

**KANDIYOHI COUNTY AND CITY OF WILLMAR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION (EDC)  
JOINT OPERATIONS BOARD OF DIRECTORS (OB) MEETING  
MINUTES  
March 10, 2022  
Community Room, Heritage Bank, Willmar and Via Zoom Video Conference**

Present: Art Benson, Donna Boonstra, Jesse Gislason, Les Heitke, Kelly TerWisscha and Mary Warszynski

Ex Officio: Vicki Davis

Guest: Julie Asmus

Excused: Abdullahi Awale and Justice Walker

Staff: Aaron Backman, Executive Director; Sarah Swedburg, Business Development Manager and Kelsey Olson, Marketing & Communication Specialist (via Zoom)

Media: Shelby Lindrud, West Central Tribune

Secretarial: Nancy Birkeland, Legal & Administrative Assistants, Inc.

Vice President Jesse Gislason called the meeting to order at approximately 11:08 a.m. and declared a quorum was present.

**AGENDA**—Added to the agenda under New Business was the Habitat for Humanity Restore building.

IT WAS MOVED BY Kelly TerWisscha, SECONDED BY Donna Boonstra, to approve the revised Agenda and following Consent Agenda. MOTION CARRIED.

**CONSENT AGENDA**

Approve: 1. Minutes of February 10, 2022 meeting  
2. Financial reports as of February 28, 2022

Accept: Committee/Subcommittee Minutes

1. Industrial Hemp Exploratory Subcommittee 1/10/2022

2. Broadband and Advanced Technology 2/7/2022

3. Marketing and Public Relations 1/24/2022

Committee member resignations/additions

1. Addition of Ben Carlson and Ann Winge Johnson to the Marketing and Public Relations Committee

MOTION CARRIED.

## UNFINISHED BUSINESS—

**2022 Strategic Planning Session.** Aaron Backman announced that the annual planning session will be April 7, 2022 from 9:00 a.m. to approximately 3:00 p.m. at the Willmar Conference Center. Anticipated results from the planning session will be to develop strategic priorities, goals and objectives and roles.

There was no other unfinished business.

## NEW BUSINESS—

**Habitat for Humanity ReStore Building.** Les Heitke questioned the status of Habitat for Humanity as its location off First Street is closed. It was noted the building that Habitat for Humanity ReStore leased is for sale and it has moved into a building on north Highway 71.

## REPORTS

**Economic Development Activity.** As Justice Walker was unable to attend today's meeting, Backman reviewed his report (see attached). Backman noted changes to the comprehensive plan are posted on the City of Willmar's website. Backman distributed the EDC's updated Willmar Industrial Park flyer (see attached) done by Kelsey Olson. In response to a question about extending a railroad spur into the Willmar Industrial Park, Backman stated staff is working with a prospect in this regard. It is possible the prospect may be able to get federal or state grants for the spur. Backman's intent is for multiple lots to have access to the spur. Backman reported availability of single-family homes remains very tight. Videos done for the EDC on the new FedEx site and the Preserve on 24<sup>th</sup> apartment complex were shown and are posted to the EDC's LinkedIn page. Unique Opportunities is moving forward with its Phases 3 and 4. Another developer was looking at a proposed project for Waterview Business Park, but has paused it due to the high cost of construction materials. Backman provided information on a newly-released strong national employment report.

Sarah Swedburg reported she continues to see a lot of interest from small businesses, some of which are looking for new locations. The EDC is updating its LOIS (LocationOne Information System) account, which is linked to the EDC's website and lists commercial properties for sale or lease throughout the county. The City of Willmar is gathering information to list its Industrial Park lots on the site. Backman noted several different types of businesses have contacted the EDC recently, many of which have been referred to the Elevate Community Business Academy.

