



MID-MINNESOTA DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

# ANNUAL REPORT 2025



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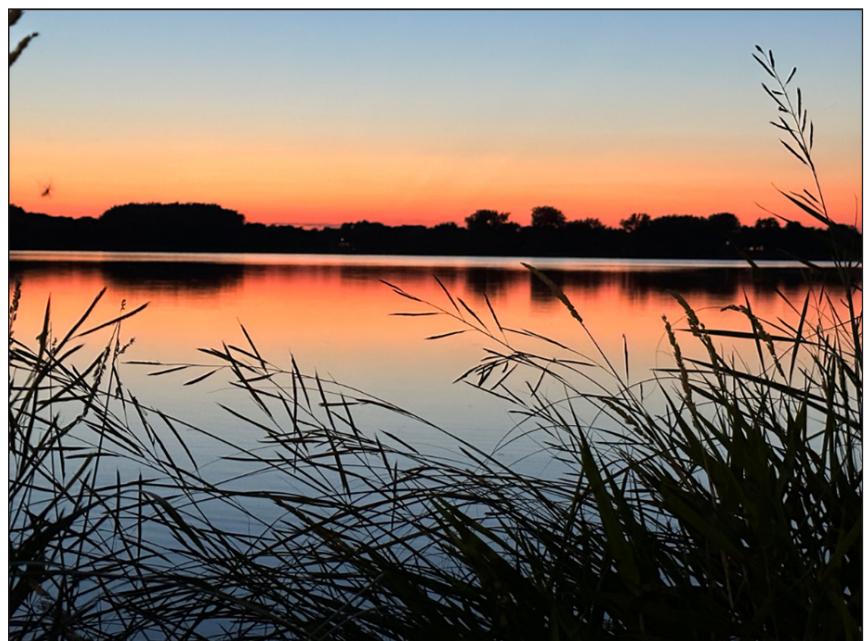
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Cover photo: Minnesota River Railroad bridge, near Morton. Taken by MMDC's Blake Barnard

## Mid-Minnesota Development Commission

Mid-Minnesota Development Commission (MMDC) is one of nine regional development commissions serving communities across Greater Minnesota. MMDC is an independent regional government entity, resulting from Minnesota's Regional Development Act of 1969. MMDC serves the four Minnesota counties of Kandiyohi, McLeod, Meeker, and Renville, an area also known as Minnesota Economic Development Region/District 6E. MMDC is governed by a Board of Commissioners, which includes a majority of locally-elected officials but also incorporates other non-elected subject matter experts who allow us to benefit from their experience and perspectives.



Sunset over Willmar Lake, from a local bike/walking path. Taken by MMDC's Ben Carlson

MMDC partners with local stakeholders to strengthen communities by improving quality of life and increasing opportunities for economic prosperity. We often provide technical assistance to area communities, businesses, and other organizations who lack capacity for planning or other goal achievement. We strive to help our stakeholders overcome shared barriers so they can achieve success. This often involves partnership with other entities, including local economic developers, CareerForce partners, Ridgewater College, and philanthropic organizations/foundations. Together, we work to make our communities stronger and more resilient to an everchanging world. We do this while also empowering those entrepreneurs willing to drive our regional economy via business establishment and expansion.

## 2025: A Year of Success Amid Uncertainty

Since January 2025, MMDC has seen a clear shift in federal priorities. In recent years we saw federal emphasis placed on public investment, climate action, and international cooperation. Now, the focus is on tax cuts, expanded tariffs on foreign goods, and deregulation. This change signals a reorientation, away from broad federal intervention and toward market-driven economic policies.

Unfortunately, this new approach impacted MMDC's work during the 2025 calendar year. In February, MMDC learned that, just over one and a half years into our five-year program, the Regional Food Business Center grant, was paused and later terminated. The RFBC Program gave MMDC the ability to provide a higher level of technical assistance to a wide array of enterprises along the food business chain (e.g. growers, producers, wholesalers, retailers, and restaurants), helping them access markets, improve business skills and strategies, and develop business infrastructure. Per a July release from the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, the temporary program ended because there was no long-term way to finance it.

Across the state, other programs that used federal funding and were no longer aligned with the new administration's priorities, met the same fate. Equity-focused programs were curtailed. For instance, MMDC was in talks to receive a \$50,000 grant to serve groups of people left behind by the digital divide (e.g., many older individuals) but the program was abruptly halted. Many of the previous clean energy opportunities also seemed to evaporate, making it more difficult for communities to reduce energy costs.

The six-week shutdown of the federal government exacerbated things in other ways. The office of the U.S. Economic Development Administration fell silent, disrupting multi-million-dollar funding applications, one that would support the redevelopment of an essential county roadway and another that would allow Ridgewater College to bring their electrician training program to their main Hutchinson campus. At the time of this report, those applications are still pending.

Despite these complications, MMDC has continued to help our communities and has enjoyed a fair amount of success. Included within this report are several features showcasing important 2025 accomplishments. Readers are encouraged to join us in celebrating our successes by sharing this information with others in their respective networks. Thank you for your support of Mid-Minnesota Development Commission and our broader mission.

