REGION NINE DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

Board of Directors Meeting

Wednesday, November 12, 2025 4:30 pm

3 Civic Center Plaza, Suite 310, Mankato, Minnesota

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING
November 12, 2025 at 4:30 p.m. | RNDC

AGENDA

		Time	Page	Action
1.	**CALL TO ORDER**	4:30		
2.	**ROLL CALL** – *Secretary Branstad*	4:30		
3.	**APPROVAL OF AGENDA**	4:31		ACTION
4.	**APPROVAL CONSENT AGENDA** a. Approval of October 8, 2025, Special Board Mtg. Minutes b. Financials – Review Only	4:32	3	ACTION
5.	**INFORMATION/DISCUSSION ITEMS – Review Only** a. Finance Director's Report – *Stephanie Hilpipre* b. Chair's Report – *Chair Laven* *c.* Executive Director's Report – *Nicole Griensewic*	4:35	7	
6.	**CLOSE MEETING** This meeting will be closed in accordance with Minn. Stat. §§ 13D.03 and 13D.05, subd. 3, which permits a public body to close a meeting for the purpose of evaluating the performance of an individual under its authority. In accordance with statute, a summary of the Board's conclusions will be presented at or before the next open meeting of the Board of Directors.	4:45		ACTION
7.	**OPEN MEETING**			ACTION
8.	**OTHER BUSINESS** a. Commissioner Updates b. Meeting Evaluation	5:55	Handout	
9.	**ADJOURNMENT**	6:00		ACTION

Members may participate either in person or via Microsoft Teams, provided they can be both seen and heard.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING
UNAPPROVED Meeting Minutes
October 8, 2025

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Laven called the meeting to order at 5:15 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

MEMBERS PRESENT: Andrea Boettger, Jim Branstad, Marie Dranttel, Mike Laven, Tom Loveall, Christian Lilienthal, Patty O'Connor, Steve Rohlfing, Phil Schafer, Rob Wilkening

OTHERS PRESENT: Nicole Griensewic, Jessica Beyer, Stephanie Hilpipre, Joel Hanif, Ky Battern

There was a quorum.

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Ky Battern was added to the agenda as a public comment participant as part of a public open forum.

Rohlfing moved to approve the amended agenda. Wilkening seconded. Motion carried.

4. PUBLIC OPEN FORUM

Ky Battern, former Finance Director, participated in the open forum portion of the meeting. He requested time to share comments as the former Finance Director. Battern noted that due to content within recent Board of Directors minutes he felt it was necessary to come before the Board to share his perspective. He commented that many of the reported financial concerns and necessary areas of clean-up were not associated with his tenure as Finance Director. He commented that the issues should not be put on him and that they stem from several months of not having a Finance Director in the position. He thanked the Board for their time and opportunity to speak before the group.

5. APPROVAL OF SEPTEMBER 10, 2025, MINUTES

Schafer moved to approve the September 10, 2025, meeting minutes. Boettger seconded. Motion carried.

5. BUDGET & PERSONNEL PLAN UPDATE

Nicole Griensewic introduced the topic of providing a special update to the Board of Directors following the September meeting to provide current information related to the financial status of the organization as well as a plan of action moving forward to address financial solvency. She shared that staff have been working for several weeks to put together information and have been meeting regularly with Commission leadership for added oversight including the Budget and Personnel Committee Chair, Treasurer, and Board Chair. Griensewic turned the meeting over to Budget and Personnel Committee Chair, Shanon Nowell, to provide outlined details of the update and current financial solvency plans.

Commisioner Nowell first provided an introduction and shared that she was covering this report due to the planned absence of Treasurer Marie Drantell was able to attend the meeting after all.

The report presented included background and context information related to some points of reference related to the history of the finance department and operations. It also provided information on challenges and contributing factors that led to where we are today including program payment delays, cash flow strains, accounting system errors, needed system clean-up, and turnover within the Finance Department. As part of the report, the current financial future was also shared. Key points included; reserve levels are lower than anticipated; a budget amendment will be needed; and that audit preparations are underway. Additionally, Commissioner Nowell updated the Board that immediate/short-term action will be needed to reduce expenditures paired with long-term strategies to rebuild organizational reserves. She called upon Deputy Director, Jessica Beyer, to present correlating information and points as part of a visual slide. Commissioner Nowell thanked current finance director Stephanie Hilpipre for her work coming into this position.

Discussion and questions by the Board followed. Commissioner Rohlfing commented that we need to turn grants and the billable time as quickly as possible due to the issues we are experiencing with the Federal Government in addition to the highly likely pending government shutdown. Beyer shared that a main factor in the financial solvency plan is to strategically ensure we are billing time to projects and alleviating strain on the general fund. Part of this is also completing work as quickly as possible for reimbursement on Federal projects. Commissioner Loveall added that we need to spend down grants fully utilizing the billable hours. Hilpipre shared that a line item will be added to the out of state travel request form to tie funding for the travel to a billing code. Commissioner Lilienthal commented that increased revenue will be needed. Griensewic shared that we have approximately $1.3 million in new revenue sources pending and are actively seeking opportunities.

Commissioner Nowell shared that this information will be shared with the full Commission following this meeting.

<u>Wilkening moved to adjourn. Boettger seconded. Motion carried.</u>

The meeting was adjourned at 5:48 p.m.

