

**Grand Forks, ND 2019 State of the City
As Presented by Mayor Michael R. Brown
February 13, 2019
(As Prepared)**

Welcome and good afternoon. Thank you all for being here.

Thank you to our Grand Forks Police Color Guard and anthem singer, Grand Forks Central student and Grand Forks Youth Commission member, Alexis Roehl.

The Chamber has been an outstanding partner and their staff and board are appreciated. Thanks especially to Barry Wilfarht and to Kimberly Strom who do such an amazing job organizing this event.

My lovely wife, Ann. Thank you for all you do.

Just last Wednesday on the balmy minus 21 degree day she asked, "Why do we live here, again?"

Well, Dr. . . . , I plan to answer that today.

Greetings to Col. Spencer, local elected officials and visitors.

How about a nice big thanks to the Alerus Center crew?

The Alerus Center Spectra team - led by Executive Director Anna Rosberg - has not only increased events from 326 to 427 over the last year, but has increased the projected profit of the building to a positive \$285,000, a turnaround of almost \$700,000 from the previous year.

In fact, as you may know, Spectra recognized the Alerus Center as Venue of the Year, out of all their 150 assets nationwide.

Congratulations to the Alerus Center team, the board, the sponsors and supporters like the Convention and Visitors Bureau who have contributed to this success.

This is grand, . . . #SimplyGrand.

Within these award-winning walls for the last 16 years, I've had the privilege to talk about our community, report on the challenges and successes, and provide direction for the future.

Today will be no different.

Here's the State of the City:

Grand Forks is at a point where the right steps forward with solid infrastructure, key investments, a focus on innovation and a commitment to inclusion will set the course for an historic period of development and opportunity.

Grand Forks has momentum.

If we are bold enough to act and we attend to the details, we'll accelerate this momentum.

Before we get to the "I's" of Infrastructure, Investments, Innovation and Inclusion, I want to recognize the "we" of our City team.

I'm impressed with our City Council. As the legislative arm, they control the purse strings and set policy.

More importantly, they chat with constituents in the aisles at Hugo's, respond to emails and texts at all hours, and engage with callers on local radio shows.

Most importantly, they work together. Between themselves, with administration and with other elected officials.

Under the guidance of City Administrator, Todd Feland, and the leadership of Council President Dana Sande, the Council has been moving forward with strategic priorities for 2019 and beyond.

I sincerely appreciate working with them and look forward to meeting our shared goals.

Speaking of Mr. Feland, I want to express my appreciation for him, and the full leadership team in place at the City.

They collectively provide hundreds of years of public sector experience and the type of professional and motivational leadership that empowers our team to deliver the type of exceptional services you've come to expect from your City.

Like the exceptional work of our street and sanitation crews over the last few weeks, led by LeahRae Amundson, Mark Aubol and Blake Beckstead.

This has been a tough winter, but our team has done an outstanding job.

How about a hand?

That also goes for our public safety and first responders who don't get the option to sit it out, even in horrible weather.

Day in and day out, our Police Department, Fire Department, 911 Public Safety Answering Point and Emergency Management personnel keep us safe and prepared.

And in like manner, our Public Health team is simply unparalleled, addressing issues like food safety, prenatal health, infectious disease, mosquitoes, junk cars and substance use disorder.

They do all that. And more.

Including the fact they've begun the arduous but important process of accreditation.

Like the Police Department, this will demonstrate that once again our teams like Public Health meet the highest of standards.

It's important to recognize that all of our Public Safety and Public Health teams work hand in hand with the Grand Forks County teams.

We enjoy a strong and growing collaboration with the County, and I sincerely appreciate our County Commissioners for making this teamwork possible.

You may have noticed I'm SO proud of our City team that I've asked a City representative to join many of your tables today.

I wanted to underscore the fact the City is here with you and let them shine as ambassadors.

Speaking of seating arrangements, many of our sponsors obliged my invitation to mix up your own tables and teams with others. Thank you.

It is so important our community continues to encourage chances for different people and ideas to mix and commit to a practice of inclusion.

If we talk the talk at the State of the City, we should walk the walk at the State of the City.

The first "I" we will focus on today is Infrastructure.

And I want to start with our fiscal infrastructure.

Grand Forks is fortunate to have the best City Finance team around.

They are perpetual award winners for budgeting and reporting excellence, this year again retaining our "Double A - 2" bond rating.

Moreover, they helped us pass a 2019 budget with a 0.05% property tax increase - which is effectively zero.

We maintained healthy reserves, increased fees by only 2.13% and continued on a 6-year budgeting model that keeps us focussed.

And at the same time we continued to invest in and provide resources to our team through the pay for performance plan.

