

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

April 25, 2022

Community Room, Heritage Bank, Willmar and via Zoom Video Conference

Present: Donna Boonstra, Ben Carlson, Jesse Gislason, Emily Lien, Pam Rosenau and Ann Winge Johnson

Absent: Liz Dyrdaahl

Staff: Aaron Backman, Executive Director and Kelsey Olson, Marketing and Communications Specialist

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

Chairperson Emily Lien called the meeting to order at approximately 12:02 p.m.

AGENDA—The agenda was approved as emailed.

MINUTES—

IT WAS MOVED BY Ben Carlson, SECONDED BY Jesse Gislason, to approve the Minutes of the March 28, 2022 meeting as emailed. MOTION CARRIED.

SOCIAL MEDIA STATISTICS—

Facebook Statistics. Aaron Backman reported good trends on EDC's Facebook page for the period of March 24-April 23, 2022. There were 260 visits, up 148 percent from the previous month. Peaks occurring in early April were attributed to the in-person job fair and the high school job fair. Posts regarding area Easter egg hunts and scholarships for high school graduates also received attention. Chair Lien commented those posts did not show up on the news feed on her phone, and requested Olson adjust the audience reach in the background. Carlson commented Facebook has merged liking and following into one, causing drop-offs in some cases.

Twitter. The top tweet in April was a thank you for the in-person job fair. There were over 2,000 tweet impressions, up from 1,600 in March. Tweets were up by 50 percent and there were over 560 followers. The top media tweet was related to area Easter egg hunts.

Social Media Update (Sprout vs. Hootsuite). Kelsey Olson met with a representative of Sprout Social. The benefits of Sprout Social over Hootsuite are the ability to compare all three social media platforms together, ease of operation if more than one person is involved, and improved analytics. Olson will organize a 30-day trial. The cost difference is not known. She questions whether Twitter is meaningful to the EDC and is considering Instagram in its place. Instagram and Facebook would have similar posts; and those along with LinkedIn could be managed without Sprout Social. Hootsuite doesn't provide helpful analytics or give a consistent time for posting. Sprout Social allows you to create themes and compare. Olson will talk to a

Hootsuite representative to find out what other features are available. Carlson recommended a case study on the effectiveness of the various platforms.

UPDATES—

Spring Newsletter in Review. Olson identified groups in Constant Contact who should receive the EDC newsletter to create one large newsletter group containing 689 recipients, down from 983 for the winter newsletter. There were 19 clicks for FedEx and, 3 each for Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and the EDC website. No one unsubscribed and the open rate was 38.2 percent. The desktop open percentage was up from 85.3 percent to 91.3 percent. Olson will add a pop-up on the EDC website inviting people to sign up for the newsletter. A suggestion was made to use giveaways as an incentive for signing up.

In-Person Job Fair Summary. Olson reported 300 people attended the in-person job fair, with over 50 vendors participating. Backman thanked all businesses in attendance. Overall they were pleased, but hoping for more connections. Backman spoke with the Executive Director of Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center (PWELC). PWELC was participating for the first time. She was looking for college-age job seekers for part-time help and seniors interested in volunteering, and got both. Olson talked to Bethesda; it reported hiring a coordinator at the virtual job fair. All of the businesses Olson communicated with had a lot of available positions and she received good feedback from everyone. There were several groups of young men who were highly engaged and asked a lot of questions. A few individuals with felonies on their record were surprised to learn they would qualify for Elevate Community Business Academy training. Backman commented that creating a welcoming atmosphere can make a difference, citing Brunswick New York Mills as an example. It participated in the Workforce Solutions Summit and the virtual job fair, and has decided to expand in Willmar, renovating the former Fabric Warehouse building. Brunswick is maxed out in New York Mills, and feels comfortable with the Willmar area. Its goal is 30-40 employees in Willmar.

When asked about comparisons between the virtual and in-person job fair, Backman responded with three observations: First, unlike the in-person, the virtual job fair is more likely to get jobseekers from outside the area. Second, people are better prepared at the virtual job fair. More filled out resume and employment information. Third, the virtual job fair taps into people more comfortable with doing things online. Olson received more positive feedback from the businesses at the in-person job fair. The virtual job fair was more attractive to those wanting to remain anonymous. Backman added the in-person job fair allows you to see the body language of the potential candidate.

