



## **EAST RANGE JOINT POWERS BOARD UPDATE OCTOBER 2020**

The ERJPB's work over the past several months has included the following areas of focus:

### **ERJPB DISASTER RELIEF LOAN PROGRAM**

The ERJPB disaster relief loan program is now operational following the approval of all documentation at the September board meeting and the rollout of the program, including a press release and correspondence with East Range businesses, on October 13. The fund was recapitalized thanks to the IRRR's Community Relief Grant Program, and its balance totals \$191,970.28. We will need to disperse the funds by June 30, 2021, and once they revolve, they become the property of ERJPB. Program guidelines and the application link are available at <http://erjpb.com/event/east-range-joint-powers-board-disaster-relief-loan-program/>.

### **BLANDIN BROADBAND COMMUNITIES PROGRAM**

#### ***Community Projects***

The East Range steering committee has used all but \$2,225.69 of our \$75,000 Blandin match to fund 15 projects on the East Range. We have until the end of 2020 to use all funds. Summaries of projects are available at <http://erjpb.com/broadband/>.

#### ***Regional Feasibility Study***

Work continues in planning for a joint feasibility study between the East Range, Laurentian, and Tower broadband groups. NEO Connect is holding bi-weekly meetings and occasional additional meetings for sub-groups such as a survey committee, in which Northspan is participating. Both NEO and GEO partners presented on their work at the East Range CAP meeting in October. NEO will present its local reports on the East Range at a special ERJPB meeting at 10:30 on October 27 (immediately following the October ERJPB meeting). Members of the public are welcome at this meeting; contact Karl Schuettler at [kschuettler@northspan.org](mailto:kschuettler@northspan.org) to receive the Zoom link. There will be additional opportunities to connect with consultant Diane Kruse when she visits the Iron Range November 9-12.

### **CHILD CARE**

Staff continues to assist an interested provider on business plan assistance and site selection. Her plan is to open a child care center to serve approximately 60 children on the East Range. She has worked with staff and the City of Aurora to select a site, and Aurora's business development committee has been supportive. The parties will continue to communicate and work toward a timeline and a development agreement. Staff has also connected with Vicki Hagberg of the Northeast Minnesota SBDC and introduced her to the project for business plan and financial projection modeling.

### **RECREATION AND TRAIL DEVELOPMENT**

Staff submitted an application to the IRRR Culture & Tourism grant program after approval of match funding at the September meeting. Follow-up discussion with IRRR led to the decision to use the Hoyt Lakes Chamber of Commerce as a fiscal agent and the launch of a bid process for the engineering portion of the contract, given the cost of the work required. If approved, the grant will fund mapping of existing networks and missing trail connections for snowmobiles, ATVs, and off-road cycling on the East Range, and provide a plan for signage and the creation of digital and paper maps to highlight local networks.