



To whom it may concern,

It is a joy to share our support for this funding request from the Village Exchange Center, a nonprofit that has been working in Northwest Aurora to support the one in five Aurorans who are immigrants or refugees.

VEC and its Executive Director, Amanda Blaurock, have been important partners of Adams County throughout the pandemic. On behalf of VEC, Ms. Blaurock was a member of two of Adams County's COVID 19 Response and Recovery teams and was an avid participant in both groups as we navigated uncharted waters through the pandemic. Adams County also directly supported VEC's payment and screening work on the Left Behind Workers Fund through funding of \$1.3MM to provide \$1000 grants to workers that lost their job due to the pandemic but were ineligible for federal or unemployment insurance. Most recently, Adams County approached VEC to start a fund for an even larger demographic of individuals that are low wage workers that get COVID but couldn't afford to quarantine. We provided VEC with a \$275,000 grant to pilot the program.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development's Economic Development Initiative (EDI) seems to be designed with VEC in mind. Housed in a former church building, VEC serves thousands of low-income community members. The space that is about 50 years old, and VEC has made significant improvements to the HVAC system, building security, and more; still, the level of investment needed is well beyond the means of a nonprofit that is focused on delivering programs and services. The large building needs major updates including structural supports in the basement and a commercial kitchen to meet the needs for VEC's culinary and entrepreneurship workforce development for adults.

An EDI grant will be a real investment in VEC, Adams County and the Northwest Aurora neighborhood where it resides. Strengthening VEC's physical infrastructure will in turn strengthen the immigrant and refugee communities that VEC serves through direct services and programming, allowing for expanded services and programming.

Adams County strongly supports this proposal for capital funding for VEC's building at 1609 Havana St., in Aurora. Thank you for your thoughtful consideration.

Sincerely,




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Commissioner Eva J.  
Henry, District 1



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Commissioner Charles  
"Chaz" Tedesco, District 2



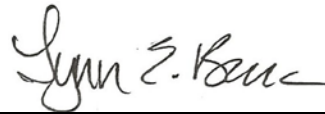
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Commissioner Emma Pinter,  
District 3



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Commissioner Steve O'Dorisio,  
District 4



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Commissioner Lynn Baca,  
District 5



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April 12, 2021

To the Appropriations Committee:

The Village Exchange Center, a nonprofit and multifaith worship space located in Northwest Aurora, is applying for capital support from the Department of Housing and Urban Development, Economic Development Initiative. The City of Aurora wholeheartedly supports this endeavor, which promises to improve VEC's role in the community and offer a broader range of programs and services upon the completion of this capital project.

Since VEC's inception four years ago, the City of Aurora has partnered with VEC in many capacities, especially through our Office of International and Immigrant Affairs. In its short life, VEC has proved to be a capable and fiscally responsible partner, helping to fill the gap between what local government and the need in our community. In 2020, for example, VEC acted as the payment partner for the Left Behind Workers Fund, screening individuals and helping to distribute approximately \$11 million in direct assistance to those who had been left out of federal and assistance programs like the CARES Act and state unemployment. VEC took a bold stance and ensured that the most marginalized in our city were not left behind.

VEC fills a unique niche in the nonprofit landscape here, serving some of those who are hardest to reach: low-income immigrants and refugees. VEC continues to deepen its roots within these diverse communities, and the present capital request will build out their existing space to accommodate more programs to serve these populations. A commercial kitchen, for example, will lend itself to culinary, nutrition, and entrepreneurship workshops for adults and youth. All of the capital improvements sought will long outlive the life of this funding, serving as a true investment in our communities' economic wellbeing.

Sincerely,

Mike Coffman  
Mayor



April 13, 2021

Chairwoman Rosa DeLauro  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. House of Representatives  
H-307 The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman DeLauro and Members of the Committee on Appropriations:

What a pleasure it is to support the Village Exchange Center as it continues to grow its roots in Aurora! I'm happy to endorse this proposal for a capital investment from HUD's Economic Development Initiative.

As the owner/founder of Stanley Marketplace in Aurora, I can speak first-hand to the importance of investment in our urban spaces, in a way that gives them new life and makes them relevant again. I was part of a group of investors who took an empty warehouse space that was for years an eyesore and turned it into a vibrant destination in Northwest Aurora. This industrial space, which sat empty for many years, is now a place where thousands come every day to converse, eat, exercise, and connect with their communities. Over 50 small businesses call Stanley their home, building Aurora's tax base and supporting local entrepreneurs and employment.

As a social worker first and a developer second, I was thrilled to learn about the Village Exchange Center, just a mile from the Stanley. In fact, I found VEC's mission so compelling, I rolled up my sleeves and helped a team of architects and contractors to take what I'd learned over my years of transforming the Stanley, to consult on the capital project under consideration. I even met with City of Aurora representatives to facilitate the challenging processes involved in any project of this magnitude. A storefront, restaurant and community kitchen here represent a truly meaningful and dynamic social enterprise.

I am not merely a cheerleader on the sidelines. I've championed VEC at the Stanley as well. We entered into a formal agreement for VEC to assume a 20-year lease on a parcel of land behind the Stanley, and I supported this effort not only with the land donation but with the site plan submission. In 2020, I watched as VEC transformed the dry soil into a vibrant, lush urban farm that feeds our low-income neighbors. I mobilized our Stanley Beer Hall kitchens, too, to feed those working on the farm, and again through prepared meals for VEC's food pantry.

After working closely with VEC in multiple capacities, I sincerely believe in how VEC is putting its vision into practice. I trust that the planned expansion and upgrades to their space will make their work in the community even more powerful.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Mark Shaker", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Mark Shaker  
Principal



**Jena Griswold**  
Colorado Secretary of State

I strongly support the proposal from the Village Exchange Center (VEC), which plans to expand its footprint and improve its infrastructure to better serve Aurora's newcomers and low-income community members. HUD's Economic Development Initiative makes great economic and social sense in this Northwest Aurora neighborhood.

Aurora in particular has been experiencing rapid growth, and investing in this high priority neighborhood can help promote employment, workforce development, and greater access to resources. VEC's capital expenditures can help VEC continue to grow its programs and services for low-income, immigrant and refugee individuals. The State of Colorado's 2020 New American Integration Report highlights the economic impact of immigrants and refugees and places a premium on programs like VEC's, which promotes opportunities that facilitate both economic stability and integration.

VEC's proposed capital investments will allow for more extensive and more robust training for future entrepreneurs, ensuring that they understand tax and licensing requirements, receive marketing and branding education, engage in networking with local resources, and receive the certifications and other training most essential to small business development and success. Acting as a business incubator, VEC plans to promote economic development and support the next generation of entrepreneurs.

VEC is an outstanding candidate for these funds, and is an organization that prides itself on fiscal responsibility. This proposal has my support.

Best,

Jena Griswold  
Colorado Secretary of State