

# STRATEGIC PLAN

2024-2027

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Beginning in early 2024, the Cook County/Grand Marais Joint Economic Development Authority (“EDA”) engaged Northspan to conduct a strategic planning process. The process began with the goal of developing a three-year strategic framework including a practical vision, underlying contradictions, strategic directions, and action planning to guide its implementation.

In its strategic planning session, the group established four strategic directions to guide its work in upholding its mission, vision, and core values:

## STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

1. Engaging and Educating Community
2. Building and Leveraging Partnerships
3. Developing Innovative Economic Solutions
4. Pursuing Development Priorities

This document provides an overview of this strategic plan, which will guide the EDA's work for the next three years. Details on the planning process and supporting documents from that process are available in the appendices.



# BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Cook County/Grand Marais Joint Economic Development Authority is a joint economic development agency representing Cook County, Minnesota and its county seat and only incorporated city, Grand Marais. The EDA is governed by a board of seven commissioners separately appointed by the county board and the city council. It has one full-time staff member and works in partnership with other local organizations such as the Housing and Redevelopment Authority of Cook County (HRA), local Small Business Development Center (SBDC) consultant, the Cook County Chamber of Commerce, and Visit Cook County (VCC) to advance community and economic development in both the city and the county.

In the early 2010s, Cook County sought to reinvigorate its economic development efforts. In 2013, a coalition of county stakeholders launched the Go Cook County initiative, which sought to develop a roadmap toward action on various major issues. Northspan facilitated a series of workshops with this largely volunteer team to identify priorities for action. These efforts led to numerous concrete outcomes, including a major broadband project, workforce programs, housing development with OneRoof Community Housing, and the creation of the HRA.

The EDA engaged Northspan to update the process in 2019, but this came to a halt in early 2020 as its focus was shifted to addressing challenges created by the Covid-19 pandemic. Following several staffing changes, county leaders discussed the potential merger of the EDA and HRA in 2023, but the county chose not to proceed in this direction. Amid the hiring of a new executive director and ongoing discussions about the EDA's role in the area's economic development ecosystem, the EDA sought a new strategic plan.

As part of this process, Northspan updated demographic and economic research that had previously been conducted in both 2013 and 2020. This research provided valuable context on county and city data and showed how it has changed over time, underscoring major areas of interest such as an aging population, high education rates, the dominance of tourism-related industries to the local economy, and the unique challenges in the local housing environment. A complete summary of this data is available as Appendix B.

# STRATEGIC PLAN 2024-2027

The EDA began its strategic planning work in early 2024 and completed a full-day planning retreat in June. The new strategic plan updated the EDA's vision, mission, and core values to guide its work going forward.

## MISSION

To strengthen economic and community vitality by building partnerships and leveraging resources to make Cook County a great place to live, work, and do business.

## VISION

A thriving community with a resilient, balanced economy.

## CORE VALUES

We are...

**Collaborative:** We actively seek partnerships to work jointly with others towards a common goal, valuing teamwork and shared contributions.

**Responsive:** We prioritize listening to the needs and concerns of our community members, promptly addressing issues, and adapting our strategies to meet evolving economic conditions.

**Proactive:** We take the initiative to identify future economic trends, seek out new business opportunities, and prepare for potential challenges.

**Trustworthy:** We are transparent in our operations, honest in our communications, and dependable in delivering on our promises.

In the service of this vision, mission, and set of core values, this strategic plan is built around the following elements:

## PRACTICAL VISION

*What do we want to see in place in three years as a result of our strategic planning actions?*

- Thriving, more diverse economy
- Expanded community infrastructure
- Clear, engaging purpose
- Effective, accountable organization management

## UNDERLYING CONTRADICTIONS

*What is blocking us from moving toward our Practical Vision?*

- Limited resources restrict growth
- Disjointed approach reduces effectiveness
- Conflicting community interests challenge efforts
- Unclear communication diminishes public support
- Unclear development process obstructs progress

## STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

*What innovative, substantial actions will deal with the Underlying Contradictions and move us toward our Practical Vision?*

- Engaging and Educating Community
- Building and Leveraging Partnerships
- Developing Innovative Economic Solutions
- Pursuing Development Priorities

These strategic directions are the pillars that will guide the EDA's work for the next three years. Each strategic direction includes a series of action steps that will move them forward, and EDA staff will coordinate with the board and local partners to ensure their completion.



# SD1

## ENGAGING AND EDUCATING COMMUNITY

### Definition

This strategic direction prioritizes actively involving and informing community members about the EDA's activities and services, ultimately leading to enhanced support, understanding, and recognition within the community.

### Action Steps

1. Conduct monthly WTIP interview and provide articles for local newspapers
2. Put EDA sign in front of office location
3. Finish and launch new website
4. Conduct survey to gauge awareness and perception of the EDA
5. Create EDA Annual report
6. Prepare customer facing package for distribution to new businesses via Chamber of Commerce
7. Provide transparency to the community about the future of the golf course

### Outcomes

- Monthly communication
- New signage in place
- New website launched
- Survey conducted
- Annual report created



## BUILDING AND LEVERAGING PARTNERSHIPS

### Definition

This strategic direction recognizes the importance of cultivating relationships to ensure alignment of resources and goals. To maximize the capacity of the organization and its partners, this direction addresses collaborative success in economic development initiatives, infrastructure projects, and community development efforts.

### Action Steps

1. Budget for training of EDA staff
2. Define roles of business-related organizations and identify gaps
3. Host strategic planning implementation planning sessions with partners
4. Provide technical assistance to local municipalities
5. Continue to examine efficiency and effectiveness of HRA and EDA structures and responsibilities

### Outcomes

- Training budget approved
- Roles and gaps identified
- Planning sessions hosted
- Technical assistance provided



## DEVELOPING INNOVATIVE ECONOMIC SOLUTIONS

### Definition

This strategic direction involves pioneering approaches to economic development, guided by a commitment to encouraging entrepreneurship, addressing unemployment, nurturing diversification, and creatively resolving challenges to propel Cook County toward a thriving and sustainable future

### Action Steps

1. Identify solution to keep SBDC services in Cook County and support staff for EDA work
2. Collaborate with HRA on housing efforts
3. Determine a new, viable path for golf course
4. Convene businesses to discuss workforce housing investment
5. Complete a study to explore diversification opportunities
6. Identify and secure resources to support public infrastructure

### Outcomes

- SBDC services maintained
- Plan for golf course developed
- Diversification study completed
- Infrastructure resources secured

## PURSuing DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES

### Definition

This strategic direction is characterized by a focused and deliberate approach towards addressing identified priorities and projects. It involves the strategic pursuit of key objectives for major city and county economic development assets that support the growth, sustainability, and well-being of both the EDA and the community

