

COUNTY LEADER



County Commissioners Association of Ohio Magazine

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Cover: State Senator Bill Reineke, Ottawa County Commissioner Mark Stahl, Sandusky County Commissioner Charles Schwochow, CCAO Executive Director Cheryl Subler, Sandusky County Commissioners Scott Miller and Russ Zimmerman
1. State Representative Jim Hoops, CCAO President and Henry County Commissioner Glenn Miller and Portage County Commissioner Sabrina Christian-Bennett
2. Darke County Commissioner Matthew Aultman and CCAO Service Corporation Manager Steve Caraway
3. CCAO Board of Directors wear blue for National Child Abuse Prevention Month

A MESSAGE FROM 2023 CCAO PRESIDENT GLENN MILLER, HENRY COUNTY COMMISSIONER

This year has proved to be more than interesting! It seems each biennial budget year brings its own opportunities and challenges. But, what budget year doesn't? In January, our Board spoke loud and clear on the full restoration of the Local Government Fund (LGF) needing to move to the top of the CCAO's legislative priority list. Along with many needs in our counties, we narrowed our focus to three main requests in the biennial budget. These three items are full restoration of the LGF, fully funding indigent defense along with a pilot program working with the State Public Defender to begin the possible transition of the Indigent Defense system to the State Public Defender's office, and additional jail funding. Our past experience has proven we get better support if we focus our efforts on a few very important asks.



Miller

The DeWine-Husted Executive Budget continued the Governor and Lieutenant Governor's commitment to county government by including our three priority items as well as funding for NG 9-1-1. As HB 33 progressed through the House, our legislative team has done a wonderful job for the Association. I believe commissioners have made a great impact on the House. After speaking to some of the legislators they not only heard from our CCAO staff, but have often heard from our commissioners. This has changed less favorable positions we found ourselves in to more favorable positions when the budget bill was voted out of the House. We now take our asks to the Senate, and I am looking forward to the budget talks there. There is no doubt in my mind we will need to activate our membership to effectively take our message to the Senate!

My main initiative for 2023 is building relationships. I encourage all CCAO members new and experienced to continue cultivating relationships with your fellow local elected officials, CCAO staff and members of the state legislature. If we are closely connected, our collective voice is more powerful as a result. Effective communication between us all is key to keeping our members informed and our association strong. There are several events throughout the year you can attend to help keep relationships strong and take full advantage of everything CCAO has to offer.

New Member Training in February was a great opportunity for fostering relationships. New members had the chance to have up-close conversations with Ohio cabinet directors and heard from other impressive speakers on topics including county budgeting, economic development and human services to name a few. Thank you to all our new and existing members who attended, we look forward to continuing to work with you on our priorities throughout your term.

Looking at the months ahead, the CCAO Summer Symposium and CCAO/CEAO Winter Conference are ways for all our members to learn and grow in their positions while simultaneously strengthening personal relationships across the state. Understanding the varying issues across counties is vital to our association's unity and consistency on our priorities. We look forward to seeing you at the Summer Symposium to be held August 16-18 at Cherry Valley Hotel in Newark, as well as at Winter Conference which will take place at the Hilton in downtown Columbus December 5-7.

It is an honor to serve as CCAO's President for 2023. I sincerely thank each of our members and the CCAO staff for giving me the opportunity to keep advancing the great work we do through leading this outstanding organization.

LETTER FROM CCAO EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CHERYL SUBLER

I hope this update finds you well and enjoying the spring season now upon us! I've always considered spring an exciting season. There's always an element of excitement in seeing the changes spring brings, whether it be blooming trees and flowers, planted fields and gardens, or simply warmer weather. Ultimately, spring brings change and opportunities to plan for the future. Similarly, your association is embracing change and laying the groundwork for even brighter tomorrows.



Subler

Since the beginning of 2022 we have gained 43 new members to the association's ranks. We warmly welcome these new commissioners, county council members and a county executive, each with a wide variety of skills and experiences to contribute to their roles. Through this diversity, our association builds its strength. To our new members, we can't wait to work with you in the years to come. Much is expected of CCAO members, and we are happy to provide our collective skills and expertise to help you strengthen your county and the state as a whole.

Similar to counties, new faces also have appeared within the General Assembly following last fall's election. We welcome our new General Assembly partners, each with their own distinct backgrounds. For some legislators, this includes county-level service; for others, county government is a new concept. It is a primary responsibility of CCAO to educate both new and existing legislators alike on the intricacies of county government and the public policies that contribute to its success. Along with the policy team, each CCAO member is a vital asset in educating new lawmakers on the work you do each day.

Speaking of awareness of county government, the association was proud to celebrate National County Government Month (NCGM) this past April. NCGM

is an opportunity for counties across the nation to tell their story and raise awareness of the critical work they do each day. At a time when the national political discourse seems to grow increasingly divisive, it's the work of county government and its dedicated staff that continues on, frequently unnoticed, providing critical services to all citizens and businesses. From ensuring public safety to building infrastructure; conducting elections; promoting public health; supporting economic development; and more, county government has an impact on every Ohioan.

We have an important story to tell to our lawmakers and the general public about the work you do. NCGM is a small step in generating understanding and appreciation for all those who answer the call to public service at the county level.

Finally, I'm happy to report on the progress the association has made reinvigorating the CCAO Research and Educational Foundation. Founded in 1991, the foundation is a 501(c)(3) organization that provides high-quality information, tools and training that our members need and the public deserves. It seeks to leave a lasting legacy in support of county government that stretches far beyond the terms of individual officeholders. We recently announced that the foundation is making available five college scholarships to students across the state who are interested in public policy. We hope this will enhance the association's legacy of nurturing future leaders who will help tackle the public policy challenges of tomorrow.

To conclude, just like the changing seasons, change is a constant across counties, the state and within your association. We embrace change at CCAO, and we are excited about the new members joining our ranks and our new partners in the statehouse. Throughout all this change though, our mission to promote effective county government remains unwavering. I look forward to carrying that mission forward in the days ahead and enjoying the accompanying spring weather and sunshine!

CCAO POLICY TEAM

BUDGET SEASON PRIORITIES FOR STRONGER COUNTIES

by Kyle Petty, Managing Director of Policy

Happy budget season everyone! CCAO had four main budget priorities going into the main operating budget: LGF increase, fully funding indigent defense reimbursement, increased support for county jails, and funding for Next Generation 9-1-1 (NG



Petty

9-1-1). As a result of the combined advocacy efforts of our members, as well as the CCAO policy team, we are making tremendous progress on most of our budget priorities. Three out of our four priorities were included in the House passed version of the budget, and we are very thankful for the support provided by this chamber. We look forward to continuing this positive momentum in the Senate.

The House passed version of the budget contains truly historic levels of funding for county jail construction and renovation. Governor DeWine reinvigorated this key area of the state-county partnership by including \$50 million for jail construction in his as introduced budget. The House increased this funding by \$150 million dollars, resulting in a staggering \$200 million for jail construction over the biennium. The budget language also includes a formula to distribute the money that will allow counties to better plan for state funding when planning their jail project.

Additionally, the House expanded on key provisions that were included in Governor DeWine’s executive budget. The House language will provide counties with flexibility when determining how to deliver indigent defense services, while ensuring that the reimbursement rate will remain steady throughout the biennium. That being said, they included additional funding to increase the amount of funding that counties will receive as a reimbursement for providing indigent defense services. The current version includes \$70 million additional dollars over the biennium for reimbursement, which will get us closer to a 100% reimbursement rate. In an effort to ensure that reimbursement is consistent throughout the biennium, the House imposed a cost freeze for reimbursement. The House language would freeze

the maximum reimbursement rate at \$75 an hour, or the current level at which you are paying as of April 1, 2023. Alternatively, if a county is paying less than \$75 an hour, they can increase their rate to a maximum of \$75 an hour. We are working with the Senate to impose a \$75 an hour cap for all counties, to provide consistent levels of funding across the state.

Furthermore, the House also included language that would allow for counties to contract with the State Public Defender (OPD) for indigent defense services. The language states that counties that contract with OPD will receive 100% reimbursement and all other counties will be reimbursed under the current process. We understand that there are concerns with this language and we are working with the Senate to turn this language into a pilot program, which will be funded out of a separate line item and will not affect the reimbursement of other counties.

Last, the House maintained the one-time expenses for NG 9-1-1 in Governor DeWine’s budget proposal. The state will receive approximately \$30 million to set up their statewide system and counties will receive around \$16 million to purchase NG 9-1-1 compatible equipment. They also included language that would provide ongoing revenue to counties to operate and fund future upgrades to a NG 9-1-1 system. The House proposed a universal access fee of 64 cents on services that allow devices to access 9-1-1. Over 70% of the revenue generated by this fee will go to local governments each year for 9-1-1 related expenses.

Unfortunately, we were unable to get an increase to the LGF included in the House. However, we plan to work on that issue with the Senate and would encourage you to reach out to your Senator and express your support for this important budget priority.

I would like to thank everyone at CCAO, from members to staff, for all of their hard work and advocacy efforts during this budget process. As we reach the halfway point in the budget, I am very proud of our collective work to ensure that the state-county partnership remains strong and policies are enacted to support Ohio’s counties.

2023-2024

CCAO Legislative Platform Highlights

BUDGET PRIORITIES



LOCAL GOVERNMENT FUND

- CCAO requests the LGF be restored to 3.68% of GRF taxes, its statutory level before being cut in 2011.
- Full restoration would provide at least \$185 million per year to counties, and additional resources for other local governments.
- These funds would support counties as they deal with inflation, state mandates, and workforce issues.