Suggestions for future job fairs included combining some of the steps for the virtual job fair with the in-person. People could register to win something if they filled out registrations in advance. Advance registration could include questions such as, do you need child care during the fair, or do you need help with travel arrangements? Ridgewater students could be recruited to handle child care during the event. Data would be more easily collected with advance registration. Other suggestions involved working with the radio station on advertising, building “playbooks” for job seekers that would highlight the booths they should visit and have a “click here for an appointment” option. Someone could serve as a “concierge” and make introductions to appropriate businesses. EDC could have a flag that offers to help job seekers decide which booths to visit. Hold a job fair where job seekers fill out questionnaires ahead of time, and businesses could reach out to those with relevant interests.

Industrial Park Handout. Olson reported the Industrial Park flyers are nearing completion. The one-page flyer is used when applying for shovel-ready certification with the state of Minnesota. The flyer has been updated with a picture of the FedEx project and the available acreage. The map showing the six-county area and “Open for Business” tagline have been removed. The EDC logo will be added. An icon will be added next to

the “Access to current airport and tier 1 rail” text. Olson will check for Adobe Stock for an icon similar to the others used.

Changes considered on the double-sided flyer include changing Willmar Poultry to Select Genetics, adding text about access to airport and rail, and adding contact information for Backman and Sarah Swedburg. A spelling error on the word Connector will be corrected. The flyer contains a multi-colored map with dark blue designating the lots sold. Olson thanked Carlson for his help copying the map onto the one-page flyer.

What We Do Flyer. Olson reported the “What We Do” flyer was created in response to being asked that question repeatedly at the in-person job fair. The icons for this flyer came from Canva. Olson will check to see if Adobe Stock has anything looking similar to the icons on the industrial park flyer. It was suggested the icons should be blue instead of black to remain consistent with the other flyers. The flyer highlights the EDC’s four main areas: business support, community advocacy, education and technical assistance, and collaboration. The flyer will be created for the general public. Suggestions included eliminating the social media icons unless the handout will be sent electronically, or make them smaller. Replacing the icons with “Visit us at” with the social media name and URL link was recommended.

Tagline, Focus Area and Branding Update. Olson reported a meeting in regard to this subject was rescheduled from last week to this afternoon so there will be more information to share at the meeting in May. A shade of gray has been added to the branding guide color scheme and was used for a table cloth with the EDC logo.

Photo Library. Olson reported the creation of an EDC photo library with folders for several categories. The people category has been broken down into subfolders, including business in business, commerce, crowds, individuals, portraits, recreation, roundtable talking, students and learning and work in action. A video library will be created as well.

Planning Session Briefing: Highlights 2021, Marketing vs. Communication, etc. Backman reported the EDC Annual Planning Session was held on April 7, 2022 with 29 attendees. Five strategic priorities were identified: Maximizing Human Potential, Housing Development, Countywide Engagement, Business Support and Advancing EDC Branding and Marketing Efforts. A rough draft was created listing the objectives for each of these priorities (see attached). Backman requested this committee’s input on action plans for countywide engagement (public relations) and advancing EDC branding and marketing efforts. The EDC could reach out to local economic development groups to see how it could help. It could connect with community banks, scheduling a meeting with the bankers association. Southwest Initiative Foundation and Mid-Minnesota Development Commission (MMDC) could be included. Banks need to understand the EDC’s role as a gap financier, that should be considered if someone is weak on equity, or maybe they could benefit from the Elevate program.

Key partners in advancing the EDC branding and marketing efforts are the Chambers of Commerce in Kandiyohi County and other marketing groups. Activities include updating the brand logo, identifying key audiences and marketing the county as a place to do business. Pam Rosenau suggested a tagline of five or six words that could be used consistently throughout all marketing materials. Olson mentioned that marketing and communications needs to be separated because of different strategies. New London has a Chamber of Commerce, the EDC could work closer with that organization. Olson and Swedburg attended a social they hosted as well as its meeting. The retail group in New London used to meet on Sunday mornings, and the Dam Club had a chamber registration which lapsed, so the Chamber of Commerce took it over. Olson checked with county clerks about meeting locations so future meetings could be held in communities other than Willmar. New London, Spicer and Raymond (Cheers) were considered. Carlson recommended establishing a communications plan. MMDC is working on a three-year plan, which Carlson will share when

completed. They have received good content from other development commissions. Goal examples include working on revolving loan fund lenders, spotlighting them, and expanding video presence throughout the region.

Website Update (EDC & Elevate). Olson reported the websites are going through growing pains. Last week the new EDC site and administration page was not accessible at the EDC. It was an internet provider and caching issue that has since been resolved. Olson will continue to audit and update the site. Townships have been added and unincorporated communities will be added next. Much of the information on the website is taken from a tri-fold brochure that will be updated concurrently with the website. New pictures on the website include the industrial park, Willmar sky picture and the train travelling by grain bins in the countryside. The website load time has improved considerably and is now a secure site. Chair Lien mentioned that it was hard to locate contact information for EDC personnel on the mobile website. Olson will correct that.

