

Memorandum

TO: City Council

FROM: Tom Simonson , Assistant City Manager and Community Development Director

DATE: August 17, 2026

SUBJECT: BR&E strategy plan implementation - approval of consulting services agreement and purchase of Bludot CRM Software

ITEM NUMBER: 8.m

SECTION: CONSENT AGENDA

REQUESTED MOTION

To approve the following actions, as supported by the economic development commission and recommended by the economic development authority, relating to the business retention and expansion (BR&E) strategy plan implementation:

1. Purchase of a business and economic development CRM software program subscription from Bludot at an annual cost of approximately \$9,000 to be paid through EDA fund 240.
2. Enter into a 12-month administrative support consulting services agreement with LLOV, LLC (Elizabeth Lovin) to coordinate the year-one implementation actions the BR&E strategy plan at an estimated not to exceed cost of \$63,000 paid from EDA fund 240.

INTRODUCTION

Staff and the economic development commission (EDC) have spent the past year working with the Golden Shovel Agency on developing a new and enhanced strategic plan for our business retention and expansion (BR&E) program. The plan has been completed and has been endorsed by the EDC.

Staff is now bringing forward two actions for city council approval that are key to the successful implementation of the new BR&E strategy plan. These recommendations were approved earlier this month by the economic development authority (subject to council approval), and include:

1. Purchasing a business and economic development CRM (Customer Relationship Management) software program subscription from Bludot
2. Entering into a consulting services agreement to contract for administrative support during the critical first-year implementation.

DISCUSSION

Background

Development of a new and more robust strategic plan has been undertaken to enhance our BR&E program and connections to our valued business community. A summary of the key areas of the plan were presented to the EDA at the June 1 meeting. The EDA was provided an update of the project and staff discussed the recommendation to purchase a CRM (customer

relationship management) program database to support the BR&E actions and goals. The EDA board was very supportive of the plan and the acquisition of a CRM, which would be funded through the EDA. Subsequently, at their August 3, 2026 meeting, the EDA gave approval of both recommended actions, subject to city council approval.

This BR&E project has involved the Golden Shovel Agency providing technical and marketing expertise to the city staff and economic development commission, with the goal of enhancing our outreach and improve communications with the local business community.

Project phases are summarized below, with the first step being the adoption of the strategic plan.

- Creating a new BR&E outreach strategy
- Developing a business engagement campaign
- Implementing special software for tracking and follow-up actions
- Marketing collateral materials

As we have now completed the preparation of the strategy plan, the work of the EDC and especially a five-member work group of commissioners (Megan Larson, Denise Firkus, Liz Lovin, Doug McCulloch, and Ritesh Patel) should be recognized for providing input and comments on the drafting of the comprehensive strategy plan.

CRM - Bludot

City staff, with assistance of EDC commissioners Liz Lovin and Ritesh Patel, both having experience in the use of a CRM systems, helped evaluate various CRM software programs. It was the consensus to recommend going with Bludot, as their CRM program is specifically designed for business and economic development and would greatly assist with tracking and reporting on BR&E actions and issues.

As background, staff has not had a software database or tracking system for business and economic development. Having a database and program that can manage and track business issues, enable prompt responses and resources, share information, and maintain an accurate business directory is important to the enhanced BR&E program.

Included is the proposal from Bludot for a subscription to their Cloud-based program, showing the tools that would be available including a comprehensive business directory that links to both our email system and the Think Shoreview website. Additionally, Golden Shovel and Bludot have a close working relationship throughout the country. Annual cost of the Bludot program is \$9,000, which would be funded through the existing EDA fund balance. This cost includes the base CRM product, business database, and the public-facing business directory.

Administrative support

Perhaps the most critical issue directly relating to a successful launch and progress of the BR&E strategy plan is making sure there is sufficient staffing support to oversee its implementation. The two primary staff to the EDA are the community development director and assistant community development director, with both positions having responsibilities that do not adequately provide work capacity to coordinate and manage the BR&E program. The original plan going into the development of the strategy plan was to rely on the existing intern position supported by the EDA. While, we have had great experiences with the ongoing internship program, most people in the position are active students or recently graduated, which means they have limited hours available and/or actively seeking employment

opportunities. This poses challenges of continuity and could delay or setback progress in getting the program off the ground.

