

Council approves coalition

Mankato expands Greater Mankato Growth

By Dan Linehan

dlinehan@mankatofreepress.com

MANKATO — The city of Mankato has since 1992 relied on an economic development group to market the city to potential businesses and help existing ones grow.

Now other cities and counties are clamoring to join the club — now called Greater Mankato Growth — and Mankato has given its go-ahead to the new group. The City Council voted 5 to 0 Monday to sign the new joint services agreement. Councilman Jack Considine and President Mike Laven were absent.

As of today, if Blue Earth County signs on during a morning meeting, one other county and six cities will have joined Greater Mankato Growth. They are: Eagle Lake, Lake Crystal, Le Sueur, Madison Lake, Mapleton, St. Peter and Nicollet County.

A press conference is slated for Wednesday to announce the new coalition.

It represents a longplanned but fundamental shift in Greater Mankato Growth's strategy from representing only Mankato and North Mankato — before it dropped out last December, at least — to a more regional focus.

Mankato will pay no more as a result of the new additions, but the eight new members will pay a lower per-capita cost for these marketing services than Mankato does.

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COALITION: Region could benefit

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Mankato pays \$2.75 for each of its residents whereas the new participants will pay \$ 1.05 per person through next year, which will increase to \$2.19 by 2012.

Blue Earth and Nicollet counties will pay a per- capita rate that doesn't include member cities.

Mankato City Manager Pat Hentges agreed Mankato should pay more per person because it will receive more benefit from the agreement. Its size will inevitably interest more prospective companies.

But adding the new members and their population base increases the chance that a business will be interested in the region as a whole. And what's good for one city is good for everyone in the regional marketplace, President and CEO Jonathan Zierdt told the Mankato City Council Monday.

In an earlier interview, Zierdt said other local governments have been asking to join the economic development partnership for more than six years.

The partnership won't replace local cities' chambers of commerce. It'll perform the economic development marketing that smaller governmentstypically haven'tdone as much of.

A big part of that will be an overhall of Greater Mankato Growth's Web site. Zierdt told the council that companies make almost all decisions about where to locate using online comparisons.

The new agreement will also aim to prevent jobpoaching regionwide just as it did between Mankato and North Mankato.

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