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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	5
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	6
INTRODUCTION	7
STEERING COMMITTEE BACKGROUND	8
ITASCA COUNTY	8
CITY OF COHASSET	9
LEECH LAKE BAND OF OJIBWE.....	9
ITASCA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION.....	10
MINNESOTA POWER.....	10
MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF IRON RANGE RESOURCES & REHABILITATION....	10
A NOTE ON NEIGHBORING COMMUNITIES	10
BOSWELL ENERGY CENTER TRANSITION.....	11
TAX BASE IMPLICATIONS.....	11
WORKFORCE IMPLICATIONS.....	12
POWER GRID IMPLICATIONS	12
HISTORY: WHO WE WERE	14
MINING.....	14
FOREST PRODUCTS	15
PRESENT: WHO WE ARE	16
PREVIOUS AND ONGOING ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION INITIATIVES.....	16
CITY OF COHASSET	16
ITASCA COUNTY	18
STRENGTHS, OPPORTUNITIES, AND ASSETS	18
CITY OF COHASSET ASSETS.....	19
GREEN IRON OPPORTUNITIES.....	19
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS.....	20
ECONOMIC RESILIENCE AND DEVELOPMENT FUNDING	21



CHALLENGES.....	22
CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH	22
HOUSING.....	23
CHILD CARE	25
JOBS AND FAMILY-SUSTAINING WAGES.....	26
WHY WE ARE HERE.....	27
STATE POLICY CONTEXT.....	27
MINNESOTA POWER IRP PROCESS.....	28
REGULATORY CONTEXT	28
SPARKING CHANGE PROCESS AND SUMMARY	30
WORK GROUPS.....	30
TOWN HALLS.....	31
COMMUNITY SURVEYS	32
FUTURE: WHO WILL WE BE	33
S1. DEVELOP ENTREPRENEUR AND BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES	34
COMMUNITY CASE STUDY:	
FUTURE LEADERS AND ENTREPRENEURS EXCHANGE	35
FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES.....	36
S2. MOBILIZE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT	37
COMMUNITY CASE STUDY: WHY WHITLEY	38
S3. LEVERAGE PARTNERSHIPS AND ADVOCACY	39
FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES.....	41
S4. PROMOTE ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT	41
CLEAN TECH	42
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES.....	44
COMMUNITY CASE STUDY:	
COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FUND.....	44
FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES	45



S5. ADVANCE SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES	46
COMMUNITY CASE STUDY:.....	47
FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES	48
S6. PROVIDE WORKFORCE SUPPORT	50
COMMUNITY CASE STUDY:	
XCEL ENERGY'S WORKFORCE TRANSITION PLAN	51
FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES	52
APPENDICES	53
APPENDIX A: DEMOGRAPHIC CONTEXT FOR	
CITY OF COHASSET AND ITASCA COUNTY	54
APPENDIX B: PROCESS AND PARTICIPANTS	57
STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS.....	58
STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING TOPICS.....	58
TASK FORCE MEMBERS	59
OBSERVERS FROM PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS AND OFFICES	59
TASK FORCE MEETING TOPICS.....	60
APPENDIX C: STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING SUMMARIES	61
APPENDIX D: TASK FORCE MEETING SUMMARIES	78
APPENDIX E: SPRING TOWN HALL MEETINGS SUMMARY	105
APPENDIX F: FALL TOWN HALL MEETINGS SUMMARY	112
APPENDIX G: SPRING COMMUNITY TOWN HALL SURVEY RESULTS	116
APPENDIX H: FALL COMMUNITY TOWN HALL SURVEY RESULTS	122
APPENDIX I: ACTION IDEAS SURVEY SUMMARY	129
APPENDIX J: ACTION IDEAS WORKSHOP RESULTS	132
APPENDIX K: CURRENT REALITIES, SUCCESS INDICATORS, AND ACTION STEPS....	134



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Executive Summary

From January 2024 to December 2024, the Itasca Economic Development Corporation (IEDC) convened a group of partners to participate in the *Sparking Change: Diversifying Our Regional Economy* process, which seeks to identify community impacts, aspirations, and pathways forward for economic diversification and resilience in response to the planned transition away from coal at Boswell Energy Center in Cohasset, Minnesota and the new availability of federal and state resources for energy communities.

The goals of this report and action plan are to 1.) Communicate the story of greater northern Minnesota to community members, decision-makers, and funders at the local, state, and federal level, 2.) Serve as a platform to take advantage of new funding opportunities for economic diversification work, and 3.) Guide ongoing action and partnerships.

The steering committee, task force, businesses, and community members from across the greater northern Minnesota region gathered to develop high-level strategies and specific actions that will advance the Sparking Change vision: **A thriving community invested in our future sustainable energy shift.**

The report describes the convening process, details the region's history of economic opportunities and challenges, highlights current progress, and outlines an action plan with high-level strategies that will guide future economic diversification work. The action plan should be considered a living document that will grow and change.

Participants in the Sparking Change process identified the following six high-level strategies, each of which contains several specific actions with associated partners and timelines.

S1. Develop Entrepreneur and Business Opportunities

S2. Mobilize Community Engagement

S3. Leverage Partnerships and Advocacy

S4. Promote Economic and Community Development

S5. Advance Sustainability Initiatives

S6. Provide Workforce Support



Introduction

Across Minnesota and nationwide, coal-fired power plants are being retired due to several factors, including market forces and state and federal policy. In Itasca County, Minnesota Power plans to cease coal operations at Boswell Energy Center (“Boswell”) Unit 3 by 2030 and Unit 4 by 2035. Itasca County communities have benefited from the jobs, tax revenues, leadership, and community engagement generated by the facility since the 1950s. Boswell is the largest regional electricity generation facility and a source of reliable baseload power supporting residents and industry across northeast Minnesota. Boswell remains a critical part of the community’s past, present, and future.

Recognizing that the energy transition will greatly impact families, businesses, and the city, county, and school district tax base, the Itasca Economic Development Corporation (IEDC), the City of Cohasset, Itasca County, the Minnesota Department of Iron Range Resources & Rehabilitation (IRRR), and Minnesota Power (MP) joined together to create a steering committee.

Building on nearly a decade of past economic diversification work in response to the energy transition, this steering committee initiated a planning process and convened a task force of additional regional partners in early 2024 to develop a community-led action plan. The task force is collaborating to consider what economic diversification might look like in response to the energy transition and exploring federal and state funding opportunities to help launch and support new projects and diversify regional and local economies.

Certain questions about Boswell are outside the scope of this plan and will be decided in utility planning and regulatory processes. Minnesota Power is modeling options for new power generation that continue to utilize Boswell’s many assets, infrastructure, and people. The scope of this Sparking Change process, report, and action plan has been to mobilize what the community can do to innovate and diversify our economic future and access dollars that are uniquely available to communities experiencing similar energy transitions.

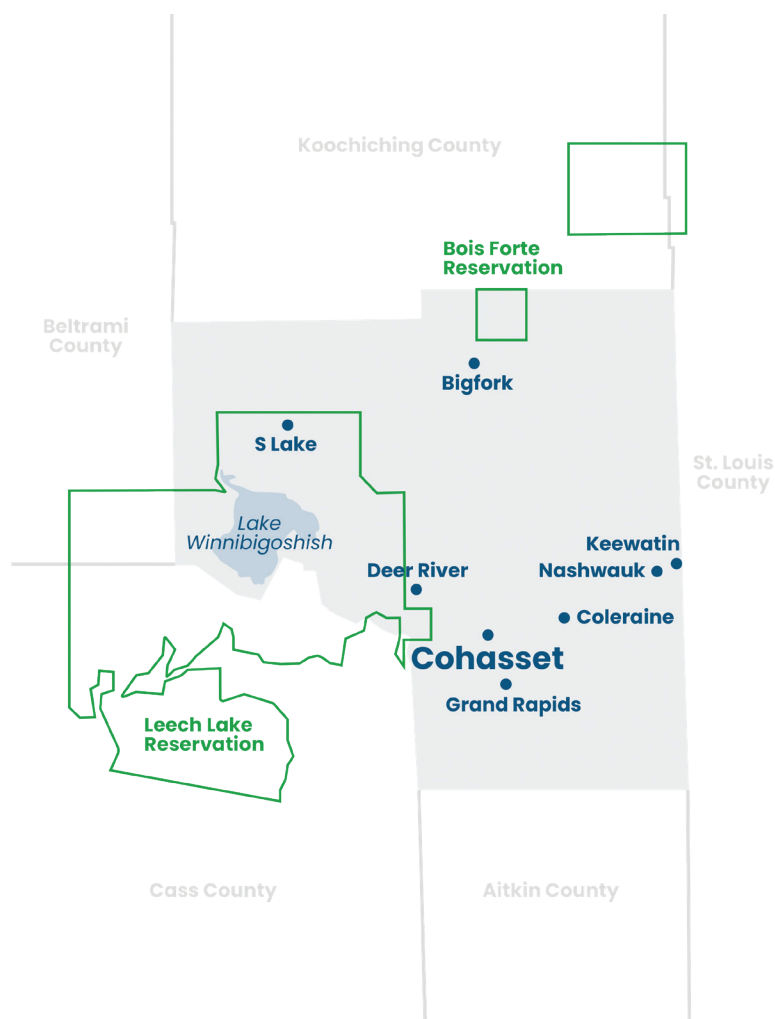
Participants in this process hold diverse and sometimes divergent opinions about regional priorities, but they share a commitment to diversifying and strengthening the region’s economy. Advocacy for a just economic transition for the City of Cohasset, Itasca County, and the greater northern Minnesota region remains a priority. This report and action plan recognizes the changes that are underway and aims to take advantage of broader opportunities to strengthen the economic base of the City of Cohasset and Itasca County.



A just economic energy transition can be both a challenge and an opportunity; however, with a proactive, collaborative approach, the community can work toward solutions that accomplish the Sparking Change vision: *A thriving community invested in our future sustainable energy shift.* The action plan is intended to be a living document that will be enhanced and built upon in the coming years.

Steering Committee Background

has significant implications for the greater northern Minnesota region. It has direct impacts on the City of Cohasset, Itasca County, the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, and numerous surrounding communities across the northern portions of the state. As a result, five organizations came together to establish the steering committee for this effort to diversify the regional economy. They include the City of Cohasset, Itasca County, Minnesota Power, the Itasca Economic Development Corporation and the Minnesota Department of Iron Range Resources & Rehabilitation. Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe staff were key contributors to the report, but did not have the capacity to participate fully in the steering committee due to the timing of the project. The steering committee is grateful for their engagement.



These organizations have diverse missions, histories, and interests that often align but sometimes conflict. They have not always agreed on questions related to economic development and diversification in northern Minnesota, and they will continue to encounter moments where their visions compete. Their residents, members, employees, and other individuals associated with them also do not necessarily share official positions taken by each organization. The steering committee members do, however, share a belief in a collaborative future informed by an intentional plan to diversify the regional economy. They undertook this project with the intent to partner and work together to develop a plan they could all support.



Itasca County

Itasca County is located in north central Minnesota with a population of just over 45,000. It is home to the western portion of the Mesabi Iron Range mining region, extensive forests used for both forestry and recreation, and hundreds of lakes. Its county seat and largest city is Grand Rapids, a regional center in north central Minnesota with a population of over 11,000. Two Tribal Nations, the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe and the Bois Forte Band of Chippewa, share geography with Itasca County.

City of Cohasset

The City of Cohasset is a community with a population of 2,683 in the heart of Itasca County. The City was founded in 1892 and incorporated in 1902. Cohasset shares a boundary and many amenities with Grand Rapids, which provides economic benefits to both communities, with many residents commuting from one to the other and doing business in both. Cohasset is also one mile from the eastern boundary of the Leech Lake Reservation. The Boswell Energy Center is located within the city limits. In an era of limited population growth and economic challenges in northern Minnesota, Cohasset tends to perform well, with a stable population, strong household incomes, less poverty than regional averages, and a daily influx of commuters who live outside the community but are employed at its businesses. For a more complete overview of the community's demographics, see Appendix A.

Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe

The Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe (*Gaa-zagaskwaajimekaag Ojibweg*) is a Tribal Nation with a significant presence in Itasca County and surrounding areas. It has over 9,000 enrolled members¹ and its Reservation lands are home to over 11,000 residents of all backgrounds.² The Reservation covers over 1,300 square miles in parts of Itasca, Cass, Hubbard, and Beltrami Counties, and it includes fifteen communities with their own Local Indian Councils (LICs), including the communities of Ball Club, Deer River, Inger, S. Lake, and Winnie Dam in Itasca County.

A series of treaties in the 1800s provide the legal framework for Leech Lake's sovereign status and relationship with the United States government. A Reservation Business Committee (RBC), also known as the Tribal Council, is a five-member elected body that governs the entire Reservation. The Band's Mission Statement emphasizes the preservation of the Band's heritage, the promotion of its sovereignty, and the protection of natural resources for its elders and future generations. It has distinct jurisdictions and delegations that

¹ "About Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe," Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, accessed November 7, 2024, <https://llojibwe.org/aboutUs/demographics.html>.

² "My Tribal Area," 2019-2023 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, US Census Bureau, accessed November 7, 2024, <https://www.census.gov/tribal/?aiahih=0335>.



apply to regional economic development projects, and the entire Reservation has been defined as an environmental justice area by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA), meaning it has been designated for meaningful engagement and evaluation of the disproportionate effects of pollution.³ The Tribal government and community members have been regularly involved in discussions over the impacts and future of the Boswell site.

Itasca Economic Development Corporation

The Itasca Economic Development Corporation (IEDC) is a nonprofit corporation dedicated to the creation of high-quality jobs in and around Itasca County. Established in 1981, IEDC is dedicated to providing charitable education and research efforts that support and advance the creation and retention of quality jobs by working with the business community and entrepreneurs residing in and around Itasca County. IEDC houses advisors from the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) and Entrepreneur Fund (EFund) and is the Itasca area resource for business development, retention, and attraction. In 2023, IEDC launched The Forge, a facility created to provide a comprehensive set of supports for innovators and entrepreneurs. IEDC secured the grant funding that launched the Sparking Change process.

Minnesota Power

Minnesota Power (MP), a division of ALLETE, Inc., is an investor-owned utility headquartered in Duluth, Minnesota, that employs approximately 1,200 people. It provides electric service within a 26,000-square-mile area in northeastern Minnesota, supporting comfort, security, and quality of life for 150,000 customers, 14 municipalities, and some of the largest industrial customers in the United States.

Minnesota Department of Iron Range Resources & Rehabilitation

The Minnesota Department of Iron Range Resources & Rehabilitation (IRRR) is a state economic development agency that reinvests local taconite production taxes back into businesses and communities located in the Taconite Assistance Area. The agency's mission is to strengthen and diversify the region's economy. IRRR is funded by a portion of a local taconite production tax paid by mining companies in lieu of property taxes on each ton of iron ore pellets produced. IRRR's service area is defined by Minnesota State Statute and determined by the boundaries of school districts containing unmined iron ore deposits of specified valuation, taconite plants, or electrical generating plants supplying electricity to taconite operations. The service area spans 13,000 square miles in northeastern Minnesota, including 53 cities, 134 townships, portions of four Tribal Nations, and 15 school districts. The service area includes most of Itasca County, the City of Cohasset, and portions of the Leech Lake Reservation.

³ "Environmental Justice," Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, accessed December 5, 2024, <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/about-mpca/environmental-justice>.



A Note on Neighboring Communities

While the most immediate impacts of affect the City of Cohasset and Itasca County, its implications reach beyond those communities' boundaries to affect the greater northern Minnesota region. The Leech Lake Reservation extends into Cass, Hubbard, and Beltrami Counties, and the Bois Forte Reservation includes portions of St. Louis and Koochiching Counties.

Boswell employees commute from a wide region that also extends beyond Itasca County boundaries. The baseload power provided by Boswell supports some of the largest employers and economic engines of northern Minnesota, including the region's six operational taconite mines and several large production facilities for the forest products industry. Combined, these large industrial and mining customers account for over 70% of Minnesota Power's retail energy use and are significant participants in the energy transition process.⁴ Tax revenue from Boswell also supports communities across northeast Minnesota through a fiscal disparities program.

Boswell Energy Center Transition

Minnesota Power owns and operates the Boswell Energy Center. Boswell is a coal-fired power plant that opened its first unit in 1958 and has operated continuously for over 65 years; it has long been the primary producer of Minnesota Power's baseload power. At its peak operation, Boswell included four units with a total capacity of 1,070 megawatts. Units 1 and 2, Boswell's oldest units, ceased operations in 2018. At that time, Minnesota Power used a workforce plan that resulted in the elimination of approximately 30 jobs directly assigned to Units 1 and 2. Minnesota Power made substantial efforts to retain staff and identify new occupational avenues for its workforce, and the closures at Units 1 and 2 led to the layoff of fewer than ten employees. Units 3 and 4, with a total capacity of over 900 megawatts, currently remain operational and employ 165 people. Minnesota Power's 2021 Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) identified that the company plans to cease coal operations at Unit 3 by the end of 2029 and at Unit 4 by 2035. These changes have implications for employees, communities across the region, and the regional electrical grid.

Tax Base Implications

The tax impacts of changes at Boswell, while difficult to predict as Minnesota Power evaluates the feasibility of different fuel sources to continue power generation on the site, could be substantial. Property taxes from the power plant have comprised a large part of the city, county, and school district tax base since its construction in 1958. In 2023, property taxes from Boswell accounted for 43% of the City of Cohasset's property tax revenue, 8% of

4 e21 Initiative, "Stakeholder Process Final Report," Appendix R, Minnesota Power 2021 Integrated Resource Plan, Minnesota Power, 16, <https://www.mnnpower.com/IRP2021>.



Grand Rapids School District's property tax revenue, and 6% of Itasca County's property tax revenue. When Units 1 and 2 were operational, the percentage of the property tax revenue supplied by Boswell was even higher.

In addition to the tax base impacts in Itasca County, the ripple effect reaches a broader area of the state through the fiscal disparities program, a revenue-sharing program that applies to the Iron Range region of Minnesota that distributes the tax base throughout neighboring counties and cities.¹⁹ This program covers the Taconite Assistance Area, the region served by IRRR, which consists of parts of St. Louis, Itasca, Crow Wing, and Aitkin Counties, as well as all of Lake and Cook Counties. Itasca County and Cohasset are contributors to those other counties that depend on that tax base, and changes at a property that generates significant tax revenue are likely to affect public budgets across the entire region.

Workforce Implications

Jobs have already been lost through the retirement of Boswell Units 1 and 2, including the direct loss of 30 jobs from the plant itself and an estimated 65 additional jobs from various supportive businesses, restaurants, and retailers in the community. With the assumption that Units 3 and 4 shut down without transitioning to another fuel source (which is not the utility's current plan), an additional 165 direct plant jobs and 265 support jobs are calculated to be lost from transportation, rail, banking, healthcare, retail, and other related industries. The economic activity in Itasca County because of this job loss would drop by an estimated \$50.7 million, which includes \$28.9 million in decreased labor income.⁵

Power Grid Implications

Ceasing coal operations at Boswell will have implications for the local and regional power grid that needs to be managed to maintain reliability. Maintaining baseload capacity, or the power generation necessary to meet minimum levels of demand, is essential both for Minnesota Power and the Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO), which ensures reliable power flow across 15 U.S. states (as seen in Figure 1), as well as parts of Canada. Minnesota Power is committed to continuing power generation on the Boswell site. It has announced plans to install a large solar array on adjacent lands and has shown interest in exploring other potential methods of power generation, pending regulatory approvals.⁶ The implications of any possible new generation methods for local employment, tax base, and broader community impacts are uncertain at this point, though the impacts of similar projects in other jurisdictions could provide some clarity.

The end of coal operations at Boswell is part of a longer-term shift for Minnesota and for

⁵ Brigid Tuck and John Bennett, "Retirement of a Coal Generated Power Plant in Itasca County," *University of Minnesota Extension*, March 2020.

⁶ Amy Rutledge, "Minnesota Power Plans Two Large Solar Projects in Northern Minnesota as Part of Its EnergyForward Strategy for Carbon-free Energy," *ALLETE, Business Wire*, September 23, 2024, <https://investor.allete.com/news-releases/news-release-details/minnesota-power-plans-two-large-solar-projects-northern>.



utilities nationwide, a trend driven by both natural market forces and state and federal policy and regulation. Minnesota Power has been a statewide leader in moving toward renewable energy, taking advantage of increased affordability and reliability in renewable energy. Since 2016, Minnesota Power has transitioned its Laskin Energy Center in Hoyt Lakes from coal to a natural gas peaking unit, fully retired the Taconite Harbor Energy Center in Schroeder, and built three large-scale solar projects.⁷

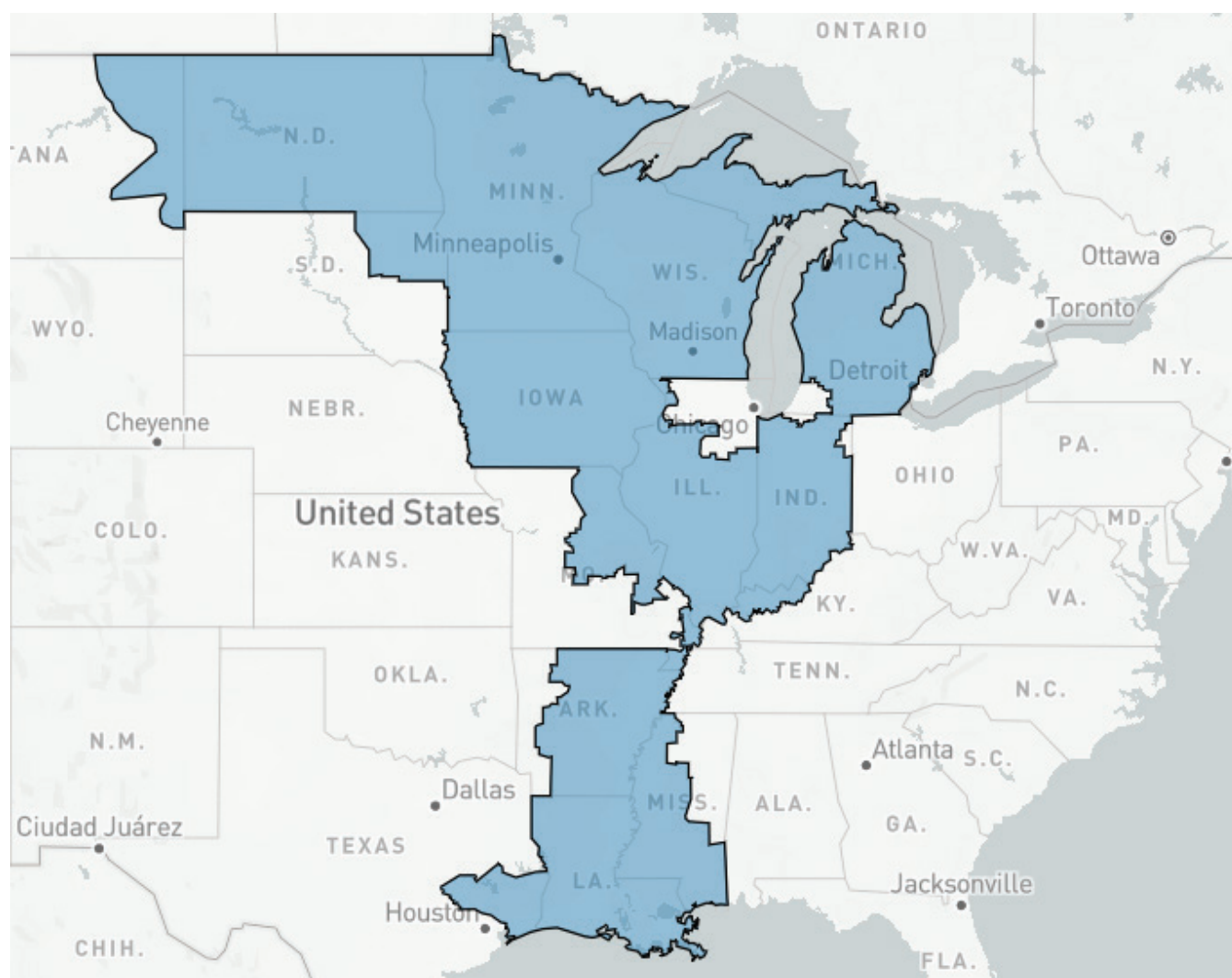
⁷ "Solar Projects," Minnesota Power, accessed on November 22, 2024, <https://www.mnpower.com/Environment/SolarProjects>.



While some Sparking Change process participants expressed concern about higher electric rates with other types of electricity generation, significant studies produced by utilities, market analyst groups, and environmental organizations show a decrease in electric rates with coal transitions. This is both due to the market and to incentives for cleaner sources.⁸ However, it also depends on the utility's fuel source substitute for coal.

Transmission lines, which carry electricity over long distances, are one of several approaches needed to maintain reliability in response to ceasing coal at Boswell. Transmission line development can also bring ongoing tax revenue benefits and temporary workforce benefits to the region.

Figure 1. Map of Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO) US Territory



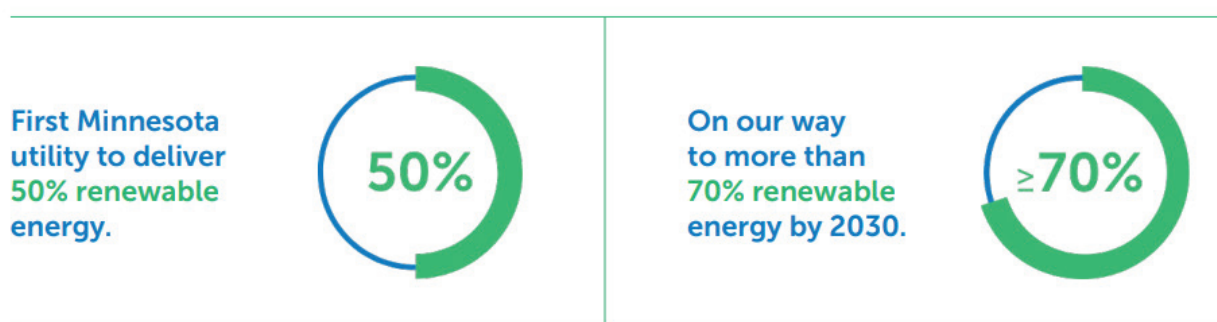
Source: "Near Real-Time," MISO, Singularity, accessed December 1, 2024, <https://miso.singularity.energy/realtime>.

⁸ Dan Slanger, "Utilities, Analysts, and Customers Agree: Transitioning from Coal Saves Money," RMI, July 8, 2021, <https://rmi.org/utilities-analysts-and-customers-agree-transitioning-from-coal-saves-money/>.



Minnesota Power and ALLETE, Minnesota Power's parent company, have supported interconnected transmission by investing in projects like the Great Northern Transmission Line from the Minnesota-Manitoba border to an electric substation on the Mesabi Iron Range. That line was approved in 2016 and began delivering hydropower in June 2020. Minnesota Power is also partnering on, investing in, or deploying other grid reliability projects, including the Northland Reliability Project with Great River Energy and modernizing the high-voltage direct current (HVDC) line terminals in Minnesota and North Dakota.⁹ Minnesota Power has also invested in solar energy in the region, developing three utility-scale solar projects producing 22.4 MW.¹⁰ As shown in Figure 2, they have been a leader in clean energy and are committed to continuing that leadership with their Energy Forward carbon-free vision.

Figure 2. Minnesota Power's carbon-free vision: Energy Forward



Source: "EnergyForward," Minnesota Power, accessed November 22, 2024, <https://mnpower.com/Environment/EnergyForward>.

History: Who We Were

The energy transition at Boswell fits into a longer narrative of economic change and opportunity in northern Minnesota. The region has long been home to strong mining and forest products industries, which have benefited from the area's substantial natural resources. These anchor industries are producers of commodities, subject to global competition and changing consumer preferences, and have faced a repeated series of setbacks, leading to layoffs and dislocation.

Mining

The iron ore mining industry, long an anchor of the Itasca County and regional economies, has faced significant headwinds. Taconite is a natural low-grade iron ore that is abundant in Minnesota's northeast region, but plant closures and downsizing in the late 20th century

⁹ "Transmission," Minnesota Power, accessed November 22, 2024, <https://www.mnpower.com/Company/Transmission>.

¹⁰ "Solar Projects," Minnesota Power, accessed on November 22, 2024, <https://www.mnpower.com/Environment/SolarProjects>.

¹¹ "Mining in Minnesota," Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, accessed November 17, 2024, <https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/education/geology/digging/mining.html>.



took a toll on the local economy.¹¹ In the early 2000s, a series of potential projects using innovative mining technologies emerged in Itasca County, generating new development and enthusiasm for the industry.¹² However, a drop in global taconite prices in the mid-2010s led to the shutdown of two startup mining operations, Essar Steel and Magnetation.

The Essar Steel project, which began on the site of the former Butler Taconite mine in 2011, struggled to meet construction deadlines and had its leases terminated by the State of Minnesota in 2016. In 2023, the state awarded mineral leases near that site to Cleveland-Cliffs, the mining company behind four of the Iron Range's six operational taconite mines. While this move has the potential to extend the life of Hibbing Taconite in neighboring St. Louis County, it deprives Itasca County of tax revenue from the mining operations.¹³ More recently, Mesabi Metallics has worked on the Essar site and sought to win control of other private leases and revive aspects of the initial Essar plan for a direct reduced iron (DRI) operation in Itasca County. While it has faced some challenges in securing leases, Mesabi Metallics is proceeding with construction on the site, increasing local optimism that a project will finally materialize.¹⁴

Magnetation, a scam taconite mining operation that converted tailings from previous mines into iron pellets, began production in 2008. It opened four plants, including three in Itasca County, and had a brief window of success before a downturn that started in 2014 led to eventual bankruptcy in 2016.¹⁵ Magnetation plant closures resulted in nearly 400 layoffs.¹⁶ Its assets were later sold in a bankruptcy auction, and halting efforts to revive these projects have yet to prove successful. A company named IronTech is currently seeking to use these assets and revive scam mining in Itasca County.

