

Minnesota Counties

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Minnesota Counties On National Stage

National Association of Counties (NACo) President Mary Jo McGuire, a Ramsey County Commissioner and AMC Past President, welcomed **U.S. President Joe Biden** to the stage at NACo's Legislative Conference in Washington, D.C., in February.

ASSOCIATION

President's Column

By Neal Gaalswyk,
Cass County
Commissioner
2024 AMC President



*"It was a day like all days,
filled with those events that alter
and illuminate our times,
and you, my friends, were there."*

Some attribute the above quote to Walter Cronkite, others aren't so sure. I first heard it from a farmer friend, who thought he was quoting his dad. Whatever its origin, it sums up what we are about at the Association of Minnesota Counties. We meet and discuss, listen and learn, debate our policy statements, decide on a course of action, dispatch our policy analysts, engage our legislators and speak as one. We do all of this to inform others, to shed light on otherwise obscure topics, and to change the future of our state and communities in a way that aligns with our collective, preferred vision.

This past year has brought a sea-swell of change to our state, politically, socially, and economically. For some, this was a freshening wind, a breath of fresh air, and a promise of new opportunity. Others may have experienced it as a tsunami that swept away years of tradition, eroded solid foundations, and challenged long held beliefs. Regardless of how it felt to us individually, as an organization we remained true to our core values and time-honored principles. We stayed the course, managed our differences, presented a united voice, and advanced our goals. All, I believe, for the betterment of our state, our counties, and most importantly, for the people we serve.

Looking forward, we can expect that the winds of change will continue to blow. Many of us are farmers. We know that sometimes the wind brings rain, other times it is laden with dust. In either case, the wind blows. How we respond is up to us. Individually and as an organization, we will need to stay on our game, forward facing, ready to engage, and eager to learn.

Garrison Keillor, when talking about his church, The Sanctified Brethren, and of some internal dispute they were having over a fine point of doctrine, said, "We were blessed with a surplus of scholars and a deficit of peacemakers." I sometimes think that describes our current political climate, with its "Red/Blue" or "Urban/Rural" divide and the partisanship rancor that we see, and speak of, and decry so often. "Agree with me now, it will save so much time..." was the motto above the wrestlers on the poster over my desk. There was a season in my life when I thought that was a good motto, one that described a good path, but that season is past.

"Happy are the peacemakers" was the lesson taught by the itinerant teacher of old. I am proud of the work the Association has done in the area of peacemaking over the past couple of years. Our "Bridging Divides" program has trained elected officials throughout the state, helping us step away from scholarly (partisan?) debates and onto a path leading to common ground. The "Handling Difficult Conversations" workshops we sponsored have been effective in increasing our ability to engage constituents in effective and productive, peace producing conversations.

One of my goals as your president will be to increase these types of AMC sponsored educational opportunities for commissioners and county staff. I would like to see us offer training in conflict resolution, running effective meetings, and perhaps a seminar on tribal relations. These are "popcorn" ideas at this point, and I am eager to hear from you on what you think would be good training opportunities for our organization to host. Forward Together, says NACo, Stronger Together says AMC. Good slogans, both.

"Don't give up meeting together. Remember the old ways as you look to the future with hope," said the ancient prophet to his people. I love that-"...look to the future with hope." Maybe that is what we are all about. We meet together, form committees, hold workshops, consider what has, or has not, worked in the past, and commit to working together, encouraging, challenging, prodding and helping each other. All to provide the hope of a better future for our communities. Thank you to all and to each of you. Today, my friends, you are here. And I am grateful. ●

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Counties Make Important Connections at AMC Legislative Conference and County Day at the Capitol

More than 250 county officials from across Minnesota were in attendance when Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC) 2024 President and Cass County Commissioner Neal Gaalswyk delivered his 'State of the Counties' address during the association's annual Legislative Conference and County Day at the Capitol.

"Here in Minnesota, we have a freedom and an advantage that many of our peers across the country lack because, at the county level, we operate in an officially non-partisan structure," Gaalswyk said. "This is not true across the country, and it is something that we should be thankful for and zealously protect."

"In the spirit of non-partisanship, I encourage all of us to take the time to listen to each other and learn one from another," Gaalswyk continued. "I have placed an emphasis on county commissioner training in the coming year as I firmly believe that as each of us gets better, the organization improves. County government is complex and there is no one among us who knows it all."

Gaalswyk's speech concluded the two-day conference, which focused on legislative issues facing Minnesota counties and attendees meeting with their legislators at the Capitol to discuss issues important to communities across the state. Gaalswyk's term as president of the association ends in December 2024. ●



AMC's Executive Committee and staff before heading in for County Day at the Capitol 2024.

L to R: AMC Executive Director Julie Ring, AMC Second Vice President Larry Lindor (Pope), AMC Secretary/Treasurer Lisa Fobbe (Sherburne), AMC President Neal Gaalswyk (Cass), AMC Past President Mary Jo McGuire, AMC First Vice President Mike Slavik (Dakota), and AMC Government Relations Manager Matt Hilgart.



AMC's Executive Committee and Speaker of the Minnesota House of Representatives Melissa Hortman.



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2024 Legislative Session Now Underway

By AMC Government Relations Staff

The 2024 Legislative Session began February 12, with counties turning their attention to the new list of county legislative priorities approved by the AMC Board of Directors at the Annual Conference in December. Many of these county-approved priorities reflect ongoing work on key community issues surrounding mental health, human services technology modernization, and youth continuum of care, while others—such as tax forfeiture, emergency management services, and waste management and recycling efforts—are reflective of new, but critical, issues impacting counties more recently and demanding a thoughtful legislative approach.

While 2024 represents the second year in the 2023-2024 biennium budget cycle, it will nonetheless host a large assortment of important legislative topics regardless of its shorter duration and more limited budget availability. On this note, it's important to reflect that Minnesota enters 2024 with grayer skies than its prior budget year where the state saw a historic \$17 billion surplus and significant investments in a plethora of county operations ranging from County Program Aid and probation funding to transportation and housing investments.

Minnesota Management and Budget (MMB) says the 2024-25 biennium is now projected to end with a surplus of \$3.715 billion, but a combination of inflation and larger than expected health and human services and education costs will result in a negative structural budget balance in the next biennium. Legislative leadership have responded to this news by focusing their members on prioritizing non-money related issues and garnering enough bipartisan support for a strong bonding bill. Even with these chilly fiscal headwinds, one can expect the Legislature to look towards both policy and small (but urgent) budget item fixes to wrap-up the biennium prior to campaign season beginning post-session adjournment.

Despite the fact that this is technically a “short” legislative session, AMC members can rest assured that there will be no lack of action or debate, as is evidenced by a full committee meeting calendar in the first week. There are updates and overviews, but also a few bills scheduled, including legislation on tax policy, polling places on college campuses, school resource officers and mental health.

