

MEMORANDUM

TO: Watonwan County Board of Commissioners

FROM: St. James Economic Development Authority and Madelia Economic Development Authority

DATE: March 4, 2025

RE: Countywide Housing Study

Many communities across Greater Minnesota have been challenged immensely in the last couple of years to fulfill their housing needs, Watonwan County included. In an effort to strategize and plan for the future, some communities are conducting comprehensive housing studies. The primary objective of these studies is to determine the community's housing deficits. Often these housing studies will identify the community's demographics, economic characteristics and trends, and the current housing market conditions. Housing studies are viewed by potential developers and investors to help determine the viability of targeted projects within their communities.

St. James has gotten a comprehensive housing study done on the St. James community every 10 years for the last 30 years. The last housing study that was completed was in 2016. St. James anticipates and has budgeted for a new study in 2026.

Madelia has not gotten a comprehensive housing study done in the last 20 years.

St. James EDA board and Madelia EDA board are in favor of coordinating a countywide housing study. There would be an option to analyze the housing needs county-wide as well as creating individual analysis for individual communities. Both EDA boards are in favor of having an individual section for St. James and for Madelia.

A housing study would incorporate a timeline of 10 years.

Cost Estimate:

Maxfield Research Consulting – \$33,000

Viewpoint Consulting Group - \$26,900

Community Economic Development Associates - \$24,750

PROPOSAL FOR FUNDS

The City of St. James is prepared to fund a St. James specific housing study in 2026. The City of St. James would be willing to budget \$10,000 towards a countywide study with an individual section on St. James in 2025.

The City of Madelia has budgeted \$10,000 towards a countywide housing study with an individual section on Madelia.

There would be the potential of applying for a grant through Compeer for \$5,000 for this study.

The request for funds would be for the County to fund the remaining cost as needed for a countywide study.

It is also anticipated that there would be participation and input from the county board required during the housing study process.

RECOMMENDATION: For CEDA to be selected for the countywide housing study. CEDA included a windshield survey and additional community engagement opportunities such as steering committee meetings within their proposal.