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Infrastructure and facility maintenance projects are front and center for municipalities and local government entities

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TAKING A HIGHER PRIORITY

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Infrastructure and facility maintenance projects are front and center for municipalities and local government entities

By Tammy Rimes, MPA

When budgets become tight, and unforeseen challenges or emergencies occur, government entities must re-prioritize operational needs, often deferring infrastructure projects and facility maintenance. However, as buildings continue to age, and the backlog of maintenance and upgrade projects becomes longer, infrastructure is taking a higher priority for municipalities, school districts and higher education institutions.

FEDERAL FUNDING AIDS THE EFFORT

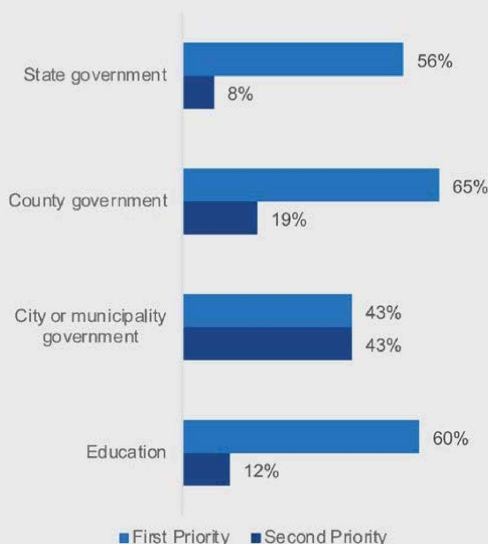
The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), enacted by Congress and signed into law by President Joe Biden on November 15, 2021, provides major funding into the nation's infrastructure. According to the White House, the goal is to rebuild America's roads, bridges and rails; expand access to clean drinking water; ensure every American has access to high-speed internet; tackle the climate crisis; advance environmental

justice; and invest in communities often left behind.

Safeware Inc., supplying safety equipment to governments across the country, has noticed a change in how states and local municipalities are spending their budgets. Safeware Vice President Rick Bond shares: "Our business has evolved from providing personal protection products to offering a broader family of products, as communities invest in more infrastructure. Government compliance and regulation are a big factor in these purchases, as well as federal dollars to support the initiatives."

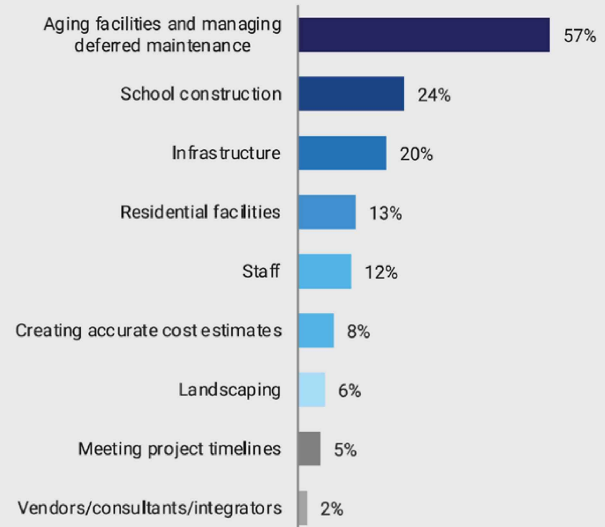
The influx of federal funding, including the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Securities (CARES) Act and American Rescue Plan (ARP), in addition to IIJA, brings the promise of support and relief, and highlights the ongoing challenges that procurement officials must navigate. Government Business Council (GBC), the research division of GovExec, partnered with Gordian to survey 200 state, local and education professionals. The results in the charts below outline the prioritization of deferred maintenance and project for public entities:

Priority Close-Up: Aging facilities & deferred maintenance



Percentage of respondents, n=200
Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

What are your agency's top priorities for funding?



Percentage of respondents, n=200
Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

ALLOCATING FUNDING TOWARD UPGRADES

Better Buildings is an initiative of the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) designed to improve lives by driving leadership in energy innovation. Through Better Buildings, DOE partners with leaders in the public and private sectors to make the nation's homes, commercial buildings, and industrial plants more energy-efficient by accelerating investment and sharing successful best practices. Its goal is to save taxpayer dollars by driving energy efficiency across communities.

Each year, the organization recognizes successful infrastructure projects excelling in energy savings and invocation. One such project was the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) 26-story building located in Manhattan's Kips Bay neighborhood. Constructed in 1971, the 225 units serve 450 low-income residents and is a critical affordable house resource. Before the retrofit project, the building's inefficient system used 28 percent more energy than the typical New York multifamily building.

