



# **EAST CENTRAL**

**Regional Development Commission**

**ECRDC.org • (320) 679-4065**

**100 Park St S, Mora, MN 55051**

**FY2021**

## **ANNUAL REPORT**



**Serving Chisago, Isanti, Kanabec, Mille Lacs and Pine Counties**



Thank you for stopping by to look over the annual report for the East Central Regional Development Commission. It's no exaggeration to say that the 2021 fiscal year was one of the most dynamic and challenging years in recent memory. The COVID-19 pandemic pushed us beyond our regular mission and altered the way we operate like we've never seen before. Like many of our communities in east-central Minnesota, the Commission shifted priorities and direct resources toward shoring up the economy and making it more resilient going forward.

The challenges encountered were plenty. Many of our businesses faced financial setbacks or worse – complete shutdowns. Large numbers of our workforce were suddenly unemployed. Many had difficult decisions to make between what is necessary vs. what is simply “nice to have”. The Commission worked tirelessly to bring additional technical and financial resources to help our communities weather the economic storm.

We learned a lot. Among them were the importance of technology and having a dependable internet connection for employees and students needing to work and learn remotely. We discovered that local governments can be nimble and conduct business remotely while remaining open, accessible, and transparent to the public. Transit providers could make accommodations for social distancing while providing rides to the public particularly to disadvantaged groups such as the elderly, disabled, and low income. Health care providers could expand the use of technology to monitor and treat patients remotely. Our post-secondary institutions could adjust their program offerings to meet the changing needs of our workforce. While there are many other amazing examples, the pandemic did show just how resilient our communities can be in trying times. It also revealed how much work we have left to do such as expanding high speed broadband to all reaches of our region. Thanks to everyone who played a part in keeping the region going during the past year!

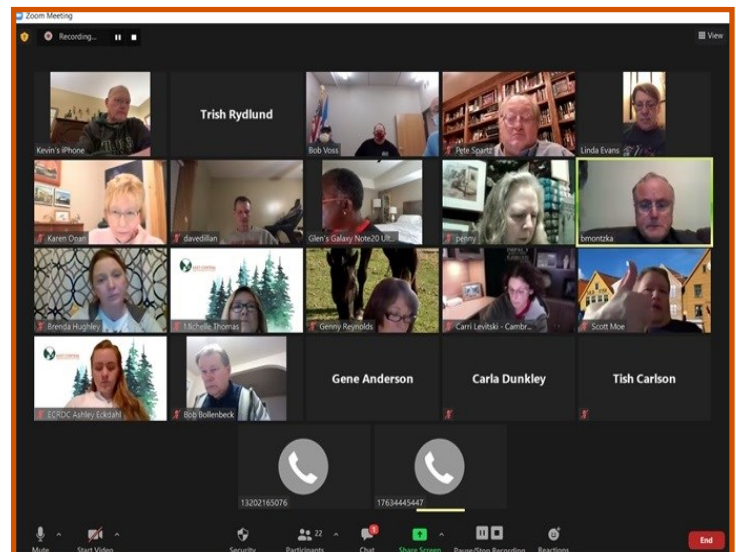
As we close out the fiscal year, I want to thank our outgoing Commission members John Mikrot (Pine County Commissioner), Gordon Gullixson (Kanabec County Municipalities), and recognize Diane Larkin (Chisago County Townships) who sadly passed earlier this year. Please also join me in welcoming our incoming Commission members JJ Waldhalm (Pine County Commissioner), Jeremy Miller (Kanabec Municipalities), and Carolyn Cagle (Chisago County Townships).

Finally, I want to offer a special thanks to the entire EC-RDC Board, our various advisory committees, and staff for the tremendous support, guidance, and hard work you've provided. The success of the Commission would not be possible without you.

Kindest regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert Voss". The signature is fluid and cursive, written on a plain white background.

Robert Voss  
Executive Director



*East Central Regional Development Commission meetings were held via Zoom due to Covid-19.*

## WHO IS THE EAST CENTRAL REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION?

The East Central Regional Development Commission (ECRDC) is a public agency serving a variety of constituents within Chisago, Isanti, Kanabec, Mille Lacs and Pine Counties. Other constituents include various state, federal, and local governmental bodies.

The board members are represented by officials appointed by county boards, townships, municipalities, school boards and citizens at large.

The ECRDC is funded through a local tax levy and planning/program grants and contracts from state agencies, federal agencies and foundations.

### Michelle Thomas is New ECRDC Economic Resiliency Coordinator



Michelle Thomas was hired this past year by the East Central Regional Development Commission (ECRDC) as their Economic Resiliency Coordinator. She is working with businesses in Chisago, Isanti, Kanabec, Mille Lacs & Pine Counties that have been impacted by the fight against COVID-19, including operation of a new 0% interest small business loan program, regional business resiliency and other initiatives. This position is funded in part by a grant from the US Department of Commerce / Economic Development Administration (EDA).