REGION NINE
DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
Your regional partner for progress.
3 Civic Center Plaza, Suite 310, Mankato, MN 56001
507.387.5643

FINANCIAL STATEMENT

To: RNDC Board of Directors
From: Stephanie Hipipre, Finance Director
Date: October 31, 2025
Re: Financial Statement – Board of Directors Meeting, October 31, 2025

At this time, I am unable to certify a complete balance sheet or full statement of accounts for presentation at the Board of Directors meeting on November 12, 2025. I am currently in the process of verifying and reconciling each line item on the Balance Sheet generated by our accounting system (GMS) to ensure accuracy.

During this review, I have identified some issues that require resolution. While a full financial statement is pending, I am providing below a disclosure of cash balances held in RNDC's bank accounts as of October 31, 2025, to offer visibility into our current liquidity position.

<u>Region Nine Development Commission</u>

R9 MAGIC Account:	$1,074,239.38
Wells Fargo Payroll:	$21,110.45
Total Cash:	**$1,095,349.83**

I have identified an issue where the Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) ACH loan payments have been deposited into the R9 MAGIC account instead of their respective RLF accounts. I'm currently working to reconcile and resolve this issue. So far, I estimate there is about $264,030.18 in our R9 MAGIC account that is money owed to the revolving loan funds.

Furthermore, a lot of funds currently held in the R9 MAGIC account are money paid in advance and owed as pass-through funds to external projects and initiatives such as McKnight Foundation, Food Recovery, Convivencia Hispana, Resource Rural, and Community Energy Innovation Prize. Since audit adjustments from fiscal year 2024 were never input into the accounting system, I'm still working to reconcile the exact value of the pass-through commitments and liabilities held in our accounts.

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Legacy Revolving Loan Fund

MAGIC Account:	$1,505,870.55
US Bank 'sweep' account:	$13,848.23
Outstanding Principal:	$1,402,936.45

CARES Act Revolving Loan Fund

MAGIC Account:	$83,849.73
US Bank 'sweep' account:	$10,978.24
Outstanding Principal:	$790,3325.13

Region Nine Area Inc.*

*Pass through funds held for other entities

Wells Fargo Checking:	$102,723.63
Wells Fargo Savings:	$3,119.84

Finance Director's Report

November 2025 Board of Directors Meeting

Submitted by Stephanie Hilpipre

Finance

- As noted in last month's special board meeting, I recently discovered that the FY24 audit adjustments were never entered into the accounting system (GMS). The journal entries were emailed to Region 9 on December 23, 2024.
- McKnight has awarded us 40 hours of controller contractor time to assist with the cleanup of our accounting system. So far, the contractor has helped input the FY24 audit adjustments. Her remaining hours will be used to support audit preparation and related work.
- The RNDC FY25 audit was originally scheduled to take place in September 2025. It was later rescheduled to the last week of October. Unfortunately, we were unable to meet that revised timeline. On October 31, I met with the Abdo audit team and our controller contractor to develop a strategy that will help us begin the audit as soon as possible.
- One of the major tasks that needs to be completed prior to the audit is the cleanup of charges billed to the indirect cost fund. Approximately $130,000 in charges that are not indirect-cost eligible were incorrectly billed to the fund. In total, around 300 line items require review and reclassification. This process involves pulling invoices and credit card statements to properly reassign the costs. Similar cleanup work is also required in the General Fund.
- The certification of our indirect cost rate has not been submitted for several years. As a result, we are required to take the de minimis rate on several contracts. Examples include, 15% on Safe Roads and Streets for All, and a 10% rate on the MSU partnership EDA application. Historically, our indirect cost rate has been around 23%. Joel and I are working on the recertification process.
- I submitted invoices and reports to collect our FY26 - Q1 money under the EECBG and State Competitiveness Fund contracts.
- The semi-annual EDA fiscal report, due October 30, 2025, could not be submitted by the deadline because the necessary 9/30/2025 accounting system reports cannot currently be generated from GMS. I am prioritizing system cleanup so these reports can be filed as soon as possible.
- My primary focus remains on audit preparation and GMS cleanup, as progress in these areas is interdependent. However, I want to note that there are other imperative items requiring attention, including FY26 budget amendments, the development of a strategic plan for billable hours, and long-term fiscal stability planning. At this time, I do not have the capacity to address these items alongside the urgent accounting and audit work.

Revolving Loan Fund

- As noted in the Financial Statement, there is a large sum of money in the Region 9 MAGIC accounts that needs to be transferred to the appropriate RLF MAGIC accounts. Funds incorrectly deposited in FY26 have been reconciled and transferred. Fiscal year 2025 still needs to be fully reconciled and verified before a transfer is executed.
- Separate US bank accounts were set up to receive the ACH payments for each plan. The "sweep" function to move this money into the MAGIC accounts has not been set up properly by the bank. Jazmine is working to resolve this issue.

Region Nine Area, Inc.

- Several contracts have been signed over the past year with Mahkato Okawitaya, Rockefeller Foundation in support of Waseca Community Investment Group, Food Recovery by Wooden Spoon, South Central Minnesota Food Recovery, and a $200,000 subgrantee award from the Minneapolis Foundation in support of Wooden Spoon's food recovery efforts.
- A job listing for an intern has been posted with MSU. The intern will take on the administrative accounting tasks for servicing these RNAI fiscal sponsorships. The cost for this intern will be largely subsidized by the Federal Work Study Program. Food Recovery by Wooden Spoon has also allocated $9,750 of their Minneapolis Foundation grant and part of that money will be used to pay for this work. Since MSU's Fall semester ends soon, the hope is to get someone hired to begin employment at the beginning of the Spring semester in January.
- We're working with Burkhardt and Burkhardt to file past due Form 990s.

