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OHIO
Counties Current
CCAO
County Commissioners Association of Ohio

July 22, 2024

CCAO members and staff represented Ohio's counties at the NACo Annual Conference last week.

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ASSOCIATION AND MEMBER NEWS

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New mandatory fraud reporting training for elected officials and county staff must be completed by September 28

All county commissioners, executives, council members, other county elected officials and all current county staff are required to complete a new, mandatory fraud reporting training through the Auditor of State's office by **September 28, 2024**. All public employees and elected officials are required to take the training once every 4 years.

Elected officials are unable to delegate this training to another employee and must complete the training themselves.

All new county employees after September 28, 2024 must take the training within 30 days of the first day of employment and all elected officials must take the training within 30 days after taking office. The requirement is ongoing and training must be completed once every 4 years.

The training is a free, 8-minute video that is available on demand on the Auditor of State's website. Each elected official and county employee will register, watch the video, and then receive a certificate of completion. All certificates should be collected from employees and retained for audit.

A detailed explanation of these requirements is available in Auditor of State Bulletin 2024-005.

The Auditor of State website includes FAQs and sample tools for tracking employee participation.

If you have questions regarding the training, you can contact the Auditor of State's office here.

URGENT: DRC seeking notices of intent to participate in TCAP for upcoming state budget requests

The Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (DRC) administers the Targeted Community Alternatives to Prison (TCAP) grant program through Bureau of Community Sanctions (BCS). This grant provides funding to counties who volunteer and agree to participate in the program and who submit Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) pursuant to R.C. 2929.34 and R.C. 5149.38 that indicate their willingness to participate. In the SFY 2024-2025 biennium (July 1, 2023, to June 30, 2025), 63 counties volunteered to participate.

In preparation for the upcoming state operating budget (which will run from July 1, 2025, to June 30, 2027), DRC needs to know which counties will be participating in the TCAP grant program during SFYs 2026 and 2027 to determine the correct amount of funding to request from the General Assembly to support the TCAP grants.

DRC is respectfully requesting that counties provide an email response from one person authorized to respond on behalf of the county to DRC.BCSgrants@odrc.state.oh.us by Wednesday July 31, 2024.

These responses will be used to create applications in early 2025 through which each county will be required to upload their Memorandum of Understanding. Requests made after this date, may be excluded from consideration. Each email response must include the following information:

- **County:**
- **Name of Primary Contact:**
- **Phone number of Primary Contact:**
- **Email Address of Primary Contact:**
- **FY24/25 T-CAP participation (choose only one):**
  - **{ } YES Felony 5 T-CAP**
  - **{ } YES Felony 5 and Felony 4 TCAP**
  - **{ } NO**

It is ***imperative*** that each county respond by July 31, 2024, as requests made beyond this date may not be included in the budget request presented by DRC. It is the intent of BCS to pursue TCAP grants with all counties that indicate their desire to participate if funding permits.

Thank you for your anticipated cooperation and response. Should you have any questions, please contact Matthew Morris at Matthew.Morris@drc.ohio.gov or Jennifer Gentry at Jennifer.Gentry@drc.ohio.gov.

Traffic enforcement camera annual report due this month

Any county that operated or contracted with another party to operate any traffic enforcement cameras during the previous state fiscal year (July 1, 2023, through June 30, 2024) is required a file a report with the Department of Taxation no later than July 31. This report is required by R.C. 5747.502 and must contain the location of traffic enforcement cameras and the civil fines collected from the cameras in school zones and non-school zones.

A copy of the report can be accessed here. If you have questions concerning the reporting requirement, please contact the Ohio Department of Taxation, Revenue Accounting Division at RevenueAccounting@tax.state.oh.us or call (614) 466-7150.

STATE AND FEDERAL NEWS

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Comment period on state Fire Code open through July 25

The Division of the State Fire Marshal (SFM), part of the Ohio Department of Commerce, is in the process of reviewing and updating all chapters of the Ohio Fire Code. The State Fire Marshal is accepting comments on the draft proposed rules until the end of the day on Thursday, July 27.

The draft code is available here. The division has also made available a table summarizing significant changes, accessible here.