AMC's Government Relations Team will continue to provide weekly updates as well as hold membership Zoom updates at strategic times throughout session. Please remember to reach out to government relations team members for policy insight, strategy on legislative outreach, or with any questions/concerns throughout the session!

A New Senate Majority Leader

2023 Senate Majority Leader Kari Dziedzic recently delivered sad news relating to her ongoing battle with cancer, announcing that she had decided to step down from her leadership. Sen. Dziedzic, a former county employee, is a dedicated public servant with a strong record of collaboration, bipartisanship, and effectiveness at the Capitol. She is well-respected by all her senate peers along with staff and members of the public. AMC is saddened to hear about her recent news and wish her the best and hope a cancer-free diagnosis will come soon!

In relation to this news, the Senate DFL Caucus met last week and selected Sen. Erin Murphy, District 64 -St. Paul, to become their caucus' new Majority Leader. Sen. Murphy has extensive experience in the House and Senate working on Health and Human Services issues and is the current chair of the Senate State and Local Government and Veterans Committee. Sen. Murphy will be the first elected Minnesota official to have served as Majority Leader in both legislative chambers. Counties look forward to working with her as the new senate leader. ●



AMC 2024 Legislative Priorities

MENTAL HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES MODERNIZATION

Mental Health/High Acuity Placements

AMC supports investments to expand services and address gaps in the state-wide mental health continuum, specifically to address acute, complex behavioral health placements and community services and clarify the state's safety net role in providing and funding these critical services.

Human Services Systems Modernization

AMC supports structural investments to modernize, sustainably fund, and collaboratively govern human services technology system improvements, with specific targeted funding to facilitate local system infrastructure and innovation.

ENVIRONMENT, LAND MANAGEMENT, AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Bonding

AMC supports a bonding bill that includes funding for transportation-related programs, including the Local Road Improvement Program, the Local Bridge Replacement Program, the Local Government Roads Wetland Replacement Program, and the Busway Capital Improvement Program.

Drainage

AMC supports adhering to the current requirements for public notice of drainage work and hearings according to Minn. Stat. 103E and the Minnesota Drainage Manual. Updates or modernization of these requirements should not create additional reporting, add to county or system costs, or impact timely maintenance and repairs.

SCORE

AMC supports allocating 100% of the revenue generated by the Solid Waste Management Tax (SWMT) to state and county waste management activities, including increased funding for SCORE grants to counties.

Tax Forfeiture

AMC supports state statute reforms to address the impacts of the U.S. Supreme Court decision regarding Tyler v. Hennepin that protect and enhance Minnesota's historic commitment to preserving home ownership and create a new system that assists counties in managing tax-forfeited properties, protects memorial lands that provide state benefit, and creates a clear and transparent process for all parties moving forward.

PUBLIC SAFETY AND EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES INVESTMENTS

Emergency Response Systems Investments

AMC supports sustainable, ongoing state funding to update and maintain Minnesota's emergency response systems including Allied Radio Matrix for Emergency Response (ARMER), Next Generation 9-1-1, Public Alert System (IPAWS), and others that are necessary to promote interoperability of emergency response communications. AMC also supports efforts to modernize, improve, fund, and maintain emergency medical services across the state to ensure all Minnesotans have access to 24/7 ambulance services.

Youth Mental Health Continuum of Care

AMC supports initiatives to address gaps in the mental health continuum of care for youth in the justice system including increased early youth intervention, long term treatment and housing, and supports for youth experiencing severe mental illness. ●

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Fits and Starts: Navigating the Economic, Political, and Social Challenges of 2024

By Bruce Messelt,
Sherburne County
Administrator

As we continue to grapple with the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and our resulting global, national, state, and local response, 2024 is emerging as a landscape marked by fits and starts across economic, political, and social domains. From the persistent waves of uncertainty to glimmers of hope, navigating our communities through these turbulent waters will require a keen understanding of the complex interplay of forces at work.

Economically, the year began with cautious optimism as markets and economies sought to rebound from the disruptions wrought by the pandemic and its aftermath. However, this optimism remains tempered by a series of confounding setbacks, including ongoing supply chain disruptions, persistent inflation, and a growing divide between winners and losers.

One of the defining features of the economic landscape in 2024

has been the uneven recovery experienced across different sectors, regions, and players. While tech has continued to soar, propelled by the digital transformation accelerated by the pandemic, traditional industries - including manufacturing and hospitality - face ongoing challenges.

The widening gap between the haves and have-nots has also raised increasing concerns over social inequality and the already frayed social safety net. In Sherburne County, for instance, the number of citizens in need of social services continues to expand, our court dockets remain packed and growing, and our children, families, and elderly populations all exhibit higher levels of anxiety and distress.

Politically, the year has been marked by a resurgence of populist movements and political rivalries. In many parts, disillusionment with established political institutions has fueled the rise of anti-establishment figures promising radical change or “winner-take-all” solutions. This trend is manifest in both democratic and authoritarian regimes, underscoring the fragility of liberal democratic norms.

At the same time, state and local politics appear increasingly fractured and polarized, as partisan divides sharpen and collaboration, consensus, and “crossing the aisle” all become four-letter words. Minnesota’s once-proudly nonpartisan school boards, city councils, and county boardrooms are no longer immune from this trend.

Additionally, ideal guiderails and efforts to “stay in our lane” are becoming increasingly blurred by



community debates over endangered species, sanctuary protections, constitutional rights, state election laws, and a newly redesigned state flag.

Socially, the fabric of our society is also being tested by a confluence of crises, lingering pandemic and public health concerns, and a resurgence of racial and ethnic tensions.

Even sports, entertainment, and technology cultures and personalities have melded into all aspects of our daily lives. Finally, the erosion of our trust in institutions, exacerbated by misinformation, disinformation, and new tools and technology (think AI), has sadly deepened social divisions, and further eroded community cohesion.

However, amidst these challenges, there remains glimmers of hope and resilience. Movements advocating for economic and political reform, true social justice, and balanced environmental sustainability have gained momentum, signaling a growing appetite for needed consensus-building and change. And the power of collective action, common vision, and unified purpose has been on display – albeit sometimes haltingly - as communities come together to support one another in the face of continued challenges and adversity.

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As county officials, leaders, and staff, we can advance these positive attributes, and the outcomes that follow, especially if we keep in mind that:

- **We are called to serve all our residents.** Not just those that voted a certain way in the last election, not just those who speak out or fill the boardroom during Open Forum, and not just those who currently receive our services or conduct business with us. Minnesota and its many counties, cities, towns, and communities are changing and evolving in a myriad of ways. Our residents expect and deserve local governments that grow and change with them.

- **We are charged with bettering our communities.** What may be politically expedient and fiscally prudent today may not stand the test and judgement of time. Government should play the long game and not seek quick fixes to complex problems, eschewing the headline grabbing soundbite for the less alluring any oft more difficult but sound public policy.
- **We are truly better together.** While disagreements, debates, and divisions of opinion and practice are a necessary and healthy part of any democracy - and of good decision-making, coming together once a decision has been made is equally vital to the success of our community and organization. When we support and respect all individuals and the roles and

responsibilities they carry out – including those of our counterpart local, state, and federal institutions – we strengthen our overall system of governance and accountability.

