

**KANDIYOHI COUNTY AND CITY OF WILLMAR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION (EDC)
JOINT OPERATIONS BOARD OF DIRECTORS (OB) MEETING
MINUTES
February 11, 2021
Via ZOOM Video Conference**

Present: Art Benson, Rollie Boll, Donna Boonstra, Jesse Gislason, Kerry Johnson and Kelly TerWisscha

Ex Officio: Julie Asmus and Dave Ramstad

Excused: Les Heitke

Staff: Aaron Backman, Executive Director and Connie Schmoll, Business Development Manager

Media: Macklin Caruso, Lakes Area Review and Shelby Lindrud, West Central Tribune

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

President Kelly TerWisscha called the meeting to order at approximately 11:00 a.m.

AGENDA—Added to the Consent Agenda under Approve, was item 4c payment of Order Estimate from West Central Tribune in the amount of \$1,185.25 for the job ad and item 4d payment of invoice from Community Venture Network in the amount of \$2,125 as budgeted. Added to the Agenda under New Business was the Business Development Manager position.

IT WAS MOVED BY Rollie Boll, SECONDED BY Art Benson, to approve the revised Agenda and the following revised Consent Agenda.

CONSENT AGENDA

- Approve:
1. Minutes of January 7 special meeting and January 14, 2021 annual meeting
 2. Financial reports as of January 31, 2021
 3. Adding Tony Kirby and Larry Kleindl to the Broadband and Advanced Technology Committee and removing Sonja Bogart
 4. Payment of Invoices over \$1,000:
 - a. Invoice No. 3168 from Redwood Valley Technical Solutions in the amount of \$2,250 to be reimbursed by Southwest Initiative Foundation
 - b. Invoice INV EDC - Jan/Feb from REDstar Creative in the amount of \$1,946.92 (\$1,669.42 to be reimbursed by Southwest Initiative Foundation)
 - c. Estimate from West Central Tribune in the amount of \$1,185.25

- d. Invoice from Community Venture Network in the amount of \$2,125 as budgeted

Accept: Committee/Subcommittee Minutes

1. Agriculture and Renewable Energy Development 12/17/2020
2. Industrial Hemp Exploratory Subcommittee 11/9/2020
3. Broadband and Advanced Technology 1/4/2021
4. Business Retention and Expansion/Recruitment 1/8/2021

MOTION CARRIED.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Update on COVID-19 Response. Aaron Backman reported 68 applications were received for the Minnesota Pandemic Relief (MPR) Grant Program with 34 being approved and paid for a total of \$555,000. This week the Finance Committee approved another six applications for a total of \$104,5000, which will be presented to the County Board of Commissioners next Tuesday. Next week, the committee will consider a number of Tier III applications from businesses and nonprofits. A majority of the grant funds will be committed after next week. The state has provided direct assistance to convention centers and movie theaters. The EDC worked with the two movie theaters in Kandiyohi County to apply for state funds directly. Connie Schmoll reported the tourism-related businesses were affected by the pandemic; all lodging facilities and R J Tours received grants from the EDC.

Purchase of Ridgewater College Surplus Property. Backman reported the Joint Powers Board approved moving ahead with the purchase of the property from Ridgewater College. The EDC's attorney has reviewed the Purchase Agreement. The state has signed the Purchase Agreement and Backman will sign it today. The closing will be held February 16, 2021. Backman has had early-stage conversations with developers.

Boards' Planning Session. Backman reported the Joint Powers Board agreed to hold a one-year focused planning session and approved the agreement with Achieve TFC/Cheryl Glaeser. The planning session will be held sometime in April.

Election of 2021 Officers. Backman informed the board that Kerry Johnson was formally approved by the Willmar Municipal Utilities Commission (MUC), however, her replacement on this board will not be appointed until after the April Joint Powers Board meeting. Johnson stated today is her last board meeting, but she will remain on the EDC's Finance Committee.

IT WAS MOVED BY Donna Boonstra, SECONDED BY Kerry Johnson, to elect Jesse Gislason as secretary of the Kandiyohi County and City of Willmar Economic Development Commission's Joint Operations Board. MOTION CARRIED.

IT WAS MOVED BY Kerry Johnson, SECONDED BY Donna Boonstra, to re-elect Kelly TerWisscha as president; elect Art Benson as vice president; and re-elect Rollie Boll as treasurer of the Kandiyohi County and City of Willmar Economic Development Commission's Joint Operations Board. MOTION CARRIED.

Elevate Business Academy. Schmoll reported Elevate was chosen as the name of the program and green was chosen for the logo and marketing materials. The website being done by Redwood Valley Technical Solutions is almost ready to go live. REDstar Creative has been working on the marketing materials and finalized a brochure. Ten individuals are registered and another four are interested—ten are Somali and the others are from other cultures; some are business owners and others are thinking of starting a business. The first training will begin on March 17 and go into June.

NEW BUSINESS

Staff Transition Task Force. Backman reported ads were placed with the League of Minnesota Cities, Economic Development Association of Minnesota, Minnesota Association of Professional County Economic Developers, West Central Tribune and this week he notified all participants in the Southwest Minnesota Business Network. The *Lakes Area Review* printed a nice article about Connie's retirement.

