



Upcoming Dates:



April 6-7
Governmental Affairs
Leadership Conference

April 12
Annual Town Meeting

May 1
Deadline for Rural Nurse
Practitioner Scholarship
Applications

May 30
Memorial Day

July 6-7
Resolutions Committee

March/April 2016

Volume 7 Issue 2

Broadband's Connection to Agriculture & Farmland Values

Recent studies suggest a link between broadband access and farmland

By Brenda Matherly

Access to high-speed Internet is important to rural Illinois. In all areas of the state, broadband plays a critical role in agriculture as well as healthcare, education and economic development. The failure of any one of these industries in a rural area could equal the end of a viable community. But, what specifically does a lack of connectivity mean for agriculture? Recent studies would suggest a solid link between broadband access and farmland values.

It's certainly a sign of the times when a buyer of farmland asks these questions, "what is the level of internet connectivity within each field," or, "what are the available upload and download speeds spanning the property?"

So, that begs a question of our own: "How connected are our farms?"

The 2012 Census of Agriculture conducted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture offers some insight into that discussion. According to the Census, 70% of all farms have internet access. This is up from the 2007 Census that reported only 57% coverage. That's good news in terms of widespread connectivity. However, what about the question of speed? Additional data from the Census shows that many of these connections were via technologies that might not be "up-to-speed" when it comes to accessing and delivering the large quantities of data that are associated with today's advanced farming practices. Speeds that can keep pace with today's precision agriculture and the increasing use of telematics (the ability to combine telecommunications with remote data in order to send, receive and store that information gathered by remote/mobile objects, such as a tractor).

*(See **Broadband** on page 3)*

Did You Know...?

 The Ice Cream Sundae originated in Evanston, IL

 Twinkies were invented in River Forest, IL

 The world's largest bakery is the Nabisco factory in Chicago, IL. (1,800,000 square feet!)



Funding 9-1-1 Services

As of January 1, 2016, all lines, both wired and wireless, will pay 87 cents per line.

By Brenda Matherly

Over the last few years, 9-1-1 services have begun facing what some may call an emergency of their own. Funding levels for 9-1-1 services had been significantly reduced causing some 9-1-1 systems to consider cutting back on skilled personnel as well as delaying valuable technology upgrades. These cuts would impact important emergency services that are critical to all Illinois residents, and especially vital to farmers and those living in rural areas.

Funding for 9-1-1 services comes primarily from a surcharge that is placed on phone bills for both wired (land lines) and wireless (cell) phone lines. Until a recent legislative change, the surcharge on wired lines varied among the 200 9-1-1 systems within Illinois, but ranged from \$0.00 to upwards of \$4.00 a line. Those wired surcharge costs were in the hands of the voters. If additional dollars were requested by the local system it was up to the voters to approve that increase via a referendum.

*(See **9-1-1** on page 7)*

Annual Town Meeting Actions Require Advance Work

By Kevin Rund

The electors present at the annual town meeting have significant powers, even the power to create taxes or to raise existing tax rates. However, that action is treated very much like a standard referendum in that it cannot simply be brought up and passed at the annual town meeting. Instead some preliminary actions are required.

First of all, a petition must be passed. Illinois statute provides that: *"Notwithstanding the provisions of any other Act, except as provided in Section 6-620 of the Illinois Highway Code, before establishing or increasing any township tax rate that may be established or increased by the electors at the annual township meeting, a petition containing the signatures of not less than 10% of the registered voters of the township must be presented to the township clerk authorizing that action."* [60 ILCS 1/30-20(b)]

Secondly, any actions to be carried out at the annual town meeting must be included on a published agenda for the meeting. That agenda needs to be created by the township board at least 15 days in advance. Then the township clerk must give notice of the meeting and its agenda by *posting written or printed notices in 3 of the most public places in the township at least 15 days before the meeting* [60 ILCS 1/30-10(b)]. If a newspaper is published in the township, then at least one notice of the meeting and agenda shall be published there.

In this manner, state statute provides some assurance that voters are made aware of any actions that might be taken at the annual town meeting regarding taxes and other significant issues.

