



REQUEST FOR COUNCIL ACTION

AGENDA DATE: December 18, 2023

AGENDA ITEM: Consider adopting a resolution authorizing the City to make application to the Minnesota Dept. of Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation Development Partnership grant program for the Downtown Organization Project.

PREPARED BY: Rob Mattei, Director of Community Development

BACKGROUND:

The Grand Rapids Economic Development Authority (GREDA), with assistance provided by the Blandin Foundation and the MN Department of Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation, has completed a community planning process that featured active public participation to combine local knowledge and leadership with professional expertise and guidance in the preparation of an updated Downtown Plan. The Downtown Plan articulates an up-to-date vision and implementation strategy focused on the core concept of activation through physical design, investment strategies, economic niche and business mix and downtown organization.

The planning process brought to light that Grand Rapids lacks the organizational capacity to support a vibrant downtown. The establishment of that organizational capacity is a key objective of the Downtown Plan, and, therefore, a necessary first step in the short- and long-term implementation of the Plan. The proposed project involves funding professional assistance to review successful peer markets and guide/facilitate the development of an appropriate organization structure, leadership, goals, and budget for the first 3-5 years of operation.

A vibrant Downtown, through an organized and engaged group of downtown business owners, property owners, public and non-profit entities will serve to attract new talent, business investment and strengthen existing businesses in the heart of the City. The businesses in this area serve a retail trade-area population of 49,000 residents in Itasca, Aitkin and Cass and St. Louis counties.

Furthermore, according to a data source subscription obtained by VGR, the City and Itasca County that extracts cell phone data within geofenced areas, downtown Grand Rapids is the most visited point of interest in Itasca County, attracting over 85,000 unique visitors traveling from further than 50 miles away, in 2021.

The new organization will need to raise funds and recruit volunteer leadership and appropriate staff, consultants, and/or contract with partner organizations to ensure that organizational goals can be accomplished. To be successful on an ongoing basis, the organization must create systems to measure progress and impact in achieving goals. With this information, the organization can refine and adjust their strategies as needed. The organization also needs to establish and implement systems for communicating regularly with business and property owners, funders, community stakeholders and potential downtown investors. It is also essential to build the capacity to communicate effectively with area residents, visitors, and potential visitors, and support a range of events as a sponsor or partner.

GREDA has already secured a \$55,000 grant from the Blandin Foundation for this project. They are seeking a \$15,000 grant from the IRRR Development Partnership Grant Program.

The total budget for the project is as follows:

<i>Revenue:</i>	
<i>Blandin Foundation</i>	<i>\$55,000</i>
<i>IRRR Development Partnership (not secured)</i>	<i>15,000</i>
<i>GREDA</i>	<i>15,000</i>
<i>Total:</i>	<i>\$85,000</i>
<i>Expenses:</i>	
<i>Consultant Fees</i>	<i>\$62,550</i>
<i>Tour (transportation, food, and lodging)</i>	<i>18,200</i>
<i>GREDA (in-kind)</i>	<i>4,250</i>
<i>Total:</i>	<i>\$85,000</i>

REQUESTED COUNCIL ACTION:

Make a motion to adopt the resolution authorizing the City to make application to the Minnesota Dept. of Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation Development Partnership grant program for the GREDA Downtown Organization Project.