

CITY OF WALHALLA

PEMBINA COUNTY

NORTH DAKOTA

Phone: (701) 549-3176

58282

Fax: (701) 549-2410

P. O. Box 318
1103 Central Ave.

Testimony of Melissa Gapp in support of HB 1018 – with an amendment

To Senate Appropriations Committee – Government Operations Division

March 8, 2023

Chairman Wanzek and members of the Committee:

I am Melissa Gapp, Auditor, City of Walhalla

I'm seeking your consideration of an amendment to support \$8 million (\$1 million per biennia per region) funding for the eight regional councils which serve communities, businesses, nonprofit organizations, and more statewide.

Created by NDCC 54-40.1 in 1973, the regional councils were to serve the purpose of establishing statewide policy for planning, economic development programs, operation, coordination and related cooperative activities of state/local governments to resolve issues and problems transcending individual jurisdictions. Yet, these organizations have not had a consistent long-term funding mechanism to meet this purpose.

Today, our region can have a rural renaissance with the need for more than 1,500 new employees in our small towns – but only if we address the critical needs of **housing, workforce, and childcare**. In 2021/2022, we enlisted Roger Brooks, a renowned national expert on **destination development** to secret shop our region and develop an action plan that would support visitor, resident, and investment attraction to northeastern North Dakota. The plan is ready to go – it calls for six professional staff to lead – which is currently not available due to the lack of funding.

The regional council is dire in our area of the state. We as a small city cannot afford to fund an employee for economic development. The Red River Regional Council helps our local communities in so many ways that cities alone just cannot afford to do anymore. They are a bright spot in our rural areas and work tirelessly to help small communities and businesses grow succeed.

I urge your support for increasing the rural development capacity across the state by supporting this amendment for \$8 million for the eight regional councils.