



**REGION NINE**  
DEVELOPMENT  
COMMISSION

2019

# KIESTER ACTION PLAN

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Region Nine Development Commission (RNDC) would like to thank the City of Kiester, their administration, business owners, residents, and all those who gave their insights, as well as the generous support from the Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation (SMIF), in the making of this plan.

This plan will act as a guide and tool to aide Kiester as they look to overcome challenges and capitalize on opportunities. This plan identifies next steps that both residents and city officials can take toward maximizing growth potential while completing priorities chosen by the community in order to create a vibrant and resilient future.

## ABOUT RNDC

RNDC serves nine counties in South Central Minnesota: Blue Earth, Brown, Faribault, Le Sueur, Martin, Nicollet, Sibley, Waseca, and Watonwan collectively known as Region Nine. RNDC takes great pride in working with and on behalf of these counties, their cities, townships, and school districts. Since 1972, being a partner for progress has led to the development of programs in the areas of economic development, business development, healthy communities, transportation, community development and leveraging regional resources. RNDC is governed by 40 regional leaders. These leaders include elected officials representing nine counties, 72 cities, 147 townships, 32 school districts, the Minnesota Valley Council of Governments, and public interest groups including, Health and Human Welfare, Minority Populations, and Youth.

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## ABOUT RNDC CONT.

RNDC receives an annual planning grant from the Federal Economic Development Administration (EDA) to conduct economic development planning activities within the district. Activities range from developing and maintaining the Community Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), leading regional-based economic development goals and strategies, facilitating the regional Community and Economic Development Planning Committee, hosting regional grant opportunities forums, workforce forums, and assisting communities who are interested in seeking Federal EDA funding.



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Kiester is located in the southern portion of Faribault County. Kiester was awarded the Small Town Grant from SMIF in 2018. This grant program seeks to build sustainable and vibrant communities by engaging community members, enhancing leadership, and creating opportunities for new leadership to emerge. Rather than funding one-time projects, the program seeks to build partnerships that will perpetuate collaboration for future work. Specifically, Kiester's application was awarded to engage the community in a visioning process to develop an action plan for the future.

RNDC was contracted to facilitate an open house event, online survey, and lead the planning process for the action plan. Consistent with SMIF's requirements for this grant, RNDC developed a process surrounding the importance of small communities like Kiester and their impact on the region. Accordingly, the research reflected an approach that recognizes that economic and community changes are inevitable.

The action plan developed includes feedback provided throughout the process including, but not limited to, the open house, survey results, and interviews with local stakeholders. Recommendations for the future are provided in addition to specific suggestions for how Kiester can become more resilient in the short and long term. Consistent with grant guidelines, these suggestions are intended to assist the community to implement projects that demonstrate a collaborative and economic opportunity for Kiester.





# CHAPTER 1

The Kiester Visioning 2020 Project is the result of an initiative conducted between November, 2018 and September, 2019. The plan was developed through a four-step process, as illustrated in the figure below, which culminated in a series of recommendations for optimal alignment of public resources with common goals.

The process incorporated both quantitative and qualitative elements to develop a comprehensive picture of Kiester's local economy, including markets and its competitive position and strategic areas.

**Figure 1: Visioning Kiester Four-Step Process**



Each stage of the process incorporated either public or official, or both, engagement in order to verify findings, test assumptions, and uncover additional opportunities or challenges to be addressed. Public input was solicited through City Hall, an open house, and online survey in which residents were asked a series of questions about the current status of the city and ideas for future growth.



Findings from Kiester Visioning 2020 identified three top priorities around which to build investment strategies and resource allocation guidelines. Ranked according to their potential to establish long-term growth for Kiester, the priorities are:

- Attract professionals and young families to move into the city
- Engage renters and lower-income residents
- Establish senior living and opportunities to age-in-place

Achieving these priorities in a fiscally responsible manner, that not only positions Kiester for sustainable growth but also enhances current residents quality of life, represents the primary goal of this plan.

A secondary goal of this plan is its use as a foundation upon which to build applications for federal, state, and private grant funding that can accelerate the city's development in a manner that aligns with previously articulated and mutually agreed upon objectives.

## **CHAPTER 2: ECONOMIC & MARKET ANALYSIS**

An economic analysis was conducted to evaluate current markets and trends, in addition to identifying areas for potential growth. Demographically, Kiester has witnessed a 22 percent drop in population since 2010, more than four times the population decrease of greater Faribault County. However, per-capita income has grown steadily for the past 20 years, dropping only twice over those two decades, once during the recession of 2008 and again in 2015. Of note, Kiester's homeowner vacancy rate dropped to zero percent in 2015, meaning every home was occupied, and remained there through 2017, which is the most recent year on record.

### **LOCATION & ACCESS**

Kiester is situated along Brush Creek in southeastern Faribault County in South Central Minnesota, just 2.5 miles from the Iowa border. Minnesota State Route 22 serves as the primary entry and exit point for the city, which benefits from an interchange at Interstate 90 approximately 10 miles to the north. Additionally, Union Pacific operates a railroad line through Kiester, which the agricultural industry leverages to transport row crops and other goods.

Albert Lea, Minnesota, population 17,703 in 2017, represents the largest metropolitan area within 25 miles. The Faribault County seat of Blue Earth, population 3,135 in 2017, sits approximately 25 miles to the west of Kiester via Interstate 90. The larger industrial-commercial hubs of southern Minnesota, Mankato and Owatonna, are both approximately 50 miles from Kiester.

