

KANDIYOHI COUNTY AND CITY OF WILLMAR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION (EDC)

MARKETING AND PUBLIC RELATIONS COMMITTEE

MINUTES

April 26, 2021

Via ZOOM Video Conference

Present: Donna Boonstra, Melissa Knott, Emily Lien, Pam Rosenau, Joanna Schrupp and Brittany VanDerBill

Excused: Jesse Gislason

Staff: Aaron Backman, Executive Director and Connie Schmoll, Business Development Manager

Secretarial: Cathy Skindelien, Legal & Administrative Assistants, Inc.

Chairperson Brittany VanDerBill called the meeting to order at approximately 12:01 p.m.

**MINUTES—**

IT WAS MOVED BY Emily Lien, SECONDED BY Melissa Knott, to approve the Minutes of the February 22, 2021 meeting as emailed. MOTION CARRIED.

**Social Media Statistics.** Aaron Backman provided the following Facebook statistics from February 19 to April 23, 2021: There were approximately 3700 followers and 37 posts published. On the Economic Development Commission website there were notable spikes that occurred in the second week in April. 1,500 people tuned in on April 12<sup>th</sup>. This was due to articles in the *West Central Tribune* regarding a potential distribution center in the Willmar Industrial Park, a potential housing project on Block 25, and the hiring of Sarah Swedburg to replace Connie Schmoll, who is retiring in May. Two days later another spike of over 1000 people occurred, this was regarding the Willmar WYE project and the City Hall discussion regarding JCPenney. Normally approximately 4,000 people are following the EDC, but there were 5,000 page views in this time frame. Eighty percent were referral or organic searches, they were tuning in on specific days.

**UNFINISHED BUSINESS—**

**Elevate Business Academy.** Schmoll reported that Elevate is a program under Rising Tide Capital, a 12-week program for entrepreneurs and start-up businesses about leadership and developing business leaders. Lesson 7 of 12 is scheduled for this week. Abdusalaam Hirsi and Schmoll are co-instructors, the main instructor is from Rising Tide Capital in New Jersey. The program started with nine students, four have dropped out so there are currently five enrolled. After class seven the task is to start selling the program and get new people for the fall session. The website is about to launch and will need testimonials and pictures, this is where the Marketing and Public Relations

Committee could help. The next step is to find funding for these classes in the fall, promote this program to the community, and reach as many individuals as possible.

**Marketing Materials for Willmar Renaissance Zone.** Two marketing flyers for the Renaissance Zone were provided to each of the committee members. The first was a two-page flyer. There were changes recommended at the last meeting, for example centering the header, and these changes were made. The one-page flyer now incorporates the logos on the bottom and other changes were made as suggested. Other information has already been removed in an effort to slim it down. Backman requested comments on the double-sided flyer. Melissa Knott commented that the City of Willmar logo is low resolution, there should be a high resolution logo so it matches the EDC logo on both flyers. Backman will check on a higher resolution logo. Knott suggested centering the Renaissance Zone so there could be an EDC logo on top, a co-brand of EDC and the Renaissance Zone. More consistent capitalization and punctuation on the bullet points in the flyer was also suggested. With regard to the one-page flyer, there was an acronym that read R2 instead of RZ, this was corrected. Chair VanDerBill stated that Backman's title should read Executive Director instead of Executive Order. Knott suggested the use of high resolution photos so the street names could be read, this would add to the quality of the flyer. Chair VanDerBill suggested removing the underlining of the URL to make the underscores show up better.

**Broadband.** Schmoll reported that broadband is a busy topic right now. It is looking positive with the four townships. Federated Telephone Cooperative will be the provider. A grant will be written to the state of Minnesota for border-to-border funding. There is funding coming from the federal government and other grants possible through the state. The EDC's Broadband Committee is looking into projects outside the four townships, on the east side of the county. Prinsburg is looking to do a project also. Nothing is needed from this committee yet, but it could happen in the future. The Broadband committee needs to educate the citizens, the information needed for that is already put together on a powerpoint presentation.

#### **NEW BUSINESS—**

##### **Election of chair and vice chair.**

IT WAS MOVED BY Melissa Knott, SECONDED BY Donna Boonstra to elect Emily Lien the Chairperson, and Pam Rosenau the Vice Chairperson. MOTION CARRIED.