In conclusion, the year 2024 has been characterized by fits and starts across economic, political, and social domains. While the challenges are formidable, they are not insurmountable. By harnessing the spirit of public service, cooperation, and resilience, communities can navigate through these turbulent times and emerge stronger and more united than ever before. It is in times of crisis that the true test of our ingenuity and compassion is revealed, and it is up to us to rise to the occasion and shape a better future for today, for tomorrow, and for generations to come. ●



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Unapproved Overtime Worked

By Melanie Ault, DDA Consultant

Work doesn't go away just because a holiday happens, and it might take working extra hours that workweek just to keep up. With several holidays happening at the end of the year/beginning of the year, an employer might face some unanticipated, significant overtime costs. In addition, throughout the year, employers can find themselves paying overtime, even when it wasn't anticipated. What can employers do to rein in overtime costs?

Over 40 in a Workweek

The Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) at [29 CFR 10.24](#) requires an overtime payment of not less than one and one-half times the regular rate of pay for all hours worked over 40 in a workweek. As expected, this occurs when the employer schedules or directs the employee to work extra hours, but it can also happen when an employee voluntarily works extra hours. Just because the employer did not direct the employee to work more hours does not mean the employer can get out from under having to pay the overtime on the longer hours.

Suffered or Permitted

The FLSA is strict at [29 CFR 785.11](#), recognizing as "work time" extra time that an employee might voluntarily put in:

"Work not requested but suffered or permitted is work time. For example, an employee may voluntarily continue to work at the end of the shift. ..., he may desire to finish an assigned task or he may wish to correct errors, ..., prepare time reports or other records. The reason is immaterial. The employer knows or has reason to believe that he is continuing to work and the time is working time."

Likewise, the extra hours might occur on the front end, when an employee comes in early to get a head start on the day's work. An employee might even try to politely decline overtime payment, stating that the early hours were for their own benefit to "get organized." No, the FLSA is clear, and the reason does not matter; whether the employee "suffers" and works the extra hours as directed, or is "permitted" to work the extra hours they desire, either way, the employer is liable for the overtime payment for all hours worked over 40 in the workweek.

Strategies to Manage Time Worked, Pay

Having written policies can help employers curb overtime costs. Violations of policies can also lead to discipline.

Prior Approval

State that "all overtime must have the prior approval of the [JOB TITLE]." Knowing that a certain person in authority (or their designee) needs to approve additional hours in advance can prevent some employees from unilaterally working overtime. But know that having a policy prohibiting unauthorized overtime won't release the employer from having to pay overtime - the time was worked, it needs to be paid.

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OVERTIME, continued from previous page.

Adjust Work Schedules

Reserve the employer's right to adjust work schedules, even for the remainder of the workweek. If extra hours were worked earlier in the workweek, curtail the remaining scheduled hours to keep the workweek's total at 40. However, beware of manipulation for getting days off at the end of the workweek that were previously denied to the employee.

No Pyramiding

When premium pay is involved, e.g., paid double time for working on a holiday and overtime is also incurred that workweek, have a written policy prohibiting two or more premium payments for the same hours worked. The higher-paid variable usually prevails, not both. A "no pyramiding" policy prohibits paying more than once for the same hours worked.

Last Resort: Discipline

Under a written policy, employers can discipline employees who work unauthorized overtime. Employees can be disciplined for violating the employer's policies, including the unauthorized overtime policy.

The FLSA will not stand in the way of an employer enforcing its written policy. At 29 CFR 785.13, the FLSA puts the responsibility on management to curtail those instances where it does not want work to be performed,

"... [management] cannot sit back and accept the benefits without compensating for them. The mere promulgation of a rule against such work is not enough. Management has the power to enforce the rule and must make every effort to do so."

Where there is a written policy requiring prior approval before overtime hours are worked, and although the employer will have to pay for all time that was worked, the employer can discipline the employee for violating the employer's policy. The policy is outside the purview of the FLSA. While it might seem odd to discipline the conscientious go-getter, it is permitted, and it might be what it takes to stop the unauthorized extra hours.



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Conclusion

Supervisors should be alert for instances where employees might be staying late/coming in early or coming in on days off and address such violations promptly. In advance of holidays, supervisors should remind employees not to perform any work unless required by the employer or called out, and if they instead volunteer or choose to work, then they should expect to be disciplined for violating the employer's overtime policy. Supervisors could even spot check during holidays or off hours, and if they notice anyone working, direct them to stop and go home.

While it might sound silly to discipline someone who wants to work extra hours, unauthorized overtime subverts the employer's attempts at managing a budget and a workforce. ●

Find new strategies at the HR Technical Assistance Program at www.amcddahrsupport.com.

Benton County's Comprehensive Tobacco Ordinance Paves the Way for Others

By Benton County and their partners at the Association for Nonsmokers-Minnesota (ANSR)

Commercial tobacco prevention and policy change are often contentious issues. But as Benton County knows, it doesn't have to be that way. Leveraging local values and fostering collaborative relationships with lawmakers are key strategies for passing comprehensive commercial tobacco policies that protect local communities.

The Benton County Board of Commissioners voted unanimously to strengthen the County's tobacco retail licensing ordinance in September 2022. The ordinance restricted the sale of flavored commercial tobacco products, capped the number of tobacco product shop licenses at zero, updated definitions to meet state and federal standards, and increased administrative penalties for violations. The ordinance took effect January 1, 2023.

Updates to county tobacco ordinances like Benton County's reduce the appeal and availability of commercial tobacco and nicotine products, especially for youth. According to the 2020 Minnesota Youth Tobacco Survey, seven in 10 students from greater Minnesota who had ever tried a commercial tobacco product started with a



(From left to right) ANSR's Katie Engman, Benton County Public Health's Jaclyn Litfin, Jenny Lezer, and Mariah Klein, Benton County Commissioner Steve Heinen, and Americorps student Palash Bhanot at the NACCHO 360 Annual Conference in Denver.

flavored product. Restricting or ending the sale of all flavored commercial tobacco products helps keep kids away from a lifetime of nicotine addiction. Additionally, data shows that high tobacco retailer density corresponds with high overall use rates. Capping tobacco licenses reduces availability. Policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) changes like these help promote healthier individuals and communities by making healthy choices easy choices.

Local lawmakers may shy away from bold commercial tobacco policy action because they believe it should be handled at the state or federal level. But as the push for a federal menthol cigarette ban has shown, the tobacco industry has powerful influence and can delay large-scale policies that would protect public health.

"Why should individuals have to wait for change at the state or national level when there is opportunity to create that change in their local community *now*?" says Katie Engman, program director at the Association for Nonsmokers-Minnesota (ANSR). "The impact of a local policy update may seem small at first glance, but adopting a comprehensive commercial tobacco

ordinance is a surefire way to protect community health, especially when state and federal action is slow-moving."

