

KANDIYOHI COUNTY AND CITY OF WILLMAR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION (EDC)  
MARKETING AND PUBLIC RELATIONS COMMITTEE  
**MINUTES**  
September 28, 2020  
Via ZOOM Video Conference

Present: Donna Boonstra, Jesse Gislason, Melissa Knott, Emily Lien and Pam Rosenau

Excused: Joanna Schrupp and Brittany VanDerBill

Guest: Cheryl Glaeser, Achieve TFC

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

Secretarial: Nancy Birkeland, Legal & Administrative Assistants, Inc.

Vice Chair Emily Lien called the meeting to order at approximately 12:01 p.m.

**MINUTES—**

IT WAS MOVED BY Melissa Knott, SECONDED BY Donna Boonstra, to approve the Minutes of the June 22, 2020 meeting as emailed. MOTION CARRIED.

**Social Media Statistics.** Aaron Backman provided the Facebook statistics for August 24 to September 20, 2020: total likes 718, total reach 2,398 (↓-50%) (69% women), post engagement 556 (↓-24%), total followers 725 and total unfollows 4. Women continue to be the top fans at 71% with the highest age group being between 35-44.

The top popular posts in September were:

- EDC's CARES Pandemic Relief (CPR) Grant Program, reach 873 (post was boosted);
- Bjornberg Farms recognized as Kandiyohi County's 2020 Farm Family of the Year by the University of Minnesota, reach 770;
- Broadband speed test, reach 676 (post was boosted)—total tests increased from 61 to 144;
- 2020 Census; and
- Amin Grocery video.

Top five posts in August were:

- United Way handing out free masks, reach 352;
- Broadband speed test, reach 288;
- National Farmers' Market Week, reach 270;
- Broadband speed test, reach 213; and
- EDC's CPR Grant Program, reach 184.

Top five posts in July were:

- EDC's CPR Grant Program, reach 3,941 (post was boosted);
- Uptown Willmar name change and lease incentives, reach 1,064;
- Construction progress of downtown Kwik Trip, reach 366;
- COVID19 Minnesota Renter's Rights, reach 330; and
- Glacial Ridge Appaloosa Club 2020 Open Horse Show, reach 323.

Website analytics show the top 10 landing pages from June 24 to September 21, 2020 were the home page, business loan programs, city of Lake Lillian, news, single sort recycling article, city of Spicer, major employers, lakes/recreation, article on demolition of the Spicer Castle and transportation. There were 5,299 users, 5,190 new users and 10,737 page views.

#### **UNFINISHED BUSINESS—**

**Update Ag Flyer.** Connie Schmoll reported the Ag Event and Marketing Subcommittee will be meeting later this week to update the Ag flyer. She asked that this committee review an updated flyer once completed by the subcommittee. The committee recommended the new flyer be updated to the format used for the healthcare flyer. Schmoll noted she will bring today's ideas to the subcommittee, as well as the comments from the June committee meeting.

**Broadband Survey Results.** Schmoll provided summaries of the June broadband survey (see attached) and the narrative on issues (see attached). The summary and some narrative will be included in the next newsletter and posted on the EDC's website. The survey results will be used for a future application of the state Border-to-Border Grant Program. Schmoll asked for other suggestions on how to use the information. Suggestions included:

- Send it to city and township clerks to share with their residents.
- Share the information as a redirect to the EDC's website rather than as individual files to keep the credit with the EDC.
- Simplify the graphs; keep the data as a percentage since it was a small number who responded.
- Do a Facebook poll.
- Boost the newsletter article.
- Send the survey results to area providers.

Schmoll was impressed with how broad the responses were around the county as was surprised that 90+ people were using a phone hotspot for their internet. Schmoll noted many people were working from home and some who should have stayed home went to the work site because of limited internet. Backman stated the survey highlights the strong need for good broadband. Boonstra spoke of her experience during the pandemic and challenges she had prior to upgrading her internet service. Pam Rosenau reported MVTW Wireless has been receiving calls from area schools about connectivity for students. Schmoll stated the schools are seeing a greater need with families not being able to afford internet service rather than with connectivity. The EDC will continue to work toward enhancing service for the county's residents.