JAIL FUNDING

- CCAO requests that the state continues and expands support for jail construction and renovation, while addressing some of the high-cost operational needs for medical, mental health, and addiction services.



FULL FUNDING FOR INDIGENT DEFENSE

- CCAO requests that the state creates a permanent statutory commitment by the state to fully fund indigent defense while creating a pilot program allowing counties to opt-in to a state administered program.



CHILDREN SERVICES

- CCAO strongly encourages an increased state investment in child protection to enlist and retain quality case workers and recruit foster parents for the increasing number of children who need placements, as well as support best practices and in-home services.

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES



E-COMMERCE APPLICATIONS FOR COUNTY GOVERNMENT

- CCAO supports the modernization of county procurement law to allow the use of credit cards to make online purchases of all services and goods that are needed for county operations.



NEXT GENERATION 9-1-1 (NG9-1-1) SYSTEM

- CCAO supports the Statewide Emergency Services Internet Protocol Network Steering Committee's (ESINet Committee) recommendation of a universal device fee. The revenue generated by the fee will allow for the creation of a statewide NG 9-1-1 network and subsequently increase public safety.



CHILD CARE & BENEFITS CLIFF

- Access to affordable and high-quality child care is a critical issue for families and for the workforce. CCAO supports the state increasing income eligibility for publicly-funded child care to 200% of the federal poverty level and increasing the capacity of the child care system to help address the "benefits cliff" for Ohio parents.



WATER QUALITY

- Water quality has become one of Ohio's highest priorities. CCAO maintains that all producers, large or small, must do their part in addressing the state's water quality challenges. CCAO supports the Water and Sewer Quality Program which provides grants to septic to sewer conversion projects, as well as continuing support for the H2Ohio program along with the newly created H2Ohio Rivers Initiative.

View CCAO's full 2023-2024 Legislative Platform as approved by our members [here](#).

FEATURE

CELEBRATING NATIONAL COUNTY GOVERNMENT MONTH

by Jessica Newbacher, CCAO Communications Coordinator

April was National County Government Month! CCAO members across the state shared their celebrations with us. This year, we distributed yard signs and window slicks to each county for use in and around their county buildings to show support, pride and awareness for county government and the services it provides to citizens and businesses.

In addition, for the first time, CCAO gave every county the opportunity to opt-in to a month-long social media campaign feature, wherein counties received a customized graphic each week with a fact about the services counties provide.



Greene County Commissioners and staff

We enjoyed seeing the participation on many counties' social media platforms. In the campaign, four pillars of county government were highlighted: Justice & Public Safety, Roads & Transportation, Economy & Employment and Human Services, with the goal to educate Ohio residents about the multifaceted and vital work that gets done at the county level.

We always encourage your county and staff members to follow CCAO on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn if you are not already to stay connected.

For more information about National County Government Month, visit NACo's website [here](#).



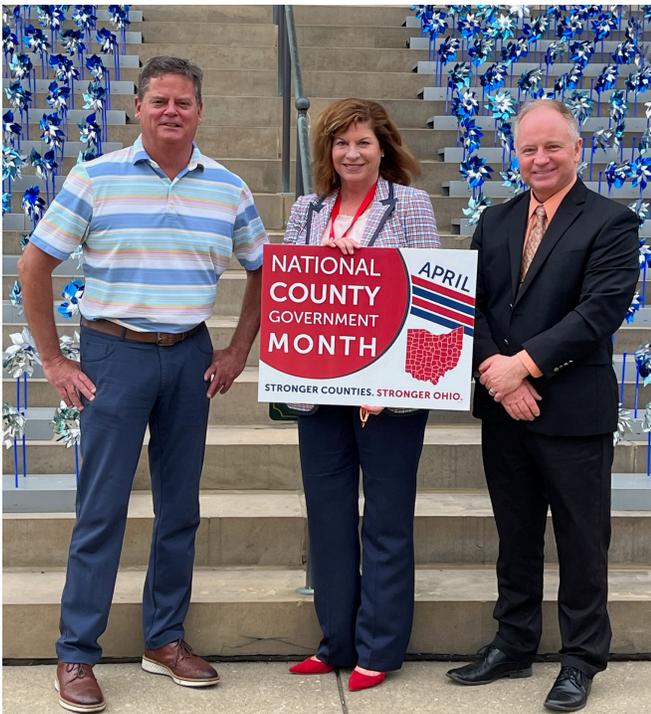
Williams County Commissioners Bartley Westfall and Lew Hilkert



National County Government Month sign on display at the Harrison County Courthouse



Lucas County Commissioners and staff



Tuscarawas County Commissioners Greg Ress, Kristin Zemis and CCAO 1st Vice President and Tuscarawas County Commissioner Chris Abbuhl



Ottawa County Commissioners Donald Douglas, Mark Stahl, Mark Coppel and Administrator/Clerk Rhonda Slauterbeck



Ashtabula County Commissioner and CCAO Secretary Casey Kozlowski and Ashtabula County Commissioners Kathryn Whittington and J.P. Ducro

GUEST COLUMN

MID-OHIO MARKETS OFFER ADAPTABLE PARTNERSHIP MODEL FOR COMMUNITY-BASED HUNGER RELIEF EFFORTS

by Mid-Ohio Food Collective

With record inflation and the end of pandemic-era supports, no Ohio community has been immune to the effects of hunger in 2023. However, every community—regardless of location, size, or economic makeup—also has food security champions and dedicated non-profits working to make a difference.

Ohio’s hunger response network comprises 12 regional foodbanks and roughly 3,600 non-profit organizations. While local hunger relief strategies differ, this network serves people in all 88 counties with the help of local organizations rooted in Ohio communities. In State Fiscal Year 2022, Ohio’s foodbanks acquired and distributed more than 242 million pounds of food and care items.

But how do community leaders turn neighbors’ need and their desire to help into efficient, scalable, and economically sustainable projects that empower Ohioans to better themselves? We at Mid-Ohio Food Collective (MOFC) believe one possible answer lies in the model demonstrated by our Mid-Ohio Markets.

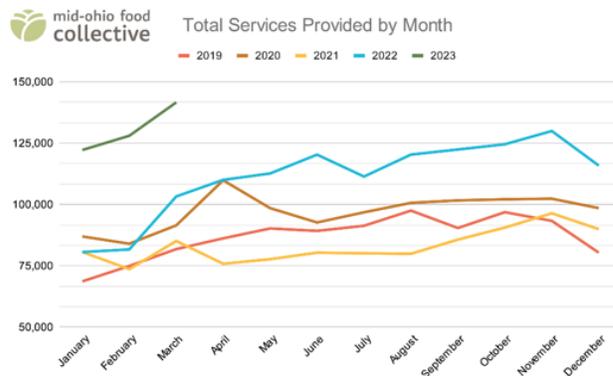
Rural Hunger in Ohio

Hunger affects every community and county in Ohio. MOFC’s distribution footprint covers 20 counties in central and eastern Ohio. Ohioans are eligible for services from their regional foodbank if their household income is below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level. People living below that income level experience an increased risk of food insecurity, which means they lack consistent access to enough food for every person in their household to live an active, healthy life. Estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau shows that 22.6% of the people living in the 19 MOFC service counties outside of Franklin County are eligible for our services. In several counties, that figure is above 35%.

The MOFC partner agency network is made up of hundreds of local, community-based nonprofits. Collectively, they served more than 178,300 people in our 19 counties outside Franklin last year. Over 15% of those individuals were seniors, and more than 30% were children. Most families who visit MOFC partner agencies outside Franklin County come just a few times a year, showing that most rural

households seeking food assistance used the help as a temporary supplement to their grocery budgets.

The overall need for food assistance in Ohio, meanwhile, is reaching all-time highs. The recent termination of SNAP emergency allotments meant the loss of over \$120 Million every month coming out of the budgets of low-income Ohioans. March 2023 was MOFC’s busiest month on record with total demand in all 20 counties up 47% year over year. The number of people visiting an MOFC partner agency for the first time ever—many who likely never dreamed of needing such assistance—has risen 62% since this time last year. Meeting that rising demand while empowering Ohioans to create their own paths out of poverty requires a flexible model of addressing food insecurity.



The Mid-Ohio Market Model

As partnerships between local non-profits and MOFC, each Mid-Ohio Market provides a dignified, no-cost shopping experience that looks and feels like visiting the grocery store. Customers qualify for services if they make 200% of the federal poverty line or less. The model is unique in several ways. First, Mid-Ohio Markets are part of the MOFC distribution network, which gives them more access to fresh, healthy foods in quantities that local non-profits might otherwise be unable to get. This gets produce into the homes of rural Ohioans who might otherwise have to drive long distances to the nearest supermarket.



A customer shops at the Mid-Ohio Market at Norton Road in January 2023.

Second, the network that Mid-Ohio Markets belong to can stretch dollars to maximum efficiency. Every \$1 donated to MOFC can be turned into \$4.89 worth of groceries distributed through our market partners, meaning more people can eat well for less.

Third, most Mid-Ohio Markets are operated by partner agencies with cultural roots in their communities, allowing them to be responsive neighbors. Mid-Ohio Markets serve as service hubs at which customers can connect with clinics, behavioral health care services, and more. Finally, Mid-Ohio Markets keep standard opening hours, giving busy families with long drives the chance to shop when they need to—saving time, gas, and money.

“A lot of families who live in remote areas have to think about how they shop for food because those transportation dollars are precious. If you have to drive for 20 minutes, you may not shop as often as you need to,” said Dawnel Volzke, who operates the Mid-Ohio Market at Center of Hope in Knox County. “Oftentimes, they’re choosing between gas and buying foods that are a little healthier.”