Thomas comes to the ECRDC with over 20 years of marketing, communications and problem-solving experience and has worked with both non-profit organizations as well as businesses in the private sector. Thomas holds a B.S. in Mass Communications and Marketing from St. Cloud State University. Most recently as Director of Marketing and Strategic Partnerships with Family Pathways, she worked with agency partners, businesses, donors and other stakeholders throughout the East Central region of Minnesota.

## MISSION OF THE EAST CENTRAL REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

The mission is to provide leadership and direction through creative problem solving. We do this by initiating projects and programs that lead to creative solutions to regional problems, providing technical assistance and identifying and developing available resources. We serve in a leadership role as an advocate for East Central Minnesota to bring about positive change.

ECRDC BOARD MEMBERS		
First Name	Last Name	Represents
Gene	Anderson	Kanabec Co. Commissioner
Bob	Bollenbeck	Kanabec Co. Public Interest
Carolyn	Cagle	Chisago Co. Townships
Tish	Carlson	Isanti Co. Municipalities
Loren	Davis	Isanti Co. Public Interest
Dave	Dillan	Mille Lacs Co. Municipalities
Carla	Dunkley	Native American Representative
Linda	Evans	Mille Lacs Co. Public Interest
Richard	Hansen	Isanti Co. Townships
Robert	Hoefert	Mille Lacs Co. Townships
Jeannette	Kester	Pine Co. Public Interest
Tom	Lawlor	Chisago Co. Public Interest
Carri	Levitski	Southern School Boards
Jeremy	Miller	Kanabec Co. Municipalities
Scott	Moe	Northern School Boards
Ben	Montzka	Chisago Co. Commissioner
Dave	Patenaude	Kanabec Co. Townships
Genny	Reynolds	Mille Lacs Co. Commissioner
Peter	Spartz	Pine Co. Municipalities
Kevin	Stenson	Chisago Co. Municipalities
Jim	Swenson	10000+ Population
Terry	Turnquist	Isanti Co. Commissioner
JJ	Waldhalm	Pine Co. Commissioner
Glen	Williamson	Pine Co. Townships





***Building Stronger Businesses for 2021 and Beyond, Training Workshop Series:*** A series of three workshops, 'Building Stronger Businesses for 2021 and Beyond' was designed to assist local business owners and operators with technical training on topics that have been identified as vital for companies in East Central Minnesota – marketing, workforce, and financials. East Central Regional Development Commission, in collaboration with the Small Business Development Center and Women's Business Alliance, developed this technical training to help businesses within the region recover, compete and expand their reach to consumers in today and tomorrow's post- COVID-19 pandemic economy. This program included a region wide training schedule, the opportunity for one-on-one coaching post training workshop and

the creation of a recorded/webinar portal online for easy topic access.

The first workshop, 'Marketing Essential for Today's Business', provided expert insights and guidance to help discover free and low-cost marketing tools, develop approaches and plans, and prepare for future marketing trends. This session was well received with 116 attendees participating at 5 on-site locations (for those with limited internet) and via online webcast. 25% of participants requested one-on-one coaching to integrate the provided materials into their own businesses.

The second webinar focused on attracting and retaining employees. 'Finders Keepers: What You Can Do to Find and Keep Employees' helped businesses utilize current strategies to find and hire the right people, build a team that is effective and long-term, and best practices for developing employee potential to fill skills gaps. Hosted 75 registered participants with 40% interested in further help through the one-on-one follow up.

The last training, 'Smart Strategies: Understanding Your Business Finances' taught attendees how to read and interpret key financial statements, use financial statements to set growth goals, and calculate and analyze which products/services offer the biggest opportunities to drive profits. This workshop had not been hosted at the time of this writing.

## Economic Development



EDA Covid RLF loan closings.

Photo left -  
Cambridge Bar and Grill.



Photo right -  
Braham Pizza Pub.

## COVID-19 Revolving Loan Fund (RLF):

**Original loan = \$500,000 | Total loaned to date = \$383,500 | Available to lend = \$116,500**

ECRDC is ahead of schedule regarding anticipated activity and interest in our COVID-19 loan program. ECRDC has approved and closed 11 new loans with local companies that represent a good cross section of businesses operating across our region. They range in size and types of operations. Some of the loans supported start-ups and expansions that include the addition of new jobs, others are supporting loans providing relief from the impacts COVID has had on them.

At the time of this writing, we have loaned more than half of the original loan total and are on track with our Grant Administration Plan for this project.