Budget. Olson presented a draft of the marketing budget. She plans to present itemized budgets to this committee each month. The EDC will be part of the New London Spring into Summer event. People can enter to win a potted plant at any New London business during this three-day event. Olson will post this on social media.

NEW BUSINESS—

Tablecloth and Marketing Materials. Olson reported the purchase of a table cloth with the EDC logo to be used at job fairs. Time has been spent cleaning and organizing. The folders used for loan application information will be updated.

Yearly Synopsis Review. Olson plans to create a condensed version of the “Year in Review” handout for comparison purposes. All of the information is relevant, but a quick synopsis with bullet points that can be read quickly would be helpful.

BRE Survey Results Social Media & Marketing Newsletter. Olson reported feedback from businesses participating in the BRE/R Survey included requests for social media and website assistance. Olson informed them about a SCORE training program that offers basic introductory information. Olson will create a Constant Contact newsletter addressing introductory social media topics, such as “What is Facebook?” and “What is Twitter?”, with tips on getting started.

Rosenau reported a social media breakfast called “Convos and Coffee” will be scheduled monthly in Willmar starting in June. There will be a planning session on May 18, 2022 at 8:00 a.m. MVTV Wireless will donate breakfast each month and speakers will be provided. Live streaming will be considered. James Miller from Heritage Bank and Heather Koffler from VantagePoint Marketing Consultants are part of the group. Olson will share information on this opportunity with her small business group.

NEXT MEETING—The next meeting is **12 noon, Monday, May 16, 2022** in-person at the Community Room, Heritage Bank and via ZOOM video conference.

ADJOURNMENT—There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 1:35 p.m.



SHOVEL-READY WITH ROOM TO GROW

— WILLMAR INDUSTRIAL PARK —

Businesses ready to expand and build should consider the expanding industrial park in Willmar, Minnesota. In 2016 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.

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 Willmar Rail Connector & Industrial Access Project (Willmar Wye). 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. FedEx Ground most recently moved in starting construction in November 2021 on a 217,000 square foot distribution center. The \$30 million dollar project is one of the largest the industrial park has seen in recent years.

one of only 48
shovel-ready
industrial parks in
Minnesota



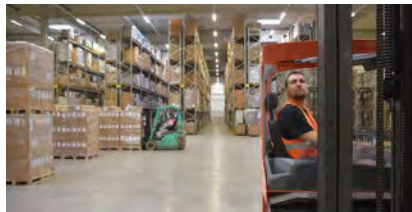
zoned I-1
light industry



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



18 platted lots
available



FedEx
Ground



DOOLEY'S
PETROLEUM INC.

