for expenses incurred prior to March 3, 2021
- Adjusting revenue loss calculation to ensure counties comply with the U.S. Treasury’s goals and the intentions of the IFR
- Incorporating additional eligible uses of Recovery Funds that will help support local and national recovery

Other suggestions included:

**Premium Pay**

- Expanding premium pay for eligible employees

**Revenue loss formula and calculation**

- Adjusting revenue loss calculation and fiscal year-end dates
- Allowing revenue loss funds to be used for rainy day and reserve funds, for debt service and to be calculated on a source-by-source basis
- Including public transit system fares in revenue loss calculation
- Including revenue and losses from municipally owned utilities
- Excluding new taxes imposed prior to the COVID-19 pandemic

**Water and sewer infrastructure**

- Expanding eligibility for water and sewer projects outside of the Clean Water State Revolving Fund and Drinking Water State Revolving Fund
- Expanding eligible uses of Recovery Funds to include dams and reservoirs
- Allowing routine maintenance of water and sewer infrastructure projects

**Broadband infrastructure**

- Expanding the definition of “unserved and underserved” households
- Allowing for scalability when determining broadband investments
- Expanding general use of Recovery Funds to include cybersecurity

**Ineligible uses of funds**

- Allowing for non-federal match requirements as an eligible expense

**Recommendations for additional uses**

- Expanding eligible use of Recovery Funds for capital investment projects and for election-related activities.

For more information, visit naco.org/covid-19-recovery-clearinghouse.
finally!

NACo swag is now available online!

naco.org/store
ASTRONAUT: Astronaut Fred Haise, who took part in the 1970 Apollo 13 flight, is from the county.

AUTHOR: Wiliter Nesmyr Ward, who won the National Book Award in 2011, calls the county home.

BARQS: Barq’s Root Beer was invented in the county in 1898 by Edward Barq's.

GULF: The county is located on the Gulf of Mexico.

HARRISON: The county is named after President William Henry Harrison.

HISTORY: The county was founded Feb. 5, 1841.

HURRICANES: The county was heavily damaged by hurricanes Camille and Katrina.

KEESLER: Keesler Air Force Base is located in the county.

DAVIS: Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederacy, moved to the area after the Civil War.

GULF: The county is located on the Gulf of Mexico.

HARRISON: The county is named after President William Henry Harrison.

HISTORY: The county was founded Feb. 5, 1841.

HURRICANES: The county was heavily damaged by hurricanes Camille and Katrina.

KEESLER: Keesler Air Force Base is located in the county.

MILES: The county is 976 square miles – 574 square miles of land and 402 square miles of water.

POTTER: Artist George Ohr, known as the “Mad Potter of Biloxi” created innovative pottery.

ROBERTS: Robin Roberts of Good Morning America hails from the county.

SEATS: The county has two county seats, Biloxi and Gulfport.

DID YOU KNOW: Annual revenue from casinos in the county is over $1 billion per year.
ALABAMA
● BALDWIN COUNTY is using GPS technology to help emergency officials responding to 911 callers who do not know their address or location. The “whatSwords” technology uses three words to create unique addresses for 10-foot squares throughout the world. The technology also works through text where a link converts GPS coordinates of an individual’s phone into a three-word address that is easier to communicate with responders. The county has used the technology to help three callers so far. “whatSwords” is faster than the time it takes 911 dispatchers to determine locations through cell phone towers, WPMI-TV reported.

● The Department of Health in JEFFERSON COUNTY has launched a hospital-based violence intervention program to help curb future gun crimes. Those who have been shot and taken to the hospital have the option to meet with an individual who helps them through the trauma in an effort to avoid further homicides or revenge killings. Jefferson County Health Officer Dr. Mark Wilson said gun crime is a public health emergency in the county, WBRC reported.

● SANTA BARBARA COUNTY Emergency Medical Services is providing free car seats and helmets to county families. The California Department of Health awarded the county the Kids’ Plate grant, which is funded through a bill for the sale of specialized vehicle license plates to support the health and safety of children. The county distributed 105 helmets and 32 convertible car seats, the Santa Barbara Independent reported.

FLORIDA
● Commissioners in ESCAMBIA COUNTY unanimously voted to contract with Magellan Advisors to use nearly $650,000 in CARES Act funding for planning a county broadband network, if approved by the board. A study by Magellan found there were 3,000 unserved or underserved residents without access to broadband in North Escambia. The project would include a fiber-based wireless network.

