

**KANDIYOHI COUNTY AND CITY OF WILLMAR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION (EDC)  
JOINT OPERATIONS BOARD OF DIRECTORS (OB) MEETING  
MINUTES  
April 14, 2022  
Community Room, Heritage Bank, Willmar and via Zoom Video Conference**

**Present:** Art Benson, Donna Boonstra, Jesse Gislason, Les Heitke and Mary Warszynski

**Excused:** Abdullahi Awale, Kelly TerWisscha and Justice Walker

**Ex Officio:** Vicki Davis

**Guests:** Julie Asmus, Joint Powers Board Chair (via Zoom) and Kayode Adiatu, Willmar City Planner

**Staff:** Aaron Backman, Executive Director; Sarah Swedburg, Business Development Manager and Kelsey Olson, Marketing & Communication Specialist

**Media:** Shelby Lindrud and Jennifer Kotila, West Central Tribune

**Secretarial:** Nancy Birkeland, Legal & Administrative Assistants, Inc. (LAA)

President Art Benson called the meeting to order at approximately 11:07 a.m. and declared a quorum was present. Shelby Lindrud introduced Jennifer Kotila, a new reporter at the West Central Tribune, who will be covering future EDC board meetings.

**ADDITIONS OR DELETIONS TO AGENDA OR CONSENT AGENDA**—Item 3b, Willmar Lakes Area Vision 2040 invoice was removed from the Consent Agenda and under Committee Reports item 4a, loan deferral, was removed.

IT WAS MOVED BY Les Heitke, SECONDED BY Mary Warszynski, to approve the revised Agenda and following revised Consent Agenda. MOTION CARRIED.

- Approve:**
1. Minutes of March 10, 2022
  2. Financial reports as of March 31, 2022
  3. Payments of bills over \$2500:
    - a. Payment of bill from Connie Schmoll in the amount of \$3,723 under the Broadband Planning Agreement as budgeted
    - b. Payment for use of Park Event Center for Highway 23 Coalition Annual Meeting in the amount of \$4677.81 (to be reimbursed by the Highway 23 Coalition)
  4. Resignations and additions of committee members:
    - a. Resignation of Dean Steinwand from the Business, Retention and Expansion/Recruitment (BRE) Committee
    - b. Addition of Kelsey Vosika to the BRE Committee

- Accept: Committee/Subcommittee Minutes
1. Industrial Hemp Exploratory Subcommittee 2/14/2022
  2. Broadband and Advanced Technology 3/7 and 4/4/2022
  3. BRE 12/3/2021
  4. Marketing and Public Relations 2/28/2022

#### **ITEM REMOVED FROM CONSENT AGENDA**

**Willmar Lakes Area Vision 2040 Investment for 2022.** Aaron Backman provided information on Willmar Lakes Area Vision 2040. The organization currently has \$62,000 on hand and with anticipated investor payments in 2022 it could have cash on hand of \$86,000+. Backman would like the EDC to continue to be engaged in Vision 2040, but recommends the EDC's 2022 contribution be \$1,000.

[Kayode Adiatu joined the meeting.]

IT WAS MOVED BY Jesse Gislason, SECONDED BY Donna Boonstra, to approve the Kandiyohi County and City of Willmar Economic Development Commission as an Infrastructure Stakeholder in Willmar Lakes Area Vision 2040 in the amount of \$1,000 for 2022.

Kayode Adiatu introduced himself as the Planner for the City of Willmar and provided his background, including education and employment.

#### **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

**2022 Strategic Planning Session.** Backman reported nearly 30 individuals attended the EDC's annual planning session, which included board members, staff, committee chairs and community partners. Backman noted that in 2020, the top goals were workforce development, business support, childcare, agricultural innovation and broadband. In 2021 the goals were broadband, workforce development and business support with additional work relative to childcare, housing development, Opportunity and Renaissance Zones and agricultural innovation. This year, the goals that resulted were maximizing human potential, housing development, countywide engagement, advancing EDC branding and marketing efforts, and business support with additional areas of broadband, childcare and agriculture. Cheryl Glaeser, the facilitator will be preparing a summary report. In response to a question relative to agriculture, Backman and Sarah Swedburg noted the EDC's Agriculture and Renewable Energy Development Committee and Industrial Hemp Exploratory Subcommittee are active and will continue to explore ag-related opportunities.

