

**KANDIYOHI COUNTY AND CITY OF WILLMAR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION (EDC)
BUSINESS RETENTION AND EXPANSION/RECRUITMENT COMMITTEE MEETING
MINUTES
April 2, 2021
Via ZOOM Video Conference**

Present: Samantha Crow (Acting Chair), Jim Ellingson, Les Heitke, Roger Imdieke, Jennifer Mendoza and Kelly TerWisscha

Excused: Sam Bowen, Jennifer Mendoza, Les Nelson, Bridget Paulson, Ranae Rahn and Dean Steinwand

Guest: Dayna Latham, Customized Training and Continuing Education, Ridgewater College

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

Secretarial: Cathy Skindelien, Legal & Administrative Assistants, Inc. (LAA)

Acting Chair Samantha Crow called the meeting to order at approximately 11:05 a.m.

AGENDA—Aaron Backman requested to add the American Rescue Plan (ARP) to the discussion under New Business.

IT WAS MOVED BY Les Heitke, SECONDED BY Kelly TerWisscha, to approve the revised Agenda. MOTION CARRIED.

MINUTES—

IT WAS MOVED BY Kelly TerWisscha, SECONDED BY Roger Imdieke, to approve the Minutes of the February 5, 2021 meeting as emailed. MOTION CARRIED.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS—

Commercial Driver's License (CDL) Training. Dayna Latham with Customized Training and Continuing Education at Ridgewater College was introduced. Latham reported that beginning in February 2022 the federal requirements for entry level drivers training will be changing. This will include a core curriculum. Ridgewater is offering this right away. It also offers the 30-hour behind the wheel training program. Currently students can take behind the wheel if they have a permit. Requirements for CDL are as follows: 18 years old, obtain Commercial Learners Permit (CLP) by passing state written CDL exam, complete DOT physical exam, pass drug/alcohol screening, complete required registration paperwork. Under the nontraditional CDL Program seven students have registered, four students have completed and passed their

CDL test. Behind the wheel is a 1 to 1 program. This works well as most have other work or family responsibilities and they can work with the schedules they have. Backman asked for the CDL documents to be e-mailed to him. Backman asked about scheduling issues. Latham responded they have been very blessed to have Eric Hoff as a resource in scheduling. The biggest problem has been scheduling the Behind the Wheel (BTW) test. There are very few options for taking the test. Willmar is currently 60 days backed up. Many of the students lose their skills in that 60 day gap. Students need to schedule their test right away and work with the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV). Hoff then schedules their training so that it is closer to their scheduled test date. They have also been using Redwood Falls and Alexandria whenever they can. In 2021, 26 Ag students used their simulator and 24 customized training and continuing education students will complete their simulator use this semester. They are training with manual transmission because you are not licensed for that unless you have been trained. The simulator is also helpful for training for load shifting, tire blow-outs, black ice, etc. Heitke asked about getting another simulator. Latham responded that the finances are not currently available. The federal requirement for BTW time does not include simulator time. Heitke asked about the ratio of men to women. In the customized training, three females have come through. This is an area they need to work on. Some struggle, but an option for them is the Class B license for driving garbage truck, dump truck, etc. Jim Ellingson asked about school bus drivers. Latham responded that school buses require a Class C license and they have not been focusing on them. There is an add-in on their simulator for school buses and fire trucks. This is an area of potential growth. They are pushing to allow third-party testing regardless of whether they have completed the 220 hour program; this would be a seamless way to get people through as opposed to the state testing sites. Anyone interested in these classes can call Latham. Jennifer Mendoza commented that her students really enjoyed the training at Ridgewater.

[Dayna Latham was excused from the meeting.]

NEW BUSINESS—

American Rescue Plan (ARP) Funding. Backman reported that on March 11th, President Biden signed the American Rescue Plan which includes Fiscal Recovery Funds (FRF), direct aid allocated to cities, counties and townships. The first money will be allocated in no less than 60 days (May 11) to entitlement communities (cities with more than 50,000 population). The State has another 30 days to provide funds to smaller communities such as Kandiyohi County and Willmar. Kandiyohi County expects to receive approximately \$8,380,000. The timeline the units of government have to spend the funds is by the end of 2024. There will be discussions with the county commissioners and the city of Willmar. This is more flexible than with CARES funding. It can be used for grants and loans for businesses, also for infrastructure, such as roads, water, sewer and broadband. Connie Schmoll commented on the broadband project, stating they have done presentations in an effort to gain funds for the project. Backman has discussed utilization of these funds with the city of Willmar. We are waiting for more guidance from the US Treasury and we will need to plan before mid-June on how to use the funds. Backman requested input from the committee, if hypothetically the EDC was allocated \$1 million, how should we use these funds? Heitke asked if businesses are willing to consider loans. Backman replied that we need to get people pivoted back to the idea of loans. It would be nice to build up funds so we can do more low-interest loans. We could carve out a small