### **Mid-Minnesota Development Commission's Mission Statement:**

**"To administer state and federal programs and coordinate multi-jurisdictional activities, and to provide technical assistance to government, business, and local organizations in order to maintain and enhance the quality of life and support economic development."**

# Mid-Minnesota Development Commission Board of Commissioners

## Kandiyohi County Elected Commissioners

Kevin Crowley	Kandiyohi County Municipalities (City of Pennock)
Roger Imdieke	Kandiyohi County Board of Commissioners
Mike Kutzke	Kandiyohi County Townships (East Lake Lillian Township)
Carl Shuldes	Municipality Over 10,000 Residents (City of Willmar)

## McLeod County Elected Commissioners

Tony Hausladen	McLeod County Townships (Winsted Township)
Doug Krueger	McLeod County Board of Commissioners
Sara Pollmann	MMDC Region School Boards (Hutchinson)
Yodee Rivera	McLeod County Municipalities (City of Glencoe)
Dave Sebesta	Municipality Over 10,000 Residents (City of Hutchinson)

## Meeker County Elected Commissioners

Gabra Lokken	Meeker County Municipalities (City of Grove City)
Lorallen Schmeling*	Meeker County Townships (Cedar Mills Township)
John Smith	Meeker County Townships (Ellsworth Township)
Darrin Sombke	Meeker County Board of Commissioners

## Renville County Elected Commissioners

Todd Frank	MMDC Region School Boards (BOLD)
Jon Hawkinson	Renville County Municipalities (City of Olivia)
Greg Mertens	Renville County Board of Commissioners
Scott Refsland	Renville County Townships (Emmet Township)

## Public Interest Commissioners

Brent Guyan	Renewable Energy Sector
Allen Hillstrom	Information Technology Sector
Jill Hoff	Local Workforce Development Board
José Luciano	Communities of Color
Rollie Nissen	Transportation Sector
Maureen Melgaard-Schneider	Aging Population
Robert Moller	Agriculture and Aggregate Mining Sectors
Shawn Mueske	Higher Education/Ridgewater College
Kiza Olson	Healthcare Sector
Reagan Quinn	Mental Health Sector
Berit Spors	Youth & People with Disabilities

\* Retired from Commission Service during the 2025 Calendar Year

## Meet Our Team of Professionals



**Eric Day**  
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## Financials

MMDC REVENUES	FY 2024 Actuals	FY 2025 Actuals	FY 2026 Budget
Local Tax Levy	\$ 397,702	\$ 407,501	\$ 418,462
EDA Planning	\$ 63,293	\$ 77,928	\$ 70,000
Other Misc. (incl. interest)	\$ 56,577	\$ 52,990	\$ 30,000
Revolving Loan Funds	\$ 39,703	\$ 48,981	\$ 84,000
USDA	\$ 38,296	\$ 8,221	---
Energy Programs	\$ 31,668	\$ 100,991	\$ 215,781
Local Contracts/Misc.	\$ 120,375	\$ 103,831	\$ 135,732
MnDOT - Planning	\$ 75,000	\$ 75,000	\$ 75,000
MnDOT - RTC	\$ 181,841	\$ 186,918	\$ 186,210
<b>(MMDC Fiscal Year: July 1 – June 30)</b>	<b>\$ 1,004,455</b>	<b>\$ 1,062,361</b>	<b>\$ 1,215,185</b>

MMDC EXPENDITURES	FY 2024 Actuals	FY 2025 Actuals	FY 2026 Budget
Salaries & Fringe	\$ 702,957	\$ 732,621	\$ 786,061
Supplies & Printing	\$ 10,980	\$ 15,809	\$ 8,209
Communications	\$ 40,332	\$ 16,914	\$ 15,700
Services	\$ 33,828	\$ 4,952	\$ 6,875
Travel & Training	\$ 13,097	\$ 12,925	\$ 20,868
Indirect Expenditures* and Misc.	\$ 196,250	\$ 212,484	\$ 264,065
Energy Programs – Reimbursements	---	---	\$ 183,500
Commissioner Travel/Expenses	\$ 14,061	\$ 14,215	\$ 13,000
<b>(MMDC Fiscal Year: July 1 – June 30)</b>	<b>\$ 1,011,505</b>	<b>\$ 1,009,920</b>	<b>\$ 1,298,278</b>

Fiscal Year 2025 Recap – Revenue & Expenditures	
Total FY 2025 Revenue	\$ 1,062,361
Total FY 2025 Expenditures	\$ 973,527
Total Margin	\$ 88,834
FY 2025 Indirect Rate	24.85 %
FY 2025 Fringe Rate	33.24 %

\* “Indirect expenditures” refers to costs not directly tied to a specific program or service, like rent or administrative salaries (also called overhead), which are necessary for overall business operations and are allocated across different cost objectives.

## Economic Development

**U.S. EDA Disaster Supplemental Grant:** In 2024, two counties in the MMDC Region, McLeod and Renville, were severely impacted by severe storms and flooding, leading to a disaster declaration (DR-4797-MN) from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). In 2025, the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) made approximately \$1.45 billion available to support economic recovery activities in areas that received disaster declarations because of hurricanes, wildfires, severe storms and flooding, tornadoes, and other natural disasters occurring in 2023 and 2024. The goal of the EDA FY 2025 Disaster Supplemental Grant Program is to assist communities as they recover from natural catastrophes and to put them on a path to exceed pre-disaster conditions. EDA investment priorities include critical infrastructure, workforce, innovation and entrepreneurship, economic recovery resilience, and manufacturing.