With the power of a regional network and local roots, the Mid-Ohio Market model has proven to be scalable. In 2019, MOFC opened the first Mid-Ohio Market at Columbus State Community College with the goal of empowering adult learners and workers to focus on self-improvement. Since then and with support from non-profit agency partners and faith-based groups, MOFC’s markets have expanded to six in its 20-county distribution area. Five are operated by local partners. More are slated to open soon, including a Mid-Ohio Market in Steubenville, Jefferson County operated by Urban Mission Ministries.

Getting a Market Started

The Mid-Ohio Market at Center of Hope opened April 25, 2023, and serves southeastern Knox County and the surrounding region. The market is strategically situated to serve a community without access to a traditional grocery store. Volzke said the model works for rural areas thanks to the combination of MOFC’s distribution muscle and her organization’s long-term outreach efforts. Partnership is the key. “You need both pieces. The reason we’ve grown is that we’ve partnered with MOFC to grow and meet the capacity of need,” Volzke said.

When the market concept was being explored, Center of Hope conducted listening sessions across the region and took their findings to the Knox County commissioners. Working with a local non-profit, they secured and repurposed an old school building. That let their neighbors know that the Mid-Ohio Market was coming to stay.

“People need to know you’re committed to the long term. You have to do the hard work so they can see you’re well intentioned,” she added. “This building has the DNA of the community and volunteers in it. Giving the community a way to get their thumbprint on something makes a difference.”



A volunteer restocks the produce section at the Mid-Ohio Market at Norton Road.

MOFC is just one of Ohio’s 12 foodbanks—each of which leverage robust distribution networks to deliver community-based solutions that work to help Ohioans in need. If you or your county colleagues are interested in exploring a Mid-Ohio Market or similar project in your area, please feel free to reach out to MOFC’s Government Relations Director Tim White at twhite@mofc.org to kick-start the conversation or visit us at MOFC.org.

FEATURE

BASEBALL SEASON IN MIAMI COUNTY AND BEYOND

by Wade Westfall, Miami County Commissioner & Midwest Ohio Baseball League President

Can you tell us about the Midwest Ohio Baseball League?

The Midwest Ohio Baseball League began operations in 2005 but has roots in a previous organization dating back to 1990. Currently there are more than 135 teams involved in the league. (Prior to COVID-19 the league had over 265 teams).

The Midwest Ohio Baseball League is a select baseball league, which offers a competitive baseball environment. The format of this organization enables coaches to develop their players' skills to prepare them for successful high school, and potentially, college competition. The format is designed to allow youth in the area the opportunity to play the highest appropriate level of competition available.

Age groups from 10-14 are divided into Competition Based Divisions in order to maximize competition and parity. This allows our players to be pushed by competition to be the best they can be while recognizing that there are different levels of select baseball. In 2007 the Midwest Ohio Baseball League expanded from its traditional age groups of 9-14U to include a 15-16U group and in 2008, 8U (8 and under) was added. The league continues to try to meet the needs of the coaches, players and parents who love baseball. The league is a coach driven organization. This allows coaches/teams to structure schedules around needs of the team and their parents, and not the organization.

How long have you been involved in leadership positions within the league?

I first became a part of the league in early 1990 with our oldest son Blake who is now 39.

How did you initially get involved?

Watching our son play t-ball in our local recreational league, I noticed the coach doing his best to control a dozen 5&6 year olds. I offered to help. That led to coaching a team the following year and then being a part of the local little league administration as a commissioner. After spending a few years and having a few more children we started noticing that the structure of the little league organization was becoming very time consuming and not necessarily competitive based, we started looking for something different. That's when we got involved in the League.

We also had a farm that allowed us to build our own baseball field. It was called Four Sons Field of Dreams. It was in existence for over 25 years and hosted countless games and families.

Which communities in Ohio does the league serve?

The league serves Miami Valley as well as a few teams inside the Indiana line. Teams from as far north as Bellefontaine, as far west as Richmond, as far east as Springfield and as far south as Cincinnati are members of the league.

Do you partner with other community organizations? Which ones?

We work well with all local recreational leagues including Centerville, Piqua, Tipp City, West Milton, Greenville, Beavercreek, Bellbrook, Springfield and Springboro to name a few. We believe that we are an asset to the recreational system. The Midwest Ohio Baseball League, over multiple decades has partnered with communities that have made an investment in their parks for the economic benefit of the entire community. The league is partnering with these communities to provide game and practice fields and host local tournaments for those teams who need or want it. This allows communities and organizations ability to raise funds to support their efforts. In addition, the Midwest Ohio Baseball League continues to provide Professional Baseball Skills Camps to the Miami Valley.

Do you follow college or professional baseball teams? Have any of the kids in the league gone on to play college or professional?

Midwest Ohio Baseball League has been the formative League for thousands of players who went on to play high school baseball, hundreds of players who went on to play college baseball and dozens of players, including some Major Leaguers, who have gone on to play professionally. We are proud of our impact on the Baseball Community and intend to continue to positively influence baseball in the Miami Valley for many years to come.

Part of a county commissioner's role is to serve the community. How does your involvement with the youth in your community inform the work you do county-wide?

It's truly an honor to be a public servant. My



Commissioner Westfall with baseball players at the Dayton Dragons Stadium

involvement in multiple organizations laid the ground work for me to be an effective county commissioner. It's the opportunity to serve our community that gives me great satisfaction and purpose.

Is there anything about operating the league that has surprised you?

Over the years I've witnessed a deterioration of behavior from adults and at times has filtered down to children. There's not a year that goes by that I don't say "I should have kept track of the bad behavior. It would have made a great book." But all in all, kids are kids and parents just need to let them be just that.

What is the most rewarding part of your work with the league?

I like the organizational aspect of the league, taking the burden off of coaches and allowing them to focus on the kids. Each year thousands of games are being played in the league and the good always shines brighter than the bad.

My favorite night is our award night at the Dayton Dragons. Normally, the league would offer an end-of-season tournament for those teams that finished in the top of their brackets. A number of years ago when the Cincinnati Reds announced the location of a minor league affiliate organization to be located in Dayton, we immediately partnered with them to host our 8, 9, & 10-U age groups. At this level, we have found kids want to be kids, and after a long season they really do not miss another game.

Can you tell us more about the Dayton Dragons Night and End-of-Season Tournament?

All of our top teams in every divisional split of every age group receive an award such as a high quality medal. Depending on age groups, we also award our teams with an end-of-season tournament or our Midwest Ohio Baseball League night at the Dayton Dragons.

11, 12, 13, 14 & 15-U teams experience an all-expense-paid single elimination one-night league tournament. 8, 9 & 10-U teams receive the Dragon's night, experience a fun-filled night at the Dayton Dragons game. Divisional first and second place coaches and players receive admission to the game. Players are chosen to throw out the first pitch. Teams experience a parade on the field prior to the start of the game. A team is chosen for a meet-and-greet with the professional players and a behind-the-scenes private tour.

Last year nearly 1,000 players, coaches, parents and family attended the Dragons night. For many years now, we have filled the entire outfield stands plus all the lawn sections including the Dragons Lair with Midwest Ohio Teams and families. Please keep in mind that the league has not raised fees in over 8 years. We work hard to keep our expenses down and pride ourselves in putting the league fees back into the kids. Over the last several years a former Cincinnati Reds player has been our guest. Last year Tom Browning (Mr. Perfect) signed well over 250 baseballs and spent hours with the kids.

Our most important award and recognition is also this night. Each year a team is selected and is recognized for sportsmanship. This award is recommended and voted on by our umpires, with final approval by the administration and board. This is the most important award that the league gives. The team receiving the sportsmanship award is recognized with a special medal at the Dayton Dragons night. They enjoy the game in a private party deck in center field with food and soft drinks. This award not only recognizes the coaches and players but also their family members. We believe sportsmanship is not limited to our coaches and players, but also the fans that follow them.

FEATURE

513RELIEF BUS BRINGS SERVICES TO THOSE IN NEED

by Bridget Doherty, Communications Manager, Hamilton County Administration

An idea that began as a response to COVID-19 is now delivering health care throughout Hamilton County in a way that's never been done before.

The Hamilton County Equity and Resource Mobile Tech Bus (also known as the 513Relief Bus) is a one-stop mobile resource center that brings services directly to residents who need them the most. Hamilton County initially relied on a borrowed bus, launched in 2021 at the height of the pandemic at a Juneteenth festival to connect residents with federal, state and local programs designed to help families find stability in challenging times.

It is well documented that long-standing systemic health and social inequities have put racial and ethnic minority groups, as well as those from lower-income families, at increased risk of getting sick. So the new higher-tech bus that rolled out in January 2023 brings even more services to underserved communities, including dentistry, addiction information and mental health referrals.

In the first two months of 2023, the bus:

- Served at 22 community locations in 17 unique zip codes
- Helped 2,691 customers (2,247 new applications + 444 other inquiries) with JFS programs at 513Relief Bus locations
- Delivered on-board providers (medical and social services professionals) who served an average of 30 to 40 residents at each bus stop. The bus partners with 12 service providers who work on the bus on rotation.

It's smart, convenient and delivers help more directly than anything the county's ever done. The President of the Hamilton County Board of Commissioners Alicia Reece came up with the idea to reach and serve the underserved.

"We helped over 4,000 people with our pilot bus in 2021," said President Reece. "The new permanent tech bus allows Hamilton County to go mobile county-wide with health and economic services to help residents. We are using technology to deliver services in what has become a national model." "At the onset of the pandemic, we quickly learned there are numerous residents of our county who are hard to reach in traditional ways," said Commissioner Denise Driehaus. "This gives us the ability to engage people in their own community in a proactive way." "We can't expect them to find us," Commissioner Stephanie Summerow Dumas said. "We are bringing help to them. That's important because it shifts the perception away from being just a number to face-to-face interactions that hopefully lead to meaningful support."

