

EAST RANGE JOINT POWERS BOARD

Monthly Northspan Consultant Report

LVP Update June 2019

Strategic Action Plan

As ERJPB moves to the end of its fiscal year, Northspan continues to carry out the tasks identified in the strategic action plan, and its scope of work has expanded to meet a variety of community needs. Staff is preparing a fiscal year-end report and 2019-2020 fiscal year budget and contract.

Board Meetings

The board received a presentation from Tamara Lowney of IEDC on Mass Timber at its May meeting.

Trails Assessment

Northspan is scheduling a meeting with Barr to review the results of the initial phase. The goal of this first phase will be the generation of a series of use-specific maps for the ERJPB communities (e.g., one map of paved bike trails, another map of ATV-authorized trails, etc.)

Brownfields

Working with Rick Crum of NTS we are putting together a poster presentation to demonstrate the value of the brownfields program, Erie/LTV changes over time, and how best to utilize and plan for brownfield redevelopment as the Iron Range continues to build upon its history and diversify. With NTS, we hope to deliver the poster presentation electronically, display it on the website, and bring it to a variety of community gatherings including CAP and LVP.

Blandin Broadband Communities Program

The Broadband steering committee approved four projects in its first round of Blandin Broadband Community funding:

- Portable training lab for technology training
- ERJPB website development
- Business retention and expansion visits with a broadband focus
- Free wi-fi expansion in public locations in the communities

These projects were approved by ERJPB at the May board meeting. There will be a second round of applications for projects over the summer, with a tentative deadline of July 26 for more applications.

Work continues in planning for a joint feasibility study between the East Range, Laurentian, and Tower broadband groups. A group with representatives from each of the three communities met on May 2 to review the process used in Hibbing/Chisholm/Mountain Iron and begin identifying potential partners. The City of Virginia will serve as the fiscal agent for the joint study. We have scheduled a second meeting on June 6 to work through the details of this effort and will re-engage the steering committee and mayors of each community

ERJPB has also been in discussions over the disbursement of the 50 free PCs from PCs for People as part of the BBC program. Seven computers are en route to the two libraries and the school district has sent out a questionnaire which they will use to distribute the remaining 43 among low-income families with children. We will write a press release once the libraries' computers have been delivered to bring attention to the program ahead of distribution to the students.

Childcare

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Northspan continues to explore leads for potential childcare facilities on the East Range. Staff maintained contact with Patricia Welsch of First Children's Finance to explore her network of connections and toured the Union Hall in Aurora and space owned by the First National Bank of Gilbert in Hoyt Lakes to assess their viability as childcare facilities. The bank space has some potential. We remain available to participate in discussions surrounding childcare in each community.

Business Retention and Expansion Visits

Northspan began outreach to each of the city clerks/administrators and mayors/town board members to begin identifying the 30 businesses that we will visit this summer. We are working in collaboration with broadband and child care efforts to make sure our BRE visits are well rounded and begin to address businesses challenges and opportunities. We intend to conduct at least one day of visits in June, pending approval of the ERJPB budget.

ERJPB Website

In June/July, Northspan will begin development of the website. We have developed a rough sketch of the website design and will solicit input from city staff on items for inclusion. This project will enhance ERJPB website, which is currently just a basic landing page, to create a centralized point for community information and help raise awareness around broadband issues on the East Range. It will also give broader visibility to ERJPB's staff, services, mission, vision, and values. We have begun laying out the framework of the website and continue to update the current framework with broadband information.

East Range CAP (MP & PolyMet)

Karl attended the May East Range CAP, which included presentations from PolyMet and Stern Companies and an update from ERJPB on its most recent efforts. CAP now begins its summer hiatus and will re-convene in fall.

Laskin Energy Park Marketing Team – Karl is working with IRRR and SEH to complete the remaining steps in the application process. SEH is scheduled to begin soil borings, which are the largest outstanding item.

Biwabik Shovel Ready Team - SEH continues background engineering work. We will meet again at SEH's direction.

NORTHFORCE – Contact Stephanie at stephanie@northforce.org for more information on the program.

Additional Meetings and Correspondence

- Maintained contact with a member of the Biwabik Area Citizens Association to discuss a project involving small chalets in a vacant lot that would serve as incubator space for artists or other similar uses. BACA will present on the project at the June ERJPB meeting.
- Continue to work with 7 local business in search of assistance and financing options including emergency succession planning services to the family of Joni Stutzman.