SCOTT COUNTY RESIDENTS REPORT

February, 2022
A note from the County Administrator

When you look through this new Scott County Residents Report, you’ll encounter a mix of data and stories – all focused around how our services impact you and your community. To be certain, the ongoing global pandemic has played, and will likely continue to play, a major role in the delivery of these services. The move to telemedicine, the provision of over 40,000 vaccine doses, and the shift to online services (including building permits and appointments for customer service and the HHW) have all been highly visible pivots that were required by COVID-19 and its restrictions; yet as painful as the pandemic has been, we’ve discovered that there have been some service delivery improvements made through these changes – as such, some of these will remain a permanent part of the way we do business with you.

In 2021, the U.S. Congress authorized the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), which was put in place to help the nation’s recovery from the pandemic. As part of ARPA, local units of government were provided funds to focus on public health, economic development, staffing, revenue recapture, and infrastructure investments in broadband and water/sewer.

Currently, staff is researching 14 projects that align with the Board’s strategic plan as well as the Scott County Association for Leadership and Efficiency (SCALE) efforts. Working as a voluntary intergovernmental partnership, SCALE has continued to focus on the areas of housing, early literacy, transportation, and workforce education/job creation over the past five years.

In terms of revenue recapture, we’re looking at funding improvements to three of our regional parks, which have exploded in use over the past several years. We’ve all been witness to how vital nature and the Great Outdoors have been to our physical and mental well-being during the pandemic; providing additional access to these parks would help provide close and convenient outlets for even more of our residents.

As we evaluate these projects over the next several months, you’ll have plenty of opportunities to engage with us and provide your thoughts, input, and feedback – we welcome and encourage you to keep visiting our website (www.scottcountymn.gov) for upcoming events and activities. At this point, we expect that the County Board will begin the approval of early projects this spring. (The projects need to be underway and completed by December 31, 2024; contracted projects need to completed by December 31, 2026, so time is a factor!)

Frankly, I can’t wait to report back on our progress in next year’s Residents Report (not to mention the Scott County SCENE)! Please, keep your eye on us. I hope, and I firmly believe, that we’ll be delivering what matters to you.  

~Lezlie Vermillion
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Emergencies can happen any time, any place, even during a worship service. That’s why staff from the County’s Emergency Management office were out at St. John the Baptist Catholic Church in Savage last year getting leadership staff prepared for the “what ifs” that can arise. The leaders were trained to respond to everything -- from big events to smaller situations -- and the information has already proven valuable.

“Fortunately, we haven’t had any real emergencies in which we had to put that information into practice,” said church deacon Joel Neisen. “But we had a couple of ‘odd’ situations that were more readily recognized by our ushers, and I think they were more confident in their decision-making abilities in those circumstances.”

One key refrain of the County’s emergency preparedness training is this: Since no one can predict exactly when and where an emergency situation will occur, being prepared for emergencies is everyone’s responsibility -- including yours. Scott County Emergency Management director Scott Haa said people should always be prepared to take steps to maintain their own safety during emergency situations. “Panicking or not knowing how to react is a major obstacle to a safe effective response in an emergency,” said Haas. Advanced planning and preparation are the most effective ways of ensuring people are able to respond calmly and effectively in an emergency.

Haas tells folks in self-preparedness training that it’s all too easy to become overly dependent on a available supply chain system that keeps our store shelves stocked. One needs to look no further than 2020’s first wave of COVID-19 infection, when stores in Scott County and across the nation saw irrational shortages due to panic buying in supplies like toilet paper and prepared goods. So in a world where we see or read about disasters almost weekly, why are so many people unprepared? For many, the idea of prepping seems too difficult, too time consuming, or simply foolish. Many people think, “Nothing is going to happen to me,” or “Why waste money on supplies I might never need?” More perilously, some also assume that “If something does happen, first responders, FEMA, and the Red Cross will provide the aid I need.”

The County Sheriff’s Office’s Emergency Management office works with the 152,000-plus residents in our communities to create policies and practices to improve the ability of local residents to prevent, protect against, mitigate, respond to, and recover from...
any type of threat or hazard effectively. The County recognizes the importance of personal preparedness in sharing accountability for the success of local disaster management efforts which enhance our community’s security and resilience.

The County has taken an array of proactive measures, including completing pre/post-disaster exercises and drills, using Mesonet weather stations, requiring all County employees to complete National Incident Management System (NIMS) training, featuring articles in County print and online publications, using a mass notification public alert system (CodeRED), building strong partnerships with the regional disaster relief organizations, developing pre-disaster service contracts, publishing real-time social media messaging, deploying volunteer teams, and applying knowledge from past responses to strengthen the community’s ability to withstand the future incidents.

As part of the disaster preparedness community outreach efforts, Emergency Management provides on-site training sessions and presentations that provide individuals, organizations, faith-based groups, schools, youth, and civic groups with an overview of the importance of disaster preparedness. During these informational sessions, participants learn how to plan for a disaster by assembling emergency supply kits, helping people with disabilities and other special needs, accessing available resources, creating family communication plans, creating a plan for their pets and animals, and more. Individual-level preparedness and self-sufficiency is critically important during emergency preparedness and response -- everyone should view themselves as being part of an emergency management system.

