

march 2026

ecia spotlight

Dubuque County Housing Needs Assessment

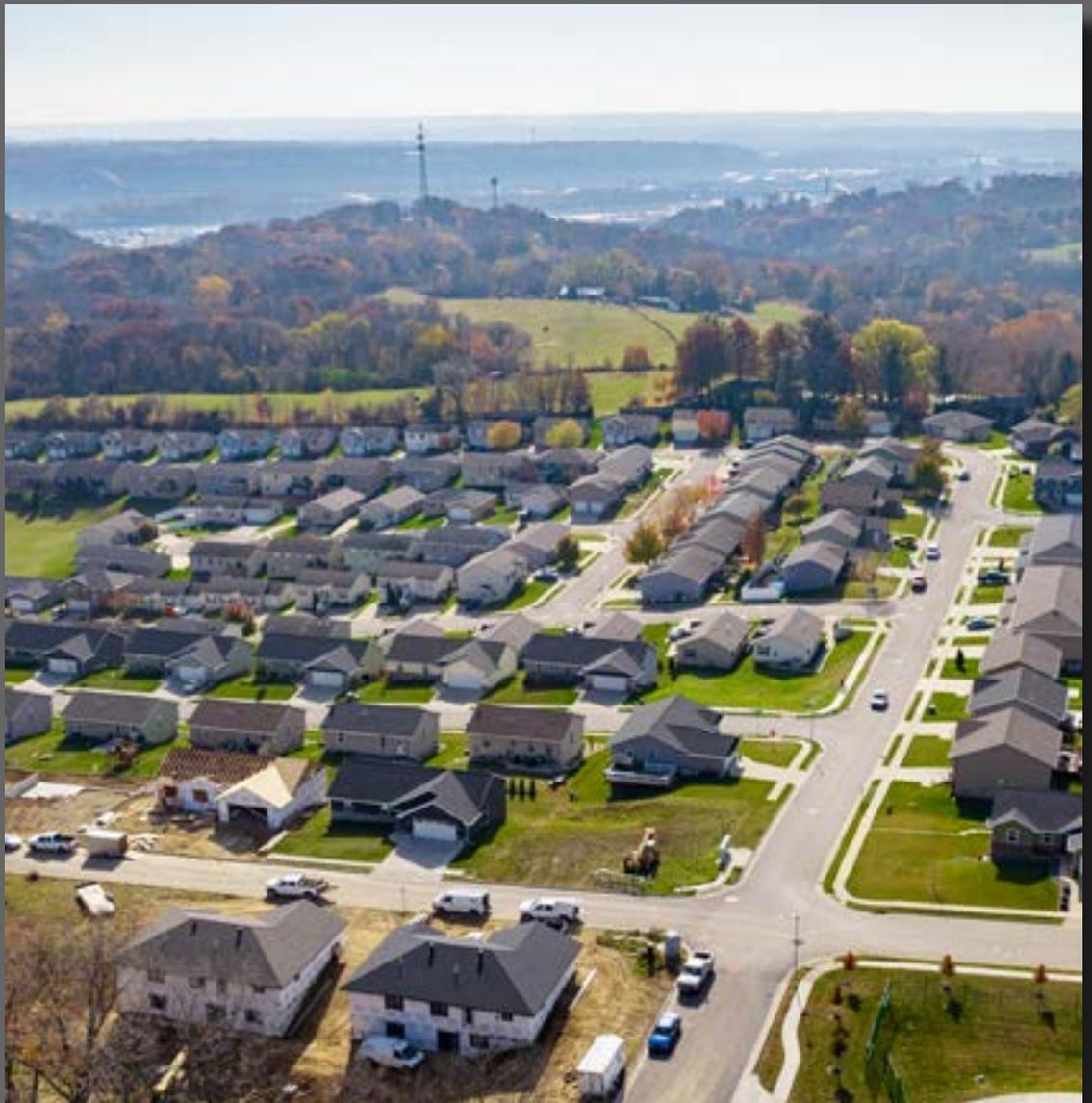
The Greater Dubuque Development Corporation contracted with ECIA to complete a housing needs assessment for Dubuque County in October 2025. Using a data-driven approach, ECIA evaluated current housing conditions and projected the number and types of homes needed over the next decade to maintain a balanced housing market with sustainable costs and healthy vacancy levels.

The assessment found that Dubuque County's housing market is generally strong; supported by population growth, solid employment, and steady construction activity. However, the county faces challenges from rising prices, declining affordability, and growing demand for a wider range of housing options, including workforce, senior, and middle-market owner-occupied homes.

To support continued growth ECIA estimates the county will need 1,900 to 2,500 additional housing units between 2026 and 2035, along with ongoing investment in housing rehabilitation and new construction to ensure access to safe, attainable housing for all residents.

If your community is interested in a housing needs assessment, contact Dan Fox, at dfox@ecia.org

[Link to the full assessment.](#)



Long-Time ECIA Board Member Retires

On March 6, 2026, after nearly nine years, Brian Wagner retired as the City Manager for the City of Tipton. Before that, he was Maquoketa's City Manager for nearly 20 years. During that time, he was on ECIA's Council for 28 years and its Executive Board for nearly 9 years.

