

march 2023

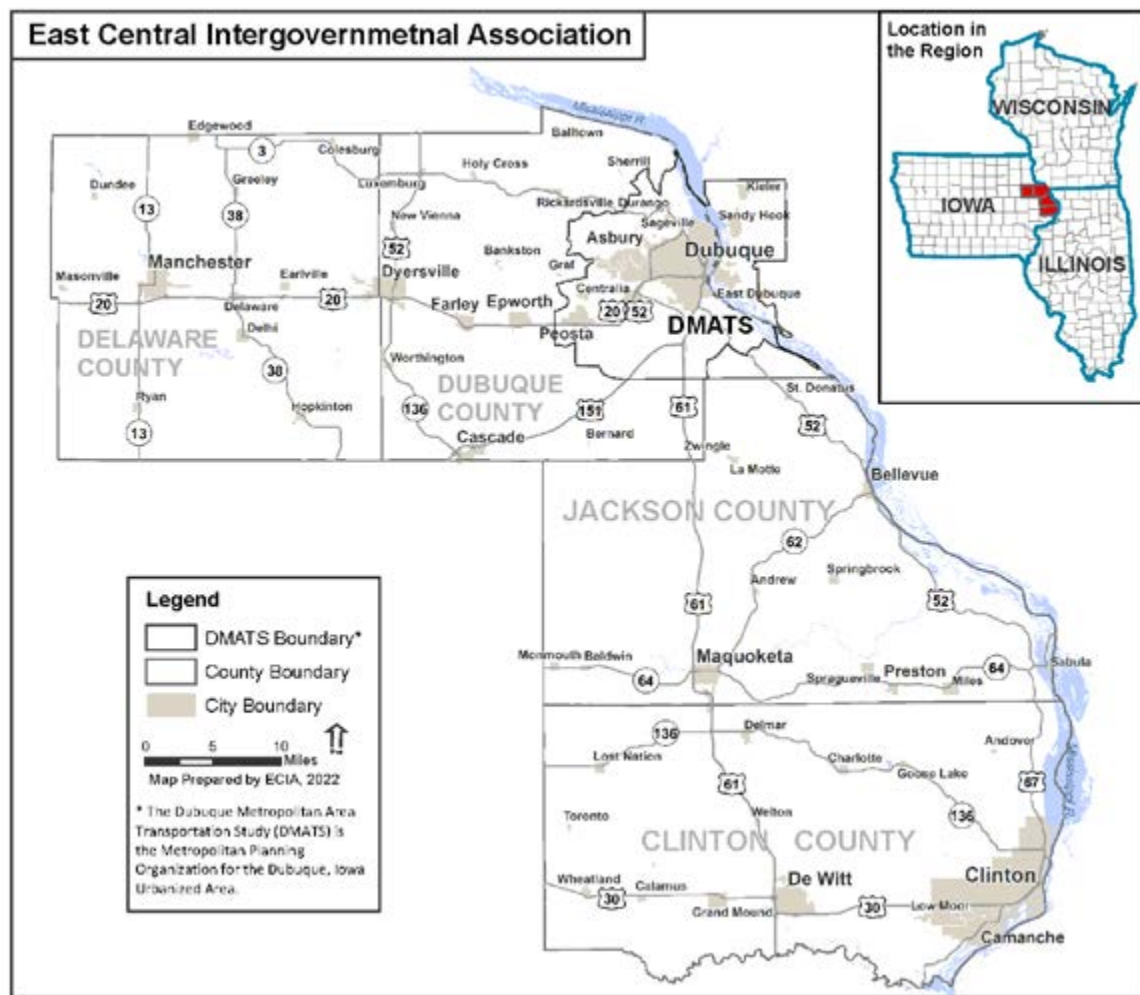
ecia spotlight



proposed structure

West Branch Heritage Hill Development





DMATS Awarded \$394K

The Dubuque Metropolitan Area Transportation Study (DMATS) - Comprehensive Safety Action Plan was selected for the FY22 Safe Streets and Roads for All Action Plan award. The selection is for \$394,186 in Federal funding.

ECIA will use this funding to help the region develop two Comprehensive Safety Action Plans. One plan will focus on communities in the Dubuque metropolitan area and the other will focus on the area's smaller communities. DMATS, the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the Dubuque area, will serve as a joint applicant on the project.

The combined study area for the two plans will include 58 cities with a total population of 117,831 and a fatality rate of 5.26 per 100,000 population. Supported by robust community engagement, safety/equity analyses will be conducted, and action plans developed using a Safe Systems approach with emphasis placed on reducing crashes in disadvantaged census tracts.