Many people believe government services will be able to feed and shelter them immediately following a large-scale disaster. Unfortunately, this is not typically the case. During a disaster, cities and counties can become overwhelmed; this is especially true during the first 72 to 96 hours until state and federal resources arrive. Individual preparedness relieves some burden on already taxed response systems, freeing up the responders to dedicate resources in the early stages of an incident. Being prepared can reduce fear, anxiety, and loss that almost always accompany disasters. What you do now can help you and your family better respond to and recover from any disaster or emergency... as well as contribute to the overall readiness of your community.

Scott County Emergency Management has several volunteer organizations that help build community strength and resiliency, including SAFCOM and Emergency Shelter Teams. If you are interested in joining a program, please contact Cara Madsen, Scott County's Volunteer Coordinator, at (952) 496-8169 or email cmadsen@co.scott.mn.us.

For more information on emergency response, follow the Scott County Sheriff’s Office Facebook and website, and look for articles in the Scott County SCENE. You can also contact Sheriff Luke Hennen at (952) 496-8625 or by email LHennen@co.scott.mn.us, or in person at 301 Fuller Street South, Shakopee.
In 2019, Scott County was awarded a four-year federal grant to put a specialty court in place to help those who have served their country in a better way. A collaborative effort among various stakeholders, the Veterans’ Treatment Court model was developed to promote public safety while assisting veterans involved in the criminal justice system. The intention underlying this approach is to address the intersection of substance abuse, mental health, and criminal behavior. Scott County Veterans’ Treatment Court first session was held in May 2020. The Veterans’ Treatment Court team includes a judge, a coordinator, a probation officer, a chemical dependency treatment provider, a mental health provider, a contracted defense attorney, two Scott County Attorneys, the Scott County Veterans Service Officer, and a VA Veterans Justice Outreach Officer. Court is held bi-weekly, with the team members meeting prior to the hearings in which the team discusses each veteran’s progress. Team members talk about what is going well for the veterans as well as any issues that need to be addressed. The program has two different tracks:

**Scott County Veterans’ Treatment Court Goals**

- Reduce recidivism
- Save lives by decreasing overdose and suicide deaths
- Reduce the collateral damage inflicted upon families and the community
- Reduce costs to the criminal justice system and the community
- Hold veterans in the criminal justice system accountable, promote their self-sufficiency, and empower them to take charge of their recovery and become productive, responsible members of their families and the community.

The Honorable Christian Wilton; Kevin Wetherille, Attorney JMW Law Office; Stefani Menning, Assistant Scott County Attorney; Derek Farwell, Veteran Services Director
**Track 1** is for *high risk/high need* veterans, and consists of five distinct phases. Some of the requirements for these phases include bi-weekly attendance at court hearings, negative drug and alcohol tests, compliance with chemical health and mental health assessments, all programming recommendations, and participation in regularly scheduled meetings with the Veterans’ Court probation officer.

**Track 2** is for *low risk/high need* veterans and consists of four phases with similar phase requirements as in Track 1; however, Track 2 veterans are required to attend court only quarterly (unless the judge and/or team members require them to appear more often due to specific issues or concerns).

Emily*, a current participant spoke about her experience with the Veterans Treatment Court. A former Marine with four years of service, she had no prior legal history until her recent offense. She was originally involved in a traditional court process, but found the process nerve racking, confusing, and overwhelming; as a result, she began to drink to cope with the stress. Soon, her increased alcohol use started affecting her mental health as well as her motivation to find employment. She then heard from her attorney about Veterans’ Court, which offered rehabilitation and other services for veterans -- and the possibility of keeping her offense off her record.

She sat in on a few court sessions to gain an understanding of the program’s expectations and to learn how the process worked. After observing these sessions, she realized it was a good fit for her -- and she saw a different side to the court process than she had previously experienced.

Now reflecting on her own positive experiences, she explained that the Veterans’ Court provides team support, individualized responses, takes the time to get to know each person and what is good for them, makes clear what is going on, and is laid out well. She stated the energy and care from the judge is one of the best elements of the process.

Veterans’ Court is an abstinence-based program and does not allow the use of alcohol or drugs, even if there is no diagnosis of a substance use disorder. Initially, this veteran felt this prohibition was unfair and was slightly annoyed by it; yet with time in the program and complying with the no-use restriction, she was able to stop using alcohol as a coping skill, get out of the cycle of self-loathing, and find the drive to accomplish the things she needed. Since entering the program, she has over a year in sobriety, has her own home (which she shares with her two children), is working full-time, is involved in local sports clubs, and is consistently participating in services for mental health/psychiatry.

Would she recommend the Veterans’ Court to potential participants? “One hundred percent,” she said. While her initial court process felt like *here is your crime, here is your time*, “Vets Court is the complete opposite, and they take the time to know each individual person, your situation, and what’s good for you.”

To date, there have been 13 veterans accepted into the program, three of whom have successfully graduated. Currently, Scott County Community Corrections is involved in an evaluation process of the Veterans’ Court, which will track the program’s outcomes and include a comprehensive participant survey. The results will be used to make adjustments and improvements to the program.

