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March 24, 2025

On Friday, the CCAO Board of Directors applauded Board Member and Fairfield County Commissioner Jeff Fix for receiving the 2025 Regional Leadership Award from the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC). MORPC honored Commissioner Fix because he "championed responsible growth in Fairfield County, balancing new housing development with community preservation. He led the creation of the county's Comprehensive Land Use Plan to guide sustainable development."

Congratulations, Commissioner Fix!

Association and Member News | State and Federal News |
Education and Grants | County News |
Job Postings

Statehouse Report and Counties Current Archive | Dates to Remember

ASSOCIATION AND MEMBER NEWS

Back to Top

Indigent defense reimbursement rate rebounds

Last week, the Office of the Ohio Public Defender issued its quarterly update memo on the indigent reimbursement rate. In it, OPD informed CCAO and other stakeholders that the reimbursement rate for the final four months of FY 2025 reimbursement payments (January through April), the reimbursement rate will be 93%, up from the 78% that OPD had been reimbursing thus far in the fiscal year.

OPD set the reimbursement rate at 78% based on the projection that monthly reimbursement requests would exceed $19 million. However, monthly reimbursements have only exceeded $19 million two times over the eight months and is averaging $18.4 million. That has allowed the agency to increase the reimbursement rate for the remainder of the year, and result in an average annual reimbursement rate of about 83%.

While CCAO is glad to see the reimbursement rate increase for the remainder of the fiscal year, the memo is a reminder of the uncertain nature of indigent defense reimbursement. The Association, in partnership with OPD, the State Bar Association, the Criminal Defense Attorneys Association, and the Ohio Access to Justice Foundation, is supporting the inclusion of HC-1087 in the House Bill 96 substitute bill. The amendment would increase funding available for reimbursement for SFY 2026 and SFY 2027, remove reimbursement rate caps that harm small counties, and provide for a performance audit of the indigent defense system.

The provisions of HC-1087, along with the creation of the Northwest Regional Hub pilot program already in the budget, will help provide more fiscal stability for indigent defense reimbursement and begin to develop and test alternative models to the current system.

Deadline nears for MARCS radios to be authenticated

The Ohio Department of Administrative Services (DAS) is reminding Ohio first responders and public safety agencies that use the Multi-Agency Radio Communication System (MARCS) to authenticate all radios or the radios won't work on the MARCS system beginning July 1.

The authentication process can take up to three months.

Radio Authentication (also known as Link Layer Authentication) is an industry standard in first responder/public safety communications and an increased safety and security measure to protect the emergency communications infrastructure of the MARCS radio system throughout Ohio. Authentication will safeguard against unauthorized people using and listening on the system, and those attempting to disrupt the system.

The DAS MARCS Program Office has been actively encouraging customers to have their radios authenticated to provide the best and most secure service to everyone since July 1, 2020.

