

# Aitkin County Board of Commissioners Board Meeting Attendance Record

Date: April 11, 2023

Name	Please check the boxes that apply		
	Aitkin County Citizen	Aitkin County Employee	Company Representative – Please list
Janet Hatfield	Yes	Yes	ACAT
Mark Jersaus		Yes	Evolution Development
Teresa Smude			HRA
Arnon Carlson		Yes	ESPZ
Arnon Hautala	no	no	Stratelligence
DJ Thompson	<del>no</del>	Yes	Land
Mike Dangers		yes	Assessor
Don Corleone			



**What is our vision for the next 5 years?**

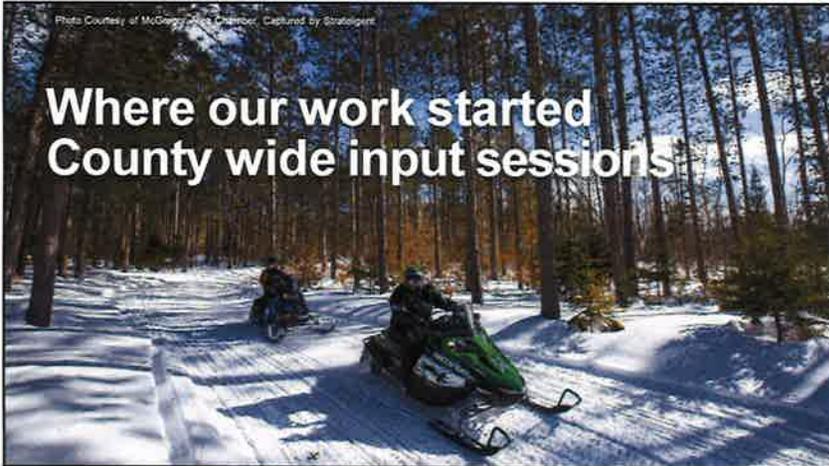
Our end goal is to successfully create an identity that is recognizable and promotable to attract new businesses and families to relocate in Aitkin County, measured by recreational asset awareness and existing business growth, plus new business growth.

**What 3 values are non-negotiable in the work we are about to do?**

1. Transparent, Honest, Authentic
2. Make it happen while having fun
3. Dare to go out of the box

**Initiatives: What are the top 3 most important initiatives that define our success and we should focus our time?**

- 1) Having a strong, aligned, and networking Aitkin County powerbase of civic, business, and volunteer stakeholders
- 2) Create a narrative and identity that is easy to remember, and easy to repeat
- 3) Persuading customers to be investors (visitor to resident)



## Where our work started County wide input sessions

1. City of Hill City
2. City of Aitkin
3. Aitkin Public School
4. Hill City Public School
5. Aitkin Chamber
6. McGregor Chamber
7. Trails - ATV and Snowmobiling
8. Trails - Paddle Sports, Bicycle, Hiking
9. Trails - Equestrian
10. Public Land/Water - Hun2ng, Fishing
11. Aitkin County Arts and Entertainment
12. County Influencers At Large

## Were the input sessions valuable?

Without a doubt, yes.

As intended, these input sessions were the prescribed silo busters we needed to unlock the persuasive truth about Aitkin County

“Thank you for being here.”

“Thankyou for asking.”

“Up until now we always felt Itasca County didn’t want us, and Aitkin County forgot about us.”



## A fast recap on what we were hired to create/develop:

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT THROUGH OUTDOOR RECREATION

1. Communication Plan
2. Microsite (Website)
3. Video

## A fast recap on what we did create/develop:

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT THROUGH OUTDOOR RECREATION

- |                        |                                     |
|------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Communication Plan  | 1. Development + Communication Plan |
| 2. Microsite (Website) | 2. Microsite (Website)              |
| 3. Video               | 3. Video                            |

We originally proposed **40 hours** to create the Aitkin County Economic Development through Outdoor Recreation Communication Plan.

To create the Aitkin County Economic Development through Outdoor Recreation Development and Communication Plan we invested **110 hours**.