*[Emily Lien assumed the role of Chairperson for the remainder of the meeting]*

**Feedback from the EDC Strategic Planning Session.** Backman presented information from the EDC's strategic planning session. There were just under 30 participants. Cheryl Glaeser was the facilitator. There was a good response rate on the survey, with 29 respondents. Based on the survey the most pressing issues were broadband, workforce, childcare and housing. Attendees pointed to the number one need of broadband access, it was brought to the forefront during the pandemic. Workforce development was ranked number two and business support number three. The EDC's financial situation last year was unusual due to COVID, with eight times more dollars

flowing through the organization than a normal year. Draft action plans were developed for the three main goals– broadband, workforce development and business support.

Glaeser had ideas about the EDC's committee structure and she suggested reformatting the Broadband Committee, replacing it with a business services and infrastructure committee that would also deal with childcare, housing and Highway 23. In Backman's opinion, since broadband is at a crucial point it would be preferable to leave this committee alone for this year.

There was also discussion by some attendees on reducing the number of committees, possibly eliminating the Ag Committee. The Joint Powers Board at its meeting strongly preferred to keep the Ag Committee, but hold fewer meetings. Schmoll reported the Ag committee does several presentations and workshops and developed a subcommittee on industrial hemp, which progress has been delayed due to regulations. It is very important to have a group that is ready and willing to act when something comes up, but they do not need to meet every month. The Ag Committee is willing to consider letting subcommittees handle certain items and meet quarterly instead of monthly.

Backman commented that there was discussion of branching off workforce development from the Business Retention and Expansion Recruitment Committee (BRE). BRE Chairperson Bowen and others are keen on workforce development. Backman would prefer not going to six committees instead of five. The question was raised if Elevate should go with the Finance Committee. They could work with entrepreneurs as well as existing businesses.

Discussion was held on should the EDC hire a person who focuses on marketing or have a contract on marketing? It would be helpful to have someone who interfaces with the other committees and can help with their marketing activities. Redstar could possibly help. Schmoll added that everything the EDC does is integrated with marketing. Knott stated that if the EDC brings in a consultant, he or she would have trouble taking on all of the committees, so hiring a full-time person would work better. With consultants you would have a learning process and higher turnover. VanDerBill agreed that if you want to lean heavier on marketing, it would be hard for a consultant to keep up with all of the committees.

Backman said that the Ag Committee has pushed for a full-time person in the past, which is a challenge for the EDC's budget. Joanna Schrupp asked how much the EDC has spent with the consultants in the past couple years. Backman responded that typically it is in the \$20,000 - \$30,000 range. VanDerBill asked if the EDC only used consultants when it absolutely had to or would they have been used more if they were a full-time employee. Backman responded that a full-time employee would have been used more than having a consultant. Schrupp asked if consultants are utilized for websites. Backman stated consultants have been used for Elevate, the Opportunity Zone prospectus and the Highway 23 Coalition. Schmoll added that they also do updates on social media. Redstar is always working in the background. Knott asked if the EDC has the ability to continue using the consulting, and have them be the education tool to hire an entry-level person who could be less expensive. Schrupp added it could be called a two- or three-year temporary position so there is flexibility. Knott stated that would give the EDC potential for a long-term solution. Backman asked about a job description for this type of position. Knott had something that could be a starting point. Schrupp would check on it also. Rosenau mentioned that

trying to hire within would help each committee as well, one-on-one contact would be beneficial, each committee wouldn't have to explain everything and the employee would be more engaged.

Backman mentioned the EDC has had specific marketing activities such as the Opportunity Zone where Golden Shovel was hired for \$16,500, and Cheryl Glaeser was used for the Minnesota Pandemic Relief and CARES Pandemic Relief programs, which was very helpful. In financial terms, the EDC is in relatively good shape, it tries to keep costs reasonable and could potentially draw from reserves to hire a marketing person. Boonstra agreed this idea has value, there are funds available, the need is there and it would be a positive move. Backman mentioned that the EDC has only spent approximately \$1,400 of its \$22,000 marketing budget. It could be time act. Boonstra mentioned the budget will need to be revised. Boonstra also stated that the need for a marketing person often gets overlooked. According to Knott, the only voice the EDC really has is Backman and Schmoll, who could more efficient and effective without having these extra responsibilities.

