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CountyNews

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NATIONAL ASSOCIATION of COUNTIES

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Franklin County, Ohio Commissioner Kevin Boyce makes a point Nov. 17 to members of a NACo task force on affordable housing; they gathered for their first meeting in Washington, D.C. Photo by Hugh Clarke

New NACo task force meets to tackle housing affordability issue

by Meredith Moran
staff writer

NACo's Housing Task Force, composed of 30 county leaders from across the country, gathered Nov. 17 in Washington, D.C., to kick off the task force's nine-month pursuit to address the nation's housing affordabil-

ity and housing security crisis. At its first meeting, the task force outlined its goals and determined top county housing issues. They will gather again in-person in February, May and July to research and conduct case study interviews, leading up to the release of a report of its findings at the NACo Annu-

al Conference in Travis County, Texas.

NACo President Denise Winfrey, a Will County, Ill., county board member, appointed Franklin County, Ohio Commissioner Kevin Boyce and Valley County, Idaho Commission-

See HOUSING page 2

Group cares for pets while owners get mental health, drug treatment

by Meredith Moran
staff writer

Johnson County, Kan. Mental Health Center is partnering with BestyBnB, a Kansas City

pet care and fostering platform, to connect pet owners who are seeking mental health or substance use treatment.

Some clients were declining substance use or mental health treatments because they needed someone to care for their pets. That's when the new component was added: A foster pet program.

A survey conducted by the mental health center found that more than 70 percent of county mental health staff members had at least one client de-

cline treatment in the past six months because they didn't have temporary care for their pet, according to Tim DeWeese, director of the center.

"If you have to choose between doing something for yourself, and then not taking care of those you love — oftentimes, we sacrifice our own needs, and pets are certainly a piece of that puzzle," said Michelle Burchyett, a clinician at the center. "So, we find that

See FOSTER PETS page 3

VOTERS SEND COUNTY VETS TO GOVERNOR'S OFFICES

by Charlie Ban
senior writer

Two gubernational candidates with county government backgrounds will take office in January after successful elections, and voters across the country cast ballots in favor of measures that will change county government.

Pennsylvanians elected former Montgomery County Commission Chair Josh Shapiro governor after a term as attorney general. The Democrat served on the county Commission from 2011-2017. He is the first Pennsylvania governor since Mark Schweiker (a Republican who filled Tom Ridge's seat after the latter became Homeland Security secretary), to have county government experience. Schweiker served for seven years as a Bucks County commissioner, from 1988-1995.

Nevadans elected two-term Clark County Sheriff Joe Lombardo, a Republican, who will succeed one-term Gov. Steve Sisolak, a former Clark County Commission chair.

Ballot measures

Voters across the country evaluated various ballot measures, including:

- **Elections:** Ranked choice voting (see *County News* article: <https://www.naco.org/articles/ranked-choice-voting-remains-rarity-county-level-races>) was on the ballot in several counties, with voters in Multnomah County, Ore. ap-

See MIDTERMS page 4

'We've had people living in the forest in RVs because they can't find housing'

From HOUSING page 1

er Sherry Maupin as co-chairs of the task force.

Boyce said before the first meeting that he's eager to get to work on the task force, particularly for the opportunity it will provide counties to exchange ideas and efforts to tackle the housing crisis together.

A major effort in Franklin County has been the Magnet Fund program, which has devoted funding to affordable housing including \$4 million for 273 new affordable housing units throughout the county.

"A lot of times, when it comes to affordable housing in a county, you look to the urban center as the only place where you can build affordable housing for low-income residents and sometimes it becomes a concentrated effort in your core city," Boyce said.

"What the county has done is said, 'Let's look at this regionally and let's look at sort of spreading the peanut butter if you will, so that some of our suburb partners and some of our townships can also provide affordable housing to their residents so we can create diverse communities economically and geographically throughout Franklin County, so no matter what part of town you want to live in, you can access quality and affordable housing.'

Although programs like Magnet Fund help, Boyce said the county's population growth has highlighted how much of a priority housing affordability, quality and supply needs to be and why something like the task force is so important.

"Today, we're 50,000 units short on affordable housing, and if we don't get those, we're going to create an environment that can't flourish where our residents can't thrive," he said. "So, housing to us is a basic and core need that we have a responsibility to try to address as we grow."

Maupin has also done considerable work toward find-



Boyce

ing solutions for affordable and secure housing, including helping form the West Central Mountains Housing Trust, which builds workforce housing in New Meadows and Valley County in Idaho. Valley

County is what Maupin calls a "resort community," where pricing has increased so rapidly that it's left out locals and the county's workforce, she said.

"This year, we had some of our teachers out living in the forest, even this winter, we've had people living in the forest in RVs because they can't find housing," Maupin said.

"These are our teachers, our firefighters, our police officers. Those who actually are middle class are really struggling, so housing is important. It's a labor shortage issue, it's child endangerment and safety issues — living in RVs — people shouldn't have to do that."



Maupin

At the first meeting of the task force, Chris Herbert, the managing director of Harvard Univer-

sity's Joint Center for Housing, discussed market trends and drivers, alongside Sarah Brundage, a senior advisor on housing supply and infrastructure at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

The two led a discussion on federal solutions that can support counties in fostering housing affordability.

"NACo is uniquely positioned to host this task force because it really gives us a little bit of everything in our country, in terms of communities that need to address a problem," Boyce said.

"I've not been to a city or county or state that hasn't had to address this issue or think about it in a broad way. So that, to me, is something that NACo is going to really help with in this conversation — it's going to be really important work." **CN**

SNAP/STATS



THANKSGIVING TOP 5 preferred locations to celebrate the holiday:

LOCATION	PERCENT
At home	62 percent
At relatives'	28 percent
At friends'	10 percent
At a restaurant.....	6 percent
Helping at homeless shelter	3 percent

Source: Statista

Retirement snag lies in wait for some county workers, officials

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

The windfall elimination provision falls in the dictionary at about the same point it comes up in the timeline of most county employees' careers — near the end.

The little-known offset in retirement programs affects workers who have split their careers between the private sector, where they paid into the Social Security system, and the public sector, where they are covered by a pension or deferred compensation program. But depending on where that break happens, they may see their Social Security retirement payments reduced by 40 percent, and it's enough that prospective county employees, including elected officials, could

balk at changing careers.

And all too often, Kris Lowdermilk has seen county employees either get a shock as they approach retirement or do the math and realize public service isn't for them when interviewing. Lowdermilk is the human resources director for Tuscarawas County, Ohio.

"If the individual thinks, 'Well if I'm going lose close to half of the value of my Social Security, why would I leave private employment to come to public employment?'" he said. "It's a tough market for employers right now, and as we try to post positions and recruit individuals, an individual who has been paying into Social Security for a fair amount of time, they're more reluctant now to come to a public employment retirement system due to the

windfall elimination."

The provision was designed to keep retirees from double-dipping in public and private insurance plans, and for the most part, it has worked, limiting the affected proportion of the American workforce to 3 percent, according to a September analysis by the Congressional Research Service, or roughly 2 million people. But the analysis also points out that state and local government employees are among those affected by the provision.

"It's kind of a blunt instrument," said Jeannine Markoe Raymond, director of federal relations for the National Association of State Retirement Administrators. "Everyone agrees on all sides that it's not perfect."

See **PROVISION** page 4

By fostering pets, county takes away a barrier to drug, mental health treatment

From FOSTER PETS page 1

individuals will not seek the treatment that they need if they don't have an alternate source of support for their pets — that's just a reality that we see over and over again — and as those individuals maybe don't get the care that they need, oftentimes, things get worse."

Burchyett referenced a situation the center had where a patient experienced a mental health crisis, and it wasn't until after the person was hospitalized that the center was made aware of the client's pet that was left alone at home.

"The hope is that if they need to get hospitalization or if they need some sort of residential treatment, we can offer that support and service before things reach a crisis point for them or for their pets," Burchyett said.

