

**RANGE READINESS INITIATIVE (RRI)**  
Strategy Team Meeting VI  
Monday, March 24, 2008 - 9:00 A.M. - Noon  
Iron Range Resources Board Room  
Eveleth, MN

**OBJECTIVE**

*To prepare and implement a coordinated regional strategy responding to the opportunities and needs associated with regional large-scale development projects*

**MEETING NOTES SUMMARY**

**Welcome and Review of February 11<sup>th</sup> Meeting Results and Next Steps**

Randy Lasky, Facilitator, reviewed the major outcomes of the February 11<sup>th</sup> meeting including Work Team information updates and next steps; a decision by Iron Range Resources to provide \$50,000 in financial support for the Housing Expeditor consultant team in partnership with Itasca and St. Louis Counties to provide communities with technical support to anticipate and address temporary and permanent housing needs over the next twelve months; selected W.A Fisher as the communications consultant and committed \$15,000 of the FIRST Grant to this effort along with an additional \$35,000 from Iron Range Resources and other partners that are interested in supporting the communications work; and heard a report on the legislative hearing held on the Mining Impacts Assessment done by Dr. Powers and the Sierra Club released last fall. Legislators and representatives from the region responded to these findings.

**Agenda and Expected Outcomes for Today's Session**

The Facilitator reviewed the proposed agenda and outlined the following major outcomes expected to be accomplished or topics addressed at this meeting including update reports from the Work Teams with highlights on the housing market assessment status; how we are addressing construction workforce needs and highlights of recent community job fairs; preparation for upcoming regional meetings on financing, housing and community needs; work related to supply opportunities and getting information out to our local vendors; initial work and comments on the logo and web site framework and the first part of the communications initiative being ramped up; and the announcement of the \$250,000 NEG –Regional Innovation Grant that was awarded to the Workforce Investment Boards and was widely supported by the RRI Strategy Team and Arrowhead Growth Alliance to support regional strategic planning involving education, workforce development and economic development, similar to the DEED FIRST Grant intent.

**Work Team Updates and Actions**

The Strategy Team has requested regular updates on Work Team activities. How are they approaching their responsibilities? What strategic priorities and actions are they taking? What results or new challenges or needs are they facing? What resources are needed and how can they be leveraged to address priorities? What's next and how can the Strategy Team or other regional resources be of assistance? The respective Chairs or facilitator provided the following reports:

## A. Housing Team

Mary Ives, Chair of the Housing Team reported on current efforts underway in two key areas of focus. The major focus has been on getting the regional housing market assessment done and the information ready to go out to the communities and interested developers. This is a high priority and is in demand. We are still working on compiling information from the communities and major employers where possible. Much of the work and the dynamic model have been developed. The other major focus is by the Project Expeditor Team. They are currently in the field meeting with communities, contacting developers, looking at potential projects and generally assessing the current housing situation. They will be attending the next Strategy Team meeting to share more information. The following highlights the major discussion by the group.

- Market Assessment...a dynamic market assessment to be updated on 6-12 month intervals
  - Two phases planned
  - Geographic breakdown of 169 corridor – into multiple sub-regions
  - Housing Supply Matrix is done
  - Reviewed all housing studies completed for counties and communities in the corridor
  - Rental assessment – 5,000 units/75% identified and information obtained
  - All hotel, motel, campsites and mobile homes units have been defined
  - Community survey in progress – 1/3 responded to date on units/developer interest
  - Draft Report formatting in process
  - Working to secure major project temporary and permanent worker information in terms of projected numbers, timing and general wage levels that will be plugged into the model to project demand and type of housing needs
  - Defining job growth potential by communities
  - Consultant will be providing a proto-type of the working model at the next Housing Work Team meeting
- Project Expeditor Team (will attend next meeting)
  - In the field and reaching out to individual communities. Starting on the West Range and moving across as quickly as possible
  - Meetings with developers, agencies, engineers, administrators and mayors
  - Weekly written reports are provided to the ARDC (contract manager) Work Team and Facilitator. Can be provided to anyone interested.
  - We are coordinating the technical work with the upcoming Market Assessment. Consultants have met and are clear on objectives, outputs and application.
  - Concerns have been expressed by the Expeditor:
    - Confusion by communities on what's going on – different requests for information has come at them. We need to clarify and coordinate better.
    - Mortgage foreclosures/impact?
  - Clarify what is going on as we move forward
    - Letter to communities
    - Web site information
    - Approach, introduce and clarify the tie to RRI at a future community information event.
    - Will ask the Communications Team to work with us on this need.
  - Funding
    - Funding for these two initiatives has been committed for two years
    - Still completing contracts
    - ARDC is the project manager and handling all contracts and funding
    - Overall budget is in good shape