On a more macro level, there are many reasons to be bullish in several key industries like value-added agriculture, healthcare and manufacturing.

For example, we've added more than 1000 manufacturing jobs since 2011, with a total aggregate annual earnings of 222 million dollars.

However, there are also economic headwinds.

In particular, we are all feeling the local impact of national retail trends and seeing the impact with vacated retail storefronts.

This challenge is real and must be addressed.

That is why I fully support the Chamber of Commerce's new "Market Capture Committee".

I expect strategies that build on our strengths but that also demonstrate a willingness to innovate and diversify, including exploring new or expanded opportunities for families.

The Market Capture Committee is important because it will support local businesses but also because the generated sales tax fuels economic development, property tax relief and the Alerus Center.

Also, the citizen-approved Water and Roads sales tax funds critical infrastructure.

Last year I committed you would see a ton of action on the roads ...and we delivered.

In fact, it is too much for words . . . so let's roll the video.

[Roads and Water Sales Tax Construction Update Video]

Todd – City Administrator

We have to look as a local government how we're going to fund basic and essential infrastructure. And our thoughts have been over the last several years of how do we move forward with a local approach and move forward with a locally-led strategy. How can we then seek support from the State and Federal government. So that's been our thought of 'let's lead local first'.

Mike – Finance

2018 was a partial year in terms of collecting the new sales tax since we didn't implement it until April of last year. Of the 8 months that we had collected, it totaled about \$3.7M. Of that, about 2 and a quarter million (dollars) had gone toward various road projects and street maintenance at about 60% of the total and the other 40%, which is a little less than 1.5 million (dollars) went toward the water fund to help pay for some of the water treatment plant costs.

LeahRae – Public Works

With the sales tax allocation for minor street repair, we were able to purchase equipment and increase materials in order to address the pothole patching challenges.

Chris - Streets

During the winter months you'll probably see me operating one of these. But last Summer I had the opportunity to run the new pothole machine. And let me tell you, that was a game-changer. Not only did it do a lot of work in a short period of time but it was a lot easier on the crews. We got a lot of work done last Summer and I know we've got a lot of work to do this Summer, as well. But with our new pothole machine, we'll be ready.

Shane - Engineering

Do you remember the roads last Spring? I do. They were a mess. So we went to work and by the end of last Summer, you could really see the difference. Take Cherry Street, for example. Cherry Street was one of the many mill and overlay projects in Grand Forks.

In fact, crews put down over 10 tons of asphalt in the City of Grand Forks last Summer. This type of work is a great example of our sales tax dollars being put to work.

Travis - Engineering

The city of Grand Forks also did a lot of concrete work last year. In fact, a little over 69,000 yards of concrete were poured in the Summer of 2018. One of those jobs was on Belmont Road. Crews were able to make repairs on sections of concrete. This type of work increases the life of the road.

Fred - Water Treatment

Behind us we're looking at the administration wing. The upper level is going to be the Water Treatment Plant administration staff, along with the training room and lunch room. Below is going to be the certified environmental lab. Construction's gone incredibly well. We're sitting here on time, on budget and the project is coming along very nice.

Thank you to our Engineering team and leaders in our water treatment and wastewater facilities and to the North Dakota Department of Transportation.

Even with all the progress last year, we plan to do even more this Spring . . . if it ever comes.

Over the last several years we've also invested in Strategic Infrastructure, thanks in part to the foresight and planning of Council Member Ken Vein and to Council Member Bret Weber who is chairing these discussions at the Growth Fund and JDA.

We set the table for industrial growth and expansion, and industries are pulling up a chair.

Last year construction commenced on the Red River Bio Refinery, we saw expansions at Simplot, LM Windpower, Steffes Corporation and Cirrus, and welcomed new tenants in the business park like Border States Electric.

And on the residential infrastructure side, the City's new housing policies helped to create a building-friendly environment that produced a spike in home starts.

We will review what these policies look like as we move forward, but last year we had 123 home starts, compared to 85 last year and 99 the prior.

Again, our City team shines with our Assessing, Planning, and Building Inspections personnel ensuring the policies and developments proceed orderly and safely.

We'll now move from infrastructure to investment, because solid infrastructure leads to solid investment.

Nowhere is that more evident than in Downtown.

The Selkirk on Fourth Condos are stretching skyward on 4th Street, JLG's "The Argyle" on 4th, and the Pure Development on DeMers and 5th Street promises new housing, an Alerus Bank and a Hugo's grocery store that will benefit the whole neighborhood and city.

And on the horizon is the redevelopment of the Water Treatment Plant Site, a potential reinvigoration of the Grand Forks Herald Building, and proposals for several other projects that, if realized, amount to over \$100 million in potential investment.

