

AREA 15 REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

NEWSLINE

Homes For Iowa helps Fairfield quickly develop empty lots

Grow Fairfield is leading a neighborhood revitalization effort on in-fill city lots. In the past year they have purchased 4 lots from the city and one privately owned lot. This in-fill initiative is utilizing the Homes for Iowa product to help meet the needs of affordable housing and supporting a noble state program.

Homes for Iowa constructs quality, affordable homes while equipping incarcerated Iowans with valuable trade skills. Homes for Iowa addresses two of the state's most pressing issues: the skilled labor shortage and the lack of affordable housing. Constructed by individuals at the Newton Correctional Facility who are learning trades like carpentry, electrical work, and plumbing, each home is a fresh start—for both the builder and the buyer. To date, Homes for Iowa has placed 120+ homes across the state, helping reduce housing shortages while fostering second chances.

For questions or help ordering, please contact Matt Naumann at (641) 814-8400 or matt.naumann@area15rpc.com



Home For Iowa house delivered to Fairfield in June 2025



AREA 15 RPC BOARD APPROVES FY26 BUDGET

The Area 15 RPC Board of Directors met on May 27, 2025 to review and approve the budget proposal for FY26 that begins July 1. The proposed budget includes four full-time staff to implement the major work programs including the EDA partnership planning, RPA 15 transportation planning, AHEAD Regional Housing Trust Fund, REDI revolving loan fund, and other local planning activities including grant administration. The total budgeted expense for FY2026 is \$474,925.

The Area 15 RPC Board of Directors meets next on July 22, 2025 for the annual meeting to elect officers and conduct regular business. Current officers include Mike Hadley (Chair), Dale House (Vice-Chair), and Bryan Ziegler (Treasurer). There are a total of 11 members on the RPC Board including 6 county officials (one representative appointed by the Board of Supervisors from a city under 2,500 in population) from each member county) and one small cities representative (from city council) and 4 private sector representatives.

IOWA DOT TSIP (TRAFFIC STUDY)

The Traffic Safety Improvement Program, managed by the Iowa DOT, allocates state fuel-tax funds to improve roadway safety through three project types: targeted site-specific upgrades, traffic control device installations (signs, signals, markings), and studies or outreach initiatives. Any city, county, or the DOT itself can apply for up to \$500,000 per project, with annual awards determined through committee review and Iowa Transportation Commission approval.

Applications are due on August 15 (FY27), with new funding available the following July. In FY25, the program was awarded over \$8.1 million across 32 safety projects statewide. Projects are evaluated on crash-history evidence, benefits-to-cost ratio, and overall safety impact, helping local jurisdictions fund enhancements like rumble strips, paved shoulders, safer signage, and intersection improvements. If you have any questions, please email hector.hernandez@area15rpc.com or call 641-814-8401. (<https://iowadot.gov/consultants-contractors/traffic-safety/programs/traffic-safety-improvement-program-tsip>)

RPC WELCOMES NEW CITY ADMINISTRATOR

Area 15 RPC would like to give a warm welcome to Shawn Metcalf, the new city administrator for Oskaloosa. Shawn comes to the region with previous experience working in Utah, Wyoming, and most recently Hastings Nebraska. Over the past few weeks RPC staff met with Shawn and introduced him to the RPC and its affiliate organizations. Welcome Shawn!





Statewide TAP (Transportation Alternative Program)

The TAP is a federal funded grant administered by Iowa DOT to support small-scale, alternative transportation projects such as: Recreational trails, Safe Routes to School initiatives Historic preservation, vegetation management, stormwater and habitat projects. The due date for Statewide funding is May 2026, for Regional funding (Area 15 RPC) is April 2026. Email hector.hernandez@area15rpc.com or call 641-814-8401 for questions.

