



ERJPB



ACTION PLAN

2021 - 2023

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
2021 - 2023 ACTION PLAN	4
PROCESS SUMMARY	10
Strategic Directions Survey	10
Practical Vision	10
Strategic Directions Consensus Workshop	11
Current Reality, Success Indicators & Accomplishments	12
APPENDICES	18

INTRODUCTION & ACTION PLAN

INTRODUCTION

This action plan aims to guide the work of the East Range Joint Powers Board (ERJPB), a partnership of the City of Aurora, City of Biwabik, City of Hoyt Lakes, and Town of White, for the next three years. It builds on the foundations past planning work with all four communities and culminated in a strategic directions workshop on January 13, 2021. It uses insights from a survey of stakeholders in the four communities to build a practical vision, establishes six strategic directions, and concludes with a series of action steps that will help the ERJPB move its vision to reality.

2021-2023 ACTION PLAN

After completing the consensus workshop, Northspan identified the current reality, success indicators, and accomplishments for each strategic direction. This section lays out the six strategic directions, defines them, and identifies the actions that will lead to specific outcomes.

SD1. Identify and utilize resources to attain fiscal stability

SD2. Promote the East Range to attract and retain businesses and residents

SD3. Provide wide range of housing options to meet diverse community needs

SD4. Expand highest speed internet to all

SD5. Create community accountability processes to inform residents

SD6. Create welcoming community packets to encourage civic engagement

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 1

IDENTIFY AND UTILIZE RESOURCES TO ATTAIN FISCAL STABILITY

DEFINITION

This strategic direction recognizes the ERJPB’s role as a convener and source of information for the East Range. It looks to ERJPP staff to provide information to member communities and community groups within them on funding opportunities and other resources that may help expand their efforts. These efforts allow these groups to better leverage their own resources and help start a financially sustainable future.

ACTIONS

1. Develop system to communicate to partners when new funding opportunities emerge

2. Periodically invite IRRR grant and loan program administrators to speak to the board to build awareness of funding options

3. Strengthen connections with East Range community groups to foster collaboration

OUTCOMES

1. City/town clerks and administrators and community groups are aware of available resources

2. ERJPB assists groups with securing resources when appropriate

3. East Range community groups work in concert with each other to reach shared goals

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 2

PROMOTE THE EAST RANGE TO ATTRACT AND RETAIN BUSINESSES AND RESIDENTS

DEFINITION

This strategic direction focuses on the East Range’s marketing efforts. It seeks to tell the region’s story both to businesses and to potential residents by compiling the necessary information and working with partners to promote its unique strengths and opportunities.

ACTIONS

- 1. Processes for collaboration documented and included among community accountability processes
- 2. ERJPB conducts periodic BRE programs, in collaboration with partners when relevant
- 3. Existing assets and mapping collected on ERJPB website and made more publicly available
- 4. Continue to manage ERJPB business loan/grant programs and seek to further capitalize them when possible
- 5. Develop list of current business owners and long-range business plans
- 6. Encourage collaboration between local chambers of commerce and the Biwabik citizens’ association
- 7. Continue to promote area non-traditional lenders and organizations

OUTCOMES

- 1. Increase in jobs and number of businesses operating on East Range
- 2. Increase in population on the East Range
- 3. Marketing efforts through Iron Range Tourism create clearer East Range brand

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 3

PROVIDE WIDE RANGE OF HOUSING OPTIONS TO MEET DIVERSE COMMUNITY NEEDS

DEFINITION

This strategic direction acknowledges the unique conditions facing the East Range's housing stock. While generally affordable, many homes on the East Range are older and do not meet changing needs and preferences of both new and longtime residents. A recent uptick in interest in the area and the potential for future growth amplifies the need for housing solutions that provide desirable products at reasonable price points.