Forest Products

Like the mining industry, the forest products industry is a longtime major employer in northern Minnesota that has dealt with significant challenges. The Blandin paper mill, an anchor of nearby Grand Rapids and currently known as UPM Blandin, underwent a series of major layoffs beginning in 2003 and culminating in an additional 150 layoffs in 2017. The plant, which once had over 1,000 employees, now has less than 250.¹⁷ The Ainsworth Oriented Strand Board (OSB) production facility, located on a Grand Rapids parcel adjacent to the City of Cohasset, shuttered in 2006. Despite numerous leads over the years, the 200,000-square-foot facility has yet to find a new user.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Mike Huglett, "Minnesota Awards Nashwauk Mineral Leases to Cleveland-Cliffs," *Star Tribune*, May 25, 2023, <https://www.startribune.com/minnesota-executive-council-awards-iron-range-mineral-leases-to-cleveland-cliffs-mesabi-metallics/600277764/>.

¹⁴ Aaron Brown, "Good news on the Iron Range: \$2 billion Mesabi Metallics is finally happening, for real this time," *Minnesota Reformer*, October 14, 2024, <https://minnesotareformer.com/2024/10/14/good-news-on-the-iron-range-2-billion-mesabi-metallics-is-finally-happening-for-real-this-time/>.

¹⁵ Dee DePass, "Court Approves Final Shutdown of Bankrupt Magnetation LLC," *Star Tribune*, October 6, 2016, <https://www.startribune.com/court-approves-final-shutdown-of-bankrupt-magnetation-llc/396218561/>.

¹⁶ Dan Kraker, "Keewatin taconite plant to be idled, affecting 412 workers," *Minnesota Public Radio*, March 12, 2015, <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2015/03/12/taconite-plant>.

¹⁷ "2023 Directory of Business and Industry," *Business North*, 2023.



In 2021, Huber Engineered Woods announced plans to build an OSB production facility in Cohasset. The proposed plant would have created 150 jobs and \$440 million of new investment and would have been built on Minnesota Power-owned land adjacent to Boswell.¹⁸ The Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe and others expressed concern that the project would have impacted wetlands, wild rice stands, forests, and other treaty-protected resources. Huber Engineered Woods pulled plans for the project in 2023,¹⁹ which led some Itasca County economic development partners to express frustration with the state's permitting framework, particularly regarding a lack of clarity around permitting timelines. Other partners felt that the process was an indication of how economic development projects need to include all affected parties from the outset and that project developers play an important role in the timeliness of permitting decisions.

The forest products industry, which has contributed to the national building industry for more than a century, remains an area of potential opportunity. The Ainsworth site remains an asset, and participants in the Sparking Change process suggested that the local wood basket is underutilized. As in the mining industry, there is a new emphasis on innovative projects such as the manufacturing of mass timber, sustainable aviation fuel, biochar, and syngas. However, challenges to their implementation persist.

Present: Who We Are

Coal-fired power generation at Boswell is the latest industry to experience a serious shift that poses challenges — and opportunities — for the region. Despite significant challenges to the region's major industries, the economy has proven resilient, demonstrating growth and diversification over the years. As the region faces its latest challenge in the energy transition, it has continued to innovate in evolving the local economy while building on its foundations.

Previous and Ongoing Economic Diversification Initiatives

City of Cohasset

The City of Cohasset has been working to address the impending transition at the Boswell Energy Center for almost a decade. Since 2015, when the City learned about Minnesota Power's plans to cease coal operations, City staff and partners have strongly emphasized economic and community development to address the impending loss of tax revenue. They have advocated for assistance to coal communities at the state and federal levels, pursued large federal and state funding opportunities, and invested directly in economic development projects.

¹⁸ "Huber Engineered Woods Announces Plans for a New Mill in Cohasset, in Response to Strong Market Demands for its Specialty Products," Huber Engineered Woods, June 21 2021, <https://www.huberwood.com/press-room/press-releases/new-announces-plans-for-sixth-mill>.

¹⁹ Dan Kraker, "North Carolina Company Drops Plans for Northeastern Minnesota Wood Mill," Minnesota Public Radio News, February 9, 2023, <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2023/02/09/north-carolina-company-drops-plans-for-major-northeastern-minnesota-wood-mill>.



Currently, Cohasset serves as the president of the Coalition of Utility Cities (CUC), an advocacy group composed of seven power plant host cities that advocate for host community assistance. CUC's advocacy has directly led to several key transition resources at the state level, including a statewide energy transition plan, energy transition grants, and energy transition aid. Through the energy transition aid program, the City of Cohasset, Itasca County, and the Grand Rapids School District will receive an estimated \$80 million through 2055 to replace the expected loss of property tax revenues from the Boswell Energy Center.

In response to expected changes at Boswell, the City has prioritized economic development over the past decade, approving and aggressively pursuing more projects than they have in the past. Starting in 2018, the City has invested \$6 million into design and development work for the Blackwater Banks Riverfront Redevelopment project in downtown Cohasset that would provide retail, restaurants, housing, and athletic facilities. The project received funding from the legislature, and the City continues to look for additional funding for the \$100 million project.

Another highlight of the City's economic development pursuits came in 2016 when Lake Country Power (LCP) stationed its headquarters in Cohasset. The success of this business highlights the importance of timing infrastructure and investments. In 2014, the City had already started developing an industrial park, which allowed LCP to break ground shortly after finalizing its decision. The City also used tax increment financing (TIF) for the first time through this project, a learning opportunity that has enabled additional economic development work. Though this project was a big win, it illustrates just how challenging it will be to replace expected tax base losses. Looking at projected tax revenues, it would take 130 LCP corporate headquarters projects to replace the taxes provided by Boswell.

Cohasset has also pursued federal funding for economic development. For example, the City applied for and received a \$3.4 million Economic Development Administration (EDA) grant to develop a spec building, which ultimately did not materialize due to the extensive project timeframe and inflation. However, the City gained valuable experience administering and managing a large federal grant. The City was also awarded a federal EDA grant to expand water and sewer infrastructure to support an industrial park. This project highlights the co-benefits of infrastructure expansion; expanding water and sewer infrastructure at the EcoPark also made it possible for 300 waterfront homes to be connected to the City's sewer system in the future, thereby improving water quality.

Alongside business and industry development, Cohasset has invested in local community development. The City contributed \$1 million to Cohasset Elementary School to expand its gym and financially supported a project to co-locate a daycare and a new 100-person community center at the school. The City has prioritized investment in its recreation and tourism sectors to continue attracting visitors and enhance the parks and trails systems for existing residents. Notably, the City invested in and developed the Tioga Recreation Area,



a world-class mountain biking trail system that attracts 30,000 visitors annually. The City leveraged several different funding sources to make this project happen, including state bonding money and grants, City contributions, and grants from IRRR. Cohasset has also supported other local projects that expand and enhance regional trail systems, including the North Country Trail expansion project and the Bushwacker snowmobile trail.

In terms of housing development, the City has procured three sites and is currently working with developers to plan for 300+ units of future multifamily and single-family housing options. The City plans to leverage each site's unique characteristics to meet local housing needs.

Itasca County

Itasca County has also participated in efforts to encourage economic diversification in response to the energy transition. The County supports new and developing businesses through letters of support and has directly advocated for industry, including supporting tax abatements for both the expansion of a Yanmar compact equipment manufacturing plant and the construction of a new distribution center for L&M Fleet Supply in Grand Rapids. Itasca County has also been politically active in seeking a more streamlined state permitting process that meets its environmental needs, while creating more hospitable conditions for new industry seeking to develop or expand in the region.

Furthermore, the Itasca County Board of Commissioners has been focusing on three mining companies interested in pursuing operations in the region. To enhance incoming industry and businesses, the County has also worked to support the Highway 169 corridor project, which aims to bring double lanes to the Iron Range expressway. If successful, this infrastructure project will not only improve safety but also expand options for commerce. The Board also approved the Local Housing Trust Fund to bring in additional funds for housing.

Strengths, Opportunities, and Assets

Despite the economic difficulties faced by its longtime anchor industries, the region has still managed economic growth over the past decade. The area has steadily diversified, with growth in tourism-related industries that take advantage of the region's natural beauty and amenities. North-central Minnesota has a rich and unique ecology that benefits the community in many ways. The region's forests and significant water resources provide important habitats for wildlife species and plants while providing cultural and economic resources for the area. In addition to their contribution to the forest products industry, forests serve as carbon sinks, holding carbon in the soil, belowground biomass, aboveground live biomass, dead wood, and litter.²⁰ Opportunities for innovative approaches to mining, next-generation forest products, and a broader economic transformation could

20 Stephen Handler et al. "Minnesota Forest Ecosystem Vulnerability Assessment and Synthesis: A Report from the Northwoods Climate Change Response Framework Project," United States Department of Agriculture, May 2014, 20, https://www.fs.usda.gov/nrs/pubs/gtr/gtr_nrs133.pdf.



all help create new, family-sustaining employment in Cohasset, Itasca County, and the broader northern Minnesota region.

City of Cohasset Assets

Cohasset has numerous notable assets. Its location next to Grand Rapids, a largely built-out regional center and a hub for numerous services for surrounding communities, makes it a natural location for regional business and housing growth. U.S. Highway 2, the most significant east-west highway in northern Minnesota that connects the Duluth and Grand Forks metropolitan areas, cuts through the heart of the community and includes a major retail and industrial corridor. The Cohasset Industrial Park is one of the largest industrial development properties in the region. The community includes substantial lakefront property, including frontage on Pokegama Lake, numerous smaller lakes, and highway corridors to additional waterfront property in more rural portions of the County. Recent notable developments include the Tioga Recreation area, a new community center, and growth along the Highway 2 corridor. These assets have helped retain and attract residents even as the region faces economic headwinds.

Green Iron Opportunities

Northeast Minnesota's iron ore and taconite mines are the foundations of the nation's primary steel industry. In fact, three-quarters of the nation's domestic steel is sourced from Minnesota's Iron Range.²¹ Ore from the region will continue to power American steelmaking, and there is increasing emphasis from across the political spectrum on the importance of a strong domestic supply chain to protect national security interests and American jobs. Making iron and steel from taconite pellets has traditionally been very carbon-intensive, and interest has surged in developing a more environmentally friendly "green iron" that relies on renewable energy sources. The green iron movement falls within a broader effort known as industrial decarbonization, which seeks to reduce industrial emissions through innovations in manufacturing.

The University of Minnesota's Natural Resources Research Institute (NRRI), which includes facilities in the Duluth area and in the Itasca County community of Coleraine, is leading regional conversations over what these projects might look like. Northeast Minnesota's ample water resources, existing iron industry, and the research capacity available through NRRI make it a strong candidate to host efforts to develop green iron. In April 2024, NRRI received funding from the U.S. Department of Energy to explore the use of Minnesota ore for greener, higher-value iron products.²² Regional economic development partners have previously discussed the potential for pilot initiatives on green iron and industrial decarbonization projects with NRRI and are committed to future collaboration. Should any

21 Larissa Donovan, "Low-emissions steelmaking could be big business for Minnesota's Iron Range, experts say," *Minnesota Reformer* (blog), December 21, 2023, <https://minnesotareformer.com/2023/12/21/low-emissions-steelmaking-could-be-big-business-for-minnesotas-iron-range-experts-say/>.

22 June Breneman, "NRRI receives two DOE grants for industry decarbonization projects," *Natural Resources Research Institute*, April 23, 2024, <https://nrri.umn.edu/news/doe-decarb-2-2024>.



of these efforts reach a commercialization phase, Itasca County could be a prime location for the construction of industrial facilities that attract jobs and investments that also address major environmental concerns.

Economic Development Partners

The Itasca Economic Development Corporation (IEDC) guides economic development across the county. For a county of its size, IEDC has a large staff and a strong network of regional partners that provide resources to area businesses, entrepreneurs, and jobseekers. It has a track record of success in securing outside grant funding, including grants from the federal Economic Development Administration (EDA). It has been a significant partner with the City of Cohasset on grant writing and in business recruitment efforts. IEDC has also been a leader in bringing innovative programming to the County, with notable recent success in the launch of The Forge, an incubator facility in Grand Rapids. It is a regular partner of many regional organizations serving northeast Minnesota, including the Northland Small Business Development Center (SBDC), Entrepreneur Fund (EFund), Northspan, Community and Economic Development Associates (CEDA), the Area Partnership for Economic Expansion (APEX), and the Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce (GRACC).

Cohasset, along with most of Itasca County, is in the service area of the Department of Iron Range Resources & Rehabilitation (IRRR), a Minnesota state agency dedicated to economic development in the historic mining areas of the northeast part of the state. IRRR funds its work through a production tax collected in lieu of a property tax on regional mining activity. This allows communities such as Cohasset to benefit from its investment, even though the nearest active mining operation is 20 miles away in Keewatin. IRRR's annual budget varies based on the annual taconite production rate and has supported numerous projects in Cohasset.

The Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe (LLBO) has undertaken numerous economic, community, and sustainability projects. Major development initiatives include a wellness center in Ball Club and a broadband project across the Reservation. LLBO has pursued an array of climate and clean energy projects, including a solar master plan, a guide to net zero emissions, the development of a 534-kW solar array near Cass Lake, an electric vehicle ready guide, electric vehicle charging stations for Tribal corridors, and an electric vehicle fleet, among other initiatives. It has also integrated these projects into a broader initiative on environmental justice, which included the completion of a health risk assessment.

The Blandin Foundation — a private foundation based in Grand Rapids, Minnesota, with a mission to connect, fund, and advocate for ideas and people to inspire resourcefulness and move rural places forward — has also been a significant source of support across the region.



Numerous other partners support economic development in northern Minnesota, including but not limited to the organizations listed below:

- **Bois Forte Band of Chippewa**
- **City of Grand Rapids Economic Development Authority (GREDA)**
- **Coalition of Utility Cities (CUC)**
- **Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce (GRACC)**
- **Iron Range Economic Alliance (IREA)**
- **Community Advisory Panels (ItasCAP and East Range CAP)**
- **Mineland Vision Partnership (MVP)**
- **Range Association of Municipalities and Schools (RAMS)**
- **Western Mesabi Mine Planning Board (WMMPB)**
- **Workforce boards**

Economic Resilience and Development Funding

Northeastern Minnesota is hardly alone as a community in transition. Across the country, communities are facing similar challenges as they adapt to the shifting economic landscape. Historically, key industries have been reevaluated, driven by emerging technological advances and market forces. This national trend toward energy transition has led both state and federal agencies to establish technical and financial assistance initiatives to support communities in transition.

At the federal level, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Office of Rural Development (RD) provides a variety of programs and services from housing preservation to business loan guarantees. For example, in 2021, IEDC received funding through USDA's Rural Innovation Stronger Economy (RISE) Grants to acquire equipment and complete renovations to launch The Forge. Broad economic development programs and initiatives such as these support innovative community-driven solutions that foster long-term community resilience.

Furthermore, for energy communities specifically confronting the phase-out of coal-fired power plants, the federal government has developed more targeted assistance. The Interagency Working Group on Coal and Power Plant Communities and Economic Revitalization (IWG), comprising key federal agencies and White House staff, spearheads efforts to increase access to funding and resources for energy communities. Additionally, EDA's Assistance to Coal Communities program directs funding to public and private efforts. Notably, the EDA granted \$2.6 million to the National Association of Counties (NACo) to lead the Building Resilient Economies in Coal Communities Initiative (BRECC), in which



representatives of Minnesota's energy communities have participated.²³

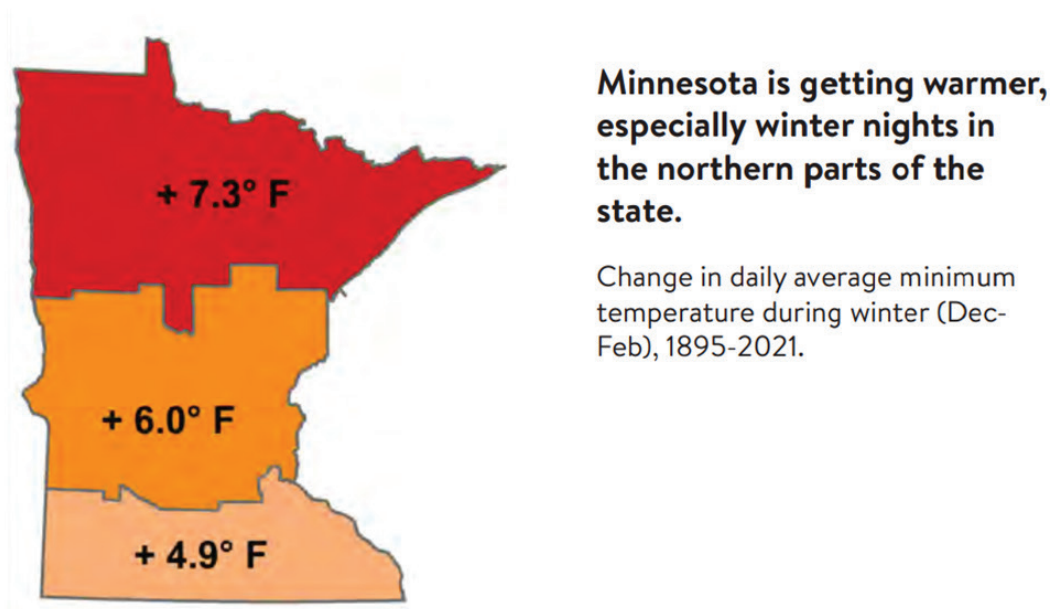
At the state level, Minnesota launched its Energy Transition Office (ETO) in 2021, which administers and manages funding to support communities across the state that are impacted by energy transitions. While many coal communities are still building the capacity needed to pursue some of these funding opportunities, and the landscape of available funds can change rapidly, their existence presents a major opportunity for Cohasset.²⁴

Challenges

Climate and Environmental Health

Minnesotans experience climate change through warming winters, seen in Figure 3, as well as heavy rain events with intermittent droughts, seasonal shifts, increasing water temperatures, crop failure, and other associated economic losses. Climate change also stresses infrastructure and strains the state's energy systems.²⁵

Figure 3. Minnesota's Climate Action Framework Warming Trends



Source: "Climate Action Framework," *Our Minnesota Climate*, September 2022.

²³ "Building Resilient Economies in Coal Communities," National Association of Counties, accessed December 4, 2024, <https://www.naco.org/program/building-resilient-economies-coal-communities#:~:text=NACo's%20Building%20Resilient%20Economies%20in,knowledge%2Dsharing%20community%20of%20practice>.

²⁴ Ann N. Junod, "Coal Communities Need Deeper Investments in Capacity Building to Capitalize on Energy Transition Funding," *Urban Wire* (blog), August 29, 2024, <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/coal-communities-need-deeper-investments-capacity-building-capitalize-energy-transition>.

²⁵ Allison R. Crimmins, "Fifth National Climate Assessment," U.S. Global Change Research Program, November 14, 2023, <https://nca2023.globalchange.gov/>.



The State of Minnesota intends to reduce detrimental climate impacts by employing strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. In addition to the 100% carbon-free electricity law and other state laws and programs aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions, the state has adopted a statewide climate action plan called the Minnesota Climate Action Framework.²⁶ The plan outlines emissions reduction strategies across all major emissions sectors, as well as strategies to improve the resiliency of our electric grid, housing, and other infrastructure to the impacts of climate change.

Coal-fired power plants have benefited us by providing a safe way to power, heat, and cool our homes. They do, however, impact the air and water in host communities, releasing carbon dioxide and other pollutants with the potential to affect respiratory, cardiovascular, and other health issues. Coal ash, which is a by-product of coal-fired power plants, contains contaminants like mercury, cadmium, and arsenic. These contaminants could pose a pollution risk to waterways, groundwater, drinking water, and the air. In some cases, coal ash spills in the U.S. have caused widespread environmental, health, and economic damage.²⁷

Housing

Ensuring that residents have access to housing that fits their needs and income is a foundational component of community well-being. The 2024 Comprehensive Housing Study for Itasca County identified that the county has roughly 19,000 housing units.²⁸ The study highlights that since 2014, the County has seen an annual average of issued building permits for 129 housing units, of which 74% were single-family permits and 26% were multifamily permits.²⁹ More than half these permits are likely for vacation or seasonal homes rather than housing for year-round residents. Itasca County has a higher percentage of cost-burdened renters and homeowners than the rest of the state: nearly 60% of renters pay more than 30% of their income on rent, while 13% of homeowners pay more than 30% of their income on housing costs.³⁰ Assuming that potential economic development projects come to fruition in the next five years, the study projected that an additional 1,300 units of housing will be needed to meet demand, as seen in Figure 4. Housing demand will only increase as the County looks to attract new industries and businesses.

²⁶ "Climate Action Framework," *Our Minnesota Climate*, accessed September 11, 2024, <https://climate.state.mn.us/minnesotas-climate-action-framework>.

²⁷ "Coal Ash Basics," EPA, accessed October 11, 2024, <https://www.epa.gov/coalash/coal-ash-basics>.

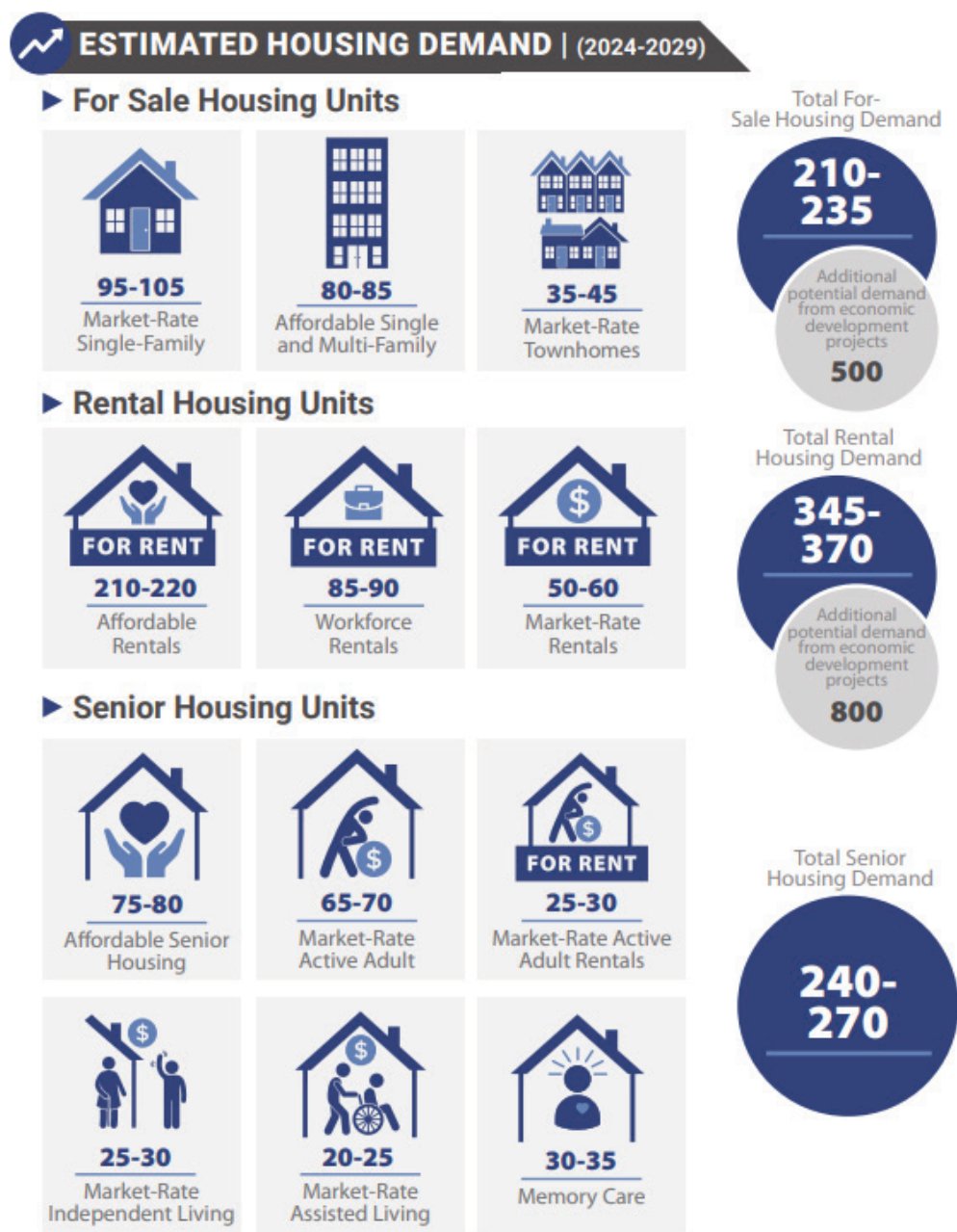
²⁸ LOCI Consulting LLC and HKGI, "Comprehensive Housing Study for Itasca County," *Itasca County Housing and Redevelopment Authority*, August 8, 2024, 20, https://files.elfsightcdn.com/eafe4a4d-3436-495d-b748-5bdce62d911d/d762bba1-b0da-4791-99c8-7b3b87caa75b/Itasca-County-Summary-Documents_Final-compressed-1.pdf.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 49.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 41.



Figure 4. Estimated housing demand in Itasca County (2024–2029). Source: Comprehensive Housing Study for Itasca County.



Source: LOCi Consulting LLC and HKGi, "Comprehensive Housing Study for Itasca County," Itasca County Housing and Redevelopment Authority.

The 2024 county housing study and Itasca County's housing-related organizations describe multiple barriers to meeting current and future demand for various types of housing. One of the primary challenges is the significant gap between the cost of development and the sale price in the Itasca County market. Multifamily housing developers indicate that high



interest rates and rising construction and land costs have led to higher investment costs that cannot be recouped with market rate rent — subsidies are needed to make projects pencil out.

In addition to building new affordable housing, housing organizations indicated that preserving existing affordable housing is an important strategy. However, the region's housing stock is old, with more than 50% of housing units built before 1980.³¹ More funding for rehabilitation and renovation is necessary to preserve the naturally occurring affordable housing in the county. Other barriers to housing development include restrictive city zoning codes and a lack of contractors in the region.

Currently, there are a variety of ongoing community-led initiatives across the region to fill gaps in the housing market. To support affordable single-family housing, the Itasca County Housing & Redevelopment Authority (ICHRA) currently funds eight homes through its Land Trust Program. These homes are sold to low-income homebuyers at a significantly subsidized rate with the agreement that once the homeowner moves out, they agree to pass the benefits to the next homeowners by selling at the subsidized rate.³²

Additionally, the Grand Rapids EDA is moving forward with a 63-unit multifamily project that will be funded through tax increment financing (TIF), of which 13 units must be reserved for low-income qualified residents.³³ The recently established Itasca County Local Housing Trust Fund (LHTF) will provide a sustainable source of funding for affordable housing development, additional projects through the community land trust, and housing rehabilitation work, which would enable the region to attract more development. While the LHTF has received some initial funding from the state and the county tax levy, ICHRA continues to seek additional funding to capitalize the fund.

Itasca County will need to continue coordinating existing housing efforts in alignment with emerging career pathway programs and gap financing opportunities in order to attract and retain a skilled workforce and foster ongoing business development.

Child Care

A strong and affordable child care ecosystem is crucial for improving student outcomes, supporting the existing Itasca County workforce, and bringing workers into the region to support any new businesses that the region hopes to attract to diversify the economy. While the availability of child care slots is better in Itasca County than in surrounding counties, the County still has significant challenges; child care providers indicate that some families cannot access child care due to cost, distance, time of day, and other barriers.³⁴

³¹ Ibid, 46.

³² "Community Land Trust Program," *One Roof Community Housing*, accessed October 4, 2024, <https://lroofhousing.org/homebuyers/community-land-trust/>.

³³ Megan Buffington, "Proposed 63-Unit Downtown Grand Rapids Apartments Moves Forward," *KAXE*, August 29, 2024, <https://www.kaxe.org/local-news/2024-08-29/four-story-downtown-grand-rapids-apartment-moves-forward>.

³⁴ Itasca County Housing and Redevelopment Authority, Kootasca Community Action Inc., and Grand Rapids Economic Development Authority, "Housing Meeting," Zoom meeting, August 6, 2024.



There is an ecosystem of child care providers across the county with different focus areas that serve different populations. While there have been attempts to improve coordination and resource sharing (e.g., blending programs through a \$2 million grant to the Itasca Area Schools Collaborative), child care providers have indicated that there is a need to coordinate more, especially as they collectively pursue funding opportunities.

Child care providers have specifically mentioned a persistent need for sustainable funding sources that can fill operational funding gaps, like facility rental and labor costs. Staff turnover remains a significant challenge, with providers unable to provide competitive wages. Providers want to offer child care subsidies and services for lower-income families, which would enable more Itasca County residents to enter the workforce. There are also barriers for people who want to start their own child care business, such as a complicated licensing process.

Jobs and Family-Sustaining Wages

Access to child care and housing is directly linked to jobs and family-sustaining wages. Participants in the Sparking Change process expressed concern about the availability of high-quality jobs in the region that can provide family-sustaining wages or living wages. Figure 5 shows the living wages for various types of families according to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Living Wage Calculator, which defines a living wage as, “The hourly rate that an individual in a household must earn to support themselves and/or their family, working full-time.”

Participants noted that while tourism has been touted as an industry that could replace jobs in natural resources-dependent sectors, the wages are not comparable. The Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development’s (DEED) Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages found that in 2023, Itasca County’s average annual wages for workers in the leisure and hospitality industry were approximately \$22,000.³⁵ While tourism will remain an important industry for the region, future economic development efforts should focus on attracting businesses that can provide family-sustaining wages.

Figure 5. Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Living Wage Calculator for Itasca County, 2024

	1 ADULT				2 ADULTS (1 WORKING)				2 ADULTS (BOTH WORKING)			
	0 Children	1 Child	2 Children	3 Children	0 Children	1 Child	2 Children	3 Children	0 Children	1 Child	2 Children	3 Children
Living Wage	\$20.09	\$34.68	\$44.17	\$57.39	\$27.93	\$33.66	\$38.36	\$39.39	\$13.96	\$19.68	\$24.71	\$28.10
Poverty Wage	\$7.24	\$9.83	\$12.41	\$15.00	\$9.83	\$12.41	\$15.00	\$17.59	\$4.91	\$6.21	\$7.50	\$8.79
Minimum Wage	\$10.85	\$10.85	\$10.85	\$10.85	\$10.85	\$10.85	\$10.85	\$10.85	\$10.85	\$10.85	\$10.85	\$10.85

Source: “Living Wage Calculation for Itasca County, Minnesota,” Living Wage, MIT, February 14, 2024, <https://livingwage.mit.edu/counties/27061>.

