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THE 2020 WCA ANNUAL CONFERENCE



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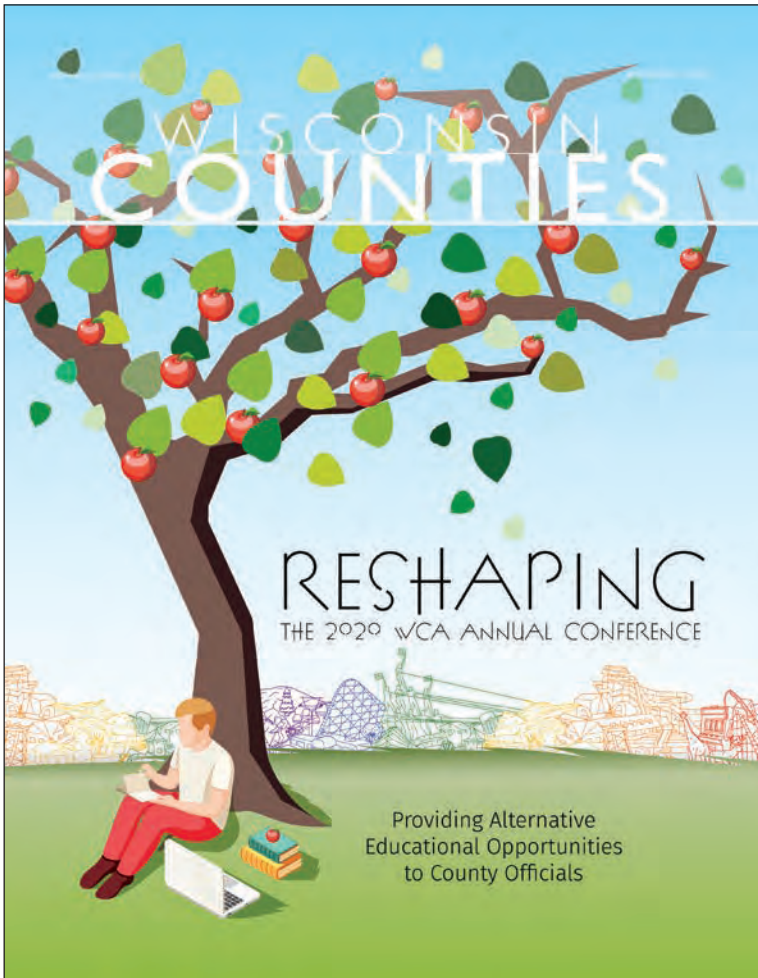
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reshaping the 2020 wca annual conference

—Mark D. O'Connell, Executive Director, Wisconsin Counties Association

The WCA offices, perched nine floors above the street and hovering above the trees that hug the State Capitol, give us a front row seat to changing seasons, farmers markets, marches, and lunches with school children on the Capitol lawn. Year round, we are lucky to witness it all.

Each September, as we get the sneak peak of autumn appearing on the leaves, we also feel things changing in our calendar year at the Wisconsin Counties Association (WCA). It is a bustling time as WCA staff prepare for the association's biggest event of the year: the WCA Annual Conference and Marketplace.

But 2020, as you know, is a year like no other. In March, everything changed. While things at the association are delivered a bit differently, what has not changed is WCA's commitment to providing members with the information they need to effectively and efficiently operate county government.

The conversation about the 2020 WCA Annual Conference began as soon as COVID-19 began to impact the state. The discussions went on as the pandemic evolved, sometimes weekly, sometimes daily or even hourly. There are many, many moving parts in putting on an event the size of the annual conference. With the safety and health of WCA membership and staff a priority, the difficult decision was made to not hold the 2020 WCA Annual Conference in the traditional format.

This year has been about adapting and forging a new path forward. I am proud of the way WCA staff and the county family have done just this, rising to the occasion. To that point, I am excited to an-

nounce the new ways the association will provide the enrichment opportunities of the 2020 WCA Annual Conference.

On Monday, September 21, WCA will conduct the 2020 WCA Annual Business Meeting virtually, with county board chairs or their designees participating, voting on resolutions, and conducting the important work of the association at that virtual meeting.

In addition, the concurrent workshops that were to be offered as educational opportunities at the conference this year will be provided to the members in a different way. First, in this edition of the magazine, eight workshop presenters have graciously transformed their presentations into seven full-length, feature articles and one legal issues column. With topics ranging from the use of veterans in the workforce to anti-human trafficking resources, this collection of articles provides a wealth of knowledge from experts in their fields.

Second, WCA will hold seven WCA Annual Conference Virtual Workshops beginning on Monday, September 28. These virtual workshops will run each Monday, with industry experts presenting and providing supporting materials after each session. A list of the workshop topics, dates, and times is provided on the facing page to the right. Stay tuned to your inbox for registration information and as always, do not hesitate to contact WCA with any questions.

As 2020 marches on, be assured the association will continue to pivot toward new solutions that empower you to conduct the business of county government. ♦



WCA Conference VIRTUAL Workshops

CYBER THREATS TO PUBLIC SAFETY

Monday, September 28, 2020 • 9:00 – 10:00 a.m.

Despite cyber security being a priority for public sector CIOs and CISOs, government agencies at all levels continue to face escalating cyber threats. Cyber intrusions and attacks increased dramatically over the last decade, exposing sensitive personal and organizational information, disrupting critical operations, and causing substantial economic losses to individuals, corporations, and governments. Hostile actors such as hackers, organized criminals, and foreign countries are rapidly improving their technical cyber capabilities. They continue to target federal, state, and local governments in attempts to steal or manipulate sensitive data and disrupt operations. The sheer criticality of emergency services will likely prompt enterprising actors to launch increasingly targeted and sophisticated ransomware extortion attacks directly against emergency services for potential financial rewards or to cause disruption as a punitive action. At this webinar you will learn strategies on how to protect your county from vicious cyber attacks.

PROMOTING DIVERSITY ON COUNTY BOARDS

Monday, October 5, 2020 • 9:00 – 10:00 a.m.

Diverse county boards make better decisions because they more accurately reflect the needs and interests of their constituents. This session will focus on: (1) the importance of incorporating diverse perspectives (including life experiences); (2) research-based strategies designed to encourage greater diversity on county boards; and (3) opportunities to learn from your colleagues across the state.

IMPLEMENTING PRETRIAL JUSTICE IN WISCONSIN

Monday, October 12, 2020 • 9:00 – 10:00 a.m.

An essential element of implementing Evidence-Based Decision-Making throughout Wisconsin's criminal justice system is the implementation of pretrial services. At this webinar, you will learn about the essential ele-

continues

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2. Protection of county interests.

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WCA Conference VIRTUAL Workshops

ments of an effective pretrial justice system, as well as learn about Wisconsin's pretrial pilot project.

LARGE LIVESTOCK SITING – WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE

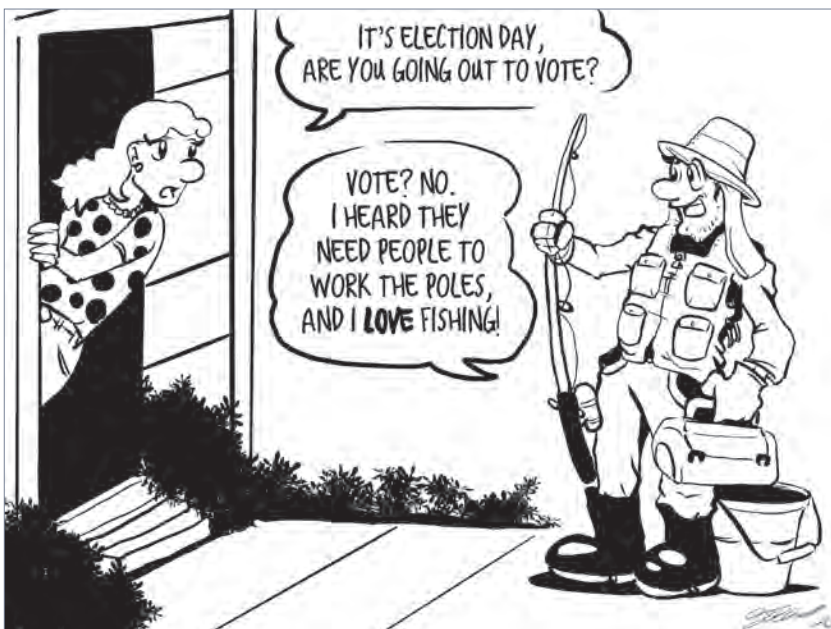
Monday, October 19, 2020 • 9:00 – 10:00 a.m.

Large livestock siting has long been a complex and contentious issue for local governments, as well as agricultural stakeholders. This webinar will discuss the Wisconsin Counties Association's efforts to partner with the agriculture community and local government partners to find policy solutions to this complex issue, while preserving Wisconsin's strong dairy heritage and protecting the environment.

PFAS – WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Monday, October 26, 2020 • 9:00 – 10:00 a.m.

The issue of controlling per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) is increasingly becoming a major environmental and public health issue in the state of Wisconsin. Hear from a county expert on what you need to know, as well as your role as a county official in addressing this ongoing issue.



