

**KANDIYOHI COUNTY AND CITY OF WILLMAR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION (EDC)  
JOINT OPERATIONS BOARD OF DIRECTORS (OB) MEETING  
MINUTES  
November 10, 2021  
Community Room, Heritage Bank, Willmar and Via Zoom Video Conference**

Present: Abdullahi Awale, Art Benson, Rollie Boll, Donna Boonstra (via Zoom), Jesse Gislason and Les Heitke

Ex Officio: Julie Asmus

Excused: Kelly TerWisscha

Ex Officio: Justice Walker, Director of Planning & Development, City of Willmar

Staff: Aaron Backman, Executive Director and Sarah Swedburg, Business Development Manager

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

Vice President Art Benson called the meeting to order at approximately 11:00 a.m. and declared a quorum was present. Justice Walker, Director of Planning & Development, City of Willmar, was welcomed followed by self introductions.

**AGENDA**—Add to the Agenda under Finance Committee will be a loan deferral.

IT WAS MOVED BY Donna Boonstra, SECONDED BY Rollie Boll, to approve the Minutes of the September 9, 2021 meeting. MOTION CARRIED.

IT WAS MOVED BY Donna Boonstra, SECONDED BY Les Heitke, to approve the revised Agenda and following Consent Agenda. MOTION CARRIED.

**CONSENT AGENDA**

Approve: 1. Minutes of the October 14, 2021 meeting;  
2. Financial reports as of October 31, 2021;

Accept: Committee/Subcommittee Minutes  
1. Broadband and Advanced Technology 10/4/2021  
2. Finance 9/14/2021

## UNFINISHED BUSINESS

**Preparations for Marketing and Communications Specialist.** Aaron Backman noted Kelsey Olson, who was hired as the EDC's Marketing & Communications Specialist will begin work on November 16, 2021. A new laptop was purchased for her use. Backman noted she has already been watching some webinars related to economic development.

**2020 Audit.** Backman reported the Joint Powers Board unanimously accepted the 2020 audit at its October 27, 2021 meeting. A copy of the audit and management letter were provided to Kandiyohi County in regard to the CARES Act funds. The audit was submitted to the Federal Clearinghouse.

**NEW BUSINESS**—There was no new business.

## REPORTS

**Economic Development Activity.** Backman reported all parties signed the Development Agreement for the logistics company; closing is anticipated for the end of November. Plans by Negen Architects were shown. Yet to be finalized is the plat after which the building permits will be approved. Backman and Sarah Swedburg met with another multi-family housing developer this week and showed him six potential sites. Unique Opportunities is working on Phases 3 and 4 and the footings are being done for Preserve on 24<sup>th</sup>. Backman provided information on housing construction in Willmar since 2016—a total of 711 units. He believes notable infrastructure in Kandiyohi County will occur in the next year. Swedburg reported the Minnesota Main Street COVID Relief Grant program closed and businesses are being notified if they received a grant; currently, four or five businesses have notified the EDC that they received a grant. Staff has attended several meetings hosted by the Real Estate Journal. Friday, Swedburg will attend an industrial and economic development summit in the Twin Cities and in December, she will attend a Community Venture Network (CVN) meeting where she will meet a childcare center provider, who is interested in setting up a facility in rural Minnesota. At the last CVN meeting she met with a company interested in industrial hemp production. Forum Communications is interested in renting out its Willmar location. On November 15<sup>th</sup>, Swedburg will be participating in a finance panel for a women-owned business webinar. Last week she attended the Minnesota Agri-Growth Food Summit, which was also attended by Ridgewater College and provided good networking opportunities. At that Summit, she met a *Star Tribune* reporter, who is interested in doing an article on the area. U.S. Senator Tina Smith visited Willmar the end of October and the EDC arranged for her to tour DI Labs to learn of their creative business. Backman reported federal infrastructure funds that were just approved are being allocated to each state; approximately \$100 million is anticipated to come to Minnesota for broadband and \$100 million for transportation and bridges. Kandiyohi County is hopeful it will receive some of those funds for broadband and \$3.9 million for the Wye bridge. The Broadband and Advanced Technology Committee is still hopeful it will hear about its grant application to the National Telecommunications and Information Administration by November 29. The House Bonding Committee was in Willmar last week where Mel Odens gave a presentation on the County Road 55 overpass; John Harren presented

the northeast Willmar water plant project and SWWC Service Cooperative gave a presentation on the Willmar Middle School expansion project.