³⁵ “Itasca County Industry Employment in 2023,” Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, Employment Details, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, accessed December 20, 2024, <https://mn.gov/deed/data/data-tools/qcew/>.



Why We Are Here

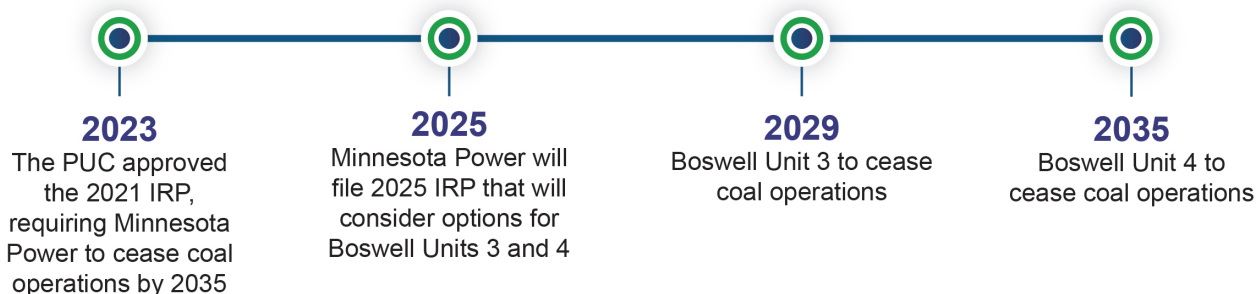
On January 9, 2023, the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (PUC) filed an order approving Minnesota Power's 2021 Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) and requiring Minnesota Power to "cease coal operations at Boswell Unit 3 at the latest by December 31, 2029,

Minnesota Power IRP Process

Resource planning is a process that energy utilities undertake to select the appropriate energy resources necessary to meet customers' energy needs over a given period of time. Resource planning is often described as the process by which utilities select the size, type, and timing of the resources that will make up their future energy supply.

IRPs are forward-looking documents that lay out the mix of energy resources that a utility intends to use. They are an important planning tool for Minnesota Power to evaluate a range of power sector investments to meet electricity demand projections and continue providing reliable and affordable electricity to its customers.

Electric utility resource planning is overseen by the Minnesota PUC through a public-facing process. The PUC requires utilities to file an IRP once every two years. The Minnesota PUC is an independent regulatory agency responsible for the oversight and regulation of public utilities, including electric, natural gas, and telecommunications services. The commission's mission is to ensure that residents of Minnesota have access to safe, adequate, and efficient utility services at fair and reasonable rates.



and Boswell Unit 4 by 2035." Ceasing coal operations at Boswell will have wide-ranging and important implications for the utility system, the environment, utility employees and workers, and the Itasca County community. Around the same time, two historic pieces of federal legislation were passed that presented new funding opportunities for energy transition communities: the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law in 2021 and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) in 2022.

In response to the announcement about Boswell and the opportunity presented by new



federal funding resources, the Itasca Economic Development Corporation (IEDC), Itasca County, the City of Cohasset, the Minnesota Department of Iron Range Resources & Rehabilitation (IRRR), and Minnesota Power (MP) convened a task force of regional partners to explore community development opportunities that diversify the regional and local economies and sustain and strengthen the community during this energy transition.

State Policy Context

In 2023, Minnesota passed the 100% carbon-free electricity law, which commits all utilities to provide their Minnesota customers with 100 percent carbon-free electricity by 2040. In other words, by 2040, all electricity supplied to Minnesotans must be generated or procured from a carbon-free resource.

“Carbon-free,” as defined by the law, can be produced by renewable sources including solar, wind, and hydroelectric, as well as other carbon-free energy technology generation sources.³⁶ Energy producers, providers, and consumers have varying perspectives on how to interpret the vast array of undefined carbon-free energy technologies, such as biomass, renewable natural gas, and solid waste. Ultimately, the Minnesota PUC will determine how utilities will implement and comply with this new 100 percent law.³⁷

Minnesota also recently adopted energy legislation to streamline the permitting process for renewable energy development and address interconnection and transmission congestion, while consolidating and reforming the state’s review and permitting process for energy projects broadly. The legislation modernizes the environmental review process for energy projects and assesses and addresses grid congestion issues. It was adopted to speed up permitting and construction of necessary infrastructure projects to enable the state to meet the goal of 100% carbon-free energy by 2040.³⁸

Minnesota Power, after closing Units 1 and 2 at Boswell in 2019, will now consider transitioning Units 3 and 4 to one of the eligible energy sources as a part of its own commitment to achieve 100% carbon-free energy by 2040. Minnesota Power’s next IRP will clarify steps to achieve the state’s goals and comply with the new legislation.

Regulatory Context

Minnesota Power’s next IRP, due in March 2025, will determine which options the utility has to replace power generation from Boswell after ceasing coal by 2035. The engagement process to inform the IRP — which ran on a similar timeline as the Sparking Change process and is ongoing as of the publication of this report — sought to engage a broad range of parties and community members to inform the development of Minnesota Power’s next resource plan. The process convened three groups:

³⁶ Minnesota Public Utilities Commission, *In the Matter of Minnesota Power’s 2021–2035 Integrated Resource Plan, Order Approving Plan and Setting Additional Requirements*, Docket No. E-015/RP-21-33, (January 9, 2023), <https://www.edockets.state.mn.us/edockets/searchDocuments.do?method=showPop&documentId={10CE9785-0000-CC15-93BC-CC94BB4400D6}&documentTitle=20231-191970-01>.

³⁷ “State Provides Further Guidance for Utilities on Carbon Free Standard,” Minnesota Public Utilities Commission, September 27, 2024, <https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/MNPUBUC/bulletins/3b898c5>.

³⁸ Minnesota Statute § 216I, Minnesota Energy Infrastructure Permitting Act.



- 1. Technical Advisory Group (TAG):** The TAG met seven times to inform the IRP modeling assumptions and discuss other IRP technical issues. The IRP modeling will evaluate replacement options for coal-fired power generation at Boswell, among other things. The modeling will include fact-based assumptions about the costs of replacement resources.
- 2. Societal Advisory Group (SAG):** The Minnesota PUC, in approving Minnesota Power's 2021 IRP, also ordered the utility to solicit input from stakeholders on "a societal cost-benefit analysis of Boswell Unit 4 and Hibbard Renewable Energy Center, considering impacts on host communities, workforce, economics, health, system reliability, the environment, and customer costs."³⁹ The SAG was formed to inform and refine a Societal Cost-Benefit Analysis (SCBA) framework that Minnesota Power will use in accordance with the PUC order to understand potential positive and negative impacts associated with changes at Minnesota Power plants. The SAG met three times and was designed to bring together individuals who collectively could speak on a broad array of costs and benefits that should be considered in the SCBA, including community representatives from Cohasset and Grand Rapids.
- 3. Joint Group:** The Joint Group was held for members of both advisory groups as well as participants not involved in either advisory group to learn about and inform the development of the 2025 IRP.

The Sparking Change process, described below, focused more on economic, community, and workforce development strategies that would support the community's broader energy transition rather than technical questions and the social, economic, and environmental implications of ceasing coal at the Boswell Energy Center.

³⁹ Minnesota Public Utilities Commission, *In the Matter of Minnesota Power's 2021-2035 Integrated Resource Plan, Order Approving Plan and Setting Additional Requirements*, Docket No. E-015/RP-21-33, (January 9, 2023), <https://www.edockets.state.mn.us/edockets/searchDocuments.do?method=showPop&documentId={10CE9785-0000-CC15-93BC-CC94BB4400D6}&documentTitle=20231-191970-01>.



Sparkling Change Process and Summary

The Sparking Change process took place from January 2024 to December 2024 and sought to chart a course forward to prepare for the economic losses that will likely occur when the Boswell Energy Center ceases coal operations. Participants established the following objectives at the start of the process:

- Build a shared understanding among all participants and the broader community regarding the current situation and future opportunities and challenges with respect to a just transition and economic development in both Itasca County and northeastern Minnesota.
- Develop an action plan that includes the following:
 - ◇ A set of shared just economic transition guiding principles and desired outcomes that are unique to this specific situation and the participants and communities involved.
 - ◇ A just economic transition vision and recommendations for Itasca County.
 - ◇ A strategic path forward for specific projects throughout the region.
 - ◇ Federal funding and other resources and opportunities that align with the vision and recommendations, as well as documentation to assist with funding applications.
- Fostering a culture of honesty, trust, and collaboration that can help all participants and communities involved continue to work together after this process is complete.

Work Groups

The facilitation team convened two work groups to guide this process:

1. A **steering committee** consisting of five key partner organizations who helped guide the overall convening process, including activities with the task force and broader community. This group met every other month throughout 2024 and consisted of the following organizations:
 - City of Cohasset
 - Itasca County
 - Minnesota Department of Iron Range Resources & Rehabilitation (IRRR)
 - Minnesota Power (MP)
 - Itasca Economic Development Corporation (IEDC)



A list of steering committee members and meeting topics can be found in Appendix B. Full steering committee meeting summaries are available in Appendix C.

2. A **task force** of close to 30 individuals that met every other month throughout 2024 to develop a vision and recommendations for action. Steering committee members also participated in the task force. The task force represents a broader array of perspectives and constituencies from the community, including the following sectors:

- Child care
- Economic development
- Entrepreneurs and small businesses
- Labor and workforce development
- Large employers
- Local governments
- Philanthropy
- School districts and higher education
- State agencies
- Utilities

A complete list of task force members, observers, and meeting topics is available in Appendix B. Full task force meeting summaries are available in Appendix D.

Town Halls

IEDC and the facilitation team also conducted community town halls. This ensured that the process was engaged with and informed by the broader community and region. These town halls occurred in two rounds of meetings in the spring and the fall of 2024 across six Itasca County communities.

SPRING TOWN HALLS

The spring town halls gave community members an opportunity to learn about the planned changes at Boswell and share ideas on future courses of action. Minnesota Power staff attended each town hall and responded to community questions about the energy transition. The town halls were organized around the question, “What do the words ‘energy transition’ mean to you?”

Five common themes emerged from the town halls, which then informed the creation of the six high-level strategies during the task force workshops:

- Promote sustainable energy and positive environmental impact
- Create economic and job opportunities



- Develop technological and infrastructure solutions
- Plan for long-term, strategic implementation
- Engage the community and enhance community well-being

FALL TOWN HALLS

In the fall town halls, facilitators provided an overview of the process, shared updates from Minnesota Power, and invited community feedback on the six high-level strategies developed by the task force. Participant comments reinforced certain themes in the plan and introduced some additional areas of emphasis.

The groups also provided numerous takeaways and potential suggestions for the energy transition and economic diversification efforts. Broader summaries of the spring and fall town halls are available in Appendices E and F, respectively.

Community Surveys

Northspan also conducted two community surveys. These surveys were released in accordance with the timeframe of the community town halls; while they were open to all community members to fill out, their primary purpose was to elicit additional written, anonymous feedback from process participants rather than reaching a broad cross-section of the community. The survey was hosted on an online platform.

SPRING SURVEY

As part of the community town halls, Northspan conducted a survey with Itasca community participants seeking feedback on energy transition. The survey received 15 responses and fed into the task force's planning efforts. Full results from the survey are available in Appendix G.

FALL SURVEY

Northspan administered a second survey in tandem with the fall town halls to gain additional written feedback on the draft plan. The survey received five responses that provided some additional context and action items to guide the plan. Full results from the survey are available in Appendix H.



Future: Who Will We Be

This report and the action plan detailed below are the culmination of the collaborative efforts of the steering committee, task force, and community members who participated in town hall meetings and provided input throughout the process. Notably, the task force spent two four-hour workshop sessions discussing and synthesizing feedback, leading to the identification of six high-level strategies, and further refining each one to identify specific actions and measurable desired outcomes. The task force also identified partners, existing work (or “momentum”), and timelines for each high-level strategy.

Participants in this process recognize that timelines and priorities may change and intend for this action plan to be a living document that may adapt and grow in response to new developments. Furthermore, this action plan represents community-identified priorities as informed and energized by existing regional initiatives around economic development and diversification. The six high-level strategies identified provide a starting point that acknowledges this past work and a commitment to a shared path forward for partners in Itasca County and the greater northern Minnesota region in achieving the Sparking Change vision: *A thriving community invested in our future sustainable energy shift.*

The six high-level strategies are as follows. Note that the alphanumerical labels for the high-level strategies do not indicate any order of prioritization or ranking and are solely for organizational and identification purposes. The actions under each strategy are organized in chronological order according to the timelines established by the task force members.

S1. Develop Entrepreneur and Business Opportunities

S2. Mobilize Community Engagement

S3. Leverage Partnerships and Advocacy

S4. Promote Economic and Community Development

S5. Advance Sustainability Initiatives

S6. Provide Workforce Support

Each high-level strategy is followed by a list of funding and assistance opportunities — including grants, tax credits, and financing — that could support the implementation of that strategy. The lists focus on federal funding opportunities but also include State of Minnesota agencies that may have relevant grant programs. Considering that the availability of federal grants and tax credits is subject to federal administrations and acts of Congress,



the specific opportunities listed here may or may not continue to be available in the near future. For future research into funding opportunities, Sparking Change partners can look at the agencies listed in the funding opportunity tables and existing databases of funding opportunities (e.g., the Interagency Working Group on Coal and Power Plant Communities and Economic Revitalization (IWG) Funding Clearinghouse, the Atlas Public Policy Climate Program Portal, and the Minnesota Technical Assistance Collaborative database of state and federal funding).

51. Develop Entrepreneur and Business Opportunities

Foster community innovation, diversification, and relationships that continue to stimulate the local economy.

Impact: This strategy aims to foster existing and new business innovation, acumen, and networks to diversify economic development opportunities and strengthen local commerce.

Desired Outcomes:

1. An increase in regional participation in entrepreneurship programs.
2. A thriving and utilized entrepreneur support ecosystem.
3. An increase in the number and diversity of businesses.
4. New value-added products are being produced from traditional assets (water, wood, iron ore).
5. An expansion in downtown business association support and participation.
6. Enhanced tourism attraction.

Partners: Arrowhead Regional Development Commission (ARDC), Center on Rural Innovation (CORI), Driving Access to Wealth Networks (DAWN), Itasca Area School Collaborative (IASC), Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), Minnesota Department of Iron Range Resources & Rehabilitation (IRRR), Itasca Economic Development Corporation (IEDC), Northspan, Natural Resources Research Institute (NRRI), Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce (GRACC), Entrepreneur Fund (EFund), Minnesota North College (“MN North”), State of Minnesota, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe (LLBO), Bois Forte Band of Chippewa (“Bois Forte”), Grand Rapids Downtown Business Association (GRDBA), industry leaders



Momentum:

- Business attraction efforts, including \$6 million for the Blackwater Banks Riverfront Redevelopment project in downtown Cohasset that would provide retail, restaurants, housing, and athletic facilities.
- Itasca County tax abatements for a Yanmar compact equipment manufacturing plant and the construction of a new distribution center for L&M Fleet Supply in Grand Rapids.

Actions		Partners	Timeline
a	Prioritize Tribal Nation engagement in the work of this plan, and in the entrepreneurial ecosystem in general	Northspan, State of Minnesota, IEDC, LLBO, Bois Forte	In progress
b	Host learning sessions and develop entrepreneurial incentives for value-add product options (e.g., wood, iron ore, water)	NRRI, IRRR, DEED, Industry leaders	Q1 2025
c	Identify community influencers and activate them with connections to programs and opportunities	CORI, DAWN, Northspan, IEDC	Q2 2025
d	Support existing businesses: Develop a small business support group Create a business ownership guide with a collection of available resources Develop an entrepreneur marketplace Host networking sessions with local entrepreneurs and small business owners Celebrate entrepreneurs through recognition events and communications Engage with existing local entrepreneurs to continue their growth or gain insight into successes and challenges that can be shared	GRACC, GRDBA, IEDC, ARDC, DAWN, SBDC, EFund	Q3 2025
e	Develop and foster venture capital or other types of startup funds and resources	IEDC, DAWN	Q1 2026
f	Engage youth in entrepreneurship programs to match solutions and programs to interest	IASC, MN North, DEED	Q2 2026

Community Case Study: Future Leaders and Entrepreneurs Exchange

Venango County, Pennsylvania is fostering the next generation of energized and skilled leaders to drive economic revitalization and growth. To diversify the local economy, which was once an industrial oil and gas hub, Venango County has focused its efforts on developing and cultivating entrepreneurship. For example, the county's Chamber of Commerce organizes the Future Leaders and Entrepreneurs Exchange, or FLEX, group which offers a venue for young professionals to build community connections and meaningfully engage in the local economic landscape, all while accessing professional development



opportunities and a peer network of like-minded young leaders.⁴⁰ The current FLEX cohort focuses on developing a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis to better understand the county’s young professional profiles, as part of a larger marketing campaign to meet the needs of Venango County entrepreneurs.⁴¹ The current FLEX president shares the objective of this endeavor, “[to help] people see themselves as professionals, regardless of their job or career path,” also noting, “FLEX is for anyone who is driven and looking to grow.” FLEX highlights the benefits of supporting and fostering innovation to meet the needs and interests of young professionals as informed by young professionals.

Funding Opportunities

S1. Develop Entrepreneur and Business Opportunities		
Federal Funding Opportunities		
Name	Agency	Description
Homeless Veterans’ Reintegration Program (HVRP)	Department of Labor (DOL)	Purpose: Federal employment-focused grant to support career exploration, training, placement, and supportive services for veterans experiencing or at risk of homelessness, to empower them to secure good jobs in stable, high-demand occupations that pay livable wages. Eligibility: State, county, city, or other political subdivision, institutions of higher education, Tribal government or Tribal organization, nonprofit, for-profit organizations (other than small businesses), U.S. Territories. Funding Terms: Competitive grant; ~\$15 million. Timing: Annual grant, dependent on Congress authorization.
Program for Investors in Microentrepreneurs (PRIME)	Small Business Administration (SBA)	Purpose: Funding for private, nonprofit microenterprise development organizations; microenterprise development programs run by State/Local/Tribal Governments; or tribes interested in providing assistance and guidance to disadvantaged microentrepreneurs and/or microenterprise development organizations. Eligibility: A microenterprise development organization (e.g., a nonprofit Community Development Financial Institution [CDFI]), an intermediary that has experience in delivering technical assistance to disadvantaged entrepreneurs, or a Tribal organization. Funding Terms: Competitive grant; ~\$5 million; 50% non-federal cost share. Timing: Annual grant, dependent on Congress authorization.
State Funding Opportunities		

Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED)

- State Trade and Export Promotion (STEP) Program
- Innovative Business Development Public Infrastructure (BDPI)

S2. Mobilize Community Engagement

⁴⁰ “Facing Changing Landscape: Venango County Leaders Empowers Next Generation to Economic Success,” National Association of Counties, accessed November 22, 2024, <https://www.naco.org/news/facing-changing-landscape-venango-county-pd-empowers-next-generation-economic-success>.

⁴¹ “FLEX Events: Holiday Happenings,” Venango County Chamber of Commerce, accessed December 1, 2024, <https://venangochamber.org/?s=FLEX+&search=site>.



Raise awareness and energy within the community about the Sparking Change initiative and other economic diversification efforts in the region.

Impact: For the broader community to understand the energy transition and its impacts on the community and to feel empowered to support the plan, there needs to be additional community engagement. This strategy will encourage community leaders to become engaged with the Sparking Change initiative.

Desired Outcomes:

1. A strong and successful marketing campaign leads to broad community understanding of the significance of energy transition.
2. A clear message is created for energy transition and there is a point person for people to contact.
3. The Sparking Change task force becomes a trusted messenger to the public on energy transition and economic diversification topics and events.
4. Volunteer committees support and socialize communication of the action plan to the community.
5. Surveys of the community show an increase in the understanding of energy transition.
6. Broad array of community members are engaged around this action plan to develop innovative ways to successfully implement action.

Partners: Marketing team, Itasca County (“County”), Minnesota Power (MP), Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), Itasca Economic Development Corporation (IEDC), Minnesota Energy Transition Office (ETO), Task force, Regional partners

Momentum:

- Community town halls were hosted during the planning process to ensure the broader community had opportunities to engage. These town halls occurred in two rounds of meetings in spring and fall across six Itasca County communities. Northspan also conducted two community surveys.
- IEDC received grant funding to develop a storytelling campaign around the Sparking Change initiative.

Actions	Partners	Timeline
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a	Develop community survey to gauge community understanding and distribute the survey annually to track changes in energy transition comprehension	Task force, Marketing team	Q1 2025
b	Identify relevant partners and build committees to disseminate information on other action ideas	Task force	Q1 2025
c	Launch website hub for the Sparking Change initiative for people to reference, both current and future	Marketing team	Q1 2025
d	Obtain funding for and implement marketing campaigns on energy transition	IEDC	Q2 2025
e	Develop politically neutral, succinct, understandable messaging that incorporates a focus on quality of life, thriving, and hope, as well as opportunities for investment: • Develop a train-the-trainer model and timeline for communicating this message through committees • Engage community members, local organizations, and county board with this message • Provide presentations at community events using this messaging	IEDC	Q2 2025
f	Create scenarios about impacts of action or inaction and incorporate into communications	IEDC, County, MP	Q3 2025
g	Provide community impact examples of lost tax base and make comparisons that community can relate to	IEDC, ETO	Q3 2025
h	Conduct radio, social media, print media, and other marketing campaigns to raise awareness and share engagement opportunities	Task force, Marketing team, Regional partners	Q3 2025
i	Create spaces for community gathering, social connections, and greater volunteerism	Task force	Q3 2025
j	Ask for feedback from community on action ideas for growing this plan (e.g., website form, partner communities' channels, booth at county fair, schools)	Task force, Marketing team	Q1 2026

COMMUNITY CASE STUDY: WHY WHITLEY

Whitley County, located in the southeastern corner of Kentucky with abundant coal resources, critically supported the region's economy in the 20th century. In recent decades, however, the county has faced a steep decline in coal jobs, leaving many community members uncertain of the county's economic future. In 2018, to spur community pride and engage community-centered economic development, a group of passionate residents formed a nonprofit entity, Why Whitley, with the mission to highlight the county's unique assets. Why Whitley partnered with the Community Economic Development Initiative for Kentucky and the Appalachian Regional Commission, gaining technical skills and securing funding, to focus efforts on a downtown Williamsburg revitalization program. For this program, Why Whitley launched its inaugural River Fog Festival, which attracted nearly double the city's population and provided a lively venue for community members to socialize.⁴² This community-initiated advocacy work, coupled with unique public-private

⁴² "Appalachia Envisioned: A New Era of Opportunity," Appalachian Regional Commission, accessed December 1, 2024, 30, <https://www.arc.gov/strategicplan/>.



partnerships, was integral to generating community momentum and excitement for socializing in downtown Williamsburg.⁴³

S3. Leverage Partnerships and Advocacy

Strengthen partnerships focused on collective advocacy in the legislative and regulatory space to support economic diversification.

Impact: Local, state, and federal regulatory and permitting processes play an important role in economic development projects — they inform what the projects look like, who can voice their input, how long the approval process takes, how to mitigate environmental impacts, and more. Participants in the Sparking Change process have different perspectives on the type of permitting reform needed. Some seek a timelier process, some call for more transparency and certainty, and some seek stronger measures to ensure environmental protection and ample time for community input.

Collective advocacy by Itasca County area partners can help ensure a just energy transition and present a unified message on the future of the Boswell site. This strategy calls for stronger partnerships and the creation of a standing advocacy table that will work to advance the area's agenda and open new avenues for the region to thrive even as there are changes at Boswell. Sparking Change partners recognize that they won't always agree on advocacy goals at the state legislature and Public Utilities Commission (PUC), but an advocacy table would allow partners to develop a decision-making framework for collective advocacy when there are common interests.

Desired Outcomes:

1. Local organizations have a coordinated advocacy approach led by a coordinating team.
2. A shared policy agenda.
3. Agenda aligned with other coal communities.
4. Clarity on possible energy sources for Boswell.
5. Sufficient, cost-competitive energy generation to meet community needs.

Partners: City of Cohasset (Cohasset), Itasca County (County), City of Grand Rapids (Grand Rapids), Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe (LLBO), Minnesota Power (MP), Coalition of Utility Cities (CUC), Blandin Foundation, Range Association of Municipalities and Schools (RAMS), Minnesota Chamber of Commerce, Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce (GRACC), Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (PUC), Advocacy table, Interagency Working Group on Coal and Power Plant Communities and Economic Revitalization (IWG), Task force subgroup

⁴³ Appalachian Regional Commission. "Appalachia Envisioned: A New Era of Opportunity," ARC Strategic Plan Fiscal Years 2022–2026, accessed December 3, 2024, 30, <https://www.arc.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Appalachia-Envisioned-ARC-Strategic-Plan-FY-2022-2026.pdf>.



Momentum:

- Several Sparking Change partners are participating in Minnesota Power's Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) process.
- Partners have been involved in statewide conversations on permitting reform.

Actions	Partners	Timeline
a Continue to support Boswell Energy Center as its uses shift (e.g., build community support and advocacy for IRP process)	Cohasset, Grand Rapids, County, MP, CUC, Minnesota PUC	In progress
b Map participants in local policy and advocacy environment	Task force subgroup (Blandin Foundation, CUC, County, RAMS) and other interested participants	Q2 2025
c Research previous permitting reform efforts to understand what has been done and which gaps remain	Minnesota Chamber of Commerce, RAMS, GRACC/local Chambers of Commerce	Q3 2025
d Work with interested partners to form advocacy table: • Meet with Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe leaders • Meet with leaders from other coal communities and related partners (e.g., Coalition of Utility Cities, Range Association of Municipalities and Schools, unions) • Convene advocacy table	Task force subgroup (Blandin Foundation, CUC, County, RAMS) and other interested participants	Q4 2025
e Develop a policy decision-making framework, including a community engagement process to inform policy agenda	Advocacy table	Q2 2026
f Create shared policy agenda for cross-sector legislative advocacy, which may include advocacy for a transparent permitting framework that provides an opportunity for partners to voice their perspectives and ensures the protection of the region's environment	Advocacy table	Q4 2026
g Engage in energy policy-making and regulatory decisions at the legislature and the Public Utilities Commission	Advocacy table	Q2 2027
h Engage with federal legislative representatives	Advocacy table, IWG	Q2 2027



Clean Tech

Clean technology, or “clean tech,” has many definitions. In this report, clean tech is used to describe industries that address energy and environmental challenges in one way or another. Examples include, but are not limited to, manufacturing of components used in renewable energy generation, energy distribution and storage, energy efficiency, and clean transportation; and technologies and industries related to the bioeconomy, like mass timber, woody biomass utilization, and sustainable aviation fuel.

Funding Opportunities

S2. Mobilize Community Engagement & S3. Leverage Partnerships and Advocacy

Federal and Philanthropic Funding Opportunities

High-level strategies involving community engagement and partnership development aren't typically the sole focus of federal funding opportunities. However, funding to support such efforts may be wrapped into programmatic federal funding opportunities (e.g., a community engagement process could be funded as part of a Community Benefits Plan that is required for a larger Department of Energy grant). To determine whether community engagement and partnership development efforts are allowable under a given federal funding opportunity, review the program guidance document, which will typically have a section identifying allowable activities, eligible uses, or a similar indicator.

Philanthropic organizations may also be a useful source to pursue funding for these types of activities. The Blandin Foundation and Northland Foundation are two notable regional philanthropic entities, and the Just Transition Fund is a national philanthropic organization that has supported this planning process and often supports community engagement and advocacy projects.

S4. Promote Economic and Community Development

Sustained commitment to coordinated economic and community development across the region.

Impact: Itasca County will be able to make more progress on infrastructure, housing, childcare, workforce development, and attracting new industries if there is more coordination between government, nonprofit, and other partners, as well as a strong relationship with the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe. A funding navigator would help identify relevant opportunities and coordinate between partners, while additional funding for



the Economic Development Authorities (EDAs) would provide sustainable economic development into the future. All new projects should have sustainable funding models, and partners should share successful models across the region. Research and coordinated marketing strategies will be necessary to attract new industries, including clean tech.



Economic Development Opportunities

Throughout the engagement process, task force members and town hall attendees mentioned several existing industries that could be expanded or leveraged in addition to new types of businesses that the region could attract.

Existing growth opportunities: Mesabi Metallics, UPM

Potential new industries and businesses: green steel, cannabis, hydrogen, cardboard production plant, chips manufacturing plant, sports fieldhouse, medical industry (research or production), local food production (e.g., vertical hydroponic growing), tech industry, and metal recycling facility.

Desired Outcomes:

- Strong partnerships between Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe and Bois Forte Band of Chippewa and non-Tribal entities.
- Multiple organizations align to successfully pursue a large funding opportunity (e.g., child care, workforce, etc.).
- Coordinated effort to build infrastructure.
- New development and opportunities are sustainable.
- Nonprofit entities are strong and sustainable.
- Funds are matched to organizations' needs.
- Small business support efforts have sustainable funding.
- More clean tech industries are established in Itasca County.
- A complete list of developable sites that are site-ready or plan to be site-ready.
- Community understands economic diversification needs related to businesses, housing, child care, etc.

Partners: Cities, Itasca County (County), Itasca Economic Development Corporation (IEDC), Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), Arrowhead Regional Development Commission (ARDC), Minnesota Department of Iron Range Resources & Rehabilitation (IRRR), Minnesota Energy Transition Office (ETO), Visit Grand Rapids, Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce (GRACC), Reif Center, MacRostie Art Center, Arrowhead Regional Arts Council (ARAC), Community Economic Development Association (CEDA), YMCA, Minnesota Housing Partnership (MHP), Housing organizations, Child care organizations, Arts organizations, Community partners



Momentum:

- On the clean tech front, IEDC and other partners have been exploring mass timber opportunities for several years through participation in a Great Lakes states mass timber cohort and a 2019 report on the economic feasibility of mass timber in 2019.⁴⁴

The Highway 169 Corridor Alliance has received several million dollars for studies to support expansion of the corridor to four lanes. This infrastructure project will improve safety and expand options for regional commerce.

