

East Range Joint Powers Board Launches Disaster Relief Loan Program

Tuesday October 14, 2020: The East Range Joint Powers Board (ERJPB) is pleased to announce a new Disaster Relief Loan Program targeting small businesses affected by the Covid-19 outbreak. The fund will provide loans of \$20,000 to \$50,000 to businesses seeking to make key changes to operations and weather this storm.

The new loan program was made possible by the Department of Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation's Community Relief Grant Program. IRRR awarded the ERJPB with a \$150,000 grant, which the Joint Powers Board matched using existing to create a total fund with over \$190,000 available for loans. Dollars that revolve through the fund will be available for future ERJPB business loan programs.

"The Disaster Relief Loan Program aims to help small businesses on the East Range who face unprecedented challenges brought on by the pandemic," said Doug Gregor, the Mayor of Aurora and Chair of the ERJPB. "We hope these funds can help fill some of the gap faced by businesses who have seen their operations disrupted since our world changed."

The purpose of this fund is to assist in supporting local businesses who have been adversely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Its goals include:

- Preventing permanent closure of ERJPB businesses during and a disaster.
- Restoring affected businesses back to financial health as quickly as possible.
- Recycling funds to continually help those in need.
- Having a fund that takes on risk above and beyond existing resources.
- Leveraging other local, regional, state, and federal resources to get businesses back on their feet.
- Providing funds in a quick, efficient manner from application to distribution.

Complete eligibility criteria and loan program guidelines are available at www.erjpb.com.

Applications are accepted on a first-come, first-serve basis, and the ERJPB seeks to make \$190,000 in loans before June 30, 2021 to take full advantage of IRRR match funding. Given this short timeline, interested businesses are encouraged to gather the necessary information and reach out with any questions as soon as possible.

As business needs are identified, these grants could be paired with other resources, such as consulting guidance to manage the effects of the pandemic, as well as other local, state, and federal resources that become available. The ERJPB also recommends that businesses in need of assistance with required documentation connect with Northeast Minnesota Small Business Development Center (SBDC) consultant Betsy Olivanti at betsy@northlandsbdc.org.

The ERJPB has partnered with the Northspan Group, Inc. for the administration of the fund. Northspan, which has assisted numerous other relief funds across northeast Minnesota and provides community development consulting services to the ERJPB, will provide a neutral review of applicants and offer recommendations to the Board.

“We’re excited by this opportunity to expand our work with the East Range and help businesses in need,” said Northspan President & CEO Elissa Hansen. “These funds will help many East Range businesses ease some of the challenges of the past few months and provide peace of mind as we work toward economic recovery.”

For more information, visit www.erjpb.com or contact Northspan Vice President Bob Palmquist at bpalmquist@northspan.org.

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About the East Range Joint Powers Board

The ERJPB began in 1984 as a collaboration and partnership effort between Aurora, Hoyt Lakes, the Town of White, and the local school district. Since then, the City of Biwabik was added in 2010 and the school district dropped out in 1994. The four communities have made a considerable effort to invest time, effort, and financial commitment toward joint services, facilities, and programs the past three years and several initiatives are in progress. A major focus of the ERJPB over the years has been to engage in all feasible forms of collaboration and partnership with local, regional, state, and federal communities and agencies involved with economic and community development. The current Strategic Action Plan includes additional resources to expand and enhance collaboration and other comprehensive plan goals and objectives. For more information, visit <http://erjpb.com/>.

About the Northspan Group, Inc.

The Northspan Group, Inc. is a Duluth-based private non-profit development organization that has provided professional business, community, and organizational development consulting services since 1985. Northspan specializes in creative thinking, enterprising strategies, and systematic approaches to help businesses, communities, regions, and organizations prosper in a global economy. Our professional staff work cooperatively with economic and community development partners to leverage resources for measurable, sustainable results. For more information, visit <https://www.northspan.org/>.