



NORTH BRANCH —Minnesota—

Sara Paul
Chair

Dennis Johnson
Vice Chair

Jessica Thelander
Commissioner

Marshall Saunders
Commissioner

Patrick Meacham
Councilmember

Kevin Schieber
Mayor

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
REGULAR AGENDA
TUESDAY, AUGUST 19, 2025 @ 3:30 PM
CITY HALL, 6408 ELM STREET, NORTH
BRANCH, MN 55056**

MINUTES OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NORTH BRANCH IN THE COUNTY OF CHISAGO AND IN THE STATE OF MINNESOTA

REGULAR MEETING

Tuesday, August 19, 2025

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Sara Paul called the Economic Development Authority meeting to order at 3:30pm.

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Commissioner Dennis Johnson led the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. ROLL CALL

Present: Mayor Kevin Schieber, Councilmember Patrick Meacham, Commissioner Sara Paul,
Commissioner Dennis Johnson, Commissioner Jessica Thelander

Absent: Commissioner Marshall Saunders

Remote:

Others Present:

Notes:

4. AGENDA APPROVAL

a. Approve Agenda

ACTION

RESULT: Passed

MOVER: Dennis Johnson

SECONDER: Jessica Thelander

AYES: Kevin Schieber, Patrick Meacham, Sara Paul, Dennis Johnson, Jessica Thelander

ABSENT: Marshall Saunders

NOTES:

5. PUBLIC COMMENT

6. CONSENT AGENDA

a. Approval of August 7, 2025 EDA Minutes

ACTION

RESULT: Passed

MOVER: Dennis Johnson

SECONDER: Patrick Meacham

AYES: Kevin Schieber, Patrick Meacham, Sara Paul, Dennis Johnson, Jessica Theland

ABSENT: Marshall Saunders

NOTES:

7. REPORTS

a. Chisago County HRA-EDA Update

VERBAL
UPDATE

Nancy Hoffman, the Executive Director with the Chisago County HRA-EDA, let the EDA know that they were having a meeting date change for August on the last Tuesday of the month, at 8am instead of at noon. They are discussing changing the meetings to the last Wednesday of the month. The East Central Development Partnership is planning its annual meeting, and that will be September 19th, at the Braham Event Center. The topics will consist of the comprehensive economic development strategy and housing, which will be the primary topic. We have some unique stories about how different people are getting housing done. Nancy mentioned Shields Plaza in North Branch with Juanita McKay. She also mentioned that they are taking a group of relators on a tour of Highway 8. There will be a discussion about the reconstruction. They will start in Chisago and then go to Taylors Falls. After lunch, they would like to go to the I-35 stretch and come through North Branch. They're looking at bringing the various cities in to talk about their projects or location, anywhere from housing to industrial to redevelopment. The EDA is working with the North Central office with Director Katie Hefner. Katie is putting on rural business success stories. Nancy will send out information as to the dates once they are announced. In October, they're going to be doing morning marketing on the first Friday of the month. This will entail coming to their office and presenting some kind of marketing for 45 minutes. The Initiative Foundations is administering the Promise grants for the State of Minnesota. If you know somebody who meets the eligibility criteria, let them know.

b. North Branch Area Chamber of Commerce Update

VERBAL
UPDATE

Community Development Director Nate Sondrol mentioned that there was a ribbon cutting at the Tanger Mall at 5pm 08/19/25, for Studio A Dance Academy.

c. North Branch Area Schools Update

VERBAL
UPDATE

Chair Sara Paul gave the North Branch Area Schools Update. The District has been connecting with local relators to ensure they are aware of what is currently happening within the District, so that as they're working with families, they can share a little more of the story about what it's like to be a part of the School District. Last week, they hosted a relator breakfast, and 18 relators attended. Several relators grew up in North Branch, and they shared their stories about how the District has evolved. The District is excited to welcome families back to school.

d. EDA Executive Director Update

VERBAL
UPDATE

Community Development Director Nate Sondrol updated the Council regarding business updates. He noted ECE has been running fiber throughout the entire community and they were looking to connect with current builders and developers to get fiber into the homes at the time of construction. He also noted that they will be holding a public hearing on amending the design standards map to modify the industrial park zone 2 designation to a zone 3 and allowing insulated metal panels as a material type at the September meeting.