### Action Steps

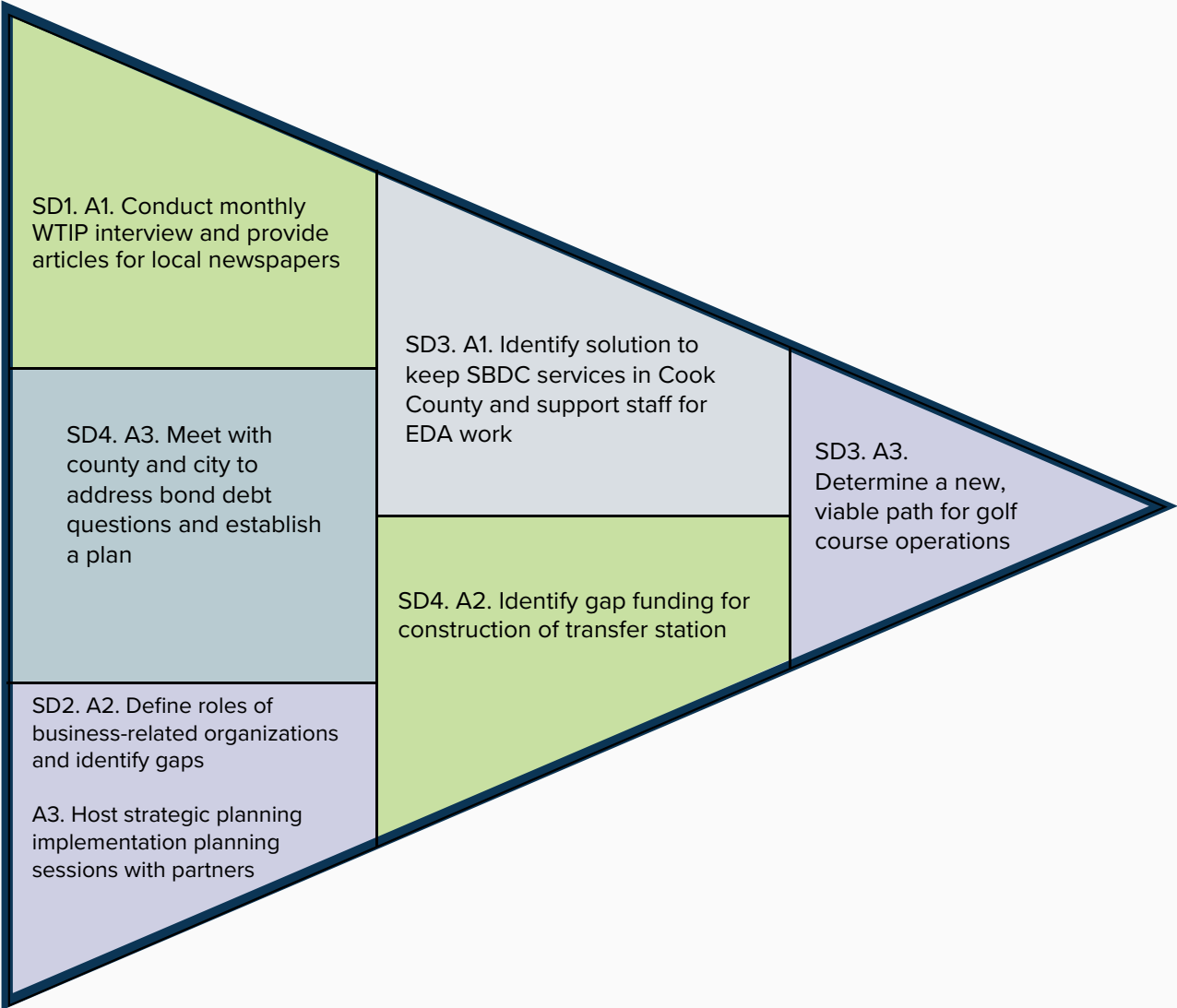
1. Secure and implement grant to implement strategic plan for Taconite Harbor
2. Identify gap funding for construction of transfer station
3. Meet with county and city to address Cedar Grove Business Park bond debt questions and establish a plan
4. Assess viability of developing a plan for 15 acres above Cedar Grove Business Park
5. Identify site and resources to attract assisted living developer
6. Audit of current Cedar Grove lot owner development compliance

### Outcomes

- Grant for Taconite Harbor secured
- Gap funding identified
- Bond debt plan established

# TIMELINE and PRIORITIES

Participants placed strategic plan actions on a timeline, which is available in the appendix titled Strategic Plan Timeline 06.07.24. Of the actions identified as beginning in the first few months of the strategic plan, strategy committee participants identified seven as the most catalytic for its overall success and placed them on a priority wedge that shows essential elements for its forward movement:



# APPENDICES

- A. Strategic Planning Process
- B. Demographic and Economic Analysis
- C. Key Stakeholders Strategic Planning Survey Summary 05.17.24
- D. Practical Vision, Underlying Contradictions, and Strategic Directions 06.07.24
- E. Current Reality, Success Indicators, and Actions 06.07.24
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- G. Priority Wedge 06.07.24





# APPENDIX A

## STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

## STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

The Cook County/Grand Marais Joint EDA has prepared this three-year strategic plan to guide its activities and achieve accomplishments consistent with the group's vision and mission. The strategic process steps, session dates, and agendas are included as an appendix, as are the results of the sessions that followed.

### PROCESS STEPS

- Collection of Background Information & Internal and External Analysis
- Stakeholder Survey
- 06.07.24 Strategic Planning Retreat
- June 2024 Draft Strategic Plan Review and Feedback
- 07.16.24 Strategic Plan Board Presentation

### COLLECTION OF BACKGROUND INFORMATION & INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL ANALYSIS

The strategic planning process began with a series of meetings and communications between Northspan and EDA staff. The staff and board worked to identify participants in the survey and shared background information, which Northspan supplemented with its own history with the EDA and economic development work in Cook County.

### SURVEY

Northspan conducted a targeted survey to gain input from knowledgeable stakeholders on the EDA's future. It received 41 responses, a robust sample showing strong interest in the process. It asked respondents to share thoughts on what economic development is, complete a SWOT analysis, and identify elements of a practical vision, underlying contradictions, and strategic directions. This input was shared with retreat participants and presented at the strategic planning retreat. A survey summary is available in the appendix titled Cook County/Grand Marais Joint EDA Survey Summary.

### STRATEGIC PLANNING RETREAT

#### AGENDA | June 7, 2024 | 8:00 AM – 5:00 PM

- 8:00 AM Welcome, Agenda, & Introductions
- 8:30 AM Context Presentation & What Is Economic Development
- 9:15 AM Practical Vision Focused Conversation
- 9:45 AM Underlying Contradictions Focused Conversation
- 10:15 AM Strategic Directions Focused Conversation
- 11:00 AM Develop Mission
- 12:00 PM Lunch
- 12:30 PM Develop Vision
- 1:30 PM Develop Core Values
- 2:00 PM Focused Implementation
- 4:30 PM Reflection & Next Steps
- 5:00 PM Adjourn

On June 7th, the strategy committee met in Grand Marais and received a presentation on the results of the survey and broader economic and demographic trends in Cook County and the surrounding area. It then reaffirmed a practical vision, underlying contradictions, and strategic directions.

### ELEMENTS OF THE PRACTICAL VISION INCLUDED:

- Thriving, diverse economy
- Expanded community infrastructure
- Clear, engaging purpose
- Effective and accountable organization management

### ELEMENTS OF THE UNDERLYING CONTRADICTIONS INCLUDED:

- Limited resources restrict growth
- Disjointed approach reduces effectiveness
- Conflicting community interests challenge efforts
- Unclear communication diminishes public support
- Unclear development process obstructs progress

### STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

1. Engaging and Educating Community
2. Building and Leveraging Partnerships
3. Developing Innovative Economic Solutions
4. Pursuing Development Priorities

Following the Strategic Directions Consensus Workshop, participants worked together to create a vision and mission for the Cook County/Grand Marais Joint EDA and identify core values that represent the city's interests.

**Mission:** to strengthen economic and community vitality by building partnerships and leveraging resources to make Cook County a great place to live, work, and do business.

**Vision:** A thriving community with a resilient, balanced economy.

### Core Values:

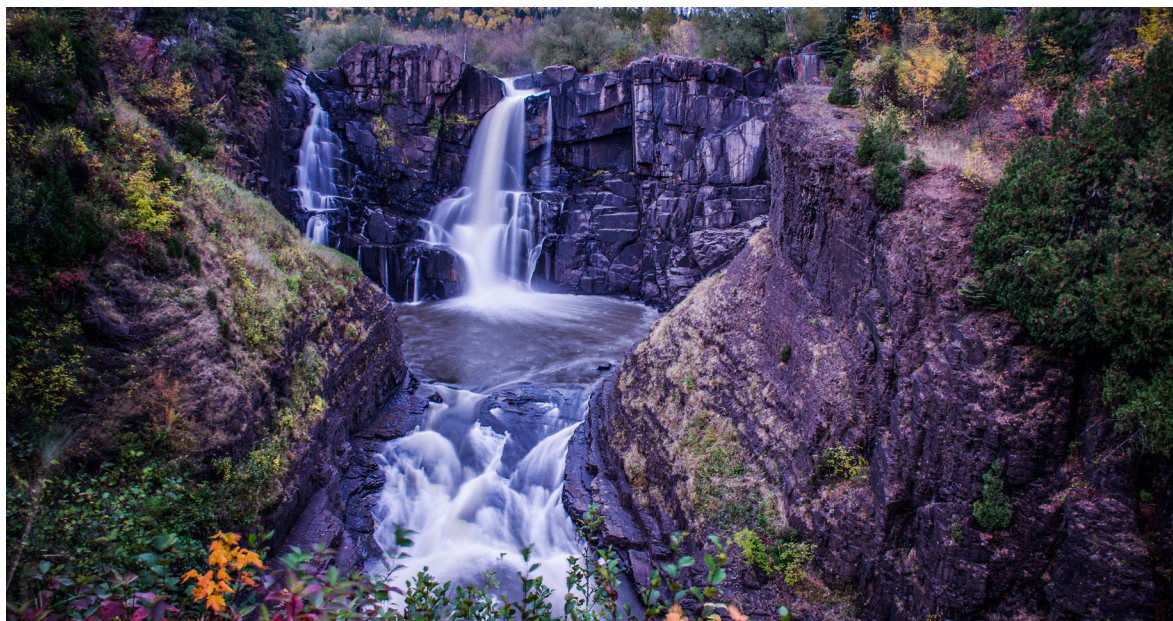
We are...