grant program for hotels since other programs have not covered them. A number of businesses have bounced back nicely. Low interest loans could be the way to go in the future. Ellingson asked about the demand for loans currently. Backman responded it should be a more common thing at this point. TerWisscha added that it has been a year of handouts. It is time to get back to loans, businesses should have the ability to pay it back. Even restaurants are back and doing well. Backman reported that the jobs market is strong with more than 900,000 jobs available nationally. It was several hundred thousand above the forecasts. Key areas, such as hospitality and construction are up. It is time for businesses to reflect on their business models. Schmoll added that the loan is a good option if the businesses are doing well and looking at expansion. The EDC's Covid-10 Business Assistance Loan Program loans worked out well. Interest rates will go up and there is an entire generation that has not seen high interest rates. Mendoza commented that she sees a lot of requests for business start ups, and would like to see some of the funding used for that. Backman agreed, and stated the EDC staff is working with a number of them. Entrepreneurs must provide some of their own money, the EDC should not do 100% financing. Ellingson asked if start ups are expecting grants? Backman replied that stimulus grants were for existing businesses, start ups will have loans. The Small Business Administration is still working on loans from the December stimulus. The EDC turned its program around in 30 days. Nonprofits such as curling, watersports and gymnastics are hurting. Several of them have received grants; 14% of the Cares Pandemic Relief grant recipients were nonprofits. Mendoza mentioned they chose to invest in a cleaning business instead of a restaurant because of the difference in funding needed.

REPORTS—

CLUES Updates. Mendoza reported her CDL students are hired within the week when they graduate. Participants have different levels of English and the language barrier is an issue. Mendoza went to the DMV directly to talk about CDL permits because of the language barrier. The Kandiyohi County DMV wants everyone to attempt the test in English before they give them the Spanish version. This is a true difficulty. Overall, everyone enjoys the class and they get hired right away. Terwisscha asked about a welding program. Mendoza replied that there is no program currently, but people are still interested. They had a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) class, but there will be no more funding until summer. Classes will work better at that time. Backman and Mendoza report that the laptops provided through the CPR grant have helped. Heitke commented that the English versus Spanish tests should be a legislative issue; we need to ask our representatives to look into this as it could be a statewide problem. Schmoll agreed but said we should make sure this is a statewide rule and not something Kandiyohi County has implemented. Mendoza will work on a resolution.

[Jennifer Mendoza was excused from the meeting]

Central Minnesota Jobs & Training Services. Bridget Paulson was unable to attend today's meeting. According to Backman she has worked on a proposal for ARP funds for a youth program for at-risk youth ages 16-24. This helps with career planning, work readiness skills and connecting youth with local employers. Locally they have built a tiny home, wheelchair access, furniture and summer career camps. Sherburne county funded a youth van with CARES Act funding so it could have at-risk youth go to different businesses, etc. They are proposing acquiring a youth van at the cost of \$20,000. It will be called Operation Exploration and could

impact 40 youth. Willmar focuses on healthcare. Hutchinson focuses on trades. TerWisscha commented that given employment issues we have locally, how do we attract people from the Twin Cities area to move for the quality of life of West Central Minnesota? We should brainstorm this. We hear ads for coming to South Dakota how can we do something similar? Schmoll replied the EDC is a member of the Minnesota Marketing Partnership and we could place ads, but it is approximately \$5000 for an ad. We have done videos for Kandiyohi County. Backman proposed a virtual job fair that targets the Twin Cities area. There are people who are now considering regional trade centers that haven't before. Several housing developers are looking outside the Twin Cities area. Imdieke commented that access to outdoors and natural resources is a desired element for people considering a move but our weakness is broadband access. This is very important for attracting young professionals who can work from home. Hiring a professional public relations firm to market the area should be considered. Backman suggested a virtual job fair where you can register for a drawing for a weekend stay in Kandiyohi County. Maybe people would take advantage of this. Heitke relayed there was a mental health professional who chose Alexandria over Willmar. The Alexandria representatives took him hunting and fishing, which determined his decision. We have that here, but just haven't organized it in the right way. Crow stated that community tours are very helpful, showing the clients grocery stores, shopping, hospitals, even the lakes. All of this is very close and convenient. Ellingson suggested a roster of resident guides they could tap into for tours or to ask for expertise. TerWisscha added that prior to all of this we need to let people know that there are jobs here, outside the metro area. Imdieke commented that a four-lane Highway 23 coming through the county will be critical.

ADJOURNMENT—There being no other business,

IT WAS MOVED, SECONDED AND CARRIED to adjourn the meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 12:19 a.m.

NEXT MEETING—The next committee meeting is **11:00 a.m., Friday, May 7, 2021** via ZOOM video conference.