LINK

ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN

To the legal voters, residents of the Town of _____
in the County of _____ and State of Illinois, that the Annual Town Meeting of said Town
will take place on
Tuesday, April 12, 2016
being the second Tuesday of said month
at the hour of 6:01 o'clock P.M. at [Location]
for the transaction of the miscellaneous business of the said town; and after a Moderator having
been elected, will proceed to hear and consider reports of officers, and decide on such measures
as may, in pursuance of law, come before the meeting; and especially to consider and decide the
following:
[Agenda]

Mark Your Calendars for April 12:

Plan to attend your township's Annual Town Meeting

By Brenda Matherly

That notice (above) will be appearing soon on bulletin boards, light poles, town hall doors and in store windows. It can also show up in local newspapers. It heralds the coming of a form of true democracy still functioning in 20 states in this nation.

Every township in Illinois must hold an Annual Town Meeting on the second Tuesday of April. It should be held after 6:00 p.m. (unless the electors fix some other time) at a place in the township picked by the township board.

While anyone is welcome to attend these meetings, only the electors of the township (persons registered to vote in the township) are eligible to vote on questions put before the assembly. All questions on motions are determined by a majority of the electors present and voting. A call for a "division of the house" may be made.

Notification of the meeting is to be given by the town clerk by posting written or printed notices in three of the most public places in the town at least 10 days before the meeting, and if there is an English language newspaper published in the town, by at least one publication in that newspaper, before the meeting.

A moderator, elected from among all electors at the meeting, presides over the meeting making announcements of the business, preserving order, and deciding all questions of order. The moderator has the same power as an election judge.

At a town meeting, the town clerk is the only elected township official to have an assigned role; he/she must keep minutes of the proceedings. The other elected officers of the township have no special authorities; they are like any other elec-

tor present.

The powers that may be exercised by voters at the Annual Town Meeting are extensive and include tax rate increases and disposition of property. For a complete list of those powers, visit: <https://www.toi.org/Resources/Download-Center/>, and select "Powers of Electors" towards the bottom of the list.

Special Town Meetings may be held when the board of trustees of the township, or at least 15 voters of the town, shall file in the office of the town clerk, a statement, in writing, that a special meeting is necessary for the interests of the town, and setting forth the objects of the meeting.

For more on the Annual Town Meeting, visit the Township Officials of Illinois website at: <https://www.toi.org/TOI-Events/>

LINK

Broadband

(Continued from page 1)

A breakdown of these technologies shows 7% of farmers are still using dial-up and 13% are relying on satellite. An additional 13% have skipped right over computer technologies and are using cellular networks - can you hear me now?

In most cases, these would not be considered reliable connectivity and fall short of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) definition of high-speed internet. The FCC defines broadband as 25 Megabytes (Mbps) per second download speed and 3 Mbps upload. Anything less could be a factor in driving down the per-acre price of farmland in underserved areas.

Agricultural producers, being rural in nature, are typical of the rural residents that stand to benefit from improved access to high-speed internet. However, the discrepancy in broadband availability and adoption between rural and urban areas could be improving with the transition from one generation of farmer to the next. The latest data from the National Broadband Map shows that while 100% of urban residents have access to at least one broadband provider, rural residents are gaining ground, up from 57% several years ago to 70% access to broadband today.

The new generation of farmers is facing a number of changes in the distribution of information necessary to operate their business and receive the most profit from their land. These changes include a switch from hardcopy distribution to delivery through online services. Farmers, looking to invest in the long-term profitability of the farm areas, are facing significant efficiency improvements and challenges when considering the benefits broadband offers, including all things technology driven. This ranges from the basics of:

- Government farm programs and applications moving to online distribution
- Up-to-date market and weather information provided electronically

Purchasing and ordering farm supplies through online services

To the advanced:

- Full application of precision agriculture technology
- The adoption of data transfer from field-to-home through telematics
- Collecting, processing and accessing on-demand information through "big data" participation
- Drone technology

It's clear that agriculture has moved into the era of technology and farmers are searching for the best connectivity to protect their ag investments. But, keeping agriculture connected continues to require support for funding of rural electric cooperatives, telephone cooperatives, and other entities that have existing infrastructure and expertise to provide improved broadband service to more rural areas. Support for state and national funding to rural providers building that "last-mile" infrastructure to extend deeper within their rural networks and closer to that "last-mile" recipient.

While building infrastructure is a key part in improving access, additional hurdles to establishing more private projects and carriers are adoption and utilization in rural areas. The Federal Communication Commission (FCC) reports in their *National Broadband Plan* that 22% of non-adopters claim "digital literacy" as an obstacle to broadband adoption. The report states that an additional 19% of potential users do not feel information delivered over broadband is useful to them.