- **Collaborative:** We actively seek partnerships to work jointly with others towards a common goal, valuing teamwork and shared contributions.
- **Responsive:** We prioritize listening to the needs and concerns of our community members, promptly addressing issues, and adapting our strategies to meet evolving economic conditions.
- **Proactive:** We take the initiative to identify future economic trends, seek out new business opportunities, and prepare for potential challenges.
- **Trustworthy:** We are transparent in our operations, honest in our communications, and dependable in delivering on our promises.

In the final workshop of the session, participants detailed outcomes and actions that could move Cook County and Grand Marais EDA toward its strategic directions and placed these actions on a timeline.

### ACTIONS

The Cook County/Grand Marais Joint EDA defined its current reality, identified success indicators, and developed actions and accomplishments that will allow the organization to move from current reality to success. These actions and the ideas that led to their creation are available in the appendix in the document titled Current Reality, Success Indicators, and Actions 06.07.24. The Cook County/Grand Marais Joint EDA then further defined the strategic plan timeline, which is available in the appendix titled Strategic Plan Timeline 06.07.24.







## APPENDIX B

# Demographic and Economic Analysis

# APPENDIX B

## DEMOGRAPHIC and ECONOMIC ANALYSIS

This document summarizes available demographic and economic data for Cook County. It builds on past research conducted by Northspan for the 2013 Go Cook County initiative and a 2020 update, using many of the same categories and points of comparison.

### A NOTE ON DATA ACCURACY

While the US Census offers the most comprehensive data available for understanding the demographics of American communities, its methods have inherent shortcomings. In addition to longstanding issues with a lower response rate, particularly among certain groups, the 2020 Census saw the introduction of a concept named “Differential Privacy,” in which the Census Bureau deliberately altered some data—particularly in small, rural areas—to help protect the identities of Census-takers. While required by law to preserve such protections, these decisions have implications for data quality, particularly in rural areas. Northspan presents this data with recognition of these shortcomings.

### DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS - POPULATION

	2010	2018	2022	Change
<b>Grand Marais</b>	1,226	1,201	1,768	44.2%
<b>Schroeder/Tofte/Lutsen</b>	780	917	971	24.5%
<b>Grand Portage</b>	470	722	616	31.6%
<b>West Unorganized Territory</b>	1,663	1,715	1,517	-8.8%
<b>East Unorganized Territory</b>	1,072	756	739	-31.1%
<b>All Cook County</b>	5,211	5,311	5,611	7.7%

Source: U.S. Census American Community Survey via Social Explorer, 2010-2022.

Unlike much of rural Minnesota, Cook County has been on a growth trajectory since 2010, and it has accelerated considerably over the past four years. 2022 ACS data backs up a community perception that the Covid-19 pandemic led to an increase in permanent residents, as many individuals sought to escape to a more rural lifestyle, either for retirement or remote work. While data from sub-regions should be taken with a grain of salt due to US Census data practices, it generally suggests more growth occurring in shorefront communities, while populations have been flat or declining further inland.

**Table 2: Cook County Labor Force Changes, 2010-2022**

	2010	2018	2022	Change
<b>Grand Marais</b>	666	605	877	31.7%
<b>Schroeder/Tofte/Lutsen</b>	438	539	562	28.3%
<b>Grand Portage</b>	227	432	355	56.4%
<b>West Unorganized Terr.</b>	964	852	760	-21.2%
<b>East Unorganized Terr.</b>	580	260	413	-28.8%
<b>All Cook County</b>	2,875	2,688	2,967	3.2%

Source: U.S. Census American Community Survey via Social Explorer, 2010-2022.

Data likewise shows that the labor force in Cook County has grown since 2010, though at a slower rate than the overall population, a trend that reflects the county's aging population.

**Table 3: Cook County Population by Race or Ethnicity and Gender, 2010-2022**

	2010		2018		2022	
<i>Race or Ethnicity</i>						
<b>White</b>	4,578	87.9%	4,614	86.9%	4,787	85.3%
<b>Native American</b>	317	6.1%	463	8.7%	417	7.4%
<b>2 or More Races</b>	187	3.6%	110	2.1%	231	4.1%
<b>Other Races</b>	80	1.5%	53	1.0%	104	1.9%
<b>Asian</b>	34	0.7%	47	0.9%	50	0.9%
<b>African American</b>	15	0.3%	24	0.5%	18	0.3%
<b>Hispanic (Any Race)</b>	80	1.5%	120	2.3%	142	2.5%
	2010		2018		2022	
<i>Gender</i>						
<b>Female</b>	2,635	50.6%	2,679	50.4%	2,807	50.0%
<b>Male</b>	2,576	49.4%	2,632	49.6%	2,804	50.0%

Source: U.S. Census American Community Survey via Social Explorer, 2010-2022.

While numbers for different racial and ethnic groups are very small and subject to noise in the data, Census statistics show a consistent trend of an increasingly diverse county. The white percentage of the population has been trending downward, while populations of color grow, particularly in the category of two or more races. Previous Northspan work in Cook County has found that Native American populations can fluctuate significantly, both due to shifting official definitions of Native status and due to historical concerns with government interaction.

**Table 4: Cook County Population by Age, 2000-2022**

	2000	2010	2018	2022	% Change Since 2000	% Change Since 2018
<b>Under 18</b>	1,054	898	816	839	-20.4%	2.8%
<b>18-34</b>	775	771	847	921	18.8%	8.7%
<b>35-64</b>	2,452	2,544	2,235	2,207	-10.0%	-1.3%
<b>65+</b>	887	998	1,413	1,644	85.3%	16.3%
<b>Median</b>	44.0	49.5	52.3	52.2	18.6%	-0.2%

Source: U.S. Census American Community Survey via Social Explorer, 2000-2022.

Since 2000, Cook County has been on a long-term trajectory of a population that is aging significantly, with a near-doubling of the 65+ population and a substantial decline in the number of children. Since 2018, however, there have been some changes in these trends. Growth in the 65-plus age bracket has leveled off somewhat, and Cook County has seen some growth in younger age brackets, including the addition of over 70 people in the 18-34 age group. This trend bodes well for the under 18 age bracket, which has finally recovered somewhat after years of decline. The county's median age, though still the highest for any Minnesota county, declined for the first time in decades over this time period.

**INCOME AND POVERTY**

**Table 5: Cook County Median Household Income and Poverty Rates, 2010-2022**

	Median HH Income				Poverty (Families)			
	2010	2018	2022	Change	2010	2018	2022	Change
Grand Marais	\$40,772	\$39,643	\$68,640	68.4%	2.4%	11.0%	5.4%	125%
Schroeder/Tofte/Lutsen	\$52,721	\$59,348	\$66,960	27.0%	5.6%	3.3%	1.9%	-66.1%
Grand Portage	\$33,056	\$43,333	\$60,391	82.7%	12.9%	22.4%	10.9%	-15.5%
West Unorganized Territory	\$54,732	\$64,500	\$85,167	55.6%	2.6%	3.8%	2.2%	-15.4%
East Unorganized Territory	\$53,217	\$58,571	\$81,250	52.7%	0.0%	16.6%	0.0%	N/A
All Cook County	\$49,162	\$52,271	\$71,937	46.3%	3.1%	9.5%	3.6%	16.1%

Source: U.S. Census American Community Survey via Social Explorer, 2010-2022.

