

KANDIYOHI COUNTY AND CITY OF WILLMAR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION (EDC)
BUSINESS RETENTION & EXPANSION/RECRUITMENT (BRE) COMMITTEE

MINUTES

June 5, 2020

Via ZOOM Video Conference

Present: Sam Bowen, Samantha Crow, Les Heitke and Les Nelson

Excused: Roger Imdieke, Ranae Rahn and Kelly TerWisscha

Absent: Jim Ellingson and Dean Steinwand

Guests: Jennifer Mendoza, CLUES Navigator and Bridget Paulson, Central Minnesota Jobs & Training Services (CMJTS)

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

Secretarial: Diane Beck, Legal & Administrative Assistants, Inc. (LAA)

Chair Sam Bowen called the meeting to order at approximately 9:09 a.m. and declared a quorum was not present.

AGENDA—As a quorum was not present, the approval of Bridget Paulson as a new BRE Committee member was tabled. Jennifer Mendoza indicated her interest in becoming a committee member.

MINUTES—A quorum was not present to approve the February 7, 2020 minutes.

REPORTS

CLUES Updates—

Diverse CNA. Mendoza reported the Diverse CNA class was put on hold due to the lack of applicants. Mendoza provided a background of CLUES, which is based out of Minneapolis with two outstate locations (Austin and Willmar) to provide access to education opportunities and services to Latino families and low-income individuals. Mendoza reported the CNA program has been successful and shared once students complete the course, they receive help with job search and placement. Most CNA students have been certified and some have been placed in CNA positions, which increased their income levels. Mendoza reported the Diverse CNA program collaborated with Ridgewater College to begin a CNA distance learning opportunity.

Diverse Banking Customer Service. Mendoza reported today is the last day of the Diverse Banking Customer Service class; there was not a lot of partnership with banks. Mendoza

stated the online class of 10 (9 women and 1 male) was combined with greater Minnesota and metro area students to fill the class. Originally there were 14-15 students. Mendoza felt with parents/single parents working, the students did not have the guidance to log on and complete their classwork. Backman stated it is important to have local bank participation and offered to introduce Mendoza to his contacts. Backman stated the community banks led the charge for the recent Payroll Protection Program (PPE).

Money Laundering Business Workshop with Secret Service. Mendoza reported a Secret Service Agent addressed money laundering at a class session. She inquired if the community/businesses would be interested in learning more on money laundering. Mendoza will report further on the topic as additional information is gathered.

CLUES Distance Learning. Mendoza reported CLUES is working with Ridgewater College on distance learning. A computer knowledge online program will be held next week. Chair Bowen felt there are advantages and disadvantages to distance learning and stated the COVID-19 pandemic has taught schools and colleges what works and what does not work, i.e., ZOOM and other online avenues. Ridgewater College went to online distance learning in February. One benefit of distance learning is it breaks down barriers. Chair Bowen shared students are now returning to Ridgewater to wrap up hands-on classes. A CNA online program will begin soon. Backman stated there is a projected drop in fall classes for colleges; Chair Bowen feels more online classes will be held. Ridgewater College is planning to have online classes for the first quarter and offer the hands-on portion of technical classes the second quarter; however, plans could change.

EDC Ag Committee Events. Connie Schmoll provided an update on the Legacy Planning workshop that was held virtually on June 2nd after being rescheduled from March. Thirty-two attended the workshop to hear information on succession planning for next generation farmers. Panel members included John Christianson and Joel Gratz of Christianson PLLP.

The MinnWest Technology Campus and the EDC are co-hosting a virtual Partners in Ag Innovation Conference on July 30th. Jason Broadwater, keynote speaker, will present information on economic development and growing a community's vibrancy. Several other topics include the effects of COVID-19 in the turkey industry, financial, government, engineering and technical areas. The workshop is free. Schmoll encouraged participation and to pass along the information to other contacts.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Bring Them Back Home Initiative. Samantha Crow reported the subcommittee had planned to organize a task force and develop a plan to move forward with the initiative, but plans have been delayed due to the COVID-19 outbreak. Crow will connect with Kelly TerWisscha and Ranae Rahn to determine next steps. Les Heitke shared he recently talked with two families previously from the area currently living in the metro area and working from home. They are considering returning to the area and continuing to work from home.

Six projects are planned for the Invest in Willmar effort: 1) recreation/event center; 2) recreation fields; 3) Robbins Island Regional Park; 4) Swansson Field Regional Park; 5) Community Center and 5) stormwater. Backman reported Willmar sales tax revenue has not been coming in as the City expected (currently at 70%) and work on some projects have been put on hold. Two projects moving forward are Robbins Island and Swansson Field Regional Parks. The committee will be reassessing and determining what other projects will move forward. Backman commented with many people working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is evident that broadband is needed, especially in rural areas.