PROGRESS REPORTS

Willmar/Willmar Industrial Park. Backman reported Northern Radiator is working with Marcus Construction to expand its facility by about 50%. Dave Ramstad reported the Willmar Planning Commission approved Northern Radiator's application last night. Backman gave an update on the Epitopix project. Ramstad stated they have made significant progress and are on the last steps in getting BNSF to sign the agreement. Backman reported he is working with a Minneapolis company that sterilizes medical products to possibly relocate to the MinnWest Technology Campus. Several meetings have been held in regard to the Municipal Utilities power plant—asbestos and lead abatement would need to be done, which is cost prohibitive. Ramstad stated that following tours and input from others, the MUC is leaning toward demolition and opening the site to redevelopment. Backman is working on a logistics project and has been providing information on various sites in the Willmar area. Kuepers Inc., a Brainerd development company has a purchase agreement to buy property on 5th Street SE and 24th Street SE for a multi-housing project; it has been interacting with Sarah Swedburg, but has not yet had a plan review. Ramstad reported a number of developers have expressed interest in the Renaissance Zone; one of which is interested in a hotel near the hospital. One challenge is smaller projects that would like to take advantage of the free land. Backman stated a St. Cloud developer has looked at 10 locations around the city and is interested in a location on Lakeland Drive. Ramstad stated the City of Willmar developed a couple of flyers for the Renaissance Zone and are creating another that will include a comparative with estimates. Schmoll reported she is working with a developer that is looking at property south of Lakeland Elementary, but the school has not been interested in selling the land. Schmoll will meet with the school's Grounds and Building Committee on March 1st. The project would provide market-rate, workforce housing, which could benefit the school. Backman stated there is only a one-month supply of housing in Willmar. Ramstad stated new apartment buildings are fully leased within six months of completion; demand far exceeds supply. Housing is very important for the county to continue to grow. Backman stated the New London/Spicer area is down to 1.9 or less than a month's inventory of single-family homes—healthy is 5-6 months. Backman stated a

St. Cloud developer is also interested in doing senior housing; the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency recommended Willmar and Fergus Falls for such development. Johnson stated Unique Opportunities will have another 72 units available later in 2021, 70 of which have already been rented and the project is only half done.

Economic Development Activity. Schmoll reported she is working with Paul Damhof on a shrimp business; an Olivia hemp processor; an electrical apprentice, who wants to start his own plumbing business; and with Cullen's Home Center.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Agriculture and Renewable Energy Development. Schmoll reported the Ag Committee continues to plan for the Partners in Ag Innovation Conference. As Schmoll will be retired when the conference is held, Dustin Kotrba agreed to emcee the event. The Ag to Energy Biofuels Workshop was rescheduled to March 18th. At its January meeting, the committee heard a very interesting presentation on Nova-Tech Engineering. The Industrial Hemp Exploratory Subcommittee has been active and is writing a letter to legislators about regulations. The subcommittee is also looking into the use of graphene.

Broadband and Advanced Technology. Schmoll reported the Broadband Committee is working with three townships (Dovre, Mamre and St. Johns) on a broadband project. Kevin Beyer of Federated Telephone Cooperative will meet with the township leaders next week to reassess their commitment level. It is possible a fourth township may be added. Last week state broadband grants were awarded; all were under \$5 million. Thus, the committee will try to keep the local projects under \$5 million. Schmoll gave a presentation to the County Board suggesting they provide funding of \$25,000 per township. She will present a resolution to the County Board next week as to their commitment. It is hoped a state grant application will be submitted this year. Schmoll stated it is not too early to start talking about the next project and which townships may be included. Donna Boonstra stated Schmoll got the attention of the County Board with her presentation and Larry Kleindl rejoined the committee.

Business Retention and Expansion/Recruitment (BRE). Backman reported the BRE Committee met on February 5th, which included a presentation by Mayor Marv Calvin on his viewpoint of the JC Penney site for the City Hall. Cost estimates are being put together. Last month, the committee heard a presentation by Willmar Ten. The committee received updates from CLUES as to diverse training and from Central MN Jobs & Training Services, Inc. on its non-traditional CDL training program. Backman reported most MnSCU enrollment is down due to COVID with Ridgewater down 7-8%.

Finance. Backman reported the Finance Committee met five times since January 1st with the major activity related to the MPR Grant Program. The committee should be meeting fewer times than last year.

Marketing and Public Relations. The committee did not meet in January, but REDstar Creative was asked to create a new ad for the visitors guide with a tag line of Places to Play, Places to Stay, including pictures of 15th Street Flats, Goat Ridge Brewing and Little Crow Golf.

What's Up? Board members provided updates. Boonstra stated her business has increased and reported the Highway 23 Coalition is working on signage for the corridor. The board is awaiting a sample sign before moving ahead. The next board meeting will include representatives from Congresswoman Michelle Fischbach's office. Boll reported commercial checking account balances are way up, which may mean businesses are becoming healthy again. Julie Asmus reported the Willmar local option sales tax projects are moving ahead. Quotes for the shelters at Robbins Island were received; the softball fields are moving forward; community presentations were given on the fields by the Civic Center; and the event center is still trying to firm up plans and financing. Benson reported things are going well for the Willmar Lakes Area Convention and Visitors Bureau, but lodging is down. Jesse Gislason reported his business is open and business has been nonstop until their 10 p.m. closing. Johnson thanked the board for her participation. President TerWisscha stated his company continues to work on the Simply Shrimp expansion and hopes to break ground this spring; they continue to work on estimates for the Willmar City Hall; Barney's on Eagle Lake will be expanding and adding a liquor store; he is seeing business confidence is up despite COVID restrictions, businesses are borrowing and it looks good for 2021. On behalf of the board, President TerWisscha thanked Johnson for her service on this board.

NEXT MEETING—The next regular board meeting is **11:00 a.m., Thursday, March 11, 2021** via ZOOM video conference.

ADJOURNMENT—There being no other business,


IT WAS MOVED BY Donna Boonstra, SECONDED BY Art Benson, to adjourn the meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 12:01 p.m.



Jesse Gislason, Secretary

APPROVED: 3/11/2021:



Kelly TerWisscha, President