● SEMINOLE COUNTY is also helping to bridge the digital divide by opening a computer lab for residents to apply for rental assistance. Five stations with computers and scanners are available along with staff to help residents submit paperwork for assistance with rental or mortgage payments, the Orlando Sentinel reported. The computer lab aims to help those who lack broadband access, don’t own a computer or scanner or who need help navigating pandemic relief. The computer lab opened alongside the launch of the county’s mortgage assistance program, according to knbc-tv.com.

● Commission of the Human Services Department in DEKALB COUNTY is providing a number of summer vouchers and scholarships for summer camp programs for county youth. The Dekalb Summer Camp Voucher Program is available for income-eligible families and youth between the ages of 5 and 15, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution reported. The program is in partnership with the DeKalb Community Development Department. The county parks and recreation centers are also offering scholarships for eligible families.

GEORGIA
The Human Services Department in DEKALB COUNTY is helping in 2021 that resulted in 32 deaths. “As we continue to reopen, traffic will increase, which will lead to more cars on the road and pedestrians crossing streets,” said County Executive Marc Elrich.

MONTGOMERY COUNTY
The Atlanta Journal-Constitution encourages individuals and businesses to take certain actions to improve air quality such as using public transportation to conserve energy and keep ozone levels low. SEDGWICK, HARVEY and SUMMER counties are also participating in the program, The Butler County Times-Gazette reported.

MARYLAND
● The Board of Liquor License Commissioners in BALTIMORE COUNTY unanimously voted to resume to-go cocktails.
The chosen near at different com have The Electric-powered cars are going to find that is subject to are Digital El Paso, pass by stopped buses. It will eras The Legislature approved a plan to legislation this year that allows local liquor licensing boards to authorize a two-year allowance of to-go cocktails for restaurants, bars and taverns.

NEW YORK
- The NASSAU COUNTY Legislature approved a plan to install school bus cameras to record drivers who pass by stopped buses. It will start with a 60-day, no-penalty warning period to educate drivers, then begin fining violators.

- ONONDAGA COUNTY has launched the Production Incentives for Movies and Entertainment Development program to offer rebates to different film, television and commercial advertising productions for local spending in hopes of keeping film production crews in the area. LocalSyr reported that the county is investing $5 million of its American Rescue Plan funds into the program and aims to generate an additional $15 million to $20 million.

- EL PASO COUNTY is participating in a three-year program to expand broadband access. Digital El Paso, a public-private partnership collaboration among the city, county, El Paso Independent School District and the city’s housing authority, will work with the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas and technical consultant, Magellan Advisors, to better understand community needs, infrastructure and other factors in expanding broadband Internet access, Government Technology reported.

- The Legislature has passed a bill allowing counties to establish overdose fatality review teams. The OCEAN COUNTY Health Department implemented the state’s first program in 2018. It identifies common trends that point to systemic issues, which then inform intervention practices. The bill requires the Commissioner of Health to report the process for drug overdose deaths and forward the information to the review team. It also promotes more cooperation and data-sharing between state and local government agencies, develop new prevention strategies and provide recommendations for programming and policy.

- Six BEXAR COUNTY election workers who took part in the November election have died from COVID-19 complications, Texas Public Radio reported. Elections Administrator Jacque Callanen said there is no way to know for sure if the workers contracted the virus from voters who did not wear masks, which were not mandated by the state at the time. More than 2,300 workers helped with the November Election Day and early voting period. Their average age was approximately 72 years.

- NASSAU COUNTY’s animal shelter and town hall will provide incentives for residents who adopt a previously killed someone is immediately and if a dog that has killed a human will be confiscated and put down. The ruling is effective immediately and if a dog that has previously killed someone is brought into Franklin County, officials will hold it at the county’s animal shelter and then euthanize it unless a judge intervenes.

- ALLEGHENY COUNTY is partnering with the Pennsylvania Resources Council to offer a traveling glass recycling program at different county parks in the second half of the year.

- Acting Secretary of State Veronica Dрагенфрид announced that the state would decertify any election equipment that is subject to third-party access and the state would not reimburse counties for the cost of replacing that equipment. TIOGA, YORK and PHILADELPHIA counties have been targeted by a state senator for a forensic audit of election equipment. Tioga and York counties have objected to the request, the Associated Press reported.