Photo: COVID-19 Revolving Loan Fund closing for Siya Hotel, Inc. L to R: Hotel owners, Ankita Sanghani, Alpesh Sanghani and their daughter.

**RECAP COVID RLF: The COVID loans have been broad in scope—varying in type and size of business as well as regionallocation**

Glockenspiel/Deutschland Meats (Lindstrom)	\$ 25,000
Dunham Run Bar & Grill (Sturgeon Lake)	\$ 30,000
Pizza Pub (Braham)	\$ 32,500
Betabfit Personal Training (Princeton)	\$ 30,000
All Mac (Stacy)	\$ 41,050
Cambridge Bar and Grill (Cambridge)	\$ 40,000
Veritas Academy (Chisago City)	\$ 40,000
Central Fence (Isanti)	\$ 30,000
Siya Hotels/Quality Inn (Finlayson)	\$ 60,000
Hinckley Vet (Hinckley)	\$ 40,000
Loban Home (Pine City)	\$ 15,000



Photos of recent COVID RLF loan closings:  
Top row, L to R: Betabfit – Princeton and Veritas Academy – North Branch . Bottom row, L to R: Denham Run Bar & Grill – Denham and All Mac Manufacturing – Stacy,



# Economic Development

## Broadband

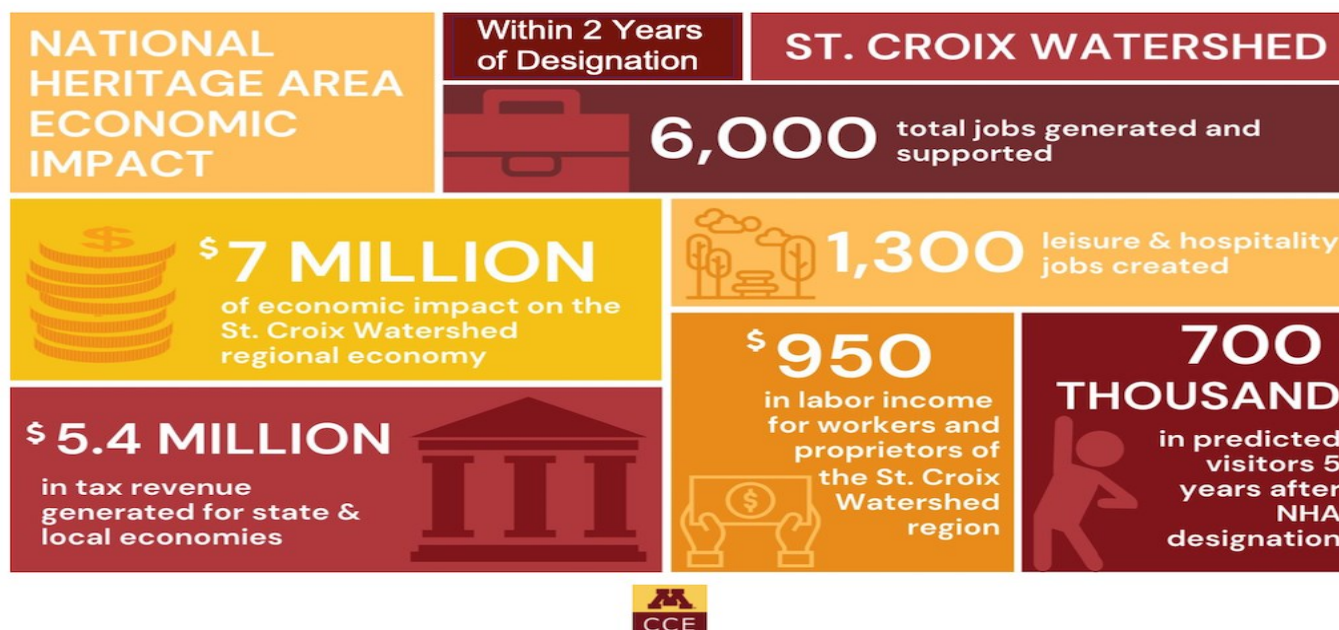
**Regional Planning - Community Broadband Resources Accelerate!:** In its pursuit to find the best possible broadband solution for the East Central Minnesota regional community, as of this writing this cooperative Accelerate! team has completed a survey of regional residents and businesses; talked with cooper-

atives and learned of their regional approaches; made presentations to township boards, City Councils, school districts, organizations; acquired Resolutions of Support; interviewed multiple local and national internet service providers; and began the process of examining potential funding solutions.





## St Croix NHA's Economic Impact at a Glance



### Regional Tourism, Economic Development of the St. Croix Valley Watershed – National Heritage Area

Collaborating with a coalition of economic and community development groups, local businesses, and non-profit organizations to explore how the natural, cultural, and historic resources within the St. Croix watershed is looking to be leveraged for economic and community development.