Since the notice of funding opportunity was released, MMDC has provided technical assistance for two separate Disaster Supplemental Grant applications. The first was for the reconstruction of Renville County State Aid Highway 21, which provides critical roadway access for several major employers. These include the Southern Minnesota Beet Sugar Cooperative; Transystems, the nation's largest sugar beet hauler; and Forsman Farms, a major cage-free egg-laying facility capable of housing 1.3 million hens.

MMDC was also proud to assist Ridgewater College with a Disaster Supplemental Grant application. If funded, this EDA award will provide much of the funding needed to replace a dated and inaccessible auditorium-style classroom, on their Hutchinson campus, with a modern training space. Ridgewater will then expand their popular electrician program to this area, improving their ability to train students for good, family-supporting jobs in a trade that has high demand for workers.

Additionally, MMDC responded to this EDA opportunity by submitting our own funding application. If awarded, MMDC will be able to dedicate more time and energy to helping McLeod and Renville County communities with federal grant applications from the EDA, USDA, and others. This may include leading the development of the applications themselves, beyond our usual technical support role, but would also include assisting with the cost of predevelopment work (e.g., engineering, architecture, environmental studies, etc.) via pass-through funding. MMDC would also work to improve the effectiveness of local economic development authorities and committees in these communities to help them improve long-term economic resilience. MMDC has pledged \$50,000 from our reserves to leverage what we hope will be a \$200,000 grant.

Unfortunately, the six-week federal shutdown put a pause on grant consideration. At the time of this annual report, all three of the applications described above remain pending.

## Economic Development (Continued)

**BNSF Railway Site Certification:** In 2025, MMDC, along with a number of other local partners, joined Kandiyohi County Economic Development (KCED) in their pursuit of site certification from the BNSF Railway for a portion of Willmar's industrial park. This comes after the 2022 completion of the Willmar Connector and Industrial Access Project. The project, otherwise known as the "Willmar Wye," created a new rail connection to bypass the city's downtown, reducing train traffic, delays, and noise, while also adding a rail spur for the new Willmar Rail Park. BNSF certification is essentially the company's confirmation that the site is "shovel-ready" for businesses needing rail access, potentially saving them six to nine months of development time.



### 10 Key Criteria for BNSF Certified Sites:

- 1. Site Description & Boundaries:** Clear property lines and size.
- 2. Land Use Regulations & Zoning:** Approved for industrial use.
- 3. Accessibility (Rail & Highway):** Proven, convenient access for transport.
- 4. Utilities Capacity & Location:** Confirmed availability of necessary services (water, power, etc.).
- 5. Wetland & Floodplain Data:** Analysis of water-related environmental factors.
- 6. Geotechnical Investigation:** Soil and ground stability assessments.
- 7. Phase I Environmental Site Assessment:** Review for potential contamination.
- 8. Cultural & Historical Resources:** Checks for archaeological significance.
- 9. Threatened & Endangered Species:** Assessment for local protected species.
- 10. Community/Public Support:** Commitment & collaboration from local entities.

A BNSF site visit was conducted in late October, involving many area partners. While the certification process remains underway, it is anticipated that the construction of new rail spurs may start as soon as 2026.

**Regional Food Business Centers (RFBC):** The U.S. Department of Agriculture decided to terminate the Regional Food Business Center program in 2025. Led by Region Five Development Commission, the North Central Regional Food Business Center included a large network of partners, including MMDC, focused on the expansion of small and mid-sized agricultural value chains across Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota. Activities included the provision of technical assistance to create new value chain connections, expand supply and demand to and from new and existing markets, improve viability, and increase market value of products. Program partners worked to boost regional food systems in response to supply chain weaknesses, small business challenges, and other difficulties exposed and intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic.



The RFBC program brought MMDC an additional \$60,000 per year to expand MMDC's economic development efforts along the food value chain, which includes farmers, processors, distributors, retailers, restaurants, and more. While the program was terminated, MMDC Economic Developer Nate Reuss, a "farm kid" who spent most of his career working in the seed industry, continues to share opportunities with and provide technical assistance to these entrepreneurs and businesses.

## Economic Development (Continued)

**Workforce Development:** A skilled and available workforce is a key factor for business attraction and retention. It drives growth, innovation, and local prosperity. That's why MMDC considers it a top economic development priority. Much of our organization's time centers on workforce needs, including things like training, childcare, housing, and opportunities for leisure and enrichment.

In 2025, MMDC was again invited to participate in several important workforce-related initiatives. Economic Developers Mike Nicholas and Nate Reuss joined local childcare provider support efforts in each of our four counties. This is because it can be difficult if not impossible for parents to fully-participate in the workforce when there is no one available to care for their children.

Executive Director Eric Day served on the LYFT Career Pathways Advisory. LYFT (Launch Your Future Today) is a rural career pathway initiative working to rebuild career and technical education (CTE) throughout Southwest Minnesota, including the MMDC Region. The goal is for every secondary student to gain marketable skills through meaningful CTE courses and other opportunities which lead to further education and on-the-job learning, in fields with strong demand for workers. In addition to serving on the LYFT Advisory, Day assists with the review of applications for LYFT grant awards, which often provide the funding needed to purchase the equipment and supplies required launch new CTE courses.