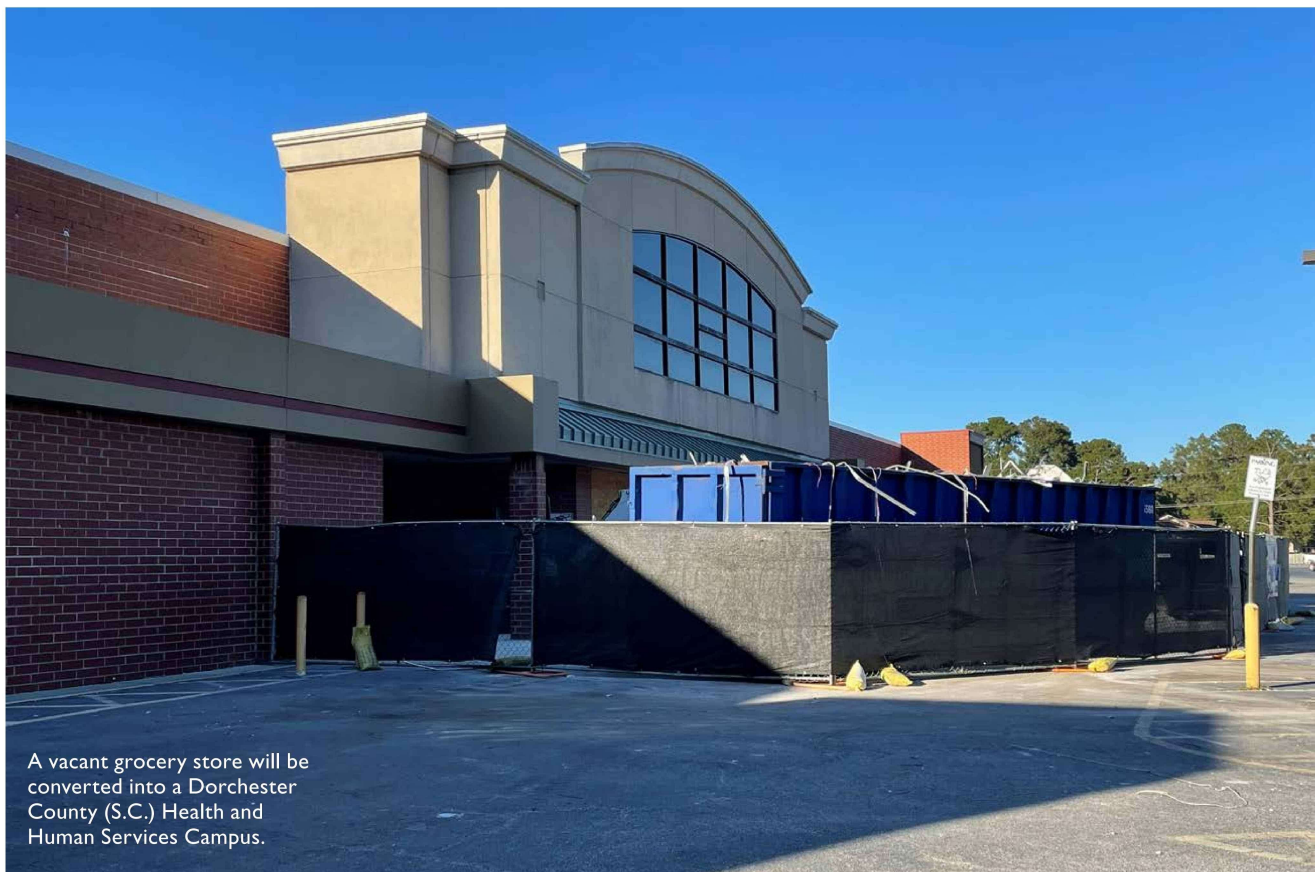
Using a combination of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds with a New York capital grant, a \$2.2 million lighting, heating and hot-water modernization project began. Upon its completion, NYCHA achieved a 55 percent reduction in the energy needed for heating domestic hot water by installing a ground source heat pump (GSHP) system, capturing waste heat in the steam condensate, and replacing hot water tanks with instantaneous hot water heaters.

The Infrastructure Law includes the investment of \$55 billion to expand access to clean drinking water for households, businesses, schools and childcare centers. Safeware is working with several municipalities who are early adopters of the requirement to replace aging lead and copper pipes. New federal standards, becoming effective in 2024, will require the replacement of aging pipes, to prevent tragedies in high profile areas such as Flint, Mich. One component of this spending is to provide residents with water filters and pitchers to have clean drinking water while the work is being done.

Bond says that Safeware recently reached a national agreement with Brita, just for this purpose. "We are very fortunate that our cooperative contracts have language that references the federal requirements (2CFR200) and the specific requirements needed government customers to spend federal dollars. While the OMD directives encourage intergovernmental contracts, not all contracts are compliant, which has made us a customer resource with large emerging infrastructure projects."