Household incomes in Cook County have risen steadily in Cook County since 2010, though cumulative inflation over this time period is about 45%, meaning the overall increase in real spending power has been fairly flat. This result is somewhat expected in a region that has an aging population, as many households step out of the workforce and see reductions in income. Income growth was most significant in the Grand Portage area, which has helped reduce the gap between different portions of the county. Nonetheless, wealth gaps persist in Cook County, and the poverty rate has fluctuated over time, showing notable increases over the 2010s before reverting toward the previous low norm by 2022. Some of these reductions in poverty may be associated with pandemic era benefits that have since lapsed, so these statistics bear watching over time. In general, there is little extreme poverty in Cook County, though Grand Portage's rate remains elevated relative to the rest of the county and state.



EDUCATION

**Table 6: Cook County Educational Attainment, 2010-2022**

	2010	2022
<b>High School Graduate</b>	93.0%	97.2%
<b>Some College/2-Year Degree</b>	66.3%	74.0%
<b>Bachelor's Degree</b>	32.9%	46.4%
<b>Advanced Degree</b>	11.9%	17.2%

Source: U.S. Census American Community Survey via Social Explorer, 2010-2022.

Cook County remains one of the most educated counties in rural America and has only trended further in this direction over the past decade and a half. The county is approaching near-universal high school graduation rates for its residents; its percentage of residents with bachelor's degrees is fifth among Minnesota's 87 counties, falling short only to three in the Twin Cities metro and Olmsted County (home to Rochester and the Mayo Clinic), and its percentage of residents with advanced degrees is second only to Olmsted County. These statistics are particularly remarkable given that the nearest four-year institution of higher education is 75 miles away in Duluth and demonstrate the extent to which Cook County has become a magnet for certain demographics.

HOUSING

**Table 7: Cook County Housing Occupancy and Vacancy Rates, 2011-2022**

	2011		2018		2022	
<b>Occupied</b>	2,627	48.0%	2,699	44.8%	2,672	44.7%
<b>Vacant</b>	2,850	52.0%	3,323	55.2%	3,310	55.3%
<b>Total Units</b>	5,477		6,022		5,982	
<b>Occupied Units</b>						
<b>Owner Occupied</b>	1,905	72.5%	2,020	74.8%	2,086	78.1%
<b>Renter Occupied</b>	722	27.5%	679	25.2%	586	21.9%
	2,627		2,699		2,672	
<b>Vacant Units</b>						
<b>Vacant for Rent</b>	25	0.5%	43	0.7%	50	1.5%
<b>Vacant for Sale</b>	68	1.2%	85	1.4%	12	0.2%
<b>Other Vacant</b>	2,757	50.3%	3,195	53.1%	3,248	54.3%
<b>Total Vacant</b>	2,850		3,323		3,310	

Source: U.S. Census American Community Survey via Social Explorer, 2010-2022.

Housing in Cook County follows unique trends given the predominance of vacation homes (categorized by the Census in the “Other Vacant” category). The data shows a modest decrease in overall number of units since 2018, while the County appeared to add another 50 vacation homes over this period. The market remains particularly difficult for renters, with a recorded decrease in the number of available units, and there remains very little slack in the local real estate market, with very few homes available.

**Table 8: Cook County Housing Costs as a Percentage of Household Income, 2011-2022**

	2011		2018		2022	
<b>Household Rental Costs</b>						
<b>Less than 10%</b>	57	9.8%	97	17.9%	47	8.0%
<b>10-30%</b>	379	65.1%	304	56.1%	301	51.4%
<b>30-50%</b>	89	15.3%	68	12.6%	86	14.7%
<b>50%+</b>	57	9.8%	73	13.5%	47	8.0%
<b>Total</b>	582		542		586	
<b>Household Homeownership Costs</b>						
<b>No Mortgage</b>	986	51.8%	985	48.9%	1,097	52.6%
<b>Less than 30%</b>	544	28.6%	640	31.9%	716	34.3%
<b>30-50%</b>	248	13.0%	198	9.8%	253	12.1%
<b>50%+</b>	127	6.7%	191	9.5%	117	5.6%
<b>Total</b>	1,905		2,014		2,086	

*Source: U.S. Census American Community Survey via Social Explorer, 2010-2022. Data may not match numbers in previous tables or add to 100% due to inability to collect rents or mortgage rates for all units*

An assessment of cost burden for Cook County residents shows some positive trends in recent years. The number of residents who are cost burdened (those spending more than 30% of their incomes on housing costs) has decreased, with real declines in the number spending more than 50%. While many Cook County residents continue to face challenges finding affordable housing in a tight market, there has been some progress around the margins of affordability relative to income.

**ECONOMIC ANALYSIS**

The Minnesota Department of Employment’s Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW) shows a modest decrease in employment between 2019 and 2023. This trend stands in contrast to the increase in the labor force identified in US Census data. A possible explanatory factor for the gap between the Census labor force numbers and DEED employment numbers, albeit a hard one to measure, is remote work, as many residents may work remotely for non-local companies. This trend is also consistent with other counties in northeast Minnesota, which have struggled to return to pre-pandemic employment highs, a phenomenon exacerbated by a large cohort of Baby Boomers moving toward retirement age.

Cook County's economy, which is heavily dependent on tourism-related industries, faced notable challenges over the past five years that come out clearly in employment data. Despite a notable decline in the number of employees in the Accommodation and Food Services sector, its concentration in Cook County relative to the state still managed to increase, a reflection of the challenging headwinds in this industry during and coming out of the Covid-19 pandemic. A similar trend is visible in retail trade, which also lost employees but only became more of a relative strength. Industries that saw absolute gains in employment, such as public administration and education, are typically tied to trends in other industries and are not foundations the EDA can cultivate for further growth, with the possible exception of Cook County Higher Education and the resources it may offer to a very educated populace that values lifelong learning.

**Table 9: Cook County Industries by Employment, 2011-2023**

	2011		2019		2023		% Change
Accommodation and Food Services	808	30.0%	920	32.0%	758	29.5%	-6.2%
Public Administration	393	14.6%	407	14.1%	407	15.8%	3.6%
Retail Trade	354	13.2%	366	12.7%	320	12.4%	-9.6%
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	282	10.5%	251	8.7%	201	7.8%	-28.7%
Health Care and Social Assistance	245	9.1%	218	7.6%	214	8.3%	-12.7%
Educational Services	138	5.1%	178	6.2%	174	6.8%	28.8%
Construction	170	6.3%	168	5.9%	158	6.1%	-7.1%
Other	110	4.9%	140	5.6%	133	5.2%	20.9%
Finance, Insurance, & Real Estate	64	2.4%	73	1.7%	89	3.5%	39.1%
Other Services (except Public Administration)	26	1.0%	44	1.5%	39	1.5%	50.0%
Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	28	1.0%	39	1.4%	43	1.7%	53.6%
Information	30	1.1%	23	0.8%	19	0.7%	-36.7%
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	22	0.8%	15	0.5%	16	0.62%	-27.2%
<b>Total</b>	2,691		2,867		2,571		-10.3%

Source: Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, 2011-2023.

This report provides a brief overview of the Cook County economic base. It begins by calculating the location quotient (LQ) of each major industry group. A location quotient shows the relative concentration of employment in an industry relative to a larger comparison area. This analysis compares Cook County to the entire state of Minnesota. Location quotients over 1 indicate a relative strength and concentration of employment in an industry, while those under 1 show a relative lack of employment. Due to the small size of the county, data is not available for all industries; the rest are aggregated into the "other" category.

A shift-share analysis is a method that subsequently analyzes how a county's location quotients have changed over time. Such an assessment of Cook County shows the ongoing importance of tourism-related industries, even amid recent challenges, and potential opportunities for growth in emerging industries that are adjacent to the tourism and vacation home industries, including real estate, insurance, and other services such as landscaping, home care, and advocacy. The construction industry, historically a strength, faced some real workforce challenges, as did health care, which is relatively small in Cook County when compared to other parts of the state, but vital given its isolation.

