

EAST RANGE JOINT POWERS BOARD MVP UPDATE

February 2021

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

STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

Northspan conducted a strategic directions consensus workshop on January 13th. The meeting had strong attendance from each of the four communities and provided an opportunity for councilors and board members to share their opinions on the direction of ERJPB activities going forward. Participants arrived at six strategic directions they would like to see implemented in the next three years:

1. Identify and utilize resources to attain fiscal stability.
2. Promoting the East Range to attract and retain businesses and residents.
3. Provide wide range of housing options to meet diverse community needs.
4. Expand highest speed internet to all.
5. Create community accountability processes to inform residents.
6. Create welcoming community packets to encourage civic engagement.

Northspan is building out a 3-year action plan that outlines accomplishments necessary to achieve the goals identified in the process.

ERJPB DISASTER RELIEF LOAN PROGRAM

The ERJPB disaster relief loan program is operational and we continue to help all area business access available Covid relief funds. 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 – REGIONAL FEASIBILITY STUDY

Work continues in planning for a joint feasibility study between the East Range, Laurentian, and Tower broadband groups. The initial round of community-level presentations is now complete. A recording of the East Range presentation is available at <https://erjpb.com/event/east-range-broadband-feasibility-study-presentation/>.

Progress on meetings with providers has stalled somewhat as we work to understand the implications of the recent Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF) auction, which granted many unserved areas on the East Range to LTD Broadband, a relatively unknown company with no track record in the region whose past efforts have primarily involved wireless technology. While the grant award does not guarantee that LTD will expand in the region or prevent other providers from expanding their own networks, it has led the state Border to Border grant program to reconsider its most recent application phase and could create potential roadblocks.

INTELLIGENT COMMUNITIES

With extensive community input, Northspan completed and submitted a questionnaire from the Intelligent Communities Forum (ICF) that seeks to provide an assessment of local analytics related to the ICF framework. The assessment will provide a valuable framework for innovative programming around community services, opportunities, and preparation for an adaptable, modern economy.

RECREATION AND TRAIL DEVELOPMENT

IRRR has approved a Culture & Tourism grant for ERJPB, with the Hoyt Lakes Chamber of Commerce serving as the fiscal agent. Barr Engineering has begun its work and aims to complete mapping and location recommendations by March. GIS work, online mapping, and a signage plan will proceed in the second quarter. Northspan will conduct the community engagement portions of the process that are the responsibility of ERJPB staff.