

DRAFT

This document will be considered
for approval by the Brookings City Council
during the 5/13/25 meeting.

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

A product of the Economic Development Merger Committee
Brookings City Council | Tuesday, May 13, 2025

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ORGANIZATION ABBREVIATIONS

Throughout the document, particularly in charts and graphics, the four existing organizations are often referred to using abbreviated terms.

- Brookings Area Chamber of Commerce = Chamber
- Brookings Economic Development Corporation = BEDC
- Downtown Brookings = Downtown
- Visit Brookings = Visit

APPRECIATION

Thank you to the members of the merger committee for your continued commitment to this effort and to getting it right. Thank you to the staff and boards of the existing organizations for your willingness to share information, have honest conversations, and position the future organization to be successful.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The Economic Development Merger Committee was formed in November 2024. The primary intention of the committee is to develop an implementation plan to guide the merger of the Brookings Area Chamber of Commerce, the Brookings Economic Development Corporation, Downtown Brookings, and Visit Brookings.

The newly-formed organization endeavors to preserve the existing missions of the merging entities, maximize available resources, and best position the Brookings region to meet challenges and opportunities now and into the future.

The implementation plan is designed to guide the launch of the organization. A new leader and Board of Directors will be expected to create a more long-range plan to include a clear mission, set of measurable goals, and recommended annual budget.

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

The co-chairs of the merger committee are Tom Fishback and Nick Wendell. The 15-member committee is populated with individuals familiar with the work of the existing organizations. All members have either served or are currently serving on at least one organization board. A complete committee roster is provided on page five.

COMMITTEE WORK

The committee has convened regularly since December 2024. Initially, the committee reviewed information (budgets, staff structure, bylaws) provided by the organizations and conducted an analysis of six peer communities who operate with merged organizations. The committee also worked to engage staff and board members through in-person meetings, interviews, forums, and follow-up surveys.

After gathering information and considering feedback from a wide variety of stakeholders, the committee drafted an organizational structure, defined staffing needs, and built the framework around a new Board of Directors.

STAFF, BOARD MEMBER, AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

While the merger committee has served as a central hub of information-gathering, discussion, and decision-making, feedback from staff, board members, and stakeholders has continued to inform the development of the implementation plan.

Early in the process, the committee received letters outlining concerns and potential opportunities from each of the existing boards. The committee co-chairs also met with the boards of each organization. Committee members conducted two-on-one interviews with each staff member in January and February. A draft version of the organizational structure was presented at an all-staff forum on March 20, 2025. A similar forum for board members and key stakeholders was held on March 27, 2025. The committee gathered feedback via an electronic survey sent to attendees after each event.

The committee will continue to engage existing staff and board members as elements of the plan mature.

PEER COMMUNITY ANALYSIS

Over the past two decades, several mid-sized (15,000-100,000 population) cities in the upper Midwest have merged their economic development related agencies. The committee identified six such peer communities to consider, including Ames, Burlington (IA), Laramie, Mankato, Rapid City, and Yankton.

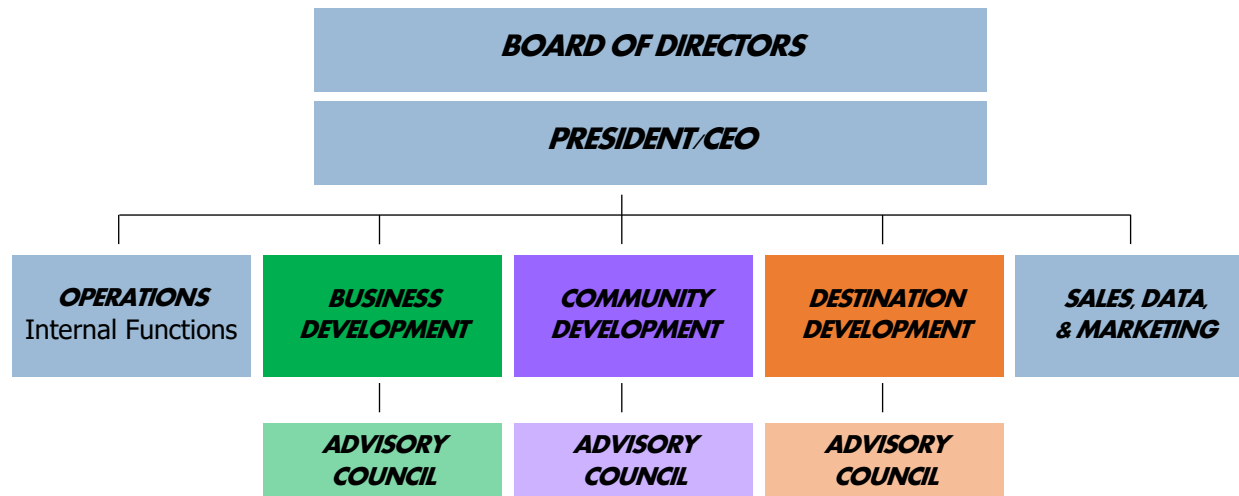
In each community, the merged organization now includes centralized staff and budgeting models supported by members, investors, and public funding. Communities cited a shared vision, enhanced resources, and the ability to recruit and retain high-caliber staff as positive outcomes of their mergers.