**Elevate Business Academy.** Swedburg reported the Elevate program is in its eighth week. Two students decided to leave the program so there are currently seven students representing five businesses; one current business and four prospective businesses. The ideal class size is 10-12. Swedburg invited board members to the graduation ceremony to be held December 17, 2021 from 5-7 p.m. at the Willmar Education and Arts Center. Swedburg has reached out to a couple of banks as to their interest in supporting the program. Southwest Initiative Foundation (SWIF) continues to sponsor the program. Swedburg continues to research translating the curriculum into Somali, but the estimated cost is \$25,000. There are about 20 on the waiting list for the March program, which does not include Somali-speaking entrepreneurs who are interested.

## **COMMITTEE REPORTS**

**Agriculture and Renewable Energy Development.** Swedburg reported the Ag Committee did not meet in October. The Industrial Hemp and Exploratory Subcommittee met this week and heard from Laura Arne, who attended the Florida Industrial Hemp Exposition and Conference. Subcommittee members will attend a hemp conference in Fargo, North Dakota, in December. The subcommittee also heard from the director of the Minnesota Industrial Hemp Association, who attended the meeting. The subcommittee will join the Association next year. The EDC supported a Value-Added Production Grant submitted by the Raymond locker plant to expand its business; Swedburg will continue to work with the owner. Justice Walker provided information on localizing halal meat processing between Kandi Acres, a goat producer by Hawick; four grocery stores and a Kerkhoven butcher, who is halal certified. They have processed 30 goats to date and everyone sold out within 48 hours. The program has been very successful. Another farm by Spicer has also been identified. The project arose from halal meat being imported from Australia. The local project is a pilot program through a grant with the University of Minnesota Extension. After collecting data, a report will be produced and hopefully the process can be duplicated in other areas of the state. Backman requested a copy of the report when it is completed. The halal consultant is from Nebraska. Kandi Acres is close to being certified for halal meat. At present, there is a big gap in the cost from the imported meat to the local meat. Swedburg noted Walker gave a presentation to the Ag Committee in June. Boll reported crop yields are higher than expected and 20% of local sugar beets will not be processed because yields were higher than expected.

**Broadband and Advanced Technology.** Swedburg reported U.S. Senator Tina Smith participated in a meeting in Willmar where 30 attended. Senator Smith's staff is working on answering the questions raised at the meeting. The committee encouraged Senator Smith to keep pressure on the NTIA grant process to ensure the review schedule stays on track. The NTIA grant application was for seven townships in northwest Kandiyohi County. If that grant is not awarded, the townships will be divided into two grant applications for the state program. Most townships are using general levy or existing reserve funds for their broadband projects. Dovre Township has a substantial area that is already served and it will assess its residents who are in the project. Dovre Township held a community meeting last night where answers to

questions were clarified. Federated Telephone Cooperative will bring fiber-to-the-home, but residents do not need to subscribe if they are not interested. The committee continues to work on education. A meeting was held Monday with three of the townships and at least three supervisors from each of the three townships attended; one supervisor from each township will be selected for the leadership team. They will continue to move forward.

[Julie Asmus joined the meeting.]

A meeting was held by the City of Prinsburg for its \$1 million project being done by Arvig. Kandiyohi County approved \$330,000 for the Prinsburg project and the city will cover the remainder through a tax abatement levy. The Community Christian School received funds for broadband in the past so the direction of the Prinsburg project was changed. A young gentleman, who works at the Prinsburg State Bank, spoke at the community meeting stating he was considering moving from the community because of the broadband issue. Charter is in New London, Spicer and Willmar; Frontier Communications is in Prinsburg, Svea and Blomkest and Boonstra stated Hanson Communications was working in the Raymond area. Swedburg noted the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF) auction was awarded to LTD Broadband. If a project can be started before LTD starts its project through RDOF, it may be allowed. Charter is doing a couple of new projects in the New London/Spicer area and another project was just added. It was noted Charter is coaxial cable, not fiber, but it is still a good speed. Vibrant Broadband is along the east side of the county, but must submit a new proposal that meets the minimum speeds set by the state. There is no movement by Vibrant at present.

**Business Retention and Expansion/Recruitment.** Backman reported the Workforce Development Subcommittee is scheduled to meet this Friday and will meet on Monday with Ridgewater College's Customized and Continuing Education Department and local employers. Nova-Tech Engineering wants to add 100 new employees in the next year and double that within three years; Carris Health has 117 positions open and the logistics company is looking at 200 employees, half of which will be new hires. The Workforce Development Subcommittee is developing a Workforce Solutions Summit to bring together agencies and businesses. Swedburg reported the Business Support Subcommittee is looking at how to stay in contact with the businesses that received grants in the past year. She will be using Synchronist to stay in contact and to document their needs. Backman noted area housing is still tight.

