

Chair Scott Dibble
Transportation Committee
Minnesota Senate
RE: SF2203

April 7, 2025

Dear Chair Dibble and Committee Members,

It's my pleasure to submit the following documents in support of my testimony about SF2203. Included is a map of the Minnesota communities participating in the first two rounds of the Empowering Small Minnesota Communities program.

In addition, I'm enclosing several letters of support from communities that have participated in the program.

Finally, I invite members of your committee to visit our program's website to explore more about how the Empowering Small Minnesota Communities program is supporting small cities and townships throughout the state. More information can be found at www.cts.umn.edu/programs/empoweringcommunities.

I and other members of the Empowering Small Minnesota Communities program team from the Minnesota Design Center, Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships, and the Humphrey School of Public Affairs are happy to connect with the committee to discuss the work of our program at any time.

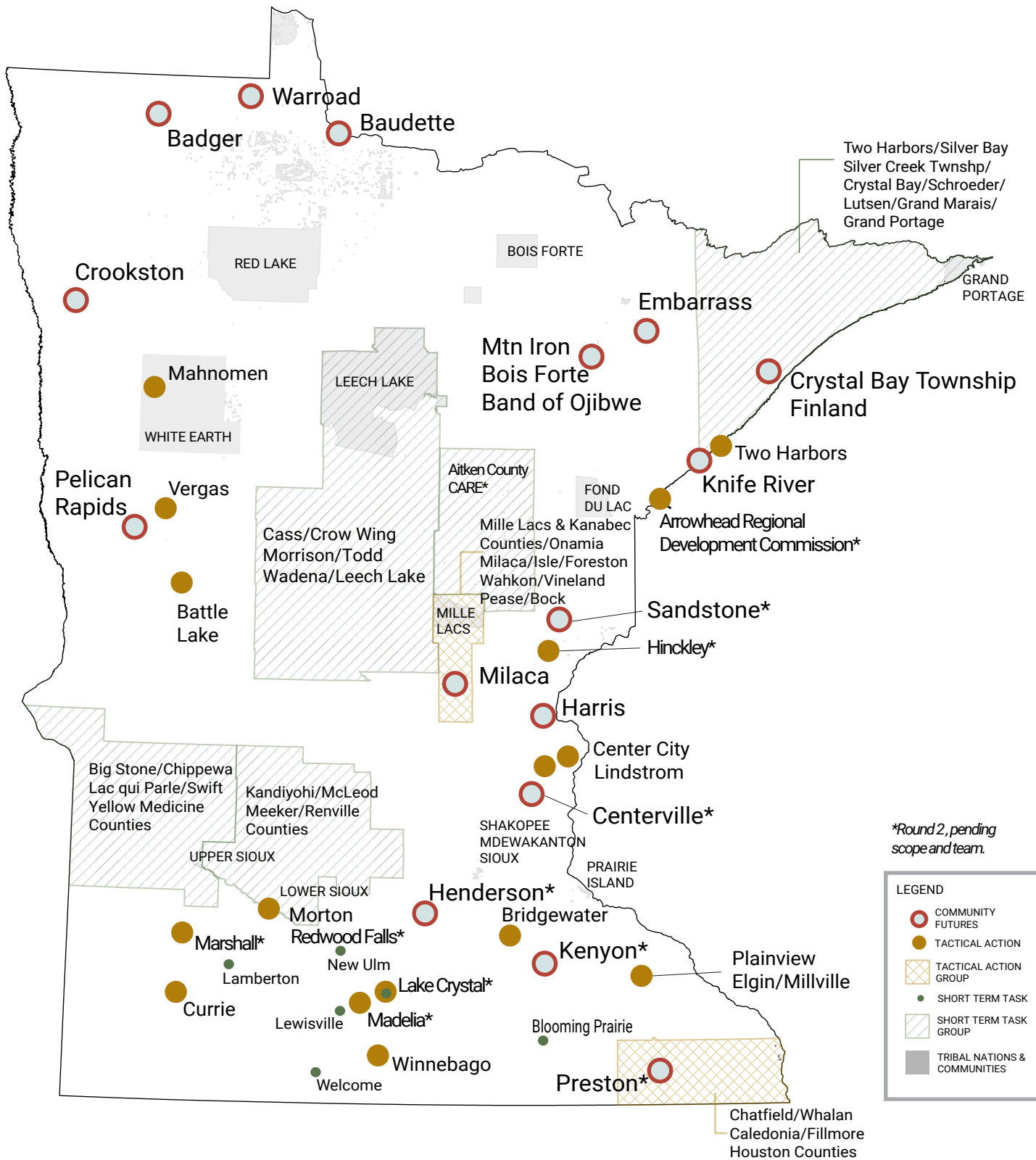
Sincerely,



Kyle Shelton
Director
Center for Transportation Studies
University of Minnesota



ESMC Efforts: Rounds 1 + 2*



EMPOWERING SMALL MINNESOTA COMMUNITIES

MAYOR
Jill Behnke
TREASURER
Tom Zine
CITY CLERK/ZONING ADMIN
Dana Miron



COUNCIL
Mark Wolcott
Lloyd Vetter
Garrett Boulineau
Sally Swanson

February 26, 2025

House and Senate Transportation Committees
Minnesota Legislature
RE: Empowering Small Minnesota Communities Program

Dear Chairs and Members,

I am writing today to express my support for the Empowering Small Minnesota Communities Program, and to ask that you support the program during the 2025 legislative session. As a resident and mayor of Center City in your district, and as a member of a team that received support from the ESMC effort in 2024, I want to share my first-hand experience about its positive impacts.

My community's ESMC project has enabled us to work together in partnership with the University of Minnesota to focus on a public trailhead design concept. This collaboration will allow us to explore options to link the trailhead to the downtown and other existing trails. These outcomes are critical to our community because these plans will help to manage critical stormwater runoff into South Center Lake as well as create positive connections with residents and trail users within our city.

This effort brought together multiple stakeholders and partners, including new and long-time residents and business owners in the community. This joint effort was supported by a team from the University of Minnesota that included researchers Torey Erin from the Minnesota Design Center and Mike Greco from the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA). This collaboration has allowed us to address important community needs and opportunities, and has provided us with critical capacity to address our infrastructure challenges.