BestyBnB was originally created to help survivors of domestic violence. Self-proclaimed pet lovers Andy Bond and Matt Krentz, friends who both work in the software industry, got the idea for the platform after hearing an interview on Kansas City NPR-affiliate station KCUR-FM with a representative from a local domestic violence agency.

"They were talking about some of the challenges they face in trying to provide services to survivors, and this person mentioned that the biggest crisis that they face is over 50 percent of the time, when a person calls their hotline wanting to make that next step to get to safety, when they find out they can't bring their pet, they hang up and don't come," Bond said.

"Matt said, 'I think if we tried to help in that area through technology, rather than how a lot of people were trying to solve it at the time, just through brick-and-mortar type of solutions, we might be able to further enable these domestic violence agencies to serve these folks.'

"I agreed and that afternoon we storyboarded out how we would envision the platform working."

In what Bond calls "serendipity," it was through the radio station that mental health center employee Matt Clark heard about BestyBnB's launch. Bond



Pets are taken care of while their owners are in treatment for mental health or substance use issues.

'The hope is ...we can offer that support and service before things reach a crisis point for them or for their pets.'

- Michelle Burchyett, JCMHC clinician

and Krentz discussed it during an interview on the station, for Domestic Violence Awareness Month. Clark reached out about adapting the platform to address mental health for Johnson County.

The mental health center is primarily funded through the county, but the partnership with BestyBnB was made possible through funding granted by the local nonprofit Friends of Johnson County Mental Health Center.

That funding helped purchase the software and cover the costs associated with taking in pets. While most of the pet sitters work as volunteers, there are expenses like food to be factored in, DeWeese said.

The process for becoming a caregiver includes providing at minimum three references and going through a customized background check that searches through county and municipal level records to confirm that the applicant doesn't have a history of abuse in their background.



The county partners with BestyBnB, a pet care platform.

"Our caregivers need to understand what it means to take care of a pet of a survivor or patient receiving services, so we give them some information, they tell us about their experience and what they're able to do with a pet, what their home life looks like, what their home looks like, what their work schedule is," Bond said.

"All of these things that are really designed to make sure that when an advocate or a clinician is searching for a caregiver, they're finding one of our caregivers that is best suited for the pet."

Finding out what kind of pets the caregivers are willing and equipped to take in is also important, because the platform isn't limited to dogs and cats, Bond said.

"A lot of people would maybe presume that that's where it would end, but birds, rabbits, furry rodents, reptiles — those are also pets that mean a lot to these survivors and patients," he said.

A group of therapy tur-

gles were the first pets placed through the BestyBnB platform, according to Bond.

He said that it was a domestic violence situation in which the abuser killed one of the turtles and destroyed their habitat, telling the survivor that they were going to continue until all of the turtles were dead, leading the survivor to flee and then get connected to the platform through a domestic violence agency.

"That story was pretty gut-wrenching," Bond said. "One of our pet caregivers was able to take in that group of turtles, restore and build them a new habitat, wait for that survivor to kind of get back on their feet and then reunite them."

"So we give a lot of customization ability for those caregivers; but then they also have to go through training videos that we have on not only how to use the platform, but how to welcome pets that have been experiencing trauma into their homes and some best practices there."

The identity of both the person fostering the pet and the person seeking treatment is confidential to everyone except the agency for safety reasons, DeWeese said.

However, BestyBnB has a tool within the app that allows the two parties to communicate via a secure chat thread, so the pet caregiver can send photos and videos of the pet and also allow for the caregiver to ask specific information, Bond said.

"The pet caregiver can ask like, 'Hey, the 4th of July is coming up, how does Lucky do with fireworks, anything I need to know?' So, it keeps that communication going and removes all of the identity," Krentz said. "We've got testimonials from some of our clinicians saying, 'This client will come to me and say, 'Look at this picture of my pet,' and then have tears in their eyes just being so happy to be able to stay connected with them while they're receiving services,' so it's something we're very proud of, but it was a very technically intense portion of the software to build."

While Johnson County is currently the only county using BestyBnB as a service specifically for mental health and substance use, the organization works with 11 other agencies to connect those who are dealing with domestic violence and homelessness to willing pet sitters.

The software is currently available in Missouri, Kansas and Oklahoma, but BestyBnB is in talks with different agencies across the country, including Hawaii, California, Washington and Florida, according to Bond.

"We've talked to county government agencies as well as others that are either private or just general nonprofit mental health providers across the country and as word has gotten out about Johnson County being the first mental health provider in the country to have a pet program, we have talked with groups all over the country reaching out to us to figure out how they can do that in their organizations," Krentz said.

"So, we're actively working with those groups to get additional pet programs established in other communities."

Ballot measures cover broadband, airports, marijuana, jail inspections and more

From *MIDTERMS* page 1

proving its use for county-level races, but voters in Clark and San Juan counties in Washington defeated similar measures.

In Ohio, voters prohibited counties from allowing noncitizens to vote.

In King County, Wash. elections for county executive, assessor, director of elections and councilmembers will move to even-numbered years beginning in 2026.

California's San Benito and San Bernardino counties' voters approved term limits for supervisors.

- **Medicaid:** Voters in South Dakota approved an expansion of Medicaid, which will cover 20,000 additional adults according to a 2019 analysis by the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation.

- **Broadband:** In Alabama, Amendment 2 will allow counties to grant federal award funds or other state-designated broadband funds to public or private entities to provide or expand broadband internet infrastructure. Alabama county probate courts will no longer manage orphans' business following the passage of Amendment 5.

- **Economic development:** Also in Alabama, Amendment 7's passage will change the requirements for counties and



Pennsylvanians elected former Montgomery County Commission Chair Josh Shapiro, second from left, governor. Photo courtesy of Montgomery County, Pa.

municipalities to provide for financing economic and industrial development through the use of public funds, issuing bonds, and leasing property or lending bonds to private entities. Local governments will be exempted from seeking voter approval for issuing bonds unless the bond issue includes a repayment provision such as a tax increase.

- **Property tax relief:** Georgia voters allowed counties to grant temporary tax relief to properties destroyed in a nationally declared disaster area.

- **County sheriffs:** Kansas

voters required that county sheriffs be elected and allowed them to be recalled.

Los Angeles County, Calif. voters have allowed the Board of Supervisors to remove the sheriff by a four-fifths vote for cause.

- **Airports:** Nebraska counties that operate airports will be able to spend revenue to develop commercial air travel.

- **Gun permits:** Oregon residents voted to require permits issued by local law enforcement agencies to buy a firearm.

In Wisconsin, Milwaukee County voters also supported

prohibiting the importation, sale, manufacture, transfer or possession of semiautomatic firearms.

- **Investment portfolios:** Wyoming voters supported allowing the Legislature to let counties invest in stocks and equities, while requiring a two-thirds vote of the legislature to establish or increase the percentage of funds a local government could invest.

Among hundreds of local taxing measures, voters in individual counties passed ballot measures, too.

- **Oath of office:** Mi-

ami-Dade County, Fla. may amend the County Charter to require an oath of office, requiring that the mayor and commissioners swear that they will "support, protect and defend the Miami-Dade County Home Rule Charter and the government of Miami-Dade County."

- **Jail inspections:** Multnomah County commissioners must now inspect county jails annually.

Also in that county, the county auditor's office may now investigate the county's administration, which includes being provided unrestricted and timely access to county employees, information and records to do so. The county Board may now appoint a charter review committee and the charter review period is extended to 18 months, from 11 months.

- **Marijuana:** Dane County, Wis. voters supported expungements for convictions of possession of small amounts of cannabis and Milwaukee County voters supported the county legalizing, taxing and regulating the drug.

- **Housing:** Sacramento County voters allowed the county and cities to develop housing for low-income people and families equal to 1 percent of current housing units in the county. **CN**

Little-known offset impacts those who split career between public, private

From *PROVISION* page 2

One of Lowdermilk's commissioners in Tuscarawas County, Chris Abbuhl, calls the system unfair and antithetical to the nature of the system.

"It's almost like you're being penalized to go into public service," he said. "Social Security is not an entitlement, this is an earned benefit."

Abbuhl worked for 24 years in the private sector before focusing on municipal and county government, falling short of the 30 years necessary to secure full Social Security benefits.