Funding from a Statewide Health Improvement Partnership (SHIP) grant and a local public health grant made tobacco PSE change possible in Benton County. This public health victory was the culmination of months of hard work from Benton County Public Health, the County Sheriff's Office, and the Benton County Tobacco Workgroup. The multidisciplinary group brought together local representatives from law enforcement, healthcare, schools, churches, and more to recognize impacts of commercial tobacco in the community and identify needed policy changes. ANSR, the Benton County Attorney's Office, and the Public Health Law Center provided technical assistance, and Community Health Specialists Mariah Klein and Jenny Lezer coordinated the grant-funded work behind these impactful changes.

Public Health convened with the Board of Commissioners through multiple Committee of the Whole meetings to update the tobacco ordinance in a way that both

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TOBACCO, continued from previous page.

respected the input and concerns of the Commissioners as well as addressed the public health needs of the community. To achieve this balance, Public Health ensured all engagement, assessment, outreach, messaging, and implementation strategies reflected the lived experiences and values of community members as best as possible.

Benton County prides itself on its schools and locally-owned businesses, so the workgroup collected county-specific data about commercial tobacco use among students and assessed the county's tobacco retailer landscape, including product availability and pricing. This data drove the workgroup's priorities. Workgroup representatives presented the figures, high-level facts about the health effects of commercial tobacco use, and examples of similar policy successes in other Minnesota communities to the Commissioners. In turn, the Commissioners expressed their concerns about some of the proposed ordinance language and discussed desired outcomes.

This collaborative, community-driven approach allowed for input from both parties while acknowledging shared values and building relationships between the commissioners and local partners.

“These were very hard conversations to have. Decision making became easier with input from our Public Health team, school leadership, and local health care professionals,” says Benton County Commissioner Steve Heinen. “Taking everything into consideration, this decision was made to protect the health of our youth and our community.”

The Tobacco Workgroup worked with Benton County schools, ANSR, CentraCare, and other partners to educate the community ahead of ordinance introduction. The local newspaper published an article about the impacts of commercial tobacco. By the time of the public hearing, the Commissioners received 151 signed postcards demonstrating strong community support for regulating the sale of flavored products and 25 letters in support of the proposed ordinance changes. Nine individuals testified at the public hearing. There was no opposition. For a county of about 40,000 people, this was an impressive amount of community engagement.

Following the unanimous vote, Public Health and its partners got busy communicating about and implementing the ordinance updates. They sent letters, license renewal packets, and the updated ordinance to retailers that would be affected by the policy. They

published press releases in the *Sauk Rapids Herald* and *Benton County News* and amplified the articles in statewide and national newsletters. These efforts helped boost awareness and, after the ordinance went into effect, compliance.

The impact of this policy work extends far beyond the county limits. Public Health staff and partners have presented on the ordinance updates in multiple settings over the past year, including a statewide webinar, the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) Conference in Denver, and the Minnesota Prevention Program Sharing Conference in Brainerd. By sharing widely about Benton's successes and lessons learned, the County has paved the way for similar communities nationwide who may be interested in updating their own ordinances. Benton County is there to say, it is possible, and it is important!

Interested in updating your county's tobacco ordinance? Benton County and ANSR are dedicated to sharing resources and best practices to help advance the policy adoption and implementation process in other Minnesota communities. Join in this bold action! Contact publichealth@co.benton.mn.us to get the conversation started. ●



Advocates celebrate in the Benton County Board Room after the unanimous vote for the updated tobacco ordinance.

Launching the Minnesota Department of Children, Youth, and Families

By Jane Hardwick, Planning Director & County Lead, Minnesota Department of Children, Youth, and Families Implementation Office

Our state depends on the success of Minnesota children, youth, and families. Built on feedback from families, educators, and local service providers, Gov. Tim Walz and Lt. Gov. Peggy Flanagan worked in partnership with the Minnesota Legislature in 2023 to create the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF)—a permanent state agency and commissioner focused on elevating children and families in state government.



DCYF will be established on July 1, 2024, as a recognizable state-level partner and public face in the state's quest to prioritize children, youth, and families. Identified programs from the Departments of Human Services (DHS), Education (MDE), Health (MDH), and Public Safety (DPS) will transfer to the new agency between July 1, 2024, and July 1, 2025, including:

- Child care and early learning programs
- Child Support, Child Safety and Permanency, and other family-focused community programs
- Economic support and food assistance programs
- Youth opportunity and older youth investments

Related to county and Tribal governments, the goals of this new agency include focusing resources on and investing in active engagement with local partners with a goal of easing access and navigation for all involved. For many leaders and partners, this is an opportunity to elevate attention, align resources, and engage more strategically around policy, budget, and systemic issues impacting children and families across county and Tribal systems.

The DCYF Implementation Office, housed at Minnesota Management and Budget, has been leading on planning efforts for the new agency, with a focus on maintaining service continuity while also identifying opportunities for innovation, including developing a Whole Family Systems framework for the new agency to use across its work. Whole Family is an approach to practice, program and policy decision making that recognizes and addresses the needs of children and the adults in their lives simultaneously.

Counties will be presenting a local vision for Whole Family Systems to the DCYF Implementation Office in February.

There will be some changes to navigate together with county staff through and beyond the transition to DCYF, including changes to state agency organizational structures and tools like websites and online resources. There will also be many things that remain consistent, such as county staff access to state technology systems, many of which will be shared between DHS and the new agency.

The statute creating DCYF requires an ongoing and collaborative engagement strategy, and to date, the Implementation Office has completed over 135 community engagements. In collaboration with AMC and the Minnesota Association of County Social Services Administrators (MACSSA), the DCYF Implementation Office has formed an intergovernmental advisory group that meets twice monthly, in addition to a joint state-county intergovernmental advisory retreat and other opportunities to communicate with and gather perspective from county human services leaders. These meetings and retreats have already been essential to informing transition efforts. Among a number of messages, counties have been clear about the need for the new agency to attend to:

- A focus on data- and research-driven policies, prevention, and innovation;
- Systems of active and effective engagement with counties and Tribes;
- Deliberate, sustainable methods to work collaboratively across state agencies, including DCYF, DHS, and the new Department of Direct Care and Treatment, to assure that the complex needs of children, youth, and families with or at risk of disabilities, experiencing mental illness, substance use disorder or other health barriers to employment are addressed in a holistic, aligned fashion; and
- Mitigating the administrative burden on counties and Tribes as a result of the state agency reorganization, noting that each increase in local administrative burden reduces the capacity for Minnesota's human services system to serve people, particularly in a workforce shortage.

County feedback is absolutely essential to informing decision-making and innovation as the Implementation Office and impacted agencies navigate this transition. There will continue to be opportunities for county feedback and input as implementation proceeds. More background, frequently asked questions, and updates on the transition can be found at mn.gov/mmb/dcyf-implementation. ●

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2023 AMC Annual Awards

Congratulations to all of the following recipients of the Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC) annual awards, which were presented December 5, 2023, at the AMC Annual Conference in Minneapolis.