Human Resources

- The health insurance plan was renewed maintaining the same plan and coverage. Our premiums for next calendar year are set to increase by 8.16%
- We have employees who have reported missing deposits into their ICMA 457(b) accounts and HSA accounts. Investigating, reconciling, and fixing these issues is still on my to-do list.
- PTO leave accruals in the Teamkeeper timesheet system have not been calculating correctly. I believe the issue lies specifically with ESST (earned sick and safe time). Analysis of everyone's accruals will need to be completed and updated accordingly.

STAFF UPDATES | November 2025

PROGRAM UPDATES:

Annual Performance Progress Report – Alejandra, Nate
The Annual Performance Progress Report is now complete. Nate has formatted the final version of the plan. The report highlights insights from a regional survey on community and economic development priorities, updates on regional goals, and feedback from the Community and Economic Development Committee. The main regional priorities identified through this process include housing, childcare, infrastructure, workforce and job opportunities, and local business sustainability.

Rural Child Care Innovation Program in Eagle Lake (RCCIP) – Alejandra
Alejandra has worked closely with the City of Eagle Lake to develop an application for the current grant round of the Taylor Family Farms Foundation. The city submitted an application to secure funding to support local childcare providers in the community.

Springfield CARES Childcare Project – Alejandra
Alejandra submitted an overview of insights and findings from engagement with childcare providers in Springfield to the CARES group. The City of Springfield and the CARES group had explored applying for funding for childcare capacity building through the Taylor Family Farms Foundation, and Alejandra had engaged with the city to support their application. However, they decided not to proceed due to limitations with the match requirement. The community will focus on working with First Children's Finance to further identify challenges and opportunities to improve childcare accessibility and affordability. The group will pursue funding through SMIF instead.

Children's Museum of Southern Minnesota (CMSM) Programming Assessments – Kristian, Nate
RNDC is in the process of wrapping up a four-month long assessment of existing and future programming with CMSM's leadership team, with particular focus on educational partners, "impact partners", and other stakeholders with a vested interest in the museum's long-term vitality. The project is funded by Compeer.

Regional Food System Supply Chains and Transportation Implications – Kristian, Aaron
RNDC is codirecting the second phase of the University of Minnesota funded study on agriculture and food systems supply chains. RNDC has provided supply chain maps, with the support of ESRI staff, identifying transportation paths for agriculture to food manufacturing/processing segments of these clusters. The policy implications of these will be presented at an event in Red Wing on November 3rd.

Regional Food Rescue – Tom, Sabri
The running total for rescued food that RNDC has assisted or organized for the year is 68,193 lbs. of food, worth approximately $106,151. This food has been disbursed into the community through area partners, some of the largest recipients of the food are ECHO, SCMNFR, St. Peter Food Shelf, Waseca Area Food Shelf, and the various clinic produce programs. Some of the most common types of food rescued recently have included squash, broccoli, pumpkins, limes, and peppers.

Tom and Sabri have secured use of the Wooden Spoon Van for out-of-town use through the Thriving Communities Grant for one year. Use is subject to van availability and scope of the project. The goal is still to get a small, refrigerated van or truck for sustainability and future use. There are grant opportunities through the MPCA that Tom will be working on with Natasha of Wooden Spoon to secure an eco-friendly hauling solution. These opportunities have not opened up yet; however, the use of the current van has been extremely successful with over 200 miles logged and 3,400 lbs. hauled.

Mankato Clinic Produce Place – Tom
The first month has been completed and talks of gaining a freezer at these locations as well are also in the works. The total amount of food rescued and disbursed in the Mankato Clinic Produce Place has already reached over 1,800 lbs.

Food Access Partnership Building – Tom
The only update to date on this is that the Eastridge Mayo site has been awarded SHIP money to buy a freezer for the program. This will help increase capacity and longevity of the food for the program.

The Make Hunger History Initiative for St. James also held an update meeting. No new initiatives came from it, however all partners have been successful so far in their assignments.

Alternative and Ethnically Relevant Rescued Food Sources - Tom
No new updates to this yet, however, the SCMNFR Advisory Council will be taking this on as a priority eventually and will come up with ways to procure more of these foods through growers and retailers.

SCMNFR Advisory Council – Tom, Sabri
As part of the Thriving Communities Grant that Sabri worked on with SCMNFR, an advisory council has been established to help plan for sustainability and growth in the region's food rescue program. The first two meetings have been held and, in the future, they will be working on the charter, future transportation opportunities, next year's growing season, freezer and meal disbursement.

Revolving Loan Fund - Jazmine
Jazmine attended the Entrepreneurial Bridge event in Albert Lea, where she connected with business partners and emerging entrepreneurs to strengthen regional relationships. She successfully closed loans for Truman Tavern, LLC in Truman and Three Brothers Meat Market in Mapleton.

In addition, Jazmine continues to advance several active projects. The loan for Endless Adventure Park is progressing, and she anticipates bringing it to the Loan Committee soon. The previously approved loan for Care Corner Daycare is also moving forward, with the goal of closing in November.

Lastly, the Crystal Clean Car Wash project in St. James—previously financed through Region Nine—has officially opened.