Commissioner Meacham commented that staff did bring three different options/ideas of how to move forward, focusing on the industrial park. The idea is not to make changes to zone one just because it's along I-35; doing that would impact the rest of the City that has those design standards. Let's focus on where the need is, instead of potentially having some unintended consequences in other areas of the City that we don't meet to focus on.

e. Downtown Storefront Facade Program - 6354 Main St

ACTION

Community Development Director Nate Sondrol introduced an application that was received from Chet Morgan, from Acoustic Avenue located at 6354 Main Street, North Branch. Sondrol reminded the Commission that the storefront program is a 5-year loan program. No payments are required; each year, 20% is essentially forgiven. The applicants need to pay for all improvements, and once they're completed, they'll provide a copy of the receipts to us. Sondrol mentioned that there was a quote in the agenda packet. The total cost of the project would be \$20,969.81, and the 50% match would be \$10,484.90. The applicant is required to enter into a loan agreement and a promissory note, followed by a universal guarantee as part of the approval. Sondrol pointed out that on this particular application, the signs have been installed already. The applicant, Chet Morgan addressed the Commission explaining that he reached out to Nate to get more information regarding the program. He was working on getting quotes, but when it came to the sign, the vendor mentioned that the quote was only good for a certain amount of time, and with the looming tariffs and the product coming from overseas, the vendor required 50% up front. Chet explained that he paid the 50% thinking that the vendor would install it when he requested, but the vendor installed the sign without approval for installation.

Commissioner Thelander asked about whether there was a plan to cover the graffiti. Chet responded that yes, and explained that the graffiti happened right after he first purchased the building. Graffiti hasn't been an issue since. There are plans to do a mural on that wall. Commissioner Thelander also asked if the proposal falls under the grant's parameters. Sondrol responded that the improvements would fall under the categories of the storefront facade program.

Chair Sara Paul asked that, with the new program, as procedures are put together, what flexibility do we have to understand the content? With this application, which has been presented in terms of the sequencing of putting the signage up before approval. Sondrol replied that the original parameters did say that any improvement should be completed after approval. It is a new program, and the applicant did reach out prior to the installation and talked about the facade application programs, as it is unfortunate that the sign was installed prior. It is at the discretion of the EDA. Chair Paul pointed out that she understands how the sequencing can get off, but that the EDA should be consistent. Chair Paul asked the commission what they thought. Commissioner Thelander mentioned that the looming tariffs disrupted everyone in business this year. The applicant did reach out before ordering and installing the sign; it would be different if all of the work had been completed. Commissioner Meacham said that he understands the concerns about the timeline, but as we know, business and everything else intensive is that we gotta pull the trigger to make sure it works for us now.

Mayor Kevin Schieber asked about the language regarding the footings in the proposal and what the requester would do with the footings or any type of structural issue that's affecting the facade as well. The applicant explained that the whole wall is sinking or settling, the East wall. He had gotten some other basement work done by Innovative Basement Authority. The East wall was leaning; this has been patched. There is a hairline crack, which means it's still moving. He doesn't know if it's going to keep settling. Mayor Schieber explained that this is a new program and we're still trying to tweak a few things. We're trying to spruce up downtown, and he was in favor of approving this application.

Commissioner Thelander made a motion to approve the facade grant for Acoustic Avenue.

RESULT: Passed
MOVER: Jessica Thelander
SECONDER: Patrick Meacham
AYES: Kevin Schieber, Patrick Meacham, Sara Paul, Dennis Johnson, Jessica Thelander
ABSENT: Marshall Saunders
NOTES:

f. License Agreement

ACTION

Director Sondrol brought to the commission a license agreement for a request to conduct a site evaluation that would allow for access onto the property to conduct activities such as surveying and evaluating physical conditions, taking soil samples and boring, and geotechnical and other inspections, analyses, tests, and studies. The agreement should have a sunset date of having everything completed by the end of the year. We do have a farm lease and occupancy agreement on that property.

Commissioner Thelander made a motion to agree to the license agreement for doing the testing.

RESULT: Passed
MOVER: Jessica Thelander
SECONDER: Dennis Johnson
AYES: Kevin Schieber, Patrick Meacham, Sara Paul, Dennis Johnson, Jessica Thelander
ABSENT: Marshall Saunders
NOTES:

Mayor Kevin Schieber pointed out that there's a little bit of wording that may need to be changed in the beginning, because it almost spoke like they were already the owners of that property. Sondrol said that the City Attorney did draft the agreement.

Commissioner Paul offered an amendment pending final administrative review.

RESULT: Passed
MOVER: Sara Paul
SECONDER: Patrick Meacham
AYES: Kevin Schieber, Patrick Meacham, Sara Paul, Dennis Johnson, Jessica Thelander, Sara Paul
ABSENT: Marshall Saunders
NOTES:

g. Comprehensive Plan Update

INFO

City Administrator Matthew Hill gave a brief update with regard to the Comprehensive Plan Review process. There was a steering committee meeting on Thursday, August 7th, at 5:30 pm to discuss the Comprehensive Plan. An overview of the survey results was provided along with the feedback forms from previous meetings, and a decision was made to create small groups to organize and review the values and vision section along with each of the individual groups, small groups of the individual portions of the comp plan, those review processes will then be brought back to the larger steering committee groups and ultimately to the City Council for approval. Each of those sections does include members who assisted in the open houses, and with the option of adding other interested parties from our survey results and from the feedback forms that we received at our open houses, we will be setting meeting days and deadlines for the completion of this next step in the review process, and keep the EDA and other commissions in the loop regarding the progress on our update plan. There is currently a survey online on our website. The survey wraps up at the end of the month. If you haven't filled it out, we encourage everybody to take a look at it and help the City by providing their feedback with regard to the comp plan and what their needs and wants are for the City as we move forward.

