

KANDIYOHI COUNTY AND CITY OF WILLMAR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION (EDC)
JOINT OPERATIONS BOARD OF DIRECTORS (OB) MEETING
MINUTES
August 9, 2018
EDC Office, Willmar

Present: Art Benson, Rollie Boll, Donna Boonstra, Robert Carlson and Les Heitke

Excused: Roger Imdieke, Kerry Johnson, Connie Schmoll and Kelly TerWisscha

Ex Officio: Bruce Peterson

Staff: Aaron Backman, Executive Director and Thor Figenskau, Summer Intern

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

President Donna Boonstra called the meeting to order at approximately 11:03 a.m. and declared a quorum was present.

AGENDA—Added to the Consent Agenda under Approve was item 4, payment of \$1,161.00 to REDstar Creative for July services.

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

CONSENT AGENDA—

- Approve:
1. Minutes of July 12, 2018 meeting
 2. Financial reports as of July 31, 2018
 3. Payment of \$1,933.26 to REDstar Creative for June services
 4. Payment of \$1,161.00 to REDstar Creative for July services

- Accept: Committee/Subcommittee Minutes
1. Agriculture and Renewable Energy Development 6/21/2018
 - a. Ag Marketing Subcommittee 6/20 and 7/13/2018
 2. Business Retention and Expansion/Recruitment 7/6/2018
 3. Marketing and Public Relations 6/25/2018

MOTION CARRIED.

PROGRESS REPORTS

Willmar/Willmar Industrial Park. Bruce Peterson reported he and Aaron Backman have been working on projects. Peterson received a letter of intent from a company to purchase one full block in the Willmar Industrial Park to construct a 100,000 sq. ft. facility next spring. The letter of intent will be presented to the Willmar City Council at its meeting next week. Negotiations as to a price are ongoing.

Peterson authorized the company to go onsite and perform soil borings. A condition of the purchase is that the intersection of County Road 5 and Willmar Avenue have traffic signals installed. The County Engineer has been included in the discussions. Another business is asking the City of Willmar to annex 74 acres it is purchasing in Willmar Township south of Mills on which it will build next spring a new 52,000-55,000 sq. ft. sales and service facility with a showroom. The business will initially develop 20 acres. The City of Willmar will extend sewer and water a quarter mile, but road upgrades will be the responsibility of the buyer. Peterson and Backman continue to work on a \$10 million high-pressure pasteurization food processing facility for northeast Willmar near the MinnWest Technology Campus (MWTC). A high volume of truck traffic is not expected and the number of employees is expected to be about 20. The Willmar City Council approved the sale of 140 acres at a price of approximately \$719,000 to be used for borrow material for the Wye project. Peterson stated the City of Willmar anticipate receiving the final Master Agreement soon. 15th Street Flats received final financing approval and is in the final discussion phase with the City of Willmar. It hopes to break ground in September. Peterson and Backman continue to have contact with a couple of other developers trying to determine particular sites for apartment complexes. Peterson reported approximately 20 single-family homes are being built. Peterson has had discussions with the Kandi Mall and a couple of potential tenants have stopped by City Hall. Potential tenants have indicated they will wait until Herbergers is completely closed before committing to anything. It was noted the city of Willmar's official population has surpassed 20,000, which prohibits access to some USDA grants. Peterson reported the City of Willmar is working on an ordinance for food trucks that will include a small license fee.

Backman reported three developers are looking at multi-family rental projects and are open to different locations in the City of Willmar. He was contacted by the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development relative to a business interested in the former Kandiyo Power Cooperative location—the business is similar to ERC. Peterson noted there has also been local interest in the building.

Highway 23 Coalition. Backman gave an update on the Highway 23 Coalition, including:

- membership renewal for 2019 is underway;
- he is making presentations to governmental entities and giving updates on work done to date;
- he distributed maps (see attached) showing Highway 23 from border to border and one with current members shown in yellow and potential new members being contacted in orange;
- he will be making presentations in Benton, Mille Lacs and Kanabec Counties;
- Highway 23 is a scenic byway in northeast Minnesota so membership may not be pursued in that area;
- he believes a majority of the current members will renew; and
- at a membership meeting this morning strategies for renewal were discussed, starting with presentations to governmental entities.

Les Heitke voiced concern that although the Corridors of Commerce funds were approved in the bonding bill, they have not been appropriated and in future years new state leadership could affect appropriation of those funds.

2018 Goals.

Childcare. Backman reported United Community Action Partnership held an organizational meeting with more than 20 core team members attending. Jessica Beyer of First Children's Finance has been assigned to Kandiyohi County's childcare initiative. Backman and Connie Schmoll met with Scott

Marquardt of Southwest Initiative Foundation (SWIF), who committed to awarding a \$5,000 grant to the EDC for childcare. State senators will hold a state listening session on August 13, 2018 in Willmar. The EDC is participating on the childcare issue in partnership with other entities.

Diverse Business Initiative. Work in this goal area involves the EDC receiving the transfer of the Willmar Area Multicultural Business Center (WAM-BC).

Opportunity Zones. The EDC has informed the West Central Angel Fund I about the Opportunity Zones program.

