



**KANABEC  
COUNTY**

*Minnesota*

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY



# STRATEGIC PLAN

## *2021-2023*

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In March 2021, the Kanabec County EDA engaged Northspan to conduct a strategic planning process. The goals of the process were to clarify and/or identify the following:

- Mission
- Strategic Directions for next 3 years
- Accomplishments by which the strategic directions are achievable

The EDA, over the course of three 1.5-hour sessions, confirmed and developed the following mission and strategic directions:

## **MISSION:**

To help existing and new businesses thrive in Kanabec County.

## **STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS:**

1. Promoting & Building Our Business Community
2. Developing & Expanding Broadband Availability
3. Connecting Businesses to Training Resources
4. Supporting Child Care Growth Opportunities
5. Coordinating & Advocating for Housing

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

# OVERVIEW

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The Kanabec County Economic Development Authority exists to encourage economic development activity in Kanabec County, Minnesota. It began operations in 2016, making it one of the newer EDAs in Minnesota.

The EDA is staffed by an executive director. A nine-member board consisting of two county board members, representatives from the county's cities and townships, and several at-large members guides the EDA. All nine of these individuals participated in the strategic planning process, along with additional county staff, regional development commission staff, and interested community members who took a survey and attended EDA meetings.

Against this backdrop, the Kanabec County EDA sought to complete a strategic plan to guide its activities from 2021-2023. The EDA most recently completed a strategic planning process in 2016, and it has completed annual action plans in subsequent years to continue work on its objectives. Now that five years have elapsed since that initial plan and the Covid-19 pandemic has upended local economies across the country, the EDA determined that the time was ripe for a new action plan.

# BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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According to the 2019 American Community Survey from the U.S. Census, Kanabec County has a population of 16,089. It sits in East Central Minnesota and borders Pine, Isanti, Mille Lacs, and Aitkin Counties. Mora is its county seat and largest city, and it also includes 15 townships and the Cities of Ogilvie, Grasston, Quamba, and a portion of Braham. Major commercial corridors include Minnesota Highways 23 and 65, which connect it to nearby metropolitan areas, including the Twin Cities, St. Cloud, and Duluth.

Like many counties in rural Minnesota, its population has been relatively stable in recent years, with most growth occurring among older residents. Its incomes are somewhat lower than the state of Minnesota and its poverty rate is somewhat higher, though it has tended to see faster than average improvement in both measures over the past decade. New housing development in the county has tended to prioritize vacation homes, and demand for new housing remains significant. Leading industries in the county include health care, retail trade, manufacturing, and education, with significant employment growth in the health care and manufacturing sectors over the past decade. Most of the Kanabec County's labor force works outside of the county borders.

Since its launch in 2016, the Kanabec County EDA has made significant strides toward a strong county economy. It has secured over \$230,000 in grants, including support for a new manufacturer, a child care project, a housing feasibility study, the designation of two certified Shovel Ready sites, and funding for marketing and training. It has recruited four new businesses, created and used a new tax abatement process for two businesses, and administered grant and loan programs to support businesses through the Covid-19 pandemic. It has worked to create or take advantage of programs that support businesses and entrepreneurs, including the operation of a Small Business

Development Center outreach office, and supported workforce development through a child care supply plan and loan program. The EDA has been a leading advocate for broadband development and expansion, supported workforce housing initiatives, held an annual economic development conference, and worked to market the county outwardly. These efforts have had tangible results for job creation and retention, investment in local businesses, and awareness around issues that Kanabec County faces.

## STRATEGIC PLAN 2021-2023

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This strategic plan is the culmination of a planning process that began in March 2021. The planning confirmed the EDA's mission and objectives, provided new strategic directions, and established action steps and outcomes to advance the strategic directions.

### STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

1. Promoting & Building Our Business Community
2. Developing and Expanding Broadband Availability
3. Connecting Businesses to Training Resources
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### MISSION

To help existing and new businesses thrive in Kanabec County.

