May 5, 2025

In late April, Montgomery County Commissioner Judy Dodge received the Miami Valley Regional Planning Commission's Arthur D. Haddad Regional Steward Award for her work towards solving regional challenges and building broad support for a regional vision.

Pictured is Commissioner Dodge (center) receiving the award from MVRPC Chair Sara Lommatzsch and MVRPC Executive Director Brian O. Martin.

Congratulations Commissioner Dodge!

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ASSOCIATION AND MEMBER NEWS

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CCAO publishes County Advisory Bulletins on virtual meeting authority and village dissolution

Last week, CCAO released County Advisory Bulletin 2025-08, which details the provisions of the new virtual meeting authority for certain government bodies, and County Advisory Bulletin 2025-09, which provides an overview of the village dissolution process and the involvement of the county commissioners in two new aspects of dissolution.

CAB 2025-08 outlines the requirements that a public body must include in a policy before it can hold virtual meetings and discusses some ambiguity in the law regarding what bodies can and cannot hold virtual meetings. Generally, if the members of the body are elected to serve on the body and/or if the members of the body receive compensation, that body cannot meet virtually.

CAB 2025-09 gives a summary of the village dissolution process and two recent laws that include county commissioners in certain components of that process. One of these is the Transition Supervisory Board, comprised of the county auditor, county recorder, and a member of the board of commissioners. As the name suggests, this board supervises the process of dissolving a village and transitioning its territory into the township(s) that absorb its land. The other is an unnamed review board convened after each federal census to evaluate whether the villages in its county meet certain conditions. If the conditions are not met, a ballot issue to dissolve the village is placed on the ballot.

You can view these CABs and others on CCAO's website.

Governor awards $2.2 million to drug task forces

Last week, Governor DeWine announced the awarding of $2.2 million in RecoveryOhio grants to 34 drug task forces across the state. The funding is used to combat the flow of drugs and to assist residents with recovery supports.

A full list of award amounts can be found here.

A Special Thanks to our Pinnacle Partner

RUMPKE

STATE AND FEDERAL NEWS

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Property tax abolition amendment submitted to Attorney General

Last week, a group submitted a proposed constitutional amendment to the Attorney General's office that would prohibit the taxation of property in Ohio. The amendment does not provide any guidance on what would become of existing property taxes.

Submitting the amendment required the petitioners to gather at least 1,000 signatures from qualified electors. Attorney General Dave Yost has until Friday, May 9, to determine if the title of the amendment and summary are "fair and truthful." If he determines so, then Ohio Ballot Board must evaluate it to ensure it contains only one amendment.

If Attorney General Yost certifies the amendment title and summary, and the Ballot Board certifies the amendment as a single amendment, then the petitioners must gather signatures from across the state. Signatures must be gathered from at least 44 counties (equal to at least 5% of number of votes cast in the most recent gubernatorial election) and the total number of signatures must equal at least 10% of the number of votes cast in the most recent gubernatorial election.

That means the supporters of the amendment would need a total of at least 413,487 signatures statewide. The number of necessary signatures by county range from 198 in Vinton County to 21,287 in Franklin County.

Given the substantial impact this amendment would have on county operations, CCAO will keep membership informed at the petition continues through the process.

Presidential budget proposal features significant cuts, some new programs

Last week, the federal Office of Management and Budget sent the US Senate Appropriations Committee recommendations for discretionary spending levels. The document includes tables showing programs, proposed funding changes from the current federal fiscal year, and a description of the recommendation, generally sorted by federal department or agency.

NACo has not made an analysis of the proposal available yet. CCAO staff has made an attempt to highlight proposed funding changes that may be of interest to counties.

Department of Health and Human Services

- Community Services Block Grant
  - Proposed funding reduction of $770 million.
  - This block grant funds community action agencies. The proposal recommends changing the source of job-training and other assistance to programs funded through the Department of Labor and Department of Agriculture.
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
  - Proposed funding reduction of $1.065 billion
  - The proposal opposes some projects supported through the administration in the past, such as syringe exchanges.

Environmental Protection Agency

- Drinking Water Programs
  - Proposed increase of $9 million
  - The proposal cites a need to better equip the EPA to respond to drinking water disasters.
- Clean and Drinking Water State Revolving Loan Fund
  - Proposed reduction of $2.46 billion
  - The proposal seeks to return funding of water infrastructure projects as a state responsibility and to return the revolving loan fund to its intended structure.