**Table 10: Cook County Location Quotients and Shift-Share Analysis**

Industry	2011 LQ	2023 LQ	Shift-Share
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	5.60	4.37	-22.0%
Accommodation and Food Services	3.77	3.79	0.3%
Public Administration	3.13	3.35	6.9%
Retail Trade	1.22	1.27	4.4%
Construction	1.67	1.25	-25.2%
Educational Services	0.62	0.85	38.2%
Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate	0.36	0.57	58.4%
Other Services (Except Public Administration)	0.30	0.49	63.7%
Health Care and Social Assistance	0.56	0.47	-15.2%
Information	0.51	0.44	-12.3%
Administrative Support and Waste Management	0.21	0.37	80.1%
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	0.17	0.11	-34.9%

**ECONOMIC BASE ANALYSIS**

Identification of location quotients and their trends allows for the completion of an economic base analysis that sorts the major industry clusters into four categories:

*Economic Base:* industries with high and growing location quotients

*Transforming:* industries with high, but declining, location quotients

*Emerging:* industries with low, but growing, location quotients

*Declining:* industries with low and declining location quotients

**Table 11: Cook County Economic Base Analysis, 2023**

<b>Transforming</b>	<b>Economic Base</b>
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	Accommodation and Food Services
Construction	Public Administration
	Retail Trade
<b>Declining</b>	<b>Emerging</b>
Health Care and Social Assistance	Educational Services
Information	Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	Other Services (Except Public Administration)

**ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT AND WASTE MANAGEMENT**

This analysis underscores the trends observed above on the challenges in tourism and related industries, even as they remain dominant in the local economy. It also points to a few emerging opportunities, including education and the real estate sector (which includes vacation rentals). The local professional services industries, while never large, have also been shifting, with declines in traditional industries and increases in other services, which can include repair and maintenance (including landscaping), personal services, and nonprofits.

**COMPARISON COUNTIES**

The initial Go Cook County report compared the county to three counties in the western United States known for their ski resorts: Teton County, Wyoming (home to Jackson), Summit County, Colorado (home to Breckenridge), and Blaine County, Idaho (home to Sun Valley). For the 2020 Go Cook County reboot, Northspan recommended the addition of five more counties that seemed somewhat more aligned with Cook County's trajectory: neighboring Lake County, Minnesota; Crow Wing County, Minnesota, a similar major vacation destination; Door County, Wisconsin, another Great Lakes tourism-focused county; Lamoille County, Vermont, home to the Stowe ski resort; and Hancock County, Maine, which hosts Acadia National Park. Table 12 shows updated statistics for each of these counties, and Table 13 shows changes in each since 2018.

**Table 12: Selected Indicators for Comparison Counties, 2022**

	Cook Co., MN	Door Co., WI	Crow Wing Co., MN	Lake Co., MN	Hancock Co., ME	Lam-oille Co., VT	Teton Co., WY	Summit Co., CO	Blaine Co., ID
<b>Population</b>	5,611	30,038	66,558	10,915	55,851	25,977	23,346	30,955	24,248
<b>Labor Force</b>	2,967	14,985	32,580	5,066	29,250	14,511	15,480	20,157	13,941
<b>Median Income</b>	\$71,937	\$68,257	\$65,975	\$73,860	\$64,149	\$69,886	\$108,279	\$100,611	\$81,794
<b>Poverty Rate</b>	5.4%	5.3%	7.6%	5.2%	6.8%	4.0%	3.8%	2.3%	4.0%
<b>Median Age</b>	52.2	53.6	45	49.7	48.9	41	39.9	39	44.5
<b>Vacant Housing Units</b>	55.3%	42.0%	32.7%	31.8%	38.8%	19.0%	27.8%	62.7%	40.3%
<b>Cost-Burdened Renters</b>	22.7%	34.5%	41.8%	33.6%	46.5%	36.5%	32.9%	41.0%	33.2%

Source: U.S. Census American Community Survey via Social Explorer, 2022.

These comparisons generally look favorable for Cook County over the past decade. It had the third-highest population growth of the eight counties since 2018, along with the highest labor force change; the others that grew saw increases in their median age, while Cook County was one of only three to grow somewhat younger. Its labor force growth and median household income growth were the highest of any county, and it performs better than average in terms of its poverty rate and progress in lowering cost burden for renters. It was the only one of the eight counties to see an increase in Other Vacant (i.e., vacation) homes over the time period, underscoring how tight real estate activity is in many desirable locations across the country. Any county with similar characteristics that can meaningfully add to its housing stock has clear advantages.

**Table 13: Changes in Selected Indicators for Comparison Counties, 2018-2022**

	Cook Co., MN	Door Co., WI	Crow Wing Co., MN	Lake Co., MN	Hancock Co., ME	Lam-oille Co., VT	Teton Co., WY	Summit Co., CO	Blaine Co., ID
<b>Pop Change</b>	5.6%	9.5%	4.2%	3.3%	2.4%	2.8%	1.2%	1.7%	10.2%
<b>Labor Force Change</b>	10.4%	6.5%	3.9%	-0.6%	3.9%	2.3%	6.6%	-1.9%	9.9%
<b>Median Income Change</b>	37.6%	17.1%	21.0%	24.1%	20.9%	15.7%	29.2%	29.7%	57.4%
<b>Poverty Rate Change</b>	-43.2%	12.1%	8.1%	9.7%	-9.2%	-62.4%	61.0%	-42.5%	-62.8%
<b>Median Age Change</b>	-0.2%	2.3%	1.6%	-1.4%	0.8%	0.2%	1.5%	-0.3%	3.0%
<b>Change in Other Vacant Units</b>	0.2%	-9.9%	-8.9%	-5.4%	-8.8%	-12.8%	-15.8%	-8.6%	-13.8%
<b>Change in Cost-Burdened Renters</b>	-12.8%	-11.6%	-4.9%	-14.7%	19.0%	-13.5%	-0.6%	-12.8%	-19.3%

Source: U.S. Census American Community Survey via Social Explorer, 2018-2022.





**APPENDIX C**  
**Key Stakeholders Strategic Planning Survey Summary**  
**05.17.24**



**OVERVIEW**

The Cook County/Grand Marais Joint Economic Development Authority (“Cook County EDA”) contracted with Northspan to facilitate a strategic planning process guiding the agency’s priorities for the next three years.

As part of the strategic planning process, a survey was distributed to local and regional key stakeholders to gather insights about the EDA and economic development priorities. The feedback collected in the survey will guide strategic planning workshops and inform the EDA’s 3-Year Strategic Plan.

The survey was distributed via SurveyMonkey and was open from May 6, 2024, through May 17, 2024. A total of 41 respondents completed the survey. Responses are reported anonymously and in aggregate.

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES**

The first section of the survey prompted respondents to assess their broader perceptions of economic development, identify economic development issues and opportunities in Cook County, and provide suggestions for the EDA’s focus areas given their understanding of economic development.

Responses to questions #1 through #4 were categorized by their key theme(s), with some responses containing more than one theme, and are displayed below by the total percentage of frequency each theme appeared.