**Newsletter.** Backman noted a summer newsletter was discussed, but was not completed. He and Schmoll are working on articles on broadband and poultry education with Ridgewater College. Other articles will include the EDC's COVID-19 response and the Willmar Renaissance Zone.

## **NEW BUSINESS—**

**Resignation of Shari Courtney.** Backman announced Shari Courtney resigned from this committee for personal reasons.

IT WAS MOVED BY Donna Boonstra, SECONDED BY Melissa Knott, to recommend to the Kandiyohi County and City of Economic Development Commission's Joint Operations Board that it accept, with regrets, the resignation of Shari Courtney, from the Marketing and Public Relations Committee. MOTION CARRIED.

Backman noted a thank you letter was sent to Courtney.

**EDC's Pandemic Response.** Backman reported the EDC has received 218 grant applications (184 from businesses and 34 from nonprofit organizations) since July 28<sup>th</sup> for the EDC's CARES Pandemic Relief (CPR) Grant Program. Approximately \$1.8 million has been expended to assist 110 business and 26 nonprofits. CPR applications totaling another \$500,000+ will be presented to the county commissioners for approval next week leaving approximately \$90,000 remaining in the program. The EDC has had some discussions with the county about additional funds. The EDC's COVID-19 Business Assistance Loan Program has disbursed about 85% of its funds. In addition, checks were sent to 88 childcare businesses and an Immigrant Business Disaster Relief Grant Program was created with funds received from Southwest Initiative Foundation. A wide mixture of businesses has contacted the EDC with approximately 85% being for the first time. The average tenure of business applying for the CPR Grant Program is 16 years with an average loss for the second quarter of 2020 being 62%. Some businesses have had increased business during the pandemic, however, businesses that were closed, such as restaurants and hair salons, have been significantly impacted. Schmoll reported on her contact with the county's Asian-owned businesses, which required the use of an interpreter. Schmoll noted it has been interesting to learn about new businesses in the county. Backman provided information on what other counties are doing in response to the pandemic and assisting small businesses.

**CPR Grant Program Outreach.** Backman introduced Cheryl Glaeser, who has been assisting the EDC since the end of July with outreach for the CPR Grant Program. Glaeser reported outreach efforts to businesses have included Facebook posts, LinkedIn posts and one-on-one contact. She has also worked with city and township clerks to notify their residents. As a result of the outreach, the EDC has obtained a more current list of businesses in the county. The EDC sent a letter to all known businesses with 50 or less employees, which was approximately 1,600 businesses. Schmoll reported one-on-one contact has been done with the family childcare providers as many do not consider themselves a business. Some are doing well as they have been caring for children of essential workers. Personal contacts were also made with restaurants and retail businesses. Knott suggested contacting entertainment businesses, such as the Barn Theatre and Music Matters, a nonprofit that works with schools. Schmoll noted entertainment businesses were some of the first to apply for the grant program. Glaeser will review the list for any entertainment businesses that should be contacted. Travel businesses, such as bus companies and hotels have been contacted. Knott asked if Google campaigns focusing on geographic reach and keywords, such as funding, have been done. The EDC has reached out to all cities and townships. Rosenau suggested small businesses be encouraged to claim their Google listing. Google representatives will help set up a

listing at no charge. Lien noted that once a business registers as a Google business, it is assigned a representative.

**Broadband Speed Test Promotion.** Schmoll reported the Minnesota Rural Broadband Coalition is working on getting broadband tests done on specific sites versus census tracts. The coordinator of the Coalition will be attending the EDC's Broadband Committee's meeting next week on how to market the program. Schmoll noted the speed test has been posted and boosted on the EDC's Facebook page.

**Ag Committee January Event Marketing.** Schmoll stated the Ag Committee discussed what it can do during the pandemic and discussed hosting a presentation by Jamey Cline of Christianson on biofuels. The Ag Event and Marketing Subcommittee will discuss this event when it meets later this week. Knott questioned how to make the EDC's Constant Contact list inclusive. Rosenau reported the Partners In Ag Conference that was held virtually in July had 118 attendees and received good feedback. Plans are to hold the conference both in person and virtually next year. The conference is still receiving views on YouTube. Schmoll stated several state agencies also attended the conference.

**NEXT MEETING**—The next meeting is **12 noon, Monday, October 26, 2020** via ZOOM video conference.

**ADJOURNMENT**—There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 12:59 p.m.