MMDC was thrilled to assist with the 2025 IGNITE Your Future career exploration event. This October event, held on Ridgewater College's Hutchinson campus, gave over 1,000 sophomores from area school districts a chance to sample dozens of different careers, highlighting rewarding vocational opportunities in the MMDC Region. Fast-paced and hands-on career focused activities helped the students learn about professions in a wide variety of sectors, including manufacturing, construction, business, agriculture, healthcare, engineering, the arts, transportation, and public service.



2025 IGNITE Your Future Employers and Volunteers. Photo taken by Ridgewater College

## Economic Development (Continued)

The IGNITE event provides a unique opportunity for regional employers to engage with the emerging workforce by exposing young people to their industries. They can peak students' interest before they disregard what could be rewarding careers due to a lack of awareness.



Right: MMDC Mobility Manager Terry Smith explains Non-Emergency Medical Transportation to an interested youth. Below: MMDC Transportation & Community Planner Blake Barnard and Regional Development & Grant Specialist Carol Lundgren visit with students about planning careers.



**“We cannot build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future.”**

**- Franklin D. Roosevelt**

## MMDC's Revolving Loan Funds (RLF)

MMDC partners with private lenders and key economic development organizations to empower local entrepreneurs with the expertise and financial tools they need to transform bold ideas into thriving businesses. Together, we're building a stronger, more vibrant regional economy.

Leveraging our three revolving loan funds, all made possible with substantial investment from the U.S. Economic Development Administration, MMDC bridges critical financing gaps when traditional lenders can't fully satisfy a business need. This strategic approach ensures that promising ventures don't stall for lack of capital. In 2025, MMDC proudly approved several business loans, including:

**Sweet Spot Bake Shop, LLC:** With a strong reputation for high quality baked goods, Sweet Spot Bake Shop owner Tina Castillo decided to expand the downtown Fairfax operation into a local Fairfax EDA-owned building, formerly occupied by the local grocery store. In addition to providing a welcoming and cheerful space for local gatherings, this expansion made it possible to add a complimentary business, with assistance from Castillo's husband, Juan Elizalde. In addition to a top-notch



frank, Lolo's Chicago Style Hot Dogs offers an array of hot sandwiches, sides, and ice cream. Lolo's also provides a local dining option for Saturday breakfasts and even special occasions, like New Year's Eve. Approved by MMDC's Loan Approval Board in 2024, the Sweet Spot Bake Shop's loan finally opened their new space in 2025, after months of construction-related delays. To plan your visit, check out both <https://www.facebook.com/sweetspotfairfax/> and <https://www.facebook.com/Lolosdogs/>.

**MAC Supply & Hardware, LLC:** In 2024, local businessman Manuel "Manny" Contreras purchased Bonnema Hardware and Flooring in Spicer. To better serve his customers, he realized he needed to invest in a new, larger store. Under the Do It Best banner, MAC Supply & Hardware now occupies a brand new, 12,800 square foot building, with an attached 6,800 square foot lumber yard. It sits on what was an underdeveloped and highway adjacent space. While the store aims to serve DIYers, MAC's primary goal is to address the unmet needs of local trades professionals who might be underserved by big-box retailers. Visit <https://www.doitbest.com/mac-supply/> to learn more about store hours, product selection, and more.



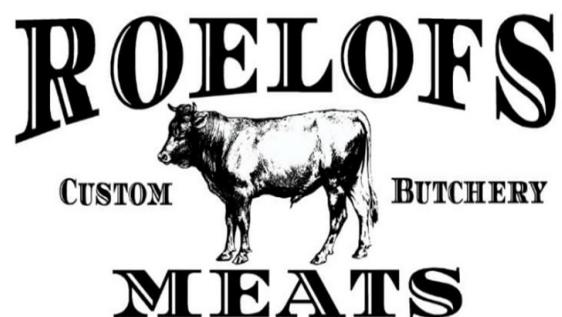
## MMDC's Revolving Loan Funds (Continued)

**Masterpiece Studio, LLC:** Dedicated to offering both high-quality tattoo and barbershop services in a safe, clean, and bilingual environment, ownership team Andres and Adriana Cabrera and Cesar and Sara Mares decided to renovate and open a location in busy downtown Willmar. Their vision is to become the go-to destination for personalized grooming and artistic expression, while also fostering community engagement and inclusivity. Masterpiece Studio celebrated its grand opening in October. To learn more, visit Masterpiece Studio's social media pages, [instagram.com/masterpiecestudiollc/](https://instagram.com/masterpiecestudiollc/) and [facebook.com/profile.php?id=61580299212178](https://facebook.com/profile.php?id=61580299212178).