While the peer community analysis influenced some of the recommendations included in the implementation plan and the interviews helped the committee identify best practices, the proposed organizational structure is unique to Brookings and designed to best meet the needs of the Brookings region.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The recommended organizational structure is designed to reflect the mission and work of the newly-merged organization. The structure includes a President/Chief Executive Office (CEO) reporting to a central Board of Directors. The structure also includes three mission-focused pillars—Business Development, Community Development, and Destination Development. Each pillar will also have an advisory council.

A high-level version of the structure is outlined below. A more detailed version is provided on pages 10-12.



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The merged organization will be led by a newly-formed Board of Directors. A seven-member selection committee comprised of representatives identified by the four existing organizations and merger committee members will appoint the initial 12-member board. The initial board will include:

- Eight at-large members, including the three advisory council chairs
- City of Brookings representative
- Brookings County representative
- South Dakota State University representative
- President/CEO (non-voting member)

Additional details related to the terms, membership, and work of the board can be found on page 10.

BUDGET

The committee received FY24 and FY25 budgets from each of the organizations. In FY24, the four organizations estimated a total budget surplus of \$152,436 (\$1,926,220 income and \$1,773,784 expenditures). In FY25, the organizations are projecting a total budget deficit of -\$42,279 (\$1,961,413 income and \$2,003,692 expenditures).

The City of Brookings provided \$858,000 in funding to the four organizations in FY25. Of that total, \$263,000 comes from revenue generated through the pillow tax and directed to Visit Brookings.

In FY25, the four organizations are projecting compensation (salary + benefits) expenditures totaling approximately \$1,150,000 and 13 positions. The implementation plan identifies approximately \$1,275,000 in compensation expenditures and 14 positions in FY26 for the merged organization.

Additional budget details are provided on pages eight and 13.

CONCLUSION

The merger effort presents a tremendous opportunity to launch a reimagined organization that preserves the best of the missions of the existing entities. The merge is an opportunity to position the Brookings region as a magnet in the upper Midwest, to better meet the needs of existing businesses of all sizes, and to create an environment that nurtures the next generation of civic and industry leaders.

SECTION I. BACKGROUND

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

The Economic Development Merger Committee was formed in November 2024 with the primary intention to develop an implementation plan to merge the Brookings Area Chamber of Commerce, the Brookings Economic Development Corporation, Downtown Brookings, and Visit Brookings. The committee is populated with individuals familiar with the work of the four existing organizations.

All members of the committee have either served or are currently serving on the boards of one or more of the organizations. Various industries and sectors of the community are represented. Historically, the organizations have received considerable public funding, therefore, the committee also includes three members of the Brookings City Council and one member of the Brookings County Commission.

Tom Fishback and Nick Wendell serve as committee co-chairs. The full committee roster is provided below.

Name	Organization	Current or Previous Board Service
Wayne Avery	Brookings City Council	
Angela Boersma	ID8 Architecture	BEDC
Tom Fishback	First Bank & Trust	BEDC, Downtown
Andi Fouberg	SDSU Alumni Association	BEDC, Chamber
Marcus Heemstra	Millborn Seeds	BEDC
Shawn Hostler	Brookings County Commission	
Paul Gilk	Daktronics	Chamber
Jamison Lamp	SDSU Office of the President	Visit
Jacob Meshke	City of Brookings	Chamber, Visit
Daniel Scholl	SDSU Research & Economic Development	BEDC
Michael Schulte	City of Volga	Chamber
Laci Thompson	Pasque and The Nook	Downtown
Holly Tilton Byrne	Brookings City Council	
Mike Turnwall	First Bank & Trust	Chamber
Nick Wendell	Brookings City Council	

SCOPE OF WORK

In order to develop a comprehensive implementation plan that both acknowledges current state and casts a vision for the future state, the committee began by gathering information.

