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Economic Recovery Special Committee September 20, 2022  
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**WAYNE:** --represent Legislative District 13, which is north Omaha and northeast Douglas County. I serve as the Chair of this committee. We'll start off by having members of the committee intro-- do self-introductions, starting with my right with Senator McKinney.

**McKINNEY:** Good evening. Senator Terrell McKinney, District 11, north Omaha.

**HILGERS:** Mike Hilgers, District 21, which is north, northwest Lincoln.

**McDONNELL:** Mike McDonnell, LD 5, south Omaha.

**WAYNE:** We also have with us Trevor Fitzgerald, who is our legal counsel, and Angenita, who is our clerk. This after-- this evening, the committee will receive-- well, first, I also want to recognize Olsson staff who are in the room. They're the consultant that we hired. So Olsson staff, please raise your hand in case people might have questions afterwards.

**TREVOR FITZGERALD:** How about the hallway?

**WAYNE:** And there's a lot out in the hallway and I'll explain that here in a little bit. This evening, the committee will receive public testimony regarding potential uses of funds for the Economic Recovery Act, LB1024. Before we begin, I want to just provide a little bit of background on the process and the timeline. LB1024 required the Legislature contract out with an outside company to conduct a study on potential uses for ARPA funds in north and south Omaha. The committee selected Olsson after a RFP process to conduct the study and has been working with Olsson for the last few months, developing the process and procedures for public engagement, reviewing and scoring potential projects and much more. The study is slated to be completed in December. In order to facilitate timely submissions on potential projects and ideas, Olsson has created a website, [www.economic--omahaeconomicrecovery.com](http://www.economic--omahaeconomicrecovery.com). Again, [www.omahaeconomicrecovery.com](http://www.omahaeconomicrecovery.com), which will serve as the official portal for submissions of ideas to be considered as part of the study. We are currently talking to a couple of community organizations regarding some potential access points in the community where if you don't have Internet access, you will be able to go in there and log-- and use their facility to submit or upload your potential idea or ideas that you may have. Throughout this process, you'll hear me say program or project. They're interchangeable. I'll also include the word idea. We are completely

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looking for any idea, all ideas and our goal as the community is to find the one idea or two ideas that we haven't thought of or we haven't heard from the community. And so if you have an idea, if you have a program or a project, please feel, feel free to submit. But I will tell you, as from the beginning of this, we are looking at transformational, we are looking at generational wealth creating, and something that will transform the east Omaha area. You can find additional information about LB1024 on the website, including project evaluation framework that has been approved by the special committee, funding eligibility guidelines for the federal ARPA funds, and then materials that we received from a stakeholder engagement process that Olsson conducted last week. There are also members outside of this room to the left in I think it's 10-- or 121, Room 121. If you have an idea, but have no idea how to put it on paper, we are providing architects, engineers and I believe the city of Omaha is also here to talk about zoning or any other permitting requirements just so we can figure out-- so you have all the resources you have to be able to put an idea together and submit it to us. As far as why we started with stakeholder engagement first, it's really simple. It's timing. When we got this process going, it was about August, mid August, and school had just started for most of the district around here. So trying to reserve a facility of this size that has all the requirements for ADA and microphones and to be able to record-- we are transcribing all these for people who aren't here. It's almost impossible sometimes to find a facility at the start of a school year. But rather than wait and slow down the process, we started community stakeholder engagement meetings with community leaders, business leaders, and philanthropic community just to keep this process going. So it wasn't that we thought the public input was least important and less important, it was simply a facility and timing issue as far as getting facilities ready and getting, and getting things going. On the back table-- this is an official Legislature hearing so on the back table of the-- in the room, you'll find pink testifier sheets. If you are planning to testify today, please fill out and hand it to Angenita in the front when you come up. This makes sure we keep accurate records of this hearing. If you do not wish to testify, but want your presence to be recorded, please fill out the green sheet in the back of the room. Also, I would note the Legislature's policy that any letter submitted for the record must be received by the committee 5 day-- 5 p.m. prior day to the hearing. Any handouts submitted by testifiers will also be a part of the record. We will start this hearing by having some brief remarks from Olsson, providing an overview on the project submission process. After that, we will have opening statements, which we'll,

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which we'll take from the public. This is an interim hearing so there is no proponent or opponent. It's just testifiers. We want to hear ideas, but even if you testify today, you must make sure you go to the portal to submit your idea. That's where we're categorizing everything and making sure we have everything together. We will also be using the three-minute light system. This is what we use in the Legislature quite often. And so when your testimony begins, there'll be a green light on the table. It will turn yellow when-- that's the one-minute warning. And at the red light, we will ask you to wrap, wrap up your final thoughts. This is to make sure everybody has an equal opportunity to speak. I will remind everyone, including senators, to be turn your phone to vibrate or silence your phones. And with that, we will start this interim study with Mike.

