COUNTIES CURRENT
CCAO
COUNTY COMMISSIONERS ASSOCIATION OF OHIO

January 12, 2026

Last week at the Statehouse, the festivities for America 250 officially began! Montgomery County Commissioner and CCAO Board of Directors Member Carolyn Rice was in attendance, as were CCAO Executive Director Cheryl Subler and CCAO Managing Director of Enterprise and Retirement Services Steve Caraway.

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ASSOCIATION AND MEMBER NEWS

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CCAO to host member briefing on property tax elimination effort

On behalf of co-chairs Casey Kozlowski and Steve Hambley, the CCAO Advocacy Committee invites members to participate in a virtual briefing on the effort to eliminate real property tax in Ohio and its potential implications for county government and essential local services.

The briefing is open to all CCAO members (county commissioners, county executives, and county council members).

The briefing will include:

- An update on current efforts to eliminate real property tax in Ohio.
- An overview of resources available to assist CCAO members in communicating with constituents about the importance of property tax revenue and the critical services it supports.
- An update on the Coalition to Protect Essential Services, which is leading the opposition to property tax elimination.
- An opportunity to for members to ask questions of the CCAO policy team.

If you are interested in joining the briefing, please contact CCAO Administrative Professional Karla Dunbar (kdunbar@ccao.org) for access information.

The 2026 Roster process has begun!

It is time to roll out the 2026 CCAO Roster! Updating your county information can all be done online!

After logging in, you will be directed to the new County Roster Form. The form is organized into three sections:

1. County Profile
2. Staff Profiles
3. Elected Officials

When completing the form, please be sure to review the Roster Options for each Commissioner and indicate whether their home address, home phone number, and cell phone number may be published by checking or unchecking the appropriate boxes.

New this year, you may update each Commissioner's photo by selecting the Edit option located in the upper-right corner of their profile on the Staff Profiles page. If any information is unable to be changed or added, please include those details in the Special Instructions/Comments section of the form.

If you experience difficulty accessing or updating the new Roster Update Utility, please contact Karla Dunbar at kdunbar@ccao.org.

A Special Thanks to our Pinnacle Partner

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STATE AND FEDERAL

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Department of Aging conducting survey regarding senior services levies, responses sought by January 28

The Ohio Department of Aging is developing tools to enhance transparency between the state of Ohio and the public. One such tool includes a public-facing dashboard that will present key metrics related to the health and well-being of older Ohioans, with senior services levy funding being a key metric the Department is hoping to collect.

The Department has developed a survey to collect information on senior services levy funding in counties. The survey intends to gather data from the past state fiscal years (SFY 2021–2024) to gain an understanding of how much funding is available and the types of programs and services supported by these funds. This corresponds to July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2024.

Counties can access the survey here. The Department of Aging has also produced a guide to help assist those who complete the survey for their county.

The Department is asking that counties complete the survey by January 28, 2026.

Public comment period on data center wastewater discharge extended to January 16

The Ohio EPA has extended the public comment period on a draft general National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit for the statewide regulation of data center wastewater discharges. The public comment period is open through January 16.

The NPDES General Permit for Discharges from Data Center Facilities (Permit No. OHD000001) is a first-time issuance and would cover data center facility operations that discharge into waters of the state. Both wastewater and stormwater from the data center facility are proposed for coverage under the permit.

Wastewater discharges include non-contact cooling waters (once through or re-circulated water that does not come into contact with the process operations of a facility and is used only to convey heat from the facility), low volume wastewaters (such as, cooling tower blowdown, boiler blowdown, and air compressor condensate yet excludes some waste streams like sanitary wastes) and stormwater associated with the industrial activities from the site.

More information about the permit proposal can be found on the Ohio EPA's website.

EDUCATION AND GRANTS

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County land use planning grants accepting applications through February, webinar to be held Wednesday

The Department of Agriculture has announced a new $1 million grant for county governments to develop, update, or implement Land Use Plans or Farmland Preservation Plans.

A virtual meeting to discuss the program will be held this Wednesday (January 14). To receive access information, please contact farmlandpres@agri.ohio.gov.

As the state continues to see growth in numerous industries, food and agriculture remains Ohio's top industry – contributing $124 billion to the economy each year. This grant helps align farmland preservation with economic vitality, encourages collaboration between farmers and local governments, and supports efforts to preserve farmland.