**Elevate Community Business Academy.** Swedburg reported the new semester begins next week. She has a waiting list for those interested in a future class. Danny Carranza, who graduated last semester, will be instructing the course with Swedburg this semester, which will be helpful as several participants are Latina/Latino. The EDC is awaiting receipt of the final grant agreement from the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development for the grant awarded to the program. Swedburg has been giving presentations on the program to area

organizations/groups. She is assisting graduates of the program in areas needed. Swedburg and Olson are highlighting women-owned businesses this month during Women's History Month, several of whom are Elevate graduates.

Backman announced Swedburg will receive the Emerging Young Leader Award from the Willmar Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce on March 24, 2022.

## **COMMITTEE REPORTS**

**Agriculture and Renewable Energy Development.** The committee heard a presentation by MNYouth Garden at its last meeting. The committee is having discussions on access to land and she has received contact information from University of Minnesota

**Industrial Hemp Exploratory Subcommittee.** Swedburg reported the subcommittee has two members who will attend the NoCo Hemp Expo in Denver and she will attend the New Uses Forum hosted by the Agricultural Utilization Research Institute, along with another subcommittee member.

**Broadband and Advanced Technology.** Swedburg reported the EDC was not on the list of those awarded a grant by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration, but they are still awaiting final confirmation. The committee will begin working on a project for the first four townships, Arctander, Dovre, Mamre and St. Johns. Swedburg, Connie Schmoll and Michelle Marotzke recently gave updates to the four townships. The state plans to have two rounds of its Border-to-Border Broadband Development Grant this year with the first round to be released soon and the second round to be released after July 1.

[Art Benson joined the meeting.]

The state of Minnesota is working on a way to include homeowners who live next to projects, but are considered served and, thus, not included in the projects. As they are not included, the cost to those homeowners to connect is extremely high.

**Business Retention and Expansion/Recruitment.** Backman reported a survey was sent to the attendees of the Workforce Solutions Summit with about 50% responding. The Summit met their expectations. Swedburg reported on the Virtual Job Fair (see attached). Available jobs were categorized by type of position so job seekers could easily find an open position in their field. Olson monitored chats that occurred during the event, noting she had more connections with the employers rather than job seekers. Olson feels more promotion can be done relative to the community booths versus the employer booths and how the organizations that have a community booth can assist them. Olson noticed some entry-level jobs did not post salaries, which she will question when she follows up with those businesses. Backman noted because it was a virtual event there were job seekers from outside the area. The EDC will follow up with the participants. Kelly TerWisscha recommended virtual job fairs be held throughout the year. Swedburg will discuss future events with the committee. Olson noted Ridgewater College commented on being

inundated with marketing materials and the competition with in-person job fairs. The West Central Minnesota Job Fair will be held April 6.

Donna Boonstra reported an open house on the detours for the North Gap project will be held April 6, 2022 at the Roadside Tavern in Roscoe from 4-6 p.m. and a groundbreaking ceremony will be held May 6 at 11 a.m. at the Roadside Tavern. The coalition's annual membership meeting is March 25 at The Park Event Center in Waite Park with U.S. Senator Amy Klobuchar as the invited keynote speaker. Boonstra distributed the Coalition's priorities for 2022 (see attached). The Coalition's Board of Directors held a strategic planning session last week at the Little Crow Event Center where they had good discussions. Cheryl Glaeser facilitated the session. Changes to the intersection at Highways 9 and 23 at New London have been postponed until 2023. Boonstra is hoping the Coalition can locate additional funds for this project.

**Marketing and Public Relations.** Olson reported the committee has been very willing to share with her. She is trying to do posts based on themes and is developing a marketing plan. She is auditing the EDC's website and making small changes with a goal of redoing the website in the future. Backman is having Olson attend the upcoming Minnesota Marketing Partnership conference. This month is Women's History Month so she is featuring local women business owners in social media. A post was done on Jessica Berghorst, owner of Cheers in Raymond, and another will be done on Fatouma Hachim, an Elevate graduate.

