



ERJPB

STRATEGIC PLAN

FISCAL YEAR 2024-2026



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INTRODUCTION & ACTION PLAN

INTRODUCTION

This strategic 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 of the previous three-year strategic plan and incorporates background data, information from business visits, and survey results that helped inform the plan. In October 2023, the board held two workshops that confirmed a practical vision and underlying contradictions, established four strategic directions, and concluded with a series of action steps that will help the ERJPB advance its work. Through this process, the group developed a new mission, vision, and core values to guide the organization and demonstrate its purpose to community members and partners.

BACKGROUND

The East Range Joint Powers Board 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 school district dropped out in 1994 and the City of Biwabik joined the collaboration in 2010.

The four communities have made a considerable effort to invest time, effort, and financial commitment toward joint services, facilities, and programs to support economic development and shared services on the East Range. In 2019, following the retirement of a longtime staff member, it hired Northspan, a community and economic development consulting firm, to provide staffing support. In 2020, Northspan facilitated the creation of a three-year strategic plan for Fiscal Year 2021-2023. This strategic plan guided Northspan's work over the past three years and helped frame the priorities for where the board directed resources and time.



FISCAL YEAR 2024-2026 STRATEGIC PLAN

Following the completion of its Fiscal Year 2021-2023 Strategic Plan, the East Range Joint Powers Board engaged its consultant, Northspan, to conduct a new strategic planning process in October 2023. This process sought to refresh the organization's strategic directions in light of its new reality and develop a mission, vision, and core values for the organization, which did not previously exist.

VISION:

The region to live, work, and play.

MISSION:

To improve the lives of our residents by fostering collaboration among East Range communities.

CORE VALUES:

We are...

Collaborative.

We build bridges across the four East Range communities and with local and regional partners to promote comprehensive solutions for us all.

Supportive.

We share resources across our communities and acknowledge the success of one community brings benefits to the entire area.

Trusting.

We build deep relationships with one another and believe our tight-knit networks are the foundations for the future of the East Range.

Responsive.

We recognize the voices of community members and adapt our efforts to address our most urgent needs and challenges.

In its strategic planning sessions, the group established and refined its practical vision, underlying contradictions, and four strategic directions to guide its work in upholding its vision, mission, and values:

PRACTICAL VISION:

What do we want to see in place in three years as a result of our strategic planning actions?

- Thriving local businesses
- Marketable community identity
- Ample, inclusive housing options
- Strong community collaboration
- Community-essential businesses
- Broadened economic foundation

UNDERLYING CONTRADICTIONS:

What is blocking us from moving toward our Practical Vision?

- Competing mindsets obstruct collective progress
- Development and outreach limitations impede growth
- Financial constraints dictate resource allocation
- Limited workforce, volunteer, and child care restrict capacity
- Disparate operations undermine impact

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS:

What innovative, substantial actions will deal with the Underlying Contradictions and move us toward our Practical Vision?

- Creating A Collaborative Culture
- Unifying Communities Through Communication
- Addressing Community Resources
- Targeting Financial Resources

These four strategic directions build on past ERJPB work, public input, and seek to streamline operations for the organization.



CREATING A COLLABORATIVE CULTURE

DEFINITION

This strategic direction recognizes the East Range Joint Powers Board's central role as an agent in collaboration on the East Range, both over the past 40 years and as the communities move toward greater integration. It creates a forum for area leaders and residents to connect on shared issues and move toward common solutions. This East Range culture is a foundation for streamlined interconnection, efficient use of resources, and addressing issues at an appropriate scale.

ACTIONS

1. Consider updating the ERJPB By Laws to include non-voting, ex officio members such as ISD 2711
2. Establish the water agreement between Biwabik and Aurora
3. Present ERJPB activity to the four councils / boards once a year
4. Create a task force to define how each community is addressing adult-use cannabis (use, sale, distribution, current situation) and determine what collaboration could be possible.
5. Explore funding projects for paved trail connections
6. ERJPB hosts one all-council meeting each year
7. Create a task force to define how each community is addressing business permitting processes and determine what collaboration could be possible
8. Create protocol to feature a business of the quarter at the ERJPB meeting
9. Create a unified volunteer list of individuals and organizations including ISD 2711
10. Continue collaboration regarding emergency services (PD, EMS, Fire)

OUTCOMES

- Completion of water project
- Connection of Town of White and Hoyt Lakes to paved trails
- Collaboration around Emergency Services (PD, EMS, Fire)
- Success for one is success for all

UNIFYING COMMUNITIES THROUGH COMMUNICATION

DEFINITION

This strategic direction works to improve the spread of information across the East Range. It seeks to explain the work of the Joint Powers Board, inform residents of regional activities and opportunities, and market the region more broadly. If successful, community members, elected officials, and visitors will better understand the amenities and opportunities provided by the East Range.