To improve overall safety, the project will:

1. Conduct inclusive public engagement to ensure that all interested stakeholders can participate in the process. A steering committee will guide Action Plan development, which will include low-income and minority representation. Separate meetings will be hosted to gather input from different constituencies: 1) public entities, including cities, counties, and school districts; 2) advocacy organizations, including bike/pedestrian, freight, passenger rail, and equity groups; and 3) the general public, where residents will be encouraged to share their perspectives.
2. Identify low-cost, high-impact strategies to reduce transportation-related risks, including crosswalk improvements, speed zones, separated multi-use paths, and traffic law enforcement.
3. Explore the use of innovative technologies, such as cameras, monitors, vehicle-to-vehicle communications, and other smart transportation tools.
4. Examine evidence-based projects and strategies identified by regional/national transportation safety leaders for consideration. Based upon crash data, the Action Plan will rank project locations by safety risk and recommend innovative solutions to decrease the region's fatality rate.

The ECIA transportation policy boards will adopt the completed action plans. Member jurisdictions will approve through resolution.

EIRHA FSS Program Funding Renewed

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) recently announced over \$109 million to 682 Public Housing Agencies (PHAs) for the 2022 Renewal Family Self Sufficiency (FSS) Program and an additional \$6 million to 32 PHAs and 38 Project Based Rental Assistance (PBRA) owners for the 2022 New FSS Program for a total of nearly \$116 million. These funds will be used to assist families in increasing their assets and improving their financial stability through the Family Self Sufficiency (FSS) program. Eastern Iowa Regional Housing Authority (EIRHA) was awarded \$336,122 for FY22, renewing three FSS positions: Mindy Meyers and Jenny Schrobilgen for Section 8 HCV FSS, and Kristi Oberhoffer with Public Housing FSS.

The FSS program is a completely voluntary program offered to families in HUD-assisted housing who are provided coaching, referrals to services, and the establishment of a family escrow savings account. FSS Program Coordinators provide the coaching and develop local strategies to connect participating families to public and private resources to increase their earned income and financial empowerment, reduce or eliminate the need for welfare assistance, and make progress toward economic independence and self-sufficiency. Childcare, education, job training, and financial literacy are just some of the services to which families are connected under the FSS program.

Unequal access to savings, negative or invisible credit history, and engagement in mainstream banking are national problems that especially impact renters and contribute to the racial wealth gap. This leaves renters with a minimal safety net to draw from in times of unemployment or unanticipated expenses such as car repair or medical emergencies. The FSS program helps to keep the unexpected from becoming larger financial problems through savings and support.

Mindy Meyers, ECIA/EIRHA Family Support Specialist has been successfully working with clients in the Section 8 HCV FSS program for 20 years. One family Mindy worked with shared their heart-warming story:

“This was a very humbling and rewarding experience for me. My children and I moved to Iowa on Easter of 2018. Since being here I have completed two bachelor’s and a master’s degree.

I worked for Bettendorf School District for four years and now I do army contracting for the Department of Defense at Rock Island Arsenal. It was a tough road being here alone, but I made it with the grace of God. This program allowed me to juggle school, work, and kids. It made things a little less stressful through the process. Mindy was amazing at cheering me on and allowing me to vent through the situation at times. She actually cared and I was not just a name in her caseload file and that meant a lot. I am appreciative of all the resources that I was able to access. I definitely want others to know that this program is a great steppingstone to success. Thanks again, for giving me the opportunity to provide a better life for me and my children.”

Michelle Schnier, Director of Housing and Support Services stated, “the difficult days seem a little easier when we see families that are successful with the programs. Kudos to Mindy and the Section 8 HCV team for assisting this family and giving her the hand up when she needed it. This is what it truly is all about.”



West Branch Heritage Hill Development



before



proposed structures

After years of anticipation, the City of West Branch saw a dream become reality in October 2022, with a celebratory groundbreaking event at the former site of Croell Redi-Mix, at 325 E Green Street. To meet the needs of its growing community, the City acquired the Green Street property in 2016. The site underwent asbestos abatement and building deconstruction to make it ready for reuse. The groundbreaking ceremony kicked off the first of a four-phased redevelopment of multiple townhouse units combined with commercial space, named Heritage Hill.

