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**Sponsor:** Community & Economic Development

**Meeting Date:** 4/14/2026

**Title:** Ramsey County Economic Development Strategy Launching  
Building Stronger Together

**File Number:** 2026-124

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**Background and Rationale:**

Since 2018, Ramsey County has made a clear and deliberate shift toward strategic economic development. The county hired its first Community and Economic Development Director in over a decade, expanded its team, strengthened partnerships with municipalities, launched the Economic Competitiveness and Inclusion Plan, and secured new funding sources. These actions have positioned the county to move forward with confidence-using its tools and influence to accelerate downtown housing development and drive economic growth across the entire county.

Over the past several years, the county has consistently risen to meet extraordinary challenges . Through the COVID-19 pandemic, federal shutdowns, and Operation Metro Surge, Ramsey County has demonstrated resilience, adaptability, and strong partnerships.

The county faces a defining moment. Funding pressures are placing unprecedented strain on property owners and exposing deeper structural challenges that affect long-term fiscal stability. The county operates with a limited tax base, with approximately 14% of property tax-exempt and the lowest per capita net tax capacity in the metro area. As a fully developed and densely populated county, opportunities for large-scale new development are limited, increasing reliance on more complex and costly redevelopment.

In 2021, Ramsey County adopted its first Economic Competitiveness and Inclusion (ECI) Plan. A key early component of the ECI Plan was a fiscal health analysis. On March 7, 2026, the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners held a board workshop on the update to the fiscal health analysis. The updated analysis continued to reinforce the importance of downtown to the county's fiscal health, however showed downtown lost value where the overall county gained value. The updated analysis also illustrated an abundance of tax-exempt property, especially county-owned property, underscoring the opportunity to put county assets to work.

At the same time, service demands continue to rise while external cost pressures intensify . Federal shifts are expected to move significant costs to state and local governments over the next decade, and a projected state budget deficit increases the likelihood of additional unfunded mandates. Together, these forces create a structural imbalance that requires a more proactive and strategic response.

Through targeted investments toward economic growth, Ramsey County can strengthen its tax base, reduce pressure on property owners, and ensure long-term stability and vitality.

Building Stronger Together is Ramsey County's forward-looking \$320 million economic development initiative. It builds on previous strategies with targeted investments in key areas and partnerships to support a dynamic downtown-encouraging new housing and business development, creating jobs, and generating tax revenue. Together, these efforts will help create a more vibrant, walkable downtown that attracts visitors and new investment.

The plan builds on the county's values of well-being, prosperity, opportunity, and accountability. It also strengthens economic development by selling county-owned land suited for redevelopment. Once developed, these properties would generate additional property tax revenue, helping distribute the tax burden more broadly among all taxpayers.

This plan is a catalytic investment strategy that decisively advances the county's most critical priorities. It builds directly on the recommendations and strategies outlined in the [Ramsey County Economic Inclusion & Competitiveness Plan](https://www.ramseycountymn.gov/your-government/projects-initiatives/economic-development-initiatives/economic-competitiveness-inclusion-plan) <<https://www.ramseycountymn.gov/your-government/projects-initiatives/economic-development-initiatives/economic-competitiveness-inclusion-plan>>, the [All Abilities 2050 Transportation Plan](https://www.ramseycountymn.gov/residents/roads-transportation/multi-modal-planning/all-abilities-2050-transportation-plan) <<https://www.ramseycountymn.gov/residents/roads-transportation/multi-modal-planning/all-abilities-2050-transportation-plan>>, [Ramsey County Climate Equity Action Plan](https://www.ramseycountymn.gov/your-government/projects-initiatives/climate-action/climate-equity-action-plan) <<https://www.ramseycountymn.gov/your-government/projects-initiatives/climate-action/climate-equity-action-plan>>, and the [Ramsey County Transportation Improvement Plan](https://www.ramseycountymn.gov/residents/roads-transportation/transportation-improvement-program) <<https://www.ramseycountymn.gov/residents/roads-transportation/transportation-improvement-program>> -turning long-standing community-informed priorities into coordinated, actionable investment.

Fully aligned with Ramsey County's Vision, Mission, Goals, and Strategic Plan, this framework unifies policy, planning, and investment into a clear, results-driven strategy in alignment with key partners including the Downtown Alliance's Downtown Investment Strategy.

Building Stronger Together focuses on two key areas:

- Building a Dynamic Downtown, *and*
- Selling County-Owned Land.

*Building a Dynamic Downtown* - Strategic county investments will focus on four key areas to stimulate both private and public investment, with the goal of creating a more vibrant, active downtown. These initiatives will drive business activation, support residential growth, and expand the tax base, fostering long-term economic vitality that benefits all county residents.

Key strategies:

- Catalyze key projects - Invest in properties, like the Park at RiversEdge, to expand businesses, housing and public spaces.
- Support downtown housing - Establish a housing fund and support office-to-residential development. This housing fund will be funded through bonding by the Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA).
- Enhance public spaces - Improve transit and elevate central downtown corridors that better connect residents, workers, and visitors through high-impact public realm enhancements.
- Activate business growth - Use existing Critical Corridors program and future flexibility created by the County's newly formed Economic Development Authority to establish business activation resources to attract and support new businesses downtown.

Strategic investments for *Building a Dynamic Downtown* are estimated to require up to \$250 million to advance. Funding comes from existing dedicated resources and strategic bonding. Existing dedicated resources include previously established project budgets, existing and future state funding awards, transportation funding where eligible, and through dedicated support from existing HRA programming. Funding will be additionally augmented by strategic bonding through a capital improvement bond and by the Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA). County investment will

augment existing and future support from other public and philanthropic partners as well as leverage private investment.

*Selling County-owned Land* - The county is uniquely positioned to drive meaningful growth. The county currently owns hundreds of acres of vacant, under-utilized land. By leveraging strategic partnerships, we will prioritize selling county-owned properties that are ready for redevelopment, transforming them into revenue-generating projects that attract businesses, create jobs, and generate property tax revenue. This includes enhancing and advancing the development readiness of projects like Rice Creek Commons through the construction of Rice Creek Blvd. and other site infrastructure.

Investments for *Selling County-owned Land* are estimated to be \$70 million. Funding comes from existing dedicated resources including established project budgets and transportation funding. County investment will augment existing and future support from other public and philanthropic partners as well as leverage private investment.

Key strategies:

- Expediate real estate project readiness and jumpstart the large portfolio of underutilized properties owned by Ramsey County.
- Invest in public infrastructure that fosters economic opportunities and contributes to sustaining and enhancing vitality.
- Cultivate new and enhanced partnerships to strengthen the tax base

**Recommendation:**

The Ramsey County Board of Commissioners resolved to:

Approve and endorse the Building Stronger Together Economic Development Strategy and authorize its implementation.

A motion to approve was made by Commissioner McMurtrey, seconded by Commissioner Xiong. Motion passed.

Aye: - 7: Jebens-Singh, McGuire, McMurtrey, Miller, Moran, Ortega, and Xiong

By:   
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Jason Yang, Chief Clerk - County Board