**Broadband action.** Schmoll reported there was work done at the strategic planning session. They set a goal to have 50% of Kandiyohi County served in two years and 100% served in five years with 100 download and 20 upload speeds. The pandemic has changed the number of people working and schooling at home. Stories of connecting with loved ones during the pandemic has also had an affect on the goals. Wireless is filling in critical needs but it won't be sufficient to get to the 100/20 goal. Schmoll is committed until the end of December on a contract basis and will be training Sarah Swedburg to assume her broadband responsibilities after December. Backman reported on a study done on telecommuting. Pre-pandemic there were 190,000 people working remotely in Minnesota; during the pandemic there were 1 million and currently 600,000 are still working remotely. Corporations have revisited the idea and will continue to have people work from home in some cases. There is a direct correlation with having broadband to be able to continue this trend.

Schmoll asked about Elevate, should Redstar do the testimonials for it? Knott responded that Jamie Sczublewski and Tyler Gehrking (10-17 Media) would do an excellent job on testimonials. Backman commented that the Elevate program is near completion; week 7 of 12 so the testimonials should be done soon.

**NEXT MEETING**—The next meeting is **12 noon, Monday, May 24, 2021** via ZOOM video conference.

**ADJOURNMENT**—There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 12:55 p.m.



Audience

Content ▼  
Global

Community Management

Mar 21, 2021 - Apr 19, 2021 ▼

Comparison period: Feb 19, 2021 - Mar 20, 2021

Time zone: America/Chicago

## Overview

Lifetime metrics of content published during the selected period.