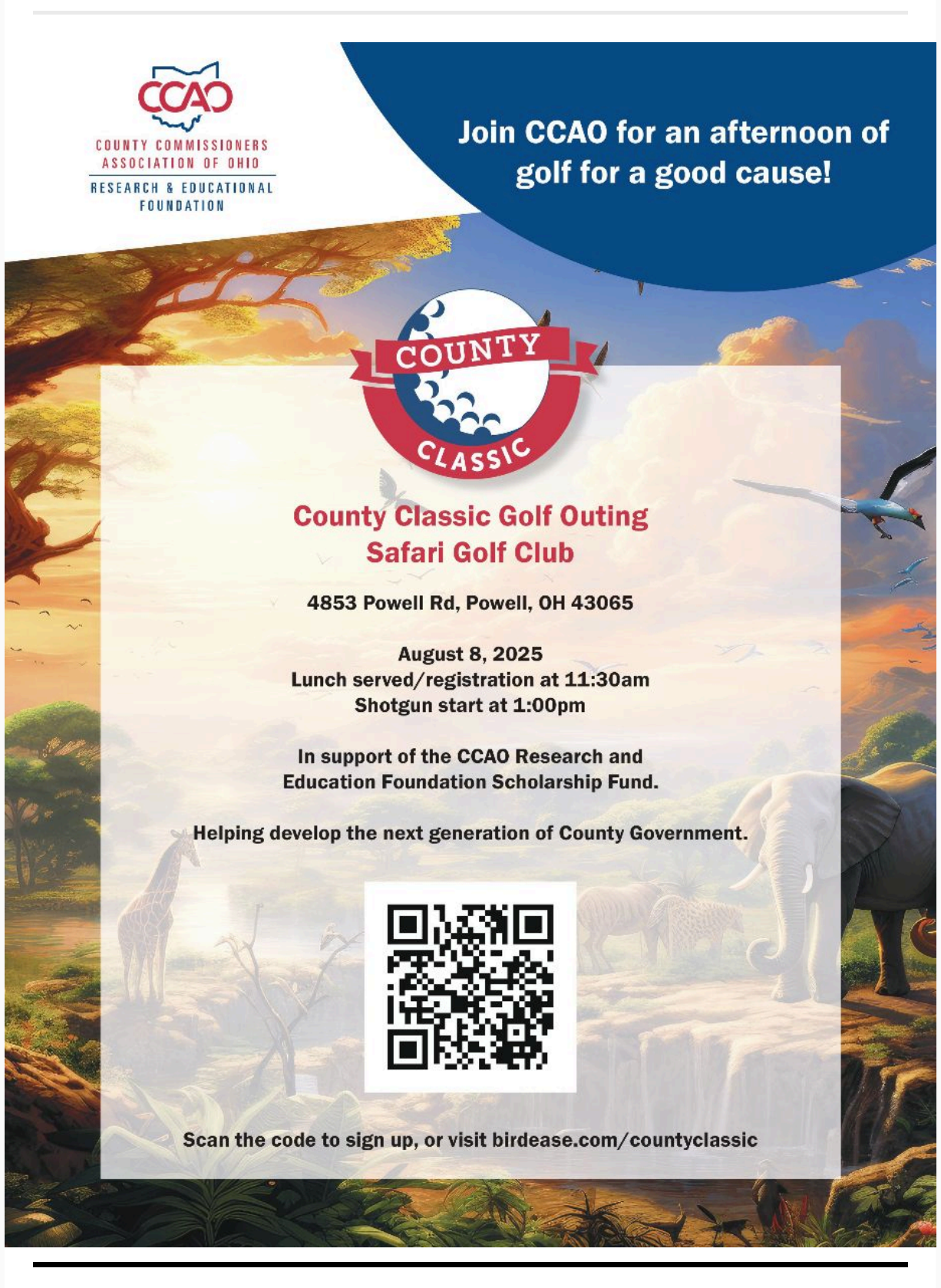
Each radio – base, mobile, and portable – must have Radio Authentication to operate on the MARCS system after July 1, 2025.

Some radios purchased after July 1, 2019, may already have been authenticated.

Radios purchased prior to July 1, 2019, may have the ability to be updated to comply with Radio Authentication, without the need to purchase a new radio.

To start the three-month authentication process, MARCS radio users are urged to contact their radio manufacturer or programming vendor today.

Users also can check with the MARCS Program Office, by emailing DAS-MARCS.admin@DAS.Ohio.gov or calling 614-995-0060.


CCAO
COUNTY COMMISSIONERS ASSOCIATION OF OHIO
RESEARCH & EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION
Join CCAO for an afternoon of golf for a good cause!
COUNTY CLASSIC
County Classic Golf Outing
Safari Golf Club
4853 Powell Rd, Powell, OH 43065
August 8, 2025
Lunch served/registration at 11:30am
Shotgun start at 1:00pm
In support of the CCAO Research and Education Foundation Scholarship Fund.
Helping develop the next generation of County Government.
Scan the code to sign up, or visit birdease.com/countyclassic

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STATE AND FEDERAL NEWS

Back to Top

State ends February with less revenue than estimated, still positive YTD

Early last week, using the authority granted to him by R.C. 941.03 and OAC 901:1-21-02, Ohio Director of Agriculture Brian Baldridge issued a proclamation prohibiting the movement of all live birds (poultry, wild game birds, fancy poultry species, and exotic species) from non-commercial premises across 13 counties (illustrated in the map below).