In December 2024, the committee requested a variety of documents from the organizations. The requested and received documents included current and historical budgets, job descriptions, organizational structures, bylaws, policies, and procedures. Much of the relevant information has been shared with the committee in group meetings and been used to guide the work of subcommittees developing elements of the plan.

In addition to gathering information from the organizations, the committee conducted interviews with staff, met with existing boards, and analyzed several peer communities with merged organizations. The findings of those interviews, meetings, and analyses are highlighted in the following pages.

Timeline

A high-level timeline of the committee's work is provided below. The timeline is not designed to capture all committee activities, but does include several key milestones. Milestones in **black** have already occurred, while milestones in **blue** are intended to occur between now and January 2026.

NOVEMBER	The committee is formed and the intent to merge is shared with staff and stakeholders.
DECEMBER	The co-chairs meet with existing boards and the committee convenes for the first time.
JANUARY	The committee begins meeting regularly to consider information gathered from organizations. Subcommittees are formed to consider various elements of the plan.
FEBRUARY	Members of the committee conduct 2:1 meetings with all staff. Six peer communities are identified, interviewed, and analyzed.
MARCH	An all-staff forum is held on March 20. A forum for board members and key stakeholders is held on March 27. A preliminary draft of the organizational structure is shared.
APRIL	A comprehensive update is provided to the Brookings City Council on April 22. The committee hosts a public open house on April 30.
MAY	The selection committee for the initial Board of Directors is identified. The implementation plan is considered by the Brookings City Council on May 13.
JUNE	The initial Board of Directors is appointed by June 16. The existing boards determine participation in the merged organization by June 30.
SUMMER	The process to hire a President/CEO is conducted. Existing staff engagement continues. The brand/identity for the merged organization is developed.
FALL	New President/CEO begins duties.
JANUARY	The merged organization launches.

MEETING STRUCTURE AND TOPICS

The full committee met on nine Friday mornings between December 2024 and May 2025. Early in the process, the committee agreed that it was important that meetings served as a safe environment to have honest conversations, but that staff and key stakeholders would benefit from the consistent sharing of information.

In January, the committee created a web site to serve as a central public depository of information. The site can be found at www.growtogetherbrookings.com.

As noted, the existing organizations provided requested information to the committee. This information guided initial discussions and broadened understanding among committee members of the current state of the economic development ecosystem in the Brookings region. The committee also created a number of smaller subcommittees designed to dig deeper into high-priority topics, work productively, and report recommendations back to the full group during meetings.

The initial subcommittee topics included:

- Communications
- Finance and Budget
- Organizational and Board Structure

As the effort matured, other smaller working groups considered topics including the structure and selection process for the initial Board of Directors, the overall organizational structure, and future staff positions.

At the close of each meeting, the committee identified a set of key takeaways to share with staff and other stakeholders. A key takeaways document from each meeting was shared electronically with staff and uploaded to the committee web site.

The committee will continue to convene until the initial Board of Directors is appointed in mid-June.

STAFF, BOARD MEMBER, AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The committee engaged with staff and the existing boards throughout the process of developing the implementation plan.

Staff Engagement

As committee co-chairs, Tom Fishback and Nick Wendell met with all directors and staff in November. In January and February, members of the Communications subcommittee conducted two-on-one staff meetings. These meetings were designed to give staff members an opportunity to share their thoughts on the merger process, the opportunities and challenges presented by the merger, and their perspectives on their current position and job responsibilities.

The committee hosted an all-staff forum on March 20, 2025. During the forum, committee members shared a preliminary draft of the organizational structure and facilitated small-group discussions centered around various elements of the structure. An electronic survey was sent to all staff following the forum and ten staff members responded. As part of the survey, respondents were asked to rank their feelings about various statements on a 1 to 10 scale, with 1 being strongly disagree and 10 being strongly agree.

“After seeing the draft structure, I believe the merger is an opportunity to enhance the ability of the existing organizations to fulfill our missions.”

9 out of 10

respondents ranked their feelings about this statement at a 7 or above.

Merger committee members currently serving on existing boards have also been encouraged to engage with staff as the work of the merger progresses. Staff feedback has been used to evolve the organizational structure and identify initial positions within the newly-merged organization.

