

Our legislators can support our communities with a good bonding plan

By Mike Syversrud Iron Range Building & Construction Trades Council

This year is a bonding year at the Minnesota capitol. This is when the legislature authorizes the State to sell bonds to raise money for public construction projects to benefit the entire State. These investments can help build and preserve public buildings, fuel local economic development, and provide safe water and roads. Investment in public infrastructure projects will create the needed economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and keep Minnesota's communities working.

Townships, cities, counties and state agencies have requested over \$5 billion in unmet needs that could fund over 500 public construction projects across our State. While not all of these projects will get funded, a strong bonding bill will create the stimulus we need to strengthen Minnesota's economy during these difficult times.

Bonding is a valuable economic development tool to fund our State's economic recovery from the impacts of COVID-19. In our region, construction professionals will be ready to take on these new infrastructure projects safely. Construction workers and their contractors are committed to high quality, family sustaining jobs and ensuring that going to work is safe for workers, their families and our community.

What does a state bonding package mean to us locally? There are more than 30 bonding projects that have been proposed for the Iron Range region. For example, \$5.48 million has been requested for much needed upgrades to the Itasca Recreation

Center (IRA) Civic Center. The IRA is a regional facility owned by the city of Grand Rapids serving over 200,000 visitors per year and serves as Itasca County's emergency shelter. During the winter months it hosts hockey and figure skating clubs. In non-winter months, the facility hosts over 40 dry floor events. The University of Minnesota estimates that the economic impact of the IRA Civic Center exceeds \$5 million annually. This impact is derived from visitors who live more than 60 miles away from the center. Without the Civic Center, the city and region would lose most local hotels and restaurants who are sustained by the visitors to the facility during the winter. The bonding money from the state will keep our community working and attract visitors that will help the local economy.

In funding this and other projects, the legislature should consider a balanced approach to funding building, water and transportation infrastructure. This will allow the state to maximize its bonding power to provide on-going economic stimulus to all the areas of our State that need it most.

In these final weeks of the legislative session the Minnesota legislature has an opportunity to both provide the state with an economic recovery package and help communities like Grand Rapids and our region prosper. Our legislators can support our community by developing a bonding plan that keeps local people working and funds the critical infrastructure that our local communities and the state need.

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