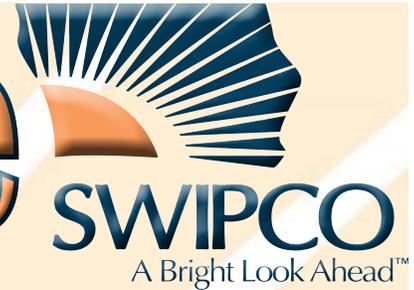


The Update



January 2024

Serving the Counties of Cass, Fremont, Harrison, Montgomery, Mills, Page, Pottawattamie, and Shelby

SWIPCO Home Repair Programs Making a Big Impact in Southwest Iowa

ESSEX, IA- Southwest Iowa Planning Council (SWIPCO), through the Southwest Iowa Housing Trust Fund, continues to make a big impact in the region. One example of that has been work in partnership with the Iowa West Foundation. Recently that work helped a rural Essex resident address some urgent needs, ultimately keeping her in the home.

Cynthia Samuel had some foundation issues that led to freezing pipes and in turn a deteriorating bathroom. She said she started searching for possible funding to help her correct the issue and got connected with SWIPCO. After speaking with SWIPCO Inspector Matthew Lee, Samuel was quickly put on track to get some repairs.

SWIPCO used grant funds from the Iowa West Foundation to repair the foundation cracks to prevent the temperature issues from continuing. Once that was corrected, updates were then made to the flooring structure and plumbing of her bathroom. That was followed by renovation and finishing of the entire room.

Samuel said it was a blessing to find help, “I didn’t think I was going to be able to stay here with the continuing water issues. I started looking for other places to live. I’m so grateful for the work as I plan on staying here as long as I can.”



Samuel grew up in the area and moved away for an extended period. She came back to take care of her parents that both had cancer. She eventually purchased the home she’s in now.

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Samuel had high praise for everyone she worked with during the repairs. “Matthew was so great to work with, we talked like we had been friends. The contractor was excellent and just came and took care of his business.”

Continued....

Multiple Home Repair Programs Available to Area Residents

She liked how simple the process was. “They just sent me some pictures of a couple options on flooring and fixtures, and I picked what I liked out. They took care of the rest. I’m proud of it even though I didn’t do it.”

SWIPCO implements several different funding sources and programs to help residents in the region get needed repairs to their homes. If you have a need for your home and would like information about what assistance could be provided, please contact SWIPCO at 712-243-4196 or 1-866-279-4720.



Iowa HOME-ARP Program funds set to open for rental housing development

The Iowa Finance Authority is now accepting applications for Iowa HOME-ARP Program funds. Applications for the initial round may be for the construction of rental units and the construction of rental units with support services. Nonprofit operating and nonprofit capacity building assistance is available to projects that will carry out HOME-ARP eligible activities. The assistance is in the form of a loan.

IFA was awarded \$29.2 million in a one-time allocation from the American Rescue Plan. The goal of this program is to reduce homelessness and increase housing stability. Projects are geared toward individuals experiencing homelessness, at risk of homelessness, or fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, or human trafficking. Other populations that qualify are those for which providing supportive services or assistance would prevent homelessness or would serve those at greatest risk of housing instability.

Minimum awards are \$1,000 times the number of HOME-ARP assisted units in the project. The maximum amount of funding awarded per affordable rental housing development project is \$5 million. Up to \$900,000 (\$150,000 per year for 6 years) in supportive services may be added to qualified rental projects.

Many types of entities are eligible to apply for funding. Development can include building acquisition, construction, and rehabilitation. Assistance may be provided to a single site or sites together with any building or buildings located on them.

The online application opened on January 5, 2024 at 9:00 a.m. and the deadline is on March 5, 2024 at 12:00 p.m. Tentative award announcement is set for June 2024.

If any entity or government in the area has an interest in applying for this funding contact SWIPCO at 712-243-4196 or email swipco@swipco.org.

Public Transit Is Growing, Not Dying in Rural Southwest Iowa

Atlantic, IA- The national narrative on public transit has been a little bleak lately. The COVID-19 pandemic spurred record investment in transit systems, but also caused a major disruption in lifestyles and transit ridership numbers. The rise in remote work and more abnormal work schedules has caused ridership to dip in some major metropolitan areas. Fluctuation in fare money and other funding has caused budgeting problems. All these things aren't necessarily true in a rural setting.

