

# Community Matters Now



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

## MALVERN, SHENANDOAH HOPE TO ENHANCE TRAIL CONNECTIVITY THROUGH COMMUNITY VISIONING

By Sandra Oberbroeckling | Program Specialist

Two southwest Iowa communities—Malvern and Shenandoah—are participating in the 2021 [Iowa's Living Roadways \(ILR\) Community Visioning Program](#).

Community Visioning is a participatory process that integrates landscape planning and design with sustainable action to assist community leaders and volunteers in making meaningful decisions about their local landscape. The program targets small, rural towns with populations under 10,000 residents that lack the resources needed to address local transportation needs.

Malvern, located in Mills County, has a population of just more than 1,000, and Shenandoah, a much larger community at nearly 5,000 residents, straddles Fremont and Page Counties. Both are among the nine southwest Iowa towns along the Wabash Trace Nature Trail, a converted railroad right-of-way stretching 63 miles from the Council Bluffs area south to the Iowa-Missouri border.

Both communities applied for the 2021 visioning program with the goal of better connecting the Wabash Trace to their business districts, along with improving pedestrian connectivity, safety, and access.

The first phase of the visioning process consists of research-based community assessments. Iowa State University Community Visioning staff and students evaluate each community's bioregion—including vegetation, watersheds, topography—and provide a series of online maps and analysis to a local steering committee.

To evaluate the local transportation system, program staff conduct focus groups

with different demographic groups—such as parents, youth, older adults, and people with mobility challenges—to identify factors and conditions affecting transportation use. ISU staff and students analyzed the data and graphically summarized the findings for each steering committee.

Because Shenandoah is a larger town, ISU staff also conducted a survey of randomly selected residents in which they were asked to identify commuting, walking, and biking routes and to rank the importance of a number of transportation features and issues. ISU researchers compiled and summarized the survey results as a series of presentation boards for the Shenandoah visioning committee.

The assessment data will guide the Malvern and Shenandoah visioning committees in identifying and prioritizing what projects they would like to pursue. Over the summer, the Omaha-based firm, HDR Engineering, will work with the steering committees to develop conceptual design plans, cost opinions, and phasing recommendations.

Trees Forever field coordinator Brad Riphagen will guide both communities throughout the visioning process and facilitate implementation planning.



*This image edit illustrates the qualities of the Wabash Trace that residents said they valued during focus group discussions.*

The 2021 visioning program will culminate in an annual meeting on November 19, 2021, where representatives from Malvern and Shenandoah will join their counterparts from eight other communities to celebrate their accomplishments.

ILR is a collaboration of the Iowa Department of Transportation, ISU, and Trees Forever. Since the program's inception in 1996, more than 250 communities—of which 32 are in southwest Iowa—have participated in Community Visioning.

### ONLINE RESOURCES

[IOWA'S LIVING ROADWAYS COMMUNITY VISIONING PROGRAM](#)

[GOAL SETTING, STRATEGIC PLANNING, AND FACILITATION](#)

[NAVIGATING DIFFERENCE© CULTURAL COMPETENCY TRAINING](#)

[RURAL HOUSING READINESS ASSESSMENT](#)

## CED'S 'SONG & DANCE MAN' SAYS GOODBYE TO ISU, BUT NOT TO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT By Sandra Oberbroeckling | Program Specialist

"Improvise. Adapt. Overcome." Those three words are the keys to success for community development according to Steve Adams, who has spent more than two decades as a southwest Iowa community development specialist for Iowa State University Extension and Outreach.

"If you're not a song and dance man, you'll never make it as a field specialist," added Adams, who has an undergraduate degree in speech and theater, as well as a master's degree in communication and human relations from TCU.

The Red Oak, Iowa, native began his career in community and economic development more than 38 years ago at an engineering and architectural firm in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. He spent 14 years in Texas before returning to Iowa in the mid-1990s to become the executive director of the Montgomery County Development Corporation. In that role, he often collaborated with ISU Extension and Outreach community development specialist Wayne Kobberdahl, who

convinced Adams to apply for his position when he retired.

During his tenure with Extension and Outreach, Adams has been involved in many programs. For example, he was part of the team that created the Developing Dynamic Leaders program, he helped develop the *Back to Business Iowa* podcast series during the pandemic, and he has taught Township Trustee workshops, to name a few.

He has also experienced challenges along the way, including the 2008 economic meltdown and the resulting recession.

"That was tough time because it was so difficult to find conventional financing for businesses," he said. "The other challenge, which started a few years before the Great Recession, was that outright grant opportunities for business, nonprofits, and communities started to dry up."

"I couldn't get a conventional bank to make a loan to a small business for the better part of five years. That saw the

emergence of revolving loan funds, which helped fill that gap. I've gotten a couple of businesses 100% financed without one penny coming from a traditional bank."



However, the rewards of his job have greatly outweighed the challenges.

"My biggest joy has been working with and getting small businesses started," said Adams. "That's been the most gratifying thing I've done over the years."

Adams has assisted a variety of businesses, ranging from small-town grocery stores to sawmills to prescription tillage companies, many of which continue to expand and thrive.

His work with nonprofits has also been rewarding because "those are the people who really have the least, but were out there doing 'God's work'—early childhood, children at risk, youth addiction...people who just go out there with all this passion and all this care about their communities."

"You walk away from some of those experiences saying 'I think we did some good today,'" he said.

When he leaves ISU Extension and Outreach at the end of June, Adams will have come full circle, resuming his role as executive director of Montgomery County Development on a three-quarter-time basis, as well as continuing to teach at Southwest Iowa Community College.