**TREVOR FITZGERALD:** If they could sit up front.

**WAYNE:** Oh, yeah. And if you're planning on testifying, up here to the front to my left, there is a row. That's going to be the on-deck testifier sheets-- or area. So if you're planning on testifying, come up. And how many people are planning on testifying today? OK. So make your way up to the front and we'll kind of go in that order. And then when you're done, you'll be able to clear out. Itzel, your light is on on your phone.

**ITZEL LOPEZ:** Oh.

**WAYNE:** Thank you.

**MICHAEL PIERNICKY:** Thank you, Senator Wayne, and senators of the special committee. I am Michael Piernicky, M-i-c-h-a-e-l P-i-e-r-n-i-c-k-y, and I'm the project manager for Olsson for the coordination plan for the Economic Recovery Act, also known or referred to as LB1024. I'm going to just spend a couple of minutes here and give you a brief overview of the program and the process we've gone through and then where the process will head. I'll describe some of the opportunities that you have here tonight with staff from our consulting team and then certainly we'll get to the testifying portion of the hearing here. And so a brief overview of the overall process. We were hired by the Nebraska Legislature in July of this year. And so we then went ahead and did a-- basically a data dive into understanding the demographics and issues in north and south Omaha from a professional's view. We also then were setting up meetings with community leaders in north and south Omaha that we conducted in, in August. In that visioning workshop, we worked with community members

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to identify strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities. And then we also had discussions about ideas the community has to address some of those things moving forward. Some of that information was then pulled forward and aligned with part of the screening criteria, which we can discuss out in the lobby at the station for that. But we wanted to make sure that it aligns with what we heard from the community. Today, we're here at the roll-out of the public meetings. They started yesterday. We had one here during the afternoon from 11 to 1. We're here at Metro South Campus from 5 to 7 this evening. Tomorrow, we'll be-- in the evening from 5 to 7, we'll be at the OPS TAC Center in north Omaha and then we'll wrap up on Thursday with another afternoon meeting from 11 to 1 at Metro Community College's North Campus and the Culinary Arts Institute. This overall process is really to roll out the information that we've received from the community so far, build that base of knowledge, but then also to talk about the application process for ideas and project and proposal submissions. Senator Wayne mentioned it once already. Everything that we do, all the information that you see in the hallway, all of the boards, as well as a bunch of additional technical information and the submittal process needs to be done at omaharecovery-- omahaeconomicrecovery.com. Everything-- we're driving everybody to that website. That's the one spot where I would tell everybody to go. Getting through that, the submission process-- and we can help you through that tonight-- after you get through the process and go to the stations out in the hall to get some of the background information, we also have three groups of engineers and architects that are available for 15 or 20 minutes to sit down and discuss your proposals, your ideas, your, your projects, to be able to provide background information to help answer some of the questions that will be on the submittal portal so that we have that base amount of information. So we have a good idea of all of the different submissions so that we can evaluate those when we go through the process. The process from tonight forward, the submission portal will close Sunday, October 9, Sunday, October 9 at 11:59 p.m. That is a hard date and the reason-- admittedly, while we would prefer to have it longer, that's three weeks to go through the process to put submissions in. But that literally gives us five weeks to take all the information in from all of the community submissions, put them through an evaluation process, document that, and then create a draft coordination plan document for the senators of the special committee. That final document will be provided to the senators in December and then they will use that document as they move forward into the legislative session when the next Legislature seats in January of next year. Once again, I want to thank you for your time here tonight. I do

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want to mention we very specifically and thoughtfully set up the setup tonight where the hearing can be going on as well as folks can be out in the hallway getting specific questions answered with regards to scoring criteria, submissions, the process we've gone through so that we're able to try and answer as many of your questions as possible tonight. But certainly thank you for coming. We appreciate all of your information you've provided so far and certainly we're looking forward to seeing great submissions from you as a community. So with that, I'll wrap up my comments. And certainly if you have any questions about tonight or the ongoing process, find me. I'll be here all evening. Once again, I'm Mike Piernicky. I'm with Olsson and I'm the project manager, so. Senator Wayne, back to you.

