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City of Duluth Communications Office

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SUBJECT: City of Duluth announces opening of Director of Planning and Economic Development position and results of recent Economic Development Study

BY: Kelli Latuska, Public Information Officer

City of Duluth announces opening of Director of Planning and Economic Development position and results of recent Economic Development Study

[DULUTH, MN] At a news conference at City Hall today, Mayor Emily Larson announced the opening of the Director of Planning and Economic Development position, left vacant following the sudden passing of late Director Chris Fleege, and outlined the results of the recent Economic Development study conducted by Baker Tilly, a consulting and advisory firm.

The Director of Planning and Economic Development is a core member of the City of Duluth's cross-department executive leadership team responsible for bringing together a broad range of resources to foster a healthy, vibrant community.

Specifically, this Director leads the City of Duluth's work on community planning; economic development; housing development; grants and compliance; permit services, and inspections. The Planning and Economic Development Department is staffed by 40 employees and supports a dozen citizen boards and commissions. The Director reports to the Chief Administrative Officer of the City.

Concurrent with this posting, the City of Duluth is issuing the results of a six-month Economic Development Audit which can be found on the City website. This audit is the culmination of economic development stakeholder conversations, individual interviews with developers, and an open community survey. The hiring process for this Director will include asking candidates to speak to the audit results and incorporate them into a vision and direction for the department moving forward.

As part of Mayor Emily Larson's goals and objectives to enhance ease of use and satisfaction with the development process in Duluth, a study was conducted by Baker Tilly, US LLP (Baker Tilly) to review the policies, procedures, and performance of the City of Duluth's Planning and Economic Development department. This department includes the divisions of Planning and Development and Construction Services and Inspection.

The audit was conducted through a series of different in-person conversations with staff, stakeholders, developers, and contractors, and via an online survey. The survey was distributed electronically to our list of 2500 recent permit holders (ranging from small house projects to large-scale development), and through the electronic membership lists of the Duluth Area Chamber of Commerce, APEX, and other economic development partners. Additionally, the survey was released via local traditional and social media channels. Roughly 200 completed surveys were received. The goals of the review were to provide recommendations for improvement of economic development processes carried out by the City of Duluth. In addition to the feedback aggregated by the survey, Baker Tilly provided a short catalog of recommendations the department can deploy to incorporate the survey's findings in its best practices. Included in these are the realignment of department leadership, partnership, and synergy; the improvement of development processes; and the bolstering of both internal and external communications.

"As part of my 2022 State of the City address, I announced our intent to conduct an Economic Development Audit with the goal of engaging community and stakeholders to help us learn what we're doing well, where we can improve, and how we can better leverage and support our economic development partners," said Mayor Larson. "The results confirm, for me, that: we have incredible staff who are deeply dedicated and informed; we have an opportunity to increase proactive communication and better tell our Planning and Economic Development story; we need to better educate the community on the realities and confines of the state and international building codes we are required to administer, and; we can better empower staff to be decision-makers to help streamline progress.

"While it continues to feel sad and unfortunate that Chris Fleege is no longer in the role of Director, the timing of this audit and the posting to fill that position means that we have an unprecedented and unforeseen alignment to refresh leadership, establish an aggressive economic development strategic vision, support staff, convene stakeholders and set new and clear priorities that match the needs of both our community and our staff.

"Thank you to the hundreds of people who participated in and impacted this audit. From sitting across the table together having candid conversations to finding time to complete the survey, your input made a difference. While having 200 survey respondents is a good sample size, human nature is to be motivated by complaint and frustration, and only 200 respondents from invitation to roughly 4000 emails and thousands of social media accounts tells me that, while we have room for growth, overall we're moving this community in the right direction.

"Information is power and what we have now is a powerful tool to help us both build more and build up. We're in an incredibly strong position as a City and I'm looking forward to finding the next great leader for Planning and Economic Development in the premier and excellent community that is Duluth," said Larson of the opportunity.

Chief Administrative Officer Noah Schuchman said of the study and the position opening, "I am eager to continue to accelerate our growth and development in the city, to inform and engage the community in the role of local government to advance growth while ensuring safe and compliant development, and to do so with the incredible staff within the Planning and Economic Development Department who work hard every single day with very little public acknowledgment of their critical work or their important impact."

The full Economic Development Study Summary and Recommendations can be found here:

<https://duluthmn.gov/media/15445/economic-development-study-summary-recommendationsfinal.pdf>

The full job description and posting for the Director of Planning and Economic Development can be found here:

<https://www.governmentjobs.com/careers/duluthmn/jobs/4090581/director-planning-economic-development>

The job will be posted through July 16, 2023, and all qualified candidates are encouraged to apply.

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