

**KANDIYOHI COUNTY AND CITY OF WILLMAR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION (EDC)
BUSINESS RETENTION AND EXPANSION/RECRUITMENT COMMITTEE MEETING
MINUTES
June 4, 2021
Via ZOOM Video Conference**

Present: Corky Berg, Samantha Crow, Jim Ellingson (Acting Chair), Les Heitke, Roger Imdieke, Jennifer Mendoza, Bridget Paulson and Dean Steinwand

Excused: Sam Bowen, Les Nelson and Kelly TerWisscha

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

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

Chair Jim Ellingson called the meeting to order at approximately 11:04 a.m.

AGENDA—

IT WAS MOVED BY Les Heitke, SECONDED BY Samantha Crow, to approve the Agenda as e-mailed. MOTION CARRIED.

MINUTES—The following changes were made to the minutes: Change Jim Ellingson from excused to present. The sentence referring to Jim Ellingson’s sons should be changed to sons-in-law. Bridget Paulson was willing to be a member of the Business Support Subcommittee instead of the Workforce Development Committee.

IT WAS MOVED BY Samantha Crow, SECONDED BY Dean Steinwand, to approve the Minutes of the May 7, 2021 meeting with revisions listed above. MOTION CARRIED.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS—

Elevate Class Update. Sarah Swedburg reported that Elevate is progressing very well, the students have just completed the last class for this cohort. There were great relationships built between the organizers and the students themselves. Graduation will be held on June 16 at the Willmar Education and Arts Center (WEAC) from 5:00-7:00 p.m. Potential future funders will be invited, along with EDC Board members and others interested in attending. Members of the lending community are also encouraged to attend the graduation. The next session is tentatively scheduled for the fall. Backman commented that the graduates have really come out of their shell. Each student was given the opportunity to reflect on what they learned and the impact of Elevate. It is a good mixture of new

businesses and expansions.

NEW BUSINESS—

EDC 2021 Planning Session Follow-Up. Backman reported that the EDC is considering hiring a Marketing and Communications Specialist to support the EDC's programs and activities. The EDC Marketing and Public Relations Committee had two questions: Would the EDC use an in-house person more than a marketing consultant or contractor? The answer was yes. Would the in-house person provide more assistance to and have more engagement with the standing committees and EDC staff? Again the answer was yes. Backman has considered the current workload, the EDC is working with housing developers on projects totaling more than \$25 million in new construction. There are two other major projects, a distribution center and a proposed bioenergy plant. Other projects are on the horizon. A draft job description for the position was approved by the Marketing Committee.

The essential job functions are:

1. Overall responsibility for the EDC's website.
2. Manage all social media content in Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and other relevant platforms.
3. Research, acquire and schedule a variety of relevant content on social media.
4. Responsible for writing, editing and designing a quarterly newspaper.
5. Be a staff liaison to the EDC's Marketing and Public Relations Committee.
6. Assist with special events and job fairs.
7. Create marketing materials and strategies.
8. In-house design support as needed for presentations, brochures, ads and flyers; management of on-line blogs.

Requirements –

1. Degree in marketing, communications or related plus 1 or 2 years of experience.
2. The drive to learn
3. Be a team player, open to feedback

The position would start at 32 hours per week, it could turn into 40 hours after a year or two. Sixteen hours per week in a remote environment would be considered.

Backman has set the salary range at \$44,928 to \$54,912 per year based on qualifications and experience. He looked at several comparable positions in the Twin Cities area and outstate Minnesota and set the salary based on those positions at 10% less for the Kandiyohi County location. One example was a Marketing and Communications Specialist position in Cottage Grove, the salary range was \$62,700 to \$78,300. The median per hour is \$33.89, 10% less comes to \$30.50. The majority of the examples were in the \$30.00 per hour range.

How will the EDC pay for this? The EDC will re-purpose existing marketing resources, reduce some budget line items and use existing reserves. In the past four years the EDC has spent \$58,200 and \$65,500 for marketing purposes which represents 11 or 12 % of the county tax levy, this includes \$34,000 allocated to the Willmar Lakes Area Convention and Visitors Bureau for tourism and convention marketing, leaving other funds for administration and miscellaneous. There is \$17-18,000 in the budget that could be redeployed from consultants to this position. In the past several years the EDC allocated \$18-22,000 per year to REDstar Creative for marketing activities. In 2019 the EDC allocated \$18,500 for