Actions		Partners	Timeline
a	Consistently attend and participate in Leech Lake LIC events; form partnerships and work with Tribal government staff	Local governments and organizations working with Tribal members	In progress
b	Identify and pursue new industries, including clean technology: - Survey gap industries and research supply chain needs to identify potential new businesses that would have high demand - Develop targeted economic development marketing campaigns for viable industries and business: - Develop and prioritize list of site-ready locations and match these to funding opportunities - Address community misunderstandings and concerns about new industries - Create commercial and residential site and land development plans - Develop spec buildings, when relevant	IEDC, County, DEED, ARDC, IRRR	In progress
c	Create funding navigator position to identify funding opportunities for infrastructure, housing, child care, workforce, and other economic and community development initiatives	County, IEDC, ARDC, ETO, ICHRA, Child care organizations	Q1 2025
d	Promote and support arts and recreation to attract workforce	Visit Grand Rapids, GRACC, Reif Center, MacRostie Art Center, ARAC	Q1 2025
e	Seek additional funding for Cohasset and Grand Rapids Economic Development Authorities (EDAs) to support ongoing economic development efforts	IEDC, CEDA, County, Cities, DEED	Q1 2026
f	Coordinate groups of organizations with shared goals to collectively identify and pursue large funding opportunities (e.g., organizations focused on housing, child care, workforce, business development)	IEDC, CEDA, County, Cities, ETO, IRRR, MHP, Child care organizations, Housing organizations	Q1 2026
g	Conduct a countywide infrastructure assessment and seek funding assistance to meet infrastructure needs	County	Q1 2026
h	Develop community spaces that attract workers to the area (e.g., create an indoor playground that would be a destination for northern MN families)	Visit Grand Rapids, Arts organizations, IEDC, YMCA, Community partners	Q2 2026
i	Pursue Tri-State Highway 2 corridor opportunity to facilitate transportation to the port	IEDC	Q2 2026

⁴⁴ Monica Haynes et al. "Economic Feasibility of Mass Timber Manufacturing in Minnesota," University of Minnesota Duluth, January 4, 2019, https://www.itascadv.org/media/userfiles/subsite_104/files/Mass%20Timber%20Study%202019.pdf.





COMMUNITY CASE STUDY: COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FUND

Since the 1970s, the coal industry has dominated the local economy in northwest Colorado. Notably, in 2023, Craig Station, located in Moffat County, Colorado, accounted for 34% of the county's property tax revenue.⁴⁵ With funding from the state, the affected communities of Moffat County and the City of Craig became formal intervenors in Tri-State Generation and Transmission's (Tri-State) electric resource planning proceeding at the PUC to advocate for a community assistance package that included funding for an economic development fund and a property tax backstop.⁴⁶ This proceeding resulted in a settlement agreement committing Tri-State to provide \$22 million in direct payments to a community economic development trust fund from 2026–2029.⁴⁷ The first of its kind for coal-transitioning communities, this trust fund will exclusively fund projects that promote economic diversity and resilience in perpetuity. The rationale for such a fund was derived from the community noting a variety of economic development priorities, while also recognizing the significant short-term and long-term uncertainties. The funds may be adapted and flexible to the shifting economic landscape and needs of the community.

⁴⁵ Mark Jaffe, "Facing Power Plant and Coal Mine Closures, Moffat County Wants \$118 Million in Help from the Company That Owns Them," *The Colorado Sun*, June 17, 2024, <http://coloradosun.com/2024/06/17/moffat-county-coal-mine-power-just-transition-tri-state/>.

⁴⁶ "OJT News: \$70M Community Assistance Package for Moffat and Craig," Colorado Department of Labor and Employment, June 27, 2024, <https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/CODLE/bulletins/3a54f82>.

⁴⁷ Eli Pace, "In a First-of-Its-Kind Deal, Craig and Moffat County Secure Tens of Millions of Dollars, Water Rights and More in Coal Plant Closure," *Steamboat Pilot*, June 29, 2024, <https://www.steamboatpilot.com/news/in-a-first-of-its-kind-deal-craig-and-moffat-county-secure-tens-of-millions-of-dollars-water-rights-and-more-in-coal-plant-closure/>.



Funding Opportunities

S4. Promote Economic and Community Development

Federal Funding Opportunities

Name	Agency	Description
Public Works and Economic Adjustment Assistance (PWEAA) Programs	Economic Development Administration (EDA)	Purpose: To support communities in pursuing a wide range of economic development activities and assist communities to advance to the next level of economic development. Eligibility: Tribe, consortium of Tribes, state, county, city, or other political subdivision, institution of higher education, consortium of institutions of higher education, public or private nonprofit organizations. Funding Terms: Competitive grants and cooperative agreements; \$100k–\$30 million/award. Award amounts per fiscal year are subject to the availability of funds. Timeline: No application submission deadlines. Applications will be accepted on an ongoing basis until otherwise noted.
Planning and Local Technical Assistance	Economic Development Administration (EDA)	Purpose: Provides planning and local technical assistance investments to support economic development, foster job creation, and attract private investment in economically distressed areas of the United States. Eligibility: Tribe, consortium of Tribes, state, county, city, or other political subdivision, institution of higher education, consortium of institutions of higher education, public or private nonprofit organizations. Funding Terms: Competitive grant or technical assistance; \$70k–\$100k/award subject to the availability of funds. Timing: No application submission deadlines. Applications will be accepted on an ongoing basis until otherwise noted.
Advanced Manufacturing Production Tax Credit 45X	Department of the Treasury (USD)	Purpose: Tax credit that supports the manufacturing of qualifying clean energy technologies, including components needed for solar and wind projects, inverters, batteries, and critical materials. Eligibility: Domestic manufacturers. Funding Terms: The value of the credit depends on the technology being manufactured. There is no cap on the credit. Timing: Will be available 2023–2029 and will phase out completely by 2032

State Funding Opportunities

- Minnesota Department of Iron Range Resources & Rehabilitation (IRRR)
 - Workforce Development Grants
- Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED)
 - Community Energy Transition Grant
 - Redevelopment Grant Program
 - Demolition Loan Programs



S5. Advance Sustainability Initiatives

Engage the community and utilities in leveraging the benefits of the clean energy transition.

Impact: The clean energy transition isn't just limited to utilities. Local governments, businesses, community organizations, and individuals can participate and benefit—especially with many new state and federal opportunities. Actions in this strategy are focused on supporting energy efficiency and renewable energy and advocating for carbon-free power generation by the utility.

Desired Outcomes:

1. Expanded power generation options at Boswell and within the community.
2. Households of all income levels can leverage incentives to afford clean energy options.
3. Increased community awareness around the need for a sustainable transition.

Partners: Itasca County (County), Cities, Minnesota Department of Iron Range Resources & Rehabilitation (IRRR), Blandin Foundation, Minnesota Power (MP), Natural Resources Research Institute (NRRI), Itasca Economic Development Corporation (IEDC), Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), Minnesota Energy Transition Office (ETO), Energy Transition Advisory Committee (ETAC), Arrowhead Regional Development Commission (ARDC), Clean energy nonprofits, Utilities

Momentum:

- Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe has pursued a wide variety of climate and clean energy projects, and was recently awarded a multimillion-dollar Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Community Change Grant for a resilience hub that will provide essential services during emergencies and will be equipped with a rooftop solar and battery storage system.
- Minnesota Power has invested in solar energy in the region, developing three utility-scale solar projects producing 22.4 MW.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ "Solar Projects," Minnesota Power.



Actions	Partners	Timeline
a Align transition efforts with other sustainability plans, including city clean energy plans, and the State of Minnesota's Climate Action Framework	County, Utilities, Clean energy nonprofits	Q1 2025
b Empower local landowners to self-generate with solar energy and provide solar installation grants for Itasca County residents	County	Q2 2025
c Seek resources to implement and maximize energy efficiency in housing, public buildings, and businesses to reduce energy burden, and collaborate with clean energy organizations to encourage adoption of clean energy technologies	County, Cities, Utilities, Clean energy nonprofits	Q3 2025
d Dedicate staff capacity to identification of clean energy and sustainability-related grant opportunities, applications, and management. Curate a library of data and other resources that will support successful grant applications.	IRRR, Blandin Foundation, IEDC, ETO, ARDC	Q3 2025
e Convene a regional biomass consortium to build the scientific basis for responsible use, and leverage past learning to encourage adoption	IEDC, NRRI, DEED	Q4 2025
f Engage with Minnesota Power to consider carbon-free power generation and storage options (e.g., biomass, nuclear, wind, solar, hydroelectric): ☐ Provide an accessible way for community members to provide input to Minnesota Power on replacement options for Boswell, including public comments and testimony during future IRP processes	IEDC, MP, ETAC, NRRI	Q1 2026

COMMUNITY CASE STUDY:

Pennsylvania is experiencing the closure of coal mines throughout the state, and a nonprofit called Grow Rural PA sought to revitalize rural communities affected by these closures. Grow Rural PA received a \$100,000 investment from the U.S. Department of Energy's Capacity Building for Repurposing Energy Assets grant program. With these funds, they are developing a roadmap to support communities on a variety of sustainable, economic, and workforce development strategies to aid in the transition. They plan to use solar energy to produce green hydrogen and clean water contaminated by acid mine drainage, among other initiatives.⁴⁹

49 "Rural Pennsylvania Forges Partnerships to Improve Environment and Support Local Workforce," Interagency Working Group on Coal and Power Plant Communities and Economic Revitalization, September 26, 2024, <https://energycommunities.gov/rural-pennsylvania-forges-partnerships-to-improve-environment-and-support-local-workforce/>.



Funding Opportunities

S5. Advance Sustainability Initiatives

Federal Funding Opportunities

Name	Agency	Description
Rural Energy for America Program (REAP) Renewable Energy Systems & Energy Efficiency Improvement Guaranteed Loans & Grants	Department of Agriculture (USDA)	Purpose: Loan financing and grant funding to agricultural producers and rural small businesses to implement renewable energy systems or energy efficiency improvements. Eligibility: Rural small businesses, agricultural producers located in rural areas with populations of 50,000 residents or less. Funding Terms: Competitive loan guarantees on loans up to 75 percent of total eligible project costs; grants for up to 50 percent of total eligible project costs; and combined grant and loan guarantee funding up to 75% of total eligible project costs. Timing: Application cycle for FY 25–27 is between July 1 and March 31 of each fiscal year. Applications submitted outside this window will not be considered.
Energy Improvements in Rural or Remote Areas (ERA)	Department of Energy (DOE)	Purpose: Provides support for rural and remote communities to build clean energy projects that benefit their communities. Eligibility: Tribes and Tribal organizations, state and local governmental entities, nonprofit and for-profit entities, rural electric cooperatives, farming associations and cooperatives, labor unions, institutions of higher education, and both incorporated and unincorporated consortia. Funding Terms: Competitive cooperative agreements; \$400 million total; \$2 million–\$50 million/award. Timing: FY 25 due dates: concept paper (2/27/2025); full application (8/25/2025).
Renewable Energy Tax Credits & Energy Community Tax Credit Bonus	Department of the Treasury (USDOT)	Purpose: The Clean Electricity Production Tax Credit 45/45Y provides a tax credit for facilities with zero emissions electricity generation (e.g., wind, biomass, geothermal, solar), while the Clean Electricity Investment Tax Credit 48/48E provides a tax credit for investing in the installation of projects that generate electricity with zero emissions. Both credits can be increased for projects that are located in an energy community (through the Energy Community Tax Credit Bonus) and/or meet certain requirements for prevailing wage and apprenticeships, and domestic content. See this overview from Rocky Mountain Institute (RMI) for more information on other clean energy tax credits and their applicability. Eligibility: Tax-exempt entities (e.g., local governments, schools, churches) can now leverage these and other clean energy tax credits through elective pay (also known as direct pay). After eligible projects are completed, the IRS provides payment for the full value of the credit. Timing: Available through 2032.



Clean Energy to Communities (C2C)	Department of Energy (DOE) and National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL)	Purpose: Advances community-led clean energy progress by providing local governments, electric utilities, and community-based organizations with cutting-edge analysis and validation from the U.S. DOE's national laboratories. Service: Technical assistance, peer learning. Structure: Peer learning cohorts and one-on-one assistance through the Expert Match offering.
State Funding Opportunities		
Home Energy Rebate Programs (HOMES & HEAR)	Department of Energy (DOE); funding distributed by Minnesota Department of Commerce (DOC)	Purpose and Eligibility: The Minnesota DOC is in the process of designing two statewide home energy rebate programs that will distribute DOE funding for energy projects in existing single-family and multifamily homes. The Home Efficiency Rebate (HOMES) program will provide rebates of \$2,000–\$8,000 to income-qualified households for energy efficiency improvements, while the Home Electrification and Appliance Rebate (HEAR) program will provide rebates to replace non-electric appliances with electric appliances. Timing: Commerce will open the program sometime in 2025, with the program running through 2031 or until all funds are expended.
Solar for All	Environmental Protection Agency (EPA); funding distributed by Minnesota Department of Commerce (DOC)	Purpose: The Minnesota DOC received \$62.5 million to support residential-serving solar projects for low-income and disadvantaged households across the state. More information about specific offerings will be released in 2025.
Minnesota Climate Innovation Finance Authority (MnCIFA)		Purpose: MnCIFA was established in 2023 as the state's green bank, which is designed to create financing options for qualified clean energy and greenhouse gas emissions reduction projects. As a State Energy Finance Institution, MnCIFA can also seek additional financing from the DOE Loan Programs Office (LPO). For example, MnCIFA recently submitted a \$150 million proposal to LPO that would bundle school solar projects across the state. This ability could be used to finance other types of clean energy projects. MnCIFA's 2025–2028 Investment Strategy vision states an explicit focus on "communities in which fossil fuel electric generating plants are retiring."



S6. Provide Workforce Support

Support, grow and retain the workforce in Itasca County through career pathways and training programs, new businesses and industries, and increased housing and childcare options.

Impact: This strategy is focused on supporting Boswell Energy Center workers, providing support to retain the existing Itasca County workforce, and attracting new workers to support new businesses and industries. Actions are focused on developing strong career pathways and training programs, increasing housing options for all types of workers, and increasing child care options to support the current and future workforce.

Desired Outcomes:

1. Fulfilling employment options for Boswell Energy Center employees.
2. Abundance of skilled workforce.
3. Increased utilization of workforce training grants and programs.
4. Increased housing options that meet workforce needs (e.g., single-family starter homes, affordable multifamily housing, justice-involved individuals, senior living options, shared living options).
5. Increased number of accessible child care spots (i.e., options that are nearby, affordable, and available at the necessary time of day).



APPENDIX A

DEMOGRAPHIC CONTEXT FOR CITY OF COHASSET AND ITASCA COUNTY





Broadband access for all who need it.

Partners: Childcare Aware, Childcare Community Partnership (CCP), Itasca County Housing and Redevelopment Authority (ICHRA), Minnesota Housing Partnership (MHP), Minnesota Department of Iron Range Resources & Rehabilitation (IRRR), Minnesota Office of Broadband Development (OBD), Minnesota Energy Transition Office (ETO), Minnesota Power (MP), Grand Rapids Economic Development Authority (GREDA), Habitat for Humanity (Habitat), Itasca County (County), Minnesota North College (“MN North”), The Forge, Itasca Area Schools Collaborative (IASC), Leech Lake Tribal College (LLTC), Northeast Minnesota Office of Job Training (JET), Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry (DLI), Kootasca Community Action (“Kootasca”), Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), Relevant employers

Momentum:

- ICHRA currently funds eight affordable single-family homes through their Land Trust Program.
- Grand Rapids EDA is moving forward with a 63-unit multifamily project that will be funded through tax increment financing, of which 13 units must be reserved for low-income qualified residents.⁵⁰

The Itasca County Local Housing Trust Fund will provide a sustainable source of funding for affordable housing development, additional projects through the community land trust, and housing rehabilitation work.

Actions		Partners	Timeline
a	Conduct a scan of best practices from other regions related to displaced energy worker support, child care, housing, and broadband	Childcare Aware, CCP, ICHRA, MHP, IRRR, OBD, ETO	Q2 2025
b	Research and educate partners about available funding and technical assistance for displaced workers, workforce development, child care, housing, and broadband	MP, ETO, CCP, DEED, MHP, Kootasca, ICHRA, GREDA, Habitat, OBD	Q3 2025
c	Invest in creation of MN North employee retraining program for Boswell employees	CCP, DEED	Q4 2025
d	Provide region-specific technical assistance for local governments on planning and zoning to support housing	MHP, ICHRA, Kootasca, GREDA, Habitat	Q4 2025
e	Fund a child care navigator to coordinate the region's child care provider network, pool resources, and help potential new providers (e.g., help people navigate the licensing process)	County, Relevant employers	Q4 2025
f	Identify, develop, and promote needed diverse career pathways in child care and construction	MN North, The Forge, IASC, LLTC, JET, DEED, DLI, Relevant employers	Q1 2026

⁵⁰ Megan Buffington, “Proposed 63-Unit Downtown Grand Rapids Apartments Moves Forward,” KAXE, August 29, 2024, <https://www.kaxe.org/local-news/2024-08-29/four-story-downtown-grand-rapids-apartment-moves-forward>.



g	Seek funding for housing, including: - Funding to capitalize the Itasca County LHTF - Funding for housing projects that can reduce the “build-to-sell or rent” funding gap (e.g., water infrastructure, pre-development, land acquisition) - Funding for housing rehab and maintenance work to help preserve existing housing	MHP, ICHRA, Kootasca, GREDA, Habitat	Q1 2026
h	Seek sustainable funding sources that fill child care operational funding gaps (e.g., increasing wages to decrease staff turnover, paying facilities fees, etc.)	CCP, DEED, IEDC, Relevant employers, Childcare Aware	Q1 2026
i	Provide support for Boswell Energy Center workers, including job training and access to career pathways	MP, MN North, The Forge, IASC, LLTC, JET, DEED, DLI, Relevant employers	Q1 2026

COMMUNITY CASE STUDY: XCEL ENERGY'S WORKFORCE TRANSITION PLAN

The Sherburne County Generating Station (Sherco) was once the largest electric generating facility in the State of Minnesota. With a nameplate generating capacity of 2,400 MW, Sherco powered 1.5 million homes and employed hundreds of workers.⁵¹ The power plant, which consists of three units, has begun the process of retirement. Unit 2 was retired on December 31, 2023, and Units 1 and 3 are planned for retirement in 2026 and 2030, respectively.⁵² Recognizing the significant impact the plant retirement will have on its workers, Xcel Energy has committed to a thorough workforce transition plan. This plan will rely heavily on conversations with current employees to identify successful pathways for transition, which could include supporting employees in upskilling, reskilling, or relocating employees within the company. In addition, Xcel Energy intends to foster an incoming workforce that is more diverse and resilient by providing ongoing employee assistance programs and hiring union labor.⁵³

Funding Opportunities

S6. Provide Workforce Support		
Federal Funding Opportunities		
Name	Agency	Description

⁵¹ Ryan Mills, “The Sherco Clean Repowering: How One Community Turned a Coal Plant into a Hub for a New Clean Economy,” RMI, November 8, 2024, <https://rmi.org/the-sherco-clean-repowering-how-one-community-turned-a-coal-plant-into-a-hub-for-a-new-clean-economy/>.

⁵² “Xcel Energy retires first coal unit at Minnesota power plant,” Xcel Energy, January 4, 2024, <https://stories.xcelenergy.com/ArticlePage/?id=Xcel-Energy-retires-first-coal-unit-at-Sherco#:~:text=Xcel%20Energy%20plans%20to%20retire,company's%20full%20exit%20from%20coal>.

⁵³ Minnesota Public Utilities Commission, *In the matter of Xcel Energy's 2024–2040 Upper Midwest Integrated Resource Plan*, Docket No. E002/RP–24–67, 2024–2040 Upper Midwest Integrated Resource Plan (February 1, 2024).



APPENDIX B

PROCESS AND PARTICIPANTS





Strengthening Community Colleges (SCC5) Training Grants	Department of Labor (DOL)	Purpose: The purpose of this grant program is to build community colleges' capacity to meet the skill development needs of employers and equitably support students in obtaining good jobs in in-demand industries. Grantees will enhance sector-based career pathways programs using strategies rooted in evidence and designed to build further evidence of the effectiveness of sector-based career pathways programs in leading to positive employment outcomes. Eligibility: Public, state, Tribal controlled institutions of higher education at which the associate degree is primarily the highest degree awarded. Funding Terms: Competitive grant; \$1.5 million–\$5.75 million/award. Timing: Annual
Good Jobs in Clean Energy Prize	Department of Energy (DOE)	Purpose: Fund to encourage and support coalition-building in communities across the country that focus on creating quality jobs and fostering an equitable and inclusive workforce in clean energy sectors. Eligibility: Coalition composed of at least one of each of the following entities: labor organizations, clean energy employers, community-based organizations, public agencies, education and workforce providers. Funding Terms: Competitive prize; coalitions must compete and win in Phase One of the prize to qualify to compete in Phase Two and Phase Three of the prize. Phase One: \$50k/award; Phase Two: \$100k/award; Phase Three: \$125k –\$300k/award. Timing: Phase One: 1/31/2025; Phase Two: 9/30/2025; Phase Three: 11/20/2025.

State Funding Opportunities

Additional Grant Offices and Programs

- Minnesota Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF)
 - Childcare Assistance Program
 - Childcare Access Grants
- Minnesota Department of Iron Range Resources & Rehabilitation (IRRR)
 - Housing, Commercial and Residential Redevelopment, and Workforce Development Grants
- Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED)
 - Transformative Career Pathway: Capacity Building Competitive Grants
 - Border-to-Border Broadband Development Grant Program



Appendices

**APPENDIX A: DEMOGRAPHIC CONTEXT FOR
CITY OF COHASSET AND ITASCA COUNTY**

APPENDIX B: PROCESS AND PARTICIPANTS

APPENDIX C: STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING SUMMARIES

APPENDIX D: TASK FORCE MEETING SUMMARIES

APPENDIX E: SPRING TOWN HALL MEETINGS SUMMARY

APPENDIX F: FALL TOWN HALL MEETINGS SUMMARY

APPENDIX G: SPRING COMMUNITY TOWN HALL SURVEY RESULTS

APPENDIX H: FALL COMMUNITY TOWN HALL SURVEY RESULTS

APPENDIX I: ACTION IDEAS SURVEY SUMMARY

APPENDIX J: ACTION IDEAS WORKSHOP RESULTS

APPENDIX K: CURRENT REALITIES, SUCCESS INDICATORS, AND ACTION STEPS

Appendix A: Demographic Context for City of Cohasset and Itasca County

**Figure A.1. Selected Demographic and Economic Statistics
for Cohasset and Itasca County, 2022**

	Cohasset	Pct. Total	Itasca County	Pct. Total
Population	2,683		45,054	
Change in Population Since 2000	202	8.1%	1,062	2.4%
Under 18	609	22.7%	9,166	20.3%
18–34	466	17.4%	7,313	16.2%
35–64	941	35.1%	17,471	38.8%
65+	667	24.9%	11,104	24.6%
White Alone	2,473	92.2%	40,432	89.7%



Native American Alone	44	1.6%	1,286	2.9%
2+ Races	101	3.8%	2,577	5.7%
All Other Races	65	2.4%	759	1.7%
Change in BIPOC Population Since 2000	127	153.0%	2,302	97.5%
Median Household Income	\$76,989		\$63,962	
Poverty Status	145	5.4%	5,161	11.8%
Total Employment (16 and over)	1,124	53.4%	19,200	52.0%
Unemployment	127	6.0%	697	3.7%

Source: "American Community Survey 2022," U.S. Census Bureau, Social Explorer, <https://www.socialexplorer.com/data/ACS2022/metadata/?ds=ACS22>.

Cohasset's population grew steadily from 1970 to 2010 and has been stable since. As seen in Figure A.1, it trends somewhat younger than Itasca County overall, with a larger proportion of the population under age 35. While the community is over 90% white, it does have a growing Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) population, which has more than doubled since 2000.

Cohasset has a median household income of just under \$77,000, which, while still lower than the state of Minnesota median, is the highest of any community with a population over 500 in the Taconite Assistance Area covering current and former mining communities across seven counties in northeast Minnesota. Its poverty rate is less than half the county and national rates, making it a relative success story in a region that has undergone notable economic disruptions in recent decades.



APPENDIX C

STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING SUMMARIES



APPENDIX C

JUST TRANSITION STEERING COMMITTEE

Wednesday, January 10, 2024 | 11:00AM – 12:00PM

Virtual Only, Join Zoom Meeting Here: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/2602699615>

MEETING SUMMARY

I. Welcome & Introductions

Elissa Hansen, Facilitator, called the meeting to order at 11:05 and asked participants to introduce themselves.

Next, Tamara Lowney of the Itasca Economic Development Corporation (IEDC) welcomed participants and explained the background on IEDC's efforts to apply for Just Transition funding. IEDC, Northspan, Center for Energy and Environment (CEE), and Great Plains Institute (GPI) have been working to develop a plan for the engagement over the next year.

IEDC has developed a Google Drive with extensive background information, which is available here: https://drive.google.com/drive/u/1/folders/1_oRBygmvQ4JEEUwanJ1PBszgoMaen5Zk

Hansen reviewed the agenda with the group.

II. Refresher

- Draft Guiding Principles
- Draft 5 Themes for Action
- Draft Vision

At an August 2023 meeting, the group adopted guiding principles that Minnesota Power had developed for its CAPs and added two new principles:

- Be comfortable with being uncomfortable
- Be okay without immediate resolution.

The steering committee also participated in a consensus workshop to answer the question: What innovative, substantial actions could the group take to move toward a just transition? Themes for action included:

- Storytelling
- Welcoming
- Growing
- Innovating
- Facilitating

The group also developed the following vision in the August workshop: *Community investment for the future sustainable energy shift.*

The group affirmed the new guiding principles, themes for action, and vision.

III. Review and Provide Feedback Scope of Work and Roles & Responsibilities

The Scope of Work was sent to steering committee members in January. Hansen reviewed highlights with the group, which then discussed and revised the scope of work to reflect the variety of potential outcomes of the energy transition at Boswell.

JUST TRANSITION STEERING COMMITTEE

Wednesday, January 10, 2024 | 11:00AM – 12:00PM

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IV. Review and Provide Feedback on the Steering Committee, Task Force, and Community Townhalls Process, Timeline and Actions

Hansen reviewed the three key groups who will guide the process:

- 1) A **Steering Committee** consisting of six key partner organizations who will help guide the overall process, including activities with the two groups below. This group will meet as outlined in the process document attached and will consist of the following organizations.
 1. City of Cohasset
 2. Itasca County
 3. Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe
 4. Department of Iron Range Resources & Rehabilitation
 5. Minnesota Power
 6. IEDC
- 2) A **Task Force** of up to 30 individuals, representing a broad array of perspectives and constituencies from the community, who will meet as outlined in the attached process document to develop a just transition vision and recommendations for action.
- 3) **Community Townhalls** to ensure the process is engaging and is informed by the broader community and region.

Hansen also covered roles & responsibilities of the facilitator organizations and the timeline for the process. The group made additions to clarify coordination with Minnesota Power's IRP process and explained how the process can be flexible, with the goal of completion by November. Documentation on the timeline has been shared with group members.

V. Recommendations for Task Force members

Lowney shared several initial suggestions for groups to include, including education, workforce development, elected officials, industry representatives, nonprofits, and businesses. Lowney challenged the group to think broadly and share "unusual suspects;" she noted there is budget to pay community member participants who would not be paid to attend. Ideas for participants generated by steering committee members included:

- State regulators (e.g., DNR, MPCA) – given past challenges with permitting and regulation, this perspective could be useful, if they are willing to participate. Jennifer Cady will consider potential names.
- Reif Center or arts person
- Carla Vita from the state Energy Transition Office cannot be a member of the task force, but she can be invited as an extra observer
- Labor representation
 - Building trades
 - IBEW Local 31
- Jim Houlihan/Ed Zabinski
- Cohasset city councilors
 - Andy Harkala also has a business
- Leech Lake band members
- Brian Peterson, Nelson Wood Shims
- Dave Lutz – innovator/entrepreneur, has a network of like-minded people
- Tapping ItasCAP list

JUST TRANSITION STEERING COMMITTEE

Wednesday, January 10, 2024 | 11:00AM – 12:00PM

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- Todd Jaranson, Lonza
 - Julie Lucas, Mining Minnesota
 - Kristen Vake, Iron Mining Association
 - Ben Benoit – District forest ranger with strong ties to LLBO
 - Faith community – can be very invested
 - Youth/student representatives – e.g., student council president, college student governance
 - Amanda MacDonell – Cohasset HRA
 - Hospitality – resorts in Itasca area; were opposed to Huber
 - Christina Bowstring – Cory Smith and Jennifer Cady have ties
 - Environmental groups
 - David Lick, Itasca Water Legacy
 - Itasca Tax Alliance – Rob Ward

The group discussed putting a call for participants out to the general public, but some expressed skepticism that this avenue would be fruitful.

Lowney asked participants to review this list and share more ideas by the end of the day on Monday, January 11. On Tuesday, Lowney will clean up the list and invites will follow.

VI. Choose Meeting Dates/Time

Hansen asked participants to send regular times when they are not available. A small Doodle poll may follow. The group will try to avoid Tuesdays due to county meetings.

VII. Next Steps

Participants should send their availability for meetings and review the list. The next meeting will be at the Bass Brook Community Center in Cohasset, and the subsequent meeting will be at Boswell. Future meetings may move around to meet the needs of task force members. Participants were also invited to share topics related to energy transitions that they would like to learn more about.

VIII. Adjourn

Hansen adjourned the meeting at 12:00 PM. Next meeting is March 25, 2024 at 1:00PM.