Northern
RADIATOR

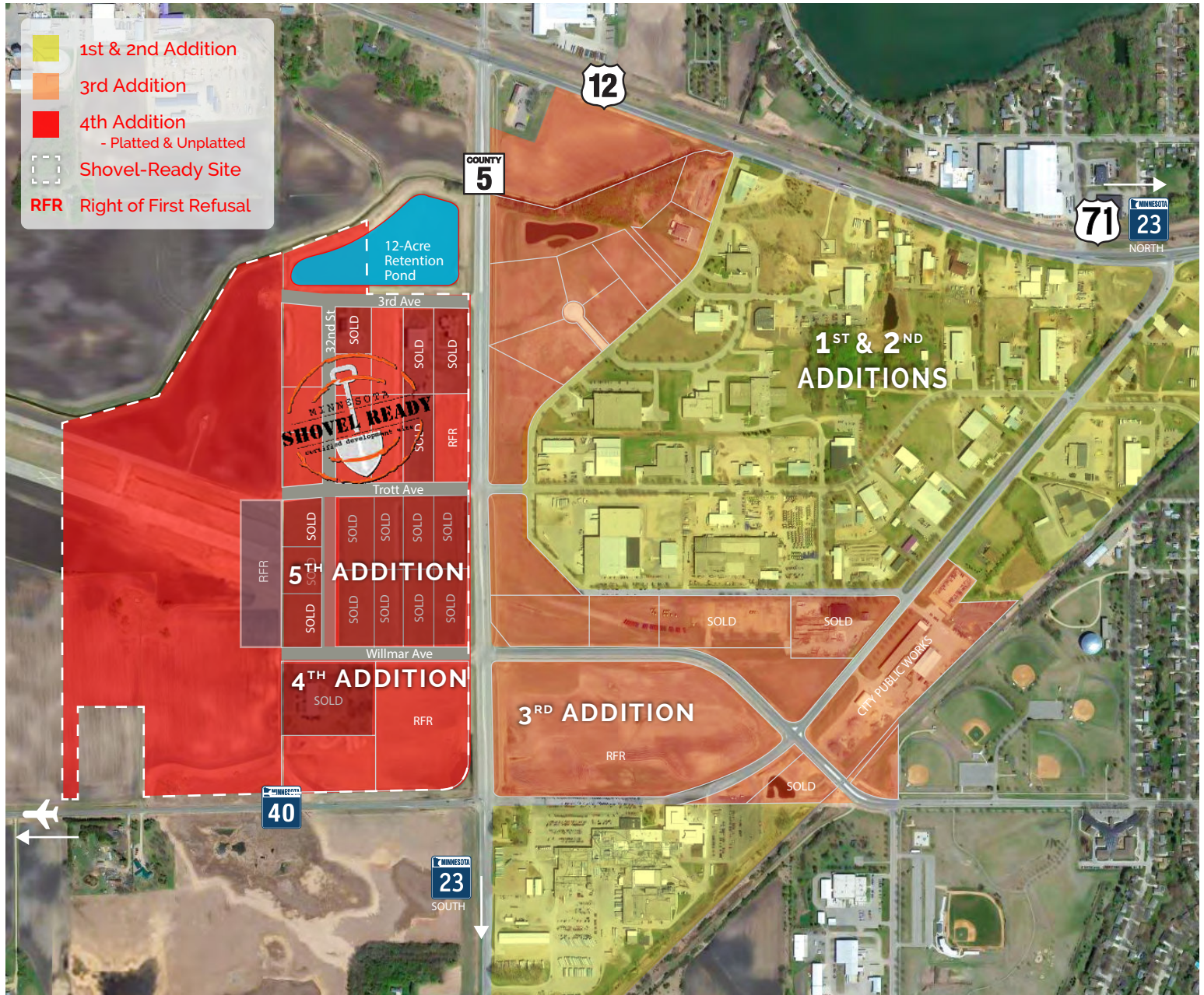


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A CLOSER LOOK

WILLMAR INDUSTRIAL PARK



Available:

147 acres

67 acres Shovel Ready

18 lots

1.4 - 12.5 acre lots



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SHOVEL-READY WITH ROOM TO GROW

WILLMAR INDUSTRIAL PARK



One of only 48 shovel-ready industrial parks in Minnesota



Easy access to US Highways 12, 71 and MN Highway 23, a soon-to-be four-lane road to I-94

Access to current airport and tier 1 rail



Roads, water, sewer and storm water infrastructure in place



135 acres available for development

* Construction of a 217,000 sq. ft. \$30 million FedEx distribution center began in November 2021 making it the largest project in the Industrial Park in recent years

* New Wastewater Treatment plant with 1.5 million gpd sewer capacity

* Electrical—close to substation w/20 MW capacity; 69 KV overhead line and 12K buried distribution

* Natural Gas—6-inch line with 55 to 60 PSI

* Ridgewater Community College and its customized training services is 2 miles away

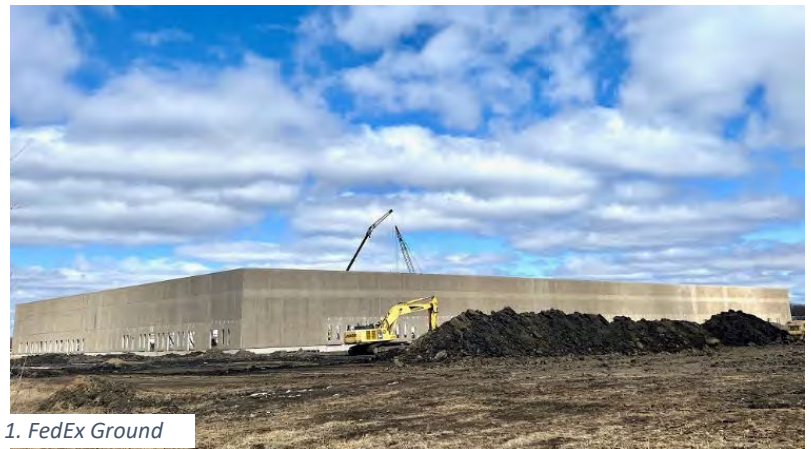


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1. Industrial Development. After 14 months of effort, a letter of intent, a purchase agreement, a development agreement, an early access agreement, and planning/city council approvals, the new FedEx Distribution Center is becoming reality in the Willmar Industrial Park. Construction on the 217,325 sq. ft. state-of-the-art facility on the 27-acre site began in November 2021. Ruedebusch Development, out of Madison, Wisconsin, indicates that the \$30 million logistics facility will be completed by September 2022.



