Re: Letter of Support for the Northside Economic Opportunity Network

Dear Rep. Ilhan Omar:

Please accept my letter of support on behalf of the SBA Minnesota District Office for the Northside Economic Opportunity Network (NEON) and its Food Incubator Center. NEON is a valuable partner and community resource in North Minneapolis serving BIPOC businesses and has operated as an SBA Accelerator.

NEON has launched a Food Incubator Center in response to critical community needs. Our understanding is that 40% of NEON’s clients are food entrepreneurs, and Northside residents spend nearly $30 Million per year on food outside of their community. NEON asserts that the North Minneapolis Food Economy is the 5th largest food desert in America and that North Minneapolis lacks community commercial kitchens despite the demand.

NEON’s solution for a Food Incubator Center represents an important opportunity for North Minneapolis and BIPOC Food Business owners. The Food Incubator Center fills a massive retail and food shortage gap within North Minneapolis that allows food entrepreneurs to retain and expand upon North Minneapolis resources that transfers to scaled businesses, job creation, a more vibrant economy and a pathway to building generational wealth.

The food business platform of space, tools, education, and financial support provided by NEON is critical in closing historical gaps. We support NEON in lifting up businesses and strengthening the local North Minneapolis Economy.

Respectfully Yours,

BRIAN
MCDONALD

Brian McDonald
District Director, U.S. SBA Minnesota District Office
April 27, 2021

Re: Letter of Support for the Northside Economic Opportunity Network

To The Honorable Rep. Ilhan Omar:

I, Esther Agbaje, supports a 5th Congressional Appropriation for the Northside Economic Opportunity Network (NEON) to advance its mission, goals, and programming.

NEON is a valuable and necessary asset within North Minneapolis serving BIPOC businesses across various areas and being a primary business resource for entrepreneurs. NEON has a long-standing history of service to businesses within the 5th Congressional District.

NEON has launched a Food Incubator Center in response to the North Minneapolis food desert and leakage issues. 40% of NEON’s clients are food entrepreneurs and Northside residents spend nearly $30 Million per year on food outside of their community. North Minneapolis Food Economy is the is the 5th largest food desert in America. Additionally, there are not shared community commercial kitchens in North Minneapolis despite the demand for it.

NEON’s Food Incubator Center is an important opportunity for North Minneapolis and BIPOC Food Business owners. The Food Incubator Center fills a massive retail and food shortage gap within North Minneapolis that allows food entrepreneurs to retain and expand upon North Minneapolis resources that transfers to scaled businesses, job creation, a more vibrant economy and a pathway to building generational wealth.

The food business platform of space, tools, education, and financial support NEON provides is critical in closing historical gaps. We urge you to strongly consider NEON for a 5th Congressional Earmark Appropriation as it will lift up so many businesses and strengthen the local North Minneapolis Economy.

Sincerely,

Esther Agbaje
State Representative
April 27, 2021

The Honorable Ilhan Omar
United States House of Representatives
1730 Longworth Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Omar,

I am writing to express my support for the appropriations request from the Northside Economic Opportunity Network (NEON) for the Food Incubator Center in North Minneapolis.

NEON is a valuable and necessary asset within North Minneapolis serving BIPOC businesses across various areas as a primary resource for entrepreneurs. NEON has a long-standing history of service to businesses within the 5th Congressional District.

NEON has launched a Food Incubator Center in response to the North Minneapolis food desert and retail leakage issues. 40% of NEON’s clients are food entrepreneurs and Northside residents spend nearly $30 million per year on food outside of their community. The North Minneapolis food economy is the 5th largest food desert in America.

Additionally, there are not shared community commercial kitchens in North Minneapolis despite the demand for it. NEON’s Food Incubator Center is an important opportunity for North Minneapolis and BIPOC food business owners. The Food Incubator Center fills a massive retail and food shortage gap within North Minneapolis that allows food entrepreneurs to retain and expand upon North Minneapolis resources, that ultimately transfer to scaled businesses, job creation, a more vibrant economy, and a pathway to building generational wealth.

The food business platform of space, tools, education, and financial support NEON provides is critical in closing historical gaps. We urge you to strongly consider NEON for a 5th Congressional Earmark Appropriation.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Jeremiah Ellison
City Council Member – 5th Ward
Minneapolis, MN
To Whom It May Concern:

Re: Funding Request from Northside Economic Opportunity Network (NEON)

It is with great pleasure that I write to you on behalf of the West Broadway Business and Area Coalition (WBC) to pledge our support for the funding request submitted by Northside Economic Opportunity Network (NEON).