Posts published

**37**

68.2%

Total reach

**3.7K**

135.3%

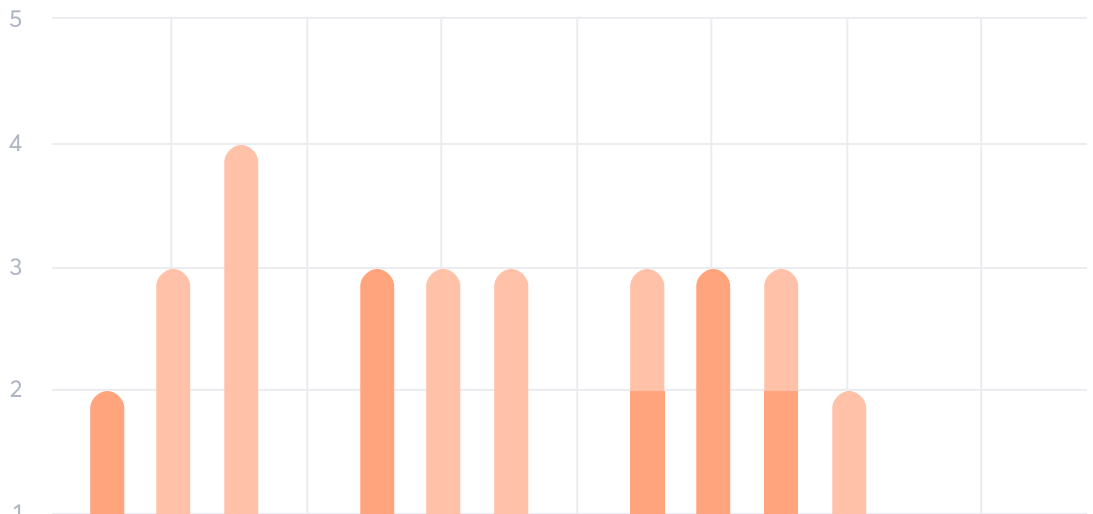
Engaged Users

**157**

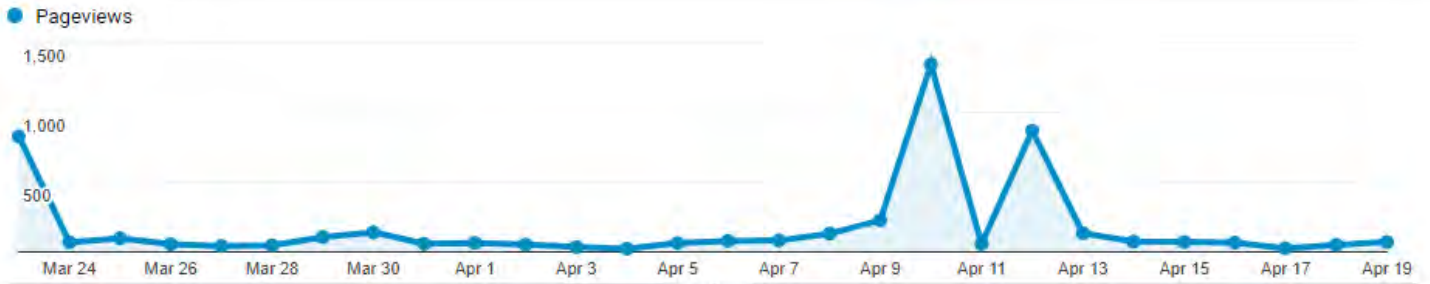
241.3%

## Publishing

Number of posts published during the selected period - with breakdown by post type.



# EDC Website Overview 3/23-4/19/2021



Pageviews  
**4,966**

Unique Pageviews  
**3,195**

Avg. Time on Page  
**00:00:36**

Bounce Rate  
**33.66%**

% Exit  
**53.06%**

## Site Content

Page

Page Title

## Site Search

Search Term

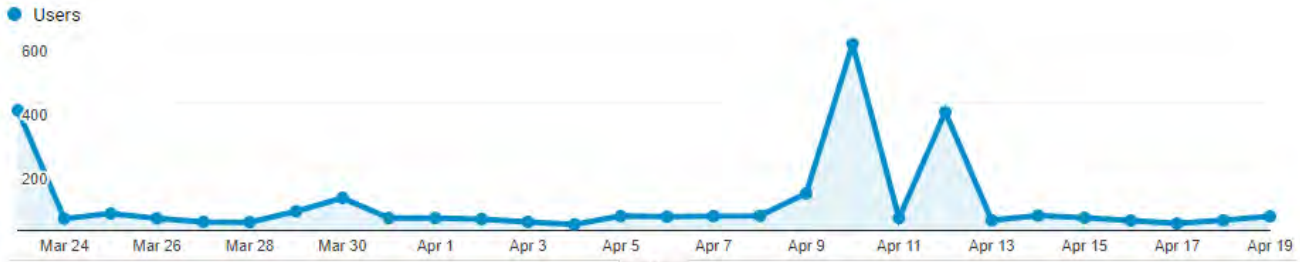
## Events

Event Category

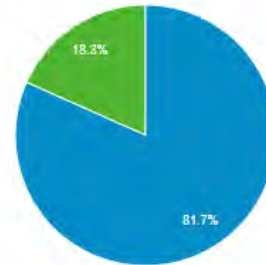
## Page

Pageviews % Pageviews

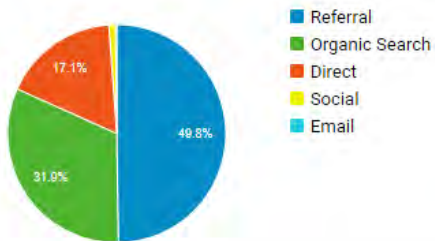
Page	Pageviews	% Pageviews
1. /	3,363	67.72%
2. /your-team/	97	1.95%
3. /business/bussiness-loans-programs/edc-covid-19-r esponse/	61	1.23%
4. /business/transportation/	54	1.09%
5. /business/major-employers/	52	1.05%
6. /news/	42	0.85%
7. /cities/blomkest/	37	0.75%
8. /cities/prinsburg/	35	0.70%
9. /cities/raymond/	31	0.62%
10. /development/	31	0.62%