**Finance.** Backman informed the board that Trevor Johnson, owner of High Intensity Fitness, doing business as Cheers of Raymond, recently passed away. The life insurance policy was being processed, but had not yet been approved. United Prairie Bank, the lead lender, closed the doors of the business on November 5. The goal is to see the business reopen, but there are legal steps that must be taken. The manager is interested in purchasing the business and Mid-Minnesota Development Commission may have funds available. The business had very good sales after Johnson purchased it.

Swedburg informed the board that the Finance Committee approved a deferral of the loan payments for Amin Grocery. Photos of the new location were shown. Renovation is underway and will include a new entrance to be ADA compliant. Because of increased renovation costs, Swedburg assisted Amin Grocery in applying for a Small Cities Development Grant through the

Kandiyohi County Housing and Redevelopment Authority. Permit fees and land review fee were waived by the City of Willmar. SWIF also deferred its loan for three months.

IT WAS MOVED BY Rollie Boll, SECONDED BY Jesse Gislason, to approve the recommendation of the Kandiyohi County and City of Willmar Economic Development Commission's Finance Committee to defer loan payments for three months (November and December 2021 and January 2022) by Amin Grocery. MOTION CARRIED.

Asmus gave an update on the Willmar City Council's recent decision to rescind project agreements for the City Hall and Community Center. It appears they will look at two separate locations/projects and may leave City Hall downtown. They will look at how a future community center may look, i.e., only seniors or families. They will get public input, get architectural drawings done and do a needs assessment. The City Council is optimistic about receiving local option sales tax funds. Asmus provided information on the City Council's decision to close the gun range.

**Marketing and Public Relations.** No additional report.

**Leisure Travel.** Backman reported the Leisure Travel Committee held its most recent meeting at Kandi Land Farm. Benson stated the farm's goal is to teach about agriculture. It intends to expand next year. The Willmar Lakes Area Convention and Visitor Bureau's numbers are up and people are starting to travel into the county. Backman noted they are seeing an increase in conferences and business meetings in the county. The local resorts had a great year.

## **WHAT'S UP?**

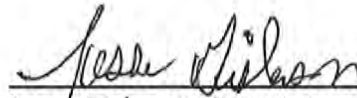
- Benson reported on a meeting for the Glacial Ridge Curling Club; it will begin fund raising for a new facility and has been contacting financial advisors who may be interested in being involved. Members will be speaking with potential sponsors and will be contacting businesses with a national presence. The club draws from a four-county region. An agreement has been made with the City of Willmar for the club to run the new facility for six months and pay for the utilities and the City of Willmar to run it for six months and pay for the utilities and possibly for hosting large events/shows. The club has 140 members and approximately 40-60 non-members that show up to curl. Open curling is \$3 per person. The club wants to increase youth leagues. Currently, five schools participate. It also has an adaptive program and has been speaking with Special Olympics. Businesses have indicated an interest in advertising. The capital campaign is for \$3.2 million, but Benson believe less may be needed. Once 60% of the funds have been raised, the City of Willmar will approve the start of construction. It will be a detached building that faces Highway 71.
- Awale reported he started dispatching for a trucking company with a couple of friends.
- Boonstra reported the Highway 23 Coalition appointed a new board member Michael Wimmer. Patrick Wiedemann from the Minnesota Department of Transportation will give a presentation at the next board meeting. She attended the Minnesota Transportation Alliance annual meeting and learned the project north of Foley is to be resurfaced in 2022

and a roundabout constructed by the school, which would delay construction of any four-lane. Her personal business is going well and she is trying to semi retire. Her son's building he purchased from Simply Shrimp is in place.


- Jesse Gislason reported a bus load of representatives and Senator Andrew Lang stopped in Spicer relative to infrastructure grant funds.
- Les Heitke announced the new women's residence for Project Turnabout will hold a grand opening from 3-7 p.m. today. The West Central Tribune printed an article on the new athletic fields in Willmar. Mary Sawatzky, chair of the Swannson Field project, stated everything is moving ahead. They want to use natural grass for the outfield and turf for the infield. He also announced that tomorrow through Saturday is the Veterans Day exhibition at the Willmar Auditorium.
- Boll noted two houses in his neighborhood sold within a week.
- Walker stated this is his eighth day on the job and he will be looking at changes in the Willmar Planning and Development Department.

**NEXT MEETING**—The next board meeting is 11:00 a.m., Thursday, December 9, 2021 at the Community Room of Heritage Bank, Willmar and via Zoom video conference.

**ADJOURNMENT**—There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 1:36 p.m.

  
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Jesse Gislason, Secretary

APPROVED: 12/9/2021

  
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Kelly TerWisscha, President