This includes public and private shows, exhibitions, sales, and all activities involving birds. Among the "activities" banned are auctions, flea markets, swap meets, livestock markets, meet ups, and sale barns in which subject birds would be involved.

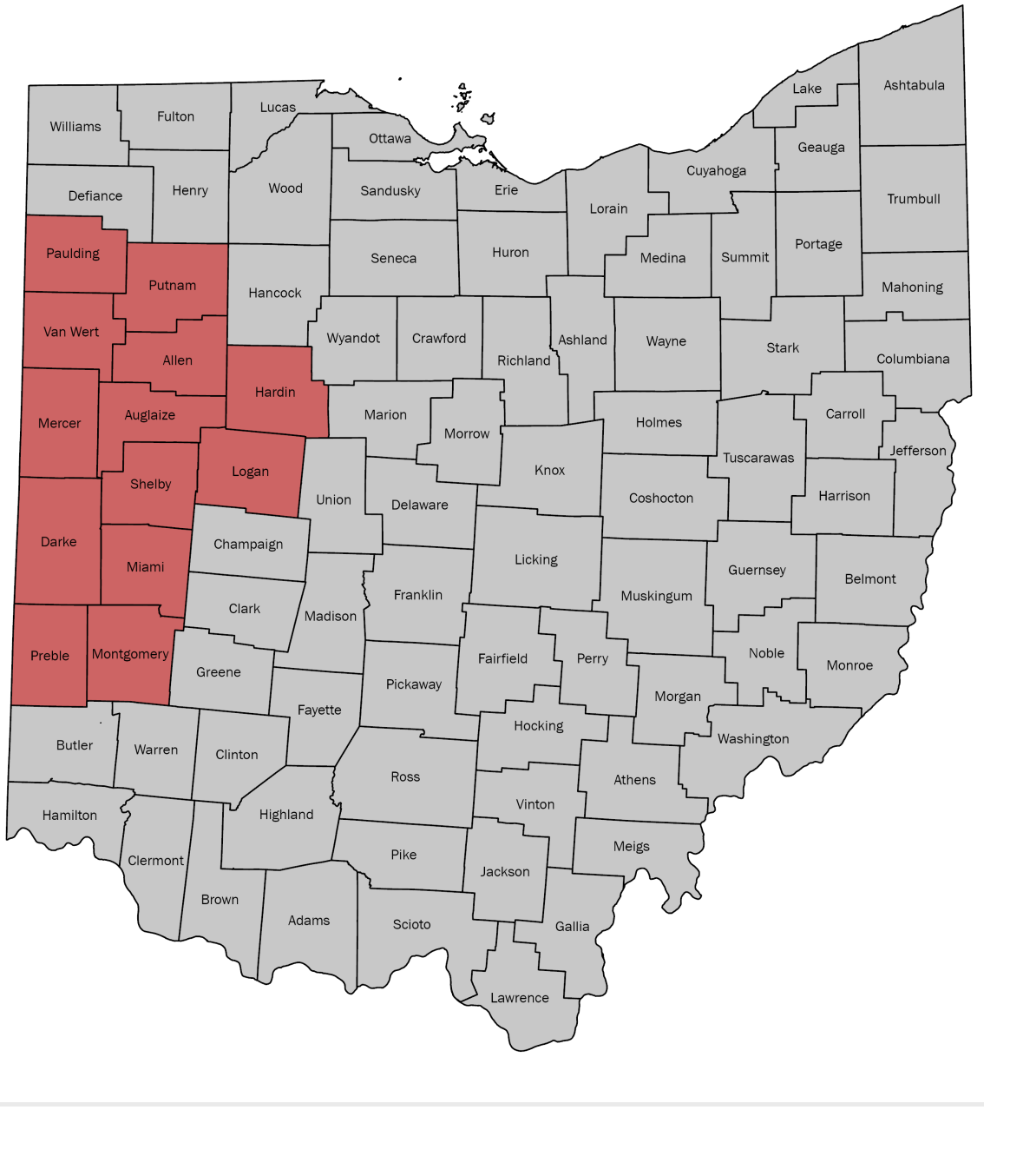
The proclamation comes as the Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) continues to spread across the United States. The ban on the activities is intended to limit the spread of HPAI.