Again, I ask that you support this program in the 2025 session so that my community and other small Minnesota communities throughout the state can continue to thrive.

I appreciate your work on behalf of the district and state. Thank you for considering my request of support for the Empowering Small Minnesota Communities program.

Sincerely,


Mayor Jill Behnke



City of Battle Lake
108 East Main, PO Box 386
Battle Lake, MN 56515

218-864-0424
E-mail: CityClerk@BattleLakeMN.org
www.BattleLakeMN.org

House and Senate Transportation Committees
Minnesota Legislature

RE: Empowering Small Minnesota Communities Program

Dear Chairs and Members,

I am writing today to express my support for the Empowering Small Minnesota Communities (ESMC) Program HF1360/SF2203 and to ask that you support the program during the 2025 legislative session. As the Economic Development Director and the City of Battle Lake Clerk/Treasurer, which has received support from the ESMC effort, I want to share my first-hand experience with its positive impacts.

My community's ESMC project is enabling us to work together in partnership with the University to plan a housing development community-design charrette, which will engage all interested community members to share ideas, explore opportunities, discuss priorities and to visualize what is possible for Battle Lake housing solutions. Community ideas and priorities will be collated into a report and exhibit the community can use as tools to advance collaboration, communicate the city's vision, and to facilitate conversations and next steps with potential partners, developers and funders to address our infrastructure challenges. This work is being supported by the UMN Humphrey School and UMN Extension.

I am happy to provide additional information about our work with ESMC at your pleasure. Again, I ask that you support this program in the 2025 session so that my community and other small Minnesota communities throughout the state can continue to improve and thrive.

I appreciate your work on behalf of the state.

Sincerely,

Val Martin
Clerk/Treasurer/EDA Director

March 17, 2025

House and Senate Transportation Committees
Minnesota Legislature
RE: Empowering Small Minnesota Communities Program

Dear Chairs and Members,

I am writing today to express my support for the Empowering Small Minnesota Communities Program (bill HF1360/SF2203) and to ask that you support the program during the 2025 legislative session. As a regional development organization focusing primarily on rural communities from South Central Minnesota and a part of a team that received support from the ESMC effort, I want to share the Region Nine Development Commission's first-hand experience with its positive impacts.