*Participant name has been changed in the interest of confidentiality.
The beginning of 2020 ushered in a disease that would change everyone’s "normal." The COVID-19 pandemic tested personal strength and resiliency. In March 2020, most County community programs were suspended or placed on hold, leaving many people who relied on County programs without the help they needed. The decreased community services also left many of our dedicated volunteers without a job. Prior to the pandemic, Scott County volunteers provided more than 20,000 hours of service each year. While the usual programs were on hold, volunteers throughout Scott County saw there was a new need and they eagerly responded. Cara Madsen, Scott County Volunteer Coordinator stated, "there were so many opportunities where volunteers stepped up to help in any capacity they could. Many came together for the greater good of everyone, to help those in need. Scott County has the best volunteers" In 2021, Scott County volunteers clocked in over 8,500 volunteer hours with programs in Health and Human Services, Library, Sheriff’s Office, and the jail. Madsen added, "This is just a small snippet of how volunteers stepped up to help during a crazy time."

Two areas that relied heavily on volunteer and community partners were Scott County Public Health and SmartLink Transit. When the pandemic hit transportation services in Scott County came to a screeching halt. Many residents who relied on public or private transportation were suddenly without means to get from one place to another. Commuter buses stopped running, non-emergency medical transports paused, and volunteer driver services were discontinued as the fear and uncertainty of COVID-19 tightened its grip on our lives.

SmartLink Transit staff wondered how they could help get people where they needed to go, and get vital goods to those that could not leave their homes or businesses. In addition, there was a need for area schools and daycares to receive items to help protect childcare workers and students of our essential workers. And PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) quickly became an acronym we all became very familiar with.

PPE -- such as hand sanitizer, cleaning supplies, masks, gloves, and the like -- were suddenly in high demand and not readily available for purchase in local stores. While

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**Scott County Volunteers By The Numbers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advisory Boards &amp; Committees</th>
<th>46 Volunteers</th>
<th>378 Hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community Outreach</td>
<td>38 Volunteers</td>
<td>459 Hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library</td>
<td>7 Volunteers</td>
<td>89 Hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health &amp; Human Services</td>
<td>39 Volunteers</td>
<td>708 Hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jail</td>
<td>6 Volunteers</td>
<td>99 Hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency Response</td>
<td>128 Volunteers</td>
<td>4,730 Hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>11 Volunteers</td>
<td>99 Hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheriff</td>
<td>20 Volunteers</td>
<td>1,945 Hours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
many were moving to a “work from home” or “remote work” model, schools and daycare operators were focused on providing care for children of essential workers as they continued to go to work each day. Scott County Public Health was coordinating many moving parts throughout the community, and received many requests for PPE from these facilities. In addition, residents who were asked to stay home under quarantine after being exposed to COVID-19 (or isolation because they had COVID-19) were no longer able to access groceries and essential goods; simply jumping in their vehicle to run errands was no longer a viable option.

SmartLink reached out to previous volunteer drivers (who used their own vehicles to assist those needing rides to appointments); while the drivers could no longer transport people, they could transport supplies. When asked to assist, they gave a resounding yes.

As requests for supplies were received, Public Health worked with the logistics unit, as well as the CAP Agency Foodshelf to obtain the needed items. In turn, Public Health would send delivery requests to SmartLink, and SmartLink then reached out to volunteer drivers to see if they were available. Volunteers delivered the items safely to the front door of local businesses and private homes.

Starting in 2021, the Scott County Public Health department was also tasked with providing COVID-19 vaccinations to community members. Early into the response, it was evident that additional help was needed to get this done. In 2020, Public Health expanded their partnership with the WGH Group, LLC to ramp up testing and assist with vaccination clinics. The WGH Group, LLC provided community paramedic, community emergency technicians, retired nurses and primary care physicians to expand Public Health’s roster of vaccinators. Additionally, a number of volunteers to assisted Public Health with the clinic flow and usher positions.

Early in 2021, Public Health followed guidelines from the Minnesota Department of Health by vaccinating all emergency medical and law enforcement agency members. As the guidelines and vaccine supply allowed, Public Health began conducting larger clinics, with the majority of them being held in partnership with Canterbury Expo Center. These large clinics were a Herculean effort whose success was based on all the help and support of partners and Scott County leadership.

In addition to the large clinics, Public Health also partnered with the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community to provide vaccination clinics for teachers and Geritom Medical, Inc. to conduct “rolling clinics” where they traveled to senior housing and adult foster care homes in Scott County. At the height of the vaccination response, Public Health was holding two 1,800 participant large scale clinics plus three rolling clinics each week.

In late spring, the large-scale clinics were scaled down to smaller community clinics as vaccine became more readily available through other community sources. However, it was also during this time when the Pfizer vaccine was approved for ages 12 and up. Late May through June, Public Health held school vaccination clinics in each district.

“I want you to know how proud I am to live in Scott County (Savage)! I was so impressed at how assertive your dept. was in getting the COVID vaccines out to residents like me! Your organization and your employees and volunteers are to be commended! Thank you!”
~COVID vaccination Clinic Attendee

“I wish to congratulate you for a job well done. The entire process was well staffed, well organized, and efficient”
~COVID vaccination Clinic Attendee

During 2021, Scott County Public Health and its partners administered about 49,000 COVID-19 vaccinations -- just about enough to fill the Gopher football stadium’s 50,800 capacity.
Community clinics continued throughout the summer and fall, with the emphasis on vaccine education and reducing barriers to vaccination access. This community engagement, through partnerships with Esperanza and the Islamic Cultural Center, removed both language and transportation barriers for community members.

