

RANGE READINESS INITIATIVE

Project Update for Iron Range Economic Alliance

December 12, 2007

Major Activities and Actions

The following is a summary of the major activities and actions that have occurred as the Range Readiness Initiative (RRI) has ramped up since its launch in August 2007. Attached are the latest Organizational Chart and Purpose Statements for reference.

- **Leadership Team** has been established.
- **Strategy Team** held its first meeting on August 7th and has met five times since then. Major activities have included the following:
 - Reviewed the organizational framework and made several modifications.
 - **Projects Team** was streamlined and now only includes the CEO or Project Manager of the six major projects:
 - Minnesota Power
 - Minnesota Steel
 - Mesaba Energy
 - Blandin Paper
 - Poly Met
 - Mesabi Nugget
 - **Housing Team** was expanded to add more private sector representation
 - **Workforce Development Team** membership was expanded
 - **Opportunities Development Team** was created to address business development opportunities and needs including value added opportunities, supplier needs and other supporting development including retail.
 - Staff support roles and responsibilities were finalized and a proposal requested and approved to hire Northspan Group, Inc. to facilitate the RRI
 - Randy Lasky from Northspan and Roy Smith from Iron Range Resources will work together to facilitate this effort
 - Funding for initial facilitation services in the amount of \$45,000 was provided by several regional funders including the Blandin Foundation, Northland Foundation, Minnesota Power, Itasca Economic Development Corporation and Area Partnership for Economic Development (APEX).
 - For each functional Work Team, the Strategy Team developed an initial set of “strategic areas of focus” to help guide their work. The team is also seeking more input on resource needs to address key issues and opportunities as the teams evolve. Situation working paper and other supporting background information such as the IREA – Beulah, North Dakota field trip notes were shared and reviewed by the Strategy Team.
 - Planned and conducted the first Projects Team meeting with company representatives on October 31st in Grand Rapids.

- Reviewed current communication tools and information and began updating a PowerPoint presentation and project background information previously developed by Dan Jordan at IRR.
 - Authorized the preparation of a Marketing and Communication professional services request for proposals to develop a communications strategy to be implemented as soon as possible.
 - Reviewed the Mining Impacts Report prepared by the Sierra Club and discussed its scope and relevance.
 - Heard a report on the activities and results of the Itasca County Readiness Project by the Arrowhead Regional Development Commission and St. Louis County’s plans to conduct a similar assessment that can then dovetail into the Community Readiness Work Team agenda.
 - Heard reports from the Workforce Team and Housing Team after initial meetings were conducted.
 - Authorized the application by RRI for a \$50,000 DEED FIRST Grant to further support RRI strategic planning and communication needs. That was submitted on November 30th. The Workforce Investment Boards of Northeast Minnesota and Duluth agreed to serve as the fiscal agent for the project funds if successful.
 - Investigating an approach to provide supplier information through a coordinated network or process so that local companies can become aware of supply needs of major companies.
- Individual Work Teams have been launched and the following major activities underway:
 - **Projects Team** met on October 31st and has agreed to work with the RRI with an emphasis on four or five major activities. They provided an update of their projects and will respond to specific information needs as appropriate.
 - **Workforce Development Team** has met and is working on a program and resources assessment and is continuing to make individual contact with major companies including Minnesota Steel and Polymet to determine skill needs. The team is looking at coming up with a basic skills certification that would be more universal.
 - **Housing Team** held a housing summit in August and has since developed a multi-faceted work plan involving a market assessment, staff support resources and eventually an action plan to guide development. Funding has been provided by the Greater Minnesota Housing Fund to undertake a dynamic housing market assessment that will be completed shortly and then updated every six months. In addition, the team is seeking additional funding and has begun a hiring process for a consultant or consulting team to serve as a “project expeditor” to focus on getting both temporary and permanent housing addressed. A major first focus is on the West Range area given the urgency to address workforce housing needs related to Minnesota Power and Minnesota Steel’s project activity. The team expects to have an expeditor hired by January 1st. ARDC is expected to serve as the fiscal agent and will help manage the work of the expeditor. Communities will be able to take advantage of these resources and work with prospective developers. A number of housing developers have expressed interest and are already in touch with a number of communities about potential projects. A number of state agencies and non-profits have stepped up with

- project assistance funding. Other resources are being investigated to provide for at least two years of staffing, marketing and development support.
- **Community Readiness Team** has not formally met as a team but the Itasca County Readiness Group is in the final stages of completing its readiness assessment and St. Louis County is already contacting communities and is pulling information and preparing to complete a similar process. Our goal is to bring the results of the two efforts together and build a cohesive team process going forward. Itasca County work includes detail on housing development sites and the status of local planning and zoning to support expected change and growth. The group has targeted completion of the last four lane section of State Highway 169 as a priority project. Communities have begun targeting development opportunities and are seeking IRR funding for various community infrastructure projects.
 - **Opportunities Development Team** has not met yet, but will meet shortly. A major need is to address supplier needs and coordinate a process to network and disseminate information to local sources. They will also be tackling a number of other needs already defined by the Strategy Team. We expect this group to launch right after the 1st of the year.
 - **Communications Team** has not been formed as yet but a sub-group of the Strategy Team has taken on this area of responsibility on an interim basis. A draft RFP for professional marketing and public relations support services has been prepared and is being revised and finalized for release shortly. Other existing tools have been updated and are being used. Commissioner Layman, Randy Lasky and Roy Smith have addressed a number of community groups and organizations, and the major newspapers have begun to do stories on RRI and the challenges we face. A Range View article will be out soon and BusinessNorth has just done a story with more planned in coming months. A major theme being emphasized is that we expect that local decision makers will make local decisions and that RRI will serve as a major supporting resource to coordinate and address common issues and needs in a focused strategic process.