"I left my private sector job that had good benefits and good pay because I wanted to go into a field where I felt I could make a difference for

my community and my county and my state," Abbuhl said. "I guess I could have stayed in the private sector until I had 30 years in and then maybe try to do something else or work concurrently and really stretch myself thin."

He says that the windfall elimination provision has the potential to cull candidates for public office, particularly those who have not paid into Social Security for 30 years.

"I do believe there are a lot of good people out there that, for a variety of reasons shy away from an elected public position because of the scrutiny it puts on your family and because of the finances. A lot of people can make more money in the private sector than they can in the public sector, so there's a

tradeoff," he said.

Julie Ehemann, a Shelby County, Ohio commissioner, said that the provision is even more troublesome for rural counties, given how elected officials are paid based on state policy. And certain positions are harder to hire for.

"If you look at attorneys who work for us, a lot are trying to juggle private practice and public service, or you know then they leave private practice to be a county prosecutor or something, or as a judge you totally have to walk away from your private practice and you're clearly not making as much as in the public sector as you were the private sector," she said.

Since 2004, various bills in Congress have sought to re-

place the WEP formula, including the introduction of the House Social Security Fairness Act of 2021.

The Social Security Administration and Internal Revenue Service now have the data to calculate the percentage of earnings subject to Social Security taxes, allowing for a proportional formula.

"They now can do it on a very fair basis, because they have all the data," Raymond said of the bill.

"It doesn't get rid of [the provision], but it's a more individualized way of calculating how much earnings somebody had in their lifetime.

"The problem is a lot of people ...don't want any offset at all."

She said various members of

Congress would rather repeal the provision, rather than fix it, which would be very expensive and create new inequities.

"I don't think it's going to happen."

While waiting for a fix, Lowdermilk tries to keep Tuscarawas County hires aware of what awaits them.

"From a personnel perspective, you have to be transparent with that, because you know, that's a terrible surprise to give an individual. People who find out after the fact are like, 'Well, I would never accepted this position had I known that.'

"It's right in our personnel manual we have them sign, that they acknowledge that they will not be paying into Social Security and we put it in their personnel file." **CN**

WORD SEARCH

BREVARD COUNTY, Fla.

Created by: Alyxa Hawkins

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

TOSH: Comedian Daniel Tosh, who was born in West Germany, grew up in the county seat of Titusville.

CRUISES: Within the county is Port Canaveral, one of the nation's busiest cruise ports. In 2016, 4.5 million passengers passed through the port. The port sees around 4 million tons of cargo a year.

SEAFOOD: Hungry? Grab some seafood at Grills Seafood Deck & Tiki Bar – voted the best seafood restaurant in Brevard County.

BEACHES: Pack your sunscreen: The county features more than 70 miles of beaches.

COURTHOUSE: The county seat of Titusville features the historic Old Brevard County Courthouse. This courthouse was built in 1912 in the Classical Revival style of architecture. In 2006, it was renamed the Vassar B. Carlton Historic Titusville Courthouse.

PARKS: The county has more than 117 parks to explore.

UNIVERSITY: The Florida Institute of Technology is in the city of Melbourne within Brevard County.

LAND: The county size is 1,557 square miles.

REFUGE: The county holds 250 square miles of federally protected wildlife refuges including the Canaveral National Seashore, the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge, and more.

TITUSVILLE: The county seat for Brevard County is located in Titusville, Fla.

POPULATION: As of the 2020 census, Brevard County has a total population of 606,612. This makes it the 10th most populous county in the state of Florida.

FLORIDA: Brevard County is located in the eastern central region of Florida.

KENNEDY: The Kennedy Space Center is in Brevard County, on Merritt Island.

This space center is one of NASA's 10 space centers in the United States.

ATLANTIC: Brevard County is bordered on the east by the Atlantic Ocean.

BREVARD: The county is named after Judge Theodore W. Brevard, a Florida settler who also served as comptroller for almost a decade in the 1850s.

PROFILES IN SERVICE

DOUG SMITH

NACo Board Member
 Commissioner
 Martin County, Fla.



SMITH

Number of years active in NACo: 12

Years in public service: Serving my 23rd year

Occupation: Martin County commissioner

Education: High school; NACo leadership program, Florida Association of Counties advanced certification program

The hardest thing I've ever done: I was chairman of the Martin County Board of County Commissioners in 2014, with two back-to-back major hurricanes, Frances and Jeanne.

Three people (living or dead) I'd invite to dinner: Amelia Earhart, Winston Churchill and Bill Belichick.

A dream I have is to: Go back and meet my great grandparents.

You'd be surprised to learn that I: Have a 2-year-old daughter and she is my world.

The most adventurous thing I've ever done is: Go skydiving.

My favorite way to relax is: What's that????

I'm most proud of: My wife and my parents.

Every morning I read: The headlines.

My favorite meal is: New England lobster with butter.

My pet peeve is: Lack of follow-through.

My motto is: "The answer is always yes."

The last book I read was: "Winds of the Carolinas"

My favorite movie is: "Pearl Harbor"

My favorite U.S. presidents are: Abraham Lincoln and George Washington.

My county is a NACo member because: It adds a level of promoting local issues to both my county and state on a national platform that brings value back to our residents.

MY FAVORITE MUSIC IS:

Steely Dan, Dave Matthews Band, Bruce Hornsby, Chuck Mangione, **Bruce Springsteen**, David Bowie, Sheryl Crow and Santana.



Bruce Springsteen performing at Roskilde Festival 2012

Photo credit: Bill Ebbesen.

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Operation Greenlight in Pictures



Peoria County, Ill. shines a light on its military statues and veterans.



The Denton County, Texas “courthouse on the square” shines bright to bring attention to veterans’ issues.



Midland County, Mich. goes green to help veterans.



The Lowry Bridge shines green as part of #OperationGreenLight in Hennepin County, Minn.



The skyline shines bright green in Mecklenburg County, N.C., where the Truit Center, the third-tallest building, brings attention to challenges faced by veterans.



The Bob Kerrey Bridge shines bright in Douglas County, Neb. The county featured the bridge in its social media posts to get the word out about veterans.



Multnomah County, Ore. shined a light on the service of veterans by featuring the Morrison Bridge, which was lit up in green. Learn more about how the county serves its veterans here: multco.us/veterans.



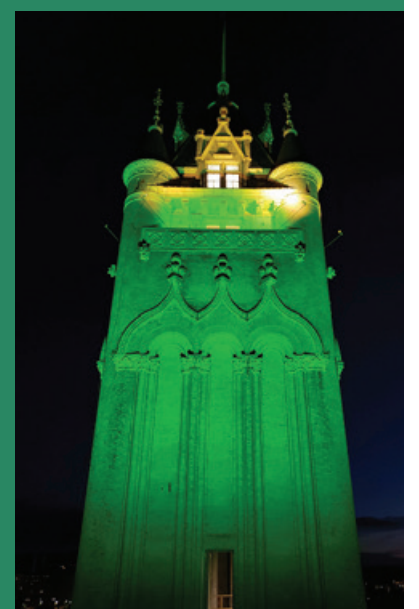
Amazon teamed up with NACo to support #OperationGreenLight for Veterans by illuminating their Seattle Spheres, Arlington County, Va. headquarters and other facilities across the country.



A bridge in Pitt County, N.C. shines green to bring awareness to veterans.



A bridge in Mohave County, Ariz. is lit in green to bring awareness to veterans' issues.



Spokane County, Wash. lit up its 1895 courthouse to bring attention to veterans. The historic building was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1974.



SPOTLIGHT ON COMMUNICATION

NYSAC Legislative Director Ryan Gregoire records an episode of “County Conversations” in the association’s podcast studio.

COUNTIES GIVE VOICE TO THEIR STORIES VIA PODCASTS

by **Meredith Moran**
staff writer

Podcasts have an ardent following — with an estimated 80 million people across the country tuning into them weekly — and are affordable to produce, making them a growing asset for county governments and associations looking to keep their constituents updated and broaden their audience.