**Leisure Travel.** Backman reported the committee met at the Willmar Lakes Area Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB). Benson noted the number of inquiries for the area were up substantially. Backman and Swedburg will be staffing the committee's booth at the Northwest Sportshow in Minneapolis this weekend. It was reported a new 18-hole golf course is being planned for County Road 40 west of New London. The course designer is from Australia and Duinink Golf has been approached to build it.

## WHAT'S UP?

- Vicki Davis announced the first outdoor downtown Willmar event will be May 7 for Cinco de Mayo.
- Boonstra reported her business project is going very well. She currently has five projects.
- Heitke noted Marv Calvin announced he will not run again for Mayor of Willmar; he is hopeful that regional leaders will run for the office. Hudda Ibrahim will give a presentation on Understanding Somali Culture on March 24 Ridgewater College.
- Mary Warzynski announced Employment Plus had a booth at the virtual job fair; they had seven people reach out and interviewed one. If they participate again, they would market it differently. They are getting new software in June, which will make them more mobile.
- TerWisscha questioned if there are any assistance programs for those who are leaving the Ukraine to get them to the United States. It was noted the Willmar Area Community Foundation recently posted information on a Minnesota organization that is assisting.
- Benson reported on the situation with Ukraine and reported the bonspiel curling tournament will be held this weekend with 32 teams from around the state.


- Gislason announced the City of Spicer hired Jacob Kolander as its new City Administrator and bowling leagues are finishing up at Alley on Ash.
- Julie Asmus noted the Willmar Planning Commission has been very busy and just discussed zoning issues on Highway 12 and County Road 5 relative to a potential grocery store, as well as a gun range and tiny homes.

**ADJOURNMENT**—There being no other business,

IT WAS MOVED BY Kelly TerWisscha, SECONDED BY Donna Boonstra, to adjourn the meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 12:54 p.m.

**NEXT MEETING**—The next regular board meeting is 11:00 a.m., Thursday, April 14, 2022 at the Community Room of Heritage Bank, 310 First Street SW, Willmar, and via Zoom video conference.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Donna Boonstra, Secretary

APPROVED: 4/14/2022

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Art Benson, President

## Planning & Development Update

- We've hired a Rental Housing Inspector. They'll start March 21<sup>st</sup>
- We have submitted our plans to SHPO for the downtown streetscape plan
- BKV Contract is signed with an in-person kickoff in the works
- The first four chapters of the comp plan are under review, and they are posted on the City's website
- Staff is currently working through chapters 5 – 8 of the comp plan
- Proposed use changes for the Industrial districts will be ready for the next Council Meeting
- We've added 1 Planning Commissioner and removed an inactive Planning Commissioner. We still have two open seats.



# SHOVEL-READY WITH ROOM TO GROW

## WILLMAR INDUSTRIAL PARK

Businesses ready to expand and build should consider the expanding industrial park in Willmar, Minnesota. It gained shovel-ready status, a certification by the Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), that means the planning, zoning, surveys, title work, environmental studies, soils analysis and infrastructure engineering are complete to start construction.

one of only 48 shovel-ready industrial parks in Minnesota



The park is just two miles from the Willmar airport, which has available hangar space and a modern terminal building. It is also a transportation hub with north/south connections via US Highway 71 and MN Highway 23 and east/west connections via US Highway 12. Plans to add direct rail car access to the Willmar Industrial Park were also recently announced. The site is close to the Burlington Northern Santa Fe switching yard connecting Chicago to the Pacific coastal states. Over 30 companies already call Willmar Industrial Park home, including Jennie-O Turkey Store, Willmar Poultry Company, Mills Parts Center, Willmar Electric Service, RELCO, Magnum Trucking, Dooley's Petroleum and Chappell Central. Most recently in 2022 FedEx Ground started a 30 million dollar project in the park with a planned 217,000 square foot distribution center. Thus far, this will be the largest building on the site.