WBC leads initiatives to bring businesses, non-profit organizations and neighbors together to create an inviting and vital West Broadway corridor that will transform the Northside into a thriving economic community.

We enthusiastically support NEON's application for funding the NEON Commercial Kitchen and Food Incubator Program. As a partner with NEON, we look forward to supporting business cohort collaborations with its new Food Incubator Program. Our collective and collaborative impact to be able to serve a diverse cross section of industries supporting the North Minneapolis economic ecosystem.

We have collaborated on a number of programs and initiatives together such as Black Friday On Broadway and the Northside Business Luncheons. Our collaborations with NEON, such as the Black Business Support Collective and MN Black owned, support businesses of targeted demographics.

Should you require any additional details of our working relationship with NEON or have any questions for myself, please do not hesitate to contact me at 612-353-5178 or email felicia@westbroadway.org. Thank you for your consideration of NEON's request, and best of luck to you in your deliberations of this bid.

Sincerely,

Felicia Perry
Executive Director
West Broadway Business and Area Coalition
RE: Letter of Support for the Northside Economic Opportunity Network

Dear Rep Ilhan Omar,

The Black Women’s Wealth Alliance, SBC fully supports a 5th Congressional Appropriation for the Northside Economic Opportunity Network (NEON) to advance its mission, goals and programming.

NEON is a valuable and necessary asset within North Minneapolis serving BIPOC businesses across various areas and being a primary business resource for entrepreneurs. NEON has a long-standing history of service to businesses within the 5th Congressional District.

NEON has launched a Food Incubator Center in response to the North Minneapolis food desert and leakage issues. 40% of NEON’s clients are food entrepreneurs and Northside residents spend nearly $30 Million per year on food outside of their community. North Minneapolis Food Economy is the is the 5th largest food desert in America. Additionally, there are not shared community commercial kitchens in North Minneapolis despite the demand for it.

NEON’s Food Incubator Center is an important opportunity for North Minneapolis and BIPOC Food Business owners. The Food Incubator Center fills a massive retail and food shortage gap within North Minneapolis that allows food entrepreneurs to retain and expand upon North Minneapolis resources that transfers to scaled businesses, job creation, a more vibrant economy and a pathway to building generational wealth.

The food business platform of space, tools, education, and financial support NEON provides is critical in closing historical gaps. We urge you to strongly consider NEON for a 5th Congressional Earmark Appropriation as it will lift up so many businesses and strengthen the local North Minneapolis Economy.

Respectfully,

Kenya McKnight-Ahad
President | CEO
Black Women’s Wealth Alliance, SBC
NEON's big plans for strengthening North Minneapolis

Apr 5, 2021, 6:47am CDT

Northside Economic Opportunity Network, an organization that supports entrepreneurs in North Minneapolis, has big plans to bolster community business and development in the near future.

Among the nonprofit's goals, NEON wants to develop a business incubator building for food-focused entrepreneurs, distribute loans from a new fund to developers of color, and purchase its 1007 and 1011 W. Broadway Ave. headquarters. These moves could catalyze commercial activity and wealth generation on the northside, NEON leadership said.

"Our vision is to transform North Minneapolis and the surrounding area into a prosperous, visible, sustainable and highly diverse multicultural community of entrepreneurs," said Warren McLean, president of NEON.
The network's planned 20,000-square-foot Food Entrepreneurship Incubation Center, designed by LSE Architects, would feature a large commercial kitchen, food storage space, and room for pop-ups and farmer's markets. It would also house NEON's food business assistance programs and feature a food photography studio.

The building would stand at 2110 23rd Ave. — currently a vacant parking lot between KMOJ 89.9 FM/NAZ and The Capri Theater — and would cost $1.5 million to develop, a third of which has already been raised, NEON said. The organization aims to break ground on the project in 2022.

The center makes sense for North Minneapolis, said Ann Fix-Yin, NEON's director of business development. Food entrepreneurs account for 40% of NEON's clients, and North Minneapolis has long languished as a food desert.