**WAYNE:** Thank you. And we'll start this hearing off with the first testifier. Welcome to yours-- committee. This has been a two-day struggle trying to-- I'm used to saying Urban Affairs for four years and so. I usually say welcome to Urban Affairs and so--

**TREVOR FITZGERALD:** It's actually six years.

**WAYNE:** Six years, you're right. Thank you.

**MARCOS MORA VARRIENTOS:** Testing, two, two, two. All right. I gave them to her.

\_\_\_\_\_: Oh, okay.

**MARCOS MORA VARRIENTOS:** OK. Well, good afternoon. My name is Marcos Mora Varrientos, M-a-r-c-o-s, Mora, M-o-r-a, Varrientos, V-a-r-r-i-e-n-t-o-s. My family has lived in south Omaha since 1925. I'm a board member of the South Omaha Business District and the Latino-- part of the Latino Economic Development Council. And I'm here today to advocate for a funding project proposal in south Omaha for the Plaza de la Raza, 24th Street and 25th Street, that will be transformational and create an enormous impact for years to come. Latinos have become-- now become the majority-minority in south Omaha and it's my love for this family-based community that it's time to make a difference in this forgotten sector of town. So many areas are being developed with new infrastructure, but what about south Omaha? This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, considered this \$35 million project proposal by the Latino Economic Development Council that will be best-served project because it's in the heart of the hardest-hit area from the pandemic. It will benefit all of the South Omaha Business District, not just one entity. Did you know that nearly 5

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million Hispanic-owned businesses in the United States contribute more than \$800 billion to the American economy annually? Hispanic-employer businesses employ about 1 million workers with more than \$100 billion in annual payroll. In the decade preceding the pandemic, the number of Hispanic business owners increased 35 percent, compared to an increase of just 1 percent among non-Hispanic business owners. I share this economic information because our local businesses are not any different than the statistics of all under these statistics. And with this ARPA development money, we can bring tourism, jobs and economic wealth to south Omaha. In conclusion, we know there will be a number of proposals, many self-serving that already have funding resources. I'm here today because this project is by the people and for the people and we will turn \$1 into \$10 because that's our business nature. Let's make a difference by supporting the project by the economic development council for the plaza at 24th Street and 25th Street. And that's my written testimony. And this doesn't have a lot of detail, but when we do propose it, it will have a lot more detail. I've shared with many people kind of what we have in mind and I appreciate all the senators, legal counsels, and all the hard work you guys have been doing. I know there is just so much to absorb. I know for us, it's a learning process. The Latino Economic Development Council is a group of us that all live and been in south Omaha and just we wanted that voice and we're going to submit an incredible project that we hope you will support and I appreciate your time. Thank you.

**WAYNE:** Thank you. Any question from the committee? Seeing none, thank you. Next testifier. Welcome to your Economic Recovery Committee.

**ROBERT PATTERSON:** Thank you. My name is Robert Patterson, R-o-b-e-r-t P-a-t-t-e-r-s-o-n, and I'm representing Kids Can Community Center at 49th and Q, soon to be 48th and Q once construction on our new building is completed. For a long time, south Omahans, you probably know us better from our original name, Social Settlement Association, and we're proud next year to be celebrating our 115th anniversary in Omaha. Two elements I wanted to highlight today, so I'll be very brief on both. First, when we talk about infrastructure, we're not just talking about streets and bridges and sidewalks. It's our kids. And it may sound cliché to say these kids are our future, but it's not a metaphor; it's a literal fact. Today's children are tomorrow's citizens. So investing in our children, especially the littlest ones, is the best return on investment that we can make. A lot of us in this room, including myself, owe much of our life to the lottery at our birth; where I grew up, my access to education, the resources that