The property, located in the midst of commercial and residential areas near downtown, consisted of several commercial buildings situated on approximately 3.94 acres of land. It was once the location of a railroad bed and train depot from 1870 to 1980; some of the structures on the property were constructed in the 1920s and operated as a feed and grain company. The property also contained coal storage from 1895 to 1927. In 1927, the Western Oil Company built a storage garage located adjacent to the property to the north. In the 1970s the site was redeveloped as a commercial concrete producer, which was in operation until 2016.

In 2016, the City pursued a land swap of 12 acres of industrial park property for this site to move the concrete business to an industrial park. To assist the City in determining the level of cleanup needed on the site, in 2018, ECIA was able to use U.S. EPA Brownfield Assessment grant funding to have a Phase I environmental site assessment completed on the property. Based on the data gathered from the assessment, further investigation was recommended. A Phase II environmental assessment was then performed later that year revealing the presence of arsenic and asbestos.

The Iowa DNR Derelict Building Grant Program provided funding for asbestos abatement in 2019-2020 and arsenic levels were under state levels so no additional cleanup was required. The site was awarded the derelict building grant and deconstruction began late 2019 and was completed in 2020. The City diverted over 71% of the waste

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from the site with over 13,397,126 pounds of material removed. Concrete totaled 6,670 tons with 100% of that waste stream recycled.

The City contracted with developer, BBCO Inc. for plans which included incorporating a creative approach to reusing grain elevators that remained on site. The property will be redeveloped into a new mix-use development including commercial and residential spaces, made possible with City tax rebates and Iowa Workforce Housing Tax Credits.

Adam Kofoed, West Branch City Administrator reported, “[the development] is roughly 97 units. They will be extending the Hoover Nature Trail along the West side of the property, and phase 4 will come with a mix of commercial and housing. Units will be a mix of rentals and owners in a private homeowners association. The first phase was awarded \$908,000 in workforce housing tax credits for 24 units.”

West Branch Mayor, Roger Laughlin, was on the Planning and Zoning committee at the very beginning of the project. “We noticed all the dust and thought the location would be much better suited for a housing development. Let’s get rid of the truck traffic as well. We did the land swap which worked out really well, we got four acres of developable property and the concrete plant moved to a brand-new state of the art facility which they built themselves, it was a really good deal for them. ECIA helped us with the phase one and phase two land assessment, and the deconstruction which helped us tremendously in terms of cost. West Branch has been trying to grow, which we are. This is just another phase. I’m fired up about it because it’s infilling a vacant lot which is more valuable to us than sprawling growth. It’s the density per capita, it is less costly for the city to operate when there’s a little higher density. And the school district should see an increase in students and ultimately a larger tax base.”

ECIA and the City of West Branch would like to give a special thank you to the Iowa DNR and EPA for the seed money to jump-start this massive redevelopment project.

Historic Hardacre Theater Marquee will be Restored

Tipton's Hardacre Theater Preservation board members were informed Feb. 15 that \$32,360 was approved through a special round of the Historical Resource Development Program (HRDP) to restore the iconic Hardacre Theater marquee. Only a month prior, the Cedar County Iowa Great Place was awarded \$348,700 for renovation of the theater from the Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs (ICA). \$77,850 of the ICA award is for a comprehensive planning study and, like the HRDP grant, included a dollar for dollar match. The \$155,700 study is being conducted by FEH Design.

The balance of the Great Places grant, \$270,850, requires a 1:2 match (\$1 match for every \$2 raised), therefore, the Hardacre board will need to raise an additional \$541,700 to access all of the Cultural Affairs grant funds. The entirety of this funding will be used for theater renovations and improvements. Grant funding was a cooperative effort of the local Hardacre organization, Cedar County Economic Development Corp. (CCEDCO), the Cedar County board of supervisors, and the City of Tipton. If all funds for HRDP and Great Places are secured, that will amount to \$1,032,970 toward the renovation of this key Cedar County asset.



Hardacre Theater Marquee back in the day
(Tipton Conservative)

Both the City of Tipton and CCEDCO are members of Keep Iowa Beautiful, which is coached by ECIA. Membership in KIB afforded the two entities assistance with the grant writing for both the HRDP and the Iowa Great Places awards.

ECIA Voted Best Place to Work

ECIA has been selected as one of the 2023 Best Places to Work. This recognition is based solely on employee feedback gathered through a third-party survey administered by Workforce Research Group in partnership with TH Media and the Dubuque Chamber of Commerce.

The anonymous survey to employees measures several aspects of workplace culture, including alignment, execution, organization's leadership and connection to name a few.

