

HF 2349 (Lee) / SF 2521 (Hawj)

Statutory Change Expanding Use of Ramsey County Housing & Redevelopment Authority (HRA)

Small businesses are the backbone of Ramsey County. It's critical to our region that we continue to invest in our business community in the wake of the pandemic. Ramsey County seeks to amend the HRA statutory language to expand authority to better support diversifying industries, communities, and emerging entrepreneurs as best as possible.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why is Ramsey County not just revising its Housing and Redevelopment Authority to include business programming as an allowable use? Why is establishment of an economic development authority included in this legislation?

A: Ramsey County Housing and Redevelopment Authority is established under state statute. The state statute is narrowly worded to the support and funding of affordable housing and redevelopment projects and programs. Small business programming is defined as allowable uses with economic development authorities. Ramsey County does not currently have an economic development authority. Based on legal guidance, the proposed legislation expands the powers of the Ramsey County Housing and Redevelopment Authority through the establishment of an economic development authority.

Will this legislative change result in a new property tax to Ramsey County property owners?

A: No. This legislative change has no change on property taxes. This legislative change simply expands the list of eligible activities in which Ramsey County's Housing and Redevelopment Authority levy is used. The text change would additionally add programming for entrepreneurs and small businesses as an eligible use for the Ramsey County Housing and Redevelopment Authority levy.

What is the county seeking from Ramsey County cities? If the legislation is successful, what is required from Ramsey County cities?

A: The County does not require approval from Ramsey County cities for this proposed legislation. The County does however seek support from our cities for this legislation.

If the legislation is successful, cities within the existing Ramsey County Housing and Redevelopment Authority area of operation will have the choice whether to:

- Opt-in: A city that chooses to opt-in will receive the greatest flexibility of eligible programming. In addition to the current portfolio of affordable housing and redevelopment programming, business programming will be provided. City Councils will be asked to pass resolutions 'opting-in' by June 2025. With the first year of HRA levy funded business programming occurring in 2026.
- Opt-out: A city that chooses to opt-out will continue to receive the current portfolio of affordable housing and redevelopment programming.

The City of North Saint Paul is not to be a part of the Ramsey County Housing and Redevelopment Authority Area of Operation. There is no change to North Saint Paul as a result of this legislation.

Ramsey County Housing & Redevelopment Authority

What is the current levy of the Ramsey County Housing & Redevelopment Authority (HRA)?

A: The 2024 HRA Levy is \$12,595,222. HRA Levy spending maintains a directed parity of 50% of the levy spent within suburban Ramsey County and 50% within the city of Saint Paul.

How is the Ramsey County Housing and Redevelopment Authority levy currently used?

A: The Ramsey County HRA levy is in its third year of operation. Over the last two years, the general breakdown of HRA levy usage was (Avg. of 2022 & 2023):

Housing Programing	Redevelopment Programs	Administration
73%	17%	10%

Current suite of HRA levy programming

Housing Programs	Redevelopment Programs
Affordable Housing infrastructure Investments	Critical Corridors – Development + Infrastructure;
FirstHome Down payment assistance	Critical Corridors Suburban Commercial Corridor Initiative <i>*Suburbs only*</i>
Emerging & Diverse Developers Program	Critical Corridors Planning
	Site Assessment Grants

► [HRA 2024 Annual Report – Highlights](#) (3rd year of operation)

Final Report is currently in production with a final version published in Q1 2025. General highlights to include:

- Affordable Housing Investments. \$6.5M of HRA levy obligated to affordable housing projects in 2024.
- Emerging & Diverse Developers (EDD). Over 30 developers received technical assistance in 2024. County invested \$2.4 million (HRA Levy only) into projects led by EDD.
- FirstHome Down Payment Assistance. 46 closings in 2024.
- Critical Corridors. Assisted 9 qualifying applicants/projects with \$1.76 million in Housing & Redevelopment Authority levy funding for place-based investments in three core areas: pre-development planning, commercial corridor initiatives (suburban only) and development and infrastructure
- Site Assessment Grants. Supported 16 projects with site investigation in 2024.