The Scott County COVID-19 Impact Survey (conducted over the summer of 2021) provides insight into the many ways Scott County residents’ lives have been impacted by COVID-19. Overall, 405 respondents completed surveys. Participants were drawn from convenience (non-randomized) samples across the community; 65 percent of respondents were females, and 53.7 percent were minorities (non-White), with an average age of 41 years old.

The survey measured overall physical health, mental health, social support and communication, and financial well-being. The results confirmed that many Scott County residents were sheltered from the worst effects of COVID; in all areas, roughly three-quarters of respondents reported that their situation had stayed the same or gotten better. However, in each of these categories, between one-fifth and one-third of respondents reported that their situation had gotten worse since the start of the pandemic.

Residents also reported delaying or foregoing care during the pandemic: One-quarter of respondents delayed dental care; respondents were less likely to delay seeking mental health care (11 percent).

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Scott County Vaccination Clinics and Registrations by Group Type

- **Large-Scale Clinics** made up 12% of clinics and 75% of registrations.
- **School Clinics** made up 10% of clinics and 12% of registrations.
- **Community Clinics** made up 28% of clinics and 7% of registrations.
- **Rolling Clinics** made up 37% of clinics and 3% of registrations.
- **Private Clinics** made up 13% of clinics and 3% of registrations.

When COVID-19 cases began to rise in the fall, Public Health saw a need for easier access to testing. In cooperation with the Library, testing clinics opened four mornings each week at the Shakopee Library.

As we continue to navigate the twists and turns of the pandemic, both Scott County Public Health and SmartLink are grateful for all the wonderful volunteers and community partners that have continued to be flexible and donate their time when called upon.

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Percentage who reported delaying or going without care during the COVID-19 pandemic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mental</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dental</td>
<td>25.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preventative</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Physical health

Most respondents (67 percent) reported their overall health as excellent or very good, while roughly 11 percent reported fair or poor health (the remainder reported their health as “good”). Twice as many reported fair or poor health compared to pre-COVID levels in 2014 (5.3 percent in 2014 versus 11 percent in 2021). More men than women reported that their physical health improved since the start of the pandemic (12 percent of men; five percent of women), though all respondents were more likely to report their physical health stayed the same or got worse. White respondents were the most likely to delay getting medical, dental, and other preventive care.

Mental health

During the pandemic, 19 percent of respondents said their mental health got worse, while 16 percent reported increased alcohol use, six percent reported increased marijuana use, and nine percent reported increased tobacco use. Further, one in seven respondents reported experiencing a low or depressed mood. Men were more likely than women to report increases in alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, and other drug use. About 11 percent of respondents reported experiencing suicidal thoughts during the pandemic (compared to 4.5 percent in the suburban metro area in 2018), and roughly twice as many White respondents versus non-White respondents reported decreases in their mental health (24 percent compared to 12 percent of respondents respectively).

75% of Scott County residents are confident the community will fully recover from the pandemic

Financial well-being

Financial situations also became more precarious, with 25 percent of respondents reporting their financial situation got worse. Existing economic disparities were exacerbated during the pandemic; those making under $50,000 annually were almost two times more likely to report decreases in household income during the pandemic than those making over $100,000 annually (42 versus 25 percent). Racial disparities in income remained as well, with almost one-third (30.2 percent) of Hispanic respondents reporting that their financial situation got worse in the past year (compared to 22 percent of Whites, 28 percent of Black/African-Americans, and 34 percent of other races). Paying rent/mortgages and paying for medical bills were top concerns among all racial and ethnic groups.

Social support and communication

Residents’ social support networks also deteriorated during the pandemic, with roughly 1/3 of respondents reporting decreases in communication with friends, family, or neighbors. Respondents were over four times more likely to report communication with neighbors got worse (37 percent). However, by summer 2021, three-fourths of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they could count on their community to respond to and fully recover from the pandemic. Parents are concerned about the impact of COVID on their families, with "falling behind on reading" as the top parental concern.

COVID response

Scott County residents were active in helping prevent the spread of COVID-19 in our community. Almost all respondents reported wearing a mask or social distancing (96 percent) to help stop the spread of COVID. Respondents reported washing their hands more frequently (82 percent), staying home or quarantining if sick (74 percent), avoiding public places (62 percent), and getting vaccinated (76.6 percent of those age 5+ having at least one dose, 72% completed two dose series).
When the global pandemic struck in early 2020, mental health professionals recognized almost immediately the negative consequences it would have on the mental health of people in our communities.

Prior to the pandemic, there had been very limited use of telemedicine as a tool for providing mental health services. However, given the mental health risks presented by the pandemic and an absolute necessity to develop a solution that provided continuity of care, staff quickly set up secure solutions that enabled sessions to continue via computers, tablets, or smart phones. Therapists and psychologists began offering virtual appointments to support people in need of therapy, diagnostic assessments, and crisis intervention services. “When schools and buildings closed, we were able to deliver telemedicine the very next day,” said Mental Health Center Clinical Director Dr. Terry Raddatz.