**1. In your own words, how would you define “economic development”?**

Economic outcomes and benefits	75%
Business support and growth	43%
Community investment and resources	40%
Quality of life and community well-being	35%
Job creation and employment opportunities	25%
Strategic planning and targeted efforts	13%
Problem-solving, innovation, and change	10%
Infrastructure development	8%
Sustainability	8%
Economic diversification	3%

**2. What do you see as the top 3 economic development issues in Cook County?**

Housing	30%
Limited population/workforce	16%
Reliance on seasonal tourism, lack of economic diversification	16%
High costs and low wages	15%

**COOK COUNTY/GRAND MARAIS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY**  
**KEY STAKEHOLDER STRATEGIC PLANNING SURVEY SUMMARY**



Child care	7%
Entrepreneurial and business support	4%
Community infrastructure	3%
Financial incentive systems, tax burdens	3%
Local culture and resistance to change	2%
Isolated location	2%
Land usage and available space	2%
Access to capital	2%
Limited dining/entertainment options	2%
Blighted buildings	1%
Superior National at Lutsen	1%

**3. What do you see as the top 3 economic development opportunities in Cook County?**

Diversifying industry and new businesses	17%
Affordable and workforce housing developments	14%
Redeveloping existing assets, e.g., Lutsen, Taconite Harbor, Superior National	13%
Year-round tourism	12%
Attracting and developing skilled workforce	9%
Broadband and remote-based work	9%
Leveraging natural surroundings	9%
Strengthening existing businesses	8%
Evaluating taxation and growth strategies	6%
Climate change and sustainability	5%
Infrastructure improvements	5%
Supporting social services, e.g., child care, health care	5%
Local food initiatives	3%
Synergistic leadership	2%

**COOK COUNTY/GRAND MARAIS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY**  
**KEY STAKEHOLDER STRATEGIC PLANNING SURVEY SUMMARY**



**4. Given your understanding of economic development, what 3 areas do you think are most appropriate for the EDA to focus on?**

Funding and technical assistance for business development	17%
Workforce development and job creation	17%
Housing solutions	16%
Attracting diversified industry and supporting new businesses	13%
Developing and revitalizing space for business	13%
Community partnerships and outreach	7%
Expanding tourism opportunities	7%
Supporting established business owners	6%
Managing growth and protecting citizens' welfare	5%
Redeveloping Taconite Harbor	5%
Child and senior care solutions	4%
Reassessing Superior National management and operations	4%



**SWOT ANALYSIS: STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES, & THREATS**

In questions #5 through #8, key stakeholders were asked to complete a SWOT analysis identifying the EDA’s internal strengths and weaknesses compared to other agencies (e.g., local units of government, private development groups, local nonprofits, etc.), as well as external opportunities and threats relating to the EDA. Participants were instructed to enter up to 3 responses per category. Responses are listed below in the order of frequency they appeared.

<b>Strengths</b> ( <i>Internal factors that give the EDA an advantage compared to other agencies</i> )	<b>Weaknesses</b> ( <i>Internal factors that place the EDA at a disadvantage compared to other agencies</i> )
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong internal leadership</li> <li>• Access to funding and resources</li> <li>• Committed, experienced board</li> <li>• Collaboration with local partners e.g., HRA, Chamber, Visit Cook County, Grand Portage</li> <li>• Business knowledge and experience</li> <li>• Clear focus and mission</li> <li>• Flexibility and resilience</li> <li>• Government support</li> <li>• Lobbying and advocacy efforts</li> <li>• Community reputation</li> <li>• SBDC consultant</li> <li>• New website</li> <li>• Superior National Golf Course</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community awareness and understanding</li> <li>• Reliance on limited government funding</li> <li>• Small size and limited staff</li> <li>• Change resistance and stagnant board</li> <li>• Perceived incompetence from past actions</li> <li>• Superior National Golf Course responsibilities</li> <li>• Political division, tension between county/city</li> <li>• Lack of long-term strategy</li> <li>• Limited economic diversity</li> <li>• High staff/leadership turnover</li> <li>• Bureaucracy, red tape</li> <li>• Remote location and limited available land</li> <li>• Unhealthy interpersonal dynamics</li> <li>• Higher performance standards than private business/nonprofits</li> </ul>
<b>Opportunities</b> ( <i>External factors that the EDA could use to its advantage</i> )	<b>Threats</b> ( <i>External factors that could create challenges for the EDA</i> )
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Availability of state and federal funds</li> <li>• Use natural environment/tourism to attract full-time residents and business</li> <li>• Small-town identity and resilience</li> <li>• Leverage local, regional, and state partnerships</li> <li>• Broadband connectivity and remote work</li> <li>• Government officials' affinity for Cook County</li> <li>• Increased housing initiatives</li> <li>• Capitalize on EDA's unique powers and abilities</li> <li>• Climate change and sustainability</li> <li>• Develop existing spaces, e.g. Taconite Harbor, west end</li> <li>• Strong local economy and tax base</li> <li>• Workforce development, e.g., international workers</li> <li>• THC legislation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Negative public opinions and apathy</li> <li>• Rising costs of living and development</li> <li>• Opposition to tax increases and government spending</li> <li>• Political polarization and conflicting interests</li> <li>• Anti-growth, "not in my backyard" mentalities</li> <li>• Loss or decrease of funding programs</li> <li>• Competing with larger communities for resources</li> <li>• Reliance on tourism industry</li> <li>• Aging population, declining workforce</li> <li>• Insufficient housing supply</li> <li>• Lack of cooperation from corporate mining/power entities</li> <li>• Land grab along North Shore due to climate change</li> <li>• Remote location logistical challenges</li> </ul>



**PRACTICAL VISION**

The next section of the survey asked participants to develop a practical vision by considering the question: *“What do you want to see in place in 3 years as a result of the EDA’s strategic planning actions?”* Responses were categorized by theme into high-level buckets below.

**9. What do you want to see in place in 3 years as a result of the EDA’s strategic planning actions?**

Thriving, diverse economy	37%
Expanded community infrastructure	24%
Clear, engaging purpose	17%
Effective asset management	12%
Improved financial systems	11%

**UNDERLYING CONTRADICTIONS (BLOCKS)**

Respondents were then asked to identify underlying contradictions by answering the question: *“What may be blocking or holding the EDA back from its practical vision?”* Responses were clustered based on their theme into the categories below.

**10. What may be blocking or holding the EDA back from its practical vision?**

Limited resources restrict growth	27%
Disjointed approach reduces effectiveness	24%
Conflicting interests foster division	20%
Unclear communication diminishes public support	17%
Restrictive regulations obstruct progress	13%

**STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS**

Next, survey participants were prompted to generate ideas for strategic directions by reflecting on the question: *“What innovative, substantial actions will deal with our blocks and move us toward your practical vision?”* The responses submitted were grouped by overall theme into categories below.

**11. What innovative, substantial actions will deal with our blocks and move us toward your practical vision?**

Engaging community stakeholders	35%
Aligning partnerships with goals	29%
Promoting innovative economic solutions	14%
Establishing clear development policies	12%
Pursuing sustainable funding options	10%





**CORE VALUES**

The last portion of the survey asked key stakeholders to consider the core values the EDA is building through this strategic planning process. Participants were instructed to submit 3 words that they feel should represent important values of the EDA. Responses are shown below in a word cloud based on the frequency each appeared.

**12. What are 3 words that you feel should represent important values of the EDA?**





**APPENDIX D**  
**Practical Vision, Underlying Contradictions,**  
**and Strategic Directions**  
**06.07.24**

# Practical Vision



Thriving, diverse economy	Thriving, diverse economy	Thriving, diverse economy	Thriving, diverse economy	Expanded community infrastructure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocating for business diversification</li> <li>• Target marketing to businesses and owner profiles</li> <li>• finding/improving capital options for businesses to tap into</li> <li>• Diversified business mix (not so dependent on tourism)</li> <li>• New location for creation of new businesses</li> <li>• THC businesses</li> <li>• A local tool rental business (like AAA rental)</li> <li>• Assist local businesses accountably, not handouts</li> <li>• Program in place to assist businesses in increasing wages</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attracting scalable startups that benefit the community</li> <li>• Support new businesses that support existing ones</li> <li>• Locals owning businesses</li> <li>• Quantitative growth in business expansion</li> <li>• Find funding to attract non-tourism related businesses</li> <li>• Broaden the focus in the County beyond ever increasing, unsustainable tourism.</li> <li>• Booming industrial park</li> <li>• Consistent branding - businesses look good</li> <li>• Actively exploring ways to diversify the economy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incentives for tech based companies to move here</li> <li>• Promote environmental responsible businesses</li> <li>• Research into possible businesses that are climate proof</li> <li>• Helping revitalize missing links downtown.</li> <li>• A retreat/conference center for businesses or associations</li> <li>• Increase tourism related attractions</li> <li>• Land-use staff that encourages development.</li> <li>• More opportunities</li> <li>• More training programs for trades</li> <li>• Apprenticeship programs locally taught</li> <li>• More trades businesses and training programs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategies to recruit workforce to the area</li> <li>• Develop a marketing campaign to attract a workforce</li> <li>• New residents fill jobs, kids in schools</li> <li>• Local businesses thrive with more year-round residents</li> <li>• Creation of additional spaces for office and commercial space</li> <li>• more small businesses sending their product/service over the line</li> <li>• Prevent commercial displacement</li> <li>• Co-ordinated support for home grown entrepreneurs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in affordable housing</li> <li>• 100 affordable workforce housing rental units.</li> <li>• Additional housing in place, EDA supporting HRA</li> <li>• More long-term rentals</li> <li>• More affordable housing options</li> <li>• short-term rental term limits</li> <li>• Land-use rules: density; lower costs.</li> <li>• Reimagining local zoning ordinances</li> <li>• Find funding to support workforce housing</li> <li>• Increased efforts with the HRA</li> <li>• 250 new affordable housing units county wide.</li> <li>• Access to affordable housing</li> </ul>