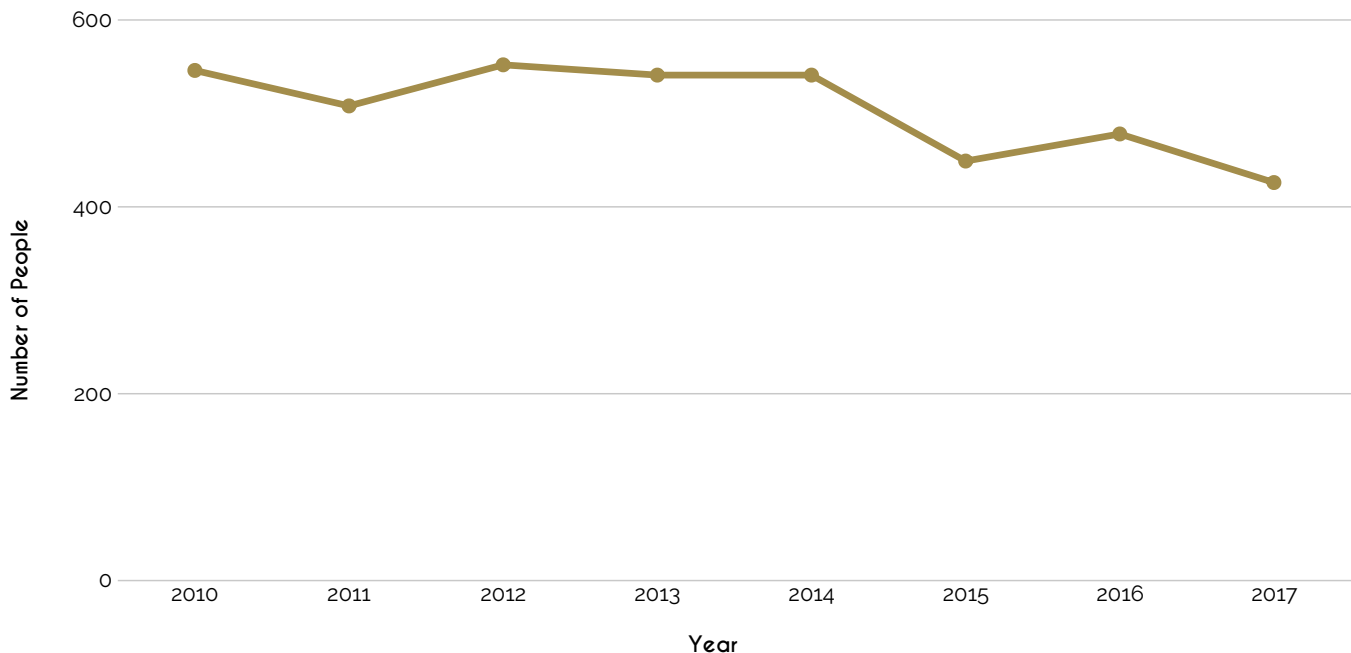
**Figure 2: Kiester Location and Access**



### **DEMOGRAPHICS & HOUSING**

Kiester underwent a 22 percent decrease in overall population from 2010 through 2017, the most recent year for which data is available. In comparison to Faribault County's 15 percent population decrease, and the U.S. overall 0.5 percent rural decline, Kiester has endured higher than average loss of population.