ACTIONS

1. Record ERJPB meetings and post on the website
2. Explore creating one 'blue book' for all 4 communities
3. Explore creating a quarterly East Range Snapshot feature for East Range Times
4. Reinstate regular city administrator meetings with ERJPB staff
5. Provide quarterly ERJPB snapshot for city councilors
6. Work with marketing committee to create unified marketing materials for visitors
7. Determine how best to get East Range events on the Iron Range Tourist Bureau calendar

OUTCOMES

- More informed residents
- More informed city council
- More informed visitors
- More consistent communication between cities

ADDRESSING COMMUNITY RESOURCES

DEFINITION

This strategic direction works to tackle community challenges around shared needs, including child care, housing, water, broadband, emergency services, trails, and other areas of opportunity that may emerge. It recognizes these are shared issues, and that the Joint Powers Board offers the connections and scale to provide solutions that may be more effective than if communities acted on their own. It creates a framework to move the needle on all of these issues and takes concrete steps toward specific outcomes.

ACTIONS

1. Expand upon the “one stop shop” flow chart
2. Determine boots on the ground coordination with the Regional Food Business Center activities for the East Range
3. Explore and determine the School District’s child care space available, shared specifics, and amenities
4. Define each community's franchise fee situation and determine what collaboration could be possible
5. Implement the Housing Institute outcomes
6. Each community identifies a shovel ready housing project
7. Attract a housing development that will be under construction within the 3-year period

OUTCOMES

- Increased available and affordable housing stock
- Increased agility to respond to any given situation
- Affordable, available child care slots more closely align with demand
- Increased residential service that also meets the growing housing demand

TARGETING FINANCIAL RESOURCES

DEFINITION

This strategic direction aims to expand the financial capacity of the East Range Joint Powers Board and provide more resources to its member communities. It improves information-sharing on financial resources, boosts efforts to access outside funding, and strengthens the ability of the Joint Powers Board to support local businesses. If successful, it will lead to cost savings, more funding from outside resources, and increased investment on the East Range.

ACTIONS

1. Stay informed and advocate for tax changes at state level including the impact of fiscal disparities
2. Relaunch ERJPB loan program and explore recapitalization
3. Compile and create an educational piece on financial resources
4. Explore increasing returns on ERJPB cash investments
5. Coordinate capital projects and resources across communities
6. Continue annual presentations from IRRR on available resources
7. Explore methods to bolster grant writing capacity

OUTCOMES

- Increased ability to respond as a group to funding opportunities
- Garner more funding from outside sources to fund ERJPB activities
- Partnership in place for greater support; letters of support
- Demonstrated cost savings from collaboration

APPENDICES

1. Process Summary
2. FY24-26 Demographic and Economic Analysis
3. FY24-26 Community Survey
4. FY24-26 Board and Staff Survey
5. Practical Vision, Underlying Contradictions, and Strategic Directions 10.23.23
6. Current Reality, Success Indicators & Actions 10.31.23
7. Strategic Plan Timeline 10.31.23
8. Priority Wedge 10.31.23

APPENDIX 1

PROCESS SUMMARY

APPENDIX 1

STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS SUMMARY

The East Range Joint Powers Board has prepared this 3-year strategic plan to guide its activities and achieve accomplishments consistent with the group's vision and mission. The strategic process steps, session dates, and agendas are included as an attachment, as are the results of the sessions that followed.

PROCESS STEPS

- Background Research
- Surveys
- 10.23.23 Strategic Planning Retreat A
- 10.31.23 Strategic Planning Retreat B
- 11.13.23 Strategic Plan Review & Feedback
- 11.28.23 Strategic Plan Board Presentation

BACKGROUND RESEARCH

Northspan compiled information from a variety of sources to provide context on the state of the East Range. These efforts included feedback from a series of business visits conducted across 2023 and data from the US Census plus local and state sources on the economics and demographics of the East Range. This background research, along with the survey results, were presented at the start of the first strategic planning session to provide a common understanding of the situation across the area.

SURVEYS

Northspan conducted two surveys on behalf of the East Range Joint Powers Board: a community survey and a board and staff survey. While both surveys received a limited response, they reflected the perspectives of stakeholders who were deeply familiar with the organization's work. Community respondents identified the East Range's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, and identified elements of a potential practical vision. Board and staff members responded to the same questions, along with additional queries regarding progress on actions in the previous strategic plan, language for the organization's new vision and core values, and the underlying contradictions that limited its ability to achieve its plan. This information was compiled and shared in the first strategic planning retreat.

