

The Iowa County

magazine



February 2022
ISAC Top Legislative Priorities
Open Meetings



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ISAC's Mission:

To promote effective and responsible county government
for the people of Iowa.

ISAC's Vision:

To be the principal, authoritative source of representation,
information and services for and about county government
in Iowa.

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Overview of Need - Open Meetings

The state open meetings law under Iowa Code Chapter 21 allows a governmental body to conduct a meeting by electronic means only in circumstances where such a meeting in person is impossible or impractical. Under the Governor's Declaration of Disaster Emergency proclamation for the COVID-19 pandemic, governmental bodies were authorized to hold meetings by electronic means, so long as proper notice and access were provided to the public, and all other requirements of Chapter 21 were met.

Given courthouse closures and recommendations for social distancing, the suspension of in-person meeting requirements was welcomed by counties and others. It was also realized that it allowed more flexibility in scheduling, better attendance if members with multiple obligations could join from anywhere via electronic means, and it cut down on travel time and expense.

In discussing this issue, I like to share that when the legislative committee for the county supervisors first discussed this proposal, the meeting was conducted on Zoom and there were members at their courthouse, at their home, at their other job, in their car ready to go to another meeting, and on vacation. This was a meeting that in years past would have been held in person at the ISAC office with members driving from all over the state. The same scenario likely played out all over the state during the pandemic for county, regional/district, and statewide meetings. Not only was meeting via electronic means a necessity, but it also became a convenient way to bring people together to conduct business.

Another aspect of electronic meetings that cannot be overstated is the transparency, access, and chance for participation provided to the public. Frankly, driving to the county courthouse or administrative office for a board meeting is not really that convenient for the public, and it can be very time consuming. With a board of supervisors meeting conducted on Zoom (as one example), a member of the public can simply click a link and tune in from the comfort of their home, office, or any place with connectivity. They can tune in at the posted time for the agenda item they are interested in or just passively listen as other items are discussed. Multi-taskers rejoice as they can keep an eye and ear on their local government while accomplishing other tasks. The sunlight provided is a good thing, as is increased access and participation.

With the expiration of the gubernatorial proclamation, counties and other governmental bodies reverted to the "impossible or impractical" threshold, leading to differing legal opinions on what qualified. After seeing the benefits, many counties would like to continue to meet via electronic means and most would at least like the option. With these desires, along with the advantages witnessed in mind, ISAC is calling on the Iowa Legislature to amend Iowa Code §21.8(1) by striking "only in circumstances where such a meeting in person is impossible or impractical". Today's technology with its advantages and capabilities could not have been contemplated when the law was written, and this change would authorize a governmental body to conduct business by electronic means regularly or on occasion, at its discretion, so long as all other open meetings requirements are met.



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The Pros and Cons of Online Meetings

As we work through this crazy time with the coronavirus, we have come to different assessments as to what has worked and what hasn't in how we continue to offer services to our citizens. We are trying to offer these services in the most economical fashion possible. What about the area of our public meetings?

Many supervisors have weekly or biweekly meetings in their individual counties. However, these same supervisors also sit on a range of different committees, from seven or eight to even more. Many of these committee meetings are multi-county boards, so travel is sometimes required.

If I am looking at just the dollar figures, having all online meetings would save immensely on mileage, meals, and travel reimbursement. These costs can add up. Time is money, as the old saying goes. In this case, miles are money.

With only electronic meetings, we would have a cost to make that switch. For some counties, it has been hard to hold meetings over phone lines, so some counties have spent the money on an online meeting system such as an "Owl" system. This technology comes at a cost, but it does allow for visual meetings. If I have a meeting in the next county and it is not going to be a long meeting, is it reasonable for me to drive thirty minutes for a thirty-minute meeting when I could participate online without incurring any mileage or other costs?

How about our constituents? Would an electronic meeting be well received by the taxpayer? Some would like the change, and some would not. Some people are tech savvy and hopping on for the short bit of a meeting would be a wise use of their time. To others that are not, would we alienate them from taking part in public meetings? That is not what any of us want to do.

In the general day-to-day operations, Clay County has tried to offer its services to our citizens as close to normal as possible while being cautious and concerned for everyone. We put up plexiglass as well as offered drive-up services. We could see that we had people on all sides of the situation we were going through. I do not think the discussion of how to handle public meetings is any different. We could take a poll across the state and probably get a range of responses from, 'These meetings should be in person and only in person'. Some may say, 'That is how it has been and that is how it should stay'. And others may say 'All public meetings should be held electronically to save time and especially money'.

As leaders of our county, it is our job to be good stewards but also look at how times change. It is our job to always strive to look for ways to improve our services and be as transparent and informative to our constituents as we possibly can. More than likely, when we step back and look at how we continue improving our service through this time, we will see that it probably will be a mixture of answers. Can we make public meetings a little more flexible while still representing our constituents? Can we ensure the wise use of time as well as taxpayer money while using technology to allow supervisors, as well as constituents, to take part in meetings remotely? I can see meetings being held in person as they have always been with the option for a supervisor to represent his county electronically. Wouldn't it also be a good thing for concerned citizens to be able to take an active role in their local government by attending virtually? If that means that we need to make some changes to our long-standing procedures, then I say yes. Each county can make decisions on what best fits their county. Bringing our public meeting laws up to date would only make us better leaders for our constituents.