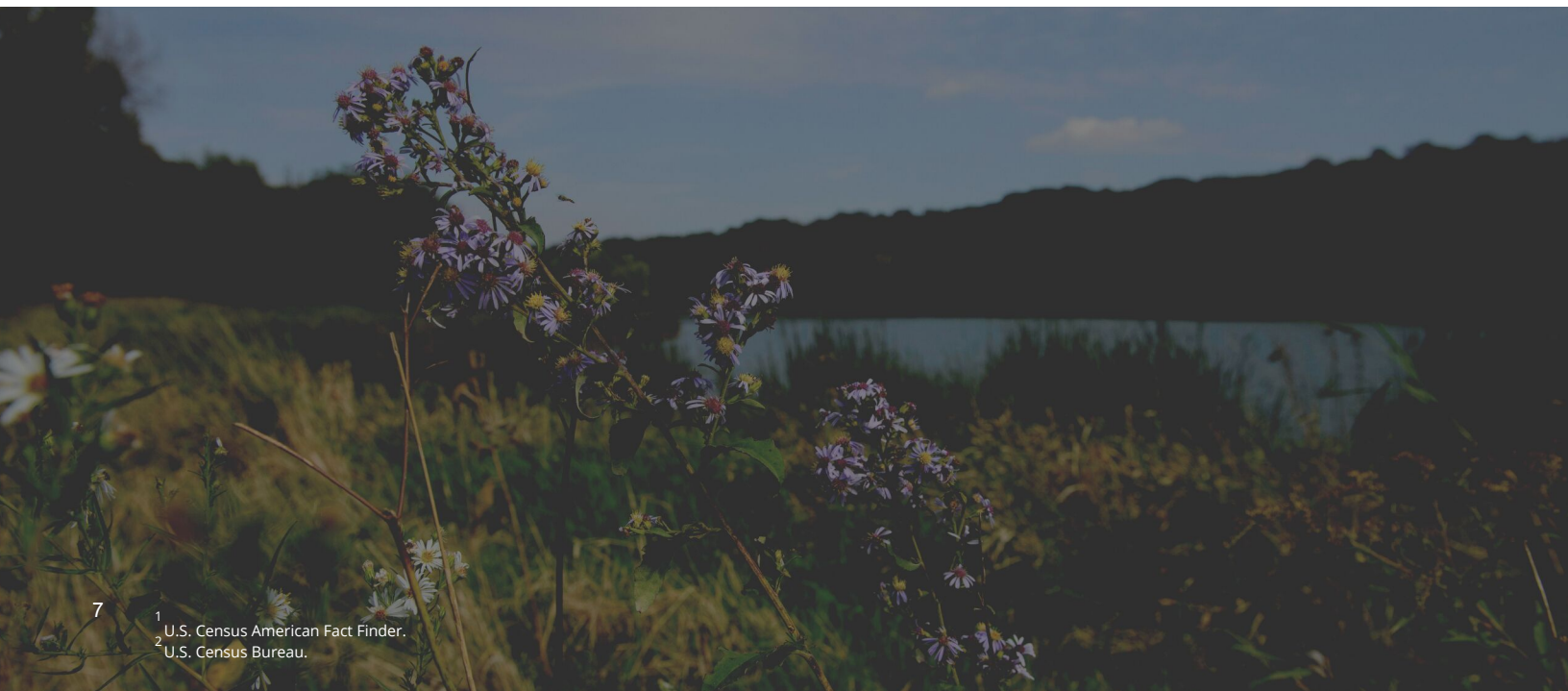
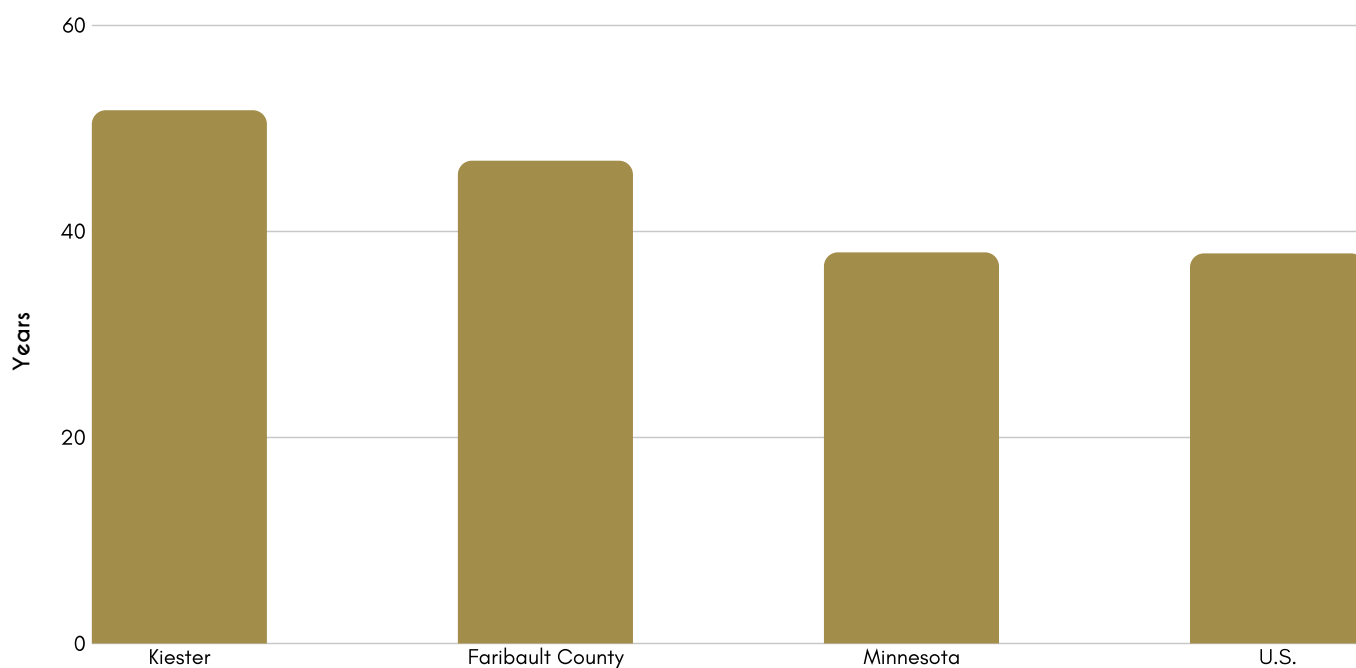
**Figure 3: Kiester Total Population**



