

February 24, 2022 Executive Director's Board Report

I am hopeful that we have now entered a new phase of the pandemic. I hesitate to call it post-pandemic, but like the public at large we had a considerable surge of cases amongst employees in late January and now see very little activity. The severity of illness varied greatly, and we do have a few staff/drivers that will probably have lingering effects so we are doing our best to work with them and get them back into a schedule without compromising their health. I do believe that mask requirements for transit vehicles will be allowed to expire in March if current trends keep going in the right direction. I have been strong proponent of us following CDC guidelines and best practices, including masking, but we are at a point now where public transit is just about the only place where it is mandated and that is an unfair burden on our drivers to enforce.

The news of the arrest of the SICOG director is deeply disappointing. Our state association is working closely with their board to try and help with the transition, but frankly I don't think that they have a full grasp of the broad scope of work that needs to be kept up with. We in all likelihood will be taking over all of SICOG's housing CDBG projects. I have been working closely with IEDA to ensure that we are properly compensated for this work, i.e. that if we are redoing work that SICOG did and already got paid for, we are paid for doing it again even if that is above and beyond the original grant award.

There is never a good time to have a bad situation like that at SICOG, but it is particularly badly timed as we were just at the Statehouse asking for an increase in state assistance to COGs. I felt that our presentation was well received by legislators, but now I find any increase highly unlikely. In addition to speaking at the Statehouse I had the pleasure of meeting with and speaking to the Mills County leadership class and am always happy to talk about the role that SWIPCO plays, but most importantly the role of good local leadership in community development.

Plans for the new addition in Atlantic and the renovation of space in Council Bluffs are well under way. We had a contractor walk through yesterday that was unfortunately poorly attended, so I hope that is not indicative of who may actually bid. Senator Grassley was speaking at Henningsen Construction at the same time—that may have impacted the number of attendees.

We are now moving into our budgeting time and salaries and fuel at the two big things that are at the front of my mind. We currently have the largest cash on hand that we've ever had at around \$5 million, and we have significant contracts in front of us, so unless we see extremely high bids I do feel fine moving forward with capital projects, but to me the real question is how far do we go increasing our recurring operating expenses. But, that's what we'll be working on in the next couple of months. I think we will see some real pain at the pump over the next couple of months, but we have so far gone almost 12% below our budget estimate pace for this year so we have some wiggle room in our numbers for a fuel cost increase between now and the end of the fiscal year.

I will be in Washington DC 3-12 to 3-16 for our NADO legislative conference and I will be out on vacation 3-21 to 3-28.