MEETING PARTICIPANTS

	Brett Skyles	Itasca County
x	Cory Smith	Itasca County
x	Arik Forsman	Minnesota Power
	Ana Vang	Minnesota Power
x	Jennifer Cady	Minnesota Power
x	Tamara Lowney	Itasca Economic Development Corporation
x	Matt Shermoen	Itasca Economic Development Corporation
	Andy MacDonell	City of Cohasset
x	Max Peters	City of Cohasset
x	Mandie Alto	Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe
x	Whitney Ridlon	Department of Iron Range Resources & Rehabilitation

APPENDIX C

JUST TRANSITION STEERING COMMITTEE

Wednesday, January 10, 2024 | 11:00AM – 12:00PM

Virtual Only, Join Zoom Meeting Here: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/2602699615>

MEETING FACILITATORS

X	Elissa Hansen	Northspan
x	Stefanie Sjelin	Northspan
x	Karl Schuettler	Northspan
x	Trevor Drake	GPI
x	Amy Ward	GPI
x	Catherine Kemp	GPI
	Marisa Bayer	CEE
X	Deidre Coleman	CEE

Respectively submitted,

Elissa Hansen

Northspan President/CEO

Email: ehansen@northspan.org

And

Karl Schuettler

Northspan Vice President

Email: kschuettler@northspan.org

JUST TRANSITION STEERING COMMITTEE

Monday, March 25, 2024 | 1:00PM – 2:30PM

Virtual Only, Join Zoom Meeting Here: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/2602699615>

MEETING SUMMARY

1. Welcome & Introductions

Hansen called the meeting to order at 1:06 PM and asked participants to introduce themselves.

2. TF Meeting #1 02.26.24

- Debrief
- Finalize Task Force Members

Hansen facilitated a discussion on the initial task force meeting. Comments included the following:

- Process seemed fine; some topics got a lot of conversation, which was something of a surprise. Good introduction.
- Underscored the scope of the challenge for Cohasset
- Showed how many people are in different places in terms of background, but all see the value in this work
- A few task force members are being added to represent the City of Grand Rapids and UPM as stakeholders; there was no additional feedback.
- Could there be more younger participants? We have the two students, but there isn't much generational diversity beyond that.

3. TF Meeting #2 04.22.24

- Review Draft Agenda
- Recommendations for edits
- What do you feel the speakers should focused on? Questions they should be answering?

Hansen shared a draft agenda for the second task force meeting, which focuses on state and national challenges and opportunities. Presenters include:

- Carla Vita from the DEED Energy Transition Office
 - Focus on ETAC recommendations and examples from within MN
 - Office just went through strategic planning – what were the outcomes?
 - DEED grants for transitioning communities – could be part of the presentation or just a handout, but useful
- Cynthia Winland of KeyLogic (a referral from GPI/CEE)
 - Develops federal interagency works group – could be a great opener, broader framing before moving on to state-level reps (Wade and Carla)
 - May have deeper knowledge on rural communities
- Wade Buchanan of the Colorado Office of Just Transition
- Rachel Young of the Just Transition Fund
- Potentially Grace Blanchard or someone from the National Association of Counties and BRECC, which can provide connections to other organizations from communities that do transitions – this may be their ideal role, and Elissa is working with them on details.

JUST TRANSITION STEERING COMMITTEE

Monday, March 25, 2024 | 1:00PM – 2:30PM

Virtual Only, Join Zoom Meeting Here: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/2602699615>

Observations and recommendations on the proposed speakers:

- We could have everyone stay on to do a panel at the end, or grouped by national vs. state focus.
- Framing question: what does it mean for any community going through a transition process to do it well?

4. Discuss Community Townhalls

Participants proposed potential locations for town halls and discussed their relative merits.

People have recommended having them in the same place in communities for consistency.

- Central school and Cohasset Community Center were proposed as venues in the survey responses, though a participant did not think Old Central would be conducive.
- The senior Center in Cohasset is good
- The breweries in Grand Rapids are comfortable spaces
- The CoHaus event space in Grand Rapids is also an option
- The Grand Rapids library has a decent meeting room
- Bigfork City Hall is nice
- Most communities have decent meeting rooms, including several heading up the Scenic Highway
- Keewatin community center and city hall room next to the council chamber in Nashwauk are options on the east end.
- Ball Club, Inger, and Ess Lake have centers we can use. People won't travel far for these.
- Deer River King School or high school have spaces that have worked in the past.
- IEDC has an upcoming event at Wizards in Nashwauk and will report on its suitability.

5. Next Steps

- Next steering committee meeting is already on calendars – Tuesday, May 28
- The group will do more outreach with the steering committee to ensure stronger participation
- Lowney shared that Mandie Aalto is leaving the Leech Lake planning office, which may be why she isn't attending; there will need to be more outreach with the Band to identify a new participant.
- IEDC is working with Giant Voices on logos and will have something to share with the whole team. It is using a past concept, which will keep the budget reasonable.
- Just Transition has access to technical assistance funding that could support site work, feasibility work, etc. to support this process. This could align very nicely with this group's goals. This funding is only available to people who have received these grants (12 total nationwide).

6. Adjourn

Hansen adjourned the meeting at 1:41 PM.

APPENDIX C

JUST TRANSITION STEERING COMMITTEE

Monday, March 25, 2024 | 1:00PM – 2:30PM

Virtual Only, Join Zoom Meeting Here: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/2602699615>

MEETING PARTICIPANTS

Brett	Skyles	Itasca County Administrator	Steering Committee
Jennifer	Cady	Minnesota Power	Steering Committee
Matt	Shermoen	IEDC	Steering Committee
Whitney	Ridlon	DIRRR	Steering Committee
Amy	Ward	Great Plains Institute	Facilitator
Catherine	Kemp	Great Plains Institute	Facilitator
Deirdre	Coleman	Center for Energy & Environment	Facilitator
Elissa	Hansen	Northspan	Facilitator
Karl	Schuettler	Northspan	Facilitator
Megan	Weck	Center for Energy & Environment	Facilitator
Trevor	Drake	Great Plains Institute	Facilitator

STEERING COMMITTEE DROPBOX

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/uv17mxdjxyqmqi9wwxjcy/h?rlkey=17eeeju0o65m38eic7qefnroc&dl=0>

Respectively submitted,

Elissa Hansen

Northspan President/CEO

Email: ehansen@northspan.org

And

Karl Schuettler

Northspan Vice President

Email: kschuettler@northspan.org

STEERING COMMITTEE

Monday, May 28, 2024 | 1:15 PM – 2:45 PM

Virtual Only, Join Zoom Meeting Here: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/2602699615>

MEETING SUMMARY

1. Welcome & Introductions – Elissa

Hansen called the meeting to order at 1:21 PM and asked participants to introduce themselves.

2. Logo for Itasca Community Taskforce Energy Transition – Tamara

Lowney shared the newly created logo for the taskforce with the group and IEDC has created a webpage with information on the process, which is available at <https://www.itascadv.org/energy-transition>. Partners are welcome to link directly to this page to help inform community members and stakeholders.

3. TF Meeting #2 04.22.24 Debrief – Elissa

Hansen shared invited any feedback on the April meeting and said that there have not been many requests for follow-up. Lowney heard from one participant who wanted to organize an advocacy effort to resist the conversion of Boswell, though she said this has yet to come up at town halls. This group is framing this process as a decision made at national and state levels; any lobbying efforts are independent of this process. Cady added that Minnesota Power's intent is to continue energy generation at Boswell in some form and will give further thought to the question.

4. May Community Townhalls Series Update – Tamara

Lowney shared that the three town halls to date showed there were more opportunities for community-level communications, and some thought there should have been further outreach. The messaging may struggle to resonate with the general public, since IEDC has made a serious effort. Food is important to drawing people in. Nonetheless, there were enough people at all three meetings to have good conversations, including task force members and IEDC board members.

Communities were different; Bigfork requested background education, leading to quality conversations. In Ess Lake, discussion was about impacts to the average person, while in Cohasset, it focused on impacts to the community and county. Janisch noted the relative disconnect in Bigfork and echoed Lowney's sentiments. Smaller communities were impressed that there was direct outreach, and this is a future avenue for similar efforts. The IEDC team is compiling ideas on places to show up in communities when possible. Hansen acknowledged Minnesota Power's presence at each meeting and the benefit of having Paul Undeland and Jodi Piekarski at the town halls.

5. Task Force Action Ideas Survey Update | Closes June 10 - Elissa

- a. Take the survey if you haven't! [Itasca Just Transition Task Force | Action Ideas Survey \(surveymonkey.com\)](https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/itasca-just-transition-task-force-action-ideas-survey)

Hansen invited anyone on the task force who has not yet taken the survey to do so. She shared that most town hall participants shared emails, so the survey has been sent to them.

6. TF Meeting #3 06.24.24 Agenda - Elissa

- a. Overview of Community Townhalls (8-10 minutes; Elissa has sent notes to Spencer)
- b. Handout of Area's Current Projects (2-3 minutes; in development by IEDC)
- c. Action Ideas Consensus Workshop: Idea generation and consensus building through focus conversation. Enabling the task force to create clearly focused, yet innovative and empowering action solutions that could move the needle of the task force vision.
 - i. Survey responses required!
- d. LOCATION: Cohasset Community Center Gym

STEERING COMMITTEE

Monday, May 28, 2024 | 1:15 PM – 2:45 PM

Virtual Only, Join Zoom Meeting Here: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/2602699615>

Hansen explained the consensus workshop model, which will take up the bulk of the agenda at this meeting. The meeting will end with a focus on the big, bucketed areas, and then in August, the group will dive into the buckets for more details. The steering committee will also bring a vision and mission to finalize to that meeting. Megan shared that GPI/CEE staff also have ToP training and can help with the workshop. These two meetings will be entirely in person.

The Forge is occupied for one of the chosen dates, and Cady offered the Boswell conference room. Hansen recommended the Cohasset Community Center and will be in touch with Peters to confirm.

7. Just Transition Fund Convening - Tamara
 - a. October 9, 2024 – October 11, 2024
 - b. InterContinental Washington D.C. - The Wharf, an IHG Hotel, 801 Wharf Street Southwest, Washington, DC 20024

Lowney attended this event last year and found it valuable, as it provided new connections across the country. She has applied for a grant that could pay for at least one more attendee. Lowney is on the planning committee.

Lowney also shared that the Just Transition Fund has technical assistance funding that is very open-ended, and IEDC is working on an application. Feedback from the town halls included more marketing work and a video series, so this is in motion to be part of the application, but she welcomes other ideas such as site work or feasibility studies that could be included in this funding request. There are few restrictions on how it could be used, as long as IEDC makes a compelling case. They hope to wrap up the grant request in the next two weeks; rough estimates are fine at this point. Funding must be spent in 2024.

Ward shared an example of a marketing video from Colorado:

<https://cnee.colostate.edu/energytransition/>

8. Adjourn

Hansen adjourned the meeting at 2:01 PM.

MEETING PARTICIPANTS

x	Brett Skyles	Itasca County
	Cory Smith	Itasca County
	Arik Forsman	Minnesota Power
	Ana Vang	Minnesota Power
x	Jennifer Cady	Minnesota Power
x	Tamara Lowney	Itasca Economic Development Corporation
	Matt Shermoen	Itasca Economic Development Corporation
	Andy MacDonell	City of Cohasset
x	Max Peters	City of Cohasset
	Mandie Alto	Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe
	Brian McCoy	Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe

STEERING COMMITTEE

Monday, May 28, 2024 | 1:15 PM – 2:45 PM

Virtual Only, Join Zoom Meeting Here: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/2602699615>

	Whitney Ridlon	Department of Iron Range Resources & Rehabilitation
x	Jason Janisch	Department of Iron Range Resources & Rehabilitation

MEETING FACILITATORS

x	Elissa Hansen	Northspan
	Stefanie Sjelin	Northspan
x	Karl Schuettler	Northspan
	Trevor Drake	GPI
x	Amy Ward	GPI
x	Catherine Kemp	GPI
	Marisa Bayer	CEE
x	Megan Weck	CEE
	Deidre Coleman	CEE

*Respectively submitted,**Elissa Hansen**Northspan President/CEO**Email: ehansen@northspan.org**And**Karl Schuettler**Northspan Vice President**Email: kschuettler@northspan.org***STEERING COMMITTEE DROPBOX**

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/ty3ku0o14cm9s0ldxpd4i/AERAUD87m8DME69ppffEI38?rlkey=nnn7dza1ijgq3sui36cn1dz94&st=hcb9vbgf&dl=0>

STEERING COMMITTEE

Wednesday, July 31, 2024 | 9:00 AM – 10:30 AM

Virtual Only, Join Zoom Meeting Here: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/2602699615>**MEETING SUMMARY**

1. Welcome & Introductions – Elissa

Hansen called the meeting to order at 9:05AM and asked participants to introduce themselves.

2. TF Meeting #3 06.24.24 Debrief – Elissa

Hansen shared invited any feedback on the June meeting. Cady said it was a strong discussion and it struck her how big the conversation was; she appreciated the facilitation and channeling it back toward actionable next steps. Peters has suggested honoring that this is not a new discussion and looking at what has and hasn't been done well so far. Shermoen said the table talk went well and there were no negatives. Cady noted that Ben Benoit shared that much of this discussion has been focused on Boswell and MP, but many people in Itasca County are served by different utilities, so there is room to talk more about the big picture and the differing effects on MP's neighbors.

Lowney said the group is good at talking about the community and economic development pieces, but certain voices were somewhat limited, and shared some of the work the planning group has been doing to bring information from other groups (e.g., housing, child care, environmental) back to the table. These issues should at least be identified as challenges, even if the group does not take direct action on them. People are in very different places of digesting the information, and even people in important positions don't necessarily know what's going on.

Hansen suggested holding one-hour open houses ahead of the August meeting to answer questions. Lowney is open to this idea but also just thinks the information-sharing will take time, and she invited participants to assist with marketing efforts.

3. Finalize Vision Recommendation

- a. DRAFT Vision: *A community invested in our future sustainable energy shift.*
- b. We will do this by:
 - i. Mobilizing Community Engagement
 - ii. Developing Entrepreneur and Business Opportunities
 - iii. Promoting Economic and Community Development
 - iv. Leveraging Partnerships and Advocacy
 - v. Advancing Sustainability Initiatives
 - vi. Providing Workforce Support

Hansen shared the draft vision recommendation with the group and invited feedback. Skyles shared that it still looks accurate to him and says it is clear. Cady echoed this sentiment. Peters wondered if workforce housing could be added as well; this could perhaps nest under workforce support and based on the input from the housing group, it may be worth calling out directly, e.g., "Providing Workforce Housing and Support." Lowney agreed with all comments.

4. TF Meeting #4 08.26.24 @ Bass Brook Community Center Agenda - Elissa

- a. IRP Update
- b. Review & Approve Vision
- c. Actions Workshop: Current Reality, Success measure, & Actions for each Strategy
- d. Determine what could be specific, measurable priority actions, who may be part of the solution, and potential timelines.

STEERING COMMITTEE

Wednesday, July 31, 2024 | 9:00 AM – 10:30 AM

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Hansen gave an overview of the proposed agenda for the August task force meeting. Most of the meeting will be a workshop, and the group will likely be split up among the topical areas to identify the actions that will advance each strategy. The group will hopefully be able to put these actions on a proposed timeline, too.

Lowney suggested the Bass Brook Center as the venue due to its size and layout; Hansen said this can work. Shermoen asked if we could send out prompting questions; Hansen said yes, these could be sent along with the agenda.

Lowney gave another plug for the marketing committee, along with the planning committee for the summit. Both will meet for the first time in August and Lowney would appreciate input on speakers, topics, and other contributions. She wants it to represent everyone's work in this process, not just IEDC. A presence from senior leadership from partner organizations would be valuable. The dates are February 5 and 6, so people should begin putting things on calendars.

Cady requested that Kate Van Daele from Minnesota Power be included on the marketing and planning committee. Van Daele will be added to the steering committee as well. Jennifer Kuklinski may also help plan the summit to connect this process to the IRP.

Skyles requested a brief update on the IRP. Cady shared that a technical advisory group is meeting, along with another looking at societal costs and benefits. Large group stakeholder meetings will take place in a few months as MP awaits rules and guidance from the Public Utilities Commission. Lowney suggested adding an IRP update to the task force meeting agenda.

Lowney reminded the group that publicity around another round of community town halls will begin soon. There is a possibility of adding another eastern Itasca County location (e.g., Coleraine or Bovey). These sessions are designed to give feedback on the plans developed to date. There will also be a public survey to give people another avenue for responses.

Hansen adjourned the meeting at 9:42 AM.

MEETING PARTICIPANTS

X	Brett Skyles	Itasca County
	Cory Smith	Itasca County
	Kate Van Daele	Minnesota Power
	Arik Forsman	Minnesota Power
X	Jennifer Cady	Minnesota Power
X	Tamara Lowney	Itasca Economic Development Corporation
X	Matt Shermoen	Itasca Economic Development Corporation
	Andy MacDonell	City of Cohasset
X	Max Peters	City of Cohasset
	Whitney Ridlon	Department of Iron Range Resources & Rehabilitation
X	Jason Janisch	Department of Iron Range Resources & Rehabilitation

STEERING COMMITTEE

Wednesday, July 31, 2024 | 9:00 AM – 10:30 AM

Virtual Only, Join Zoom Meeting Here: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/2602699615>

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	Trevor Drake	GPI
X	Amy Ward	GPI
X	Catherine Kemp	GPI
X	Megan Weck	CEE
X	Deidre Coleman	CEE

Respectively submitted,

Elissa Hansen

Northspan President/CEO

Email: ehansen@northspan.org

And

Karl Schuettler

Northspan Vice President

Email: kschuettler@northspan.org

STEERING COMMITTEE DROPBOX

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/ty3ku0o14cm9s0ldxpd4i/AERAUD87m8DME69ppffEl38?rlkey=nnn7dza1ijgq3sui36cn1dz94&st=hcb9vbgf&dl=0>

STEERING COMMITTEE

Monday, September 23, 2024 | 1:00 PM – 2:30 PM

Virtual Only, Join Zoom Meeting Here: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/2602699615>

MEETING SUMMARY

1. Welcome & Introductions, Elissa

Hansen called the meeting to order at 1:04 PM and asked participants to introduce themselves.

2. Integrated Resource Plan Update, Jennifer Cady, Minnesota Power

Cady shared that Minnesota Power is pleased to announce that, in response to an RFP for additional solar capacity, MP chose an 85 MW solar project just outside of Boswell on 600 acres that will interconnect with the site. MP is eager to invest in clean energy at the Boswell site. The project will require regulatory approval.

Within the IRP process, Cady shared there was a meeting on societal cost-benefits this morning, followed by a tour of the Hibbard Energy Center. This Thursday, the Public Utilities Commission will have a hearing on how to implement the carbon free by 2040 standard, including what technologies will count. A variety of fuel sources including biomass, trash, carbon capture, hydrogen, and other substances are up for discussion. MP supports a proposal that would consider combustible technologies as eligible depending on a carbon life cycle analysis. It will be a lively hearing due to a controversial Twin Cities facility, but Cady does expect some action at the end of the process.

3. Results of Needs Assessment of Impacted Communities Presentation, Carla Vita,

Director Energy Transition, Department of Employment and Economic Development
Vita shared that, in June, several stakeholders were asked to provide input to the federal intergovernmental working group (IWG) for a needs assessment. DEED sent a survey to 23 impacted communities and received 10 in response. Vita did not share the results in full because parts are identifiable by respondent, but she shared some highlights. Workforce development, supporting small businesses, and supporting current businesses emerged as major themes. Types of funding considered most necessary include grants without required match, though many were receptive to any type of funding. Housing and child care came up repeatedly as themes. IWG said it had not heard these needs before, so this was a valuable piece of input.

The energy transition advisory committee (ETAC) has identified some potential upgrades to the IWG website. It has thorough resources, but it is rarely used and often not user-friendly. Respondents preferred webinars and virtual meetings and had frustrations with past interactions with federal partners. Minnesota does not have an action team for the transition and some stakeholders believe this would be an additional valuable federal resource, along with resources before a closure happens.

4. TF Meeting #4 08.26.24 Debrief, Elissa Hansen, Northspan

Comments about the effectiveness of 6 facilitators at each strategy area and the process worked for good discussion.

STEERING COMMITTEE

Monday, September 23, 2024 | 1:00 PM – 2:30 PM

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5. Draft Document, Actions, & Timeline Overview to Take in Further Recommended Edits, Elissa Hansen, Northspan

Schuettler walked through the draft document and shared progress to date. Task force members provided additional input. A final draft will be shared for review in the next few weeks.

6. Focus for 2nd set of Community Townhalls, Tamara, IEDC
 - i. Who will be at each town halls?
 1. September 25th and 26th
 2. October 15th and 16th

Hansen shared the planned agenda for the community town halls, which will include introductions, an IRP update, an energy transition update, a timeline and strategies overview, a strategy posterboard walk around, and a close out conversation.

7. TF Meeting #5 10.31.2024 Agenda, Elissa Hansen, Northspan
 - a. Draft of report with gut check and challenge perceptions.
 - i. Provide edit enhancements.
 - b. LOCATION: Boswell Energy Center, Cohasset, MN & VIRTUAL

Hansen shared plans for the agenda. The group discussed moving the date, since the chosen date is Halloween. Hansen will check with Lowney and follow up potentially with a Doodle to the whole group.

8. Ongoing Survey purpose, Elissa & Tamara
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ItascaCommunityEnergyTransitionOngoingSurvey>

Hansen shared a draft survey designed to collect additional input on the process. The survey will remain open to gather additional input, and IEDC and Northspan will pull results periodically to see if it can inform the process.

9. Adjourn

Hansen adjourned the meeting at 1:51 PM.

STEERING COMMITTEE

Monday, September 23, 2024 | 1:00 PM – 2:30 PM

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X	Brett Skyles	Itasca County
	Cory Smith	Itasca County
	Kate Van Daele	Minnesota Power
	Arik Forsman	Minnesota Power
X	Jennifer Cady	Minnesota Power
	Tamara Lowney	Itasca Economic Development Corporation
X	Matt Shermoen	Itasca Economic Development Corporation
	Andy MacDonell	City of Cohasset
X	Max Peters	City of Cohasset
X	Whitney Ridlon	Department of Iron Range Resources & Rehabilitation
	Jason Janisch	Department of Iron Range Resources & Rehabilitation
X	Carla Vita	DEED
X	Gavin Herrera	Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe

MEETING FACILITATORS

X	Elissa Hansen	Northspan
	Stefanie Sjelin	Northspan
X	Karl Schuettler	Northspan
	Trevor Drake	GPI
	Amy Ward	GPI
	Catherine Kemp	GPI
X	Megan Weck	CEE
	Deidre Coleman	CEE

*Respectively submitted,**Elissa Hansen**Northspan President/CEO**Email: ehansen@northspan.org**And**Karl Schuettler**Northspan Vice President**Email: kschuettler@northspan.org***STEERING COMMITTEE DROPBOX**

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/ty3ku0o14cm9s0ldxpd4i/AERAUD87m8DME69ppffEI38?rlkey=nnn7dza1ijgq3sui36cn1dz94&st=hcb9vbgf&dl=0>



APPENDIX D

TASK FORCE MEETING SUMMARIES



ITASCA JUST TRANSITION TASK FORCE

Monday, February 26, 2024 | 1:00 – 4:00PM

In-Person Bass Brook Community Center [305 NW 1st Ave, Cohasset, MN 55721](#)

with Zoom virtual option here: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/2602699615>

Task Force Attendees: Ben Benoit, Blake Bailey, David Lick, Ed Zabinski, Jason Quiggin, Kristin Renskers, Lisa Marcis, Malissa Bahr, Matt Grose, Paul Peltier, Shane Zahrt, Shayla Drake

Absent: Brandy Toft, Brian Peterson, Carol Burr, Jaci David, Jim Houlihan, Joni Namyst, Julie Lucas, Andy MacDonell, Jennifer Cady

Other Attendees: Corey Smith, Max Peters, Arik Forsman, Tamara Lowney, Pete Makowski, Josh Bergstad, Angie McKinley, Brett Skyles, Matt Shermoen, Mandi Aalto

Facilitator Attendees: Deirdre Coleman, Elissa Hansen, Karl Schuettler, Amy Ward

Welcome & Introductions

Elissa Hansen, Northspan President & CEO, called the meeting to order at 1:05 PM. She gave an overview of the agenda and invited participants to introduce themselves. Tamara Lowney of IEDC then gave an overview of the purpose of the Just Transition Task Force, acknowledging Minnesota Power's work to prepare for this transition and explaining some of the unique funding opportunities available to assist. She explained the importance of communication without driving fear and invited input on the process, no matter how much experience people have with the concept of an energy transition.

Minnesota Power: How are we messaging transition?

Arik Forsman, Manager – Strategic Accounts, email: aforsman@mnpower.com

Forsman introduced himself and gave an overview of Minnesota Power (MP) and the companies under the Allete umbrella all have roles in the energy transition. He noted Allete's market leadership in energy transition and shared the unique customer mix of MP, with 70% of its sales coming from industrial sales, which is driven by the region's natural resource-based economy. MP has a goal to be 100% carbon free by 2050 and reached 59% in 2022. The Minnesota legislature has set a goal for the state to have 100% carbon free energy by 2040. The company had nine coal units in 2012, and the vast majority of its energy came from carbon; seven of those nine units have since closed or transitioned, including two Boswell units that shuttered in 2019.

Forsman explained the importance of diversified resources in meeting energy needs, including baseload power from traditional plants; intermittent renewables (wind and solar); natural gas to stabilize generation when other sources are unavailable; purchased energy from the market; and demand response, in which users curtail their usage under certain circumstances to meet demand. The looming question will be how to manage the baseload without coal.

Forsman explained that the Boswell site is central to MP's operations. Its transmission infrastructure all runs from the site, which has opportunities for complementary generation, including solar at the Boswell site.

ITASCA JUST TRANSITION TASK FORCE

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MP is now evaluating its needs post-coal to maintain its baseload. Current Boswell capacity is as follows:

Unit 1- 68 MW (retired)

Unit 2- 68 MW (retired)

Unit 3- 335 MW

Unit 4- 468 MW

The Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) provides a 15-year outlook for how MP will serve its customers with energy. It recently completed its 2021 IRP, and the next IRP is beginning on a parallel track to the Just Transition group; there will be opportunities for the two groups to collaborate. The most recent IRP said Boswell will “cease coal” (not retire) Boswell units 3 and 4, and it ensured loss of tax revenue and jobs are criteria for consideration in the future, which MP considers to be wins for Cohasset. MP hopes to collaborate to develop a sustainable transition plan for its host communities.

Forsman answered questions following his presentation.

Ice Breaker

Coleman welcomed participants to think about what is top of mind for the scope of work for the task force.

- Zabinski asked if we are making recommendations and to whom, and how these outputs will be used. Lowney replied that there will be a strategic path and that this plan will be essential for accessing state and federal funding; it may not have a single home, but it will feed into many potential projects.
- Lowney clarified that the process is not a one-to-one replacement for lost tax base, but instead an opportunity to pursue unique funds for the community. This level of collaboration was essential for successful federal grant applicants in other communities.
- This group is not planning the future of Boswell, but looking at how the community can use this transition to bring in new business and resources.
- Lick asked if there are opportunities to talk with local businesses about supply chains to explore opportunities. Lowney replied that there are some, though the workforce shortage can limit local capacity. Lick emphasized the value of identifying many small wins to fill some of the gap.
- Smith emphasized the degree of the challenge of replacing the Boswell tax base for the city, county, and school district.
- Drake noted the importance of site readiness and finding uses that make sense for the region and the sites that are available or could be brought online.
- Renskers shared the concern about labor shortages and expressed the importance of keeping workers through the transition process, especially if they think their jobs have expiration dates; she noted workers have many technical skills that may not be perfect matches for existing openings. She also said that Boswell has excellent wages and benefits

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that may be difficult to replace. She added that there are fewer jobs associated with gas plants, and even fewer for wind and solar. Drake echoed the importance of thinking about transitional career opportunities.

- Lick asked about potential examples from other communities. Renskers shared that Xcel is able to re-absorb its workers elsewhere due to its size, while MP has less of an opportunity, a sentiment Forsman echoed. Lowney noted that many comparable Minnesota plants are in urban areas and the lack of comparable jobs in Itasca County.
- Grose asked about what “ceasing coal” (vs. “retirement”) could look like. Forsman explained that there may be opportunities to repurpose Boswell, potentially with biomass, if regulations allow it to be considered carbon-free. He added that the Public Utilities Commission is the ultimate stakeholder.
- Smith asked about moratoria; there is currently one on nuclear generation, while biomass is more ambiguous. There is an active public comment period on the topic through the PUC.
- Lick voiced support for exploring biomass and asked that local politicians address the question.
- Lowney will share information on the comment period with the group.
- Renskers asked about the most effective method to move on the biomass question. Forsman said Jennifer Cady could answer this question, and Hansen said the Just Transition group could have an advocacy role.
- Skyles reiterated the importance of advocacy.

Steering Committee Recommended Guiding Principles

Hansen shared recommended guiding principles for the group and provided context for them. She then facilitated a conversation with participants.

- Lowney expressed appreciation for not always recording and having all in-person meetings.
- Bailey appreciated the acknowledgment that people be comfortable with being uncomfortable.
- Drake appreciated the principle for having grace with others.
- Zabinski reiterated the importance hearing everyone’s voice.
- Quiggin noted the kids walking past the community center’s windows how this process will affect the community’s future.
- Hansen clarified the attendance expectation (3 of 5 task force meetings).
- Bahr suggested that we add “Own your own story” to the list, as members are not speaking on behalf of other organizations. The group agreed to add this principle.

ITASCA JUST TRANSITION TASK FORCE

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Drafting a Vision

Hansen explained that the steering committee held a workshop that includes a draft vision and several overarching areas that will be important components in this work. Hansen she said this vision will be workshopped in the third session when task force members have a better understanding of the scope. Lowney noted that we have outside resources that we will share for the group for those who are interested.