Department of Transportation

- Infrastructure for Rebuilding America Programs
  - Proposed funding increase of $770 million
  - This new program would fund competitive grants for highway, port, and freight rail improvements.
- Rail Safety and Infrastructure Grants
  - Proposed funding increase of $400 million
  - Funding from these grants would improve the safety of railways and communities surrounding railways.

Department of Housing and Urban Development

- State Rental Assistance Block Grant
  - Proposed funding reduction of $26.718 billion
  - The proposal seeks to change rental assistance from a federal program to a state-based formula grant program wherein states would design their own assistance programs.
- Community Development Block Grant
  - Proposed funding reduction of $3.3 billion
  - The proposal calls for completely eliminating the Community Development Block Grant.

Department of the Treasury

- Rural Financial Award Program
  - Proposed funding increase of $100 million
  - This new program would seek to aid economic development in rural areas through affordable financing options.

Department of Veterans Affairs

- Medical Care
  - Proposed funding increase of $3.309 billion
  - This funding would strengthen health care options for veterans and allow veterans to receive care from local providers instead of at VA facilities.

Other Agencies

- Elimination of regional commissions
  - The proposal eliminates six regional commissions, including the Great Lakes Authority. The Appalachian Regional Commission ***is not*** eliminated.

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.

BroadbandOhio and OSU Extension to host broadband information sessions over next three weeks

BroadbandOhio and OSU Extension are partnering to host information sessions across the state to discuss the availability of federal funds to connect unserved areas and how to advocate for your area.

The organizations will host five sessions across the state during May, one in each region of the state. The schedule is below.

PLEASE NOTE: Last week's issue incorrectly listed the location of the May 7th event and the May 19th event. The dates and locations below are accurate.

May 5, 3:00 p.m.
Knox County
Remser 4H Activity Central
700 Perimeter Drive,
Mount Vernon, OH 43050

May 7, 2:00 p.m.
Preble County
Eaton OSU Extension Building
722 S. Franklin St.,
Eaton, OH 45320

May 12, 2:00 p.m.
Stark County
Main Library Branch
715 Market Avenue N,
Canton, OH 44702

May 19, 2:00 p.m.
Paulding County
Paulding County OSU Extension Building
503 Fairground Drive,
Paulding, OH 45879

May 20, 2:00 p.m.
Athens County
Athens Public Library
30 Home St.,
Athens, OH 45701

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

Wood County has state's first organized crime task force

Sentinel Tribune, April 30, 2025

Wood County will lead the state in developing a task force against organized crime.

Lt. Rod Smith with the Wood County Sheriff's Office told Wood County Commissioners at an April meeting that he had been approached to lead an organized crime task force focusing on retail theft.

Some thefts are to support drug habits while others are part of an organized crime ring where the items taken are sold to a third party which turns around and sells them on Ebay and elsewhere, Smith said.

The task force will focus on drug cartels and gangs who run these organized crime rings, said Wood County Sheriff Mark Wasylyshyn.

Smith said they are not looking for people who steal once or twice. They are interested in people that have a shopping list for their fences.

"When we talk retail theft, the definitely is anything that is stolen with the intention of being reintroduced into the economy," he said.

Smith said he was approached and asked to take the director's role of the task force.

He met with the directors of Ohio Organized Crime Investigations Commission, who explained the Wood County's task force would be the pilot program with the intent it eventually spread throughout Northwest Ohio.

"The goal is for the commission to have five task forces," at the state's four corners and in Columbus, Smith said

Northeast District

Veterans Service Commission hosts ribbon-cutting for new office

Star Beacon, April 26, 2025

A new office for the Ashtabula County Veterans Service Commission was celebrated Friday morning, as more than 175 people attended a ribbon cutting at the renovated building.

Ashtabula County VSC Executive Director Ben Schwartfigure's multiple year push for a new facility ended with the November opening of the facility, located along Route 20, but the celebration was saved until spring.

Veterans, business leaders, politicians and other community leaders attended the ceremony.

Schwartfigure said he began discussing the idea of a new facility within the first 45 days as executive director, and is thankful for the Ashtabula County Board of Commissioners' willingness to walk through the process with him.

Ashtabula County Commissioner Casey Kozlowski said Schwartfigure worked well throughout the whole project, making sure he did the legwork for change orders.

VSC Board Member Rick Arndt said Schwartfigure went well above the call of duty to make sure the building was found, renovated properly and funded adequately.

"He kept us focused on the need," Arndt said. He said Schwartfigure also monitored every part of the renovation efforts while still making sure area veterans received services as well.