Transportation Infrastructure. Nothing in addition to the Highway 23 Coalition report.

Business Visits and Meetings. Backman highlighted information from Connie Schmoll's report (see attached), including the Talent & Technology workshop to be held August 13, 2018 at Little Crow Golf Resort and working with the EDC's intern, Thor Figenskau.

Figenskau reported he has been doing Facebook ads for the Talent & Technology workshop; has met with every school in the county, except for Kerkhoven-Murdock-Sunburg, and obtained updated information for the EDC's website and a flyer featuring education; and he recently held a Facebook 101 workshop (see attached) through his business Figenskau Advisory hosted by the Willmar Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce with 30 attendees.

Backman highlighted information from his report (see attached), including the following:

- the transfer of WAM-BC's loan fund and assets was approved by the Joint Powers Board and the two loan in default were filed in Conciliation Court;
- the Joint Powers Board approved reserving \$100,000 for the WAM-BC Microenterprise Loan Fund;
- the Joint Powers Board approved increasing the reserve for the Revolving Loan Fund from \$224,052 to \$300,000;
- he met with state representatives as to federal freight corridor designation of Highway 23;
- he met with President Johnson of Ridgewater College and will meet with him monthly;
- he toured Little Crow Golf Resort—GrandStay Hotel has 51 rooms; the event center can accommodate 300 people and the restaurant and outside patio can accommodate 75 people;
- the EDC assisted with the application for a USDA grant for Simply Shrimp for a feasibility study for expansion;
- he is participating in a retail merchandising project in partnership with University of Minnesota Extension and the University of Minnesota College of Design;
- Spurs has received final inspections and approvals by the City of Willmar and Kandiyohi County and a soft opening will be held tomorrow;
- the annual Ag & Animal Science Conference will be held September 25, 2018 at MWTC; and
- he will attend the Community Venture Network meeting tomorrow.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Budgets. Backman reported the Joint Powers Board revised the 2018 budget to include the summer intern position and approved the 2019 budget that was emailed to the board last week. Backman will

present the 2019 budget to the Willmar City Council on September 10 and to the County Board on September 18.

NEW BUSINESS—Backman informed the board he will be on vacation and traveling to Finland August 28-September 4, 2018.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Agriculture and Renewable Energy Development. Rollie Boll reported the committee has been focused on the Talent & Technology workshop.

Broadband and Advanced Technology. Chair Boonstra reported the committee met Monday and the chair, Mark Boeschen, would like the committee to brainstorm on what it can do to bring local broadband to the next level. Peterson recommended the committee provide the community with an informational sheet on local broadband options and if there are technologies not available. Chair Boonstra reported Frontier Communications installed copper around Raymond. Peterson noted the two companies looking at the Willmar Industrial Park are very interested in broadband. Chair Boonstra stated one thing the committee discussed was a city and county ordinance that whenever any road work is done, conduits be installed.

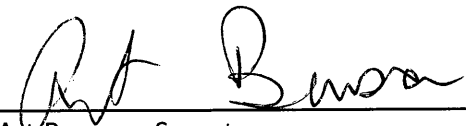
Business Retention and Expansion/Recruitment. Backman reported the committee held its meeting at Midtown Plaza. Heitke reported the committee had a tour of the plaza. The committee heard from guest speaker Sam Romain, a former employee of Haug Implement, who started an SEO business in the metro area.

Marketing and Public Relations. Backman reported Kandiyohi County is again featured in the *Business in Focus* magazine (see attached).

Leisure Travel. Backman reported the committee had its August meeting at Model Citizen in New London.

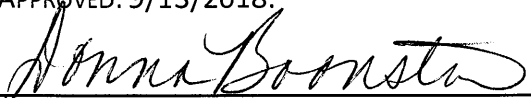
NEXT MEETING—The next board meeting is **11:00 a.m., Thursday, September 13, 2018.**

ADJOURNMENT—There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 12:22 p.m.



Art Benson, Secretary

APPROVED: 9/13/2018:

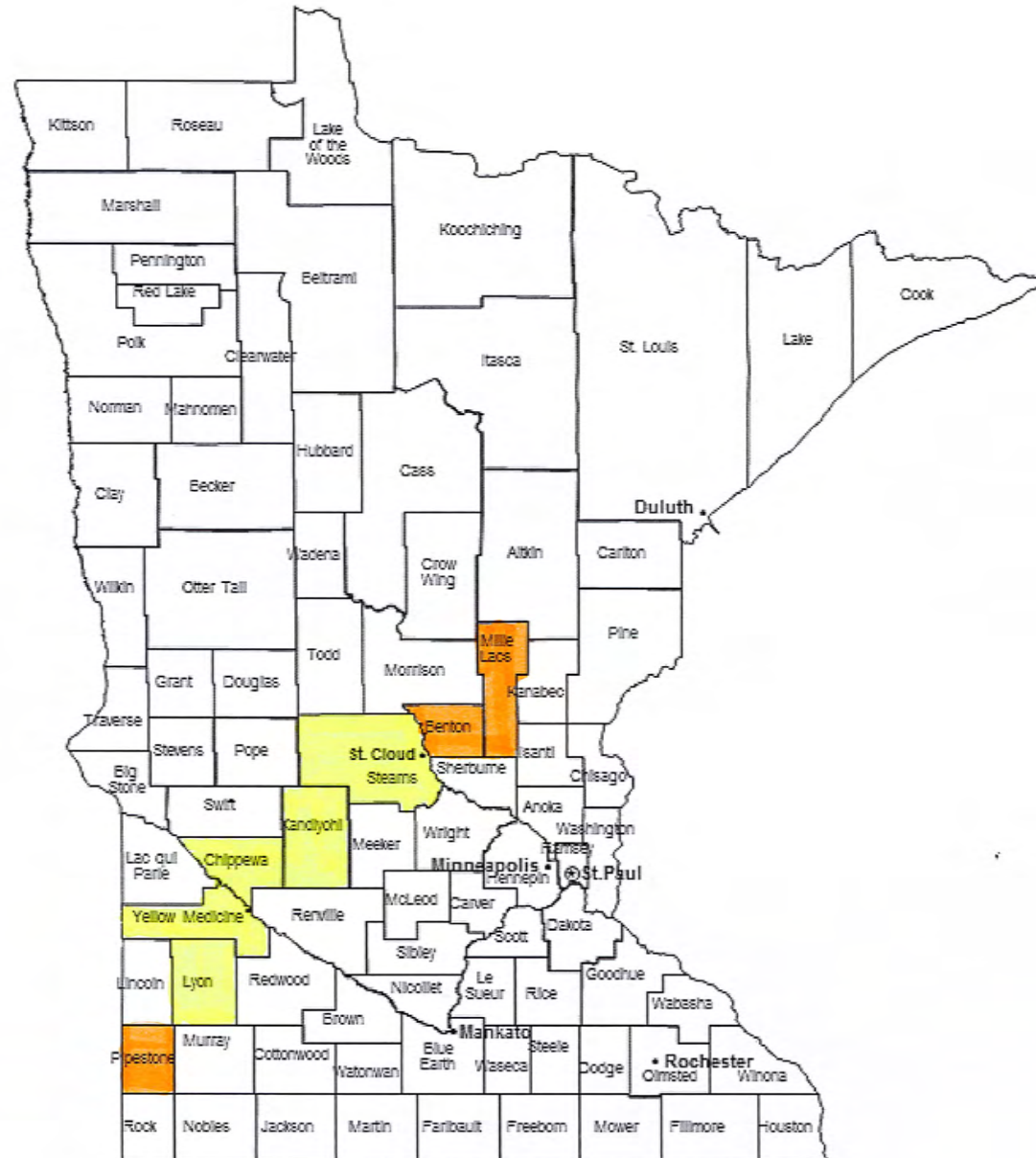


Donna Boonstra, President



Portions of Highway 23, with a predominance of significant commercial traffic, must be added to the National Highway Freight Network to be eligible to receive federal funding under the Highway Freight Program.

Highway 23 Coalition Membership



0 75 Miles
0 75 KM



**Joint Operations Board Meeting
Connie Schmoll Report
August 9, 2018**

Broadband

The governor's veto of the 2018 Supplemental Bill put an end to planning for a Border-to-Border grant application opportunity this year. The committee will continue to plan for a project in the county. Hiawatha Broadband Communications has shown an interest. Other providers will be contacted once again to consider planning for a grant application in 2019 if Border-to-Border funds are restored.

West Central Angel Fund I

The EDC has informed the leaders of the West Central Angel Fund about Opportunity Zones and will keep them updated as new information is released. Their marketing flyer is now available for distribution. The EDC assisted in the costs of creating the marketing piece. I have kept them informed about webinar opportunities to learn more about Opportunity Zones.

Agriculture Renewable Energy Development Committee

Marketing materials are complete for the August 13, 2018 Talent & Technology Workshop for Ag producers. The morning workshop will begin at 7:30 a.m. and will include four speakers on the subjects of securing and retaining workforce for ag producers, regulations regarding employees, technology in crop farming today and use of data collected with precision agriculture equipment. The event will be held at the Little Crow Golf Resort by New London.

Committee members met the goal of securing \$6,000 in sponsorships to cover costs. The sponsors are as follows:

Kandiyohi County Corn and Soybean Growers	\$ 1,000
MinnWest Technology Campus	\$ 1,000
Central Counties Cooperative	\$ 1,000
Ag Country FCS	\$ 1,000
Christianson CPAs and Accountants	\$ 500
Heritage Bank	\$ 500
Haug Implement	\$ 500
Kandiyohi Power Cooperative	\$ 500

Childcare

United Community Action Partnership (UCAP), with a 2018 Technical Assistance grant, held an organizing meeting on July 27th with over 20 core team leaders in attendance. First Children's Finance (FCF) staff member, Jessica Beyer has been assigned to our community to lead the discussion and planning process. At the first meeting, an introduction to First Children's Finance was provided. Videos were viewed which showed the tremendous benefits of quality childcare for children in the important early years of child development. Preliminary data for childcare provisions and the upcoming need for spaces were reviewed.



Core team members provided information that will be helpful to create a final version of the supply and demand picture. Please see attached for more details.

