



# First District News

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## December 2025

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## DOT Update

Annual DOT Roadway Update Since 1995, the South Dakota Department of Transportation (SDDOT), in cooperation with the South Dakota Planning and Development Districts, has been collecting city, county, township and federal roadway information using Global Positioning System (GPS) technology. This information is utilized by the SDDOT for several purposes, including reporting mileage to the Federal Highway Administration and county auditors, as well as creating county and city maps. Annually, on behalf of the SDDOT, First District staff contacts individuals with jurisdiction over roads and asks for assistance in updating any changes in an effort to keep roadway information current. The assistance of county, city, and township officials is critical to the accuracy and overall success of the SDDOT public road inventory. We believe we all benefit through this multi-agency cooperation.



## FUNDS AWARDED

**Brookings County** – \$6,000 HMEP Grant

**De Smet** – \$38,461 HMGP Grant

**Grant County** – \$6,000 HMEP Grant

**Hayti** – \$10,000 SDDANR Small Community Planning Grant

**Oldham** – \$10,000 SDDANR Small Community Planning Grant

**Roberts County** – \$400,000 SDDANR Solid Waste Management Program Grant,  
\$1,600,000 SDDANR CWSRF Loan

**Shared Resources** – \$1,165,548 ARPA Grant





## MY THOUGHTS...

By: Todd A. Kays



2025 was an extremely busy year here at First District. Staff were involved with more than 225 specific projects in the areas of planning, GIS, grant writing/project administration and other community/economic development activities. We were fortunate to assist our members in obtaining over \$20.1 million in grants and \$6.1 million in low interest loans for various community and economic development projects. Since 2008, First District has helped its members receive \$323.5 million in grants resulting in a return on investment of \$69.75 for every dollar of membership dues paid.

Every year I like to take the opportunity to promote the staff at First District and remind our membership of the myriad of services that we have provided for more than 54 years. I am very grateful and proud of our team as they continue to provide a wide variety of technical services to our members with complete professionalism. The First District currently employs nine full-time staff with a combined 144 years of experience in community and economic development. The following are the core areas of expertise within the First District. However, it should be noted that the First District will respond to any member's request for a specific service. Either by attempting to provide such service directly or by finding an outside resource to provide the assistance in a cost-effective manner. So, as you are thinking about your upcoming 2026 projects that involve the expertise listed below, just remember to give us a call.

**Strategic Planning and Policy Development:** Staff assists communities and counties preparing for growth by providing technical assistance to aid government officials and citizens in making educated decisions regarding physical, social, economic and environmental concerns. Staff provides its members with the tools and information needed to successfully manage community and economic growth. Staff plays an integral role in developing short range and long-range plans and implementing those plans through policy and ordinance development and other administration programs. First District provides a large variety of planning services including but not limited to Annexation Studies, Capital Improvement Plans, Utility Rate Analysis, Comprehensive Plans, Emergency Plans, Housing Needs Assessments, Policy Development, Special Purpose Ordinances, Strategic Planning, Tax Increment Financing and Zoning Ordinance Development. Your Community and Economic Development Planning contacts are Todd Kays, Luke Muller, and Jessica Tesch.

**Grant Writing and Project Administration:** One of the most common areas of assistance the First District provides to its members is identifying, acquiring and administering funding sources for local community and economic development projects. Projects range from sewer and water infrastructure to community facilities like community centers or fire halls. First District has years of experience preparing grants and loan applications at no charge to our membership. Additionally, we provide grant administration services to assist with the necessary paperwork and procedures required by many grant and loan programs. Your Grant/Loan Application and Project Administration contacts are Mason Weidenbach and Todd Kays.

**Geographic Information Systems (GIS).** Geographic Information Systems (GIS) is a computer program that creates and manages a geographically referenced database GIS and provides a visual interpretation of data. GIS technology has an unlimited number of uses and the First District utilizes GIS in areas such as land use planning, economic development, environmental and hazard mitigation planning, infrastructure development, GIS based taxation, and intra/intergovernmental data sharing as great planning and decision-making tools for our members.