#### **NEW BUSINESS**

**Replacement for Abdullahi Awale.** Backman informed the board that Abdullahi Awale resigned from his position on this board due to a change in employment. Awale recommended Abdul Kadir

Gaal, owner of Somali Connections, as a possible replacement. An application form has been emailed to Gaal. Vicki Davis noted the application form is also on the City of Willmar's website.

IT WAS MOVED BY Les Heitke, SECONDED BY Donna Boonstra, to accept, with regrets, the resignation of Abdullahi Awali as a member of the Kandiyohi County and City of Willmar Economic Development Commission Joint Operations Board. MOTION CARRIED.

**Upcoming Conferences.** Swedburg reported she will be attending Community Venture Network (CVN) in the Twin Cities next Friday; the 2022 Minnesota Redevelopment Conference at Breezy Point on April 28-29; and Consultants Forum with site selectors in Columbus, Ohio, June 15-17. Also, she and Kelsey Olson will attend the Economic Development Association of Minnesota's summer conference in Nisswa June 1-3. Backman stated Olson is updating the EDC's marketing materials for Swedburg to bring with to these upcoming conferences.

## REPORTS

**Economic Development Activity.** Backman reported he will present an early access agreement to the Willmar City Council next week for a proposed project in the unplatted portion of Willmar Industrial Park. This project requires rail service.

Backman stated Happy Halal is doing a feasibility study to determine if there is sufficient demand to have a local processor for goat meat to possibly be located in the Willmar Industrial Park 4th Addition. Backman authorized the EDC's participation in the study. Doris Mold, president of Sunrise Agricultural Associates, LLC is doing the study. Swedburg stated Happy Halal will be a subsidiary of Clean Chickens and Co. LLC, a family-owned business out of Elk River, that provides USDA-certified mobile poultry processing. The business is applying for several grants for which the EDC has provided letters of support. The owner of Kandi Acres, a Halal-certified goat farm near Hawick, is currently in the Elevate program and a local producer in support of Happy Halal. Backman reported the walls of the FedEx building are up. Swedburg reported she gave a presentation to eighth graders at Willmar High School about being a public employee and economic development.

Adiatu reported Willmar city staff and the Planning Commission have been looking at users of the various districts within the city. An abatement recommendation for MinnWest Technology Campus will go before the council next Monday. City staff is looking at lowering lot minimums (currently 8500 sq. ft.) within the city and is reviewing the budget, which will be presented to the Planning Commission next Wednesday. They are hopeful the City Council will approve a new columbarium ordinance for churches. The Housing Inspector has been viewing rental properties in the city for violations. They are looking at ordinances as to the violations and how to better address the violations and had a meeting with Suite Liv'n representatives to address tenant concerns. They are looking at translating all of their department's documents into Spanish.

[Backman was excused from the meeting.]

Lumber One is applying for a grant for Block 25, which the city is supporting and RockStep Capital is looking at adding a drive-through restaurant, Slim Chickens, at the former Pizza Hut location.

**Elevate Community Business Academy.** Swedburg reported tonight will be the fourth class for the current Elevate program and HMD Photography will be taking headshots of the students. There are nine students who consistently attend. Each cohort has increased in size. Several guests will attend the latter half of upcoming classes and speak on marketing, accounting, legal, etc. Ten17 Media will provide assistance for the marketing class. The last class is June 9 and graduation will be June 28 from 6-8 p.m. at the Willmar Education and Arts Center. President Benson requested an overall report of all of the classes and how many have gone into business following graduation or have continued their business. The high school KCEO program is somewhat similar in content to Elevate.