# Practical Vision



Expanded community infrastructure	Clear, engaging purpose	Clear, engaging purpose	Effective and Accountable Organization Management	Effective and Accountable Organization Management
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More affordable housing projects in the works</li> <li>• Senior community housing transition plans</li> <li>• Online presence advocating rural housing living</li> <li>• Expand childcare options</li> <li>• Access to childcare</li> <li>• A comprehensive childcare system for Cook County.</li> <li>• Assisted living services in Cook County.</li> <li>• Development of senior living / assisted living home</li> <li>• community resources like third-places, no purchase necessary</li> <li>• Frequent and inexpensive transportation to Duluth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create public perception that EDA helps all county residents.</li> <li>• an increase recognition and approval of EDA activities &amp; accomplishments</li> <li>• Positive community-wide attitude toward economic development.</li> <li>• Better education plans for the community about EDA</li> <li>• Positive public perception (support)</li> <li>• Strategic long range planning</li> <li>• A good roadmap</li> <li>• Renewed goals</li> <li>• Create a development plan/framework county-wide.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish key locations for ED efforts.</li> <li>• Clarity of mission of EDA, esp vis a vis HRA</li> <li>• More bipartisan cooperation among community</li> <li>• Commitment of boards and staff</li> <li>• Stronger board involvement</li> <li>• Term Limits for the board of the EDA</li> <li>• More guidance</li> <li>• Greater connections with Sulver Bay and Grand Portage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The sale of Superior National Golf Course</li> <li>• A sustainable exit plan for Lake Superior National.</li> <li>• Future of Superior National is feasible, sustainable</li> <li>• Superior National long term management resolution</li> <li>• Increased play at the golf course</li> <li>• Development of Taconite Harbor Property</li> <li>• Taconite Harbor how-to plan in place</li> <li>• A project plan is in place to create a vision for Taconite Harbor area development</li> <li>• Publicly-funded performance venue(s) under construction.</li> <li>• Better entrance from the West - West Hwy 61</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incentives for more contractors to move here</li> <li>• Incentives for more entertainment and dining venues</li> <li>• Improved and more stable financial position</li> <li>• Commissioners investing dollars in economically-important infrastructure</li> <li>• Continued funding, work with the HRA</li> <li>• A system for a "local discount" for locals</li> <li>• County tax to support day care ( like current highway tax)</li> <li>• Vacation rental taxation increases to support infrastructure</li> <li>• Assistance</li> </ul>

# Underlying Contradictions



<b>Limited resources restrict growth</b>	<b>Limited resources restrict growth</b>	<b>Disjointed approach reduces effectiveness</b>	<b>Disjointed approach reduces effectiveness</b>	<b>Conflicting community interests challenge efforts</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of grant funding</li> <li>• costs of capital</li> <li>• Limited budget</li> <li>• Dependence on county for funding.</li> <li>• Dependence on County tax funding</li> <li>• Unrealistic dependence on grant funding</li> <li>• Consistent and long-term financing</li> <li>• County invests little in economic infrastructure.</li> <li>• City invests little in economic infrastructure.</li> <li>• Not recognizing that is needs to be subsidized.</li> <li>• Mismatch of housing costs to local job wages</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Infrastructure expense - sewer, wells, septic</li> <li>• important side issues that shift resources i.e. daycare and housing</li> <li>• Limited construction abilities (contractors and workers)</li> <li>• Remote location impacts imports/exports</li> <li>• Staff capacity to engage in specific ED work</li> <li>• Limited staffing</li> <li>• Limited availability of land for development</li> <li>• restricted private land</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Siloed services.</li> <li>• Unclear community vision</li> <li>• A defined focus and long term plan to help guide our more immediate decisions</li> <li>• Uncoordinated projects/ideas between county groups</li> <li>• Misunderstandings of opportunities</li> <li>• limited number of people willing to serve</li> <li>• Unwillingness to involve others in business community</li> <li>• County Board has no long-term development vision.</li> <li>• Lack of coordination</li> <li>• large group of stake holders lacking a coordinated approach</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disjointed leadership? Does the board understand their roles?</li> <li>• No vision</li> <li>• Unbalanced focus on hospitality economy</li> <li>• Unrestricted approach to VRBOs and rentals resulting in lack of local housing</li> <li>• A best practice management approach for SNL</li> <li>• Local management of for-profits</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fear of development</li> <li>• Resistance to change in the community</li> <li>• Change of Culture to "Local Locals"</li> <li>• Conflicting attitudes or desires of residents</li> <li>• Community members unwilling to compromise/cooperate</li> <li>• Greed</li> <li>• Smaller county= few louder, entrenched voices.</li> <li>• Differing views on what is important in the county</li> <li>• Political bifurcation/distrust around EDA efforts/tools</li> <li>• Political upset to implement change</li> <li>• Regional divisions among Commissioners.</li> <li>• Intra agency cooperation ( county/city/ township)</li> <li>• Limited Board diversification ( city versus county)</li> <li>• Age discrimination</li> </ul>

# Underlying Contradictions

## Unclear communication diminishes public support

- Poor communication of actual accomplishments and effect.
- Lack of enthusiastic support from public
- Overall community support (locals versus others)
- Inconsistent communication with larger community
- Identifying the PR issue
- Disinterest
- Prevailing belief that it can't be done.
- Community outreach efforts to stimulate involvement
- Prevailing belief that it can't be done.
- Skills communicating entire package of project benefits
- Negative perception in community due to history
- Unclear messaging communicated about roles and goals

## Unclear development process obstructs progress

- As a gov't agency, more processes to follow so things are slower to move forward
- Red tape
- Regulations
- Land-use rules strangle housing & economy.
- Zoning restrictions
- Policy
- Restricted in response time with county oversight
- Historical inertia
- Outdated processes until T. Bajda arrived.



# Strategic Directions



Engaging and Educating Community	Engaging and Educating Community	Building and Leveraging Partnerships	Building and Leveraging Partnerships	Developing Innovative Economic Solutions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicate successes to public</li> <li>• Intentional public relations messaging</li> <li>• On-going education regarding resources available (grants)</li> <li>• Programs that educate the community on opportunities</li> <li>• Community engagement</li> <li>• EDA leadership communicate more openly with public</li> <li>• Develop impactful bullet points describing roles/goals</li> <li>• public relations approach</li> <li>• Increased visibility of the EDA in Cook County</li> <li>• Celebrate and communicate successes</li> <li>• Communication plan that reaches deep into community.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educating leaders/community on importance of ED work</li> <li>• listening sessions with our smaller business owners</li> <li>• Open minds</li> <li>• Transparency</li> <li>• Engaging new, younger voices to contribute to ED</li> <li>• Addition of younger demographic on the board</li> <li>• Organize committees and sub-committees increasing public involvement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partner with diverse area organizations</li> <li>• combine efforts with other local entities i.e. CCHE, the Chamber, the schools &amp; healthcare organizations</li> <li>• The board could network with similar boards for ideas</li> <li>• Network with regional EDAs, brainstorm growth opportunities as a region</li> <li>• Network with other, national, small county EDAs - find creative solutions</li> <li>• IRRR RELATIONSHIP DEVELOPMENT</li> <li>• Executive director networking locally and regionally.</li> <li>• Work with local education institutions on outcomes</li> <li>• Aligning of roles with SBDC, EDA, HRA, and Chamber of Commerce</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take leadership and sponsorship roles where possible</li> <li>• 10-year County Board Development Plan.</li> <li>• Better understanding and sharing between County and City and role of the EDA</li> <li>• Mediate relationship between county and city.</li> <li>• Goal alignment between business and gover</li> <li>• Commissioner training to look at entire County.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Efforts to diversify the local economy</li> <li>• Identify core sectors and lift up/leverage</li> <li>• Hire experienced senior workforce</li> <li>• Work with legislators to remove international hiring barriers</li> <li>• Help local tradespeople develop paid internship programs</li> <li>• Create a technology incubator</li> <li>• Focus on developing CC as a wellness destination</li> </ul>