zoned I-1 light industry



easy access to US Highways 12, 71 and MN Highway 23



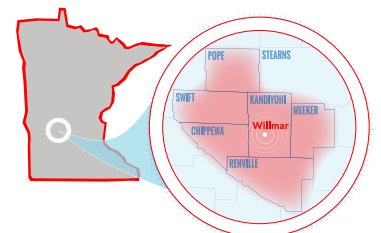
23 platted lots available



Contact us:  
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toll-free 866.665.4556

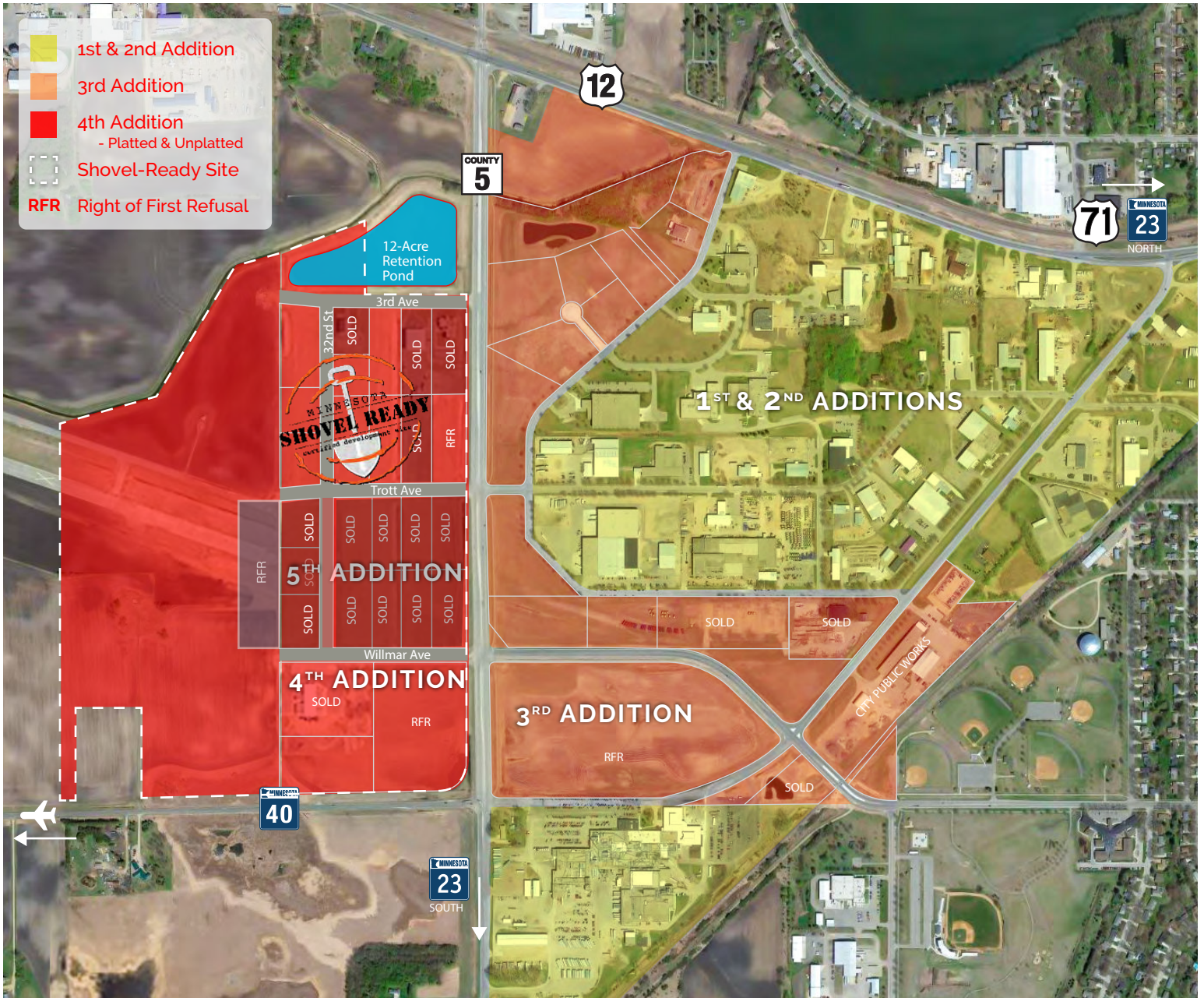


OPEN for BUSINESS



# A CLOSER LOOK

## WILLMAR INDUSTRIAL PARK



### Available:

**202** acres

**111** acres Shovel Ready

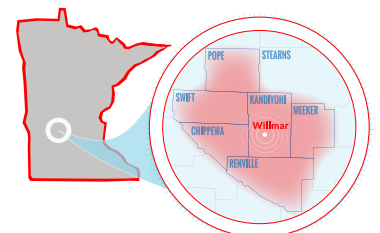
**23** lots

**1.4 - 30.0** acre lots

Contact us:  
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OPEN for BUSINESS







Kandiyohi County & City of Willmar  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

TO: Business Retention & Expansion/Recruitment Committee

FROM: Sarah Swedburg  
Business Development Manager

DATE: March 10, 2022

RE: West Central MN Virtual Job Fair Recap

Over the past several months, the BRE/R Business Support Subcommittee worked to organize a virtual job fair. We partnered with the State's CareerForce office to use the "Premier Virtual" software. At the State's request, we expanded our partnership to ensure a regional focus: CareerForce, Central Minnesota Jobs and Training Services, SW Private Industry Council, Kandiyohi County and City of Willmar EDC, Willmar Lakes Area Chamber, Redwood County EDA, Renville County HRA/EDA, Meeker Development Corporation, Meeker Area Chamber, City of Montevideo, Swift County HRA/RDA, and Lakeland Broadcasting.

The West Central MN Virtual Job Fair was held on Wednesday, February 23<sup>rd</sup> from 11am – 2pm. During this live portion of the event, employer representatives were available to instant-message with job seekers. Job seekers had access to the online platform 24 hours before and after the live event.

In total, we had 54 organizations participate (50 businesses and 4 resource organizations). These booths posted a total of 215 job postings, representing 767 job vacancies – we know the need is great.

There were 78 job seeker profiles created, 69 attended the live event (9 did not participate between 11am and 2pm on February 23<sup>rd</sup>), and one additional profile registered during "late access" (the 24 hours immediately following the live event). While the majority of job seekers reported living in Kandiyohi County, we did have participants from Chippewa, Hennepin, Renville, Stearns, Swift, Wright, and other counties.

During the live portion of the event, 337 chat conversations took place totaling 1307 individual messages! Every single organization had conversations take place, which was exciting to hear. There were 45 resumes submitted through the platform and 1 interview officially marked as scheduled.

For our first-ever virtual job fair, staff at the EDC are optimistic about continuing with future events for our region. We continue to seek solutions and creative new opportunities to help fill our workforce needs, with the help of the EDC BRE/R Committee. Hosting this event has been a learning process (and opportunity!), and we intend to host another virtual job fair next year. Kelsey and Sarah are gathering feedback from both our partner organizations and business participants, and these results will be shared in the near future.