To be eligible, county governments must demonstrate collaboration with:

- All townships, villages, and municipalities within the county that contain active farmland;
- The county Soil and Water Conservation District and/or Regional Planning Commission; and
- Optional partners such as land trusts, agricultural nonprofits, or educational institutions that provide technical assistance.

Applications and more information can be found at the program's webpage. Applications must be submitted no later than February 27, 2026.

OHPELRA's Annual Training Conference to take place in February, registration open

In February, the Ohio Public Employer Labor Relations Association (OHPELRA) will hold its Annual Training Conference (ATC), *From Tightropes to Teamwork: Mastering the HR/LR High Wire*. Designed for public sector human resources and labor relations professionals, this conference is also an excellent opportunity for managers and administrators who handle personnel matters.

The conference will feature more than 20 sessions led by Ohio's top employment law attorneys, policy experts, and experienced practitioners. Attendees can tailor their experience by choosing sessions that best meet their needs. Topics will span a broad range of human resources and labor relations issues, including contract negotiations, workplace communication, employee benefits, legal updates, and more. Click here to view the conference agenda.

OHPELRA's ATC will be held 2/1/26 - 2/3/26 at the Hilton Polaris in Columbus. **Click here to register** and reserve your hotel accommodations. Please note that the hotel room block expires January 16, 2026.

The conference is open to both OHPELRA members and non-members. OHPELRA's membership includes public sector HR professionals, supervisors, managers, and other non-bargaining unit leaders involved in workforce and labor relations. As Ohio's premiere public sector HR and labor relations association, OHPELRA provides access to valuable resources, meaningful connections, and professional development opportunities to support growth and organizational success. To learn more about OHPELRA, please click here**.**

NACo, Professional Development Academy training options available

Two development opportunities are available to county leaders through NACo and the Professional Development Academy.

The NACo High Performance Leadership Academy is intended to help empower county leaders with practical and fundamental leadership skills that they can utilize to deliver results to the residents of their communities. The curriculum was developed in part by the late General Colin Powell and other private and public sector leaders.

Enrollment costs $1,995 (discounts may be available). The academy is delivered entirely online over ten weeks. There are three cohorts remaining, which are set to begin on April 6, July 13, and October 5. More information is available at the academy's webpage.

The Workforce Network Leadership Program is intended for county administrators and county HR professionals. The program costs $1,000 per participant and will help participants build strong mindsets in times of great change, align high-performing teams to balance competing priorities, and effectively execute strategies to deliver higher value to multiple stakeholders.

More information about the Workforce Network Leadership Program, and information on how to enroll, can be gathered by emailing the program administrator Luke Afeman.

