

Testimony of Dawn Mandt in support of SB 2390

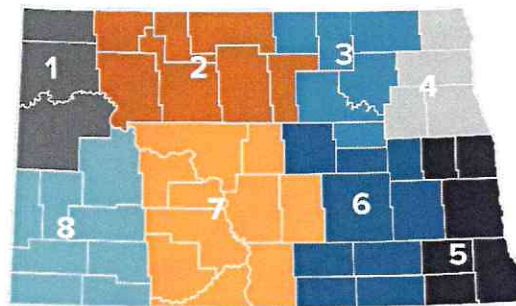
To the House Political Subdivisions Committee

Thursday, March 13, 2025

Chairman Longmuir and Committee Members,

Hi, my name is Dawn Mandt, and I'm the Executive Director of the Red River Regional Council in Grafton. Our team serves four counties in the northeast corner of North Dakota known as Region 4. There are eight regions in the state.

I'm here to discuss the need for flexible funding to support quality-of-life projects in North Dakota's small towns.



Small Town Quality of Life Needs

The ND Association of Regional Councils recently conducted a statewide survey on quality of life project needs. There were 81 communities that responded identifying 193 specific projects with a total cost exceeding \$305 million. With projects ranging in size from \$5,000 to \$50,000,000.

These projects include:

- **Arts & Culture:** Theater renovations, large-scale murals, town squares, and outdoor gathering spaces.
- **Health & Wellness:** Recreation centers, ice rinks, and community gardens.
- **Economic Development:** Upgrading equipment for small businesses, renovating vacant buildings, and creating business incubators.
- **Childcare:** Expanding or constructing childcare facilities.
- **Community Development:** Repairs to community centers, libraries, and fire halls.
- **Parks & Recreation:** New pickleball courts, campgrounds, picnic shelters, walking trails, and swimming pools.

Why is this Needed?

Many of these projects struggle to secure traditional funding for capital projects. For example for parks and recreation in small towns have significant financial constraints.

- The tax mill value in Grafton (population 4,200) is around \$10,282 per mill, compared to nearly \$300,000 in Grand Forks and over \$700,000 in Fargo.
- Additionally, construction costs in rural areas can be 20% or 30% than in larger cities, making project costs a barrier to completion. Many rural counties have lost licensed contractors.
- Even further, rural residents travel to the larger cities as retail and entertainment hubs and contribute upwards of 50% of the sales tax revenues – providing additional resources to build the very quality of life amenities they lack in their hometowns.

Linking Leaders with Professional Expertise

Experience tells us that these communities will need assistance with these projects from the **Regional Councils. We are experts in project and funding development.** Over the past five years, we have helped businesses, communities, nonprofits, and volunteers **secure funding 1,410 times and securing over \$365 million.** These councils, established in the 1970s for cohesive and orderly development of the state, regularly update economic strategies based on data and community input.

Match Requirement

SB 2390 also includes a **matching funds component**, where every \$1 raised in nonstate funds could be matched with \$2 from the program. This encourages local investment and allows in-kind contributions, such as donated labor or equipment, with the possibility of waiving the match in some cases. This is a prudent requirement that ensures the community buy in and support for the proposed projects as well as builds local capacity.

Community Size

The Senate amended the bill to allocate half of the funding to communities under 1,000 people. We **recommend raising this threshold to 1,500**, recognizing that towns slightly over 1,000 serve as critical service hubs for even smaller rural communities.

I urge your support for SB 2390, emphasizing its potential to enhance the quality of life and ensure the sustainability of North Dakota's rural communities.

Thank you for your time and support of rural North Dakota.

Dawn Mandt

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ASSOCIATION
OF REGIONAL COUNCILS

Small Town Quality of Life Survey Comments

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Expand our existing health and fitness facility to improve accessibility and functionality, replace other aging structures, and provide essential space for our volunteer-led fire and ambulance services, city offices, additional office spaces and 3 to 5 motel rooms, supporting economic growth.

Dawn Flaten
Hope Development Corp.

“This has been an issue in Ellendale for a long time and there is not an active daycare in the community to address the concerns. We are actively sourcing grants and other means of funding to assist.”

Andrea Mireles
Ellendale

“Our community center, which has the daycare center and several businesses in it, is in desperate need of a new heating system.”

Keith Burt, Mayor
City of Tolna

Park, playground, and sport field improvements. These would make the ball-fields and park more user-friendly as our community has increased in size significantly and more children in our community than ever before. (\$25,000)

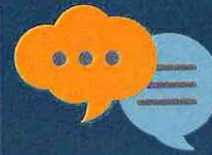
Tasha Pond
City of Amenia

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Improvements and updates to the Sherwood City Gym/Fitness Area. This facility is important to the entire community, and surrounding area. The project would promote positive health and wellness, and impact community development.

Kristy Titus
City of Sherwood

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small town voices

”

Convert a former parochial elementary school building into six apartment units with variety of sizes.

Bob Wurt
Hankinson CDC

”

“Remove delapidated buildings in the business district. The cost of removal and the price of rebuilding is beyond the ability of a small-town business owner and the city doesn't have the funding on its own.

Eric Hoberg
Napoleon
Logan County JDA

“

“It is vital for our community to have a grocery store - need a roof, flooring, signage and equipment.”

Kari Enget
City of Powers Lake

“MULTI-FAMILY HOUSING IS NEEDED.”

Carol Peterson
Milnor

“We want to start a grocery store in the former Edmore School Building.”