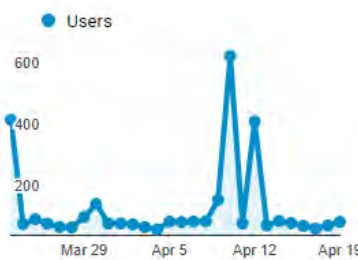
■ New Visitor ■ Returning Visitor



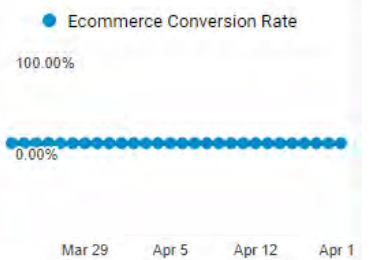
Top Channels



Users



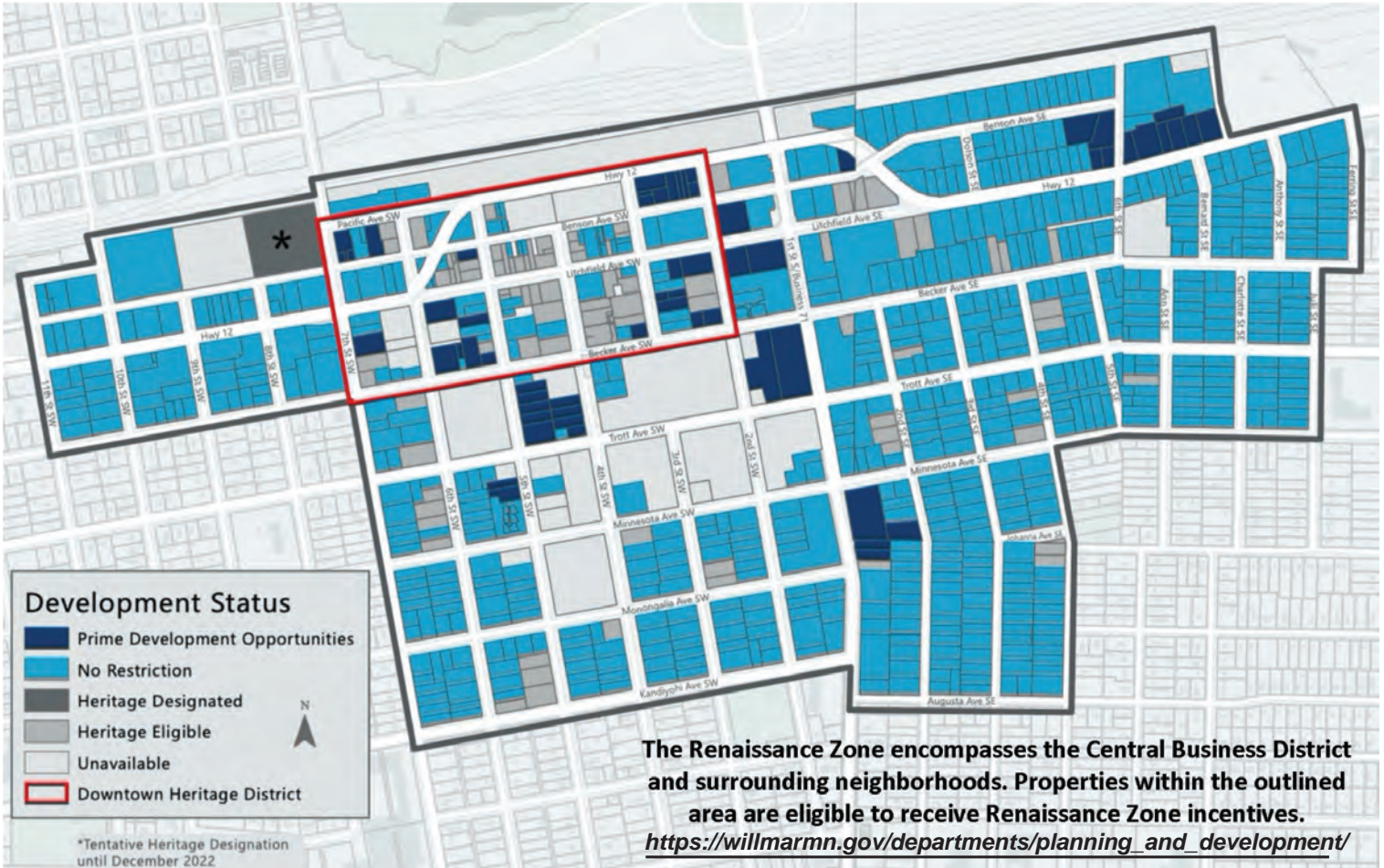
Conversions



	Acquisition			Behavior			Conversions		
	Users	New Users	Sessions	Bounce Rate	Pages / Session	Avg. Session Duration	Ecommerce Conversion Rate	Transaction...	Revenue
	2,077	2,021	2,635	33.66%	1.88	00:00:32	0.00%	0	\$0.0
1 ■ Referral	1,036			2.18%			0.00%		
2 ■ Organic Search	665			71.66%			0.00%		
3 ■ Direct	357			77.75%			0.00%		
4 ■ Social	20			69.57%			0.00%		
5 ■ Email	4			25.00%			0.00%		



An economic development initiative to spur creativity, construct new housing, enhance diversity, and improve the quality of urban life in the heart of Willmar.



