

**KANDIYOHI COUNTY AND CITY OF WILLMAR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION (EDC)  
MARKETING AND PUBLIC RELATIONS COMMITTEE**

**MINUTES**

**July 26, 2021**

**Multi-Tech Conference Room, MinnWest Technology Campus and via Zoom Video Conference**

Present: Donna Boonstra, Jesse Gislason, Melissa Knott, Emily Lien, Pam Rosenau, Brittany VanDerBill

Absent: Elizabeth Dyrdal

Staff: Aaron Backman, Executive Director and Sarah Swedburg, Business Development Manager

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

Chairperson Emily Lien called the meeting to order at approximately 12:05 p.m.

**AGENDA—**

IT WAS MOVED BY Melissa Knott, SECONDED BY Brittany VanDerBill to approve the Agenda as emailed. MOTION CARRIED.

**MINUTES—**

IT WAS MOVED BY Melissa Knott, SECONDED BY Brittany VanDerBill to approve the Minutes of the June 28, 2021 meeting as e-mailed. MOTION CARRIED.

**SOCIAL MEDIA STATISTICS—**

**Facebook Statistics.** Aaron Backman reported during the period of June 23<sup>rd</sup> to July 20<sup>th</sup> Post Engagement was up 89%. Post reach was 1569 and there were approximately 800 total page likes with 73% coming from women. The top four posts were:

1. Minnesota Department of Transportation's Highway 71 project-661 views.
2. Prairie Winds summer band concert-331 views.
3. 4<sup>th</sup> Street block party and Silent Auction-225 views.
4. Nova Tech Engineering's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary- 207 views. NovaTech employs over 260 professionals in more than 55 countries.

**Website Statistics.** Backman reported activity peaks on July 4<sup>th</sup> relating to the Spicer parade, on the 15<sup>th</sup> regarding the Swanson Field groundbreaking and the largest on July 20<sup>th</sup> regarding an infrastructure article in which Mayor Marv Calvin and Jeff Pattison from West Central Steel were quoted. Elected officials throughout the state were trying to encourage Congress to pass an

infrastructure bill. West Central Steel was the only business in the west central Minnesota region highlighted at the press conference.

There were 1,122 new users, with the highest number coming from the 25-34-year age range. Knott suggested website engagement could be improved by adding links to the posts to give the viewers an opportunity for more information.

#### **UNFINISHED BUSINESS—**

**Marketing and Communications Specialist Position.** Backman reported the Joint Powers Board approved the 2022 budget and the Marketing and Communications Specialist position. They also approved related changes to the employee handbook that would allow flexibility in the new position. The EDC will begin the hiring process. The Board suggested the EDC consider applicants without a bachelor's degree, but with relevant experience. A flexible 32-hour work week, remote work two days per week and benefits are all included in the job description. Two people have already approached Backman regarding the position and it hasn't been posted yet. The ad will be posted to the jobsites of the League of Minnesota Cities, the Association of Minnesota Counties, the Economic Development Association of Minnesota (EDAM), the Minnesota Association of Professional County Economic Developers (MAPCED) and the West Central Tribune. Applications will be accepted for four weeks. The EDC will conduct interviews in September and plan to fill the position by October. The Marketing and Communications Specialist will be the liaison to all EDC committees in need of marketing help and will handle action items from the EDC's planning session in April.

**Broadband Project.** Sarah Swedburg reported that broadband is moving forward. Several mailings have been sent to township residents as the Border-to-Border grant application deadline gets closer. Connie Schmoll is working on a National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) grant. This will include all of the Border-to-Border area plus three additional townships and requires a local match of 10%. American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds cannot be used as the local match for the NTIA grant. The EDC's Broadband and Advanced Technology Committee is working to empower township leaders to handle communications with their residents. Finalizing the grant applications is the current priority. The next step is to delineate who will receive service and who won't. Kandiyohi County will have a planning session to determine how to spend the ARP funds, this should take place in the next few weeks. Charter proposed five small project areas. Two of the projects are in the Border-to-Border area and will be handled by Federated Telephone Cooperative (FTC), the other three are pending. Kandiyohi County has approved one of the three, but has concerns about the cost of the other two projects. The Broadband Committee is working with Charter in an effort to lower the cost, either by changes in Charter's funding level or reconfiguring the engineering.

Arvig's project with the City of Prinsburg is progressing. Central Minnesota Christian School has access to some funds and the city has given support for assessments to cover the rest. The project should be finalized this summer.

**Industrial Hemp Flyer.** Swedburg reported she is gathering content for the industrial hemp flyer. Since no urgent need exists, the project will not be completed until the new Marketing and Communications Specialist is hired. The Industrial Hemp Exploratory Subcommittee discussed the content of the flyer, which will include information on the hemp industry, promotion of Kandiyohi

County as a processing location, area hemp farmers and seed producers, such as Hemponix. While developing the flyer the subcommittee may add other pieces as the need arises. There could be fun video content for education. Swedburg reported there will be a bioplastics company participating in the Community Venture Network on August 13<sup>th</sup> that will be looking for a location for a hemp processing facility. In response to the type of information that would be helpful to promote Kandiyohi County, Swedburg replied options for existing buildings to retrofit or green field spots for development. This information can be communicated verbally or digitally. Promoting the work of the Industrial Hemp Exploratory Subcommittee will help Kandiyohi County stand out as a possible location.

Swedburg attended the National Consultants Forum Workshop, a site selector conference on July 12-14 in Detroit, Michigan. Approximately 20 site selectors attended along with 45 economic development professionals, most from the Midwest and East Coast; she was the only attendee from Minnesota. Mini workshops were led by various site selectors. There were roundtable discussions in groups of five, this was an opportunity to speak directly with the site selectors. It was good to have a range of different site selectors at one place. Backman stressed the importance of attending these conferences. There is a benefit to consistency with attending these events because you encounter many of the same people and build a relationship. Knott suggested creating a database for site selectors with a contact schedule.

[Backman was excused from the meeting]

**Agriculture Flyer.** Swedburg reported the logos and statistics will be updated on the agriculture flyers. There will be two versions created, a tri-fold brochure and an electronic version which will be used to reach out to site selectors. The tri-fold can be bolder, flashier and more picture-oriented. Suggestions for pictures on the tri-fold include Vaxxinova (Epitopix) due to its international presence, Simply Shrimp LLC and Hemponix (Lettuce Abound) representing diverse agriculture and Bushmills Ethanol for renewable energy. It was suggested to change the title of the flyer from Diverse Agriculture & Renewable Energy Opportunities to Diverse Agricultural Opportunities so that it all fits on one line.

**Opportunity Zone/Renaissance Zone Prospectus Update.** Swedburg reported that updates have been made to the Renaissance Zone (RZ) Prospectus, including correcting Backman's job title, improving the resolution quality of the map and City of Willmar logo and changing some verbiage on the map. The flyer is now linked to the EDC website which in turn links to the city's website. There is a PDF version available.

Changes to the Opportunity Zone (OZ) prospectus include on page 21 removing Schmoll's picture and bio and replacing it with Swedburg's. Schmoll's contact information on page 25 will also be replaced with Swedburg's. The picture of Mattress Firm will be removed. The main change will be pivoting from an OZ prospectus to an RZ prospectus. The OZ is a federal program but is very specific on projects. Only new property owners qualify for OZ. The City of Willmar created the RZ to allow more flexibility. The prospectus has been helpful when giving a site tour, the site selector can take it home and learn more about the community. Most of the prospectus will remain the same except the maps will be updated. The last few pages that feature questions and answers about the OZ will

be changed to RZ questions and answers. The resolution on the City of Willmar logo on the back page will be improved. RZ was enacted in December of 2019 so there are five more years of incentives. For now, small changes will be made and a small batch printed to avoid running out. Knott suggested using Flipsnack on the electronic version, it is like paging through a book. Another suggestion was adding more links to drive people to the website. Shortened URLs could be created and documented to allow the EDC to trace which articles are generating interest. When the Marketing and Communications Specialist is employed the EDC newsletter will be reinstated.

**NEW BUSINESS**—Rosenau commented that the Partners in Ag Innovation Conference will be on Thursday, July 29. It will be held in-person and virtually. There are approximately 100 people registered to attend. There are several local speakers. An article in the *West Central Tribune* featured the conference and it will be shared on social media by the EDC.