SERVING OUR AGING POPULATION

November 2, 2020 • 9:00 – 10:00 a.m.

As Wisconsin's aging population continues to rise, counties need to be ready to meet the increasing demands associated with an aging population. Presenters at this webinar will discuss services provided to Wisconsin's senior population, as well as how aging and disability resource centers (ADRCs) serve as an information conduit for a broad range of programs and services available to our seniors and individuals with disabilities.

PREPARING FOR THE EMERGENCY YOU HOPE NEVER HAPPENS: MEDIA & COMMUNICATIONS

November 9, 2020 • 9:00 – 10:00 a.m.

The events surrounding the onset of a global pandemic in March 2020 called for unprecedented action. Counties were forced to quickly change the way business is normally conducted to ensure the continuation of vital services. Was your county ready for the emergency? Can a county ever be ready for something like that? Join us for this webinar where we look back to that time to discuss what went well, what went not so well, and what your county can do to prepare for the next "once in a lifetime" situation. ♦

The “Remote Work” Opportunity for Wisconsin

—Dale Knapp, Director of Research & Analysis, Wisconsin Counties Association

The state of Vermont, the city of Tulsa, and Colbert and Lauderdale counties in Alabama are ahead of the game. Each offer up to \$10,000 for telecommuters to relocate to their respective state, city, or counties.

The hope is that once these workers relocate, they will appreciate the local amenities and remain there long term, bringing incomes and purchasing power that will stimulate local economies. These programs were started before the 2020 pandemic.

COVID-19 has created illness, death, and economic pain. It is likely to have long-lasting impacts as well. One is a large increase in the number of people working remotely, which ultimately may impact where people choose to live. State, county, and municipal officials in Wisconsin need to begin thinking about how to take advantage of this major shift.

Technology & Work at Home

With advances in technology, the number of Americans working from home at least half time has been growing rapidly. During 2010-2017, remote work increased 91%.¹ Despite rapid growth, these remote workers represented a small fraction of the workforce; in 2017 they constituted less than 4% of those employed.

By necessity, work-at-home numbers soared with the onset of the pandemic. Stanford economist Nicholas Bloom estimates that up to 42% of employees nationally were working from home in June.

When the pandemic has run its course, many if not most of these workers will return to their previous

place of work. However, some will continue to telecommute, either full time or on a part-time basis – working from home several days a week and going to the office the remainder of the time.

According to the Survey of Business Uncertainty from the Federal Reserve of Atlanta (FRA), the number of new telecommuters could be in the tens of millions. Their May survey indicated that, following the pandemic, just over 10% of employees will work from home full time, up from 3.4% in 2019. Another 10% of workers will work from home two to four days per week, up from 2.9% last year. In other words, within two years about 20% of all employees are expected be working remotely at least part time.

These percentages indicate as many as 200,000 workers in Wisconsin and 10 million nationally will begin working remotely full time, joining the 5.5 million Americans who did so in 2019. Similar numbers of workers will begin working remotely on a part-time basis. As technology advances, those numbers will likely continue to grow.

Implications for Residential Location

The dramatic shift in where many Americans do their jobs will likely impact where some of them choose to live. For both single persons and families, the decision on where to live depends on a variety of factors, including commute time, public safety, cultural and recreational amenities, and affordability. Families with children also consider the quality of local schools.

For those who work remotely full time, commute time is no longer a factor in the location decision,

continues

giving increasing importance of these other factors. The surge in remote work means local amenities will become the most important driver of residential location for a growing number of Americans.

There is an increasing consensus that a surge in working from home will positively impact suburban and some rural areas at the expense of urban locations. For rural and suburban areas to benefit though, broadband must be available, reliable, and affordable.

Bits of anecdotal evidence are already appearing that support the consensus view. One example is a recent CNBC report that tech workers are leaving San Francisco and buying houses in the Lake Tahoe area at unprecedented rates. The report notes that many of these home buyers no longer see any reason to live in the city anymore.

For Wisconsin and its cities and counties, this shift can be a double-edged sword. On one side is the

opportunity to address the demographic challenges the state and many counties face. Over the past decade, 13 Wisconsin counties lost population and another 24 had meager gains of less than 1%. Attracting telecommuters will not solve their population challenges, but it can be part of the solution.

On the other side is competition from other parts of the country. States and localities will be targeting Wisconsin residents who are working remotely. The state cannot afford population losses from residents leaving.

Wisconsin, like nearly every other state, is behind Vermont, Tulsa, and northern Alabama in creating policies to attract telecommuters. If policymakers procrastinate, the state will likely lose out on an opportunity to attract new residents and ameliorate its long-term demographic challenges. ♦

¹ Analysis by FlexJobs and Global Workplace Analytics, 2020



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In March, the world as we know it turned upside down. Nobody could have predicted the public health, emergency services, finance, employment, human services and court services challenges that counties would be forced to confront. County leaders embraced the challenge as they worked together and did what was necessary to ensure that vital services suffered no interruption. In times like these, we are reminded of how proud we are of our partnership with the Wisconsin Counties Association and county governments throughout the State. Know that whatever the challenge may be, von Briesen's Government Law Group is there to lend a helping hand. Let us put our vast knowledge and experience with county government to work for your county.

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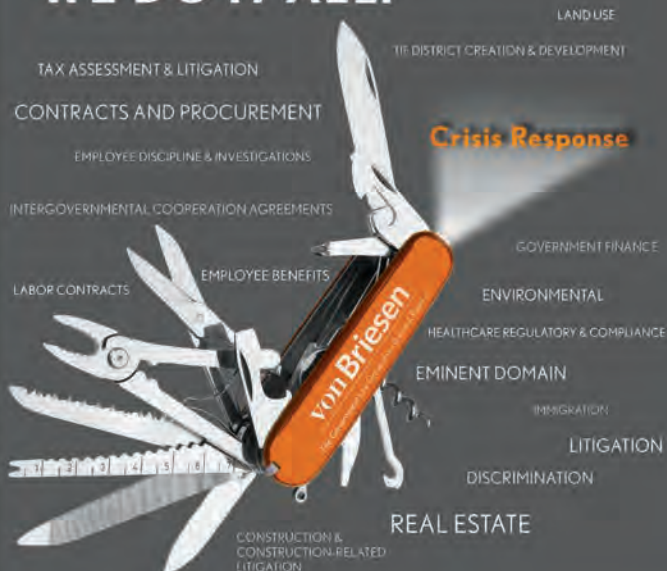
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VIRTUAL MEETINGS DURING COVID-19 Ramifications of the Open Meetings Law

—Andrew T. Phillips, Ryan P. Heiden, & Bennett J. Conard, von Briesen & Roper, s.c.

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and particularly following the various county emergency orders the pandemic necessitated, many county boards moved their board and committee meetings to a virtual platform. While many in-person meetings have resumed, several counties continue to conduct at least some of their meetings virtually in light of current health and safety concerns and to comply with local health guidelines. Some counties may also choose to return to a virtual platform during the winter months if cases increase in conjunction with the cold and flu season.

In light of this virtual environment, county boards have faced many questions as to whether the Open Meetings Law¹ allows virtual meetings to be legally conducted and, if so, what specific compliance issues surround virtual meetings. As virtual board meetings continue, whether as a result of the pandemic or merely as a convenience, counties should take the opportunity to audit board rules and procedures to ensure the meetings comply with standard procedure and are otherwise conducted in compliance with the Open Meetings Law.

In addition, as meetings moved to a virtual platform, many governmental agencies implemented, or considered implementing, a live-stream component to their meetings whereby the meetings were simulcast over the internet or through a service that otherwise allows the public to monitor the meeting from the comfort of home. Similarly, several local governments began posting video recordings of meetings on their websites. While the use of video

recording is not a novel practice and is undoubtedly a valuable mechanism for ensuring broad-based public access to the affairs of government, there may be legal ramifications associated with video recorded meetings.

The purpose of this article is to discuss the legal principles associated with both virtual meetings and the presentation of meetings on a virtual platform. Understanding these principles will allow county boards to work with corporation counsel in ensuring compliance.

OPEN MEETINGS LAW REQUIREMENTS

The Wisconsin Open Meetings Law requires that “all meetings of all state and local government bodies shall be publicly held in all places reasonably accessible to members of the public and shall be open to all citizens at all times” (Wis. Stat. § 19.81(2)). A meeting must be preceded by notice providing the time, date, place, and subject matter of the meeting, generally, at least 24 hours before it begins (Wis. Stat. § 19.84).

The Open Meetings Law applies to any meeting that is: (1) for the purpose of conducting governmental business; and (2) involves a sufficient number of members of the body to determine the body’s course of action on the business under consideration (*State ex rel. Newspapers, Inc. v. Showers*, 135 Wis. 2d 77, 398 N.W.2d 154 (1997)). There is no doubt the Open Meetings Law applies to county board and committee meetings, even while conducted during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.²

continues

So long as virtual meetings are permitted under board rules and procedures, county board and committee meetings may be conducted virtually. Even though the Open Meetings Law requires meetings to be held in places that are reasonably accessible to members of the public, this does not limit meetings to being physically held only in publicly owned places (*e.g.*, the county government building). Additionally, the Open Meetings Law also does not require direct public participation, such as providing public comment, in meetings. Direct participation and public comment is only required for certain public hearings (*e.g.*, a public hearing for a zoning petition). Rather, the public must be reasonably able to *monitor* meetings. For these reasons, virtual meetings, by teleconference or by videoconference, are permitted under the Open Meetings Law so long as the teleconference or videoconference is reasonably accessible to members of the general public, and otherwise complies with the Open Meetings Law.³ This includes providing the public with notice of the meeting and the opportunity to “dial-in” to monitor a telephonic meeting and/or a live-stream being made available for the public to view on a video conference platform.