Additionally, as we better understood the scope of the required work and necessary steps to implement the program it became more clear that a part-time student intern may not have the necessary experience or skillset. The year-one implementation actions laid out in the BR&E strategy plan require some level of project management experience and communications skills.

In exploring various options for support, we arrived at the conclusion that the best approach would be to seek an experienced and knowledgeable firm or person to contract with for services to successfully implement the BR&E plan. Consulting firms, including Golden Shovel, would be very costly and even this arrangement would likely require more day to day involvement from staff.

It was during discussions with the EDC about staffing resources that we were approached by Elizabeth Lovin, an EDC commissioner and recently retired corporate executive about her interest in providing her services to help with the implementation. Subsequently, staff and Liz Lovin had a number of discussions about the scope of work that would be necessary for the year-one implementation. We arrived at the conclusion that a contract for services agreement would be a better option than hiring her as a part-time hourly employee. A contractual arrangement can clearly lay out the specific work and expectations and would be crafted as a 12-month agreement. Ms. Lovin has established an LLC for this contractual arrangement, and would be required to submit invoices verifying the hours and work done (similar to other consultant contracts we have in place).

Staff, in consultation with Golden Shovel, reviewed the month by month actions outlined in the year-one implementation of the BR&E strategy plan and estimated the number of hours that will likely be required to accomplish the first year work. Below is a breakout of the estimated costs for a 12-month period:

Pay

- \$60 paid hourly – invoiced to the city

2026

- Start second week of September – 18 weeks for remainder of 2026 @ 20-25/hrs weekly
- 2026 cost: \$21,600 - \$27,000 (estimated 360-450 hours)

2027

- January to September – 33 weeks @ 18/hrs weekly
- 2027 cost: \$35,640 (estimated 594 hours)

Year-one implementation – total: \$57,240 - \$62,640

Funding source

As stated earlier, it is recommended that the EDA fund 240 cover the costs of both the Blutot CRM program and a contract services agreement. While the EDA fund balance is sufficient to

take on these cost items, there are some additional savings or resources that benefit the EDA fund 240 and can offset the cost of these proposed actions.

This past year, as part of our agreement with Golden Shovel for maintaining the Think Shoreview website, they will now be the responsible party to ensure compliance with ADA regulations. The firm AudioEye has been providing this ADA oversight for both the city and Think Shoreview websites. The EDA has paid a proportionate share of the AudioEye cost each year, so this change results in about a \$12,000 savings to the EDA fund starting in 2027 - essentially covering the added annual cost of the Blutot CRM software.

In addition, when the city completed the sale of the property for the Krew project to Enclave Companies and then paid off our obligation to the Metropolitan Council for the RALF loan, the difference between what the city received and what we paid provided a net gain of around \$60,000. This money has been added into the EDA fund 240 - which is the approximate cost of contracting for the BR&E first year implementation work.

RECOMMENDATION

At their most recent meeting, the economic development commission, officially voted to support and recommended the purchase of the Blutot CRM software. Through discussions with city staff, the EDC also fully supports providing sufficient resources to accomplish the strategy recommendations and implementation of the BR&E strategy plan.

As recommended by the economic development authority, the city council is asked to approve the following actions relating to the business retention and expansion (BR&E) strategy plan implementation:

1. Purchase of a business and economic development CRM software program subscription from Blutot at an annual cost of approximately \$9,000 to be paid through EDA fund 240.
2. Enter into a 12-month administrative support consulting services agreement with LLOV, LLC (Elizabeth Lovin) to coordinate the year-one implementation actions the BR&E strategy plan at an estimated not to exceed cost of \$63,000 paid from EDA fund 240.

ATTACHMENTS

[Blutot CRM - Shoreview Proposal](#)

[Shoreview BR&E Consulting Services Agreement](#)

[BR&E Strategy Plan - Year One Implementation Plan](#)