Each year, AMC asks members to nominate exceptional county employees, programs and collaborations for the association's annual awards.

AMC President's Award. Each year, the outgoing AMC President selects an individual (or individuals) to receive this prestigious award that is given for exemplary leadership in public service. No nominations are accepted for this award.

AMC Outstanding Service Award. Outstanding Service Awards are presented to individuals who have exhibited exceptional leadership, innovation and/or participation in county government and the Association.

AMC County Achievement Award. County Achievement Awards recognize valuable innovations and improvements in county government.

AMC-BWSR County Conservation Award. The AMC-BWSR County Conservation Award recognizes a county's leadership, innovation and excellence in protecting or improving their natural resources. This award is presented by AMC and the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR).

MAPCED Outstanding Economic Development Award. The Minnesota Association of Professional County Economic Developers' (MAPCED) Outstanding Economic Development Award celebrates successful economic development efforts and partnerships that fulfill the MAPCED mission of fostering economic growth expanding tax base and enhancing quality of life in Minnesota counties.

Nominations for the 2024 awards will open in June. To read more about this year's recipients, please visit www.mncounties.org. ●



2023 AMC President's Award recipient **Rich Sve, Lake County Commissioner.**



2023 AMC President's Award recipient **Barbara Weckman Brekke, Scott County Commissioner.**



The family of 2023 AMC Outstanding Service Award recipient **Blair Nelson, Waseca Commissioner**, accepted the posthumous award on his behalf.



2023 AMC Outstanding Service Award recipient **Alex Kotzke, Ramsey County Chief Financial Officer.**



2023 AMC Outstanding Service Award recipient **Pam LeBlanc, Anoka County Chief Officer, Property Records and Taxation.**



2023 AMC Outstanding Service Award recipient **Kyle Oldre, Rock County Administrator/Emergency Management Director.**



2023 AMC Outstanding Service Award recipient **Julie Hanson, Mahanomen County Social Services Director.**



2024 AMC-BWSR Conservation Award Winner **Pennington County - Ditch 96.**



2024 MAPCED Economic Development Award Winner **Aitkin County/Mississippi Headwaters Board's Utilizing Resourcetainment to Retain Workers and Encourage Economic Development.**



2024 AMC County Achievement Award Winner **Augmented Reality Trail Program - Tracks, Anoka County.**



2024 AMC County Achievement Award Winner **Broadband For All - Benton County.**



2024 AMC County Achievement Award Winner **Developing a Robust Mental Health Crisis Continuum - Dakota County.**



2024 AMC County Achievement Award Winner **Tribal/County Agreement - Fond du Lac Band Human Services, Carlton County Public Health & Human Services, and Arrowhead Regional Corrections.**



2024 AMC County Achievement Award Winner **New London-Spicer High School EMT Class - Kandiyohi County.**



2024 AMC County Achievement Award Winner **Behavioral Health Services Unit - Rice County.**

2024 AMC Student Scholarship and 4H Community Leadership Awards Presented

Congratulations to the recipients of the Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC) annual student scholarship and 4H Community Youth Leadership Awards!

Each year, the current AMC Past President selects a high school senior from their county to receive the association's annual student scholarship, which is made possible by proceeds from the annual conference silent auction.

AMC and the University of Minnesota Extension solicit applications and select the recipients of the 4H Community Leadership Awards. Each project is recognized based on responding to real community needs and demonstrating broad participation by youth in the design and implementation. Each winning club receives \$500. ●



AMC 4H Community Leadership Award winners **Murray County 4-H Ambassadors** received their award from AMC President Neal Gaalswyk (Cass County) during the AMC Legislative Conference on February 22.



AMC Past President **Mary Jo McGuire (Ramsey County)** presented Roseville Area High School Senior **Naima Sheikh-Mohamed** with this year's annual **student scholarship** during the AMC Legislative Conference on February 22.



2024 AMC 4H Community Leadership Award winners **Anoka County Green Superheroes of Science** received their award from AMC President Neal Gaalswyk (Cass County) during the AMC Legislative Conference on February 22.



Blue Earth County Commissioner Vance Stuehrenberg (left) received the "Outstanding Contribution to Better Minnesota Transportation" Award from the **Minnesota County Engineers Association (MCEA)** during their annual conference on January 18.

The award was presented in recognition of Stuehrenberg's many years of dedicated service advocating for transportation at the local, state, and federal levels. Also pictured is **Polk County Engineer Rich Sanders**. ●



Make Plans to Celebrate National County Government Month in April



By Mary Jo McGuire,
Ramsey County
Commissioner, AMC Past
President and National
Association of Counties
(NACo) President



Each April, we seize the opportunity provided by National County Government Month (NCGM) to elevate our work and teach residents about the importance of county government. The people living and working in our counties benefit from seeing how our work touches their lives, and learning about the broader framework of intergovernmental partnership wherein we deploy local, state, and federal programs on the ground.

When developing your plans for this year's NCGM, consider the pillars of the **ForwardTogether** platform:

Connect, focused on building bridges to advance excellence and networks in county government,

Inspire, focused on driving community engagement and residents' trust in county government, and

Lead, focused on spearheading local, state, federal and tribal intergovernmental partnerships and common-sense policy.

This NCGM, we will tell stories, share data and lift up work that speaks to those values. Spotlight your county's role in making life better for every single resident, and in contributing to the intergovernmental partnership that makes effective governing possible. .

As you celebrate your finest programs, I also encourage you to nominate them for a [NACo Achievement Award](#) now through March 30, 2024.

In the spirit of NCGM, we celebrate you and thank you for your service and your commitment to helping counties move **Forward Together!** ●

You can find helpful tools and more information at www.naco.org/page/national-county-government-month

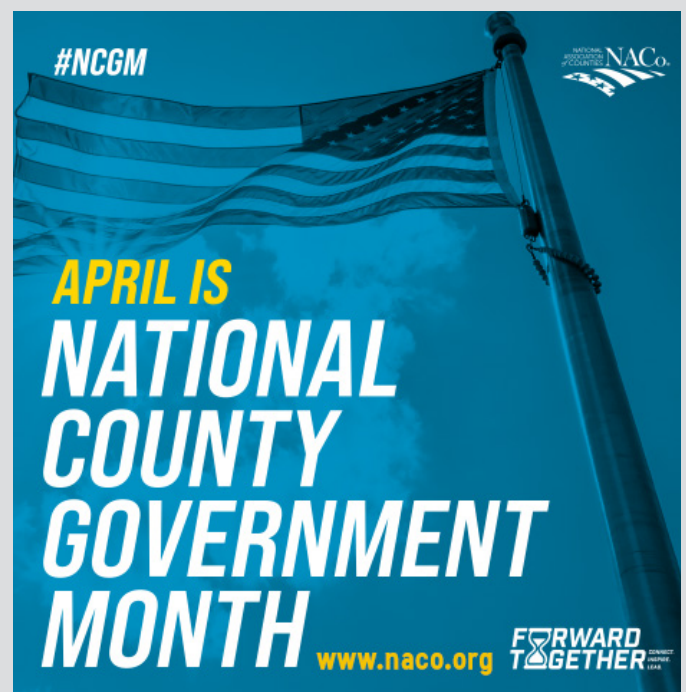
Apply for the 2024 NACo Achievement Awards

Your county can earn local and national recognition. Explore below to learn more, or click "Apply Today" to begin your application. Applications are due March 30, 2024.

