

Community Matters Now



A monthly publication for Iowa leaders from Extension and Outreach Community and Economic Development

IDA GROVE PILOTS RURAL HOUSING READINESS ASSESSMENT PROGRAM *By Abbie Gaffey | Community Development Specialist*

Your house is now everything—your home, your office, your kids’ school. Turns out, if you spend months on end in your house, the importance of quality, affordable, safe housing that meets your lifestyle needs is top of mind.

Add in all the news about housing: looming foreclosures and evictions, houses lost to derechos, historically low mortgage interest rates, and suddenly housing is something that matters more than ever. However, with everything going on, who has time to focus on community housing needs? Well, if you are socially distancing and Zooming all day anyway, it’s a perfect time to evaluate and plan for a different future.

At least that’s how it turned out for Ida Grove. Way back in the olden days before COVID-19, Ida Grove agreed to pilot the Rural Housing Readiness Assessment (RHRA) program being offered by Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Community Economic Development (CED) in cooperation with the Iowa Economic Development Authority’s (IEDA) Community Development Block Grant technical assistance fund. The RHRA program is a series of workshops bringing community leaders together to examine their local housing statistical data, learn about the types of housing other Iowa communities are having success with in addressing their housing needs, engaging with their town’s residents about the type of new housing they’d like to see developed in their community, and drafting a strategic plan and action plan to implement their ideas.

Unable to meet face-to-face, the program was quickly converted for virtual delivery. While college students are used to sitting through classes, adults quickly zone out on Zoom, so the CED team had to amp up

these virtual classes to be more engaging, more interactive, and livelier while still covering the subject matter and producing a plan at the end. To do that, the team built in polling questions, breakout rooms, questions to be answered in chat boxes, and facilitated conversations.

“The breakout sessions with participants and ISU were fun and made the process even more enjoyable!” said Heather Sweeden, Ida Grove city clerk and RHRA participant. “The breakouts made it fun and interactive, which I enjoy much more than just listening.”

Using an interactive tool called Miro, CED staff members were operating in the background capturing the participants answers and ideas on a virtual white board while other staff members were engaging with the participants and leading the conversation. The level of interactive engagement kept participants on their toes.

“I really enjoyed the process, even though COVID kept us online versus meeting in person. It was an interesting experience



During the RHRA process, participants created a time line of the projects they want to complete.

while taxing at times it helped the participants consolidate the vision of our community and helped clarify the true housing needs of Ida Grove,” says Ida Grove mayor Devlun Whiteing. “The staff of the ISU Extension ensured the process was a truly collaborative effort in putting all the pieces of our puzzle together. Additionally, they facilitated the process through guidance based on their real-life experience and extensive study of the topics and issues.”

While most communities have engaged in housing plans through housing needs assessments and comprehensive plans, sometimes plans have stalled after the low-hanging fruit has been accomplished

continued on P03

ONLINE RESOURCES

[APPLICATION FOR 2021 COMMUNITY VISIONING PROGRAM \(DUE OCT. 15\)](#)

[BACK TO BUSINESS IOWA PODCAST](#)

[REGISTRATION FOR VIRTUAL INTRO TO PLANNING AND ZONING WORKSHOPS](#)

[BUILDING TEAM CAPACITY DURING COVID-19](#)

[EMPOWER RURAL IOWA RURAL HOUSING READINESS ASSESSMENT RESOURCES](#)

[COMMUNITY FOOD SYSTEMS PROGRAM](#)

WHAT DID YOU DO OVER THE SUMMER?

This was usually one of the first questions asked by our teachers and classmates when we returned to school in the fall. It probably was again this fall, at least in the schools that have returned to in-person or hybrid instruction. That statement in itself tells you what an unusual year this has been. Pandemics, derechos, and droughts, oh my!

Community and Economic Development (CED) has been busy over the summer. It started as a typical spring of program planning and delivery, but quickly turned into frantic weeks of reassessment and adaptation. In this issue we tell the stories of three outreach efforts in various stages of development or delivery when we had to hit the "reset" button. The Municipal Professionals Institute and Academy have been held in July on the ISU campus for more than 40 years. With an article word

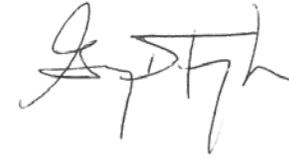
limit of around 500 institute director Sara Shonrock can't begin to describe everything that went into shifting an in-person, two-week course of instruction for 300 municipal professionals to an all-virtual format. Sara is not one to brag, so I will tell you that Sara and her program coordinator Amanda Eggers did amazing work!

Courtney Long, Kaley Hohenshell, and Bre Miller deserve kudos, as well. They moved their successful, nationally-recognized Local Food Leader and Community Food Systems certifications to a virtual format and began their first offerings this month to sold-out cohorts.