Residential Development Revolving Loan Program now accepting applications

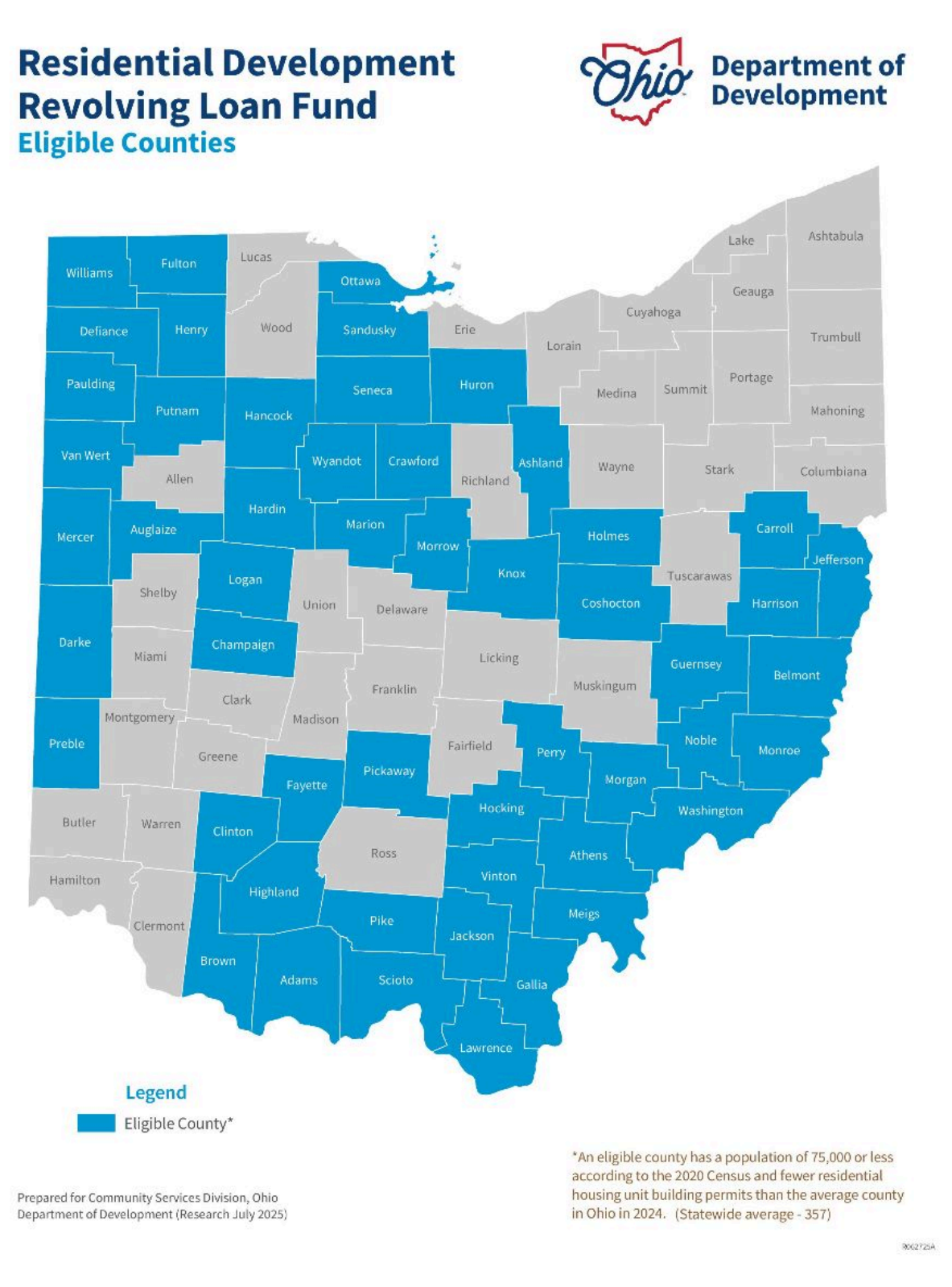
The Department of Development has begun accepting applications for the Residential Development Revolving Loan Program, which will provide loans to local governments to fund eligible infrastructure costs for the construction of new, single-family residential dwellings in rural areas of Ohio.

Approximately $100 million in funds is available for the program. Applications will be accepted on a rolling basis until the appropriation is depleted.

Loans are available to only certain local governments. To be eligible, a government must either be the county itself or a township or municipality at least partially located in one of the highlighted counties on the map below. Eligible counties were determined by a population threshold (75,000 or less) and based on the number of housing unit permits granted last year.

Recipients must use the loans to develop infrastructure needed for the construction of a residential development project. Infrastructure for this purpose includes water, sewer, transportation, electric, or gas.

More information about the program, as well as guidelines and information about application scoring, can be found on the program's webpage.



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 floats increase to tax levy for 911, radio communications system

Toledo Blade, January 8, 2026

Lucas County officials disagreed over a 0.7-mill levy request for the countywide communications and 911 system, saying the current request would put the system in a deficit.

Sheriff Mike Navarre proposed the 0.7-mill, five-year levy to the citizens levy review committee on Wednesday. The committee offers nonbinding recommendations to the commissioners, who have the authority to approve or deny requests to get on the ballot.

The county operates a consolidated 911 system and a shared countywide radio system, and a levy supports the capital and operational expenses of the services. The levy would generate $5,460,657 annually and cost homeowners about $15 per $100,000 of assessed value.

However, after a presentation by Sheriff Navarre, Pete Gerken stepped up to the podium and said he doesn't believe 0.7 mills is enough. The commissioner proposed an increased rate of 0.8 mills, which would make up the difference.

"I am vastly concerned, deeply concerned that this levy they're requesting of you, at this millage, puts us in a hole ... and there's no plan to make up that hole," Mr. Gerken said. "The county's general fund can't do this, nor should it. This levy's been on since 1986, and the community has always supported it."

The budgets for the 911 Regional Council of Governments and Countywide Communication System will begin operating at annual deficits reaching $1.39 million by the end of the five-year levy.

Northeast District

Commissioners, sheriff host information session on Public Safety Center

Gazette News, January 9, 2026

The Ashtabula County Board of Commissioners and Sheriff Bill Niemi invited residents and community stakeholders to attend a Public Information Session on Monday, Jan. 5, regarding the Ashtabula County Public Safety Center project.