## B. Community Readiness Team

The Community Readiness Team has not been organized as yet as a single coordinated team, but work is well underway in the two respective counties. Andy Hubley of ARDC is leading the Itasca County Readiness project and reported on work going on in that area. Barb Hayden, St. Louis County Planning Director reported and distributed information on efforts to meet with communities expected to be impacted in the corridor area.

- St. Louis County
  - Have now contracted with ARDC to assist with Land Use Planning technical assistance with a tie to providing GIS services
  - Comprehensive and Master Planning document is being prepared as a tool
  - That model is in process and should be completed soon. This will highlight the various programs and initiatives and the resources being committed to development.
  - Ready to convene the combined Community Readiness Team soon.
- Itasca County
  - Community Readiness Study has been presented to all communities
  - Funding development for additional land use planning is being sought
  - Townships have also been contacted
    - Western Mesabi Planning Board is now the lead group for ongoing coordination in the county
    - Regional and community infrastructure needs have to be addressed and are quickly being touted as a major need
- Concerns being expressed by communities
  - Infrastructure needs...how will these get addressed?
  - Small community attractiveness for developers
  - Rehab and infill needs are an opportunity
  - Still reluctant optimism out there
  - Who will win and lose? Growing parochialism
  - Diversity of workforce – changes expected but are not being addressed
- Have one more meeting in Itasca County
- Should we plan on convening a communities information meeting?
  - Iron Range Resources is planning a funding resource meeting on May 21<sup>st</sup>
    - Report on RRI by Work Team Chairs or Facilitator
- Housing Market Assessment (separate/earlier?)
- RAMS – vehicle to communicate with the communities
  - We should plan on attending the next RAMS meeting and introduce RRI. They meet on the third Thursday of the month. Harlan Tardy will make arrangements for a presentation in April.
  - Use the Web site to share information and get the word out on the site
- Need to convey the same message on RRI at all of these events – consistent message is critical. Needs to be part of the communication plan for RRI. Talking points would be nice for all.

## C. Workforce Development Team

Roy Smith, Team Facilitator, reported that the Workforce Development Team continues to meet on a regular basis and is focusing on issues in two basic tracks; permanent regional workforce retirements and project expansion workforce needs for both temporary and permanent workers. He highlighted upcoming meetings with key workforce stakeholders, discussed the response to recent job fairs, and some of the other challenges and barriers the team has been wrestling with of late. The following major work activities and discussion was held.

- Don Hoag, Director of the Duluth Workforce Investment Board has been added to the Work Team membership.
- The next two team meetings will focus on construction workforce needs
  - Number of issues will be discussed
  - Diversification
  - Family needs
  - Training
  - Etc.
- A meeting has been scheduled with Frank Raune at Minnesota Power's site to discuss their workforce development efforts and experiences to date.
- Meeting with the Unions has also been set with John Grahek to learn where things are at on their contracts etc. and what expectations and issues they see going forward
- Workforce Investment Board - industry cluster initiative is in process
  - Hired Project Director Katrina Mitchell
  - Survey questions are being developed
  - DEED Business Services staff will do survey/interviews
  - Expect to complete within six months – starting mid-April. We will report on this in the future.
- Older generation workers are a resource needing our attention
  - Early retirees would be the main focus
  - What are their unique needs and what do we need to do to be able to attract their skills?
  - This group, 55 years and older, are quickly becoming part of a national trend of starting new businesses.
- Hibbing Community College – looking at funding for training on diversity issues (Ray Jensen)
  - UMD currently has faculty that are from India and would be willing to help on this subject. Contact Elaine Hanson for introductions.
- Itasca County Jobs Forum was held in early March – five companies represented including retail
  - 300 people attended. Very high participation.
- Virginia Job Fair – held two weeks ago. Same experience....very high interest and participation.
- Consider future job fairs – communicate the opportunities (align with RRI)
  - Public
  - Schools
  - Kids not here anymore
  - DEED is planning a series of these – business services staff are the contacts
- Technology skills and a two-year degree was the focus of the message from major manufacturing companies at these recent events
- Use of “The Northland Works” Web site to communicate these events would be helpful
  - More specific focus added to the site
- Are any companies supporting on the job training so that workers can get a two-year degree while on the job...hire and train?
  - Blandin does now
  - Should be talked about to take advantage of current workers that can't afford to quit working and go to school for two years.
- Job site classes and training might be another flexible approach to consider