Finally, Abbie Gaffey explains how the disrupted plan for a Rural Housing Readiness Assessment with Ida Grove actually turned into an opportunity to pilot several virtual

tools and strategies that led to an engaging process with strong results.

What will we answer when the question "What did you do over the summer?" is asked next year at this time? No one knows, but CED will continue to offer programs that positively impact Iowa communities regardless of the circumstances.



Gary Taylor
Program Director, Iowa State University
Extension and Outreach Community and
Economic Development

LOCAL FOOD LEADER AND COMMUNITY FOOD SYSTEMS CERTIFICATIONS OFFERED VIRTUALLY

By Courtney Long, Program Coordinator | Farm, Food, and Enterprise Development

Iowa State University Extension and Outreach's Community Food Systems program staff worked hard this summer to transition the Local Food Leader and Community Food Systems trainings and certifications to a virtual format.

Early September marked the launch of virtual Local Food Leader and Community Food Systems Certifications. Both certifications were sold out with cohorts of 16 for Local Food Leader and 21 for Community Food Systems. Each course incorporates a dual-format curriculum with virtual workshops through Zoom and an online course within Moodle.

The Local Food Leader Certification teaches foundational competencies critical for successful food systems development through integrated virtual workshops and four online modules. These include equity

in food systems, working in food systems, facilitation and coordination, evaluation and professional development. The online modules offer intensive curriculum including community food systems overview, methods of engagement and leadership, creating teams and tools for success, and evaluation. The certification process takes four months and costs \$375.

The Community Food Systems Full Certification is a process-based certification that increases capacity for food systems practitioners to work within communities and develop food systems. The virtual workshops center around activities and networking with colleagues to learn a new framework for community food systems development.

The certification process focuses on building new skills for facilitation and

developing vision, mission and core values; tools for conducting community food systems assessments; prioritization methods; evaluation techniques; and project management and development.

The online modules offer intensive curriculum around visioning and implementation; community food systems assessments; mapping for decision making; and tools for project management and evaluation, feasibility studies, economic impact, and design thinking. This certification program takes eight months to complete and costs \$600.

After receiving certification, attendees have the opportunity to take a train-the-trainer course to be able to offer the workshops in their own communities. The Community

continued on P03

CONTACT INFO

Iowa State University Extension and Outreach
Community and Economic Development
2321 North Loop Drive, Suite 121, Ames, IA 50010-8218
515-294-8397
Fax 515-294-1354
www.extension.iastate.edu/communities

- Download additional copies of this newsletter in PDF file format (www.extension.iastate.edu/communities/newsletter/)
- To change your mailing information, contact Sandra Oberbroeckling (soberbr@iastate.edu)
- Find us on Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com/ISUExtensionCED>) and follow us on Twitter (@ISUExtensionCED)

Editorial Board: Gary Taylor, Himar Hernández, Jon Wolseth, Susan Erickson, and Sandra Oberbroeckling

Community Matters Now is published monthly for Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Community and Economic Development staff and their clients. Comments, questions, and suggestions regarding the content of this newsletter should be directed to:

Sandra Oberbroeckling, editor
ISU Extension and Outreach
Community and Economic Development
2321 North Loop Drive, Suite 121
Ames, IA 50010
515-294-3721
soberbr@iastate.edu

This institution is an equal opportunity provider. For the full non-discrimination statement or accommodation inquiries, go to www.extension.iastate.edu/diversity/ext.

2020 MUNICIPAL PROFESSIONALS TRAINING GOES VIRTUAL

By Sara Shonrock | Extension Program Specialist, Office of State and Local Government Programs

For two weeks every July for more than four decades, up to 300 municipal professionals from around the state of Iowa have descended on Ames to receive training focusing on real-world instruction that assists municipal clerks, finance officers, and administrators in doing their job. The Iowa Municipal Professionals Institute and Academy (MPI/MPA) are offered by Iowa State University Extension and Outreach's Office of State and Local Government Programs and the Iowa League of Cities.

The year-long planning process for the 2020 MPI/MPA was already well underway when COVID-19 started spreading through the United States in March. It didn't take long to realize that bringing 300 people together in person for the annual training was not feasible for July 2020.

Moving forward with a virtual MPI/MPA posed a number of challenges. First, because registration was already open, changing the dates of the Institute and Academy was not an option. Then came transforming 44 different courses into a virtual format that would occur over 10 days, leaving all-day trainings in place for many of the participants. Giving in-person sessions a virtual home for 300 participants who all have different class schedules followed shortly behind. There was also the question of whether instructing these courses would make sense in a virtual format and then adjusting what that learning meant in a virtual world. Fortunately, ISU Extension and Outreach's Community and Economic Development unit was already immersed in

the process of moving programming to an online format.