The session, held in the County Commissioners' Conference Room on the 2nd Floor of the Old Courthouse, provided an overview of the current status of the project and outlined anticipated next steps.

The commissioners and Sheriff Bill Niemi were joined by Eric Ratts of DLZ, the project architect.

The group shared updates and the project's progress, as well as conceptual renderings of the facility.

"This is one of several meetings that will occur over the next few years as this project moves forward," Commissioner Casey Kozlowski said. "While we're still very early in the process, it's important that we keep our community informed about our progress, our planning and the steps ahead. Transparency and communication will be main priorities…The Public Safety Center project has truly been nearly 10 years in the making."

He said the project is able to move forward in large part due to the success the County had in securing a $15 million grant from the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections.

Central District

Knox County commissioners adopt $64.7M non-general fund budget

Knox Pages, January 9, 2026

The Knox County commissioners approved a non-general fund (NGF) budget on Thursday that includes $64,710,365 in appropriations.

The estimated 2026 revenue for the NGF is $55,882,507.

Non-general funds are special-revenue funds such as the motor vehicle and gasoline tax, state and federal grants, or lodging tax.

The Knox County commissioners do not have direct oversight of all non-general funds. However, they must approve them as part of approving the county's final budget.

Job & Family Services ($14.1M) and Knox DD ($10M) account for a little over $24 million of the county's 2026 non-general fund budget.

The commissioners contribute $1 million from the general fund to JFS children's services.

Capital/permanent improvements (9.8%), the county engineer (9.2%), and water/wastewater (7%) round out the top five expense categories.

The commissioners approved general fund appropriations totaling $28,644.279 in December. When you include Knox Public Health appropriations of $14,681,432, the total county appropriations are $108 million.

Total estimated revenues are $97,691,188.

Southwest District

Packed Commission Meeting Highlights Debate Over Proposed Data Center Tax Abatement

Scioto County Daily News, January 9, 2026

A standing-room-only crowd packed Thursday's Scioto County Commissioners meeting following last week's announcement that the county is considering tax incentives tied to a proposed $1 billion data center project in northern Scioto County.

The crowd was so large—and emotions so high—that Scottie Powell moved discussion of the data center to the very start of the meeting to allow residents to ask questions and voice concerns before the rest of the agenda continued.

At the heart of the discussion was a point commissioners repeatedly emphasized: they are not voting on whether a data center comes to Scioto County. The vote scheduled for January 22 is solely about whether the county will grant a tax abatement—and under what terms.

Commissioners explained that the project is still under a non-disclosure agreement (NDA), preventing them from naming the company involved. However, Powell said a Fortune 100 technology company approached the county last year about locating a data center on private property in Haverhill.

"The county does not control the land, and we do not control permitting," Powell said. "That's not what we are deciding."

He added that the site has already attracted interest from multiple developers.

"In my estimation, it's not *if* it's a data center—it's *which company*," Powell said.

The property lies within an established industrial corridor and was previously designated as part of a Community Reinvestment Area (CRA), which allows companies to request tax abatements for qualifying projects.

Southeast District

Washington County commissioners approve developmental disabilities levy for May ballot

WTAP, January 9, 2026

The Washington County Commissioners have announced their approval of putting a tax levy to support the Washington County Board of Developmental Disabilities before voters in May.

The commissioners announced they were in favor of putting a levy on the ballot at their meeting Thursday morning.

A replacement levy to support the board failed in last year's general election, forcing the board to evaluate its budget and consider cuts to services.

Commissioner Charlie Schilling said the commission's support of putting another levy on the ballot was based on careful consideration of the developmental disabilities board's finances.

"We went through an evaluation process with them, you know, to look at what the overall status of the department was and feel like it's in the best interest, you know, of their clients, which are the kids and youth in the county when it comes to the services that they provide for them," Schilling said.

Following their announcement, the commissioners will still have to pass a formal resolution to put the levy on the ballot. Schilling said he expects the commissioners will do that at their next meeting or the following one.

DATES TO REMEMBER

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

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JANUARY 19
Martin Luther King, Jr. Day - Holiday

JANUARY 23
CCAO Board of Directors' Meeting

JANUARY 30
CEBCO Board of Directors' Meeting

FEBRUARY 13
CCAO Board of Directors' Meeting

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