The most notable project will be the DeMers Avenue reconstruction starting this Spring that will be literally repaving the way to a refreshed community core.

We know this will disrupt businesses and events alike, but our city special events team and others like the Downtown Development Associations Vision 2020 effort, will provide communication and engagement that sends a clear message that downtown is open while it gets a whole lot cooler. Thanks, DDA.

This is important, because coming together is important, and so are the spaces where we do so.

Spaces like the new, "totally rad" Rydell's Skate Park. What a wonderful amenity for our community, led by the Park District, supported by the City and so generously championed by Rydell's, the Engelstad Foundation and the Tony Hawk Foundation.

As part of the Downtown Action Plan, we are exploring development opportunities, completing a streetscape plan, and reimagining our parks and open spaces, especially our community's signature space: Town Square.

We have been so fortunate to have developers and local businesses to drive these efforts with the support of the Community Development Department, led by Meredith Richards.

Last year, partnering with the Governor's Main Street Initiative, we showcased our unique qualities and our work earned the inaugural Main Street Excellence Award.

Thank you, Governor Burgum for the award and, moreover, for the initiative.

And we must always remember that Downtown is a shared downtown with our good friends in East Grand Forks.

It is an absolute pleasure working with the East Grand Forks City Council and Mayor Gander, a thoughtful leader and firey advocate for East Grand Forks.

In addition to these Downtown projects, there are huge investments underway, planned or proposed around UND and the Grand Cities Mall.

Add to that Altru Health System's "Bold New Era" \$300 Million "Hospital in a Park".

What a bold decision indeed by the leaders of Altru who obviously are "focused on you, focused on the future" to reinvest so much in the community and in the health of our region.

It is the type of decision that not only makes an impact, but defines a legacy. Thank you.

Here's the big picture: If we keep up the momentum and follow through with these projects, then . . .

Grand Forks is poised for a Billion Dollar Boom.

As Keith Lund says, "Investment is validation."

A billion is a lot of validation in Grand Forks.

In order to drive this momentum, I'm asking our team and partners to develop a Grand Forks Investment Prospectus in the next 100 days.

It should showcase the opportunity for even more investment and how we can leverage current assets and layers of programs like Tax Increment Financing, the Renaissance Zone, and the new federal Opportunity Zones.

And it should showcase the amazing investments made and planned at the University of North Dakota, which is without a doubt the largest asset, attribute, and attractor to Grand Forks.

That is why I am so excited about President Kennedy's vision for UND, the region's Chief Opportunity Engine, and the actionable strategies already being thoughtfully implemented.

Our partnership with UND has never been stronger.

I attribute that to President Kennedy and Provost Tom DiLorenzo with shared investments in the 701 Co-Working Space, Main Street Challenge, Internships, research and transit collaboration.

I'm excited about the numerous facilities, private sector developments and infrastructure in and around campus, including the student vote to refresh the Memorial Union.

Congratulations to Student Body President Erik Hanson, who by the way, was "Mayor for a Day" in the fourth grade. . . . Not that I'm taking ALL the credit.

There are numerous Town-Gown partnerships and here are my top five:

1. Coulee to Columbia PLUS: Continue to support road improvements, new and improved campus facilities, supporting P3 ventures, and an improved transportation corridor from campus to 3rd Street.
2. City as Research Lab: Continue collaborative research on water, wastewater and street infrastructure and expand to fields like autonomous systems, UAS and computational science, or big data.
3. Enhanced Student Experience: Work with UND and community partners to enrich the student experience through educational, professional, social and cultural connections.
4. Recognized Top 10 College Town: By 2023. Top 10. Nationally.
5. Formal Town-Gown Structure: Explore a committee, program or position to foster ongoing relationships, to build on strengths, and to expand opportunities.

I can't wait to work with the President, Provost and their team, including some amazing new members, Vice President Meloney Linder and Vice President Jed Shivers.

Another key investment is how we invest in people and the organizations that serve them.

Our sense of community is what defines Grand Forks.

Nowhere is that more evident than in how nonprofits invest in us and how we support our nonprofits.

This includes the Community Foundation that, under the leadership of Becca BahnMiller, is creating connections, advocating community leadership and maintaining critical philanthropic relationships that leverage local dollars with national partners.

Nonprofits cover critical gaps, build hope, and strengthen the fabric of our community while at the same time creating jobs and generating economic activity.

So I'm taking this opportunity to put in a heartfelt plug for Giving Hearts Day, which happens to be tomorrow, Valentine's Day of course.

More than 30 local nonprofits are working together to encourage your support and tomorrow your dollars will be matched so there's no better time to invest.

Go ahead and be generous. Invest in ourselves tomorrow with Giving Hearts Day.