Safe Streets and Roads for All Grant – Mark
The three-year, $340,000 grant will allow for the development of a regional road safety action plan, along with individual action plans for our nine counties. Activities this fall will include field visits to high crash corridors, meetings with MnDOT to review future transportation projects, and listening sessions with the public and specific user groups to get their feedback on the safety of our transportation system.

Transportation/MnDOT Regional Planning Grant – Joel, Mark
Joel took part in the second VINE Door2Door Task Force meeting on October 23. The group is taking a closer look at what the biggest revenue makers and drainers are, and considering a survey of former riders and drivers to see why both groups have decreased in number. RNDC's involvement in this task force will help build on goals around non-emergency medical transportation outlined in Region Nine's Local Human Services Transit Coordination Plan.

On October 9, Joel participated in the Advocacy Awareness Walk in Downtown and West Mankato along with other Greater Mankato Bike Walk Advocates board members and clients of the SMILES Center for Independent Living. The SMILES clients included several wheelchair-bound people as well as some developmentally disabled people. The purpose of this event was to show the issues with our local active transportation infrastructure in Mankato when used by people with disabilities. The most notable issues were crosswalk timings and sidewalk widths. Crosswalk timing tended to be far too short for people in wheelchairs to safely cross the road at several intersections on Riverfront Drive. Sidewalks were also too narrow for wheelchair users in most spots. Through most of the route, it is impossible for two wheelchair users traveling toward one another without one having to risk falling by rolling through the grass.

On October 21 and October 23, Joel and Mark participated in planning workshops in St. James and North Mankato as part of the MnDOT Active Transportation Planning grant received by those cities. The purpose of the exercise was to identify priority corridors and intersections for improvements to user safety and active transportation connectivity. The workshops were well-attended and informative. The feedback gained will be used to inform demonstration projects such as temporary bike lanes, traffic-calming, and parklets. These demonstration projects are expected to be installed spring/summer 2026.

On October 27, Mark met with MnDOT District 7 staff to discuss the proposed changes to Trunk Highway 169 in St. Peter in 2028. Topics of discussion included lowering the speed limit, pedestrian safety, and traffic signalization. As a result of the discussion, MnDOT altered signal timing at the intersections of Jefferson, Mulberry and Nassau to improve pedestrian safety.

REGIONAL TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE:

Fairmont Energy and Environmental Resilience Plan – Sabri, Sam, Lisa, Nate
The community survey is being conducted, and the team has continued meeting with partners to collect data and information to inform the plan.

Federal EDA Disaster Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) – Jessica, Kristian, Mark, Alejandra
RNDC has continued work to engage with counties and communities to help submit potential project applications for the Federal EDA Disaster Notice of Funding that was released in early June.

Technical assistance and grant administration work is underway for the following applications: Cannon River Watershed Project with Le Sueur, Rice, and Waseca counties (grant submitted); Martin County (grant submitted); the communities of New Richland, Springfield and Waterville; Farmamerica; the City of North Mankato, and through a joint project with Minnesota State University and RNDC (grant submitted). The RNDC/MSU application was submitted in October with a total budget of $3.5 million, with an anticipated allocation to RNDC of approximately $850,000.

Martin County submitted an application for funding under the Disaster NOFO, supported by CEDA, to support economic recovery and resiliency programming. The project's deliverables include building resiliency in manufacturing and other key industries, increasing workforce skills, diversifying the economy, and improving downtown resiliency.

Le Sueur County, in partnership with Waseca County and Rice County, and with the assistance of Region Nine, submitted an application for funding under EDA's Readiness Path designed to address the root cause of frequent and severe flooding in the Upper Cannon River Watershed. The three counties were severely impacted by the June 2024 floods, which established a new high water mark in Waterville by two feet above the previous record set in 2019. The requested funding will yield preliminary and final engineering reports for water storage projects in the three counties that should be sufficient to lower floodwaters by one foot in Waterville.

Blue Earth Solar on Public Buildings Grant – Sabri
Sabri is working with Blue Earth Light and Water to apply for this grant to install solar at their Power Plant and Utility Warehouse.

Minnesota Climate Adaptation Partnership (MCAP) – Jessica, Sam
This partnership and contract for project deliverables with the University of Minnesota is ongoing. Sam recently attended the Midwest Climate Conference in Milwaukee, representing RNDC as part of our partnership, along with

speaking on a panel. Given our recent contract extension, there will be a key focus on convening stakeholder meetings, listening sessions, and completing the remaining areas of our workplan with MCAP.

Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation (SMIF) - Kristian
Kristian presented research findings to SMIF's board of directors at their quarterly meeting in Owatonna on October 22, with particular focus on economic opportunities and needs in the larger region, the findings from the REV assessments he conducted in spring with Tim Penny, including recommendations for future economic development programming/funding. The presentation, which included other partner organizations, concluded with table discussions on respective topics.

Waterville Housing Study – Alejandra, Jessica
Alejandra applied for funding to support the City of Waterville as it prepares to conduct a housing study and is seeking grant opportunities to help offset the cost of the project. She and Jessica also met with and presented to the city's Economic Development Authority to discuss strategic economic development planning, housing studies, and local grant funding opportunities.

Tri-County Solid Waste Management Plan – Joel, Mark, Nate
The project team has started assembling data tables, background narratives on various things (geology, watersheds, land use), and other assorted things for the plan document. Joel is working on a revised contract for the project as external factors beyond the control of RNDC and Tri-County Solid Waste have delayed the plan beyond the original contract dates.