If you have any questions about the rule update process and/or the submission of a comment, please contact OhioFireCode@com.ohio.gov or call the SFM's Code Enforcement Bureau at 614-728-5460.

Great Lakes Commission releases improved water use database

The Great Lakes Commission (GLC) announced that it has released an updated Great Lakes Water Use Database website.

The GLC states the new website is more secure and will make it easier for the public to access water use data. Upgrades to the site include: a streamlined, more intuitive process for water use data managers to report their jurisdictions' data and metadata; an improved public-facing "create your own query" tool that will allow users to create charts based on their specific data selections; and enhanced security features to better protect data before it is published.

For nearly 40 years, as part of the historic water agreements, the eight states and two provinces in the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River basin have provided water use data to the regional water use database. The GLC compiles and summarizes these datasets into an annual report that is submitted to the Compact Council and Regional Body, which manage the agreements to sustainably manage Great Lakes water.

To view the new website, visit waterusedata.glc.org.

JobsOhio releases 2023 annual report and 2024 strategic plan

JobsOhio recently released its 2023 annual report and 2024 strategic plan. The strategic plan focuses on four strategic initiatives: sites, talent, small business and communities, and innovation. According to the report, the four initiatives "provide companies and Ohio's towns with a competitive advantage."

EDUCATION AND GRANTS

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Visit the Grants and Funding Opportunities page on the CCAO website for a detailed listing of open grant programs.

CCAO, DCY to hold child welfare placement webinar July 25

On Thursday, July 25 at 11 a.m., CCAO and Department of Children and Youth (DCY) Director Kara Wente will provide an update on the department's transition and strategic goals. The director will focus on updates regarding Ohio's child welfare placement challenges, including information on the department's Children Services Placement Crisis Working Group.

Members will have the opportunity to ask questions.

House Bill 33, the state operating budget, created DCY as a new cabinet level agency. DCY operates programs and services previously housed at six other cabinet agencies and serve children prenatal to age 21.

Director Wente has spent her career advocating for children. She has served as the Director of the Governor's Children's Initiative since January 2023 and was previously the Chief Operating Officer for Future Ready Columbus. With more than 20 years in dedicated state service, Wente has extensive experience in serving the most vulnerable children and families in Ohio.

She used data as an accountability tool for systemic change during her time as the Assistant Director of Health and Human Services at the Ohio Department of Job & Family Services and led several large-scale system and policy changes as Deputy Director at the Office of Family Assistance.

You can register for the webinar here. If you are unable to register with this link, please contact Nedra Benson, CCAO administrative professional, at nbenson@ccao.org or call 614-221-5627, and provide her with your email address.

H2Ohio 2024 Conservation Ditch Grant Program Rollout Webinar

The Ohio Department of Agriculture is proud to announce the 2024 H2Ohio Conservation Ditch Grant Program! This is a great way to bring funds to your county for ditch projects and improve water quality at the same time!

The application period begins on August 1st and ends on October 31st of this fall. The Department is hosting a rollout/training webinar on **Friday, July 26th at 9:00 a.m**. *This webinar was originally scheduled for July 19th, but has been rescheduled to the 26th*. All are welcome to attend.

You can register for the webinar here. The webinar will be recorded and placed on our YouTube channel here.

Here are some key facts about the program:

1. Only county engineer offices and SWCDs may apply.
2. Projects must be self-forming or two-stage ditch designs.
3. Grant funds will not be distributed to grantee until after construction and placed on the maintenance program.
4. This is a competitive grant program and approved projects will be announced in December.

If you have questions about the webinar, please contact Boden Fisher (boden.fisher@agri.ohio.gov) or Justin McBride (justin.mcbride@agri.ohio.gov).

Registration for SPBR conference open until July 31

Registration is now open for the State Personnel Board of Review (SPBR) conference and will continue through the month of July.

The conference, to be held on August 22, is intended for those new to the field of managing exempt and non-exempt employees in the classified civil service. This SPBR Conference is also for new or current managers, union officials, attorneys, staff, human resource professionals, elected officeholders, and those who are or will be working in positions where they need to know how Ohio's laws and court decisions are evolving to impact public varied employment issues and questions.