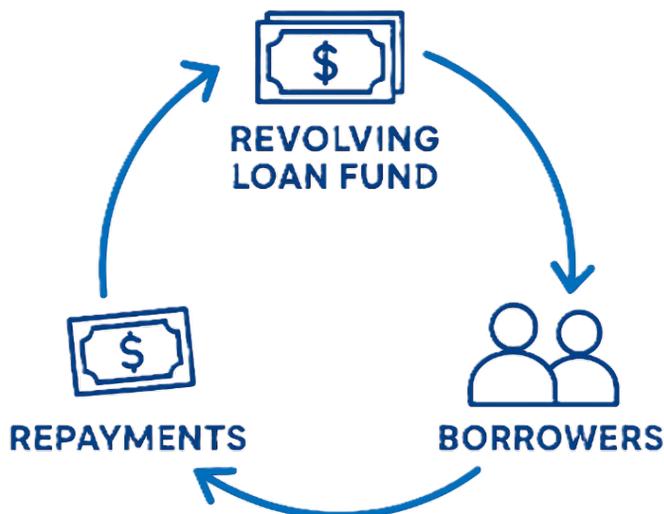
**Smokey Dukes, LLC:** Approved in late 2024, MMDC's loan to Smokey Dukes closed in 2025. Cofounded by siblings Lance Walter and Mari Wildt, Smokey Dukes specializes in pellet-smoked and seasoned pretzels. What sets this company apart is their true slow-smoking process (competing products are typically made with artificial liquid smoke or smoke seasoning). With assistance from MMDC's revolving loan fund, Walter and Wildt purchased the equipment and inventory needed to ramp up their production. At present, they're located in the Hutchinson EDA's Enterprise Center, a business incubator. However, they plan to grow and eventually open their own production facility.

Smokey Dukes has broadened their market over the course of 2025, and their product can now be found on store shelves in Arizona, Arkansas, Michigan, Minnesota, and Pennsylvania. Available in four flavors, their delicious snacks can also be purchased online at <https://smokeydukespretzels.com/>. Caution: they will ruin you for any other pretzel!

**Roelofs Meats, Inc.:** Already MMDC RLF customers, Travis and JoAnna Roelofs requested and received a new loan from MMDC in 2025 to improve their company's operations. The Roelofs used MMDC's financing to purchase a vacuum stuffer, clipper, and grinder to improve efficiency, reduce operational costs, and provide scalability. With this new equipment, Roelofs Meats was able to reduce the amount of time required to prepare 2,100 pounds of ground beef down to an estimated 1.58 labor hours – an estimated 86% time reduction. This 49.8% reduction in labor overhead is expected to significantly increase profit margin, converting hamburger sales from a near loss leader to a profitable activity. To learn more about Roelofs Meats' custom butchery services, visit <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100088703509676>.



## MMDC Revolving Loan Funds Are Available!



Thanks to a handful of early loan payoffs in 2025, MMDC has money available to lend. MMDC can provide affordable financing to both current business owners and prospective entrepreneurs. We do this to boost our local economies and support job creation. This is an ideal opportunity for those who require gap funding due to limitations with traditional financing. MMDC is happy to collaborate with banks and other lenders to help businesses achieve their goals. Loans may range from \$7,000 to \$150,000 and there is no penalty for early repayment. A quality business plan is required, but help is available. It is expected that all loans will be repaid

so that dollars can “revolve” back into loans for other businesses. To learn more, visit <https://mmrfdc.org/economic-development/revolving-loan-funds/> or contact MMDC Economic Developers Mike Nicholas and Nate Reuss at (320) 235-8504.

### 2025 MMDC Revolving Loan Fund Recap

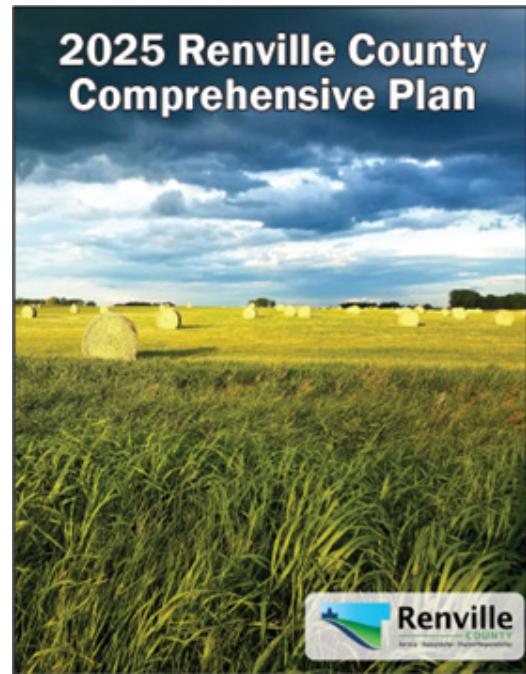
Total Number of Loans Made by MMDC (Historical)	112
Number of Active MMDC Revolving Loans	44
New Loans During the 2025 Calendar Year	5
Total Dollars Disbursed Using MMDC's RLFs (Historical)	\$ 7,261,243.16
Active Loan Balance	\$ 1,724,517.17
Amount Lent in 2025	\$ 235,000.00
Dollars Leveraged Using MMDC's RLFs (Historical)	\$ 54,509,958.76

## Community Development

The term “Community Development” includes a wide array of activities at MMDC. In addition to various planning projects (e.g., transportation planning, comprehensive planning, energy efficiency and environmental resilience strategy development), MMDC assists our stakeholders with grant writing and partners with other local and regional players to address shared community needs. Some highlights of our 2025 work include:

**Renville County Comprehensive Plan:** Initiated in 2024, the updated Renville County Comprehensive Plan was completed, approved, and adopted in July 2025. This project, led by MMDC’s Mike Nicholas and supported by several other MMDC professionals, is significant. The new plan, which includes a good deal of public input, contains chapters and outlines strategies to achieve goals related to land use, housing, infrastructure, natural resources, climate and weather resilience, and more. It is expected to provide a roadmap for county decision makers, both county commissioners and department heads, for up to 15 years or more.