**NEXT MEETING**—The next meeting is **12 noon, Monday, August 23, 2021** in-person at the Multi-Tech Conference Room, MinnWest Technology Campus and via ZOOM video conference.

**ADJOURNMENT**—There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 12:59 p.m.



# facebook

## Results from June 23 to July 20, 2021

 <b>786</b> Total Page Likes <b>72.6 Women 27.4% Men</b> <b>Highest age group: 35-44</b>	 <b>1,569</b> Post Reach ↑6.7%	 <b>59</b> Page Views ↑13%
 <b>1</b> Page Likes ↓76%	 <b>310</b> Post Engagement ↑89%	 <b>1</b> Page Followers ↓76%
		Total Page Followers <b>942</b>

## TOP 6 POSTS 6/23 to 7/20/2021

**Kandiyohi County & City of Willmar EDC**  
 July 14 · 🌐

Yesterday, Minnesota Department of Transportation started making several roadway and safety improvements along US Highway 71 north of Willmar reducing traffic to single lanes. If possible, you may wish to take an alternate route or allow extra travel time. Construction is planned to go through September 3, 2021. Find more info here <http://ow.ly/dG5u50Fw5to>

**661** People Reached

**19** Reactions, Comments & Shares

<b>2</b> Like	<b>0</b> On Post	<b>2</b> On Shares
<b>1</b> 🤔 Wow	<b>0</b> On Post	<b>1</b> On Shares
<b>1</b> 😡 Angry	<b>0</b> On Post	<b>1</b> On Shares
<b>10</b> Comments	<b>0</b> On Post	<b>10</b> On Shares
<b>5</b> Shares	<b>5</b> On Post	<b>0</b> On Shares

**31** Post Clicks

<b>4</b> Photo Views	<b>4</b> Link Clicks	<b>23</b> Other Clicks
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**NEGATIVE FEEDBACK**

<b>0</b> Hide Post	<b>0</b> Hide All Posts
<b>0</b> Report as Spam	<b>0</b> Unlike Page

Reported stats may be delayed from what appears on posts

**Kandiyohi County & City of Willmar EDC**  
 June 23 · 🌐

Tonight and next Wednesday are your last opportunities to attend the Prairie Winds Summer Band Concerts.

**331** People Reached

**3** Likes, Comments & Shares

<b>1</b> Likes	<b>1</b> On Post	<b>0</b> On Shares
<b>0</b> Comments	<b>0</b> On Post	<b>0</b> On Shares
<b>2</b> Shares	<b>2</b> On Post	<b>0</b> On Shares

**4** Post Clicks

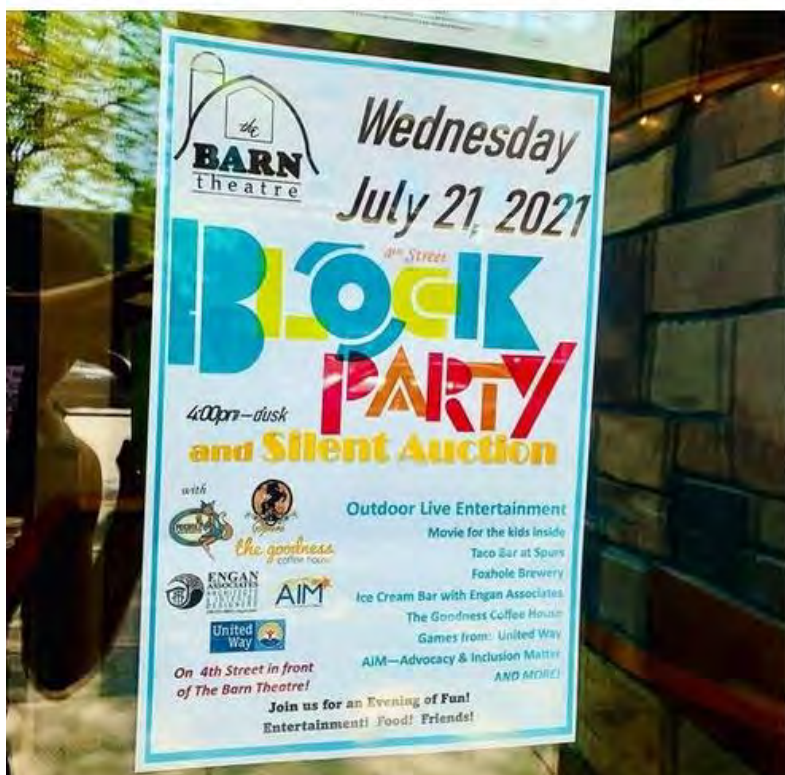
<b>2</b> Photo Views	<b>0</b> Link Clicks	<b>2</b> Other Clicks
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**NEGATIVE FEEDBACK**

<b>0</b> Hide Post	<b>0</b> Hide All Posts
<b>0</b> Report as Spam	<b>0</b> Unlike Page

Reported stats may be delayed from what appears on posts

Did you know the 4th Street Block Party is being held tomorrow in downtown Willmar? Sounds like a great evening of fun! #willmarmainstreet



225 People Reached

8 Likes, Comments & Shares

4 Likes	2 On Post	2 On Shares
2 Comments	0 On Post	2 On Shares
2 Shares	2 On Post	0 On Shares

8 Post Clicks

2 Photo Views	0 Link Clicks	6 Other Clicks
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#### NEGATIVE FEEDBACK

0 Hide Post	0 Hide All Posts
0 Report as Spam	0 Unlike Page

Reported stats may be delayed from what appears on posts

Next year Nova-Tech Engineering will celebrate its 30th anniversary. It started as a two-person company that has grown to employ over 260 professionals. It holds 10 US patents and has equipment in over 600 hatcheries in more than 55 countries and 6 continents.

Nova-Tech is located on the MinnWest Technology Campus. Listen to this interview on how Nova-Tech was started <http://ow.ly/IJ5d50FgYUX>. Looking for employment? Nova-Tech has several openings for machinists, machine operators, accounting intern, programmers and more. Check them out here <https://nteglobal.com/careers/>.



207 People Reached

11 Likes, Comments & Shares

10 Likes	10 On Post	0 On Shares
0 Comments	0 On Post	0 On Shares
1 Shares	1 On Post	0 On Shares

7 Post Clicks

2 Photo Views	2 Link Clicks	3 Other Clicks
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#### NEGATIVE FEEDBACK

0 Hide Post	0 Hide All Posts
0 Report as Spam	0 Unlike Page

Reported stats may be delayed from what appears on posts



Willmar Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce is co-hosting a hybrid workshop on "Dealing with Toxic Co-Workers and Creating Healthy Boundaries." If you are struggling with this issue, register for this workshop to be held July 15 from 12-1 p.m. <http://ow.ly/a1SQ50FmSnS>.

## Wellness Wins:

### Dealing with Toxic Co-Workers and Creating Healthy Boundaries

Toxic co-workers are common. They stir the pot and steal joy from work. Join us to learn how to reclaim your dignity and establish healthy boundaries in the workplace. The presentation will be followed with a question and answer session.

*Wellness Wins is a free virtual series organized to bring resources to business leaders across Kandiyohi County to help them navigate the uncertainty of turbulent and stressful times.*



Presented by Heather Christensen, PE  
Envisioneering, LLC

📅 Thursday, July 15  
🕒 12:00 - 1:00 PM  
📍 Hybrid - Willmar Conference Center or Zoom



178 People Reached

2 Likes, Comments & Shares

1 Likes	1 On Post	0 On Shares
0 Comments	0 On Post	0 On Shares
1 Shares	1 On Post	0 On Shares

6 Post Clicks

1 Photo Views	3 Link Clicks	2 Other Clicks
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#### NEGATIVE FEEDBACK

0 Hide Post	0 Hide All Posts
0 Report as Spam	0 Unlike Page

Reported stats may be delayed from what appears on posts

Yesterday Kandiyohi County & City of Willmar EDC hosted a team from the MN Multi Housing Association based in Bloomington. Following a meeting at the EDC, Executive Director Aaron Backman provided a tour of the Willmar community. They were pleased with the information provided and were particularly interested in seeing the housing projects/sites the EDC has been working on in Willmar.