**And we're donating that extra 70 hours to Aitkin County.**

**Why?**

**What's good for Aitkin County is good for all of us.**

**This job isn't about completing it and getting paid.**

**It's about making it happen.**

**Together we win.**

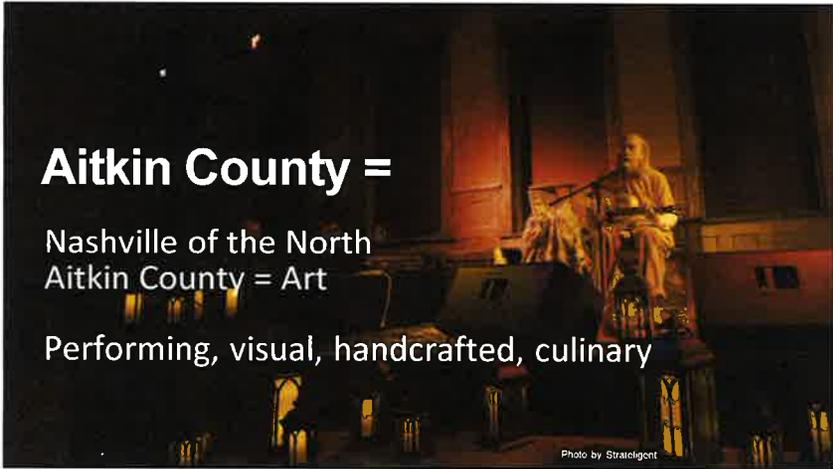


**What non-residents of Aitkin County told us Aitkin County was:**

- Primarily home to an older population
- Nothing but swamp and farmland
- Flyover county that is only good for a bathroom break
- Doesn't want visitors
- Boring, sleepy, and for the locals

**What did we learn during our Input Sessions Aitkin County is?**





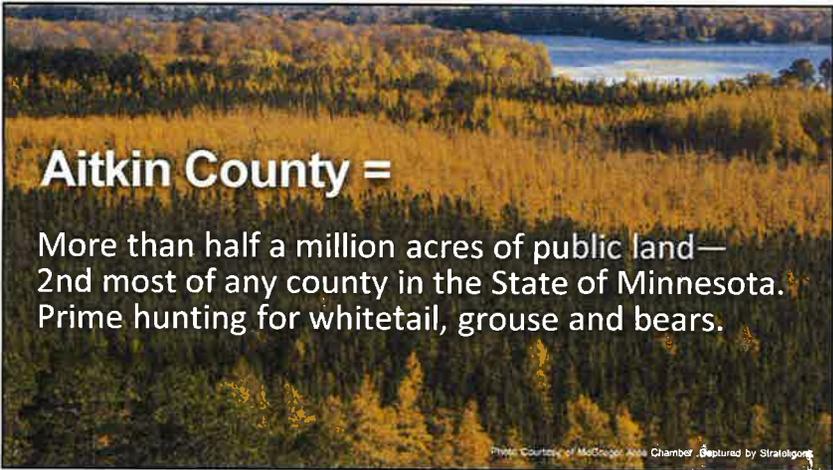
**Aitkin County =**  
Nashville of the North  
Aitkin County = Art  
Performing, visual, handcrafted, culinary