"It has been very rewarding to see the community's response to this bus," said Michael Patton, director of Hamilton County Job and Family Services, whose employees staff the bus. "People know that we mean it when we say we are coming to help them and bringing services as directly to them as we possibly can."

The bus initially began as a way to deliver vaccines and other critical healthcare access to the historically vulnerable populations within Hamilton County. Community leaders advocated for a mobile solution that could address some of the disparities in



access to healthcare, economic services and social services.

This program addresses both the current crises felt by many as a result of the pandemic but also combats those long-standing systematic inequities. It provides in-person assistance with a range of needs in one location. Also, citizen demand for rent, utility, mortgage and property tax relief has been high. The bus allowed Hamilton County to bring those relief programs directly to people who needed them. It also helped cut application time and hassle by having staff people sit with applicants and help fill out documentation.

The effort leverages the collective power of multiple departments within Hamilton County government and numerous community partner organizations to provide residents with meaningful in-person assistance and essential healthcare. Residents can find the bus's schedule at 513Relief.org. The calendar there tells where the bus will be and which of the dozen partner agencies are scheduled for each day so residents can know when to go for what they need.

The generosity of local community providers allowed Hamilton County to implement the first phase of the 513Relief Bus program with minimal costs. Using some of its Federal CARES Act allocation, Hamilton County spent nearly \$64,000 in COVID-19 vaccination-related costs in the first phase of 513Relief Bus operations.

Hamilton County allocated \$5 million of federal American Rescue Plan (ARP) funding to further develop and sustain operational and operating costs for the 513Relief Bus through 2026. Expenditures will include the procurement of a commercially built, turnkey bus designed to operate 513Relief Bus mobile programming for years to come, fuel/maintenance, staffing, marketing and outreach, unreimbursed provider medical costs and other associated provider expenditures.

During its first year of operation in 2021, the 513Relief Bus team administered more than 1,500 vaccinations and helped over 4,100 citizens receive services at 79 community-based locations. It served even more the following year.

GUEST COLUMN

SPOTLIGHT ON COUNTY SANITARY ENGINEERS

by John Fulton, Professor and State Extension Specialist, Ohio State University

The new commercial availability of global positioning system (GPS) technology in the mid-1990s brought with it a huge interest in precision agriculture in the United States. During that same period of time, computers became common so taking computing "power" coupled with GPS's ability to provide location and velocity led companies to innovating and developing precision agriculture technologies. These new 1990s technologies included yield monitoring on grain combines, which allowed farmers to collect and create yield maps reflecting crop performance spatially across fields.



Fulton

farmers to apply different rates of inputs like fertilizer, along with GPS-based guidance for farm machinery, also advanced rapidly. Other technologies evolved allowing for improved performance of farm machinery. In other words, 1990s advances in precision agriculture allowed farmers to use technology to track and match inputs like fertilizer, water, and herbicides with the actual requirements for crop growth throughout a field, instead of applying a one-size-fits-all solution to a large area. Together, these new technologies helped producers become more efficient with their time and resources, which added value to farm operations across the United States.

Fast forward to today, and these technologies have become an integral part of most agricultural machinery. Once cumbersome machine functions are now automated, and wireless technology has

made it possible to connect machines and other farm equipment plus facilities to the internet. With cloud computing, a multitude of sensors, remote sensing capabilities and artificial intelligence (AI), production agriculture is quickly being digitized with new technological advancements available for farm operations. Smartphones and mobile applications (APPs) are commonly used to conduct business within agriculture today.

Similarly, farm machinery is increasingly connected to the internet, with sensors placed around the farm and within fields starting to become more available. With all of these advancements and new digital tools becoming available to help us grow food, feed, fiber, and energy, the term “digital agriculture” is now used more frequently than “precision agriculture.”

Cutting edge digital agriculture technologies today include automated farm machinery (robots), drones for application of crop protection products and cover crops, drone technology for scouting fields and monitoring livestock, smart sprayers, and robotic milkers are among a few available today. Additionally, artificial intelligence (AI) is playing an increasing role in these technologies. Facial and plant recognition are available, allowing farmers to monitor livestock health and their crop fields differently. A farmer can use an APP today to take a picture of a plant or weed and immediately identify it.

Some APPs even provide a recommended plan to address weed issues. John Deere’s See & Spray technology, introduced in 2022, is equipped with over 30 cameras across the sprayer boom that identify individual weeds versus the growing crop and only apply pesticide to the weeds versus applying product across the entire field. Several companies are offering a similar solution for this type of spot spraying with research indicating a 70% to 94% reduction of herbicide applied, meaning less herbicide is used, and more money and time is saved.

A reliable internet connection is absolutely necessary to take full advantage of these technologies. While digital agriculture is evolving globally, challenges remain, including technological hurdles right here in Ohio. Challenges include a lack of available, dependable, and fast broadband in certain regions

and counties in Ohio. Some of the current and near future technologies being offered by industry will even require 5G connectivity at the farm. Furthermore, while download speeds remain important for much of the internet use today (i.e. streaming movies and shows), upload speeds will be critical for the technologies being offered for on-farm use.

Data being collected by machines, drones or other sensors will need to be uploaded or used to remotely monitor activities at the farm in real-time.

There are technologies today that Ohio farmers are unable to adopt due to limited download and uploads speeds and lack of 5G coverage at the farm. Quoted internet connectivity requirements by companies for some available products are 100-50 megabits per second (Mbps). This 100-50 Mbps is just the requirement for one product to operate properly, so even more capacity will be required for multiple digital agriculture technologies to operate simultaneously.

This level of upload-download requirements is also much higher than the FCC’s current estimation that connectivity needs across the country would be met with a connection speed of 25-3 Mbps. Thus, the concern is that Ohio farmers could be falling behind since connectivity and speeds will just keep increasing.

While these technologies cost money, the fact is that Ohio farmers or agriculture service providers are unable to adopt or take advantage of them, while other regions of the world can. Rural broadband coverage for Ohio counties is becoming important as digital agriculture solutions become available and Ohio farmers consider adopting. Planning now is necessary for both farmers and government officials to not allow rural areas of Ohio to fall too far behind.

FEATURE

NEW MEMBER TRAINING RECAP

by Jessica Newbacher, CCAO Communications Coordinator

CCAO welcomed 41 new members this year over New Member Training, which took place at the DoubleTree hotel in downtown Columbus this past February, offering newly elected county commissioners, county council members and a county executive a unique opportunity to learn how new members can successfully serve their counties directly from distinguished speakers.

New members heard presentations by experienced commissioners, county staff and other officials along with CCAO, CORSA and CEBCO staff. Some of the subject matter included county budgeting, ethics, economic development and workforce, human services and strategic planning.

That evening, new members took advantage of the opportunity to have informative, in-depth conversations with several Ohio directors. They discussed policy with Kimberly Murnieks, Director of the Ohio Office of Budget and Management, Lori Criss, Director of the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, Matt Damschroder, Director of the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, and Brian Baldrige, Director of the Ohio Department of Agriculture. We hope our new members brought back valuable information to implement in their counties from this diverse lineup of speakers.

Members of the CCAO Board of Directors and Executive Committee were also in attendance and served as a guiding force for new members. "In this job, you are always learning and taking advantage of every opportunity you can to enrich yourself on the many topics you will be working on as a county commissioner," said Ashtabula County Commissioner and CCAO Secretary Casey Kozlowski about getting involved as a new member. "CCAO can be a great resource, so please utilize them whenever you can to help you be better in your position."

Since 2022, CCAO has welcomed 43 new members from 36 different counties. The County Connections Yearbook is a great online resource you can utilize to get to know more about them and their backgrounds.



New CCAO members pose for a group photo in the Ohio Statehouse Map Room

Access the 2022-2023 Yearbook on our website [here](#). The document will be updated as new members continue to join the association.

Thank you to CCAO's new members for attending New Member training. We wish you luck in your term and look forward to supporting you.



Kimberly Murnieks, Director of the Ohio Office of Budget and Management, Lori Criss, Director of the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, Matt Damschroder, Director of the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, and Brian Baldrige, Director of the Ohio Department of Agriculture

2022 NEW CCAO MEMBERS



Sasha Rittenhouse
Clark County
Commissioner



Dana Phipps
Defiance County
Commissioner



David K. Smith
Gallia County
Commissioner



Amy Norris
Harrison County
Commissioner



Dave Hall
Holmes County
Commissioner



Zachary Manuel
Meigs County
Commissioner



Erin Dickinson
Summit County
Council Member



Christine Wiedie Higham
Summit County Council
Member

2023 NEW CCAO MEMBERS



Kelly Jones
Adams County
Commissioner



Donald Leggett
Carroll County
Commissioner



Nino Vitale
Champaign County
Commissioner



Patrick Kelly
Cuyahoga County
Council Member



Chris Ronayne
Cuyahoga County
Executive



Marshall Combs
Darke County
Commissioner



Leslie Henry
Gallia County
Commissioner



Dustin Corder
Harrison County
Commissioner



Lori Siclair
Henry County
Commissioner



Brad Roades
Highland County
Commissioner



Jessica Dicken
Hocking County
Commissioner



Jason D'Onofrio
Hocking County
Commissioner



Eric Timmons
Jefferson County
Commissioner



Richard Regovich
Lake County
Commissioner



Mike Finley
Lawrence County
Commissioner

2023 NEW CCAO MEMBERS



Michael E. Yoder
Logan County
Commissioner



Jeffrey Riddell
Lorain County
Commissioner



Lisa Sobecki
Lucas County
Commissioner



Mark Davis
Marion County
Commissioner



Aaron Harrison
Medina County
Commissioner



David Buschur
Mercer County
Commissioner



Cecil Mayle
Morgan County
Commissioner



Jon Mason
Morrow County
Commissioner



Melissa Bell
Muskingum County
Commissioner



Floyd "Allen" Fraley
Noble County
Commissioner



Lisa McClure
Paulding County
Commissioner



Mike Tinlin
Portage County
Commissioner



Jack Everson
Ross County
Commissioner



William Frankart
Seneca County
Commissioner



Denny Malloy
Trumbull County
Commissioner



Greg Ress
Tuscarawas County
Commissioner



Kristin Zemis
Tuscarawas County
Commissioner



Dave Lawrence
Union County
Commissioner



Jonathan Hofstetter
Wayne County
Commissioner



Bartley Westfall
Williams County
Commissioner

FEATURE

CCAO RENEWS FOCUS ON FOUNDATION

by Steve Caraway, CCAO Service Corporation Manager

For more than three decades, the CCAO Research and Educational Foundation has existed to provide high-quality information, tools and training that our members need and the public deserves. Beginning this year, CCAO made a commitment to grow the foundation and provide the best possible services to our members and the general public.