STRATEGIC PLANNING RETREAT A AGENDA | October 23, 2023 | 9:00 AM – 4:00 PM

- 9:00 Welcome, Agenda, & Introductions
- 9:30 Context Presentation
- 10:00 Practical Vision Focused Conversation
- 10:30 Underlying Contradictions Focused Conversation
- 11:00 Strategic Direction Consensus Workshop
- 12:00 Working Lunch
- 1:30 Develop Mission
- 2:30 Develop Vision
- 3:15 Develop Core Values
- 3:50 Reflection ORID
- 4:00 Adjourn

PRACTICAL VISION

Through the survey and subsequent refinement in the first strategic session, the group identified six elements of a practical vision for the Joint Powers Board:

- Thriving local businesses
- Marketable community identity
- Ample, inclusive housing options
- Strong community collaboration
- Broadened economic foundation

UNDERLYING CONTRADICTIONS

As with the Practical Vision, survey participants identified the underlying contradictions that hold the Joint Powers Board back and refined this text in a workshop. These blocks include:

- Competing mindsets obstruct collective progress
- Development and outreach limitations impede growth
- Financial constraints dictate resource allocation
- Limited workforce, volunteer, and child care restrict capacity
- Disparate operations undermine impact

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS CONSENSUS WORKSHOP

Northspan facilitated an ERJPB strategic directions consensus workshop on October 23, 2023. Participants included board members, city staff, and ERJPB staff and consultants. Based on the Practical Vision and Underlying Contradictions, 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 four strategic directions:

1. Creating a collaborative culture
2. Unifying communities through communication
3. Addressing community resources
4. Targeting financial resources

The strategic directions and the ideas supporting each are available in the appendix in the document titled ERJPB Practical Vision, Underlying Contradictions, and Strategic Directions 10.23.23.

MISSION, VISION, AND CORE VALUES

In this session, the strategy committee developed a mission, vision, and set of core values for the East Range Joint Powers Board. This language had not previously existed for the organization, and the session allowed the organization to settle on clear guiding language that better conveys its purpose, aims, and shared beliefs. Committee members generated the following language:

Mission: The region to live, work, and play.

Vision: To improve the lives of our residents by fostering collaboration among East Range communities.

CORE VALUES:

We are...

Collaborative We build bridges across the four East Range communities and with local and regional partners to promote comprehensive solutions for us all.

Supportive. We share resources across our communities and acknowledge the success of one community brings benefits to the entire East Range.

Trusting. We build deep relationships with one another and believe our tight-knit networks are the foundations for the future of the East Range.

Responsive. We recognize the voices of community members and adapt our efforts to address the most urgent needs and challenges on the East Range.

STRATEGIC PLANNING RETREAT B AGENDA | OCTOBER 31, 2023 | 9:00 AM-1:00 PM

- 9:00 Welcome, Agenda, & Introductions
- 9:20 Focused Implementation
 - Current Reality, Success Indicators, Actions
 - Timeline
 - Priorities
- 12:20 90-Day Plan Teams
- 12:50 Next Steps
- 1:00 Adjourn

FOCUSED IMPLEMENTATION

With its strategic framework in place, the ERJPB defined its current reality, identified success indicators, and developed outcomes and accomplishments that will allow the organization to move from current reality to success on each of its strategic directions. These accomplishments and the ideas that led to their creation are available in the appendix in the document titled ERJPB Current Reality, Success Indicators & Actions 10.31.23. The strategy committee then further defined the strategic plan timeline, which is available in the appendix titled ERJPB Strategic Plan Timeline 10.31.23 and identified the most important priorities for the first quarter of the strategic plan, which is available in the appendix titled ERJPB Priority Wedge 10.31.23.

With the workshops complete, Northspan compiled the strategic plan documentation and shared it for review before presenting it for approval at the November 2023 Joint Powers Board meeting.

APPENDIX 2

FY24-26 DEMOGRAPHIC AND ECONOMIC ANALYSIS

APPENDIX 3

FY24-26 COMMUNITY SURVEY

APPENDIX 4

FY24-26 BOARD AND STAFF SURVEY

APPENDIX 5

FY24-26 PRACTICAL VISION, UNDERLYING CONTRADICTIONS, AND STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS 10.23.23

APPENDIX 6

CURRENT REALITY, SUCCESS INDICATORS & ACTIONS 10.31.23

APPENDIX 7

STRATEGIC PLAN TIMELINE 10.31.23

APPENDIX 8

PRIORITY WEDGE 10.31.23