Photo by Stratigent



**Aitkin County =**  
Superior overlanding on more than  
300 miles of public forest roads.

Photo Courtesy of Curvina.com. Captured by Hans Johnson



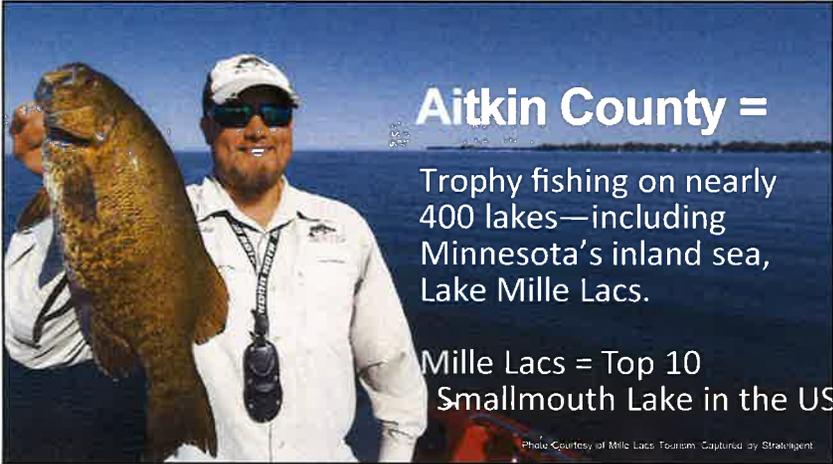
**Aitkin County =**  
More than half a million acres of public land—  
2nd most of any county in the State of Minnesota.  
Prime hunting for whitetail, grouse and bears.

Photo Courtesy of McGowan.com Chamber. Captured by Stratigent



**Aitkin County =**  
A place to explore the night sky—with one of  
the only dark sky facilities in the state.

Photo Courtesy of Curvina.com. Captured by Stratigent



**Aitkin County =**  
Trophy fishing on nearly 400 lakes—including Minnesota's inland sea, Lake Mille Lacs.  
Mille Lacs = Top 10 Smallmouth Lake in the US

Photo Courtesy of Mille Lacs Tourism. Captured by Strategic



**Aitkin County =**  
One of Minnesota's top kiteboarding destinations.

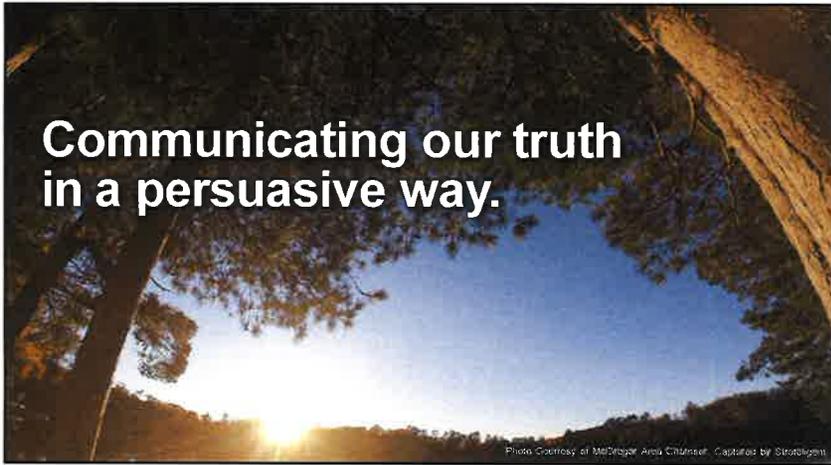
Photo Courtesy of Mille Lacs Tourism. Captured by Strategic



**Aitkin County =**  
Mecca for birding.  
1,000,000 ring-necked ducks all gathered at one time in McGregor's Rice Lake Wildlife Refuge.

Photo Courtesy of McGregor Area Chamber. Captured by Strategic

**That's a major difference.**  
Should we tell our true and authentic story? How?



**Communicating our truth in a persuasive way.**

We gotta get better at bragging.

**Positioning Statement**

A positioning statement tells your audience what you do, why you do it, and what makes you different from your competitors.

Our bedrock to stake our claim, our why. Take ownership for what we are.

Gives every stakeholder the same story.

County wide consistency = understanding = growth = goal achieved.

At the intersection of adventure and opportunity, you'll find Aitkin County.

A place to own a business, start a business, or grow a business—with county resources and neighborly support.

A place where nature abounds—with plenty of room to explore and recreate. More than half a million acres of public land. The County with the most Mississippi River frontage miles in the state of Minnesota and more Mississippi River miles than the entire state of Kentucky. Endless ATV and snowmobiling on the largest interconnected system in the state. Prime hunting for whitetail, grouse and bears. Superior overlanding on more than 300 miles of forest roads. Trophy fishing on nearly 400 lakes—including Minnesota's inland sea, Lake Mille Lacs.