Caraway

One of the important things that we have learned in talking with other foundations across the state is to focus on several projects and to raise awareness to our members that the foundation exists. We are looking forward to growing the foundation in two ways. First, additional fundraising will be necessary to provide the kind of services that we are striving to provide. Second, we will soon roll out our educational and training focus that will help guide us in the coming years.

Our first item of business is to invest in the future of Ohio – our young people. This year, the Board of Directors authorized a \$5,000 commitment for college scholarships throughout Ohio from the foundation. After discussion, the board voted to double the commitment and with a match of an additional \$5,000 from CCAO. The 2023 Ohio Counties Scholarship will provide five \$2,000 scholarships to students across the state who are planning on focusing their career on public service in this state.

We are looking forward to strengthening the foundation together, so that we can continue to provide training and research for our members, offer a robust county government curriculum to students across Ohio, and invest in students with scholarships and learning opportunities.

2023 CCAO Summer Symposium
SAVE THE DATE: AUGUST 16-18, 2023
Registration Opens Soon!

TOPICS INCLUDE:
Economic Development Practices
Workforce Development Case Studies
Successful Landbank Practices
Expanding Broadband Services
and more!

Plus: Discussions with lawmakers and CCAO Golf Outing!

VOICE OF COUNTY LEADERSHIP

ILENE SHAPIRO, SUMMIT COUNTY EXECUTIVE



Shapiro

How long have you been a county executive?

In August 2016, I was first appointed Summit County Executive. Since then, I have been re-elected in 2016 and 2020.

Can you tell me about yourself? What is your professional background? What other elected positions have you held? Why did you first run?

My background is diverse, ranging from that of a small business owner to an executive of a \$10 billion financial services organization. I'm also a lifelong community volunteer and have helped create several philanthropic organizations in Summit County. Prior to becoming County Executive, I was a County Council Member at large for 10 years. I served as Council President and Vice President on that body and Chaired the Economic Development committee for several years. I first ran for County Council because a good friend encouraged me to throw my hat in the ring. I had been approached to run for several elected positions over the years, but the timing was never quite right. When the opportunity to run at the county level appeared, it finally felt like the right time.

Why did you want to be a commissioner?

Leadership takes many forms. Over the years I have found myself in many such roles. Many elected officials can point to a moment when they were called to lead. My moment came when my beloved predecessor became terminally ill and asked me to follow in his footsteps. The only response to that question at that moment was, yes. I never expected to be County Executive, but you never know where life will take you. Though I was not expecting to

become County Executive, I know now that life's twists and turns leading up to that moment prepared me to be the leader our community needed.

What are you most proud of for having achieved in your time as commissioner?

There is much to be proud of in Summit County: my team at the county, our community-wide collaborations, and our ability to move Summit County forward in ways that keep us competitive, fiscally stable, and forward-thinking.

I am especially proud of the pandemic programs we created using our federal CARES Act funding and the work we have led to address the ongoing opioid epidemic.

As a large county, we received \$94 million from the federal government in April 2020. We worked very quickly and very tactically to provide aid to residents, businesses, our 31 local governments, non-profits and others in our community who were feeling the effects of the pandemic. Three programs in particular stand out: our COVID-19 Small Business Grants program, Summit County Cares, a housing and utility assistance program and public safety grants to our 31 communities. Through the small business grant program, we provided more than \$12 million to over 3,000 small businesses throughout the county to help them keep the lights on and their staff employed.

Even before we received federal Emergency Rental Assistance funds, we used \$12 million in CARES funding to start Summit County Cares. We later expanded it with the ERA funding. To date, we have provided \$68 million in housing and utility aid to 12,700 unique households in Summit County. And from a Public Safety perspective, we immediately provided funding to all our 31 communities for their safety forces to ensure our communities remained safe during such a difficult and uncertain time.

In December 2017, as our community was suffering from addiction and overdoses, I declared a state of emergency in Summit County and filed a lawsuit

against the opioid manufacturers and distributors. Several mayors, trustees and levy agencies joined with me in that action. It was clear to me and my colleagues that these entities played a major role in igniting and fueling addiction in Summit County. We knew it was the right thing to do, but had no idea if we would ever have our day in court or recoup a single penny. Not long after filing, the federal court in Cleveland enjoined thousands of cases and selected Summit and Cuyahoga counties as the bellwether cases. This meant we would have a chance to seek accountability and force a change in business practices. Our team spent countless hours preparing for a trial. On the day it was set to begin, we reached a last-minute settlement deal, avoiding a lengthy trial and giving us quicker access to the funds our community desperately needed.

Summit County received over \$123 million (before legal fees). Since receiving these funds, we convened a group of experts and individuals with lived experience who provide guidance regarding the use of the funds. We have provided \$14.3 million in grants to non-profits, hospitals and other organizations on the front line of the epidemic. We continue to explore unique programs worthy of funding. We are also taking steps to create vehicles and opportunities that will enable these funds to continue to make an impact on those that are struggling.

What has been the biggest challenge you've dealt with as a county commissioner?

The last three years have been incredibly challenging for every local government official. We have had to navigate an opioid epidemic followed by a global, pandemic, and are now experiencing significant economic challenges from supply chains to interest rates. The silver lining, however, is these events have led to strong collaboration in our community. In good times and bad, we rally together in Summit County.

What was the biggest surprise or adjustment after taking office?

Using my many years of private sector experience, I took office and immediately challenged our team to increase our collaboration and connectedness with our 31 communities, and to be and stay as contemporary as possible. I knew that in an enterprise as large as ours, operations can become

stagnant if we do not challenge ourselves. This approach was new and required me to earn the trust of my staff. I encouraged them to think big and bold. For many, this was a significant adjustment, but with encouragement and support, we have become a County that prioritizes innovation and creativity for the benefit of those we serve.

One of the primary responsibilities of a commissioner is to develop a balanced budget and provide adequate resources to deliver county services. What has been one of the biggest challenges in that area?

Summit County takes fiscal responsibility very seriously. We are proud that we have managed to balance innovation and creativity with a strong financial position, as evidenced by our Aa1 and AA+ ratings.

One unique challenge we face is our charter requirement related to sales tax increase. We operate under a Charter form of Government and our Charter requires any sales tax increase must be approved by the voters. When we experience cuts to the Local Government Fund and other state funding challenges, we cannot simply raise our sales tax to offset these losses. As funding sources ebb and flow at the State level, we continue to find new ways to do more with less in Summit County.

How have you or what has your county been doing to participate in the state-county partnership?

The decisions made in Columbus have a direct effect on Summit County and our residents. We actively engage our state lawmakers and other state leaders to make sure they know what is happening on the ground in our community. Without this information they cannot make the most informed decision about which programs to fund, which legislation to pass and what issues deserve their advocacy. We are their eyes and ears at the local level.

We have more than 40 new CCAO members this year. What advice do you have for them as they take office?

CCAO provides a great opportunity to get to know your fellow commissioners and to learn from them. While all our counties are unique, we still have common challenges. Having the opportunity to be at a table to listen to a variety of opinions, perspectives,

and ideas from a diverse group of County Elected officials from across the State is incredibly valuable. Our collective efforts bring us positive solutions and creative ways to work with the State and to present our thoughtful and impactful positions in a meaningful way. I always take time to talk one on one with my colleagues to learn how they are tackling a particular issue.

Could you discuss your involvement with CCAO as well as the benefits of being an active member?

I have been a CCAO Board member for a number of years. In this role, I have the ability to share my perspective and weigh in on important decisions like legislative priorities. I've also learned more about the organization and how it operates, and strengthened my relationship with CCAO leadership and staff. A CCAO membership is an incredible value add for all counties in our state. With so much happening in Columbus, it's critical to stay informed. CCAO staff provides us with the much-needed information we need to advocate for our counties and assist us with those efforts at the Statehouse.

What are your main priorities? Why?

Two of my main priorities for the next year are public safety and workforce and economic development. Over the last three years, we have taken significant steps to modernize our public safety infrastructure. We have deployed a new consolidated dispatch system, created a virtual court platform, implemented new jail case management software and joined together with several communities to create a regional dispatch center, the Summit Emergency Communications Center. We expect construction of the center to be completed by July and once it is operational, it will provide dispatch services to over 300,000 county residents. To further enhance this center, we are creating Summit Connects, a countywide fiber optic internet ring to connect all our 31 communities, dispatch center and other governmental entities to a high speed and secure public safety network. We are also advocating the state to provide funding for the transition to Next Generation 9-1-1.

