

OPINION

OUR VIEW

Best use of directors

A move to include the community’s directors of development on an Economic Response Team made up of elected officials should not proceed.

Instead, Shawn Mason, director of economic and community development for the International Falls Economic Development Authority, and Paul Nevanen, Koochiching Economic Development director, should serve as resources to the three go-to action teams developed by the Economic Response Team.

We ask the International Falls City Council to reconsider its motion seeking to add the two directors to the ERT and ask councilors to instead encourage the three other teams to use the expertise and knowledge of these directors to move this community forward.

Clearly, the Economic Response Team is political. It was organized by elected officials representing International Falls and Koochiching County government to, just as its moniker says, respond to the May 2 announcement by Boise Inc. to reconfigure the paper mill here and eliminate 265 jobs. It is made up of International Falls Mayor Bob Anderson, Falls Councilor Pete Kalar and Koochiching County Commissioners Rob Ecklund and Wade Pavleck.

From that team, three other teams were developed with volunteers from all walks of this community’s life. Those teams are charged with tasks associated with their names: Business Development and Retention; Long-term Vision and Strategy; Worker Retention and Assistance.

These teams are doing the research, connecting with assisting agencies and resources, developing clear, specific mission statements, and setting goals to be met in the next 18 to 24 months.

These teams are truly developing a response and Nevanen and Mason should be available to assist, while the ERT is providing, guidance and connections to resources to the teams.

Our lead development directors have a role to play in this important process, but it cannot be carried out by membership on the ERT.

They would instead be best used by being at the table or in attendance at the meetings of the three go-to teams. Nevanen and Mason can provide in an instant a plethora of information about this community’s resources, businesses, disadvantages and opportunities.

We need Mason and Nevanen immediately accessible to the three action teams in order to allow them to consider fully the community’s needs during this downsizing of the workforce at Borderland’s largest employer and set goals to fill those needs.

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Helping the community helps us all give what you can

As a member of the local United Way Advisory Board and as a contributor, I support United Way because of all the good it does in our community.

No matter your current income, employment or health status, there may be a time when you need United Way. When you have a new baby, they are there with free, new monthly books to build a library for your child while building their vocabulary. When you have an ailing loved one, United Way supports hospice care services to keep your family member comfortable. If you lose your home in a fire and need immediate help, United Way funds the American Red Cross to be there for you. There is unpredictability in life. There are ups and there are downs. Some things you can plan for and some unfortunately just happen. Knowing that help is there –right here in our community – is truly a blessing for all of us. I hope that I can encourage you to give what you can give in order to help preserve these important programs and services.

When people donate to UW they are supporting their own community. Everyone is able to get by with a few dollars less. Payroll deductions are an easy way to set that up. However, many of us as small business owners, employees of organizations without payroll deduction or retirees, do not have the option to give in this way. When I give my annual

contribution, I write a check and send it directly to United Way. A few dollars every pay period or a little larger one-time annual gift probably won’t make a big difference to you – but when everyone participates, the money adds up and makes a huge difference to the people of Koochiching County.

In order to help some of our community’s most vulnerable citizens, we are expanding one of UW’s programs, Buddy Backpacks, by 50 percent to reach 120 children in Koochiching County this year. These are children who are at risk of experiencing hunger over the weekend. If we raise \$10,000 to support this effort, the Otto Bremer Foundation has committed a \$10,000 match. We are currently at the half way mark and are confident we will reach this goal to help our children. I urge you to join in this effort.

In addition to Buddy Backpacks, there are many local agencies that rely on



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GUEST COMMENTARY

LIVE UNITED



United Way of Northeastern MN

United Way funding to provide the many needed services. Costs are going up everywhere and needs are increasing too. Donations are down in Koochiching County which will result in fewer services. We need people to support this community now more than ever. Without your support, many programs and agencies will start to falter and close. The very health of Koochiching County will be negatively impacted. We need everyone to give what they can give. Without these local funds, our local agencies would suffer, be able to do less and many programs would cease operations.

I would encourage everyone to support United Way as that is the best way to support the agencies that provide services right here in our county as well as local United Way programs.

Please consider contributing through United Way to help our community. If you would like to send in a gift, please mail your contribution to UWNEMN, c/o Julie Ehrman,1303 16th Street, International Falls, MN 56649.

How to contact your lawmakers

FEDERAL OFFICES

President Barack Obama
 Democrat
 The White House
 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. N.W.
 Washington, D.C., 20500
 202-456-1111
 Website:
 www.whitehouse.gov
 E-mail:
 president@whitehouse.gov

U.S. Rep. Rick Nolan
 2447 Rayburn House Office Building
 Washington DC 20515
 202-225-6211
 Website: www.nolan.house.gov
 Facebook: US Rep Rick Nolan
 Twitter: @USRepRickNolan

Duluth Office of Congressman Rick Nolan (TEMPORARY)
 Gerald W. Heaney Federal Building and United States Courthouse
 515 West First Street, Room 235
 Duluth, MN 55802
 218-464-5095, 5096, 5097 and 5098

Brainerd Office of Congressman Rick Nolan
 Brainerd City Hall
 501 Laurel Street
 Brainerd, MN 56401
 218-454-4078

U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar
 Democrat
 302 Hart Senate Office Building
 Washington, D.C. 20510
 202-224-3244

Minnesota Office:

1200 Washington Avenue South, Suite 250
 Minneapolis, MN 55415
 612-727-5220
 Website:
 www.klobuchar.senate.gov

U.S. Sen. Al Franken
 Democrat
 Senate Hart Building 320
 Washington DC 20510
 202-224-5641
 Website:
 www.alfranken.com
 E-Mail:
 info@franken.senate.gov

STATE OFFICES

Gov. Mark Dayton
 130 State Capitol
 75 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
 St. Paul, MN, 55155
 800-657-3717
 E-mail:
 Mark.Dayton@state.mn.us

Rep. David Dill
 571 State Office Building
 St. Paul, MN 55155
 651-296-2190
 800-339-0466
 rep.david.dill@house.mn
 Assistant: Joan Harrison

Sen. Tom Bakk
 75 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
 Capitol, Room 226
 St. Paul, MN 55155-1606
 Capitol Office phone:
 (651) 296-8881
 Email:
 www.senate.mn/
 senatorbakkemail

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Mail letters to The Journal, 1602 Highway 71, International Falls 56649. Letters can also be sent by e-mail to laurel@ifalls-journal.com.

what he envisions for our future. Maybe you could tell us. Where are the 50 jobs? You should ask the mayor that question. He had bogged us down in technical jargon and put the development of the multimodal district months behind. Why?

So far the mayor has voted against economic development more than once. Twice he voted against the liquor license for County Market. The second time he voted that way he ultimately voted against the Menard’s expansion.

Yes, I would like the mayor to lead our fair city. I would also like to decide if he wants to be just the mayor. It seems he also wants to be police chief, fire chief, public works director, city administrator and economic development director. Please lead us as mayor.

Paul Eklund
 International Falls, MN
Editor’s note: Eklund represents the East Ward on the International Falls City Council.