ACTIONS

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| <p>1. Conduct a workshop in each of the four communities to assess community housing opportunities</p> | <p>2. Provide recommendations of potential regulatory changes based on community input</p> | <p>3. Create map for developers to see available lots</p> |
| <p>4. Consider a more formal housing study that clearly identifies existing assets, demand, and opportunities</p> | <p>5. Conduct outreach to potential developers for the area</p> | <p>6. Assist with any applications to Minnesota Housing or other outside funding sources by ERJPB communities citizens' association</p> |

OUTCOMES

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| <p>1. Community leaders understand local housing market and tools available to address its challenges</p> | <p>2. Significant housing development to meet new demand</p> | <p>3. Residential development opportunities catalogued and available</p> |
|--|---|---|

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 4

EXPAND HIGHEST SPEED INTERNET TO ALL

DEFINITION

Access to fast, reliable internet service has become essential for residents and businesses to succeed, and this trend has only accelerated in recent years. Access on the East Range remains inconsistent, and marketing the area successfully requires service at the fastest available speeds across the region. As technology improves and standards for acceptable service change, this strategic direction looks to make high-quality internet connectivity on the East Range as ubiquitous as possible.

ACTIONS

- 1.** Continue leadership role within regional broadband collaborations
- 2.** Rally community support to show providers the demand for broadband
- 3.** Apply for federal or state broadband grants when available and eligible
- 4.** Share broadband 'wins' with the community to show progress

OUTCOMES

- 1.** An increase in the number of households in the study area labeled fully served
- 2.** Collaborative efforts with broadband providers are successful

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 5

CREATE COMMUNITY ACCOUNTABILITY PROCESSES TO INFORM RESIDENTS

DEFINITION

This strategic direction reflects a concern among many stakeholders that the ecosystem for assisting businesses and residents on the East Range can feel fragmented. City staff and community institutions are not always sure where to route people who have inquiries, and they find that some get routed in convoluted directions. This strategic direction seeks to streamline these processes and help stakeholders better understand how various partners can work in concert to support the region.

ACTIONS

- 1. Flowcharts/documentation developed to show stakeholders where to refer anyone who inquires after certain services
- 2. Gaps in services identified and assigned to appropriate stakeholders
- 3. Update ERJPB reporting methods to reflect progress on strategic directions

OUTCOMES

- 1. Stronger understanding of community processes and progress on strategic directions
- 2. Fewer people fall through the cracks or get routed in circles
- 3. More projects, businesses, etc. are moving forward/completed on the East Range

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 6

CREATE WELCOMING COMMUNITY PACKETS TO ENCOURAGE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

DEFINITION

This strategic direction reflects a desire for broader civic engagement on the East Range. Currently, many community efforts feature the same short list of volunteers, and some newcomers report challenges in integrating into their new homes. This strategic direction seeks to provide the connections that can help broaden community efforts and build a greater sense of inclusion across the four communities.

ACTIONS

1. Engage in developing NE MN regional welcoming community strategy
2. Develop documentation of community activities and contact information for those who would like to get involved
3. Create something that identifies existing local businesses and encourage a 'shop local' environment so newcomers & locals can connect with the local business community
4. Explore ways to improve communication across the East Range in response to a changing media environment
5. Identifying current "community champions" and connecting with them

OUTCOMES

1. More community engagement in area projects, more volunteers
2. Engagement from younger people or groups who have not traditionally participated
3. Welcome wagon-type system implemented consistently across the East Range
4. Business and community members are engaged in community activities and projects

PROCESS SUMMARY

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS SURVEY

In preparation for the East Range Joint Powers Board Strategic Directions Consensus Workshop held Wednesday, January 13, 2021, Northspan, the economic development staff for the ERJPB, conducted a survey via email for workshop participants. This survey aimed to collect information to provide valuable background information for the virtual workshop. The 18 respondents provided thoughts on what they would like to see in place in 3-5 years as a result of ERJBP efforts and actions. These ideas formed the foundation of a practical vision, which then led to ideas on how the board, staff, and consultants can move toward the vision. A full survey summary is available in the Strategic Directions Survey Summary 1.12.21 document.