#### D. Opportunities Development Team

Nancy Norr, Chair, reported that the Opportunities Development Team has not met since their first meeting in February and are continuing to work on two major activities: development of value added business opportunities and supply chain information, and communication and

support to local businesses and communities. The group is going to use the manufacturer's cluster survey as a vehicle to gain information from companies to help with the supply chain work. We are working on developing and sharing current information and understanding the procurement systems of companies new to the area such as Essar and PolyMet. The following comments were shared with the team:

- Two focus areas of the team:
  - Supplier opportunities (50 companies will be interviewed within the next six months)
    - Have worked on alignment with manufacturer's survey (manufacturer's – both as suppliers and users)
    - Have tailored several questions tied to suppliers
    - Initial results are expected by June
    - Process will involve the Iron Mining Association (IMA)
    - SME statewide conference will be held in Duluth in mid-April – (opportunity to tie into that session somehow)
      - Vendors will be present
      - Companies will also be there
  - Communication coordination will be needed in future...tie in with Communications Team
  - We are also feeling the need to approach our major companies through the Project Team (we will need to discuss reconvening that Team soon)
    - What are their supply needs?
    - How do they approach meeting those needs and when?
  - By-product opportunities are also a secondary focus (i.e. Minnesota Power has had recent discussions with PolyMet about several opportunities)

#### E. Projects Team

Randy Lasky led a discussion about the Projects Team and the next steps with the major companies. It was agreed that we would reconvene the planning team to discuss the agenda and timing for a follow-up Projects Planning Team meeting. It was suggested that this planning team meeting be tied with the Arrowhead Growth Alliance meeting planned for April 4th. Randy will follow-up.

#### F. Communications Team

Rob West, Communications Committee Chair, reported on recent activities of the team. W.A. Fisher has been engaged and is working on several immediate priorities. Several planning meetings in person and by conference call have been held. We have agreed that our immediate goal is to get the logo and Web site done now and address the rest of the communications plan later. He also referenced the need to talk more about these public events and how to best coordinate and communicate. John Kolhase, Project Manager for W.A. Fisher was introduced and was prepared to go over the new logo and Web site draft framework developed so far by the Communications Team. The logo was accepted as shown. We went on to address the Web site in more detail. John was looking for feedback on the home page and other ideas being developed as the Web site objectives. Rob and John presented and engaged the Strategy Team for their comments. It was emphasized that timing was of the essence and we needed to stay focused to get this part of our immediate communication needs addressed. There was a lively discussion on various aspects of the site design as well as how to market and share information on the site availability. A number of suggestions and decisions were made by the group as highlighted in the scope of the discussion summarized as follows:

- W.A. Fisher was selected and has hit the ground running with our team
- Mantra is the “Truth Well Told”
- Our priority is to get the logo and Web site done now – communications plan later
- Draft Logo
  - Samples developed/reviewed by the team
  - Wanted something very basic with a tagline
  - Paid close attention to colors – wanted to be sensitive to environmental issues and business development. Decided on a blue/green color combination
  - Team accepted the logo as presented. It will now be used and the consultant will provide a file for access to various file types as needed.
- Web site outline review – handout provided of parts of the site and commented on the content items:
  - Home page – snapshot of what’s going on in the region
  - News
  - Featured project
  - Interactive Map with major projects highlighted
  - Banner with flash that will cycle thru... “All about people” – concept
  - Key messages are environmental and other needs
  - Other key is to update this site constantly. Will be set up to easily do this daily by whoever is assigned and trained.
- Strategy Team comments on the site outline:
  - Must have an infrastructure emphasis - “Regional Assets” need to be highlighted
  - Diversity demonstrated (in photo’s banner of people and activity)
  - Do we need “Password Protection” capability for some areas of the site?
    - Share – keep it open/don’t protect...this is a public initiative
    - Not necessary – Chambers don’t do this
    - Project Team related information may need protection? Will keep in mind.
    - It was agreed that all of the site should be open
  - E-news subscription/sign-up will be provided
  - We need to track who visits with some information on users if possible...but it needs to be voluntary. We want to know how active the site is and what is of interest to the viewers. This is possible and will be addressed.
  - How to handle contact information?
    - E-mail address – RRI
      - Who monitors? Will need to be determined
    - Add all Strategy Team Members, with contact information
    - Add all contacts by Team
    - Add consultant contacts
- Market/sell site?
  - Key audiences need to be defined
  - Media event needed to launch site and establish RRI branding
    - Plan this – tie to community communication
  - Each of us use our own databases to make awareness known and further brand the RRI
- Home page lacks reference to “RRI Initiative” – needs to be on that page
  - “About Us” button
  - Better explanation
- “Upcoming Events” needs to be highlighted on the site
- Map should also include Douglas County (Murphy Oil)
- Should the interactive map include 7 (front) or 16 (another page) projects? How to decide?
  - Criteria:
    - \$50 M plus investment levels
    - Environmental permitting in process
- Lead project clearly identified, contacted, and upfront
  - Others/possibilities on another page

- Identify access to information for business development opportunities
- Is URL rangereadiness.com or .org? Not in play yet. Will be reserved.
- Who's the audience?
  - Public – at large
  - Civic
  - Legislators
  - Education
  - Businesses
- “Regional Readiness”? Should we change the logo and name? Decided not to change the name at this time.
- Home Page will be revamped to cover the following:
  - Who is RRI
  - Why it's necessary
  - What are we doing to prepare for the projects
- Should we use videos on the site?
  - Trend today is more videos
  - What about production? Who and at what cost?
  - Could upload existing videos
  - Updating considerations?
  - More thought needed on this.
  - Capability can be easily added if we choose to include

#### G. NEG/Regional Innovation Grant Award - \$250,000

Michelle Ufford, Don Hoag and Jim Wroblewski have been involved in securing a \$250,000 National Emergency Grant – Regional Innovation, from the U.S. Department of Labor to support regional strategic planning. That award has been made to the region, including Northeast Minnesota and Northwest Wisconsin, and involves the three Workforce Investment Boards (WIB) as the recipients. RRI was a strong supporter of the application as part of its submittal last fall and hopes to be involved with its implementation. The specific role and involvement of RRI will need to be determined as the project unfolds. Planning funds are available for an 18-month process. The following outcomes were highlighted as the purpose of the grant:

- Develop a strategic plan for the region (not implementation grant)
- Must address workforce and economic development alignment
- A key is addressing transformation needs
- Organizationally they are looking at establishing a regional leadership board – six WIB and six Arrowhead Growth Alliance (AGA) members (total of 12 members)
- An alignment with RRI is critical and will need to be determined
- Other key needs – communication
  - “The Northland Works” Web site
- A major premise of the grant is on addressing “strategies to reduce timeliness between major layoffs” and to “reduce constraints to business growth”

A planning meeting will be held shortly to begin addressing how the project will be implemented and the roles various stakeholders will need to play. The group will report on that discussion at the next RRI Strategy Team meeting.

#### H. RRI Budget and Current Resource Alignment

Randy Lasky and Roy Smith provided a first draft of the RRI budget summarizing major work activities and dollars/resources being leverage. Given the available time today, the team suggested a couple of changes and asked that a second draft be presented at the next Strategy Team meeting.

I. RRI Evaluation....How are we Doing?

Given time constraints, this topic will be addressed as the start of our next team meeting.

J. Next Meeting

The next meeting of the RRI will be held on April 28, 2008 from 9:00 A.M. – Noon at the Iron Range Resources Board Room. The agenda will focus on:

- RRI Evaluation
- Housing – Expeditor presentation and market assessment update
- Communications – Beta Website and regional meetings planning
- NEG Innovation Grant and role of RRI
- Project Team planning group – update

K. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at Noon.

Respectively submitted,

Randy Lasky  
Facilitator