Like every county in the state, we are facing challenging workforce development issues. We have created a unique cross functional structure that focuses on economic development and in turn,

workforce. At the table weekly are area specialists that review opportunities and calling efforts. Focused calling efforts are ongoing to businesses of all sizes to better understand their needs. A common response from business owners is the lack of a qualified workforce.

We are very fortunate to have Stark State Community College and the University of Akron among others who are amazing partners in building our talent pool. The trick for all of us is to keep pace with existing demand while planning and building for the ever-changing projected future demand. We continue to implement best practices and collaborate with an array of stakeholders to help our residents and businesses alike.

What do you find are the most successful methods for reaching out to the residents of your county to communicate what your office is doing and why it's doing it?

My team does a great job of sharing information through a wide variety of outlets. Social media, videos, press releases and more traditional media sources, like local newspapers and television. We are in constant communication.

Our residents know they can find the information they need when they need it. All that cannot replace face-to-face conversations. That's where you find out what's really going on. Our work is for the people, and being accessible and approachable is a key component to understanding their needs and aspirations. People approach me at the grocery store, or the mall or wherever they see me to ask me questions, tell me how we have helped them, or find out where help may be available. Additionally, being open and available to speak with our residents as much as possible so they can hear county news and information directly from me makes a real difference. We have had great success with a wide range of local groups like Kiwanis, Rotary, Leadership Akron, Diversity on Board, and many others.

At the end of the day, the people you represent, no matter who they are or what they do, want to know their elected leaders care and are working for them and their futures.

GUEST COLUMN

COUNTY GOVERNMENT NEEDS TO ENDURE THE BAD TIMES BY PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

by Dave Robinson, Principal & Founder, The Montrose Group, LLC.

“What goes up, must come down”- lyrics from a Blood Sweat and Tears song from the 1970s also describe world economic reality. Rising inflation and interest rates, now met by several bank failures, may make 2023 a challenging economic year. However, as with all challenges, there are also opportunities for county governments. County governments are where economic development starts. An economic slowdown presents counties with an opportunity to plan for both what their community is, what they want to become and how can an economic development action plan be crafted to make realistic goals attainable.

The Montrose Group was founded 14 years ago with the goal of promoting the creation of high-wage jobs and capital investment. The Montrose Group completed over 40 economic development strategic plans and successfully developed over \$1.67 B in funding for public and private sector projects including \$177 M last year alone. Our team suggests that challenging economic times are prime time for counties to create economic development strategic plans.

County governments and their economic development public-private partnerships need to start with researching who their community is from a demographic, macroeconomic, industry cluster, workforce, housing, and quality of life standpoint. As an example, Montrose Group recently completed Morrow County, Ohio’s economic development strategic plan. Morrow County, like nearly all of rural Ohio, operates a strong industry base in agriculture and manufacturing but struggles with a lower educational level, income, and population growth rates. Based upon research into Morrow County’s economic, demographic, industry strengths, and quality of life analysis, the Montrose Group reached the following Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis for Morrow County.

**Morrow County SWOT Analysis
Strengths**

- Morrow County has an abundance of developable land.
- Morrow County is an affordable community to live and work in, which has attracted people from the central Ohio region.
- The proximity to strong and emerging industries will provide an abundance of growth opportunities.
- Interstate 71 traverses the county with interchanges at State Routes 95 and 61 where development opportunities exist.
- Robust career development/talent retention strategy among K-12, higher education, and businesses.
- Proximity to multiple high-tier educational centers brings substantial workforce development, talent attraction, and research & development opportunities.

Weaknesses

- Need updated countywide economic development strategy for business retention, expansion, and new business attraction.
- Need for CEO roundtable-style networking opportunities to build an interconnected business community.
- Develop broader zoning strategies to guide development.
- The tourism industry is an asset to Morrow County that should have more robust promotion and marketing to attract visitors.
- Lack of available housing inventory to attract workforce and residents to the county.

Opportunities

- Interstate 71 interchanges, coupled with necessary infrastructure investments, presents competitive sites for new business attractions.
- Morrow County has increasing development interest in manufacturing and distribution industry sectors.
- Morrow County is positioned to obtain new advanced manufacturing opportunities due to Intel's investment.
- Downtown areas of Morrow County's largest population centers are prime for new small business opportunities.

Threats

- Future development opportunities in Morrow County should be intentionally driven around key development areas while preserving agricultural and rural attributes.
- Retaining the youth of Morrow County to develop a pipeline of the future workforce.
- Need to increase residential housing stock across multiple price points to spur population growth.
- Morrow County should address dilapidated areas of the county.

Who a community is needs to then be compared with input from community, business, and government leaders about what a community wants to become. This structured conversation needs to mix aspiration with realism—there is only one Hollywood for movies, Silicon Valley for tech companies, and Wall Street for financial services but that should not stop counties from taking an inventory of regional assets and finding a place in growing markets.

Finally, economic development strategic plans need to build specific action steps that can be tied in with land-use planning strategies to outline how existing local, state, and federal government economic development tools can be used to retain and attract high-wage jobs and capital investment in targeted industries. These specific action steps are often

around land use, workforce, infrastructure, tax, and quality of life initiatives that can transform a community from what they are to what they want to become.

The Montrose Group recommended four specific economic development action plan steps for Morrow County based upon the economic analysis of the community and the community's economic aspirations as listed next.

- Establish a standalone Economic Development Organization via the Public-Private Partnership model that brings together government and private sector stakeholders to prioritize, implement, and fund comprehensive economic development and countywide tourism priorities.
- Morrow County should develop economic development and tourism priorities that support existing business needs, builds a strong network of Morrow County business leaders, and encourages investments that create high-value jobs and enhances the wealth of Morrow County and its residents.
- Implement Morrow County Industrial Site Development Marketing Strategy around key sites along the Interstate 71 corridor in leading and emerging industry sectors which include Advanced Manufacturing, Semiconductor Supply Chain, and Logistics & Distribution, and develop an incentives policy to attract new investment to key sites.
- Morrow County should support private, developer-led residential investments to increase the overall housing inventory in Morrow County which will support the attraction of a diverse cross-section of talent.

Morrow County represents a community that is planning for its future economic success. Ohio's county governments should capitalize on a slowdown in economic activity to figure out their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to position their region to boom when companies begin to focus on economic growth.

Please contact Dave Robinson at drobinson@montrosegroupllc.com if you need any assistance.

CEBCO NEWS

AN UPDATE FROM CEBCO

by Mike Kindell, Managing Director of Health and Wellness

The 19th CEBCO Annual Membership Meeting was held on March 31 in Columbus. During the meeting, Commissioners Jeff Benton (Delaware County), J.P. Ducro (Ashtabula County, Steve Hess (Champaign County), and Cory Noonan (Allen County) were elected to three-year terms for the CEBCO Board of Directors.



Kindell

can engage our membership, especially those with potential or emerging medical conditions, use the benefits and programming that is in place to delay and/or treat these conditions to lower medical costs. At the Annual Meeting, we shared that for 2022, 3% of our membership accounted for more than 45% of the total claim cost. These percentages are very close to those for the prior two years. As we grow, the volume of claims paid for this small subset of members will also continue to grow. We are looking for ways to address and help these members, while attempting to prevent additional members from reaching this category.

Representatives from 43 of the 46 member counties were present, making this the largest attended meeting ever for CEBCO. During the meeting, Thisbe Butcher, Finance and Benefits Manager, and Mike Kindell, Managing Director, reviewed the 2022 financial and program results, providing a detailed look at where CEBCO stands moving forward. The financial results, which are going through the audit process, mirror the expected results that were forecast last year. CEBCO is in great financial shape, as we look to continue our growth.

Another area that CEBCO will concentrate on is MSK (musculoskeletal conditions). Many of these conditions are lifestyle related and currently, MSK represents CEBCO’s top clinical condition. About 2500 members suffer from low back pain and approximately 25% of our pharmacy spend is for medical conditions related to MSK. We are reviewing a program that we will roll-out in the near future that we feel will help alleviate the claims that revolve around this condition.

At the end of 2022, CEBCO added two additional counties for 2023. Coshocton County joined on January 1 and Hocking County will rejoin CEBCO on July 1. With the addition of these two counties, CEBCO has grown to 46 counties and will serve more than 14,000 employees and approximately 31,500 members this year.

April is Health Nutrition Month and May is Mental Health Awareness Month. Through our Wellness program, Hannah McKee, our Wellness Coordinator, will provide material to our counties and members on both topics as we look to improve the health of the members we serve. We hope everyone enjoys the upcoming spring and summer months!

The Board of Directors and CEBCO Staff will have their annual Board Retreat at the end of April. This is an opportunity to review our goals and objectives, as we look toward the balance of 2023 and plan for 2024. With four new board members this year, we will allocate time to discuss our Investment Policy, allocation and use of Member Equity, and a review of different programming. One of the main initiatives this year is a review of our Wellness Program.

For 2023, we will provide nearly \$600,000 in wellness grant funds to our member counties, for them to develop programming unique to their county. Part of the wellness review will focus on how we



2023 Board of Directors at the CEBCO Retreat

CORSA NEWS

BUZZ WORD...MULTI-FACTOR AUTHENTICATION (MFA)

by John Brownlee, Managing Director, Property and Casualty Insurance

With the ever-changing cyber insurance market, MFA has now become a requirement to obtain coverage by most carriers. So, what is MFA?