## Every project is unique!

Likewise, this handout cannot cover every detail of the Renaissance Zone program. Please meet with city staff to discuss your project and explore the possibilities.

**David Ramstad, PhD**  
 Director, Planning & Development, City of Willmar  
 320-214-5184 | dramstad@willmarmn.gov

**Aaron Backman**  
 Executive Order, Kandiyohi County & City of Willmar EDC  
 320-235-7370 | aaron@kandiyohi.com

## Monetary incentives that are available in the Renaissance Zone (RZ)



Free City-Owned Land



50% Reduction in  
 WMU New Service Fees



TIF or Tax Abatement



Free Water & Sewer  
 Access Charges



Free City Permits



Forgivable Matching Loans  
 for Façade Renovations





# Renaissance Zone (RZ)

***An economic development initiative to spur creativity, construct new housing, enhance diversity and improve the quality of urban life in the heart of Willmar.***

## What monetary incentives are available in the RZ?

- Free City Permits
- Free Sewer Access Charges & Water Access Charges
- Forgivable Matching Loans for Façade Renovations
- Free City-Owned Land
- TIF or Tax Abatement
- 50% Reduction in WMU New Service Fees

### Free City Permits:

Includes all Building Permits, Land-Use and Sign Permits (nominal State fees still apply).

### Free Sewer Access Charges & Water Access Charges:

Significant savings, as SAC and WAC is charged on a per plumbing fixture unit basis.

### Forgivable Loans for Façade Renovations:\*

Commercial property owners may apply for \$5,000 or \$10,000 matching forgivable loans that are payment free and forgiven 20% each year over their five-year term.

### Free City-Owned Land:\*

Awarded based on project satisfaction of RZ goals: Meets significant demand, Creativity, Provides Mixed-Income Housing, Feasibility and Enhancement of pedestrian experience.

### TIF or Tax Abatement:\*

Projects must meet minimum thresholds:

- At least 10,000 square feet (gross)
- At least 3 stories
- At least 4 dwelling-units (mixed-use with housing component) or 10 dwelling-units (residential only)
- Projects with housing components must designate at least 5% or 1-unit

2020 Minimum Investment Thresholds			
Term	Renovation	New Construction	Abatement Percentage
5 Years	\$30 SF	\$50 SF	100%, Years 1-5
10 Years	\$45 SF	\$75 SF	100%, Years 1-5 75%, Years 6-10
15 Years	\$60+ SF	\$100 + SF	100%, Years 1-5 75%, Years 6-10 50%, Years 11-15

(whichever is greater - 25% max.) for households earning up to 80% Area Median Income. These affordable housing units must have rents set at Fair Market Rent for Kandiyohi County as defined by HUD.

- Renovation project costs must be at least 50% of current assessed value.

*\*Subject to approvals by Planning Commission and City Council.*

To apply, visit [https://willmarmn.gov/departments/planning\\_and\\_development/zoning/index.php](https://willmarmn.gov/departments/planning_and_development/zoning/index.php)

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## 50% Reduction in Willmar Municipal Utilities (WMU)

### New Service Fees:

	<u>Fee 100%</u>	<u>Fee 50%</u>
Electric <200 Amp Service	\$300.00	\$150.00
Electric >200 Amp Service	\$800.00	\$400.00
Water 5/8" Supply	\$425.00	\$237.50
Water 3/4" Supply	\$475.00	\$212.50
Water 1" Supply	\$600.00	\$300.00
Water 1-1/2" Supply	\$1,175.00	\$587.50
Water 2" Supply	\$1,325.00	\$662.50

## Ready to access incentives?

Free permits are automatically applied to all projects within the RZ.

All other incentives require submission of an application, found on the City's website. Staff present applications to Planning Commission & City Council for final determination, based on an Evaluation Rubric defining minimum project thresholds.

