

LAURENTIAN VISION PARTNERSHIP

East Range Joint Powers Board Report

October 16, 2019

STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

In July, Northspan and ERJPB administrative staff submitted the FY 2020 grant application for \$50,000 to DIRRR and awaits official word on its approval. Northspan continues to complete the scope of work outlined in the strategic action plan.

COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

Blandin Broadband Communities Program

Four projects in the first round of the BBC program have been funded and are in process:

- Portable training lab for technology training (Sue Sowers & various educational partners) - \$17,050
- ERJPB website (ERJPB staff) - \$10,565
- Business retention and expansion visits (ERJPB staff) - \$17,640
- Free wi-fi expansion in public locations in the communities (Pete Senarighi) - \$3,255

The second round of applications for projects is **now open**. We encourage steering committee members to share the application widely, and application forms are now available for download at <https://erjpb.com/broadband/>. Additional volunteers are still welcome.

Work continues in planning for a joint feasibility study between the Laurentian, Tower, and East Range (LTE) broadband groups. The LTE group has now raised over \$55,000, which is adequate to fund a feasibility study, though we will continue to aim for up to \$75,000 to ensure the highest quality possible study. The LTE Feasibility Study meeting is set for Friday, November 8th at 10 am at Aurora Community Center @ 15 West 1st Avenue North, Aurora, MN.

Childcare

Northspan remains in touch with a potential provider with whom we toured buildings in July and with First Children's Finance. We plan to re-engage on this issue in the next month and remain available to participate in discussions surrounding childcare in each community.

Recreation and Trail Development

Northspan met with Barr, ARDC, and the Iron Range Tourism Bureau on September 11. We will be bringing forward action recommendations in October.

The goal of this first phase with Barr has been 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.) which will then lead to targeted field mapping for targeted user groups with which ERJPB believes it can develop more comprehensive trail plan. We are aware that a Hoyt Lakes trail user group met recently and will engage with the group when ready.

Housing

Northspan will begin exploring the East Range housing market in greater depth in late 2019.

Community Identity & Marketing (Brownfields)

Northspan has continued to work with Rick Crum of NTS as he presents on the value of the Iron Range brownfields program. When complete, we will share this information with ERJPB & LVP.

Workforce

Contact Stephanie Skraba, stephanie@northforce.org for more information on NORTHFORCE, the Northland's regional talent portal.

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Downtown/Main Street

In the coming months, Northspan will develop a proposal to repurpose the storefront revolving loan fund dollars, which are sitting unused after the program was sunset.

BUSINESS RETENTION & EXPANSION VISITS

Northspan has completed five BRE visits and has complete lists of businesses we plan to visit in each community during this round of 30 visits. We will resume these visits in October.

Our questionnaire includes a business overview section that mirrors the Minnesota Chamber's Grow Minnesota! survey, a series of Northspan-developed questions about the community, and a series of questions on broadband service designed in tandem with the Blandin Broadband Communities program. We will enter all information we collect in the Grow Minnesota! database to help inform the Chamber's work to analyze the state's business climate and explore common trends. We will provide a full report when these visits are complete.

ERJPB WEBSITE

Check it out! Northspan has developed a new website for ERJPB, erjpb.com, which is now live. It includes an overview of the Board, including its purpose and members, and connects to resources for the communities. The site includes a page on the Blandin Broadband Communities program (with updates on deadlines and events) and includes an events calendar for the entire East Range, which we will look to populate in the coming months.

PARTNERSHIPS

Laskin Energy Park Marketing Team – DIRRR has now released details on its new Shovel Ready program and emails were sent to city clerks/administrators with active projects. Hoyt Lakes is working to submit an application and staff assisted with language for the project narrative. DIRRR is helping to coordinate engineering estimates.

Biwabik Shovel Ready Team – DIRRR has now released details on its new Shovel Ready program and emails were sent to city clerks/administrators with active projects. Biwabik will need to apply to DIRRR for funding to complete the handful of outstanding items necessary for certification. Northspan is available to assist with this process.

Additional Meetings and Correspondence

- Met with two Aurora businesses directly, including a discussion of storefront upgrades with a referral to the Entrepreneur Fund and with one seeking assistance with a succession strategy and connecting them with a licensed business broker.
- Have now worked or continue to work with 13 local business in search of assistance and financing options.