As a result, adoption and utilization barriers have the potential to reduce the number of "customers" in rural communities where potential users are already limited due to sparse population. The incentive for providers to offer services is compromised without a strong "customer" base willing to subscribe to broadband services.

By addressing adoption and utilization

concerns through education and awareness in rural areas, private providers will gain a stronger "customer" base. Creating demand provides incentives to private providers and the opportunity for price reduction for service in rural areas.

Efforts to drive broadband demand should also include support for the development of public and/or private training and consumer education programs targeting rural residents. Supporting these programs has the potential to increase adoption and utilization of broadband in rural areas.

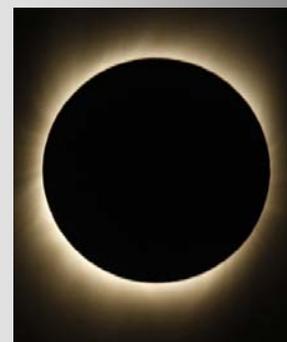
The value of your farm might just depend on it...

[LINK](#)

Southern IL to cash in on Solar Eclipse

Source: Associated Press (January 19, 2016)

Tourism officials in southern Illinois say they're already preparing for the Aug. 21, 2017, solar eclipse, which is expected to draw thousands of visitors. It's the first total solar eclipse over the United States' mainland since 1979 and the eclipse will reach its point of greatest duration - about two minutes and 40 seconds - a few miles south of Carbondale. Southern Illinois University officials project 30,000 to 50,000 visitors on campus for the eclipse.



Local Government Consolidation

By Russell Orrill

During the current spring legislative session there have been multiple bills filed in the Illinois General Assembly regarding local government consolidation. To date, there are 10 pieces of legislation that will look to accomplish specific recommendations that were proposed by the Lt. Governor's *Local Government Consolidation and Unfunded Mandates Task Force*.

Most of these proposals would make it easier for townships (primarily) and local governments to consolidate and/or dissolve. One way they are trying to streamline this process is by allowing county boards to pass an ordinance that would put the question of dissolution on the ballot for the voters to decide.

Currently, the only way to dissolve a township is through front door referendum that is initiated by a citizen led petition. These bills are also making it easier for voters to approve of the referendum on Election Day. For example, current township dissolution requires referendum approval by a majority of the voters in at least $\frac{3}{4}$ of the townships of the county, which must contain at least a majority of the population. Several of the bills that have been filed this spring make it easier for local referendum approval by requiring only a simple majority of the voters in the entire county to approve.

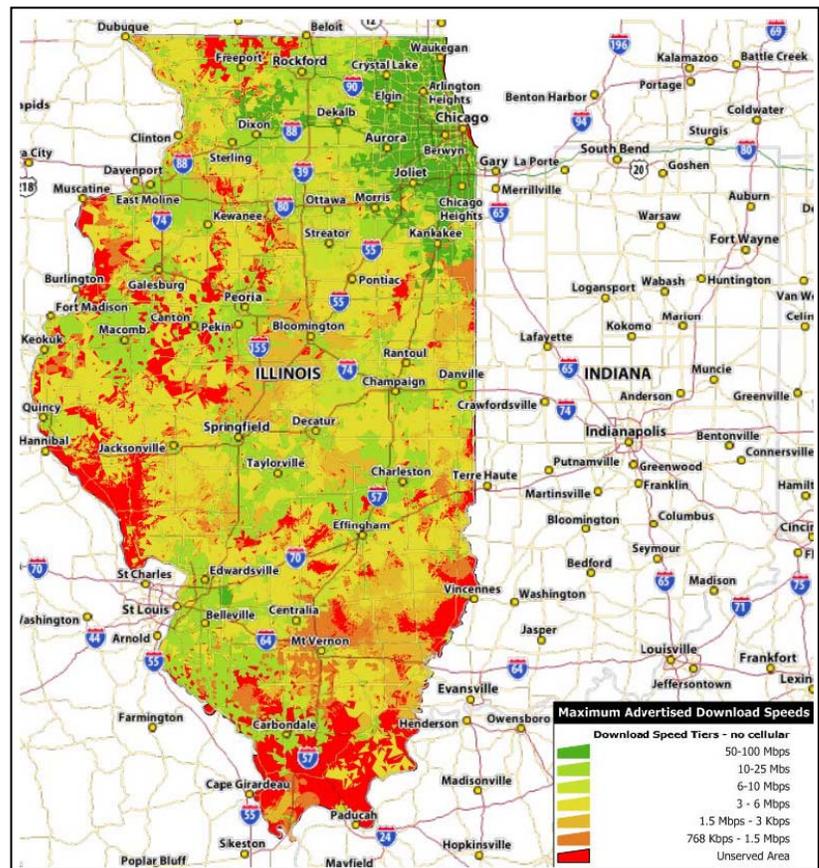
At the heart of just about every bill that has been filed this spring are these considerations about dissolution approval:

- What the petition signature requirements should be on the ballot (10% of the voting population in the County? 5% of the voters in each township?, etc.)
- Should County Boards be allowed to pass an ordinance putting a front door referendum in place that would be placed on the ballot in the next election?
- How many voters would be needed to approve of the referendum? (Simple majority of the entire county? A majority of the townships in the county? All of the townships in the county?, etc.)

(See **Legislation** on page 6)

(Continued from page 1)

The map below is a graphic of the Statewide broadband coverage by maximum advertised download speed. (Map source: *BroadbandIllinois.org*.)



Glossary of Technology Terms

Broadband - A high-speed internet connection or telecommunication in which a wide band of frequencies is available to transmit information. Currently defined by the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) as 25 Mbps per second download and 3 Mbps upload.

Wired Broadband - a broadband connection through some type of wireline provider (cable, Digital Subscriber Line, fiber). These connections can often be routed wirelessly throughout the premises.

Wireless Broadband - a **broadband** connection to the internet that is accessed without cables.

Mobile Broadband - This is the use of 3G or 4G technology, which uses mobile phone signals to connect to high-speed internet.

Dial-up - Connection to the internet via a modem and telephone line; limited to 56 Kbps connection speed.

Satellite Internet - Internet access through communications satellites. Speeds can reach broadband thresholds but connections sometimes have issues with interference.

Telematics - Wireless communication that allows for the transmission of data between a home-base location and a remote or in-the-field location.

Governmental Affairs Leadership Conference: Change. Challenge. Opportunity.

"Change. Challenge. Opportunity." is the theme for the 2016 Illinois Farm Bureau (IFB) Governmental Affairs Leadership Conference (GALC), to be held April 6-7, 2016, at the Crowne Plaza in Springfield.

With two days of general sessions and workshops, attendees will have the opportunity to discuss the changes, face the challenges and create opportunities that impact Illinois farms, as well as access timely information and tools needed to help advance the agenda of farmers and agriculture.

GALC workshop sessions will focus on three tracks: water quality, local government and leadership. Speakers will also highlight current federal and state issues facing agriculture, including GMOs, livestock, transportation and trade.

IFB members will have the opportunity to hear from newly-elected American Farm Bureau Federation President Zippy Duvall. Duvall will spend both days with IFB members, engaging them in discussion and asking for their opinions.

Again this year, attendees will see firsthand what happens

when hundreds of farmers partner together on issues during the Statewide Legislative Reception Wednesday evening.

The cost of the conference is \$50 for Wednesday only, \$30 for Thursday only, or \$70 for both days, which is a savings of \$10. Attendees may register for the conference or obtain additional information, by contacting their local county Farm Bureau office or visiting www.ilfb.org.



Homegrown by Heroes Service to our country and our farm lifestyle

By: Cynthia Haskins

With a growing number of people leaving the farm lifestyle and moving out of rural Illinois, it is important to look at new programs that could help address some of those concerns. The Homegrown By Heroes program is an excellent example of this type of ingenuity. This program creates a renewed desire in agriculture, benefits our rural areas, strengthens the production and sales of Illinois-grown

products and honors our service men and women.

Over 40 organizations came together on Mar. 7, 2016, to serve on the Farmer Veteran Program Collaborative. The Farmer Veteran Programs, Statewide Collaborative is for organizations that wish to serve military veterans desiring to pursue food, farming, and agricultural careers.

The primary focus of this effort is to get the word out about the Homegrown By Heroes—Illinois Product program. Illinois Products is a state branding program established to denote farm products grown and raised by military veterans or active duty service members via a specialized logo. The *Homegrown By Heroes - Illinois Products* program will afford Illinois farmers who served, or are currently serving in any branch of the United States Military the ability to use the specialized Homegrown By Heroes - Illinois Products logo on their product packaging, labels, marketing materials, and the like. The brand is a new way of communicating to consumers that Home-

grown By Heroes— Illinois Products represents the labors of hardworking veterans and service members that have now chosen to become farmers to feed the nation. Moreover, Homegrown By Heroes - Illinois Products affords consumers a direct, immediate, and measurable way to "thank a veteran or current soldier for their service" by purchasing their products.