If you’re not quite sure what a podcast is, it’s like a radio show, told in a series and streamed online. People don’t have to tune in live; they can listen to them whenever they have time.

In the past five years, podcast consumption has nearly dou-

bled. Early to the craze, Fairfax County, Va. launched its program in 2007 and has since created eight county-focused podcasts, ranging from “Scam Slam,” which warns residents of current scams circulating the community, to “EnviroPod,” a show the county’s public works and environmental services department runs. The episodes include “Alternative Uses for Holiday Waste” and the “Coming Cicada Invasion.”

“Podcasting for the past several years has been just on fire and it’s a great way to get information out to the residents, because it’s free or very minimal cost to get into it,” said Jim Person, Fairfax County’s emergency informa-

tion officer.

Renee Dallman, the host of Virginia’s “This Week in James City County,” echoed the affordability of creating a podcast, saying that all she needed to launch the show was a microphone, a computer and a Pro SoundCloud account for listeners to stream episodes, which costs the county \$144 a year.

“Our local media have a lot that’s being asked of them right now, so this is an opportunity for us to get that information out there straight from the county’s voice,” Dallman said. “We really moved into social media around 2016, but because they have all become more monetized, the information that we’re putting

out isn’t necessarily reaching everybody that we want it to reach, so the podcast is something that we have control over, and we can guarantee that that message is going to get to whatever eyes or ears want to hear it.”

Person runs Fairfax County’s podcast program and is the host for “The County Conversation,” in which he discusses different programs, services and happenings in Fairfax County with county employees and subject matter experts. At the time it was launched, the county only had scripted podcasts, so Person created “The County Conversation” to help fill what he considered a gap.

“It wasn’t just having the ability to provide a timely update about a program or service or whatever, but I really wanted that podcast to humanize county government and give people a chance to get to know the person behind the program,” Person said.

Person said he’s found people are much more willing to be a guest on the show because he focuses on having a more casual conversation style and doesn’t release a video form of the pod-

cast.

“It’s much easier to get people to talk on the podcast because there’s not a TV camera there,” he said. “When you’re trying to line up guests, they’ll go, ‘Oh, there’s a TV,’ and I’m like, ‘No, we’re audio only,’ and that’s always an easy sell to get people to come talk. That’s what I’ve built the county conversation podcast as — it’s not an interview show, it’s just a conversation.”

Kate Pierce, the New York State Association of Counties’ multimedia specialist, said the structure of a podcast makes it easier to speak to a wide variety of people. Being a state association, creating a podcast allowed NYSAC to highlight its legislative advocacy and interesting initiatives at the county level while still being convenient for the county officials who are featured, she noted.

“County officials are so busy, so it’s hard to sit down and watch an hour-long webinar on a specific topic,” she said. “NYSAC has a lot of educational webinars, and that’s a big-time commitment and it’s also difficult to

See **PODCAST** page 16

COUNTIES MUST MONITOR AND CORRECT MISINFORMATION IN SOCIAL MEDIA ‘TOWN HALLS’

by Meredith Moran
staff writer

As the number of people who turn to social media for their news continues to grow — it’s currently at 71 percent of Americans — it’s becoming increasingly important for county governments to both track platforms for misinformation and be more engaged on social media to spread verified information to a larger audience.

“The advent of social media is definitely a blessing and a curse,” said Clark County, Nev. Commissioner Justin Jones.

“It’s so easy for someone to put out false information, but it’s also so easy whether you’re a large county or a small county to put out accurate information in sort of a rapid response format — whether it’s a tweet or YouTube video, those are things that can be deployed within minutes, or at least within hours, to combat that type of misinformation.”

Maricopa County, Ariz. uses brand sentiment analysis tools to assess what is being posted on social media about the county and also has a five-person operations team to examine platforms for individual instances of misinformation and larger concerted efforts. The county’s Chief Information Security Officer Lester Godsey said his team generates a daily “threat briefing.”

“Not all counties are Maricopa, where they don’t have the same spotlight, but nonetheless, all counties, regardless of size and spotlight have the same challenges, so recommendations I’ve made to other counties who may not have those resources is to try to diversify or distribute the workload to people within the county organization that it aligns with,” Godsey said. “So, the best example of

that is public information officer or communications roles.

“Most counties have a PIO or a director of communications, so in those instances, they’re all posting on social media anyway, because they’re using it as a vehicle by which they communicate with their constituents, the business community, etc., so if they’re already in there doing that, they could be the front lines for those organizations that don’t have the same resource availability in looking for those indicators of heightened risk or potential issues that may be affecting the county.”



Godsey

Brian Gleason, communications manager for Charlotte County, Fla., echoed the importance of tracking social media misinformation, regardless of the number of resources the county has the ability to devote toward it.

“It’s imperative to have — no matter what size your staff is, if it’s one person or if it’s a 100-person shop — you have to have eyes on social media,” Gleason said. “Number one, it’s where most of your misinformation is coming from, and two, you get more bang for your buck by putting resources into social media because not only are you reaching the people who are sending out misinformation, the efforts you make there are seen by the media



and so that message then gets amplified by traditional news sources.”

Charlotte County focuses heavily on its social media — having accounts on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, NextDoor and TikTok — to both combat misinformation and keep residents engaged, Gleason said. The



Jones

county has several jobs in its Joint Information Center devoted to monitor social media and update local pages for misinformation. Those employees then take information that has been vetted by subject matter experts and compiled for the county’s emergency operations center digital outlet and use them to reply to posts identified as misinformation on various social media platforms, Gleason said.

“Because the social media portals are sort of community town halls, gathering places where people share information, not all of it is accurate information,” Gleason said. “And so, we’re there in the town square — we monitor the comments, we monitor some of the pages that are community

information sites, like ‘What’s Happening in Charlotte County,’ and so we monitor not only our own comment feeds on our posts, but we also monitor these popular neighborhood sites for information requests and misinformation.”

Because counties can’t realistically flag and respond to every bit of misinformation on the internet, Gleason said the county looks for instances of misinformation that have gained traction on particular platforms and then addresses them on all of its social media.

“NextDoor has a public agency feature that allows us to reach all of the NextDoor communities with one post,” he said. “It’s a very engaged community, in fact, it’s so engaged we really can’t do the same level of replies that we do with Facebook just because of the sheer numbers, so we get the kind of temperature of what’s happening on NextDoor, and then what we’ll do is post specifically about the top things that we’re hearing and seeing on all the



Gleason

platforms and try to address misinformation that way rather than answering each individual theory or morsel of misinformation.”

Misinformation related to COVID-19 and elections have been two of the largest misinformation obstacles for counties in recent years. Godsey said Maricopa County saw a lot of mis- and disinformation related to the pandemic, as well as phishing campaigns. Jones helped lead an effort that resulted in the Clark County Board of Commissioners adopting a resolution declaring COVID-19 misinformation a public health crisis.

“We were really following the lead of Surgeon General Vivek Murthy last year, in laying out

the case for why misinformation about COVID-19 was really leading to health effects and unnecessary deaths, and so we made a public statement, and we took action also,” Jones said. “We scheduled multiple forums with doctors and hospital officials that we broadcast through our own social media channels and our own cable news network in order to get the real facts out there, and I think that had an effect and made sure that people can have adequate and reliable information about COVID-19.”

Engaging on social media is key, particularly within the nature of creating a community online, Godsey said.

“The premise behind the monitoring of social media is twofold,” Godsey said. “We see a lot of mis-, dis- and now the new buzzword is ‘malinformation,’ and so social media is a threat vector from that perspective, but it’s a source of intelligence as well ... Social media is also really important to the county organizations as it relates to

“Our overall communications strategy is to reach people how they want to be reached...”

– Brian Gleason, communications manager for Charlotte County, Fla.

brand sentiment, trust, that sort of thing and so your communications departments can augment your security function to a certain degree.”

While county governments are not traditionally considered to be on the forefront of the newest social media trends or technology, Charlotte County has found that creating a TikTok account has brought exposure to the information they want to lift up to a much larger, and also younger, audience than they otherwise would reach. For Generation Z (people born in the late 1990s and early 2000s), TikTok has become not only a platform to post dancing or comedy videos, but also


 SPOTLIGHT ON
COMMUNICATION


by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

The *Herald-Progress* made Faye Prichard's career in public service possible.