In addition, Aaron and I had discussions about childcare accessibility in our county with Scott Marquardt of Southwest Initiative Foundation (SWIF). Scott then reported that SWIF is willing to provide \$5,000 to the EDC to assist in locating a new childcare center in our county and would forward a letter to us stating such intent in the near future.

On August 13th, 6 to 8 p.m., a delegation of state senators will be visiting Willmar for a community listening session on the statewide childcare shortage. The EDC was asked to arrange for an informal discussion prior to the community discussion, with community childcare leaders and business representatives. I made arrangements to have Jennie-O host the discussion at its corporate headquarters training room at 3 p.m. on the 13th. Childcare professionals, business leaders, social services, healthcare and school personnel will be in attendance.

Business Meetings and Events


1. Networking meeting with Chamber – joint planning of speaker on international trade
2. Work with Intern, Thor Figenskau
 - a. Flyer- marketing education options in our community
 - b. Social media posting of ag event and direct calling of ag producers
 - c. Plans to attend city council meetings outside of Willmar
3. International Food and Technology Trade Show
4. Open Mic for ag event
5. Neighborhood Development Center conference call
6. Willmar child carecenter planning
7. SCORE volunteer training
8. Ag Professionals event planning and monthly meeting
9. UCAP/Children's Finance first planning meeting
10. Atwater City Council Meeting
11. New London Citizens in Action
12. Chamber Public Policy Meeting
13. Networking with Craig Johnson, President, Ridgewater College
14. U of M Showcase Planning

Business Visits

1. Tour of West Central Steel's new expansion
2. Two new startups initial meetings
3. CBRE calls: site details for a new business

BUILDING STRONGER
CHILD CARE BUSINESSES

Jessica Beyer
Business Development Manager
320-808-7066
jessica@firstchildrensfinance.org



Rural Child Care Innovation Program

Kandiyohi County Kickoff Summary

JULY 31, 2018



First Children's Finance
111 Third Avenue South, Suite 220
Minneapolis, MN 55401
www.firstchildrensfinance.org



The Rural Child Care Innovation Program launched in Kandiyohi County on July 27, 2018 at the United Community Action in Willmar, MN. Twenty One representatives from the community came together to set a level foundation of understanding about child care in the local area.

The full day program concentrated on educating participants about the impact of child care from various vantage points. From the importance of brain development for our youngest children to the impact child care has on businesses and employers, the program provided solid background surrounding the importance of this critical issue. The program also provided perspectives on the operational models of family child care and child care centers along with several examples of success stories from greater Minnesota.

The current Potential Need Analysis completed by First Children's Finance shows a shortage of 776 child care slots in the Kandiyohi County. The data is looking at all parents in the work force that have children under the age of 5. The zip code of 56201 in Willmar has the largest identified shortage of 164 slots with a close second in the zip code of 56288 in Spicer with a shortage of 143 slots.

The next step will be a planning meeting to schedule community engagement activities, to build additional buy-in, participation in future efforts, and the gathering of additional community level data.

As part of the program, participants worked as a group to address several questions designed to start the process of evaluating their own community challenges in addressing the child care shortages. The outcomes from these exercises are summarized below in the following pages.

What are the your expected outcomes from participation in the RCCIP program? These are unedited answers.

Participants were asked to share what they hoped to see as a result of participating in the program. There were was no limitation on scope of outcome.

- More affordable slots
- Somali community
- Know the barriers
- Don't forget the smaller parts of the county
- Think bigger than the county
- Willmar is the regional center
- Know the need
- Data centered based solutions
- Create ways for sustainable child care businesses
- Look at the barriers
- Keep kids at the center
- What are the pinch points to entry to new child care businesses
- Understand the difference between a center and a family provider
- Shift/sick care needs
- Change the view of child care professionals – not baby sitters
- Holistic solutions – community based birth and up
- Education begins at Birth

***How is the lack of child care impacting your local community?
These are unedited answers***

This question followed an in-depth look at topics such as brain development, impact of child care on businesses, and the parent's dilemma.

- Extended hours are a challenge
- Affecting parents who want to work and want to move out of poverty
- Can't afford child care – so use older children or neighbors
- Mothers return to abusive relationships because can't find child care
- Truancy issues for older children
- Businesses loss productivity
- Businesses can't fill slots
- Businesses can't bring new people into the community

What are some of the barriers and community challenges you see for child care? These are unedited answers.

This question followed the child care model section and participants were encouraged to think of any potential challenges providers and the community face.

- Finding center staff and being able to pay them
- Lack of licensable space
- Lack of affordable space
- Archaic rules and regulations
- Inconsistent rules and regulations for child care center and family child care
- Variances allowed in some regions and not others
- Business retention and recruitment
- Retention of providers and retirement of providers
- Family providers don't feel respected and can't make enough money
- Need more positive attitude about the profession

What examples could fit in your community? What are the potential barriers for the development of these? These are unedited answers.

This question followed data collected and examples of success across the state. Participants were encouraged to think of any potential ideas that might fit within their local community.