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were available to my parents. We also know that many of the families, particularly in east Omaha, don't have those same opportunities and the wealth gap, gap will increase that divide. At Kids Can, we believe every child should have an equitable opportunity and successful start in life and for education, no matter the color of their skin, the paycheck of their parents, or the zip code they happen to live in. So we want to be part of that investment in our kids, but we also know that we don't work in a silo. We can't do it alone. So we are aspiring to grow our partnerships with those that share that vision, providing shared childcare, providing early childhood education for families and employees both in south and north Omaha. The other important piece that's embedded in that-- in this vision is that childcare is a necessary and critical piece of a thriving workforce. If the pandemic taught us anything over the past two years, is that dependable childcare is needed so our parents continue, continue to maintain their employment, businesses can grow, and our economy, economy can prosper. The second smaller item that we'll be proposing is investing in a athletic field on the southeast corner of our property. While this is something that we could be using for our own programs during the day, we want to actually make sure it's a community-based field for our neighbors, partnering organizations and sports leagues on evenings and weekends. As you know, there can't be enough safe outdoor recreational space in south Omaha so we want to take advantage and leverage the land that we have and utilize some of the funding available for this opportunity. Thank you for your time and with that, I'm open to any questions.

**WAYNE:** Thank you. Questions from the committee? Seeing none, thank you for being here. Remember that O-- [www.omahaeconomicrecovery.com](http://www.omahaeconomicrecovery.com) will be the official portal-- thank you-- for the online applications. Thank you. Welcome to your special Economic Recovery Committee.

**LINA STOVER:** Thank you. Good afternoon. My name is Lina T. Stover, L-i-n-a S-t-o-v-e-r, and I am here representing Heartland Worker Center. I serve as the executive director of this important nonprofit and I am here to support the Latino Economic Development Plan. And I am here to support it because one of the things that I appreciate about this plan is that there is a plan to involve the community in figuring out all the details. So when Marcos says that it is by the community and for the community, I can tell you that one of the important pieces of our proposal is to include the constituents of the Heartland Workers Center that are coming from all kinds of different backgrounds so that they can have a say on the details on, on what it looks like so we can really serve them. So La Plaza Nebraska will be

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serving the families that I, that I represent, and it will provide a space for all of us to create more community, more safe community and communities where we can celebrate each other's achievements. So thank you for that, simple but straight to the point. Any questions?

**WAYNE:** Any questions from the committee? Seeing none, thank you for being here. Next testifier. We did not say that you couldn't come more than once, so welcome back to the Economic Recovery Committee.

**ITZEL LOPEZ:** I think Senator Justin Wayne just likes the microphone as much as Itzel Lopez. There you go. All right, so buenas tardes. My name is Itzel Lopez, I-t-z-e-l L-o-p-e-z. So talking about generational wealth, right? So in my day job, I'm the vice president of advancement and community relations at the AIM Institute. That's an innovative, not-for-profit community with a mission to grow a strong and diverse community. I'm currently participating the Opportunity Corp's Woman in STEAM, which is a ten-month education and professional development program designed for women who are working in the industries of STEAM. Why do I say all of this? Well, today I'm here to support the collective efforts led by the Latino Economic Development Council, like I mentioned yesterday, regarding the need for community public spaces along the South Omaha Business District. I personally foresee there's a huge need for that. The AIM Institute currently is the only nonprofit institution training participants in south Omaha to answer a high-demand, high-career, high-wage opportunity in technology. I started by saying generational wealth. Well, not everyone wants to own a business. We also need to get people in high-demand job opportunities. With the recent passing of LB1112, known as the Computer Science and Technology Education Act, and the forthcoming funding from LB1024, we have an opportunity to offer all of our technical training outside of the school setting. But guess what? There's not enough community spaces to hold an average ten-week-long training that are workforce ready, inclusively located and welcoming to all. The vision of the AIM Institute is to create a thriving community where everyone can pursue a rewarding tech career and we can train 125 individuals for \$250,000. As someone who was undocumented, I know what it's like to be faced with enormous challenges and discrimination and poverty and I also know what having access to outstanding technology education can do to someone. It can change people's lives. I have benefited from it and I want other people that look like me to have access to this amazing training. This bill will impact the entire community and I know it-- with everyone talking about the shortage of workers, well, there's an unfilled tech job shortage and we can definitely create an opportunities to address



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the high unemployment and the underemployment in certain areas, some of the historically excluded populations. We're trying to close this gap. And so I'll end with this: the Latino Economic Development Council is doing all these projects along the South Omaha Business District. Community spaces are in demand. Spaces like tonight where we serve, because again, there are not enough community spaces like this in south Omaha to host things like this or others. AIM has funding to have training and we don't have spaces in south Omaha to conduct those trainings. So the efforts of the Latino Economic Development Council to create spaces for our community that our public spaces are really needed. And I can foresee that not only as a resident of south Omaha, but also as a leader in this community. Thank you.