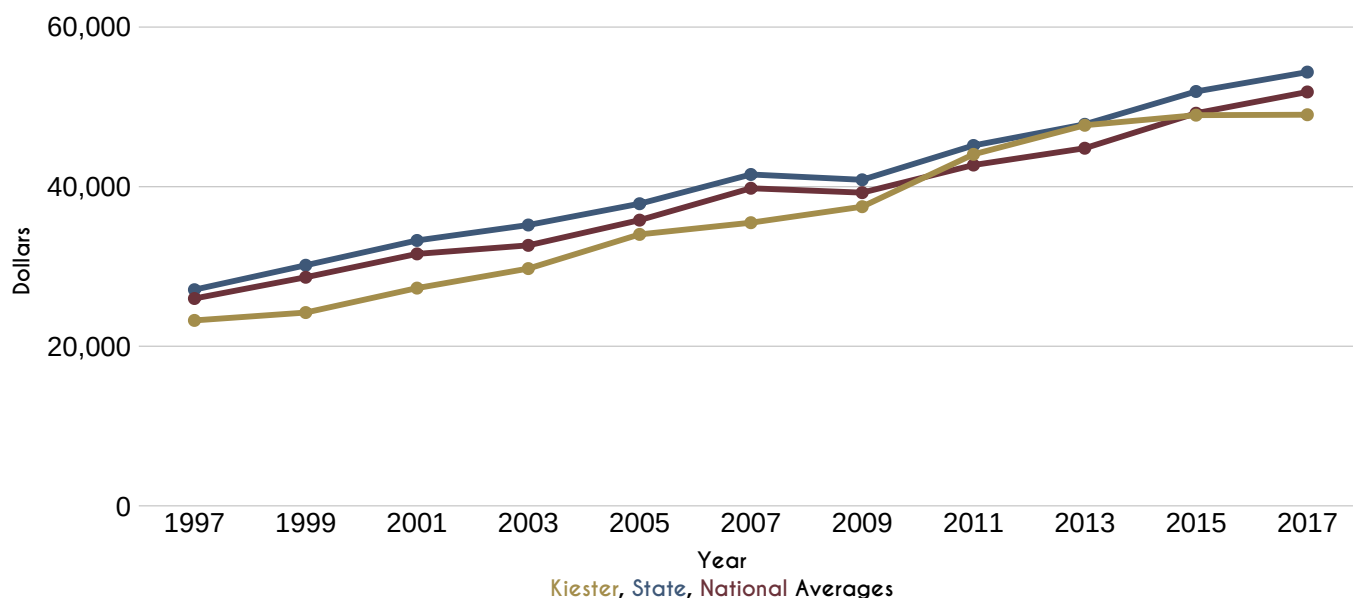


Like many rural municipalities, Kiester has an older population than the national and state averages. The median age in Kiester is 51.7 years old, approximately 27 percent older than the national and state averages of 37.8 and 37.9 years, respectively.<sup>1</sup> This is not unique to Kiester and should be considered in the broader context that the U.S. in general is preparing for a two-fold increase in the number of residents who are 65 years or older in the coming three-to-four decades. However, the fact remains that Kiester currently is home to an older than average population, which requires novel solutions when addressing long term viability of the city.

**Figure 4: Median Age<sup>2</sup>**



**Figure 5: Per-capita Income<sup>3</sup>**

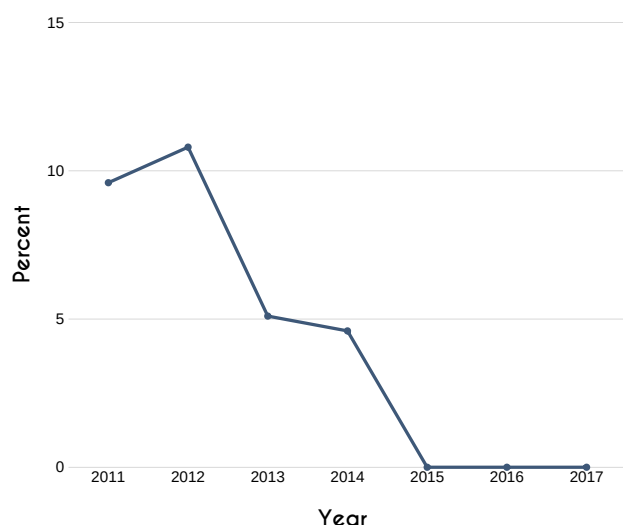


Encouragingly, Kiester witnessed two years of net population growth during the same period, while per-capita income kept pace with national and state averages during the 20 years from 1997 to 2017.

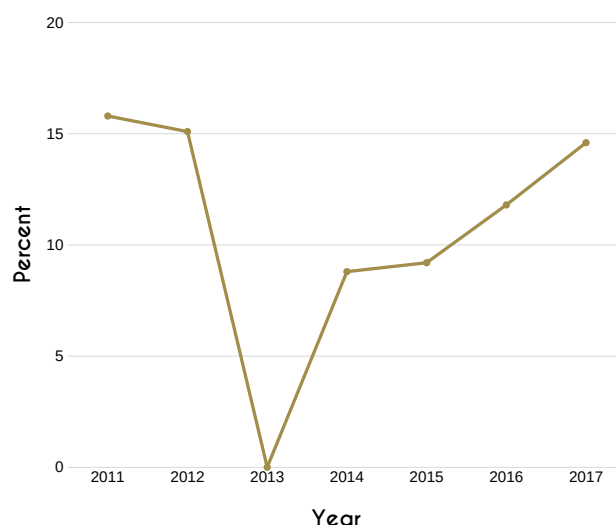
Housing stock, both rental and single-family dwellings, represent a significant challenge for Kiester. Analysis from the U.S. Census Bureau shows a zero percent homeowner vacancy rate for the most recent three years. This is generally interpreted to signal a tight housing market in which potential buyers seeking new residences would have difficulty finding a home of choice. Conversely, the city's rental vacancy rate has trended significantly higher than national and regional averages.

Taken together, the above two indicators, homeowner and rental vacancy rates, suggest that Kiester currently has a shortage of single-family homes and a surplus of rental units. Strategies for addressing these imbalances will be discussed in Chapter 5.

**Figure 6: Kiester Homeowner Vacancy Rates**



**Figure 7: Kiester Rental Vacancy Rates**



<sup>3</sup> Bureau of Economic Analysis, U.S. Department of Commerce.

## CHAPTER 3: STAKEHOLDER OUTREACH SUMMARY

A public input session was held in the Kiester Community Center where representatives from various groups participated in a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis and ideation session. Business owners, residents, religious leaders, city officials, emergency responders, and regional government representatives are an example of groups that participated in the session.

Results of the session are compiled below.