Apple Blossom Road and Shooting Star Scenic Byways Corridor Management Plans – Mark, Joel, Sabri, Sam, Alejandra, Kristian, Sarah, Nate
RNDC received scopes of work from MnDOT for two scenic byway corridor management plans in MnDOT District 6. These plans offer RNDC a unique opportunity to lead a process where planning, transportation, tourism, recreation, and economic development intersect, enabling us to tap into the skillsets of almost all of our staff. Mark and Joel are currently working on budget proposals for each plan. The maximum amount allocated to each plan is $75,000, for a total of $150,000 (Note: Because these plans are outside RNDC's service area, a higher out-of-region contractual rate of $125/hour will be used. The primary beneficiaries are communities that do not contribute to Region Nine's levy, so this higher rate offsets that lack of levy support). MnDOT hopes to have contracts executed in early December, and the project timelines will be from that point until June 30, 2026.

<u>GRANT COORDINATION AND ADMINISTRATION:</u>

Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant (EECBG) – Sam, Sabri, Lisa
Mapleton will be moving forward to receive energy audits for 10 city-owned buildings/facilities. RNDC is working with Frontier Energy to formalize this process and will seek a completion date in Fall 2025.

We are also working with the City of Welcome and Bolton and Menk to begin an initial energy design on a new Reverse Osmosis building for the community's water treatment to meet MPCA requirements.

The City of Le Sueur is working with engineering firm ICS to perform energy studies at their Community Center and Ice Arena, City Hall, Library, and Joint Services Building.

Sabri has been working with Belgrade Township to develop a Resilience Study for their Township shop which has outdated HVAC systems, flooding issues, and needs to be reconfigured for better use by township staff.

Small Communities Planning Grants – Sam, Lisa
Working with the City of Henderson to apply for wastewater planning funds. SEH is supporting these efforts as a long-standing engineering partner with the city, along with PeopleService, who represents the wastewater treatment perspective. If awarded, RNDC will be the project manager and lead community engagement efforts.

COMMUNICATIONS – Nate
In addition to the above projects, Nate helped Tom prepare for his presentation at NADO by creating a one-page summary of the Food Rescue Project and organizing promotional materials. Nate finalized the new RNDC promotional video that was created by True Facade. He has uploaded it to the website and promoted it on social media channels.

Nate was out for a portion of this time period assisting his mother and eventually took bereavement leave.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR UPDATES
At the NADO Annual Training Conference in Salt Lake City, Tom presented the food rescue work that is happening throughout our region. The presentation went well, and a couple of regions from other states have reached out to inquire about the program and how it started. While there, Tom also made many connections with people who work with food systems and will be sharing ideas with them for food recovery. A goal was also made to do more work with disaster preparedness when it comes to food systems because of the information Tom learned at the 'Lesson's Learned from Helene' session.

Nicole and Sabri did a radio interview on KTOE's, *Talk of the Town* program on October 10th. They shared updates on RNDC's work, highlighting the food recovery work which was then presented nationally the following week during the NADO Annual Training Conference.

While at NADO, Nicole and Sabri participated in meetings for the newly created Rural Energy Academy (REA). Nicole was asked by NADO to take the lead. REA is reimbursing the travel costs and will offer a stipend to cover the staff time involved. NACo is also a partner for the REA, which was created by Olmstead County Commissioner, Dave Senjem, a RNDC partner through Climate Smart Municipalities.

The team celebrated the fall by holding a staff potluck on October 27. The lunch gave an opportunity for staff to interact casually and enjoy some fellowship.

Nicole helped lead a call with local area leaders and AGIT (regional economic development organization with public and private partnerships) from the Aachen, Germany region on November 3rd. MSU,M's Dean of Education, Director of Agriculture and Engineering, Department Chair of Aviation, head of the Mankato FBO, Northstar Aviation and others wanted to discuss possible partnerships with the Aachen region. Merzbruck, Germany has the only research-based airfield in Europe. With MSU,M's well-known aviation program, there is a strong interest in finding connections and future shared projects. Greater MSP was invited to present during the call on the SAF Hub in Minnesota, where they are taking the lead with corporate partners. RNDC is staying close to the SAF (Sustainable Aviation Fuel) conversations, as it shows potential for our agricultural feedstocks and proximity to MSP. This is just one of the projects that has come from our sister region partnership and learning exchange this past June. RNDC's relationship with MSU,M has never been stronger.

Nicole was also asked by NADO to do the introduction and kick off for the training conference. She welcomed the crowd and did the introduction for the opening plenary speaker, Doug Griffiths, author of *13 Ways to Kill Your Community*.

While at NADO, a colleague from Sioux Falls asked if RNDC would be a local partner to help promote loans their RDO does in Minnesota, in addition to SD. Their office will provide a stipend ($2-3k) for being a local partner, finding meeting space for presentations to bankers and other regional lenders. Sarah is assisting with the project.

Nicole will be hosting the next quarterly MADO Executive Directors meeting in Mankato on December 1-3. She has invited MnDOT Commissioner Daubenberger to attend, as MADO seeks to increase the MnDOT annual planning grant. The Executive Directors are also meeting with MnDOT about this concern on November 4th. The last increase was in 2013, yet the list of work items has continued to grow, as well as inflation, personnel and other costs.