As an Ashland, Va. resident who got into community organizing in the early 2000s, before the dawn of social media, she didn't have much public visibility until she met with the paper's longtime editor and publisher, Jay Pace.

"Jay would make endorsements, but everyone had to come in and meet with him and talk about the issues," she said. "He endorsed me and said, 'She does her work.' It really changed everything for me."

Prichard won election to the town council and a decade later, joined the Hanover County Board of Supervisors. About the same time, though, she saw her hometown paper change hands when it was bought by investors in a neighboring county, then a neighboring state, with investment in the newsroom decreasing along the way.

The frequency of published news decreased, the paper's staff photographer position was eliminated and reporters showed up less and less to town council and Board of Supervisor meetings. The news coverage became more superficial and the paper retreated as a public forum, even as it established operations near the center of town. It stopped publication in 2018.

"In my mind, the greatest downfall of local newspapers

is that we don't have reporters who know their localities and follow up on things," Prichard said. "Part of it is that there are no reporters to call people anymore and nobody who's invested enough in the stories to know who to call or what things are all about. You can tell what happens from the minutes, but you have no idea what any of that means."

During the same timeframe, Hanover County lost another weekly newspaper, the *Mechanicsville Local*, and has seen scant attention from the nearby *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, which has shed staff while its owner fended off an acquisition by a hedge fund in 2021. If the county is lucky, the local Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist will turn his eye to the north from Richmond, but that's far from consistent coverage.

Hanover County isn't an aberration. At the end of May 2022, the United States had 6,380 newspapers — 1,230 that publish daily and 5,150 that publish weekly, according to a Northwestern University study. Since 2005, more than 2,500 newspapers have folded, accounting for more than a quarter of the papers at the start of that period, and the country is on track to lose a third of the pre-2005 pa-

pers by 2025.

The study found that 200 counties don't have a newspaper, representing 70 million people, and 1,630 counties have only one newspaper, typically a weekly. Those communities that lose their papers don't tend to have alternative news sources, leaving most residents to get their news from social media.

Retaining newspapers doesn't mean things are great, either. As large chains consolidate ownership, their newspaper staffs are exposed to layoffs and job cuts, with a recent 400-person layoff at newspaper giant Gannett, with more on the horizon in December, serving as just the most recent in a decades-long reduction in journalists across the industry. Lee Enterprises, which owns the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* near Hanover County, has cut nearly 400 positions in 2022, also, though its holdings are smaller than Gannett's.

Consolidations preserve some newspapers in theory, but ultimately can deteriorate the identity of local papers in a pyrrhic victory, such as when the weeklies the *Humboldt Sun*, *Battle Mountain Bugle* and *Lovelock Review-Miner*, representing three Nevada counties, combined print editions as the *Great Basin Sun* in June 2022.

At first glance, Story County, Iowa seems like a thriving media ecosystem, with three weeklies and a daily. But the weekly *Nevada Journal*, *Tri-County Times* and *Story City Herald* are all owned by the daily *Ames Tribune*, which was recently bought by Gannett. What appeared to be four different perspectives is all one, and there's no chance that competition will drive newspapers to step up their coverage. And the staffing situation at many papers has spread reporters thin and contributed mightily to burnout. The industry is chronically underpaid and relies heavily on entry-level writers who don't have the tenure to develop institutional knowledge.

"We have one reporter who came to a couple of meetings and she does reach out to us every once in a while, but there's too much ground she's got to cover by herself," said Story County Supervisor Chair Latifah Faisal. "I think she does a pretty good job of attending the Ames City Council meetings, but I don't believe she makes it to every single meeting."

Though the county is developing an in-house media plan, recent years have lacked a third-party scrutiny that Faisal said would not only push the

county to do better, but also give the county some outside credibility while supervisors debate and discuss important issues, like allocation of American Rescue Plan Act funding. The county tries to show its work, but nobody is watching.

"We were pushing out information on our Facebook and social media and we were talking to people about it when we were at different events, but there were very few articles in the paper about ARPA when we opened up applications for grant funding opportunities," she said. "I think there was an article about when we finally decided to award some of the funds," but the lack of coverage made the county's process seem less transparent.

Karl Anton Neff, an Owen County councilmember in Indiana, understands the balance newspapers have to strike, but worries that paywalls, such as those locking stories in his hometown, at Gannett-owned *Spencer Evening World*, discourages residents from reading the news.

"There's a lot of the public that expects that information to be accessible all the time," he said.

Like Faisal, he looks to social

CRATERING NEWSPAPERS LEAVE COUNTY STORIES UNTOLD

Story County, Iowa Supervisor Latifah Faisal speaks during the 2022 County Leadership Institute. Photo by Leon Lawrence III

See **NEWSPAPERS** page 11

Build your ‘big box store’ of information

by **Jennifer Finch**

Social media has been a part of our lexicon for almost two decades, yet it is still a hot topic among government agencies who may often find themselves asking, “Is it really worth it, this seemingly uncontrollable, barely manageable, Wild West frontier form of communication?” The answer is unequivocally “yes.” Why? Because that’s where the people are.

I know what you’re thinking: “But our agency has an awesome website.” And I agree, your agency does. I know how much time and effort goes into building and maintaining a good government website, and your website does play a very important role in your communication strategy. But your website is no Walmart; it’s no Target.

You see, social media [insert whichever platform you want here], is the ultimate in one-stop shopping for information. It’s convenient, and it doesn’t ask much from the user.

Just like you can go into a big-box store and grab socks, cereal, curtains, pet food and a new TV all at one place, social media allows users to get updates on Grandma, see their friend’s vacation pictures, get the latest celebrity gossip, learn a new DIY craft, catch highlights (and lowlights) from their favorite sports team and skim through local and national news topics of interest. Just open up the app and start scrolling. Easy peasy.

The question isn’t should you be, or should you stay, on social media. The question really is, are you using social media correctly? Whether your agency has been using social media for years or your team is considering dipping their collective toe in the murky water, here are some tips and things to think about as you move forward.

Legitimate

Acknowledge that social media is a legitimate platform for communicating to residents. You personally might not like or use any of the social media platforms, but that doesn’t discount the millions of people who do (182.3 million on Facebook, 77.75 million on Twitter, 123.1 million on Instagram and 86.9 million on TikTok, and 66.8 million on LinkedIn).

The very definition of communication is the imparting or exchanging of information or news/information/ideas, which is exactly what these platforms do. Social media as a communication tool should be right up there with news releases, webpage info, interviews, etc. and it is a tool that needs to be taken seriously and have appropriate staffing to do it well.

Understand social media users

Regardless of the platform(s) you choose to participate on as a government agency, it’s crucial you understand the platform: Its strengths, its weaknesses



and most importantly, its users. People who primarily use Instagram use it because they are picture people. Twitter brings in word people. Facebook is often folksier, while LinkedIn is more about professional news and advancement.

I’ve seen agencies hop on a platform just because it’s there only to struggle to effectively communicate with constituents via that platform because the agency doesn’t understand the users’ expectations from the platform. In other words, if you don’t have a lot of pretty and interesting things to take pictures of for your agency, Instagram probably isn’t for you.

Define how you will use social media

Along with understanding the platform, it is also good to define how your agency plans to use the platform. For example, the Weld County, Colo. Facebook and Twitter pages are where news, board openings and events are posted; our LinkedIn page use is geared toward showing our core values as an organization as well as a place to highlight the work of our employees and post job openings. As we gear up to

launch Instagram, we will use that platform to pull back the curtain, if you will, on the human side and day-to-day work of county employees.

Develop a content calendar to ensure a consistent flow of information to your audience on each of the platforms you use. While there may be some crossover of content, the content built for each platform is specific to that platform. And remember, social media is a lot like a plant: If you don’t feed and water it regularly, it will wither and die.