Registration costs $175 and can be completed here. Rooms are available at the Marriott Columbus Northwest as well (SPBR requests that you abstain from booking hotel rooms until your registration for the event is confirmed).

The session topics include the following:

- How Will AI Impact Tomorrow's Workforce?
- Best Practices and Challenges to Implementing R.C. 124.34 Orders
- Whose Side is HR On? Employer vs Employee Interests
- Social Media: Work or Personal Expression?
- Public Records: Challenges and Solutions
- Bridging the Generational Divide: Building a Cohesive Workplace Culture

An application for 5.5 continuing legal education hours is pending.

COUNTY NEWS

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Each week Counties Current highlights the happenings in our counties in the words of their local media. One story from each of the CCAO's five districts is highlighted, and on occasion other stories may be highlighted as well.

Northwest District

County to consider economic opportunity

Review Times, July 19, 2024

At the Seneca County Commissioners' meeting Thursday, the board heard information from the Toledo Metropolitan Area of Council Governments (TMACOG) and Tiffin-Seneca Economic Partnership (TSEP) about an opportunity to become part of an economic development district.

TSEP President and CEO Aaron Montz discussed the recent completion of the Seneca and Sandusky Counties Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) in which TSEP and Sandusky County partnered with Bowling Green State University to create a "road map to success" that will help the counties in applying for and receiving grants.

Montz explained that Seneca County becoming part of an economic development district would allow the county, along with the other counties in the district, to receive grant funds available from the Equitable Economic Development program. He also said that Seneca and Sandusky counties alone cannot become a district as a district would need 5 – 6 counties to be involved. That is where TMACOG comes in.

He presented the commissioners with a memorandum of understanding with TMACOG to become part of a larger CEDS study at no cost to the county. The larger study would utilize data from previous CEDS.

TMACOG's Executive Director Sandy Sprang explained that the council currently handles the Metropolitan Planning Organization and Regional Transportation Planning Organization for Wood and Lucas counties. It also handles water quality for its region. She said that Seneca County can participate in these organizations without becoming a member of the council. Participation in the organizations opens participants up to additional funding.

Action to consider participation in the study is expected at the next commissioners' meeting.

Northeast District

Columbiana Commissioners to make some cuts to stay in 2025 budget

WFMJ, July 17, 2024

Commissioners in Columbiana are trying to figure out how to get their bottom line in 2025.

Each year the county auditor makes a prediction on how much they will be able to spend. In 2025, they expect a little over $23 million dollars. County departments have requested what they believe they need next year and it adds up to more than $26 million. That $3 million difference means some departments won't get as much as they want.

"What the commissioners have to look at when they are appropriating those monies is what they've spent in the last few years," Nancy Milliken, the Columbiana County Auditor said. "If they get somebody's budget in that's way out of line, they need to ask some questions. Which they do."

The commissioners and Milliken refer to the requests as "wish-lists." Board of Commission President, Mike Halleck told 21 News the requests "will be trimmed down based on need and made to align with our revenue."

The Sheriff's Department has one of the biggest wish-list. In 2025, they're requesting more than $4 million - which is up from years past.

"Everything just keeps going up," Sheriff Brian McLaughlin of Columbiana County said. "The fuel for the cruisers, the cost of the cruisers, the upkeep of the cruisers, it all has gone up."

The funds they get also cover payroll for about 60 employees, cost for patrol, registrations for offenders, the 911 dispatch center and more.

Central District

Can farming and solar panels work together? Madison County project is trying to find out

Columbus Dispatch, July 21, 2024

MECHANICSBURG − A new solar farm in Madison County is tackling the longstanding complaint that the growing number of utility-sized solar projects in Ohio are taking critical farmland out of production.

Renewable energy company Savion has opened Madison Fields Solar Farm, a 180-megawatt project capable of generating enough power to run 38,000 homes. The farm will also test on whether it is possible to grow crops between and around the rows of 400,000 solar panels on about 1,000 acres of land in Pike Township.

"Madison Fields is one of the first operating units of a utility-scale solar project of its size to emphasize the fundamental role of agriculture in the transition to clean energy," Scott Zeimetz, Savion's chief development officer, told a crowd at a ceremony to celebrate the opening of the solar farm.