- A dozen LOUDOUN COUNTY roads named for Confederates or segregationists are candidates for renaming. The Board of Supervisors told InsideNoVa.com it will be looking into additional names submitted by the public that are not already included in the current list, to see if any more should be added. The county’s school system is doing its own review of its buildings.

- The CHELEN COUNTY Sheriff’s Office is creating a public-private partnership called Operation 2300 to respond to 911 calls in 17 county roads warning drivers about the extreme fire hazard level. The chosen county roads typically lead to U.S. Forest Service Roads.

- The CLARK COUNTY Jail has reached a settlement with the U.S. Department of Justice to ensure that people who are deaf or hard of hearing have equal access to services. The jail must provide interpreter services for things like medical appointments, educational classes, classification reviews and religious services and modify its restraint and handcuffing policy so inmates can communicate with sign language or writing, the Daily Record News reported.

- The MILWAUKEE COUNTY Sheriff’s Office is creating three deputy sheriff positions to deploy with mental health specialists to respond to such crises in the 17 Milwaukee County communities without such services, the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel reported. Crisis Assessment and Response Teams are pairs of one deputy sheriff and one mental health counselor — as opposed to two deputy sheriffs — to respond to 911 calls that require mental health services.

- News from Across the Nation is compiled by Charlie Ban and Rachel Looker. Does your county have news we should know about? Contact charlie@naco.org or rlooker@naco.org.
‘Erie Grown’ Website Promotes Local Agriculture

By Rachel Looker, staff writer

With just a few clicks of the mouse, those living in or near Erie County, N.Y. can find the closest producer of locally grown agricultural products.

The Erie County Office of Agriculture launched the Erie Grown website to promote local produce and encourage residents to purchase food from area farmers.

The office formed with the mission to address loss of farmland and improve the agricultural economy.

The Erie Grown website includes a site locator map and a produce finder with 145 producers. Users can search for a specific type of produce to find a location where they can make a purchase from a local grower.

“If you want to find who has apples in Erie County, you can do that,” said Sarah Gatti, senior planner with Erie County Environment and Planning.

Users can search for farms or farm-related businesses or search for specific produce within a set distance from their location.

The website provides links to various farms’ websites or social media pages.

“It was in the hopes of just really better connecting the farmers and the consumer,” Gatti said.

The website features resources for producers including links to Local Harvest, Meat-Suite, Farmland Relief Fund as well as a list of farmers markets throughout the state and other government and non-profit agencies that support farmers.

Gatti said she used existing outreach to farmers often proved challenging.

“After the pandemic hit, I was in touch with those people who were kind of in crisis mode,” she said.

Over 145 farms, farmers markets, wineries and cideries have enrolled in the Erie Grown website.

At last count, the website had over 50,000 views. The website also includes information for farms in other counties to connect residents to neighboring communities.

“We added the other counties because agriculture doesn’t respect county boundaries,” she said. “A farmer may and probably does own land in Erie County and then our neighboring counties.”

The site was developed and built by the county’s Department of Information Support Services and the Office of Geographic Information Systems, which created the mapping features.

In addition to Erie Grown, the county launched the Erie Grown Passport to further incentivize local purchasing.

Through the program, those who visited local producers had a chance to win agriculture-related prizes.

“We hope it incentivizes people to visit the Erie Grown website, but more importantly to visit our local farmers,” Gatti said.

The passport program encourages consumers to purchase produce from different farmers and post about it on social media.

The Office of Agriculture also began planning for the passport program before the COVID-19 pandemic but launched a modified version to eliminate points of contact. The program now includes QR codes on posters and postcards where individuals self-report visits to local growers instead of marking physical passports.

Individuals can visit a site, fill out the online passport or printable brochure and turn them in. The individual with the most passport points won a prize.

Gatti said she used existing networks to encourage farmers to sign up for the website through email blasts and organizations in the community.

There were more than 40 enrollments the first day the website launched.

The Erie Grown website was also expanded to allow restaurateurs to search for farms and growers that have local meats and produce.

Gatti advised counties to partner with agricultural agencies that have relationships with farmers to increase their involvement with the county and local community.

“I think that trust in those long-standing relationships go a long way in getting farmers on board with something like this,” she said.

Erie County’s Erie Grown website is the recipient of a Best in Category 2021 NACo Achievement Award in the Community and Economic Development category.