REVITALIZING COMMUNITIES

Dorchester County in South Carolina is known for winding rivers, scenic walking trails, a booming local arts scene and historic sites that pre-date America's founding. Approximately 161,000 residents in this community rely on the county for a variety of needs, from marriage licenses and mosquito control, to water and sewer utilities



A vacant grocery store will be converted into a Dorchester County (S.C.) Health and Human Services Campus.

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and social services. With a mix of open, rural areas and densely populated urban spaces, the county's primary goals through its strategic plan are to deliver a consistent standard of service to all residents, and elevate health and wellness countywide, for long-term viability.

Fulfilling these promises to the community required the acquisition of properties that would be large enough to house multiple services and be located close to public transportation. Dorchester County Council voted to spend nearly \$2.9 million of ARPA funds for a 47,000 square-foot building near the town of Summerville. The plan is to convert a vacant former grocery store into a consolidated Dorchester County Health and Human Services Campus. This multipurpose facility will house the

local arm of South Carolina's Department of Health and Environmental Control, the Department of Social Services and the Department of Health and Human Services.

"Dorchester County has been steadily advancing its facilities master plan and related strategic plan goals since 2019," explained Daniel T. Prentice, Dorchester deputy county administrator. "Since the old Bi-Lo grocery store near Summerville closed many years ago, I always thought the building would be a good spot for consolidated delivery of certain services. This project is really bringing us full circle to turn the location into a permanent hub."

Rather than pursue a lengthy bid process, Dorchester County chose the option of job order contracting (JOC) to quickly address this revitalization project. JOC is a single-solicitation construction project delivery method, enabling project owners to complete multiple projects using one competitively awarded contract. A primary benefit is it leads to faster project starts and a lighter administrative burden for public sector professionals. In 2021, Gordian and NIGP: The Institute for Public Procurement conducted market research with a determination that JOC projects typically begin 25 percent faster than projects that use traditional procurement methods like design-bid-build and design-build.

The community center is expected to be completed this year. According to Ryan Duggan, senior account manager at



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Enabling the internet of things (IoT) on campus can allow real-time analysis of the environment and adjust to improve productivity and efficiency.

Gordian, “This project is a good one as it meets the county’s objectives to better serve their community. The county was able to use federal funding, release work orders for long lead time items prior to design completion and start work quickly.”

INCREASING SAFETY THROUGH INFRASTRUCTURE

The Partner Alliance for Safer Schools (PASS) was established in 2014 with the mission to provide school administrators, school boards, public safety and security professionals with information, tools and insight to implement an approach to enhance the safety of school environments. Vetted by experts across education, public safety and energy experts, PASS issued the “Safety and Security Guidelines for K-12 Schools,” a report providing comprehensive information on best practices for securing school facilities.

According to the report introduction, “Since 2000, schools have been the second most frequent targets in active shooter incidents as defined by the FBI...where approximately 56 million students attend nearly 132,000 K-12 schools.” The PASS guidelines were developed to provide administrators with a means to effectively evaluate security infrastructure currently in place, prioritize investments and maximize security gained by leveraging available resources.

To help school districts navigate, Lee Osterman, vice president, federal and SLED for Wesco, states, “As our security experts understand the PASS guidelines, we see an increasing number of schools and government agencies leveraging multiple technologies to build, connect, power and protect their buildings and people.”

Osterman further shares five key technology infrastructure areas part of a wide-ranging plan to address student learning and safety:

- > **Security and safety:** Education facilities contain complex areas requiring special attention and integration into an overall risk management strategy. According to the guidelines, this includes vetted security practices specific to K-12 environments, with objective, reliable information on available safety and security technologies.
- > **Network performance:** A high-performance

structured cabling system plays an essential role in operating a modern campus environment, including new learning models, wireless connectivity and increased bandwidth requirements.

- > **Student performance:** Adequate bandwidth and wireless coverage is needed to support the new ways people consume information, mobile device dependency and innovative learning environments.
- > **Space utilization:** Increased demand for multipurpose areas require configurations for different activities and controlled for comfort, safety and efficiency. Flexible facilities enhance the productivity of students, faculty and staff.
- > **IoT enablement:** Enabling the internet of things (IoT) on campus can allow real-time analysis of the environment and adjust to improve productivity and efficiency.

It is important for a school district or municipality to ensure that facility infrastructure supports new technology as part of a unified system. The PASS report suggests that “a pilot project is a good way for districts to evaluate new security products. Many manufacturers and integrators will provide products and services that can be tested by end users in a small, controlled location before they are deployed in a larger scale.”

Wesco’s Osterman continues, “Our best team experiences are with entities that partner with a specialized team to offer solutions to address important teaching challenges, keep the campus safe, and meet the requirements of the Infrastructure Act.”

MORE THAN ROADS AND BRIDGES

Traditionally, government infrastructure is primarily related to buildings, roads and bridges, with underground utilities, water or sewer pipes as part of the system. However, as municipalities move toward the proliferation of electric vehicles, this trend creates a critical new focus of constructing and maintaining a comprehensive system with charging stations.