► [HRA 2023 Annual Report – Highlights](#) (2nd year of operation)

- Affordable Housing Investments. \$6.15M of HRA levy obligated to affordable housing projects in 2023. Across all funding streams, County invested in the construction of 1,365 new and 767 preserved rental housing units in 2023. Of the total, 988 were classified as deeply affordable for residents earning at or below 30% Area Median Income.
- FirstHome Down Payment Assistance. Of the 27 closings, 25 were first-generation homebuyers.
- Emerging & Diverse Developers (EDD). EDD is a two-part program initiated in second half of 2023.
 - Part A is provides technical assistance and cohort group learning to strengthen the pipeline of local emerging and diverse developers in real estate. 48 developers received technical assistance in 2023.

- Part B is a solicitation for projects led by EDD. County invested \$3.1 million (across all funding) into projects led by EDD.
 - Critical Corridors. Assisted 10 qualifying applicants/projects with \$2.1 million in Housing & Redevelopment Authority levy funding for place-based investments in three core areas: pre-development planning, commercial corridor initiatives (suburban only) and development and infrastructure
 - Site Assessment Grants. Program initiated in late 2023. Supported one project in 2023.
- **HRA 2022 Annual Report – Highlights** (1st year of operation)
- Affordable Housing Investments. \$7.2M of HRA levy obligated to affordable housing projects in 2022. Across all funding streams, Ramsey County leveraged multiple funding sources in 2022 to bring dozens of affordable housing projects closer to realization and invested in the construction of 1,128 new rental housing units and preserved 1,029. Of the total, 571 are classified as deeply affordable for residents earning at or below 30% Area Median Income.
 - FirstHome Down Payment Assistance. In Fall 2022, County relaunched its down payment assistance program to better align with market realities and offer first-time and first-generation homebuyers with down payment assistance. \$187,500 in down payment assistance loans disbursed in 2022.
 - Critical Corridors. Established in the Fall 2022, 14 grants in its first round of solicitations, totaling roughly \$2.3 million in three core areas: pre-development planning, development and infrastructure, and commercial corridor initiatives.

Will this change result in Ramsey County shifting its focus from supporting the preservation and expansion of deeply affordable housing?

A: No. Ramsey County remains focused on the improving affordable housing infrastructure throughout the county. The MN Legislature made unprecedented investments in housing and housing infrastructure as part of the 2023 Legislative session. The Local Affordable Housing Aid (LAHA) or housing sales tax is estimated to bring resources comparable to that of the HRA levy. This additional funding for affordable housing allows for a slight adjustment of funding priorities of the HRA levy without deviating from the County's primary focus on expanding and improving affordable housing infrastructure.

Who decides on funding priorities on HRA Levy?

A: Ramsey County HRA Board is responsible for establishing funding priorities and make final decisions regarding spending of HRA levy. While the County HRA outlines its priorities, it relies on city partners as well as community organizations and developers to ready important projects. Prior to the county's funding in a project, projects are required obtain a municipal resolution in support in accordance with state statute.

EDA and business programming

What type of business activities does the County intend to do with this legislative change?

A: The County is responding to community requests for enhanced business programming. The small business support (EDA eligible activities) realized by this legislative flexibility would be a strong reelection of those local requests and would initially start at \$1.5 - \$2 million of our yearly HRA levy to ensure the bulk of resources are remain available and prioritized for housing programs and projects. Funding will continue to align with HRA levy spending directives where 50% of HRA levy spending occurs in suburban Ramsey County and 50% with the City of Saint Paul. Areas of need identified to strengthen the small business ecosystem are informed by the County's involvement and engagement with cities, business support organizations and small businesses that include:

- Capacity building of small business support organizations to meet current and future needs

- ▶ More technical assistance/advisory services to better serve targeted geographies, communities and/or industries
- ▶ Additional flexible capital to enable greater business retention, expansion and attraction

Did the County attempt to form an EDA previously?

A: During the 2024 Legislative Session, Ramsey County introduced proposed legislation amending HRA statutory language and establishing an EDA to allow for business programming to be an eligible use of Ramsey County HRA levy funding. HF 3784 (Lee) / SF 4655 (Hawj) was later amended based on feedback from cities. A redlined version, including a memo from the County Attorney's office describing the changes is available. The current draft version for the 2025 Legislative session of the bill reflects this city feedback in 2024.