City of Cohasset Presentation with Q&A

Max Peters, Director of City Operations / Finance Director, email: maxp@cohasset-mn.com

Hansen introduced Peters, who presented on the Cohasset's history as an energy generation community, emphasizing the scope and scale of Boswell. He noted the size of the community, some general demographics, and its substantial tax capacity. Boswell is 70% of Cohasset's tax base; it lost \$3 million in capacity when Boswell Units 1 and 2 closed, and the end of coal operations at Boswell at Units 3 and 4 could result in another \$3 million loss each. If Boswell were to cease all operations, Cohasset's total tax capacity could drop from \$13 million in 2018 to \$4 million in 2035, resulting in city taxes rising by potentially 3.3 times.

Cohasset has five pillars of municipal excellence: 1) its tax levy and utility funds; 2) economic development; 3) state and federal assistance; 4) local government aid (LGA); and 5) Iron Range fiscal disparities funding. The community has pursued numerous economic development activities, many of which have fallen through, and even if they had all come to fruition, it would not replace half the potential tax base loss from a complete shutdown of Boswell. Community readiness for projects can also be a challenge.

The city has landed some wins in recent years. Community development projects have provided leverage to attract visitors, including the Tioga Recreation Area. The Coalition of Utility Cities has given Cohasset an avenue to lobby for the community, leading to the creation of the DEED Energy Transition Office, \$30 million in transition aid, and a potential \$1 million transition grant. Because Cohasset is already an energy transition community, there will be immediate funding in transition aid. There is no anticipated bonding money in the coming year.

Cohasset currently receives no funding in LGA because it is a utility city; it could receive \$700,000 per year in the future. The community contributes \$1 million to fiscal disparities, but it would be collecting \$500,000 if Boswell were to entirely shut down. This will have substantial effects on area communities who currently receive fiscal disparities money from Cohasset.

Potential new opportunities include the riverfront downtown development, MN Technologies (a cannabis operation), Northland Machine, development on the MP site previously identified for Huber, and potential housing projects, though all of these initiatives face some obstacles. The community is doing what it can to support these projects, but it cannot solve the challenge on its own.

APPENDIX D

ITASCA JUST TRANSITION TASK FORCE

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Peters answered questions during and after the presentation. Lowney noted the nearby Ainsworth site, with its many assets, has been vacant since 2006. Peters explained the concept of fiscal disparities and how Cohasset supports other communities in the Taconite Assistance Area.

Coalition of Utility Cities with Q&A

Shane Zahrt, Senior Attorney/Lobbyist for Flaherty & Hood,
email: sazahrt@flaherty-hood.com

Hansen introduced Zahrt, who is a lobbyist for the Coalition of Utility Cities (CUC); he represents local governments at the capitol on taxes, energy, transportation, economic development, and other issues, and has worked with the group since 2016. The Coalition includes Cohasset, Hoyt Lakes, Becker, Monticello, Granite Falls, Oak Park Heights, and Red Wing, which host, or have hosted, many of the state's largest power plants. It dates to 1998, when all communities noted the extreme effects of power plants on their tax bases and sought a unified effort to prevent major swings in tax capacity. The shifting energy landscape has led the coalition to shift its efforts to focus on plant retirement, especially as several coal plants have started retiring sooner than originally expected. It now works to find positive outcomes for communities.

Coalitional and planning efforts include participation in the creation of numerous reports, including state and multi-state reports, including one for the state Energy Transition Advisory Committee. The resources noted by Peters are direct results of these efforts.

Community Energy Transition Grants: Created in 2020, the Renewable Development Account provides funds designated to invest in new energy resources dating to Xcel nuclear expansions in the 1990s. It can be used to assist workers, increase property tax bases, and develop economic development strategies. Historically, they have been limited to use in Xcel territory; the Coalition seeks to include Cohasset and Itasca County. The grants do not include local match and are flexible, recognizing the divergent needs of communities. In 2023, the program received \$10 million from the state general fund (which could be used outside Xcel territory), plus \$2 million from the Renewable Development Account. A \$5 million grant round will be rolled out soon (official dates TBD), with a FY 2025 round of \$5 million after July 2024. Communities can receive up to \$1 million in grants per year, with eligibility for 5 years after unit retirement. Funds have been used to fund transition processes, economic impact assessments, or public infrastructure costs to support employers and business park expansions. Zahrt will follow up with a list of past projects. DEED Deputy Commissioner Kevin McKinnon believes there are many other potential uses, and the grants could be used in coordination with other funding sources.

Energy Transition Office and Advisory Committee: This new state office draws on an example from Colorado to create centralized coordination for local governments and workers affected by plant retirement. The state recognized that no one agency had the expertise necessary to address plant retirement, leading to its creation by the legislature in 2021. Its statutory charges include establishing transition programs, promoting economic development, providing support to local

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government workers, and advising the governor and legislature on relevant issues. Carla Vita was hired as its director in 2022, and it quickly issued a transition plan and is embarking on further planning. The office created the Energy Transition Advisory Committee (ETAC), which issued a late 2022 plan with five major categories for work (tax base and economic incentives, workforce, economic diversification reuse of assets, and community engagement). ETAC was reestablished in the 2023 legislative session and extended through at least 2027. ETAC includes 18 voting members, including several layers of government, workers, ED, utilities, Coalition of Utility Cities, and Senate and House members; and 8 non-voting members, including state agencies, the governor's office, and the Public Utilities Commission. It meets quarterly, monitors emerging issues through a task force (e.g., power plant and pipeline valuations), and looks for ways to directly support communities, participate in IRPs, and advance federal coordination.

Electric Generation Transition Aid: Passed as part of the 2023 omnibus bill, this funding is designed to keep governments whole in first year after plant retirement. It includes the possibility of retroactive aid for communities that already faced plant retirement. The aid should assist communities that lose any tax base, even if they transition to another fuel source. Cohasset and Itasca County should be eligible for aid, though the exact amount is unclear. Counties, cities, school districts, and townships are eligible upon retirement of an electric generating unit at a plant powered by coal, nuclear, or natural gas.

Zahrt concluded by noting that these tools alone are not the sole answer. There is considerably more work to do, and more people need to be aware of this work. CUC will continue to participate with the PUC through IRPs, share best practices across communities, and respond to legislation or proposals that may affect tax treatment of new technologies.

Zahrt answered questions during and after the presentation.

Next Steps

Hansen facilitated a reflection on the information shared in the session.

- Ridlon shared her hope for action and focused the group on smaller initiatives that can help fill the tax base gap. We listen to many people sharing their resources, but the community needs to tell higher levels of government what they want to do.
- Grose noted the potentially overlapping goals and asked about the process for prioritization.
- Benoit expressed a desire to learn from other communities that have gone through similar processes.
- Drake: What's possible, what can we do, and what is actionable in this area with the resources we have?
- Bahr appreciated the variety of perspectives in the group; how can we be supportive, but not get in the way? MP has its own timeline, so how can we be supportive without hindering their progress?

APPENDIX D

ITASCA JUST TRANSITION TASK FORCE

Monday, February 26, 2024 | 1:00 – 4:00PM

In-Person Bass Brook Community Center [305 NW 1st Ave, Cohasset, MN 55721](#)

with Zoom virtual option here: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/2602699615>

- Zabinski noted that municipal boundaries don't limit effects of transition; why aren't Grand Rapids, UPM, etc. included in this discussion? Lowney added that the group is trying to bring in unusual suspects and shared some of the process behind the committee selection.

Adjournment

Hansen adjourned the meeting at 4:05 PM.

Future TASK FORCE Meeting Dates

MEETING #2 MONDAY, APRIL 22, 2024 | 1:00 – 4:00PM @ The Forge, Grand Rapids, MN

SURVEY ON YOUR OWN

MEETING #3 MONDAY, JUNE 24, 2024 | 1:00 – 4:00PM @ TBD

MEETING #4 MONDAY, AUGUST 26, 2024 | 1:00 – 4:00PM @TBD

MEETING #5 MONDAY, OCTOBER 28, 2024 | 1:00 – 4:00PM @ Boswell Energy Center, Cohasset, MN

MEETING #6 IEDC SUMMIT NOVEMBER | DATE & LOCATION TBD

IEDC WILL PROVIDE TO THE GROUP

- *Google drive with all shared documentation and weblinks and a*
- *Binder with hard copies of all materials from each meeting throughout the year*

APPENDIX D

ITASCA JUST TRANSITION TASK FORCE

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Task Force Members

Jaci	David	Blandin Foundation	Task Force
Carol	Burr	Bois Forte Band of Chippewa	Task Force
Shane	Zahrt	Coalition of Utility Cities	Task Force
Ed	Zabinski	Entrepreneur	Task Force
Jim	Houlihan	Entrepreneur	Task Force
Malissa	Bahr	Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce	Task Force
Kristin	Renskers	IBEW Local 31	Task Force
Jason	Quiggin	Iron Range Building Trades Council	Task Force
Matt	Grose	ISD # 318	Task Force
David	Lick	Itasca Water Legacy Partnership	Task Force
Brandy	Toft	Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe	Task Force
Julie	Lucas	Mining Minnesota	Task Force
Blake	Bailey	Minnesota North College	Task Force
Lisa	Marcis	Minnesota North College	Task Force
Brian	Peterson	Nelson Wood Shims	Task Force
Paul	Peltier	RAMS	Task Force
Ben	Benoit	US Forest Service	Task Force
Shayla	Drake	Workforce Strategy Consultant MN DEED	Task Force
Joni	Namyst	YMCA	Task Force
Andy	MacDonell	City of Cohasset	Steering Committee
Max	Peters	City of Cohasset	Steering Committee
Whitney	Ridlon	DIRRR	Steering Committee
Matt	Shermoen	IEDC Staff	Steering Committee
Tamara	Lowney	IEDC Staff	Steering Committee
Brett	Skyles	Itasca County Administrator	Steering Committee
Corey	Smith	Itasca County Commissioner	Steering Committee
Mandie	Aalto	Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe	Steering Committee
Arik	Forsman	Minnesota Power	Steering Committee
Jennifer	Cady	Minnesota Power	Steering Committee

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Task Force Attendees: Blake Bailey, Brian Peterson, David Lick, Ed Zabinski, Jaci David, Jeff Bauman, Jim Houlihan, Joni Namyst, Malissa Bahr, Rick Blake, Shane Zahrt, Shayla Drake, Brett Skyles, Matt Shermoen, Max Peters, Tamara Lowney, Brian McCoy, Whitney Ridlon

Task Force Members Absent: Andy MacDonell, Arik Forsman, Ben Benoit, Brandy Toft, Carol Burr, Corey Smith, Jason Quiggin, Jennifer Cady, Julie Lucas, Kristin Renskers, Lisa Marcis, Mandie Aalto, Matt Grose, Paul Peltier

Facilitator Attendees: Amy Ward, Deirdre Coleman, Elissa Hansen, Megan Weck, Stef Sjelin

WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS, & ICE BREAKER

Elissa Hansen, Northspan President & CEO, called the meeting to order at 1:04 PM. She gave an overview of the agenda and briefly reviewed the Task Force's guiding principles before inviting participants to introduce themselves.

Hansen welcomed participants to think about what they recalled most clearly from the first Task Force meeting and asked them to describe in their own words what it means to accomplish transition well in their community (i.e., what does it look like or feel like). Answers included:

- Environmental and economic sustainability
- Economic diversification and revitalized workforce
- Everyone participating and showing passion whether they were new to the process or not; everyone being on the same page with how to move forward
- Here to learn and very curious
- Promoting local economic development and diverse, resilient, equitable, and inclusive economies
- Basic human services (water, housing, etc.) and opportunities (employment, jobs), cultural aspects
- Sustainability, excitement, and renewed hope
- Enabling families to stay and have a rich life in their community
- Diversified, socially just, environmentally responsible communities; being able to be leaders in new technologies
- Enabling global competitiveness
- Legislative open-mindedness and clarification to help solve the problem of Just Transition
- Clear communication with the community and transparency
- Pain is minimized in the communities; minimizing ripple effects of shutting down Boswell; spreading the fair share of responsibility and engagement; not squandering opportunities; learning
- Equalization of economic burdens; taking advantage of opportunities; more contributing tax base
- Promoting opportunities

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- Accomplishing transition well means residents don't even notice the shockwave
- Economic diversification; property taxes not spiking
- Impact; competing on a global stage with jobs, pricing, etc.; minimizing impact
- Diversifying economic opportunities to bring in technology and new generational jobs
- Keeping people informed while protecting from bad impacts; recognizing other challenges must also be addressed; how do we bring resources to Itasca County? How do we capitalize on this?
- The importance of having everyone in the room; being open to possibilities and listening for solutions
- Learned a lot; Max's presentation on Cohasset; viewing things on a macro level; collaboration, communication
- Opportunity to come out of this stronger than we started
- Excitement from the community; community wellness initiators; ripple effect on the community
- Concentrate on resources this area provides; segue opportunities for collaboration with companies in the area with strong reputations; tribal collaboration; recycling and reusing resources; impetus for innovation and drawing young people to the area; hesitation about how much of the tax base is dependent on the transition; need to incorporate
- Reducing existing polarization in the community; respectful dialogue between people with different views; finding solutions

NATIONAL LEVEL JUST TRANSITION PANEL PRESENTATION WITH Q&A

Rachael Young, Just Transition Fund Director of Grantmaking, email:

ryoung@justtransitionfund.org

Hansen introduced Rachael Young, who presented on helping coal communities overcome barriers to accessing federal funding to support economic development. See slides for details.

Young first thanked Hansen and Lowney for the opportunity to present. The Just Transition Fund (JTF) works with communities across the county to support economic diversification and was started in 2015. It helps communities most impacted by coal transition access money and leverage investment in local economic solutions. The JTF's work falls into three buckets: access, advocate, and convene. Across the country, 10% of counties (372 total) are home to a coal plant or mine. JTF prioritizes the hardest-hit counties with the highest percentage of marginalized population and serves approximately 50% of coal communities today. Hundreds of billions in funding is available for coal communities and the JTF's Federal Access Center works to ensure communities can take advantage of opportunities. Its Framework for Economic Transition involves community economic development, workforce development, and infrastructure. The Federal Access Center provides support with submitting grant applications, early-stage planning for capacity building, and last year launched the Coal Communities Get Ready! Challenge.

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Young noted the best results happen when communities plan early and congratulated IEDC for being inaugural member of the cohort. To support community-led planning and project development, the JFT awarded IEDC a \$150K grant and up to \$100K more available for TA needs. Planning is slow, hard, and expensive, and different communities need different things. JTF can provide support for things like feasibility analysis, business plans, and market assessment. Young encouraged the Task Force to think about what it needs to help move the transition forward.

Grace Blanchard, Program Manager, Resilient Economies and Communities, National Association of Counties, email: gblanchard@naco.org

Next, Hansen introduced Grace Blanchard, who shared a presentation on supporting economic diversification in Minnesota counties. See slides and visit <http://www.naco.org/brecc> for further information.

Blanchard noted transition can be a lot of effort on the front end, but real outcomes can be seen about a year out, and thanked participants for doing the hard work early on. The National Association of Counties (NACo) serves and advocates for all counties across the US. It leads the Building Resilient Economies in Coal Communities (BRECC) initiative and is supported by the US Economic Development Administration (EDA) to connect communities across the country. Blanchard noted Itasca is not alone in this transition issue and invited participants to join the BRECC National Network to connect with other coal communities of practice. The Network provides a platform to connect with and learn from other like communities and its benefits include strategies and solutions, learning from each other to avoid recreating the wheel, and connecting to federal resources to help bridge gaps and amplify experiences at the local level.

The BRECC Economic Diversification Strategies emphasize economic resilience and how to prepare for transition shocks by ensuring eggs aren't in one basket through the following strategic pillars: 1) Infrastructure Investment, 2) Workforce Development, 3) Industry Diversification, 4) Community Revitalization, 5) Strategic Planning. The slides include several case studies and Blanchard highlighted the counties of Apache, Coconino and Navajo, Arizona, which were directly impacted by the closure of several power plants. What they're doing well that can be used as inspiration includes strategic planning, asset-based industry expansion, bundling industry clusters, and thinking creatively to address barriers. Blanchard concluded by noting the importance of preserving the culture and mindset of being an energy-based community.

Cindy Winland, Subject Matter Expert, Energy Communities Interagency Working Group, email: cynthia.winland@keylogic.com

Hansen then introduced Cindy Winland, who presented on the Interagency Working Group (IWG) on Coal and Power Plant Communities and Economic Revitalization. See slides for details.

The IWG uses a whole-of-government approach spanning 11 agencies to bring focused resources to energy communities. Based on communities' input, this includes upgraded infrastructure, affordable housing, revitalizing manufacturing, workforce training and development, capacity

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building, and accessing federal funding. There are federal and state opportunities to address these needs, and Winland noted 75-90% is formula funding passed through the state. IWG's accomplishments include accessing federal funding, leveraging private funding, tax credits available for industry and non-profits, and strong efforts to bring in philanthropic donations.

IWG's capacity-building tools include a clearinghouse, rapid response teams, navigator, getting started guide, and additional resources. Winland reiterated there's a lot of money available for coal communities to transition and 8 out of 11 IWG agencies offer TA to help manage federal grants. Funding sources include the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, Inflation Reduction Act, and Qualifying Advanced Energy Project Credit (48c) Program. Winland displayed a brief overview of how to navigate the above tools on the IWG website, as well as tools like interactive maps and visualization tools. She noted that rapid response teams are not currently available for Itasca but encouraged lobbying efforts and further discussion. Winland also shared that there are a few instances where federal funding can be used to match federal money (e.g., tribal nations) and that the EPA is the agency most likely to provide progressive support.

Young, Blanchard, and Winland answered questions after the presentations.

STATE LEVEL JUST TRANSITION PANEL PRESENTATION WITH Q&A

Amanda Pankau, Director of Energy and Community Resiliency, Prairie Rivers Network, Illinois Affiliate of the National Wildlife Federation, email: apankau@prairierivers.org

Next, Hansen introduced Amanda Pankau, who gave a presentation on Illinois' energy transition. See slides for more detailed information.

Pankau noted the Prairie Rivers Network (PRN) is an environmental nonprofit with a mission to protect water, heal the land, and inspire change that focused on coal community investment and Just Transition in the last 15 years. Unlike Minnesota, Illinois doesn't have an Energy Transition Office. In 2008 IL had 48% coal electricity, which dropped to 21% in 2022, and continues to drop in 2023. Despite a large nuclear energy presence, it is the nation's 4th largest coal producer. As coal plants closed, protecting communities from coal ash became a large focus, and Pankau invited the group to reach out with questions about coal ash cleanup. As transition kicked in, PNR talked with communities about other impacts like tax revenue, lost jobs, etc. There was a big increase in closures 2017-2019 as Illinois was negotiating their climate law and coal communities around the state convened to discuss impacts with each other and with legislatures about what could be done to mitigate impacts by conducting listening sessions.

Pankau shared that Minnesota and Illinois are similarly poised for transition success due to laws allowing for stacking tax credits. PRN works with several partners for targeted support for coal communities, including the JFT, IWG, and the University of Minnesota's Great Lakes Environmental Justice Thriving Communities Technical Assistance Center (TCTAC). The Great Lakes TCTAC is charged with providing TA to take advantage of state and federal funding related to clean energy and environmental justice. It offers tiered services centered around education,

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navigation, and development, with the last tier mainly reserved for the most underserved communities. Pankau encouraged the Task Force to reach out to the Great Lakes TCTAC and to browse success stories in the slides.

Wade Buchanan, Director, Colorado Office of Just Transition, email: wade.buchanan@state.co.us

Hansen then introduced Wade Buchanan, who provided a presentation on early lessons from Colorado's coal transition. See slides for more information.

Buchanan expressed pleasure to be part of the panel for the Task Force meeting. The Colorado Office of Just Transition (COJT) was created in 2019 and was the first of its kind in the nation, with Minnesota being the second. The COJT coordinates a larger array of state and local government agencies and is governed by legislation and its action plan. Its role is to assist transitioning communities in replacing lost property tax, job development, and increasing economic diversity. Buchanan emphasized diversification and getting on base; we usually want to hit a home run, but singles and walks are often what win the game. It's an energy challenge, but also an economic development challenge where communities are overly dependent on one sector. The answer is to be proactive about diversifying, not to bring another employer of the same size in the same industry. The COJT also aims to assist workers who have lost their jobs in transitioning to new jobs (or retirement) to ensure their economic security.

Colorado had 8 power plants as of 2019, all of which are scheduled to be closed by 2031. Buchanan shared that Itasca has similar attributes as the Yampa Valley region in northwestern Colorado. He noted multiplier effect to communities when prominent industries close and community assistance is guided by local vision and priorities. Additional observations include:

- Don't focus on energy, diversify. For communities, a Just Transition is about business development, economic diversification, and job creation – not necessarily about energy.
- Give communities a genuine voice. Smaller grants can have a bigger bang for their buck and empower communities, and partnerships can be fostered in unconventional ways.
- Worker transitions are guided by the visions that workers have for the economic futures of themselves and their families.
- Early intervention increases opportunities and lowers costs. It's better to approach transition proactively rather than reactively.
- The entire family is affected, and it can be part of the solution. A household's capacity to have sustainable, economically viable futures does not depend on one individual.
- Tend to all the damage being done. Transition is not just about the economy or environment, it's about a community's, heritage, identity, and pride in their history.

Buchanan closed by reiterating the importance of expanding instead of replacing and listening and helping instead of directing or overseeing.

ITASCA JUST TRANSITION TASK FORCE

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Carla Vita, Energy Transition Office Director, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, email: carla.vita@state.mn.us

Hansen then introduced Carla Vita, who provided a presentation on Minnesota's energy transition in power plant communities. See slides for more detailed information.

The Energy Transition Office (ETO) was created in 2021 to assist energy communities in Minnesota. The Energy Transition Advisory Committee (ETAC) put together an Energy Transition Plan and \$5M in funding per year is available for a wide variety of uses through the Community Energy Transition Grant Program. Vita discussed cases of projects that have been awarded funding in Granite Falls and Fergus Falls. She then briefly reviewed responses and plans in other Minnesota communities with coal power plants/units that have closed or have upcoming closure dates, including Fox Lake in Martin County, Granite City (natural gas) in St. Cloud, Hoot Lake in Fergus Falls, Allen S. King in Oak Park Heights, SHERCO in Becker, and Taconite Harber in Schroeder Township.

Pankau, Buchanan, and Vita answered questions following their presentations.

ACTION IDEAS FOCUSED CONVERSATION

Hansen then led the Task Force in a focused conversation on generating action ideas relating to the Just Transition implementation centered around the following questions.

What caught your attention across the information shared today? What did you learn?

- A distinction between helping, guiding, or empowering the community through the transition compared to the Task Force overseeing, directing, or taking initiative, and the need to find a balance.
- Growing energy around the transition movement; lots of money available to support it.

Are there any other breakthroughs or new insights that this information has given you?

- The importance of economic diversification and not putting all of our eggs in one basket; if the basket has a hole in it, that could lead to disaster.
- The need to have a plan within a plan due to strategically address the unique barriers caused by Minnesota's permitting regulations and timelines.
- Assessing the feasibility of various options available in the communities to determine the best next steps that can start a domino reaction.

What actions could the community take to move toward transition?

- Thinking outside of the box and exploring options for economic diversification that are realistic and can tap into existing resources, e.g., a tannery, manufactured housing, lumberyard, biomass facility, childcare.
- Working more collaboratively with entrepreneurial support like ILT Academy and SBDCs to ensure potential projects are feasible and ready to apply.

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- Opportunities to bring more missing voices, e.g. more trade representatives to the table, while being careful not to grow the task force so much it becomes counterproductive.
- Studying cases of successful transitions in similar communities, namely SHERCO in Becker, to determine what role Xcel played and how that might translate to our own assets, e.g. UPM, Minnesota Power, etc., and how we approach taking initiatives to them.
- Continuing to intentionally encourage people in the community to attend and engage with upcoming town hall meetings to spread information and excitement about the vision for the transition.

NEXT STEPS & ADJOURNMENT

In closing, Hansen issued a notice to the Task Force to watch for and respond to the Action Ideas survey that will soon be distributed to the group. Hansen adjourned the meeting at 4:06 PM.

FUTURE TASK FORCE MEETING DATES

MEETING #3 MONDAY, JUNE 24, 2024 | 1:00 – 4:00PM @ TBD

MEETING #4 MONDAY, AUGUST 26, 2024 | 1:00 – 4:00PM @TBD

MEETING #5 MONDAY, OCTOBER 28, 2024 | 1:00 – 4:00PM @ Boswell Energy Center, Cohasset, MN

MEETING #6 IEDC SUMMIT NOVEMBER 20-21, 2024 | Timberlake Lodge, Grand Rapids, MN

TASK FORCE DROPBOX

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/ishkgwpz9otauo3x2xyyk/h?rlkey=vrun69qwigna5rjwz7hvc81gh&st=g742fh7j&dl=0>

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Task Force Members

Ben	Benoit	US Forest Service	Task Force
Blake	Bailey	Minnesota North College	Task Force
Brandy	Toft	Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe	Task Force
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Whitney	Ridlon	DIRRR	Task Force and Steering Committee
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APPENDIX D

ITASCA JUST TRANSITION TASK FORCE

Monday, June 24, 2024 | 1:00 – 4:00 PM

In-Person Cohasset City Hall, Community Center Gym, [305 NW 1st Ave, Cohasset, MN 55721](#)

Task Force Attendees: Sarah Carling, Ed Zabinski, Amber Smith, Jim Houlihan, Kate Van Daele, Jennifer Cady, Max Peters, Lisa Marcis, Tamara Lowney, Matt Shermoen, Josh Skelton, Jeff Bauman, Brian Peterson, Shayla Drake, Blake Bailey, Ben Benoit, Brian McCoy, Whitney Ridlon, Joni Namyst

Task Force Members Absent: Andy MacDonell, Brandy Toft, Carol Burr, Corey Smith, Jason Quiggin, Julie Lucas, Kristin Renskers, Matt Grose, Paul Peltier, David Lick, Jaci David, Malissa Bahr, Rick Blake, Shane Zahrt, Brett Skyles

Observer Group Attendees: Josh Bergstad, Carla Vita

Facilitator Attendees: Amy Ward, Catherine Kemp, Deirdre Coleman, Elissa Hansen, Karl Schuettler

WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS

Elissa Hansen, Northspan President & CEO, called the meeting to order at 1:06 PM. She gave an overview of the agenda and briefly reviewed the Task Force's guiding principles before inviting participants to introduce themselves.

Hansen welcomed participants and asked them to share what “Just Transition” means to them.

OVERVIEW OF COMMUNITY TOWNHALLS

Tamara Lowney, IEDC, tlowney@itascadv.org and Karl Schuettler, Northspan, kschuettler@northspan.org Hansen introduced Schuettler, who reviewed a handout that summarized the six townhalls conducted in May and June across Itasca County. Schuettler and Lowney both then shared takeaways, including the complexity of the issue and the many different perspectives attendees brought to the meetings. While some had relatively large groups and others were smaller, all six townhalls had strong discussion. Task force members who had attended the townhalls also shared their thoughts.

HANDOUT OF AREA'S CURRENT PROJECTS

Tamara Lowney, IEDC, tlowney@itascadv.org

Lowney gave an overview of IEDC activities relevant to the process. There will be a summit this fall funded by the Just Transition grant to discuss some of these projects, and there is funding to leverage going forward. The group also got a TA grant from Just Transition, \$20,000 for a storytelling campaign around this work to increase visibility. There is also funding for grant research and writing, along with some site readiness work at the Itasca Eco-Industrial Park. These grants will tell the story of the Just Transition process and keep related work moving forward.

ACTION IDEAS WORKSHOP

Hansen then led the Task Force in a workshop that identified “innovative, substantial actions could we take to move us toward a just transition?” She began by sharing the details behind the survey and the framing question. Based on the survey results, Northspan staff identified six potential areas for action. She invited participants to review the responses.

Comments on the responses include:

- This will be very hard and we don't want to gloss over the challenges – part of the community engagement
- Teaching people what energy transition is, because people just don't know what it is

APPENDIX D

ITASCA JUST TRANSITION TASK FORCE

Monday, June 24, 2024 | 1:00 – 4:00 PM

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- Engagement to what end? We need to be clear about this. Is it education? What is the tie to action?
- Some ideas seem very tangible, others are bold; there's room for bold ideas, but we need to be realistic
- Acknowledging the complexity of power networks in the county, e.g., MP vs. GRE service
- Jennifer Cady explained the Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) with the group
- Potentially Missing Items:
 - Communication with the business community
 - Need to explain the extent of the impact – perhaps with several scenarios to make it more real
 - Identifying businesses with expansion opportunities to offset tax base loss

Participants brainstormed additional action ideas, first individually and then at tables. Each table then shared at least three new ideas and added them to the wall of responses. Participants voted on the items they felt were most feasible and within the realm of accomplishing, and they also voted for things they wanted to see happen badly but were unsure it can or will. The group then reflected on the actions developed to date.

NEXT STEPS & ADJOURNMENT

In closing, Hansen explained the next steps, which include Northspan capturing the information. At the August meeting, participants will dive into each of the strategies and explore their current realities, success indicators, and specific actions. The facilitators will then draft an initial transition plan document for the October meeting.

Lowney invited members to join the summit planning committee, which will be following a model from Just Transition and meet virtually. She also invited people to assist with marketing and communications strategies.

Hansen adjourned the meeting at 3:46 PM.

