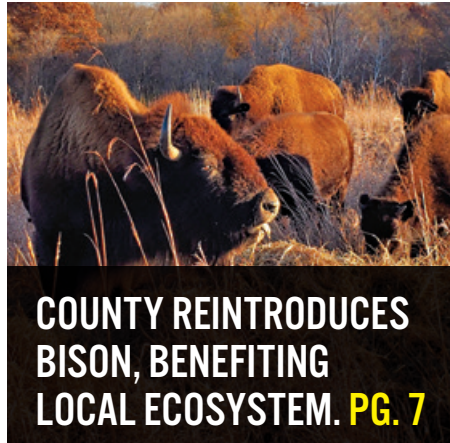




**'NOW I KNOW' FEATURES WHAT COUNTY OFFICIALS LEARN ON THE JOB. PG. 4**



**HOT TOPICS: COUNTIES CURB CRISIS OF HOUSING AFFORDABILITY. PG. H1-H8**



**COUNTY REINTRODUCES BISON, BENEFITING LOCAL ECOSYSTEM. PG. 7**

## Urban county leaders discuss workforce development

by **Meredith Moran**  
staff writer

Leaders from NACo's Large Urban County Caucus (LUCC) gathered June 14 in Washington, D.C. to share work their respective counties are doing to bridge the workforce development divide and discuss policy solutions.

The county leaders received data on workforce development at the county level from Kevin Shrawder, NACo senior analyst for economic and government studies, and also heard about policy solutions from Michael Matthews, NACo legislative director of community, economic and workforce development, before meeting with U.S. Department of Labor officials to discuss ways counties can partner with the federal government to support workforce recruitment.

County governments employ more than one in 50 workers in America, but with an aging workforce (what some call "the silver tsunami") and the cultural shift to a hybrid workplace, local government employment is one of only two sectors that has not returned to pre-COVID levels.

Matthews outlined policy solutions for county workforce recovery:

- Increasing federal investments in America's workforce
- Modernizing the current national workforce development system and landscape
- Eliminating barriers to education and employment
- Broadening access and strengthening the intergovernmental partnership.

The importance of investing more in trades — and making it more widely known as an option for America's youth — came up repeatedly in discussion. Nearly half of Americans over 25 don't have post-secondary training credentials, which consists of a college education or trade and vocational training.

"ARPA (the American Rescue Plan Act) has been a godsend and, if not for ARPA, there's so much we would be in a bigger hole with, but the reality of it is, with Pell Grants we need to think about also using those for certificate programs, not just the standard university scholarships," Harris County Commissioner Adrian Garcia said. "... We need a different strategic look at the existing resources that the federal government provides our respective workforces."

Local governments have had the hardest time filling positions

See **WORKFORCE** page 2



A little girl waves a flag as the crowd celebrates the Fourth of July holiday in Summit County, Colo. Across the country, counties will be hosting and celebrating the nation's independence with parades, fireworks and cookouts. Photo by Shane Morris, Town of Silverthorne

## Wisconsin passes 'game changer' for county funding

by **Charlie Ban**  
senior writer

Wisconsin counties will see a major boost in funding and a chance to control their own destiny under a new state tax policy signed into law this week.

Assembly Bill 245, which

Gov. Tony Evers (D) signed June 19, will send 20% of the average state's sales tax revenue to local governments, which will receive a minimum increase of 15% in existing county and municipal aid.

The new law also allows the Milwaukee County Board to vote on raising local sales taxes.

"This reform will inject a significant amount of new money into the system," said Josh Schoemann, Washington County's executive.

"At the same time, it will incentivize us to help that sales tax grow, which is an important

See **REVENUE** page 3

## Get ready for the 2023 NACo Annual Conference!

by **Mary Ann Barton**  
editor

More than 2,500 county officials and others are expected July 21-24 for NACo's 88th Annual Conference & Expo at the Austin Convention Center in Travis County, Texas.

Conference attendees will have the opportunity to network, learn and connect with their counterparts from across the country and shape NACo's

federal policy agenda for the upcoming year during the four-day event.

Programming will run the gamut of timely topics, including disaster resiliency, housing affordability, workforce development, mental health and investments in broadband and infrastructure.

Featured speakers this year include Dr. Drew Pinsky, Sen.

John Cornyn (R-Texas) and Allan C. Golston, president of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, U.S. Program.

"Dr. Drew," is a well-known doctor on radio and TV and has authored several best-selling books. He will share his perspectives on the nation's mental and behavioral

See **CONFERENCE** page 7



# LUCC members share ways to eliminate barriers to workforce training

From **WORKFORCE** page 1

in healthcare, specifically nursing, since the onset of the pandemic, according to NACo data. As a result, Baltimore County, Md. is partnering with its community college system and the University of Maryland medical system to fund a 30-person nursing cohort that provides stipends for everything from transportation to childcare to housing.

“We are basically guaranteeing work, for an employer who needs it in the hospital system, but also for our residents,” said Baltimore County Executive Johnny Olszewski. “So, we’re taking folks, who are in many cases, maybe a high school dropout, and at the end of two years, they’re going to go from potentially being on services and having support from the government to being in a place where they’re in a family-sustaining job.”



**(L-r) David Iannucci, president of Prince George’s County Economic Development Corporation; Jeffrey Swilley, from Employ Prince George’s and Kerry R. Watson Jr., regional vice president of Government Affairs at MGM Resorts International, discuss Prince George’s County’s partnership with MGM National Harbor.** Photo by Hector Emanuel

Eliminating barriers to workforce training and prioritizing historically disadvantaged populations, such as people with disabilities, formerly incarcerated individuals and people of color, particularly women, were also identified as important paths forward in addressing

workforce development gaps. Programs that were highlighted in this area include a Harris County, Texas family-friendly workplace program, which offers paid parental leave, infant sick leave, childcare access, breastfeeding support and mental health support for county employees to both better serve its workforce and compete with private employers with the changing workplace. Another program that was highlighted is in Hennepin County, Minn. Its “community productive day” program, which provides training and education to justice-involved individuals, connects them to community-based staffing agencies and employers.

people to be pitied, we’re investing in them and their long-term employment skills and self-sufficiency. “We are all very familiar with the fact that skilled labor is hard to find and retain, so we’re targeting that portion of the employment base that’s too often disregarded and making sure that they are a cornerstone to our overall regional workforce strategy,” she noted.

DOL officials pointed to specific grants, including the Equitable Transition Model (ETA) Strengthening Community Colleges program and the Incarcerated Veteran Re-Entry program, as well as state exchange on employment and disability — which provides direct assistance on how local governments can set up disability hiring initiatives — as ways counties can receive federal help financially in overcoming barriers in workforce development.

LUCC leaders then went to Prince George’s County’s to hear how the county’s partnership with the MGM resort casino is developing its local workforce through investing in both the training pipeline and in small, minority-owned businesses in the county.

“Prince George’s County every year in income taxes loses \$7.5 billion because that’s how many people live in our county, but don’t work here,” said Kerry R. Watson Jr., regional vice president of Government Affairs at MGM Resorts International.

MGM National Harbor is hoping to make a dent in that number by creating more livable wage jobs for people who actually live in the county. In accordance with its partnership with the county, roughly half of the casino’s 3,200 employees are Prince George’s County residents, according to Watson.

“There are jobs [at MGM] that literally only require a high school diploma, but people are making upwards of \$60-, \$70-, \$80,000 a year,” Watson said. “These are jobs with benefits, they are union represented — whether you have extended education or very little education, there’s really an opportunity to make a livable wage being employed here at all levels.”

To broaden their reach, MGM partnered with local universities on expungement events, which consist of going into areas with high rates of criminal justice-involved individuals and helping people get their non-violent drug charges expunged so that they can then be connected to skills training for employment.

“The county was involved in us assuming the presence of the training center in an elementary school that was closed and refabricated for a training facility specifically for the gaming industry here, for a \$1 lease,” Watson said. “... About 33% of our operational spend is on diverse companies and that is very intentional. We look for, identify and support through additional programming our small and diverse businesses and we pay particular attention to small minority businesses from Prince George’s County.” **CN**

## SNAP/STATS

### FOURTH OF JULY HOLIDAY

(BY THE NUMBERS)

SPENDING	DOLLARS
What Americans spend: .....	\$7.7 billion
Hot dogs eaten: .....	150 million
Spending on beer and wine: .....	\$1.4 billion
Spending on fireworks: .....	\$2.4 billion
No. of people who travel: .....	47.9 million
American flag ownership: .....	57%

Source: WalletHub 2022

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Published by:  
National Association of Counties  
Research Foundation, Inc.  
660 N. Capitol Street, N.W. STE. 400,  
Washington, D.C. 20001  
202.393.6226 | FAX 866.752.1573

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**POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to County News, 660 N. Capitol Street, N.W. STE. 400, Washington, D.C. 20001

(USPS 704-620) n (ISSN: 0744-9798)  
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# Shared revenue bill secures Wisconsin county budgets, gives them skin in the game

From REVENUE page 1  
point.”

Counties and municipalities currently use the percentage of net new construction as a valuation factor in determining the allowable levy, which Wisconsin Counties Association Executive Director Mark O’Connell said has been inadequate.

“That is insufficient to take care of counties’ growing needs, whether it’s employee healthcare or pay raises or increase costs to perform our functions. It’s just not enough,” he said.

Prior to being elected executive, Schoemann was Washington county’s administrator, and in both roles, he has been keenly aware of the budget stresses mounting as revenues stagnated and costs increased across the board.

“The better part of the last 20 years, we have really been doing more with less, and then eventually doing less with less,” he said.

“We haven’t significantly added sheriff’s deputies and personnel in the sheriff’s office

for many, many years and this will give us the ability to actually do that and the growth capacity in the budget for future years to pay for it continually.”

Racine County Executive Jonathan Delagrave is going to see his county’s share of revenue increase by \$2.5 million per year.

“With this extra money, we’re going to be able to proactively deal with issues like fentanyl, mental health crises and other problems we just haven’t been able to meet with the appropriate resources.

“It’s going to be a game changer, and we did it with a divided government, and for a divided government to come together and do what’s in the best interest of counties is pretty cool.”

Upon signing the bill, the Governor said shared revenue “has always been about doing the right thing for Wisconsin.

“I believe the state should be doing its part to support our local partners and ensure our communities have the resources they need to meet basic and unique needs alike, period, and

I’ve always believed that supporting our local communities is an area where we could work to find common ground and bipartisan support, and that’s exactly what we did.”