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Technology Upgrades

Video Conferencing is a technology that has sprung up across the nation in relation to the pandemic. More and more individuals are moving their offices from work to home in efforts to comply with social distancing guidelines. Counties and businesses are hastily building out conference rooms and handing out webcams

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to keep their workforce intact, while still maintaining social distancing. But are these buildouts adequate or necessary? There are so many things that must be considered when attempting to meet these requirements, especially when they often spring up new issues that were not anticipated. Many counties are slapping a standard webcam to a computer with little regard to how inadequate that serves them. This thought process works for standard multiple users in one meeting, but what about conference rooms? What are the items you need to consider to fulfill open meeting requirements? Or a general collection with two different sites involved? I'll start with the room.

The room itself needs careful consideration regarding the construction and how many windows or walls it includes. Sound bounces off any hard surface, which in turn can produce artifacts. Artifacts are little noises that you hear during a video conference. They aren't full blown echoes but are little sounds that bounce and traverse the system which the other party hears. It's the main reason recording studios and companies well versed in video conferencing, or sound in general, have cloth walls and carpet. Fabrics absorb sound; the softer the fabric the more sound absorbed. Iowa counties typically have tile floors and plaster or dry wall for their walls in the Board of Supervisor rooms, which really aren't conducive for video conferencing. Using hard surfaces won't necessarily prevent communication, but it will have a small impact and can be distracting. This is something to note when selecting a room for video conferencing.

Another item not often considered is infrastructure. Can your network support video conferencing? I often equate video conferencing to streaming movies or TV shows. If your network cannot stream video, it certainly isn't going to be able to support video conferencing. The more individuals that video conference, the faster the internet needs to be. If a county wants to do a single board of supervisor meeting online, then slower speeds are fine. However, when you introduce multiple individuals trying to video conference at that exact same time, then internet speed needs to be bumped up. Video is very fickle, which is why it's usually the first to go when you have network issues. Video conferencing should be done hardwired not over Wi-Fi, but that's not to say Wi-Fi can't be leveraged under the right circumstances with positive results. Wi-Fi is a gamble that can pay off, but hard wire is a guarantee that your video won't degrade or become pixelated during your meeting; that is unless the other party has a less than stellar connection.

Equipment is another consideration regarding video conferencing. When building out a video conferencing room, the solution is not a random desktop with a camera. Even using this equipment in smaller huddle rooms is not the most ideal solution. Reason being is most webcams have microphones built-in that are only designed for one voice within the distance of a couple of feet. Webcams have limited scope when it comes to visibility as well. A standard webcam doesn't have the resolution to encompass an entire room, even if the room is no bigger than a standard closet. Generally speaking, the larger the room, the less likely an integrated microphone and camera is going to work. Microphones need to be close to the person or persons speaking, while cameras need to be farther away to include the entire table or party. There lies the difficulty of using an integrated microphone and camera. In bigger conference rooms, these functions need to be separated.

A standard desktop adds additional complexity with management on both the side of the end user and the IT Staff maintaining it. Equipment leveraged must be considered with the style and scale of the room that is being turned into a video conferencing room. A standard desktop and monitor with a webcam works great for the average end user. However, when building a video conferencing room, leveraging that type of equipment is going to result in a poor experience all the way around. This experience includes all parties having issues being able to hear, see, speak, encounter artifacts, and the list goes on. A different solution needs to be scaled to the type of room being used.

Technology Upgrades

How the meeting is ended has big effect on the end user, and I'm not talking about the content of the meeting. I'm talking about how the individual running the meeting has to end the meeting. A head unit or tablet, so to speak, provides a better experience all the way around, than say having an end user walk up to a desktop to manage a meeting. If possible, I advocate for the use of a tablet to control the meeting. In this example, the end user doesn't do any signing in to a desktop, they just input their meeting code and passcode and tap on "Join Meeting" and that's how their meeting starts. To end the meeting they just tap "End Meeting for All" and the meeting ends; the end user then just moves on to the next item in their day. No additional work on the part of the tablet is required except maybe hooking it back up to power.

What platform is better than others? Researching this is more dependent upon the IT maturity of the user base and what you currently leverage when it comes to communications. Cisco Webex is more hardware based which could be a bit more seamless between devices. Microsoft Teams is more software based and offers a fluid experience with Microsoft 365 integration. Zoom works a bit better with Apple devices I have found. Ring Central looks more to be a direct competitor to Zoom than any other platform. The environment and the userbase dictate what platform should be used more than anything else. There are strengths and weaknesses across them all. If you leverage Cisco more than anything else, I would gravitate towards Cisco Webex, as you'll probably have better integration with the phone system and exercise features you wouldn't be able to on other platforms. Microsoft 365? Teams is probably a better answer. The point is all of the platforms offer some sort of conference room functionality that provides a much better experience than trying to use the standard desktop webcam setup. Through my own experience, Zoom is a great option but is also more expensive than the others. Zoom is a bit more rigid to work with as well. The other platforms I'm certain are a bit more lax on their hardware requirements and by extension are less expensive.

Can the Board of Supervisors authorize an electronic meeting, i.e. video conferencing? As of right, now the State of Iowa is under the Governor's Declaration of Disaster Emergency Proclamation which authorizes video conferencing as a means to hold meetings provided that proper notice and access is given to the public. Once this declaration expires the law reverts back to "impossible or impractical". That will not necessarily get rid of video conferencing altogether, but it could force counties to revert back to their old practices. The terms "impossible" or "impractical" are rather subjective in my opinion. Currently, there is legislation occurring to remove those terms so that Supervisors can attend meetings electronically.