The "non-commercial" premises is defined as a premise where at least one of the following applies:

- A site home to an egg-laying flock with fewer than 75,000 birds.
- A plant processing meat-type chickens that slaughters fewer than 200,000 birds per week or fewer than 2 million per year.
- A plant processing commercial waterfowl and upland game that slaughters fewer than 50,000 birds per year.
- A site for raising and releasing upland game birds that releases fewer than 25,000 birds a year.
- A site home to a breeding flock with fewer than 5,000 birds.

The ban on movement took effect on March 17 and will remain in effect until May 15 or until it is revoked or amended.

Under Ohio Director of Agriculture Brian Baldridge's proclamation, the movement of live birds from non-commercial premises is banned in the highlighted counties until May 15 or until the proclamation is revoked or amended.



FINAL DAY: State Fire Marshal accepting comments on 2nd draft of 2025 Ohio Fire Code

The State Fire Marshal recently announced the release of its 2nd Revised Draft of the 2025 Ohio Fire Code (OFC) and the Report on Comments (ROC), which contains comments received regarding updates to the current OFC.

The OFC is being reviewed as a part of the required five-year rule review process.

With the release of the 2nd Revised Draft 2025 OFC and the ROC, the state enters the next phase of the rule revision process and the beginning of the formal rule filing process.

You can view the proposed rules, along with the ROC and the Business Impact Analysis (BIA) instrument on the State Fire Marshal's website.

The website contains the most recent version of the draft 2025 OFC (including red-lined copies of each rule), as well as the ROC, the BIA, a document summarizing significant changes, and all other previously released documents regarding this OFC update.

If you wish to submit a comment regarding the 2nd Revised Draft 2025 OFC or the BIA, please send them to BOTH the State Fire Marshal (OhioFireCode@com.state.oh.us) AND to the Common Sense Initiative Office (csipubliccomments@governor.ohio.gov) by the close of business ***TODAY***.

If you have any questions regarding the 2nd Revised Draft 2025 OFC, any of its associated materials, or the update process in general, please send an inquiry to OhioFireCode@com.oh.gov or contact the Code Enforcement Bureau at (614) 728-5460.

Final week for nominations for Ohio Senior Citizens Hall of Fame class of 2025

The Ohio Department of Aging is seeking nominations of outstanding older adults to induct into the Ohio Senior Citizens Hall of Fame for the Class of 2025.

Nominations must be received by Monday, March 31, 2025, to be considered for induction during a September ceremony.

The Ohio Senior Citizens Hall of Fame honors native-born or long-time Ohio residents age 60 and older who have made and continue to make a lasting impact on their communities, their professions, or their vocations.

Past inductees have included business and industry leaders, advocates, community planners, educators, scientists, health care professionals, volunteers, artists, entertainers, athletes, and more.

Inductees are selected from public nominations. Nominees are evaluated on the scope and impact of their contributions begun or continued after age 60. Nominees must be native-born Ohioans or have been residents of the state for at least 10 years. Posthumous nominations are accepted, provided the date of death is within the last five years and the nominee was age 60 or older at the time of death.

Repeat nominations of Ohioans who were not selected in the past are welcome, provided the candidate still meets the eligibility criteria.

OCCO LEGISLATIVE RECEPTION
APRIL 8, 2025
5:00 PM-7:00 PM
STATEHOUSE ATRIUM
OCCO
Ohio Council of County Officials
Please RSVP at www.OCCOohio.com/RSVP
or by scaning the QR code...
County Auditors Association of Ohio (CAAO), Ohio Clerk of Courts Association (OCCA), County Commissioners Association of Ohio (CCAO), Ohio State Coroners Association (OSCA), County Engineers Association of Ohio (CEAO), Ohio Judicial Conference (OJC), Ohio Prosecuting Attorneys Association (OPAA), Ohio Recorders Association (ORA), Buckeye State Sheriffs Association (BSSA), County Treasurers Association of Ohio (CTAO)

EDUCATION AND GRANTS

Back to Top

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

NEXT TUESDAY: Ohio Chamber of Commerce to host Child Care Policy Summit on April 1

On April 1, the Ohio Chamber of Commerce will be hosting a Child Care Policy Summit from 9:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

Registration is open and costs $99 for Ohio Chamber Action Network members and $149 for nonmembers. You can register here.