After your agency has decided which platforms it wants to use and knows what type of content it wants to push out, it is important to have policies or guidelines in place to help staff navigate how to respond to content pushing back in via these platforms — namely, public comments.

Talk with your legal department, talk with your communications staff and develop a strategy for public engagement. How will your agency handle trolls? (A troll is a person who intentionally tries to instigate conflict, hostility or arguments in an online social community.) How will your agency navigate misinformation or even solicitations posted on your page? If you’re just starting out with social media, set these policies in place before you launch your page. If you’ve had your page active for a while, consider reviewing and updating your

policies to ensure they give your team the support they need to manage your page well.

Finally, keep it all in perspective. Regardless of what social media platforms you are considering using, it is important to remember this: You’re playing in somebody else’s sandbox, and they get to make up the rules.

Don’t like the changes to the algorithm? OK. Don’t want to pay for verification? OK. Don’t agree with why your boosted post was denied? OK. While frustration may be warranted, remember your ultimate goal of using the platform is to communicate with your residents. If your desire to meet that goal outweighs the contention staff feels about the platform, then participation on it may still be a good use of time and energy.

According to a Pew Research study, half of Americans get their news on a digital device (versus television, radio or print), and on that digital device half at least sometimes get their news from social media sites. Social media is a valuable tool in your agency’s communication toolbox and should be treated as such. So, go ahead, build your big box store of information and take it to where the people are. 

Jennifer Finch is the PIO for Weld County, Colo., and 1st vice president of the National Association of County Information Officers (NACIO).

‘I wonder if this isn’t the moment in history for the resurgence of the newspaper’

From **NEWSPAPERS** page 10

media as an asset, particularly for small counties like his, and takes on the leadership for his council, disseminating information to his Facebook followers.

“If there is a big issue, like we’re increasing the tax rate, I’ll publish how it impacts people’s bottom lines, usually with a chart showing where the money goes and often the local paper will ask if they can use the chart and integrate it into an article.

“Local officials should step up to the plate, they can help the local news situation, if they put themselves out there and provide valuable information,” Neff

said. “That could be a way to make up for when a newspaper can’t do it.”

But he said newspapers have to add their own value and make an honest effort to cover issues.

“Sending a reporter to see what’s going on and writing about it is a lot different than sending a reporter the next day to read the minutes or listen to the tape,” he said. “You don’t get the three dimensions, the commissions, the public, the counsel interplay. Is there a confrontation? Is there body language? The reporter is picking that up, you can’t do that after the fact.”

Social media is at a crossroads, with Facebook reexamining its

relationships with publications that populate its dedicated news section, the Wall Street Journal reports, with deals that paid publishers tens of millions of dollars expiring this year. At the same time, Twitter’s revised verification standards are prompting soul-searching about what is reliable.

“I wonder if this isn’t the moment in history for the resurgence of the newspaper,” Prichard said.

The problem is capturing people’s attention versus, covering what is important.

“The ‘least sexy’ but most im-

See **NEWSPAPERS** page 16

DWINDLING PAPERS FORCE ADDITIONAL FOCUS ON LEGAL ADVERTISEMENTS

If the *Sherman County Times* goes out of business, it will make things harder for Marcy Sekutera.

The Sherman County, Neb. clerk isn’t used to seeing reporters show up for county meetings.

“They probably only have two employees,” she said.

That said, the *Times* still carries some news from the Board of Commissioners

in the form of the legal advertisements the county is required to post in advance of public business. And Sekutera hopes the *Times* doesn’t fade away, because without a paper of record for Sherman County, its 3,100 residents would be split among four different papers, and that would mean paying four times as much for her to place those legal ads.

ON THE MOVE

NACo OFFICERS

- President **Denise Winfrey** attended the Kansas Association of Counties Annual Conference in Johnson County, the Alabama Association of County Officials Black County Commissioners Retreat in Jefferson County; the United Counties of Council of Illinois Seminar in Sangamon County; the Virginia Association of Counties Annual Conference in Richmond and the Missouri Association of Counties Annual Conference in Camden County.
- Immediate Past President **Larry Johnson** and Second Vice President **James Gore** attended the California State Association of Counties Annual Conference in Orange County.

NACo STAFF

- Chief Economist **Teryn Zmuda** discussed county ARPA investment trends at the National Academy of Public Administration Fall Board Meeting in Washington, D.C. She also participated in a panel at the Consortium of University Public Service Organizations Fall Directors Meeting in Arlington County, Va. In addition, she described county ARPA investments in small businesses at the NC IDEA Ecosystem Summit in Forsyth County, Ga. and moderated a panel on American Rescue Plan Act investments to ensure small business equity at the National League of Cities City Summit in Jackson County, Mo.
- Chief Information Officer **Rita Reynolds** attended the Kentucky Association of Counties Annual Conference in Fayette County.
- Director of Legislative Affairs **Eryn Hurley** attended the Association of Oregon Counties Annual Conference in Lane County.
- Legislative Director **Jonathan Shuffield** attended the Washington State Association of Counties Annual County Leaders Conference in King County.



Zmuda



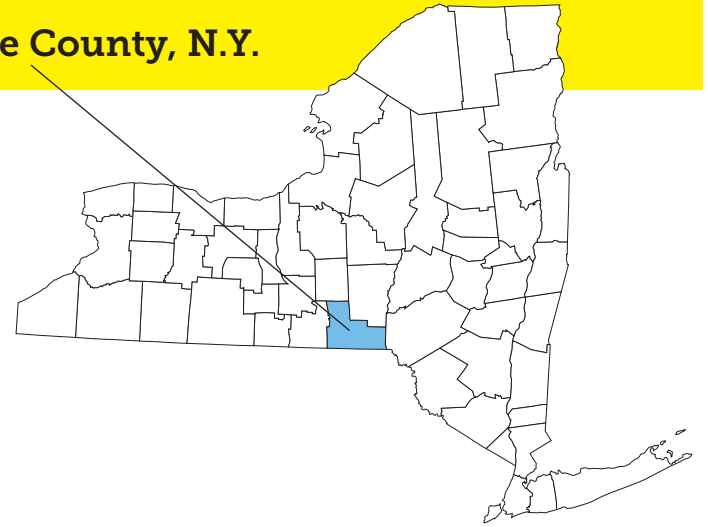
Reynolds



Hurley

GET TO KNOW...

Broome County, N.Y.



Welcome, Broome County, N.Y.!

Established in 1806, Broome County, N.Y. was named for the American Revolutionary leader John Broome. Its county seat, Binghamton, is considered the Carousel Capital of the World with its collection of antique merry-go-rounds across the city, one of which was featured in the Twilight Zone episode “Walking Distance,” as the creator Rod Serling was a Binghamton native. The flight simulator was invented in Binghamton and the city is the location of the fifth-oldest zoo in the country, which holds two toed sloths, red pandas and alpine goats.

Broome County measures roughly 716 square miles and its population is around 198,683, according to the 2020 census. In 2017, an Animal Adventure Park in

the county livestreamed the birth of a baby giraffe and the months leading up to it, accumulating more than 232 million live views, making it the second most live-viewed channel in the platform’s history at the time. Actress Amy Sedaris, who voices Princess Carolyn in the Netflix animated series “BoJack Horseman,” and her brother, the humorist David Sedaris, were born in Broome County.

Spiedie, which was once considered to be peasant food,

is local to Binghamton and has become the county’s unofficial signature food. The dish is made up of cubes of marinated beef, chicken, lamb or veal served on a white roll, and it’s so beloved by locals that the county holds an annual Spiedie Fest & Balloon Rally, where residents compete in a cooking contest of the dish and watch a hot-air balloon launch and fireworks show.

“Get to Know” features new NACo member counties.



Broome County’s county seat of Binghamton is considered the carousel capital of the world.

finally!

NACo swag is now available online!

naco.org/store

BRIGHT IDEAS | UNION COUNTY, N.C.

North Carolina County Lays Out 2050 Comprehensive Plan with Citizen Input

PROBLEM:

Union County needed an updated plan to best serve its growing population.