To broadcast a meeting live there are some required items that need to be in place before a broadcast can be attempted. You'll need the equipment and software to be able to hold a meeting obviously. I suggest tweaking the software as well to tailor to the meeting, meaning utilizing a webinar license. I suggest a webinar environment with a room attendant. A citizen should not be able to randomly disrupt the meeting at any given chance when utilizing a webinar license. In a webinar, there are panelists and participants. Panelists can openly speak, while participants can post in the chat. Citizens in this environment would be participants, while subject matter experts, the Supervisors, or even the room itself would be the panelists. The room attendant monitors the chat so that questions are conveyed appropriately while the meeting is going. They also can present questions on behalf of a citizen in an orderly fashion. Another option of the webinar is having a hard coded URL (universal resource locator, ie. Google.com) for the meeting on the county's website so that citizens can easily attend without the sending of links via email. Recording the meeting isn't necessary but is an option, and if a Youtube account is created, then the meeting can be uploaded for posterity. However, be advised that uploading these meetings will take significant time due to sheer length.

I've gone over a lot of little items that aren't necessarily considered with video conferencing. The intent is to provide some answers to questions that aren't considered immediately and to pass on a better experience to the citizens of the county. An experience beyond what the standard desktop and webcam can provide.

Basic Open Meetings Guidance

As we have moved into this time where meeting electronically has become common place, there are few questions I have frequently received about how to properly conduct public meetings electronically. Please note, that this article is based on current Iowa law (February 2021).

Q: Can we vote via email as a part of an electronic meeting?

Iowa Code Chapter 21 does not allow votes to be taken through email. According to Iowa Code Section 21.3, “Each governmental body shall keep minutes of all its meetings showing the date, time and place, the members present, and the action taken at each meeting. The minutes shall show the results of each vote taken and information sufficient to indicate the vote of each member present. The vote of each member present shall be made public at the open session. The minutes shall be public records open to public inspection.”

Even when pandemic proclamations were in place that more broadly allowed electronic meetings, voting procedure requirements stayed the same. Votes should be by a show of hands or a roll call so participants know who voted how. If board members are appearing electronically, it’s important they have their cameras and/or microphones on so that the public can understand the voting.

Additionally, not only is voting via email not allowed, but you should proceed with caution when discussing county business via email with other board members. Receiving information is allowable, but if a quorum of board members is participating in an email discussion that rises to the level of deliberation or action, then a violation of the law can occur.

Q: What are the rules for public participation during an electronic meeting?

I have received many variations of this question, such as: Can we remove a member of the public from a public meeting if they are being disruptive? Do we have to allow members of the public to speak during an electronic meeting?

The general rule of thumb is that holding a meeting electronically does not change the procedures for public participation. Iowa Code allows the public to listen in to public meetings. It does not require that the public have the opportunity to participate in the meeting, although many counties may have a policy that allows the public to participate in some manner. As with any public meeting, it is important that you follow your policy and practices consistently for public participation even when meeting electronically. If you typically ask members of the public to sign in when they attend a public meeting in person, then it is likely reasonable to ask members of the public to identify themselves when they attend a public meeting electronically. If a member of the public is being disruptive in a way that they would be removed from in-person meeting, then it would be reasonable to remove them from an electronic meeting.

The wrinkle here is not really a legal one, but a technical one about how you will handle muting members of the public if it is not a point in the meeting where public participation is allowed and/or how you will remove someone if they are being disruptive. Most electronic meeting platforms have a way for the meeting host to mute or remove participants, but you may need to consider who will be in charge of those activities. If you have a current meeting procedures policy for public participation in public meetings, you may want to review it to determine if tweaks need to be made in order to accommodate electronic meeting procedures.

Another consideration is Iowa Code Section 21.7, which states “[t]he public may use cameras or recording devices at any open session. Nothing in this chapter [21] shall prevent a governmental body from making and enforcing reasonable rules for the conduct of its meetings to assure those meetings are orderly, and free from interference or interruption by spectators.” These provisions would also apply in the same manner for electronic or in-person meetings. If the county decides to record its electronic public meeting, that recording would likely be a public record subject to review and inspection by the public.

As we continue to navigate the most efficient use of electronic public meetings, please remember to always consult with your county attorney and feel free to reach out to me with any questions.



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Increased Transparency

TRANSPARENCY IN GOVERNANCE - What does it mean and how can we best provide it?

This chapter seeks to assure, through a requirement of open meetings of governmental bodies, that the basis and rationale of governmental decisions, as well as those decisions themselves, are easily accessible to the people. Code of Iowa, Chapter 21.1 Intent – declaration of policy.

When Iowa's Open Meetings law was passed in 1967, the primary way citizens or journalists found out what decisions were being made by governmental bodies, and the rationale for those decisions, was to attend their meetings in person. Other than the occasional meeting being held by conference call when meeting in person was deemed "impossible or impractical", it remained largely that way in most jurisdictions for over half a century. And although some public bodies had begun to broadcast their meetings in the last decade or two, many (like Story County) were still delayed broadcasts and, even if broadcast in real time, the only way for a citizen to make public comment was by attending in person.