**Hutchinson Safe Routes to Schools Plan:** While not yet complete, MMDC Transportation & Community Planner Blake Barnard spent a good portion of 2025 working with a group of Hutchinson stakeholders to craft a plan that, when implemented over time, will improve safety and make walking, biking, and rolling to and from school safer, healthier, more convenient, and more appealing to students and their families.



**Safe Routes to Schools (SRTS)** plans are comprehensive strategies that incorporate what are known as the “Six Es” – Engineering (sidewalks, crosswalks), Education (the rules of the road), Encouragement (events that promote activity), Engagement (community involvement), Equity (serving all students), and Evaluation (assessing effectiveness). Hutchinson’s planning group consists of representatives from the school district as well as the city, including local law enforcement. At the time of this report, Hutchinson’s SRTS plan is approaching final stages, and it is expected to be finalized in the Spring of 2026.

## Community Development (Continued)

**Safe Streets for All:** MMDC's Blake Barnard also successfully assisted Hutchinson's Public Works department with a U.S. Department of Transportation Safe Streets for All (SS4A) application. In late-December, the city was notified that they were selected to receive \$160,000, to be matched with at least \$40,000 from the city or other nonfederal partners, to create Hutchinson's first ever Comprehensive Safety Action Plan. This strategic plan will help the city to identify, prioritize, and implement actions to prevent roadway fatalities and serious injuries.



**Kandiyohi County Health & Wellness Collaborative:** The newly formed Kandiyohi County Health and Wellness Collaborative, led by Kandiyohi County Health & Human Services and CentraCare, brings people together who have a mission and vision related to their core focus areas, which include mental health and well-being, childcare access, substance misuse, the aging population and food insecurity. These focus areas come from the community health priorities outlined in Kandiyohi County's Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP).

MMDC has been invited into this collaborative and Executive Director Eric Day's goal is to be useful to the group and to keep transportation access included in the conversation, as this can be a significant barrier within each of the core focus areas.

**Emergency Management Educational Videos:** In 2025, to help ensure Kandiyohi County's residents understand how to prepare for and effectively respond to various emergencies, MMDC Communications Specialist Ben Carlson wrapped production on a series of six short educational videos. These recordings, which were made with both social media and public access channels in mind, informed residents on:

- The dangers of smoke and carbon monoxide;
- How to respond to air quality alerts;
- Tornado and thunderstorm safety;
- Winter weather preparations;
- Lake ice safety; and
- How to cope with excessive heat.

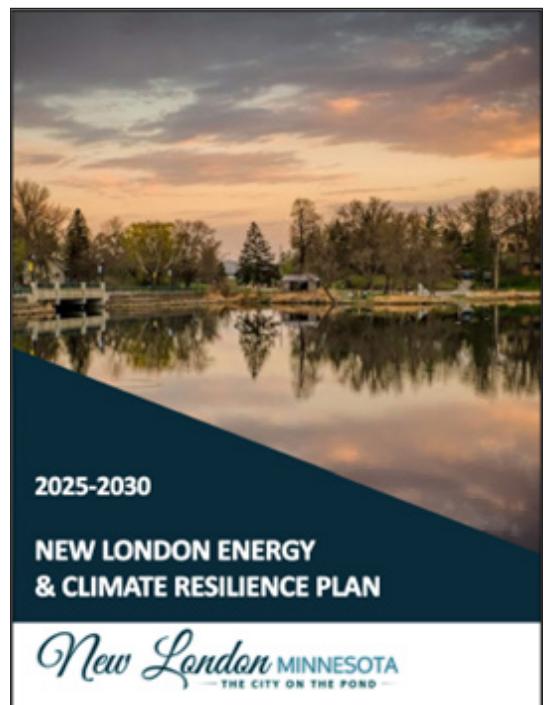


Because Kandiyohi County is home to many English language learners, these videos were produced in English, Somali, and Spanish. The Willmar Area Community Foundation provided funding for this important project, which was done in cooperation with Kandiyohi County Emergency Management. These videos can be accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLUFwL1A13VOW3-469CmttAcXEOr7-gQAq>.

## Energy & Environment

**Energy & Climate Resilience Planning:** In 2025, led by MMDC Regional Development & Grant Specialist Carol Lundgren, MMDC took significant energy and environmental strides alongside several of our communities. The City of New London completed a five-year energy and climate resilience plan, crafted to help them map the steps necessary to reduce energy costs while also improving sustainability across municipal operations and increase resilience to severe weather events.

A similar plan is nearing completion for Eden Valley and are underway for the Buffalo Lake and Olivia communities. Additionally, the cities of Silver Lake and Watkins worked with MMDC to arrange grant-funded energy audits for their public buildings. Thanks to funding from the Minnesota Department of Commerce's Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant Program, braided with additional funding from the McKnight Foundation, these plans are being developed and energy audits provided at an extremely low cost to each community. In addition to their involved time, cities are asked to reimburse MMDC for associated printing and mileage only.