### *STRENGTHS*

Strengths in Kiester, as identified by analysis participants, focused on a healthy downtown economy and availability of shopping and government services uncommon to other cities of similar size. Highlights include a grocery store, movie theater, post office, and bank with a Certified Public Accountant (CPA). In addition to the conveniences these establishments provide, participants highlighted strong community engagement and passion for their city as strengths.

#### Community Events:

- Kiester Days
- Farming of Yesteryear

#### Public Safety:

- Low crime rates
- Local fire and ambulance service

#### People:

- Engaged community members
- Lots of volunteerism
- Local food pantry
- Growing population of immigrants and renters

#### Other:

- Low cost of living
- Intersection of two state highways

#### Abundance of local amenities:

- Grocery store
- Bank
- CPA office
- Library
- Movie Theater
- Cafe
- Quilt shop
- Liquor store
- Farm supply store
- Post office
- Gas and automotive service station
- Flooring store
- Grain elevator
- Active houses of worship



## **WEAKNESSES**

Residents identified housing, education, and healthcare as weaknesses in Kiester. Specifically, concerns pointed to two areas: difficulty attracting new families and retaining aging seniors who make up a large portion of the city's demographic. Individuals approaching retirement (ages 50 to 64 years old) account for 25 percent of the city's population, more than the 15 year difference from ages 35 to 49 (21 percent) or from ages 65 to 80 (18 percent).<sup>4</sup> Generally speaking, comments focused on uncertainty over finding an appropriate balance between investment in amenities and beautification versus higher municipal taxes.

- Lack of access to healthcare
- Closing of community health clinic
- Poor curb appeal
- Home and yards appear poorly maintained
- No local schools, unified schools now located in Wells roughly 15 miles away
- No senior housing or assisted living facilities
- Poor internet access outside city limits

## **OPPORTUNITIES**

Consistent with the attendees apparent desire to improve their city and lift overall quality of life for residents, opportunities identified focused on converting some of the weaknesses into potential offerings for new residents. A strong example of this is the proposed redevelopment of the now-closed Kiester Middle School. Attendees cited the building's closure as a major blow to the city. However, they now see it as an opportunity to convert into a community center, assisted living facility, or other municipal use. Similarly, the local health clinic recently closed, forcing residents to seek routine care in Wells. This now presents the city with a unique opportunity to court new providers, who would be able to move into a practice-ready building in downtown Kiester. Another opportunity that attendees said is currently under-leveraged is engagement with immigrants and renters, who continue moving into the city because of its low cost of living.

School building redevelopment ideas:

- Assisted living
- Community center

Engagement with immigrant families and renters:

- Wellness on Wheels (WOW) program at local church
- Vacation Bible School
- Community evenings after farmers market

Other:

- Ambulance service employment (city paying for training)
- Vacant clinic building for new healthcare provider
- Smaller "home-like" senior living facilities possible

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Census American Fact Finder.

## THREATS

Several of Kiester's key infrastructural offerings are aging, and attendees cited the need for significant investment to remain functional and relevant. Specific examples included roads and water and sewer systems. Again, a threat to long term city vitality includes an aging demographic without new families moving into the workforce.

Aging infrastructure:

- Municipal roads
- Water and sewer

Diminishing healthcare resources:

- Recent clinic closure
- Closure of part of Albert Lea facility

Other:

- Ambulance service at risk for closing due to difficulty staffing and training new employees
- Deteriorating housing stock
- Aging population

After completing the SWOT analysis, attendees were asked to reach a consensus on three priorities for Kiester. Included in this exercise was identification of next steps the city and its residents can take moving forward. Ultimately, strategic alignment of lower-order priorities to the first priority could help support success of all three. Priorities identified at the visioning session are:

- Attracting professionals and young families to move into the city
- Engaging with renters and lower-income residents
- Establishing senior housing and increasing opportunities to age in place

## CHAPTER 4: COMPETITIVE POSITION

From a business perspective, Kiester has an unusually thriving downtown, which offers significantly more consumer options than most comparable cities. Examples include a grocery store, movie theater, CPA, insurance agency, bank, cafe, quilting shop, flooring and home-supply store, post office, and much more.

The majority of downtown storefronts are currently occupied, and those few that are vacant remain both aesthetically pleasing and available for immediate occupancy. Additional commercial ventures include an automotive service shop and gas station, construction and trades, agribusiness, trucking, arts and crafts stores, news services, and others.

Industry in Kiester centers around the area's largely agricultural economy. Iowa-based Farmers Coop Association (FCA) operates a large grain elevator and farm services facility in Kiester. State Line Farm Supply, meanwhile, offers a variety of industrial and retail products for both farmers and homeowners.

From a shipping perspective, a major attraction for industry in Kiester is a combination of low land costs and taxes, combined with rail access to the Union Pacific, the nation's largest freight rail carrier. Additionally, Kiester is just 10 miles from a transcontinental Interstate, Interstate-90, and 30 miles from Interstate-35, a major north-south thoroughfare connecting Duluth, Minnesota near the Canadian boarder to Laredo, Texas on the Mexican border.

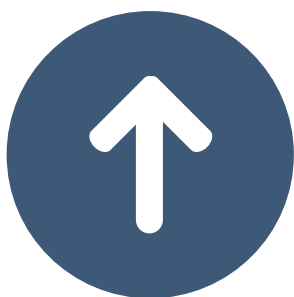
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Housing poses both one of the city's biggest challenges and its most competitive offerings. Challenges were borne out through both statistical analysis and resident comments. For example, at the time of this writing, there was just one home for sale within city limits. Residents, meanwhile, commented on the need for beautification incentives and/or ordinances requiring homeowners to improve the "curb appeal" of their homes.