## Taking the wheel

O’Connell likes the control the bill gives counties to drive their own economic growth.

“We ask ourselves ‘What

does the private sector need?’ It’s available capital, infrastructure like broadband everywhere you can breathe, hard infrastructure like transportation, but also smart young talent,” he said.

“When you look at the list of things that attract talent, 80% of them are things that government funds, but we couldn’t fund them without resources.

“Thanks to this revenue stream, we’ll be able to take those dollars, invest in our communities, make them attractive to the smart young talent which can then fuel the private sector, generating more economic activity and the cycle is actually sustainable,” O’Connell said.

“I think that is sort of the innovative part of this.” **CN**



Wisconsin county officials celebrate AB 245’s signing with Gov. Tony Evers. From left: Marathon County Administrator Lance Leonhard, Marathon County Board Chair Kurt Gibbs, Washington County Executive Josh Schoemann, Winnebago County Executive Jon Doemel, Evers, Kenosha County Executive Samantha Kerkman, Sheboygan County Supervisor Tom Wegner, Milwaukee County Executive David Crowley, Wisconsin Counties Association President & CEO Mark O’Connell and Sauk County Supervisor Marty Kreuger.



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## NOW I KNOW

## ‘The general public doesn’t think like us..’

by Curtis Koch

Davis County, Utah auditor

The general public doesn’t think like us.

And that’s a good thing. They’re worried about their businesses, their jobs, their kids. They don’t see government how we see it.

As an elected official, I view my role as being able to help bring government to the people — to help them understand how things work. In the past, we announce a tax increase and then at public hearings, we would get 300 to 400 people coming. Nobody’s happy, nobody’s feeling good. Those would go four hours at a time and at the end, the officials, the commissioners would receive a lot of feedback, but was there really any education that took place? The public walks away and they’ve expressed anger, but nothing changes, and they still leave with anger because they don’t understand what the government’s perspective



Curtis Koch, Davis County, Utah auditor, speaks on a panel at NACo’s 2023 Legislative Conference.

Photo by Denny Henry

is here.

Now we schedule open houses first, all over the county. Everybody is there, every department, every elected official who was related to that tax increase. We start by saying “Look, we’re not here to sell you a tax increase, but we want to educate you and we want you to educate us and at the end, you may walk away and disagree with us, but you’ll know where we’re coming from, and

we’re in the same boat.”

We had probably 300 people show up at these open houses, it was the equivalent of who would have come to a public hearing, but we get to have a discussion that we wouldn’t have had otherwise.

You can say to them: “You have questions about our flood control? Right over here is our public works director and he’s going talk to you and he can explain what’s going on.”

At the end of that process, we had our public hearing, and 30 people showed up. Ten people spoke, eight of them opposed the tax increase, but two actually stood up and said they were supportive of what the county’s doing.

#### What that taught me

What that taught me at an early point in my career was that you can have this dialogue with the citizens and there’s al-

ways going to be a portion that you’re going to disagree on, but if you give them an opportunity to educate you and you give them an opportunity to be educated, then hey, that makes government understandable to them.

Nobody left those open houses cheering for a tax increase, but they could understand where we were coming from. We certainly could understand better what the needs of the public were. From the citizens’ perspective, sometimes they may not have a full understanding and so the more understanding you can give them the better off it’s going to be for everybody, especially the public. **CN**

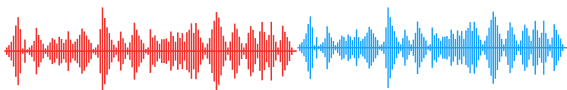
*“Now I Know...” is a new feature offering words of wisdom from county officials who share what they have learned after facing challenging aspects of their position. The feature is written from interviews by Charlie Ban, digital editor and senior writer.*

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GOVERNMENT  
SHOW**



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# BRECC visits Southwest Virginia counties



**BRECC Coalition members. First row: Dan Mosley, Harlan County, Ky.; Victoria Brown, U.S. Economic Development Administration; Jenna Draper, Six County Association of Governments, Utah; Tammy Tincher, Greenbrier County, W.Va.; Marc Kiehna, Randolph County, W.Va.; Cora Gnegy, Giles County Va.; Lauren Struhldreher, U.S. Economic Development Administration; Sandi Curd, Kentucky Highlands Investment Corporation; Melody Villard, Moffat County, Colo.; Grace Blanchard, NACo; Tina Toyne, Big Horn County, Mont. Second row: Will Clear, Virginia Energy; Sharon Fain, PacifiCorp Power; Greg Puckett, Mercer County W.Va.; Will Payne, InvestSWVA; James Hutzler, VACO; Mark Sarver, Glenville State University; Steve Henry, Weber County, Utah; Michael Hatfield, Wise County, Va.; Erik Pages, EntreWorks Consulting, Jack Morgan, NADO; Gabe Pena, Town of Fayetteville, W.Va.; Stephen Allen, Lincoln County Wyo.; Duane Miller, LENOWISCO Planning District Commission.**

by Erik Pages

If you are looking to understand the complexities and opportunities tied to our ongoing energy transition, Southwest Virginia is a good place to start. The region has been a center of coal production since the late 1800s, and it is now serving as a testbed for new ideas related to regional economic transformation. That's why the Building Resilient Economies in Coal Communities (BRECC) Coalition, NACo's network of 20 coal community leaders, touched down recently in Wise County and the City of Bristol, Va.

BRECC Coalition member Will Payne, managing partner of Coalfield Strategies and director of Invest SWVA, served as the group's local host. Invest SWVA is a public-private partnership that seeks to market local assets and attract new businesses and talent to a region that encompasses 13 counties and three independent cities. While traveling to

reclaimed coalfields, walking main streets and listening to local leaders, this visit generated two key lessons for leaders looking to strengthen their local economy:

First, it takes a region. Southwest Virginia sprawls across a large 13-county region that is rural and mountainous. Many places have a history of local turf wars, but local leaders are putting past disputes behind them for a shared vision to help the region recover and thrive. Counties are embracing regional partnerships, like Invest SWVA and the regional Economic Development District — the LENOWISCO Planning District Commission — to receive strategic planning and grant administration support.

One example of this includes the creation of the Lonesome Pine Regional Industrial Facilities Authority (RIFA), which enables Lee, Wise, Scott and Dickenson counties to pool their resources and share de-

“Effective diversification requires diverse strategies.”

- Erik Pages

velopment revenues. Collaborating across county lines, the RIFA funded a regional talent attraction plan for tech and remote workers, known as Project Fuse. The authority is also backing the redevelopment of an abandoned coal loadout facility into a grain processing and distribution terminal, which will resolve supply-chain barriers and contribute to the region's promising future in the craft beverage industry.

Second, effective diversification requires diverse strategies. Although the region backs a common vision, local partners are not all doing the same thing. Instead, they em-

brace multiple strategies and approaches such as small-town revitalization, energy innovation, outdoor recreation, sustainable forestry, entrepreneurship and many more.

In Wise County, a major coal-producing area, the BRECC Coalition viewed a range of innovative projects for transforming abandoned mine lands into new assets, such as alternative energy developments, industrial parks and data centers. This included the Energy DELTA (Discovery, Education, Learning & Technology Accelerator) Lab, where former mine land will become an energy testbed and proving ground for the commercialization and deployment of energy technologies, like solar, hydrogen, geothermal and small modular nuclear reactors.

While energy projects are sparking fresh excitement, localities are also focused on quality-of-life assets and building cultural tourism. In the small town of Big Stone

Gap, revitalization efforts, like a vintage service station turned welcome center and a main street pharmacy turned business incubator/coworking space, are not only beautifying the town but also attracting new visitors and residents to the county. Bristol's Birthplace of Country Music Museum, showcasing the area's role in birthing American country music, as well as an organization called the Friends of SWVA are also nurturing a vibrant arts and culture scene.

Southwest Virginia's progress is a beacon of hope for other coal-impacted communities, showcasing the instrumental role that creativity, collaboration and enthusiastic leadership play in economic revitalization. **CN**

*Erik Pages, president of EntreWorks Consulting, is an organizational partner on NACo's BRECC initiative. BRECC is a Community of Practice supported by the U.S. Economic Development Administration.*

# WORD SEARCH

## LOUDOUN COUNTY, VA.

Created by: Mary Ann Barton

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

**AIRPORT:** Washington Dulles International Airport is located in the county. It was built in 1962.

**BICYCLE:** The 45-mile Washington and Old Dominion Trail, that starts in nearby Arlington County, runs through the county for walking, running and bicycling. A 30-mile horse trail runs alongside part of the trail.

**COURTHOUSE:** The first of three courthouses was erected in 1758 in the county.

**DOUGLASS:** Civil rights leader Frederick Douglass spoke to a crowd of 2,000 in 1879 in the county.

**FARMING:** The county is home to 1,400 farms totaling more than 135,000 farms.

**FLIGHT:** The mother of Wilbur and Orville Wright, Susan Catherine Koerner Wright, was born in the county.

**HORSES:** The equine industry has a \$180 million impact on the county.

**INCOME:** The median income for the county is \$147,111, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, ranked number one in the nation.

**INTERNET:** Seventy percent of the world's Internet traffic flows through the county, in Ashburn. Ninety-six percent of homes in the county are connected to the Internet.

**LEESBURG:** The county seat is not a city but an incorporated town.

**LOUDOUN:** The county was founded in 1757 and named for John Campbell, the fourth earl of Loudoun, a Scottish nobleman who served as commander-in-chief for British armed forces in North America. He served as titular governor of Virginia from 1756-1759.

**METRO:** The Washington Metropolitan Transit Authority's metro system includes the Silver Line, a 23-mile extension which includes three stops in Loudoun County connecting the county to the DC metro area.

**SKATING:** The county is home to two Olympic-standard ice-skating rinks.

**VINEYARDS:** The county is home to many vineyards including Cana Vineyards, home to the 2022 Governors Cup winner, a rose created by wine-

maker Melanie Natoli, the first woman to win the award.

**WASHINGTON:** George Washington was a frequent visitor to the Red Fox

Inn, located in Middleburg. The inn was owned by his cousin Joseph Chinn.

## ON THE MOVE

### NACo OFFICERS

● President **Denise Winfrey**, along with NACo FSC Executive Chairman **Bill Jasien**, Chief Strategy Officer **Danny Melgoza** and Membership Director **Kim Hall** attended the Florida Association of Counties Annual Conference in Orange County.