For those who had not been able to access in-person therapy in the past (due to lack of transportation, time constraints at work, mobility challenges, or other issues), telemedicine made therapy and treatment of their symptoms possible. One example involved a person who was living in an abusive relationship. She had a history of past trauma, was significantly depressed, and was unable to leave her home for days at a time. The easy and safe access of telemedicine allowed the client to actively engage in services in a time of great need, something that could not have happened had she been required to leave the house. The client was able to work through her trauma, address and resolve unhealthy relationship patterns, reduce depression symptoms, improve her confidence and self-worth, and ultimately leave her abusive partner.

Particular emphasis was placed on addressing the negative impacts of the pandemic on children’s mental health, and serving them presented one of the biggest challenges.

Scott County Mental Health Center staff provided virtual training and support to nearly one 1,000 parents, students, and school staff members during these stressful months on topics such as coping with anxiety, recognizing mental health symptoms, and tips for parents navigating student distance learning.
In an effort to create an option that would work for young children, therapists created "virtual playrooms" that included characters (avatars) who looked like the play therapists and interacted with children just as they would in person. Virtual playrooms offered children the same choices of toys, books, games, and art projects, allowing them to select activities just as they would if they were participating in an in-person session. Therapists also shared screens and used visual and auditory tools to facilitate therapy. In addition, to make the teletherapy process as effective as possible, therapists sometimes dropped off materials at the doors of clients before sessions. And the results have been promising.

A five-year-old girl, who had been having behavior issues at school, started tele-medicine sessions with the Mental Health Center. The child’s parents had recently divorced, and she was struggling with transitions between two different houses and school. Using telemedicine, the therapist met with the child in both households, helping both parents to be aligned in their goals for the child and support consistency between homes. The child started talking about her emotions and concerns in therapy. Parents also met separately with the therapist to work on their individual parenting needs to support their daughter’s mental health. Both parents and the child reported telemedicine therapy was helpful, and the client now has cheerful, happy, social behaviors.

Therapists began tele-medicine visits with a family who had a history of involvement with child protection and difficulty following through with therapy services. The family reported it was more comfortable to meet with the therapist virtually, from the comfort of their home, and without the added stress of having a therapist they didn’t know very well in their home. The therapist was able to observe more of their typical challenges and work through them in real time. Rapport between the therapist and the family improved; the family began to be on time for appointments, committed to the process, and even encouraged extended family members to participate! Now, three generations of family members are working together and can access the outside resources they need. The family has reduced conflict, improved overall functioning, and worked through generational family dynamics. The child protection case was closed, and there have been no new reports for over a year.

Mental Health Center therapists began to work with a six-year-old who had recently been placed in foster care. Through virtual play therapy, the therapist worked with the child and his family to build trust and attachment. The telemedicine model had the added advantage of giving grandparents an easy way to participate and support the child and the parent. The child’s anxiety was reduced, he was successful in virtual kindergarten.

Since March 2020, the Mental Health Center has provided over 32,000 telehealth sessions. Going forward, individuals have their choice of in-person or tele-medicine appointments, based on their unique needs and their access to technology.
Scott County CARES Funds Help Businesses Survive In A Pandemic

Helping community-based businesses survive the pandemic was the goal of the Scott County Board when it allocated $5.5 million of its $17.7 million federal economic stimulus aid from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act to qualified businesses in 2020. By all accounts, that goal was met.

Lee Siriouthay, president of Shakopee restaurant Thai Tempo, said their business was a recipient of one of the grants, and she is grateful for it. “We saw a big decrease in business when the state-ordered shutdown occurred in March 2020,” she said. Even though they remained open (with online takeout orders only), she said the loss of the lunch crowd had a major effect on them. “Everyone was at home, and many have continued to work at home even today,” said Siriouthay.

She said they heard about the availability of the Scott County Small Business Recovery Fund (SBRF) Grant Program from customers. “We had applied for a state grant, but we never received it, so we were very grateful to get grants from Scott County and the City of Shakopee,” said the local restaurant owner. The grant assisted with such things as supplementing payroll, utilities, supplies (like carryout trays and sanitizers), and the installation of plexiglass at the register.

“This program was a life saver for Thai Tempo. Thank you so much for all that you do for us and our community.”
The CARES Act provided $150 billion dollars in funding to state governments, eligible local governments, the District of Columbia, U.S. Territories, and tribal governments.

The state of Minnesota was allocated $1.87 billion from the CARES Act; In June 2020, it announced a plan to distribute $841 million of those funds to “support local government Coronavirus relief efforts.” These funds were distributed to counties, cities, and townships in the state using a formula based on population size. Scott County received over $17.7 million to fund its Coronavirus relief efforts; and established the $5.5 million SBRF Grant Program to “…provide emergency recovery support to small local businesses in Scott County adversely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.”

The Scott County Board of Commissioners approved targeted funding allocations for the following business sectors:
- Small for-profit businesses -- $3,500,000 in targeted funds
- For-profit farming operations -- $700,000 in targeted funds
- Licensed in-home childcare providers -- $1,000,000 in targeted funds

In August 2020, the local program was announced and applications were accepted. Acting as the program administrator on behalf of the County, NextStage received and processed grant applications from County businesses for each of the three target business sectors. The SBRF Grant Program awarded 302 grants, for a total of more than $3.4 million.