Our region's ESMC project has enabled us to work together in partnership with the University to engage with local emergency medical service providers, hear their issues with recruitment and retention, examine similar situations in other rural areas, and create strategies to tackle the issues our EMS providers identified. The work has given our region a road map to address this sector in crisis. These outcomes are critical to our community because rural EMS in our region and throughout Minnesota is at a critical point where many providers are understaffed and experiencing high turnover, existing staff are experiencing burnout, and many long-time employees are reaching retirement age.

This effort brought together multiple stakeholders and partners. Key parts of our team include South Central Minnesota EMS, Brown County, and the City of Eagle Lake. This joint effort was supported by Stuart Grande in the University of Minnesota School of Public Health, his graduate assistants, and Anne Dybsetter of Southwest Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships at University of Minnesota Extension. This collaboration allowed us to achieve a great deal of our goals and provided us with critical capacity to address our infrastructure challenges.

I am happy to provide additional testimony about our work with ESMC at your pleasure. Again, I ask that you support this program in the 2025 session so that my community and other small Minnesota communities throughout the state can continue to thrive.

I appreciate your work on behalf of the region and state. Thank you for considering my request for support of the Empowering Small Minnesota Communities program.

Sincerely,



Jessica Beyer
Deputy Director
Region Nine Development Commission
507-646-9631 | jessica@rndc.org

House and Senate Transportation Committees
Minnesota Legislature
RE: Empowering Small Minnesota Communities Program

Dear Chairs and Members,

Scenic Highway 61 from Duluth to the Canadian border is a well-traveled route for locals and tourists. It passes some of the most visited state parks in Minnesota, including Gooseberry Falls, which welcomed over 1 million visitors in 2025. Just a few miles south of Gooseberry on Hwy 61, the town of Two Harbors (pop: 3,531) welcomes and serves these visitors with a handful of restaurants and shops. Two Harbors, where I work and live, is home to Minnesota's first iron ore shipping port and hosts the starting line of the world-famous Grandma's Marathon.

Yet, despite all of these natural resources and economic strengths, the city lacks the capacity to develop resilient, sustainable, and adaptable infrastructure projects. Over the last year, Empowering Small Minnesota Communities Program provided essential guidance and project planning to help Two Harbors move forward with a shared community and city vision to turn 40+ acres of Agate Bay waterfront on Lake Superior into a safe, accessible, and usable public space. The property, which currently includes a barbed wire fence and dangerous rebar sticking out of a dilapidated concrete pier, is steps from downtown businesses and walking distance of the historic lighthouse.

Small communities with big visions need programs like ESMC to compete with towns that benefit from larger tax bases and populations. The resources and experts ESMC brought into our community have been pivotal in moving the Agate Bay redesign from a community conversation to a shared vision for shovel-ready implementation.

In 2024, over 122 citizens in our community volunteered 525+ hours across 34 events in support of the Agate Bay project, but we would be spinning in circles if ESMC hadn't stepped in to help guide the next phase of the project. It takes a village, and for a project like this, we know our village needs regional and statewide partners to carry it across the finish line.

As one member of the project likes to say, "We can have nice things too."

I am writing today to express my support for the Empowering Small Minnesota Communities Program **HF1360/SF2203** and to ask that you support the program during the 2025 legislative session. I am happy to provide additional testimony, and I ask that you support this program in the 2025 session so that my community and other small Minnesota communities throughout the state can continue to thrive.

Sincerely,

Jolene Brink



City of Harris

Pride in our Community

February 27, 2025

House and Senate Transportation Committees
Minnesota Legislature
RE: Empowering Small Minnesota Communities Program

Dear Chairs and Members,

I am writing today to express my support for the Empowering Small Minnesota Communities Program, and to ask that you support the program during the 2025 legislative session. As a resident and mayor of the City of Harris in your district, and as a member of a team that received support from the ESMC effort in 2024, I want to share my first-hand experience about its positive impacts.