In 2019 I also would like to join Council Members Sandi Marshall, Jeannie Mock and Katie Dachtler and other local organizations like the Business-Non Profit Alliance to look at how we prioritize and allocate resources like Community Development Block Grants.

As Council Member Mock advocates, data-driven strategies, priorities and targets should be the goal, like when I asked for a focus on Youth Poverty last year.

I am grateful to the work started on reducing Youth Poverty by Pat Berger and Becca Bahnmler.

We set a five year target of reducing childhood poverty from 17.1% to under the statewide average of 13.6% and I intend to meet it.

And to make these investments work, we will have to innovate, which brings us to the next "I".

Grand Forks can reach our potential if we apply innovation in three key ways:

1. Generally, fostering an Innovation Culture in our workplaces and throughout the community;
2. Creating and optimizing economic opportunities in fields like Energy, Autonomous Systems and Big Data; and
3. Innovating solutions to community challenges like homelessness and substance use disorder.

First, I am proud of our innovation culture in City Government.

It starts with our Human Resources team.

They foster an amazing place to work and to thrive by going out to departments, proactively engaging employees, and supporting a culture that encourages our people to think outside the box on how to deliver excellent services.

A lot of our work is driven by technology and supported with our Information Technology team.

They are trusted, proven and simply a team that our people just love to work with.

As such, we're having great success in adopting new technology including asset management systems, new financial software, expanded communication capabilities, and greater interfaces with residents like online service requests, bill payments, permit applications and social media.

In fact, let's hear from a few of our folks on Instagram.

[Innovation Culture Video - Instagram Story Mode]

(Greta, Public Information Center)

Providing great service means a focus on the people we serve. And it means continuously looking for ways to improve.

Here at the city, that culture of innovation lives throughout the organization and how we deliver on core functions.

(Macy, Mayor's Office Intern)

For example, the communication landscape is changing, and so are we.

Making sure people have access to information about the city and in return, the city is listening to suggestions, questions and concerns is a fundamental thing we do.

(Greta, Public Information Center)

How we do it, however, is continuously changing. Going where people are with pop-ups and using the latest social media is specifically targeting information with specific audiences, maybe even a "selfie cam".

This is how we tell our story.

(Andy, Community Development)

Now more than ever it's important we're engaging the people of grand forks in major community projects like the DeMers reconstruction. Or enriching the places we love to connect in, like town square.

These are public places, our places so talking directly with people is important and time is critical so we have to be intentional about how we connect with them so they can play their role.

(Melanie, Public Works/Water)

Whoever said wastewater couldn't be at the cutting edge of technology.

In fact, we're deploying the same UAS technology that is making our region the Sili-Drone valley of UAS and data.

We use the "Ro-bird" to mitigate bird presence in the area, particularly near the airport. It is an effective and humane approach and provides another example of employing the latest tech.

(Cpl. O'Neill, Grand Forks Police Department)

And sometimes it's not tech but simply being willing and able to rethink our solutions as a group, partnering with others to leverage resources like the Mission, Valley Community Health or other Call to Action partners and more.

And making sure our focus remains on approaches removing stigma, putting resources in place and, most of all, putting focus on the people.

We are seeing success and that's inspiring.

(Greta, Public Information Center)

It means everyday we go to work and we're making differences in other people's lives. And that's inspiring. Great tech, leadership that inspires and encourages innovation throughout the organization, . . . It's a culture. To do what we do for you . . . Better.

Innovation requires a highly skilled workforce and these days that means career education and training along multiple paths.

That is why we're fortunate to have both UND and Northland Community Technical College in our community.

NCTC develops highly skilled workers in a range of technical fields from UAS to health care to energy and agriculture, just as importantly, have leaders like President Bona who are engaged with the community and developing relationships.

An innovation culture also supports the entrepreneurial culture that we've been working on with the partners like the Center for Innovation, Grand Forks Region EDC, Evolve Grand Forks and with our own Start Up Grand Forks program.

Together, all of these efforts and organizations provide the type of spectrum of education and training that yields the highly skilled workforce necessary for today's and tomorrow's industry.

The second area to apply innovation is of course in the fields of energy, autonomous systems and big data.

UND's Energy and Environmental Research Center is the gold standard of energy research and that's why we fully support investments in their work that continues to add value to energy sectors in North Dakota and all over the world.

And we know the sky is literally the limit with how far our region can go with unmanned systems and big data.

The UND Aerospace Foundation, UND's Research Institute for Autonomous Systems, the Grand Forks Air Force Base and Grand Sky UAS Business and Development Park and numerous private partners are all in sync with advancing our capacity and prestige as "Sili-Drone Valley".