One stop was to see 15th Street Flats. Photo (L to R): Joe Abraham, MHA Board Chair; Cecil Smith, MHA President and CEO; Lisa Paulson and Kristine Wiemiller, MHA Members; Aaron Backman, EDC Executive Director; Todd Liljenquist, MHA VP and COO; Sandy Garbrecht, MHA Membership Director and Kyle Berndt, MHA Director of Public Policy



175 People Reached

4 Likes, Comments & Shares

4 Likes	4 On Post	0 On Shares
0 Comments	0 On Post	0 On Shares
0 Shares	0 On Post	0 On Shares

7 Post Clicks

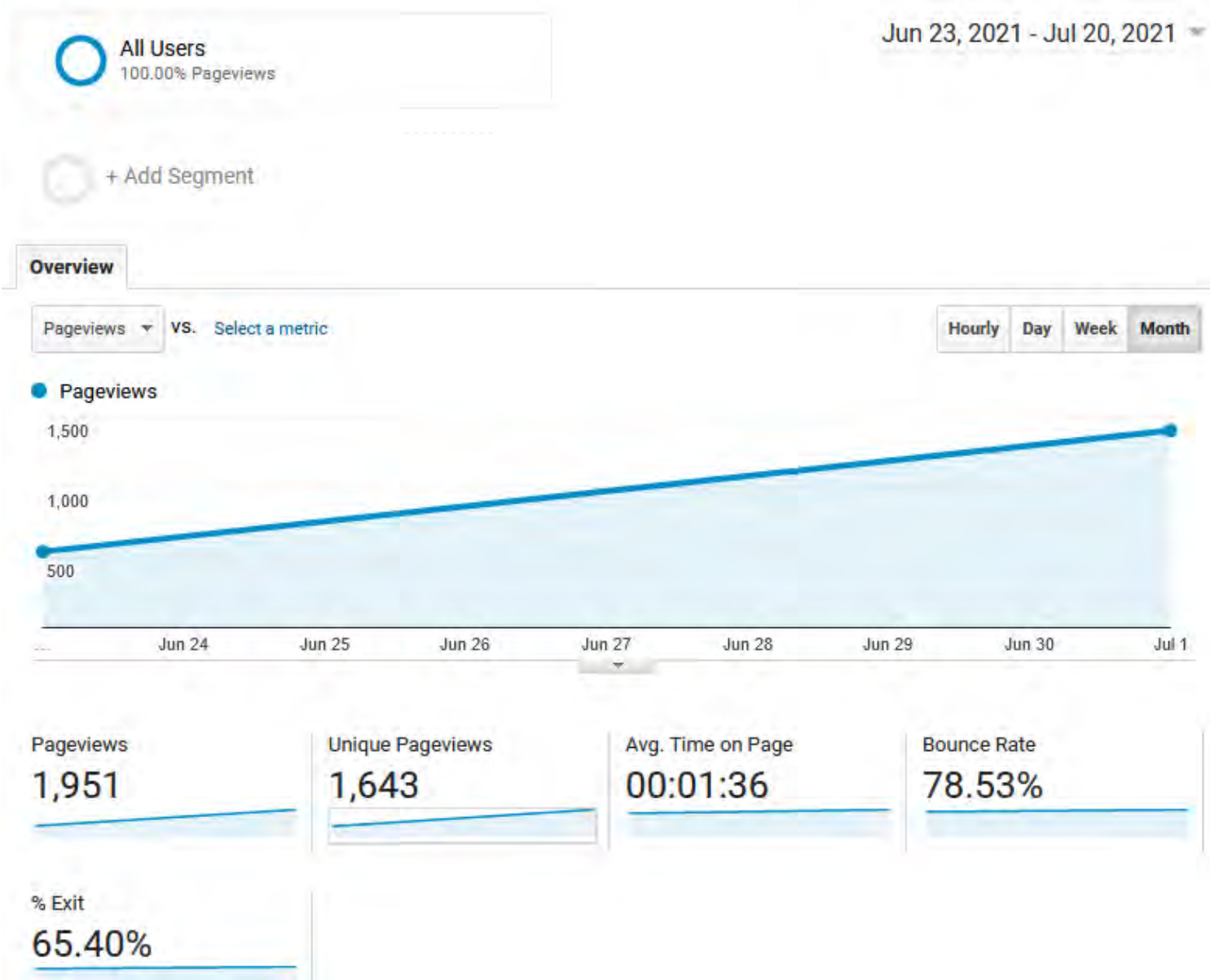
2 Photo Views	0 Link Clicks	5 Other Clicks
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#### NEGATIVE FEEDBACK

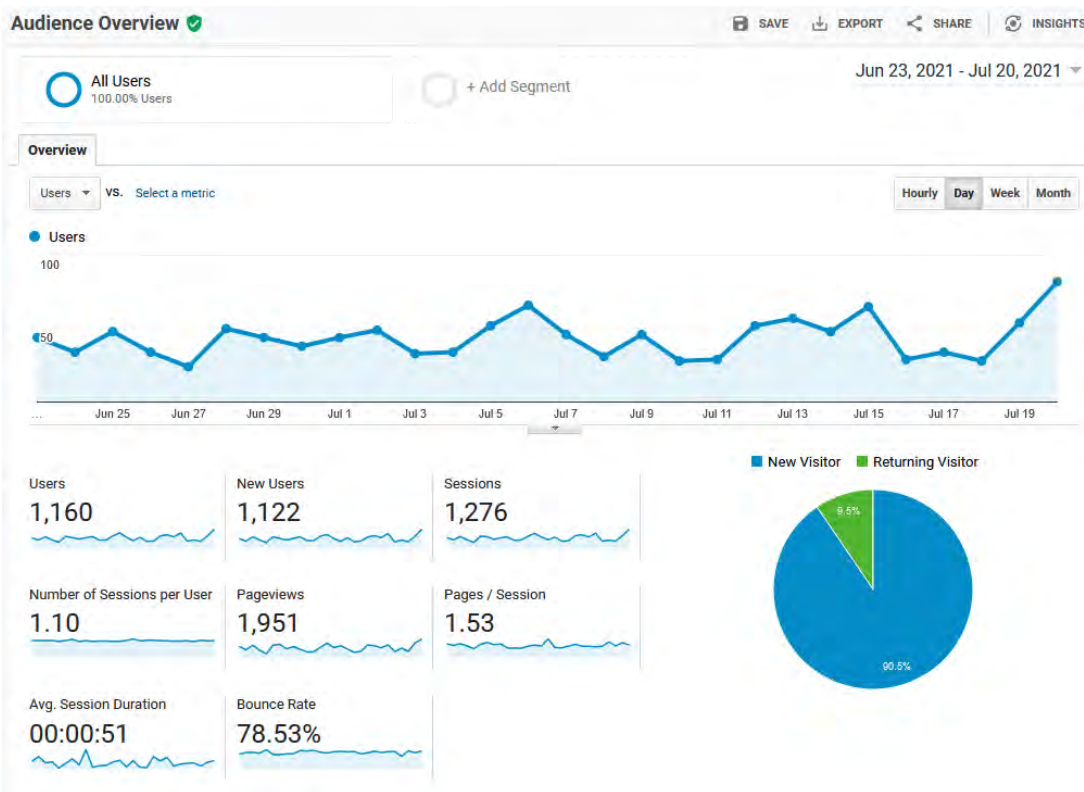
0 Hide Post	0 Hide All Posts
0 Report as Spam	0 Unlike Page

Reported stats may be delayed from what appears on posts

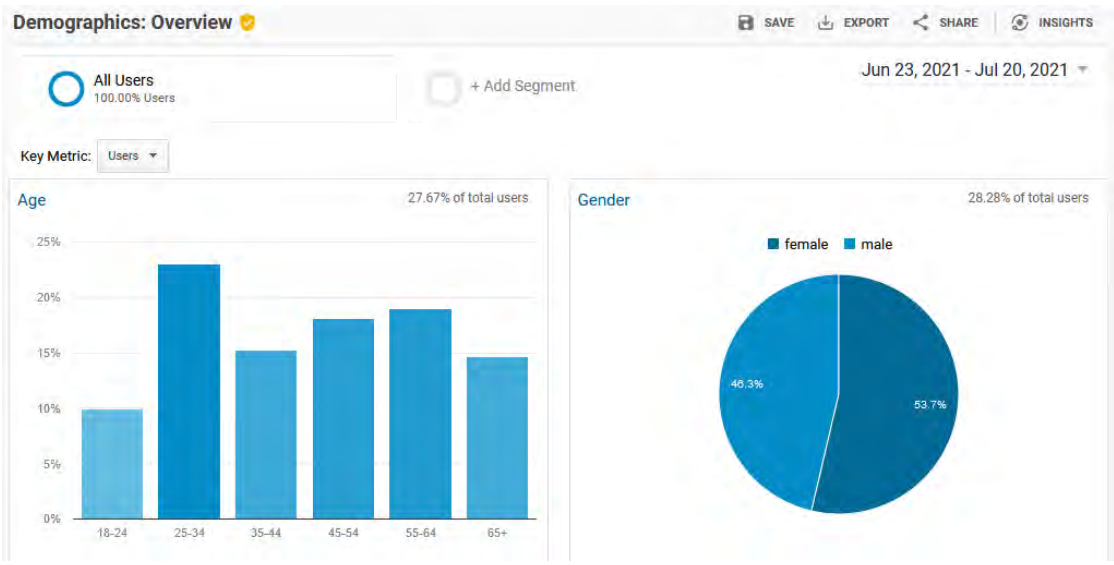
# Website Statistics June 23 – July 20, 2021



