

The Update



November/December 2025

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

Walnut Daycare Facility Set to Become a Reality After \$600,000 CDBG Obtained

WALNUT- A new childcare facility is on track to become a reality in Walnut after Southwest Iowa Planning Council helped secure a \$600,000 Community Development Block Grant for the project.

The facility is set to be created in one wing of the current Peace Haven Retirement Home in Walnut and will be operated by a newly developed 501c3 organization called Play Haven. The total project cost is expected to be \$1,030,000 and other funding includes a \$500,000 grant from the Lakin Foundation. Play Haven has been doing fundraisers and collecting local donations to help cover the remaining amount needed to complete the project.



Obtaining childcare is a challenge in the region and this facility will be a big help to area residents looking for the service. Currently, a single in-home daycare provider exists in Walnut to

serve a population that is estimated to have 85 children under the age of ten. That's just the need within town. The Iowa Child Care Resource and Referral, a state-run organization focused on connecting families with quality childcare, shows that Pottawattamie County is facing a severe shortage of approximately 6,942 childcare slots to meet demand. The new Play Haven facility in Walnut is

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Play Haven Continued...

designed to serve up to 65 children.

Rachel Hamilton with Play Haven is very excited that this project is coming to life, “We’ve been working for three years towards this and it’s so exciting that is happening. I’m thrilled for our community. The partnership with Peace Haven will create such a positive impact on two vital age demographics, seniors and children.”

Access to safe, reliable, and high-quality childcare close to home will help eliminate the need for area residents to make long commutes for care or piecemeal care arrangements. This can also help working families reduce employment-related disruptions and support greater workforce participation in the region.

Hamilton said inspiration for the project came from her own children who have struggled to find childcare and were asking for help, saying “I think we need to look at this issue in a different way other than grandparents retiring early to take care of grandchildren.” That is how this dedicated group got started and eventually Peace Haven was brought up as a potential space. “When this conversation started there were close to a dozen Walnut residents expecting children, with limited childcare spaces to serve them,” said Hamilton.

A unique aspect of this project will be the opportunity to connect the youth and elderly populations with the connection to a retirement facility. Children and senior residents will participate in shared, structured activities to enrich quality of life and community connection for all involved. Hamilton said they’ve been working hard to make sure it’s a partnership that’s respectful of the residents and enriching for both groups.

The new Play Haven facility is also expected to create 10-12 new jobs, ranging from educators, assistants, and administrative staff.

“This has an opportunity to impact the community on a larger scale as well. We’ve already been talking about the need for housing and the potential for wrap-around care, that can set the table for growth,” Hamilton said.

SWIPCO is proud to have helped obtain this important funding for a resource that should benefit the Walnut community for many years to come. Recently, a similar facility was completed in Malvern, with SWIPCO playing a key role in securing the necessary funding. As part of its commitment to community development, SWIPCO continues to collaborate with member cities and counties, supporting a wide range of grant programs to foster growth and innovation.

Southwest Iowa Housing Trust Fund Receives Local Housing Trust Fund Award from Iowa Finance Authority

ATLANTIC – The Iowa Finance Authority (IFA) Board of Directors recently announced more than \$12.2 million in grants to 26 Local Housing Trust Funds. The Southwest Iowa Housing Trust Fund (SWIHTF), administered by the Southwest Iowa Planning Council (SWIPCO), was honored to be one of those recipients for a total of \$441,474.



The grant funds support a range of initiatives aimed at developing or preserving housing for low-income households. This includes the development and preservation of housing, rental assistance, assistance for people experiencing homelessness, and homeownership support across the state. These funds bolster the capacity of local housing organizations to directly address local housing needs.

The housing trust fund annual grant funding allows SWIPCO and SWIHTF to help on average 22 families a year purchase a home with downpayment assistance. An average of 25 families receive necessary home repairs such as heating, plumbing, windows, and more to help them safely stay in their homes. Funding also supports the ability of communities in the region to demolish dilapidated homes and create infill lots for new development. SWIPCO Executive Director John McCurdy said, “In a very real way we are able to help keep families in Southwest Iowa and empower residents to stay in their homes longer.”

The State Housing Trust Fund was created by the Iowa Legislature in 2003 and Local Housing Trust Fund awards come from this fund. Since its inception, the State Housing Trust Fund has provided \$140 million in affordable housing assistance to benefit more than 41,400 families. The awards announced this year are expected to leverage an additional \$3.6 million in other financing to complete projects.

SWIHTF was created in 2005 and serves seven counties in Southwest Iowa: Cass, Fremont, Harrison, Mills, Montgomery, Page, and Shelby.

The SWIHTF Homeownership Assistance program will open for 2026 on January 2nd. These funds can help income eligible individuals purchase a new or existing home. Assistance is 7% of the purchase price, up to \$8,000. The first \$5,000 is a 5-year forgivable loan, forgiven 20% per year. Any amount over that is optional and repayable at a 1% interest rate over a maximum 5-year period.