### NACo STAFF

● **Kaelynn Crawford** has joined NACo as special assistant to the CEO for policy advocacy, partnerships and operations. She previously interned in the White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs and served as a legislative aide for the city of North Bay



Crawford



Karon

Village, Fla.  
 ● Program Manager **Sammy Karon** attended the Iowa State Association of Counties' Opioid Settlement Funds Strategic Planning Summit in Polk County while Associate Legislative Director **Paige Mellero** attended the Auditors Conference.

# 2023 NACo ANNUAL CONFERENCE & EXPOSITION

# TRAVIS COUNTY

AUSTIN, TEXAS JULY 21 thru 24

SCAN FOR MORE INFO AND TO REGISTER

CountyNews

**HOT**

**topics**

**HOUSING  
AFFORDABILITY**

Wisconsin county invests  
in next gen housing. **H5**

ADUs help many find,  
keep housing. **H8**

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION *of* COUNTIES

JULY 3, 2023



**THE  
HOUSING  
AFFORDABILITY  
CRISIS**

County recommendations  
to meet the challenge

# COUNTIES NEED ACCESS TO MODERATELY PRICED, FAIR-QUALITY HOUSING

by **Kevin Boyce and Sherry Maupin**

For a growing number of Americans, the cost of housing is crowding out the rest of their household budget. That's forcing many families into precarious living situations that affect their safety, their health, the length of their commutes and their chance to build generational wealth or to contribute to a vibrant community where they feel like they have a stake.

In 18% of counties, households must spend more than 3.5 times their annual income to afford a typical home. Nearly a quarter (24%) of households that occupy rental units are severely cost-burdened, spending more than half of their annual income on rent. According to Freddie Mac, there is a shortage of more than 3.8 million homes — both rental and owner-occupied — across the country, and it will take more than 20 years to close the housing unit gap despite the recent acceleration in development, according to the National Association of Realtors. These statistics lend context to a problem that counties know all too well: Housing affordability is increasingly out of reach for residents.

In Valley County, Idaho, a small resort community outside of Boise, the median home price is \$650,000 (while the median household income is only \$75,000) primarily driven by the influx of wealthy households. First responders, service-sector and healthcare workers, teachers and other community members face the choice of commuting several hours or living in homes not intended for long-term habitation like recreational vehicles (RVs). For children of the community, there is virtually no path that leads to living in the county where they've grown up.

Across the country in Franklin County, Ohio, the bustling home to the capital city of Columbus, four out of every 10 renters are cost-burdened, spending more than

30% of their annual income on housing. The lingering impacts of decades of unjust housing policies like redlining, access to financial institutions and affordable financing still cloud the pathways to homeownership for many black and brown residents. And, with Franklin County's rapid growth, expected to welcome more than

1 million more residents by 2050, the demand on the housing market — and the need to ensure affordability — is acute.

Stories like these are not the exception in this country. Housing fulfills the basic human need for shelter and is the foundation for better health, consistent education, a stronger workforce, improved financial wellness and lowered demand for the social safety net.

Housing experts, policymakers and data illuminate three persistent barriers for access to housing: Affordability, supply and quality. In November 2022, NACo President Denise Winfrey of Will County, Ill., launched a national county task force to study housing affordability, charged with two goals: Identify county-led policy, practice and partnership solutions to addressing America's housing affordability crisis and explore intergovernmental partnership opportunities that support housing solutions between federal, state and local officials, along with private, nonprofit and other community organizations.

Housing policy is a highly complex, multi-layered topic requiring bipartisan partnerships, dialogue and coordination across all levels of government, private and nonprofit organizations and the com-

munity. It affects residents of all political, demographic, geographic and socioeconomic stripes. County authority on housing-related issues varies, so it is important for county officials to take an overarching perspective and identify opportunities to add the county voice, partnership and leadership into housing conversations.

Since November, the task force has met with experts and policymakers, studied data and trends, and analyzed county authority and strategies to foster housing affordability. While there is no simple solution to housing affordability, counties can work within our policy, financial, convening, educational and administrative levers to be a part of the effort to generate and preserve housing so our neighbors, communities and children can have a better future. **HT**

**Hon. Kevin Boyce**

Commissioner, Franklin County, Ohio  
NACo Housing Task Force Co-Chair

**Hon. Sherry Maupin**

Commissioner, Valley County, Idaho  
NACo Housing Task Force Co-Chair





by **Kevin Shrawder**

# COUNTIES CAN FOLLOW THE MAP TO THE ‘MISSING MIDDLE’

Goldilocks and her realtor were getting frustrated. Single-family homes were too big, and too expensive. Apartments were too small. Fewer and fewer properties were just right.

They aren't alone.

The scarcity, and solution to, the “missing middle” when it comes to housing was the focus of a recent program that took center stage at the Kreisman Initiative Symposium on Housing Law and Policy held at the University of Chicago. The summit focused on the widening gap between single-family homes and mid-to-high rise apartment units.

The missing middle includes duplexes, cottage courts, townhomes and multi-use buildings, among others. Many of these types of structures were built in the early 1900s, up until the mid-20th century. As one panelist noted, the median two-to-four-unit property was built in 1967. As populations shifted in communities, governments implemented modern regulations and existing housing stock aged; the missing middle became a smaller share of units.

Two key strategies influenced the symposium's programming: Preserving existing missing middle units and fostering the creation of new housing stock through construction.

Not all strategies for housing affordability necessitate new construction. In counties across the country, vacant homes and commercial structures can be repurposed into suitable homes. Renovating existing homes helps to preserve owner-occupied, smaller-type multi-unit buildings (such as courtyard apartments, triplexes, fourplexes and townhomes).

One strategy to preserve some of these properties is incremental development, wherein structures are intended to evolve as the community evolves. This could mean revitalizing a vacant or blighted property to multi-use commercial, adding on an Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU), or renovating a larger single-family property into separate units. Many of these concepts fall under the umbrella of “lean urbanism,” which focuses on projects that “aim small to provide maximum impact.”

Vacant commercial properties offer opportunities to use these strategies. Though it is a longer process than demolition, revitalizing old office buildings, hotels or other properties that are no longer providing commercial value can often be more sustainable and more cost effective than new construction.

The critical component of revitalization is to lower the barrier to entry for existing residents. Neighborhoods are better when they are built and maintained by residents, who generally have more of

a stake in the community, and it keeps money in the local economy, supporting entrepreneurs and small businesses. When residents don't buy in, community-based organizations and nonprofits can be key partners to help grow and sustain support.

Building codes and liability laws pose some of the biggest barriers to increasing missing middle housing. Building codes are the governing regulations for new construction, establishing requirements on the materials, processes and standards used in projects. The arbitrary threshold between residential and large-scale commercial construction (for example, a 500-unit apartment complex), wherein any building with four units or more are viewed as commercial properties, can lead to increased costs for builders and stymie the process.


While returning to the days of mail-or-

der homes from Sears may not be realistic, there are a few strategies county policymakers can employ. The first is to review zoning and land use codes and consider solutions from a regional perspective. There are several checkpoints a new development must pass prior to construction, and each presents an opportunity for failure unless requirements are met unanimously. Counties can also comprehensively review current regulations to ensure projects have viability. Analyzing regulations governing ADUs could reveal areas to ensure the ADU process is legal and efficient.

Leveraging local community leaders to engage residents can help build momentum. No housing policy change can be created in a vacuum, and resident voices are crucial to the process. While this can sometimes be a contentious process, several speakers raised the idea

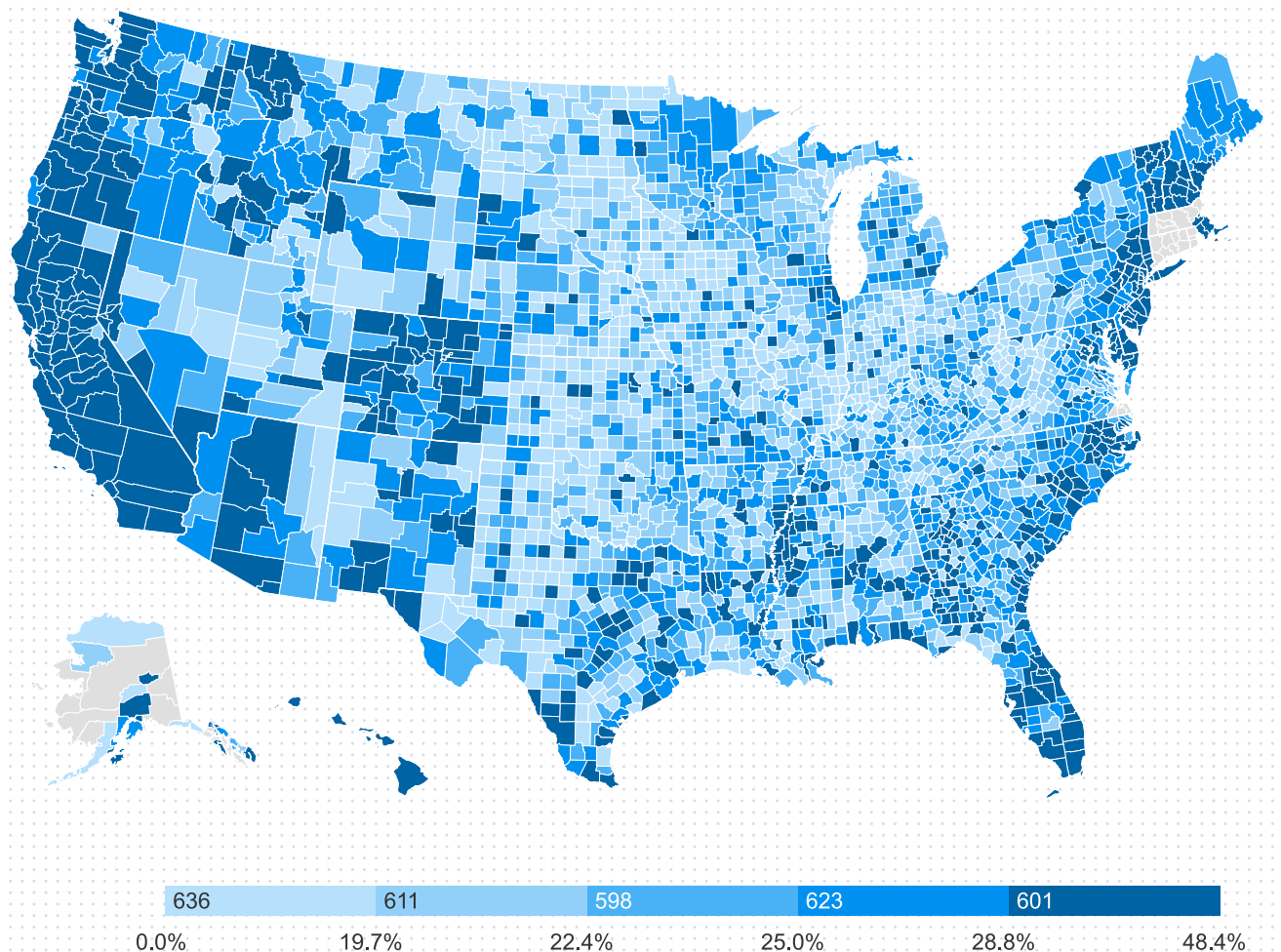
of “reframing the conversation” to better communicate the goals. One successful example of this discussed during the conference is to make the connection to the next generation. Instead of discussing density or ending exclusionary zoning, county leaders can talk about the need for housing so residents' children can live in the community where they grew up. This strategy is also effective in cultivating a coalition of community members in favor of housing affordability.