In his own words:

When I started in city management 35 years ago, I frequently thought ahead to retirement. However, I always thought of it as something that would never arrive.

I actually worked nearly two years past 65. I kept changing my last day. First, it was to be June 30, 2024—Social Security age. Then, it was September 30, 2025; December 31, 2025; February 13, 2026; and finally, March 6, 2026.

I never saw myself as an expert in any part of city management. I was more of a "jack of all trades" that picked up different things over the years.

I was a Project Guy. But I never saw myself as the only guy. I couldn't have accomplished anything without help from our various staff members and partners.

In Maquoketa, we did the reconstruction of Downtown Main Street. We also created a new industrial park and brought in Family Dollar's distribution center and Generac—now HUSCO. In Tipton, we did the downtown reconstruction of Hwy 38. We assisted in the improvement of several businesses in our downtown corridor, including the redevelopment of dilapidated or empty buildings. We brought in several million dollars in grants. And, on the day I retired, our electric utility's new 1-megawatt solar array was activated.

In Tipton, particularly, I've asked our staff to concentrate on looking for opportunities. They could be either large or small if they improved their departments or the community.

It ended up being difficult to walk away. There was always one more project, one more goal, one more thing to do.

Strangely, now that I've retired, I've had mixed feelings. There've been days when I've felt guilty about not going to work. But, on any weekday, I've awakened feeling like it's Saturday.

I've had a lot of favorite memories. But they're all blurred together—except for the various elected people and staff members that I worked with over the years. By and large, those memories are the best.

After a couple of months of this, I think I'll be looking for something to do. I've heard that there's a need for interim city managers. Maybe I'll try that and see what happens. But, first, my wife told me that I must clean up the basement.



Brian and Tipton Economic Development Director, Linda Beck, in front of one of the many projects that happened during Brian's time at the City.

Catalyst Grant Activity

Mechanicsville

The City of Mechanicsville is applying for its first Community Catalyst Building Remediation grant, due April 15. This grant program, through the Iowa Economic Development Authority provides \$100,000 grants to Cities that partner with a developer(s) to rehabilitate an abandoned building into a new use.

The proposed project will breathe new life into two connected downtown buildings: 113 and 117 E 1st Street in Mechanicsville which have been abandoned for eight years, with one apartment abandoned for five years. When this project is complete, visitors and residents will have a new bar/restaurant and an events center to enjoy on the main level. Prospective apartment renters will also have two new options. The total project cost is still being identified.



Manchester

The City of Manchester is trying for the second time to secure a \$100,000 Catalyst grant for one of their downtown buildings. This historic rehab at 116 S Franklin in Manchester will include three quality upper-story loft apartments overlooking vibrant downtown Manchester and the white water park on the Maquoketa River. First floor will feature fine dining and social opportunities with a unique menu for rural Iowa. Total project cost is estimated at \$650,000.



It would be the first time either City was awarded....ECIA staff are writing both applications. Good luck to both communities!

apartment rendering

Open Meetings Requirements

A law adopted in the 2025 legislative session set a requirement for all new elected officials and those appointed to governmental bodies (at the city government level, common examples include library boards, planning and zoning commissions, boards of adjustments and more) to complete a training on the responsibilities and requirements for open meetings and open records laws. The training must be completed within 90 days of an official taking the oath of office or assuming the duties of their office.

The Iowa Public Information Board (IPIB) is responsible under the law to oversee the training requirement and provide classes. They are also allowed to authorize other entities to provide training. The law stipulates that the training must be at least one hour, but not more than two hours. The IPIB, or another entity providing the training, is required to provide a certificate of course completion, and the governmental body must maintain and make these certificates of completion available for the public.

The law also requires a certificate of completion to be provided to each participant, and for governmental entities to preserve such certificates and make them available for public inspection.

The law increases civil penalties for violation of open records laws to \$500-\$2,500 for accidental violations and \$5,000-\$12,000 for knowing violations. Additionally, a member of a governmental body can be removed from office if they have engaged in prior violations for which damages were assessed.

More information on the Open Meetings law is on the back page in the last article of this newsletter.

IPIB Training Events

Event	Type	Date
IPIB Training for Newly Elected and Appointed Officials	Lunch and Learn	April 15, 2026; 12:00 pm
IPIB Training for Newly Elected and Appointed Officials	Virtual	April 20 2026; 5:00 pm
IPIB Training for Newly Elected and Appointed Officials	Lunch and Learn	May 20, 2026; 12:00 pm

Iowa League of Cities Training Events

Event	Type	Date
ILC Training for Newly Elected and Appointed Officials	Virtual	April 6, 2026; 5:00-6:30 pm
ILC Training for Newly Elected and Appointed Officials	Virtual	April 29 2026; Noon-1:30 pm

Please note: The following League webinars are only for city governments that are members of the League.

