

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

MINUTES

October 2, 2020

Via ZOOM Video Conference

Present: Aaron Backman, Sam Bowen, Jim Ellingson, Les Heitke, Roger Imdieke, Jennifer Mendoza and Bridget Paulson

Excused: Samantha Crow, Ranae Rahn, Dean Steinwand and Kelly TerWisscha

Absent: Les Nelson

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 9:06 a.m. and reported there was not a quorum.

REPORTS

CLUES Update

Diverse CDL Course. Jennifer Mendoza reported she has been working on ESL, GED and citizenship courses. She shared five individuals attended the CDL class with one receiving a permit. She plans to work with other class members to assist them in studying to pass the permit. Chair Bowen suggested Mendoza contact Donna Latham at Ridgewater College regarding the permit process and the class hours issue. Mendoza reported some of the CLUES training funds have not been utilized due to COVID and shared the funds need to be utilized by the end of December. She is looking into job market needs in the area. CLUES will offer a customer banking course and plans to hire an educator. Mendoza does not see a lot of customer service banking opportunities in the Willmar area and feels banks have an adequate number of diverse employees. Mendoza will attempt to partner with Litchfield for welding positions. Bridget Paulson shared she talked with someone at Bobcat in Litchfield and they are planning to hire 60 people in January, including welders; Mendoza will contact Bobcat. Backman inquired if CLUES has enough computers (laptops); she stated they are currently out and could use eight laptops by the end of October. She has been driving to the Metro area to get additional computers from the CLUES headquarters but St. Paul is also out of computers. Les Heitke inquired if the community kitchen in downtown Willmar could be utilized for training. Mendoza shared that Azteca purchased the kitchen for its restaurant's use. Jim Ellingson inquired on follow up of former CLUES students. Mendoza reported only a few CNA graduates are employed in the CNA field.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Bring Them Back Home Initiative. No report.

NEW BUSINESS

EDC PANDEMIC RESPONSE UPDATE

COVID-19 Business Assistance Loan (COBAL) Program. Backman reported 36 COBAL applications were received with 27 approved; 85% of the funds have been expended.

CARES Pandemic Relief (CPR) Grant Program. Backman reported the EDC has received 231 CPR grant applications from both businesses and nonprofits with 110 approved and paid out. Forty-six applications are in the queue which will be acted upon at the next Kandiyohi County Board of Commissioner meeting. The EDC Finance Committee will review 17 CPR applications at its meeting on Tuesday. Backman shared 20 businesses were ineligible for the program. He shared the EDC has received 34 nonprofit CPR applications with 26 approved and paid out. He reported 56% of the applications are from Willmar with a good cross section from the cities and townships (18 applications from New London and 17 applications from Spicer). He shared Kandiyohi County, Willmar and the governments transferred \$2.5 million to the EDC for businesses and nonprofits; \$2.3 million has been expended and he feels all funds will be encumbered after the County Board meeting next week. Backman has talked with Jean Spaulding, Kandiyohi County CARES Coordinator, and Larry Kleindl, County Administrator, about the possibility of transferring additional funds to the EDC.

[Roger Imdieke joined the meeting.]

As a quorum was present, Chair Bowen officially called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m.

AGENDA—There were no changes to the Agenda.

MINUTES—

IT WAS MOVED BY Jim Ellingson, SECONDED BY Les Heitke, to approve the Agenda and the July 10, 2020 Minutes as emailed. MOTION CARRIED.

EDC Ag Committee Events. Connie Schmoll reported the Industrial Hemp Exploratory Subcommittee visited Tim Seehusen's Prairie PROducers hemp operation in Olivia in August and received a tour of the equipment and test plot sites. Senator Andrew Lang and Representative Tim Miller were among the several attendees. She shared the former Lettuce Abound in New London is growing hemp priority seed and plans to sell the seed to growers. Schmoll provided information regarding the Ag Innovation Conference held in late July. The conference was held virtually at the MinnWest Technology Campus with most of the speakers on site. Schmoll reported the planning

coordinator did an excellent job and if anyone is looking to hold a virtual conference, she can supply the contact information. Schmoll reported the Ag Marketing and Event Planning Subcommittee, along with Christianson and Associates is planning a biofuels event in January 2021 to discuss agriculture biofuels and share information on grant opportunities.

Job Market Needs. Mendoza has heard from some Jennie-O employees that there are not enough workers and has reached out to Jennie-O for information. Mendoza is wondering how training for these jobs can be accomplished. Schmoll encouraged Mendoza to contact Melanie Faust, HR Director at Jennie-O, and will send her the contact information. Chair Bowen suggested having an open workforce forum to discuss training needs and business trends. Paulson shared Willmar is holding a job fair on October 20th and offered to visit the various booths to make a list of businesses in attendance and inquire what kind of employees they are searching for. She will also inquire if they would be interested in attending an open workforce forum. Backman asked Paulson about CDL training. She stated they will be recruiting for the free CDL training and plan to include Forklift training. She commented it is difficult to get the word out. Paulson will put together a laminated flyer and get to Mendoza for distribution to appropriate locations/neighborhoods. Backman asked Roger Imdieke what he is hearing about workforce needs in the area. Imdieke feels it not there due to the availability of unemployment funds. Chair Bowen feels there will be training opportunities available soon.

[Chair Bowen was excused from the meeting.]

ADJOURNMENT—There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:47 a.m.

NEXT MEETING—The next committee meeting is **9:00 a.m., Friday, November 6, 2020**, via ZOOM video conference.