Since 1970, the NACo Achievement Awards have recognized outstanding county government programs and services. Through a non-competitive application process, noteworthy programs receive awards in 18 categories that cover a vast range of county responsibilities.

Eighteen "best of category" winners will receive special recognition, and all winners will receive a customizable press release to share the good news. Explore further for full program details and to learn more about the application process, including key dates, award categories, eligibility and criteria. ●

For more information or to apply, visit bit.ly/NACo_Awards.



New Standard: Accounting for Subscription-Based Software Agreements



By Julie Blaha,
Minnesota State Auditor

A big change is coming for county audits regarding subscription-based software agreements. These types of arrangements are more common due to the increase in cloud computing as a means of storing information. This new standard is applicable to Minnesota counties starting with the 2023 financial statements.

We know it can be difficult to track all the Government Accounting Standards Board (GASB) changes to accounting standards, but every county should pay attention to GASB Statement No. 96. This provides guidance on subscription-based information technology arrangements (SBITAs), or subscription-based software agreements.

A SBITA is a contract that conveys control of the right to use another party's software for a period of time in an exchange or exchange-like transaction. This definition covers many software agreements used in county government including cloud computing arrangements. For example, a three-year agreement for a new property tax software program hosted in the cloud would likely qualify. Other examples of qualifying software agreements may include subscriptions for Microsoft Office 365 or cybersecurity software.

According to GASB, counties will report an asset for the right-to-use the software and a corresponding liability for the subscription. The asset value may include certain implementation costs and prepayments. The asset will be amortized over the subscription term or the underlying asset's useful life. The liability is reduced through future subscription payments. This standard closely follows the lease accounting standard counties implemented for 2022.

We encourage you to begin planning for this new requirement. As a first step, counties should identify their software agreements and compile them in one location. Counties use a wide variety of software programs and individual departments may maintain their own software agreements. Your auditors will need to see the agreements. To identify all software agreements, counties will want to consult with their IT staff and review general ledger activity related to software costs.

Like leases, accounting for subscription-based software agreements can be complicated and requires thorough analysis of agreements. Counties should work with their external auditors to address any questions related to the implementation of this new standard.

State Auditor's Form Entry System (SAFES)

Two forms are due by January 31 of each year: the County Summary Budget Form and the Lobbying Expenditure Reporting Form. The forms are submitted through the State Auditor's Form Entry System (SAFES): <https://safes.osa.state.mn.us/Default/Login>. **If you haven't submitted these forms, please do so as soon as possible.**

For those not familiar with SAFES, the system provides access to necessary documents and indicates whether the required reporting has been submitted. After documents are submitted, the system will provide you with a confirmation number.

If you don't have a username and password, please email safes@osa.state.mn.us with the following details: your name, title, entity name, office mailing address, work email, and telephone number. We'll set up your access to SAFES.

For guidance on accessing and using SAFES, check out the instructional video (<https://www.osa.state.mn.us/forms-deadlines/submit-forms/safes-training-video/>) on the OSA website. ●



MCIT Members' Outstanding Achievement Awarded

MCIT Board Chair Ron Antony announced the recipients of MCIT's annual awards during the 2023 Minnesota Counties Intergovernmental Trust Annual Membership Meeting December 4 in Minneapolis. Every year MCIT recognizes three counties that excel at risk management and loss control, as preventing and mitigating losses is important to the overall success and stability of MCIT.

Criteria used for the awards include:

- Performance in risk management and loss control efforts
- Responsiveness to MCIT program initiatives
- Improvement in property/casualty claims experience and administration over the past four coverage years (2019-2022)
- Improvement in workers' compensation claims experience and administration over the past four coverage years (2019-2022)

Washington, Grant, Morrison Counties Recognized

Washington County earned the 2023 County of the Year award. This award honors the county that has set the standard of excellence in risk management and loss control for the year. Washington County's leaders made a priority to educate and inform staff about techniques to mitigate exposures and provided superior assistance when claims arose.

The other two awards recognize improvement in the specific areas of property and casualty (liability) and workers' compensation risk management and loss control. Grant County received the **Outstanding Performance in the Property and Casualty Division** award and Morrison County earned the **Outstanding Performance in the Workers' Compensation Division** award.

These division awards are presented to counties that demonstrate consistent improvement in the areas during the assessment period. For property and casualty, that means improvements in the county's loss ratio through commitment to implementing better loss control and risk management methods, as well as a dedication to protecting county property and citizens.

For workers' compensation, the award recognizes improvement in the county's experience modification factor and reduced claims in the areas of workplace injury and illness, as well as a commitment to reducing employee injuries and improving loss control efforts.

On behalf of the entire board, Antony congratulated the winners on their accomplishments. ●

Watch 'Minnesota Open Meeting Law and Remote Participation' Webinar Recording on Demand

Individuals who missed the live presentation of "Minnesota Open Meeting Law and Remote Participation" webinar in January are encouraged to watch the recording at MCIT.org/resources. The webinar details how and when members of public entity governing bodies can join and participate in open meetings remotely while being in compliance with the law.

Failure to comply with the provisions of the particular statute under which the board is meeting may mean that the remote board member:

- Is unable to be counted as part of the quorum
- In unable to participate in all proceedings

Common questions about board members' remote participation at open meetings are addressed, including:

- The number of times a board member may participate remotely in an open meeting
- Circumstances under which a remote location may be closed to the public
- Participating from an out-of-state location
- Last-minute remote participation
- When technological difficulties arise for remote participation, such as losing video or audio connection

The webinar was developed for:

- Members of public entity governing bodies, such as county commissioners and joint powers entity board members
- Administrators/coordinators, executive directors, clerks to the board
- County attorneys

Watch Now

The webinar recording is posted to the Resource Library at MCIT.org/resources. Use the library's filters to find the session quickly: Choose "Open Meeting Law" from the Topics filter and "webinar" from the Resource Type filter. ●

Water-quality Goals Drive City, McLeod SWCD Collaboration

By Ann Wessel, BWSR

The McLeod Soil & Water Conservation District's collaboration with the city of Winsted to construct a wetland that filters residential stormwater before it enters Winsted Lake builds upon its previous work with farmers to curb field erosion upstream.

Judicial Ditch 111 flows through the wetland to the lake, carrying runoff from farm fields to the west and from residential lots in town. Winsted Lake is impaired for aquatic recreation.