SOLUTION:

Create a new 30-year plan that encompasses perspectives across the county.

by Meredith Moran
staff writer

Union County, N.C.'s 2050 Comprehensive Plan — which addresses issues from trees and open spaces to business and economic development — involved residents, business leaders, non-profit organizations and other stakeholders in its formulation to best represent as many perspectives in the county as possible.

“We had so many people participate, because we’ve got such a vast difference of folks that live in our community and what they do and what their interests are, that we wanted everyone to have a seat at the table,” said Lee Jenson, Union County’s director of planning.

“On the western side of the county, it’s very suburban. A lot of folks commute into Charlotte, so their concerns are mainly about traffic, density, utilities and things like that.

“The eastern side of the county is rural, so their issues are a little bit different — their concerns are about agricultural preservation and clean drinking water because we’ve got a lot of arsenic.”

The subcommittees were centered on four focus areas: agricultural, business development, environmental and infrastructure.

There was also a citizen committee for those that didn’t want to feel limited to one issue and a coordinating committee composed of a chair from each subcommittee and an appointee by each county commissioner, to factor in all



The Waxhaw Parkway, a multi-lane project from north of Waxhaw east to NC 75, is outlined in the county’s transportation section of its 2050 comprehensive plan.

of the input from the different subcommittees and make final decisions throughout the process.

There were 64 Union County residents on the subcommittees, all of whom submitted an application.

As far as getting the word out, Jenson called it a “grassroots movement” of word of mouth, with the county pushing it out to as many people and groups as possible.

From there, the county commissioners chose the subcommittee members based on the issues they were interested in and the areas they had experience in, Jenson said.

“They had a lot of knowledge that they brought to the table, and that’s honestly why we ended up with such a good plan. They wrote it — we just listened and provided feedback and research, but ultimately it was the Union County citizen plan,” Jenson said. “And then of course, we had citizens who came to the input sessions and workshops that participat-

‘Ultimately, it was the Union County citizen plan.’

- Lee Jenson, director of planning

ed as well. It was a very open process.”

The county felt it was necessary to update their last implemented plan from 2014 to accommodate the massive growth it has experienced since then.

At the time the previous plan was created, the county was recovering from the recession and had slow development, whereas in the years since, at times, Union County was the fastest-growing county in North Carolina and ranked as a fast-growing county nationally as well.

Jenson attributes Union County’s growth to low taxes and the fact that it’s considered to be one of the counties with the top public schools in the state, he said.

The county started the process of creating the updated

plan in 2019, setting aside January through April 2020 for “visioning” and April through June for “scenario-building.” While the COVID-19 pandemic created a roadblock of sorts due to restrictions, the county was still able to get through the planning process efficiently by hosting virtual meetings on the front end to identify big-picture issues that didn’t require hands-on activities, as well as virtual input sessions from county residents who were not on the subcommittees, Jenson said.

Something that came out of the pandemic that contributed to the plan was how much it highlighted the county’s broadband issues.

While it was already on the county’s radar primarily for agricultural reasons, the pandemic added another element

to the conversation around the need for broadband with the geographic gap it created in education, Jenson said.

“That’s when everybody started talking about it, because the western side, those kids, they were fine,” Jenson said.

“They’re sitting at their house, doing their homework, watching their teacher on the screen. The eastern side — there were kids out there who had no internet, they just could not access it. So, a lot of the schools, the parents drove them to the school where they sat in the parking lot, and that’s how they did their work.

“They had to sit in the parking lot at the school to use the school’s Wi-Fi, which, even out there, some of the Wi-Fi was pretty slow, so that really brought broadband and the need for that to the forefront.”

Some of the first listening sessions resulted in ambitious visions, like the extension of a light rail system into the county, Jenson said, but it was important to the subcommittees to focus on attainable plans so that they could actually make realistic and tangible differences in the county, like prioritizing access to clean water, he said.

One of the visions that has already been implemented since the plan was adopted earlier this year is the Short Water Line Extension program, which provides Union County residents with an affordable option to get connected to safe drinking water.

“We didn’t want goals that were in this plan that were never going to be achieved,” Jenson said.

“We wanted doable things that we could hit the ground running with, so when it came to implementation, we really saw it as not ‘we’re going to do this first and that second,’ but ‘we’re just going to start working on all of this now.’” **CN**

NEWS FROM ACROSS THE NATION

COLORADO

EL PASO COUNTY'S "Next Chapter" program aims to prevent **veteran suicide** by providing therapy, counseling, employment help and access to housing support at no cost.

Veterans are at a 57 percent higher risk of suicide than those who haven't served in the military and the county has one of the highest veteran suicide rates in the country. Of the county's 176 deaths by suicide in 2021, 53 were identified as active duty and military veterans. That's a 10 percent increase from the previous year.

"I love that they use the name Next Chapter, because I think that's a big thing veterans think about," said Sean Sindler, a U.S. Airforce veteran who sought help from Mount Carmel Veterans Service Center, which is one of the program's supporting organizations. "They know about their chapter in the military service, but they're not quite sure what the next chapter, post-military, is going to be, and sometimes that's tough. I feel like there is a next chapter. You may think that maybe there's not, but there is, and you get the opportunity to write it yourself, which is great."



GEORGIA

DEKALB COUNTY commissioners voted to require **solar developers** to provide the county with \$100,000 per project proposal, as well as a performance bond that covers 115 percent of the cost of decommissioning the projects. The bond requirement will be re-evaluated every five years for adjustment. The decommission agreement will require solar companies to return the land it leased to its original condition and remove all panels from the site.

The three-year pilot program has already helped around 120 local veterans and will expand to **TELLER COUNTY** and then likely to more counties in Colorado, according to Damian McCabe, the director of behavioral health in military affairs for UCHealth.

FLORIDA

ST. JOHNS COUNTY is offering free passport photos and notary services to all current and former **military members** throughout November in honor of Veteran's Day. All veterans and people enlisted can take advantage of the service, not just St. Johns County residents.

INDIANA

HAMILTON COUNTY helped launch a five-year program to recruit more high school students into teaching **special education**. The program, which is the first federally registered special education apprenticeship program in the country, will allow juniors and seniors at Noblesville High School to take classes at Ball State University and get experience working with students in special education. Indiana currently has more than 400



MINNESOTA

HENNEPIN COUNTY commissioners have adopted the Land and Water Acknowledgement, which formally recognizes the genocide, dispossession and settler colonialism against the county's **Native Americans**. The acknowledgement commits to work more closely with all First Nations People in the county, through organizing events and workshops on Indigenous history, culture and current issues, in addition to collaborating on developing land and water-based project research.

openings for special education teachers and the program is aiming to help address that gap over time.

KANSAS

The **JOHNSON COUNTY** Board of County Commissioners has allocated \$7,253,000 in **COVID-19 funding** for small businesses, housing, food insecurity and community programs. Of that, \$565,000 will go to community investment programs, including the Metropolitan Organization to Counter Sexual Assault. The group serves around 460 sexual abuse and assault survivors. The funds will also go to My Resource Connection Mobile project, which will more easily connect those looking for assistance with the resources they need through an app it will develop with the funding.

MAINE

CUMBERLAND COUNTY residents now have access to free **soil lead tests** through Environmental Protection Agency funding. The county's soil and water district teamed up with the University of Maine on the program. An environmental steward from the district will take a soil sample

from any interested Cumberland County resident's garden, which will then get sent to the college's soil lab for testing. It takes two weeks to know if the soil is safe for gardening.

MONTANA

A former **BLAINE COUNTY** employee who set up a **pumpkin patch** each year, donates the proceeds from sales to the Blaine County Library. This year, the patch raised more than \$2,000. The donations through the partnership have al-

lowed the library to create **STEAM** — science, technology, engineering, art and math — programs and resulted in the expansion of the library's Lego Club program and the purchase of a karaoke machine.

NEW JERSEY

• **BURLINGTON COUNTY** has allocated \$3 million from the American Rescue Plan Act to fund a grant program supporting **affordable housing development**. Nonprofit organizations will



be eligible to apply for grants to support efforts to develop new affordable housing units within the county, including special populations such as families experiencing homelessness or housing instability or escaping a domestic violence situation.