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As with so many things, COVID-19 changed that. The Governor's March 20, 2020 Emergency Proclamation allowed governmental bodies to hold meetings by electronic means, **as long as proper notice and access were provided to the public** (emphasis added).

The question then was how to best provide access to the public while keeping everyone safe.

The answer was, of course, technology.

In Story County, we closed our Administration Building to the public on March 18, 2020. The Supervisors continued meeting in person (safely distanced and masked), but access to the meetings was provided, first by conference call, then by using Zoom. We re-opened the building to the public on October 5, 2020 (to coincide with the start of early voting) and allowed members of the public to attend in person, with a lowered limit on our meeting room's capacity to allow for social distancing. Even when we returned to "nearer normal" operations in 2021, we continued to offer public access to our meetings via Zoom.

Our primary reason for continuing virtual access is that it provides greater, more convenient, access to our deliberations. In Story County, where the vast majority of our residents live several miles from our administration building, most residents must travel to attend a meeting. (Two-thirds of the county's population lives in Ames, which is ten miles from Nevada, the county seat.) Also, many of our staff live or work throughout the county. By continuing the video conferencing format, we maintain increased accessibility for all county residents, staff, and representatives of agencies to attend our meetings, in their entirety or just for a topic of interest.

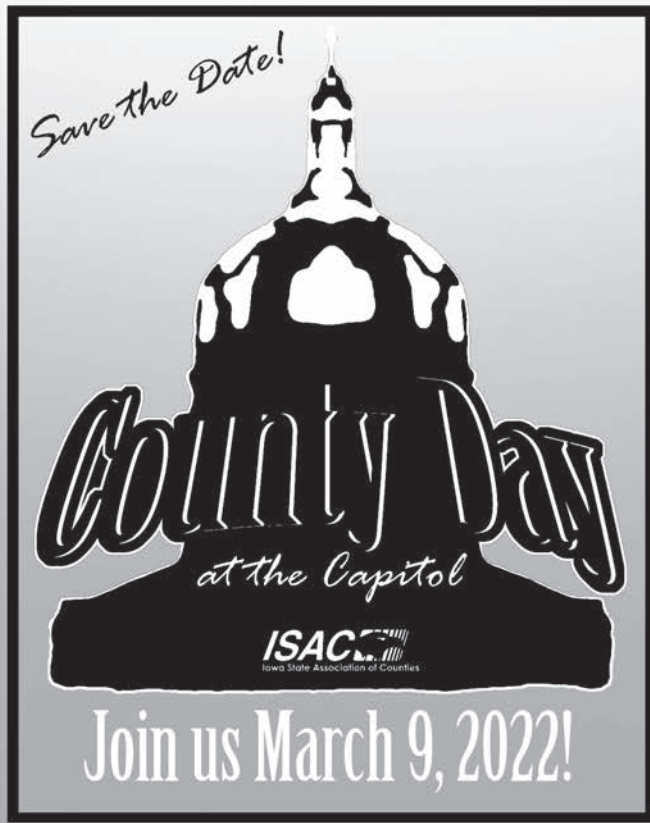
We also allow the public to address the board virtually during the public comment sessions of meetings, ranging from drainage district meetings to discussion of application of the master matrix for a CAFO siting. We have also provided virtual access to work sessions held by the Supervisors to discuss applications for ARPA funds, our Capital Improvements Plan, the results of our newly-completed Housing Study, and other topics. Some of these meetings required significant advance planning due to a high level of interest. We utilized our website to allow residents to sign up to comment, and several staff assisted to make it go smoothly.

Increased Transparency

Other Boards and Commissions have also elected to meet virtually: our Board of Health, Planning and Zoning Commission, Board of Adjustment, and Emergency Management Commission to name a few. In addition, many regional boards on which the Supervisors and county staff serve are meeting virtually or in a “hybrid” mode. Being able to attend virtually is a true convenience, as it can eliminate hours of travel. And it meets the test of making the basis and rationale of governmental decisions, as well as those decisions themselves, easily accessible to the people.

What are the downsides of meeting virtually? Some say there is better debate of issues in person. I personally think the “hybrid” approach, where the public body meets in person, while allowing the public to attend either in person or virtually, has worked well for the Story County Supervisors. By meeting together, even during the earlier days of the pandemic, we felt more like a team, rather than three individuals in our separate tiles on the zoom screen. But I also think there are definite advantages to both county and regional boards allowing the option for members to attend virtually, especially in winter months when travel can be hazardous.

In an age when nearly everyone can access the internet through a computer or a smart phone, should virtual meetings become a part of local government, as well as of business, education, and nearly every other aspect of our society? In Story County, the answer is a strong “yes”.



Join us on Wednesday, March 9, for County Day at the Capitol.

Schedule of events

10:00 am - 11:00 am
Legislative Updates
Wallace Building

11:00 am - 2:00 pm
Affiliate Displays and
Legislative Interaction
Capitol Rotunda

11:30 am
Lunch
Capitol Rotunda West Wing

Pre-Register beginning Wednesday, January 5, 2022 for County Day at the Capitol. This event will begin at the Wallace Building auditorium. There will be special presenters on the hot issues of the time. From there, the group will travel to the Capitol. The time at the statehouse will give county officials the opportunity to participate in the lobbying process by meeting with their legislators.