Thanks to the leadership of Grand Forks County we have Grand Sky, and thanks to Grand Sky, our region is home to international heavy hitters like Northrup Grumman, General Atomics, Harris Corporation and with local startups like SkySkopes.

And our State also boasts the Northern Plains UAS Test Site.

Listen to these shared accomplishments of just this past year: Historic Beyond Visual Line of Sight flights; Participating in the federal Innovation Pilot Program, and; One of three test sites - nationwide - to help develop the national UAS air traffic control system.

In both of these fields, we must continue to stress the importance of research funding, including continuing federal and state support.

This is a good time to thank our local and statewide legislators for their past actions and current support on critical needs like the Statewide Interoperable Radio Network, infrastructure and research to help diversify and strengthen our economy. Thank you.

It is also a good time to spotlight our Global Hawk Air Force Base.

Like UND, the Base and their people are simply a part of who we are.

My deepest appreciation to Colonel Spencer and to Chief Master Sergeant Brian Thomas.

The two of you have made your mark and developed outstanding relationships and we are grateful for your leadership.

To both of you: Did you know Grand Forks was just recently recognized as one of the top five places to retire from the military?

I can attest. It worked out ok.

Just sayin' . . .

And speaking of appreciating our military members, after years of unrelenting dedication, Grand Forks Veteran's Memorial Park organizers have broken ground and are full steam ahead.

Thanks to the organizers and to all the local sponsors, particularly the Park District and the generous Engelstad Foundation and Rydell's.

This park that will be a place to honor our veterans and educate generations to come.

The third area to apply innovation is on finding new ways to address long-standing issues. Issues like substance use disorder, or addiction.

On the topic of addiction, the leadership of North Dakota's First Lady cannot be overstated. Locally, regionally, and nationally, she has been at the heart of this monumental shift in the conversation and has empowered and energized a world of new solutions.

Earlier in the video you saw Cpl. O'Neill working with the people who are homeless and are suffering from substance use disorder. This tells a great story and underscores our "person-first" approach in Public Health and Public Safety.

These efforts, as well as other innovative actions by community partners like LaGrave on First and the Northlands Rescue Mission are having real impact by putting people first and implementing proven solutions.

Together with dozens of community members, our Call to Action effort developed far-reaching strategies and has turned them into action.

Action like bringing access to Medication Assisted Treatment, expanding treatment and recovery support options, increasing access to life-saving naloxone, changing public perceptions of addiction, intervening early with Licensed Addiction Counselors in schools, and strengthening prevention efforts.

We are starting to see the results of these life saving actions. Opioid overdoses have decreased by 43% and in August, we had our first overdose free month since 2015.

Although these trends are encouraging, we are remaining active and committed to solving the disease of addiction, regardless of the substance.

I look forward to bolstering efforts to connect individuals at risk with treatment and support with long-standing local partners like Valley Community Health Centers and Agassiz Associates.

And with new local partners, like Face It Together and F5, whom we warmly welcome to Grand Forks, as well as statewide programs, Free Through Recovery and the Substance Use Disorder Voucher Program.

Together, we are developing innovative solutions to substance use disorder by putting people first, treating addiction as a disease, and proving without question that recovery is possible, and we stand committed to sustaining it.

While we continue these successful strategies, it is also the right time to refocus on the root issues of mental health and capitalize on the positive recent actions of the Grand Forks Public Schools and Altru's TEARS group, or Together we Educate About the Realities of Suicide.

I look forward to working with the Grand Forks Public Schools leadership to host a "Call to Action Version 2.0" convening right here at the Alerus Center on March 7. Look for more details to come.

I know they don't want to be singled out, but I've got to express appreciation to our new Superintendent, Dr. Terry Brenner, new Assistant Superintendent Catherine Gillach, Associate Superintendent Jody Thompson, and the whole team of counselors and other professionals leading this groundbreaking work on mental health for our youth and for the community.

And that leads me to our final I: Inclusion.

Inclusion is welcoming people into our community, into our discussions, and into our way of life.

It is creating equity, or making sure everyone has equal access to all the incredible opportunity that is Grand Forks.

Grand Forks is committed to being not just the best place to be from. . . but to move to.

And so many are doing such great work already to meet this welcoming commitment. From our faith-based organizations to the Global Friends Coalition that provides invaluable mentoring and tutoring. It is a testament to our character and how we share our community.

After all, it's natural to want to share great things.

Like a great book you've just read, a wonderful recipe you prepared or an Amazon Prime series you just binged, you want to share it.

For example, last year with the incredible generosity of North Dakota's five Tribal Nations, punctuated with a stirring drum ceremony in Council Chambers, the City installed the five Tribal Nations' Flags.