# Strategic Directions



Pursuing Development Priorities	Pursuing Development Priorities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Enlightened Land Use Rules.</li><li>• Establish clear restrictions on rentals/VRBOs</li><li>• Resolve the golf course direction</li><li>• Develop planning for key sites</li><li>• Outsourcing golf course management to qualified team</li><li>• Master plan for Taconite Harbor</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 5% of County/City Budgets for EDA.</li><li>• find capital partners</li><li>• 10% of County/City Budgets on Housing/Day Care Projects.</li><li>• Get creative finding new grant funding resources</li><li>• Create consistent, long term funding solutions (instead of short term grants)</li></ul>



**APPENDIX E**  
**Current Reality, Success Indicators, and Actions**  
**06.07.24**

## **Current Realities, Success Indicators, & Actions/Accomplishments**

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

**Success Indicators:** Explains what will be different in 3 years if the organization mobilizes around and gets behind the Strategic Direction.

**Actions:** Considers and answers “What are our specific, measurable, and achievable accomplishments for the next 3 years?”

### **SD1. Engaging and Educating Community**

#### **Current Reality**

- SBDC is represented locally
- Web presence
- CCHE
- Lack of EDA awareness
- Chamber/ VCC/HRA/City/County
- Lack of PR
- WTIP, Boreal, Herald
- Misperception about our EDA work
- No engagement with student body

#### **Success Indicators**

- Clear distinction and mutual support between Chamber and EDA
- More favorable positive community perception
- Increased public knowledge of what we do
- Increased SBDC awareness and understanding of scope of services
- Better local coverage about EDA work

#### **Actions**

1. Conduct monthly WTIP interview and provide articles for local newspapers
2. Put sign in front of building
3. Finish and launch new website
4. Conduct survey to gauge awareness and perception of the EDA
5. Create EDA Annual report
6. Prepare customer facing package for distribution to new businesses with Chamber
7. Provide transparency to the community about the future of the golf course

## **SD2. Building and Leveraging Partnerships**

### **Current Reality:**

- Acknowledged overlap with EDA and HRA
- Existing partnerships- IRRR< SBDC, DEED
- Grant opportunities are not being pursued due to capacity
- Partnerships with local media
- Growing partnership with Chamber of Commerce
- Partnership with Grant Portage Band exists
- City and County Partnerships
- Grant opportunities exist
- Isolated organizations
- Small organizations

### **Success Indicators**

- No silos or duplication of efforts
- Training budget and time are available for EDA staff
- Goals and staffing capacity align in budget and practice
- Productive relationships with local municipalities

### **Actions**

1. Budget for training for EDA staff
2. Define roles of business-related organizations and identify gaps
3. Host strategic planning implementation planning sessions with partners
4. Provide technical assistance to local municipalities
5. Continue to examine efficiency and effectiveness of HRA and EDA structures and responsibilities

### **SD3. Developing Innovative Economic Solutions**

#### **Current Reality:**

- Seeing grant money for Taconite Harbor
- Working with golf course board on report/plan
- Redid business development grant program guidelines
- Discussions on countywide land use
- SBDC exists; staff retiring
- Managing numerous grants
- Partnering with HRA on housing projects
- Not looking at much funding for infrastructure e.g. Federal EDA (proactive)
- Business retention and expansion opportunities
- No plan for diversification
- Getting legal priorities through
- Walk-in business being handled
- Workforce collaboration
- Limited capacity
- Golf course taking time and resources- needs a solution

#### **Success Indicators**

- Increased number of new businesses and types of businesses (non-hospitality)
- Reduced job vacancies
- Increased labor force working in Cook County
- Clusters/opportunities for diversification and innovation identified
- Increase in available housing units for workforce
- Solution to golf course

#### **Actions**

1. Identify solution to keep SBDC services in Cook County and support staff for EDA work
2. Collaborate with HRA on housing efforts
3. Determine a new, viable path for golf course operations
4. Convene businesses to discuss workforce housing investment
5. Complete a study to explore diversification opportunities
6. Identify and secure resources to support public infrastructure



## **SD4. Pursuing Development Priorities**

### **Current Reality**

- Bond debt- Cedar Grove
- Bond debt- golf course
- Few senior living options
- No assisted living options
- Own 15 acres above Cedar Grove
- 40% of private property in county is near Hoveland, with little available development property
- Outdated/insufficient development strategy (2006 comp plan)
- Lutsen?
- Coast Guard property TBD
- Taconite Harbor – permits
- Lack of food establishments
- No natural gas and utilities for infrastructure
- Wetland and bedrock
- Unique cultural economy (folk school, art colony, etc.)

### **Success Indicators**

- Assisted living facility is created
- Plan for 15 acres in place
- Eliminate/resolve bond debt
- Plan for Taconite Harbor is in place
- Sufficient waste capacity

### **Actions**

1. Secure and implement grant to determine plan for Taconite Harbor
2. Identify gap funding for construction of transfer station
3. Meet with county and city to address bond debt questions and establish a plan
4. Assess viability of developing a plan for 15 acres above Cedar Grove
5. Identify site and resources to attract assisted living developer
6. Audit of current Cedar Grove lot owner development compliance



**APPENDIX F**  
**Strategic Plan Timeline**  
**06.07.24**

		2024		2025				2026				2027	
		Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2
<b>SD1. Engaging and Educating the Community</b>													
A1.	Conduct monthly WTIP interview and provide articles for local newspapers	START											END
A2.	Put EDA sign in front of office location	START/END											
A3.	Finish and launch new website	START	END										
A4.	Conduct survey to gauge awareness of the EDA		START				START				START		
A5.	Create EDA Annual Report			START/END				START/END				START/END	
A6.	Partner with Chamber to prepare customer facing package for distribution to new businesses via Chamber of Commerce			START	END								
A7.	Provide transparency to the community about the future of the golf course			START									END
<b>SD2. Building and Leveraging Partnerships</b>													
A1.	Budget for training of EDA staff		START										END
A2.	Define roles of business-related organizations and identify gaps				START		END						
A3.	Host strategic planning implementation planning sessions with partners			START			END						
A4.	Provide technical assistance to local municipalities				START								END
A5.	Continue to examine efficiency and effectiveness of HRA and EDA structures and responsibilities						START		END				
<b>SD3. Developing Innovative Economic Solutions</b>													
A1.	Identify solution to keep SBDC services in Cook County and support staff for EDA work	START	END										
A2.	Collaborate with HRA on housing efforts	START											END
A3.	Determine a new, viable path for golf course	START					END						
A4.	Convene businesses to discuss workforce housing investment					START				END			
A5.	Complete a study to explore diversification opportunities						START		END				
A6.	Identify and secure resources to support public infrastructure						START						END
<b>SD4. Pursuing Development Priorities</b>													
A1.	Secure and implement grant to implement strategic plan for Taconite Harbor	START					END						
A2.	Identify gap funding for construction of transfer station	START			END								
A3.	Meet with county and city to address Cedar Grove Business Park bond debt questions and establish a plan		START	END									
A4.	Assess viability of developing a plan for 15 acres above Cedar Grove Business Park				START							END	
A5.	Identify site and resources to attract assisted living developer						START					END	
A6.	Audit of current Cedar Grove lot owner development compliance		START				END						



**APPENDIX G**  
**Priority Wedge**  
**06.07.24**

SD1. A1. Conduct monthly WTIP interview and provide articles for local newspapers

SD4. A3. Meet with county and city to address bond debt questions and establish a plan

SD2. A2. Define roles of business-related organizations and identify gaps

A3. Host strategic planning implementation planning sessions with partners

SD3. A1. Identify solution to keep SBDC services in Cook County and support staff for EDA work

SD4. A2. Identify gap funding for construction of transfer station

SD3. A3. Determine a new, viable path for golf course operations