"I always say, 'I come to work because of the people I work with!' This ECIA team is amazing, and as a team we have created a great place to work. We believe in each other and genuinely care for our co-workers. We have a very supportive and caring Board of Directors that encourages us to work hard and have fun! I couldn't be prouder of being named one of the 2023 Best Places to Work in Dubuque!" Kelley Deutmeyer, ECIA Executive Director.

ECIA has nearly 50 employees and is committed to working with member governments, their citizens, and others to empower eastern Iowa communities and enhance the quality of life in the five-county region. Through ECIA membership, local governments share resources they could not afford individually. The services and programs provided by ECIA cover six broad categories:

Community Development, Economic Development, Housing Assistance, Special Programs, Transportation and Planning, and Transit.

ECIA will be honored with other winners at an awards dinner in April at the Diamond Jo.



Staff getting into the Halloween spirit

Preston Ribbon Cutting for Fitness Course

Join the City of Preston as they celebrate the completion of their Fit Core™ fitness course, the first of its kind in the ECIA region. Thanks to several grants, City funding and County support, Preston will be home to a fitness course that is appropriate for preschoolers through senior citizens. Three generations of a family can make the fitness course their destination, with ages 5 to 60 and over all using various pieces of equipment at the same time.

The Fit Core™ fitness course will be free for all to use during park hours of 5:30 a.m. - 10:00 p.m., in a park that also offers a basketball court, tennis court, small skate park and a new 1/3-mile lighted walking path. The value comes in the 'easy choice' for an individual, family, or group to get active whether intentional as part of a conditioning program or just 'let me see what I can do' attitude.

A ribbon cutting event celebrating the Fit Core™ fitness course will take place on June 3rd at 10:30 a.m. at Westside Park, 512 West School Street, Preston IA 52069 during Preston's Annual "Firemen's Celebration". Come out for the festival and join the ribbon cutting!

Friday June 2nd:

5 PM - Carnival

6 PM - Parade

8 PM - Street Dance (Two Good Park) 3 On A Tree

Saturday June 3rd:

9-11 AM - How it Works (West Side Park) Preston Growth and Development

11 AM - Kid's Water fights

Noon - Fireman Water fights

12 PM - Carnival

4 PM - Fireman Steak Supper

8:30 PM - Street Dance (Two Good Park) 3 Day Rain

More events are to be announced as the weekend gets closer and events are confirmed! <https://allevents.in/preston/preston-firemens-celebration-2023/200024184379748>



CSEI Awarded \$240K Grant



Community Solutions of Eastern Iowa (CSEI) was awarded a \$240,000 grant from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Iowa Balance of State Continuum of Care (IA BoS CoC) to provide Rapid Rehousing for individuals and families experiencing homelessness in Delaware and Dubuque counties. The grant will provide extensive supportive services along with financial assistance for housing costs, prioritizing those who have experienced barriers to housing stability due to mental illness or substance abuse.

This is a critical grant for CSEI. It will help fill the gap left by the loss of a permanent supportive housing grant in Dubuque last year, and the ending of special COVID funding this year. We continue to see increasing numbers of households in our region facing complex situations that have left them without housing, and are thankful that CSEI was selected to steward this funding.

EIRHA Receives Iowa NAHRO Housing Achievement Award

The purpose of the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO) is to be the leading housing and community development advocate for the provision of adequate and affordable housing and strong, viable communities for all Americans, particularly those with low to moderate income, and to enhance the professional development and effectiveness of NAHRO's members.

The mission of Iowa NAHRO is to increase professionalism through training, networking, and member involvement, and to educate members regarding state and national housing and community development policies with the ultimate benefit of a higher standard of service to the people in communities served.

Eastern Iowa Regional Housing Authority (EIRHA) staff Jenny Schrobilgen, Caitlin Siemionko, Maria Elgin, and Debbie Maier, (pictured to the right with their awards) were awarded the Iowa NAHRO Housing Achievement Award at the Iowa NAHRO Conference held in Des Moines, Iowa, this week. The four work tirelessly to ensure that the Eastern Iowa Regional Housing Authority maintains at High Performer Status in the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program.

"They are the unsung heroes working with the families ensuring that they have decent, safe and affordable housing. Through the COVID Pandemic they implemented the remote inspection process, were flexible with working from home, and ensured there was an uninterrupted flow of services to the families served. Between the four of them, they have almost 100 years of service in the housing field. Their professionalism both in the office and in the field is exemplary, despite some of the most trying situations that they encounter. They are very worthy of receiving the Iowa NAHRO Housing Achievement Award," stated Michelle Schnier, Director of Housing and Support Services.