This year's event is being held in conjunction with the 2022 ISAC Spring School Conference, March 10-11. Hotel accommodations are available at discounted rates on Tuesday, March 8 at the spring conference hotels. You must pre-register for the spring conference on the ISAC website before making your hotel reservations.

We have secured space in the Capitol Rotunda for affiliate displays. This will give each individual affiliate the opportunity to introduce legislators and the public to your important roles in the effective administration of county government.

Lunch will be provided for legislators and attending county officials in the Capitol Rotunda West Wing. This will again give county officials the opportunity to interact with legislators. Please pre-register for an accurate lunch count.

In order to have the opportunity to meet with your legislators on this day, each county is encouraged to set up meetings with their legislators in advance. Most days of the session are extremely busy and having a scheduled time with your legislators is very important to make the most of your day.

As an ISAC member county it is important to be involved in the legislative session and to work to promote ISAC's legislative priorities and objectives. County Day at the Capitol will give our members the opportunity to support ISAC's efforts and work towards improving county government.

It is our hope that by making a concentrated effort to focus on county issues on just one day, that we will have the greatest impact at the Capitol.

Please pre-register at www.iowacounties.org, and mark your calendars now for March 9, 2022! Pre-registration closes at 4:00 pm on Thursday, February 24.

County Day at the Capitol & Spring Conference



ISAC County Day at the Capitol | March 9

Wallace Building and Iowa State Capitol

Free to attend, but please pre-register!

Join all ISAC members and staff as we advocate for good county government at the Statehouse. Affiliate displays will be setup around the Rotunda and lunch will be served to all attending county officials and legislators during County Day at the Capitol on March 9.

ISAC Spring Conference | March 10-11

Veterans' Memorial Community Choice Credit Union Convention Center

Reduced rate pre-registration is available through 4:00pm on Thursday, February 24. The Spring Conference will feature two full days of education including a general session, educational seminar (see descriptions below), and ample affiliate time. Hot breakfast will be served Thursday and Friday and a reception will be held on Thursday evening in the exhibit hall. Lunch will also be provided to attendees both days. Find all the details at www.iowacounties.org.

ISAC Educational Seminars

9:00 am – 10:15 am | Thursday, March 10

Healing Iowa: Overview of ACEs in Iowa and How to Respond

Learn about Iowa research on adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and how trauma impacts health and well-being. Reflect on factors that contribute to childhood trauma and explore ways to promote healing and resilience in your counties and engage in systems change efforts.

Speaker: Lisa Cushatt, LMSW, Executive Director, Iowa ACEs 360

The Ten Habits of Highly Effective Counties

Sometimes, issues can get a little out of control and all your county seems to get done is “put out fires”. Then, perhaps, you may want to attend this workshop, to learn why some counties just don’t seem to “have their act together”, but other counties and their leaders have done some amazing things for their counties. The success that occurs in many outstanding counties does not just happen without effective leadership and careful planning. This workshop will focus on the “ten habits of highly effective counties” and how your county might benefit from their approach. Join us for a short presentation and a lively discussion on how your county can accomplish great things and get beyond those nasty “fires” in your county.

Speaker: Patrick Callahan, Callahan Municipal Consultants, LLC

County Day at the Capitol & Spring Conference

Flood Monitoring, Forecasting, and Mapping with IFC and IDNR

Thanks to the Iowa Legislature's leadership and foresight in creating the Iowa Flood Center (IFC) in 2009, Iowans have access to the latest technology and resources to help them prepare for floods and become more resilient to their effects. The IFC puts science-based information and technology in the hands of Iowa's decision-makers, emergency managers, home and business owners, and the public through the Iowa Flood Information System (IFIS) online platform. The presentation will focus on flood monitoring, forecasting, and mapping tools available through IFIS to help counties to understand and reduce their flood risks. Attendees will also learn about a new IFIS-like platform developed for the Missouri River following the 2019 floods, designed to help the region prepare for future flooding. The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) will provide insight into the new pricing methodology under Risk Rating 2.0 and the impacts to policyholders and their communities across Iowa. On October 1st, 2021 FEMA implemented Risk Rating 2.0 and changed the way flood insurance rates are calculated. For over 50 years FEMA has determined flood insurance rates by which flood zone a structure is located on a Flood Insurance Rate Map. Risk Rating 2.0 FEMA aims to create a more individualized picture of a property's flood risk. The new pricing methodology will consider the distance to flooding sources, cost to rebuild, prior claims and many other variables. With this transformation, FEMA is striving to deliver rates that are actuarially sound, equitable and easier for policyholders to understand. Time will be reserved for questions and answers.

Speakers: Iowa Flood Center, Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Need help getting registered? Contact support@iowacounties.org and we'll be happy to help!

Recapping the Latest NACo Events

“Don’t let them kid you. It’s all rural.”

Mike Bergan, Former Winneshiek County Supervisor.

Before I delve into the last two NACo conferences/symposiums/meetings I attended, I want to give a shout out to those Iowa counties that became new NACo members recently. Jefferson, Keokuk, Page, Taylor, Van Buren, Adams, and Ringgold. I apologize if I missed anyone. I think the work NACo did regarding the ARPA funding made folks realize the need to be a NACo member. The information and guidance NACo provided was a big help to the county finance staff, especially the auditors. Some of them paid the \$450 membership fee from their own budget just so they could stay up to date on any changes. Thanks to all of you, and I hope you continue to be NACo members.