FUTURE TASK FORCE MEETING DATES

MEETING #4 MONDAY, AUGUST 26, 2024 | 1:00 – 4:00PM @ Cohasset City Hall Community Center Gym

MEETING #5 MONDAY, OCTOBER 31, 2024 | 1:00 – 4:00PM @ Boswell Energy Center, Cohasset, MN

MEETING #6 IEDC SUMMIT FEBRUARY 5-6, 2025 | Timberlake Lodge, Grand Rapids, MN

TASK FORCE DROPBOX

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/ishkgwpz9otauo3x2xyyk/h?rlkey=vrn69qwjgna5rjwz7hvc81gh&st=g742fh7j&dl=0>

APPENDIX D

ITASCA JUST TRANSITION TASK FORCE

Monday, June 24, 2024 | 1:00 – 4:00 PM

In-Person Cohasset City Hall, Community Center Gym, [305 NW 1st Ave, Cohasset, MN 55721](#)

Task Force Members

Ben	Benoit	US Forest Service	Task Force
Blake	Bailey	Minnesota North College	Task Force
Brandy	Toft	Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe	Task Force
Brian	Peterson	Nelson Wood Shims	Task Force
Carol	Burr	Bois Forte Band of Chippewa	Task Force
David	Lick	Itasca Water Legacy Partnership	Task Force
Ed	Zabinski	Entrepreneur	Task Force
Jaci	David	Blandin Foundation	Task Force
Jason	Quiggin	Iron Range Building Trades Council	Task Force
Jeff	Bauman	UPM	Task Force
Jim	Houlihan	Entrepreneur	Task Force
Joni	Namyst	YMCA	Task Force
Julie	Lucas	Mining Minnesota	Task Force
Kristin	Renskers	IBEW Local 31	Task Force
Lisa	Marcis	Minnesota North College	Task Force
Malissa	Bahr	Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce	Task Force
Matt	Grose	ISD # 318	Task Force
Paul	Peltier	RAMS	Task Force
Rick	Blake	City of Grand Rapids	Task Force
Shane	Zahrt	Coalition of Utility Cities	Task Force
Shayla	Drake	Workforce Strategy Consultant MN DEED	Task Force
Andy	MacDonell	City of Cohasset	Task Force and Steering Committee
Arik	Forsman	Minnesota Power	Task Force and Steering Committee
Brett	Skyles	Itasca County Administrator	Task Force and Steering Committee
Brian	McCoy	Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe	Task Force and Steering Committee
Corey	Smith	Itasca County Commissioner	Task Force and Steering Committee
Jennifer	Cady	Minnesota Power	Task Force and Steering Committee
Matt	Shermoen	IEDC	Task Force and Steering Committee
Max	Peters	City of Cohasset	Task Force and Steering Committee
Tamara	Lowney	IEDC	Task Force and Steering Committee
Whitney	Ridlon	DIRRR	Task Force and Steering Committee

TASK FORCE

Monday, August 26, 2024 | 1:00 – 4:00 PM

In-Person, Bass Brook Community Center, Cohasset

Task Force Attendees: Ed Zabinski, Joni Namyst, Jaci David, Blake Bailey, Matt Grose, Brett Skyles, Jim Houlihan, Kate Van Daele, Max Peters, Tamara Lowney, Matt Shermoen, Shayla Drake, Jason Janisch

Task Force Members Absent: Andy MacDonell, Brandy Toft, Carol Burr, Corey Smith, Jason Quiggin, Julie Lucas, Kristin Renskers, Paul Peltier, David Lick, Malissa Bahr, Rick Blake, Shane Zahrt, Sarah Carling, Amber Smith, Jennifer Cady, Lisa Marcis, Whitney Ridlon, Gavin Herrera, Josh Skelton, Jeff Bauman, Ben Benoit, Brian Peterson

Observer Group Attendees: Josh Bergstad, Carla Vita

Facilitator Attendees: Amy Ward, Catherine Kemp, Deirdre Coleman, Megan Weck, Elissa Hansen, Karl Schuettler

WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS

Elissa Hansen, Northspan President & CEO, called the meeting to order at 1:04 PM. She gave an overview of the agenda and briefly reviewed the Task Force's guiding principles before inviting participants to introduce themselves.

MINNESOTA POWER IRP UPDATE

Kate Van Daele, Community & Local Government Affairs Manager, cvandaele@mnpower.com Van Daele provided an update on the Minnesota Power Integrated Resource Plan (IRP). MP is required to file period IRPs and is working to comply with the state's 100% clean energy by 2040. The company has been involved in discussions over the potential for biomass to meet the goal; guidance is necessary before any MP can make any decisions on its possible use. Two subgroups are meeting to address a variety of scenarios to evaluate how to meet the carbon free standard.

IEDC UPDATES

Tamara Lowney, President, tlowney@itascadv.org

Lowney provided an update on the Just Transition Fund convening that will take place in October in Washington DC, which she will attend; she is also on the convention planning committee. IEDC has received a grant to continue this convening work, and there is support for at least one more attendee through these grants. This event will take place October 9-11 and is a valuable experience for stakeholders. Lowney, Vita, and a fellow with the Environmental Quality Board will attend. Task force members interested in attending should reach out to Lowney.

Lowney is planning a video series to help educate people on the importance of engagement in the transition. Hansen plugged the community townhalls that will take place in September and October.

FINALIZE ENERGY TRANSITION VISION

Elissa Hansen, Northspan, ehansen@northspan.org

Hansen reviewed the energy transition vision. Grose suggested adding the word “thriving” to the vision statement so it would read “A thriving community invested in our future sustainable energy shift.” The group expressed support for this change.

TASK FORCE

Monday, August 26, 2024 | 1:00 – 4:00 PM

In-Person, Bass Brook Community Center, Cohasset

ACTIONS WORKSHOP: CURRENT REALITY, SUCCESS INDICATORS, & ACTION STEPS

Hansen then led the task force through a focused implementation workshop. Attendees split into six groups, with each group taking one of the actions, and identified the current reality, success indicators, and action steps for each. The groups then shared their work with the full task force and solicited input and edits. Once complete, each group laid out a timeline for completing the actions and shared in on a wall, including identification of responsible parties for each step. Hansen facilitated a closing discussion in which participants reflected on the timeline and the work necessary.

NEXT STEPS & ADJOURNMENT

In closing, Hansen explained the next steps, which include Northspan capturing the information and sharing it for review. There will be a second round of six community townhalls in September and October, and Lowney strongly encouraged task force members to attend and bring friends. The facilitators are working to draft an initial transition plan document for the October meeting.

Hansen adjourned the meeting at 4:17 PM.

FUTURE TASK FORCE MEETING DATES

MEETING #5 MONDAY, OCTOBER 31, 2024 | 1:00 – 4:00PM @ Boswell Energy Center, Cohasset, MN

MEETING #6 IEDC SUMMIT FEBRUARY 5-6, 2025 | Timberlake Lodge, Grand Rapids, MN

TASK FORCE DROPBOX

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/ishkgwpz9otauo3x2xyyk/h?rlkey=vrun69qwjgna5rjwz7hvc81gh&st=g742fh7j&dl=0>

TASK FORCE

Monday, August 26, 2024 | 1:00 – 4:00 PM

In-Person, Bass Brook Community Center, Cohasset

Task Force Members

Ben	Benoit	US Forest Service	Task Force
Blake	Bailey	Minnesota North College	Task Force
Gavin	Herrera	Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe	Task Force
Brian	Peterson	Nelson Wood Shims	Task Force
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Max	Peters	City of Cohasset	Task Force and Steering Committee
Tamara	Lowney	IEDC	Task Force and Steering Committee
Whitney	Ridlon	DIRRR	Task Force and Steering Committee

TASK FORCE MEETING #5

Thursday November 7, 2024 | 10:00 AM – 1:00 PM

Hybrid, The Forge, 1201 SE 7th Ave. Grand Rapids, MN, 55744

Task Force Attendees: Malissa Bahr, Blake Bailey, Jeff Bauman, Rick Blake, Shayla Drake, Jason Janisch, David Lick, Tamara Lowney, Lisa Marcis, Max Peters, Brian Peterson, Matt Shermoen, Brett Skyles, Amber Smith, Ed Zabinski

Task Force Members Absent: Ben Benoit, Carol Burr, Jennifer Cady, Jaci David, Arik Forsman, Matt Grose, Gavin Herrera, Jim Houlihan, Julie Lucas, Andy MacDonell, Brian McCoy, Joni Namyst, Paul Peltier, Jason Quiggin, Kristin Renskers, Whitney Ridlon, Corey Smith, Shane Zahrt

Observer Group Attendees: Josh Bergstad, Sarah Lerohl, Carla Vita

Facilitator Attendees: Amy Ward, Catherine Kemp, Deirdre Coleman, Megan Weck, Elissa Hansen

WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS

Elissa Hansen, Northspan President & CEO, called the meeting to order at 10:04 AM. She gave an overview of the agenda and invited all virtual and in-person participants to introduce themselves.

RMI UPLOAD

Tamara Lowney, IEDC, tlowney@itascadv.org

Lowney and several task force members provided an overview and reflection on RMI's Mobilizing Climate-Aligned and Community-Led Capital event hosted in St. Paul, Minnesota on October 28-30, 2024. [Slides can be found here](#). The purpose of this event was to convene city, county, and tribal representatives, along with other interested entities across Minnesota to discuss federal financing opportunities related to clean energy and technology. Participants relayed key themes coming out of RMI's event including an emphasis on regional coordination and collaboration as well as braiding and leveraging rebates, tax incentives, and other innovative financing mechanism to meet communities' energy and economic needs.

COMMUNITY TOWN HALL OVERVIEW

Elissa Hansen, Northspan, ehansen@northspan.org

Hansen provided an update on the final six town halls which were held in September and October 2024. The focus of these town halls was to gather community feedback on the six action areas developed by the task force. Additionally, town hall attendees were sent an optional follow up survey to provide additional detail and reflection if they wanted. Across the six town halls, over 70 community members participated.

DRAFT REPORT OVERVIEW

Catherine Kemp, Great Plains Institute, ckemp@gpisd.net

Kemp then led the task force through an in-depth review of the draft report. In a large group, Kemp walked through the background, history, assets, and challenges sections, asking task force members to consider if there are any missing details or gaps in the narrative. Task force members expressed general approval of the draft report's framing with the following high-level recommendations:

TASK FORCE MEETING #5

Thursday November 7, 2024 | 10:00 AM – 1:00 PM

Hybrid, The Forge, 1201 SE 7th Ave. Grand Rapids, MN, 55744

- Expand on the challenges section to encompass impacts on the entire region, not just Itasca County.
- Highlight the impact that Boswell's retirement will have on other businesses and industries that service the power plant and its workers. Consider the ripple effect of power plant closure on local, regional, and national industry.
- Expand on workforce impacts as it relates to child care and family sustaining wages.
- Highlight ongoing innovative energy practices and projects being pursued in the region.

Next, in-person attendees and virtual attendees split into their respective small groups to further review and provide feedback on the six action areas presented in the draft report. Small groups discussed for roughly forty minutes.

NEXT STEPS & ADJOURNMENT

In closing, Hansen thanked all task force members for their dedicated participation in the day's meeting, as well as throughout the entire process. Hansen noted that task force members will have until November 22 to provide draft report feedback. To aid in providing feedback, Northspan will send out a guided survey to all task force members that will pose reflection questions for each draft report section.

The facilitators will incorporate today's meeting feedback, as well as additional feedback received in the coming weeks, into the final report. Lowney reminded

Hansen adjourned the meeting at 1:15 PM.

FUTURE TASK FORCE MEETING DATES

MEETING #6 IEDC SUMMIT FEBRUARY 5-6, 2025 | Timberlake Lodge, Grand Rapids, MN

TASK FORCE DROPBOX

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TASK FORCE MEETING #5

Thursday November 7, 2024 | 10:00 AM – 1:00 PM

Hybrid, The Forge, 1201 SE 7th Ave. Grand Rapids, MN, 55744

**Task Force Members**

Ben	Benoit	US Forest Service	Task Force
Blake	Bailey	Minnesota North College	Task Force
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Max	Peters	City of Cohasset	Task Force and Steering Committee
Tamara	Lowney	IEDC	Task Force and Steering Committee
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APPENDIX E

SPRING TOWN HALL MEETINGS SUMMARY



COMMUNITY TOWN HALLS SUMMARY MAY & JUNE SERIES



OVERVIEW

The Itasca Community Taskforce for Energy Transition hosted Community Town Halls to provide information about its work and gain valuable insights and ideas from members of six different communities in Itasca County about energy transition and what is being done to get prepared. These sessions were hosted over two series of three town halls.

May & June Series

- Bigfork | Bigfork City Hall, May 14, 2024, 12:00 – 2:00 PM
- Cohasset | Cohasset Community Center, May 14, 2024, 4:30 – 6:30 PM
- S. Lake | S. Lake LIC Community Center, May 15, 2024, 5:30 – 7:30 PM
- Nashwauk | Nashwauk City Hall, June 5, 2024, 12:00 – 2:00 PM
- Deer River | Deer River High School Commons, June 5, 2024, 5:30 – 7:30 PM
- Grand Rapids | Itasca County Family YMCA, June 6, 2024, 5:30 – 7:30 PM

COMMUNITY TOWN HALLS ATTENDANCE & DEMOGRAPHICS

At each of the Community Town Halls, the number of attendees was recorded, along with their gender and age range. Attendance ranged from 5 to 24 participants and demographics varied between each community. Details of the full attendance counts and demographics collected are displayed below.

	Bigfork	Cohasset	S. Lake	Nashwauk	Deer River	Grand Rapids	Total
# Male	14	12	6	3	3	2	40
# Female	8	12	9	2	5	9	45
% Male	64%	50%	40%	60%	38%	18%	45%
% Female	36%	50%	60%	40%	62%	82%	55%
# Youth (<18)	0	3	3	0	0	0	6
# Adult (18-60)	16	21	12	5	8	11	73
# Senior (60+)	6	0	0	0	0	0	6
% Youth (<18)	0%	12%	20%	0%	0%	0%	5%
% Adult (18-60)	73%	88%	80%	100%	100%	100%	90%
% Senior (60+)	27%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	5%
# Total Attendees	22	24	15	5	8	11	85

COMMUNITY TOWN HALLS KEY POINTS

The energy transition Community Town Halls were structured to foster understanding and engagement through information sharing on the Just Transition Task Force's work to date. There were also opportunities for general discussion and Q&A sessions between community members and Just Transition Task Force representatives. The following provides a high-level overview of these various aspects of the Community Town Halls.

Information Sharing

During the Community Town Hall events, community participants were briefed on a variety of topics pertaining to the energy transition. Topics included the legislative mandate requiring the idling of Boswell Unit 3 by 2030, examples of successful transitions in other communities, state guidance on developing comprehensive plans, current Minnesota Power initiatives, plans for the Boswell site, and the significant burdens rural areas face.

Participants were also informed of the Community Task Force's intent, exploration of proactive programming, community resilience, potential projects (e.g., hydroponics, wood resources), Blandin's role and uncertain growth in Minnesota, and the costs of renewable energy. Additional topics included community engagement tactics, the energy transition impact, industrial decarbonization, electric vehicles, the need to start small, homelessness concerns, hempcrete, and research expansion.

General Discussion

Through general discussion, participants shared various insights, such as personal experiences relevant to the energy transition and their reasons for attending a Community Town Hall event. Emphasis was placed on the inevitability of the transition, potential financial impacts, and options for consumers to incorporate home energy efficiency improvements. Complexity and confusion surrounding current programs and rates were discussed, along with the need for clear messaging that balances motivation with practical benefits. Concerns were raised about the economic impacts of the Unit 3 mandate, as well as the necessity of educating the community on the broader impacts of the transition. Practical incentives to increase community involvement were suggested and the importance of local input and representation was highlighted.

Q&A

In the Town Hall Q&A sessions, community members voiced a diverse range of questions reflecting concerns and curiosities about the energy transition. Participants inquired about topics such as mandate deadlines, outcomes of similar rural communities, and the potential roles of various energy sources, such as nuclear power, natural gas, and biomass. Questions also addressed the financial and environmental implications of transitioning from coal, solar and wind feasibility, the involvement of local wood and paper industries, carbon capture technology, potential uses for the Boswell site, and the energy transition's broader economic impacts on the community.

WHAT DO THE WORDS “ENERGY TRANSITION” MEAN TO YOU?

In addition to learning information and engaging in open discussion regarding the Itasca Just Transition, community members who participated in the Community Town Halls were given the opportunity to define their understanding of energy transition in their own words. Participants shared a wide range of perceptions of what energy transition personally means to them.

While their ideas varied, several common themes emerged from participants' responses to the discussion question, as listed below:

- **Promoting sustainable energy and positive environmental impact**
 - Transitioning from traditional energy sources to clean, renewable, and/or carbon-free sources
 - Diversifying energy sourcing without compromising reliability
 - Supporting environmental stewardship
- **Creating economic and job opportunities**
 - Implementing energy-efficient projects that save money and employ people in the community
 - Developing new types of jobs with new technologies
 - Leveraging local industries e.g., wood products, paper companies
 - Using local strengths to access available state and federal funding
- **Developing technological and infrastructure solutions**
 - Implementing renewable energy projects that build on past plans and utilize existing power infrastructure
 - Capitalizing on technologies well suited to the region that are gaining momentum e.g., industrial decarbonization, woody biomass
 - Researching the impacts of alternative energy sources
 - Incorporating new infrastructure e.g., electric vehicle charging
- **Planning for long-term, strategic implementation**
 - Acknowledging the complexity and interconnectedness of the transition's impact on various aspects of the community
 - Committing to a proactive, systems-level approach
 - Balancing the reliability and cost-effectiveness of energy sources
 - Conducting front-end research and focusing on effective pre-work
- **Engaging with the community and enhancing community well-being**
 - Involving the community and incorporating diverse perspectives and needs
 - Preserving community identities and promoting a strong rural presence
 - Building community resilience and preparedness for the transition

FUTURE TAKEAWAYS

Throughout the Community Town Halls held in May and June, various takeaways and potential suggestions emerged relating to energy transition and the next round of sessions planned for fall 2024.

Recommendations for furthering community involvement and engagement include, but are not necessarily limited to:

- Increasing visibility and outreach at community events e.g., powwows, fairs, rodeos, Bigfork Wilderness Days, fire department fish fry, etc.
- Scheduling fall events in the evening
- Collaborating with townships for better community involvement
- Providing more virtual open office hours on Fridays
- Ensuring Minnesota Power is present to address myths and provide accurate information
- Sending attendees the action ideas survey and comment period link
- Hosting a Town Hall at Sugar Point
- Emphasizing how the energy transition can impact individual communities
- Sharing information about alternative fuel sources under consideration
- Considering police presence to address safety and drug use concerns
- Utilizing social media, KOJB radio, and the DeBahJiMon newspaper for broader engagement
- Highlighting the balance of affordability, sustainability, and reliability
- Leveraging features in Watt news
- Exploring options for residential Building Energy Rating (BER) programs
- Addressing transit issues, particularly concerning Leech Lake and gaming shuttles

COMMUNITY TOWN HALLS SUMMARY MAY & JUNE SERIES



COMMUNITY TOWN HALLS-INFORMED SURVEY SUMMARY

As part of the Community Town Halls, Just Transition facilitator Northspan conducted a survey with Itasca community participants seeking feedback on energy transition. The survey was distributed via SurveyMonkey and received 15 responses. The following presents the summarized results of participants' responses to five survey questions aimed at assessing their involvement and knowledge regarding energy transition.

1. Did you attend a community town hall?

Survey participants were first asked if they had attended a Just Transition Community Town Hall to determine their level of direct engagement. All 15 respondents indicated that they had attended a Town Hall event.

	<i>Count</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Yes	15	100%
No	0	0%

2. What community do you live in?

Next, respondents were invited to share their community of residence in an open-ended question format to assess the geographic distribution of survey participants. Grand Rapids residents were most prominently represented, followed by Cohasset, as well as small numbers of respondents from communities throughout Itasca County. Additionally, two respondents indicated that they live in Duluth (St. Louis County).

	<i>Count</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Grand Rapids	4	27%
Cohasset	3	20%
Bigfork	2	13%
Bovey	2	13%
Duluth	2	13%
Itasca County	1	7%
S. Lake	1	7%

3. Have you ever heard of energy transition?

Participants were then prompted to share if they had ever heard of energy transition to gain insight into the community's baseline awareness. The majority of respondents were familiar with the topic of energy transition.

	<i>Count</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Yes	13	87%
No	2	13%

4. What do the words "energy transition" mean to you?

Survey respondents were then asked to share their personal understanding of the term "energy transition" in an open-ended question. Responses covered a broad range of community perceptions regarding energy transition.

Several common themes emerged and are listed below in order of the approximate frequency each appeared:

- Shifting from traditional energy sources to renewable, clean sources (e.g., wind, solar, geothermal, etc.)
- Preserving local jobs and community stability
- Acknowledging concerns about rising energy costs and economic impacts
- Emphasizing environmental and health benefits of sustainable energy
- Finding collaborative solutions to interconnected, complex challenges

5. What would you like to learn about regarding energy transition?

Lastly, participants were invited to answer an open-ended question related to specific areas of interest for further information about energy transition. Survey respondents in the community expressed a desire to learn more about multiple aspects of the energy transition process.

Several key takeaways were identified from the responses and are displayed below in the approximate order of frequency each appeared:

- Viability and cost-effectiveness of new energy sources
- Community, workforce, and economic impacts
- Plans for existing and future energy infrastructure
- Government support and transparency across all levels
- Opportunities for community engagement and leadership
- Effects on global warming
- Regular Task Force progress updates



APPENDIX F

FALL TOWN HALL MEETINGS SUMMARY



OVERVIEW

The Itasca Community Taskforce for Energy Transition hosted a second series of Community Town Halls in the Fall of 2024 to provide information about its work and gain additional insights and valuable feedback from members of six different communities in Itasca County about energy transition and what is being done to get prepared. These sessions took place in September and October over two sets of three town halls, respectively.

September & October Community Town Hall Series:

- Nashwauk | Nashwauk City Hall, September 25, 2024, 5:30 – 7:30 PM
- Grand Rapids | Itasca County Family YMCA, September 25, 2024, 12:00 – 2:00 PM
- Deer River | Deer River High School Commons, September 26, 2024, 5:30 – 7:30 PM
- Cohasset | Cohasset Community Center, October 15, 2024, 4:30 – 6:30 PM
- Bigfork | Bigfork City Hall, October 16, 2024, 12:00 – 2:00 PM
- S. Lake | S. Lake LIC Community Center, October 16, 2024, 5:30 – 7:30 PM

The fall series of Community Town Halls were organized to deepen community engagement in the ongoing Itasca Community Energy Transition planning. Each event followed an agenda that included introductions, an invitation for comments from any elected officials present, an update by Minnesota Power on their Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) and Energy Transition involvement, and an overview of the Energy Transition Task Force's timeline and strategies, including success indicators and specific actions. Town Hall participants then engaged in an interactive posterboard walk-around to review and provide input on the following six strategies developed by the Task Force to guide the community through the transition. The Community Town Halls concluded with a facilitated closing conversation encouraging community members to discuss the strategies and share comments.

ATTENDANCE & DEMOGRAPHICS

At each of the Community Town Halls, the number of attendees was recorded, along with their gender and age range. Attendance counts ranged from between 5 to 21 participants per event and demographics varied by community, with adult males most strongly represented overall. Details of the full attendance counts and demographics collected are displayed below.

	Nashwauk	Grand Rapids	Deer River	Cohasset	Bigfork	S. Lake	Total
# Male	4	3	4	13	7	8	39
# Female	1	8	3	8	4	10	34
% Male	80%	27%	57%	62%	64%	44%	56%
% Female	20%	73%	43%	38%	36%	56%	44%
# Youth (<18)	0	0	2	0	0	3	5
# Adult (18-60)	3	9	3	14	11	10	50
# Senior (60+)	2	2	2	7	0	5	18
% Youth (<18)	0%	0%	29%	0%	0%	17%	8%
% Adult (18-60)	60%	82%	43%	67%	100%	56%	68%
% Senior (60+)	40%	18%	29%	33%	0%	28%	25%
# Total Attendees	5	11	7	21	11	18	73

KEY THEMES & TAKEAWAYS

Across the series of Town Halls, community members engaged in dialogue highlighting various perspectives and shared their thoughts on potential opportunities, challenges, hopes, and concerns pertaining to the Itasca Community Energy Transition. Several key recurring themes and broader takeaways appeared throughout the Town Hall conversations, including:

- **Economic Stability Amid Industry Shifts**
 - General concerns about potential job loss and reduced tax revenue after the Boswell closure.
 - The need for economic diversification to lessen reliance on traditional industries (e.g., timber, mining, manufacturing) while acknowledging the importance of their role in the local economy.
 - Interest in attracting both large and small new industries to the Itasca County area, including technology and more novel examples such as the houseboating industry.
 - Opportunities to leverage regional strengths, like capitalizing on outdoor recreational tourism.
 - Calls to make Itasca County more “business-friendly”, such as through State regulatory reform and non-traditional funding sources (e.g., grants) to attract private businesses.
- **Exploring a Sustainable Energy Mix**
 - Discussion of the recently announced 85 MW solar project planned for the Boswell site, along with support for using the existing energy infrastructure.
 - Emphasis on the need to look at all available and emerging energy technologies, including solar, wind, natural gas, biomass, hydrogen, and nuclear power.
 - Potential for biomass energy (pending final decisions on its carbon-free status) including using excess wood waste from the timber industry and new innovations such as algae as biomass fuel.
 - Consideration of nuclear power as a clean, safe, and reliable energy source, with particular emphasis on thorium and breeder reactors.
- **Continued Community Engagement and Communication**
 - Recognition that clear messaging, inclusive communication strategies, and ongoing community education are key to building public trust and support for the energy transition.
 - Challenges effectively reaching and engaging with the broader community, partially due to primary reliance on social media and flyers at earlier points in the transition process.
 - Suggestions for diversifying outreach methods to include options such as a greater variety of in-person events, recorded or livestreamed meetings, and targeted mailings.
 - Emphasis on the need to specifically direct outreach toward certain groups, including elders and youth, to get them actively engaged in the transition process.
- **Environmental Stewardship and Conservation Efforts**
 - Calls to prioritize the protection of natural ecosystems, notably wetlands, as well as careful consideration of managing forest areas.
 - Concerns about issues such as energy consumption and waste, including light pollution, single-use plastics, and recycling.
 - Strong support for environmental education initiatives, particularly in schools, to promote future sustainability and create environmental awareness in younger generations.

- **Need For Regulatory and Legislative Advocacy**
 - Frustration regarding the extensive permitting delays in Minnesota’s regulatory landscape that serve as barriers to infrastructure and energy projects.
 - Calls for legislators to consider the increased costs associated with renewable energy goals and to allow more time for adjustments during the transition process.
 - Suggestions for increased community participation in legislative advocacy and more education regarding topics like previous permitting reform efforts.
 - Desire for increased national and state-level advocacy to ensure the needs and perspectives of rural communities such as Itasca County are addressed in policy decisions.
- **Housing and Infrastructure to Support Development**
 - Discussion on how current widespread housing shortages, rising property taxes, and zoning restrictions impact community growth and resiliency.
 - Importance of upgrading critical infrastructure, such as highlighting Deer River’s recent sewage improvements that can now support expanded and new development.
 - Comments on the need for improved infrastructure support, such as the availability of GIS and utility data, to attract potential businesses.
- **Workforce Support and Flexible Employment Options**
 - Emphasis on supporting Minnesota Power employees, who represent a large portion of the community, through the transition.
 - Acknowledgement of child care shortages and caregiving responsibilities negatively impacting workforce participation and retention, with subsequent staffing shortages affecting all sectors.
 - Encouragement for employers to provide more flexible work arrangements, including provided example such as job-sharing, to overcome workforce barriers.
- **Social Resilience and Community Wellbeing**
 - Calls for increased public education to increase awareness of the long-term social effects and broader economic impacts of the Boswell shutdown versus the immediate transition costs.
 - Comments about a general lack of interest in civic engagement or volunteering outside of a small core group of people.
 - Suggestions for increasing community activities, shared gathering spaces, and initiatives to promote social connections and foster a greater sense of community among residents.



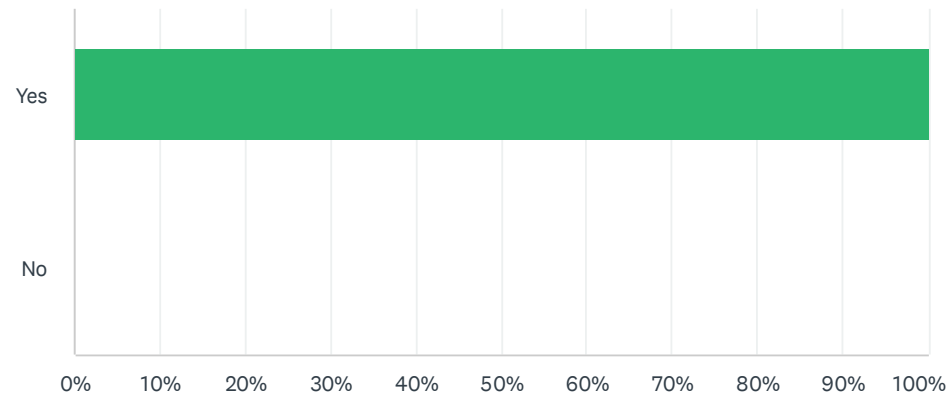
APPENDIX G

SPRING COMMUNITY TOWN HALL SURVEY RESULTS



Q1 Did you attend a community townhall?

Answered: 15 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	100.00%	15
No	0.00%	0
TOTAL		15

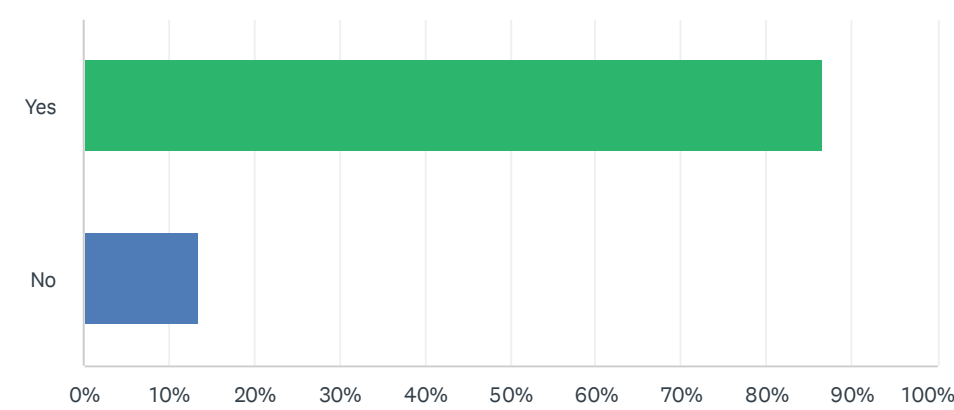
Q2 What community do you live in?