### VALUE STATEMENTS

1. Collaborative
2. Fiscally Sound and Responsible
3. Good Community Stewards
4. Responsive
5. Balanced Risk Takers
6. A Proud Community
7. Sociable and Approachable
8. Innovative

# SD 1

## PROMOTING & BUILDING OUR BUSINESS COMMUNITY

### DEFINITION:

This strategic direction focuses on core elements of Kanabec County's economic development and emphasizes business retention, expansion, and attraction. It seeks to add and enhance tools to promote the county and support local businesses and build more collaborative relationships that can better support them. Intentional work with businesses will give them the resources they need to grow, thereby supporting the growth of the county's population, wealth, and tax base.

### ACTION STEPS:

1. Regularly update and conduct outreach to county list of businesses
2. Market the Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) program
3. Develop funding for and create a county promotional video
4. Facilitate a coordinated Business Retention & Expansion (BRE) program conversation with ECRDC and related partners
5. Conduct coordinated BRE visits
6. Identify Small Business Development Consultant (SBDC) to serve county businesses

### OUTCOMES:

1. Decreased vacancy rate in industrial park
2. Population increases in county
3. Video promoting county exists
4. More people take advantage of PACE program
5. Fewer vacant buildings
6. Stronger partnerships with cities/townships/county
7. Contracted SBDC consultant in place to support small business

# SD2

## DEVELOPING AND EXPANDING BROADBAND AVAILABILITY

### DEFINITION:

This strategic direction recognizes the significant shortcomings in Kanabec County's current broadband infrastructure. It builds local and regional partnerships to engage providers, understand demand, and advocate for additional funding sources. Successful implementation of this strategic direction will make affordable and reliable high-speed internet available to anyone in the county who would like it.

### ACTION STEPS:

1. Follow and understand RDOF information, and understand how this will affect other providers' ability to provide services (LTD Broadband)
2. Identify current and interested providers
3. Market study to determine local demand
4. Conduct provider interviews
5. Identify funding partners and potential local government development partners

### OUTCOMES:

1. Anyone who wants broadband in the county can get it
2. Community Broadband Resources team focuses on affordable and accessible levels for high-speed internet, not just current "broadband" definition
3. Broadband access map that indicates that areas are served, underserved, or unserved shows the entire county served
4. Broadband will be viewed as a utility, i.e., shovel-ready requires high speed internet at application at same level as electricity and roads
5. More employees are working from home

# SD3

## CONNECTING BUSINESSES TO TRAINING RESOURCES

### DEFINITION:

This strategic direction seeks to provide businesses with resources that can help them meet workforce challenges. It gathers information on the needs in the county, collects information on training resources, and holds events to increase engagement. With stronger awareness of local options, businesses will better be able to upskill their workers and train employees more smoothly.

### ACTION STEPS:

1. Compile complete list of available trainings in and around county
2. Conduct industry appreciation events that provide businesses with resources
3. Work with industrial businesses in county to understand training needs

### OUTCOMES:

1. More industrial jobs/businesses in county
2. More businesses taking advantage of training programs
3. List of all trainings available both in county and nearby compiled and shared with businesses



# SD4

## SUPPORTING CHILD CARE GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES

### DEFINITION:

This strategic direction seeks to increase the number of child care slots in Kanabec County. It builds on existing efforts to better understand the factors that currently limit growth and works with potential providers to help them get their businesses off the ground. If successful, it will reduce the gap between number of children and available slots, streamline processes for providers, and create more flexible options for families.

### ACTION STEPS:

1. Implement child care supply plan
2. Maintain free and local trainings to providers
3. Identify funding or funding partners to continue child care forgivable loan/grant program
4. Determine how to market to potential local providers; family members deciding to stay home may want to start a business
5. Identify and understand the barriers to entry to provide child care

### OUTCOMES:

1. Childcare providers offering flexible options for families
2. Slots for all children/families in demand, or a waitlist that's manageable
3. Labor force numbers grow
4. Childcare providers, both in-home and centers, all perceived/acknowledged as businesses
5. Businesses offering on-site childcare or benefits to access childcare

# SD5

## COORDINATING & ADVOCATING FOR HOUSING

### DEFINITION:

This strategic direction recognizes a shortage of workforce housing in Kanabec County and the barriers this creates for area employer recruitment. It works to identify funding sources, engage developers, and advocate for projects in the community. It also works to address curb appeal in the county by exploring ways to improve blighted properties that can color perceptions of the area.

