

**KANDIYOHI COUNTY AND CITY OF WILLMAR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION (EDC)
JOINT OPERATIONS BOARD OF DIRECTORS (OB)
BUSINESS RETENTION & EXPANSION/RECRUITMENT (BRE/R) COMMITTEE
TECHNOLOGY TASK FORCE
MINUTES
January 11, 2006
EDC Board Room, Willmar**

Present: Bob Bonawitz, Jay Bosch, Doug Dodge, Bev Dougherty, Ron Erpelding, Steve Salzer, Diane Schulte, Jean Spaulding and Roy Stiff

Guest: Kim Larson

Staff: Steven Renquist, Executive Director

Secretarial: Nancy Birkeland, Legal & Administrative Assistants, Inc. (LAA)

Ron Erpelding called the meeting to order at approximately 11:05 a.m. and introduced Jean Spaulding, who will chair this task force. Jean Spaulding thanked everyone for coming followed by self introductions with a brief description of their technology business/background.

Structure, Organization, Purpose. Steve Renquist provided background on the EDC, the BRE/R Committee and how this task force may work on the area's technology issues, including discovering the physical capabilities of the area, how the area is or is not meeting the technology needs, workforce capacity and the ability to fill the needs of area businesses and the MinnWest Technology Campus. Renquist suggested the task force may wish to meet monthly for the first six months and then quarterly.

[Doug Dodge was excused from the meeting. Bob Bonawitz joined the meeting.]

Focus.

- a. **Additional task force members.** The following were suggested:
- representatives from West Central Industries
 - county human services
 - county recycling and sanitation
 - William Jagow, CIO of Affiliated Community Medical Centers
 - Teri Beyer, IS/IT Manager at Rice Memorial Hospital
 - Mike Nitchals of Willmar Municipal Utilities (MUC)
 - Jeff Roiland of Entel
 - Don McGrath

Diane Schulte reported on quarterly meetings she has with local business people through the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) office. Renquist suggested making a presentation to those individuals. Renquist suggested doing a survey on the quality of the area's infrastructure and personnel training. Roy Stiff can offer background information on the computer users with whom he works.

[Kim Larson joined the meeting.]

- b. **Status of local technology/e-commerce industry.** Stiff stated local businesses are attempting to do e-commerce to supplement dwindling store front sales. Bev Dougherty stated her focus for 2006 is e-commerce and was a major part of her income prior to coming to Willmar. Dougherty suggested all downtown Willmar businesses should be using e-commerce. It is believed Willmar has redundancy. Spaulding stated Spicer has local redundancy with TDS, but if Qwest's lines are cut, there is no redundancy for those lines. Stiff reported he is developing a map of area providers and their range of services to place on his web site; he has found service is very spotty. Jay Bosch suggested being able to type in an address on the map and it would show what is available. A goal of this task force will be to get information on all service providers and their coverage areas. Possibly hosting an evening meeting for area service providers was mentioned. Questions would need to be determined and could be sent to the providers in advance. There are quality of life questions relating to technology. **Task force members** should submit questions to edp@kandiyohi.com and whom they feel it should be directed toward. It was suggested that a representative of Kandi Link attend a future meeting and make a presentation. Questions to ask include:
- 1) What services are currently provided and where.
 - 2) What does this area need, at a minimum, to capture the technology boom.
 - 3) What should this area have to get to where it needs to be.

Bob Bonawitz suggested obtaining the area's projected growth rate for the next five to ten years in light of the new airport and MinnWest Technology Campus. The MUC is looking at upgrading and needs to know what will be needed for future growth. It is estimated there will be a 10% increase on the MUC's capacity once the MinnWest Technology Campus begins. Bonawitz stated we also need to include energy concerns under technology. Stiff suggested recycling and human resources are also involved and there is a need to train computer users as many are inexperienced with technology available.

- c. **Technology Directory.** The task force reviewed the list compiled to date following the dialogue luncheon (see copy attached to original minutes). Nancy Birkeland informed the task force that this directory is on the www.kandiyohi.com site. It is believed Kandi Link is non-functioning at this time. Possibly placing the businesses on the list in categories was suggested. This may show the voids in services offered. Renquist suggested looking at what other communities are doing to showcase their technology services.
- d. **Identification of retention-related topics.** Erpelding stated the future comes from that which exists now so how do we help those who are here to stay and expand, if they choose. Salzer suggested identifying businesses that left or closed and find out why they closed or left and if it could have been prevented. Quality of life issue is a huge impact in attracting employees. Bosch suggested the EDC needs to promote it is a one-stop shop for economic development aids. Schulte stated DEED has business job specialists, who will answer questions for individuals interested in going into business. Bonawitz stated a key component of the MinnWest Technology Campus is to create an incubator program. Stiff stated obtaining a location was a difficult decision for him as to what was available and the costs for utilities, rent scales, lease agreements. Birkeland distributed the Willmar Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce and EDC community informational packet, which is a source for area information. In reviewing the packet, the task force suggested it is a good packet for people who are moving to the area, but not for those looking to create a business. Erpelding suggested the **task force** review the packet to see what additional information should be included for business needs. Dougherty informed the task force a downtown real estate survey is being conducted by the Real Estate Association for the Willmar Design

Center. Birkeland recommended the task force review the kandiyohi.com site for items that should be changed or added. Birkeland stated the EDC's Marketing & Public Relations Committee has been researching search engines for the kandiyohi.com site.

- e. Bosch stated there has been discussion about the EDC and the MinnWest Technology Campus sponsoring a regional technology conference where this community would be highlighted and to showcase how area businesses are using technology. It would be to attract people and businesses from outside the area to move here. It could be consumer focused as well as business focused. Bonawitz suggested the area advertise for missing services, such as the hospital advertises for a particular surgeon. Possibly holding seminars such as the former BLAST and the women's entrepreneur seminars. For the convenience of vendors, it was suggested to hold conferences at the same time, but maybe on different days—one for consumers and one for businesses. Renquist stated he has contacted Minnesota Technology and offered Willmar to host a 2006 regional conference. If it is to be a major recruitment tool, presence is needed from the state level. Birkeland informed the task force the BRE/R Committee is sponsoring a technology forum on March 15, 2006 through Minnesota Technology on "Biotechnology: The Bio Boom Continues," which will be held at St. Paul Travelers ([see www.minnesotatechnology.org/training/events/forum.asp?forumID=210](http://www.minnesotatechnology.org/training/events/forum.asp?forumID=210)). Renquist stated the EDC's Marketing & Public Relations Committee will put together a presentation on the community and the MinnWest Technology Campus will also put together a presentation. This task force may also wish to provide information that should be included. Steve Salzer stated the MinnWest Technology Campus will have a tri-fold brochure. The task force suggested local companies be encouraged to have brochures at the booth. It was recommended **Renquist** contact area technology businesses so they are aware of this sponsorship.

Stiff distributed information gathered from the Internet ([see](#) copies attached to the original minutes).

Information and criteria for a community being e-commerce certified can be found on DEED's web site at <http://www.deed.state.mn.us/Community/erg/index.htm>. Willmar is e-commerce certified.

ADJOURNMENT—There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 12:26 p.m.

NEXT MEETING—The next regular committee meeting is **12 noon to 1:00 p.m., Friday, February 24, 2006**, at the EDC office, Willmar.