Golden Shovel for the Opportunity Zone Prospectus. This position could be helpful to the Business Retention and Expansion/Recruitment (BRE) Committee and its subcommittees. Backman requested comments. Ellingson asked how we would find this person. Backman responded the EDC would advertise in the job opportunities webpages for the League of Minnesota Cities, the Association of Minnesota Counties, the West Central Tribune, the Economic Development Association of Minnesota (EDAM) and word-of-mouth. Paulson added that it could be promoted through Central Minnesota Jobs and Training Service (CMJTS) and CareerForce. Les Heitke commented that there are so many marketing efforts going on in the community that operate independently of each other. How will this position fit in with the other efforts? How do we measure the success of this position? Backman responded that in terms of events, success would be measured by the numbers, such as the numbers of hits and views. An increase in attendance would be a measure of success. Increased social media stats, likes or traffic are a measure of success. If the EDC becomes the go-to place for developers, that would be a positive. Backman agrees there should be collaboration between entities, but each place has their own role. Corky Berg asked if the EDC should add "other duties as assigned" to the job responsibilities. Also, since this is a Public Employees Retirement Association (PERA) position, would the person be on probation for a time period? Backman responded that he would add the "other duties as assigned." The PERA retirement aspect can be used as a recruiting tool. You need to be there 5 years to be vested. Swedburg added that the promotion of benefits and flexibility are an added value.

[Jennifer Mendoza joined the meeting.]

Ellingson asked if this position has already been approved, Backman said not yet, it is currently being brought up to the committees. The next step is to go to the Joint Operations Board and Joint Powers Board and they may make changes. The Joint Powers Board will consider approval in July. Preliminary budget numbers need to be set in June so this is a good time to consider this. Jennifer Mendoza agreed that marketing it is a lot of work, so this is a good choice. Roger Imdieke asked if the EDC is using some reserves to pay Connie Schmoll, so will there be a significant increase in costs? Backman answered that Schmoll and Swedburg will offset last year's costs due to differences in salary and health care costs. There will be an overall operations increase this year. Last year there was no increase, this year the EDC is looking at a four percent increase. There was a good response with COVID business assistance. The four percent will equate to \$22,000.

Workforce Development Subcommittee Discussion. Swedburg reported that at the last meeting decreasing the number of meetings for the BRE Committee and creating subcommittees that are project oriented were discussed. Two subcommittees were proposed, Business Support and Workforce Development. Goals for the subcommittees include a targeted marketing campaign to recruit employees and exploring a virtual job fair targeted toward the Twin Cities area. There would be follow-ups with the CPR and MPR grant recipients. Exposing 200 students to workplaces in the Willmar area along with a workforce summit with workforce partners are goals. This would let the BRE committee be the idea-generating committee and will mitigate some of the committee's breadth. Following discussion it was agreed that the subcommittees will meet monthly beginning in July and the BRE Committee will meet quarterly with the next meeting being in September. Paulson volunteered for the Business Support Subcommittee, Heitke agreed to either subcommittee, but leans toward workforce; Ellingson also said either but would lean toward workforce. Berg agreed to serve on either subcommittee.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

CLUES Update. Mendoza reported a lot of contact with community members due to the work she is doing with emergency shelter. Many of these people also need employment. She has been helping them prepare applications, resumes and provided training. Mendoza is interested in implementing new training programs. There is still interest in the Commercial Driver's License (CDL), Certified Nursing Assistant and welding. Mendoza is trying to learn as much as she can to help people get into the workforce. Backman commented that people come in talking about the trucking business, this is an ongoing issue. Mendoza's first participant got his CDL and worked so much that his wife talked to him about cutting down his hours. It brought up his income and he eventually got it under control.

CMJTS. CMJTS is partnering with Ridgewater College for two programs this summer. One will be Industrial Maintenance that will be partly online, 120 hours and some in-person at the Hutchinson location. There will be welding training partially online and in-person at the Willmar location. The problem is finding people. Recruiting, advertising, partnering with CLUES is important. They are trying to increase eligibility to 200% of poverty level. For youth programs, there will be two career camps. Willmar will be health care, Hutchinson will be trades. Up to ten kids from high school will be targeted. Businesses on board are K & M, Case, Michaels Foods, Liquibox, Bobcat, Uponor, Miller Manufacturing and Jennie-O. CMJTS will do an industry specific hiring event at the end of the summer. Paulson will be in touch with Mendoza about recruitment. Participants will get credentials. The businesses are offering feedback about what they need for entry level welders. Backman requested digital copies of the flyers. Backman asked how the Industrial Maintenance is marketed. Paulson responded it is marketed through CareerForce, schools, partner agencies, social media and virtual meetings. The biggest challenge is finding people to do free training. Backman commented that 560,000 new jobs have been added, but there is still a ways to go. Re-training should attract people but is has to fit the situation. CMJTS can help with gas money for participating students. Paulson noted that the Hutchinson camp will be at the middle school. They are bringing in employers, doing mock resumes, work readiness classes and doing business tours. They are trying to educate those who don't go off to college about opportunities in their own community.

ADJOURNMENT—There being no other business,

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

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 12:00 p.m.

NEXT MEETING—The next committee meeting is **11:00 a.m., Friday, September 3, 2021** via ZOOM video conference.