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Staff provides training for GIS system end users including assistance in GIS data analysis. First District also web hosts GIS data for counties and communities across South Dakota. “Webhosting” gives end users the ability to view, search and analyze GIS data using a standard web browser. Your GIS contacts are Ryan Hartley, Darin Stein, Amy Arnold, and Kelli Henricks.

**Small Business Lending:** First District fuels economic growth through small business lending programs. First District’s three revolving loans offer financing available at terms that benefit borrowers and lenders for small businesses to access. Your contact is Todd Kays.

**Office Management:** Finally, I would be remiss if I did not mention our Office Manager, Suzie Zirbel. For nearly ten years, Suzie has kept the daily operation of the office moving smoothly.

I also want to welcome new Governing Body members: Kim St. John (Hamlin County Municipal Representative, Lora Zwart (Moody County At-large Representative), and Travis Benthin (Roberts County Municipal Representative) and recognize those Governing Body members who will not be returning to the Board in 2025 and thank them for their service to this organization. (Carleen Wild – Moody County At- Large Representative).

Finally, I want our member finance officers, county auditors, utility managers and zoning administrators to be on the lookout next month for information flyers regarding the First District’s new GIS Permit Manager and Utility Manager services.

As I get closer to retirement, which isn’t happening this year, I continue to reflect on all the positive and impactful projects our members have committed to over the years. I am grateful that the membership asked First District to be of assistance in their endeavors. In my year-end closing message to the membership, I share my “Mantra” that I will use to help guide my thoughts and actions in the upcoming year. Since Covid, they have evolved from “Change” to “Thankful” to “Hope” to “Believe” and last year to “Learn”. This year I have chosen the mantra of “Resolve”. I want to commit wholeheartedly to the goals and values that matter most (Faith, Family, Friends, Coworkers and Community), even when my enthusiasm fades and obstacles appear. This year will be about moving with more intention rather than impulse, choosing consistency over perfection, and treating setbacks as opportunities. My resolve will show up in the extra hours of focus, the honest conversation I may have been avoiding, and the decision to begin again when it would be easier not to. By carrying this steady determination into the months ahead, I will set the tone for the next year defined not by circumstance, but by my own unwavering purpose. I encourage you all to join me this year on a path of showing “Resolve”. As always, I leave you with a few words for the new year to reflect upon. These come from my favorite lyricist, Neal Peart.

If the future's looking dark  
We're the ones who have to shine  
If there's no one in control  
We're the ones who draw the line  
Though we live in trying times  
We're the ones who have to try  
Though we know that time has wings  
We're the ones who have to fly

On behalf of the entire First District staff, we want to wish you a Merry Christmas and thank the Governing body and our membership for their continued support. It truly has been a privilege to serve you, and we look forward to a prosperous new year.

## GOED Conference

The 2026 GOED Conference will be held February 24-26, 2026, in Pierre.

Check out GOED’s website to register!

<https://sdqped.com/partners/governors-conference-on-economic-development2026/>



First District

Governing Body Officers

- Mike Bartley.....Chairperson  
Brookings County At-Large
- Gary Jaeger.....Vice Chairperson  
Deuel County At-Large
- Myron Johnson.....Secretary  
Codington County Commissioner
- Todd A. Kays.....Executive Director



Governing Body Meeting

Our next Governing Body meeting is tentatively scheduled for April 30, 2026. More information to come.

Upcoming Events

- December 19**—Office Closed (afternoon)
- December 24-26**—Christmas, Office Closed
- January 1**—New Years Day, Office Closed
- January 19**—Martin Luther King Day, Office Closed
- February 16**—Presidents’ Day, Office Closed
- DEADLINES FOR SUBMITTING DOCUMENTS TO THIS OFFICE MAY BE PRIOR TO DEADLINES LISTED HERE. PLEASE CONTACT OUR OFFICE.**
- October 15**—Bridge Improvement Plan Deadline
- April 30, July 31, Oct. 31, & Jan. 31**—Deadlines for Local Infrastructure Improvement Program
- April 1, July 1, Oct. 1, & Jan. 1**—Deadlines for State Revolving Fund (SRF) Applications
- April 1 & Oct. 1**—Deadlines for CDBG Applications
- May 1, Aug. 1, Oct. 1, & Feb. 1**—Deadlines for State Water Plan (SWP) Applications