1. An Economic Impact/Opportunity Assessment for National Heritage Area Designation study was completed with help from the Carlson School of Management at the University of Minnesota. This exhaustive study was able to define the implications that a National Heritage Area designation would have on the St. Croix Watershed area and community. Within two years of NHA designation, the study shows an additional 6,000 jobs would be created, \$7 million would contribute to the economic impact of the region, and an increase of \$950 in income would be seen by business owners and employees. And from the included graph, readers can see the numbers continually go up

2. helping to grow and stabilize jobs, businesses, resources for the area. The National Park Service has now granted us permission to apply for NHA status.
2. An informative article was published in the National Parks Traveler about the economic impact study:  
[www.nationalparkstraveler.org/2021/06/economic-studies-point-value-st-croix-watershed-national-heritage-area](http://www.nationalparkstraveler.org/2021/06/economic-studies-point-value-st-croix-watershed-national-heritage-area)
3. At this time, a formal request has been sent to Congressman Pete Stauber to co-sponsor an upcoming bill designating the St. Croix Watershed as a National Heritage Area. We are doing this in an effort to get congressional approval that ultimately would make this designation a reality.

Economic Development



Minnesota has significant economic opportunities all across the state. Regions throughout Greater Minnesota share many qualities and challenges, but lack the intentional alignment needed to take **advantage** of shared priorities and maximize the use of resources. The lack of alignment has led to a limited voice in crafting effective development policy based on regional priorities. DevelopMN helps identify needed alignment and documents a broadly supported strategy for creating shared prosperity.

**DevelopMN has identified four cornerstones for strong regions and communities:**

#### Foundational Assets

Greater Minnesota communities require proactive and collaborative approaches/strategies to address infrastructure needs in a cost-effective manner. Managing the access to, maintenance, replacement, and growth of these assets is key to preserving and maintaining communities as well as providing for growth opportunities. Foundational Assets include above-ground and below-ground infrastructure including transportation, utilities, and water.

## Economic Development

### Administrators City/County Clerks, & Economic Development Professionals Meetings

The ECRDC organizes City / County Clerks / Administrator & Community / Economic Developers meetings approximately quarterly to discuss mutual key issues occurring in the Region 7E communities. During the Pandemic, these events went online. Past topics include financing opportunities for local units of government and businesses, customized training and workforce needs, business recruitment and expansion initiatives, entrepreneurship, and regional marketing initiatives. These meetings have evolved into a best practices approach to city economic development. Issues and speakers are selected that provide insight that will assist local governments and communities.

#### Human Capital

It is clear that prosperity in the 21st century will be driven by a combination of Human Capital and Innovation. In a world that is constantly shrinking, people with knowledge and skills are becoming ever more mobile and have multiple choices of where to live, work and play. Growing, retaining and attracting talent, and then maximizing its potential, are critical for Greater Minnesota.



#### Economic Competitiveness

Making Greater Minnesota an attractive environment for growth is critical to creating jobs, raising living standards and financing necessary public services. Economic prosperity requires that communities link all assets of the community to generate new knowledge, new businesses, and transform existing businesses into thriving 21st century companies.

#### Community Resources

Greater Minnesota communities seek to maintain our rural heritage while creating amenities that in return offer sustainable populations and become defining pillars of our culture.



Photo—Administrators City/County Clerks, & Econ Development Professionals meetings held via Zoom.





## GPS 45:93 Collaboration:

The ECRDC continues its economic development partnership with the GPS 45:93 in attracting high technology firms to Region 7E. GPS 45:93 is a regional economic development consortium strategically located along Interstate 35 between Minneapolis/St. Paul and Duluth. This makes it an ideal location for those companies serving the Twin Cities and Duluth area.

The mission of GPS:45:93 is to better position the region to attract high wage, technology based jobs, collaborate on business retention and expansion and encourage entrepreneurial activity. GPS 45:93 is working with Chamber of Commerce, banks and other local partners to support businesses in the region.

## Local Planning Projects

The East Central Regional Development Commission is assisting the City of Rock Creek with updating their Comprehensive Plan, the City of Hinckley with developing an Economic Development Strategic Plan, and Mission Creek Township with updating their Comprehensive Plan.



Photo above - Mission Creek Township's Planning Commission works on their Comprehensive Land Use Plan.