Southwest Iowa Transit Agency (SWITA), based in Atlantic and serving 8 Southwest Iowa counties, has in fact seen record ridership post-pandemic, while maintaining a very cost-efficient system. SWITA Transit Director Mark Lander said the agency's success can be attributed to several factors, "We are structured differently as a rural system. Urban areas rely on a lot of fixed routes and funding from fares and local taxes. We offer more flexible options and much of the funding comes from the federal and state level. We can operate much more like a private sector transportation firm, offering what people want and need as best we can."

Lander said another thing that helped SWITA weather the pandemic was the fact that they never shut down. "People still needed to get places like work or the grocery store, and we kept serving them," he said.

SWITA had a record 526,300 riders in fiscal year 2023 and has seen record numbers year over year the past three years. Lander credits his staff and drivers for helping achieve those numbers, "We've been willing to do what some others don't want to. We've continued to increase workforce rides, taxi offerings, and student transportation."

One problem some of the major metro areas have run into is their systems were designed to get a lot of people downtown and back out at peak commute times. Many work schedules have changed to a different number of office days, or different times of day so they are trying to adapt to those changes. The workforce routes SWITA supports are set schedules so it's much more predictable.

This September SWITA received an award from the Federal Transit Administration Region 7 for highest rural transit ridership in Iowa for fiscal year 2022. SWITA topped that list in fiscal year 2023 as well. After receiving that award SWIPCO Executive Director John McCurdy said, "Awards because of big numbers are nice, but what is really important is what those numbers represent. SWITA is getting people in Southwest Iowa where they need to go—including to work, school, and medical appointments. The SWITA staff bend over backwards to meet the needs of our clients because they know every trip is important to that client."

Not only has SWITA continued to see ridership grow, but those rides are being provided at the lowest cost per ride of any rural transit system in the state. In the past fiscal year SWITA achieved a cost average of \$9.12 per ride, which is nearly \$3 more efficient than the next closest region. The statewide average cost per ride was \$20.87. What makes that accomplishment even more impressive is the fact it was reached while providing the most rides and driving the 2nd most miles of any rural transit region.

SWITA ridership is rising continued...

SWITA transportation is accessible to everyone in the region, including the disabled population and elderly, but you don't have to be elderly or disabled or meet income guidelines to ride. SWITA vehicles are equipped with wheelchair accessibility and one personal care attendant rides free. SWITA transportation is affordable: taxi rides are \$2.50 per trip or \$2.00 per trip for elderly clients (60 years and older) with collaboration from Connections Area Agency on Aging; medical trips are \$30 per hour; Summer Fun Bus rides are \$1 per trip or \$40 for the full summer; other special trips are \$40 per hour.

For questions or to request a ride, contact SWITA at 712-243-2518 or 1-800-842-8065.

Kisner joins SWITA as Maintenance Assistant



Southwest Iowa Transit Agency (SWITA) welcomes Adam Kisner as Maintenance Assistant. Adam will help to keep the SWITA fleet of vehicles clean and maintained along with ensuring offices and facilities are kept in top shape. He will also run routes as a driver and help shuttle vehicles.

Kisner has a strong background in transit, working for the Sacramento (CA) Regional Transit District. During his time there he helped maintain trains, train stations, buses, bus stations, and some time as an operator.

"I've worked in this field and when looking for

a job when we moved here my wife and I saw SWITA vehicles and wrote down the name to put in a call. I was initially just going to be a driver but once they saw my background, I was offered this position. It has been great so far."

Kisner is originally from Cleveland and then spent time in California before moving here to be closer to his in-laws. He said he really is enjoying the pace of life here.

In his free time, he is interested in tennis, working out, aviation, and board games.