# Audience Overview



# Demographics Overview



# Behavior Flow

## Behavior Flow

Jun 23, 2021 - Jul 20, 2021

Automatically Grouped Pages   Level of Detail   Export



All Users  
100.00% Sessions

+ Add Segment





# Behavior Overview



Site Content	Page	Pageviews	% Pageviews
Page	1. /	372	19.07%
Page Title	2. /your-team/	90	4.61%
Site Search	3. /lone-tree-board-paddle-spicer-mn/	69	3.54%
Search Term	4. /business/transportation/	58	2.97%
Events	5. /cities/lake-lillian/	49	2.51%
Event Category	6. /living/lakes-recreation/	45	2.31%
	7. /news/	38	1.95%
	8. /cities/blomkest/	37	1.90%
	9. /5544-2/	35	1.79%
	10. /cities/spicer/	34	1.74%



**Acquisition Overview**

All Users  
100.00% Users

+ Add Segment

Jun 23, 2021 - Jul 20, 2021

Primary Dimension:

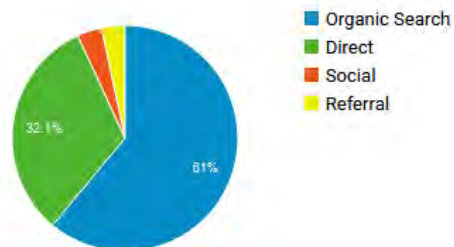
Conversion:

Top Channels

eCommerce

[Edit Channel Grouping](#)

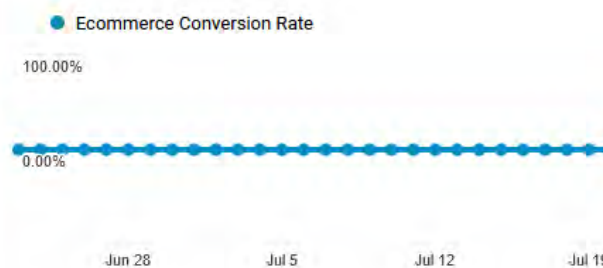
### Top Channels



### Users



### Conversions



### Acquisition

Users

New Users

Sessions

### Behavior

Bounce Rate

Pages / Session

Avg. Session Duration

### Conversions

Ecommerce Conversion Rate

Transactions

Revenue

1 Organic Search

1,160

1,122

1,276

78.53%

1.53

00:00:51

0.00%

0

\$0.00

2 Direct

710

373

76.50%

1.53

00:00:51

0.00%

0

\$0.00

3 Social

41

41

97.56%

1.53

00:00:51

0.00%

0

\$0.00

4 Referral

39

39

94.87%

1.53

00:00:51

0.00%

0

\$0.00



Kandiyohi County & City of Willmar  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

# OPPORTUNITY ZONE PROSPECTUS

Prepared by the Kandiyohi County and City of Willmar Economic Development Commission



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## INCREASE

Willmar's population is up 9% since 2000.



## INNOVATIVE

regional investments in the fields of animal vaccine, metal fabrication, food processing, and value-added agriculture.



## MINNWEST TECHNOLOGY CAMPUS

business community currently accommodating over 30 agribusiness, bioscience and other innovative companies who are global leaders.



## GROWTH

Kandiyohi County's labor force has risen by 5.4% from 2010 to 2018.



## INCLUSION STRATEGIES

by community leaders maintain a goal of equitable and diverse growth for all segments of the community.





## VIBRANT

arts community and rich cultural diversity featuring distinctive events and over 80 ethnic businesses.



## COMMUNITY-BUILT

19,000 square foot, fully-accessible Destination Playground is one of the many recreational opportunities for families.



## WIDESPREAD

access to 200Mbps download speeds gives innovative companies the needed bandwidth to succeed.



## SIGNIFICANTLY

lower cost of living than other areas of Minnesota with annual property taxes between \$800-\$1,499.



## AMBITIOUS

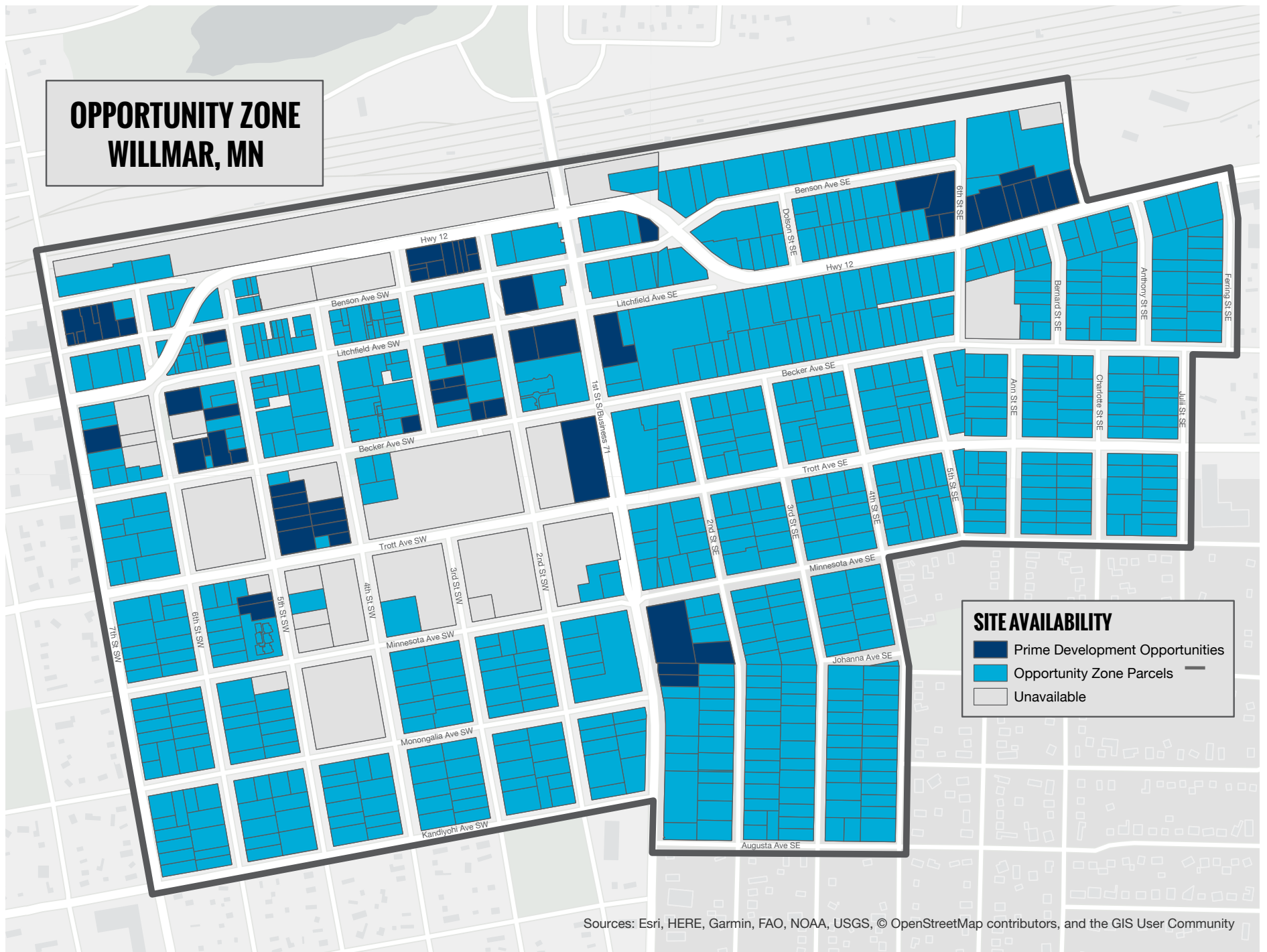
economic development leaders collaborating with community leaders to offer the best possible opportunity zone investments.



