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Public Comments for City Council Meetings - Submission #11854

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Public Comment

Good evening, Mayor and Council Members.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on the City's 2027 budget. I am speaking today as a private resident of Saint Anthony Village, though I also have experience engaging with the Council and local businesses through my role with the Chamber.

I'd like to respectfully request that the Council consider budgeting for a dedicated Economic Development role, whether as a new full-time position or through a clear allocation of duties for an existing staff member. My rationale is as follows:

1) Council and community sentiment already reflects a desire to grow and diversify our commercial tax base. Over the last year, I've heard multiple Council Members say the Chamber can be used to recruit businesses or spur development. That expectation is understandable, but the Chamber's mission and legal duties do not include official economic development functions. It would be more effective and appropriate for the City itself to own this work.

2) Economic Development roles exist in many Minnesota cities of similar size. A number of communities, both in the Twin Cities region and across Greater Minnesota, have staff focused on business attraction, retention, redevelopment, and administration of incentive programs. Typical duties for these roles include serving as a primary business point-of-contact, managing city development programs, coordinating with developers and brokers, and pursuing grants that expand the tax base.

3) Economic Development positions can be revenue-neutral or revenue-positive. Council has correctly made investments in public safety and in a Sustainability Coordinator; staff additions that have direct service value and, in the Sustainability role's case, nearly pay for themselves through grant revenue. A dedicated Economic Development employee can similarly pursue county, state, and federal grants, manage incentive programs like TIF, coordinate property/site inventories, and facilitate commercial development that expands the tax base over time.

4) Our small commercial/industrial tax base limits fiscal flexibility and long-term sustainability relative to peer communities. Without a staff person to strategically engage prospects, shepherd development processes, and support local businesses, the City risks surrendering opportunities to neighboring jurisdictions that make these investments. By contrast, cities that have embraced economic development staffing are better positioned to respond quickly to prospects and proactively shape outcomes.

5) Economic Development staff can amplify existing regional and state resources. Minnesota and its regional partners offer grant and technical assistance programs, such as the Small Cities Development Program and other DEED resources, that require local administration and strategic planning to secure and implement. Dedicated staffing helps ensure Saint Anthony Village can compete for and manage these funds effectively.

In conclusion, I urge the Council to consider explicitly budgeting for economic development capacity in 2027. Increasing staff capacity in this function would not only better align City operations with Council and community goals, but also support long-term fiscal health by growing the commercial/industrial tax base that serves all residents.

Thank you for your consideration.