

A SPECIAL MEETING OF THE



**IRON RANGE RESOURCES
& REHABILITATION BOARD**

Thursday, February 12, 2026

3:30 p.m.

IRRR Administration Building

4261 Hwy 53 South, Eveleth, MN 55734

Meeting of the Iron Range Resources & Rehabilitation Board
IRRR Administration Building
4261 Hwy 53 South, Eveleth, MN 55734
Thursday, February 12, 2026 – 3:30 p.m.

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Pursuant to Minnesota Statutes Section 13D.015, some board members may participate by interactive technology.

AGENDA

- 1.** Call to Order
- 2.** Roll Call
- 3.** Approval of December 4, 2025 Meeting Minutes
See Addendum A
- 4.** Commissioner's Comments
- 5.** Technical Correction to Prior Resolution – Cook County Public Schools ISD 166
- 6.** Scope Amendment to Prior Resolution – Furin & Shea Welding & Fabricating Inc./Sturgeon River Properties LLC
- 7.** Iron Range Schools & Community Development Account – Aitkin Public Schools ISD 001
See Addendum B
- 8.** Iron Range Higher Education Account
- 9.** Public Works Projects
- 10.** Natural Resources Research Institute
- 11.** Other
- 12.** Adjournment

Description: **Technical Correction to Prior Resolution**

Purpose: A resolution that was previously adopted at the May 29, 2025 IRRR Board meeting needs a technical correction. The correction is not related to IRRR funding amounts, rather it pertains to technical content within the original resolution.

**Resolution No. 25-023
Cook County Independent School District No. 166**

Original Resolution: At the May 29, 2025 IRRR Board meeting, Resolution No. 25-023 was adopted, approving \$5,000,000 from the Iron Range School & Community Development Account to Cook County Independent School District No. 166.

Reason for Technical Correction to Resolution: Following the May 29, 2025 IRRR Board meeting, the school district changed the referendum questions and amounts to adapt to the evolving project scope and budget. At the November 2025 election, a referendum was approved by the voters totaling \$6,650,000. The referendum eliminated the bus garage and scaled back the parking lot improvements. These changes reduced the total project cost from \$38,180,000 to \$35,825,000.

Corrected Resolution: Exhibit A of Resolution No. 25-023 will be corrected by:

- Omitting reference to the bus garage.
- Changing the line items in the budget table, resulting in a new total project investment of \$35,825,000. The agency's investment of \$5,000,000 will not change.

Description: **Scope Amendment to a Prior Resolution**

Purpose: A resolution that was previously adopted at the December 4, 2025 IRRR Board meeting needs a scope amendment. The amendment is not related to IRRR funding amounts, rather it pertains to the applicant and intended use of funds within the original resolution.

Resolution No. 26-008

Participation Loan: Furin & Shea Welding & Fabricating Inc. / Sturgeon River Properties LLC

Original Resolution: At the December 4, 2025 IRRR Board meeting, Resolution No. 26-008 was adopted, supporting a \$1,298,100 participation loan from the Douglas J. Johnson Economic Protection Trust Fund for the Sturgeon River Properties LLC project.

Reason for Scope Amendment to Resolution: The adopted resolution incorrectly identified the applicant as the real estate holding company and misstated the purpose of the funds, which were intended for the purchase of equipment.

Amended Resolution: Resolution No. 26-008 will be amended by:

- Designating the applicant as Furin & Shea Welding & Fabricating Inc.
- Allowing Furin & Shea Welding & Fabricating Inc. to purchase equipment.
- Omitting mention of Sturgeon River Properties LLC.

Program: Iron Range Schools & Community Development Account

Purpose: The Iron Range Schools & Community Development Account provides disbursements to assist school districts with the payment of bonds that were issued for qualified school projects, or for any other school disbursement as approved by the commissioner of Iron Range Resources & Rehabilitation after consultation with the IRRR Board.

Minnesota Statutes Section 298.28 Subd. 7a

Aitkin Independent School District No. 001

Grant Amount: \$5,000,000

***Note:** This project was previously reviewed at the May 29, 2025 IRRR Board meeting. The district was approved to receive \$5 million in funding, contingent upon meeting specified milestones. Those milestones were not met. The district has revised the project scope and milestones and is requesting consideration to receive funding.*

The agency is recommending \$5 million to Aitkin Independent School District for infrastructure and site development related to construction of a new PreK-6 elementary school situated on a 220-acre property which has been annexed by the city of Aitkin.

On November 4, 2025 voters considered a referendum with the following two questions:

- Question 1: The construction and equipping of a new PreK-6 elementary school and transportation center.
- Question 2: The construction and equipping of a new community wellness center attached to the new elementary school.

The referendum failed by 211 votes.

In response the district reduced the project scope and cost. The new PreK-6 elementary school building size was reduced from 94,000 to 83,000 square feet by using hallways for collaborative learning spaces, improving cafeteria and gym space efficiency, creating shared use spaces and reducing HVAC costs. The transportation center space was reduced to house only active route buses. The community wellness center space was reduced to an auxiliary gym.

