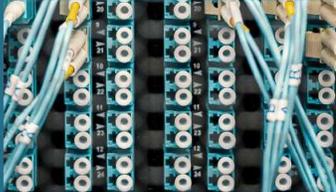




APA-ISS SPRING CONFERENCE

FRIDAY, APRIL 16, 2021 AND FRIDAY, APRIL 23, 2021



Zoomtowns: Creating 21st Century Boomtowns

APRIL 16, 2021

9:00 AM - 10:15 AM

(CM | 1.25)

Gone are the days of economic development professionals strictly courting site selectors and searching for the Next Big Thing to locate in their communities. Across the country, towns and cities are competing to attract the nation's remote workers. What was already trending in the form of cash incentives or tax benefits came into sharper focus as the COVID-19 pandemic forced more Americans to work from home and forced companies to reckon with the operational impacts of a dispersed employment base. With many companies moving towards an increased interest in engaging a remote workforce, where does that leave communities that have typically struggled to attract large employers? What is needed to be a 21st century boomtown?

Join us for this session as we hear from Chris Collins and Molly Hammond of USDA discuss resources and programs designed to help rural communities holistically address their infrastructure needs to promote remote workforce population attraction. Also joining the conversation will be Jonathan Weyer from the City Hillsboro, who will also discuss his community's efforts pre-COVID – and what is planned post-COVID – to attract remote workers to their city of 6,400.



Christopher "Chris" Collins is an engineering graduate of Tennessee Technology University and has been in the telecommunication industry since '2000. Chris began his telecommunication career with a telephone cooperative in Tennessee where he led their very first Fiber to the Home deployment in '2004 leading deployment from design through construction oversight. As an engineer at the cooperative, Chris maintained the outside plant facilities according to Rural Utilities Service (RUS) standards and later joined RUS by taking the position of General Field Representative (GFR) in '2008. He currently administers USDA telecommunication programs within the States of Missouri and Illinois and was part of the USDA ReConnect Pilot Program team assisting with new electronic application system and review processes.

With over 20 years of telecommunication experience, Chris assists telecom and electric companies, as well as; local governments in obtaining and completing federally funded projects to expand telecommunications and broadband throughout Missouri and Illinois.

Molly Hammond is the Acting State Director of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development in Illinois. Hammond will serve in an interim capacity until a permanent State Director is named.

Before being appointed to this role, Hammond served as the Illinois Associate Director for USDA Rural Development, overseeing agency operations and managing administrative functions for Rural Development in the state.

In a previous role at Rural Development, she worked with businesses and lending institutions throughout the state on financing new and expanding business ventures, coordinated the agency's renewable energy and energy efficiency efforts in Illinois and coordinated available programs with Illinois electric and telephone cooperatives. Prior to Rural Development, she worked in commercial and mortgage banking. She is past Chair of the Board for Illinois Rural Partners and a graduate of the University of Illinois with a Bachelor of Science in Finance.



Jonathan Weyer is the Community and Economic Planner for the city of Hillsboro, Illinois. He wrote Hillsboro 2030, the town's strategic plan which was adopted by the town council in November 2020. Further, he's been building the city's marketing efforts from scratch that began when he led the effort to develop a marketing/tourism website launched in December 2020. Jonathan has also been asked to serve on the Montgomery County Economic Development Board and is expected to be elected the first week of April. Before he stepped into the planning world, he worked in a variety of nonprofit ventures, worked as a writer and an editor (he helped develop a book on exorcism). Currently, he volunteers as the Steward of Trail Planning and Community Development for the Wisconsin Way, a pilgrim trail started in 2014. Weyer is passionate about helping small communities figure out how to encourage human flourishing through practicing responsible planning that seeks to engage all citizens in order to develop places that are equitable, ecological and economically beautiful places to live.