Multi-factor Authentication (MFA) is a layered approach to securing access when a system requires a user to present a combination of two or more different authenticators to verify a user's identity. MFA increases security because if one authenticator becomes compromised, unauthorized users are not likely to meet the second requirement to gain access to the computer system.

Password cracking techniques and ways of harvesting credentials through phishing emails are becoming more sophisticated. MFA adds protection against account takeovers due to the extra layer that has been put in place. A typical MFA login would require a user to present a combination of the following: a username or email address with a password or Personal Identification Number (PIN). The second layer would include: fingerprint, token, email, or a text code. Consider using MFA on any internet facing software or systems such as email, remote desktop, and virtual private networks (VPN).

MFA is a way to mitigate risk and losses but by itself is not a one and done solution. Although it does help lower your cyber risk, it's helpful to think of it as an added layer of security protection. As a member of CORSA there are additional resources and grants available. For more information contact Frank Hatfield, Risk Manager, at fhathfield@ccao.org or 614-560-1474. Watch our very own Jim Hale, Risk Control Consultant, on the topic of MFA [here](#).



Brownlee

CCAO SERVICE CORP NEWS

SERVICE CORPORATION ADDS NEW SERVICES IN SUPPORT OF COUNTIES

by John Leutz, CCAO Assistant Director

The beginning of 2023 has been a busy time for the Service Corporation as we work to roll out two new services to our strategic partner family.

With RoofConnect and PaveConnect, one call can connect counties with two superior companies. Both companies came to us highly recommended and the relationship was formed based on the needs of multiple counties not being able to find reputable roofing vendors.

This strategic partnership offers counties a cooperative purchasing opportunity, allows counties to partner with local contractors, avoids the expenses and risk of public bidding and has saved multiple local governments time and money. For more information, please reach out to John Leutz or Steve Caraway with the Service Corporation or Melanie Leneghan with RoofConnect at 614-975-9454.



Leutz

The Service Corporation is also proud to announce a strategic partnership with Huntington Commercial Bank. We invite counties to join the Ohio County Commercial Card Consortium as the program has perks available for member counties.

Counties that join the consortium, created by CCAOSC, will have access to the program. This commercial card program makes it easier to purchase, track expenditures and to protect against fraud and misuse. The CCAO Ohio County Commercial Card also offers counties a cash rebate on the total spend of the consortium, which provides a higher rebate tier than standalone programs. For more information on the program, contact John Leutz or Steve Caraway with the Service Corporation or Eddie Baumann, Government Banking at Huntington, 614-899-8236.

CCAO SERVICE CORP ENERGY UPDATE

WHY ARE ENERGY COSTS SO VOLATILE?

by Mark Frye, President, Palmer Energy

For over a decade abundant natural gas supplies meant gas futures prices, and, in turn, wholesale power prices remained very steady. Much of the abundance was from shale gas and oil production growth, primarily from Appalachian region and in various parts of Texas. In fact, from 2015 – June 2021, an average Ohio household paid ~\$2.85 per MCF (thousand cubic feet) of gas (not including basis costs for gas transportation).

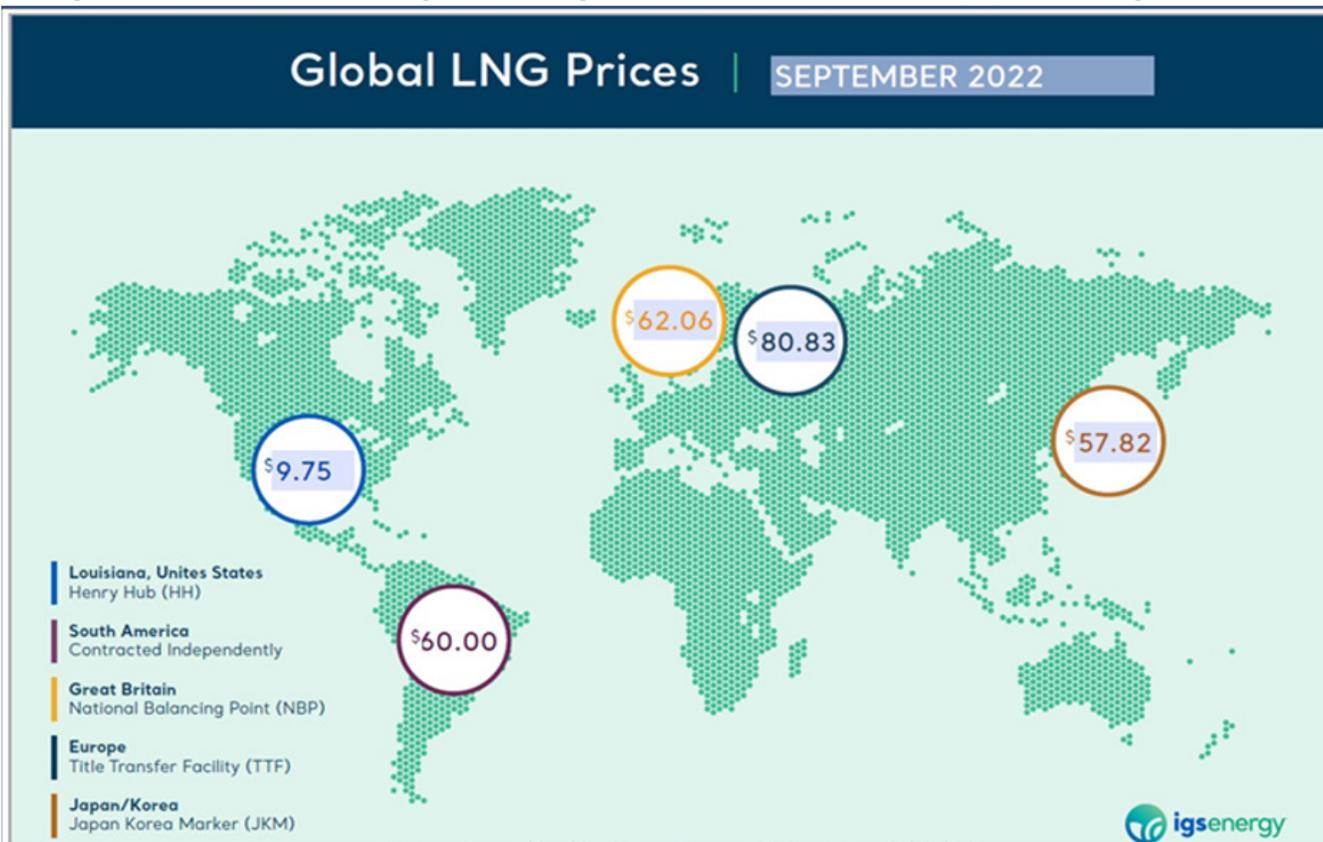
In late 2021 and into 2022, natural gas supply levels compared to total demand shifted, largely due to the United States becoming a major provider of gas supplies in global energy markets via liquefied natural gas (LNG) exports.

After being a net importer of natural gas as recently as 2017, the U.S. is now the largest exporter of LNG in the world. This major shift in fundamental dynamics caused domestic natural gas prices to move precipitously higher between mid-2021 through late 2022. Since natural gas is the largest

fuel source for electricity generation, wholesale power prices similarly experienced major increases relative to recent years.

In August 2022, gas futures prices traded as high as \$10.18 per million BTU (e.g. Dth) – a level not seen since 2008. This price is just for the physical gas commodity and does not include basis transportation costs or regulated utility distribution costs. The market expectations of increasing natural gas demand for export and to produce electricity reset pricing expectations. From July 2021 – January 2023, an average Ohio household paid ~\$5.57 per MCF, nearly doubling relative to the prior 6.5-year average supply cost.

Another factor in more recent energy price volatility is the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Crude oil prices shot up and natural gas had a sympathetic response despite these markets having limited connection. Market hysteria led to emotional reactions from traders/speculators/general market-

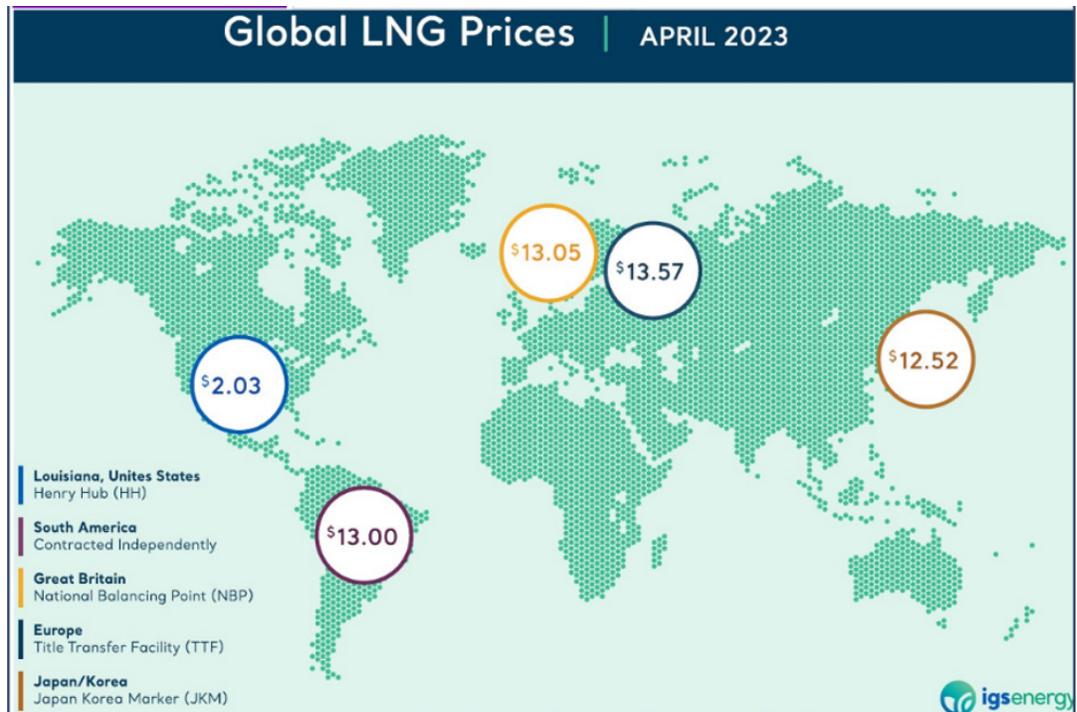


movers to push prices higher in a very short time span. Regardless of the outcome of this war, Europe has committed to reduce its dependence on Russian oil and natural gas energy supplies, but this will not happen overnight.