SWITA by the Numbers

	December 2023	YTD (Since July 1)
Total Miles	162,829	874,050
Total Hours	9,163	50,485
Total Rides	44,407	225,927
<u>December Rides by Service</u>		<u>December Rides by Demographic</u>
Workforce Rides	6,744	Disabled 23,428
Taxi Rides	5,112	Elderly 2,400
Student Rides	5,798	Other Gen. Public 18,579
Other	26,753	

SWIPCO adds Jones as Payroll & Benefits Specialist



Southwest Iowa Planning Council (SWIPCO) is pleased to announce the addition of Amy Jones to the team as a Payroll & Benefits Specialist. Jones has an extended background in accounting and human resources that will help her flourish in this new role.

Amy was raised and went to school in Shenandoah. She spent time with Hy-Vee in Shenandoah in both Human Resources and Accounting Coordinator roles. She also gained experience in city government with both the Shenandoah Police Department and the City of Shenandoah, working in accounts payable with the city.

Amy cited helping others as her favorite aspect of her previous positions, “I want to be approachable and willing to help the staff. With the benefits aspect of this new position, I enjoy being able to help people understand what is available to them and guide them through the process,” Jones said.

Jones even cited her first job as a waitress as some of her most valuable work experience: getting to know people, dealing with different personalities, and customer service. She saw the opening for the SWIPCO position on Facebook and thought her experience with accounting and the city might match up well. “I have already started to see some similarities with my previous work. I feel very lucky to get this opportunity. I look forward to working with everyone at SWIPCO,” Jones said.

Jones currently resides in Red Oak and has three adult children and four grandchildren. She enjoys getting to spend time with them and her grand-dog.

SWIPCO is Hiring

Atlantic, Red Oak, and Shenandoah Area Drivers Wanted

Southwest Iowa Transit Agency (SWITA) is seeking part-time drivers in the Atlantic, Red Oak and Shenandoah areas for a number of shifts. Applicant must possess or be willing to acquire a commercial driver’s license class C with passenger endorsement (SWITA will assist with ELDT and drive test), and enjoy working with the public. Starting wage is \$16.00 per hour plus IPERS and PTO. Applicant must be able to obtain a CDL Medical Exam and pass a DOT pre-employment drug screen.

More information and the ability to apply online for this position is located on www.swita.com. For questions contact Daurine Petersen at 800-842-8065. Please apply online or send the application to SWIPCO, Attn: Daurine, 1501 SW 7th St., Atlantic, Iowa, 50022 or email to daurine.petersen@swipco.org.

SWIPCO is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.



SWIPCO Announces RPA-13 Transportation Alternatives Program Fund Applications are Open

Atlantic, IA- Southwest Iowa Planning Council (SWIPCO) and Regional Planning Affiliation 13 (RPA 13) are now accepting applications for the Regional Transportation Alternatives Program fund for projects in Cass, Fremont, Montgomery, and Page Counties. Applications are being accepted until February 28, 2024.

Local governments, regional transportation authorities, transit agencies, school districts and local education agencies, natural resource or public land agencies, tribal governments, and non-profit entities are among those eligible to apply. Funds are limited to meeting certain project types. Those include but are not limited to construction, planning, and design of on-road and off-road trail facilities for pedestrians, bicyclists, and other non-motorized forms of transportation; conversion and use of abandoned rail corridors for trails; construction of turnouts, overlooks, and viewing areas; vegetation management; and historic preservation and rehabilitation of transportation facilities.

Projects and sponsors must provide a non-federal match of at least 20 percent of the eligible costs, comply with federal regulations, and maintain the project for 20 years among other requirements. Projects must be completed within two fiscal years of the award.

Completed applications must be in to SWIPCO by 4:30 p.m. on February 28, 2024. Applications will be submitted to the Iowa DOT for review. The RPA 13 Technical Committee and Policy Board will meet to score applications and to recommend awards. Award letters will be sent to applicants and the Iowa DOT by August 1, 2024. Funds will be released by the Iowa DOT after October 1, 2024.

Application and criteria can be found online at <https://www.swipco.org/rpa-13/> For more information or to obtain a hard copy of the application contact SWIPCO Grant Specialist III, Tammy DeBord at 866-279-4720 ext. 234 or 712-249-4300. You can also email Tammy.DeBord@swipco.org



Interested in Being Involved?

SWIPCO currently has vacancies on our policy council, housing trust fund, and revolving loan fund boards. Contact Executive Director John McCurdy if you have an interest in any vacancy.