Sharon Blekestad
City of Edmore



INTRODUCTION

The North Dakota Association of Regional Councils conducted a statewide survey of communities with populations under 8,500 to develop a list of quality of life improvement projects and estimated costs to support the need for flexible rural funding. The survey was conducted February 25 to March 4, 2025.

There were responses from 81 communities with 193 project proposals.

Projects ranged in size from \$5,000 to \$50 million. The total estimated costs are \$305 million.

TYPES OF PROPOSED PROJECTS

Arts and Culture

- Historic place renovation
- Museum renovation, restoration
- Indoor and outdoor theater improvements
- Large scale murals
- Cultural and historical interpretive signage, maps, walking paths
- Outdoor gathering spaces
- Education and meeting center at historical society
- Community signage
- ADA improvements in historic buildings
- Rebuild historic theater
- Build town square
- Statue renovations

Economic Development

- Building conversions for business growth
- Business incubators, business development space, office rentals, retail space
- Shared-Use commercial kitchen
- Equipment upgrades in food places
- Renovate vacant buildings to make way for new business
- Extend natural gas to other side of interstate to enable new housing, commercial and industrial growth

Childcare

- Renovate existing space
- Build addition
- Developing childcare solutions and build new facilities

Community Development

- Renovate community center, new HVAC system, handicap accessibility, building repairs, new roof
- Build new fire hall
- Renovate laundromat
- Renovate bowling alley
- Build gym
- Community gardens
- Create new community centers/gathering spaces
- New city hall/community center, ADA, new kitchen
- Facelift to downtown
- Create green space downtown
- Create storywalks along bike paths
- Renovate library
- Install pavers or cement for community events

Health and Wellness

- New diagnostic lab equipment
- Building repairs and renovations on community center
- Community gardens
- New community recreation/wellness center, indoor ice rink, fitness center, walking paths
- Obstetrics wing renovation
- Indoor aquatics and wellness center
- Building new cancer and birthing center

Housing

- Renovate old buildings
- New apartments, townhomes, and houses
- Infrastructure to support new housing
- Rental housing
- Single family homes

Infrastructure

- Water mains
- Replace sewer infrastructure, repair lagoon and lift stations
- Seal coat streets, street improvements
- Emergency generators
- Sidewalks
- New city shed
- Surface water drainage
- Water towers, water leakage

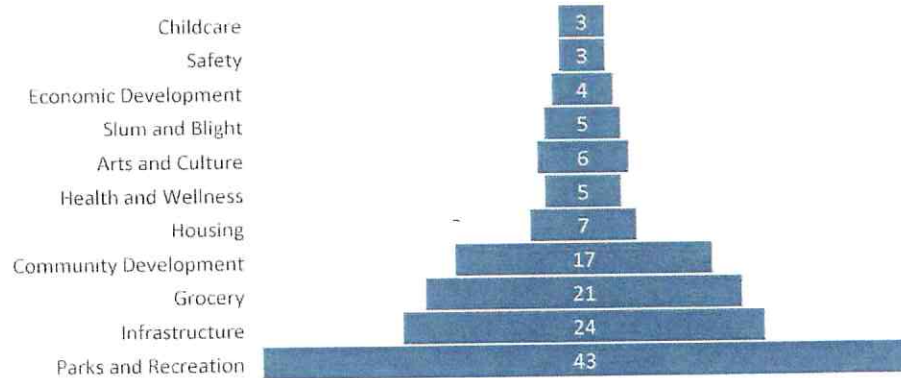
Parks and Recreation

- Pickleball and tennis courts
- Ice rinks - indoor and outdoor
- Campgrounds - new, expansion, renovation
- Swimming pools and splash pads
- Walking trails and bike paths
- Playground equipment including ADA
- Park improvements
- Dredge lake
- New baseball and softball complex
- New picnic shelters
- Safe walking paths
- Skate park
- New pier at city pond

City	Population	City	Population
Abercrombie	258	Leal	24
Almont	98	Leeds	423
Amenia	84	Lidgerwood	593
Beach	972	Lignite	136
Cleveland	61	Litchville	165
Colfax	202	Ludden	17
Columbus	131	McVille	379
Cooperstown	961	Medina	265
Crary	112	Michigan	259
Crystal	111	Milnor	614
Dazey	75	Minnewaukan	187
Drake	277	Minto	609
Dunseith	611	Mohall	689
Edinburg	194	Napoleon	745
Edmore	138	Neche	388
Enderlin	856	Northwood	950
Esmond	88	Oriska	108
Fingal	90	Pekin	72
Finley	391	Peterburg	159
Fordville	202	Powers Lake	375
Forest River	111	Rolette	462
Gilby	240	Rutland	160
Glenburn	403	Sherwood	189
Glenfield	95	St. John	313
Hankinson	918	St. Thomas	312
Harwood	827	Tolna	131
Hoople	244	Walhalla	880
Hope	277	Wing	131
Kulm	366	Wishek	841
Lakota	685	Wyndmere	448
Lankin	103		

Total Project List: \$63.7 million

Under 1,000 People: 138 Projects in 60 cities
 Cost Range: \$5,000 to \$6 million



Total Project List: \$119.5 million

City	Population
Devils Lake	7,135
Valley City	6,551
Wahpeton	8,000
Watford City	6,020

Population: 5,000 to 8,500
15 Projects from 4 cities
Cost Range: \$500,000 to \$50,000,000