The Collaborative is continuing to work toward several programs including, farmer training, farmers' markets opportunities and partnerships, assisting veterans in developing value-added products, fostering relationships with retailers and food service organizations, making resources available for veterans wishing to raise livestock and commodity crops, developing mentorships between experienced farmers and veterans and identifying land and equipment access. To learn more or to sign up for the Homegrown By Heroes Illinois Products logo, please visit the Illinois Department of Agriculture's website: <https://www.agr.state.il.us/homegrown-by-heroes-illinois-products-logo>.



Legislation

(Continued from page 4)

The following is taken from Illinois Farm Bureau's® *QuickView* from early March and briefly describes the major bills addressing local government consolidation that have been introduced in Springfield.

HOME RULE TAX LIMITATION- HB 4238 (Rep. Cabello)

Under HB 4238, no home rule unit in Illinois could impose any tax increase or levy any new tax levy without first seeking approval through referendum. HB 4238 has been referred to House Rules Committee.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REDUCTION AND EFFICIENCY - HB 4501 (Rep. Yingling), HB 4979 (Rep. Sandack), SB 2463 (Sen. Righter)
HB 4501, HB 4979, and SB 2463 would allow all county boards within the State to dissolve and consolidate units of local governments whose boards are appointed by the county board. The county board would pass a resolution or ordinance to dissolve a specific local government unit, which would be initiated through back-door referendum. HB 4501 and HB 4979 have been referred to the House Rules committee. SB 2463 has been referred to the committee on Assignments in the Senate.

TOWNSHIP MODERNIZATION AND CONSOLIDATION - HB 4975 (Rep. Yingling)

HB 4975 creates the Township Modernization and Consolidation Act, which allows for township dissolution through front door referendum. The question to dissolve through referendum could be accomplished by a citizen initiated petition or by county board ordinance. The referendum would be accepted if approved by the majority of the voters in the county. The bill also provides for transfer of property, assets, personnel, contractual obligations, liabilities, tax levies, rights and duties from the township to the county if dissolution does occur. HB 4975 has been referred to the House Rules Committee.

SINGULAR TOWNSHIP DISSOLUTION - SB 2287 (Sen. Althoff)

SB 2287 allows for singular townships to dissolve into the county, provided that a citizen initiated petition to dissolve the township is approved by local referendum. Referendum approval must be agreed to by a majority of voters in the entire county. The bill would also transfer the duties, debts, property, and obligations from the township being dissolved to the county. SB 2287 has been referred to the Committee on Assignments in the Senate.

TOWNSHIP BOUNDARY CAP - SB 2289 (Sen. Althoff)

SB 2289 removes the 126 square mile cap on township size, while also removing the minimum requirement for each township to have an equalized assessed valuation of \$10,000,000.00. If township boundaries are consolidated, SB 2289 would allow for the county board to pass an ordinance requiring a new property tax levy rate to be levied on the newly consolidated township, unless otherwise specified in the petition to consolidate. SB 2289 has been referred to the Committee on Assignments in the Senate.

TOWNSHIP BOUNDARY CAP - HB 5885 (Rep. Kifowit)

HB 5885 removes the 126 square mile cap on township size if the county board decides to redraw township boundaries. HB 5885 has been referred to the House Rules committee.

MUNICIPALITY TAX LEVY - HB 4434 (Rep. DeLuca)

HB 4434 would allow the county clerk to automatically extend a tax levy for a municipality who fails to adopt a tax levy ordinance. The county clerk can only extend the tax levy equal to the rate in the most recent levy year, or the maximum rate permitted to be extended if a valid levy ordinance had been adopted. HB 4434 passed the House Cities and Villages Committee 6-0-0 and is on Second Reading.

DISCONTINUE TOWNSHIP INTO MUNICIPALITY - SB 2288 (Sen. Althoff), SB 2462 (Sen. Duffy), HB 4968 (Rep. Demmer)

SB 2288, SB 2462, and HB 4968 would allow townships to dissolve into a coterminous or substantially coterminous municipality. Currently this law only applies to the Village of Evanston, IL. The bills listed would apply this law to all townships falling within those requirements of being within a coterminous municipality. SB 2288 and SB 2462 have been referred to the Committee on Assignments in the Senate. HB 4968 has been referred to the House Rules Committee.