NEW BUSINESS

Resignation of Eric Day. Backman shared Eric Day was hired as the new Executive Director of Mid-Minnesota Development Commission and resigned from this committee. He recommended Bridget Paulson, his replacement at CMJTS, become a committee member. Paulson shared she has been with CMJTS for several years and recently moved from the youth program to the business services team. She gave a brief recap of her duties with CMJTS. Backman feels the EDC Joint Operations Board will be supportive of her membership on this committee.

Approve New Member Bridget Paulson. Due to lack of quorum, the committee was unable to approve Paulson as a new BRE Committee member. Chair Bowen suggested an email vote be done approving Bridget Paulson and Jennifer Mendoza prior to the EDC Joint Operations Board meeting on June 12th. Chair Bowen will work with Diane Beck to send an email.

EDC PANDEMIC RESPONSE

COVID-19 Business Assistance Loan Program. Backman reported the COVID-19 Business Assistance Loan Program provides bridge funding for businesses shut down by Governor Walz's initial Executive Orders. Approximately 46 businesses asked for information on the loan program with 27 applications being received and 21 approved. Loans are available for up to \$5,000 at no interest. Most businesses receiving the loans were restaurants, salons, gyms, a winery and a yoga studio. Backman shared as of June 1st restaurants were allowed to operate on outside patios (50 people maximum); establishments are also allowed to continue curbside/takeout services.

Childcare Business Assistance. Schmoll reported due to the pandemic, home childcare providers have been operating at 50% capacity. She provided background information on the Kandiyohi County Rural Childcare Innovation Program and the leadership group, which has more than 20 community members, including Les Nelson. Due to the pandemic, the EDC committed \$25,000 to a Childcare Business Assistance Program. Along with a \$5,000 grant from the Willmar Area Community Foundation and its Willmar Area Response Fund, the EDC mailed \$325 to 88 licensed home childcare providers in Kandiyohi County to use for supplies for their business. Schmoll reported they have received thank you cards, some with drawings by the children.

Immigrant Business Disaster Relief Grants. Backman shared the Immigrant Business Disaster Relief Grant Program was approved by the EDC Joint Operations Board on May 14th. Grant funds of

\$25,000 were given to the EDC from the Southwest Initiative Foundation and the Minnesota Disaster Recovery Fund due to the Coronavirus. Approximately 30-40 grants of \$500-\$750 each may be given distributed through this program until October 15th. Grants will be given to immigrant business owners that have been in business for seven years or less. Some grants have been awarded. Funds may be used for rent, insurance, mortgage, etc. Schmoll shared there may be a need for interpreters in working with the non-English speaking Asian businesses. The Happy Family Asian Grocery Store will work with Schmoll and assist with interpreting. Schmoll asked committee members to let her know of any immigrant businesses.

Other. Chair Bowen gave an update on Ridgewater College CDL simulator mobile unit and trailer that were recently delivered. Four-day training sessions are scheduled for next week; a trainer from Salt Lake City, Utah, will be on site. Chair Bowen thanked the community for its fund-raising support for the CDL simulator. Chair Bowen will work with Ridgewater College's Marketing Department to issue a press release. Chair Bowen mentioned they are looking at resuming the in-person CDL training and are working with area businesses to train some of their employees. Mendoza shared they would like to work with Ridgewater College on diverse CDL training and asked Chair Bowen to send her information she can forward to CLUES headquarters. Paulson stated CMJTS may be able to assist with some classroom costs.

Chair Bowen reported there is a possibility of adding a full-time position for welding instruction to conduct mobile short-term non-credit training for businesses. If committee members hear of a demand for welding training outside of the traditional realm, they should inform Chair Bowen. If there is a high demand, Ridgewater College has an interested instructor. Schmoll suggested Chair Bowen contact the Kerkhoven-Murdock-Sunburg School as they have a similar program.

Paulson gave an update on the Women on the Move Program that was held in January at Ridgewater College for low-income women of color and women over 50 on the basics of manufacturing positions. She would like to hold another program in the future.

July Meeting Date. Chair Bowen reported he will not be available on July 3rd. It was the committee's consensus to hold the next committee meeting at 9:00 a.m., July 10th via ZOOM.

ADJOURNMENT—There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 10:15 a.m.

NEXT MEETING—The next committee meeting is **9:00 a.m., Friday, July 10, 2020**, via ZOOM.