**Solar on Public Buildings Grant:** MMDC's work with the City of Eden Valley has already resulted in a successful energy-related grant application. In December, the city was informed that they had been conditionally approved to receive over \$97,000 to support the installation of two ground-mounted solar arrays, one at the city's fire station and the other at their water treatment plant. MMDC-provided grant assistance was funded by a separate grant from the Minnesota Department of Commerce's State Competitiveness Fund Local Capacity Building Program. This grant gives MMDC added capacity to research funding mechanisms and to provide our stakeholders with grant proposal writing services, including related research and application organization assistance, so they can better respond to these clean energy opportunities.

**Outreach and Education:** Along with the planning and other assistance described here, MMDC's McKnight Funding has given MMDC the ability to increase community outreach and educate on the benefits of taking steps to reduce energy costs. This has included outreach to students at campus events and, in 2025, even included outreach to families at a Halloween Trunk-or-Treat event on the MinnWest Technology Campus. While the kids received a sweet treat, their parents received an energy-efficient LED light bulb with tips on reducing energy consumption to help the environment and enjoy lower utility bills.



MMDC's Blake Barnard, Ben Carlson, and Nikki Johnson helping out at the 2025 MinnWest Technology Campus Trunk-or Treat Event.

## Mobility Management

Mobility Management is a relatively new term for the numerous activities associated with the coordination of various transportation services. The goal of this work is to help nondrivers, especially people with disabilities, aging individuals, and those of little financial means, who rely on these services to meet their daily needs and to fully participate in their communities. In recent years, MMDC has received a Regional Transportation Coordinating Council (RTCC) grant, managed by the Minnesota Department of Transportation, to accomplish this work. 80 percent of grant funds come from the U.S. Department of Transportation, with the State of Minnesota contributing 10 percent and MMDC providing the remaining match. With MMDC Mobility Manager Terry Smith in the proverbial driver's seat, and with navigation assistance from MMDC's six-member RTCC Subcommittee, 2025 was an exciting year!

**ILT Academy:** In 2025, each of Minnesota's RTCC grant recipients was given the opportunity to participate in ILT Academy. Short-hand for "I like that", ILT Academy is a virtual education platform and community that empowers innovators with skills to build and grow a business or, in MMDC's case, to accomplish a transportation goal. ILT focuses on lean startup principles, customer discovery, and market validation. ILT Academy helps founders, including those from underrepresented groups, turn ideas into viable ventures through hands-on learning, coaching, and networking. MMDC's Terry Smith used his 10-week ILT course as an opportunity to develop a new idea to complement rural public transit services with increased rideshare service.



**Uber is Here in Kandiyohi County!**

Have you or someone you know ever tried to get a Rideshare ride in the Willmar area? Mid-Minnesota Development Commission (MMDC) is working to make rideshare service (e.g. Uber) available to Kandiyohi County residents! With generous funding from the Willmar Area Community Foundation, we're working with two Uber Drivers to increase transportation service throughout the county, especially during late afternoon, evening, and weekend hours!

**You Can Use Uber For:**

- Rides to Work
- Appointments & Errands
- Grocery Runs
- Social Outings & Community Events
- Safe Rides Home
- And More!

Whether it's your everyday commute or a last-minute need, rideshare services help fill the gaps in rural transportation.

**To Use Uber, Follow These Steps:**

1. **Download the Uber App to Your Smartphone**  
Just search for "Uber" in the App Store (iPhone) or Google Play (Android) or simply scan the QR code to the right.
2. **Set Up Your Account**  
Just follow the prompts to create a free account. You'll need a phone number and payment method (credit/debit card, PayPal account info, or Uber gift card).
3. **Enter Your Destination**  
Simply input where you want to go and confirm your pickup location.
4. **Choose a Ride Option**  
Select the type of ride you'd like (UberX is the most common)
5. **Request Your Ride**  
When you confirm your trip you'll be notified that a driver is on their way to pick you up. Be ready for their arrival!

Not sure how to get started or need some help downloading the app? Contact MMDC Mobility Manager Terry Smith at (320) 235-8504 and he'll be happy to help you out!

**Rideshare Support Project:** Rural public transit services are limited and are primarily available during daytime hours, Monday through Friday. Because the lives of nondrivers don't always neatly fit into weekday parameters, MMDC saw a need to support another transportation option – rideshare services. While rideshare (e.g., Uber) is widely available in more urban areas, where the population density can make it a profitable venture, it is far more difficult to launch in rural areas.

To remedy this, MMDC proposed to try something new and innovative in 2025. With a generous \$20,000 grant from the Willmar Area Community Foundation, and with Mobility Manager Terry Smith in the coordinator role, MMDC piloted the Rideshare Support Project.

In short, over a 26 week period, a tapered weekly subsidy was provided to two rideshare drivers willing to operate within Kandiyohi County. To earn the subsidy, the drivers had to agree to operate at least 30 hours per week after 2 p.m. on weekdays or at any time of day during weekends and holidays.