Normally, the Western Interstate Conference is held in May. This year it was moved to October and was preceded by a Rural Action Caucus Symposium, held in Salt Lake County. I was unable to get that article written due to time constraints getting ready for the November election. President Johnson’s board meeting was in December in Dekalb County, Georgia and was preceded by a Large Urban County Caucus Symposium. So, I thought I would write about the differences and similarities between RAC and LUCC in one comprehensively brief article.

At both were presentations on the American Rescue Plan Act. But since you all have been knee deep into that, I won’t need to elaborate on that issue. I do need to relate a quote from a speaker that I want to share regarding ARPA. “Do not hire a consultant. Just use NACo.” So I’m sitting there with Grant Veeder during an ARP session with NACo staffers, Chief Economist Teryn Zmuda and Eryn Hurly (the one you’ve seen on the webinars). I leaned over to Grant and said that Teryn and Eryn are up on stage and he should write a limerick about it. In about two minutes he gave me this:

Some people continue to carp
Concerning the details of ARP
So NACo got Eryn
Assisted by Teryn
To make us all current and sharp

Usually at a WIR conference, there is much discussion on environmental concerns, especially of the government owned land. National Parks, Bureau of Land Management, National Forests, and the Forest Service. As you know, Western states have been dealing with wild fires, severe drought, and low reservoir levels. I was chatting with a Utah rancher and said that we in Iowa have been getting plenty of moisture. My county is a drainage county and our drainage districts are trying to get rid of the water. He jokingly said to send some his way. At LUCC in December, a gentleman from Ohio said there are some Western folks who want to drain water from the Great Lakes to fill low reservoirs. I chuckled at the absurdity of such a Herculean effort. However, he was serious that some are really advocating for that. Remember back in the day when we were putting bricks in our toilets and showering together?

At a WIR conference many of the discussions revolve around the Federal government’s perceived mismanagement of federally owned lands. The ranchers there think they know how to better handle environmental concerns like forestry, water, and wildlife issues. They may be right. This makes me think about how we in Iowa have handled our privately owned lands. Did you know that Iowa is the most environmentally/ecologically altered state in the country? Our ancestor’s homesteads brought saws to cut down hardwood forests, plows to turn over the western grasslands, and spades to drain the Northern wetlands. Because, well, that’s just what we did in those days. Now we are trying to re-establish wetlands, timbers, prairies, and that which we lost. An audience member at a seminar on the environment asked the expert speaker what is the most important thing we can do for the environment. “Pay attention,” was his only response. We are all still learning, I guess.

Both RAC and LUCC symposiums had workshops on diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts in government. Several large counties have gone so far as to hire DEI directors. It seemed like the LUCC counties were more engaged with this concept.



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Recapping the Latest NACo Events

Presumably, because they have more people issues than environmental/land issues. So, I'm talking to this guy who thinks the whole concept of DEI is not that worthy of effort. We've always had, and will continue to have segments of our society looked down upon, he said. The Irish, Italians, Eastern Europeans, and others have worked their way in to acceptance throughout the years. One of the great things about attending a NACo Conference is hearing opinions from a diversity of people. It makes one think and ponder. So, this conversation got me to thinking. Over the past 300 or so years, haven't we been using or abusing our lands and waters and wildlife in an oppressive sort of manner? Rivers on fire, foul air, loss of wildlife habitat, etc. In July of 1970, President Richard Nixon signed into law the establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency. Is DEI like an EPA for people? Maybe I think too much!



I've used the epigraph at the beginning of my article before, but I really like it and it seems appropriate for this article. First, the story behind it. I was at a CRIS Board meeting years ago, discussing with Scott County Supervisor Otto Ewold which Iowa counties were urban and which were rural, when Mike Bergan chimed in with the quote. I didn't know if he meant that all Iowa counties were relatively small compared to large urban counties in other states. Or did he mean that everything we depend on for the survival of mankind comes from rural areas? Food, fiber, fuel, building materials, etc. I like to think it is the latter.

While in Georgia, one of our mobile workshops took us to the Metro Atlanta Urban Farm. MAUF works to reduce barriers to healthy living by promoting agriculture to eliminate food insecurity and also offers training to beginning farmers. Obviously not corn and beans but veggie crops. One lady, who is a holistic therapist, had a plot of herbs like rosemary and sage that are to be good for one's wellbeing. The best part was watching her son tend the garden. But the best best thing about the tour was seeing several inner-city high school students wearing FFA jackets! I don't hang around high school youth very much these days, so I hadn't seen an FFA jacket for years. But to see students from a LUCC county who are in FFA was really nice. I wish I had taken a photo.

Well, shoot. I've been rattling along for way too long. To experience NACo, the best thing you could do is go to a conference and talk with and get to know folks from other counties across the country. Next summer the Annual Conference will be held in Adams County, Colorado. Hope to see many of you all there.



