



# EDA Activities Focused On Growing The Community

By Karen Lauer  
Barnesville EDA Director

The Barnesville Economic Development Authority (EDA) is the arm of the City of Barnesville tasked with driving Barnesville's growth! The activities of the EDA are overseen by a seven member Board of Directors, appointed by the Barnesville City Council.

The efforts of the Barnesville EDA to grow Barnesville are focused in two primary areas - housing development and business development.

Business development includes a wide range of activities including working to retain our existing businesses and assisting local business owners who might be interested in expanding their business. In addition, the EDA works to attract businesses that might be looking to relocate into west central Minnesota or assisting individuals that might be interested in starting a new business.

### Work And Shop Local Campaigns See Success

Over the last three years, the EDA has collaborated with the Barnesville Main Street Program on an aggressive "Work Local" campaign in partnership with local business owners. The vast majority of individuals living in Barnesville commute to jobs outside of Barnesville. In many cases they are unaware of the local jobs and career opportunities.

The City of Barnesville website - [www.barnesvillemn.com](http://www.barnesvillemn.com) now includes a large work local button which brings people to a current listing of Barnesville area jobs. The same listings can be accessed at [www.barnesvillejobs.com](http://www.barnesvillejobs.com). The group also produced a "Work Local" TV commercial which runs during streaming athletic events.

During 2025 this campaign was broadened to include a new "Shop Local" campaign focused on encouraging Barnesville area residents to locally purchase products and services. Numerous Barnesville businesses made financial contributions to the initiative which included a number of different strategies. Marketing efforts included the mailing of an oversized postcard to residents featuring special offers, a Facebook ad campaign driving traffic to a landing page on the City of Barnesville website with additional business offers.

Local businesses were pleased with the results of the campaign. Thomas Gonsler, owner of Barnesville Grocery, who invested in the campaign said "It's been fun seeing a lot of new customers coming



The Shops and Storage development area in the Barnesville industrial park is home to numerous buildings which house local businesses along with private storage for multiple residents.



into the store to take advantage of the special promotions and coupon savings."

### Encouraging Entrepreneurs

Supporting entrepreneurs who might be dreaming about starting or purchasing a business is another focus of the EDA. Assistance provided by EDA staff includes development of business plans and identification of buildings that might be available for rent or purchase or land on which to construct a new building.

In addition, the Barnesville EDA has a low-interest revolving loan fund to provide gap financing; both for start-up businesses, purchase of existing businesses and the expansion of existing businesses.

The sister organization to the EDA, the Barnesville Main Street Program oversees a Business Incentive Program and a Storefront Revitalization Grant Program that can be accessed by those looking to start a new business.

During 2025, several new businesses opened including Strand Ace Hardware, WashWell and the Pup Tub, with the assistance of EDA staff. In addition, the long time accounting office Salber & Associates was purchased by Jill Hough and rebranded as Barnesville Tax Services. During 2026 several businesses are planning expansion

projects including The Petal Parlor, Bloom and NAPA.

### Barnesville Commercial Park

During 2025 development activity continued in the Barnesville Commercial Park on the east side of town. Lee's Electric constructed a new building at the edge of the park which is expected to be completed in 2026.

The new Shops and Storage development, located at the east end of the Commercial Park continues to be popular with smaller businesses as well as residents who are looking for a shop or just additional storage. Lot prices start at only \$7,300, which can easily accommodate a 1,200 square foot building. All of the infrastructure is in place including water and sewer hook-up's, electric, fiber and natural gas services.

### Regional Marketing Activities

In addition to business development activities, the Barnesville EDA continues to invest in marketing activities targeted at encouraging young families to move to Barnesville. The focus is on creating top-of-mind awareness of Barnesville being a safe community to raise your family. An important part of their marketing activities is the "Choose Barnesville" magazine which is available on grocery store racks in the Fargo-Moorhead area April through September.

A critical part of that messaging is promoting the new expanded school district campus. The new sports arena, performing arts center, ag/tech building; along with new elementary classrooms and expanded programming allow Barnesville to be very competitive with other smaller communities located just

outside of the Fargo-Moorhead area.

Many families might choose to purchase an existing home when they make the move to Barnesville. To welcome these families to the community, the City of Barnesville provides a \$500 utility incentive as a way of saying, "Welcome to Barnesville!"

### Residential Building Lots + Incentives

In addition to existing homes, many families currently living in the Fargo-Moorhead area are looking at building their dream home in smaller communities - in large part hoping to find lower lot costs.