Board Member and Stakeholder Engagement

Since January, the boards of the existing organizations have each submitted letters to the merger committee, which were reviewed during full group committee meetings. The letters highlighted opportunities and concerns presented by the merger. Each of the letters can be viewed on the committee website, but some common themes did emerge, including; the importance of preserving the unique missions of the organizations, opportunities for stronger collaboration and better use of resources, concerns about the role of the City of Brookings, and consideration of brand identity and awareness.

Since December, Tom Fishback and Nick Wendell, committee co-chairs, have attended board meetings for each of the existing organizations. These meetings have provided an opportunity to share details of the merger process and to gather feedback from board members.

On March 27, 2025, the committee hosted a forum for board members and key stakeholders. More than 70 attendees (including staff) reviewed an updated draft of the organizational structure and engaged in small group discussions led by merger committee members. The discussion groups focused on various elements of the merged organization. An electronic survey was sent to attendees following the forum.

Tom Fishback and Nick Wendell presented an update to the Brookings City Council during their public meeting on April 22, 2025. The slide deck from that meeting can be found on the committee web site. The committee also hosted a public open house on April 30, 2025.

BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS

The four existing organizations shared their projected FY25 budgets and recent budget histories. While the budget of each organization has important nuances in both income and expenditures, common themes emerged.

Total Income and Expenditures (FY24 and FY25)

	FY24 (Actual)	FY25 (Projected)
Income	\$1,926,220	\$1,961,413
Expenditures	\$1,773,784	\$2,003,692
Difference	\$152,436	-\$42,279

By the Numbers

The statistics below were provided in organization budgets shared with the merger committee. All information is based on **FY25** data.

\$858,000

in overall funding provided to the four organizations from the City of Brookings, the largest single funding source in the ecosystem.

Of that total, **\$263,000** comes from revenue generated through the pillow tax and directed to Visit Brookings.

\$1,100,000

in salary and benefits costs for the four organizations.

\$138,000

in rent, lease, and office related expenses for the four organizations.

\$135,000

in marketing expenses for the four organizations.

\$540,000

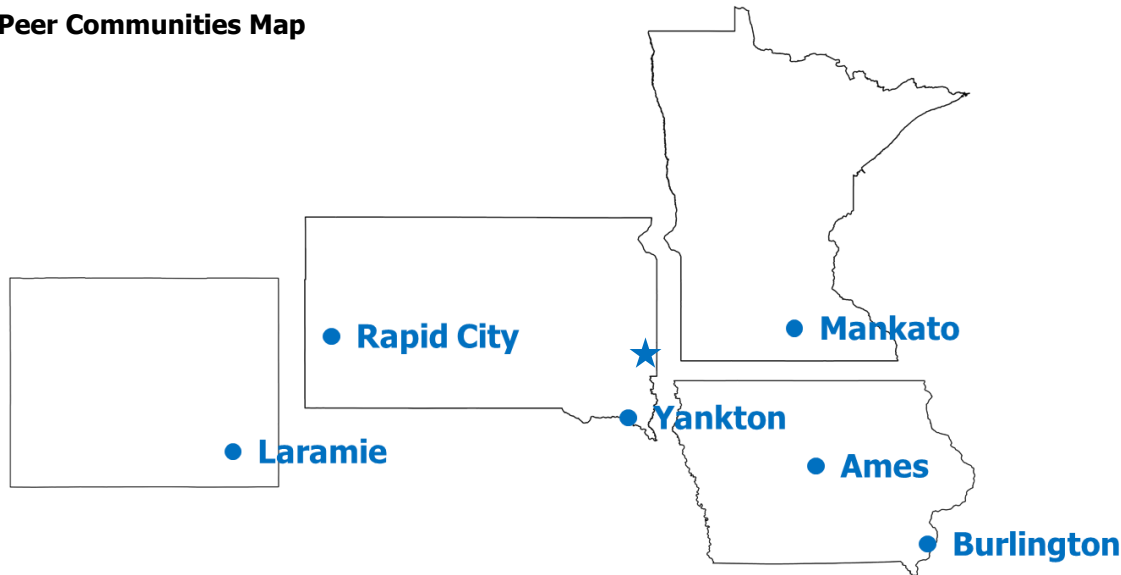
in revenue generated from memberships and sponsorships.