- **UNION COUNTY** is the first county in the state to manage a free **plastic film recycling** program with 12 of its municipalities. The program will accept produce, ice and shopping bags, closable bags, cereal box liners, case over-wrap, bread bags, newspaper sleeves, bubble wrap and e-commerce mailers.



VIRGINIA

- After almost two decades of planning and construction, **LOUDOUN COUNTY** will be connected to the rest of the Washington Metro Area Transit Authority's **light rail system**. An 11.5-mile extension of the Silver Line via **FAIRFAX COUNTY** will add six stations, spread among both counties, to the line and includes a connection to Dulles International Airport.

domestic partner registry, formalizing relationships alternative to marriage covenants. Local Law #5 adopts the registry for unmarried persons 18 years and older who are unrelated by blood who share a common household in a close and committed financially interdependent personal relationship.

- **NASSAU COUNTY** police will conduct spot checks of cars in search of **fake and stolen license plates**. "Operation Safety" follows a surge of cars that have evaded detection by license plate readers, WCBS-TV reported.

NORTH CAROLINA

The **WAKE COUNTY** Department of Environmental Services and the county's Housing Affordability and Community Revitalization division are helping low-income households make **well and septic repairs**.

The county approved \$200,000 for a two-year pilot

program supporting lower income, elderly and disabled residents who often cannot afford needed repairs to their well or septic systems.



OREGON

A new pilot program is helping **MULTNOMAH COUNTY** residents exchange their **wood-burning stoves** with heat pumps in an effort to reduce air pollution during the winter and the risk of household fires. Participating homeowners will receive incentives ranging from \$3,000 to full cost replacement, depending on eligibility and household income.

PENNSYLVANIA

ALLEGHENY COUNTY voters repealed a rule that required members of the County Council to **resign while running** for other elected offices. Other elected officials in the county were not bound by the same restriction, WESA-FM reported.

TEXAS

- A **HARRIS COUNTY** program will hire **unhoused people** to perform labor on county properties, while also giving them time to access counseling and human services resources.

The \$2.1 million Employ2Empower program aims to make it easier for people in need to interact with county programs, and it saves money on outside contracts for the labor and those savings will help fund it further, the *Houston Chronicle* reported.

- **TARRANT COUNTY** commissioners approved bids to buy up to six **electric vehicles**. It's part of a pilot program to diversify its vehicle fleet, with an eye toward reducing emissions, improving health outcomes and potentially realizing long-term savings on vehicle maintenance, KT-VT-TV reported.

VIRGINIA

- **Entrepreneurs** recently walked the digital red carpet at the inaugural **ARLINGTON COUNTY REV Awards**. The REV program, which stands for Revenue, Employment and Venture, recognizes Arlington-based companies that have experienced substantial growth in their respective categories with exceptional growth in revenue, employment and venture capital. All REV winners were required to be privately held, Arlington County-based companies outside the retail sector and to provide documentation to demonstrate their growth in each relevant category.

Charlie Ban and Meredith Moran compile News From Across the Nation. Does your county have news we should know about? Contact cban@naco.org and mmoran@naco.org.



NEW YORK

- Tow truck companies will now be required to **remove glass**, pieces of cars, road flares and other debris following car crashes in **SUFFOLK COUNTY**.

NEW YORK

- The **MADISON COUNTY** clerk's office has adopted a

NEW YORK

• Law enforcement from 27 counties gathered in **SCHUYLER COUNTY** for the second **Sheriffs' Showdown** at the Watkins Glen International racetrack. The event, which offers participants a chance to get out of the office and race cars, raised money to send 900 kids to the New York State Sheriff's institute summer camp for free and returned after a two-year COVID hiatus. **CHEMUNG COUNTY** Sheriff Bill Schrom won the time trials.

Chemung County Sheriff Bill Schrom receives the Sheriff's Showdown trophy from Shuyler County Sheriff Kevin Rumsey. Photo by Joe Damone



Will County, Ill. is named for state Sen. Conrad Will, who co-authored the Constitution of Illinois. The county was established by the state legislature in 1836. The county seal was created in 1985 by a county employee. John Meincke's design won and he turned down the original prize of a bicycle (a competition to create the design was open to schoolchildren) for cash. The seal represents Will County's past and present, including its Native American heritage, railroads, agriculture and the sun to represent the county's "bright future."



Would you like to see your county seal featured? Contact Meredith Moran at mmoran@naco.org.

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Starting a podcast? ‘Consistency is key’

From **PODCAST** page 8

travel across the state for different workshops. Podcasts are an engaging format and you can be working on something else in your office or on your commute.

“It’s a really flexible and dynamic medium of accessing information and they’re just available on demand, so you don’t have to wait for a specific live event — you have it pinged up ahead of time, and you can listen to the topics that interest you and skip the ones that don’t.”

NYSAC’s “County Conversations” podcast addresses local and regional issues as well as the impact of national issues at the county and state level.

“Our mission at NYSAC is to foster excellence in county government and unite the voice of New York county leaders, so our guests really represent that range of voices that come from the public and private sector, from the state and federal level,” Pierce said. “...for example, one of our most recent episodes, we talked with the head of fraud prevention at KeyBank, and

she’s based in Georgia with a bit of a nationwide focus, but the content of the conversation was tailored to local county officials.

“We can cast that wide net of a topic of nationwide concern, or certain topics in the legislative process that are similar across different state associations.”

Podcasts have created a platform to share information to even wider audiences than intended and keep counties informed on successful initiatives across the country, Pierce said. The Maryland Association of Counties’ podcast, “Conduit Street,” has cross-published NYSAC episodes, including its interview with three+one CEO Joseph Rulison on the 2022 economic forecast, and has also featured NYSAC Executive Director Stephen Acquario as a guest.

NYSAC is always open to collaborating with other state associations on the podcast, Pierce noted. “County Conversations” launched in 2018, but wasn’t streamed on a regular schedule until the pandemic, when the association started to release episodes weekly, Pierce said.

Fairfax County’s “The County Conversation” is released bi-weekly, but Person’s advice to any counties looking to launch a podcast is to upload as often as possible.

“Consistency is key,” Person said. “I think if you really want to get any traction and have any real value to it and make it a valuable asset for the community, you need to do it at least every other week — if I were starting over again, I would go for weekly.”

The podcast has been a great resource for James City County and she thinks any county that is considering creating one should not be daunted by the process. “We’re really filling a void — there’s nobody else that’s talking about James City County news on a radio or podcast show, so it was just starting it, stepping off the curb, giving it a shot and getting feedback from our listeners and adjusting as we go along,” Dallman said.

“That would be my biggest tip for counties — to not hesitate for too long if it’s something that you’re interested in.” **CN**

Actively clear up misinformation

From **TOWN HALLS** page 9

has become a search engine. A video Charlotte County posted on its account about replacing stop signs knocked over by Hurricane Ian has racked up nearly 300,000 views.

“By TikTok standards, that isn’t viral, but by county government standards, it’s pretty darn good,” Gleason said. “We have 80,000 homes impacted by the hurricane and we’ve got to put up messaging, like ‘Separate your debris pile,’ so we can say separate your debris piles

until we’re blue in the face, but if we put one of our staffers on a video wagging her finger with a TikTok sound, then all of a sudden you have 20,000 viewers, and even if they have a negative reaction to the post, they got the information.

“Our overall communications strategy is to reach people how they want to be reached, so that has to include online social media platforms, because that’s where a lot of people spend a lot of time — that’s where a lot of people get their primary source of information.” **CN**

Build a relationship with the media

From **NEWSPAPERS** page 11

portant thing we do is land use,” she noted.

“It is where you and your children will live in 20 years, how your community will develop, the safety of your home and how your schools will develop.”

But when Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin (R) suggested making it harder for counties and

independent cities in Virginia to block dense development, Prichard saw Youngkin’s proposal to interfere with local land use authority barely make a splash in local news.

“A real reporter would have been picking it apart and reporting that the governor is trying to take control over local zoning,” she said.

“That’s a front-page story.” **CN**

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