A place to explore the night sky—with one of the only darkest sky facilities in the state. And ride the summer breeze at the top kiteboarding destination in Minnesota.

A place with a robust arts community—with visual arts, performances, and culinary delights taking center stage. Theaters, galleries, festivals. Authentic Minnesota artwork and handcrafted goods. Craft beverages and urban dishes with local flare. And live music from local and visiting performers.

A place where you'll come to visit, decide to live, and stay to work. We call it "Nashville of the North." You'll call it amazing.

Welcome to Aitkin County. From wilderness adventures to business ventures. It's naturally better here.

Visit [websiteurl.com](http://websiteurl.com) to begin your Aitkin County adventure today.

**Positioning Statement**

## **Boiling the Positioning Statement Down Into the Lowest Common Persuasive Denominator**

The Tagline

## **Tagline**

A tagline is your brand's slogan.

It tells your audience about your brand.

Generally, a tagline is concise, persuasive, emotional, and memorable.

## **Tagline Challenge**

Our tagline has to collaborate with existing tagline(s) in Aitkin County.

Our recommended tagline for Aitkin County:

**Naturally Better**

## Naturally Better

When used with supporting content about the county's brand-differentiating outdoor recreation tenants "Naturally Better" succinctly tells audiences that Aitkin County is the place to visit, live, work, and invest.

## Naturally Better

Successfully carves out real estate in the mind of our target audience. Creates preference.

## Naturally Better

Even better, "Naturally better" aligns with our Aitkin County Chambers and Destination Marketing Organizations tagline making the total sum of our County even more desirable.

## Aitkin Area of Chamber *Experience Aitkin*

*When you experience Aitkin you may say, "Is this the Nashville of the North?" Live music, farm-to-table foods, fresh brewed beer, and and one of the only dark sky facilities in the State of Minnesota. Let us tell you a secret, it's naturally better here. We like that, you might too.*

### McGregor Area Chamber

*Where natural wonders never cease*

*It's true, McGregor is where natural wonders never cease. From hiking our continental divide along glacial lakes to experiencing a million ring necked ducks at one time in our Wildlife Refuge, you'll agree, it's naturally better here.*

### Mille Lacs Tourism

*Do the lake.*

*When you fish Lake Mille Lacs you not only can catch one trophy fish, but four. Walleye, Pike, Muskie and Smallmouth Bass. More in love with our turf? Lake Mille Lacs also boasts the largest interconnected ATV trail system in the State of Minnesota. What are you waiting for? Get up here and Do The Lake, it's naturally better here.*

Aitkin County collaborating with NE MN Counties (Itasca, St. Louis County) examples:

*You know, what Aitkin, Itasca, and St. Louis County all have in common is we're naturally better. From our lakes, to our rivers, to our lumber and mineral resources. When we work together, think together, plan together, we'll succeed together.*

## Communication Plan Next Steps



Photo Courtesy of McGregor Area Chamber, Captured by Strakeigent

## Outbound Communication Campaign

- Digital advertising campaign
  - Targeted Digital Display (targeting relocation, business growth)
  - Facebook/Instagram (targeting relocation, business growth)
  - YouTube (targeting relocation, business growth)
- Target Audiences
  - MSP, Duluth, Rochester, MN Metropolitan
- Grant funded three month campaign
- Target Date: Monday, May 15th, 2023

## We need YOU to help spread the word!

- One County, One Voice
- Feel Free to use “Naturally Better” in any marketing and promotion
- Walk the walk, talk the talk

## Please remember to thank:

- Mille Lacs Tourism
- McGregor Area Chamber
- With both organizations allowing us to use our photography captured for them over the years on this economic development work saved Aitkin County well over \$15,000 and a year of work.