In 2016, the County did submit legislation that would have created a Ramsey County EDA. The legislation was pulled by the County following community concerns around the creation of a new taxing authority. The county's current legislation would not create a new taxing authority as it merely allows for additional eligible uses (i.e. business programming) of the County's existing Housing and Redevelopment Authority.

Does Ramsey County provide business programming? If so, what programs? How much does it spend? And how does it pay for business programs?

A: Ramsey County provides limited business programming. The County funds the programming through the County's general property tax levy. Current business programming totals \$345,000.

- ▶ Entrepreneur support: Open to Business – Provides no cost direct technical assistance and other forms of support to small business owners and aspiring entrepreneurs. This program was expanded countywide in 2019 in response to direct city requests for this program.
- ▶ Small Business Growth: Ramsey County has two cohort-based leadership programs geared for established businesses. Both programs are a partnership with Hennepin County.
 - CEO Next – Group learning leadership program for CEOs/founders of second stage businesses that are growth-minded (\$1M-50M in revenues, 10-99 employees, etc.)
 - CEO Now – Group learning leadership program for CEOs/founders of first stage businesses that are growth-minded (\$250K-2M in revenues, more than one employee, operating for two years, etc.) Newly established in 2024.
- ▶ Marketing & attraction programming: RamseyCountyMeansBusiness.com An online portal providing workforce and economic development resources throughout the county to current and prospective businesses and investors. This online portal went live in 2019 and was refocused during the pandemic as a central repository for covid business relief resources. A redesign of the portal is underway and will be live in early 2025.

How do other metro counties support business programming and how did they obtain authority to provide economic development activities?

A: Hennepin County received special legislation (MN Statute 383B.79) - *A multijurisdictional reinvestment program is authorized involving Hennepin County, the Hennepin County Housing and Redevelopment Authority, and one or more of the following political subdivisions: the cities of Minneapolis, Brooklyn Center, and other interested statutory or home rule charter cities in Hennepin County, the Minneapolis Park Board, the Three Rivers Park District, and any watershed district entirely or partially located in Hennepin County. The multijurisdictional program may include plans for housing rehabilitation and removals, industrial polluted land cleanup, water ponding, environmental cleanup, community corridor connections, corridor planning, creation of green space, acquisition of property, development and*

redevelopment of parks and open space, water quality and lakeshore improvement, development and redevelopment of housing and commercial projects, economic development, and job creation.

- ▶ Hennepin County utilizes Housing and Redevelopment Authority funding for a variety of economic development programs including their CEO Next and Elevate Business platform. Due to the broader nature of this statute, this has limited applicability to Ramsey County.

Dakota County has a Community Development Agency. Under MN Statute 383D.41, subdivision 7, *After December 31, 1999, the Dakota County Housing and Redevelopment Authority shall be known as the Dakota County Community Development Agency. In addition to the other powers granted in this section, the Dakota County Community Development Agency shall have the powers of an economic development authority.*

- ▶ A core focus of local Community Development Agencies (CDAs) is the ability to own and operate affordable housing. Ramsey County has expressed no interest in owning and operating affordable housing, so this the CDA statute has limited applicability to Ramsey County.

Washington County has a Community Development Agency. In 2016, Washington County successfully sought special legislation to amend their Housing & Redevelopment Authority and created a Community Development Agency. Under MN Statute 383D.41, section 2, subdivision 2a, *Request to handle economic development, housing, or redevelopment duties. The governing body of a statutory or home rule charter city or township with an existing municipal economic development authority may request the Washington County Community Development Agency to handle the economic development, housing, or redevelopment duties of the authority and, in such an event, the Washington County Community Development Agency shall act and have exclusive jurisdiction for economic development, housing, or redevelopment duties in the statutory or home rule charter city or township pursuant to the provisions of the Economic Development Authorities Act, Minnesota Statutes, sections 469.090 to 469.1081.*

- ▶ A core focus of local Community Development Agencies (CDAs) is the ability to own and operate affordable housing. Ramsey County has expressed no interest in owning and operating affordable housing, so this the CDA statute has limited applicability to Ramsey County.

Scott County and Carver County each have a Community Development Agency. CDA's provide the most diverse array of eligible programing for housing, redevelopment and economic development uses.

Other questions:	
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