Aside from food scarcity, North Minneapolis is also burdened by a large number of untapped empty lots. While large developers haven't been chomping at the bit to build on the land, firms owned by people of color actually have interest — they simply don't have the resources to pursue deals, said Stephen Obayuwana, NEON vice president. That's why the organization collaborated with the Local Initiative Support Corp. to create the Northside Commercial Real Estate Revolving Loan Fund in December.

Anchored by a $1 million seed investment, NEON will distribute loans of up to $200,000 to developers of color for residential, commercial and mixed-use projects. The hope is to grow the fund to $5 million by 2023.

As for NEON obtaining ownership of its own building, the move is crucial, McLean said, because it will mean the organization can provide its services, like affording its clients economical office space, permanently. It would cost the network $2 million to purchase and renovate.

After acquisition, NEON plans to renovate the building to expand its space to 16,222 square feet, up from 6,560, which NEON estimates will boost its office provision revenue 247%.

More, NEON hopes to become a certified community development financial
institution — an organization that receives money from the federal government to provide loans for businesses in low income and ethnic-minority communities — later this year.

These plans come after demand for NEON's services skyrocketed in 2020. The economic impact of the pandemic and the unrest that followed the death of George Floyd in police custody drove NEON to provide twice the amount of technical assistance in 2020 than it did in 2019, and to disburse $3.8 million in grants and loans, up from $46,000. Much of the capital distribution uptick came from the organization's service as a Small Business Emergency Loan provider, McLean said.

The hope is these plans will aid in NEON's quest "to change North Minneapolis from a drive through to a destination," McLean said.

Iain Carlos
Reporter
Minneapolis / St. Paul Business Journal
Resurgent W. Broadway boasts $125 million in projects in north Minneapolis

As the Capri renovation nears an end, other projects are moving forward


NOVEMBER 15, 2020 — 3:59PM

Gabrielle Grier, managing director of Juxtaposition Arts on W. Broadway in north Minneapolis, was making business connections one morning this month as she toured the stunning resurrection of the Capri Theater at Penn Avenue and W. Broadway.

Director James Scott will reopen the century-old Capri Theater in January, after a $12.5 million overhaul that adds an exhibit and meeting space and outdoor plaza to the 260-seat theater.

“We have a theater, a workshop, a community hall and a serving pantry that will be used by Appetite for Change and other food preparers for events,” Scott said. “We hope to welcome 1,000 to 1,500 people a week to the Capri, creating a catalyst for more investment and growth along the W. Broadway corridor.”

Grier, an artist, succeeded founder DeAnna Cummings at the generation-old arts institution. Juxtaposition Arts, known as JXTA, is set to break ground next year on its own $14 million renovation. It needs more space to instruct, create, display and sell the works of hundreds of students and affiliated professionals.

She found a partner just up the street in the Capri, which wants to showcase North Side artists. The Capri has help raising its capital from mostly private stakeholders through its nonprofit owner, the 60-year-old Plymouth Christian Youth Center, next door.

JXTA and the Capri are the veritable bookends that border an unprecedented $125 million worth of commercial-residential projects underway or planned for 2021 between Bryant and Penn on W. Broadway, said Erik Hansen, the city’s director of economic development.

“We are about to experience a building boom on W. Broadway,” said Hansen, 46, a Minneapolis native who remembers far leaner times when he was trying to drum up business amid vacant store fronts.

The W. Broadway corridor experienced modest progress in redevelopment and business expansion after the 2008-2009 recession. Now, that has given way to a redevelopment wave that portends to be the biggest building surge ever on the near North Side.

“JXTA is building a new state-of-the-art campus on the corner of Emerson and Broadway avenues,” Grier said. “We are reimagining the economic reality of young people in the creative arts, injecting vitality, curiosity and Black excellence in the creative economy of Minnesota.”

Tara Watson, nurse and chiropractor, also owns the Anytime Fitness franchise and a home-health agency in buildings she has renovated in recent years at Penn and Broadway, just north of the Capri. Her business mentor was the late Dr. John Williams, a dentist on lower W. Broadway, who returned to Minneapolis after an all-star football career for the University of Minnesota and in the NFL.
Watson is chairwoman of the West Broadway Business Association. It has worked with business owners, the city, developers and Northside Economic Opportunity Network (NEON) to get more absentee-owned buildings, some abandoned, into local hands and redeveloped.

Warren McLean, chief executive of NEON, said he's optimistic despite the COVID-19 pandemic and protests and riots that damaged several businesses in the neighborhood. The damage was limited by business owners and residents who turned back looters and arsonists for several nights in late May after the police killing of George Floyd in south Minneapolis.