Mayor Schieber added that during the steering committee meeting, there was a mention of the importance of including the school district, as people move into our community, and the impact on the school district. Chair Paul agreed and brought up that the District did undergo about a year-long facility study and that it would make sense to update the rest of the community about what we've learned through the study and what some of the anticipated changes are.

h. Grocery Market Study

ACTION

Community Development Director Nate Sondrol brought the commissioners a proposal that was provided in the agenda packet for \$8,000 to do a feasibility study that takes approximately 45 days to determine the results of the study. DBS Group received a proposal to conduct a feasibility analysis for another grocery store in North Branch. DBS group has constructed a dozen grocery stores over the last 4 years, and this is always the first step. Once the study is complete, the info will be shared with the wholesalers for analysis and review. This is where these opportunities can quickly get traction. DBS currently has this process underway in two locations, the south and west suburbs of the Twin Cities. The cost of the study is \$8,000. DBS group is inquiring whether the City/EDA would be willing to fund the study. The final report would become the city's data.

Chair Paul asked if we would want to know the broader success of a grocery store, not just one specific site that is proposed with this analysis. Commissioner Meacham and Mayor Schieber agreed. Mayor Schieber said that he'd like to see a little broader scope, not just a specific location, maybe the best location. Director Sondrol explained that the analysis is what's needed in order to work with grocers, not just one individual. After some discussion regarding requesting more clarification of what the definition of format means, the council would like to get more clarification. The council made a consensus to table the motion until the September 16th EDA Meeting.

i. Retail Trade Analysis

ACTION

Community Development Director Sondrol explained that staff contacted the U of M Extension office to provide info on their ability to provide support on conducting a Retail Trade Analysis (RTA) of the North Branch Area. The U of M extension office noted that they have the ability to provide support to conduct the RTA and provide a customized report for the North Branch area. A Retail Trade Analysis would help understand the retail sales potential, which retailers can be attracted to here, and then provide accurate local sales data, a community plan for business expansion, and expansion recruitment. Nancy Hoffman from the Chisago County EDA thinks this is something that the HRA, EDA would be willing to pay for and get the information out to the County.

Motion to support the authorization and approval of Chisago County EDA to be the lead agency conducting the RTA study for North Branch.

RESULT: Passed
MOVER: Dennis Johnson
SECONDER: Jessica Thelander
AYES: Kevin Schieber, Patrick Meacham, Sara Paul, Dennis Johnson, Jessica Thelander
ABSENT: Marshall Saunders
NOTES:

j. 2026 EDA Budget INFO

Community Development Director Sondrol said that in September, we'll be discussing adopting the 2026 preliminary budget for the EDA. Some items that have been discussed are signage, getting some tighter numbers from the EDA, and increasing the marketing budget up to about \$30,000. Chair Paul asked if a video about the opportunities at the Interstate Business Park could be considered. Sondrol mentioned that the City Council has authorized the update of our website, and the City is going to ask the EDA to provide the content they would like to see on the website.

k. EDA Commission Vacancy ACTION

This discussion is tabled until the EDA September Meeting.

8. CLOSED SESSION

Motion to move into closed session pursuant to Minn. Stat. 13D.05 (c) to consider the sale of real property identified as portions of Outlots C and F, Essby Business Park, Outlot A, portions of Essby Business Park 4th Addition Outlot F, Lot 1, Block 1, and Outlot A, Essby Business Park 3rd Addition and Lot 1, Block 2, North Branch Industrial Park, North Branch, Minnesota at 4:36pm.

RESULT: Passed
MOVER: Dennis Johnson
SECONDER: Jessica Thelander
AYES: None
ABSENT: Marshall Saunders
NOTES:

a. Closed meeting pursuant to Minn. Stat. 13D.05, sub. 3 (c) to consider the sale of real property identified as portions of Outlots C and F, Essby Business Park, Outlot A, portions of Essby Business Park 4th Addition Outlot F, Lot 1, Block 1, and Outlot A, Essby Business Park 3rd Addition and Lot 1, Block 2, North Branch Industrial Park, North Branch, Minnesota INFO

9. NEXT MEETING - September 16, 2025 - 3:30 PM

10. ADJOURNMENT

Motion to return to open session at 5:18pm.

RESULT: Passed
MOVER: Dennis Johnson
SECONDER: Patrick Meacham

AYES: Kevin Schieber, Patrick Meacham, Sara Paul, Dennis Johnson, Jessica Thelandt
ABSENT: Marshall Saunders
NOTES:

The meeting adjourned at 5:18pm.

RESULT: Passed
MOVER: Sara Paul
SECONDER: Dennis Johnson,
AYES: Kevin Schieber, Patrick Meacham, Sara Paul, Dennis Johnson, Jessica Thelandt
ABSENT: Marshall Saunders
NOTES: