




Memo To: City of Lake Elmo Mayor and Councilmembers
Mayor Mike Pearson
Councilmember Justin Bloyer
Councilmember Julie Fliflet
Councilmember Jill Lundgren
Councilmember Anne Smith

From: Barbara Dacy, Executive Director

Date: May 2, 2016 

RE: Proposed Legislation to Add Economic Development Powers to Washington County HRA

The Washington County Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA) respectfully requests the City of Lake Elmo to adopt the enclosed resolution which will legally enable the HRA to conduct economic development activities in partnership with county cities and townships. The HRA has drafted legislation to amend its enabling law and has introduced a proposed bill for consideration during the 2016 legislative session. The proposed bill has been identified as part of the 2016 legislative agendas for both Washington County and Washington County HRA.

Attached to this memo is a summary of the key provisions of the bill (Attachment A), the proposed bill (Attachment B) and the proposed resolution (Attachment C).

Background

In the fall of 2013, Washington County convened a work group consisting of city economic development practitioners and community representatives to define the appropriate role of the county in economic development. A question was also included in the county's survey of residents, and 69% of respondents agreed that a stronger role in economic development is appropriate. An Economic Development Strategic Plan, adopted in 2014, establishes guiding policy principles and identifies specific strategies and goals. In 2015, the County Board researched organizational options and determined the Washington County HRA is to be responsible for county-wide economic development activities. The objectives of economic development are consistent with the HRA's mission, to promote community and economic development, and the HRA's brand, "to help communities thrive". The County Board authorized \$215,000 of the annual HRA levy to hire an Economic Development Director, support staff, and startup funds.

Implementing the Washington County Economic Development Strategic Plan

Guiding Principles

It is envisioned that the Washington County CDA will fill a vital role in coordinating county-level economic development activities and will support communities in the county in working towards their individual economic development goals. This supportive role has been the key foundation of the Economic Development Strategic Plan. The Washington County CDA would collaborate with the City of Lake Elmo to provide additional support and capacity to the city's local economic development programs, business retention and business creation efforts, as may be mutually determined.

The Washington County CDA would adhere to the following economic development guiding principles identified in the Strategic Plan:

- The private sector is the lead that drives the economy.
- The County will not duplicate or replace the work of cities and other public agencies.
- The County supports a strong collaborative approach to economic development.
- Business attraction and business retention are essential policy objectives.
- The diversity of the county requires an adaptable and open-minded approach.
- A deliberate, purposeful and strategic plan is required.

Goals and Benefits of Proposed Bill

Goals

The proposed bill to amend the HRA's enabling law was drafted to fulfill the following goals:

- Add statutory powers to enable the County to address economic needs through programs and projects, given the diversity of municipalities, large and small.
- Complement municipal economic development authorities and not impede their activities.
- Provide municipal approval prior to the CDA exercising any physical development powers.
- Confer consistent geographic jurisdiction for both HRA and EDA activities and levy authority.
- Maintain current process for levy authority and level of control by County Board.

Benefits to the City of Lake Elmo

A county role in economic development will provide the following benefits:

- Dedicated staff experienced in economic development to respond to city and township requests.
- Stronger presence in the industry and marketplace through communication and marketing.
- Stronger county relationship with GreaterMSP.
- Opportunity to build on tourism initiatives, labor and talent attraction initiatives, business creation programs, or other suggestions from communities.
- Potential for additional financial resources for communities to augment existing programs.
- Conduct economic development and industrial/commercial market studies.
- Advocacy for economic development issues at the Legislature.

The initial responsibility of the new CDA Economic Development Director will be to determine how best to support the cities and to cultivate relationships with communities, key stakeholders, and relevant boards. One of the recommendations of the existing strategic plan was to convene a community workgroup; this will be implemented and a starting point to provide community input to determine the best manner in which the County can complement and augment what communities are doing.

Recommendation

We are excited to work with the City of Lake Elmo in a collaborative approach. We respectfully request support for the proposed bill by adopting the attached resolution.

ATTACHMENT A

Key Aspects of the Proposed Bill

Key aspects of the proposed bill include naming of the agency, determining levy authority, requiring municipal approval prior to the CDA exercising its physical development powers within a jurisdiction, offering tax-forfeited lands to the CDA, and identifying limitations requiring County Board approval.

Agency Renaming

In order to adequately represent the combined housing, redevelopment and economic development powers to be bestowed, it is proposed the HRA be renamed the Washington County Community Development Agency (CDA). While this term is not defined in statute, the CDA nomenclature has been adopted by Dakota, Carver and Scott counties in their respective enabling laws. The consistency in terminology across the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area provides for greater recognition and understanding of a county CDA.

Levy Authority

State Statute permits special levying authority for housing and redevelopment authorities up to 0.0185% upon all taxable property, subject to the consent by resolution of the governing body. In addition, a county may, at the request of an economic development authority, levy a tax of up to 0.01813% upon all taxable property. The proposed bill, however, waives EDA tax levying authority under section 469.107 and, it retains the County Board consent process currently in place for establishing the levy rate and amount under the HRA limits in section 469.033, subd. 6. The proposed language reserves the right to levy the higher of the HRA or EDA permissible rates, as they may be determined by the legislature. This provides the County with future flexibility should there be a program or issue that the County determines is appropriate for this purpose. On an annual basis, the HRA Board has prepared a levy request, within its annual budget, of sufficient size to complete its strategic priorities and financial obligations for approval from the County Board. Under the amended enabling law, the CDA would follow the same process in proposing an annual levy request and obtaining the consent of the County Board.

Municipal Approval

The HRA's current enabling law requires municipal approval prior to the HRA undertaking a housing development. The proposed bill maintains this requirement and adds the municipal approval requirement prior to exercising economic development powers.

Offer of Tax Forfeited Land

When the County receives real property through the tax forfeiture process, it may determine the property to be appropriate for a housing, redevelopment, or economic development purpose. Currently, the HRA must purchase forfeited parcels in the same process as the general public. The proposed bill adds that such parcels "may" be offered to the CDA in the same manner it would be offered to a County department with justification of public purpose.

Establishing the Washington County CDA

The Washington County HRA was created in 1980 under a special enabling law and authorizing resolution from the County Board. This enabling law must be amended to add the powers of an economic development authority and formally rename the agency to the Washington County Community Development Agency (CDA) to reflect the full scope of responsibilities. The proposed bill follows the same process taken by CDAs established in Dakota, Scott, and Carver counties.

The proposed bill retains board composition. The HRA Board is currently composed of seven members: five appointees representing each County district, a representative of the County Board of Commissioners, and a participant in the federal housing assistance programs. Historically, because many of the activities of the HRA require real estate development transactions involving public financing, the HRA Board has been comprised of members with backgrounds in real estate, finance and banking, business or government. It is also proposed that the CDA would solicit comment on policies and programs from county citizen boards including the Workforce Investment Board and the Community Development Block Grant Advisory Committee. The CDA will also convene a workgroup of community economic development professionals to provide ongoing input.

Final Approval

Upon passage of the proposed bill, the County Board will need to pass a resolution to formally confer the EDA powers and establish the Washington County CDA. The resolution will further identify any limitations of EDA powers the County may wish to impose on the CDA.