**Eligibility requirements**

The SBRF Program consisted of three separate subprograms, each with its own distinct terms, processes, and eligibility requirements. The SBRF program

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**Breakout of Planned Small Business Support Activity**

- **$2.96 Million For-Profit Small Businesses** 54%
- **$1.50 Million For-Profit Farming Operations** 27%
- **$770,000 In-Home Day Care Providers** 14%
- **$50,000 Workforce Development** 4%
- **$220,000 CDA Administration** 1%
prohibited the use of funds for expenses that were paid with funds from other COVID-19 related business assistance grant programs, such as the Paycheck Protection Program and Economic Injury Disaster Loan.

The SBRF Program offered small for-profit businesses and for-profit farming operations that completed the application process and met all requirements an award of:

- Up to $7,500 grant for entrepreneurs with no employees, depending on eligible expenses.
- Up to $15,000 grant for small businesses, depending on eligible expenses.
- Up to $25,000 grant for local for-profit farming operations, depending on eligible expenses.

Audit process

The application process required each applicant to complete an *Itemized Budget for Use of Funds* and enumerate the eligible expenses the business incurred within the reimbursement period (March 16 to August 31, 2020). As part of the application review process, NextStage staff examined every applicant’s submitted budget.

NextStage also selected a random sample of 23 grantees to be audited – roughly 14 percent of the 169 businesses that received assistance from the program, not including the businesses funded by the programs.
specifically designed for farmers and daycare providers. Only one of the businesses audited did not meet all the requirements, but it was not a serious infraction.

Grant approvals and unfunded applications
NextStage processed a total of 510 applications, and awarded 302 grants, between the three programs with an overall grant approval rate of 59.2 percent.

Three categories made up over half the grants awarded in this program: “Food” businesses – restaurants, bars, grocery stores, et cetera, received 24 percent of the total; “Service to Consumers” businesses received 19 percent; and “Retail” businesses rounded out the top three, with almost 12 percent of the funds.

Survey results
In consultation with Scott County staff, NextStage developed a survey to measure the satisfaction of grant recipients with the SBRF program, process, and outcomes. The survey invitation was sent to every Scott County business that received a small for-profit business grant -- a total of 169 invitations, with a response rate of 34 percent. This survey was also administered to grant recipients in other programs across the metropolitan area. Almost 95 percent of responding businesses were open at full or partial capacity as of February 2021. (This is consistent with the total of businesses across all counties and cities that participated in the survey.) None of the Scott County businesses receiving SBRF grants closed permanently.

In addition to remaining open, survey results reflected 65 percent of respondents indicated funds had a “significant” or “moderate” impact on their ability to keep all or most of their staff employed. Almost 67 percent of business owners indicated the grant they received from SBRF had a substantial impact on their ability to pay their bills.

Over all the areas, a higher percentage of Scott County businesses felt the program had a meaningful, positive impact on their business than the total comparison group. This difference is most significant in assessing the impact on their “ability to keep all or most of their staff employed.”
The Library is OPEN

For years, Scott County residents like Mitch Marlow have wanted more access to their library but have been limited by available open hours. Marlow was excited to join Scott County Library’s Extended Access Pilot, which engaged residents to test a new self-service system at the Jordan Library. Marlow and other residents were given access to Jordan from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m., seven days a week, through a technology system that unlocks the building using their library cards.

Scott County Library has been exploring ways to make library buildings more open to the public. For nearly a decade, residents have been able to reserve free meeting rooms before and after hours in multiple locations, and it remains one of the most in-demand library services. The positive response to meeting rooms inspired the Library to consider how they could offer access to other resources like WiFi, computers, and study spaces outside of staffed hours.

In 2019, the Library engaged the University of Minnesota’s Resilient Communities Project to research libraries with self-service hours in Scandinavian countries and other parts of the United States. Part of the research included a Community Needs Assessment, which garnered responses from nearly 1,800 Scott County residents. Residents expressed some concern about safety and opportunities to improve technology, which library staff took into serious consideration while designing a pilot at the Jordan Library. The service was named Extended Access to reflect the project goal: To add more access. It does not reduce or supplant staffed service hours; instead, it adds more hours and opportunities to use the library via self-service periods.

From September 1 through October 31, 2021, Mitch Marlow and 45 other library users -- representing multiple Scott County cities -- tested the system and actively provided feedback to library staff. During a typical visit, customers scan their library card number and enter their PIN at an entry panel to unlock the Jordan Library. Once inside, they can freely use in-library resources and self-service equipment such as the self-checkout machines, computers, printers, copiers, and study rooms.

To help gather data, the pilot project’s members were encouraged to give as much feedback as possible. No detail was too small: Adjustments were made to computer settings, staff procedures, cleaning schedules,
and more. Anonymous door count data were also gathered. During the pilot, the Jordan Library was successfully unlocked over 400 times, and the system reports showed that early mornings (6 a.m. – 8 a.m.) and weekends were popular times to visit, reflecting how the service complements commutes, work schedules, and leisure times.