**WAYNE:** Thank you. Any questions from the committee? Seeing none, thank you for being here. Next testifier.

**MONIKA PHILP:** Hello. Thank you for having me. My name is Monika Philp, M-o-n-i-k-a P-h-i-l-p, and I'm here to represent AIM Institute. I'm the director of leadership and member development at the AIM Institute and as Itzel mentioned, we're a nonprofit [INAUDIBLE] growth of Omaha's tech sector for more than 30 years. AIM's vision is to create a thriving community where anyone can pursue a rewarding tech career. Our programs promote diversity and inclusion in tech sector by making educational opportunities and career training available to all, from elementary school to adulthood. I was born in Poland. I came to the U.S. through a Diversity Visa Lottery program when I was ten years old. As a little girl from Poland, we were on the edge of poverty and homelessness. Going through challenges and adversity as a child, I understand what it feels like when someone helps you along the way. That's why I made it my mission to give back to those that need it. I'm grateful that I get to do this work through the AIM Institute. AIM's mission is to grow a strong and diverse tech talent community through career development, educational programs, and outreach. Our mission is more relevant now than ever before. Technology is leading the way and is changing everything. It's also planting opportunities everywhere. Unfortunately, those opportunities are not available to all. AIM's mission is to provide those opportunities to everyone, regardless of their age or economic background. AIM is connecting leaders and communities to inspire positive change. We are connecting opportunities and resources to the underrepresented, underserved and underemployed. What makes AIM unique is that we have over 30 years of experience growing the tech community. We know that, that there is the tech gap, but there is also the diversity gap. There's also the soft-skill, also known as human skills, gap. And there's also the

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first job in tech challenge. This is why today, with the forthcoming funding from LB1024, AIM would like to train 125 people for \$250,000. Our approach will include the following steps. Our IT Leadership Academy will address the soft-skills gap. During this program, participants will learn new communication skills and relationship-building techniques, along with hearing from today-- some of today's IT leaders. Technical training will provide the skills needed to enter the tech workforce and then tech career coaching is our one-on-one guidance provided by the experience AIM career coach that will support participants along the way to help them get into their first tech job. Help us connect the untapped talent in south Omaha to the life-changing opportunities. Together, let's build the community we need for the future we want. Thank you.

**WAYNE:** Thank you. Any question from the committee? Thank you for being here.

**MONIKA PHILP:** Thank you.

**WAYNE:** Next testifier.

**LUIS JIMENEZ:** Luis Jimenez, 2709 Dewey Avenue. Thank you for your time.

**WAYNE:** Will you spell your name?

**LUIS JIMENEZ:** Oh, L-u-i-s, last name, J-i-m-e-n-e-z. This is a very important work for the committee. You're not just doling out money that you got from the Feds. You are going to change people's lives. I want to talk about two organizations: Culxr House, spelled C-u-l-x-r H-o-u-s-e, and then Omaha Arts Council. Culxr House is on a qualified census tract on North 24th Street and it's also on a-- in a BID so our ask would be about the property. Right now, it's currently owned by, by Mr. Charles Lindhorst [PHONETIC], who is interested in selling this property at 3414 N. 24th Street [SIC]. I looked at Dodge's and it's-- the improvements are 82,400 and the land is 4,000. And then also a property right next to it is 30,000 for the improvements, 1,300 for the land. So what we want to do is get help to transfer ownership from, from Charles-- we call him Chuck-- from Chuck to the art director at Culture House. His name is Marcey Yates. And there-- so that total is \$1,117 and \$700 plus vacating the alley in between the two buildings. The alley would be vacated only for vehicles. We would still have the pedestrian be able to go through it. And recently, the Omaha turnback tax supported its programs. The African Unity Fund at

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OCF supported their programs. It is something that if you support it, it would be transformational in, in this area. Omaha Arts Council is at 33rd and Franklin and that's a dilapidated building. It caught fire during the pandemic and that's how it got transferred to our ownership at Omaha Arts Council. It was a community building and we want to turn it into a art center, bringing art to the community. But it's, it's going to need a lot of work and so we would also be asking for a capital improvements, possibly programmatics. But those two organizations, arts and Culxr, they would fit into the area. The area is already zoned residential, a little bit of mixed use. Anyway, thank you for your time.