Addressing housing affordability will not be a quick fix, with no “silver bullet” solution. Though there are many innovative strategies, the simplest approach is the most important: Building or rehabilitating more units in communities across the country. Each additional home, whether it is specifically designated affordable or not, adds rungs to the ladder, increasing affordability for residents. By enabling, encouraging and incentivizing more missing middle type homes, counties can help accomplish this goal.

Read more about NACo's local housing policy research and explore the county policy solutions developed by the Housing Affordability Task Force at [www.naco.org/housing](http://www.naco.org/housing). 

*Kevin Shrawder is a senior analyst for economic and government studies in the NACo Counties Futures Lab.*

## PERCENT COST BURDENED HOUSEHOLDS



# Teton County creates Workforce Home program for those ‘in the middle’



Teton County worked with Mercill Partners to create 30 workforce condominiums, 20 one-bedroom homes and 10 two-bedroom homes. Photo courtesy of April Norton

by **Meredith Moran**  
staff writer

Teton County, Wyo.’s average home costs \$5 million, pricing out a large percentage of people who work in the county, including critical services providers. To make the county livable for its middle class, the Jackson/Teton County Affordable Housing Department created a Workforce Homes program for county residents who earn too much to qualify for affordable housing, but too little to afford a home.

“Home prices have grown at an astonishing 48% per year since 2019 relative to median income,” said April Norton, director of the Jackson/Teton County Affordable Housing Department. “At the same time, interest rate increases have decreased the purchasing power of median income. The result is that home sales are almost twice as expensive relative to what the median income can afford as they were at the height of the housing bubble in 2008.”

There’s no income cap for participants in the Workforce Homes program, but the household must earn 75% of their aggregate income locally, an effort to prevent people who work remotely and have trust funds from utilizing it, Norton said. The maximum sale price for an affordable housing unit in Teton County is around \$400,000, while a two-bedroom Workforce home typically sells for \$600,000 to

\$800,000.

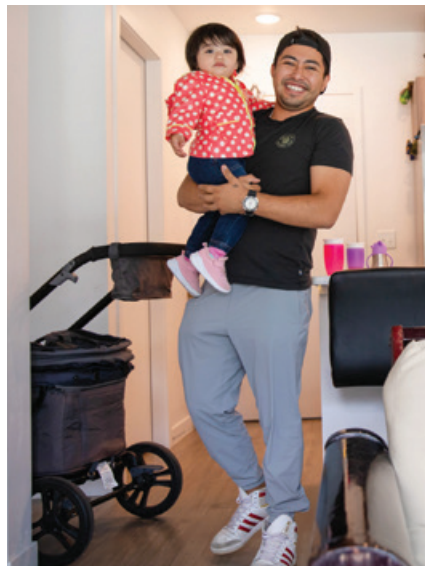
However, all of the Workforce Homes units have an appreciation cap of 3%, making them more affordable over time. In an estimated 15-30 years, the workforce homes will become affordable housing, according to Norton. The housing department works with local developers to create the deed-restricted units.

“We really shifted our focus in 2016 from sort of a traditional housing authority model, where we would go out and buy land and build whatever housing development and then either sell the units or rent the units and then go to the next project,” Norton said. “So, we shifted from that to this public-private partnership model, where we’re really focused on finding private sector developers to partner with on across our entire portfolio.

“We typically will ground lease a property to a private developer that we either choose through a public RFP process or we partner with because they own adjacent land or there’s something about it that makes sense for us to partner with them.”

As a result, the county has seen more than a 50% increase in the number of units it’s been able to produce, as well as reduced the public investment per unit, according to Norton.

“Because we’re not the only person in the project, we share risk and reward,” Norton said. “When we’re partnering with



Brian Martinez, who works as a manager at a local restaurant, lives in a Mercill condo.

private developers ... instead of us having to take up a loan and then spend all of our time designing and building a project,

we actually are able to identify a location where we want housing, then we go find somebody who is going to design the project, who’s going to be the project manager and go out and secure funding for the project and then we’re able to move on to the next thing.

“In the past, we would do one project and it would take us three years to finish it and then we’d start another one. [Now], every year we start two-to-four new projects and we’re just spreading out the same resources, but across more projects, because we’re able to actually leverage private-sector expertise, so that they can go and get the development built.”

Developer Ruben Caldwell partnered with the department to create 12 workforce ownership homes at 440 W. Kelly

See TETON COUNTY pg H6

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# WISCONSIN COUNTY INVESTS IN HOUSING FOR NEXT GENERATION

by Meredith Moran  
staff writer

Washington County, Wis. is investing \$10 million into its Next Generation Housing initiative with the hope that the promise of housing affordability draws millennials and young adults to put down roots in the county.

Through Next Generation Housing, the county plans to build 1,000 homes over the next decade — the most expensive of which will be priced just under \$420,000, with 75% of them listed under \$320,000. Washington County Executive Josh Schoemann said the price range was determined based on the median household income of the county computed with the banking standard of devoting 30% of income toward housing.

“Washington County has always had a challenge with bringing our kids back and getting them to return to Washington County to raise their families,” Schoemann said.

“And when I started to do my research, establishing my platform and the policy initiatives, I realized some of the demographic challenges that were coming and that really kind of lit a fuse to, ‘How do we resolve this in the long term?’”

“And what became abundantly clear is one of the first major hurdles for any young person wanting to come back is having a place to live, and housing in Washington County, even four years ago, was a challenge, but now it really has turned into the existential crisis that so many demographers and futurists predicted.”

According to a study that was funded through the initiative to assess the county’s housing needs, the demand for new construction in the county is largely for homes under \$350,000, according to Washington County Community Development Director Deb Sielski.

“That’s really consistent with that ‘missing middle’ or mainstream workforce of the markets, but the majority of the new construction offerings in that market are concentrated at prices that are above \$350,000, so there’s a real disconnect between what was being built and what was being offered,” Sielski said.

“When I talk to people about this ‘miss-

ing middle,’ it’s about those individuals who make too much to be eligible for subsidized housing, but they don’t make enough that they’re able to afford the new construction that is happening in our area, so we’re really trying to focus in on that that, and it’s typically the teachers, the police officers who are working and trying to find a home in Washington County.”

Washington County’s Community Development Department met with all of the cities and village throughout the county to determine the most suitable areas for potential Next Generation Housing Developments.

The first pilot project, which is in the Village of Jackson, broke ground in May and the county is hoping that people are able to move into the homes by March 2024,

Schoemann said.

“There’s a supply side issue, and that’s being addressed by creating these pilot projects of divisions throughout the county,” Schoemann said.

“And then there’s the demand-side issue — you’ve got a 30-something year old individual who’s looking to buy, and they’ve been paying \$2,000 a month in rent and haven’t been able to save up for a down payment, so how do we support helping them there? So, we created a separate program that we’re calling a down payment incentive, and it really takes the concept of the [Veterans Affairs] loan and it flips it on its head.”

Washington County residents participating in the down payment incentive program can receive up to \$20,000, or 10% of the value of the home, up front, and then “pay” it back through community service.

Each hour volunteered for a non-profit or civic organization in the county equates to \$25 back, and participants can donate money to community organizations that goes toward the down payment as well, according to Schoemann.

“We have our economic development corporation put basically a secondary

mortgage on the home,” Schoemann said.

“... You get the incentive and you’re eligible to earn that back by service to the community through a nonprofit or by donations to a nonprofit at a little bit of a lesser rate, and of course, you can pay it back at your own rate or when you sell the home.

“Our program is unique in that it really tries to get people to not just live here, [but] work here, whether it’s public service or private service, but more importantly, get rooted in the community and give back to the community. I think that’s what makes our program distinct, and one that I think can be replicated all across America.”

Washington County’s population that is 60 and older is 20% higher than the national average, and how it addresses housing affordability now will play a big role in what the county’s socioeconomic landscape looks like down the line, Schoemann said. Christian Tscheschlok, executive director of Economic Development Washington County, echoed similar sentiments.

“Our country as a whole is experiencing a transition of workforce and popula-

See NEXT GEN pg H6



Washington County, Wis. Executive Josh Schoemann discusses the Next Generation Housing initiative. Photo courtesy of Josh Schoemann

## Teton County partners with private sector developers to create worker housing

From TETON COUNTY pg H4

Ave. in Jackson, which were completed in March. He said the fact that all of the units are deed-restricted is something he's most proud of — “that isn't something that you would be able to achieve working outside of these kinds of partnerships.”

“Here at Teton County, we've seen 100% appreciation over the last three or four years in some of these units,” Caldwell said. “So, for a family that has a couple of professional jobs, let's say that they're making \$200,000 a year, which is a crazy amount of money obviously relative to the mean family income within the United States, that family maybe with some help could have probably afforded an \$800,000 house potentially before this. But now, we're getting to a point where the housing supply here has jumped to well beyond that, so it's not like

here on the free market you can kind of stretch and figure it out anymore, unless you really have pretty substantial backing or some kind of huge job.

“... So, I think that these kinds of programs are going to be really important, especially in high barriers-to-entry markets like [Teton County], where they're addressing folks that can't qualify for something that's means-tested, but are in no position whatsoever to begin to approach something that's actually free market.”

Developer Tyler Davis worked on the county's Merill Project, which built 30 deed-restricted units — 18 of which had the traditional parameters of the Workforce Homes program, while the remaining 12 were set aside to be purchased by employers to rent to their employees. Buyers included the county and hospital, as well as local restaurants and stores, according to Davis.

‘We shifted our focus from a traditional housing authority model.’