“It gave me a chance to use the library when it’s convenient and quiet,” said Marlow, who also praised the increased availability of the library’s computers. Computer use was one of the top activities identified by the pilot members in the Library’s final evaluation survey, along with picking up holds and leisurely browsing the collection. “I use the library a lot to check my email, because I don’t have internet access at home. It really helps me to be able to come here seven days a week,” noted another pilot member on the evaluation survey.

Extended Access offers new opportunities to visitors who prefer using the library when it is less crowded – whether for remote work, studying, personal preference, or social distancing. “It was a great experience and provided me a distraction free space to do my homework. I was so much more productive!” noted a student pilot member.

Another pilot member further explained: “I really appreciated being able to do the work I wanted to do at a time convenient to me, when I was going to be near the library, and not just during open hours. This was very helpful to me. In the age of COVID, I also felt safer being in the library when it was almost empty (another pilot user did come in while I was there but that meant there were only two of us). This is an amazing opportunity being offered to Scott County residents.”

Procedures are in place to ensure visitors have a safe, clean, and welcoming experience during unstaffed hours. Cameras and motion-activated lights are installed throughout the space to monitor activity. Library leadership also communicated with local law enforcement to ensure they are aware of the service in the rare case of an emergency.

“I found the program to work seamlessly! I love the freedom and increased access. When I encountered other users, we either ignored each other or politely said hello. It always felt safe and well managed,” replied a pilot member on the Library’s evaluation survey. “We’ve had no incidents. It’s clear our community deeply cares about their library,” adds Jordan Library Branch Manager Brittany Brown. “It was great to open up a community space and give people ownership of how it’s used and taken care of.”

Because of Extended Access, the Jordan Library is now available 112 hours a week – making it one of the most open libraries in the United States. Few libraries have implemented this system in the U.S., which means Scott County Library is pioneering a new service model. The Library hopes to expand the service over the next few years after surveying each library location with city and County partners. Some buildings may require strategic facility updates, such as partitioning staff areas and added technology infrastructure.

Currently, the service is only available in Jordan, but anyone aged 16 and older with a Scott County Library card may sign up to use it. To sign up, drop into any SCL location to attend a brief orientation with library staff and sign a user agreement. Teens aged 16 and 17 must have a parent attend and sign on their behalf. To learn more about Extended Access, visit www.scottlib.org/EA or call the Jordan Library at (952) 496-8050 during open hours.
This winter, local officials across Scott County are beginning the effort to redraw their voting district boundaries based on 2020 Census data, which showed that the County added 21,000 residents over the past decade. Hitting a population of 150,928, most of this growth occurred in the urban areas -- particularly on the north side of the County -- as well as rural pockets in the eastern area. Other areas experienced moderate increases or slight decreases in population.

Every ten years, local officials need to account for these shifting growth patterns as they balance manageable voting districts. “The purpose of redistricting is to ensure that the people of each district are equally represented,” said Scott County Auditor Cindy Geis, who is leading the effort at the County level and assisting officials at the cities and townships.

Cities and townships will use 2020 Census data to create precincts, which are like the building blocks for County Commissioner Districts. Geis said the ideal size of a precinct is 2,000 voters to efficiently administer voting efforts and manage polling locations. Based on where growth has occurred over the past decade, many of the current precinct boundaries will need to be redrawn, and their boundaries must be set by March 29. Historically, most townships in the County have had one voting precinct; the larger northern cities (Shakopee, Prior Lake, and Savage) have had seven to 14 precincts in each city; and the rural cities (Jordan, Belle Plaine, New Prague, and Elko New Market) have had one to two precincts. (Our newest city – Credit River – historically had one during its days as a township.)

When setting these local municipal precinct boundaries, Ann Orlofsky, city clerk for Prior Lake, said not only is it important to understand where growth has occurred, but also where it is expected to occur over the next 10 years. “We plan to assess whether there is a need to add more voting precincts for the 2022 election,” Orlofsky said. "Several factors need to be considered, such as school district boundaries, population density and the potential for future development, as well as the availability of a new polling location."

Census and Redistricting: What you should know

Many of the current precinct boundaries will be redrawn for the 2022 elections
Between 2010 and 2020, the population increased by **16%**

Scott County at a glance

- **RACE**
  - White
  - Asian
  - African American
  - Two or more races
  - American Indian or Alaskan Native

By 2040, the 65+ population is projected to increase by **50%**

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Because the process to redraw right-sized precincts is based on who lives where, it is an intrinsically geographic one that requires the integration of many factors, which can be addressed most effectively utilizing local Geographic Information Systems (GIS) tools. This mapping tool gives local governments, the public, and advocacy groups access to the redistricting process and provide more transparency into the process.

“Communities are using GIS mapping tools to better understand the trends and factors at work in a region, assess redistricting scenarios, and build consensus,” said Tony Monsour, County GIS analyst who is assisting in the redistricting efforts. “After district boundaries are finalized, the demographic data used for this process remain valuable and can be used to improve election management.”

Once municipalities have drawn their local precincts, the County will need to set any new boundaries for County Commissioner voting districts and Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) voting districts. These voting districts need to follow local precinct boundaries and should encompass an equal proportion of the County’s total 2020 Census population (roughly 30,000 people, in the case of the five Commissioner Districts). District populations cannot vary more than 10 percent from the average for all districts in the County. These boundary plans must be set by April 26.

