

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
October 12, 2006
EDC Board Room, Willmar

Present: Dean Bouta, Ron Erpelding, Bill Jagow, Jim Millard, Jeff Roiland and Jeff Tengwall

Staff: Steve Renquist, Executive Director

Excused: Teri Beyer, Jay Bosch, Mike Nitchals and Jean Spaulding

Secretarial: Jodie Heuring, Legal & Administrative Assistants, Inc. (LAA)

Executive Director Steve Renquist called the meeting to order at 7:15 a.m. There were no changes to the agenda.

MINUTES—

IT WAS MOVED BY Dean Bouta, SECONDED BY Ron Erpelding, to approve the minutes of the September 15, 2006 meeting as mailed or e-mailed. MOTION CARRIED.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

2007 Goals/Action Plan. Renquist reported after speaking with Chairperson Jean Spaulding about the goals for 2007, they decided it would be best to start by reviewing the 2006 goals. The following 2006 goals will continue and/or change for 2007:

1. Assess needs and access opportunities for technology-based industry recruitment and expansion.
2. Continue to identify and share with elected officials the necessary technological infrastructure to be included in new construction, repairs and improvements to state highways, county roads and city streets, especially in the area of the new Willmar industrial park.
3. Identify and implement ways to support entrepreneurial efforts in technology by individuals and companies.

Renquist reported the EDC staff has been working on this and will continue to do so in addition to the MinnWest Technology Campus; i.e., business incubators without walls. Renquist stated staff will be asking for volunteer business advisers to offer to work up to two hours with a new business within the volunteer's particular area of expertise at no charge to the business and after that time, further services would be agreed upon between the business and volunteer, including whether a rate of pay would begin.

4. Identify and implement ways to attract, retain and support technologically-based educational offerings.

5. Identify locations in the area that have and do not have high speed internet capacity, including redundancy and cellular telephone service and determination of the needs for such type of services.
6. Communicate to prospective businesses the technology services that are available and attempt to have those services provided to all areas of the county.
7. Encourage businesses to complete a technological needs assessment of the services provided by their current provider and to do a comparison with alternative providers.

It was suggested to have a comparison of what services are available without identifying specific business names.

Renquist asked **LAA** to assign 2006 goal 3 to the Executive Director for completion before the next task force meeting; i.e., investigate the possibility of using sales tax funds for technology infrastructure at the new Willmar industrial park.

Erpelding brought up the Wi-Fi discussion held at the last BRE/R meeting. Renquist sees this task force looking into the Wi-Fi idea and making a recommendation to government to set up the system or maybe the private sector is willing to step forward and do it. If the cost is such and rewards are not adequate for private, then is it a government function? It is important to first determine the need.

Jeff Roiland stated Kandiyohi Power Cooperative conducted a survey about 12-18 months ago of its consumers asking whether Kandiyohi Power Cooperative should enter into the internet arena. At that time, a need was not expressed in the rural areas.

Report on Industrial Park Infrastructure Meeting. Bouta reported attending a meeting with the city of Willmar where providers such as En-tel, Charter Communications, Qwest and Bennett Office Technologies were present. Mike Nitchals from the Willmar Municipal Utilities was also present. This meeting was to start discussion of what the city's plans are for building in the industrial park and get feedback from the providers on what the city should be considering with its options and needs. It was determined it is not feasible to put in common ductwork. Attendees felt there was good feedback from providers on their initial plan. There is the big unknown for companies as to what businesses and types are going to be in the industrial park; i.e., a big warehouse for trucking will have different needs than a manufacturing company. A brief discussion was held about the installation of city-owned ducts so there would not be a cost for providers, but liability is an issue. St. Cloud looked at this possibility and determined it would be too costly as it is not only the ownership, but the maintenance. The cost is the biggest issue; spending a lot of dollars without knowing the return. The city did agree to place common ductwork under road intersections versus boring then trenching. This task force was instrumental in the initial meeting between the city and the private sector. It is hoped the city will continue sharing information on the design. This process may need assessment and encouragement from this task force for the city to continue its communication with private providers.

There was no other unfinished business.

NEW BUSINESS

Infrastructure Assessment. Bouta asked the task force to keep in mind as it moves forward with the Blandin Foundation application that it will come in and assist with needs assessment. A full technology assessment would be good. It is necessary to know what businesses are doing for technology, how are they using it and also an emphasis on the ag side and education/awareness of that too.

Renquist stated the EDCOB approved \$7,500 from the BRE/R Committee's budget for a match on the Blandin Foundation grant as it requires a dollar for dollar match. This is assuming the application is for \$15,000 which requires \$15,000 from the EDC and/or the business sector. Renquist plans to ask for \$5,000 from the Agribusiness/Renewable Energy Development Committee and a portion from other EDC committees. It may be possible for some remaining funds in KandiLink to be used. It is hoped the assessment will help determine the business and/or residential technology needs for our community. There is no association of providers or any established norms of which providers are aware; most norms are competition based. A general agreement of what to ask for is needed; Bouta indicated Blandin will help with that determination, however, a general idea is needed. Bouta is unaware of limits to the grant as long as it is technological and broadband. It was suggested the EDC consider selling the assessment to businesses/providers to recoup the grant money. Renquist stated it would be nice to provide technology services to people who pay taxes to provide EDC funding.

Upper Great Plains Technology Conference. Renquist stated the Upper Great Plains Technology Conference just finished and was attended by Jay Bosch. Renquist sent an e-mail to task force members about the possibility of covering up to \$400 of Bosch's costs for his attendance at this conference. Bosch attended knowing this task force had not made a financial commitment for his attendance. Renquist also announced a broadband conference will be held in Alexandria and encouraged this task force to consider covering the conference registration for attendance.

IT WAS MOVED BY Ron Erpelding, SECONDED BY Dean Bouta, to affirm payment of up to \$400 for Jay Bosch to attend the Upper Great Plains Technology Conference and approve the expenditure up to \$200 per person for a maximum of two people of the Business Retention and Expansion/Recruitment (BRE/R) Technology Task Force to attend the broadband conference in Alexandria with said funds coming from the BRE/R Committee's budget. MOTION CARRIED.

Renquist will e-mail task force members today with details on the broadband conference in Alexandria. Renquist indicated he and Spaulding plan to attend; however, their expenses will be covered by their employers' budgets.

There was no further new business.

ADJOURNMENT—There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at approximately 8:20 a.m.

NEXT MEETING—The next regular committee meeting is **7:00 to 8:00 a.m., Thursday, November 9, 2006**, at the EDC office, Willmar.