PEER COMMUNITY ANALYSIS

Several mid-sized cities throughout the region have shifted to merged and/or partner organizations over the past two decades. The Organizational and Board Structure subcommittee conducted interviews with six comparable cities identified as peer communities. These cities have multiple characteristics in common with Brookings, including:

- Populations between 15,000 and 100,000 people
- Located in the upper Midwest
- Similar economic/industry composition (several are home to a college or university)

Peer Communities Map



In each community, the merged organization now includes centralized staff and budgeting models supported by some combination of members, investors, and public funding. Communities cited a shared vision, enhanced resources, and the ability to recruit and retain high-caliber staff as positive outcomes of their merger. In addition to the six identified peer communities, the committee found more than a dozen cities in Iowa and Minnesota that have also gone through similar mergers.

Peer Community Organization Characteristics

City	Chamber	Downtown	EDC	Visit	Public \$	Model
Ames	x	x	x		x	Pillared
Burlington	x	x	x	x	x	Pillared
Laramie	x		x			Central
Mankato	x	x	x	x	x	Pillared
Rapid City	x		x		x	Central
Yankton	x		x	x	x	Pillared

While the merged organizations in peer communities had a variety of similarities and differences, the committee identified two general models that appeared to exist—**pillared** and **centralized**. In the pillared model, all components of the organization report to the President/CEO, but distinct pillars and units remain. Some general staff serve across all units (i.e. marketing, HR, finance and budget). In the centralized model, all components of the organization seemed to report to the President/CEO and most or all staff serve the central function of the organization.

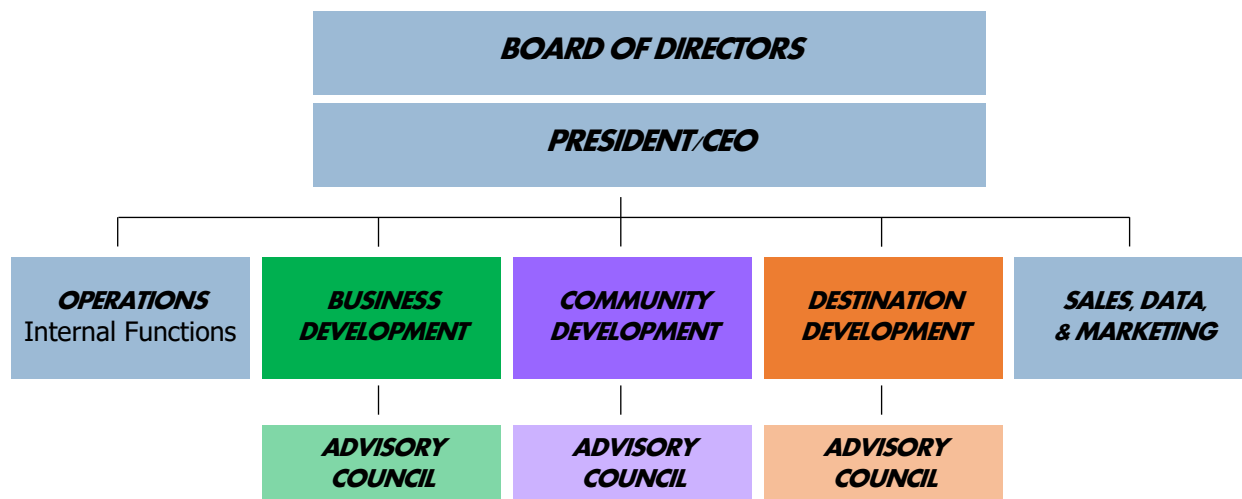
SECTION II. RECOMMENDATIONS

PROPOSED ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The recommended structure is designed to organize the mission and work of the merged organization, with a President/Chief Executive Office (CEO) reporting to a central Board of Directors. The structure includes an Operations (internal functions) pillar and a Sales, Data, and Marketing pillar, both comprised of staff intended to serve across the entire organization.

The structure also includes three mission-focused pillars—Business Development, Community Development, and Destination Development. Each mission-focused pillar will have an advisory council.

A high-level version of the structure is outlined below. This section of the plan also includes additional details related to the Board of Directors, the President/CEO, shared-services pillars, and the potential staff positions, primary functions, and advisory councils for the three mission-focused pillars.



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The merged organization will be led by a newly-formed Board of Directors. The board will be charged with oversight of the President/CEO and with setting the strategic direction of the organization.