European LNG imports will increase but conservation and utilizing its indigenous energy resources may also become a larger factor in their markets. Congruently, the U.S. has responded by initiating construction of more LNG export terminals with many others waiting in the wings for a green light from investors and the federal government. All of this will increase U.S. integration into the global natural gas market and make our markets more susceptible to external events such as the Russia & Ukraine conflict. These bullish factors have weighed on the minds of market participants over the past 24 months.

As noted in the images above, the gas futures market started a swift decline beginning in late November 2022. Between February 2023 – April 2023, an average Ohio household cost for natural gas supplies was ~\$2.67 per MCF. The current weighted average market price for May 2023 – April 2024 is at ~\$3.34 per MCF (note these prices trade and change not only by the day, but by the second). The quick market decline was attributed to:

- Warmer than normal weather projections for January and February.
- The frigid cold spell around Christmas lasted 2-4 days in most areas of the country.
- Extreme unseasonably warm temperatures



quickly setting in just prior to the New Year holiday and mostly remaining through the remainder of the heating season, leading to what is likely to be the third or fourth warmest US winter in the past 50+ years.

- Ongoing tame demand expectations vs. historical spring demand.
- Continuing delays in restarting a major LNG export terminal that was offline between June 2022 – February 2023 (~2 billion cubic feet per day in LNG supplies). Partial operations finally commenced in early March 2023.
- The European Union installing a “cap” on its international natural gas prices – Ripple effect through other global gas prices as the overall level of volatility is lowered (the sky is no longer the ceiling for Euro prices).

In summary, commodities pricing volatility had already returned to U.S. markets due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated impact on the global economy. Geopolitical tensions only add to the uncertainty. Rest assured that the CCAOSC Energy Program will continue to work on your behalf to limit your exposure by securing competitively priced natural gas and electricity prices moving into the future.

COUNSELOR’S CORNER

LOCAL GOVERNMENT INCENTIVES AVAILABLE UNDER INFLATION REDUCTION ACT

by John Caleb Bell, CRE@Partner & Public Finance Practice Group Chair, Bricker & Eckler
 Rebecca C. Princehorn, Partner, Bricker & Eckler
 Christopher L. McCloskey, Partner & Public Sector Industry Group Chair, Bricker & Eckler
 Justin D. Cook, Partner & Tax Practice Group Chair, Bricker & Eckler
 John Flis, Associate, Bricker & Eckler

Federal energy policy is making many new incentives available for local governments to fund energy-related assets. The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), enacted in 2022, established a set of energy-related asset categories that are now being directly subsidized by the federal government. Under the IRA, nearly any advanced or renewable energy asset constructed by a local government is eligible for some kind of federal cash subsidy.

Importantly, local governments are not taxpayers and normally do not benefit from tax credits, but the IRA authorizes direct pay tax credits as cash subsidies to local governments to fund energy-related assets. Now, counties, townships, municipalities and school districts can build long-term energy-producing assets like solar fields, install geothermal heating, or invest in clean fuel buses for their vehicle fleets, all with federal support. New local government buildings can be constructed more cheaply with IRA-authorized subsidies. This article provides a summary overview of the key incentives available under the IRA for local governments investing in green, energy-related assets.

Green asset categories are targeted

The IRA opens up the playbook for investment by authorizing direct federal support for many green and renewable technologies. The investment tax credit is available for solar facilities, small wind projects, fuel cells, energy storage systems, microgrid controllers, electrochromic glass, certain geothermal facilities and qualified bio gas facilities. The production tax credit is available for solar and wind facilities, biomass facilities, geothermal facilities, hydropower, small irrigation and certain landfill and trash energy facilities. Other direct pay tax credits are available for qualified clean commercial vehicles and alternative fueling and charging stations in low-income or rural areas. In addition to the green asset categories described above, certain tax benefits

may be passed along to vendors that design energy-efficient buildings for tax-exempt local government users. Care should be taken when designing new government building projects, because many projects may have energy-related elements that are eligible for federal support.

Significant cash payments are available through tax credits

The IRA makes tax credit funds available for an unlimited number of energy-related projects nationwide. For the investment tax credit category, generally the base tax credit can be as low as 6% of the project’s costs and the maximum tax credit can be as high as 70%, depending on the specific asset, the location of the project and certain other compliance-related factors. The typical investment tax credit for a small solar asset under 1MW will be equal to 30% of the qualifying costs of the solar asset. For the production tax credit category, tax credit levels are based on the amount of green power produced by the asset. Tax credits are available to local government and non-profit owners in addition to private owners, manufacturers and utilities.

Tax filings are required to claim payment

To claim a direct pay tax credit under the IRA, a local government must pay the cost of the eligible asset, place that asset in service and then file a special tax return that claims a refund for the amount of the tax credit. The IRS will then issue a refund check for the amount of the tax credit.

Local government fiscal officers should be mindful that the tax credit process involves certain IRS filing requirements that may be unusual for fiscal officers. A special application process for direct pay tax credits was used for Build America Bonds, Qualified School Construction Bonds, Recovery Zone Facility and Economic Development Bonds that were

authorized under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

Tax-exempt governmental bond options are enhanced

Local government benefits have typically not been the focus of federal tax laws. Recognizing the opportunity to spur local investment in green assets, the IRA has enhanced local government opportunities to fund green assets with tax-exempt governmental bonds.

Previously, tax-exempt governmental bonds that funded green assets would not result in special federal tax benefits beyond the tax exemption itself. In addition, the private activity bond rules in effect before the IRA resulted in a 50% reduction in the tax credit when attempting to pair an investment tax credit or a production tax credit with tax-exempt bond financing. The IRA permits tax-exempt governmental bond financing of green assets and scales back the reduction in tax credit percentages from 50% to 15%. Now, any local government projects financed by tax-exempt governmental bonds will receive a much smaller 15% reduction in the amount of credit for which the project is otherwise eligible. For example, a 30% investment tax credit for a solar project funded entirely with tax-exempt governmental bonds will be reduced by 15% to become a 25.5% effective credit. In other words, if local government pays \$100,000 for a solar installation with cash, then the effective subsidy is \$30,000, but if local government pays \$100,000 for a solar installation with tax-exempt bond proceeds, then the effective subsidy is reduced to \$25,500.

Sequestration risk is limited

Prior federal laws and programs, including many ARRA bond programs, attempted to stimulate local government investment by using tax credit subsidies to offset debt service payments. Later, when times were tight and federal budgeting priorities shifted, the federal government unilaterally reduced the subsidy by sequestering a portion of the payments it promised to local government bond issuers. In many cases, local governments that relied on ongoing tax credit subsidies to support their debt service obligations felt a bit of “bait and switch” due to the IRS enforcing sequestration.

The IRA attempts to eliminate sequestration risk by causing the federal subsidy to become a one-time,

up-front style payment instead of an ongoing series of payments over time. Once an eligible project is placed in service, the local government owner can apply for the direct pay tax credit and obtain the direct pay tax credit payment. There are some mechanisms in the IRA that offset or reduce the effectiveness of the tax credit as a penalty if the requested tax credit is too high or not applicable. While no one can predict how long the exact tax credit percentages in the current version of the IRA as enacted will remain in effect, it does appear that local governments can rely on the subsidy opportunities without extensive recapture or sequestration risk.

Compliance issues are present but not onerous

It should be noted that the IRA is federal legislation and it comes with some specific rules based in part on the assets being constructed and in part on the level of tax credit being requested. Some energy-related assets have specific construction and placed-in-service requirements that need to be followed. There are important domestic content rules in place to ensure that energy assets are sourced from American-made materials. In addition, all eligible assets can obtain some base level of tax credit, but some of the higher tax credit percentage levels may require additional federal prevailing wage compliance or may need to be located in targeted areas.

Conclusion

Energy assets are often long-term assets that reduce ongoing operating costs and can be worthwhile projects on their own. Under the new IRA law, the upfront cost of an energy asset can be partially offset with a cash payment from the federal government equal to 30% or more of the cost of the asset. In short, there's pretty much no good reason why a local government investing in renewable energy assets, sustainability assets or clean vehicles should not consider applying for a federal tax credit to offset the costs of these assets. If a local government is including energy assets in a project, there are some compliance boxes to check off, but the amount of the federal tax credit payment can be significant. Bricker's Public Finance, Construction and Energy teams can advise directly on IRA qualification and compliance issues. Our teams are excited to leverage this new law and assist local governments seeking to invest in clean, renewable and sustainable energy assets.

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County Leader, CCAO's quarterly e-magazine, provides an in-depth look at the news, programs and policies affecting Ohio's 88 counties. The e-magazine also showcases our members, offers best county practices as well as ways to enhance the state-county partnership practices and shares the offerings of the association. If you have questions or story submissions, contact Editor Jessica Newbacher at jnewbacher@ccao.org or 614-220-7986.