Homebuyers must submit a signed purchase agreement with their application and will be selected on a first approved-first served basis. To obtain an application visit <https://www.swipco.org/housing-swihtf/funding-sources-dashboard/> or contact the SWIPCO Housing Department at 712-243-4196

Regional Planning Affiliation 13 Now Taking Applications for Transportation Alternatives Program

ATLANTIC -- Southwest Iowa Planning Council (SWIPCO) and Regional Planning Affiliation 13 (RPA 13) is now accepting applications for its Regional Transportation Alternatives Program fund for projects in Cass, Fremont, Montgomery, and Page Counties. Applications are being accepted until February 13, 2026.

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. Approximately \$400,000 is available for FY2027.

Completed applications must be in to SWIPCO by 4:30 p.m. on February 13, 2026. 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 award recommendations. Award letters will be sent to applicants and the Iowa DOT by August 1, 2026. Funds will be released by the Iowa DOT after October 1, 2026.

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



Example of a previous RPA-13 TAP project, the Stanton Greenbelt Trail

Birthdays & Anniversaries



Dee Holtz

Administrative Assistant
7 Years of Service



Nicole Rhodes

Grants Specialist II
5 Years of Service



Tammy DeBord

Grants Specialist III
18 Years of Service



Tracy Clark

Transit Scheduler III
6 Years of Service



Brandie McFarland

Human Resource Specialist
2 Years of Service



SWITA by the Numbers

	October 2025	YTD (Since July 1)
Total Miles	173,341	516,493
Total Hours	9,697	37,806
Total Rides	48,743	175,076
<u>October Rides by Service</u>		<u>October Rides by Demographic</u>
Workforce Rides	8,530	Disabled 22,136
Taxi Rides	5,698	Elderly 2,612
Student Rides	8,137	Other Gen. Public 23,995
Other	26,378	

Upcoming Grant

Information:

- IDOT Speed Feedback Signs Program
Opens Jan. 1st until exhausted
- Choose Iowa Value-Added Grant
January 16, 2026
- EPA Brownfield Grants
January 28, 2026
- IDOT RISE Grant
February 1, 2026
- Keep Iowa Beautiful Paint Iowa
February 12, 2026
- 2026 Land and Water Conservation Fund
March 6, 2026
- CDBG Water and Sewer Program
Early 2026

From the Desk of the Executive Director...

John McCurdy

Merry Christmas and a Happy Holidays!

As we wrap up the calendar year (and one last time to mention it's our 50th year!) it's an exciting time to look forward to the spring season and all the promise that the new year brings. This year we've put together a "Christmas Catalog" of various services that SWIPCO and SWITA provide, and I hope that you can take a few moments to look through it and think about what needs your community may have and how SWIPCO and SWITA might fit into your goals for a successful 2026 and beyond.

I want to take this opportunity to say thank you to our member cities and counties. Not just because dues notices for FY27 have gone out in the mail! No, although the dues revenue that communities pay to SWIPCO/SWITA/SWIHTF are critical to match grants, and are therefore multiplied many times over, it's your participation in SWIPCO and its components that are critical to our success. I've said it before, but we were created by you (the cities and counties) to meet your needs—so you should always feel free to reach out with a problem and we'll work together to solve it. We can't do everything all the time, but the main reason that we do provide so many different services now is because over time our members have asked for them and we will always try and meet your needs.

2025 was a year of celebration with our 50th anniversary as well as many projects completed and new grants and projects started. We had a number of new great additions to our staff, and we had some losses as well. Thank you to everyone who has been a part of this journey this year. A special thanks to two board members, Terry Arentson who retired from the board earlier this year, and Grace Garrett who will go off the board at the end of the year—your contributions to the board have been great and I have very much appreciated your input throughout the years, thank you and enjoy your "retirement!"

SWIPCO STAFF

John McCurdy, AICP
Executive Director

Mark Lander
Transit Director

Daurine Petersen
Administrative Services Director

Rhonda Brown
Finance Manager

Brandie McFarland
Human Resources Specialist

Kersten Abild
Transit Scheduler II

Ann Anstey
Housing Programs Coordinator

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

Mark Hansen
Fleet Mechanic

Ashley Hayes
Disaster Recovery Coordinator

Julie Hays
Transit Scheduler I

Dee Holtz
Administrative Assistant

Allyson Jones
Transit Scheduler I

Matthew Lee
Building Inspector II

Chris Parks
Communications Coordinator

Nicole Rhodes
Grants Specialist II

Phil Richter
Building Inspector I

Kyle Rock
Maintenance Assistant

Kristen Templeton
Transit Coordinator

Teresa Wright
Finance Specialist