Scott County residents will have an opportunity to participate in the redistricting process in April. Please review the column to the right for more information.

So if you thought your participation in the 2020 Census effort was a useless endeavor, it certainly wasn’t! “It is so important to participate in the Census,” said Orlofsky. “The Census is a tool to help invest in your community for the next ten years. Census results provide direction for investments in your community for the next 10 years -- the data not only helps determine local voting precincts, but also helps with decisions about where to build new schools and how public funds are distributed.”

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**We Want to Hear From You**

Please join us at one of these open house sessions to review draft redistricting maps:

- April 11, Elko New Market Library 6:30-7:30pm
- April 11, Scott County Government Center 6:30-7:30pm
- April 13, Belle Plaine City Hall 6:30-7:30pm
- April 13, Prior Lake City Hall 6:30-7:30pm

You can also view and comment on draft maps by:

- Going to the Scott County Website www.scottcountymn.gov
- Visiting the Scott County Government Center, first floor atrium (see website for days and times).
Scott County has 295 centerline miles and 775 lane miles of paved highways, and to maintain this pavement to an acceptable performance level and extend pavement longevity, the County currently spends around $10 million each year through its Pavement Preservation Program (PPP). Pavement preservation practices include annual crack filling, seal coating, milling, and overlaying the top layer of bituminous material. However, at about 25 years of age, some roadways will need to have the bituminous pavement completely removed and replaced. For these roadways, the Highway Department has been experimenting with a new technique that promises to provide a better pavement product and longer lifecycle.

Today, roadways are constructed with engineered sand and granular materials that provide a strong base on which to place the bituminous driving surface. However, a significant number of the County’s older roads have a road base that contains a high percentage of clay material. Clay material traps water, which in turn weakens the road base. When a bituminous pavement is placed on this weak base, the lack of proper support will cause the pavement to fail prematurely. Excessive pavement cracking and rutting often result from a poor subbase; in addition, operating heavy equipment on a soft base can cause severe rutting and pumping of the base materials. A strong base will extend the life of a pavement, and it may also reduce the required thickness of the bituminous pavement, resulting in significant cost savings.

In pavement rehabilitation projects requiring only milling and replacing a few inches with new surface pavement, spot locations of a weak base can negatively affect a relatively good roadway. Once the pavement surface is milled, soft base areas are often too weak to support heavy construction equipment and the section of roadway would fall apart. This results in unanticipated construction delays and costly repairs of both the damaged pavement and the subgrade.

In order to address these issues, the County has been experimenting with a process called Cement Stabilized Subgrade (CSS). During this process, Portland cement material is worked into the top eight to 10 inches of a weak base prior to paving. The cement chemically reacts with the base materials to improve the overall strength of the subgrade material. This creates a stronger and more consistent platform on which to place the bituminous pavement.

Scott County first used this process in 2019 on a four-mile segment of County Highway (CH) 59 in St. Lawrence and Belle Plaine Townships. Stabilizing and strengthening the aggregate base allowed the bituminous pavement thickness to be reduced, saving $250,000 in paving costs. In addition, the CSS process eliminated an estimated $150,000 of repair and rework of soft spots in the base. Using the CSS process on this project yielded an overall project savings of $70,000, reduced the construction period, and minimized inconvenience to local residents.

The County has implemented the CSS process on four projects totaling 20 lane miles to date. The roads are performing well and are expected to have an extended life with a higher quality surface that has less cracking.

CSS benefits have included:
- Sustainable solution to numerous base soil problems
- Improved roadway base strength
- Structural benefit to pavement
- Ease of implementation
- Increased life-cycle expectation
- Reduced overall cost and time of construction
The figure to the right shows recent pavement projects in rural areas where poor base soils were encountered. Prior to using the CSS process, projects experienced additional cost and construction time. When the CSS process was implemented, both extra project costs and construction delays were dramatically reduced.

With positive results of implementing the CSS process, the Highway Department will continue to look for new techniques that improve pavement quality, reduce costs, and minimize disruptions to traffic during construction.

In 2021, the U.S. Congress authorized the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), which was put in place to help the nation’s recovery from the pandemic. As part of ARPA, local units of government were provided funds to focus on public health, economic development, staffing, revenue recapture, and infrastructure investments in broadband and water/sewer.

After two intensive works sessions, the Scott County Board provided the following direction: ARPA funds should be invested in programs that:

- We would not be able to do with typical/regular funding sources;
- Will yield a noticeable impact ten years from now;
- Ensured community engagement in the design, development, and operations of the program(s); and
- Are aligned and complementary with and not duplicative of other existing programs.

Some projects include:
- Several of the projects under consideration are in the area of housing. The extension of sewer, water, and streets to service these homes would help provide the necessary groundwork for much-needed entry-level housing.
- A potential program in partnership with the school districts would take a look at educational neglect prevention, emphasizing the need to stay and progress in school.
- Construction of a drop-in day care, in partnership with Southwest Metro Schools, is currently under evaluation.
- The extension of the "Open Library" program (see page 17) to our other six systems libraries is being strongly considered.
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