PRACTICAL VISION

Through the survey, participants identified seven areas that form the foundation of the practical vision:

1. Business retention, expansion, and attraction
2. Affordable, accessible broadband
3. Expanded outdoor recreation opportunities and marketing
4. Quality, affordable child care
5. Regional funding and planning
6. Updated water and road infrastructure
7. Housing opportunities for all

A document that includes all of the ideas supporting the seven elements of the practical vision is available in the appendix and titled Practical Vision ERJPB 1.13.21.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS CONSENSUS WORKSHOP

Northspan facilitated an ERJPB strategic directions consensus workshop on January 13, 2021. Participants included board members, city council and town board members, and city and ERJPB staff. The meeting began by affirming the practical vision determined through the survey, with participants offering feedback on the recurring themes across all areas. They noted consistency with previous planning efforts and the interconnectedness between the various priorities. Several emphasized the need to identify the most immediate opportunities to address these challenges and some developments that have arisen in recent years, including the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, housing trends, and outdoor recreation trends.

With the practical vision confirmed, participants worked to identify the innovative actions or efforts the ERJPB, its staff, and consultants can do or take to move toward the practical vision. This process identified six strategic directions:

1. Identify and utilize resources to attain fiscal stability
2. Promote the East Range to attract and retain businesses and residents
3. Provide wide range of housing options to meet diverse community needs
4. Expand highest speed internet to all users
5. Create processes (to identify, plan, act, measure, and share successes) for community accountability to inform residents
6. Create welcoming community packets to encourage civic engagement

The strategic directions and the ideas supporting each are available in the appendix in the document titled Strategic Directions Consensus Workshop 1.13.21.

CURRENT REALITY, SUCCESS INDICATORS & ACCOMPLISHMENTS

With the consensus workshop complete, Northspan conducted an internal session to identify the current reality, success indicators, and accomplishments for each strategic direction.

SD1. IDENTIFY AND UTILIZE RESOURCES TO ATTAIN FISCAL STABILITY

CURRENT REALITY:

1. Stable funding from communities and IRRR
 2. Communities sporadically use ERJPB for grant writing but no unified effort
 3. Haphazard knowledge of funding resources available
-

SUCCESS INDICATORS:

1. Always afford staff and consultants
 2. Continue to see community results
 3. City clerks/admins and community groups aware of available resources
 4. ERJPB helps these groups secure resources when appropriate
-

3-YEAR ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

1. Develop system to communicate to partners when new funding opportunities emerge
2. Periodically invite IRRR grant and loan program administrators to speak to the board to build awareness of funding options

SD2. PROMOTE THE EAST RANGE TO ATTRACT AND RETAIN BUSINESSES AND RESIDENTS**CURRENT REALITY:**

1. Now have a website
 2. Positive working relationship with Iron Range Tourism
 3. No real unified East Range marketing effort
 4. Strong relationships with regional partners such as IRRR, SBDC, and APEX
 5. Varying community-level efforts between 2 chambers and BACA
 6. Limited community knowledge of how all these groups interact
 7. Inconsistent efforts to map and catalog development opportunities
-

SUCCESS INDICATORS:

1. Increase in jobs and number of businesses operating on East Range
 2. Increase in population on the East Range
 3. Marketing efforts through Iron Range Tourism create clearer East Range brand
-

3-YEAR ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

1. Processes for collaboration documented and included among community accountability processes
2. ERJPB conducts periodic BRE programs
3. Existing assets and mapping collected on ERJPB website and made more publicly available
4. Continue to manage ERJPB business loan/grant programs and seek to further capitalize them when possible
5. Develop list of current business owners and long range business plans
6. Continue to promote area non-traditional lenders and organizations

SD3. PROVIDE WIDE RANGE OF HOUSING OPTIONS TO MEET DIVERSE COMMUNITY NEEDS**CURRENT REALITY:**

1. Housing stock is generally dated and not always reflective of current desires
 2. Significant uptick in interest in the region during Covid
 3. Projects such as PolyMet could further strain housing stock
 4. Understanding of the market is largely anecdotal
 5. Few rental options
-

SUCCESS INDICATORS:

1. Significant housing development to meet new demand
 2. Residential development opportunities catalogued and available
-

3-YEAR ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

1. Create map for developers to see available lots
2. Complete a more formal housing study that clearly identifies existing assets, demand, and opportunities
3. Conduct outreach to potential developers for the area
4. Assist with any applications to Minnesota Housing or other outside funding sources by ERJPB communities

