

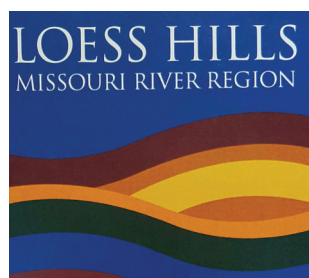
# What's Happening

*For Community Leaders*

January/February 2020

## Parks to People project works to enhance eco-tourism

Built by silt comprised predominantly of quartz grains packed together closely, the Loess Hills are a unique feature and natural wonder along the Western Iowa landscape. In fact, China is the only place with loess hills as extensive as those found in the Omaha-Council Bluffs metro region. Protecting the Loess Hills, increasing outdoor



recreational opportunities to attract and retain workforce, promoting healthy lifestyles and developing an alternative economic opportunity for rural communities are the foundation behind the Loess Hills Missouri River Parks to People project in Iowa.

The Parks to People regional project is coordinated by Golden Hills Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) through the Loess Hills Missouri River Region (LHMRR) Board of Directors along with stakeholders such as the MidAmerican Energy Foundation, Iowa Parks Foundation, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources State Parks Bureau and the Counties of Harrison, Pottawattamie and Mills.

Since this collaborative effort launched in 2018, the LHMRR board has leveraged a \$500,000 Challenge grant through the MidAmerican Energy Foundation toward more than \$10 million for 13 new and expanded projects in the region. "Collaboration is at the heart of Parks to People and our region," said Michelle Wodtke Franks, Golden Hills RC&D Executive Director. "What is good for one county is good for the neighboring county as we develop the beautiful front yard to the Omaha metro area."

Pressing short term goals include raising the balance of funding for the 13 identified projects by the end of 2020. These projects include nine new cabins for the region, several trails, an art corridor and bridge enhancement to the Wabash Trace Nature Trail, increased public hunting ground and many county park amenities such as shelters, pavilions and natural playspaces.

Long term goals include continuing to support collaborative work to expand the Frontier Iowa Trails network throughout the region, connecting the trails to neighboring states and other trail networks. A planned Willow Lake Nature Center in Harrison County, expansion of Brent's Trail to create an Appalachian-style ridge and valley hiking trail and increased community connectivity to the Wabash Trace Nature Trail are big projects on the horizon.

"I am a fifth generation Loess Hills native and I live in Mills County. Sharing the Loess Hills with the public and opening up a truly national treasure to others to enjoy, hike, bike and camp – is the best way to help people appreciate the area's fragile and unique beauty," said Wodtke Franks. "As population trends downward, it becomes vital that rural communities explore other ways to add vibrancy and economic opportunity to their towns. Outdoor recreation, trails, rural tourism and other cultural offerings are innovative and exciting ways to do that."



Michelle Wodtke Franks, Golden Hills RC&D Executive Director, receives the 2019 MAPA Regional Service Award at the Annual Council of Officials Meeting. (L to R: Clare Duda, MAPA Council of Officials President; Shawn Koehler, Mills County Trails Board; Michelle Wodtke Franks; Greg Youell, MAPA Executive Director; Doug Kindig, MAPA Board of Directors Chair)

For its efforts to develop eco-tourism and work collaboratively, MAPA awarded the Loess Hills Missouri River Parks to People regional project its 2019 Regional Service Award. The Regional Service Award is awarded to a group which recognized that regional problem-solving transcends county boundaries and contributed to the region in a way that helped it improve or grow.

# Council Bluffs 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue Transit Alternatives study starts

A study is underway on transit alternatives along Council Bluff's 1st Avenue corridor.

MAPA and the City of Council Bluffs contracted with Toole Design and Cambridge Systematics to analyze transit options and connectivity of multiple modes of transportation, and assess the existing bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure along key routes.

The study will also analyze how land use might change to complement transit and the economic impacts associated with various levels of growth and development. The public will have an opportunity to comment on any recommendations once a draft report is available.



A study is underway to assess Council Bluff's 1st Avenue corridor for possible transit alternatives.

## MAPA secures flooding assistance funding for local communities

MAPA continues to seek funding for flood recovery assistance to communities in the region impacted by the 2019 floods.

In February, the U.S. Department of Commerce- Economic Development Administration (EDA) awarded \$1.1 million conditionally to the Mills and Pottawattamie County Levee District to complete a levee accreditation study and the Iowa Flood Mitigation Board (IFMB) awarded \$279,149 in local matching funds for the study. The EDA also awarded



\$8.4 million conditionally to the City of Council Bluffs for two Missouri River Levee improvements in the southwest portion of the city. MAPA prepared the applications for this funding and several others still being considered.