On April 14, 2026 voters will consider a new referendum with the following three questions:

- Question 1: The construction and equipping of a new PreK-6 elementary school.
- Question 2: The construction and equipping of a transportation center.
- Question 3: The construction and equipping of an auxiliary gym at the new PreK-6 elementary school.

The majority of the existing elementary building, Rippleside Elementary, is more than 60 years old and does not meet Minnesota Department of Education standards. The building has significant health and safety issues including poor indoor air quality, water intrusion, asbestos-containing materials and inadequate security.

A new PreK-6 facility is necessary to meeting current educational, safety and health standards. The new site will allow for long-term flexibility for future consolidation of district facilities. Recent improvements to the high school allow it to remain in use.

The following milestones must be met to receive funding from the Iron Range Schools & Community Development Account:

1. Approval by the commissioner, following consultation with the IRRR Board.
2. Project approval by the Minnesota Department of Education.
3. Voter approval of Referendum Question 1 at the April 14, 2026 election.
4. Submission of a final project budget and timeline after referendum approval.

If the four milestones above are met, construction can begin in spring 2027 and be completed by August 2028. See full project details attached, Addendum B.

Uses		Sources	
New PreK-6 elementary building	\$39,283,200	IRRR	\$5,000,000
Site infrastructure	7,281,700	Local Referendum Question 1: PreK-6 building (pending)	48,517,800
Site lighting, playground and field	1,144,700		
Utility extension to school site	3,916,800		
Furniture, fixtures and equipment	1,891,400		
Total	\$53,517,800	Total	\$53,517,800

Program: Iron Range Higher Education Account

Purpose: The Iron Range Higher Education Committee (IRHEC) advises the commissioner on providing higher education programs to the service area.

Programs are funded by 5 cents of the Taconite Production Tax that are placed in the Iron Range Higher Education Account.

Upon approval by the IRHEC and recommendation of the Iron Range Resources & Rehabilitation Board, the Commissioner approves expenditures from the account.

Minnesota Statutes Section 298.28 Subd. 9d.

Current Committee Members:

Senator Rob Farnsworth
Senator Grant Hauschild
Representative Cal Warwas
Representative Roger Skraba
Julie Marinucci, governor's appointee
President Michael Raich, Minnesota North College
Commissioner Ida Rukavina, Iron Range Resources & Rehabilitation
Chancellor Nies, University of Minnesota Duluth

The IRHEC met on Jan. 12, 2026, to receive updates from Minnesota North College and consider proposed investments. The IRHEC approved the following expenditure from the Iron Range Higher Education Account:

Minnesota North College (MNC): The Forge Technical Training Center, Grand Rapids - Lab and Classroom Space

Grant Amount: \$725,000

- **Project description:**
 - MNC will enter into a long-term lease agreement (approximately 10 years) with Itasca Economic Development Corporation (IEDC) to establish a technical training center for manufacturing and welding technology training programs at The Forge.

- **Workforce and job statistics, according to state of Minnesota employment resources:**
 - Manufacturing and welding jobs are in strong demand regionally and statewide.
 - Manufacturing has a planned growth of over 11,000 jobs in Minnesota from 2022-2032.
 - Machinists are predicted to realize a 9.3% increase in job openings in northeastern Minnesota from 2022-2032.

- Manufacturing accounts for 6.6% of employment in the region, making it the sixth largest industry.
- **New location goals:**
 - Strengthen the workforce pipeline from high school to college to career on the western Iron Range and diminish the need for students to leave the area for college-level training in places such as Duluth or Alexandria.
 - Offer work-based learning opportunities where students receive firsthand experiences that translate to employable skills post-graduation.
 - Offer summer internships over two rotations with manufacturing businesses in the region who will host students.
 - Develop a critical mass of trained and skilled employees available to local businesses and manufacturers.
- **New location considerations:**
 - MNC currently serves the region in heavy industrial technical training primarily from the Eveleth and Hibbing campuses, requiring time and travel for Grand Rapids students to access.
 - The Itasca campus lacks infrastructure needed for technical training. To meet strong demand for technical training in Grand Rapids, MNC has partnered with IEDC for the past two years to rent space at The Forge and offer entry level welding and other programs.
 - The Forge is approved as a Higher Learning Commission “additional location,” allowing MNC to offer curriculum there long-term.
- **Timeline and key milestones:**
 - **Spring 2026:** Purchase equipment, modify air handling and compressor needs in the main lab space.
 - **Summer 2026:** Hire faculty, deliver surplus equipment from other campuses to site.
 - **Fall 2026:** First cohort of manufacturing students.
 - **Spring 2027:** Purchase lab equipment to facilitate automation program changes and updates.
 - **Fall 2027:** Admit new incoming cohorts for advanced diploma.
 - **Key milestones:** Staffing support for lab set-up, including faculty release; identifying and purchasing updated tools and equipment; and funding baseline lab space. (Initial curriculum development for the entry-level diploma occurred in 2024-2025.)
- **Funding installments:**
 - \$250,000: January 2026.
 - \$250,000: Summer 2026.
 - \$225,000: Fall 2026.