SD4. EXPAND HIGHEST SPEED INTERNET TO ALL**CURRENT REALITY:**

1. Broadband communities work in process
 2. Current broadband availability decent across East Range but has clear holes
 3. Zito Media, NESC appear to be willing partners
 4. State/federal programs offer major opportunities but could also complicate things (e.g., LTD Broadband)
-

SUCCESS INDICATORS:

1. An increase in the number of households in the study area labeled fully served
 2. Collaborative efforts with broadband providers are successful
-

3-YEAR ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

1. Continue leadership role within regional broadband collaborations
2. Rally community support to show providers the demand for broadband
3. Apply for federal or state broadband grants when available and eligible
4. Share broadband 'wins' with the community to show progress

SD5. CREATE COMMUNITY ACCOUNTABILITY PROCESSES TO INFORM RESIDENTS**CURRENT REALITY:**

1. Monthly meetings occurring
 2. Clerks/admins report it's unclear who to refer people to and things sometimes come back to them
 3. ERJPB consultant reports thorough but could better align with community priorities and demonstrate progress on goals
-

SUCCESS INDICATORS:

1. Stronger understanding of community processes and progress on strategic directions
 2. Fewer people fall through the cracks or get routed in circles
 3. More projects, businesses, etc. are moving forward/completed on the East Range
-

3-YEAR ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

1. Flowcharts/documentation developed to show stakeholders where to refer anyone who inquires after certain services
2. Gaps in services identified and assigned to appropriate stakeholders
3. Update ERJPB reporting methods to reflect progress on strategic directions

SD6. CREATE WELCOMING COMMUNITY PACKETS TO ENCOURAGE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT**CURRENT REALITY:**

1. No unified effort to welcome new residents
 2. Many community processes carried by same small group of volunteers
 3. People who are engaged tend to be older and have deep roots
 4. Newcomers do not always feel welcome
 5. There are local chambers of commerce, but they aren't always very active with programming
-

SUCCESS INDICATORS:

1. More community engagement in area projects, more volunteers
 2. Engagement from younger people or groups who have not traditionally participated
 3. Welcome wagon-type system implemented consistently across the East Range
 4. Business and community members are engaged in community activities and projects
-

3-YEAR ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

1. Engage in developing NE MN regional welcoming community strategy
2. Develop documentation of community activities and contact information for those who would like to get involved
3. Creating something that identifies existing local businesses and encouraging a 'shop local' environment so newcomers & locals can connect with the local business community
4. Identifying current "community champions" and connecting with them

APPENDICES

A. Strategic Directions Survey Summary 1.12.21

B. Practical Vision 01.13.21

C. Actions 01.13.21



ERJPB

EAST RANGE JOINT POWERS BOARD Strategic Directions Survey

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS SURVEY SUMMARY

In preparation for the East Range Joint Powers Board Strategic Direction Consensus Workshop held Wednesday, January 13, 2021, Northspan, economic development staff for the ERJPB, conducted a survey via email for workshop participants. This survey aimed to collect information to provide valuable background information for the virtual workshop.

Respondents: Workshop participant partners include ERJPB members and city councilors, and town board members of Aurora, Biwabik, Hoyt Lakes, and the Town of White. The survey was emailed to all 18 workshop participants and there were nine responses.

Practical Vision: The first question directed participants to list up to five answers addressing the following: *“What do you want to see in place or available in your community in 3-5 years as a result of the East Range Joint Powers Board efforts and actions?”* There were 42 unique responses.

Keyword	# of responses
Business	13
Broadband	7
Child care	5
Infrastructure	5
Recreation	4
Housing	3

Many responses indicated a desire for broadband improvements, opportunities for new or expanding businesses and promotion of the East Range as an attractive area for tourism and business. General infrastructure improvements, housing and child care were other topics of mention.

Strategic Direction Actions: Next, respondents were again asked to list up to five answers while considering the following question: *“What innovative actions or efforts can East Range Joint Powers Board, staff & consultants do or take to move us toward your vision?”*

There were 35 individual answers for this prompt. Survey respondents suggested a variety of actions ranging from acquiring tax forfeit land for housing development to partnering with Iron Range Tourism Board for marketing and promotion of the area. A theme of collaboration as a means of cost saving on projects or initiatives appeared throughout the answers, as well as continuing to seek out and actively pursue additional grant and funding opportunities.