Membership

The 12-member Board of Directors will include the following positions:

- Eight at-large members, including the three advisory council chairs
- City of Brookings representative
- Brookings County representative
- South Dakota State University representative
- President/CEO (non-voting member)

Selection Process

A seven-member selection committee has been identified and includes three members of the merger committee and one representative identified by each of the four existing organizations.

The selection committee includes; Nathaniel Condelli (Downtown Brookings), Tom Fishback (Merger Committee), Andi Fouberg (Merger Committee), Marcus Heemstra (Merger Committee), Jared Knudson (Brookings Economic Development Corporation), Kate Treiber (Visit Brookings) and Samantha Tupper (Brookings Area Chamber of Commerce).

The selection committee will begin accepting applications soon, with the goal of appointing the initial board by June 16, 2025.

PRESIDENT/CEO

A President/CEO will be hired to oversee all aspects of the newly-merged organization. The President/CEO will report to the Board of Directors.

Primary Function

- Provide oversight to the organization, including direct supervision of multiple directors.
- Maintain authority to make all budgetary and personnel decisions.
- Serve as the key advocate and public face of the organization, particularly with members, elected officials, and other stakeholders.

Hiring Process and Timeline

The Board of Directors will oversee the hiring process for the President/CEO. Interview days will include in-person opportunities for staff, stakeholder, and public engagement.

PRIOR TO SUMMER 2025 JUNE & JULY 2025

Search Plan Developed
Job Description Drafted

Hiring Process Conducted
(including stakeholder groups)

AUGUST 2025

President/CEO Selected

FALL 2025

President/CEO Tenure Begins



SHARED SERVICES PILLARS

One of the benefits of a merger is the ability to share services across the entire organization. This level of collaboration will create an opportunity to maximize the resources directed at fulfilling the central mission while reducing duplicative efforts. The recommended structure includes two shared-services pillars—an Operations pillar and a Sales, Data, and Marketing pillar.

OPERATIONS

In a newly-defined structure, one of the shared services pillars will be Operations.

Primary Function

Staff in this pillar will focus primarily on internal functions, including:

- Finance and Budget Management
- Office Management
- Contracted Services (human resources, legal, audit)

Staff

The Operations pillar will include two full-time positions, including an Office Manager and a Finance/Controller position. This pillar will likely also oversee a variety of contracted services including human resources, legal, and auditing functions.

SALES, DATA, AND MARKETING

In a newly-defined structure, one of the shared services pillars will be Sales, Data, and Marketing.

Primary Function

Staff in this pillar will oversee marketing and communications for the organization and play a key role in revenue generating activities, including:

- Membership Efforts
- Sales (in partnership with relevant mission-focused pillars)
- Data and Analytics

Staff

The Sales, Data, and Marketing pillar will include five full-time positions and will be led by the Director of Sales. Other positions in this unit will include the Membership Specialist, the Data and Analytics Specialist, and two Marketing Specialists.

MISSION FOCUSED PILLARS

In addition to the shared services pillars, the merged entity will function as one dynamic, multi-faceted organization with three mission-focused pillars—Business Development, Community Development, and Destination Development.

The recommended structure will allow staff to narrow their focus to particular elements of the organization's mission, but will also promote synergy among pillars through collaborative efforts and working groups aligned with certain initiatives.

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

In a newly-defined structure, one of the mission-focused pillars will be Business Development.

Primary Function

Staff in this pillar will support programs and services related to:

- Advocacy for the Business Community
- Entrepreneurship and Innovation
- Support for New, Small, and Growing Businesses
- Workforce Development, Recruitment, and Training

Staff

This pillar will include two full-time positions, a Director of Business Development and a Business Development Specialist. The Director of Business Development will likely report to the President/CEO.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

In a newly-defined structure, one of the mission-focused pillars will be Community Development.

Primary Function

Staff in this pillar will support a wide variety of quality of life initiatives, including:

- Childcare
- Education and Training
- New Resident Experience
- Placemaking and District Development
- Workforce Housing

Staff

This pillar will include two full-time positions, a Director of Community Development and a Community Development Specialist. The Director of Community Development will likely report to the President/CEO.

DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT

In a newly-defined structure, one of the mission-focused pillars will be Destination Development.

Primary Function

Staff in this pillar will support programs and services related to:

- Conference, Convention, and Event Recruitment
- Downtown and Community Events and Promotions
- Management of the Visit Brookings Brand
- Support for Tourism-Related Businesses and Attractions

Staff

This pillar will include two full-time positions, a Director of Destination Development and a Destination Development Specialist. The Director of Destination Development will likely report to the President/CEO.