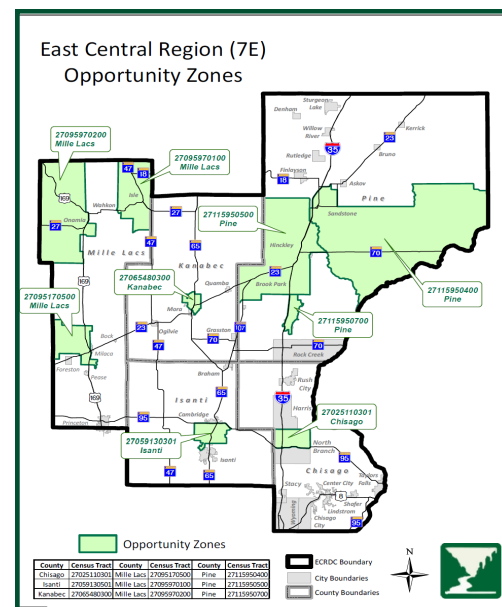
GPS 45:93 is dedicated to growing and attracting businesses with high-paying jobs to the 5-county region of East Central Minnesota. It takes its name from the point of latitude and longitude at which the four original counties in the partnership meet.

The Mission Statement of GPS 45:93 is: Collaborate to strengthen regional economy by:

- Providing a regional approach to workforce development, business attraction, retention and expansion
- Acting as a conduit for members and the region to access resources and educational opportunities.

## Opportunity Zones

We continue to market Opportunity Zones in East Central Minnesota. Our region is home to nine Opportunity Zones, with at least one in each of our five counties. Investment in qualified Opportunity Zone projects can provide a variety of tax benefits. For more information, please see our website: [www.ecrdc.org](http://www.ecrdc.org) or call us at (320) 679-4065



Economic Development

## Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS):



The ECRDC has been implementing their five-year CEDS completed and adopted in 2017, and created a new CEDS to replace it as it comes to the end of its five-year life. The CEDS tracks the region's demographic trends and economic conditions, identifies weaknesses and threats, and identifies strategies that have the potential to help mitigate roadblocks to the region's prosperity. A valuable planning process for regional economic development takes place in the development of a CEDS. An approved CEDS is required to maintain East Central Minnesota's designation as a federal Economic Development District. The current CEDS can be found on our website at [www.ecrdc.org](http://www.ecrdc.org).

The Pandemic also brought financial assistance through the CARES Act and other programs. The CARES Act provided funding to hire an Economic Resiliency Coordinator, who has organized a variety of economic development initiatives in an effort to overcome the effects of the pandemic and greater strengthen and diversity the region's economy.

The ECRDC applied for and received \$500,000 to capitalize a new small business Revolving Loan Fund (RLF), along with assistance with administrative expenses.

And the Federal EDA made available funding through a variety of opportunities to local units of government, tribal and post-secondary education. Although unsuccessful in obtaining grants for these organizations in early rounds, we are hopefully for funding of grant applications being developed.



*Congressman Pete Stauber and two of his staff visited the ECRDC on Monday, January 25th to chat on topics impacting East Central MN, including small business conditions and business assistance from the Federal government, amongst others issues.*

*Photo above - L to R: Congressman Pete Stauber, Karen Onan – RTCC Coordinator, Michelle Thomas - Economic Resiliency Coordinator, and Bob Voss – ECRDC Executive Director.*

## Economic Development

Economic Development Districts (EDDs) are eligible to apply for various funding opportunities available through U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA). For example, the ECRDC accesses the Partnership Planning grant to develop and implement the regional CEDS. More importantly, our local units of government may include regionally significant projects in the CEDS. Eligible projects may apply for federal funding through EDA's Public Works grant program on a competitive basis. The Public Works program seeks to empower distressed communities to revitalize, expand, and upgrade their physical infrastructure to attract new industry, encourage business expansion, diversify local economies, and generate or retain long-term, private sector jobs and investment.

In 2019 the US Department of Commerce / Economic Development Administration awarded Pine Technical & Community College in Pine City a \$1.1 million grant for campus upgrades, and construction was completed this past year.





## Inventors & Entrepreneur Club

The ECRDC partnered with East Central Energy and GPS::45::93 to hold events to focus on supporting local entrepreneurs and encouraging them to start and grow their business here in the region. These events went online this past year because of the pandemic. The advisory team is working to develop this club and promote a monthly gathering for individuals that are seeking to share ideas and get more information about the first step or next step in starting their business.



Photo: Angie Grafstrom, City Administrator of Braham, presents on opportunities and assistance available to entrepreneurs and businesses from the City of Braham at our February 23, 2021 Inventors & Entrepreneurs Club event.



Photo above: The June 15th Familiarization Tour stops at the Interstate Industrial Park in North Branch. L to R: Carla Vita – City of North Branch, Catalina Valencia – DEED, Nancy Hoffman – Chisago County EDA, and John Shoffner – DEED.



## Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis Business Surveys

The East Central Regional Development Commission, along with other regional planning organizations from Minnesota, have been partnering with Ron Wirtz with the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis to conduct surveys of businesses to help the Fed better understand not only our regional business economy, but Greater Minnesota, and the Pandemic's effects on it. Mr. Wirtz's boss, Neel Kashkari, President of the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, sits of the Fed's Federal Open Market Committee, which sets benchmark interest rates in the United States.

Economic Development





## Scenic Byways

The ECRDC continues its role as administrative host for two State of Minnesota designated scenic byways, Veterans Evergreen Memorial Drive Scenic Byway in Pine County and Lake Mille Lacs Scenic Byway in Mille Lacs County, with the byway meetings conducted remotely during the past year.



ECRDC staff completed a variety of administrative tasks that includes submittal of the annual report to MnDOT and coordination of organizational activities such as meetings and events for both the Lake Mille Lacs Scenic Byway and the Veteran's Evergreen Memorial Scenic Byway. Training opportunities for all three scenic byways within Region 7E—Lake Mille Lacs, Veteran's Evergreen Memorial, and St. Croix remain available to the byways by the ECRDC and its partners.



*Photo above—An evening on Lake Mille Lacs with friends and a relaxing bon fire.*

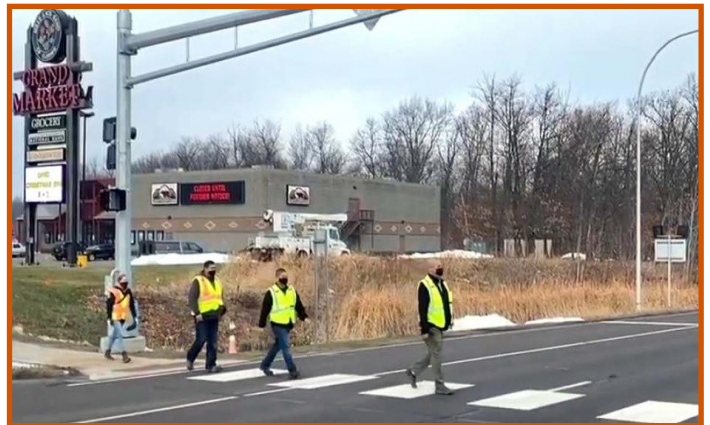
# Transportation

## Transportation Alternatives and Surface Grant Funding

Federal funding available through these two primary sources continue to be applied for by communities and/or counties in the East Central Regional Development Commission five county area, and administered through three Minnesota Department of Transportation Districts (1, 3, and Metro). Work related to the solicitation, application, review, and selection processes were completed as an on-going work effort from the ECRDC.

In 2020-21 the ECRDC assisted in the facilitation of solicitation and selection of Transportation Alternatives funding for counties in MnDOT Districts 1 and 3, and for surface grant funding in MnDOT Districts 1 and Metro within Region 7E for future projects.

*Photo right—Tony Pike (roads and solid waste manager, Mille Lacs Band Public Works), leads a demonstration of the new HAWK crosswalk installed near Grand Casino and Grand Market.*



## Minnesota's Safe Routes to Schools



Minnesota's Safe Routes to Schools program, administered by the Minnesota Department of Transportation provides funding for planning, infrastructure and non- infrastructure projects. The ECRDC developed the Safe Routes to School Plan with the City of Finlayson and Finlayson Elementary (part of Hinckley-Finlayson School District), who undertook this planning initiative, completed in the spring of 2021, in hopes that infrastructure and non-infrastructure funded projects will follow as a natural progression to correspond with larger MnDOT roadway projects along MN 18 in the City of Finlayson/Pine County later in the decade.

Since its inception, SRTS assists communities in tackling unique challenges and taking full advantage of opportunities specific to individual schools and neighborhoods. Nationwide trends common to most communities include things such

as: 1) declining rates of physical activity for school age children; 2) increasing rates of childhood and adolescent obesity and related health problems; 3) increased automobile traffic congestion around schools and on nearby roadways; and 4) continued land use patterns that focus development further away from already developed areas. The Finlayson Safe Routes to School Plan explores each of these.

Flourishing Safe Routes to School projects see remarkable changes in the way students and parents choose to travel to and from school. These projects succeed by including each of the "Six E's" of Safe Routes to School to ensure that their project is a well-rounded, multi- prong and time-tested approach to getting students safely walking and bicycling. The Six Es of Safe Routes to School are: 1) engineering; 2) education; 3) encouragement; 4) enforcement; 5) evaluation; and 6) equity.