What do you want to see in place or available in your community in 3-5 years as a result of the East Range Joint Powers Board efforts and actions?

Business Retention, Expansion & Attraction	Affordable, Accessible Broadband
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a new small business in Laskin /energy park • Aggressive Marketing Plan to Attract Business & Residents • Business development and expansion • Business development and recruitment. • Business Recruitment Efforts & Documentation by Community • Develop a Marketing Plan For Loon Lake Comm Center • Growth of existing business • job growth with existing business • more destination quality restaurants • New business opportunity • New Businesses • Polymet operational 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 100% Fiberoptic Broadband Coverage for TOW • Affordable internet supplier • Broadband • Broadband expansion • Broadband widely available in each Community • extensive high-speed fiber optic broadband services • improved internet options
Expanded Outdoor Recreation Opportunities & Marketing	Quality, Affordable Child Care
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand outdoor recreational opportunities • Expanded recreation/tourism attractions • Improve Recreation Opportunities in TOW • regionally integrated recreational trail facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affordable daycare East Range • Availability of childcare • Day Care • quality day care • sufficient and affordable day care services
Regional Funding & Planning	Updated Water & Road Infrastructure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitation of Partnering & Sharing between cities/towns • Grant Applications & Funding Generation for Township • long range plans for our area • Loon Lake Community Center Facilities Plan • Promotion of the area businesses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue infrastructure in communities • Expand land and water trail systems • Install Water Lines on Hwy 110 Corridore & Scenic Acrea's • Road improvements. Rural into cities • up-to-date, reliable and affordable water infrastructure

What do you want to see in place or available in your community in 3-5 years as a result of the East Range Joint Powers Board efforts and actions?



Housing Opportunities for All

- Boase School Hoyt Lakes demolished/ affordable senior housing
- Elder Housing
- Promote/develop adequate housing opportunities

42 Responses	%
Business Retention, Expansion & Attraction	29%
Affordable, Accessible Broadband	17%
Expanded Outdoor Recreation Opportunities & Marketing	12%
Quality, Affordable Child Care	12%
Regional Funding & Planning	12%
Updated Water & Road Infrastructure	12%
Housing Opportunities for All	7%



ERJPB

What innovative actions or efforts can East Range Joint Powers Board, staff & consultants do or take to move us toward your pactical vision?

Identify & utilize resources to attain fiscal stability	Promoting the East Range to attract and retain businesses & residents	Provide wide range of housing options to meet diverse community needs	Expand highest speed internet to all	Create community accountability processes to inform residents	Create welcoming community packets to encourage civic engagement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More help with grant writing • Help identifying resources to accomplish goals • Funding from Grants & Investors • Support local business (funding / connections) • Grant searches for such things as broadband, tourism etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a list of available properties suitable for businesses • Develop a map of current utilities: water / sewer / gas / fiber • Mapping & Documentation of Area for Development • Better help and connect with BRE • Pairing communities to reduce public safety costs • must make it easier for new business to locate here • Develop doc listing available properties and contact info • Promote our area for business development. • List of current business, owners and long range plans • Marketing of area & opportunities • Work with IRTB for promotion • Greater involvement in business recruiting • Selling the East Range as business hotspot • Promote tourism leading to business expansion • Partner with communities to connect trail systems • Encourage buy-local and locally grown consumption 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better housing options to get new workers to live here • Look for developers interesting in building housing. • Revolving fund for building and residence renovations • Acquire tax forfeited land to develop housing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued involvement Broadband initiative • Multi-constituency broadband task force • Work with state legislators to expand broadband. • Develop a map of current broadband infrastructure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly identify who will take actionable steps on each • Clear processes for assistance/ customer service between orgs • Appropriate guidance and direction on goals • Assign a rep to follow up/report back to ERJPB on inquires • Cost Saving Goals & Actions by Community • Sharing of Goals Achieved by Community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify ways to get families civically engaged • Encourage civic engagement among younger residents • Continued involvement daycare developement • Regular grass-roots community based visioning sessions