- Partnerships
- Faith based
- Expansion of existing center businesses with community support
- Businesses sponsor child care rooms i.e. Infant room
- Barriers of how entities can see how everything intersects
- Intercultural barriers
- Increase costs – umbrella organization
- Pod Model – all children in the same building but separate child care businesses
- City of Willmar new office space
- Extra local options – sales tax?
- Tax Abatement?
- Space in the Mall
 - Cost to renovate
 - Find partners
- Community and county support for pod model and Head Start partnership

Where should the Core Team consider going to get the message out to gather more information and to build buy-in from the community? These are unedited answers.

As the Core Team prepares to begin the community engagement process, there was a brainstorm session to gather ideas on ‘who’ to engage in the process.

- Decide on a cohesive message
- Make sure to agree on the data
- What are employers outside of Willmar need
- School district
- Set next meeting after August 13th – after legislative listening session
- Someone attend the listening session
- Who can help with public relations/media for the community
- One person help with radio, newspaper, social media



Kandiyohi County Potential Child Care Need Analysis

Zip Code Analysis

Zip Code	City	County	CCC #	CCC Capacity	FCC #	FCC Capacity	Total Capacity	Exptd Capacity*	Under '0' Working	Expected Under '5'**	Plus/Minus/Total
56201	Willmar	Kandiyohi County	4	311	57	614	925	834	1189	999	-164
56209	Atwater	Kandiyohi County	0	0	4	42	42	40	120	101	-61
56216	Blomkest	Kandiyohi County	0	0	1	10	10	10	56	47	-37
56251	Kandiyohi	Kandiyohi County	0	0	0	0	0	0	81	68	-68
56253	Lake Lillian	Kandiyohi County	0	0	1	10	10	10	60	50	-40
56273	New London	Kandiyohi County	0	0	13	144	144	130	288	242	-112
56279	Pennock	Kandiyohi County	0	0	1	10	10	10	74	62	-52
56281	Prinsburg	Kandiyohi County	0	0	2	20	20	20	54	45	-25
56282	Raymond	Kandiyohi County	0	0	5	54	54	50	111	93	-43
56288	Spicer	Kandiyohi County	0	0	7	74	74	70	254	213	-143
56289	Sunburg	Kandiyohi County	0	0	0	0	0	0	35	29	-29
Total			4	311	91	978	1289	1174	2322	1950	-776

*Expected capacity is an internal calculation of First Children's Finance based upon historical data collection.

**Expected Under '5' is the adjusted calculation from the US Census totals of children with all

1. Each Preschool and Preschool/School Age listing was manually checked to confirm full-day care. All programs offering less than full year, full day care were excluded.
2. Provider data was updated on June 1, 2018 from the MN DHS Licensing Records Website.
3. Census data was updated on June 12, 2018 from the American Community Survey 2016 5 yr Estimates
4. 7 programs with a max capacity of 238 slots were excluded due to not offering full day or full year care.

The Zip Code Analysis provides insight into zip codes that are experiencing a negative gap in care availability for expected number of children seeking care. These totals will be slightly different than the area view due to zip codes extending beyond area boundaries.

Revised 8/1/2018
Draft 2

Facebook ads Workshop

SEO — Search Engine Optimization

- SEO decides what is first on google and what is last
- Keywords
- Website
- Social media
- Google business
- More people=higher SEO

Analytics

- Facebook comes with a customizable analytics screen
- Provides detailed metrics
- Analytics are accessed by the ads manager
- No traditional advertising provides analytics like this

Delivery ▲	Results	Reach	Impressions	Cost per Result	Budget	Amount Spent
● Active 2 Approved	1,391 Reach	1,391	1,405	\$9.02 Per 1,000 P...	\$32.75 Lifetime	\$12.55

Bad Targeting

- Targeting only interests
- Only 3 targets
- Generic interests

Interests > Additional Interests



Farm

Organic farming

Technology

Add demographics, interests or behaviors

Suggestions

Browse

Good Targeting

- Targeting Behaviors,
Demographics and interests
- Using jargon
- NOT just targeting interests

Behaviors > B2B > Industry

 **Agriculture**

Demographics > Education > Field of Study

Agriculture

Farming

Demographics > Work > Employers

Agriculture

Dairy farming

Family Farm

Farming















Detailed targeting

- Facebook gathers information by monitoring online activity
- Can target interests, behaviors, job titles etc.
 - Interests
 - Behaviors
 - The more targeting the better

Advertising Objectives

- First step
- Three Categories
- Cost varies on objective
- Different objectives

Awareness	Consideration	Conversion
 Brand awareness	 Traffic	 Conversions
 Reach	 Engagement	 Catalog sales
	 App installs	 Store visits
	 Video views 	
	 Lead generation	
	 Messages	



Traffic

Send more people to a destination on or off Facebook such as a website, app or Messenger conversation.

Cost of Facebook ads

- Reach campaign
- Cost varies
- Every business can afford Facebook ads
- Able to set limit on spending



Why Facebook?