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2022 Calendar

February 2022

- 2 ISAC Executive Committee Meeting (Virtual)
- 9 ISAC Board of Directors Meeting (Virtual)
- 10 Statewide Supervisors Meeting (Embassy Suites Des Moines Downtown)
- 12-16 NACo Legislative Conference (Washington Hilton, Washington, D.C.)
- 15-18 ISSDA February Jail School (Holiday Inn Airport, Des Moines)

March 2022

- 9 ISAC County Day at the Capitol (Iowa State Capitol Building)
- 10-11 ISAC Spring Conference (Veterans Memorial Community Choice Credit Union Convention Center, Des Moines)

April 2022

- 10-13 ISSDA Civil School (Holiday Inn Airport, Des Moines)
- 28 ISAC Board of Directors Meeting (ISAC Office)

May 2022

- 3-5 Public Health Conference of Iowa (Hybrid - Scheman Conference Center, Ames)
- 19-20 Western Interstate Region (WIR) Conference Anchorage, Alaska

June 2022

- 21-24 ISACA Summer Conference (Hotel Julien, Dubuque)
- 29 ISAC Board of Directors Meeting (ISAC Office)

July 2022

- 13 ISAC Scholarship Golf Fundraiser (Otter Creek Golf Course, Ankeny)
- 21-24 NACo Annual Conference (Adams County/Aurora, Colorado)

August 2022

- 2-4 ISAC Board of Directors Retreat (Mills County)
- 24-26 ISAC Annual Conference (Veterans Memorial Community Choice Credit Union Convention Center, Des Moines)

September 2022

- 20-23 ISSDA Fall Jail School (Airport Holiday Inn, Des Moines)

October 2022

- 9-12 Assessors Fall School (Airport Holiday Inn, Des Moines)

November 2022

- 17 ISAC Board of Directors Meeting (ISAC Office)

December 2022

- 13-16 ISSDA Winter School (Holiday Inn Des Moines Airport)
- 14-16 ICEA Conference (Veterans Memorial Community Choice Credit Union Convention Center, Des Moines)

If you have any questions about the meetings listed above or would like to add an affiliate meeting to the ISAC calendar, please contact Kelsey Sebern at ksebern@iowacounties.org.

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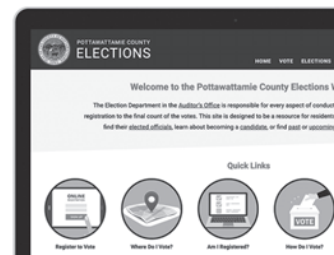
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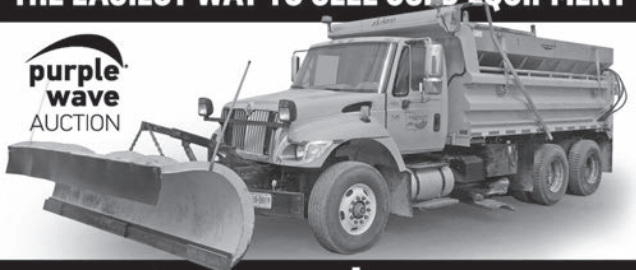


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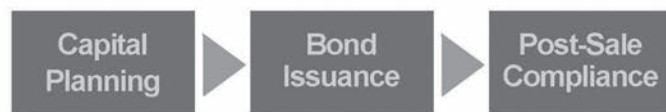