“What I liked about the project is it allowed us as the developers to still make a profit and still get a project on the ground and build it, but the deed restrictions made sure that it's people that truly work local and that there's an appreciation kept moving forward,” Davis said.

“... We had a huge [housing] demand already, COVID hit, amplified that and construction costs, inflation and everything has made it very hard and out of reach to an extent for the normal worker to make it happen, so it's important to have some of these projects.”

Because there's more demand than supply for the Workforce Homes program,

it works off a weighted drawing process. A household can have up to 12 entries, earning up to 10 of them based on the number of consecutive years at least one person in the household has worked locally.

There's an additional entry, with a maximum of two total, per household member who works as a critical services provider, including healthcare workers, search and rescue members and fire emergency services, according to Norton.

“We have a list that our elected officials have said, ‘These are people that we want to have a little bit of an extra step up in these drawings,’” Norton said.

“... Recognizing that these are folks that are required to be here to actually do their job and on short notice, and if they don't live here, they can't do that and then our town literally will shut down, so it's a health and safety issue.”

## Inside the NACo Housing Task Force: Tackling the Housing Affordability Crisis

by Kevin Shrawder

Housing undergirds all aspects of well-being, from economic prosperity and employment to mental health, personal security and social connectivity. As an essential pillar of individual physiological needs, access to safe, quality and reasonably priced housing is the top concern of counties nationwide.

In November 2022, NACo President Denise Winfrey launched the Housing Task Force, a group of 33 elected officials and professional county housing experts. President Winfrey charged the task force with two goals:

- to elevate county-led solutions to address the housing affordability crisis confronting America's counties

- to identify intergovernmental opportunities for partnership on housing issues.

The task force work began in earnest in November 2022, with an in-person convening to explore the county role in housing.

Led by co-chairs Sherry Maupin, commissioner, Valley County, Idaho and Kevin Boyce, commissioner, Franklin County, Ohio, task force members engaged in discussions with experts from the Harvard Joint Center for Housing, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the Aspen

Institute — the task force partner — on county authority, challenges and solutions to housing affordability.

Five core focus areas emerged from these conversations to form the *County Housing Ecosystem*.

1. The federal-to-county nexus
2. Local regulations, building codes and fees
3. Financing, lending and county tax policy
4. Land use, zoning, infrastructure and community planning
5. Community engagement, partnerships and education.

Meeting again in February during the NACo Legislative Conference, the task force began to explore these areas in-depth with conversations on homeownership, rental housing and technology solutions.



Maupin



Boyce

The task force also participated in an open discussion with White House senior leadership on the federal-to-county nexus and areas for intergovernmental collaboration.

Over the following months, the task force met virtually with experts from around the country to discuss the financial, administrative and policy levers counties can employ to affect change. During the final in-person meeting in May in Dallas County, Texas, task force members explored some of these solutions

in action.

From the task force work, a recommendation guide for local leaders seeking to advance housing affordability has been born.

The framework is not a silver bullet solution, and housing affordability does not come to fruition overnight. However, the framework provides a guide — a point of origin — for leaders seeking change, wherever they may be starting the housing affordability journey.

Though county authority on housing is complex and varied, the task force guide aims to be another tool in the county toolbox from which local leaders can draw ideas, inspiration, projects and solutions that can be tailored to fit the unique needs of each community.

Though the work of counties on advancing housing affordability is not done, the release of the recommendation framework marks a milestone in the county effort to build strong communities and ensure equitable access to safe, quality, reasonably priced housing for every resident in every county across the country.

The NACo Housing Task Force invites you to join the release session during the upcoming NACo Annual Conference in Travis County, Texas, on Saturday, July 22, at 8:30 a.m.

To read more about the task force work, delve into data on housing affordability and explore county solution spotlights, visit [www.naco.org/housing](http://www.naco.org/housing).

## County creating homes for next gen

From NEXT GEN pg 5



Washington County is building homes to appeal to young homeowners.

tion where Baby Boomers are retiring, yet there's growth in businesses and communities, but with them retiring, there are fewer people that are getting involved civically, there are fewer people to take job opportunities and everybody is competing for the same slice of pie,” Tscheschlok said.

“Our thought process is to grow the size of our ‘pie’ here in Washington County ... so we see this as a challenge that has many sides, but at the nexus is creating a place where a family can live, grow and a community that they are digging roots and becoming a part of.

“The way that that happens, that nexus, is having that home for them to locate, so rather than us fighting for new talent, we're going to give opportunity for the talent to be able to live and be here and grow here and, in effect, then grow the size of the Washington County ‘pie,’ solving the workforce issue, solving the community engagement issue and essentially growing our social capital in all of our communities across the county.”

# HOUSING AFFORDABILITY | By the Numbers

## SUPPLY SHORTAGES

**3.8 million units** 

As of the fourth quarter of 2020, the United States had a housing supply deficit of 3.8 million units. These 3.8 million units are needed to not only meet the demand from the growing number of households but also to maintain a target vacancy rate of 13%, according to Freddie Mac.

**34.6%**

34.6% of households in the country have repair needs, with an average cost of \$3,359. It's crucial to address maintenance needs promptly to avoid more expensive repairs down the line.



## DEMOGRAPHIC SHIFTS

More than half of counties experienced population growth last year, with medium-sized counties gaining the highest number of residents and emerging as the fastest-growing segment of counties.



**1.3 million**



While gains in population between 2020 and 2021 occurred in the South and West regions, which grew by 1.3 million and 158,000 residents, respectively, the Midwest and Northeast regions experienced population declines. Domestic migration was the primary driver of regional patterns.

**55%**

Over 55 percent of large counties, defined as counties with populations exceeding 500,000 residents, witnessed a faster increase in median gross rent compared to the national average of 10.5 percent.

## COST BURDENS

**3.5 times**

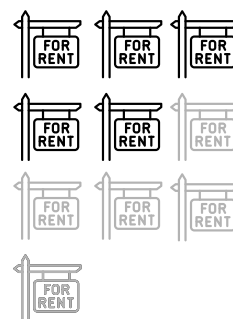


In 18 percent of counties, households must spend more than 3.5 times their annual income to afford a typical home, according to the Housing Solutions Matchmaker Tool ([naco.org/MatchmakerTool](http://naco.org/MatchmakerTool)).

**30%**



A significant issue faced by households is housing cost burden, which occurs when more than 30 percent of their annual income is spent on housing. Across the United States, this burden affects 31 percent of households.



Renters face a significant challenge when it comes to housing costs, with close to half of all renter households burdened by the expense of housing.

## MARKET SHIFTS

Although the nation's median household income witnessed a modest growth of 8.3 percent between 2011 and 2021, it was overshadowed by a significant rise in inflation, which surged by 20.8 percent during the same timeframe. This disparity highlights the challenge of keeping up with the increasing costs of living and housing.

# Miami-Dade County's ADU rules aim to help many find, keep housing

by **Charlie Ban**  
senior writer

Eileen Higgins is proof that accessory dwelling units work.

As a child in Bernalillo County, N.M., her grandmother lived in an apartment connected to her family's house. As a college student, she lived above a family's garage. Now, as a Miami-Dade County, Fla. commissioner, she was an enthusiastic vote for an ordinance that is allowing accessory dwelling units — ADUs — on properties in the half of the county that is unincorporated.

"In some ways, ADUs go back to the way we traditionally lived in this country, with in-law quarters next to the house," she said. "My grandmother couldn't have afforded a home on Social Security, and my parents — with three kids — couldn't have handled two households."

Miami-Dade County is facing a bevy of threats to housing affordability. The county was already feeling pressure before the COVID-19 pandemic, but the proliferation of remote work has accelerated the influx of high-earners, insurance rates are rising and with the Atlantic Ocean on one side, the Everglades on two sides and Broward County on the other, residential expansion



Different types of accessory dwelling unit types, from "The ABCs of ADUs," by AARP

is limited. Infill throughout existing communities is the only alternative.

Locally, Miami, Miami Beach, North Miami, Pompano Beach, Miramar and Tamara had already passed ADU ordinances before the Miami-Dade County commissioners voted in November 2022 to establish one in unincorporated areas.

The ordinance mandates a minimum area of 7,500 square feet for ADUs ranging from 400 to 800 square feet, with a minimum amount of habitable area of 220 square feet, accommodating garage conversions and reducing the minimum lot area to 5,000 square feet. One-month rental minimums aim to prevent them from becoming vacation rentals. Setback requirements match those for primary structures, as do height limits. RVs and

trailers aren't included.

Now 171,683 single-family properties are eligible to add an ADU, and the first such permits were being reviewed in late June.

"This won't just help people find housing, it will help keep people in their homes," Higgins said. "This can be a source of income that helps offset rising costs. They are a means for people to stay in their homes longer as they age and as they move into retirement, when their retirement incomes will not be the same level as their working incomes."

If an ADU isn't occupied by a renter, the same inspection rules don't apply.

"This could be a way families could give their adult children a launching pad while protecting them from a brutal rental mar-

ket," Higgins said.

The county's total control over the ordinance and the permitting process helps Higgins feel confident that the county can make adjustments as needed.

"We certainly want to be careful with how this rolls out," she said. "It was written to be very careful to make sure these units were in keeping with the rest of the neighborhoods and that parking would be included. We don't want one family's decision to add an ADU to affect another family who chose that neighborhood because it was single-family homes."

ADUs would represent one in a series of measures policymakers aim to apply to reduce the county's housing burden.

"We are not going to solve our housing affordability crisis with this one change, but I think this is a good start that could help a lot of people," Higgins said. "We do need to think about townhouses and multifamily homes, particularly when it's near transit, but in other cases, it's a real solution for people to use their properties. We are going to have to build differently, think differently do differently. And there's no other way...we have to find a way to add to the supply of housing."

"We're going to have to become more comfortable living with our neighbors." ■

# Texas county prioritizes housing for public sector workers

by **Charlie Ban**  
senior writer

Bill Gravell acts like a matador to encourage development of housing that public employees can afford.

The Williamson County, Texas judge will get everyone excited, he'll shake the cape around, and when the project comes charging at him, he steps out of the way. That's how he feels the county can best get the job done: Stay out of the way of the developers.

"In my experience, the less we're involved, the better," he said about the county government. Williamson County has a housing affordability problem, but at the same time, Gravell doesn't want to get into the housing business. The county is growing, roughly 40,000 new residents move in each year, and while private sector salaries have increased with new commercial and industrial development, the county's workforce can't hope to match it.