Thank you to UND Vice President for Student Affairs, Cara Halgren, and her team at the American Indian Center and Multicultural Center for helping us recognize the Sovereign tribes in North Dakota and honor and embrace our Native American friends and neighbors.

I enjoy the Time Out Week and Wacipi more every year and I hope we continue to take opportunities like these to promote respect and understanding.

And opportunities we saw blossom last year like the Longest Table, Welcoming Community Roadmap and MainStreet GF Challenge.

Please help me welcome to the stage Kathryn Kester of the Greater Grand Forks Young Professionals, Robin David, Bush Fellow and incoming Strategic Initiatives Welcoming Community Fellow and Collin Hanson of Evolve Grand Forks and the 701 Co-working space.

[Side Stage Discussion and GF is Way Cooler Video]

Kathryn Kesster, Greater Grand Forks Young Professionals

Thank you Mayor Brown- Intro

September 5th was a warm, sunny day in Grand Forks, North Dakota. GGFYP and the Community Foundation of Grand Forks-East Grand Forks had already been preparing for this day with many other community volunteers. What was our goal? To have 1 day, one table, hundreds of conversations. We hosted the Longest Table. This idea really came to life after a visit from Gov. Burgum early in 2018 to Grand Forks. Burgum had spent the time talking with city leaders and young adults about his Main Street Initiative to improve North Dakota cities. After securing a generous sponsorship from the Knight Foundation Donor Advised Fund from the Community Foundation, the organizers hit the ground running to put on a record-breaking event.

Upon arrival to the Longest Table, we assigned the 717 attendees to a section of the table with only one other person they knew and asked to fill out a survey that included 6 perception questions about our community. Then over the course of a delicious meal provided by Hugo's, smaller group discussions were guided by our 90 table captions, including 24 UND students. Table conversations included topics such as favorite events, the changes people wanted, and dreaming of the future of what our community could be. Before the event goes left we asked them to fill out the same exact survey they filled out at arrival. We wanted to see if a conversation with strangers could change the way you think and feel about their community. In every single category, attendees perceptions of this community positively improved. You can interact with all of the data at longesttablegf.com

One of our top priorities for this event was to make this more than just a conversation. We wanted to provide the opportunity for community members to make changes in our community they want to see. We wanted to give the opportunity for ideas to come off the table and into the community.

Thanks to a partnership with the City of Grand Forks, a grant process opened immediately following the event where any Grand Forks resident could apply for funding up to \$3,000. The City of Grand Forks empowered the people of this City to create new, innovative initiatives and projects based on what they and other residents want their City to look like.

10 applicants were awarded funding and the momentum to enhance our community is gaining. The grant committee chose projects based on how well they tied into the three "pillars" of Gov. Doug Burgum's Main Street Initiative: healthy, vibrant communities, efficient infrastructure and 21st-century workforce.

Some of the projects include murals to create vibrancy in downtown Grand Forks, the creation of a Jam Lot to allow for more opportunities for local musicians, opportunities for low-income senior residents to

attend theater performances, and a Farmer's Market Nutrition Program - providing nutrition education sessions during the Town Square farmers market.

Over the course of the next year, we will witness these projects coming to life. All of this is coming to fruition because of the hundreds of conversations that took place on that warm, sunny day in September. I don't know about you, but I am excited to see what this does for our community.

Robin David, Bush Fellow and Strategic Initiatives Welcoming Community Fellow

I'm Robin David, current Bush Fellow with Welcoming Community Roadmap.

Every year, thousands of people come to Grand Forks, from around the state and around the world. They come for jobs, education, and quality of life.

And when they arrive, they come with boxes, dorm refrigerators, rucksacks, briefcases, or sometimes just the clothes on their back. But they all come with something more than this: Valuable skills. New ideas. Important perspectives.

When all these newcomers have the means to connect and grow here, the City can benefit from everything they bring.

And now, Grand Forks has a 5-year strategic plan to do just that: 78 initiatives that aim to ensure everyone in Grand Forks knows that this is their community to shape, and has the means to do so.

As the first year of the plan kicks off, we can already see progress:

1. New, diverse materials to better reflect the public at the Grand Forks Public,
2. A relocation guide developed by Grand Forks Region Economic Development
3. Improved distribution of GF Park District summer activity guides for people in apartments
4. A Global Friends Coalition assessment of local employers needs regarding immigrant workforce

These are just a few of the 78 initiatives. You can see, the potential for major community impact is profound.

But what's just as beautiful as that product and the promise is the means by which it was developed. Nearly 80 people representing a broad range of backgrounds, perspectives, and sectors came together to research the issue and craft recommendations. People connected with folks they otherwise wouldn't have. New ideas started sparking. New collaborations.