Our community's ESMC project has fostered a collaborative partnership with the University of Minnesota to develop a strategy for enhancing bike and pedestrian infrastructure. This initiative aims to connect the city's parks with Fish Lake County Park and nearby residential areas. Additionally, the project team is exploring opportunities to improve water quality in Goose Creek—an impaired waterway—revitalize the downtown commercial district, mitigate flooding risks across the community, connect with the Sunrise Prairie Regional Trail, and reimagine the primary use of each city park.

Harris is considering applying for a Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR) grant in 2026 to support stormwater management and water quality improvements. The city is also exploring a Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) small communities planning grant to initiate planning for enhancements to the stormwater sewer system.

To engage the community, we hosted a public open house in September 2024 and have scheduled a second open house in April to gather additional feedback and ideas. Additionally, we meet regularly with a community advisory committee that plays a key role in guiding this partnership.

This effort brought together multiple stakeholders and partners, including new and long-time residents and business owners in the community. This joint effort was supported by a team from the University of Minnesota that included Torey Erin and Mary Vogel from the Minnesota Design Center, and Mike Greco from the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA). This collaboration has allowed us to address important community needs and opportunities and has provided us with critical capacity to address our infrastructure challenges.

43970 Ginger Avenue • P.O. Box 111 • Harris, MN 55032

Phone: 651-674-7546

Fax: 651-674-2535



City of Harris

Pride in our Community

Again, I ask that you support this program in the 2025 session so that my community and other small Minnesota communities throughout the state can continue to thrive.

I appreciate your work on behalf of the district and state. Thank you for considering my request of support for the Empowering Small Minnesota Communities program.

Sincerely,

Randy Carlson
Mayor City of Harris.



House and Senate Transportation Committees
Minnesota Legislature
RE: Empowering Small Minnesota Communities Program

Dear Chairs and Members,

I am writing today to express my support for the Empowering Small Minnesota Communities Program (bill HF1360/SF2203) and to ask that you support the program during the 2025 legislative session. As a resident of Bridgewater Township in district 58A and a member of a team that received support from the ESMC program, I want to share my first-hand experience with its positive impacts.

The Township's ESMC project has enabled us to work together in partnership with the University to develop a method for removing PFAS from leachate at the Rice County Landfill, which is located in Bridgewater Township. The work has pointed to a cost-effective approach Rice County can take to eliminate PFAS from leachate while also reducing the total volume at the landfill.

These outcomes are beneficial to our community in that they lead to affordable approaches to eliminating one source of landfill contamination while also extending the life of the landfill by reducing its total volume.

This effort brought together multiple stakeholders and partners. Key participants on our team include Rice County, Bridgewater Township and the University of Minnesota. This joint effort was supported by The UMN Center for Biorefining and the Department of Applied Economics. This collaboration allowed us to achieve a great deal of our goals and provided us with critical capacity to address our infrastructure challenges.

I am happy to provide additional testimony about our work with ESMC at your pleasure. Again, I ask that you support this program in the 2025 session so that my community and other small Minnesota communities throughout the state can continue to thrive.

I appreciate your work on behalf of the district and state. Thank you for considering my request of support for the Empowering Small Minnesota Communities program (bill HF1360).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Glen Castore".

Glen Castore
Supervisor, Bridgewater Township
651-343-6613
gmcastore@gmail.com



City of Vergas

House and Senate Transportation Committees
Minnesota Legislature

RE: Empowering Small Minnesota Communities Program

Dear Chairs and Members,

I am writing today to express my support for the Empowering Small Minnesota Communities (ESMC) Program HF1360/SF2203 and to ask that you support the program during the 2025 legislative session. As Energy Representative, Planning Commission Secretary, EDA/HRA Treasurer, and the City of Vergas Clerk-Treasurer, which has received support from the ESMC effort, I want to share my first-hand experience with its positive impacts.

My community's ESMC project has enabled us to work together in partnership with the University to research energy and water use in several municipally owned buildings to identify opportunities to optimize energy efficiency and cost savings. The building benchmarks, energy audits and building model scenarios will provide the City of Vergas concrete designs and options to discuss with community members for informed decisions for municipal building improvements and to address our infrastructure challenges. This work has been supported by the UMN Center for Sustainable Building Research and UMN Extension.

