

Senate Appropriations - Government Operations Division Public Hearing HB1018

Dear Members of the North Dakota Senate Appropriations Committee,

I am writing on behalf of Underwood Area Economic Development Corporation, Underwood ND in support of returning funding for the Commerce Department requested under Governor Burgan's budget request.

First, please restore funding for a full-time position for the Main Street Program. As a small city, we rely heavily on our ability to work with Commerce on local projects. We partnered with Commerce for grant funding for a Comprehensive Plan for our City. The Main Street initiative has been key in allowing us to work through this process. Having staff in place knowledgeable with the components of the Initiative is vital to its continued success and I strongly encourage you to continue funding that position.

Secondly, as it applies to the \$ 15 million funding for blight and slum removal for commercial and residential, these funds are imperative for ALL communities large and small. Because of greater infrastructure needs, these types of buildings have for to long gone by the wayside and are now in the way of growth and development.

Speaking for small cities such as Underwood, our limited finances must be directed to the basic infrastructure such as water, sewer, streets and storm water. The City of Underwood has taken on back-to-back multi-million dollar projects since 2014 for storm water and streets. Our City Commission is currently working on a water tower/ water systems replacement/upgrade. While grant funding is being sought to assist with the costs, the city will need to cover the match requirements. As with a lot of other communities we just don't have the funds available to address the blighted buildings.

Blighted/slum buildings have long been on the list of what our residents want to see handled. But again, priorities dictate needed infrastructure takes precedent. I'm sure this is the case in most North Dakota cities.

Most small towns do not have an economic development group, JDA or professional grant writer at their disposal. Federal grant writing is daunting at best and impossible for most. Having grant funding available at the State level would be a great benefit to any community successful in getting those dollars.

Again, slum and blight stand directly in the way of not only progress but the making and maintaining of healthy, vibrant communities. Please reinstate the \$ 15M funding for this process.

Thirdly, please return the \$ 800,000 in grant funding that would be used to fund projects and community planning. Cutting this funding at a time when workforce is a major issue not only in North Dakota but country wide is a mistake. This funding is used to help create communities that can attract and retain workforce.

There are so many aspects to creating these types of communities but each city must be able to come up with a plan to best utilize its resources toward this goal. Not having the means on its own directly impacts those small towns looking to improve their lot for current residents as well as any future transplants they can attract.

I believe a fundamental job of government is to provide the infrastructure for it's residents. When we have the opportunity to assist communities because we are blessed with the resources we have, it is imperative we do so.

The state has a stake in every community. Monies spent reviving and renewing our communities will improve the livability for existing and potential new residents. We are looking for assistance in making dreams into plans that can develop into reality for the betterment of the state as a whole.