Some opportunities for housing that will cater to public sector workers, specifically in law enforcement and education, are on the horizon, and although Gravell doesn't want the county to give anything away to developers, he sees an opportunity for an in-kind donation of sorts through a pub-



An artist's conception shows the tiny homes that would be available to public workers.

lic-private partnership.

The first of those partners is a husband-and-wife team — he's a police officer and she is a teacher — and they lived outside of Williamson County, but they saw an increasing number of their colleagues in their situation: Unable to afford to live in the community they served. The couple wanted to build a community of 28 tiny houses across the street from an elementary school, one that rented only to public sector workers, for \$1,340 a month, well below the market rate. Police officers get an additional discount if they park their patrol cars at the ends of the development, as a crime deterrent.

It works, Gravell said, because in con-

struction, time is money, with materials and labor costs increasing steadily. Delays are costly. By expediting any government "red tape," Williamson County can help shepherd projects through and avoid delays that often puts them over budget.

"Sometimes in county government, we forget that we have a powerful voice, and we can 'add the fire' for lack of a better word," he said. "The value-add in this project was believing in it and permitting it."

"We're not giving them anything free, we're not giving any handouts, but we're giving them a hand up to be successful."

In the couple's situation, their development was off a county road, and Gravell was happy to allow them access to the

road for utilities if it meant housing more county and city workers.

"I just can't ask men and women to put on uniforms and badges and go into our schools and then when they walk out of those properties they have to drive 45 minutes or an hour to lay their head down at night," he said. "It seems morally wrong that we ask people to work for us, and we ask people to sacrifice to work for the public — teachers, paramedics, firefighters, cops — and then send them somewhere else to live. I think we have a moral obligation to take care of them, a moral obligation to make sure they can have the same quality of life."

The initial development will include 28 freestanding buildings, with two bedrooms each, totaling 800 square feet.

"An 800 square-foot house is a lot better than an apartment the same size," Gravell said. "And for the teachers who live there, they can't walk to school. You can't walk to where you work in most parts of Texas."

He sees the tradeoff — more predictable costs for dedicated housing — catching the interest of other developers, and anticipates 500 new units among different developments over the next two years. His goal is 5,000 units. ■

## BRIGHT IDEAS | DAKOTA COUNTY, MINN.

# Bison Are Grazing the Prairie Again In Minnesota County, Benefiting Ecosystem

### PROBLEM:

A county's ecosystem takes a turn for the worse after bison disappear.

### SOLUTION:

Reintroduce bison to restore and maintain the prairie.

by **Meredith Moran**  
staff writer

Bison are grazing the prairie in Dakota County, Minn. again for the first time in over a century.

In conjunction with the Minnesota Bison Conservation Herd, the county is reintroducing plains bison in Spring Lake Park Reserve to restore the prairie and benefit its ecosystem.

"Dakota County was around 80% prairie prior to European settlement," said Tom Lewanski, Dakota County's director of natural resources.

"Historically, the prairie was maintained by three natural processes — climate, fire and grazing," he said.

"Obviously there's not much we can do about climate on a local level; fire we do utilize as a tool as we restore and maintain these prairies, but we're very interested in that third driver, the natural grazing, and the primary grazer on the prairie is the bison ... they impact the ecosystem in so many various ways, so it's been really exciting to reintroduce that piece."

Bison are what Lewanski refers to as a "keystone species," meaning if they're removed from their native ecosystem, the ecosystem ceases to function in the same way.

Without the bison grazing, the prairie grass can get up to 6 feet tall, which prevents proper sunlight from getting to flowers, which then negatively impacts the area's insects, birds and mammals.

"The bison impacts the prairie in so many other ways, too,"



Spring Lake Park Reserve in Dakota County, Minn. is home to 12 plains bison, who maintain the prairie. Photo courtesy of Dakota County

Lewanski said.

"They have a propensity to roll on the ground, called 'waddling,'

"In a prairie, the plants are so thick that if you have a seed, their chances of finding mineral soil in that thick living and dead material is pretty slim. When bison waddle, they open up the mineral soil, so the seeds can have a place to germinate and start to grow.

"[Bison] can also weigh up to 2,000 pounds, so rolling around on the ground they tend to compact the soil to the extent that there's a little divot in the earth that actually holds water, which provides drinking water for other animals on the prairie and a breeding habitat for frogs and toads, all the way to grassland bird species."

In October 2022, eight bison were brought to Spring Lake Park Reserve from two state parks. There are now 12.

"It's a living laboratory for us," Lewanski said.

"It took over four years for us to plan and do this, so that allowed us to get our ecologist out there and we did a kind of pretreatment. 'What are the plants? What are the butterflies, the mammals, reptiles, breeding birds?'"

"So, we have a pretty good sense of what's out there, and now that we reintroduced the bison, we will continue to do those studies over time so we can really document what impact the bison are having on our prairie in this particular park."

The reintroduction was made possible through the state's Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund, which devoted \$560,000 to build the necessary infrastructure, including fencing, gates and water troughs — "all the things that keep the bison and park visitors healthy and safe," Lewanski said.

While Dakota County reintroduced the bison to help manage and restore the prairie, there was also an understanding that people would want to come out and see them, which was important to take into account when determining which park the bison would roam, Lewanski said.

"People really love this idea of bringing in the bison, knowing that this is a part of our history, of the heritage of this county," Lewanski said. "There's a greenway that goes through the park, so people jumping on their bikes or walk-

ing, they can wander between these paddocks and there's great opportunities to view the bison."

Another beneficial element of the initiative is how it celebrates the historic impact of bison for the Dakota people, who are indigenous to the region, according to Lewanski.

"The bison were such an integral part of these communities that it's gratifying for us to be able to bring them back," Lewanski said.

"It's an opportunity for us to educate people and tell the story about the relationship between the bison and the Indigenous plains people that were here and are still here. Dakota people and bison had a close relationship for thousands of years.

"For the Dakota people, it was their grocery store, clothing, bedding, tools, food — it was also their pathway to the Creator Spirit, so this is an opportunity for us to help to tell that story, which I think is as important as the ecological story." **CN**

Dakota County, Minn. earned a 2023 NACo Achievement Award for its program in the County Resiliency category.

## Mobile workshops planned

From CONFERENCE page 1

health crisis.

Cornyn, who sits on the Senate Finance, Intelligence and Judiciary committees, was first elected to the U.S. Senate in 2002. He has worked closely with NACo for many years in securing key flexibility for the American Rescue Plan and mental health policy reforms.

Golston leads the Gates Foundation's efforts to advance educational opportunity and has been a partner on NACo's growing work on economic mobility and creating opportunities for our residents to succeed.

Content at the conference will cover five themes:

- County Economies
- Health & Wellbeing
- Leadership
- Resiliency & Safety
- Governance & Operations

Attendees will have the opportunity to take part in several mobile workshops to visit some innovative local programs in Travis County, including:

1. 911 Emergency Communications and STAR Flight, a county-owned and operated helicopter emergency service
2. Community First! Village, a community partner that supports permanent housing for chronically unhoused individuals
3. Engaging Global Businesses with Dell Technologies and the University of Texas Advanced Computing Center Vislab

One of the highlights includes a NACo First-Time Attendee Orientation, set for 8-9:15 a.m. Friday, July 21.

That's when NACo President Denise Winfrey, NACo Executive Director Matt Chase and Membership Committee Chair Matthew Prochaska will welcome first-timers to the conference; they will also get a chance to connect with NACo ambassadors in roundtable discussions.

Before the conference begins, attendees can download the NACo Conference app, which will allow users to create their own schedule, access content, view other attendees, send messages and more. **CN**

SPONSORED CONTENT

# BEST PRACTICES FOR BUDGETING AND STRATEGIC PLANNING

Budgeting and strategic planning are two critical components for the success and growth of counties. While they are often discussed separately, it's important to recognize the connection between the two.

By aligning your plan with your budget, you can effectively communicate your priorities, make data-driven decisions, and ensure taxpayer dollars are being used to support your community's long-term vision.

## Planning

Getting your community involved in planning and budgeting discussions helps citizens understand your county's decision-making process. Include citizens in planning, share your strategy and goals, tie goals to performance measures, and show them your vision for the future.

When developing your strategic plan, it should directly connect to your budget and show the focus areas and goals that align with the spending priorities of your county.

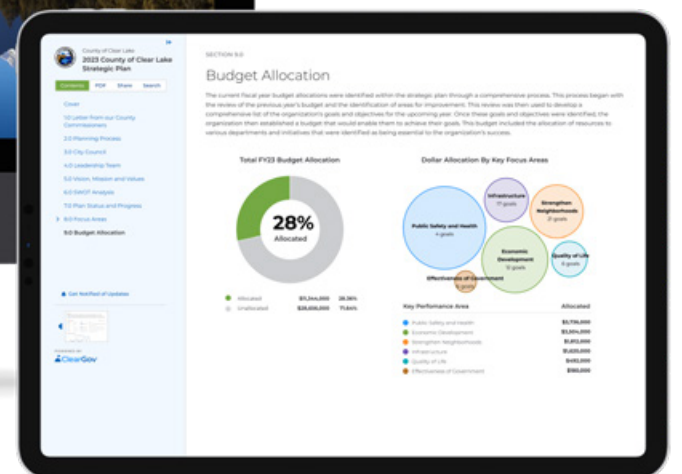
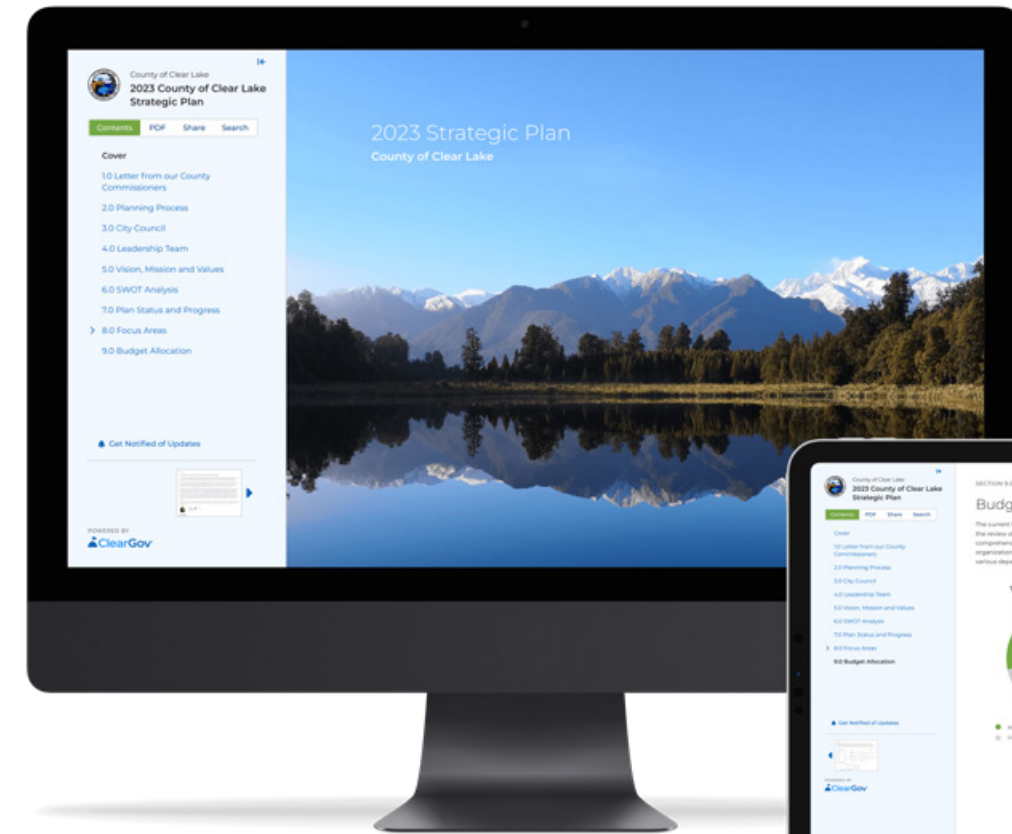
By tying your budget requests to specific objectives and communicating that in your budget, citizens will better understand how projects and services are prioritized and funded.

However, it's important to remember that not all budget requests need to be tied to spending.

Many government expenses are related to the operations and maintenance of public services, which should be transparently communicated as well.

## Creating

Collaboration can be chal-



lenging when creating your strategic plan and budget.

You may have many internal and external (engaged citizens!) stakeholders that need to be part of the process. But manual data entry, messy spreadsheets and back-and-forth emails can put a kink in the most well-intentioned process.

You can make things go smoother by documenting and communicating the process to set expectations, clearly communicating deadlines and leveraging a cloud-based budgeting and planning solution to streamline the process, consolidate communication and reduce errors.

## Communicating

A strategic plan should not be a static document but a



living, breathing roadmap for progress.

It's essential to continually update and share the status of your plan throughout the year with citizens, internal stakeholders and project owners. By keeping the plan "alive" in this way and regularly sharing updates and involving citizens in the process, you keep everyone engaged and informed, keep your county accountable, and foster a sense of transpar-

ency and community ownership.

Use clear simple language to communicate your plan and budget, use visuals to help citizens understand the data, be transparent and consistent with your messaging, and encourage feedback throughout the process.

## Leverage ClearGov for Budgeting, Strategic Planning

ClearGov offers powerful cloud-based solutions to streamline both budgeting and strategic planning processes for counties.

With ClearGov's full suite of Budget Cycle Management solutions, you can simplify budget creation, collaboration, and communication.

You can easily create trans-

parent budgets that support your strategic goals and make it easier to communicate rationale to citizens in an easy-to-understand format.

ClearPlans is a robust strategic planning solution that lets you develop, track, and update any type of plan.

With built-in task management, progress tracking, and reporting capabilities, ClearPlans keeps your plan alive and enables effective communication with stakeholders.

By combining ClearGov's solutions, counties can optimize their budgeting and strategic planning processes and build trust with citizens.

See how ClearGov can transform your county's budgeting processes by visiting <https://cleargov.com/lp/naco>



# PROFILES IN SERVICE

## DAVID L. PAINTER

**NACo Board Member**  
Commissioner  
Clermont County, Ohio

**Number of years active in NACo:** Six years

**Years in public service:** 14

**Occupation:** Project Management (Construction, Engineering and Environmental Restoration)

**Education:** Bachelor of Science in Environmental Management

**The hardest thing I've ever done:** Release my co-dependent relationship from a loved one battling substance use disorder. My heart goes out to all those who battle and all the loved ones who try to help.



PAINTER

**Three people (living or dead) I'd invite to dinner:**

Jesus – I would have a lot of questions for him. James Madison – Give it to me straight, tell me the Constitutional story. My Mother and Father – I would love to tell them once again, “You were right.”

**A dream I have is to:** Be the Governor of Ohio

**The most adventurous thing I've ever done is:** As a young man, I worked on a secret De-

partment of Defense R&D project to win the Cold War. The result made history and culminated in a famous speech by then President Ronald Reagan who said, “Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall.”

**My favorite way to relax is:** Listening to good music, reading or working on cars, trucks or boats, especially high performance Mopars or Harley Davidsons.

**I'm most proud of:** My children and family.

**Every morning I read:** Social media content.

**My favorite meal is:** Shrimp cocktail, salad, filet mignon, mashed garlic potatoes and fresh bread.

**My pet peeve is:** People who complain but aren't willing to be part of the solution.

**My motto is:** If you inspire people to greatness, great things will happen.

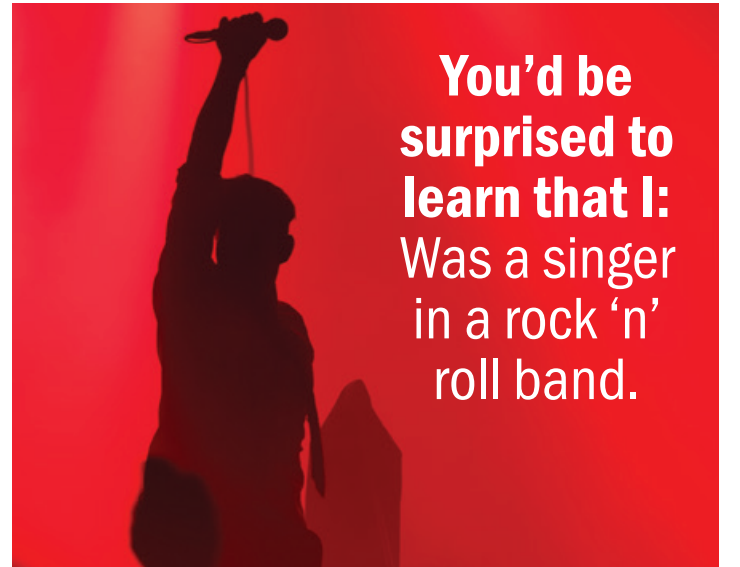
**The last book I read was:** “Governing on the Ground – The Past, Present, and Future of County Government” by Peter Golden, published by NACo.

**My favorite movie is:** “Field of Dreams.”

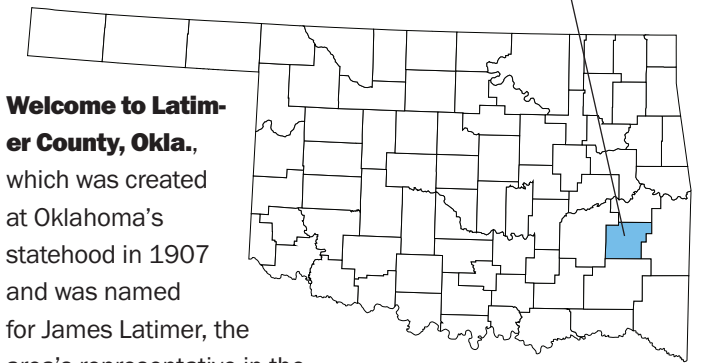
**My favorite music is:** Rock ‘n roll and country rock.

**My favorite U.S. president is:** Ronald Reagan and John F. Kennedy.

**My county is a NACo member because:** There isn't a better investment that a county can make, than partnering with NACo. Being a member of NACo gives counties a unique opportunity to advocate with their federal partners and foster cooperation among government at every level. Simply put, NACo provides a pathway to make all the 3,069 counties a better place to live, work and raise a family.



## GET TO KNOW... Latimer County, Okla.



**Welcome to Latimer County, Okla.,** which was created at Oklahoma's statehood in 1907 and was named for James Latimer, the area's representative in the Constitutional Convention. The county has nearly the same population as it had when it was founded, which was 9,340 in 1907 and 9,444 in 2020, according to the census.

**The county seat, Wilburton, is located in the San Bois Mountains and is home to Robbers Cave State Park, where thousands of people visit each year to camp, horseback ride, canoe, fish and explores caves or “spelunk.”**

The state park was once a hideout for infamous Old West outlaws Jesse James and Belle Starr, better known as the “Bandit Queen.” Ac-

cording to local legend, they would steal horses from local ranches and ride them back to the cave during their crime sprees.

The Robbers Cave Fall Festival, which features live entertainment, amusement park rides and the Fall Foliage Cruise Car Show, is held in the county each October. Although

Wilburton has around 2,000 residents, the three-day event has drawn as many as 80,000 visitors to the city.

Red Oak, the only incorporated town in the county aside from Wilburton, became an area of settlement for members of the Choctaw Nation during the forced relocation of Indigenous people in the Trail of Tears. Professional baseball player Lane Adams, formerly of the Atlanta Braves and current outfielder for the Mexican League's Tigres de Quintana Roo, is a notable native of the just over 500-person town.

Get to Know features new NACo member counties.



## BEHIND THE SEAL ALLEN COUNTY, IND.

**A**llen County, Ind., which was founded in 1824, unveiled a new county seal last year. The updated seal includes the Allen County courthouse and three waves to represent the St. Joseph, St. Mary's and Maumee rivers. The old seal featured a

large stack of hay and a farmer with a sickle, as farmland makes up 65% of the county's land use. The decision to update the seal came out of a desire to better represent the county as a whole.

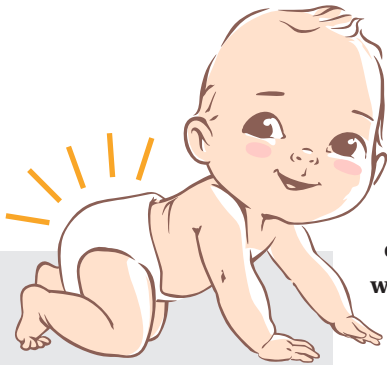
The copper color on the new design was chosen to highlight the county's agricultural roots in a more subtle way, along with the furrowed fields next to the courthouse.



Want to see your county seal featured in County News? Contact Meredith Moran at [mmoran@naco.org](mailto:mmoran@naco.org).