**WAYNE:** Thank you for coming today. Any questions from the committee? Seeing none, thank you for being here. Next testifier.

**CARLA RIZZO:** Good evening. Thank you for taking the time to listen to the community. My name is Carla Rizzo. That's C-a-r-l-a, Rizzo, R-i-z-z-o, and I am the CEO at Completely Kids. First, I'm going to echo many of the comments that my colleague, Robert Patterson made from Kids Can and not waste my very limited time with those again, but he's exactly right. If you aren't familiar with Completely Kids, we're a local nonprofit that serves approximately 2,500 kids and families, mostly in north and south Omaha, every year. Our core services are youth development of afterschool and summer programs that are supporting academic and social, social/emotional development, teen employment, weekend food, mental health services, and adult education to address generational poverty. We really strive to be holistic in our approach to help kids and families attain access to the knowledge, skills and resources to achieve their goals. Our main facility is on 26th and Saint Mary's Avenue, but we reach kids in ten OPS school buildings, three homeless shelters and four community locations, all located in ARPA QCT neighborhoods. Recently we were required-- we acquired property on the corner of 24th Avenue and Saint Mary's Avenue, almost right in the middle of north and south Omaha. We believe this is the perfect location to work with our community partners to provide access to resources that will transform the trajectory of people's lives. This new location will provide additional adult education, mental health, early childhood care and education, communities, building services, and so much more. This project includes a public-private partnership to leverage the dollars and bullpens to create something that could not have on its own. Completely Kids has spent decades building relationships and listening to the needs of our kids and families, and we have a reputation with them built on trust and accountability. The last thing I will say is

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that we know that access to high-quality, affordable childcare and early childhood services are one of the least talked about and most important issues in economic development. While we're all moving towards strategies to address the wealth gap, please don't forget the workers of today and the future workers, our children, that adds so much potential to our great city. Our population is no different than any other population. They just need access to those knowledge, skills and resources to achieve their dreams. An investment in Completely Kids is an investment in our QCT neighborhoods. We will be asking for \$8 million to support this \$20 million project. We look forward to submitting a proposal and thank you in advance for your consideration.

**WAYNE:** Thank you for being here. Any questions from the committee? Seeing none, thank you for being here. Welcome to your Economic Recovery Committee.

**MARTY MARTINEZ:** Good evening. My name is Marty Martinez. Marty, M-a-r-t-y, Martinez, M-a-r-t-i-n-e-z. I'm a lifelong resident of south Omaha and have several suggestions here. I believe it would be a great investment to provide scholarships to students at Metropolitan Community College in the areas of needs such as cybersecurity, fire science, law enforcement, healthcare, future education and vocational-- the vocational trades. The cost per year as a full-time student here at Metropolitan Community College is \$3,834. And I think that would be a great investment to go and help the marginalized or for those students that want to try to earn a live-- better living. By providing these scholarships, we can close the income gap and provide the services for the professions that are in need. Secondly, we need to provide affordable housing. I think we need to look at areas that are dilapidated and areas that we can go and try to improve and build affordable homes. I would partner with the vocational trades at Metropolitan Community College to give students the opportunity for hands on to go and build a house. And lastly, I believe south Omaha badly needs a tiered parking garage. If we had better parking in south Omaha, we could go and accommodate the patrons that come to south Omaha and shop there and spend their money. Again, thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to present today.

**WAYNE:** Thank you. Any questions from the committee? Seeing none, thank you for being here. Next testifier. Welcome to your Economic Recovery Committee.

**KIMARA SNIPES:** Thank you very much, Senators, and my name is Kimara Snipes, K-i-m-a-r-a S-n-i-p-e-s. And I just want to start off by

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saying thank you for all of the just extremely hard work I know that you are put into this process. It is greatly appreciated. I just have four quick requests. Our mission at the alliance is to improve south Omaha neighborhoods and we do that through communication, communication, collaboration, empowerment and promoting positive perceptions. I do not have specific project ideas, but it is my hope that as you put thought into this, that whatever is created there are produced ways to leverage money to create unrestricted revenue, something similar to the micro loan fund from the enterprise zones. Two, create opportunities to leverage funding for sustainable revenue opportunities in the future, some sort of fee for service or something like that. Number three, to make sure that we hold people and organizations accountable for making sure that whatever is invested in is inclusive of all people in south Omaha. There are forgotten-about communities in south Omaha and as someone who was also born and raised in south Omaha, I will state again that we just want to make sure that all people are included in these thought processes. And fourth, biased request, if you do not already, please have a representative at the South Omaha Neighborhood Alliance meetings to communicate with us what has happened during this process. We meet on the first Thursday of the month at 6:30 p.m. at the Kroc Center. Thank you.