Some counties also have a requirement in their local rules or ordinances requiring a public comment period during board and/or committee meetings. In this case, a county may want to consider temporarily or permanently amending their board and committee rules to exclude such a requirement in the event a meeting is conducted in a virtual environment. However, it is important to remember that there may be situations where public comment is required by state statute. In those circumstances, the public must be allowed to speak at the meeting even if the meeting is completely virtual.

It is also recommended that county boards thoroughly vet the technology used for virtual meetings. Some platforms provide better security than others. Likewise, some platforms are more effective at controlling participation of both government officials and the public (mute, unmute, chat features, etc.). As discussed above, the public only has a right to monitor meetings of governmental bodies, not to directly participate in such meetings (absent a county ordinance or board rule requiring participation). For this reason, counties should utilize platforms that only allow observation by the public, and not the ability to speak in order to be able to conduct efficient and orderly meetings.

ADDITIONAL NOTICE REQUIREMENTS FOR VIRTUAL MEETINGS DURING COVID-19

In addition to the general notice requirements set forth in Wis. Stat. §19.84(1)(b) – requiring providing at least 24 hours’ notice of the time, date, place, and the subject matter of the meeting – the Department of Justice’s (DOJ) guidance suggests there are additional notice requirements for virtual meetings under the Open Meetings Law. Specifically, DOJ guidance indicates the notice for virtual meetings must also state the board or committee meeting will be held remotely and include instructions for how the public may access the meeting. The agenda should also include this information to help ensure the meeting’s accessibility to the public. Best practices dictate that the notice contain a name and contact number for a designated staff member that can be contacted in the event that a member of the public is unable to participate in the remote meeting to allow the board to evaluate its potential obligation to accommodate participation.

SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS & CONSIDERATION FOR CONDUCTING VIRTUAL MEETINGS

Appropriate Accommodations May Be Necessary

The DOJ has advised that a county board conducting a meeting remotely should be mindful of the possibility that it may be particularly burdensome or even unfeasible for one or more individuals who would like to observe a meeting to do so remotely. Under such circumstances, state and federal law require that a county board make a good faith effort to reasonably accommodate those with access issues.

For example, county boards may need to make appropriate accommodation for people without telephone or internet access or who are blind, deaf, or hard of hearing in order to facilitate reasonable access to the meeting for such individuals. County boards should consider alternative methods of accommodation for such individuals in order to evaluate their potential obligation to provide reasonable access to the virtual meeting.

Ultimately, Wisconsin courts apply a reasonableness standard to the actions taken by a county board to accommodate public access. Only reasonable, not total, access by the public is required under the law (*Badke v. Village Board of Greendale*, 173 Wis.2d 553, 580-81, 494 N.W. 2d 408 (1993)). A county board that makes a good faith effort to reasonably accommodate those with access issues – especially in light of the pandemic – will likely remain in compliance with the Open Meetings Law and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in all services, programs, and activities provided to the public by state and local governments (such as county board meetings).⁴ However, the DOJ has advised that the final determination will depend on the facts of each circumstance, so county boards should consult with corporation

counsel should any difficult accommodation issues arise before conducting the meeting or denying the accommodation request.

Recording & Posting of Meetings Encouraged

If a county board typically records meetings, it should continue to do so. The DOJ advises that when possible, the county board may consider recording and posting the meeting on its website as soon as practicable after the meeting concludes to ensure that their meetings remain open and accessible to the public. While posting a recording is not a substitute for real-time monitoring of the meeting under the Open Meetings Law, it provides an additional level of access to the public and shows a good faith attempt to maintain openness. County boards must also remain mindful of their responsibility to ensure accessibility for all individuals of recorded meetings, such as individuals with disabilities who may be hard of hearing and require subtitles, sign language, or other reasonable accommodations under Title II of the ADA.

Meeting Procedures

There are no required additional or special procedures for meetings conducted virtually. However, at the beginning of each meeting, the DOJ advises that the board chair should encourage all members to identify themselves before they begin speaking and not to speak over one another. This will help all those listening to the meeting better understand who is speaking. When it comes to voting, votes on any matters other than the truly routine should be conducted by roll call vote. Likewise, members should be encouraged to announce when they are temporarily absent from a virtual meeting. Finally, it is important that the board chair maintain decorum and order to allow for the

continues

orderly transaction of business. Best practice dictates that the board chair (in consultation with others) develop a script to announce these procedures prior to taking up the order of business so the members of the board and the public will have a better understanding of how to conduct themselves.

Situations Where Virtual Meetings May Be Inappropriate

While virtual meetings that otherwise comply with the Open Meetings Law requirements are permissible, the DOJ has cautioned that remote access to an open meeting is not always appropriate. For example, where a complex plan, drawing, or chart is needed for display or the demeanor of a witness is significant, a meeting held by telephone conference likely would not be appropriate because important aspects of the discussion or deliberation would not be communicated to the public (or the elected officials). Best practices prescribe that any meeting that requires the use of plans, drawings, or charts be conducted by videoconferencing means featuring a “screen-share” option so that viewers and meeting participants can follow the discussion meaningfully. Handouts or materials that are relevant to the discussion should be distributed electronically in advance of the meeting to all participants upon request, and this should be set forth in the notice. As noted above, the technology should be thoroughly tested and vetted to avoid technical problems during the meeting. County boards should consult with legal counsel if any doubtful situations arise.

In addition, and prior to the pandemic, the Attorney General advised against holding meetings that involve quasi-judicial functions by videoconferencing. If such a situation arises, consideration must be given as to how to hold an appropriate in person “hearing” with appropriate safeguards.

Virtual meetings may also not be appropriate for meetings involving a closed session if adequate safeguards cannot be implemented to ensure only those who are permitted to participate in the closed session have access to the closed session portion of the virtual meeting (*e.g.*, ensuring elected officials do not use a cell phone to broadcast a closed session video meeting). This is particularly true if the closed session discussion relates to privacy interests of employees or strategic financial discussions involving bargaining or negotiation considerations.

If a county wishes to conduct a closed session virtually, the county should ensure it has the ability to drop all lines that are not board or committee members (or other parties deemed necessary) from the closed session part of the agenda. There is also added difficulty if the body intends to reconvene in open session. In that case, it is recommended that the body set a time to resume in open session and tell the public to dial back in at the specified time via the public notice and agenda. As is the typical case, any official action on matters discussed in closed session should be undertaken in open session except in the rarest of circumstances as approved by corporation counsel.

Ensuring a Quorum in a Virtual Meeting

In order for a county board meeting to be a valid meeting, a quorum must be present (*Showers*, 135 Wis. 2d at 102). In many situations, counties either require physical presence in board rule or do not otherwise specify that virtual attendance is considered “present” under Robert’s Rules’ rules regarding presence for quorum purposes. In a virtual meeting, where board members are not physically present, it will be difficult, if not impossible, to obtain a quorum under such rules. In order to address this concern, county boards should review their rules to determine whether the physical presence of a board

member is required for purposes of a quorum. If desired, the county should consider amending the rules to allow those members attending by remote means to be counted for quorum purposes.

Avoiding Nonpublic Comments & Walking Quorums During Virtual Meetings

The Open Meetings Law applies whenever a quorum of the county board is present (*Showers* at 102). Therefore, all communications and discussion by board members that take place during a virtual meeting must be made publicly in a manner accessible to the public attendees of the meeting. Board members should avoid private texting by cell phone or internet-based chat programs and exchanging emails or other private electronic communications while participating in the meeting.

Many videoconferencing platforms include chat functions that are viewable by all meeting attendees if the attendee clicks on the chat box. In the interest of openness and efficiency, county boards should minimize or avoid the use of the chat function during the meeting. Not all users may be familiar with the nuances of the platform, and may not be aware that information is being communicated in the chat box. Additionally, messages exchanged on the chat platform, by text message, or through other transmissions may constitute records under Wisconsin's Public Records Law. In turn, such messages must be appropriately retained by the elected official or the county and produced if requested and subject to disclosure by law. Many virtual platforms may not allow for retention of messages exchanged on them, making compliance with Wisconsin's Public Records Law difficult as it relates to retention and production of such messages.

CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced counties to re-think the way they conduct county business. In many circumstances, the move to a virtual platform has created efficiencies. Nonetheless, neither the Open Meetings Law nor the regulations regarding public accommodation allow a county to sacrifice open government for the sake of efficiency. For this reason, it is important that counties review their rules and procedures to determine whether they should be updated and, if so, whether it should be on a permanent or temporary basis.