Scenic Byways

Exhibit C: Specifications, Duties, and Scope of Work

Background

The Apple Blossom Trail Scenic Byway follows County Highways 29, 1, 12, and 3 for 17 miles along the bluffs above the Mississippi River from La Crescent, to Nodine, near Great Bluffs State Park, and north to US 61. The Apple Blossom Scenic Byway is known for its rolling hills of apple orchards and panoramic views of the Mississippi River Valley. Trees are in full blossom in spring and summer, but make sure to stop and pick up some fresh apples, apple cider, and pumpkins in the fall. Winter provides a picturesque landscape as the hills and apple trees are blanketed with snow and winter birds move into the area. The last Corridor Management Plan (CMP) was completed in 1998.

Deliverables

A new Corridor Management Plan that builds upon the 2002 CMP and its implementation accomplishments, and that addresses the Federal Highway Administration Corridor Management Plan required 14 CMP elements (Federal Register Vol. 60, No. 96). The plan, public engagement, and all other deliverables will be ADA compliant.

1. **Corridor Map** developed using ArcGIS Pro. Utilize "Charted Territory" as the ESRI default basemap. Integrate MnDOT provided wayshowing sign, road/shoulder and byway alignment, MnDOT Capital Highway Investment Plan (CHIP), District 6 Traffic Safety Plan, and crash data. Apply the attached GIS data format requirements for intrinsic resources to add points and data for intrinsic resources (scenic, historic, archeological, natural, recreational, and cultural).

The purpose of the mapping is to graphically communicate and manage byway characteristics and needs based upon data analysis during the CMP development process and through its implementation ongoing. The mapping can also be utilized for marketing, promotion, and itinerary development, as well as consumer print maps, StoryMaps, and online interactive trip planning maps. D6 Planning, OES Scenic Byway Program, and Shooting Star Scenic Byway champions and partners are the intended users of the full map, while byway travelers are intended users of the resulting trip guidance.

2. **Intrinsic Quality Assessment** use the corridor map to determine resource conditions and how well they currently meet byway traveler needs and contribute to the byway experience.

3. **Intrinsic Quality Management Strategies** to determine resource preservation and enhancement of the visual, historic and natural integrity and attractiveness, and develop promotion opportunities including themed itineraries.

4. **Interpretation Plan** to determine where interpretation currently occurs, its relevance to the byway, and its condition. Develop interpretation themes specific to the byway and its intrinsic resources. Identify where on-site, on-line, and printed interpretation can be added or improved. Develop themed itineraries that promote the intrinsic resources.

5. **Highway Design & Maintenance Standards** discussion relating to planned projects in MnDOT's CHIP. This discussion should include an evaluation of how the proposed changes may protect and enhance intrinsic

qualities of the byway corridor, wayshowing, interpretation, multi-modal connections, and intrinsic resource access.

6. **General Road Safety Issues and Strategies** resulting from a review of MnDOT's TH 56 safety plans, CHIP, and accident record to identify strategies that address issues through highway design, maintenance, or operation.

7. **Commercial Traffic Plan** to assess if there are conflicts with commercial and agricultural road users and develop a plan to accommodate commerce while maintaining a safe and efficient byway experience.

8. **Wayshowing Guide Sign Condition Assessment and Maintenance Plan** that 1) confirms through field review MnDOT TAMs sign location and condition data, and 2) describes how the State will insure and make the number and placement of signs to provide continuous and coherent route marking in accordance with the MnMUTCD.

9. **Outdoor Advertising Control Compliance** confirm MnDOT permitted off-premise outdoor advertising locations and document compliance with all existing local, State, and Federal laws on the control of outdoor advertising. As provided at 23 U.S.C. 131(s), if a State has a State scenic byway program, the State may not allow the erection of new signs not in conformance with 23 U.S.C. 131(c) along any highway on the Interstate System or Federal-aid primary system which before, on, or after December 18, 1991, has been designated as a scenic byway under the State's scenic byway program. This prohibition would also apply to Interstate System and Federal-aid primary system highways that are designated scenic byways under the National Scenic Byways Program and All-American Roads Program, whether or not they are designated as State scenic byways.

10. **Byway Visitor Experience Plan** to describe how existing development might be enhanced and new development might be accommodated while still preserving the intrinsic qualities of the corridor. This can be done through design review, and such land management techniques as zoning, easements, design standards, and economic incentives.

11. **Marketing Narrative and Plan** outlining byway marketing goals, target audience, the tactics you will use to achieve those goals, marketing media options and priorities, events, funding, annual marketing schedule, staffing, and partnerships.

12. **Byway Development Plan** for maintaining and enhancing the byway experience for travelers' safety and comfort, and for preserving and enhancing the corridor to reflect the highest levels of visual integrity and attractiveness to provide a cohesive and legible byway experience that will result in revisitation.

13. **Byway Leadership and Public Participation Plan** to assure on-going public participation in the development and implementation of corridor management strategies and objectives. Facilitate at least one meeting per month with byway leaders and partners, including MnDOT District and Environmental Stewardship. At least three will be on-site with a remote option, while interim meetings may be conducted remotely.

14. **CMP Implementation Work Plan** including a 5-year schedule and a listing of all agency, group, and individual responsibilities needed to implement the corridor management plan. Develop a schedule and duties to assure the continuing review by byway leaders and partners to assess how well those responsibilities are being met and to make work plan adjustments.

Objectives

The project will accomplish the following:

1. Develop the CMP deliverables to meet MnDOT's ADA requirements.

2. Foster existing and potential new partnerships to ensure long-term byway support and plan implementation to leverage broad byway program benefits.