On the upside, and despite the low inventory, price points remain very attractive for single-family buyers. The median sale price for a single-family home between 2017 and 2019 was approximately \$43,000 with a slightly higher average sale price of \$50,400. This is less than half of the Faribault County average of \$104,450 and less than a quarter of the state average of \$238,000.

It bears noting that Kiester offers many non-quantifiable benefits to quality of life, including a weekly farmers market in the summer months, active houses of worship, a library with a variety of activities for residents of all ages, well-maintained parks, and a summer festival, Kiester Days. Additionally, Kiester has several tourist offerings, including access to Minnesota's network of snowmobile trails, proximity to Brush Creek, and the Farming of Yesteryear museum and grounds.

### Figure 8: Summary of Competitive Position



- Low home prices and cost of living
- Access to two major Interstate highways
- Active downtown and attractive business district
- Proximity to transportation infrastructure
- Large inventory of affordable rental units



- No local education system
- Nearest employment center is over 25 miles away
- Very low single-family housing inventory
- Aging population with limited senior housing
- No local healthcare system



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## CHAPTER 5: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES & IMPLEMENTATION WORK PLAN

Next steps residents and the city could take toward realizing these goals include the following.

### *ATTRACT PROFESSIONALS AND YOUNG FAMILIES TO KIESTER*

Residents identified this as the primary need for Kiester. Their sentiments align well with the reality that Kiester currently is facing an aging population of decreasing numbers. Implementation of this goal, however, is not without challenges. Doing so will require meaningful partnerships with various local and regional institutions, which can help the city address issues of rurality and distance from employment centers and schools. Mutually beneficial partnerships should leverage Kiester's strong business and downtown community and low cost of living.

Objective include:

- Form partnerships with Faribault County and the cities of Albert Lea and Blue Earth. These partnerships would focus on building a regional economy and housing stock, in which Kiester is strategically located in a central area with easy commutes to two of the area's larger employment centers.
- Identify grant programs to help rehabilitate and modernize housing and rental stock. See Appendix I for a list of community and business resources.



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## ***ENGAGE RENTERS & LOWER-INCOME RESIDENTS***

With the city's current surplus of available rental units, combined with a low cost of living, an increasing number of residents are choosing to rent, rather than own, according to attendees at the visioning session. This poses the unique opportunity to engage these newer residents in community events.

Objectives include:

- Organize "Welcome to Kiester" events, social supports and integration, and language support. It is recommended to facilitate creation of a volunteer-led committee for these initiatives with grass-roots type focus. Suggested membership could include business owners, religious leaders, city/elected officers, and representatives from the communities of new residents.
- It is suggested that both the farmers market organizers and religious leaders make a practice of actively seeking to increase engagement with and participation from residents.

## ***ESTABLISH SENIOR LIVING OPTIONS & OPPORTUNITIES TO AGE IN PLACE***

The median age in Kiester is 51.7 years old, approximately 14 years older than the national and state averages of 38 and 37.8 years, respectively.<sup>5</sup> This increases pressure on the city to provide aging residents with opportunities to remain in Kiester.

Objectives include:

- Activate a "Meals on Wheels" program while supporting the Kee Kafe's work delivering to seniors.
- Conduct a feasibility study of various spaces for development of an assisted living facility.
- Solicit regional healthcare providers to open a clinic in the currently vacant clinic space on Main Street. Having a clinic in town would reduce the burden on seniors to have to travel to appointments in Albert Lea or Wells for medical care. An additional benefit to completion of this objective would be to increase the attractiveness of the city to potential new residents and younger families.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Census American Fact Finder.

## CONCLUSION

Kiester, like many rural communities, faces numerous challenges in the future as a nationwide trend of rural-to-urban migration persists. Kiester's declining population has led to the closure of amenities such as the community health clinic and school. At the same time, the Kiester's older-than-average population has created a demand for senior housing and accessibility to increased and specialized healthcare.

Aging housing and infrastructure must be addressed. As time passes, the water and sewer infrastructure will need frequent repair, and eventually, both water and wastewater facilities will need replacement. Additionally, resurfacing of city streets and maintaining the curb-and-gutter drainage is needed. Potential options for combating the costs associated with maintenance and repair can be with increased utility fees and/or United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) grant and loan programs. City ordinances for keeping yards and homes well maintained will also help to achieve these goals.

Despite challenges it faces, Kiester has many opportunities for the future. For its size, Kiester has several amenities. These include a grocery store, bank with CPA, library, movie theater, quilt shop, and farm supply store. There is also opportunity to transform former amenities, such as the closed school, into something that addresses the city's current needs. Potential options for the closed school could be transforming it into a community center, senior/assisted living center, health clinic, or accessible apartments. Due to its size, there is potential that the building could be used for more than one of these options. The amenities the city has to offer, coupled with a healthy rental market and low cost of living, make Kiester more attractive to new families and potential businesses. In addition to its amenities, Kiester has one more valuable asset: its people. Kiester has a tradition of active and engaged community members, volunteerism, and well attended community events. Kiester can build on this solid foundation to continue to welcome new families and businesses.

While Kiester faces many challenges in the future, it has many unique amenities that make it stand out when compared to other cities of its size. Its strategic location along transportation routes, and an involved and engaged community ensure that Kiester is well-positioned to address these challenges.





# APPENDIX

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APPENDIX I  
Business & Community Resource Guide

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APPENDIX II  
Kiester Visioning Survey Questions & Summary



# APPENDIX I: BUSINESS & COMMUNITY RESOURCE GUIDE

There are multiple organizations and resources available to Kiester as it moves forward with implementing changes to the community. Some resources which may be particularly useful are provided below, grouped according to purpose and focus. Of course, many resources are also available locally within the community and should be utilized whenever possible.