If you have any questions concerning the application of the legal principles discussed in this article to your situation, we encourage you to speak with corporation counsel. ♦

Endnotes

1 Wis. Stat. § 19.81, et seq.

2 The Wisconsin Department of Justice ("DOJ") has provided guidance indicating that remote participation by members of the public complies with the Open Meetings Law in two recent Open Government Advisories. (<https://www.doj.state.wi.us/news-releases/office-open-government-advisory-coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19-and-open-meetings>; <https://www.doj.state.wi.us/news-releases/office-open-government-advisory-additional-information-regarding-covid-19-and-open>)

3 *Id.*

4 Counties have an obligation to accommodate individuals with disabilities with respect to county board and committee meetings, including meetings held in a virtual environment and streamed to the public. Under Title II of the ADA, counties must provide auxiliary aids or services that enable effective communication. This obligation is ordinarily triggered upon a request for accommodation by an individual with a disability. However, when a county board conducts a virtual meeting, a county must proactively ensure meetings are accessible to individuals with disabilities. Accessibility features of virtual platforms should be considered by counties, such as use of subtitles, speech-to-text, closed captioning, etc. Additionally, meeting notices should include information as to who to contact for accommodation. Background materials for the meeting may be made available prior to the meeting. Requests for accommodation should be immediately addressed and accommodations provided. Under Title II, counties are required to give primary consideration to the type of auxiliary aid or service requested by the individual, and thus, such requests should be honored to the extent the accommodation does not fundamentally alter the nature of the board meeting, result in an undue financial/administrative burden, or an equally effective accommodation is available.



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Easier with TAS & LRIPWeb

—Patrick Vander Sanden, LRIP Statewide Program Manager, Wisconsin Department of Transportation

Wisconsin counties, as well as cities, villages, and towns, have new tools to keep tabs on their program activity at the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT). The Local Transportation Programs & Finance Section at WisDOT, created a web-based system for users to view, organize, and manage their transportation projects and transportation funding data.

NEW ACCESS TOOL: TAS

The Transportation Assistance System, or TAS, is a new tool for user access on the WisDOT website. It is continually updated to provide local government officials access to up-to-date funding data on transportation aids and improvement programs administered through WisDOT. Through TAS, local government officials can view statewide funding data in addition to their local government data. TAS does require one-time registration. *To register, go to TAS.WisconsinDOT.gov.*

IMPROVEMENTS TO LRIPWEB

One of the program tools available through TAS is an enhanced version of LRIPWeb, the web-based application that allows communities to manage their Local Roads Improvement Program (LRIP) dollars and public road projects. The enhanced LRIPWeb application was developed by WisDOT in response to direct feedback from LRIP users. It was released on June 22, 2020 and provides a more intuitive and efficient user experience.

While retaining the LRIPWeb format that users are familiar with, changes incorporated to enhance the user experience include:

- Project and reimbursement requests are provided in an accordion-style format that guides the user

through the application process without needing to move from screen to screen. Subtle color cues indicate started and completed steps. On-screen instructions were reworked to be more intuitive, with the goal of reducing the number of returned applications and reimbursement requests.

- Quick access buttons were added in the header of some screens, which gives the user a “short-cut” to project documents and shared comments with just one click.
- To assist with communication between LRIPWeb users, each screen allows users to enter shared comments that become “pop-up” notices for the next user.
- The mapping function has been improved and provides the user an instant on-screen map of the selected road section(s) and a dynamic road section diagram to assist the user with road width calculation.
- Users are now allowed to enter separate improvement criteria for multiple road sections within the same project application, and the State-Municipal Agreement (SMA) will now list all the road improvement information.
- The secure TAS log-in enables the application to prefill information for you, including the names and addresses of your local officials and your name and title, based on your unique email address. You simply check a box as confirmation of your electronic signature.

LRIP program participants can learn more about the enhancements through informational videos and other educational materials available on the LRIP website at: WisconsinDOT.gov/LRIP. If you have questions, call 608.266.0775, or email patrick.vandersanden@dot.wi.gov. ♦

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Cellulose - all Around Us

Forest products are all around us. Some products are obvious, while others may take you by surprise. At the USDA Forest Products Laboratory in Madison, researchers are constantly studying the ways in which forest products can be used. One common byproduct of trees that can be found in numerous consumer products is cellulose. Dr. Carl Houtman, a chemical engineer for the USDA Forest Products Laboratory explains, “Trees are amazing things, they really provide an amazing range of products for us that we sometimes don’t even think about. Cellulose is one of the fundamental building blocks of trees. Part of the reason cellulose is really useful is that it’s kind of like molecular Velcro. So, it actually is the element of the wood that really provides the strength.”

The most common way to extract cellulose is through a chemical pulping process known as kraft cooking. The process starts with wood chips and ends with an organic compound that can be found all around us. Dr. Houtman explains “There is sometimes cellulose in your pre-grated cheese. There’s also cellulose in tablet medicines. If you look on the back of your shampoo bottle, you might see something like carboxymethyl cellulose, or you might see something like ethopropol cellulose. Those are all made from wood cellulose.” Other products that contain cellulose from wood products are textiles like cotton and linen, concrete, dog food, coffee filters, sponges, and even toothpaste.

Pheasant Branch Conservancy

Pheasant Branch Conservancy is a natural area located west of Madison, in Middleton. It contains a marsh with open water, springs, prairies, meadows, lowland forest, and wooded hills. These various habitats sustain a wide variety of plants and animals and create a haven for local birdwatchers. “One



Pheasant Branch Conservancy is a natural area located west of Madison, in Middleton. It contains a marsh with open water, springs, prairies, meadows, lowland forest and wooded hills. (Photo Credit - @crisysh)

of the cool things about Pheasant Branch is we have five or six different habitats and many birds need at least two habitats for their survival during the course of the year so they can be successful. Of the 400 bird species that you find in Wisconsin, you can find almost half of them here at some time during the year,” said Pheasant Branch Conservancy Education Coordinator Anne Boucher. Over the last 25 years, thousands of volunteers have restored this land by weeding invasive species, collecting and spreading prairie seeds, coordinating prescribed fires, and working on construction projects throughout the year to provide the community with this free, public space. With numerous fundraisers and events throughout the years, Pheasant Branch Conservancy hopes to raise enough money to keep the space open for years to come.

Wisconsin’s First Town - Aztalan

Aztalan State Park was established in the 1950s to preserve remnants of the ancient



There are nearly 50 member land trusts throughout Wisconsin, each land trust has a unique service area, mission, and vision, based on its size and scope

town known as Aztalan, Wisconsin's first town. The group of people that migrated and built Aztalan originally came from America's first city, a place we now call Cahokia in southern Illinois. Aztalan included characteristic monuments such as large earthen platform mounds that supported important buildings. The buildings were sometimes religious and sometimes the houses of important people. This historic site is maintained by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and a group of volunteers known as the Friends of Aztalan State Park. These volunteers are dedicated to the preservation, promotion, and enhancement of a unique, ceremonial and residential Native American town. To learn more about this important piece of Wisconsin history, visitors can take a self-guided walking tour of Aztalan or visit the Aztalan Museum, located just north of the park.

Wisconsin's Land Trusts

Gathering Waters is Wisconsin's Alliance

for Land Trusts, and it exists to strengthen Wisconsin's land trust organizations. A land trust is a non-profit organization with a primary mission of protecting land. The work behind the organization is, as Mike Carlson, Executive Director at Gathering Waters, likes to call it "the three W's: water, wildlife and Wisconsin's way of life. That's really what drives us." With nearly 50 member land trusts throughout Wisconsin, each land trust has a unique service area, mission, and vision, based on its size and scope. Land trusts are essential for supporting healthy, vibrant communities and by protecting the land in your community, it creates more opportunities for outdoor adventure close to home. Both residents and wildlife have cleaner air and water because of these protected spaces.

Waukesha, Home to Les Paul

If you visit Waukesha, you might notice colorful guitar sculptures scattered throughout the city. This is because Gibson Guitar Company selected Waukesha for its eighth and ninth worldwide GuitarTown designation in 2012 and 2013 to honor the birth and final resting place of guitar legend Les Paul. Les Paul is the only person to be in both the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and the National Inventors Hall of Fame. He was not only a gold record performer, but also an inventor of the solid-body electric guitar and many other recording industry inventions. Remnants of his past such as his mother's player piano, to early versions of what would become the Gibson solid-body electric guitar, can be found at the Waukesha County Museum. The immersive exhibit explores the innovative and tenacious spirit of Les. To further commemorate this music legend, Waukesha has dedicated many colorful murals to Les Paul that decorate the downtown. Maps are offered so visitors can take a self-guided walking tour of these sculptures and murals. ♦



RESHAPING

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FEATURE ARTICLES

W I S C O N S I N PUBLIC LAND SURVEY SYSTEM

A N E S S E N T I A L N E T W O R K
W O R T H Y O F P R O T E C T I O N

—Bryan H. Meyer, La Crosse County Surveyor

Would you believe that Wisconsin's first man-made infrastructure is more than a century and a half old? That same infrastructure is still functioning and utilized daily by Wisconsin citizens today. That infrastructure is the geographic framework known as the Public Land Survey System (PLSS).