The \$80,975 project drew from a \$123,546 multipurpose drainage management grant the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources awarded to the SWCD in 2022. The city's engineering consultant, Bolton & Menk, designed the wetland. McLeod County made \$45,000 available to the city for its construction, tapping Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds from the U.S. Treasury Department.

Together with grade stabilization structures, side inlets and water and sediment control basins upstream, the constructed wetland will help to improve water quality of the lake, and will allow the ditch (previously known as McLeod County Ditch 11) to function as designed and reduce the need for maintenance in the long term. The upstream work is backed by two multipurpose drainage management Clean Water Fund grants BWSR awarded to the SWCD: the 2022 grant, plus an \$111,000 grant awarded in 2019.

"Projects like this just don't happen without collaboration, and we have a really strong group working on all the projects as part of this process," said Coleton Draeger, McLeod SWCD resource conservationist.

That group included South Central Technical Service Area (TSA) engineers, and the neighboring Wright SWCD, which worked with landowners on a water and sediment control basin that flowed to a McLeod County project site.

Multipurpose drainage management targets critical pollution source areas to reduce erosion and sedimentation, reduce peak flows and flooding, and improve water quality while protecting drainage system efficiency and reducing drainage system maintenance.

"We're fortunate that we have the right people in place."

- McLeod County Commissioner Nathan Schmalz, on cooperation among the private consultant, city and county.

In McLeod County, the Ditch Authority — composed of the five county commissioners — is responsible for maintaining the county ditch system. First District Commissioner Nathan Schmalz, a fourth-generation crop farmer, represents an area including the city of Winsted and Winsted Township.

Schmalz elaborated on elements of the grant-supported work that extend beyond land drained by the judicial ditch: "Along with those benefits are the conservation benefits that some of these projects will give us. Whether it's (reducing) streambank erosion, whether it's water-storage capacity, whether it's stormwater treatment — those are all worthy benefits."

Draeger explained the water-quality improvement piece of the project. "The whole aim is, at the end of the day, water-quality (enhancement) in the receiving water body of the drainage system and Winsted Lake. We're going to reduce phosphorus- and nitrogen-loading, reduce our TSS (total suspended solids) load, and, overall, hopefully see a water-quality change in the lake itself."

Winsted Lake is a focal point of the town situated on its western shore. A paved path runs from City Hall to a park with a fishing pier. The Luce Line State Trail curves around the south shore to a county park with a public water access.

The wetland is tucked into a triangle of unimproved city parkland within a residential neighborhood. Contractors excavated the half-acre wetland in August. It will treat 15 acres of city stormwater runoff — allowing sediment and the pollutants it carries to settle out.

Bob Bean of Bolton & Menk said getting buy-in from residents adjacent to the site proved challenging. Some were concerned the wetland would be a "mosquito nest." He said seeing the design and knowing that it would help to improve the water quality of Winsted Lake drew their support.

"Lake Winsted has four incoming ditches from the county. This ditch is extremely large, with over 10 square miles of drainage area, and it's been dumping a lot of sediment into the lake at the connection. Any amount of effort we can do to reduce that has been instrumental in trying to preserve (Winsted Lake) from degrading further," Bean said.

When SWCD and city staff viewed the site on Aug. 15, the outlet structure awaited installation and the site awaited seeding. Construction finished later that month.

Draeger explained the effect on the drainage system upstream: “We’re reducing erosion and sediment delivery into the drainage system — on the system and off the system, so along the drainage corridor as well as in the uplands — to try and treat water, slow flow and eliminate some of the erosion that’s on the drainage system’s banks, which then makes its way into the drainage system and later Winsted Lake.”

In addition to the constructed wetland, the two multipurpose drainage management grants together backed 11 grade stabilizations and nine water and sediment control basins involving eight landowners and 10 parcels.

Projects installed in fields upstream have benefited farmers by eliminating gullies (which may have been too deep for equipment to cross), temporarily retaining water, and transporting it underground (which reduces erosion and nutrient loss).

“It’s a collaborative effort with the city of Winsted and the residents here, and also the upstream land operators who work and farm those lands,” said BWSR Board Conservationist Jeremy Maul, who had recommended the constructed wetland to the SWCD.

“There are benefits to the lake for intercepting (nutrients) before they get to the lake. It creates some water storage that allows the water to get held up long enough so the water upstream has a chance to flow in,” Maul said. “In the long run, there’s nutrient savings. There’s also hopefully cost savings to the producers because there’s going to be less cost for maintenance on the drainage system as a whole.”

Together, the multipurpose drainage management grant-backed projects are estimated to reduce sediment-loading by 228 tons, soil erosion by



A line of vegetative debris marks how high the water reached in a newly constructed wetland after a rain the day before. The wetland, built on city-owned property bordering a ditch in Winsted, will filter about 15 acres of residential stormwater runoff bound for Winsted Lake. The project, a collaboration that included the McLeod SWCD and the city of Winsted, was nearing completion on Aug. 15, 2023. Photo Credit: Ann Wessel, BWSR

127 tons, phosphorus-loading by 255 pounds and nitrates by 91 pounds annually.

“It’s a lake that’s in recovery,” Schmalz said. “Decades ago there weren’t the concerns of pollutants entering the lake, and now there’s an awareness. Now there’s an opportunity for a healthier lake, a healthier ecosystem for fish to survive in the lake. As a society we’re all more conscious of water quality today, and this is a step forward in that direction.”

Winsted City Administrator Neil Schlager grew up in Winsted, where he swam in the lake as a kid, and noticed the gradual decline in water quality. He taught high school business classes before he became city administrator in summer 2023. A former business owner and financial adviser, he sees the potential for water-quality improvements to spark economic development.

“If it had more use, the lake would bring more people to town,”

Schlager said. “With more people coming to town, we have more opportunities for businesses to expand, or more opportunities to bring in new businesses. I do believe it would be a driving force for economic development.”

“Our lake has potential,” Schlager said. ●

The Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources’ mission is to improve and protect the state’s water and soil resources by working in partnership with local organizations and private landowners.

Thirty-three percent of sales tax revenue from the Legacy Amendment, which Minnesota voters passed in 2008, is allocated to the Clean Water Fund. Clean Water Funds may only be spent to protect, enhance or restore water quality in lakes, rivers and streams, and to protect groundwater.

USDA Rural Development Updates

By Colleen Landkamer, USDA Rural Development State Director



Another year has passed; a new year is born. With the help of our great partners, stakeholders, and Minnesota's Congressional delegation, Rural Development works collaboratively to assist in building continued sustainability of rural Minnesota every year. We are proud to say USDA Rural Development Minnesota invested \$2,789,983,296 since 2020. Rural Development employees across the state strive to bring top customer service, never waning to service our many rural customers and partners.

Rural places are the backbone of our nation and have a broad impact on our economy. They feed and fuel America - providing our nation's agricultural and energy resources, the fiber for goods and manufacturing - and are home to more than 35 percent of our nation's military members, despite comprising 20 percent of the population.