Major Road Expansions Planned For Oskaloosa and Mahaska County

SE Connector 163/23

Groundbreaking for the Oskaloosa Southeast Connector was recently held in June. This project aims to link U.S. Highway 63 with Highway 23 to provide a direct route to the city's industrial park. The industrial park contains a 500-acre certified site ready for development. The project aims to redirect truck traffic out of residential neighborhoods and improve safety and quality of life. Construction of this \$15 million road project begins this summer with heavy grading; final paving is scheduled to be completed in late 2026 or early 2027.

This project was funded in part by a \$10 million RISE grant, the largest in the State of Iowa's history.



IOWA SOUTH - Educators in the Workplace

Last month (June) the Iowa South regional economic development group held the 11th annual Educator's in the Workplace program! Over 20 local teachers participated in the program that included tours of businesses in the region in the healthcare and tech industry. This included visits to the Lucas County Health Center, Chariton Specialty Care, Monroe County Hospital, Mahaska Health Partnership, William Penn Nursing Department. Technology stops included visits to M3 Fabrication and Metal Wholesale in Bloomfield, and Weaton Companies, Creative Edge, Bovard Studios, and Agri-Plastics in Fairfield. This program provides local teachers with the means to assure that K-12 students are prepared for the workplace of today and tomorrow.



NW 63/163 OSKALOOSA BYPASS

*Photo: Groundbreaking Oskaloosa SE
Connector Project, June, 2025*



The largest investment project currently programmed in FY26-29 for the RPA 15 Region is the Oskaloosa NW bypass. This is a \$70 million federal project that will connect Iowa Highway 163 to US Highway 63 along the Northwest section of Oskaloosa. The new facility will be a 3.6 mile long 2-lane undivided highway with 10-foot shoulders, turn lanes, and a climbing lane. A new interchange at IA163 and

a new intersection at US Highway 63 will be built, along with new highway exit ramps. The need for the project is to eliminate large truck traffic from driving through downtown Oskaloosa daily. It is expected to help the business community and help the retail community and ease the stop and go traffic and make the area safer. Heavy grading started in 2025 and final paving is scheduled to complete in 2027.

RPC STAFF CONTINUES FEDERAL GRANT TRAINING



Iowa Economic Development Authority is now requiring all grant administrators to receive monthly training on the requirements of the federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. The CDBG program is a very important source of funding for our communities for infrastructure projects for water, sewer, stormwater, community facilities, and downtown

revitalization (up to \$500,000). There are many rules and regulations involved with the CDBG program that must be followed and IEDA will only allow trained staff to administer these grants. Area 15 RPC continues to receive this training so that we can deliver these important programs to our communities!



COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANTS

The Iowa Economic Development Authority (IEDA) manages the State Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program on behalf of the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Area 15 RPC is a partner of IEDA and attends monthly training, and can assist your community with project development for application to the following programs:

COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND SERVICES

This competitive program assists projects such as day care facilities, senior centers, vocational workshops, and storm water projects. Applications are accepted on an ongoing basis as funds are available.

DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION FUND

This program can be used to rehabilitate blighted downtown buildings to provide economic opportunities for people, especially those of low- and moderate-income. Projects must meet HUD's Slum and Blight National Objectives.

WATER/SEWER

This competitive program assists cities and counties with projects such as sanitary sewer system improvements, water system improvements, water and wastewater treatment facility projects, storm sewer projects related to sanitary sewer system improvements and rural water connections. Application deadlines are Mar 1 and June 1.



AREA 15 RPC ASSISTS OTTUMWA AND FAIRFIELD WITH CDBG WATER/SEWER APPLICATIONS

Area 15 Regional Planning Commission is currently assisting the cities of Ottumwa and Fairfield with developing grant applications for the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Water/Sewer Fund.

Both projects aim to address critical infrastructure needs through sewer lining and repair work, helping to improve system efficiency and reliability. In addition to sewer improvements, Fairfield's project will also include targeted water main upgrades to further enhance the city's water infrastructure.

These important infrastructure projects take time to plan and develop, and Area 15 RPC is here to support these communities in their effort to secure funding.