- Incredibly cheap
- Many advertising objectives
- Detailed Targeting
- Analytics
- Highest amount of active monthly users (2 billion)

Boosted vs. Ad

Boosted

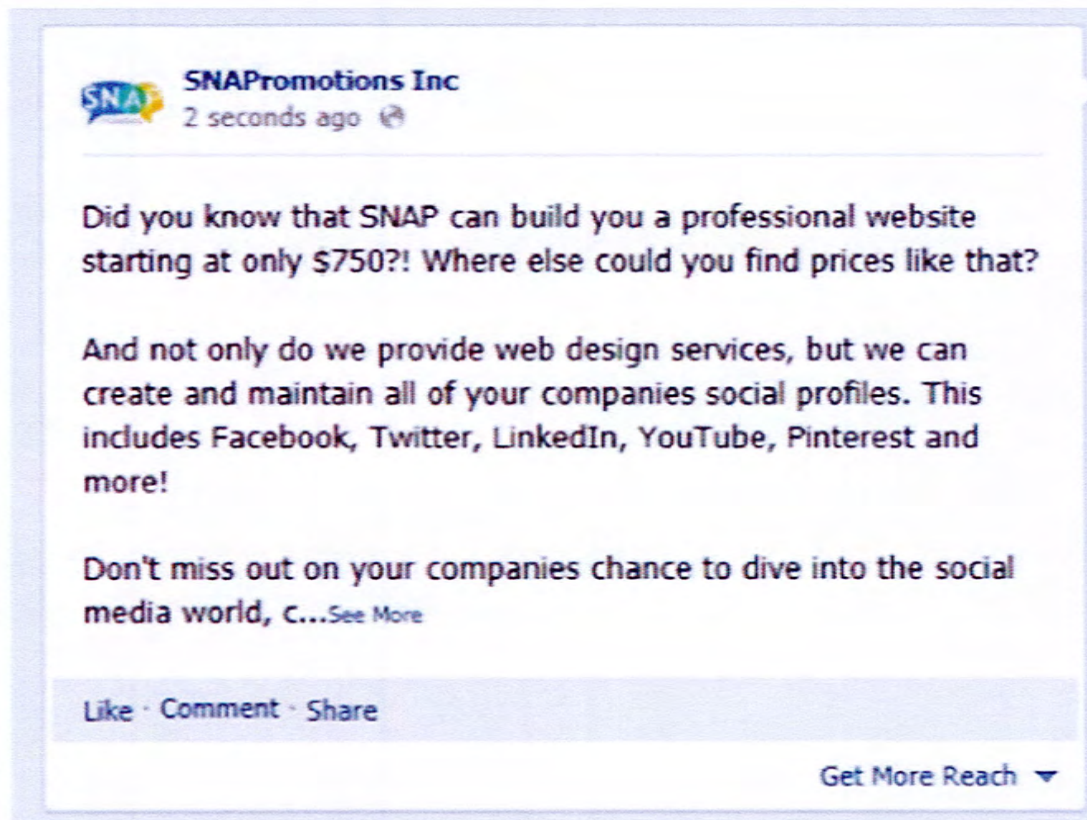
- Just press boost
- Not as in depth
- Random people see your post
- Language

Targeted ad

- Have to go into ads manager
- Shown to target market
- Have to set up ad yourself
- Slightly more work

Boost Post

Good vs. Bad post



Bad Post

- Not Personal
- No hashtagging
- Just an ad
- Too long
- No picture/video



Joint Operations Board Meeting

Aaron Backman Report

August 9, 2018

Highway 23 Coalition

The membership renewal process for the Hwy 23 Coalition is underway in earnest. We have been reaching out to units of government because this is the time of the year when counties and cities are working on their 2019 budgets. Thus far Connie and I have reached out to 18 units of government and have presented at about half of them. The responses from existing members has been good.

WAM-BC Loan Portfolio

The EDC's Finance Committee at its June 12th meeting discussed at length the WAM-BC Board request. The Committee members unanimously recommended to the EDC Boards that the EDC accept the assets; assume administration of the WAM-BC Microenterprise Revolving Loan Fund and all loans; and that the EDC assist in the process and expenses of dissolution of WAM-BC (with the exception of the 990 tax return).

Following approval by the EDC's Joint Operations Board of the WAM-BC proposal on July 12th, the EDC's Joint Powers Board considered the matter at its regular meeting on July 26th. The Joint Powers Board members unanimously approved accepting the WAM-BC assets, assuming the administration of the Microenterprise Revolving Loan Fund and all loans, and assisting in the WAM-BC dissolution process. This action was communicated to WAM-BC representatives and Mike Burgett, the EDC's attorney. Following discussions with the EDC, WAM-BC did file in small claims court regarding the two non-performing loans. It is expected the court will consider those filings in October of 2018.

The Joint Powers Board approved the establishment of a Reserve Fund for the Microenterprise Loan Fund (WAM-BC) of \$100,000. They also adopted increasing the Reserve Fund in 2019 for the EDC's regular RLF from \$224,052 to \$300,000.

Retail Merchandising Project

The EDC has been working with the University of Minnesota Extension and the University of MN College of Design on a retail merchandising project. This year-long retail revitalization effort has three components: 1) A series of educational workshops for retailers around topics related to retail merchandising, marketing, and management, 2) Four technical assistance projects with retailers in Kandiyohi County which could engage College of Design Retail Merchandising students, and 3) The creation of case studies and a best practice guide for local economic development staff to duplicate these efforts with other retailers. Neil Linscheid will work as the project coordinator.