Dufferin County, located in central Ontario, Canada, covers 573 square miles with a population of approximately 65,000 residents. Originally agriculturally based, Dufferin’s economy has diversified to include commercial and retail businesses, industries related to residential and commercial construction (building, supplies, aggregates, real estate) and manufacturing.

Dufferin County is progressing towards the future with 24 new EV charging stations. The charge up in Dufferin’s network was made possible through a \$289,000 investment (\$189,000 for the public stations and \$100,000 for the fleet chargers) from Natural Resources Canada, through its Zero Emission Vehicle Infrastructure Program (ZEVIP). The project is an important move for the county, as the Canadian federal government is requiring 100 percent of car and truck

sales to be zero emission vehicles by 2035. One out of three automobiles in Ontario is anticipated to be electric by 2030.

According to Clean Air Canada, “Governments are now adopting policies that move electrification from being a largely theoretical prospect to the real world.” This climate and clean energy program within the Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue at Simon Fraser University, produces white papers and notes the economic benefits of moving toward electrification. Its recent report, “Canada’s New Economic Engine,” states “The results are clear: the more Canada goes big for electrification, the more jobs and economic benefits await. Those quarter-million jobs would be found across the country: from the geologist exploring for copper deposits in B.C., to the engineer developing battery testing equipment in Nova Scotia, to the worker assembling electric vehicles in Ontario.”

To gain greater cost effectiveness, the county used a Kinetic GPO cooperative contract to take advantage of leveraged pricing through a ready to use contract. Chris Penny, CEO of Kinetic GPO says, “Communities recognize that investing in infrastructure is one of the most powerful ways to transform society for the future. As needs increase, Canadian public sector entities are looking to group purchasing organizations to quickly address their infrastructure needs.”

STREAMLINING THE CONSTRUCTION BID PROCESS

As the largest city in northern Nevada, Reno is nestled on the eastern slope of the Sierra Nevada Mountains in the southern part of Washoe County. Serving more than 235,000 residents, it uses a decentralized purchasing policy, overseen by a purchasing program that stimulates competitive bidding to support its operational needs.

Marcie Wood, the purchasing program’s management assistant, acknowledged the 2020 pandemic instituted big changes for the organization as teams were sent home. Luckily, the city had implemented eProcurement system PlanetBids in March 2019. Staff quickly became comfortable with the new system, and suppliers voiced a preference for on-line submissions, as the city quickly transitioned to full automation.

The Public Works Department, seeing the ease of a system, decided to implement it for construction bid projects. Construction is seen as an essential service, and the module-based cloud system allowed users to access information, upload documents and track submissions from any location—work or home. In addition, it saved tremendous amounts of paper and removed the burden of mailing or delivering large paper proposals to downtown offices.

“Previously, we would have contractors arrive for the bid

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The expansion of a wastewater plant in Reno, Nevada, is a recent project that took advantage of e-bidding.

opening and sit in a room awaiting the results,” says Catie Harrison, engineering manager for the public works team. “Now, the system notifies them within minutes after the bid opening, saving them from having to drive to our offices.”

In addition, the system performs calculations and bid tabulations, a math-intensive process that is a prime area for human blunder. Harrison notes, “We hate to turn away a potential contractor due to a simple math error.”

Construction is one of the deep-rooted services provided by government, and yet, is traditionally entrenched into antiquated paper-intensive processes. Ria Diaz, director of client services for PlanetBids, says, “Construction projects can be the most complicated bids with unit pricing, labor cost calculations and sub-contractor expenses. As procurement departments are moving to eProcurement, it makes sense that public works departments are beginning to take advantage of new technologies to solve age-old problems.”

The city continues to improve its roads, storm drains, sewer systems, parks and facilities through its capital improvement program. Jonathan Simpson, engineering manager for the Utility Services Department notes that using the on-line portal has been a beneficial tool for bidding and management of these construction projects. The expansion of a wastewater

plant, which supports compliance with wastewater treatment requirements and fulfills the needs of future growth, is a recent project that took advantage of the e-bidding process,

Previously advertising contracting opportunities in the local newspaper and website, Wood shares, “Automation has resulted in a larger vendor pool and increased diversity subcontracting, as we are expanding outreach to additional contractors, both inside and outside of our area. This ultimately increases competition for projects, which is a big part of our mission to protect taxpayer dollars.”

TAMMY RIMES, MPA, is the executive director of the National Cooperative Procurement Partners (NCP). She formally served as purchasing agent for the city of San Diego, the ninth largest city in the nation, and emergency logistics chief during the 2007 Witch Creek Fires. Under her leadership, the city consolidated its warehouse operations, centralized all purchasing and contracting operations, and moved to a more customer focused approach.