Training

Please Advocate for Us

ECIA is a Council of Governments (COG) and across Iowa, COGs are shaping the future of our communities. Created more than 45 years ago by visionary public leaders, Iowa's Councils of Governments (COGs) provide professional planning, programming, and technical assistance to Iowa's cities, counties, businesses, community organizations and Iowans of all ages.

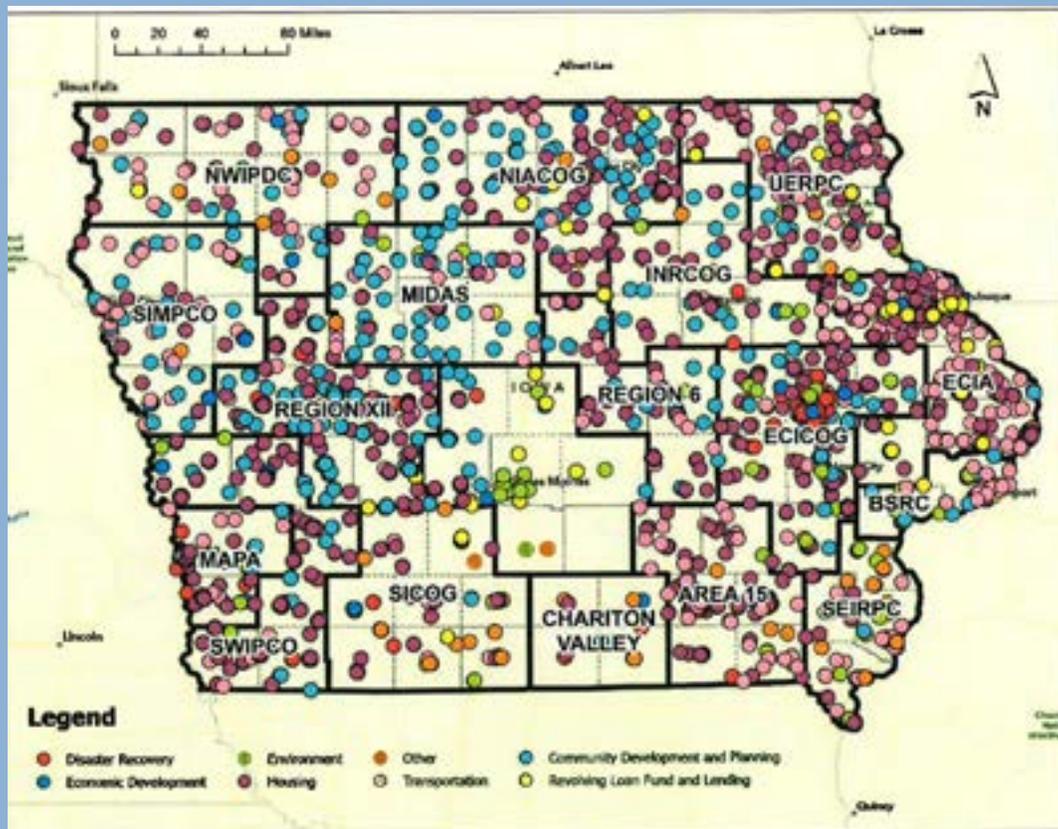
Over the past three years, COGs have delivered meaningful impact on these communities through a wide range of transformative projects. These numbers reflect strategic leadership, thoughtful collaboration, and unwavering commitment to local priorities. From housing and infrastructure to economic development and land revitalization, COGs are driving results that matter.

**3,081
Projects
Completed**

**740
Communities
Served**

**\$1.5 Billion
in Total
Project
Investment**

Click on the map below to zoom in on projects



This year, COG assistance is at risk of being zeroed out in the state budget. With its share of the historically appropriated \$350,000, ECIA uses these funds to create networking opportunities among municipal leaders; provide technical assistance on local, state, and federal grant programs; and utilize the funds as match when applying for competitive grants, which helps leverage more funds. These activities directly impact rural community development while reducing the burden on local municipalities. ECIA staff have been actively advocating for COG Assistance to be maintained in the state budget and would appreciate your support, as well, when speaking with your legislators to ensure the \$350,000 remains in the budget.

ECIA Anniversaries February - March



Dan Fox
16 years

Well done!



Kristi Oberhoffer
4 years

Are you Posting Your Agendas Properly?

When there is no traditional city hall, it can be difficult for small communities to hold meetings in a place that is reasonably accessible to the public. Whether you are holding council meetings in church basements, fire stations, community centers, diners, etc., remember to post meeting notices/agendas at the location of where the meetings are taking place.

The Iowa League of Cities has general guidance on the Iowa Open Meetings Law, Code of Iowa Chapter 21. This law requires meetings of governmental bodies to be open to the public. Cities often have questions about the applicability of this law to day-to-day city business. The information contained [here](#) is designed to be general in nature and does not constitute legal advice. Cities should contact their attorney if there are specific legal questions about open meeting requirements.



East Central Intergovernmental Association

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