TOWNSHIP CONSOLIDATION - SB 2470 (Sen. Duffy), HB 4980 (Rep. Franks)

SB 2470 and HB 4980 removes the 126 square mile cap on the size of a township, and that if a township size is altered a new property tax rate shall be levied on the affected townships. The bill also allows the county board, by resolution, to initiate a referendum to dissolve all townships into the county, which would have to be approved by at least three fourths of the townships containing at least a majority of the populations in the county. The county board would also have the option of restructuring into a commission form of government, dissolving the offices of township assessor and multi-township assessor by either county board approval or referendum, and to abolish a road district with less than 25 miles of roads within the district. SB 2470 has been referred to the Senate Assignments Committee. HB 4980 has been referred to the House Rules Committee.

ANNEXATION PUBLIC HEARING - HB 6033 (Rep. Pritchard)

HB 6033 would require a public hearing to occur before any annexation of territory by a municipality, and landowners within one half mile of the proposed annexation will be notified of the public hearing. HB 6033 has been referred to the House Rules Committee.

LINK

9-1-1

(Continued from page 1)

Although the surcharge for wired lines varied, the surcharge on wireless phones was a set fee statewide of \$0.73 per line. Of that \$0.73 surcharge, 9-1-1 systems receive \$0.57, \$0.15 was deposited into a fund to reimburse wireless carriers for their expenses, and the Illinois Commerce Commission receives \$0.01 for administrative costs. Those surcharge monies were collected by wireless carriers and then distributed by the state to 9-1-1 systems based on the number of wireless phone lines billed within their coverage area.

With the rise of cell phone use over the past 10 years, the number of land line connections in Illinois has been greatly reduced. In fact, according to the 9-1-1 Future Technology and Financial Needs Study released by the General Assembly in August 2011, wireless calls now account for more than 75% of all 9-1-1 calls. As people get rid of their land lines and go exclusively with wireless phones, the amount of revenue that 9-1-1 systems received from the wired surcharge had been significantly reduced. Since the landline "bust," 9-1-1 systems were experiencing a 20% shortfall in revenues. Some 9-1-1 centers, particularly in rural and downstate coun-

ties, reported even greater shortfalls. The revenue shortfall made many 9-1-1 officials seriously consider staff cut-backs, service cuts and delaying implementation of new technologies, including NextGen 9-1-1, which would further enhance 9-1-1 services, allowing callers to send texts, video and pictures, among other features. Advanced technology upgrades are costly, and many 9-1-1 officials were concerned as they saw their operating costs increase as revenues continued to go down.

Recently passed legislation changed the structure, rates and administration of 9-1-1 funding. One of the biggest changes was the adoption of a uniform single fee on wired lines, and an increased single fee on wireless phones. As of January 1, 2016 all lines, both wired and wireless will pay 87 cents per line.

While the increase on wireless lines will likely be felt the same by cell phone users in both rural and urban counties, the uniform single fee on wired lines might be beneficial for rural residents. With the varied surcharge, rates were based on the number of landlines funding the local 9-1-1 system.

In rural areas, those charges tended to be higher than in more populated urban

areas. The lower population base and fewer subscribers to landlines created a higher surcharge in rural areas. The new uniform rate will likely lower the current surcharge amount being paid by rural residents. Conversely, more populated urban areas could see an increase in their rate.

This new law also created an office for the statewide 9-1-1 administration. This office of administration was created within the Department of the Illinois State Police. According to the new law, beginning January 1, 2016, the Office of the Statewide 9-1-1 Administrator will be responsible for developing, implementing, and overseeing a uniform statewide 9-1-1 system for all areas of the State outside of municipalities having a population over 500,000.

Additional considerations within the law would allow for the state-level, centralized collection of 9-1-1 revenue, including "no sweeps" language that would prohibit the transfer of surcharge revenue.

It's yet to be seen if this new law will provide the much needed "critical care" and resuscitation of our 9-1-1 system across the state.

[LINK](#)

ENTREPRENEURS IN INNOVATIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLANNING FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES

A recent report released by Lieutenant Governor Sanquinetti, chair of the Governor's Rural Affairs Council, stresses the importance of including entrepreneurs in innovative economic development planning for rural communities. The report, *Rural Illinois: New Challenges, New Opportunities* also identified the difficulties that small, rural communities are having "attracting younger people" and "competing with metro areas when engaged in traditional industry recruiting efforts."

[LINK](#)