Participants attend MPI/MPA to obtain certification from two different organizations—International Institute of Municipal Clerks (IIMC) and Iowa Municipal Finance Officers Association (IMFOA)—both of which require that all classes be live and interactive to receive credit. That and the fact that every participant would potentially have a different schedule provided the road map for taking an entirely in-person event online. The participants were housed in a Learning Management System with links to their class schedules, quizzes, online sessions, and all class materials such as handouts and presentations. Courses were held via Zoom sessions during which instructors relied heavily on breakout rooms, polls, and survey questions to encourage engagement; all attendees were required to keep cameras on throughout the sessions.

Making in-person training completely virtual necessitates having the assistance and support of a good team, as well as having instructors willing to try new technologies, adapt curriculum, and work to assure that it flowed virtually. It also requires a degree of leniency from participants as the hosts find new and creative ways to work through technological issues. Being able to identify and troubleshoot issues for all users in advance lessened the anxiety of the actual event. Doing walk-throughs and pre-sessions can benefit instructors, hosts, and participants and provide a level of comfort for the actual event.

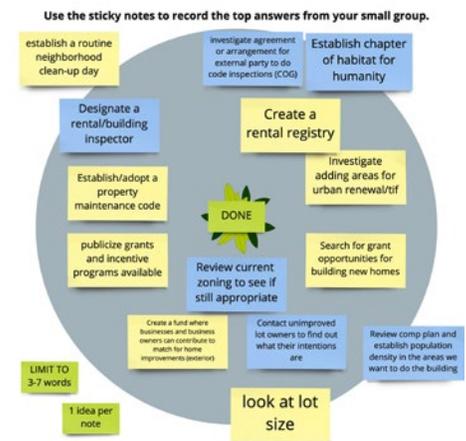
What July has shown is that without any prior experience in online events, hosting a 300-person, 44-class, two-week event is feasible, completely possible, and even beneficial to participants, as comments from their evaluations show:

"Personally, I loved the virtual training. I felt it moved along better than in person and I retained more information."

"The city was able to save so much money. There was no hotel, no travel, no food bill, etc. That was a HUGE plus. Being a small city if we are able to save money we try to."

"[The virtual sessions] made it easier to attend class during the day and go into work at night to try and stay caught up. Being gone from the office for 10 days would be a nightmare!"

Ida Grove RHRA continued from P01



The program Miro allows interactive participation in virtual breakout rooms.

and the tasks become harder. The RHRA program workbook that is used as part of the workshop sessions provides a checklist of programs, resources, ordinances, policies, services, and infrastructure that communities need to have in place for the more complicated types of housing development to happen.

"The idea of bringing different folks that collaborated on this project together was great in and of itself," said Rita Frahm, director of Ida County Economic Development. "Our first choice would have been to do it face to face, but people who participated this way learned things that they didn't know existed. It was good to get ideas out on the table. The amount of planning the city has done has set them up to move forward—ready to move a project forward and setting them up for success."

Ida Grove is one of seven cities in the first set of RHRA program recipients. The other communities are Manning, Creston, Stanton, Central City, Springville, and Keokuk. Another round of applications is available in September through IEDA's Empower Rural Iowa office. Communities are asked to pay a \$5,000 fee up front but receive a grant for \$10,000 upon completion of the program. The funds can be used to move forward with a project resulting from their planning efforts, such as hiring an architect to determine if an existing building is suitable for conversion to multifamily housing, an engineer to survey a possible subdivision, or to put toward the purchase of land.

Communities interested in applying in the next round of funding can contact Jon Wolseth, ISU Extension and Outreach community development specialist, 515-509-0558, jwolseth@iastate.edu, or Liesl Seabert, Empower Rural Iowa director, 515-348-6154, rural@iowaedacom.

Community Food Systems continued from P02

Food Systems team is hoping to offer an in-person train the trainer this winter. However, the course is also available virtually.

The team is planning to host a second course for Local Food Leader in spring 2021, as well as a Community Food Systems certification in fall 2021. Those interested in more information regarding the course, can contact Kaley Hohenshell, food systems program coordinator (kaleyh@iastate.edu), or Courtney Long, food systems program manager (court7@iastate.edu).

The Community Food Systems program is housed within the Farm, Food and Enterprise Development and Community and Economic Development programs of ISU Extension and Outreach.

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

Extension and Outreach

Community and Economic Development

2321 North Loop Drive, Suite 121

Ames, IA 50010-8218

Let us know how you want to receive your free monthly *Community Matters Now* subscription!

First Name

Last Name

Organization

Mailing Address (including City, State, and ZIP Code)

Email Address

Phone Number

- Sign me up for the monthly e-newsletter only! (email address must be included above)
- Sign me up for the monthly mailed copy of *Community Matters Now* only! (mailing address must be included above)
- I would like to receive both versions monthly! (all information must be completed to receive both publications)

Please return this form to:

ISU Extension and Outreach Community and Economic Development

c/o Community Matters Now

2321 North Loop Drive, Suite 121

Ames, IA 50010