3. Review the existing CMP to identify past CMP implementation accomplishments and remaining priorities.

4. Highlight accomplishments achieved by existing partnerships.

5. Determine new priorities, opportunities, and constraints, organized in a 5-year work plan that identifies who is responsible for actions, funding resources, authorizations, and partnerships needed to develop CMP implementation projects.

6. Develop a GIS database detailing locations, conditions and contacts for the byway intrinsic resources, byway wayshowing guide signs, signage to intrinsic resources, and interpretation signage.

7. Identify updates to the byway website, social media and other electronic communication media to implement CMP strategies.

8. Develop a historical record retention protocol for byway organization and partner use.

The Contractor will:

1. Convene, facilitate, and document meetings,

2. Conduct necessary research.

3. Make the document ADA accessible.

4. Draft the corridor management plan.

5. Engage stakeholders and encourage public feedback.

6. Ensure proper communication with the State's project manager and District staff.

7. Publish the final CMP and associated documents in ADA accessible PDF format and the final map data in ArcGIS Pro map format.

First Children's Finance

SUPPORTING FAMILY AND CENTER CHILD CARE PROGRAMS

For more than 30 years, First Children's Finance has worked with communities, family providers and child care centers to increase the supply and sustainability of early care and education in urban and rural areas. We do this through business management training, one-on-one coaching, financing, and community consulting. Depending on the project, our work may be available to providers at no cost due to funding from the MN Department of Children, Youth, and Families and other regional funders.

Right Size Solutions for Start-Up, Existing or Expansion:

Financial Modeling & Analysis | Business Planning | Marketing Assistance | Loans Grants | Contract & Policy Review | Rate Structure | Enrollment & Staffing Analysis Facility Consultation | Startup Consultation | Business Goal Setting Board Governance | Budget & Cashflow

For more information contact:

Stephanie Sanvig
Sr. Business Development Specialist
stephanies@firstchildrensfinance.org | 612-473-4542

Newsletter Article

Brownfield Funding Available!

Abandoned gas stations, former dry cleaners or old manufactoring spaces exist in every community. Properties like these, called brownfields, can be a challenge to redevelop and often sit idle for years due to risks of perceived contamination. This can lead to neighborhood blight, unsafe structures, and polluted spaces that can harm people and the environment

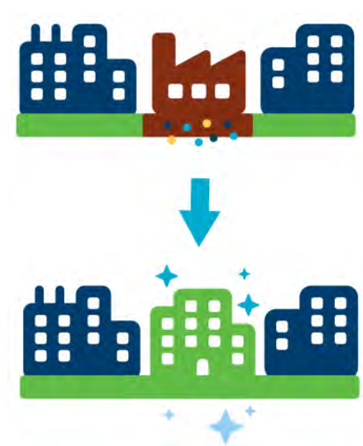
The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency can help! The MPCA is now accepting applications to its Brownfield Assessment Grant, which funds environmental investigations on brownfield properties across the state

Eligible applicants include: local units of government, community organizations, nonprofits, small business owners, emerging developers and Tribal Nations.

Funding can be used for: Phase I & II environmental site assessments, sampling and analysis plans and, preparation of cleanup plans.

Applications accepted on a rolling basis. Learn more and apply today!

Social Media Post



Brownfield Funding Available! The MPCA is now accepting applications to its Brownfield Assessment Grant, which funds environmental investigations on brownfield properties (sites with known or suspected contamination) across the state.

Eligible applicants include: community organizations, individuals, nonprofits, small towns, small business owners, and Tribal Nations. Learn more and apply today!

We invite you to participate with local and regional farmers, policymakers, business leaders, and researchers for a critical conversation about strengthening regional food systems in the Upper Midwest. This event will examine how transportation infrastructure and supply chain design impact local economic development opportunities and agricultural competitiveness.

Event: The Value of Regional Food Chains
Date: Monday, November 3, 2025
Time: 9 a.m. - 2 p.m.
Location: Anderson Center Historic Barn
Address: 163 Tower View Dr., Red Wing, MN 55066

Key topics

- **Middle Supply Chain Solutions**: Addressing gaps in processing, distribution, and logistics infrastructure.
- **Transportation & Economics**: How infrastructure decisions shape regional food system capabilities.
- **Local Value Capture**: Strategies for keeping agricultural economic benefits in local communities.
- **Last Mile Challenges**: Overcoming distribution barriers for small and medium-scale producers.

Recent research reveals that while commodity agriculture receives systemic support, regional food systems lack critical infrastructure connections. This event will examine current trends, challenges, and opportunities, exploring innovative business models and policy frameworks that can better support local agri-businesses and communities.