Teresa L. Smude  
Executive Director  
[Teresa@aitkinhra.org](mailto:Teresa@aitkinhra.org)

## What is an HRA?

- ▶ Housing and Redevelopment Authorities are local units of government
- ▶ Governed by State Statute
- ▶ Created by cities or counties
- ▶ Intent is to be the housing and redevelopment arm of the city or county
- ▶ 155 HRAs across the State

## What is the purpose of an HRA?

- ▶ Provide a sufficient supply of adequate, safe, and sanitary dwellings;
- ▶ Clear and redevelop blighted areas;
- ▶ Perform duties according to comprehensive plans;
- ▶ Remedy the shortage of housing for low and moderate income residents; and,
- ▶ Redevelop blighted areas, in situations in which private enterprise would not act without government participation or subsidies.

## What are HRAs authorized to do?

- Acquire and sell property
- Redevelopment
- Issue bonds
- Perform Needs Assessments
- Operate and/or acquire affordable housing, including federally-assisted public housing
- Administer the Section 8 program
- Create interest reduction programs
- Operate parking facilities
- Develop and administer down payment programs
- Housing development projects

## HRA of Aitkin County

- The State Legislature passed a bill in the 1965 session allowing the Aitkin County Housing and Redevelopment Authority to be created, subject to a public referendum in the County
- The referendum passed and the first County Housing Authority in the State of Minnesota was created by Resolution of the Aitkin County Commissioners on October 4, 1966
- Governed by Minnesota State Statute 469
- Governed by a 7 member board appointed by the County Commissioners
  - One Resident Commissioner pursuant to HUD regulation
- Agency operating funds are currently restricted to public housing

## HRA of Aitkin County Programs

- ▶ Affordable and Public Housing Program
  - ▶ Mary Hill Manor, 60 units
  - ▶ McGregor Pioneer Villa, 30 Units
  - ▶ McGregor family housing (2, 3 and 4 bedrooms), 13 units
  - ▶ Hill Lake Manor, 30 units
  - ▶ Hill City family housing (2, 3 and 4 bedrooms), 12 units
  - ▶ Village Apartments, 16 units – Funded by USDA Rural Development
- ▶ Housing Choice Vouchers/Section 8 Program
  - ▶ 35 Vouchers – Aitkin and Mille Lacs Counties

# Affordable & Public Housing

- ▶ Own, operate and manage 161 affordable housing units; 145 of those are public housing units
- ▶ What is Public Housing?
  - ▶ Federally-funded program through the Dept. of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)
  - ▶ Residents pay 30% of their gross adjusted income towards rent and, in theory, HUD makes up the difference
- ▶ Who are our Residents?
  - ▶ Average Household Income - \$21,446
    - ▶ 43% Working
    - ▶ 45% Elderly
    - ▶ 41% Disabled/Handicapped
  - ▶ Current occupancy rate - 99%

## Housing Choice Voucher/Section 8

- ▶ 35 Vouchers Authorized by HUD (31 until January 2023)
  - ▶ 33 Vouchers currently leased
    - ▶ 12 households leased in Aitkin County
    - ▶ 21 households leased in Mille Lacs County
- ▶ 100% SEMAP Score – (Section Eight Management Assessment Program)
  - ▶ Scored 130 points out of 130
  - ▶ Overall performance rating is **High**

## Current/Upcoming Physical Improvement Projects

- Village Apartments
  - Roof replacement on south building - completed
  - Concrete replacement in the courtyard – completed
  - Carpet/Vinyl replacement in hallways/entryways – completed
  - Mailbox replacement - completed
- Mary Hill Manor, Hill Lake Manor, Pioneer Villa
  - Landscaping/removal of trees around building and courtyard – completed
  - Installation of lock boxes on buildings for emergency services personnel - completed
  - Window replacement in 13 family units in McGregor – completed
  - Replacement of interior fire doors and entrance doors at Maryhill Manor – in process
  - Update fire alarm systems/entrances at Pioneer Villa/Hill Lake Manor – POHP – In process

## Summary

- ▶ HRAs are tasked with providing affordable housing options for our residents, identifying housing needs, identifying market failures and conducting redevelopment projects to improve and enhance our communities.

I, as Executive Director of the Housing and Redevelopment Authority of the Aitkin County HRA, intend on exploring and participating in many projects throughout the County in the years ahead.

Thank you!