In order to describe the perimeter of a piece of Wisconsin property, "starting points" are necessary. That is where the PLSS comes in. The PLSS is comprised of approximate 6-mile by 6-mile squares

known as "townships" and approximately 1-mile by 1-mile squares known as "sections." It may help to think of a typical plat book page – a square township containing 36 numbered sections. The network is anchored by thousands of section and quarter corner monuments located at approximately half-mile intervals. Orig-



Library of Congress



“The PLSS is an integral part of Wisconsin’s heritage and a vital part of our current state infrastructure.”

inally established in Wisconsin from 1832 through 1866, the original corner monuments of the network were typically wood posts. Nearby trees were blazed and scribed as witnesses to the corner location. Understandably, the original network fell into disrepair over the next 100 plus years. The wood posts rotted away and the witness trees were lost to natural causes or were cut down.

Today, county surveyors and County Land Information Departments are working diligently to reestablish and maintain Wisconsin’s PLSS corner locations. A typical modern-day corner monument is made of iron, aluminum, or concrete.

The PLSS is an integral part of Wisconsin’s heritage and a vital part of the state’s infrastructure. It positively impacts the citizens of Wisconsin in a variety of ways:

- The location of property lines and the acreage owned by landowners are predicated on the corners of the PLSS.
- Real estate agents, assessors, title professionals, and attorneys rely on the PLSS section breakdown in identifying tracts of land.
- The Register of Deeds tract index system is primarily based on the PLSS section breakdown.
- Treasurers and Real Property Listers utilize the legal descriptions for real property – which are tied to and related to the PLSS – for fair taxation and assessment. Modern land surveys, based on measurements to PLSS corner monuments can more accurately reflect acreages on parcels to ensure fair and equitable taxation.
- County Land Information Departments rely heavily on the PLSS to create and update mapping information in Geographic Information Systems (GIS). These maps are readily available on county websites and allow for a clearer picture of size, shape, and proximity of land parcels.
- Professional land surveyors use measurements to PLSS corner monuments to perform calculations to mark property boundaries on the ground. Surveyors are required to indicate which PLSS corner monuments were used to establish property lines. Even land surveys performed within cities and villages are required to be related to two PLSS corner monuments of the PLSS.

continues

FUN FACT

The Original Government Surveyors not only had the responsibility to measure and leave markers on the land, they were also responsible for assessing the terrain, the timber and the soils as they passed through the land. This information was extremely valuable to folks “back east” wanting to settle in the new land.





"If you see a corner marker that may be in danger, please contact your County Surveyor or your County Land Information Department."

PUBLIC LAND SURVEY SYSTEM CONTINUED

The PLSS network is not a perfect geometric configuration. The original government survey was intended to be a series of relatively straight lines. However, the quality of work by surveyors in the nineteenth century was constrained by the technology and equipment of the time, challenging terrain, and the elements. As modern-day surveyors work to reestablish the corners of the PLSS and acquire measurements to the corner monuments, the unique differences between what was originally intended and the final product has become apparent. Namely, the intended straight lines have slight bends at roughly half-mile intervals. The distances, as purported in the Original Survey, can vary from measurements taken with modern survey tools such as the Global Positioning Systems (GPS). Those varying measurements are directly relatable to the acreages of parcels within a section, making the work of today's surveyors in reestablishing the corners critical.

As mentioned, the PLSS network of corners is in the process of being rebuilt in Wisconsin. Surveyors call this rebuilding work "remonumentation." Several Wisconsin counties have completed or have nearly completed remonumenting their PLSS corner network. Other counties are off to a good start but still have a long way to go. There are, however, areas of Wisconsin that have a serious amount of work to do to achieve the goal of being fully remonumented.

Having a county surveyor to oversee the work of PLSS remonumentation and maintenance is a key component of success in this process. The Wisconsin County Surveyors Association (WCSA) can

provide resources to assist counties in encouraging remonumentation work. Representatives from WCSA are eager to speak to county committees and county boards regarding the importance of the PLSS and the value of having a county surveyor on staff. Wisconsin also has a PLSS Workgroup that provides PLSS Forums at various locations in Wisconsin. These free events provide a great overview of the PLSS and include a field trip to a nearby PLSS corner location. (The PLSS Forum for 2020, scheduled to be held in April in Marinette, Wisconsin was cancelled due to COVID-19).

You can be an active participant in protecting PLSS corner monuments. Small signs (typically yellow in color) are often set near PLSS corner locations. The verbiage on the sign states "Please Protect Nearby Corner Marker." If you see excavation work taking place near one of these signs, it is possible that the PLSS corner monument is in danger of being disturbed or even destroyed. This is especially true on roadways. Often, roads follow section lines, which means the PLSS corner monument is in the traveled portion of the roadway. If you see a corner marker that may be in danger, please contact your county surveyor or the County Land Information Department.

The infrastructure you probably did not even know existed is working for all of us every single day. If you have questions regarding the PLSS in Wisconsin or if you have questions regarding the work of a county surveyor, please feel free to contact me. I'd be happy to have a conversation with you. ♦



RECYCLING WAS NEVER FREE

UNCOVERING & UNDERSTANDING THE COSTS OF MUNICIPAL RECYCLING PROGRAMS

—Amanda Haffele, Director, Portage County Solid Waste; Meleesa Johnson, Director, Marathon County Solid Waste;
Analiese Smith, Waukesha County Solid Waste Supervisor

It has been said that the best things in life are free, like the joy of a baby's smile or the beauty of a color-filled sunset. However, as much as everyone loves to recycle (and 4 out of 5 Wisconsinites report they always recycle), it is not one of those "best-in-life" free things. There are, and always have been, a multitude of costs embedded along the entire recycling supply chain.

For the past three decades Wisconsinites have taken to the curb or to municipal drop-off centers millions of pounds of recyclables. And during that time, recycling professionals have been operating recycling programs to ensure these recyclables are taken to processing centers to be sorted, baled, and marketed to various manufacturers to be made into new products.

In 1990, Wisconsin's recycling law was passed, banning many recyclables from the landfill. Legislators knew that communities would need financial assistance to make recycling work. That financial assistance came in the form of Basic Grants for Responsible Units of Recycling (RUs), funding that came from fees placed on landfill disposal. Annually, \$30-40 million is collected through the recycling fee. Unfortunately, while the amount collected by landfills has remained consistent or increased, the money available to RUs has

diminished. In 2009, the amount available to RUs for grants totaled over \$29 million; today only \$19 million is made available to help RUs cover the costs of their programs.

Tightening markets have also increased the need for clean recyclables. This, in addition to many programs switching to single sort recycling to gain efficiencies on the collection side of recycling programs, has made the cost to produce a ton of marketable recyclables rise sharply. While the specific numbers vary for each municipality, the overall trend is costlier programs with fewer revenues and grant funds to offset program costs. Unfortunately, these trends are not anticipated to change in the near future. So what can municipalities do to build sustainable recycling programs?

QUALITY COUNTS. Residue, or non-recyclable material that is mixed in with recyclables, is very costly. It can harm employees and damage equipment and still needs to be hauled to and disposed of in the landfill. Most communities in a county likely use the same Material Recovery Facility (MRF). Communities can coordinate recycling education efforts to ensure everyone is on the same page with what belongs in the bin.

continues

RECYCLING WAS NEVER FREE CONTINUED

RecycleRightWisconsin.org is a great resource for communities looking to educate their residents.

CONTRACTING COUNTS.

Hauling, processing recyclables, and disposing of garbage are very complex contracts. There are many industry best management practices to ensure total transparency of costs that includes decoupling hauling expenses from processing and disposal costs, participating in material audits, and planning for education. The Recycling Partnership has recently released a report on MRF contracting. If you have a hauling contract that is soon available for renegotiation, consider joining the Associated Recyclers of Wisconsin (AROW) for the November Lunch-N-Learn on this topic. Visit *AROW-online.org* to learn more.

COOPERATION COUNTS.

Collaborating with other municipalities makes programs more efficient. Counties can play a pivotal role as independent RUs or to help their member municipality RUs come together on education, program operations, and more. Those involved with recycling should also network with industry professionals. Professional organizations such as AROW provide members a wide array of technical expertise on hazardous waste, recycling, and waste reduction to help improve the sustainability of recycling and solid waste programs across the state. ♦

True Cost of Recycling

While some recyclable materials have value, that value doesn't always cover the entire cost to recycle. There are many factors that determine a recyclables ultimate value or the cost to recycle. Just like trading stocks on Wall Street, their value fluctuates. The factors listed below all play apart of thier worth and ultimately the cost to recycle.



Recycling programs around the state offset or subsidize the cost to recycle. Which means, the true cost isn't felt by our residents.



Learn More

RecycleMoreWisconsin.org
RecyclingPartnership.org

Associated Recyclers of Wisconsin



U S I N G T H E T A L E N T S O F VETERANS IN YOUR TEAM

—Mary Kolar, Secretary, Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs

What do you look for when hiring a new employee? Aside from the technical skills required for the position, most business owners are searching for someone with a certain set of characteristics – traits like dependability, responsibility, adaptability, leadership, and the ability to work well as part of a team. Do you know who comes to mind when I consider those traits? Military Veterans.

