



## EAST RANGE JOINT POWERS BOARD UPDATE JUNE 2020

### ***ERJPB Disaster Relief Fund***

In April, the ERJPB approved a repurposing of its dormant storefront loan fund to provide business assistance. It created a business participation loan program (which is not currently accepting applications) and disaster relief grant and loan programs. It approved eight grants totaling \$20,000 to support local businesses across three board meetings in April and May.

### ***Blandin Broadband Communities Program***

The East Range's on the Blandin Broadband Communities program continued. On May 18, the Blandin Foundation joined the Steering Committee for its second Strut Your Stuff Tour event, which allowed the East Range to showcase its projects to date and receive feedback on next steps. Blandin extended the East Range's grant through the end of 2020, meaning we have six additional months to wrap up the community projects. The Blandin Foundation posted on the event on its broadband blog here: <https://blandinonbroadband.org/2020/05/19/strut-your-stuff-broadband-projects-in-mn-east-range/>

The East Range steering committee has approved 15 applications for community projects:

- Palo Volunteer Fire Department Technology
- Portable training lab for technology training at libraries
- ERJPB website
- Business retention and expansion visits
- Free wi-fi expansion in public locations in the communities
- Technology, robotics, and STEM training
- WIFI on four school buses
- Upgrades to TV screens for announcements in common areas
- New laptops for emergency vehicles (Hoyt Lakes Ambulance)
- New laptop for training (Hoyt Lakes Fire & Ambulance)
- New laptops for police squad cars (East Range Police Department)
- BBC & LTE facilitation, training & management
- East Range business digital marketing training & technology audits
- Hoyt Lakes public safety building SMART board
- Tech equipment and internet access (Ranger Snowmobile & ATV Club)

Work continues in planning for a joint feasibility study between the East Range, Laurentian, and Tower broadband groups. NEO Connect, the group's consultant, is holding bi-weekly meetings and occasional additional meetings for sub-groups such as a survey committee, in which Northspan is participating. NEO Connect is now guiding the process and adapting its approach with COVID-19.

GEO Partners (formerly NEO Partners), which is providing additional mapping services for the project, is collecting data. A speed test request went out to the entire county and is available



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

at <https://expressoptimizer.net/public/> and initial data is available from RAMS at <https://broadband.ramsmn.org/2020/04/13/st-louis-county-broadband-speed-test/>. NEO Connect plans to incorporate GEO's data into its own mapping work, which it will supplement through on-the-ground outreach and relationship-building with providers.

### ***Child Care***

The East Range Child Care group met via Zoom on April 28. Northspan shared results from a survey on child care in the area, which received 84 responses. Trends included:

- Of families who are currently using child care, 37% are using relatives (grandparent, aunt/uncle, etc. Fourteen percent (14%) of those surveyed indicated not having care currently but are seeking services
- The inability to find a provider rose to the top of issues reported on the ability to find care, with 85% reporting that as their top barrier.
- 56% of survey respondents had to make modifications to their work schedule. Of those, 70% (33 respondents), state that one parent has had to reduce working hours, while 25% (12 respondents) have had one parent leave the workforce completely to stay home.
- When asked if there was anything else to share, survey respondents touched on three main themes: the need for child care on the East Range in general, the inconvenience of driving to Virginia to access care, and the need for child care that can accommodate shift work and/or flexible hours.

Staff continued to meet with an interested provider in developing a business plan and researching potential sites for a new child care facility.

### ***Recreation and Trail Development***

Northspan continues to work with Barr Engineering on trail mapping and planning on the East Range in coordination with ARDC and Iron Range Tourism. We have meetings set with these partners to establish the process for a complete grant application to IRRR.

### ***Laskin Energy Park Marketing Team***

The Laskin team met on April 29 and assigned tasks for the completion of its DEED Shovel Ready application. The group hopes to submit its application to certify the site in summer 2020.