*Photos above—picture of Finlayson Elementary School sign.*

*Photo above right—West Street and Highway MN 18 sidewalk in front of school looking west.*

*Photo right—picture of John W. Osborn Finlayson Elementary School.*



Transportation



## East Central Regional Transit Coordinating Council (ECRTCC)



In July, 2018, the MnDOT, Minnesota Department of Transportation, and the Department of Human Ser-

vices, in collaboration with other state agencies, worked with the Metropolitan Council and other local governments and organizations to create Regional Transportation Coordinating Councils (RTCCs) throughout Minnesota. July 1, 2018 marked the beginning of Phase 1, the Planning Phase. The ECRTCC Advisory Board, established during the 2018 – 2019 Planning Phase, is represented by aging, workforce, healthcare, human services, transportation, Tribal, Veteran, and a variety of other pertinent governmental agencies.

The ECRTCC moved into the second phase, Implementation - on July 1, 2019. In June of 2020, the ECRDC was notified by MnDOT that the Phase Three application was approved for funding to begin implementing the plans determined through the 2019-2020 Implementation Phase.

These were the five ECRTCC Implementation tasks for the 2020 – 2021 fiscal year and accomplishments:

1. Transportation Management Coordination Center Development
  - Transportation Resource Guide has been published online and in hard copy form. Included in the directory is information about park and ride lots, car charging stations and bike racks.
  - New portal: [eastcentraltransit.com/](http://eastcentraltransit.com/) is in construction process. On the site there will be helpful and relevant information to

answer questions for potential riders. Provider links to be provided to users.

- GIS mapping has been accomplished for the region's public providers.
- Surveys finalized for further transportation coverage expansion in northern Mille Lacs region. A staffing change at Tri-CAP has given pause in pursuing the sharing analytics with Tri-CAP board. Pursual forthcoming.
- New logo developed by professional promotional agent to be used in marketing the EC-RTCC.
- Continued collaboration with RTCCs throughout the state, networking by sharing relevant and current information online through Facebook and Instagram.
- Stay in front of the public through radio (KBEK 95.5fm), the Kanabec County Fair (2021) other local fairs to follow and in local news media.



Photo above - one of the many electric vehicle charging stations in Region 7E. This charging station is located at 800 Main St. S, Pine City, MN 55063 next to Family Pathway Thrift Store.



## East Central Regional Transit Coordinating Council con't.

### 2. Volunteer Driver Program Development, Coordination and Training

- Developed and implemented a successful 8-course Volunteer Driver Forum series that spanned from November 2020 to June 2021. Over 350 people participated in the forum over the 8-month span.  
<http://www.coordinatemntransit.org/events/volunteerdriverforum/2020-21/>
- Worked with providers to utilize whatever access they had for volunteers that would help with reverse transit during the pandemic. Many volunteers left their positions as most volunteers are of the senior persuasion – at most risk of COVID.
- Continued perseverance of legislative changes for Volunteer Drivers through association with the MN Volunteer Driver Coalition and letter writing to legislators.

<https://volunteerdrivermn.org/>

- Strong participation with MCOTA (MN Council on Transportation Access) meetings which is the driving force for much legislative adjustments. <http://www.coordinatemntransit.org/MCOTA/>
- Consistent recruitment efforts for Volunteer drivers, through radio (KBEK 95.5fm), the Kanabec County Fair (2021) and in local news media.

### 3. Policy Action

- Continued perseverance of legislative changes for Volunteer Drivers through association with the MN Volunteer Driver Coalition and letter writing to legislators. [volunteerdrivermn.org/](https://volunteerdrivermn.org/)
- Legislative lobbying along with the Coalition's persistence caused two bills to be passed in June of 2021. The first is a bill that explains the new

definition of a volunteer driver as “not for hire” – this is crucial for dealing with insurance policies who wish to raise volunteer driver's insurance rates, and the second bill allows the tax subtraction of 1099 tax charges for volunteering from MN taxes. All very well explained on the link above.

- Continued advocacy for smaller vehicles available through 5310 funding.
- Continued advocacy for insurance coverage/policy changes/options for vehicle sharing.
- Continued advocacy for raising the IRS volunteer driver mileage reimbursement rate up from .14cents per mile up to the IRS business mileage reimbursement rate – which is reevaluated yearly.

### 4. Ongoing Transportation Exploration

- Participation and advocacy of NLX continuance.
- Share information and research educational materials regarding alternative modes of transportation as well as Electric and Connected and Automated Vehicles (CAVs). Inventory of Car Charging Stations.
- RTCCs availability to connect transportation for those in need during COVID, including reverse transit.
- Consistent dialogue with MnDOT of region's COVID needs and developing solutions.

Photo right—Arrowhead Transit bus stop located next to the Braham Post office, 164 2nd Street SW, Braham, MN 55006.