## START-UPS & SMALL BUSINESSES

Small Business Development Center: [www.myminnesotabusiness.com](http://www.myminnesotabusiness.com)

Small Business Development Centers (SBDC), located in Mankato, provides expertise and guidance for business owners to flourish in today's competitive economy. SBDC is funded by the U.S. Small Business Administration and regional support partners, which allows SBDC to provide professional services at no cost. SBDC offers one-on-one, confidential consulting to established businesses and start-ups. It also helps find and secure capital needed to operate and expand. Finally, SBDC offers an array of training sessions at no cost or nominal cost. SBDCs help identify, understand, and overcome challenges of running a successful business and competing in the global marketplace.

Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship: [cob.mnsu.edu/center-for-innovation-and-entrepreneurship](http://cob.mnsu.edu/center-for-innovation-and-entrepreneurship)

Established in late 2016, the College of Business Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship is the newest center at Minnesota State University, Mankato. Located on the second floor of the Hubbard Building in Old Town Mankato, the center is uniquely situated to foster relationships between students and local business members. The mission of the center is to facilitate the launch of the next generation of entrepreneurs, innovators, and dynamic organizations through education, research, and outreach. Resources include access to talented students, university faculty experts, a space for videotaping business pitches and presentations, open collaboration space where multiple groups can meet and work on projects, several meeting rooms, prototyping materials to help teams visualize and communicate ideas, 3D printer and scanner prototype creation, and unique spaces and furnishing to stimulate creativity.

South Central MN SCORE: [southcentralminnesota.score.org](http://southcentralminnesota.score.org)

South Central MN SCORE, Chapter 710, Counselors to America's Small Businesses, is part of a national nonprofit association dedicated to entrepreneur education and the formation, growth and success of the nation's small businesses. The experts at SCORE can help with no-cost business counseling and low cost workshops and small business classes. SCORE offers aspiring business owners and entrepreneurs with free confidential small business advice, entrepreneur training, business plan templates, and more. Aspiring business people, as well as those with existing businesses, may schedule an appointment with a SCORE expert to discuss all varieties of business-related topics.

## *DOWNTOWN, COMMUNITY MARKETING, LOCAL ARTS & RETAIL*

League of Minnesota Cities: [www.lmc.org](http://www.lmc.org)

The League of Minnesota Cities is a membership organization dedicated to promoting excellence in local government. The League serves its more than 800 member cities through advocacy, education and training, policy development, risk management, and other services.

Minnesota Main Street: [www.mnpreservation.org/services/minnesota-main-street](http://www.mnpreservation.org/services/minnesota-main-street)

Minnesota Main Street is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization working statewide for the use of old buildings and sites. At the Preservation Alliance of Minnesota (PAM), the organization's core services help educate, motivate, and strengthen communities. Board, staff, and partners protect and promote Minnesota's shared environment and culture. The Minnesota Historical Society and the Bush Foundation are just two of the many groups supporting the mission. Other organizations include neighborhood groups who need advice on historical designations or saving important structures; developers who support the need to work with legislators on the historic tax credits and investment partnerships; homeowners who want to learn more through unique classes and experiential tours; and Main Street communities for a proven path to economic strength; and others.

Paint the Town Grants: [smiffoundation.org/what-we-do/com\\_development/community\\_grants](http://smiffoundation.org/what-we-do/com_development/community_grants)

SMIF's Paint the Town Grant Program is designed to engage volunteers, create a sense of community pride, and build collaborative efforts that beautify communities through "Painting the Town" with a new community mural, community welcome sign, or painting a historic structure. Paint the Town grants are administered by SMIF in collaboration with 14 Ace Hardware stores located in the region.

Small Cities Development Program: [mn.gov/deed/government/financial-assistance/community-funding/small-cities.jsp](http://mn.gov/deed/government/financial-assistance/community-funding/small-cities.jsp)

Small Cities Development Program (SCDP) funds are granted to local units of government which, in turn, lend funds for the purpose of rehabilitating local housing stock, public infrastructure, and commercial rehabilitation projects.



## EDUCATION, TRAINING, & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Minnesota State Engineering Center of Excellence: [engineering.mnsu.edu](http://engineering.mnsu.edu)

The Minnesota State Engineering Center of Excellence facilitates relationships by engaging academic institutions with industry and provides educational outreach by inspiring interest in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). These efforts shape the next generation of engineers who will solve real-world problems. The Engineering Center of Excellence fosters accessibility to the latest technologies, workforce program, and post-secondary education. Collectively, advancing Minnesota's engineering innovation and competitiveness by enhancing education, engaging industry, and inspiring students.

Pipeline Program: [www.dli.mn.gov/pipline](http://www.dli.mn.gov/pipline)

The Minnesota PIPELINE (Private Investment, Public Education, Labor and Industry Experience) Program is an approach to address current and future workforce needs. The program works with employers to change the conversation from "How do we find workers with the skills we need?" to "How do we GIVE workers the skills we need?" PIPELINE exists to support employers in creating or enhancing a competency based dual-training approach where workers receive a combination of related instruction strategically paired with on-the-job training. Dual-training grants through the Minnesota Office of Higher Education provide funding for employers to create new and expand existing dual-training initiatives. The program targets four, high-growth industries with limited history in Minnesota's apprenticeship system: advanced manufacturing, agriculture, healthcare services, and information technology.