"Thomas Wolf was wrong," said Adams. "You can go home again."

## CED'S WORK IN SOUTHWEST IOWA

Beginning with this issue, we periodically will be highlighting our work in particular parts of the state. First up is southwest Iowa, which we define loosely as the quadrant south of I-80/680 and west of I-35. Between the Community Visioning programming, Rural Housing Readiness Assessments, and our needs assessment conducted for Centro Latino in Council Bluffs, CED has been quite busy in this part of the state in recent years, and we have no plans for that to change.

Unfortunately, our focus on southwest Iowa comes with some sad news. Steve Adams, who has served as one of our specialists in Red Oak since 1999, has decided to take the plunge into retirement from Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. We rarely get a chance to tap the brain

of someone with such a long history of experiences, so we've dedicated space in this issue to an interview with Steve. Those of you who know Steve and his good nature will not be surprised that we had to edit out a few jokes to keep it within the allotted space. 😊

Congratulations Steve. CED and the communities of southwest Iowa will miss you!

Gary Taylor  
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## SW IOWA COUNTIES TO PARTICIPATE IN CED PROGRAM'S RHRA AS PART OF DISASTER RECOVERY

By Jon Wolseth | CED Associate Program Director

In spring 2019, southwest Iowa and portions of Nebraska and Missouri experienced unprecedented flooding of the Missouri River and its tributaries. Levees broke, farmland flooded, and many communities were underwater for months. An estimated \$1.6 billion in property damage occurred in Iowa, causing destruction and leading to evacuations.

Fremont, Mills, and Harrison Counties were designated as federal disaster areas that same year. Recovery, however, has been a long process. Two years on, many communities are still experiencing the aftershock of ruined homes and population dislocation. In some communities, such as Pacific Junction and Hamburg, residents fled flooded homes for neighboring towns, putting housing pressures on cities where damage was not as widespread and creating tightened rental and real estate markets unable to expand due to the impacts of COVID-19 and subsequent rising construction prices. The flood aftermath has spotlighted the need for affordable home options to meet demand and to help rebuild devastated communities.

Communities in Fremont, Mills, and Harrison Counties will be eligible to apply

for Community Development Block Grant—Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) funds, federal dollars administered through Iowa Economic Development Authority and earmarked for improving affordable housing options. However, communities without a concerted plan may not know how to best utilize the influx of financial resources.

Using its Rural Housing Readiness Assessment (RHRA), Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Community and Economic Development (CED), in conjunction with the economic development corporations and county extension offices in Mills, Harrison, and Fremont Counties, will help communities develop a game plan for how and where to use these funds.

The RHRA program is both an educational and planning workshop series that teaches communities what issues to address to improve the quality, affordability, and accessibility of housing. A committee of local officials, organizations, and residents reflects on where the community is based on data and past planning efforts and, along with community input, envisions where it would like to be in the next 3–5 years. The committee is then organized into work teams with responsibilities and time lines to complete identified projects. With the

CDBG-DR granting cycle approaching, participating communities will be able to identify and prioritize the steps needed to increase affordable housing options. These steps can become part of the CDBG-DR application that communities will submit in conjunction with their council of government (COG) affiliate.

Disaster relief funds can go toward new construction of rental or owner-occupied housing that meets Low-to-Moderate Income limits, with additional grants available for public infrastructure. Identifying infill and greenfield development projects within communities is crucial to submitting a timely application, as is being aware of the prep work needed to make the site construction-ready.

Disaster recovery takes time and cooperation. The individual and community losses are not replaceable, but there is opportunity and hope inherent in the chance to rebuild. CED is proud to partner in this effort and support southwest Iowa as it builds its future.

[Learn more about RHRA at the CED website](https://www.extension.iastate.edu/communities/rural-housing-readiness-assessment) (<https://www.extension.iastate.edu/communities/rural-housing-readiness-assessment>).

## CED SPECIALISTS HELP CENTRO LATINO OF IOWA MEET THE NEEDS OF THE LATINO COMMUNITY IN SW IOWA

By Lynn Adams | Community Development Specialist

According to American Community Survey estimates, since 2000, the Latino population in Pottawattamie County in southwest Iowa has increased by 155%, while the total county population has increased by only 6.6%. Centro Latino of Iowa was born of an effort to provide support to this growing demographic.

Since 2001, Centro Latino has become a vibrant, self-sustaining, independent nonprofit providing education and direct services to Spanish speakers from its office located in downtown Council Bluffs. As the Latino population has continued to grow, Centro Latino's board and director decided data were key to analyzing the current needs of its clients, along with those of other agencies, businesses, and organizations interacting with them to deliver direct services. To get those data, Centro Latino engaged the Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Community and Economic Development (CED) program to

conduct a county-wide needs assessment of the Latino community.

CED specialists began work in late fall 2019, capturing data through surveys, phone calls, personal interviews, and focus groups. Upon reviewing the assessment results, published in February 2020, Centro Latino engaged CED for additional services. CED specialists proposed a suite of programming that included [Navigating Difference©](#) cultural competency training.

Centro Latino assembled a cohort representing local government, business and industry, and state and local organizations and institutions, which completed the 18-hour Navigating Difference© program virtually over five months in early 2021. Participants learn skills to work more effectively with diverse audiences and have the chance to share experiences and possibly open opportunities for new partnerships.



Going forward CED will offer other services such as facilitated strategic planning, nonprofit identity building, and facilitated dialogues for racial understanding and healing. These and other services CED has available can assist Centro Latino to engage new partners and investors. This programming also prepares organizations to create long-term plans keeping them focused on agreed-upon primary target areas coupled with action-based goals.

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