In Barnesville, the cost of residential lots in the new Del

Acres Gilbertson 3rd Addition are substantially less than in many communities, this is because the EDA is the developer of the lots and what has motivated the group to develop the lots is the goal to attract new residents; not so much to make a huge profit on the sale of the land. New residents mean new tax base for the city, new students for the school district and more customers for our Barnesville businesses.

The year of 2025 saw the construction of three new homes, two in Del Acres/Gilbertson and the final of three Habitat For Humanity homes. It is hoped that lower interest rates in 2026 will encourage more

families to consider building their dream home! If a family buys a lot and constructs a new home they will qualify for a 2 year property tax rebate on their City and County property taxes. In addition, the City of Barnesville also provides a utility incentive package with a value of up to \$1,500.

### New Apartment Building Under Construction

While single family residential growth has been strong over the past 10-15 years, the availability of new multi-family housing options has continued to be a challenge. In 2025, after years of conversations with regional developers, Fargo based Turn-Key Solutions Development purchased a 1.2 acre site owned by the Barnesville EDA on the west edge of Barnesville and construction started on a 35 unit apartment building which is expected to be completed by Fall of 2026. This beautiful new building, called "The Landing" will offer 1, 2 and 3 bedroom units with central air conditioning and a heated parking garage.

### Looking Forward

During 2026, the Barnesville EDA will remain focused on innovative ideas and initiatives to continue that same trend. The Economic Development office is located on the 2nd floor of the Dobmeier Funeral Home and the door is always open to talk with individuals interested in buying or building a home or starting a business. Interested individuals who might have questions can also reach staff at 218.354.2145 or [eda@barnesvillemn.com](mailto:eda@barnesvillemn.com).

## Meal Repack Program . . .

# A Simple Act Of Feeding Kids Ran Into The System

By Chandra Buck  
Staff Writer

What began as a simple, compassionate idea to make sure no child went hungry has turned into a complicated struggle shaped by the rules that govern school food programs.

In Barnesville, the Meal Repack program was created to keep unserved school lunches out of the trash and into the hands of students who need food after school, on weekends, and during school breaks.

The district launched the program at the elementary school in March 2024, adopting a model that had already been piloted in the Fargo-Moorhead area through the Cass Clay Hunger Coalition, a regional partnership supported administratively by the Great Plains Food Bank.

That model was first tested in spring 2021 in Moorhead, Fargo, and West Fargo, where surplus hot lunches were frozen and redistributed to students and families facing food insecurity. The idea was straightforward: if the food was already cooked and going to be thrown away, why not use it to feed kids?

At Barnesville Elementary, the program became known as "Grill to Chill." A freezer was stocked with leftover lunches that would otherwise have been discarded. The school did not prepare additional meals to fill it.

Some days there were no leftovers at all. Items such as taco meat or chicken that could be safely reused remained in the kitchen for future lunches. Fully prepared menu items that could not be repurposed — including chili crispitos, pizza boats, and pasta dishes — were frozen for students to take home.

During the 2024-2025 school year, the elementary program alone repackaged about 1,000 meals and supported roughly 100 students and families, according to school social worker Jamie Skrove. No forms were required. The process was simple: students opened the freezer door and took what they needed.

That changed in fall 2025, when Meal Repack expanded to Barnesville High School. The expansion significantly increased both the number of students using the program and its visibility. In early October, a WDAY television feature brought regional and national attention to Barnesville's effort.

Food Service Director Kevin Roller said his inbox filled almost immediately.

"Once it went that big, it got put out on school nutrition websites,"



A sign on the Meal Repack freezer indicates meals are currently unavailable, as funding challenges at the state level cast uncertainty over the future of the Barnesville food assistance program.

Roller said. "I had people contacting me from all over the United States."

Some of those inquiries reached the Minnesota Department of Education, which began asking questions about how the program was being funded.

Under federal school nutrition rules, food purchased with cafeteria funds may only be used for reimbursable meals served during the school day. Any food that leaves the lunch line — even leftovers that would otherwise be thrown away — is considered "nonprogram food" under USDA rules and must be reimbursed at full cost, including

food, labor, and overhead.

Superintendent Dr. Jon Ellerbusch said the ruling forced the district into an unexpected financial bind.

"In order to do it correctly, the school district cannot use food service funds to supply the food or the labor that goes into the meals," he said. "The district either has to get donations to cover those costs, or move money from the general fund to the food service fund."

In October, shortly before the state's inquiry escalated, State Rep. Jim Joy visited Barnesville schools after hearing about the success

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Barnesville Elementary's main entrance, bus pick up/drop off area, classrooms, and the district offices were part of the new construction in 2021.



## Barnesville Area Licensed Childcare Providers

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**Katie Hegdahl**  
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Fri 7:00 am-4:00 pm  
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