The estimated cost of the Wilmar-Kandiyohi County Merchandising project is estimated to cost \$20,000 to \$25,000. Funders would include University of MN Extension, Univ. of MN College of Design, Willmar Main Street Program, the EDC, and possibly the Spicer EDA.

Business Meetings (July 13th – August 9th)

1. Hwy 23 Coalition members meeting with Andrew Andrusko, MnDOT Office of Freight & Commercial Vehicle Ops in St. Paul
2. Mtg. w/Sarah Anderson, Willmar City Planner, re Main Street Program ideas
3. Participate in a Retail Merchandising Meeting at MCROC on July 17th
4. Presentations on membership (new and renewal) for Hwy 23 Coalition to City of Spicer (7/17), Kandiyohi County (7/17), City of New London (7/18), City of Granite Falls (8/6), Chippewa County (8/7), City of Foley (8/7)
5. Mtg. w/Dr. Craig Johnson, President of Ridgewater College on July 19th
6. Conference call with Willmar, EDC, SWIF, and ADC reps re Willmar Child Care Center
7. Attended Facebook 101 Presentation by Thor Figenskau at Bremer Bank
8. Meeting w/Lucas Evenson, Braun Intertec, re development in Kandiyohi County
9. Mtg. w/Bruce Peterson re site information for logistics company
10. Attended Social Media Breakfast presentation of Chris Davis at WORKUP on August 1st
11. Mtg. w/Dr. Craig Johnson, President of Ridgewater College on August 3rd

Business Visits

1. Meeting w/Zack Mahboub at Midtown Plaza re lower level renovation project
2. Meetings w/owner of Spurs Restaurant re status of construction completion
3. Meeting with reps of Willmar, ADC, and EDC regarding potential Willmar Child Care Center sites.
4. Tour of Little Crow Resort, inc. the GrandStay Hotel, Event and Restaurant with Amy Johnson, Sales & Event Manager
5. Meeting with couple considering retail business in Downtown Willmar
6. EDC's BRE Committee meeting held at Midtown Plaza; Tour provided to members
7. CVB's Leisure Travel Committee meeting held at Model Citizen in New London

That **#KanDo** Mentality That Can Only Mean **Success**

For almost 15 years, the Kandiyohi County and City of Willmar Economic Development Commission (EDC) has been working hard to serve as a catalyst for economic growth in its region. In 2017, **Business in Focus** took a closer look at this dynamic organization and all of the great initiatives the EDC was working on in partnership with other sectors to make the City and County a vibrant and attractive place to live and do business.



Written by Stacey McCarthy

Now, #KanDo is the new Vision 2040 hashtag to bring attention to events in the Willmar Lakes Area: this summer, #KanDo for business and economic development supports the success of the Kandiyohi County area.

A quick snapshot of the region shows that the City of Willmar itself, which represents about 48 percent of the population of

Kandiyohi County, recently passed the 20,000 population mark for the first time. The city's population has also become more diverse, with over 21 percent Latino and six percent East African residents.

Willmar also represents about 70 percent of the jobs and payroll in the county, and 1800 of those jobs were added in the past five years. Over 90 percent of those new jobs are

based in Willmar, and all of them have meant an impact on the housing market. There is only a 2.8 percent vacancy rate for rental housing.

The EDC uses the slogan "Open for Business" as a means of inviting prospective companies to come and take a look at all that it has to offer. It has been a successful campaign that resulted in many development projects being launched. When we spoke with them one year later, what we found is that many of those projects are now in fact "open for business."

Some of these projects include the new 600-student Lakeland Elementary School; the 29,000 square foot Carris Health Surgery Center; Schwieters Chevrolet of Willmar car dealership; West Central Steel's new 85,000 square foot facility; and the Little Crow Resort, a newly constructed \$7.8 million facility that opened this past June. This resort is in fact poised to be a great year-round destination with 51 hotel rooms, a 300-seat convention center, a 75-seat restaurant, and a golf course.



Little Crow Resort



Lakeland Elementary School



Schwieters Chevrolet of Willmar



West Central Steel

These projects, in conjunction with others, have resulted in just under \$103 million in permit value for construction for the county, a 22 percent increase over the previous two years.

This year, the growth continues with new projects, including Urban Escape Boutique, an \$865,000 retail project in Spicer; the \$400,000 Midtown Plaza – a diverse business center which opened in January; and three new Kwik Trip convenience stores and gas stations. The EDC is also working with CBRE Group Inc., a worldwide commercial real estate company that is working with a prospect considering a new 100,000 square foot logistics facility.

The major employers in the region remain constant, including Jennie-O, which employs over 1,600 people and the newly-formed Carris Health, the result of a partnership between Rice Memorial Hospital, CentraCare Health and ACME Health. These three facilities deliver healthcare to West Central and Southwest Minnesota, and employ over 2,000 people.

"While the EDC is pleased with the overall growth in Kandiyohi County, it is concerned about commodity prices affecting the agricultural sector."