The brave men and woman who chose to serve in the Armed Forces have also learned how to work well under pressure, meet deadlines, give and follow detailed directions, be flexible and adaptable, and have a commitment to working safely. And they are ready to enter the civilian workforce. When a member of the military prepares to leave active duty, they participate in pre-transition activities that include job search and preparation activities.

Nearly all military jobs have an equivalent civilian job. When recruiting veterans, it may be helpful to develop a better understanding of how a position within a military career translates to the civilian workforce. For example, an E-1 or E-2 rank is entry level and someone with this experience would likely be interested in general labor, machine operator, or

other entry-level skilled positions. An E-9, however, is a senior leader used to operating at a high level in an organization. This person may excel in strategy development, planning, and overseeing execution of projects, similar to a CEO or department manager. For a complete comparison of military and civilian ranks and duties, visit the employment section of www.WisVets.com.

Once you have hired a veteran, how do you make the most of their experience? I have seen businesses describe themselves as “Veteran friendly” to express their desire to employ Veterans. I applaud those businesses, but I also must ask: are these businesses truly *ready* to employ Veterans? There is no “one size fits all” approach to becoming Veteran ready, but by developing a basic understanding of military culture, and experience and implementing programs to support the veterans within their company, employers greatly improve employers’ and employees’ abilities to effectively communicate and utilize a veteran’s unique talents. Some ways to do this are:

- 1). Ask a Veteran in your company to help provide an understanding of how military skills relate to

continues

VETERANS CONTINUED

positions in your workplace. They can also be your “translator,” if needed, explaining military jargon in civilian terms.

- 2). Provide Veteran-specific employee onboarding programs and offer Veteran-specific management training programs.
- 3). Establish an affinity group and peer resource/mentor opportunities to help Veterans connect with each other within the company.

The Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs is dedicated to assisting veterans in transitioning to a civilian career and providing resources for employers who hire veterans. One way we do that is through our Veteran Employment Grant, an incentive program to support businesses hiring honorably discharged veterans with a 50% or more service-related disability. Additionally, the Invest in

Vets 5-Star Program (<https://wiveteranschamber.org/pages/invest-in-vets-5star-program>), offered through the Wisconsin Veterans Chamber of Commerce, provides educational assistance to veteran business owners and coaching and networking programs for veteran business owners and professionals. Finally, the Vets Ready Employer Initiative (www.WiscJobsforVets.com), offered through the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development, recognizes employers who go above and beyond by providing additional support, resources, and outreach to veterans and their families. If you are seeking skilled and talented employees to join your team, I encourage you to consider a Veteran, and use these resources to give our country’s heroes the opportunity to truly make an impact with you. ♦



W I S C O N S I N CHILD WELFARE T R A N S F O R M A T I O N & T H E F A M I L Y F I R S T A C T

—Vicki Tylka, Director, Social Services, Marathon County & Wendy Henderson, Administrator, Division of Safety and Permanence, Wisconsin Department of Children & Families

Wisconsin child welfare is at a moment of great opportunity. There is a growing consensus that strengthening families to raise their children is the primary work of child welfare. Children belong with their families. Counties are already doing creative work to bolster the ability of families and relatives to care for children in their own homes. At the same time as this philosophical shift in child welfare is occurring, the federal law has

changed. Financial disincentives will be in place for removing children to non-family settings and fiscal incentives will be provided for serving children in the home, which will provide additional opportunities for counties to support families in the community.

The Family First Prevention and Services Act (Family First) was signed into law in February 2018. Family First provides historic funding reforms in the nation’s child welfare system and is focused on keeping families intact. Family First will change



“Wisconsin received a onetime allocation of \$8.7 million in federal funding to assist in Family First implementation.”

the foster care landscape by putting more emphasis on keeping children in home-based environments whenever possible. When a child cannot safely remain in their home, every effort will be made to place a child with a relative or like-kin caregiver. When that is not possible, the next preference is to place children with foster families.

Under Family First, states will receive more federal funding for preventive programs, such as trauma-informed mental health services, substance use treatment, and in-home parenting skills training. These programs are meant to that help families at-risk of entering the child welfare system build safe, loving, and supportive homes where their children can grow and thrive.

Lastly, Family First is reducing the use of group care settings, such as group homes and residential care centers by narrowing the use to children and youth who require a high level of care due to certain medical needs. The law also requires states to establish new group facilities called Qualified Residential Treatment Programs (QRTP) to provide intensive treatment for youth who have the highest needs, still with the goal of reaching toward placement with family.

FUNDING

Title IV-E of the Social Security Act is the major source of federal funding that supports state and local child welfare programs. Family First does not provide any additional funding to states or counties; instead, it shifts existing resources and attention to prevention services to address child and family needs so that the need for future engagement in the child welfare system is avoided.

When Family First is implemented in Wisconsin – no later than October 1, 2021 – states will receive a federal match on state dollars spent on eligible prevention services. Additionally, residential facilities will only be reimbursed when a setting has been validated as a Qualified Residential Treatment Programs (QRTP).

As Wisconsin begins to invest more state dollars in serving children in the home with evidence-based practices, Family First will be the mechanism by which Wisconsin will be able to reinvest federal dollars into the child welfare system with a stronger focus on early intervention and prevention.

PLANNING

Wisconsin received a onetime allocation of \$8.7 million in federal funding to assist in Family First implementation. The Department of Children and Families (DCF) is collaborating with counties and other stakeholders to identify the most critical areas in which to invest resources. This flexible funding must be used between October 1, 2019, and September 30, 2025.

The next steps for planning for Family First include identifying specific implementation phases necessary to transform Wisconsin's child welfare system and comply with Family First requirements. This includes administrative rule changes and developing statewide and local resources that will be needed to keep more children with their families. DCF is committed to partnering with counties to keep local partners and governing boards informed of this major system change that promises to bring positive outcomes to Wisconsin's children and families. ♦



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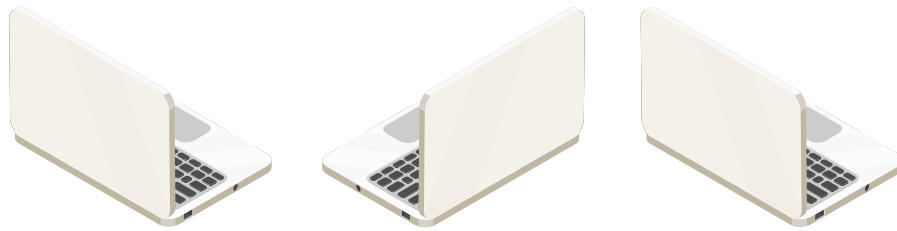
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W I S C O N S I N REGISTER OF DEEDS & C O V I D - 1 9

—Staci M. Hoffman, CPM, Jefferson County Register of Deeds

It's annual report time and during the presentation, your Register of Deeds (ROD) reminds you how awesome their department is and how important they are to your county – blah, blah, blah. But wait, the COVID-19 pandemic has proven their report to be accurate and their duties to be more important than ever for your county's economic recovery.

As Governor Ever's Office was determining which workers were deemed essential, the Wisconsin Land Title, Realtors and Bankers Associations, as well as the Federal Housing Finance Agency (FHFA) and Fannie Mae, all reached out to ensure the ROD's offices remained open for business. The vital role registrar's play is critical to the economy by the timely recording of real estate transactions each day.

Wisconsin is a Race Notice state and all documents must be processed daily and in the order they are received. The Dodd-Frank Act was designed to ensure that a financial crisis like that of 2008 will not happen again and the registrar's play a vital role in ensuring its success. Documents not processed in a timely manner may be the difference in the sale of property, qualifying for a loan, and the best interest rate. In spite of this pandemic, many ROD's offices throughout the state are experiencing a record number of recordings due to low interest rates and a hot real estate market.

The Register of Deeds Association (WRDA) has a history of being proactive in creating efficiencies by utilizing technology within their office; from quill pen to eRecording and Remote Notarization, WRDA has consistently taken the legislative lead to allow for procedures to keep their office functional, even during a pandemic. WRDA's persistence has assured that all 72 counties are capable of eRecording, which have become the new normal for many title and lending institutes during the pandemic.

Register of Deeds are leaders in all things electronic, including access to their recorded documents. Records are available online for purchase through a subscription service or a one-time credit card transaction. This technology has allowed business partners to confidently insure real estate transactions. Property sales and loans in process prior to and during the pandemic were able to continue as the title industry could address their gap insurance concerns.

The Land Records Systems used in each county provides staff access to the county's network to ensure a secure connection using encryption through either remote desktop or VPN technologies. A few counties have a hosted production environment replacing the need for an on-site server.

continues

REGISTER OF DEEDS CONTINUED

Most counties were able to supply their employees with laptops, additional monitors and printers, while others allowed their employees to take their desktops home with them. For employees without a strong Wi-Fi connection, “hot spots” were provided and business continued as usual. The need to allow staff to work remotely from home also reinforced the need for more reliable broadband and internet access throughout the state and not just in rural areas.