For more information contact:
Brandon Dicks
641-814-8404.

HOUSING NEEDS SURVEY

Earlier this summer, we sent out a Housing Needs Survey to gather valuable insights for our Housing Action Plan (HAP). This plan is a key part of our annual application to the State Housing Trust Fund, and feedback plays a crucial role in shaping the future of housing in our region. The HAP is designed to assess and address the housing needs of our residents, ensuring we develop strategies that meet the demands of today and prepare for the needs of tomorrow.

Eleven people representing nine jurisdictions have completed the survey and several trends have emerged from the data. Most respondents indicated that both rental and owner-occupied housing availability is inadequate to severely inadequate in their communities. Single-family housing units were reported as the most needed type of housing. Apartments for families and seniors are also ranked as high priorities for most communities. Low-income housing is a priority for most communities, so too is housing to attract young families.

ALL BUT ONE COMMUNITY INDICATED PROBLEMS WITH VACANT/DILAPIDATED HOMES.

BARRIERS TO REMEDIATION INCLUDED:

- COST OF DEMOLITION
- ABSENTEE OWNERSHIP
- DIFFICULTY IN LEGAL ACQUISITION OF THE NUISANCE PROPERTIES

Primary barriers to new housing development were split evenly between land availability and construction/labor costs. Lack of infrastructure and access to funding also ranked high as limitations to new housing.

Five communities have initiated action plans to address housing shortage. Fairfield and University Park have created new subdivisions. Davis and Van Buren school districts have recently created construction trades programs at their high schools. Students will build single family homes while learning valuable skills and earning high school credit. Ottumwa has adopted an ambitious plan to build 500 new homes by 2030.

We will continue distributing the survey to individuals and organizations that have expressed interest in housing development in our area. If you would like to be added to the list of recipients, please reach out to us by emailing matt.naumann@area15rpc.com.

Your participation is key to ensuring that our HAP reflects the diverse needs of the region and helps us secure much-needed resources for housing projects. We look forward to hearing from you and working together to make our region a great place to live!

SUNRISE TRAIL SUBDIVISION

SUNRISE TRAIL

- FUTURE PHASE
- LOT
- 40' X 50' FOOTPRINT
- SHARED GREEN SPACE
- PRIVILEGE
- PLAYGROUND
- POSSIBLE PLANTING LOCATION

DATA

31 lots
Average lot size: 1/4 acre
Shared green space: 3/4 acre

SETBACKS

Front: 25'
Side: 5'
Rear: 35'

DESTINATIONS

SCHOOLS

- 1/2 MILE TO FAIRFIELD COMMUNITY MIDDLE SCHOOL
- 3/4 MILE TO PENCE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
- 1 3/4 MILE TO FAIRFIELD HIGH SCHOOL
- 2 MILES TO MAHARRISH SCHOOL + HSU

FOOD SHOPPING

- 1 1/3 MILES TO HYVEE
- 1 1/2 MILES TO BOB'S PRODUCE BARN
- 1 3/4 MILES TO EVERYBODY'S WHOLE FOODS
- 2 MILES TO WALMART

DOWNTOWN

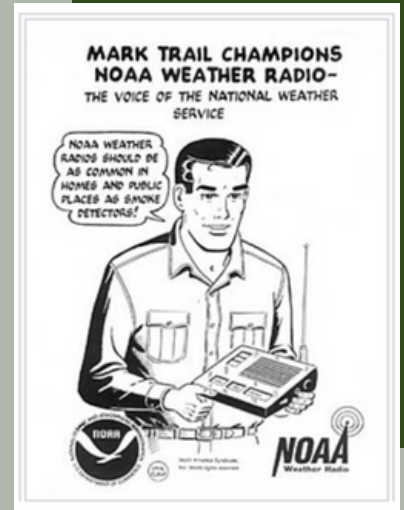
- 1 1/2 MILES TO DOWNTOWN FAIRFIELD



RPC Remembers When . . . May 2002

“Regional NOAA Weather Radio Project Underway”