*"The way this community [Willmar] has embraced its growing workforce, its immigrant workforce, and is navigating those challenges is really a model for the rest of the state."*

**Steve Grove, DEED Commissioner  
& former Google Executive**

# OPPORTUNITY ZONE WILLMAR, MN



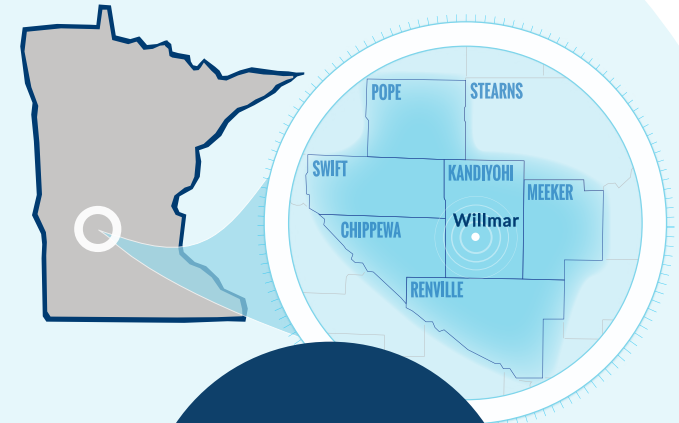
Sources: Esri, HERE, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community

# LOCATION OVERVIEW

Willmar's diverse economy and population provide new and existing businesses the right socio-economic environment for growth and success. Located 90 miles west of Minneapolis/St. Paul, this county seat with 20,000+ residents, offers the key transportation routes needed for today's businesses.

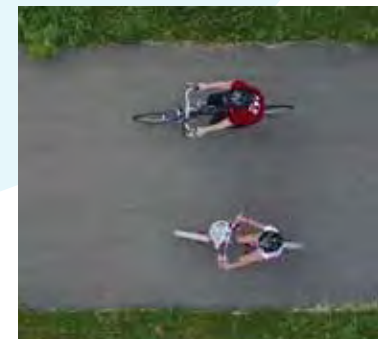
Originally established on a railroad town in 1869, Willmar is surrounded by productive farmlands and scenic lakes. This vibrant community supports robust medical, technology, service and value-added sectors.

Willmar, the largest city in Kandiyohi County, is a regional center for advanced manufacturing, agricultural biosciences, healthcare, and retail service and hospitality. These industries generate employment opportunities and livable wages for thousands of families in the surrounding communities.



## FAST FACT

Nearly 12,000 employees commute to Willmar for work on a daily basis.



# INDUSTRIES



## FAST FACT

Private investment  
in the MinnWest  
Technology Campus now  
exceeds \$17 million.

## ADVANCED MANUFACTURING

The Willmar area hosts emerging regional technologies in the fields of food manufacturing, robotics, and advanced agriculture. Companies like Select Genetics, Nova-Tech Engineering, DI Labs, Epitopix, and RELCO have access to a thriving, highly-skilled workforce provided by Ridgewater College and the University of Minnesota's Mid-Central Research and Outreach Center (MCROC). Cooperation with educational programs and Ridgewater College allow business leaders to help prepare the future workforce.



## AGRICULTURE

Willmar is a prime location for agribusiness, bioscience, and technology businesses and is home to industry leaders. Jennie-O, the nation's largest turkey processing company, and RELCO, the world's third-largest dairy equipment manufacturer, are located in Willmar's Industrial Park. Epitopix, an affiliate of the Netherlands' company, Vaxxinova, is a veterinary biologics research, development, and manufacturing company located in Willmar. Nova-Tech Engineering, situated on the MinnWest Technology Campus, manufactures and leases poultry-treating equipment used globally.



## MEDICAL

As a regional medical center, Kandiyohi County has state-of-the-art facilities and hundreds of medical providers who provide outstanding care. At every stage of your life, Kandiyohi County has healthcare options for almost every circumstance. There are over 5,000 healthcare jobs in Kandiyohi County, making it the region's top industry and that number continues to grow.



# GROWTH

Healthcare and social assistance are the largest and fastest growing industries and may account for up to 40 percent of the projected growth. Construction, professional services, technical services and agriculture represent areas of expected further growth.

During 2019 several notable construction projects were underway or completed, including, the Ziegler Cat sales and service center (a \$15 million project), 15th Street Flats multi-family housing project (a \$9.3 million project), the Child & Adolescent Behavioral Health Services (an \$8.7 million project), and Unique Opportunities' multi-family housing project (a \$4.8 million project). Notably, in 2019, Policom ranked Willmar as the top Micropolitan community in Minnesota and #66 in the country.

The projected growth continues to build the confidence in business owners and community leaders who support expansion. Willmar's Opportunity Zone is an ideal location for investors wishing to tap into the city's future.

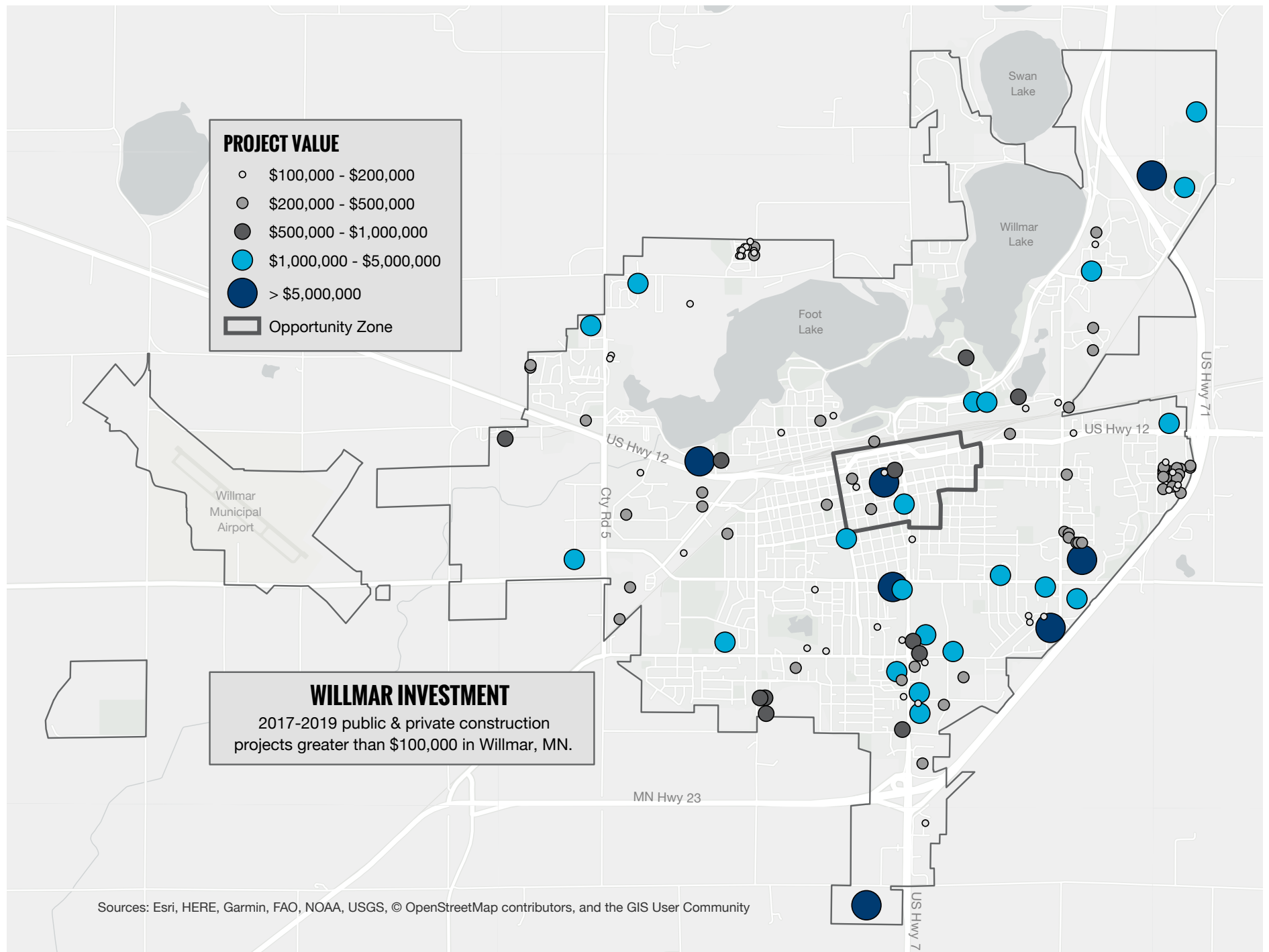
## FAST FACT

From 2016 to 2019, there has been \$190 million in commercial, industrial, institutional, and residential construction in Willmar.