Program: FY26 Grant Amendment: Public Works (Highway 1 Corridor Account)

Purpose: Public Works grants support local and Tribal governments with infrastructure funding that provides essential services and promotes economic development.

Economic Impact:

- # of Projects: 1
- Agency Investment: **\$350,000**
- Total Project Investment: **\$11,484,999**

City of Tower

Grant Increase: \$350,000

Original Project Approval: The original project consists of temporary water, sewer and electric utility placement for development of six newly constructed sustainable homes. The single-family homes feature two or three bedrooms and are suitable for permanent homestead or short-term rentals. The homes are Phase 1 of a larger development project situated on the East Two River. IRRR previously approved \$482,000 for the project in February 2025 and an additional \$566,000 in May 2025 to enable the public infrastructure to become permanent.

Reason for Grant Increase: The grant increase will help support unanticipated soil corrections for the larger harbor development which includes the construction of 14 townhomes, 14 condominium-style apartments and 7,500 square feet of commercial space. The \$350,000 grant increase will bring the agency’s investment to \$1,398,000 and the total project investment to \$11,484,999, as shown in the budget table.

Uses		Sources	
Utilities extension construction	\$1,559,773	IRRR - original grant (FY25) - Highway 1 Corridor Account	\$482,000
Wetland credits	43,000	IRRR - first grant increase (FY25)	566,000
Soil corrections	301,812	IRRR - second grant increase (FY26) - Highway 1 Corridor Account	350,000
Site development	489,931	City of Tower	400,000
Tinde home construction	2,454,710	Tower Economic Development Authority	125,000
Land acquisition	650,000	Minnesota Housing	180,000
Harbor building construction	5,650,000	Frandsen Bank & Trust	1,000,000
Architectural and engineering	275,000	Private	8,381,999
Contingency	60,773		
Total	\$11,484,999	Total	\$11,484,999

Program: University of Minnesota Duluth’s Natural Resources Research Institute (NRRI) and the U.S. Department of Energy’s (DOE) Mine of the Future Proving Ground Initiative – Federal Grant Opportunity (NOFO 3390) – Local Match

Purpose: NRRI is a nonprofit research institute within the University of Minnesota Duluth. It was established by the Minnesota State Legislature in 1983 to foster economic development of Minnesota’s natural resources in an environmentally sound manner to promote private sector employment.

Project Cost: \$2,000,000
(NRRI is requesting \$2,000,000 from IRRR to help leverage up to \$40 million in DOE Mine of the Future – Proving Ground Initiative federal funding. Industry partners have pledged \$1.5 million in matching funds, and the University of Minnesota is pledging a similar amount.)

Project Description: NRRI is pursuing a DOE grant to establish regional proving grounds for mining technology. The DOE Office of Fossil Energy and Carbon Management released NOFO 3390 on November 14, 2025. Key features include funding of up to \$40 million per site, a 20% minimum cost share, and the creation of field-scale mining technology proving grounds.

NRRI proposes to establish a proving ground for advanced mineral processing, incorporating modernized comminution flowsheets, advanced flotation systems, AI-enabled sensing, and critical mineral recovery. The grant would allow NRRI to significantly increase its capabilities, including the construction of new facilities, the installation of new mineral processing equipment, and the hiring of additional staff at its Coleraine facility. While this expansion will be beneficial to iron ore research, the intent of the federal investment is to bolster critical minerals and materials capabilities, including:

- Rare earth elements (REEs).
- Transition metals.
- Platinum group metals.
- Battery minerals (lithium, nickel, cobalt, graphite).
- Other minerals essential to energy, manufacturing and defense supply chains.

The project has several strategic benefits to the region including:

- Establishment of NRRI and the Coleraine facility as one of four national mining-focused proving grounds. In essence, this is supercharging mining research as an economic driver and sector in northeastern Minnesota and positioning Minnesota as a national leader in critical minerals innovation.
- Potential long-term federal investment in mining innovation. The grant requires operation of the proving ground for at least 10 years.
- Workforce pipeline development for modern mining technologies, which will benefit both regional mining companies and mining companies across the U.S.
- A direct increase in employment at the NRRI Coleraine facility. Rough estimates suggest that employment will need to double, from 40 to 80 including researchers, technicians and support personnel.

- Local access to technology modernization, boundary-pushing minerals demonstrations and applied research for regional mining operations. This includes cutting-edge research proposals for dry processing of minerals to eliminate any potential demand and discharge risks associated with water processing.

Funding Authorization: Douglas J. Johnson Economic Protection Trust Fund Corpus: This project is authorized under the provision of the Douglas J. Johnson Economic Protection Trust Fund Act (Minnesota Statutes sections 298.291 – 298.297) pertaining to expenditures of Douglas J. Johnson Economic Protection Trust Fund Corpus monies for economic development projects in that these statutes authorize the expenditure of corpus funds for projects and programs that are designed to create and maintain productive, permanent and skilled employment and that encourage diversification of the economy within the Taconite Assistance Area defined in Minnesota Statutes Section 273.1341.