Agenda

8:45 - 9 a.m.: Refreshments and assorted pastries

9 - 9:30 a.m.: Welcome and presentation
Frank Douma, TPEC
Tom Horan, TPEC

9:30 - 10:30: Panel - Economics: Transportation, labor, policy, and sustainability
Theresa McCormick, The Good Acre
Kate Seybold, MN Dept of Agriculture

Sam Ziegler, GreenSeam
Michelle Miller, Center for Integrated Sustainable Agriculture, UW Madison
Moderator: **Benya Kraus**, Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation

10:30-10:45: Break

10:45-11:45: Panel - Business models and regional food systems
Landon Plagge-Matt Kruger, Green Acres Milling
John Peterson, Ferndale Market
Sara George, Renewing the Countryside
Sadie Gannet, MN Dept, of Health
Moderator: **Ariel Kagan**, MN Farmers Union

11:45-12:15: TPEC Presentation
Burke Murphy, TPEC
Kristian Braekkan, Region Nine Development Commission
Audrey Clark, TPEC

12:15-12:30: Cannon Roots food cluster introduction
Laura Qualey, Cannon Falls Community & Business Development

12:30 - 1:15: Lunch and table discussion

1:15 - 1:45: Tables share out

1:45 - 2:00: Next steps and closing
Tom Horan, TPEC
Frank Douma, TPEC

Rural Energy Academy

For Information: Jennifer Jenkins, CEO, Mana Group, Managing Partner, REA
jennifer@ruralenergyacademy.org

The Rural Energy Academy

The National Association of Counties (NACo), in partnership with the National Association of Development Officials (NADO), and the Mana Group are working together in the launch of the Rural Energy Academy ("the Academy") to provide resources, peer learning opportunities, and targeted technical assistance (TA) to rural decision makers as they consider diversifying or expanding their energy production portfolios.

NACo and NADO, as trusted brokers of information for and coordinators of rural stakeholders, host the Academy and incorporate its programming into their member offerings. The Academy is managed by the Mana Group and an Advisory Group made up of members from its host organizations.

Resources and Activities

- Creation of energy fact sheets by resource
- Responsive publications and case studies, such as:
  - Tax advantageous approaches to energy development
  - Strategies for mixed land use
  - Environmental and human considerations of materials
  - Repositories of community benefits agreements and planning tools
  - Workforce training needs and strategies to ensure resident economic mobility
- Evidence-informed targeted TA
  - On Demand Education: monthly 'talk to a SME' for NACo and NADO members
  - Office hours: book a specific time slot during a monthly window
- Energy Tours in energy-production communities
- Cohort-based TA that supports interested county leaders in preparing to expand their communities' energy production
- National virtual network for information-sharing and collaboration

Anticipated Impact

The Academy and its activities can help change the narrative on energy production from displacement to expansion; from erasing the past to building our collective future. County and municipal governments are, in many ways, the laboratory of innovation. Local leaders will be given tools, training and networking opportunities that build their expertise on energy production, allow them to visit and see success stories in-person, learn from unsuccessful projects, and efficiently solicit and incorporate community input to be fully equipped to make decisions about their communities' energy future.

Hosts

The Academy will be hosted by NACo and NADO to serve their memberships, which includes nearly 40,000 county elected officials and 3.6 million county employees that are members of NACo and the national network of more than 500 Regional Development Organizations (RDOs) across the country that NADO serves.

Audience

Rural decision-makers such as; county elected representatives, zoning officials, planners, and economic development professionals

Timeline

The Academy launched in July 2025, with educational activities for members already underway. A Peer Exchange is set for December, followed by a 12-week program in early 2026.

Terms & Abbreviations

ACC – American Connection Corp

ACE - Americas Competitiveness Exchange on Innovation and Entrepreneurship

APPR – Annual Performance Progress Report (CEDS) ATP – Area Transportation Partnership

AURI – Agricultural Utilization Research Institute

BDO – Bioeconomy Development Opportunity

CRP – Carbon Reduction Program

CEDS – Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

COPAL – Comunidades Organizando el Poder y la Acción Latina (Communities Organizing Latino Power and Action)

CGMC – Coalition of Greater Minnesota Cities

CPRG – Climate Pollution Reduction Grant

CSET – College of Science, Engineering & Technology

CSM – Climate Smart Municipalities

CSSJ – Climate Smart St. James

CTS – Center for Transportation Studies

DEED – Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development

DOE – Department of Energy

EDA – Economic Development Administration

EDD – Economic Development District

EECBG - Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant

GAC – Gustavus Adolphus College

GIS – Geographic Information Systems

GMG – Greater Mankato Growth

GMNP – Greater Minnesota Partnership

HACER – Hispanic Advocacy and Community Empowerment through Research

IF – Initative Foundation

LGU – Local Government Unit

LMI – Labor Market Information

LMI – Low-to-Moderate Income

MADO – Minnesota Association of Development Organizations

MAPCED - Minnesota Association of Professional County Economic Developers

MAPO – Mankato/North Mankato Area Planning Organization

MCLA – Minnesota Council on Latino Affairs

MDH – Minnesota Department of Health

MPCA – Minnesota Pollution Control Agency

MSA – Metropolitan Statistical Area

MSU,M – Minnesota State University, Mankato

MYLAP – MN Young American Leaders Program

NEA – National Endowment for the Arts

NEH – National Endowment for the Humanities on Center

NRCS – Natural Resources Conservation Services

PROTECT – Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-saving Transportation

REDA – Regional Economic Development Alliance

REV – Rural Entrepreneurial Venture

RLF – Revolving Loan Fund

RNAI – Region Nine Area Inc.

RNDC – Region Nine Development Commission

SACE – Southern Agricultural Center for Excellence

SAF – Sustainable Aviation Fuel

SBDC – Small Business Development Center

SCC – South Central College

SCSC – South Central Service Cooperative

SHIP – Statewide Health Improvement Partnership

SMIF – Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation

SRTS – Safe Routes to Schools

SS4A – Safe Streets and Roads for All

STIP – State Transportation Improvement Program

SWCDs - Soil and Water Conservation Districts

TAC - Transportation Advisory Committee

WCI – West-Central Initative

TZD – Toward Zero Deaths