It was May 2002 when the RPC applied for and was awarded a \$700,000 grant from FEMA to purchase and distribute NOAA Weather Radios to 26,000 households in the Area 15 Region. This was a public safety project to help save lives and protect property from severe weather hazards. Regional leaders and emergency coordinators rallied to assist the RPC staff to implement this project in a timely way to distribute radios and program them to receive immediate weather announcements and alerts. Many of these radios are still in use today! Although technology has changed significantly, the need for early alerts remains extremely important to all of us. The RPC was presented with the “Mark Trail” award at a luncheon in Washington D.C. from NOAA for this innovative project!



Addressing Fairfield’s Housing Needs Through Strategic Development

In 2023, Grow Fairfield Economic Development Association and the City of Fairfield partnered with Iowa State University to conduct a Rural Housing Readiness Study. The study's findings have since guided efforts to address the community's housing needs. As part of these efforts, Grow Fairfield purchased 34 acres of land adjacent to the new Cambridge Little Achievers Center near the hospital. This area will become Fairfield's newest subdivision – Sunrise Trail.

The first phase of development will feature 31 single-family home lots. To support the project, the City of Fairfield approved an Urban Renewal Agreement and authorized Tax Increment Financing (TIF) for the construction of phase one infrastructure, scheduled to begin this year. A groundbreaking ceremony for Sunrise Trail was held on June 10th, with lots expected to be ready for home construction by spring 2026.

The timeline for Phase 2 will be based on the level of interest in Phase 1. Grow Fairfield continues to engage local builders and developers, keeping them informed and collaborating on incentive opportunities, including Workforce Housing Tax Credits and newly introduced local programs.

INDIAN HILLS COMMUNITY COLLEGE BEGINS PAVING PROJECT AT NORTH CAMPUS



Indian Hills Community College was recently awarded HUD Community Project funding to improve the CDL truck driver training facility at its North Ottumwa Campus. This important project involves paving the existing parking lot that is used for truck driver CDL license training. The improvement will enhance safety, functionality, and long-term durability of the training area.

Area 15 Regional Planning Commission is excited to partner with Indian Hills to assist with the administration on this federal grant project. The RPC will assist with maintaining compliance with federal and state regulations throughout the process. This project supports our efforts to strengthen workforce development infrastructure in our region.



Highway Railroad Crossing Safety Program

The Iowa DOT's Highway-Railroad Crossing Safety Program helps cities, counties, and railroads fund critical safety improvements at public grade crossings. Eligible projects include installing new warning signals, widening crossings, improving sight distance, and even closing crossings when necessary.

Funding typically covers 100% of project costs through federal aid. Applications are due by July 1, 2026, for the next funding cycle, and priority is given to projects with strong safety benefits based on crash risk, traffic volume, and cost-effectiveness. Joint applications between jurisdictions and railroads are encouraged. Communities or counties interested in applying please email hector.hernandez@area15rpc.com or call 641-814-8401.



<https://iowadot.gov/transportation-development/grant-programs/grant-program-list/crossing-safety-program>



REGIONAL TRAILS PLAN 2025-2026

Area 15 Regional Planning Commission is updating the RPA 15 Regional Trails Plan from 2021. The plan covers Jefferson, Keokuk, Mahaska, Van Buren, and Wapello counties. This project is necessary to coordinate trail development to enhance recreation, tourism, and transportation. It is funded by the Iowa DOT, FHWA, and FTA.

The plan update includes an inventory of existing and proposed trails, local parks, and scenic areas. It also outlines goals, funding sources, and future priorities identified by RPA 15's advisory committees.

This plan is updated every five years, with GIS data that is maintained between updates to reflect local trail efforts. If you have any questions, **please email hector.hernandez@area15rpc.com or call 641-814-8401.**

MANY CONGRATULATIONS!

Congratulations to the cities of Birmingham and Farmington on being awarded Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds this month! These projects support critical sewer infrastructure upgrades and the grant funds will cover a significant portion of the cost.