The event will have five sessions:

"Untapped Potential: Ohio" Economic Report
A presentation by the US Chamber of Commerce Foundation on a study to assess the financial impact that insufficient child care coverage has had on Ohio's economy.

Early Childhood Workers: The Workforce Behind the Workforce
A discussion on how to recruit and retain child care workers.

Business Engagement Strategies for Childcare
A discussion on the role that business can play in fostering child care options for their workers.

Legislative Panel
A panel discussion with Representative Andrea White (Chair of the House Children and Human Services Committee), Representative Bride Rose Sweeney (Ranking Member on House Finance), and Representative Mark Johnson.

Keynote Speaker
An address by Director of Children and Youth Kara Wente.

OneOhio Impact Academy to host webinar on sustaining capacity

Sustainability is a critical challenge for organizations working to create lasting change. The next OneOhio Impact Academy event, on April 2, 2025, will host experts who will introduce the Sustainability Framework designed to help organizations strengthen their capacity to combat addiction and save lives.

This interactive session will explore the eight key domains that influence program sustainability, providing valuable insights on how organizations can enhance their long-term impact. Attendees will also learn how to leverage the Program Sustainability Assessment Tool (PSAT), a free resource that helps organizations evaluate their programs and identify areas for improvement.

This session is ideal for past and future OneOhio grant applicants and stakeholders involved in addiction recovery, including:

- Nonprofit organizations
- Behavioral and mental health associations
- Government agencies
- Service providers
- Other related organizations

SAVE THE DATE! CSH Ohio and OMHAS to host webinar on rental subsidy and supportive housing

The Ohio Housing Finance Agency and the Ohio Capital Corporation for Housing will be hosting the 2025 Ohio Housing Conference at the Greater Columbus Convention Center on November 12-13.

More details on the schedule, sessions, and speakers will be available in the future, and registration will open in September. You can begin booking at the Hyatt Regency now.

You can view a recap of last year's conference here.

COUNTY NEWS

Back to Top

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

Williams County board reverses vote, will ask Ohio Supreme Court to hear pipeline dispute in AquaBounty case

Toledo Blade, March 20, 2025

In a rare move, a northwest Ohio county commissioner reversed the swing vote he cast nine days earlier in a significant legal case and publicly admitted that, upon further reflection, he erred by not agreeing right off the bat that his county board should try getting the case heard by the Ohio Supreme Court.

The three-member Williams County Board of Commissioners voted 2-1 Thursday to take the AquaBounty right-of-way case to the high court, nine days after a 2-1 vote on March 11 against doing that.

On both occasions, Commissioner Scott Lirot, the board's vice president, cast the swing vote.

On Thursday, he voted with Commissioner Bart Westfall to take the case to the state's highest court.

On March 11, he had voted with Commission President Terry Rummel to end litigation.

"I think Scott had some second thoughts, and that's what led to the decision today," Mr. Westfall told The Blade after the vote but declined to elaborate.

Mr. Lirot didn't say much about what led to his reversal but began his remarks near the end of the board meeting by saying that "a flood of information has come my direction, as well," since the first vote on March 11.

"I've been reading nonstop," Mr. Lirot told the other commissioners. "Truthfully, I think I was in error in wanting to go the direction I was going."

He made a motion for the board to "finish this out with the courts and let them have their decision."

Northeast District

Builders wanted for new $6 million Ashland County office building

Ashland Source, March 20, 2025

A new county office building could start taking shape, at least conceptually, starting in May.

Ashland County commissioners are seeking statements of qualifications from firms willing to build the new, 13,500 square-foot building they hope to situate on the former Ashland Middle School site along Cottage Street.

Commissioners will accept statements until April 1. The board will then select the top three firms, request pricing proposals and begin contract negotiations with the "top-ranked firm."