## COMMITTEE REPORTS

**Agriculture and Renewable Energy Development.** Swedburg reported the owners of Kandi Acres and Happy Halal will give presentations to the Ag Committee at its meeting next Thursday. Swedburg attended the AURI New Uses Forum last week where she met with the Assistant Ag Commissioner and invited him to tour local projects. One Industrial Hemp Exploratory Subcommittee member attended the New Uses Forum and two others attended the NoCo Hemp Expo in Denver last month.

**Broadband and Advanced Technology.** Swedburg reported Connie Schmoll's contract ended the end of March. The committee is hoping to see changes in legislation to do the projects in the northwest part of the county. The cost of the four townships being done by Federated, Arctander, Dovre, Mamre and St. Johns, increased by a half million so the total project is now over \$10 million. The state Border-to-Border grant is capped at 50% unless it is increased. Swedburg noted that projects that are more rural and have less density are harder to get done. Vibrant Broadband is now willing to do a project in Hawick and Long Lake, which will be the eleventh current project in the county and will serve 289 properties; the project will be brought before the County Board on April 19 to approve the use of \$444,700 of American Rescue Plan Act funds. The provider will provide 50% of the cost and Irving and Roseville Townships will be asked to provide approximately \$60,000. If funded, the project could start this year. Swedburg has been in contact with the two townships about their participation. The committee sent letters to Rep. Dave Baker and Senator Andrew Lange about legislative changes that are needed and have also communicated with federal legislators. Charter started the one project that was approved by the county. Some projects continue to move forward, but they continue to wait on the state grant for larger projects. Swedburg noted Schmoll began the state application form, but it needs to be finalized once the formal grant application is open.

**Business Retention and Expansion/Recruitment.** Swedburg reported there were 53 business booths at the West Central Minnesota Job Fair and there were approximately 300 job seekers, which is similar to prior years. The committee is considering holding another virtual job fair this summer.

**Finance.** Swedburg reported the committee is awaiting further information before taking any action on a loan deferral.

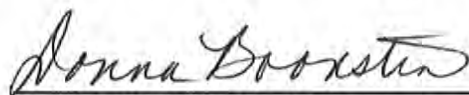
**Marketing and Public Relations.** Olson reported the in-person job fair went well with new businesses attending. There was good feedback from participants. Information on the Elevate program was provided at the job fair. Olson has completed a photo library for the EDC and has been taking new photos from other communities. She continues to update the EDC's marketing materials and website. The EDC has contracted with Redwood Valley Technical Solutions on the website updates, including making it a secure site. The Willmar High School Job Expo will be held May 10<sup>th</sup> and is hosted by the Willmar Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce; the EDC is a partner. At the last update, there were 10 businesses registered.

**Leisure Travel.** President Benson reported hits on the Willmar Lakes Area Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB) website have increased significantly. The CVB is looking to add activities to its website that visitors can do while visiting local communities.

**WHAT'S UP?** Board members provided information, including that Fairview Cemetery is looking at holding a fund raiser for its cemetery; Vinje Lutheran Church has discussed a columbarium at its cemetery; Habitat for Humanity moved to a new location near Sunray Square; Fox Hole Brewery is moving to south of Whitney Music in the Husinga building; Whitney Music is selling its inventory and what does not sell locally will be sold at a virtual auction—they may continue to provide instrument repair services; Fancy Coats on Highway 12 is for sale; housing projects are coming to Spicer near United Prairie Bank and four 16-unit complexes will be built near Zorbaz; Boonstra's business was honored to receive its fifth Best of the Best - St. Cloud award in the interior design category; and the City of Willmar will be interviewing two candidates for the assistant administrator position.

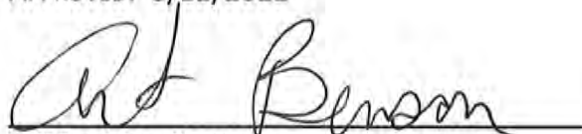
**ADJOURNMENT**—There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 12:43 p.m.

**NEXT MEETING**—The next regular board meeting is 11:00 a.m., Thursday, May 12, 2022 at the Community Room of Heritage Bank, 310 First Street SW, Willmar, and via Zoom video conference.



Donna Boonstra, Secretary

APPROVED: 5/12/2022



Art Benson, President