

CivicWest hosted a civic engagement chat at the West Fargo Firehall on November 20 at 7pm, featuring:

- **Nicole Dutton**, Owner, Thunder Coffee
- **Casey Sanders-Berglund**, West Fargo Economic Development
- **Eddie Sheely**, West Fargo Economic Development Advisory Committee

The discussion focused on five major components of the West Fargo economic landscape, along with current incentives, city goals, and opportunities for future community engagement.

1. Business Inquiries

Stakeholders evaluating West Fargo typically assess:

- a. **Cost factors:** real estate, utilities, labor, taxes, franchise fees, rent/lease terms, and fit-up expenses.
- b. **Infrastructure and logistics:** vendor/supplier proximity, transportation (airport, rail, site access), utility capacity, internet/fiber, recycling, and snow removal.
- c. **Regulatory environment:** permitting, zoning, compliance, scalability, and timeline efficiency (WF noted for quick turnaround due to staff coordination).
- d. **Workforce availability:** talent pipelines from regional universities, labor-market data, wage comparisons, and transportation barriers for workers.
- e. **Quality of life:** retail amenities, childcare, healthcare, housing, safety, and community cleanliness.

2. Value Added to the City

Economic development activities increase property-tax value and density, generate sales-tax revenue, create quality jobs, support targeted industries (notably AgTech), expand primary-sector activity, and activate space that increases lodging and commercial activity.

3. Economic Development Advisory Committee (EDAC)

The EDAC focuses on maintaining quality jobs, supporting businesses, evaluating incentives, and advising on community development.

- a. 20 total advisory participants; 9 voting members.
- b. Oversees renaissance zone authority recommendations and property-tax exemption proposals (final approval by City Commission).
- c. Acts as a think tank for growth, retention, and expansion.

4. Incentive Programs & Case Examples

Multiple tools are used to attract or retain businesses, each with strict vetting and eligibility requirements.

- a. **Renaissance Zone**

- i. *Northwest Tire*: 5-year incentive enabled expansion in West Fargo, generating 15 new jobs and long-term increases in property and sales-tax revenue.
- b. **PILOT (Payment in Lieu of Taxes)**
 - i. *Vanna Vans*: 5-year PILOT supporting 20 new jobs and \$1.2M in sales-tax revenue.
 - ii. Primary-sector firms may qualify for full property-tax abatement for several years (non-primary sectors do not). Projects already underway are not eligible.
- c. **Enterprise Grant**
 - i. *Thunder Coffee*: Received funding to launch their first WF location; now expanded to Brewhalla. Program supports up to 50% of costs, capped at \$150,000.
 - ii. *Noble Hare*: Received \$75,000 for space activation and job creation.
- d. **Gap Funding**
 - i. *Junkyard Brewing*: Forgivable loan and PILOT-supported improvements (patio/roof), resulting in strong sales-tax performance.
 - ii. *Costco*: Incentive package tied to job-creation minimums, sales-tax reinvestment for infrastructure, and additional capped support. Brought regional commercial activity and catalyzed development.
- e. **Tax Increment Financing (TIF)**
 - i. *Sandhills*: TIF supported infrastructure improvements and spurred additional business growth within the development district.

5. Governance, Oversight, and Future Opportunities

All incentives undergo a multi-layered approval process involving the City Commission, School Board, and Cass County. West Fargo's strategy balances fiscal responsibility with growth objectives. The city is also exploring the feasibility of an **Innovation Hub or campus** to further strengthen talent pipelines and entrepreneurship.

This session provided transparency into how economic decisions are made and how residents can engage in shaping West Fargo's future.