Register of Deeds offices were quick to adapt to Safer at Home recommendations by allowing staff flexibility. Some worked from home while others staffed the office to fulfill statutory duties; RODs quickly found an equitable balance for everyone. Many offices began weekly Zoom meetings or conference calls to boost morale and help employees through the anxious and conflicted uncertainty of

the pandemic. Several offices rotated staff to give each employee equal opportunities while trying to juggle the complexities of their lives.

As we tested our Continuity of Operations plans each registrar determined how they could best serve the public while protecting the mental and physical health of their staff and the public. We were able to identify shortfalls in our plans and enjoy several successes. Additionally, ROD's offices implemented policies and procedures to assure the safety of the county's network and staff accountability.

The pandemic has proven that Continuity of Operations plans work. Register of Deeds have dedicated staff that truly care about their county's economic success. It has also demonstrated the ROD's office is more resilient than COVID-19. ♦



Mental Health & Drug Addiction

I N W I S C O N S I N J A I L S

S C O P E , C O S T S &
S O L U T I O N S *

—Grant County Sheriff Nate Dreckman, BSSA 1st Vice-President

At any given time, Wisconsin jails house between 12,500-13,000 inmates in 71 counties. Over the past five years, this number has fluctuated, with a low in 2015 of 12,300. In 2020, COVID-19 changed the jail inmate population, as the court systems shut down for some time. Even as inmate populations fluctuate over time, the one thing that does not change is the enormous volume of inmates who

enter county jails with substance abuse and mental health issues.

In Grant County, they surveyed inmates, after they had been in the facility for about a week, to see what their mental health needs might be and found out that 60% of them had some form of mental health issue. Pepin County Sheriff Joel Wener stated, “We found that 80% of the inmates entering the jail with substance abuse charges are also facing

“Wisconsin must continue to work with county boards and county executives, as well as other county agencies and the state, to try and develop solutions. The solutions range from providing treatment, counseling, and other jail reentry programs to help stem the tide of recidivism.”



significant mental health problems. Things such as depression, anxiety, bi-polar disorder, schizophrenia, as well as suicidal tendencies are exacerbated by illegal drug use or self-medication.” Jail populations across Wisconsin – and the country – contend with similar issues.

Looking at this data, it is clear that jails in Wisconsin are facing a mounting problem. How do jails deal with the high number of inmates with mental health and substance abuse issues? What are the costs to the counties?

Many jails have been innovative in their approach in dealing with this issue. In Rock County, a screening tool was developed that allows staff to identify issues an inmate may be experiencing. The screening starts with the transporting officer and extends through the booking process and beyond. The method includes questionnaires, face-to-face assessments, and referral to various programs. Critical to their success, Rock County has the availability of a licensed clinical therapist, 24/7 jail nursing staff, and a multi-disciplinary program targeting education, mental health and addiction, and restorative justice needs of inmates.

The challenge becomes that not all county jails have the ability or financial resources to develop such programs within their facilities. For example, with an average inmate population of 43 in 2019, Grant County expended over \$150,000 for inmate medical and mental health care.

In various parts of the state, it is often difficult to find resources to help facilitate these types of treatment options. Pepin County experienced this

recently, when it took almost 12 months to find someone to provide mental health services required under the Wisconsin Department of Corrections regulations.

Another challenging factor is the change in drug usage. Law enforcement and substance abuse counselors have been dealing with the opioid crisis over the past several years, and with that was the start of some promising treatment options, such as MAT (medication-assisted treatment) programs. Unfortunately, there has been a shift in drug usage from opioid-based drugs (heroin, prescription narcotics, etc.) to methamphetamine (Meth). The Langlade County jail, like many others, has experienced an increase in the number of inmates reporting Meth usage, which results in new medical concerns. The change has rendered new problems for county jails, not the least of which is finding available treatment.

What does the future hold for county jails dealing with mental health and substance abuse?

Wisconsin must continue to work with county boards and county executives, as well as other county agencies and the state, to try and develop solutions. The solutions range from providing treatment, counseling, and other jail reentry programs to help stem the tide of recidivism. It not only applies to substance abuse, but we must find ways to assist with mental health in the long term.

The Sheriffs in Wisconsin stand ready to help, provide input, and drive initiatives to curb people with mental health and substance abuse issues coming into county jails. ♦

**Data provided by: Rock County Sheriff Troy Knudson, Pepin County Sheriff Joel Wener, Langlade County Sheriff Mark Westin*

WHAT IS HUMAN TRAFFICKING?

HUMAN TRAFFICKING IS...

Exploiting a person through force, fraud, or coercion

Anyone under the age of 18 involved in a commercial sex act

Sex trafficking, forced labor, and domestic servitude

A highly profitable crime

Exploitation-based and does not require movement across borders or any type of transportation

THERE ARE DIFFERENT TYPES OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

SEX TRAFFICKING

Victims are manipulated or forced against their will to engage in sex acts for money.



HUMAN TRAFFICKING IS HAPPENING IN THE UNITED STATES



SUBURBS



RURAL TOWNS



CITIES

FORCED LABOR

Victims are made to work for little or no pay. Very often, they are forced to manufacture or grow products that we use and consume every day.



DOMESTIC SERVITUDE

Victims are hidden in plain sight, forced to work in homes across the United States as nannies, maids, or domestic help.



VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING MIGHT BE AFRAID TO COME FORWARD, OR WE MAY NOT RECOGNIZE THE SIGNS, EVEN IF IT IS HAPPENING RIGHT IN FRONT OF US.

IT CAN HAPPEN TO ANYONE

NO MATTER AGE, RACE, GENDER IDENTITY, SEX, ETHNICITY, NATIONALITY, IMMIGRATION STATUS, AND SOCIOECONOMIC CLASS



RECOGNIZE AND REPORT HUMAN TRAFFICKING

- To report suspected trafficking to federal law enforcement, call 1-866-347-2423 or submit a tip online at www.ice.gov/tips.
- Get help from the National Human Trafficking Hotline by calling 1-888-373-7888 or text HELP or INFO to 233733 (BEFREE).
- Call 911 or local law enforcement if someone is in immediate danger.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Visit the Blue Campaign website to learn more about the indicators of human trafficking: DHS.gov/BlueCampaign.
- Use Blue Campaign materials to raise awareness of human trafficking in your community.
- Follow @DHSBlueCampaign on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.



ANTI-HUMAN TRAFFICKING RESOURCES

—Asia Jackson, Anti-Human Trafficking Coordinator, Wisconsin Department of Children and Families

Trafficking of children and youth is a growing concern across the nation. The Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF) is committed to combating the growing crisis of the human trafficking of youth and children and works closely with other systems including the Wisconsin Departments of Justice, Corrections, Public Instruction, and Health Services, as well as the Office of State Court and local courts, and community service providers, to provide a comprehensive response.

One of the key elements of that response is in raising community awareness of trafficking. To inform youth and adults about the risk factors and warning signs of trafficking, DCF has created the film *It Happens Here*, which tells the true experience of sex trafficking in Wisconsin and conveys how easy it is to be drawn into that life. The content of this video may evoke strong emotions and is intended to be used in a professional or educational setting with proper curriculum and support.

To assist in this, the department has developed a facilitator guide that will answer questions and provide additional resources while viewing the film. Additionally, a human trafficking fact sheet is available for facilitators to utilize as a handout. To view the film and access the guide and fact sheet,

please visit our website at dcf.wisconsin.gov/aht/toolkit and click on “*It Happens Here* Documentary.”

Additional resources available at dcf.wisconsin.gov/aht/toolkit provide information on what human trafficking is, how it impacts young people, and how to effectively respond. In brief, human trafficking is the exploitation of people, often for the purpose of sexual exploitation or forced labor. According to federal law, any minor under the age of 18 engaging in commercial sex is a victim of sex trafficking, regardless of the presence of force, fraud, or coercion. “Commercial sex” is defined as any sex act on account of which anything of value is given to or received by any person. The sex act can be for money, food, shelter, drugs or alcohol, or safety.

At DCF, staff focuses on the trafficking of children and adolescents. But, trafficking can occur at any age. Human traffickers often recruit vulnerable youth with force or deception. They may exploit youth through fraud, abuse of power, control, violence, or physical abduction. They may also threaten the youth or their family. Economic pressure can make a person more vulnerable to being trafficked.

Identifying if a youth is being trafficked is not always easy, as human trafficking is often “hidden in plain sight.” Creating a relationship with youth is the best way to understand if they may be at risk or need help. Providing effective protection and

continues



“The “Guidelines for an Effective Coordinated Community Response to Sex Trafficking of Youth” found at dcf.wisconsin.gov/aht/toolkit can help your community get started.”

V E T E R A N S C O N T I N U E D

assistance to youth who have experienced trafficking is a complex challenge, requiring a collaborative and coordinated effort between systems and agencies, as well as the availability of youth-focused, trauma-informed community services. Building an effective response to sex trafficking in Wisconsin requires that individual communities perform an inventory

of available local resources, identify gaps in current responses, and explore opportunities to develop a sustainable network of community services for youth. The “Guidelines for an Effective Coordinated Community Response to Sex Trafficking of Youth” found at dcf.wisconsin.gov/aht/toolkit can help your community get started. ♦



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Adams County Establishes Wisconsin's 30th County Forest

—Rebekah Luedtke, Executive Director, Wisconsin County Forests Association

Adams County, located in central Wisconsin, has formally established the state's 30th County Forest. Adams County joins with 29 other counties in the state with lands enrolled under Wisconsin's County Forest Law (§28.10 & 28.11). Collectively, these counties manage over 2.4 million acres of forest lands, the largest public ownership in Wisconsin.