South Central Workforce Council: [www.workforcecouncil.org](http://www.workforcecouncil.org)

The Workforce Council was incorporated in 1983 to administer job training programs in the nine county area of South Central Minnesota and expanded its role to include welfare reform and oversight responsibilities for the WorkForce Center System. The Workforce Council is responsible for designing and marketing employment services, selecting organizations to deliver those services and monitor service delivery.

## *BUSINESS FINANCE & GRANTS*

Region Nine Development Commission: [rndc.org/what-we-do/revolving-loan-fund](http://rndc.org/what-we-do/revolving-loan-fund)  
RNDC administers a Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) to assist exiting businesses, as well as new entrepreneurs, in securing financing they are otherwise unable to get through traditional channels. The primary goal of this program is to create new jobs, or retain existing jobs, in the nine county region. Preference is given to businesses that add full-time skilled or semi-skilled positions. Support comes from the Federal EDA but now is matched locally with RLFs. RNDC welcomes partnering with other lenders to assist local businesses to succeed and thrive.

Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation: [smifoundation.org](http://smifoundation.org)  
SMIF is a regional development and philanthropic organization that fosters economic and community vitality in 20 counties across southern Minnesota through culture collaboration and partnership. SMIF collaborates widely to support community vitality through investments in early childhood, economic and community development. SMIF got its start in the farm crisis of the 1980s to help diversity Greater Minnesota economies and ensure vibrant communities for future generations. SMIF invests about \$5 million annually through loans and grants, in addition to specific programming.

## *PROPERTY LISTINGS*

CoStar: [www.costar.com](http://www.costar.com)  
Free service for property owners to list properties. City may submit listing but must be confirmed by property owner at follow-up call.

LoopNet: [www.loopnet.com](http://www.loopnet.com)  
Free service for city or property owner to list properties. Account can be setup online. Tracking information to view number of property hits and downloads.

Property Drive: [www.propertydrive.com](http://www.propertydrive.com)  
Fee-based listing service for property listings commonly used by brokers.

## USEFUL GUIDES FOR BUSINESS INFORMATION & ASSISTANCE

Minnesota Trade Office: [mn.gov/deed/business/exporting](https://mn.gov/deed/business/exporting)

The Minnesota Trade Office helps turn opportunities into profits in foreign markets by providing the training and expertise that small and mid-sized companies need to export goods and services successfully worldwide.

Minnesota Department of Agriculture: [www.mda.state.mn.us/exporting-and-international-trade](https://www.mda.state.mn.us/exporting-and-international-trade)

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) helps companies and individuals export raw and processes Ag products out of Minnesota. They provide the needed certificates and paperwork, and help companies expand their reach through business and trade development.

Region Nine Development Commission: [www.rndc.org/what-we-do/international-partnerships](https://www.rndc.org/what-we-do/international-partnerships)

RNDC works closely with local industry to leverage comparative advantages in today's global markets. As the designated regional development organization in South Central Minnesota, RNDC fosters partnerships with entities from both public and private sectors to strengthen everything from regional food clusters to medical device manufacturing.

## COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT FUNDING RESOURCES

U.S. Department of Agriculture: [www.usda.gov/topics/farming/grant-and-loans](https://www.usda.gov/topics/farming/grant-and-loans)

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) offers a variety of programs for assisting in community development, housing, and community facilities.

Community Development Block Grant Program:

[www.hud.gov/progam\\_offices/comm\\_planning/communitydevelopment/programs](https://www.hud.gov/progam_offices/comm_planning/communitydevelopment/programs)

The Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG) offers assistance for a variety of community development activities, such as construction of public facilities, planning efforts, and housing development.

Explore Minnesota/Minnesota Department of Tourism: [www.exploreminnesota.com/index.aspx](https://www.exploreminnesota.com/index.aspx)

Explore Minnesota offers assistance for event planning and associated marketing.

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources: [www.dnr.state.mn.us](https://www.dnr.state.mn.us)

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) offers funding assistance for a variety of environmental initiatives from park and trail acquisition to water quality to clean-up of environmentally contaminated "brownfield" sites.

Minnesota Department of Transportation: [www.dot.state.mn.us](https://www.dot.state.mn.us)

The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) has programs for major street reconstruction projects and trail projects.



## APPENDIX II: KIESTER VISIONING SURVEY QUESTIONS & SUMMARY

A public survey was developed to solicit feedback from Kiester residents on the future vision of the community and to help identify community priorities. Feedback from the 36 responses were incorporated into the plan.

### Survey Questions:

- What is your age range?
- What is your gender identity?
- In what language do you speak most often?
- What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?
- Where do you live?
- Where are you employed?
- Why did you originally move to Kiester?
- What three things do you like most about Kiester?
- What three destinations do you visit most frequently?
- What is the biggest challenge Kiester faces?
- What three words describe your vision for Kiester in 20 years?
- What amenities, activities, or offerings would you like to see located here in the future?
- Within the next FIVE YEARS what improvements are most important to you?
- Within the next TWO YEARS what improvements are most important to you?
- Which of the items you mentioned above do you feel is the most important to address?

Key themes emerged from the survey including improving roads, infrastructure, and recreation spaces; property clean-up and yard ordinances; bringing in new businesses and clinics; and re-purposing or demolishing the old school. Along with these themes, there was emphasis on the importance of bringing in new jobs and families to the city.

Respondents mentioned the small size of the city, friendly people, quiet atmosphere, low cost of living, and local amenities, such as the grocery store, theater, and Kee Kafe, as their favorite aspects of the city.



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