1. FedEx Ground

2. Housing. Unique Opportunities, the 72-unit multi-family housing project that began in September of 2019 continues to progress well. The developer, Kuepers out of Brainerd, Minnesota, completed the project and started Phase 2 in 2020. The developer was pleased with the market and accelerated the third and fourth phases of the development. Construction on those began in October of 2021 and will bring an additional 144 units online by end of 2022. The EDC helped facilitate Tax Increment Financing (TIF) with the City of Willmar for this \$20 million investment.



2-Unique Opportunities Housing Development

Kuepers has purchased 7 acres of land in the Water View Business for Preserve on the 24th. There will be three market-rate multi-family housing buildings each with 36 units. The first phase, a \$7 million project, involves constructing two of the three buildings off 24th Ave. SE in Willmar. Site work and construction began in October of 2021.



4-Preserve on 24th construction

Bethesda North Pointe is a senior housing project, located in New London, is located on an 11-acre site along Peterson Parkway. It includes 34 independent living units, 18 assisted living apartments, and 18 memory care units, plus various amenities including a chapel, a café, creative arts workshops, and more. Marcus Construction, out of Willmar, began working on the \$19.5 million campuses began in October 2019 and had residents a year later. The EDC assisted and the City of New London approved a TIF for this project.



3-Bethesda North Pointe

3. Redevelopment. The first major approved project for Willmar's Renaissance Zone is the Block 25 Lofts, a four-level 58-unit, \$10 million multi-family complex. In 2021 the City's Planning Commission approved a Conditional Use Permit for the project and in November the City Council approved a TIF Development Agreement and plat. The developer has acquired all necessary lots (both public and private). There have been environmental challenges with the site, but Lumber One, the developer, remains committed to the project and expects to begin soil corrections this month.



4. COVID Business Assistance. During the first quarter of 2021, the EDC funneled state-funded financial assistance to businesses throughout Kandiyohi County impacted by COVID19 closures. The EDC provided \$844,000 in grants to 60 businesses and 6 non-profits, mostly in the hospitality industry. They were located in Willmar, Spicer, New London, Atwater, Sunburg, New London Township, Dovre Township, and Lake Andrew Township. Now the EDC is pivoting back to more traditional business assistance—gap financing, low-interest loans, and technical assistance. Included in this funding was: a \$19,500 Microenterprise Loan with Chaw's Asian Market. Revolving Loan Funds for \$45,000 to Amin Grocery, both in Willmar, and \$38,000 to Groom Zone in New London. Rosita's received a Minnesota Pandemic Recovery (MPR) grant for \$14,000.



5. Workforce Development. Finding sufficient and skilled employees is a local, state, and national issue. In 2021 the EDC supported workforce development. After an absence of two years the EDC and three other partners, KDJS Radio, Ridgewater College, and CareerForce, held an in-person Job Fair on October 13, 2021, at the Ridgewater College Gymnasium. It was great to be back in person with 50 employers and 300 jobseekers. The BRE Business Support Subcommittee also planned a Workforce Solutions Summit. The Summit was held in Willmar and hosted 74 attendees from 20 regional cities and 3 guest speakers.



6. Elevate. The mission of the Elevate program is to elevate businesses for success through education and mentorship with a focus on creating economic opportunities for underserved minorities. Classes meet for 12 weeks learning a variety of business ownership-related topics. 2021 was our first year of classes and we graduated 12 students, representing 10 businesses. The program was recognized statewide, first through a Small Business Partnership Grant from the MN DEED of \$76,000. This will fund the program through June 2023. The EDC received the 2021 Minnesota Association of Professional County Economic Developer's (MAPCED) Outstanding Economic Development Program award. These awards will allow the Fall 2022 class to be translated and taught in Somali.



8-An Elevate graduates celebrates with family

8. Marketing Position. The 2021 Strategic Planning Session suggestion that the EDC expand its marketing activities to existing businesses, new entrepreneurs, and potential residents of Kandiyohi County was met by the hiring of an in-house marketing professional in the latter part of the year. The Marketing Committee and Boards considered the role of this new marketing position, job responsibilities, and financial impacts. During June and July, the EDC's Joint Operations and Joint Powers Boards approved the job description and opened the position. 16 individuals applied for the Marketing & Communications Specialist Position by the August deadline. Interviews were held in early September. An offer was made to Ms. Kelsey Olson and her hire was approved by the Boards on October 14th. Her official start date was November 16, 2021. The EDC staff is very pleased to have Kelsey's talents available to the team.