*"The Willmar Lakes Area is full of people deeply invested in our communities. They dream big dreams, step up to lead and roll up their sleeves to make things happen not only from a business mindset, but from a quality of life perspective."*

**Sara Carlson, Executive Director • Willmar Area Community Foundation**



# WORKFORCE

Willmar is the regional center for West Central Minnesota and extends employment opportunities into the six contiguous counties of Chippewa, Meeker, Pope, Renville, Swift and Kandiyohi. Of the 103,000 residents, over 65,000 are employed earning an average household income of \$51,859. Almost 90% of the residents have a high school or higher level of education with 18% holding a bachelor's degree or higher.

Willmar continues to see steady increases in the number of workers aged 20 to 44 years and gains in workers over 65 years of age. The 25 to 54-year-old age group is the largest contributor to Willmar's labor force, accounting for 58 percent of the total. Latino and East African working populations increasingly contribute to Willmar's workforce. As with many areas of the U.S., access to a steady or growing workforce is critical to future area economic development.

"The way this community has embraced its growing workforce, its immigrant workforce, and is navigating those challenges is really a model for the rest of the state," Steve Grove, MN DEED Commissioner, said in an interview following an hour-long question-and-answer exchange with about 30 business and community leaders at the MinnWest Technology Campus.

## FAST FACT

From 2010 to 2018 Kandiyohi County's labor force grew three times as fast as its overall population growth





# EDUCATION

Ridgewater College, with campuses in Willmar and Hutchinson, boasts of several highly ranked programs: Ridgewater's Computer-Aided Drafting (CAD) Associate Degree is ranked #2 in the U.S. Its Nondestructive Testing (NDT) Program in the Hutchinson campus is ranked in the top 18 programs in the U.S. Its Nursing Program is ranked 5th in Minnesota. Ridgewater's Dairy Management Program is Minnesota's only two-year dairy program. Moreover, the college's Customized Training and Continuing Education Department serves nearly 10,000 individuals a year.

With an average yearly enrollment of 4,500 students and rated #1 among Minnesota Community Colleges, Ridgewater College is an essential asset for the Willmar community and employers.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Niche.com



*“Ridgewater College has set a priority goal to eliminate the achievement gaps in our student population, aimed at ensuring that all members of our community achieve their full potential for career and life success.”*

**Dr. Craig Johnson, President •  
Ridgewater College**



# TRANSPORTATION/DISTRIBUTION

Willmar's comprehensive transportation network has an abundance of modalities to keep goods and services moving through Kandiyohi County.

As a regional trade center for West Central Minnesota, one of the key elements in the city's plans is enhanced freight connectivity for industrial development. The \$48 million Willmar Rail Wye Project provides access, the opportunity to expand businesses, and create jobs. With this rail spur, the Willmar Industrial Park will be served by all three major freight modes - air, rail, and trucking.

## FAST FACT

Each day 17,000 vehicles travel through the Opportunity Zone on 1st Street/Business 71 alone.

The Willmar Industrial Park to the west of the Opportunity Zone is stimulated by The Burlington Northern Santa Fe Class I Railroad. Minnesota's most active railway connections travel through Willmar providing superior access for our companies.

Highway Business 71 goes through the Willmar Opportunity Zone and connects with two major highways, US Highway 12 and MN Highway 23.

The Willmar Municipal Airport sufficiently accommodates business jets and cargo planes with the paved 5,500-foot runway. This airport offers precision instrument approach, non-precision instrument approach, and aircraft storage. Business travelers and owners have access to a full-service, fixed-base operator (FBO) without the congestion of a metro airport.

# CAPITAL INVESTMENT

Kandiyohi County has experienced sustained growth over the past six years with investments occurring in medical, manufacturing, institutional, retail, and housing.

Private investment in the MinnWest Technology Campus now exceeds \$17 million since 2006.

Highway 23 Coalition successfully lobbied for \$105 million in Corridors of Commerce funding to expand two-lane gaps to four lanes extending north from Willmar.

From 2016-2018, approximately \$63 million has been invested in housing in Kandiyohi County (including Willmar) creating over 300 multi-family and single-family housing units, and over 150 housing units are underway in 2020.

In the last two years, education investments include a newly constructed \$27 million Lakeland Elementary school in Willmar and a \$25 million Performing Arts Center/Gymnasium addition in the New London-Spicer School District.

Implementation of the Rural Child Care Innovation Program has a total of 210 new spaces in two new childcare centers that are under construction.

## FAST FACT

Public and private investment in Willmar's Central Business District exceeded \$21 million over the last six years.







# INCLUSION STRATEGY

The City of Willmar is working towards equitable and inclusive growth for all segments of the community. Our inclusion process is evidenced by the successful participation of large Latino and East African populations that continue to grow the business community of Willmar and the surrounding area.

The 2017 Diverse BRE Survey identified 31 East African businesses, 27 Latino businesses and at least 8 Asian businesses in Willmar. Almost half of the Latino businesses have been operating for more than 10 years, and a fifth of the Latino businesses have been started within the last two years. Businesses created by the Somali population are more recent with one third in operation for over 10 years and one third starting in the last two years.



Successful Opportunity Zone (OZ) development will increase economic growth, security and mobility for all Willmar residents and reduce racial wealth gaps. Developers, builders, and investors will have equal access to opportunities in the zone. The Opportunity Zone drives investments that foster mixed-income housing, affordability, and security for families most at risk of displacement, including low-income households and households with new Americans. Investments are expected to drive equitable growth and prosperity for current low-income residents and communities of new Americans within the zone.

Community groups and leaders continue to intentionally pursue equity throughout all facets of life in the Willmar area.

## FAST FACT

Kandiyohi County leaders understand the benefits of social and economic diversity and maintain a goal of equitable and inclusive growth for all segments of the community.

*“A healthy Willmar is an equitable and inclusive community where everyone is empowered, valued and treated with dignity.”*

**Willmar Human Rights Commission**



# INCENTIVES

Kandiyohi County & City of Willmar Economic Development Commission (EDC) provides technical and financial assistance to businesses (both direct loans and loan guarantees). The EDC can develop and submit funding applications to the Minnesota Department of Employment & Economic Development (DEED) on behalf of companies.

Southwest Initiative Foundation (SWIF) provides business loans in West Central and Southwest Minnesota communities. SWIF can finance up to \$300,000 for equipment, inventory, working capital and real estate.

West Central Angel Fund is Willmar-based and focuses on early to mid-stage investments in high-tech and growth companies. 28 investors have committed \$1.5 million to the fund.

Business & Industry (B & I) Loan Guarantees through USDA. This program is only available in rural areas with populations under 50,000. The maximum loan guarantee is 80% for up to \$5 million.

The EDC can also collaborate with the City of Willmar's Planning & Development Services Department on Tax Increment Financing (TIF) and Tax Abatement financial assistance for projects in the Willmar Opportunity Zone.

## FAST FACT

City officials pursuing additional layers of incentives to be added to the OZ capital gains tax incentives.

## FAST FACT

Development-friendly city issuing around \$50 million in construction permits annually



# PROPERTY TAXES

This chart shows that households in Willmar, MN distributed according to applicable tax rates compared to the national averages. Willmar households pay taxes in the \$800-\$1,499 range (Census Bureau).

County Rate	59.15
City of Willmar Rate	38.076
Willmar School District Rate	24.05
Countywide HRA Rate	1.091
Countywide EDC and MMDC Rate	1.147
<b>Total for Willmar Residents</b>	<b>123.514</b>

*County rates the same for all cities but the city and school amounts vary.*

## FAST FACT

The overall index cost of living is almost 32% lower in Willmar than in the Minneapolis, Minnesota metropolitan area. Minneapolis area housing costs are 68% higher and transportation costs more than 82% higher than in Willmar.