Supplemental disaster recovery funding appropriated to the EDA is still available for Nebraska and Iowa communities. The Denver region, which includes Nebraska and Iowa, received \$107 million for planning, infrastructure restoration and provisions for long-term recovery which incorporates economic resiliency principles into a region's collaborative economic development efforts.

Applications for these funds will be accepted on an open cycle through grants.gov and the funding is available to all communities in the MAPA region. The EDA infrastructure projects should be related directly to the 2019 flooding and propose viable long-term recovery/resiliency solutions. If you are interested in applying for these funds, contact Donald Gross, MAPA Community and Economic Development Manager, at [dgross@mapacog.org](mailto:dgross@mapacog.org) or (402) 444-6866, ext. 230.

## Block Talk evaluates Omaha's Maple Street for walkability and safety

MAPA is working with the Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT), the Federal Highway



MAPA and NDOT staff accompany neighbors during a Maple Street Block Talk.

Administration (FHWA), and the City of Omaha Public Works Department, to find measures which could improve pedestrian safety along a stretch of Maple Street from 97th to 102nd

Streets in northwest Omaha. In addition to a pedestrian fatality in late 2019, the corridor has experienced a number of pedestrian-related crashes.

Staff from NDOT, FHWA, the City of Omaha and MAPA, along with residents from the surrounding neighborhoods, walked that portion of Maple Road to evaluate the area for walkability and safety during a Block Talk MAPA hosted on Feb. 12. Feedback from the Block Talk will be used to determine possible improvements to the roadway. Block Talks provide an unbiased evaluation of the active transportation environment, and facilitate input from all stakeholders. This spring a Block Talk will be conducted in downtown Benson.

# 2020 U.S. Census kicks off March 12

Time is approaching to complete the 2020 Census. March 12 is the first day the census is available to the public to be filled out. It's very important for all residents to complete the census. U.S. Census Bureau data is used to guide the distribution of federal funds to state and local communities. In 2015, more than 132 programs used U.S.

Census Bureau data to distribute more than \$675 billion. MAPA is working with the City of Omaha and Douglas County on their efforts to ensure a complete count of the region's population.

## Why the 2020 Census is Important to Nebraska

Over a 10 year span:



## MAPA hosts elected officials training



MAPA hosted training for elected officials from Pottawattamie and Mills Counties at the Oakland Community Building in Oakland, Iowa, on February 13.

Eric Christiansen, a field specialist on local government matters with the Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, presented information on the leadership roles of elected officials and the decision-making bodies they represent as well as the requirements of Iowa's Open Meetings Act.

# CALENDAR

## March 2020

- Mar. 8th – Daylight Saving Time begins
- Mar. 11th – RPA-18  
11:00 a.m.  
Council of Officials
- Mar. 15th – NADO Washington Policy Conference (Mar. 15-18)
- Mar. 17th – St. Patrick's Day
- Mar. 18th – Finance Committee  
8:30 a.m.  
  
Coordinated Transit  
10:30 a.m.
- Mar. 19th – Spring begins
- Mar. 20th – Transportation Committee  
10 a.m.
- Mar. 26th – MAPA Board of Directors  
1:30 p.m.

## April 2020

- Apr. 1st – April Fool's Day
- Apr. 3rd – Regional Planning (Heartland 2050 RPAC)  
10:00 a.m.
- Apr. 5th – Palm Sunday
- Apr. 8th – RPA-18  
11:00 a.m.  
  
Passover begins
- Apr. 12th – Easter
- Apr. 15th – Finance Committee  
8:30 a.m.  
  
Coordinated Transit  
10:30 a.m.
- Apr. 17th – Transportation Committee  
10 a.m.
- Apr. 22nd – Earth Day  
  
Administrative Professionals' Day
- Apr. 23rd – MAPA Board of Directors  
1:30 p.m.
- Apr. 24th – Arbor Day

# New Director of Finance and Administration joins MAPA

MAPA welcomed a new staff member in January. Michael Keays, is MAPA's Director of Finance and Administration.

Michael has lived in Omaha since high school and is an U.S. Air Force veteran.

He earned a Bachelor's and a Master's degree in Business Administration from Bellevue University, is a Certified Public Accountant, and obtained his Chartered Global Management Accountant designation.

Prior to working for MAPA, Michael served as the State of Nebraska's Controller and the Chief Financial Officer for the Nebraska Department of Transportation.

Michael and his wife have three grown children and eight grandchildren, and enjoy attending their grandchildren's sporting and school events. Michael has been an assistant coach for several of their activities.



**MICHAEL KEAYS**

Director of Finance and Administration

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