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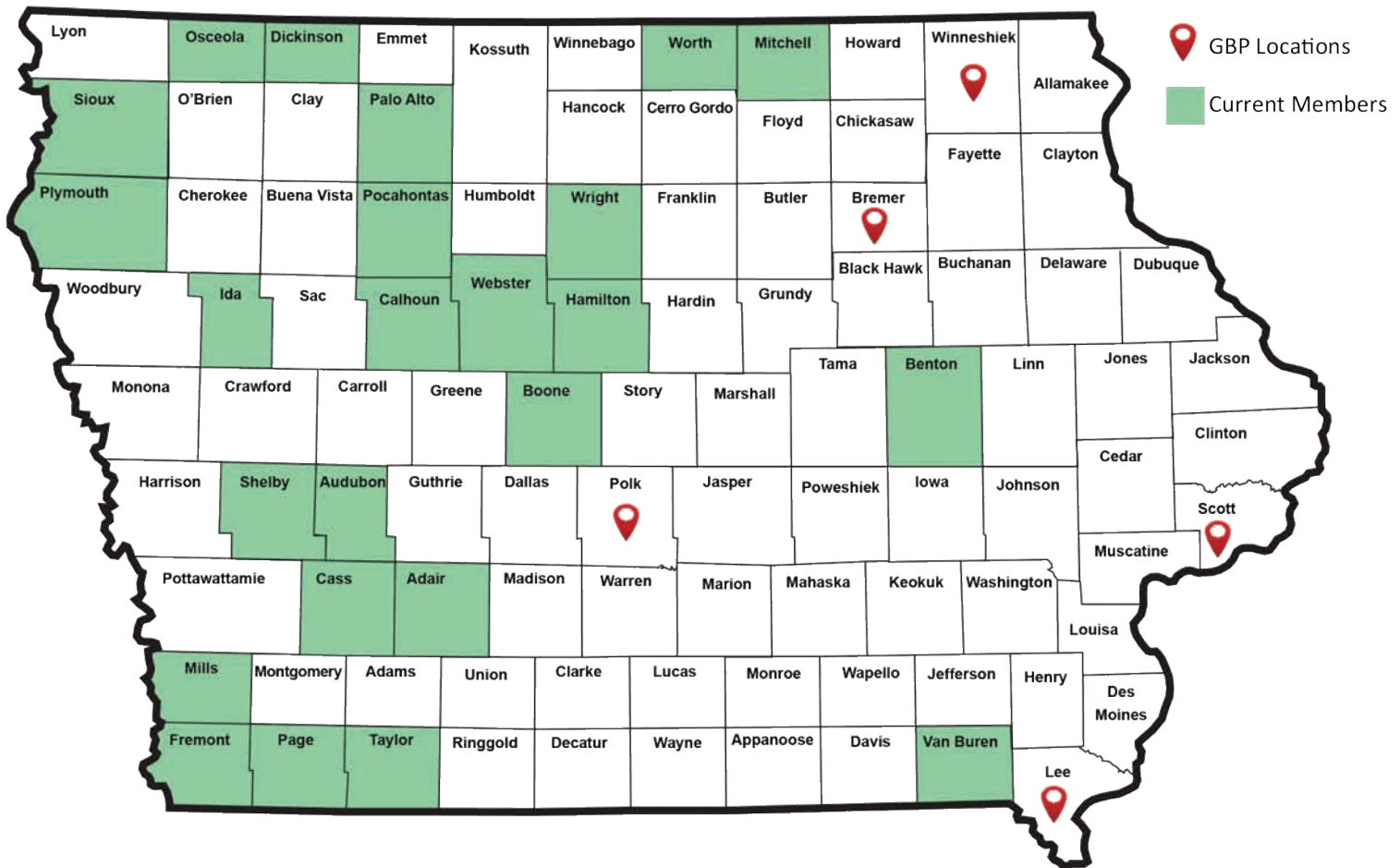
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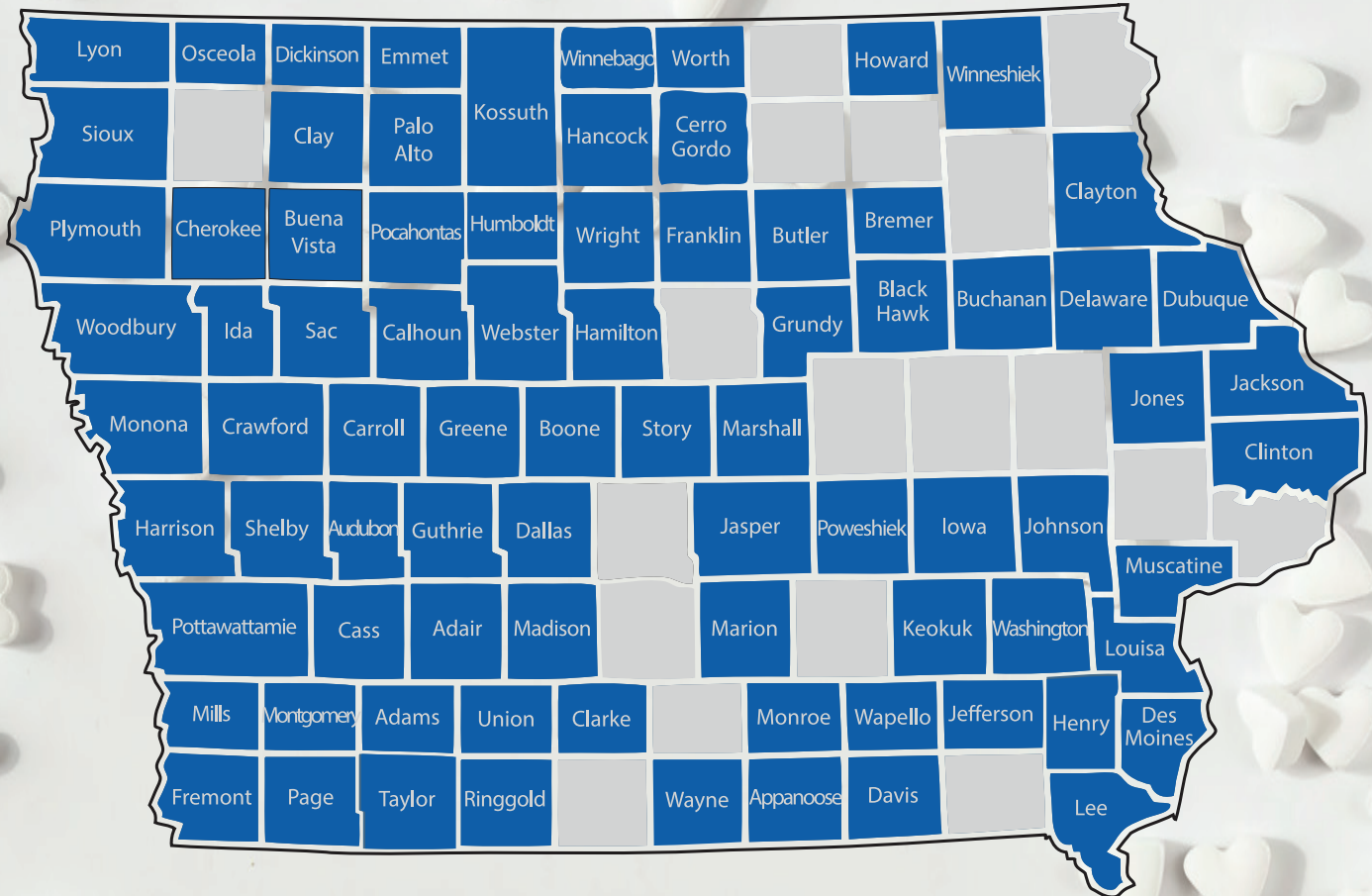
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