ADVISORY COUNCILS

Each of the mission-focused pillars will include an advisory council comprised of advocates, stakeholders, and potential volunteers. The chair of each advisory council will also serve on the Board of Directors to ensure there is a consistent flow of information, support, and accountability throughout the organization.

The existing organizations operate with several volunteer committees, many of which will likely play an important role in the merged organization in the future.

DEVELOPING THE STAFFING PLAN

In FY25, the four existing organizations are projecting compensation (salary + benefits) expenditures totaling approximately \$1,150,000. The organizations include 13 full-time positions (not including interns). The implementation plan identifies approximately \$1,275,000 in compensation expenditures in FY26 to support 14 positions for the merged organization.

All current staff in the existing organizations will have positions in the merged organization. Final staff positions, including job responsibilities, in the shared-services and mission-focused pillars are currently being developed. Merger committee members will continue to engage existing staff in this work. The goal is to begin aligning existing staff with potential new positions throughout the summer to prepare for a transition into new roles in January 2026.

A working group of merger committee members is currently evaluating existing and potential future compensation packages, including salaries, incentives, benefits, and leave.

IDENTIFYING OFFICE SPACE NEEDS

The existing organizations operate from three separate office spaces, including:

- Brookings Area Chamber of Commerce and Visit Brookings at 1321 6th Street
- Brookings Economic Development Corporation at 2301 Research Park Way
- Downtown Brookings at 414 Main Avenue

In FY25, the organizations are projecting rent, lease, and office related expenses totaling more than \$138,000. Ideally, the merged organization will be co-located in one space. Co-location will help to maximize resources and enhance collaboration.

The merger committee is working with staff to identify the characteristics of a future space, including square footage, location within the community, and visibility for current and potential stakeholders.

BUILDING THE BUDGET

While the merger committee has spent considerable time evaluating the budgets and financial conditions of the existing organizations, an initial task for the newly-formed Board of Directors and President/CEO will be to finalize the FY26 budget for the merged organization. This work will include confirming the appropriate allocation of resources to support each of the shared services and mission-focused pillars.

SECTION III. PREPARING FOR THE LAUNCH

HIGH PRIORITY TASKS

The launch of a newly-merged organization will require a number of initial tasks that should be prioritized between June and December 2025. These tasks will be the primary focus of the Board of Directors and the President/CEO, as the current staff will maintain the missions and workload of the existing organizations.

The initial list of high-priority tasks includes:

- Naming a new board of directors to provide oversight to the merged organization
- Affirming participation from the boards of the existing organizations
- Conducting a search process and hiring a President/CEO to lead the organization
- Developing a set of bylaws, policies, and procedures to govern the organization
- Finalize a staffing structure that considers existing staff and the needs of the organization
- Identifying the benefits, leave accrual, and other details of total compensation packages
- Securing necessary funding for 2026
- Building a new brand and identity to support the organization
- Identifying a physical space to accommodate the organization and staff

TRANSITION FUNDING

The remainder of 2025 will include the launch of the merged organization and a continued commitment to the existing organizations and their missions. A successful launch will require funding to support merger specific activities for the remainder of 2025.

Request

The merger committee requests the Brookings City Council provide funding up to \$250,000 to support merger activities for the remainder of 2025.

Source

The allocation could be supported through the Economic Development Reserves Fund.

Needs and Intended Activities

The funding would support the following needs and activities:

- President/CEO Search Process
- Brand/Identity Development
- Legal Counsel (determining a plan for assets, bylaws/policy/procedure development)
- President/CEO Compensation Package (remainder of FY25)

CONCLUSION

The merger effort presents a tremendous opportunity to launch a reimagined organization that preserves the best of the missions of the existing entities. An opportunity to position the Brookings region as a magnet in the upper Midwest, to better meet the needs of existing businesses of all sizes, and to create an environment that nurtures the next generation of civic and industry leaders.

The merged organization will work to invest in quality of life and placemaking initiatives, to develop districts and neighborhoods in downtown and beyond, and to create the kind of community that attracts and retains visitors and makes residents proud.

This implementation plan likely doesn't answer every question, but it does begin to define the organizational structure and resources necessary to accomplish the bold intent of the merger.

Additional information regarding the work of the Economic Development Merger Committee and the creation of the implementation plan can be found at

WWW.GROWTOGETHERBROOKINGS.COM