Wisconsin's first county forest in Langlade County was established in 1928. The focus of the Wisconsin County Forests is to ensure the long-term health and sustainability of forest ecosystems while providing benefits to the public.

Wisconsin county forests programs bring revenue into county coffers to not only fund their programs but to supplement county wide budgets. Other county departments and services, and possibly tax levies, are significantly impacted by revenues primarily from harvested timber. In 2018, Wisconsin's County Forests generated \$45 million in revenue back to the counties and towns from timber sales alone.

Active sustainable forest management provide healthy forest conditions, robust wildlife habitat,

clean water resources, and offer numerous outdoor recreation amenities and services. Besides timber harvest opportunities, forested tracts in Adams County are heavily utilized by motorized and non-motorized recreationists and are critical filters for area watersheds.

Adams County Conservationist and Forest Administrator Kason Morley stated, "It has taken significant effort and support to get to this stage and formally establish the Adams County Forest. We look forward to working with the Wisconsin DNR, staff from other county forests, and our local citizenry to grow and develop these lands for multiple public use."

Established in 1968, the Wisconsin County Forests Association (WCFA) provides a forum for the consideration of issues, programs, and policies of Wisconsin's County Forests. WCFA Executive Director Rebekah Luedtke states, "We are excited for the citizens of Adams County and the state of Wisconsin, and look forward to helping county staff move this forest forward and join one of the finest forest management programs in the country." ♦

The Wisconsin County Forests Association provides leadership uniting the interests of the world's largest county forest program while ensuring long-term forest health and sustainability. Information on the Wisconsin County Forests Association can be found at www.wisconsincountyforests.com.

Media Contact: Rebekah Luedtke, Executive Director Phone: (715) 282-5951 Email: wcfa@frontier.com. Information on Adams County Land and Water Conservation can be found at www.co.adams.wi.us. Media Contact: Kason Morley, Land and Water Conservation: (608-339-4275. Email: kason.morley@co.adams.wi.us.

2020 Wisconsin County Mutual Insurance Corporation & WCA Group Health Trust **SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM**

—Robyn Voss, Programs & Services Assistant, Wisconsin Counties Association

To say that 2020 has been a challenging year would be an understatement. COVID-19 has caused our busy lives to come to a screeching halt. From canceled concerts, to graduation ceremonies, not to mention sporting events, we are all trying to find activities to look forward to, things that spark joy in our lives and those around us.

“In spite of all that’s happened this year, the County Mutual Board realizes the importance in education for our young people,” said Robert Wurtz, president of Aegis Corporation, which administers the Wisconsin County Mutual Insurance Corporation (County Mutual). “The five scholarships are just one way of demonstrating this. These scholarships are a way to give back and support our youth through these hard times.”

This year especially, the County Mutual is incredibly proud to again offer five scholarships. The County Mutual created the scholarship program as a way to give back to individuals and their families, the families that have helped make the County Mutual the success it is today.

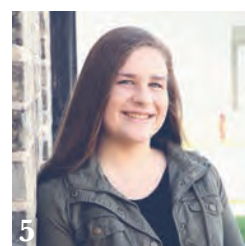
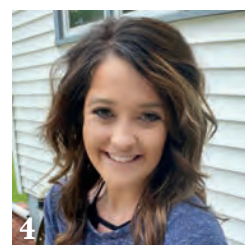
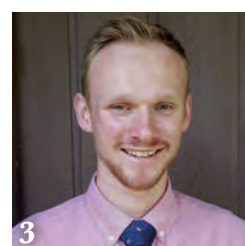
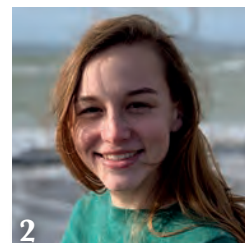
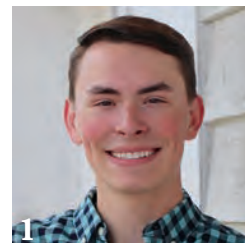
To qualify for the scholarship, the applicants must be enrolled in a full-time undergraduate course of study at an

accredited two- or four-year Wisconsin college no later than the fall of 2020. In addition, the applicant, or the applicant’s spouse, parent, grandparent, or guardian must be an employee of a County Mutual member. Scholarship recipients are selected by an independent panel of current educators based on scores received in the following categories: future goals and career plans, grade point average, community involvement, the quality of their writing, and lastly, a letter of recommendation.

Congratulations to the winners of the 2020 Wisconsin County Mutual Insurance Corporation Scholarship, which include:

Jacob Carignan (1) is the son of Darin Carignan a Highway Department Operations Manager in Sauk County. Jacob will be attending UW-Madison and is working toward a degree in Mechanical Engineering. After graduating with his Bachelor’s degree, Jacob’s dream is to become a park engineer or golf club designer.

Sara Pabich (2) is attending UW-Madison and is working toward a degree in Economics and Environmental Studies. Sara’s dad, Kenneth Pabich, is the County Administrator in Door



"These scholarships are a way to give back and support our youth through these hard times."

Robert Wurtz, president of Aegis Corporation



County. After graduating Sara wants to focus on a career that aids the community. She also plans to further her education at UW-Madison.

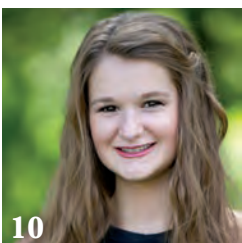
Casey Nieman (3) is the son of Scott Jochman an Operator in Portage County. Casey is attending UW-Stevens Point with a focus in Graphic Design/ Communications. Following graduation, Casey plans to become a designer, filmmaker, and artist in his community.



Margo Weiland (4) will be attending UW-Eau Claire working towards a degree in Health Care Administration. Margo's dad, Randy Weiland, is a County Highway Superintendent in Juneau County. Upon graduation Margo plans to become an Administrator in a long-term care facility.



Danella Van Ess (5) is attending Saint Norbert College working towards a degree in Accounting. Danella is the daughter of Debbie Van Ess who is a Judicial Assistant in Kewaunee County. Her career goal is to become a team leader in a Financial Department.



2020 marks the 12th year that the WCA Group Health Trust (GHT) proudly offers five scholarships. The GHT Board was looking for a

way to give back to their members and offer support in educating Wisconsin's youth; and in 2008, they launched a scholarship program specifically targeted toward students in the healthcare field. Along with needing to be in the healthcare field the students must be attending a two- or four-year Wisconsin college. Additionally, the applicant, or the applicant's spouse, parent, grandparent, or guardian must be a member of the GHT. Scholarship recipients are selected by an independent panel of current educators based on scores received in the following categories: future goals and career plans, grade point average, community involvement, the quality of their writing, and lastly, a letter of recommendation.

"Due to the global pandemic, we are at an even greater need of healthcare professionals," said Wisconsin Counties Association Director of Programs and Services Michael Lamont. "These front-line essential workers are pushing through hard times to keep us healthy and safe. We owe it to our members to give back and help cover some of the expenses of their education, many of whom are already working in clinics and hospitals."

continues

SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM (CONT.)

The WCA Group Health Trust is excited to announce the winners of the 2020 scholarship program, which include:

Steven Martell (6) is starting his senior year at UW-Madison majoring in Biochemistry and Neurobiology. Steven is the son of Stephanie Martell, a Marathon County Library Assistant. Upon graduation, Steven hopes to serve as a faculty member at a research university, where he intends to conduct basic and clinical research on neurodevelopmental and neurodegenerative disorders.

Eleanor Sladek (7) is the daughter of Carolyn Sladek, a Kaukauna School District Educator. Eleanor is entering her senior year at UW-Eau Claire and is pursuing a degree in nursing. When Eleanor graduates she wants to become a Nurse Practitioner or Certified Nurse Midwife.

Steven Halderson (8) is entering his senior year at UW-Madison. Steven is a biology major and upon graduation he hopes to further his education and become a primary care Physician Assistant (PA). Steven is the son of Jeanne Halderson, a La Crosse School District Educator.

Rachel Wilke (9) is the daughter of Tracy Wilke, a Sheboygan County Quality Assurance Assistant. Rachel is beginning her senior year of school at UW-Oshkosh pursuing a degree in Radiological Sciences. When Rachel graduates she hopes to further her education for a more specialized career within the imaging department: mammography.

Nicole Wolfe (10) is entering her junior year at UW-Eau Claire and is majoring in Nursing. Nicole is the daughter of Ann Wolfe, a La Crosse School District Teacher Assistant. When Nicole graduates she plans to become a Global Health Nurse Practitioners. ♦

For more information about the scholarship programs offered by the Wisconsin County Mutual Insurance Corporation and the WCA Group Health Trust, visit www.wisconsincountymutual.org and www.wcaght.org respectively. ♦

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