Upcoming Grant Information:

- Paint Iowa Beautiful-Keep Iowa Beautiful. February 12, 2024
- Derelict Building Grant Program. February 23, 2024
- RPA-13 Transportation Alternatives Program Fund. February 28, 2024.
- Iowa HOME-ARP Program Funds. March 8, 2024
- Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant Program. March 18, 2024
- Land and Water Conservation Fund Program. June 15, 2024



SWIPCO/SWITA employees showed their holiday cheer with an Ugly Sweater Day at the office on December 22nd. (Left photo, left to right): Kersten Abild, Aaron Koontz, Julie Hays, John McCurdy, Kristen Templeton. (Right photo, left to right): Erin Hudson, Barb Boggs, Aaron Koontz, Tammy DeBord, Nicole Rhodes.

Birthdays & Anniversaries



Tracy Clark
Transit Scheduler III
Birthday Month



Rhonda Brown
Finance Manager
Birthday Month

Mark Hansen
Fleet Mechanic
Birthday Month



Nicole Rhodes
Grants Specialist II
Birthday Month



Barb Boggs
Grants Specialist I
Birthday Month



Mike Ballinger
Safety Coordinator
Birthday Month

IFA Iowa Home Repair Pilot Program Application Deadline Extended

The Iowa Finance Authority has extended the application deadline for the Iowa Home Repair Pilot Program (HRPP) until March 29, 2024 at 4:30 p.m. The goal of the program is to prevent homeowner displacement by assisting with home repairs to maintain the habitability of the home.

Eligible homeowners must be income qualified, have repair needs that affect the ongoing insurability or accessibility of their home, own the property located in Iowa, occupy the home as their primary residence, and have experienced a financial hardship because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Award recipients can receive up to \$35,000 to assist with eligible repairs. Eligible homeowners may also qualify for assistance with past due mortgage and related property expenses, if requested and documentation is supplied during the application.

Single-family homes, condominiums, and manufactured homes are all eligible properties. Eligible repairs range widely from windows, siding, roofing, drainage, electrical, plumbing, foundation, septic, and wells. Accessibility/health modifications that can be considered include asbestos removal/abatement, HVAC repair or replacement, ramps/lifts, modification of bathrooms or kitchens, and much more.

Anyone can take the precheck now online to determine preliminary eligibility and full applications can be submitted online as well once documentation has been gathered. Complete the precheck at this link: iowafinance.com/home-repair-precheck-form/

Payments will be made directly to eligible repair contractors by the local administering partner overseeing the repairs, which would be SWIPCO for those in our region.

Anyone in the region who believes they could benefit from this program should contact SWIPCO at 712-243-4196 or 1-866-279-4720. You can also call IFA's Iowa Homeowner Assistance Fund team at 1-888-668-0927.

SWIPCO STAFF

John McCurdy, AICP
Executive Director

Mark Lander
Transit Director

Erin Hudson
Community Development Director

Karen Mauer
Administrative Services Director

Rhonda Brown
Finance Manager

Daurine Petersen
Human Resources Coordinator

Kersten Abild
Transit Scheduler II

Ann Anstey
Grants Specialist II

Mary Auten
Grants Specialist I

Michael Ballinger
Safety Coordinator

Barb Boggs
Grants Specialist I

Dani Briggs
Lead Planner

Tracy Clark
Transit Scheduler III

Tammy DeBord
Grants Specialist III

Gina Gentile
Transit Scheduler I

Mark Hansen
Fleet Mechanic

Sandy Hansen
Grants Specialist III

Ashley Hayes
Disaster Recovery Coordinator

Julie Hays
Transit Scheduler I

Dee Holtz
Administrative Assistant

Holly Jackson
Planner I

Amy Jones
Benefits & Payroll Specialist

Adam Kisner
Maintenance Assistant

Aaron Koontz
Grants Specialist I

Matthew Lee
Building Inspector II

Brandie McFarland
Human Resources Specialist

Chris Parks
Communications Coordinator

Nicole Rhodes
Grants Specialist II

Phil Richter
Building Inspector I

Kristen Templeton
Transit Coordinator

Teresa Wright
Finance Specialist