**WAYNE:** I might have a question for you.

**KIMARA SNIPES:** Oh, sure.

**WAYNE:** I'm just [INAUDIBLE]. No questions, thank you for being here. Welcome to your economic committee.

**BEN SALAZAR:** Oh, come on. Just a second. How you doing? Good afternoon. My name is Ben Salazar, B-e-n S-a-l-a-z-a-r. I'm the director of La Casa del Pueblo, a 501(c)(3) and also a government grant director for Generation Diamond, also a 501(c)(3). I'm currently working as a consultant with the health department, county, and I also help to distribute funds for DCCR on a contract and I have another contract pending to additionally distribute funds for families. The last couple of, of two and a half years, that's been my primary focus is to help families, children who are going through some tough times. So I've had several contracts in as a consultant and that's what I've been doing and that's my main focus point. However, I want to focus right now on Generation Diamond. The director is Blanca Mejia. I'm an advisor and consultant to Generation Diamond. She has a building right next to the Plaza de la Raza, where she does a multitude of services to people that most of us probably ignore; the homeless, the hungry,

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some drug addicted, reentry. Her hands are full. She's a one-man game. She serves over 1,500 people a month. She and I have discussed some buildings that might be available to a larger services, also does reentry. So she, likes I said, wears a lot of different hats. She's a tremendous, tremendous leader. We're looking at a track, a property, a couple of buildings south of Johnny's. And that tract of land now south of Johnny's off of L Street has tremendous potential for development. Economic, economic development would be a tremendous opportunity in that area. I don't think anyone seriously consider that tract of land, but there's got to be at least three or four acres there. So Blanca and I are looking at one building in particular for expansion of her services. I will continue to do my work with her as well La Casa del Pueblo for social services. I don't have a building. I work out of my home, but I get out into the community regularly. We just hosted the fiesta this weekend at the Plaza de la Rasa I know that there's been some commentary about renovation. I know there's already been money allocated for renovation of that parking lot. I believe the city and the county have submitted or committed money for the renovation of that project. So there's a lot of interest there, but my immediate concern is for Generation Diamond. That's got great potential and she's doing a dynamite job. Thank you.

**WAYNE:** Thank, thank you for being here. Any questions from the committee? Seeing none, thank you for being here. Welcome to your Economic Recovery Committee.

**DONNA POLK:** Thank you very much. My name is Donna Polk, D-o-n-n-a P-o-l-k. I'm the CEO of Nebraska Urban Indian Health Coalition. First of all, I want to do a land acknowledgment to remind people on whose land we stand. There is a reason it is called Omaha and we are in the state of Nebraska. Two points I'd like to make, I waited patiently until everyone that I could identify as a speaker spoke because I was waiting for someone to talk about a subject that brings sorrow to my heart and that is the use of methamphetamines and fentanyl in our community. Just today, I printed off photos so that people in our community will understand what is happening in Douglas County as it relates to the labs that are producing that fentanyl, carfentanyl, as it's called by some, that's targeting young Americans, making it look like candy and the chalk that children are using to draw on sidewalks. And I say to you all that I understand that this funding, over \$300 million, is not to be used for programming. We must save our children. And I do have several ideas that I'm working with key people in the community to present to you all as a plan to address this serious issue. The other thing I want to talk just briefly about is the fact

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that really there's nothing in south Omaha that says Native Americans. We've been a part of this community since 1986. So I looked at the land bank to see if there was land available, just a small piece of land that maybe we could use to have park or some place where we could have a sweat lodge or a [INAUDIBLE] that could be used by Natives and others. So we will be putting together a proposal to request funding to produce our vision in terms of the space in the community where the park could be created. Thank you.

**WAYNE:** Thank you. And just to clarify, we're not saying no to programs. We're just trying to figure out how things are transformational and the economic impact. So when we say projects, that's just my construction background, but it's-- I said that in the beginning and I'll keep saying it throughout this process, programs, projects or just ideas. We're looking for anything that we haven't thought of yet, but thank you for all the work you're doing in the community.