Kansas City, Missouri-based Savion, in conjunction with Ohio State University, is testing a variety of crops at the site, including wheat, soybeans, alfalfa, corn, hay mixes and pollinating plants. The study also includes soil health and the use of agricultural equipment to navigate the narrow lanes between the rows of solar panels.

If vegetation has become firmly established, sheep may be brought in as soon as the new year to graze.

"Savion is striving to be a leader in this field and sees agrivoltaics as a way of the future and a bridge between agriculture and solar energy and the local communities we operate,'' Zeinmetz said, using the term of integrating farming and solar farms.

Construction of Madison Fields began in December 2022 and finished last December.

It is the first solar project Savion has developed, constructed and operated. Shell New Energies U.S., a subsidiary of European oil giant Royal Dutch Shell, bought Savion in December 2021.

Savion partners with Ohio State on Madison Fields

Savion has a subsidiary called Between the Rows dedicated to investigating whether integrating farming on utility-size solar farms can work.

It partnered with Ohio State to study on a 2-acre site in northwest Ohio where alfalfa, hay and soybeans were being grown around solar panels.

The U.S. Department of Energy has awarded Ohio State a $1.8 million grant to study the concept at Madison Plains.

"Big picture: Can we grow and raise crops under solar panels?" asked Scott Shearer, professor and chair of the Department of Food, Agriculture & Biological Engineering at Ohio State.

Savion is working with Ohio State to expand the Molly Caren Agricultural Center in London, a 2,100-acre site that hosts the Farm Science Review each September, into a national training center to teach farmers how to farm successfully around solar panels. It also wants to work with Tolles Career and Tech Center close to Plain City to establish a program that could help Madison County become a regional hub for training workers in solar power and agrivoltaics.

Will agrivoltaics work?

The introduction of agrivoltaics at Madison Fields comes during a building boom for solar farms in Ohio.

There are about 60 farms in some stage of development in the state, according to state regulators. Projects approved several years ago, like Madison Fields, are coming online.

Add it all up, and the projects take up about 95,000 acres in the state. The state has about 13.1 million acres of farmland in 2022, down about 400,000 acres from the prior year, meaning far more farmland is being lost to projects other than solar farms.

Shearer said it would likely take at least two or three years of study to determine whether growing crops at Madison Fields will pay off.

"We're starting down the road. We're learning a lot of things," he said.

Savion also wants to incorporate agrivoltaics into its neighboring Oak Run project, which it is developing in Madison County south of Madison Plains. State regulators signed off on the project in March.

It is far bigger than Madison Fields, costing at least $1 billion and covering 6,050 acres of farmland, making it one of the biggest in the country.

The 800 megawatts of power to be generated by the project is the biggest in the state of any solar farm.

Savion has promised to turn Oak Run into the largest agrivoltaic program in the country. The company will plant crops and graze livestock in the rows of the solar panels and around the perimeter of the project.

In its first year of operation, Oak Run must graze at least 1,000 sheep and grow crops on 2,000 acres. State regulators said when they approved the project that within eight years of operation, at least 70% of the farmable project area, or at least 4,000 acres, must include agrivoltaics.

Who is buying the power from Madison Fields?

Amazon's data center operations in central Ohio run entirely on renewable energy, and the e-commerce giant backs about two dozen renewable energy projects in the state, including Madison Fields.

"Amazon is proud to enable solar and wind projects in Ohio, which have helped Amazon reach its 100% renewable energy goal, and it's exciting to see how agriculture experts are working with the site developers, Ohio State University and Savion to maximize the benefits of the investment for the community we're serving," said Amazon's Merle Madrid.

Amazon is also buying the power from the Fox Squirrel solar project that just completed its first phase in southern Madison County. After Oak Run, Fox Squirrel is the second biggest project in the state.

Southwest District

Commissioners speak on sales tax, roads and community housing

Daily Times, July 16, 2024

Sales tax revenue is down in Scioto County, as well as around Ohio, according to the county commissioners.

