

January 7, 2025

Economic Development Merger Committee  
Attn Co-Chairs: Nick Wendell/Tom Fishback  
520 3<sup>rd</sup> Street  
Brookings, SD 57006

To the Economic Development Merger Committee,

The Brookings Area Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors appreciates the ongoing efforts of the City of Brookings and the committee to explore the feasibility of merging our local economic development agencies into one unified organization. We recognize the importance of collaboration and alignment in advancing our community's shared goals. The topic of merging has surfaced multiple times over the years, and we are glad it is finally being explored in-depth. This process will allow us to either move forward with a unified vision or confidently continue operating independently, knowing it is the best path for our community.

The Chamber fully supports open conversations and thoughtful consideration of this potential merger. However, we must express several key conditions and areas of concern that need to be addressed for our participation to remain a feasible option:

1. **Transparent Communication:** Clear, consistent communication regarding decisions made during committee meetings, along with details shared with staff, is essential.
2. **Peer Community Input:** In reviewing peer communities where similar mergers have occurred, we believe it is crucial to include perspectives from the local business community—not solely leadership of merged entities—as businesses remain our Chamber's primary stakeholders and focus.
3. **Independent Governance:** Should the Chamber merge, maintaining our own Board of Directors and CEO would be non-negotiable. Independent governance ensures our ability to advocate effectively for business interests without risking conflicts that may arise from shared oversight or funding structures.
4. **Preservation of Our Mission:** The Chamber's mission—to promote, advocate, connect, and enrich the Brookings business community—must remain a central focus. Economic development is multifaceted, and it's essential that core Chamber functions, such as advocacy, workforce retention, and membership engagement, are not diluted in the broader scope of merged priorities.
5. **Financial Impact Considerations:** A merger would likely lead to a portion of our 550 members reconsidering their renewals. We seek clarity on whether such financial impacts would be borne solely by the Chamber's segment of the budget or absorbed across the broader organizational budget.

6. **Future Partnership Commitment:** Should the Chamber ultimately decide not to merge, we anticipate continued partnership and support from the City of Brookings, ensuring we can continue to both effectively and collaboratively pursue shared economic goals for the Brookings business community.
7. **Regional Representation:** The Brookings *Area* Chamber of Commerce serves not only businesses within the City of Brookings but also those in the surrounding region, including Volga and other neighboring communities. It will be critical to ensure that the voice, engagement, and representation of businesses outside city limits remain a priority. These regional businesses contribute significantly to our shared economic ecosystem and deserve equitable attention and advocacy within any merged structure.
8. **Evaluation of Outcomes:** The ultimate measure of success must be whether a merger enables us to fulfill our mission as well as—or better than—we currently do. If the answer is yes, then this change will serve the business community well.

In closing, the Brookings Area Chamber of Commerce remains committed to active participation in these discussions. Our focus is—and will always remain—on advocating for the best outcomes for our local businesses and the Brookings area community at large.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and dedication to this critical conversation. We look forward to continued dialogue and collaboration as we collectively chart a path forward.

Sincerely,

The Brookings Area Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors

Becky Degen, SDSU Office of the President
Chris Brozik, Civil Design
Jacob Meshke, City of Brookings
Jesse Davis, Craft
Kristina Lankow, Daktronics
Kyle Bender, Falcon Plastics (Past Chair)
Michael Schulte, City of Volga
Mike Turnwall, First Bank (Treasurer)
Nicole Nuttbrock, Larson (Vice-Chair)
Paul Gilk, Daktronics (Chair)
Samantha Tupper, Wink's Fine Jewelry
Seth Saylor, Best Choice