Prosperity, however, often goes hand in hand with challenges, and while the EDC is pleased with the overall growth in Kandiyohi County, it is concerned about the agricultural sector and the impact that low commodity prices are having on the economy – in particular, soybeans and corn. The region is the third largest soybean exporter in the U.S., so when export prices are impacted, a ripple effect can be felt throughout the economy as a whole.

But the EDC is not deterred by these ripples; in fact, it has embraced the challenges by strengthening the partnerships it has built with local businesses with an eye toward workforce development initiatives and with the local community and technical college, Ridgewater College, on attraction and retention initiatives. The EDC is also working with partners and developers on a \$9.4 million affordable housing development.

We spoke with Aaron Backman, Executive Director of the EDC, Connie Schmoll, the EDC's Business Development Specialist, and Sam Bowen, Dean of Customized Training and Continuing Education at Ridgewater College about the exciting initiatives they have been working on over the past year. ■

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"Employers are looking for more and more creative ways to build their workforce."

"We work hard along with the EDC and other entities in trying to keep students local once they complete school so that they become a part of the workforce, and for others to return once they are done with that educational pathway," explains Bowen.

"We are part of the Minnesota State College and University System. As such, that state public higher education system is one of the largest in the country, and as a member of that we have a lot of opportunity to bring knowledge and resources to bear at a local level," says Bowen. "Not many communities this size have the opportunity to leverage the strength and the resources of seven large state universities and more than 20 two-year community and technical colleges all here locally. So that's a pretty important facet and pretty important driver of our economy, and an opportunity for us to leverage those resources."

The MinnWest Technology Campus has been one asset that is helping to retain graduates. A new co-working space on the campus called WORKUP, featuring the latest technology and broadband services, quickly became a hub for entrepreneurial thinkers of all stripes.

"It offers a relaxed environment that our Millennials and Gen Xers are really attracted to," explains Schmoll. "They share with one another their marketing expertise, and when they have an issue or a problem comes up, everyone in the building gets together and helps problem solve together. It is a very collaborative environment that is attractive to young people launching new businesses."

The Kandiyohi County Creating Entrepreneurial Opportunities (KCEO) program is another initiative that the EDC has been leveraging for workforce retention. This program offers high

school juniors and seniors the opportunity to learn how to start and run a business firsthand while they are in school. Over 50 businesses are member partners of the program, which is significantly higher than other chapters of the program across the country, whose average business participation is 20 to 30. This program also carries college credits at Ridgewater College, building incentive for students to study and stay local.

"We're trying at Ridgewater to leverage the state's post-secondary enrollment options program in partnership with our local high schools or regional high schools. This option delivers more and more college-level class programming at the high schools that have college credits tied back to Ridgewater. This is an additional incentive for students to stay around here to hopefully become a more well-established part of our workforce," explains Bowen.

Another important asset to local businesses that is helping to bridge the gaps in the labor force is that Ridgewater has a very robust non-credit customized short-term training wing where it provides training across virtually every industry – from agriculture, to manufacturing, to public safety, to health-care, to transportation.

"Our customized training department at Ridgewater College has been busy working to partner with local businesses and organizations to address the dire need for a strong workforce," says Bowen. "As such, the employers are looking for more and more creative ways to build their workforce, specifically a skilled and trained workforce. We are trying to take what we are learning from all of these partnerships to continue developing customized short-term entry level learning programs. The process has the potential to lead to great career earnings or education."

When I asked Backman, Schmoll and Bowen what they feel makes Willmar so special, it was evident that they truly enjoy the work they do because they are committed to the region.

"Having been working in this field for 25 years, I have been able to compare it with other communities that I have served in and there are several things that jump out at me," says Backman. "Number one, we have creative people here that do interesting things. For instance, a company called DI Labs, Inc. run by three brothers has the largest 3D printer in the state of Minnesota. And if you look at the MinnWest Technology Campus, there are 65 engineers who work for different companies on that campus of over 30 private companies; they have created over 200 patents and their companies work worldwide."

Backman cited other examples like Nova-Tech Engineering, which boasts products in 49 countries around the world, Simply Shrimp, which is growing shrimp inside an old dairy barn, and Lettuce Abound, growing lettuce using aeroponics. He also talked about the Highway 23 Coalition, an organization that is working on the second longest highway corridor that spans the state of Minnesota. In the past year, the Coalition secured a \$105 million appropriation for improvements.

The volunteerism that occurs here is another thing that has impressed both Backman and Schmoll.

"We have a lot of community leadership," says Schmoll. "Many of our leaders come together to collaborate to build a strong, healthy community. The Chamber hosts programs for next generation leadership for persons under 40 years. They have a strong group of young people and they are there because they want to be leaders in building a strong, healthy community," she says.

"We have a great quality of life here in Willmar," continues Schmoll. "We have trails and lakes and parks and playgrounds. We care about our small businesses and our large businesses. We have diversity and we value the diversity in our community. Diversity offers a variety of food, celebrations, events and storefronts that are all part of a strong community."

Bowen went on to add that, "We have big city features with a small town community feel. We're the best of all worlds here in Willmar and we're a great business community and a career and educational opportunities community." ■



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