Under the leadership of President Biden and Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack, USDA is prioritizing:

- **Equity** – access to new opportunities, affordable financing, strong and modern infrastructure, and good-paying jobs.
- **Climate impacts** – reducing climate pollution and increasing energy independence through climate-smart infrastructure.
- **Building a strong and vibrant Rural America** – assisting rural communities with economic recovery.

At Rural Development, this means addressing rural concerns at a local and regional level wherever possible. Helping meat processors and health care providers recover economically in the wake of a global pandemic, to ensure everyone has access to affordable food and health care services. Assisting even the most remote areas of the state with implementing high-speed internet infrastructure through programs like the ReConnect program. This is just a glimpse of the many ways that USDA is working to address the needs of rural areas. USDA continues to invest in rural Minnesota at the county level through flagship programs like our Community Facilities programs that invest in essential public facilities and Water and Waste Disposal programs that help provide access to clean drinking water and safe waste disposal. These types of investments are critical to the continued economic growth of rural communities.

Here are a few examples from 2023:

Appleton Area Health received a \$714,000 Community Facilities Emergency Rural Health Care grant to upgrade Telemedicine and Telehealth capabilities and replace hospital equipment at their 15-bed critical access hospital.

Garrison Animal Hospital received a \$14,728 REAP grant to purchase and install a 10-kilowatt solar array, a project estimated to save the business \$5,253 in energy costs and 8,434 kilowatt-hours of electricity each year.

A \$6,036,000 Water and Waste Disposal grant will be used to construct a new wastewater treatment facility in Mazeppa, addressing health and sanitation concerns caused by deteriorating water distribution lines.

Rebuilding Together, a home repair nonprofit, received a \$142,000 Housing Preservation grant to assist low-income households in Cottonwood, Jackson, Murray, Nobles and Pipestone Counties to provide critical repairs to their primary residences.

We are here to help, from the brainstorming process through project completion. ●

Visit www.rd.usda.gov/mn to locate your local Rural Development area office and get started on your project. And remember to follow [@RD_Minnesota](https://twitter.com/rd_minnesota) on X!

Anoka County Recognized for Exemplary Leadership in Public Finance Liquidity Management



New State Seal's Impact on County Offices



By Karen Long, Chisago County Recorder, MCRA President, and MACO Representative

Anoka County received the prestigious 90+ cashVest® Award by three+one® which recognizes exemplary leadership in public finance liquidity management. This recognition is earned by only 22% of public finance offices, highlighting public entities excelling in maximizing the value of all taxpayer cash. This award is provided by the National Association of Counties (NACo) in conjunction with three+one, a specialized national financial-technology company that analyzes public sector cash-management practices. It focuses on maximizing the utilization of every taxpayer dollar with data-informed decisions, ensuring optimal benefits for communities across the country.



Anoka County commissioners and staff were presented the 90+ cashVest® Award by three+one® for exemplary leadership in public finance liquidity management.

"We congratulate Anoka County on receiving the cashVest 90+ Award," said Matthew Chase, CEO/Executive Director of NACo. "We applaud these public finance leaders for helping to maximize the value of their taxpayers' dollars, optimize cash flow, lower borrowing costs, and strengthen protections for public resources."

"Anoka County has gone above and beyond to set a national standard in cash management and to certify they are doing everything they can to maximize their liquid cash resources," added Garrett Macdonald, Executive Vice President of three+one.

By maintaining a cashVest score of 90 or above for four consecutive quarters, Anoka County has demonstrated its commitment to effective cash management, improving financial stability, and ensuring responsible stewardship of public resources.

The county's achievement sets a high standard in the stewardship of public resources and serves as an inspiration in the sector. ●

In December 2023, the Minnesota State Emblems Redesign Commission selected a new state flag and state seal, wrapping up a several months' long process in "rebranding" the State of Minnesota. The new designs for each were certified and submitted to the governor and Legislature prior to the January 1, 2024 deadline. The new Minnesota State Flag and Great Seal of the State of Minnesota will become official on May 11, 2024 (the anniversary of when Minnesota became a state).

While it might seem at first that this is a "state issue," there will, of course, be a trickle-down effect to county government when this change happens. At the February 2024 MACO conference, a representative from the Secretary of State's office gave a brief presentation on what the change to the Great Seal of the State of Minnesota means for county offices.

Some of the questions that Recorders and Auditor/Treasurers have include: What does this mean for notarized acknowledgments in recorded documents? What kind of direction are notary publics being given with this change? Do all county offices need to update their seals to reflect the Minnesota's new seal? What, if any, additional time do we have to make these updates?

Stay tuned for more information to be communicated during the 2024 Legislative Session! ●

By Bev Durgan, Dean,
University of Minnesota
Extension



Minnesotans from across the state turn to University of Minnesota Extension when they seek research-based information and partners to address some of our communities' most challenging issues.

Recently, Extension has been part of several initiatives that take on these difficult topics:

- The SuperShelf program, which includes Extension and partner organizations from across the state, replaces the stigma of visiting a food shelf with the respectful, welcoming environment of a grocery store. SuperShelves are set up to prioritize healthy, appealing food with logical store layouts and signage in multiple languages. The program currently is featured on an University advertising campaign on radio stations throughout Minnesota.

- Empowering Small Communities, a collaboration of Extension and other University of Minnesota partners, is aimed at communities with populations of fewer than 15,000. Communities that are selected for this new program will receive support to advance projects and position them toward receiving federal, state and local funds. Project ideas can fall under many areas, including water; parks; trails; tourism; buildings; emergency and weather readiness; energy efficiency; economic and cultural vitality; and housing.
- The need for trained, committed professionals in the agricultural field is being addressed through Minnesota 4-H's plant science programming. Last year, 524 participants took part in 4-H learning about agriculture. The plant science program recently was recognized by the Minnesota Soybean Growers as "Industry Partner of the Year."

These are just a few of the new and expanding programs that Extension offers to benefit Minnesotans in every county. Thank you to all members of the AMC for your support of Extension, and I look forward to our continued and growing partnerships. ●

For 75 years, we've made a difference in communities that trusted us to tackle their challenges and **exceed their expectations.**



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NACo Board Member Todd Patzer (Lac qui Parle), AMC President Neal Gaalswyk (Cass), and AMC Government Relations Manager Matt Hilgart at the U.S. Capitol during the NACo Legislative Conference in early February.



Minnesota's NACo Board Members Tarryl Clark, Todd Patzer (Lac qui Parle), NACo President Mary Jo McGuire (Ramsey), Tim Sumner (Beltrami) and Lisa Fobbe (Sherburne) at the NACo Legislative Conference.



County Commissioners Rena Moran (Ramsey), De Malterer (Waseca), Karla Bigham (Washington), Annie Harala (St. Louis), Barb Weckman Brekke (Scott) and Trista Martinson (Ramsey) at the U.S. Capitol during the NACo Legislative Conference in early February.



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