# REFERENCES

## PAGE NOTE

## SOURCE

2	Willmar's population is up 9% since 2000	In 2000, the U.S. Census listed Willmar's population as 18,351. In 2010, the U.S. Census listed Willmar's population as 19,610, an increase of 6.97%. In June 2018, Susan Brower, MN State Demographer, indicated Willmar's population was 20,008 or a 9.0% increase.
2	Kandiyohi County's labor force has risen by 5.4% from 2010 to 2018	Luke Greiner, Regional Analyst, MN DEED, May 2019, in Kandiyohi County Profile Report, Table II.
3	Arts community and rich cultural diversity featuring distinctive events and over 80 ethnic businesses	Aaron Backman, Executive Director, Kandiyohi Co. & City of Willmar EDC, Business Retention & Expansion (BRE) Program for Diverse Businesses in the Willmar Area (July 2017 and more recent data)
3	Lower cost of living than the Twin Cities and other metropolitan areas of Minnesota with average annual property taxes ranging between \$800-\$1,499	Mark Thompson, Kandiyohi County Auditor/Treasurer; Sperling's Best Places, 2019 Cost of Living Calculator
5	Nearly 12,000 employees commute to Willmar for work on a daily basis	Luke Greiner, Regional Analyst, MN DEED, June 2018, the data from State of Minnesota is from 2015
6	Private investment in the MinnWest Technology Campus now exceeds \$17 million	Joanna Schrupp, General Manager, MinnWest Technology Campus, September 2019.
8	From 2016 to 2019, there has been \$190 million in commercial, industrial, institutional and residential construction in Willmar	Bruce Peterson and Dave Ramstad, Planning & Development Services, City of Willmar.
10	From 2010 to 2019 Kandiyohi County's labor force grew three times as fast as its overall population growth	Luke Greiner, Regional Analyst, MN DEED, May 2019.
12	Each day 17,000 vehicles travel through the Opportunity Zone on 1st Street/Business 71 alone	Willmar Traffic Volume Map, 2016, Minnesota Department of Transportation.



- |    |   |   |
|----|---|---|
| 13 | Public and private investment in Willmar's Central Business District exceeded \$21 million over the last six years  | Sarah Swedburg, City Planner, City of Willmar, Willmar Downtown Main Street Economic Development Report (2018). |
| 15 | Kandiyohi County leaders understand the benefits of social and economic diversity and maintain a goal of equitable and inclusive growth for all segments of the community   | City of Willmar Council and Human Rights Commission   |
| 16 | City officials pursuing additional layers of incentives to be added to the OZ capital gains tax incentives  | Dave Ramstad, Planning & Development Services, City of Willmar.   |
| 16 | Development-friendly city issuing over \$50 million construction permits annually   | Dave Ramstad, Planning & Development Services, City of Willmar.   |
| 17 | The overall index cost of living is almost 32% lower in Wilmar than in the Minneapolis, Minnesota metropolitan area. Minneapolis area housing costs are 68% higher and transportation costs more than 82% higher than in Willmar. | Sperling's Best Places, 2019 Cost of Living Calculator  |



# BIOGRAPHIES

## Aaron Backman

Executive Director

Aaron Backman, Executive Director, has been active in economic development management at the local level for 26 years. Since February of 2016 he has been the Executive Director of the Kandiyohi County & City of Willmar Economic Development Commission (EDC) in West Central Minnesota. In that capacity Aaron has been instrumental in getting approvals for a variety of projects in the Willmar Lakes Area, including:



- \$525,000 in TIF financing for 15th Street Flats, a new \$9.3 million multi-family affordable housing project in Willmar offering 47 units utilizing a 9.0% tax credit program from Minnesota Housing;
- \$983,000 in tax abatement financing for Little Crow Resort, a new \$7.8 million complex that includes a 51-room GrandStay Hotel, 300-seat event center, 75-seat restaurant and clubhouse;
- \$1,527,000 in TIF financing for Bethesda North Pointe, a new \$17.5 million senior lifestyle housing development under construction in New London encompassing 75 units of independent living, assisted living, and memory care.

As the Executive Director of the Windom Economic Development Authority (EDA), Aaron was responsible for promoting, facilitating, and coordinating economic development activities for the City of Windom in Southwest Minnesota. He facilitated the development and expansion of the North Windom Industrial Park, a new 80-acre subdivision. He raised over \$1.4 million in state infrastructure grants for the project.

## Connie Schmoll

Business Development Manager

As the Business Development Manager for the Kandiyohi County and City of Willmar Economic Development Commission, Connie Schmoll identifies development needs and opportunities in Kandiyohi County emphasizing advancing agribusiness, bio-business, value-added agriculture and renewable resource development as economic drivers in the future success of Kandiyohi County.

In five years, she has facilitated several committees, including the Business Retention and Expansion/Recruitment Committee, Agriculture and Renewable Energy Development Committee, and the Broadband and Advanced Technology Committee. She has conducted studies of local business needs and agriculture production, agri-business and agriculture/bioscience industries retention issues and expansion plans.

In 2017, Connie was instrumental in establishing the West Central Angel Fund that has 28 local members and makes investments in early to mid-stage private companies that demonstrate the potential for sustainable, profitable, growth-capable operations while providing a suitable return for investors.

Connie has over 20 years of experience in fund development and grant writing. She wrote a successful proposal for Transportation Economic Development (TED) Grant funds to enhance a rural road for a large dairy operation. She has recently prepared and submitted a \$1.3 million grant proposal to the State of Minnesota for Innovative Business Development Public Infrastructure funds to assist the City of Willmar and a local business in expansion efforts, including an extension of city utilities.

Connie gained her fundraising and grant writing skills in a prior position as Executive Director of a non-profit organization. She led the organization in a \$1.5 million capital campaign and building project that served as a shelter for women and children.

Connie is a graduate of St. Catherine's University in St. Paul, Minnesota.



# WHAT ARE OPPORTUNITY ZONES AND HOW DO THEY WORK?

In 2017, opportunity zones were added to the tax code by the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. This federal legislation recognized distressed neighborhoods with high-poverty as places needing investment. Willmar, MN received an opportunity zone designation for Census Tract: 27067780800 located in the City of Willmar.

Willmar's Opportunity Zone is an economic development tool designed to attract investment and job creation.

## WHAT IS AN OPPORTUNITY ZONE?

An opportunity zone is an economically-distressed community where new investments, under certain conditions, may be eligible for preferential tax treatment. Localities qualify as opportunity zones if they have been nominated for that designation by the state and that nomination has been certified by the Secretary of the U.S. Treasury via his delegation of authority to the Internal Revenue Service.





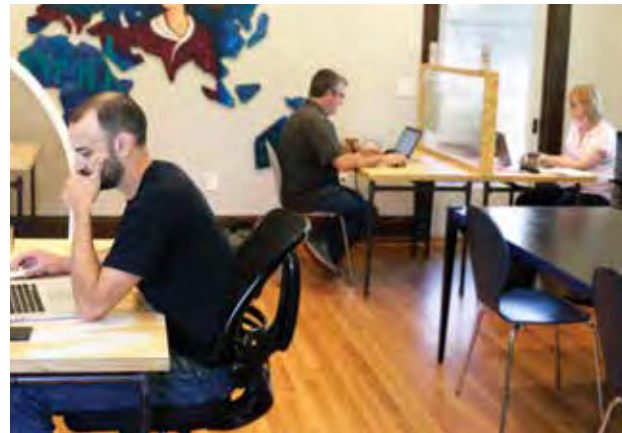
## HOW DOES THE WILLMAR OPPORTUNITY ZONE WORK?

Opportunity Zones are designed to spur economic development by providing tax benefits to investors. First, investors can defer tax on any prior gains invested in a Qualified Opportunity Fund (QOF) until the earlier of the date on which the investment in a QOF is sold or exchanged, or December 31, 2026. If the QOF investment is held for longer than 5 years, there is a 10% exclusion of the deferred gain. If held for more than 7 years, the 10% becomes 15%. Second, if the investor holds the investment in the Opportunity Fund for at least ten years, the investor is eligible for an increase in basis of the QOF investment equal to its fair market value on the date that the QOF investment is sold or exchanged.

- A poverty rate of at least 20%; or
- A median family income of:

No more than 80% of the statewide median family income for census tracts within non-metropolitan areas.