# Highway 23 Corridor

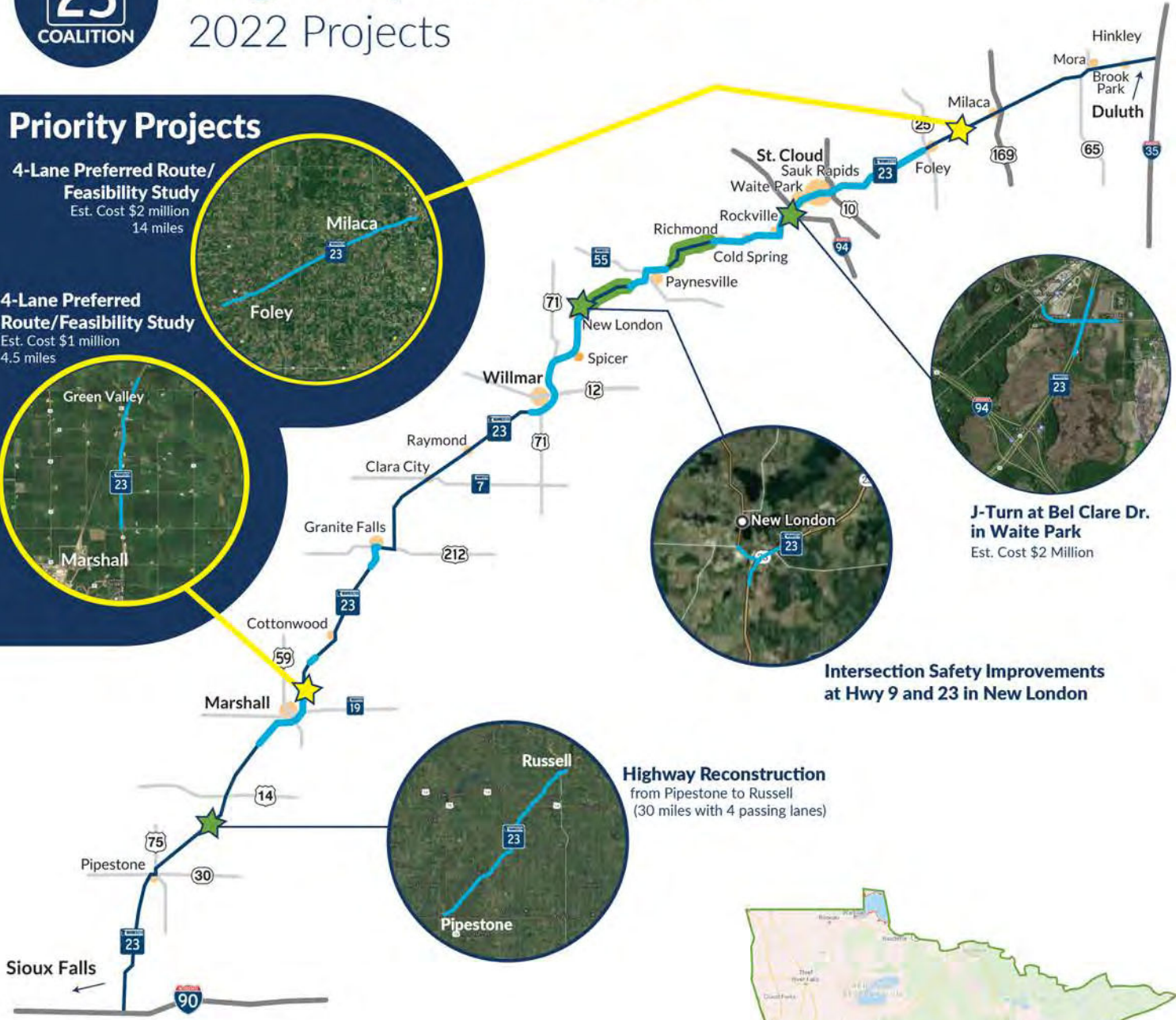
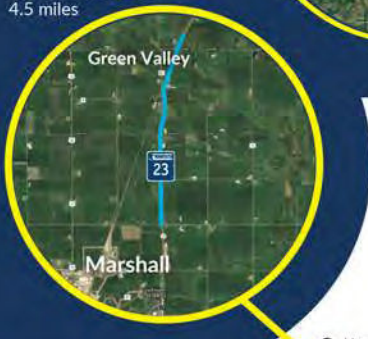
## 2022 Projects

### Priority Projects

**4-Lane Preferred Route/  
Feasibility Study**  
Est. Cost \$2 million  
14 miles



**4-Lane Preferred  
Route/Feasibility Study**  
Est. Cost \$1 million  
4.5 miles



### Ancillary Projects

Highway 23 Coalition has 100+ members, including 62 businesses, 15 cities & 12 counties fully supporting the effort to fill the gaps in four-lane access.