I am happy to provide additional information about our work with ESMC at your pleasure. Again, I ask that you support this program in the 2025 session so that my community and other small Minnesota communities throughout the state can continue to improve and thrive.

I appreciate your work on behalf of the state.

Sincerely,


Julie Lammers, CMC
City Clerk-Treasurer
City of Vergas

131 East Main Street • P.O. Box 32 • Vergas, Minnesota 56587 • Phone: (218) 302-5996
Website: www.cityofvergas.com • Email: jlammers@cityofvergas.com

The City of Vergas is an equal opportunity Provider and Employer.

House and Senate Transportation Committees
Minnesota Legislature
RE: Empowering Small Minnesota Communities Program



Dear Chairs and Members,

I am writing today to express my support for the Empowering Small Minnesota Communities Program (bill HF1360/SF2203) and to urge you to support its continuation during the 2025 legislative session. As a resident of Winona, Minnesota, and a member of a team that has directly benefited from this program, I want to share my firsthand experience with its invaluable impact on our community.

Through the Empowering Small Minnesota Communities (ESMC) program, we have built meaningful partnerships that would not have been possible otherwise. Our project, which focuses on establishing a long-distance hiking trail across Southeastern Minnesota, has relied on ESMC's support to foster engagement with local communities. ESMC provided us with the opportunity to collaborate with the University of Minnesota and host listening sessions in our region. These sessions were instrumental in strengthening our relationships with residents and local stakeholders, ensuring that our trail aligns with community needs and aspirations.

ESMC also connected us with the expertise of the University's team, which guided us in developing standards and guidelines that will shape our project for years to come. Their knowledge and insights—particularly in trail planning and development—have been invaluable in giving us confidence in our approach, ensuring that we are not only creating a sustainable and well-designed trail but also fostering an inclusive and transparent planning process.

The resources provided by ESMC have enabled us to take a community-driven approach, which is critical to its long-term success. Without this program, we would not have had access to the same level of professional guidance, nor the ability to hold open, constructive conversations with the communities impacted by our work. The program has laid a foundation for us to move forward in a way that is collaborative, thoughtful, and respectful of local perspectives.

Programs like ESMC are essential for small organizations like ours, where funding and expertise are often limited. By continuing to support this initiative, you are ensuring that rural and small-town projects across Minnesota have the tools they need to succeed and thrive. I would be happy to provide additional testimony at your request. I respectfully ask that you support this program in the 2025 session so that our community—and others like it—can continue to grow and benefit from these critical resources.

Thank you for your time, your work on behalf of our state, and your consideration of my request.

Sincerely,
Alexa Shapiro
Trail Director
director@mndriftlesshikingtrail.org

Mayor

Judy Chartrand

City Administrator

Daniel Undem



LINDSTRÖM
AMERICA'S LITTLE SWEDEN

www.cityoflindstrom.us**Council Members**

Mike Hilber

Brian Norelius

David Waldoch

Greg Krueger

13292 Sylvan Ave • Lindström, Minnesota 55045
(651) 257-0620 • Fax: (651) 257-0623

March 3, 2025

House and Senate Transportation Committees
Minnesota Legislature

RE: Empowering Small Minnesota Communities Program SF 2203

Dear Chairs and Members,

I am writing today to express my support for the Empowering Small Minnesota Communities Program, and to ask that you support the program during the 2025 legislative session. As the City Administrator from the City of Lindstrom, and as a member of a team that received support from the ESMC effort in 2024, I want to share my first-hand experience about its positive impacts.

My community's ESMC project has enabled us to work together in partnership with the University of Minnesota to develop a park plan for the City's Beach Park. This collaboration has allowed the city to access professional design services to help the city plan the future of Beach Park. This planning provides us with a foundation on how we can better connect the park to our downtown business district, improve stormwater collection in the park, and relocate the parking lot out of the high-water zone.

As Lindstrom works to increase tourism in the city, the improvements envisioned in the Beach Park plan will help the city to add much needed connectivity to the park and amenities to help us increase our tourist attraction. These outcomes are critical to our community because they will help us to strengthen our local business community by increasing tourism market share. If not for the grant awarded through the ESMC grant program, this important work would not have been possible.