No more than 80% of the greater statewide median family income or the overall metropolitan median family income for census tracts within metropolitan areas.



Up to 25% of the census tracts of each jurisdiction that met these criteria could be nominated. An additional 5% of each jurisdiction could qualify if they met a different set of income and geographic qualifications:

- A census tract that's contiguous with a low-income Opportunity Zone; and
- A median family income of no more 125% of the median family income of the adjacent Qualified Opportunity Zone.

### **DO I NEED TO LIVE IN WILLMAR?**

No. You can get the tax benefits, even if you don't live, work or have a business in an opportunity zone. All you need to do is invest a recognized gain in a Qualified Opportunity Fund and elect to defer the tax on that gain.

### **WHAT IS A QUALIFIED OPPORTUNITY ZONE FUND (QOF)?**

A Qualified Opportunity Fund is an investment vehicle that files either a partnership or corporate federal income tax return and is organized for the purpose of investing in Qualified Opportunity Zone property. It is the intent of the EDC to pursue the creation of a local/regional QOZ Fund that would have local and outside investors.



## HOW CAN WILLMAR TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE OPPORTUNITY ZONE?

Opportunity Zones and Opportunity Funds were created to stimulate private investment in exchange for capital gain tax incentives. This program is intended to stimulate the investment of the estimated \$6.1 trillion of unrealized private gains held by U.S. taxpayers.

This program is less restrictive than other tax credit programs, such as New Markets Tax Credits (NMTC) and Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) Program. Opportunity Zones don't operate through a tax credit program. Instead, Opportunity Zone designation and investment are governed through two Internal Revenue Code sections. This removes any limitation on the number of Opportunity Funds that can exist, making them more the product of an entirely new IRS rule that changes the tax treatment of capital gains than the subject of a more traditionally structured tax credit program.

There is no cap on the amount of capital that can be invested into qualified Opportunity Zones, and hence no arbitrary limit on the extent to which Opportunity Zones and Opportunity Funds may help reshape downtrodden communities.

Most importantly, the Opportunity Zone program allows local investors, at any level, to participate in investment in Willmar and to participate in the economic growth of the community.

For more information contact Aaron Backman, Executive Director [aaron@kandiyohi.com](mailto:aaron@kandiyohi.com) or Connie Schmoll, Business Development Manager [connie@kandiyohi.com](mailto:connie@kandiyohi.com). Or call, 320-255-7370 toll-free 866-665-4556.





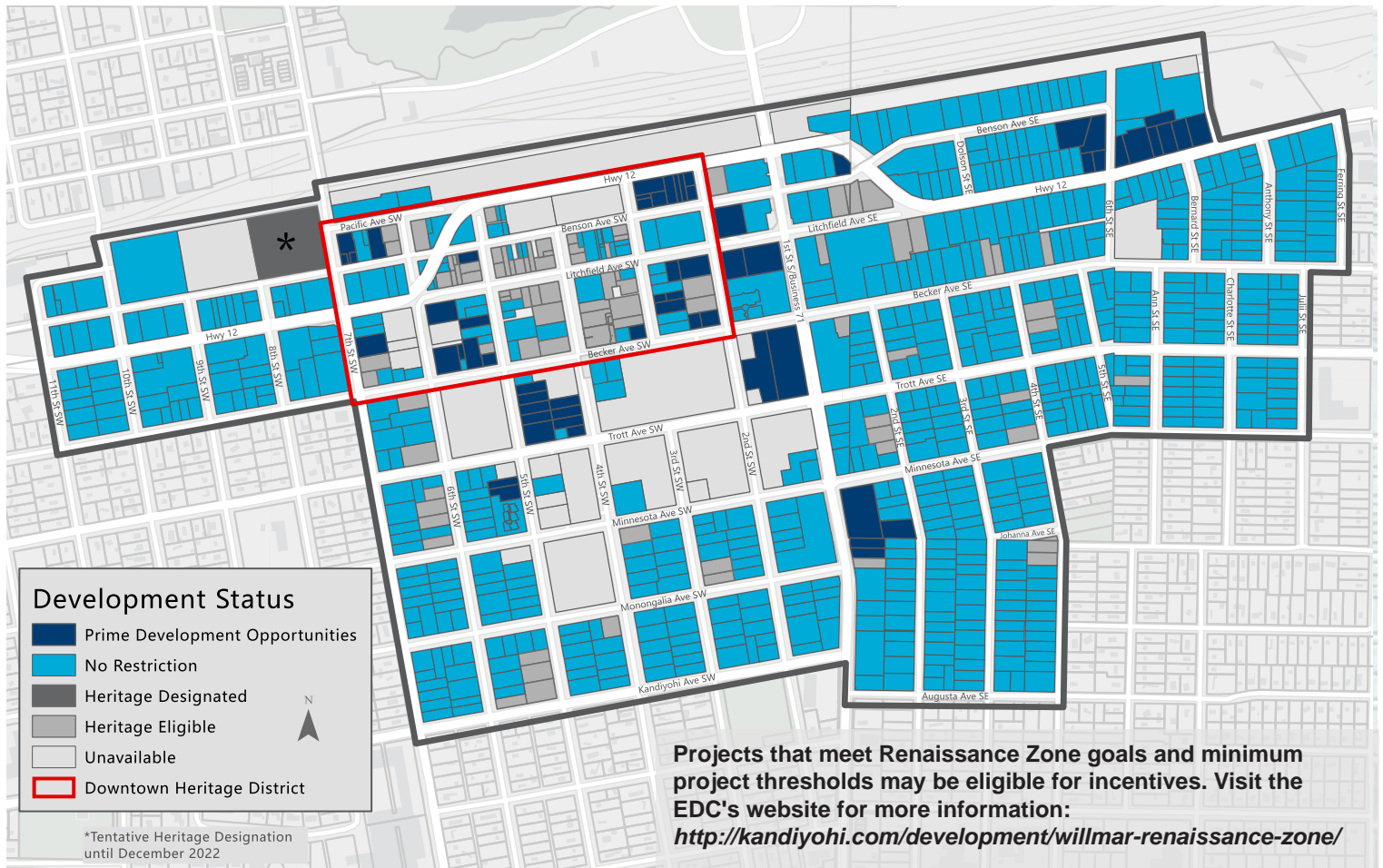
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Prospectus Prepared in Partnership With:





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](mailto:dramstad@willmarmn.gov)

**Aaron Backman**

Executive Director, Kandiyohi County & City of Willmar EDC  
320-235-7370 | [aaron@kandiyohi.com](mailto: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

# DIVERSE AGRICULTURE & RENEWABLE ENERGY OPPORTUNITIES

## — AGRICULTURE & RENEWABLE ENERGY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE —

Kandiyohi County has deep roots in agriculture and a bright future as well. Our strong agriculture sector makes us a prime location for agribusiness, bioscience and technology businesses. Many industry leaders such as Nova-Tech Engineering, Select Genetics, RELCO, LLC and Jennie-O Turkey Store are headquartered here in West Central Minnesota's business hub. Recently, we've made some great strides towards creating a more eco-friendly business community by investing our time in renewable energy efforts.

The EDC is committed to working collaboratively with local farmers and ag-related industries through our Agriculture & Renewable Energy Development Committee. The committee's mission is "To sustain, identify and develop agriculture, agribusiness and renewable energy opportunities." It supports this mission by targeting activities that leverage Kandiyohi County's assets in agriculture, with a special emphasis on ag business, manufacturing, bioscience, technology, energy and research.

Diverse ag  
economy with  
over 1,300 farms



Produced enough  
wind & solar to  
power 1,280 homes



Contact us:  
kandiyohi.com  
toll-free 866.665.4556



# IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS

— A PROFILE OF AG AND RENEWABLE ENERGY IN KANDIYOHI COUNTY —

## Agriculture in Kandiyohi County



Farmland:  
**415,090 acres**

Land Area:  
**75%**

# of Farms:  
**1,310**

Average Size:  
**317 acres**



Agricultural Marketing:

**\$414 million** { Crops: **\$183 million**  
Livestock: **\$231 million**  
(2016)

## Renewable Energy in Kandiyohi County



Wind:  
**7.7 million kwh**

Enough to Power:  
**800 homes**



Solar:  
**5.3 million kwh**

Enough to Power:  
**480 homes**



Ethanol:  
**65 million gallons**

Enough E-85 to Power:  
**190,000 cars**

Contact us:  
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