### ACTION STEPS:

1. Write letters of support for housing projects in the county
2. Identify sources of funding for proposed housing projects
3. Establish new relationship with City of Mora HRA
4. Develop list of available land for more housing projects (both single family and multi-family)
5. Determine ways to advocate for different types of housing and funding options
6. Explore ways to improve curb appeal of community to make it more attractive

### OUTCOMES:

1. CMHP continues to have "potential" projects in Kanabec County
2. Developers are interested in creating workforce housing
3. Curb appeal of community has improved

## APPENDICES ATTACHED

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1. Strategic Planning Process
2. Kanabec Co EDA Strategic Planning Survey Summary 04.26.21
3. Kanabec Co EDA Strategic Directions Consensus Workshop 04.07.21 04.28.21
4. Kanabec Co EDA  
Current Reality, Success Indicators & Accomplishments 04.28.21 05.12.21
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# STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

The Kanabec County EDA has prepared this 3-year strategic plan to guide its activities and achieve accomplishments consistent with the group's mission. The strategic process steps, session dates, and agendas are included as an attachment, as are the results of the sessions that followed.

## PROCESS STEPS

1. Collection of background information and scheduling of meetings.
2. Use of past reports and relevant community economic data to develop an overview presentation that provides context for the county and recent EDA activity.
3. Environmental scan survey with EDA members, staff, and other relevant stakeholders identified by EDA staff
4. 04.07.21 Strategy Planning Session 1 of 3
5. 04.28.21 Strategy Planning Session 2 of 3
6. 05.12.21 Strategy Planning Session 3 of 3
7. 05.21.21 Draft Strategic Plan Review & Feedback
8. 06.09.21 Strategic Plan Board Presentation
9. Complete a 90-day check-in

## BLOCKS & STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

### STRATEGIC PLANNING VIRTUAL SESSION: APRIL 7, 2021

#### **AGENDA | April 7, 2021 | 3:30PM-5:00PM**

- 3:35 Welcome, Zooming In & Introductions
- 3:40 Demographic & Economic Data Overview
- 3:45 Recent Work & Achievements Overview
- 3:50 Survey Overview
  - COVID Impacts
  - Mission & Priorities
  - 2020 Strategic Action Plan Review
  - SWOT
- 4:00 Strategic Directions Workshop
- 5:00 Next Steps & Adjourn

On April 7, Northspan facilitated a strategic planning session with the Kanabec County EDA board and staff that focused on strategic directions that could move the organization toward its mission. These strategic directions are available in the appendix in the document titled Kanabec Co EDA Strategic Directions Consensus Workshop 04.07.21 04.28.21.

### STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

1. Promoting & Building Our Business Community
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### ACCOMPLISHMENTS & TIMELINES

#### STRATEGIC PLANNING VIRTUAL SESSION: APRIL 28, 2021

**AGENDA | APRIL 28, 2021 | 3:30PM-5:00PM**

**Open Zoom space at 3:15PM**

3:30 Welcome & Zooming In

3:40 Introductions

3:45 Strategic Directions: Refining Continued

4:15 Focused Implementation Workshop

- Accomplishments Part 1 of 2

5:00 Next Steps & Adjourn

On April 28, Northspan facilitated a second workshop with the Kanabec County EDA board and staff. In this session, participants completed efforts to refine its strategic directions and began identifying outcomes and accomplishments that could move the EDA toward its strategic directions.

**ACCOMPLISHMENTS & TIMELINES****STRATEGIC PLANNING VIRTUAL SESSION: MAY 12, 2021****AGENDA | May 12, 2021 | 4:00PM-5:30PM****Open Zoom space at 3:45PM**

4:00 Welcome &amp; Introductions

4:10 Focused Implementation Workshop

- Accomplishments Part 2 of 2
- Timeline
- Prioritize

5:10 Celebrate!

5:30 Next Steps &amp; Adjourn

On May 12, the Kanabec County EDA completed the definition of its outcomes and accomplishments that can move it from its current reality toward its success indicators. These accomplishments and the ideas that led to their creation are available in the appendix in the document titled Kanabec Co EDA Current Reality, Success Indicators & Accomplishments 04.28.21 05.12.21. The EDA then further defined the strategic plan timeline, which is available in the appendix titled Strategic Plan Timeline 05.17.21.