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Key Takeaways from the January 10, 2025 Economic Development Merger Committee meeting

Importance of Regional Representation

Two new members have been added to the roster of the Economic Development Merger Committee. **Shawn Hostler** of the **Brookings County Commission** and **Michael Schulte** of the **City of Volga** have recently joined. Shawn represents the commission on the Brookings Economic Development Board and Michael serves on the Brookings Area Chamber of Commerce Board.

Since the launch of the merger committee, concerns have been raised related to regional representation on the committee and in the merged organization. Multiple organizations within the existing economic development ecosystem identify serving the region beyond the city of Brookings as central to their mission. To ensure that communities and stakeholders in the region are adequately represented and considered in the future organization, Shawn and Michael are an important addition to the committee.

Establishing Subcommittees

To ensure our time together as a full committee is **productive** and that **adequate attention** is given to important topics, three subcommittees will be formed.

1. Finance and Budget | This subcommittee will consider organization budgets and other pertinent financial documents. The group may also consider potential funding models for the future.

2. Organizational and Board Structure | This subcommittee will consider the existing organizational structures and board relationships. The group may also consider potential structures for the future. This subcommittee, with the assistance of the full committee, will continue developing a list of peer communities to evaluate.

3. Communications | This subcommittee will develop a plan for staff and public engagement, primarily between now and April 2025.

Committee members selected the subcommittee in which they'd be interested in serving during the meeting. Subcommittees will be populated in the coming days.

Letter from the Chamber

The committee received a letter from the Brookings Area Chamber of Commerce Board highlighting concerns they have with the work of the merger committee. The letter includes eight topics and was drafted after a discussion among the board and staff in December.

A primary takeaway from the letter is the importance of the merged organization maintaining the Chamber's mission—**to promote, advocate, connect, and enrich the Brookings business community**.

The committee discussed the letter and Chamber representatives shared their perspectives.



The takeaways identified in this document were reviewed by the committee at the close of the January 10th meeting. This document is designed for public consumption and can be shared.

Requested Documents Received

At the end of December, Tom and Nick requested a variety of documents from the four organizations. All requested documents were received this week.

Requested documents included:

- FY21-FY25 Budgets
- Organizational Structure
- Job Descriptions
- List of Outstanding Contracts, Leases, and Agreements
- Policies, Procedures, and Bylaws

As the committee continues their work, a request for additional documents and information may be forthcoming.

Budget Highlights Explored

A significant portion of the meeting was spent overviewing highlights from the four organizations' budgets. Highlights included an analysis of city funding in eight other South Dakota communities, a five-year history of City of Brookings funding, and a high-level look at income and expenses.

Several common themes emerged, as did some disparities (i.e. revenue sources). The budget will be explored in greater detail by the Finance and Budget subcommittee.

Staff Engagement Considerations

Tom and Nick affirmed that they have met with all staff members at least once in-person since Thanksgiving. The committee discussed the most effective and productive methods to engage staff from the four organizations. The engagement will have multiple goals, including **keeping the staff updated** on the progress of the committee and **gathering feedback**.

It was agreed that in-person, small group or one-on-one meetings would be preferred. The Communications subcommittee will develop a more concrete plan with the understanding that continued staff engagement, not just with directors, is an important part of the process.

Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for **Friday, January 31, 2025 at 7:00am**. Discussion topics include Peer Communities Analysis and the Public Engagement Plan.

The committee has begun outreach to peer communities, but if anyone has a community with which they suggest we contact, please share it with Tom and Nick.

Meeting Attendance

Committee members in attendance at this meeting were Wayne Avery, Angela Boersma, Tom Fishback, Andi Fouberg, Paul Gilk, Marcus Heemstra, Jamison Lamp, Jacob Meshke, Daniel Scholl, Michael Schulte, Laci Thompson, Holly Tilton Byrne, Mike Turnwall, and Nick Wendell.

Questions or Comments?

If you have any **questions or comments**, please reach out to committee co-chairs, **Nick** (wendellnick@gmail.com, 605-830-5446) or **Tom** (tom.fishback@bankeasy.com, 605-695-2585).