**DONNA POLK:** And I should say we invested \$16 million on the corner of 22nd and N Street, which is transformational.

**WAYNE:** Absolutely.

**DONNA POLK:** Thank you.

**WAYNE:** Thank you. Any questions from the committee? Seeing-- thank you for being here. Any other testifiers? Going once, going twice. Well, just so you guys know-- oh. Come on down. If you bet it or not bet it-- if you say a dollar, you usually win on the Price is Right. And I just want to remind everybody, even tomorrow-- both hearings tomorrow and tonight, if you have an idea and you're just not sure-- you don't want to come up and publicly talk about, but need to flesh it out, there are architects and engineers and people from the city in the back to the left in a room that you can start just having that conversation to help you build out what you need, maybe for a programming space, which you may need, and how to build that-- out that budget because we are trying to open this up to every idea, every program, every project out there. So nobody's turned away because they can't afford an architect or engineer. We're providing that services for you right now for free. Welcome to your Economic Recovery Committee.

**MARGIE STOYSICH:** I'm Margie Stoysich, M-a-r-g-i-e S-t-o-y-s-i-c-h. I just am representing people in south Omaha, citizens and the needs

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that are-- that I've seen that are needed. I noticed the computers in the library, south Omaha library, there's very little. There's only, like, a handful of computers. They've been all taken out. Down in south Omaha at 24th Street, if there's a possibility and it would be good that some of the signs also be written in English as well. And what I propose is not only have the homeless shelter that they have a day program as well, but to make 24th Street a tourist attraction so people from out of town can come see 24th Street and they want to come see there. It would be another place for people to come see and to fix it up. And, and I was just thinking, I don't know if it's New York or what, they have Chinatown and we can have, like, Little Mexico and put plants and decorate all of the businesses. And they would have a lot of business themselves from out of town, like the Old Market is French Quarters. And this would be another area where they can come visit. So I think it's time that we fix it up with something like that. Thank you so much and thank you, guys, for your service. I appreciate it.

**WAYNE:** Thank you and thank you for being here. Any questions from the committee? Again, thank you for being here. Any other testifiers? So just to recap, the portal is [omahaeconomicrecovery.com](http://omahaeconomicrecovery.com). It will be open till October 9 at 11:59 p.m. I encourage everyone to talk to your neighbors. I will tell you, though, once your submission is done, there's still a process. And part of that process may be Olsson or committee members who are elected in your area following up with you all because sometimes, not every time, but the two blocks next to each other are talking to each other. So if we see that, instead of-- I'm using a project, so don't get offended about programming, but sometimes you'll have a project that are literally two blocks away and it doesn't make sense from a space perspective to fund two project managers when we could actually make you guys work together and be more efficient. So we're also looking at those things. So there's going to be a long list of database of programs. And what we're trying to do as a committee and as a state is create our first kind of needs analysis and strategic plan from the state's perspective, for east Omaha. That hopefully when we're, we're all out of the office, that the next people who are in office can go back and still continue to fund and look at this database of ideas and hopefully build transformational, not over the next three years, but hopefully the next ten years. So we know that this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and we have to get it right. So there is going to be a lot of scrutiny on projects because we won't get this opportunity again if we don't make transformational change. And I can give you plenty of examples, but the reality is, is we invest a lot of money in our



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communities, but we're not seeing the transformational change. And what the state has said is we think in part it's because it's not a coordinated plan around everything. So we're trying to develop that coordinated plan around everything as it relates to east Omaha. So thank you for being here tonight. There will be a lot more information coming out. Omahaeconomicrecovery.com is going to be the information portal so look for updates, look for those things. We'll have hopefully our, our final draft out in December, but it could be a little later than that, just depending on the number of projects and programs we're being submitted because we're not going to rush this. We're not going to rush this process, but we do have a deadline on the ARPA funds. They have to be spent by 2026. So it's hurry up, sprint, but wait. And so that's part of this process we're going through. So again, keep giving us ideas. If you submit one thing, you're not limited to one thing, but try to submit one or two at a time. And if you think of something the following week, don't, don't feel like you can submit it. We're looking for every, every opportunity that can be transformational. Thank you again for coming today. Wait, I guess, committee members, do you want to say anything? OK. Thank you for coming today.