"We have major catalytic projects going on W. Broadway," McLean said. "The Capri Theater on the north end. The Jay and Rose Phillips Foundation, Tri-Construction, and New Rules just broke ground on the 927 building on W. Broadway. And developer Tim Baylor is about to break ground on Satorii Village, a project that consists of market-rate housing, affordable housing and senior housing. Cub Foods has recommitted to W. Broadway as has U.S. Bank, both damaged during the protests. Cub will institute a commercial bakery that will bring jobs."

Some details on those projects:

- Satorii Village, a $60 million housing, 198-unit, three-phase project near the Cub store on the south side of lower W. Broadway, on which Baylor expects to break ground next spring after five years of planning, property acquisition, rezoning and fundraising among equity partners and lenders. Baylor, 66, is owner of several local McDonald's restaurants and a veteran real estate developer who lives in Minneapolis.

"I chose that location ... because of the goods and services on Broadway, Cub Foods, public transportation, a stable neighborhood with homeownership," Baylor said. "We need to build what the city has indicated it wants. More density. I've been pushing the city to incentivize developers to build more market-rate housing." The development also will include affordable units and senior housing.

Baylor is negotiating with the city for up to a $4 million loan for infrastructure improvements that would be repaid through increased property taxes on the mixed-income housing development, including a senior complex.

- The 927 W. Broadway building, a $7 million overhaul, including an $800,000 city loan, of a dilapidated commercial building that will be the new headquarters for the Jay & Rose Phillips Family Foundation; headquarters for Black-owned Tri-Construction of the Northside, and Chris Webley's New Rules, which is expanding from the former corporate manager's flagship collaborative-workspace site on Lowry Avenue.

- The still-developing Resolute, scheduled for construction next summer, several blocks southwest of the Capri, will be 65 apartments, a coffee shop, hair salons and a day-care center that will replace a former pizza shop and parking lot at 1300 W. Broadway.

Ian Alexander, an attorney and developer who lives nearby, said Resolute's housing will be affordable for working class and young professionals. Damaris Hollingsworth, principal architect at Design By Melo, who is working on the Resolute, said neighbors have contributed to the project.

"There has to be a complete and holistic ecosystem; housing and jobs that pay a livable wage" and proximity to education, stores and entertainment, she said. "The projects where I am the lead designer ... [are] really about housing and commercial and retail."
Neal St. Anthony has been a Star Tribune business columnist/reporter since 1984.

Dee DePass is a business reporter for the Star Tribune. She spent the last four years covering Minnesota's manufacturing and mining industries. She previously covered the economy, workplace issues and banking.
April 27, 2021

Re: Letter of Support for the Northside Economic Opportunity Network

Dear Rep. Omar:

As a co-chair of the Northside Economic Opportunity Network’s (NEON’s) Capital Campaign Committee and Executive Director of the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) Twin Cities, I fully support NEON’s efforts to advance its mission, goals and programming.

NEON is a valuable and necessary asset within North Minneapolis, serving BIPOC businesses and operating as a primary business resource for entrepreneurs. More specifically, NEON has a longstanding history of service to businesses within the 5th Congressional District. LISC Twin Cities has proudly partnered with NEON to support businesses through the COVID-19 recession and provide assistance to businesses seeking to buy their properties.

NEON has launched a Food Incubator Center in response to the North Minneapolis food desert, the fifth largest food desert in the United States. Forty percent of NEON’s clients are food entrepreneurs, while Northside residents spend nearly $30 Million per year on food outside of their community. Additionally, there are no shared community commercial kitchens in North Minneapolis, despite the demand for them.

NEON’s Food Incubator Center is an important opportunity for North Minneapolis and BIPOC owners of food business. The Food Incubator Center fills a massive retail and food gap within North Minneapolis and assists food entrepreneurs to retain and expand upon North Minneapolis resources. That in turn translates to scaled businesses, job creation, a more vibrant economy and a pathway to building generational wealth.

The food business platform of space, tools, education, and financial support NEON provides is critical in closing historical gaps. LISC Twin Cities urges you to support NEON for Community Project Funding in the 5th Congressional District that will lift up many businesses and individuals and strengthen the local North Minneapolis Economy.

Peter McLaughlin, Executive Director and
Co-Chair of NEON’s Capital Campaign