MMDC's goal was to ensure the drivers could afford to operate in our rural area while they developed the critical mass of regular users needed to sustain operations. Driver "meet-and-greet" and rideshare education events, organized by Smith, were also conducted to help improve rider comfort level, especially amongst seniors and people with disabilities. Information, including a short video on the rideshare service, has been distributed via social media and through numerous Kandiyohi County partner agencies.

## Mobility Management (Continued)



Project-engaged rideshare driver Chris Peterson shares rideshare information with a local resident during Willmar's September Welcoming Week resource event and celebration.

MMDC's busiest project-engaged driver noted that, prior to the onset of this initiative, he typically provided eight local rides each month. However, by the end of the calendar year, and with several subsidy weeks remaining, well over 1,000 Uber and Lyft rides have been provided to Kandiyohi County residents and visitors since the July launch of the Rideshare Support Project. MMDC plans to learn from this project, make necessary adjustments, secure additional funding and, with community support, expand this project to other corners of the MMDC region in the coming years.

**Inspired Rides:** MMDC was excited to welcome a new transportation provider to the regional scene this year. During the fall of 2024, after several discussions with various McLeod County service providers, a meeting was held to discuss the viability of bringing a volunteer driver program back to the McLeod County area. While such a program was once operated by local public transit provider Trailblazer Transit, it was discontinued in 2019, due to a decline in volunteers, administration issues, and a desire to instead expand its public transit system.

After learning of the transportation void left by the previous volunteer driver's conclusion, a small local nonprofit organization, Parents Inspired, decided to add the coordination of a new volunteer driver program to their mission. In August 2025, the Inspired Rides program was launched. Designed to help older adults and individuals with disabilities to stay mobile and independent, this community-based volunteer program offers safe, friendly rides to medical appointments and other important destinations and events.

The program, which specializes in rides within a 25-mile radius of Hutchinson, as well as rides between McLeod County and Twin Cities-based medical centers, is funded through rider donations. 300 rides have been provided since the program's launch. MMDC's Terry Smith has been happy to provide Parents Inspired with both technical assistance and resource connections to help them launch this important new program.



## MMDC's Values Statement

**Vision/Goals:** While acknowledging and valuing the history of our Region, we will influence decisions that result in healthier, more resilient, more inclusive, and more prosperous communities while maintaining a future-focused perspective.

**Accountability:** We believe the MMDC should be held accountable to the residents of our Region, and to our funding partners, for the quality of our work, for the fiscally-responsible management of our budget, and for the continuous promotion of opportunity and development throughout our Region.

**Professionalism:** We will promote opportunities for MMDC staff and Commissioner development, encourage leadership at all levels, and expect professionalism to be demonstrated through our conduct and through our achievements.

**Communication:** We value timely, open, honest, and respectful communication as a pathway to improved MMDC effectiveness.

**Adaptability:** We welcome new ideas and challenges as opportunities for improvement and the advancement of the MMDC organization and Region.

**Diversity:** The MMDC aspires to lead as an organization where equality and inclusion is achievable for all, regardless of ethnicity, age, ability/disability, religion, gender/gender identity, sexual orientation, or other difference. We believe that all deserve respect, dignity, and an opportunity to learn, grow, and achieve.

**Teamwork:** The MMDC supports teamwork throughout the organization and collaboration, both throughout our Region and beyond its borders. We will not hesitate to share our talents when partnering will lead to the achievement of greater outcomes for our communities.

**Imperfection:** We acknowledge our humanity. As humans, we will make mistakes. We will help each other learn from these mistakes and will strive for continuous improvement.



<https://mmrdc.org/>



/MidMinnesotaDevelopmentCommission

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## Menu of Professional Services

**Community & Transportation Planning Services:** MMDC helps communities develop tailored plans that can position them for sustainability, development, and a high standard of living.

- Comprehensive Planning
- Historic Preservation & Rehabilitation Planning
- Preliminary Planning Studies
- Parks, Trails & Recreation Planning
- Walk & Bike Audits
- Active Transportation Planning
- Safe Routes to School Planning
- Survey Development, Deployment, & Analysis

**Energy & Environment Planning Services:** MMDC helps communities improve efficiency and resilience to reduce energy expenses while also mitigating the impact of severe weather events.

- Energy Efficiency & Conservation Planning
- Program Development, Education & Implementation

**Grant Assistance:** MMDC helps local governments and nonprofits secure funding for impactful community projects and programs.

- Grant Application Assistance
- Grant Project Assistance

**Economic Development:** MMDC can help communities undertake a range of projects aimed at creating jobs, attracting investment, and fostering business growth, ultimately leading to a more prosperous and sustainable community.

- Housing Action Planning
- Strategic Economic Development Planning
- Economic Development Authority Establishment or Improvement
- Business Planning Assistance & Referral
- Gap Financing

**Fiscal Hosting:** MMDC can act as an organization's financial intermediary and provide related administrative support (e.g., accounts payable and receivable), allowing them to focus on core activities without the burden of financial compliance.

**Communications Services:** MMDC can help communities and organizations develop a communications plan, manage websites, package social media content, develop and distribute press releases, produce video and voiceover work, and more.

**Learn more at [MMRDC.org](http://MMRDC.org), or call (320) 235-8504 for more information.  
We look forward to serving you!**