Fellow board member Ed Somppi also gave credit to Schwartfigure.

"He is, in my mind, the best director in the state," he said.

Central District

Commissioners adopt updated Knox County Comprehensive Plan

Knox Pages, May 2, 2025

A process that started 15 months ago reached fruition when the Knox County commissioners approved the updated Knox County Comprehensive Plan on Thursday.

In November 2023, the Regional Planning Commission voted to let the Knox County Area Development Foundation take the lead in updating the Together Knox plan.

The ADF solicited proposals from consultants, chose Planning NEXT, and created a steering committee.

Through the next 15 months, community members, stakeholders, and local officials held meetings and provided input. The RPC, City of Mount Vernon, and county commissioners had public hearings.

Commissioner Bill Pursel, president of the Knox County Board of Commissioners, said commissioners are pleased with the comprehensive plan.

"It is always a tedious process, which shows our diversity of opinion about what Knox County is and what it needs to be," he said.

Pursel noted that the comprehensive plan asked, "If change happens, how do we control and steer it?"

"One only needs to go to the Knox County Museum to understand that Knox County has always been changing," he said. "The comprehensive plan, knowing that change is inevitable, seeks to understand the pace of change that we rural Knox Countians will find as our comfort level. Some want it faster, but most don't want it at all.

Southwest District

Commissioners sign on to join Stepping Up Initiative

Highland County Press, May 3, 2025

Highland County commissioners Brad Roades, Terry Britton and David Daniels agreed to move toward joining an initiative to better assist individuals with mental illnesses within the criminal justice system during their Wednesday, April 30 meeting.

Commissioners voted 3-0 to approve a resolution signing on to the "Call to Action and Stepping Up to Reduce the Number of People with Mental Illnesses in Jails" as part of the Stepping Up Initiative, following an appointment with Hillsboro Municipal Court Judge Chad Randolph and Highland County Probation Department Director of Programming and Clinical Services Tonya Sturgill.

Stepping Up is a national organization with participating counties in nearly every state, including 58 of Ohio's 88 counties thus far, according to https://stepuptogether.org. Sturgill said that commissioners' passage of the resolution is the first step in Highland County joining the initiative, which "supports local jurisdictions in establishing and reaching measurable goals that demonstrate reduced prevalence of serious mental illness across the justice system."

According to a handout provided by Sturgill, "The mission of both the national and Ohio's Stepping Up Initiative is to help criminal offenders with mental illnesses get connected to clinical treatment and other services so they can get well, make positive life changes and stay out of jail."

Judge Randolph said that Sturgill has met with retired Ohio Supreme Court Justice Evelyn Lundberg Stratton, who serves as project director for the Stepping Up Initiative in Ohio, in preparing to implement the program locally.

"It's just a way for counties not to have to reinvent the wheel," Sturgill told commissioners. "Obviously, we're all dealing with a lot of mental illness in the criminal justice system. Randy [Sanders, Highland County Sheriff] has them in the jail every day, and we're all looking at each other saying, 'What can we do?'

Southeast District

Belmont County's success with capital investment program highlights Issue 2's local impact

WTOV9, April 30, 2025

Voters across Ohio will face a crucial decision next Tuesday as they consider Issue 2, a proposal to renew the State Capital Investment Program for another decade.

This initiative, managed by the Ohio Public Works Commission, funds local government projects across the state.

"I would say over the 10 years, almost $2 million has made its way to Belmont County," Commissioner J.P. Dutton said. "Belmont County is probably one of the most successful counties in our part of the state of receiving funds. It's really across the county. Townships, villages, county projects as an entity, so it's pretty widespread,."

In Belmont County, the funding has gone to nearly 50 projects, many of which are for small budget townships and villages.

"A lot of great work is done through this program that really, honestly, if this funding didn't exist, it would be challenging, especially at the smaller government level to find the funding to make those projects happen, particularly for townships and villages," Dutton said.

If approved, the proposal will authorize the state to issue general obligation bonds totaling $2.5 billion over ten years, or $250 million annually.

DATES TO REMEMBER

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

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MAY 9
Northeast District Meeting

MAY 12
Richland County Regional Legislative Briefing

MAY 15 - 16
CCAO Board Retreat
CCAO Board of Directors Meeting (May 16)

MAY 19
Portage County Regional Legislative Briefing

MAY 26
Memorial Day - Holiday

MAY 30
Montgomery County Regional Legislative Briefing

JUNE 6
Central District Meeting

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