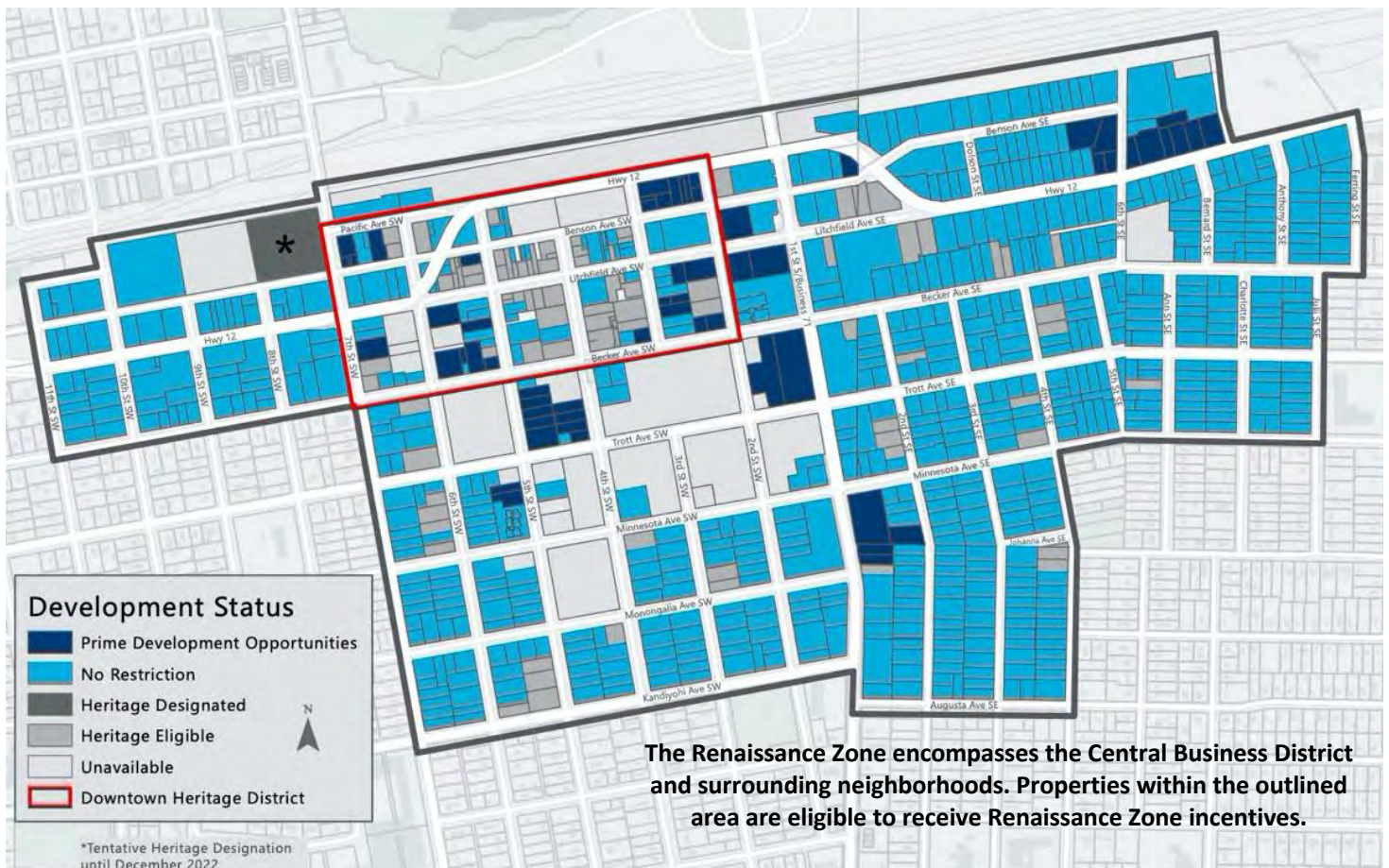
Additionally, the RZ removes development barriers & protects the historic business district and buildings:

### "Open" Zoning:

- Special Conditional Use Permit
- Few Use Restrictions
- Encourage pedestrian-oriented design
  - reduced setbacks
  - increased density
- Reduced parking requirements via "credits"

### Heritage Designation:

- Creation of Heritage Preservation Commission
- Voluntary program for property owners
  - Protect historic buildings
  - Preference for storefront incentive
  - New construction contextual sensitivity within downtown district



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