And every week, I hear from more people, more organizations who want to get involved. Trust me, we have room for you. We always have room for you. All are welcome.

So stay tuned this spring as we launch a new website to track progress, a new newsletter, and a new Welcoming Grand Forks social media campaign.

Tune in for opportunities to work together to make Grand Forks home.

Collin Hanson, Evolve GF and the 701 Co-Working Space

January of 2018, Governor Doug Burgum visited Grand Forks to launch his Main Street ND Initiative. Over a hundred community leaders gathered at The 701 Coworking Space in downtown talk about the future of our city and state. During that visit, a question was asked of the 3 students who were in attendance: what do you do for fun?

Hello, my name is Collin Hanson, and I'm the executive director of Evolve Grand Forks, whose nonprofit mission is to support a culture of entrepreneurship in our region.

After this meeting, we spent some time discussing with students the question that was posed to them: what do you do for fun. After some reflection, we at Evolve Grand Forks realized that we were asking the wrong question.

Instead we approached the University of North Dakota and together we decided to ask students "How can we empower you to create the community you want to live in?" Thus, the Main Street GF Challenge was born.

Partnering with UND, the Knight Foundation, City of Grand Forks, the Grand Forks Region EDC, and several other key partners, we took that question seriously. Our goal with the challenge is to spur civic engagement, inspire talent, and build community.

Over 40 high school and college students submitted an application with their civic project idea that would improve our community. Our sponsors and partners provided each student with \$3-5k in starting capital, access to The 701 Coworking Space, and access to civic advisors and mentors.

Some of the challengers include Sayjen Aldridge – who founded New Wheels for New Americans, an initiative to gather donated bicycles for New Americans that lack transportation – and Rebecca Gaida – who is introducing wind energy education into middle school classrooms across Grand Forks and the region.

After a successful first year, we're even more excited for the Main Street GF Challenge, Version 2.0. We expect to select 2 Grand Forks high school students and 4 UND students based on their civic project proposal. We're developing higher impact leadership trainings to be held twice every month, and we're building more on the strengths of our local mentors.

How can you help? We ask that you encourage students that you know to apply with their civic innovation that will improve our community.

We are also in need of those with diverse leadership expertise and specialized skills who are able to work with the future leaders of our community.

If you can help, contact me, Collin T. Hanson, at Evolve Grand Forks. Let's work together to empower the students of Grand Forks to create the community in which they want to live.

And now, in a separate role as the sole co-host of Greater Grand Forks is Way Cooler than you Think, I'm excited to introduce this new video highlighting some of the newest faces around town.

Way Cooler Thank You Think Video

Intro

Keith: Sure things around here may be just a little chilly, but life is also pretty cool! The Grand Forks Region Economic Development Corporation is one of the area's many champions for growth, and we know how important it is to recruit and retain top talent. So nearly two years ago we gathered together key community stakeholders and a whole slew of HR Experts to launch Greater Grand Forks Way Cooler than You Think! The City of Grand Forks agreed to be cool and invest in the initiative for two years, so we want to let you know how things are going.

We created a stunning website, developed cool social media accounts, and compiled a toolkit of information for area employers to use in their recruitment efforts. Now I'm in economic development, so I'm a big fan of listing boring numbers, like the fact that Cooler digital advertising has been seen 4.1 million times across the United States, or that #GFisCooler has been used over 5,000 times on Facebook, twitter or Instagram... but instead of boring you with those details I thought I'd bring in some really cool people who can tell you themselves why this initiative matters.

Chad: Whether it's creating a cool brew or building a cool community, we at Half Brothers Brewing have always been about seeking out the cool factor. That's why we really wanted to recruit Charlie to be our brewer. Just one slight hiccup: He flew into Grand Forks for his interview on a nice winter weekend... with -12 below windchills and good ol' blowing snow. But I know life doesn't stop below freezing and reached out to Cooler Becca who helped me put together a list of cool places to take Charlie during his interview. He met cool people, saw cool things, and now he's part of our cooler team at Half Brothers.

Kaitlyn: When the Alerus Center recruiters first reached out to me and asked if I'd be willing to move to Grand Forks North Dakota for an amazing career opportunity, my first thought was a swear word followed by a healthy no. But then I went on Instagram, where I kept seeing this hashtag #GFisCooler. There were so many cool things being posted by so many people that I thought Grand Forks must be paying a whole lot of people to talk so great about it. It was enough to get me on a plane to come for an interview and explore the city and I learned it really is Way Cooler than You Think - and nobody paid me to say that.