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# NEWS FROM ACROSS THE NATION



## ARIZONA

**MARICOPA COUNTY'S** Human Services Department is **providing free diapers** to low-income families. The Diaper Bank program is set to send a monthly supply of 150 diapers to nearly 5,000 children throughout the county whose households are within 150% of the federal poverty level, which is \$37,290 for a family of three. Families who are part of the county's Head Start program are also eligible for the Diaper Bank, which is funded through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

## CALIFORNIA

• **SAN MATEO COUNTY** is hoping to reduce accidents, injuries and noise complaints through its **fireworks buyback program**. Leading up to July 4, the county is trying to cut down on illegal fireworks activity around the holiday by offering up to \$75 in cash to those who turn in unused fireworks.

## COLORADO

The **ADAMS COUNTY** Work Options program is helping **justice-involved youth interested in cooking** pursue their culinary aspirations. The free training is specialized to each person, but all participants learn basic skills including commercial kitchen technology and safe handling of food. Work Options lasts from four to six weeks and students can earn up to \$125 in a weekly stipend. Participants are helped with creating resumes and interview skills, and upon completion of the program are eligible to continue on to the National Restaurant



Association's apprenticeship program.

## GEORGIA

**DEKALB COUNTY** is **investing in its Black male youth** with its Legacy Program, which teaches STEM and financial literacy. School resource officers, educators and parents came together to determine what curriculum could benefit the youth the best. The summer program

ended with a visit to Montgomery, Ala.'s Legacy Museum, which provides a comprehensive history of U.S. slavery and its lasting impact.

## MASSACHUSETTS

The **BARNSTABLE COUNTY** Fatherhood Program, which is celebrating its 25th year, has taught more than 3,000 fathers **parenting skills**, helping them to re-establish relationships with their children. The 12-week program includes workshops, presentations and discussion groups related to communication skills, child development, employment and legal matters such as child support.

## MINNESOTA

**NOBLES COUNTY** is gathering data and assessing priorities for the **Rural Child Care Innovation Program** through surveys on childcare. The county is seeking responses from parents, childcare center directors, family childcare providers and area employers to determine the unique needs of different groups and create more efficiency in the childcare system overall.

## NEVADA

**CLARK COUNTY** will create its first official **cultural district**

— Little Ethiopia. More than 40,000 people of Ethiopian ancestry live in Las Vegas.

It is the culmination of several businesses and local leaders in the area working toward recognition of the growing Ethiopian and Eritrean communities here.

## OREGON

In several **JEFFERSON COUNTY** departments, new mothers are allowed to bring their babies to work with them when they return from maternity leave. The **Infant@Work** policy requires the consent of coworkers and supervisors and lasts until the child is mobile.

*The Oregonian* reported that the county is considered a



## CALIFORNIA

• **SAN DIEGO COUNTY** is making its **free ride service wheelchair-accessi-**

**ble for low-income seniors.** County residents eligible for the program must be at least 60 years old and have a house-

hold income that is 30% or below the area median income, which is \$31,250 for a two-person household. "Transportation is a fundamental aspect of independence and quality of life, and we firmly believe that physical abilities should not limit mobility," senior program manager Maureen Glaser told KPBS-TV. "By introducing wheelchair-accessible rides and increasing enrollment, we aim to bridge the transportation gap and empower San Diego seniors with mobility challenges to navigate their communities independently."



**VIRGINIA**

• **PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY** has received two **historical records** that were stolen from its courthouse during the Civil War. One was the county's first deed book from 1731-1732, the other was a court order book from Dumfries District Court from 1798-1799.

In 1936, a collector in Rhode Island offered to sell the books back to the county, which started a dispute. The books were found at the Library of Virginia, which returned the books and digitized them, which will make them available for public viewing at the Clerk of the Circuit Court's Office.

Tracy Harter, Library of Virginia and Prince William County Circuit Clerk Jacqueline Smith show off one of the documents. Photo courtesy of Prince William County



"childcare desert," with fewer than 33% of the county's children having access to care, with the scarcity becoming more pronounced after the pandemic. District Attorney Steven Leriche said employees have left because the rising cost of childcare makes the job a losing proposition, and other directors note increased positive emotional health outcomes from

participating mothers. Departments participating in the policy include Public Health and Community Development, in addition to the District Attorney's office.

**TEXAS**

**HARRIS COUNTY** has launched a **free childcare program** — Early REACH — using \$26 million from the American

**WISCONSIN**

**DOOR COUNTY** is a destination for **international seasonal student workers**, and the Door County BRIDGES program aims to provide friendship, assistance, group social events and helpful services to them. The program helps students get around with volunteer transportation, organizes events and links student visitors with local pals.

help from **HENRICO COUNTY**'s Office of Virginia Cooperative Extension through its **SMART Scapes** program, which helps residents assess their home landscape, offering guidance on planting, pruning and mulching.

Master Gardener volunteers will visit homes to analyze the landscape, prepare a property map, and offer fact sheets on current plantings and general gardening information and a soil sampling kit.

Rescue Plan Act. The program covers county residents with children under age four who meet income requirements.

*News From Across the Nation is compiled by Charlie Ban and Meredith Moran. Does your county have news we should know about? Contact [cban@naco.org](mailto:cban@naco.org) and [mmoran@naco.org](mailto:mmoran@naco.org).*

**VIRGINIA**

• Homeowners can get some



**OHIO**

Children in the foster care system will get to take in pop musician Taylor Swift's Cincinnati concert thanks to a new **HAMILTON COUNTY** program funded by the American Rescue Plan Act. The **Beyond Your Imagination** program aims to provide the children with fun experiences, like attending Cincinnati FC soccer games and enjoying Swift's concert from the county's suite in the venue.

"These young people have many life experiences, some I don't think adults could even handle," said Commissioner Stephanie Summerow Dumas. "We want to be a part of having the good memories outweigh the bad. We want to make sure that youth are given the opportunity to attend a play, to go to a museum, to experience a summer camp."

**NEW JERSEY**

**Hearing-impaired residents** will be able to use new technology in several **BURLINGTON COUNTY** government buildings to make meeting rooms and offices more inclusive and accessible. They are intended to help remove barriers that challenge or limit those with hearing impairments from participating in public meetings and court proceedings or from accessing important government

services and programs. The improvements include the installation of hearing loops, portable hearing hotspots, transmitters and receivers. The improvements are located in various county offices in the Burlington County administration and courts facilities as well as in the county's Human Services Building, Health Department Building and library.

Hearing loops assist people with hearing impairments by

directly transmitting audio into telecoil-enabled hearing aids or "neck loop" devices via magnetic fields. Doing so amplifies the voices or sounds from a microphone or an audio system and greatly reduces background noises. Most prescription hearing aids and implants have telecoils. Transmitters and receiver systems use low-power radio frequencies to transmit sounds to receivers, such as headphones or neck loops.

# I Love My County

## Because...

# ART CONTEST

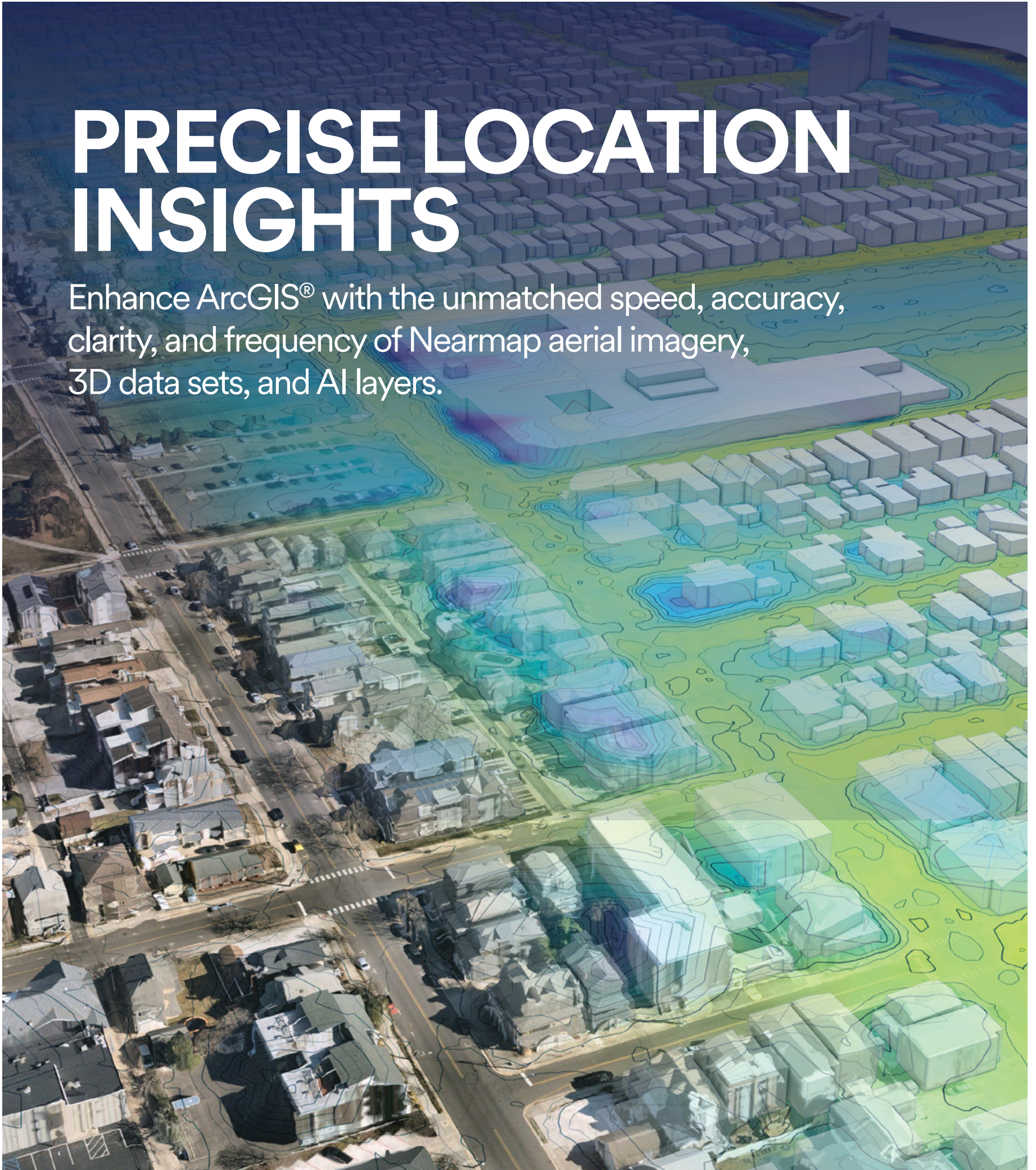
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