Additionally, congratulations to the City of Hedrick on the successful completion of its new water tower! This vital project was funded through a combination of CDBG funds and a State Revolving Fund (SRF) Drinking Water Loan.

Area 15 Regional Planning Commission is proud to have assisted Birmingham and Farmington in preparing their CDBG applications, and to have supported Hedrick in seeing its water tower project through to completion.





T-Mobile® Hometown Grants

is investing \$25 million in 500 rural towns over five years to jumpstart projects and build strong communities. Small rural communities with a population of 50,000 or less can apply for up to \$50,000 for physical projects benefiting the public. The grant program is specifically open to 501c3 and 501c6 nonprofit organizations and local government entities. It will help fund projects that foster local connections, like technology upgrades, outdoor spaces, the arts, and community centers.

For more information, visit [Hometown Grant Program: Revitalizing Small Towns | T-Mobile](#). For application assistance, please get in touch with Brandon Dicks at brandon.dicks@area15rpc.com

Area 15 RPC Provides Project Planning and Grantwriting

For those new to city/county government in the area, Area 15 Regional Planning Commission is your local government organization formed since 1974 to assist with economic development and planning needs of the 6-county region also known as the Council of Governments (COG). As members of Area 15 RPC, our programs and grant writing and administrative services are available to you. We help partner our communities with local, state, and federal programs to help fund projects.



Project Completion

Congratulations to the City of Milton on their beautiful new Welcome Sign! With funding received through a successful application to the Van Buren County Foundation—written by Area 15 Regional Planning Commission—and printed by a local company, the sign is a true community effort. Also a big thank you to the Milton Lions Club for volunteering to help install the new sign!

Thank You For Your Membership!

A BIG THANK YOU to all the cities and counties in our region who committed their annual membership to support Area 15 Regional Planning Commission! Your membership dues help provide the matching funds for our U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development planning grant. This program supports our staff to answer your calls and questions and provide technical assistance such as project development and grantwriting. The following is the list of RPC member cities and counties for FY2026 –

AGENCY | BARNES CITY | BATAVIA | BEACON | BIRMINGHAM |
 BLAKESBURG | BLOOMFIELD | BONAPARTE | CANTRIL |
 CHILLICOTHE | DELTA | EDDYVILLE | ELDON | FAIRFIELD |
 FARMINGTON | FREMONT | HARPER | HAYESVILLE | HEDRICK |
 KEOMAH VILLAGE | KEOSAUQUA | KEOTA | KESWICK | KINROSS |
 KIRKVILLE | LEIGHTON | LIBERTYVILLE | LOCKRIDGE | MAHARISHI
 VEDIC CITY | MARTINSBURG | MILTON | NEW SHARON | OLLIE |
 OSKALOOSA | OTTUMWA | PACKWOOD | PLEASANT PLAIN |
 PULASKI | RICHLAND | ROSE HILL | SOUTH ENGLISH | SIGOURNEY
 | STOCKPORT | UNIVERSITY PARK | WEBSTER | DAVIS COUNTY |
 JEFFERSON COUNTY | KEOKUK COUNTY | MAHASKA COUNTY |
 VAN BUREN COUNTY | WAPELLO COUNTY

NEWSLINE

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BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Mike Hadley, Chairperson - Keokuk Co.

Dale House, Vice-Chair - Van Buren Co.

Bryan Ziegler, Treasurer - Wapello Co.

Dave Henderson - Davis Co.

Lee Dimmitt - Jefferson Co.

Mark Gronendyk - Mahaska Co.

Jimmy Morlan - Sigourney

John Helgerson - Private Sector

Emily Starnes - Economic Development

Matt Greiner - Private Sector

The preparation of this newsletter was financed in part through federal funds provided by the Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration, the Iowa Economic Development Authority and the U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration.

AREA 15
REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

MAHASKA • KEOKUK • WAPELLO
JEFFERSON • DAVIS • VAN BUREN

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