This effort brought together multiple stakeholders and partners in our community, including the Lower St. Croix Watershed District, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, the

Lindstrom Parks Commission, and residents and business owners in the community. This joint effort was supported by a team from the University of Minnesota that included Torey Erin from the Minnesota Design Center and Mike Greco from the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA). This collaboration has allowed us to address important community needs and opportunities and has provided us with critical capacity to address our infrastructure challenges.

Again, I ask that you support this program in the 2025 through your support of SF2203 so that my community and other small Minnesota communities throughout the state can continue to thrive. I am happy to provide additional testimony about our work with ESMC at your pleasure.

I appreciate your work on behalf of the district and state. Thank you for considering my request of support for the Empowering Small Minnesota Communities program.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Undem', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Daniel Undem
City Administrator
City of Lindstrom



crookstonheda.com
kkirschbaum@crookston.mn.us
218-470-2000

510 County Rd 71 Crookston, MN 56716

House and Senate Transportation Committees
Minnesota Legislature
RE: Empowering Small Minnesota Communities Program

Dear Chairs and Members,

I am writing today to express my support for the Empowering Small Minnesota Communities Program **HF1360/SF2203** and to ask that you support the program during the 2025 legislative session. As a resident of your district from Crookston and a part of a team that received support from the ESMC effort, I want to share my first-hand experience with its positive impacts.

My community's ESMC project has enabled us to work together in partnership with the University to develop a strategy that coordinates community infrastructure improvement priorities and advances Crookston in a collaborative way for more efficient and useful community and economic development. The work has had the following impact upon the Crookston community: ongoing weekly collaboration with local and regional partners, identification of federal, state and local resources to advance community initiatives, submission of several grant proposals, securing of funding for MNDOT transportation planning, support and informing of the updated Crookston Comprehensive Plan and mobilization of volunteers across several interest areas and specialty areas.

These outcomes are critical to our community because Crookston seeks to strengthen its position in the region and the state as a center of critical services, education, manufacturing and economic strength with an eye toward resilience and environmental stewardship.

This effort brought together multiple stakeholders and partners. Key parts of our team include the University of Minnesota Crookston, West Polk Soil and Water Conservation District, Otter Tail Power, Polk County Public Health, NW Regional Development Commission, Fresh Energy, Clean Energy Resource Teams and Crookston Parks and Recreation Department. This joint effort was supported by the University of Minnesota's, Minnesota Design Center and the NW Regional Sustainable Development Partnership. This collaboration allowed us to achieve a great deal of our goals and provided us with critical capacity to address our infrastructure challenges.

I am happy to provide additional testimony about our work with ESMC at your pleasure. Again, I ask that you support this program in the 2025 session so that my community and other small Minnesota communities throughout the state can continue to thrive.

I appreciate your work on behalf of the district and state. Thank you for considering my request of support for the Empowering Small Minnesota Communities program HF1360/SF2203.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Karie Kirschbaum". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Karie Kirschbaum
Community Development Director



CITY OF
MILACA *Minnesota*

255 First Street East, Milaca, MN 56353

(320)983-3141 | (320)983-3142 fax

House and Senate Transportation Committees
Minnesota Legislature
RE: Empowering Small Minnesota Communities Program

Dear Chairs and Members,

I am writing today to express my support for the Empowering Small Minnesota Communities (ESMC) program and to ask that you support the program during the 2025 legislative session. As the mayor of Milaca, which has received support from the ESMC effort, I want to share my first-hand experience with its positive impacts.

My community's ESMC project has enabled us to work together in partnership with the University to bring together business owners and community members to talk about the development of Milaca Junction and how it might attract new business and compete for public funding. The work has helped us strengthen relationships in our community and build on the many assets in our city. This work has been supported by Molly Zins and Tom Fisher at the University of Minnesota and this collaboration allowed us to achieve a great deal of our goals and provided us with critical capacity to address our infrastructure challenges.

I am happy to provide additional information about our work with ESMC at your pleasure. Again, I ask that you support this program in the 2025 session so that my community and other small Minnesota communities throughout the state can continue to thrive.

I appreciate your work on behalf of the state.

Sincerely,

Mayor Dave Dillan