Wendy Wendt: Recruiting for a Director of Information Services is an incredibly competitive process. The Grand Forks Public Library knew we needed to pull out all the stops, so we signed up for a major national recruitment fair. Before we left, I contacted Cooler Becca who hooked me up with Cooler swag. We were surrounded by libraries from incredibly awesome cities, and when we met Arnessa we really wanted her to come to ours. Thanks to the Cooler initiative we had a great website to point her to and when she interviewed, she brought along her Cooler coffee mug and knew all about the great life here. She accepted the job and now our library staff is even cooler.

Keith: We know the Cooler initiative has been a valuable resource for our employers, and the Grand Forks Region Economic Development will continue to work hard to promote our region and recruit top

talent. We're proud to say that the city's initial investment helped us launch, and that the effort is now completely supported by private industry. This region wouldn't be cool without the people who've made it that way. We invite all of you to join in by sharing your favorite photos of life in Grand Forks county using the hashtag #GFisCooler and continuing to help us share why Greater Grand Forks is Way Cooler than You Think!

The Longest Table really was something, wasn't it? The pictures still get me. Thank you to the YP's and the Community Foundation for this incredible event and all the subsequent follow through.

And the Way Cooler video. . . That was wonderful.

"Way Cooler" captures our promise and urges not just newcomers to discover how cool we are, but the rest of us to re-discover how *really* cool we are.

And one of the lessons we've learned is just how important communications, branding and storytelling are.

That's why, with guidance from our City Council Members Weigel and Sande, our team is launching a refreshed City communications effort.

We plan to better tell our story, introducing the great people who make the great work come alive, and providing even more channels and enhanced content to reach diverse audiences.

We've already started with the City's new branding - a refresh on the City's image.

This refresh demonstrates a new, more modern and more nimble iteration of our City team, reflecting a commitment to continuous improvement and innovation.

Here's what we're thinking:

Green and blue. UND green, in fact, emphasizing the Proud Home of UND and Airmen Blue denoting our connection with the Grand Forks Air Force Base.

The green also signifies our roots in agriculture and related economy and the blue, the rivers from which the community sprang.

The Paddle Wheel is a nod to Steamboat Captain and founder Alexander Griggs and a recognition that the paddle wheel at Town Square has become a unique identifier of our community.

We designed this logo with our own Public Information professionals, drawing from expertise of our generous communications and marketing professionals at the Park District and UND.

Look for the logo and branding in a new City website coming in the next few weeks.

That's called a teaser.

And did you know this event and other City meetings are not only on GFTV2 and Facebook but are also carried by the Grand Forks Herald's web page?

I have to say, I've learned to appreciate the Herald's E-paper in the recent cold snap, avoiding the snow in my slippers.

The media is important. The City can tell a great story, and we will do so, but I firmly believe every connected community needs a connected and engaged media.

I appreciate Forum Communications, Leighton Broadcasting and I Heart Media being invested in Grand Forks.

Having our own new magazine is also fun. It's well done, tells a lot of good local stories, and is quite . . . "GRAND".

We also know telling our story and engaging isn't just about technology.

That's why the City Council members and I have scheduled "Neighborhood Meetings Week" between February 25-March 1, specifically to reach those who can't be here today but want to be a part of this conversation.

And I still believe one of the best ways to communicate who we are, to ourselves and to visitors alike, is through Public Art.

Grand Forks and its residents deserve great Public Art. I am committed to delivering and our team will continue to work with the Public Arts Commission, and warm welcome to Ra'Chel Alexander, the new Executive Director, to make breathtaking and engaging public art a reality.

In conclusion, my two favorite words in any speech, . . . It comes back to the Grand Forks Promise.

With this promise, we ensure everyone has the opportunity to grow.

And we are the best version of ourselves by standing tall on the promise pillars: A Safe Place to Live; An Affordable Place to Live and Do Business; A Commitment to Youth; Healthy and Recreational Activities; and, Opportunities to be Engaged.

Let me tell you a story about the "lovely" Blue Weber, now Executive Director of the Downtown Development Association.

Years ago, he was asked why a vibrant young person like himself chose to set up shop in Grand Forks and not one of the communities so often touted for its coolness.

His reply was unexpected but has since become quite common.

Blue said he didn't want to be a part of someone else's community. He intended to help shape the type of community in which he wanted to lived.

Here, in Grand Forks, he knew he could not only enjoy the assets and amenities but could have a hand in building them . . . and building ON them.

That's what we offer in Grand Forks. We can all be the authors of this great story.

I am immensely grateful for who we are.

And I have a profound sense of optimism for Grand Forks' future.

When asked a decade from now to reflect on 2019, we will be proud to report we took action, we followed through with our initiatives, and put into motion an historic period of development and opportunity.

It is the right time to be in Grand Forks and I'm grateful we're here together.

For all you do.

Thank you.