Answered: 15 Skipped: 0

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	Bigfork	6/17/2024 9:16 AM
2	Squaw lake	6/16/2024 8:36 AM
3	Bovey	6/14/2024 9:58 PM
4	Itasca County	6/14/2024 8:16 PM
5	Cohasset	6/14/2024 6:32 PM
6	Cohasset	6/14/2024 5:53 PM
7	Cohasset	6/14/2024 4:50 PM
8	Grand Rapids	6/14/2024 2:57 PM
9	Duluth	6/14/2024 1:33 PM
10	Grand Rapids	6/6/2024 8:37 PM
11	Bovey	6/6/2024 8:20 PM
12	Grand Rapids	6/6/2024 7:24 PM
13	Grand Rapids	6/6/2024 7:20 PM
14	Duluth	6/5/2024 1:10 PM
15	Bigfork	5/14/2024 1:00 PM

Q3 Have you ever heard of energy transition?

Answered: 15 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	86.67%	13
No	13.33%	2
TOTAL		15

Q4 What do the words “energy transition” mean to you?

Answered: 15 Skipped: 0

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	Clean energy	6/17/2024 9:16 AM
2	Energy costs rising.... alot	6/16/2024 8:36 AM
3	To be facetious: Great expense at a questionable cost. Movement to another but viable source to provide an alternative source of power.	6/14/2024 9:58 PM
4	getting away from coal	6/14/2024 8:16 PM
5	Changes that are being made to provide energy to the surrounding communities.	6/14/2024 6:32 PM
6	Finding another source of energy to keep Boswell open and save jobs.	6/14/2024 5:53 PM
7	Wind, Solar	6/14/2024 4:50 PM
8	Non-petroleum-product, non-coal-product, SUSTAINABLE energy generation made by community stationary bicycle stations, (i.e. the YMCA); hemp batteries and hempcrete, (as opposed to "concrete"); geothermal heated/cooled, sustainable dwellings; more SOLAR GARDENS, (like in Grand Rapids, east of Hwy 169); etc...	6/14/2024 2:57 PM
9	shift from traditional, fossil fuel-based energy systems to more sustainable, renewable, and low-carbon energy sources.	6/14/2024 1:33 PM
10	Moving from energy source to others	6/6/2024 8:37 PM
11	Moving to a cleaner method of obtaining our energy for the sake of our environment and health. After this presentation I realize this transition is going to really be a challenge to our community, and there are so many competing factors for "how to grow our community/keep our community safe & healthy/be able to afford the place we live." These are all interconnected and we need to work together to find solutions.	6/6/2024 8:20 PM
12	Changing the way we get our power.	6/6/2024 7:24 PM
13	Thinking about sustainable energy which is both a replaceable natural resource AND be affordable to create and pass on that value to the buyer of said energy.	6/6/2024 7:20 PM
14	Affects everything	6/5/2024 1:10 PM
15	Transition from fossil fuels(coal) to other more renewable sources	5/14/2024 1:00 PM

Q5 What would you like to learn about regarding energy transition?

Answered: 15 Skipped: 0

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	The impact on our community and workforce.	6/17/2024 9:16 AM
2	Nuclear power	6/16/2024 8:36 AM
3	I'd like to hear from our state legislators that have imposed these laws and what they have for viable and cost effective means.	6/14/2024 9:58 PM
4	how the government will support jobs in our community after shutting down current jobs. things sound good until rural loses jobs.	6/14/2024 8:16 PM
5	Is it cost effective? And how does the use of solar and wind turbines effect the global warming across the United States ?	6/14/2024 6:32 PM
6	I attended a meeting and was disappointed it only included new business venture discussion to replace the tax base,of Boswell.	6/14/2024 5:53 PM
7	What is going to happen to Boswell. Seems insane to do all the upgrades that have been done past decade and then shut it down and build new replacement sources. Wake up citizens, your being fleeced to try change mother nature's natural warming and cooling cycles.	6/14/2024 4:50 PM
8	See above; full city/county/state/ federal/ TRIBAL financial/legal transparency, and how Cohasset, Grand Rapids, Deer River, Leech Lake Nation, Coleraine, Bigfork, etc. can sustainably SHIFT the local economy...	6/14/2024 2:57 PM
9	How our communities and people can be leaders in energy transition to improve our local economies and quality of life.	6/14/2024 1:33 PM
10	Options to engage the area's communities in the process of finding viable alternatives for our future	6/6/2024 8:37 PM
11	I'd just like to stay informed with the progress of the taskforce(s).	6/6/2024 8:20 PM
12	How much is it going to cost, how reliable and available will it be.	6/6/2024 7:24 PM
13	The numbers of what it costs to change how we get our energy. How efficient will it be? What are the true costs of changing our energy production methods up.	6/6/2024 7:20 PM
14	?	6/5/2024 1:10 PM
15	What the planned cost will be going forward, how/when will these increased infrastructure cost be passed onto the customer?	5/14/2024 1:00 PM



APPENDIX H

FALL COMMUNITY TOWN HALL SURVEY RESULTS



APPENDIX H

Q1 Please share any additional ideas for Action Items that will begin moving us from Current Reality to Success in Developing Entrepreneur and Business Opportunities:

Answered: 4 Skipped: 1

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
1.	100.00%	4
2.	25.00%	1
3.	0.00%	0
4.	0.00%	0
5.	0.00%	0

#	1.	DATE
1	Co-Working scape to share ideas and provide an open source gathering place	10/31/2024 10:52 AM
2	Develope a local organization for manufacturers like SME (society of manufacturing engineersj. I was an officer in Eula Claire and partictipated in the organization in Fergus Falls. This allowed us to make connections and lead to more local calibration for support. When I was in Wahperon for 3M/Imarion. These contacts allowed us to use more local resources.	10/28/2024 9:00 PM
3	Define success, bringing in jobs for the sake of job is not enough. Do not settle for non-family sustaining wages. Work to build in community wealth building principles into our business opportunities.	10/16/2024 9:13 AM
4	Engage owners and leaders of existing businesses in this work	10/15/2024 11:58 AM
#	2.	DATE
1	Community Commercial Kitchen to support new food start-ups	10/31/2024 10:52 AM
#	3.	DATE
	There are no responses.	
#	4.	DATE
	There are no responses.	
#	5.	DATE
	There are no responses.	

APPENDIX H

Q2 Please share any additional ideas for Action Items that will begin moving us from Current Reality to Success in Mobilizing Community Engagement:

Answered: 3 Skipped: 2

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
1.	100.00% 3
2.	0.00% 0
3.	0.00% 0
4.	0.00% 0
5.	0.00% 0

#	1.	DATE
1	Better storytelling and value prop for Itasca and its communities.	10/31/2024 10:53 AM
2	As discussed in the S. Lake meeting engage the tribe early. As mentioned the city of Cohasset did not engage the tribe in the permits review. During the public forum for Huber no one was allowed to speak. The tribe was not allowed input. Shortly after this they went to the Courts. The interface could have been handled better.	10/28/2024 9:05 PM
3	Offer food or payment of some sort for people to engage. Work is work.	10/16/2024 9:16 AM
#	2.	DATE
	There are no responses.	
#	3.	DATE
	There are no responses.	
#	4.	DATE
	There are no responses.	
#	5.	DATE
	There are no responses.	

APPENDIX H

Q3 Please share any additional ideas for Action Items that will begin moving us from Current Reality to Success in Leveraging Partnerships and Advocacy:

Answered: 3 Skipped: 2

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
1.	100.00%	3
2.	0.00%	0
3.	0.00%	0
4.	0.00%	0
5.	0.00%	0

#	1.	DATE
1	We need to focus on either building, strengthening or repairing relationships with the state economic development agencies to ensure that Cohasset, which is significantly impacted by coal energy transition is front of mind when business opportunities present themselves in the state. The area should not be an afterthought which is a common perception.	10/28/2024 5:40 PM
2	Engage IRR for funding with some of these items. Get them on board and in the room.	10/16/2024 9:20 AM
3	Identify the local leadership collaborative to manage this work	10/15/2024 12:01 PM
#	2.	DATE
	There are no responses.	
#	3.	DATE
	There are no responses.	
#	4.	DATE
	There are no responses.	
#	5.	DATE
	There are no responses.	

APPENDIX H

Q4 Please share any additional ideas for Action Items that will begin moving us from Current Reality to Success in Promoting Economic and Community Development:

Answered: 3 Skipped: 2

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
1.	100.00%	3
2.	33.33%	1
3.	33.33%	1
4.	0.00%	0
5.	0.00%	0

#	1.	DATE
1	See previous comment.	10/28/2024 5:43 PM
2	Why are we calling out Leech Lake and Bois Forte and then only talking about Leech Lake under action items? This seems disingenuous and likely seen as a sign of tokenism.	10/16/2024 9:26 AM
3	Increase local funding for arts and recreation programs	10/15/2024 12:02 PM
#	2.	DATE
1	Create community wealth building funds to support local development via CDFIs and locally owned banks.	10/16/2024 9:26 AM
#	3.	DATE
1	Improve our tax situation so our schools can thrive and encourage new people to come and current people to stay.	10/16/2024 9:26 AM
#	4.	DATE
	There are no responses.	
#	5.	DATE
	There are no responses.	

APPENDIX H

Q5 Please share any additional ideas for Action Items that will begin moving us from Current Reality to Success in Advancing Sustainability Initiatives:

Answered: 1 Skipped: 4

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
1.	100.00%	1
2.	100.00%	1
3.	0.00%	0
4.	0.00%	0
5.	0.00%	0

#	1.	DATE
1	Not all of these action items seem neutral and therefore could turn people away.	10/16/2024 9:29 AM
#	2.	DATE
1	Use data in decision making processes not people's feelings and opinions.	10/16/2024 9:29 AM
#	3.	DATE
	There are no responses.	
#	4.	DATE
	There are no responses.	
#	5.	DATE
	There are no responses.	

APPENDIX H

Q6 Please share any additional ideas for Action Items that will begin moving us from Current Reality to Success in Providing Workforce Support:

Answered: 2 Skipped: 3

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
1.	100.00% 2
2.	0.00% 0
3.	0.00% 0
4.	0.00% 0
5.	0.00% 0

#	1.	DATE
1	Gain a better understanding of what a living wage(comfortable living not just basic means) is for the area.	10/31/2024 10:55 AM
2	Engage each of the employers, educators, employees, etc. in these sectors ensuring all players are involved.	10/16/2024 9:32 AM
#	2.	DATE
	There are no responses.	
#	3.	DATE
	There are no responses.	
#	4.	DATE
	There are no responses.	
#	5.	DATE
	There are no responses.	



APPENDIX I

ACTION IDEAS SURVEY SUMMARY



Itasca Community Taskforce
Energy Transition Action Ideas Summary
06.17.24



What innovative, substantial actions could we take to move us toward a just transition?

- Developing Entrepreneur and Business Opportunities
- Mobilizing Community Engagement
- Leveraging Partnerships and Advocacy
- Promoting Economic and Community Development
- Advancing Sustainability Initiatives
- Providing Workforce Support

Energy Transition Action Ideas

Developing Entrepreneur and Business Opportunities	Mobilizing Community Engagement	Leveraging Partnerships and Advocacy	Promoting Economic and Community Development	Advancing Sustainability Initiatives	Providing Workforce Support
- Research supply chain needs for current businesses. Could we start a business locally that would meet those needs? - Cardboard Production Plant - Endow a \$5 million business start-up fund - Speak with local entrepreneurs (like Gary Lemke) who have started successful businesses. Do they have “unfulfilled” dreams or ideas? - Identify new industries that may be able to/interested in locating in the community - Market area for any viable replacement business - Survey gap industries for new potential businesses - Build capital stack that prioritizes local entrepreneurship - Chip Manufacturing Plant (or supplier of components) - Fieldhouse that could host tournaments all year long - Something in the Medical industry, either research or production - Host sessions will local entrepreneurs and small businesses for growth, not retail and food - Convert facility to store power - large battery installation for peak power availability - Convert facility to a garbage burner - Capitalize on the diminishing trades industry - Local Food Production: Vertical hydroponic growing - Metals recycling from computers, phones and other tech	- There needs to be just one “point” organization - Explain to people what energy transition is - Help the community understand the opportunities for new investment, the language “just transition” is something people don’t understand. Find new ways to engage people. - Ask community (not professionals) about their vision - reach out to local organizations explaining the taskforce - Explain to people how energy transition is impacting them now and into the future - I think people need to see the county board more active with this - Create a presentation that explains and informs the general public about what it is, how it impacts, and why it matters. - Do a baseline survey of community wellness indicators to gauge future efforts - Develop local definition of what a “just transition” looks like - must extinguish idea that Boswell being closed by environmentalists - We had very few people at the meetings vs the Just Transition stakeholders and committee - we could do a more boots on the ground approach using community celebrations to inform them about energy transition. - visitors need to be canvassed - Specific Action Steps/Game Plan - Open to all feasible options - provide an e-address for ideas to replace Boswell	- Communicate at highest MP levels-support Boswell options - Discussions with MP about alternative energy production - Advocate for continued generation at the Boswell facility after it stops using coal - Press Minnesota Power for a firm commitment to biomass, doing something at the current site has the greatest potential for job opportunity - Advocate for a thoughtful timeline for the Boswell facility transition - Connect work to City clean energy plan, ItascaCAP, and others. - Legislative authority to explore other power generation options - UPM support and communication - retention and expansion - Minnesota permitting reform-support MN State Chamber	- We need to decide what we can promise and what we can’t. If we want them to envision ideas for economic development that is a series of well designed programming not a 45 minute meeting. - Endow Cohasset and Grand Rapids EDAs with \$1 MM each - NRRI - explore & support commercialization opportunities - Focus efforts on new economic development opportunities - Enhanced Tourism Attractions - Develop community spaces that attract workers to the area. - Indoor playground that would be a destination for northern families - Marketing of the area’s various resources	- Promote CO2 free energy. ie - build a nuclear power plant - Convert to a biomass facility - Restore Mississippi River wetlands in Itasca County - decentralize power distribution - empower local landowners to self generate power - consider hydro electric generation - Provide solar installation grants for Itasca Co. residents	- Invest in Minnesota North employee retraining program - Survey what gap careers could train/create - programs in to support existing employers - Job transition training - Programming in place for any potential displaced workers - Mesabi Metals support - connecting with the trades and new residents



APPENDIX J

**ACTION IDEAS
WORKSHOP RESULTS**



Actions Ideas Workshop | 06.24.2024

GREEN: Which actions do you feel are the most feasible and within the realm of accomplishing?

YELLOW: Which do you want to happen so bad but not sure it can or will?

Mobilizing Community Engagement	Developing Entrepreneur and Business Opportunities	Promoting Economic and Community Development	Leveraging Partnerships and Advocacy	Advancing Sustainability Initiatives	Providing Workforce Support
Train the Trainer (6 Green)	Spec Building (6 Green)	Leverage growth of UPM, MN Power, & Mesabi Metallurgy (9 Green + 1 Yellow)	Get upstream: Engage in energy policy making decisions (6 Green + 1 Yellow)	Convert to a biomass facility (1 Green + 2 Yellow)	Ensure housing matched workforce needs (3 Green + 4 Yellow)
Focus on Action items, What is our objective? (4 Green + 2 Yellow)	Research supply chain needs for current businesses. Could we start a business locally that would meet those needs? (5 Green + 2 Yellow)	Tri-state HWY 2 economic corridor opportunities (3 Green)	Discussions with MP about alternative energy production (2 Green + 2 Yellow)	Promote CO2 free energy. ie - build a nuclear power plant (1 Yellow)	Survey what gap careers could train/create programs in to support existing employers (2 Green + 1 Yellow)
Educate on challenges too: Reliability & Cost/Affordability (4 Green)	Site and Land development plan commercial and residential (5 Green)	Targeted economic development marketing strategy (2 Green)	Minnesota permitting reform- support MN State Chamber (5 Yellow)	Restore Mississippi River wetlands in Itasca County	Invest in Minnesota North employee retraining program
Effectively communicate impending Boswell transition risks & opportunities (3 Green)	How do we support MN Power to keep them here? (4 Green)	NRRI - explore & support commercialization opportunities (1 Green)	Focused permitting reform efforts for Host Communities (2 Yellow)	decentralize power distribution	Job transition training
Simplify engagement collateral to engage diverse audiences (2 Green)	Venture Capital Fund, attract new and local (3 Yellow)	Focus efforts on new economic development opportunities (1 Green)	Communicate at highest MP levels- support Boswell options	empower local landowners to self generate power	Programming in place for any potential displaced workers
Community impact example of lost tax base = X Targets or Walgreens tax base (2 Green)	Entrepreneur Marketplace (3 Yellow)	Child care strategy (3 Yellow)	Advocate for continued generation at the Boswell facility after it stops using coal	consider hydro electric generation	Mesabi Metallurgy support
Energy retrofits reduce costs to encourage transitions (2 Green)	Metals recycling from computers, phones and other tech (1 Yellow)	Investment in housing (1 Yellow)	Press Minnesota Power for a firm commitment to biomass, doing something at the current site has the greatest potential for job opportunity	Provide solar installation grants for Itasca Co. residents	connecting with the trades and new residents
Communicate complex topics, not click bait (Huber example) (1 Green)	Cardboard Production Plant	Global housing strategy (1 Yellow)	Advocate for a thoughtful timeline for the Boswell facility transition	Maximize community energy efficiency	Retraining Strategy
Stable, reliable, and affordable energy (1 Yellow)	Endow a \$5 million business start-up fund	Develop community spaces that attract workers to the area.	Connect work to City clean energy plan, ItascaCAP, and others.		
Ensure "listening" is a part of all engagement activities	Speak with local entrepreneurs (like Gary Lemke) who have started successful businesses. Do they have "unfulfilled" dreams or ideas?	Endow Cohasset and Grand Rapids EDAs with \$1 MM each	Legislative authority to explore other power generation options		
There needs to be just one "point" organization	Identify new industries that may be able to/interested in locating in the community	Enhanced Tourism Attractions	UPM support and communication - retention and expansion		
Explain to people what energy transition is	Market area for any viable replacement business	We need to decide what we can promise and what we can't. If we want them to envision ideas for economic development that is a series of well designed programming not a 45 minute meeting.	Develop a broader set of partnerships to support specific plan strategies		
Help the community understand the opportunities for new investment, the language "just transition" is something people don't understand. Find new ways to engage people.	Survey gap industries for new potential businesses	Indoor playground that would be a destination for northern families	Carbon free woody biomass		
Ask community (not professionals) about their vision	Build capital stack that prioritizes local entrepreneurship	Marketing of the area's various resources	Identify barriers to successful energy transition		
reach out to local organizations explaining the taskforce	Chip Manufacturing Plant (or supplier of components)	Case Study communities	Eliminate income thresholds for energy improvements		
Explain to people how energy transition is impacting them now and into the future	Fieldhouse that could host tournaments all year long	Master Plan for Itasca County Development			
I think people need to see the country board more active with this	Something in the Medical industry, either research or production	Transportation on demand			
Create a presentation that explains and informs the general public about what it is, how it impacts, and why it matters.	Host sessions with local entrepreneurs and small businesses for growth, not retail and food				
Do a baseline survey of community wellness indicators to gauge future efforts	Convert facility to store power - large battery installation for peak power availability				
Develop local definition of what a "just transition" looks like	Convert facility to a garbage burner				
must extinguish idea that Boswell being closed by environmentalists	Capitalize on the diminishing trades industry				
We had very few people at the meetings vs the Just Transition stakeholders and committee - we could do a more boots on the ground approach using community celebrations to inform them about energy transition.	Local Food Production: Vertical hydroponic growing				
visitors need to be canvassed					
Specific Action Steps/Game Plan					
Open to all feasible options					
provide an e-address for ideas to replace Boswell					



APPENDIX K

**CURRENT REALITIES,
SUCCESS INDICATORS,
AND ACTION STEPS**



Current Realities, Success Indicators, & Action Items



Current Reality: *Description of the current situation as it relates to the Action.*

Success Indicators: *Explains what will be different if the organization mobilizes around and gets behind the Action.*

Actions Items: *Considers and answers “What do we need to accomplish at a level of program, project, or event to begin moving from Current Reality to Success as described?”*

This document includes current realities, success indicators, and accomplishments as developed at the August 26, 2024 workshop. It includes raw ideas from workshop participants, with mild edits from the facilitation team for clarity. Many of these action items were later refined and updated through discussion with the task force, steering committee, and other community partners with knowledge of major topics.

ENERGY TRANSITION VISION: A thriving community invested in our future sustainable energy shift.

We will do this by:

1. Mobilizing Community Engagement
2. Developing Entrepreneur and Business Opportunities
3. Promoting Economic and Community Development
4. Leveraging Partnerships and Advocacy
5. Advancing Sustainability Initiatives
6. Providing Workforce Support

Current Realities, Success Indicators, & Action Items

A1. Developing Entrepreneur and Business Opportunities

Current Reality

- IEDC has The Forge, an innovation and education space for aspiring entrepreneurs
- Driving Access to Wealth and Networks (DAWN), a Launch Minnesota regional program covering Itasca County that supports entrepreneurs
- Opportunity for new industry (green steel, batteries, cement)
- Difficulty in energy cost competitiveness
- Massive grid supporting power
- Abundant water resources
- Cannabis opportunity
- Underutilized wood basket
- Expansion opportunities (DAWN, Yanmar/ASV, Boswell renewables)
- Infrastructure for entrepreneurs and solo-preneurs (makerspace, Entrepreneur Fund (EF), Small Business Development Center (SBDC), Non-Traditional Lenders Forum (NTLF), commercial bankers)

Success Indicators

- Increase in cohort participation geographically
- Thriving and utilized entrepreneur support ecosystem
- Increase in number and diversity of businesses
- New value-added products are being produced from traditional assets (water, wood, iron ore)
- Expand downtown business association support

Action Items

1. Learn about value-add product options (wood, iron ore, water)
2. Center on Rural Innovation (CORI) and DAWN identify community influencers and activate them
3. Develop small business support group
4. Create business ownership guide and resources
5. Consider Tribal culture and communities within entrepreneurial ecosystem engagement
6. Celebrate entrepreneurs through recognition events and communications
7. Entrepreneur early identification and education (college and high school – move from problem to solution)
8. Create incentives to produce these products here (R&D?)

Current Realities, Success Indicators, & Action Items

A2. Mobilizing Community Engagement

Current Reality

- Limited community engagement – often it is the same handful of people that show up at and/or engage in community events
- Lack of understanding of how this impacts the community (taxes, school, jobs, Boswell; different from past employment and economic cycle transitions)
- Planning for this transition now
- Unrelatable planning timelines (10 years in future)
- It's happening regardless of political climate
- People only show up to public meetings when directly affected (usually negative)

Success Indicators

- Strong marketing campaign for broad community understanding of true information about issue and scale/significance
- Volunteer committees to help other action ideas get out to community for understanding
- Track community understanding with survey – 70-80% in 5 years
- Engagement from people about new ideas and ways to make other actions successful
- Group becomes trusted for public to get information from and people show up to meetings/events

Action Items

1. Develop community survey to gauge community understanding of energy transition
2. Build volunteer committees to disseminate information on other action ideas (*Keep messaging politically neutral, succinct messaging that includes the 'why', high level and focus on quality of life, thriving, and hope.*)
3. Launch website hub for this initiative for people to reference, both current and future
4. Create scenarios about possible impacts of action or inaction and incorporate into communications
5. Conduct radio, social media, print media, and other marketing campaigns to raise awareness and share engagement opportunities. "What do people need to know and need to do?"
6. Obtain funding for marketing campaigns
7. Ask for feedback from community on new ideas around other 5 action ideas (e.g., website form, partner communities' channels, booth at county fair, schools)
8. Identify proper partners and timing of engagement

Current Realities, Success Indicators, & Action Items

A3. Leveraging Partnerships and Advocacy

Current Reality

- There was some permitting reform last legislative session; the issue has some momentum
- Tension between “getting upstream” of issues and reality of fires that are on the ground
- Local policy/advocacy environment is unclear
- Approach does not appear unified
- Ongoing questions about what is considered carbon free or neutral, potential for biomass, and concurrent regulatory processes
- Limited coordination with Leech Lake Band

Success Indicators

- Local stakeholders have a coordinated approach led by a coordinating team
- Supplying sufficient, cost-competitive energy
- Clarity on possible energy sources for Boswell
- Shared policy agenda
- Agenda aligned with other coal communities

Action Items

1. Continue to support Boswell Energy Center as its uses shift (e.g., build community support and advocacy for IRP process)
2. Dig deeper on permitting reform to understand what has been done and what gaps remain
3. Continue permitting advocacy reform for all business models
4. Map out local policy/advocacy environment and stakeholders
5. Meet with Leech Lake leaders to align agenda
6. Meet with leaders from other coal communities and related partners (e.g., Coalition of Utility Cities, Range Association of Municipalities and Schools, unions)
7. Convene advocacy table
8. Develop community engagement process to inform policy agenda
9. Develop policy decision-making framework
10. Created shared policy agenda (e.g., St. Louis County Days)
11. Proactively engage with federal legislative representatives

Current Realities, Success Indicators, & Action Items

A4. Promote Economic and Community Development

Current Reality

- On the right path with Leech Lake Band
- Organizational, community, etc. (segmented) goals
- Sense of defeat, especially on housing and child care
- Overwhelming tasks, more talk than action
- Not sure how to access funds to fit needs
- Success in small business development
- Opportunities for clean tech industries with federal funds
- Understaffed
- Strong arts community
- Don't understand cost of doing business, housing needs, community needs
- Don't understand site availability
- Outdated infrastructure

Success Indicators

- Strong relationships with Leech Lake and Bois Forte bands; nations are engaged with non-Tribal entities
- Multiple organizations aligned for a large funding opportunity (child care, workforce, etc. success)
- Employers and workers have choice of housing and child care options
- New development and opportunities are sustainable (projects/grants)
- Nonprofit entities are strong and sustainable
- Funds are matched to organizations' needs
- Sustainable funding for small business support
- Coordinated effort to build infrastructure
- More clean tech industries
- Complete list of developable sites that are site-ready or plan to be site-ready
- Community understands needs related to businesses, housing, child care, etc.

Action Items

1. Consistently attend and participate in Leech Lake Local Indian Council (LIC) events
2. Develop and prioritize sites and match to trends to complete site readiness
3. Clearly communicate business needs and combat NIMBYism with marketing campaign
4. Create fund navigator position (not a grant writer)
5. Promote and support arts and recreation to attract workforce
6. Develop marketing strategy to leverage clean tech opportunities – attraction, launch, and relationship with the Band
7. Unify a group of organizations behind a project or idea that convenes to identify and preserve a large fund (housing, child care, workforce, business development)
8. Understand and develop sustainable models for all projects
9. Conduct countywide infrastructure assessment and position to partner with fund assistance

Current Realities, Success Indicators, & Action Items

A5. Advancing Sustainability Initiatives

Current Reality

- 100% mandate (2040)
- State is investing in sustainability
- Federal grants and support available
- Limited/low community knowledge on energy transition
- Grand Rapids PUC solar project came online this year

Success Indicators

- PUC ruling on carbon free energy (where biomass is considered carbon free)
- Expanded power generation options (e.g., nuclear)
- More incentives to enable all income levels to afford clean energy
- Increased community awareness around transition (political support and will/buy-in)

Action Items

1. Provide comments, public input, and testimony for Minnesota Power in IRP and carbon free docket at the Public Utilities Commission
2. Identify primary resource of information of financial impact (Itasca County?) and compile in one place
3. Conduct education campaign focused on grassroots understanding of the big picture financial and community impacts on all residents, including education on what energy sources work for northeast Minnesota
4. Dedicate staff capacity to identification of clean energy and sustainability-related grant opportunities, applications, and management
5. Work and collaborate with Minnesota Power to consider other power generation options (e.g., biomass, nuclear, wind, hydroelectric, etc.)
6. Add some of the other action ideas from [this document](#) and from the survey
 - a. Partner with [Project Stove Swap](#)
 - b. Curate a library of data and other resources that will support successful grant applications by any applicant
 - c. Tap into hydrogen hub, which avoids NE MN
 - d. Convene a local/regional biomass consortium to build the scientific basis for responsible use – leverage past learning, such as Blandin Foundation-convened tour of Finland
 - e. Align action with the state's Climate Action Framework

Current Realities, Success Indicators, & Action Items

A6. Providing Workforce Support

Current Reality

- Not enough housing
- Many child care barriers (staffing, facilities)
- Lack of awareness of state workforce training grants
- Lack of broadband in some areas
- Will need upskilling and reskilling of Boswell employees
- Mismatch between jobseekers and skills needed

Success Indicators

- Abundance of skilled workforce
- Increased number of accessible child care spots (proximity, affordability, time of day)
- Increased utilization of workforce training grants and opportunities
- Increased housing options – single family starter homes, affordable multifamily, justice-involved individuals, senior living options, shared living
- Broadband access for all who need it
- Boswell-related employees have fulfilling employment

Action Items

1. Conduct child care best practice scan from other regions
2. Conduct housing best practice scan from other regions
3. Conduct broadband best practice scan from other regions
4. Conduct displaced workers best practice scan from other regions
5. Educate about available funding and technical assistance for displaced workers
6. Educate about available funding and technical assistance for child care
7. Educate about available funding and technical assistance for housing
8. Educate about available funding and technical assistance for broadband
9. Identify, develop, and promote needed, diverse child care career pathways
10. Identify, develop, and promote needed, diverse construction career pathways
11. Identify, develop, and promote needed, diverse displaced workers career pathways
12. Seek funding to capitalize the Itasca County Local Housing Trust Fund
13. Seek funding for housing projects that can reduce the “build-to-sell or rent” funding gap (e.g., water infrastructure, pre-development, land acquisition)
14. Seek funding for housing rehab and maintenance work to help preserve existing housing.
15. Provide region-specific technical assistance for local governments on planning and zoning to support housing
16. Fund a childcare-focused navigator to coordinate the region’s childcare provider network, help pool resources, and help potential new providers (e.g., aid navigating the licensing process)
17. Seek sustainable funding sources that fill operational funding gaps (e.g., increasing wages to decrease staff turnover, paying facilities fees, etc.)



SPARKING CHANGE

DIVERSIFYING OUR REGIONAL ECONOMY