Community Development

## East Central Regional Transit Coordinating Council con't.



The ECRTCC's focus is to provide transportation solutions for the residents of Region 7E. To solve this issue, there must be improved coordination between transportation providers and service agencies, filling transportation gaps, providing more service with same or fewer resources, streamlining access to transportation, and providing customers

more options of when and where to travel. The focus is particularly driven to improve mobility for the transportation disadvantaged such as older adults, individuals with disabilities, lower income individuals and/or military veterans.

Throughout most of Phase III, COVID-19 required transportation to make ongoing adjustments in to continue with much needed transportation. From the onset, citizens worked through the pandemic, developing creative solutions. Volunteers, teachers, faith organizations, counties, community action groups, transit services and others stepped up to deliver food, pharmacy supplies, books, school items – so-called Reverse Transportation. Isolationism has been most certainly a problem with seniors and disabled. So much awareness has come to the fore. Regarding transportation units, barriers were built in vehicles, advanced disinfecting techniques utilized, vehicle entry modified. Another unfortunate impact has been the issue of volunteer drivers leaving the field, as most volunteer drivers are the vulnerable adults that the virus has mostly affected. Throughout the pandemic, the ECRTCC has discussed all these variables with other RTCCs and MnDOT and have worked with our subcommittees to stay abreast to be of help where we could best serve.

As vaccines have become available, vaccine clinics have been deemed destinations for our transportation providers. Public Providers offer free rides for vaccination clinics and appointments. Masks are still required for riders of public transit. The Delta (and other) variants may set us all back further. All transportation which has drivers and rider(s) lay in uncharted territory.



As of July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021, the ECRTCC entered into Phase Four, which is a two-year grant cycle. Reevaluation of the workload and possible reconstruction will take place as needed as adjustments are made toward the end of this first fiscal year. The work is fluid. With the past three year's experiences, the tasks moving forward are much more concise, based on the requirements of current situations. These are:

- Task #1. Transportation Guidance/Consultation
- Task #2. Vehicle Sharing
- Task #3. Private non-profit and for-profit providers – engagement
- Task #4. Volunteer Driver Programs
- Task #5. Staff Training
- Task #6. Local Human Services – Public Transit Coordination Plan
- Task #7. Emergency Preparedness Facilitation

### Volunteer Driver Program

Make a difference for someone today!

Volunteer drivers receive a mileage reimbursement to pick up clients in the program, take them to their appointments and bring them home. Volunteers must have a valid driver's license and a good driving record. Volunteers are also required to have current automobile insurance and a vehicle that is in safe working order.

#### Benefits of the Program

- Personal Satisfaction
- Recognition and Appreciation
- Flexible Scheduling
- Mileage Reimbursement

Interested in becoming a Volunteer Driver?

Visit us at [EastCentralTransit.com](http://EastCentralTransit.com)

Driving schedules are flexible and the drivers determine their own availability within the hours offered to passengers.



	<b>FY 2021 ADOPTED BUDGET</b>	<b>FY2021 UNAUDITED PRELIMINARY PRIOR TO CLOSE</b>	<b>FY 2022 ADOPTED BUDGET</b>
<b><u>AGENCYWIDE REVENUES (by source)</u></b>			
County Tax Levy	328,384	332,504	333,310
Grant Revenues	547,268	486,302	597,134
Local Contract Revenues	7,500	3,089	8,000
Various Other Sources	12,340	16,894	18,240
Revolving Loan Fund	86,533	158,182	122,600
<b>Total Revenues</b>	<b>982,025</b>	<b>996,971</b>	<b>1,079,284</b>

<b><u>AGENCYWIDE EXPENDITURES (by program)</u></b>			
General Fund	107,733	167,795	71,801
Economic Development	351,187	277,272	352,649
Transportation / Safety	360,536	322,435	407,179
Revolving Loan Fund:			
Administration	33,163	19,529	33,383
Loans Disbursed	250,000	383,550	-
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>1,102,619</b>	<b>1,170,581</b>	<b>865,012</b>

<b>Fiscal Year ended June 30, 2021 (unaudited)</b>	<b>General Fund Increase</b>	<b>76,036</b>
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<b>Fiscal Year ended June 30, 2022 (Projected)</b>	<b>General Fund Increase</b>	<b>125,055</b>
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Fiscal Year 2020 Audit was conducted by CliftonLarsonAllen LLP, Brainerd, Minnesota.
The auditor's report expresses an unqualified opinion on the General Purpose Financial Statements of the East Central Regional Development Commission.



Photo Right—Isanti Mayor  
Business Appreciation Luncheon.

# Financials and Budget



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**ANNUAL REPORT**  
**EAST CENTRAL REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION**  
**100 PARK STREET SOUTH**  
**MORA, MN 55051**  
**JUNE 30, 2021**

**Serving Chisago, Isanti, Kanabec, Mille Lacs and Pine Counties**

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