"We are continuing to see a drag on our sales tax revenue. I think it's a reflection on the economy as a whole," said Scioto County Commission Chair Bryan Davis. "It's becoming harder and hrader with the press on everyone with inflation and the cost of living, period. Utilities, food, medicine, you name it. Everyone's getting hit hard at every turn."

Ohio's sales tax rate is 5.75 percent. Consumers in Scioto County are paying 7.25 percent total in total sales tax on purchases made locally due to 1.5 percent added for local government needs.

"It's starting to have a reflection not only on our sales tax revenue, our base, but across the state of Ohio," Davis said.

Across the state, there has been a dive in revenue.

"It's hitting everywhere, it's not just here. The state of Ohio itself has seen a reduction in sales tax revenue," Davis said. "Something to watch."

The commissioners also:

-Signed off on the completion of two mortgages through the Community Housing Improvement Program, or CHIP. The mortgages were in the amounts of $27,999 and $38,800 and saw two residents doing repairs and staying in their homes.

"This is a satisfaction of mortgage. Once again, a successful contract between the Scioto County Board of Commissioners as part of our CHIP program for rehabbing owner-occupied houses," Davis said.

-Approved Portsmouth Metropolitan Housing Authority to apply for a $20,000 grant to upgrade door and entrance locks at Hudson House "to ensure the safety of our residents."

-Accepted $7.79 from Help America Vote

-Established a fund and approved the notice to proceed on the Ohio River Road Safety Project. This is expected to correct some drainage issues in Wheelersburg. County Engineer Darren LeBrun worked with the Porter Township Trustees to get a grant of $500,000 to help fund the project.

Southeast District

Plan in works to allow historic Holmes Courthouse to shine bright in the night sky

Wooster Daily Record, July 16, 2024

The goal is to blend art and science in a way that will tell the historical story of the Holmes County Courthouse using night lighting.

That was the message given to Holmes County commissioners Monday morning by the designers and engineers working on illumination for the building.

The commissioners met via Zoom with senior lighting designer Matt Minard and lead electric engineer Kelly Huston of KLH Engineering to hear an update on lighting plans for the renovated Holmes County Courthouse.

Minard said it is his hope to be able to tell the historical story of the courthouse via lighting the building at night. He said it is important to highlight the statue of Lady Justice, because that is why there is a courthouse.

The project is in the conceptual design phase. Within the next few weeks the engineers will provide the county with a plan.

Minard said they are blending the art and science to illuminate the clock tower and the structure and architecture of the courthouse, which was renovated two years ago.

"At the end of the day, we are artists who work with light," Minard said. "Our first approach is the artistic approach, especially when we deal with historical features. We are currently going through some internal testing, with software that helps us inform our decisions.

"The ideas and concepts that we pull together as a team need to blend well with your ideas, and we put them through software mockups to make sure we're heading in the right direction," he said.

The project timeline: Perhaps lights-on in spring

The project is expected to get underway soon, but the timeline is flexible.

Minard said it will probably be October before all the documents will be ready. They have conducted on-site background research, and are currently in the design phase.

"We envision some back and forth over the next few weeks through this phase and have it wrapped up by the end of August," Minard said. "We would be looking at bringing some sample equipment on site for a one-night mockup display, so you can actually see what we've designed and what those effects look like."

KLH Engineering will provide a plan that lays out the material and construction costs to ensure when the project is bid, the commissioners will know what project costs should be.

"We don't like to rush projects of historical significance like this," he added. "We don't think you would want this installed over the winter, so we envision sometime in March or April to be ready for a lights-on event sometime in the spring."

Commissioners Dave Hall and Joe Miller agreed that lighting the courthouse will enhance the beauty of the building, and give folks another reason to come visit downtown Millersburg.

KLH is contracted with Holmes County commissioners for $38,500 for the concept, design, construction documents and field verification.

DATES TO REMEMBER

Please view the CCAO Calendar for a comprehensive list of events to note.

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JULY 26
CEBCO Board of Directors Meeting

AUGUST 16
CORSA Board of Directors Meeting

AUGUST 21 - 23
CCAO Summer Symposium - Hocking Hills

AUGUST 23
CEBCO Board of Directors Meeting

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