"This is a qualification-based selection process," reads the commissioner's request for qualifications. "Firms that have submitted pre-qualification materials within the past year may also be considered. Firms should not submit bids, price estimates or project specific proposals at this time."

The building — which has been estimated to cost $6 million — is expected to house the county auditor, treasurer, recorder and tax map offices. All of those offices are currently housed within the Ashland County courthouse. The title department, also within the courthouse, will be moved to vacant space at the dog shelter along Baney Road.

Commissioners hope the design phase to be between May and September, with construction possibly starting by November of this year.

Central District

Work begins on county-funded Broadband Expansion Project

Delaware Gazette, March 18, 2025

The Delaware County Board of Commissioners and Consolidated Cooperative have announced the start of a $4.9 million expansion of broadband services in the county. The project marks the next phase of an effort begun in 2023 when the Commissioners' Office conducted a study of internet access and network infrastructure throughout Delaware County.

Areas located largely in the northwestern and north-central portions of Delaware County have been identified and will be able to connect to the expanded fiber network Consolidated Cooperative is building. Utilities provider Consolidated Cooperative is based primarily in Delaware and Morrow counties and serves more than 19,000 homes and businesses. It earned the contract for the expansion project through a competitive sealed proposals process in 2024. The company plans to contact eligible property owners via mail and with door-hanger notifications.

The project is being funded with the County's American Rescue Plan Act monies, which were allocated to local governments in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. This funding for broadband projects is limited to providing service to unserved and underserved areas.

Barb Lewis, president of this year's Board of Commissioners, noted: "We are very pleased to see this project taking tangible form now. So many more families, especially in the rural parts of the county, will finally be able to connect to high-speed internet from their homes and farms, rather than having to travel someplace else to access it."

Southwest District

Grease from fish fry events causing havoc on sewer systems

Dayton Daily News, March 15, 2025

As the Catholic season of Lent is in full swing, many homes, churches and restaurants have increased the use of oils and fats during their annual traditional fish fries.

That increase of oil often contributes to excess grease being added to community sewer systems.

"When grease enters the sewer system, it can solidify and block pipes, leading to costly clogs, backups and potential system failures," said Montgomery County Commission President Judy Dodge. "These blockages not only increase the risk of backups in homes but also place an immense burden on the county's sewer infrastructure and water reclamation facilities."

Grease in the drainage pipes reduces the effectiveness of treatment processes, she said, including leading to slower filtration rates, increased energy consumption, and a higher potential for equipment failures and malfunctions.

In the worst case, excess grease could cause significant operational disruptions and financial strains on facilities tasked with keeping water clean and safe.

Southeast District

Jefferson County expands broadband access with new investments and grants

WTOV, March 18, 2025

The Jefferson County Commission is making strides in expanding broadband internet service to the county's most remote and rural areas, thanks to new investments and grant funding.

Tony Morelli, a Jefferson County Commissioner, highlighted the progress made since the establishment of a broadband task force four years ago.

"We have been seeing progress," Morelli said. "Four years ago, when I was first elected, the commissioners decided to start a broadband task force, and we have made progress. Broadband is slow, but some things that are happening right now. I live out by the airport, and Comcast is hooking up the fiber now for County Road 33 and County Road 26."

The initiative addresses long-standing concerns about cost and the need for a sizable customer base, which have been barriers for decades.

"The good part about this is it is specifically money used to the areas that would be very difficult to get the other internet service providers," Morelli said. "When they go into an area, they want a bunch of potential customers."

The total cost for this round of broadband installation is $3.5 million, with four providers being added to the region.

DATES TO REMEMBER

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

Back to Top

MARCH 26
Northwest District Meeting

MARCH 28
Noble County Regional Legislative Briefing

MARCH 31
Portage County Regional Legislative Briefing
Lake County Regional Legislative Briefing

APRIL 4
CEBCO Annual Business Meeting
Lucas County Regional Legislative Briefing

APRIL 4
Madison County Regional Legislative Briefing

APRIL 8
CCAO Board of Directors Meeting
OCCO Legislative Reception

APRIL 11
Defiance County Regional Legislative Briefing

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