

**KANDIYOHI COUNTY AND CITY OF WILLMAR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION (EDC)
AGRICULTURE AND RENEWABLE ENERGY DEVELOPMENT (Ag) COMMITTEE MEETING**

MINUTES

June 16, 2022

EDC Board Room and via Zoom Video Conference

Present: Kevin Halvorson, Kim Larson, Chris Radel (via Zoom), Nate Reuss (via Zoom) and Keith Poier

Absent: Rollie Boll, Larry Konsterlie, Dustin Kotrba, Dan Lippert and Dan Tepfer

Guest: Shelby Lindrud, West Central Tribune (via Zoom)

Staff: Sarah Swedburg, Business Development Manager (via Zoom) and Kelsey Olson, Marketing & Communications Specialist (via Zoom)

Secretarial: Diane Beck, Legal & Administrative Assistants, Inc.

Sarah Swedburg announced she is in Columbus, Ohio attending a Site Selection Conference.

Chairperson Kevin Halvorson called the meeting to order at approximately 7:35 a.m. and reported a quorum was not present. Self-introductions were conducted. Swedburg shared although there is not a quorum, she will conduct a high-level discussion regarding the Ag Committee's goals.

AGENDA—There was not a quorum in attendance to approve the Agenda.

Kim Larson asked Swedburg inform the committee of EDC Joint Operations Board (EDCOB) vacancies when they arise. Swedburg stated this will be discussed later in the meeting.

[Chris Radel joined the meeting.]

MINUTES—There was not a quorum in attendance to approve the April 21, 2022 minutes.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS—

Committee Goals/Mini Planning Session. Swedburg stated agriculture is the only sector that is mentioned during the EDC's annual planning sessions as it is a cornerstone and critical industry in Kandiyohi County. Following conversations held since the last committee meeting, it was decided to hold a mini planning session to ensure the committee is providing value to its members, as well as to the entire agricultural ecosystem. Swedburg worked with a person with an agriculture background to help design the structure of this mini planning session. Swedburg started out with

the following statement on the cover of the EDC Ag Producer BRE Report April 2017 ([click here](#) for a link to the online report):

Agriculture is an important sector of the Kandiyohi County economy. We believe the vitality of agriculture is important to the future economic stability of our area. The purpose of this program is to develop a vision for agriculture as a cornerstone in the economic foundation of Kandiyohi County and the surrounding area.

Swedburg asked the following questions of members:

- **What is your favorite project from the past that delivered and received positivity in the county?**
 - Larson:
 - Bushmills Ethanol plant in Atwater. The EDC was directly behind the project to make it happen. He shared there were over 5,000 people who attended the open house.
 - Meadow Star Dairy
 - Partners In Ag Innovation Conferences
 - Keith Poier:
 - The help Minnesota Valley Alfalfa Producers (MnVAP) received in attempting to develop pellets for energy. The Ag Committee has learned a lot as to where it should be in recognizing energy resources, which led to looking at industrial hemp.
 - Kevin Halvorson:
 - Bushmills Ethanol plant; it was a major project and has been very successful.
 - Nate Reuss:
 - MnVAP and Bushmills Ethanol plant, which were game changers for the county's agriculture economy.
 - Chris Radel:
 - Excited about the future goat halal processing plant in the Willmar Industrial Park.
- **In a few words, what healthy momentum does the EDC Ag Committee have right now?**
 - Radel:
 - Looking at a wide range of projects that are valuable and may touch many different populations.
 - Halvorson:
 - Partners in Ag Innovation Conference and keeping it as an ongoing project.
 - Reuss:
 - Progress in the shrimp industry and the involvement of Nova-Tech Engineering in processing. Shrimp farming could add a whole new option in the agricultural industry.
 - Poier:
 - Momentum in industrial hemp development that is being promoted.
 - Larson:
 - Concurred with the industrial hemp area. He shared since the existence of the Ag Committee, it has never gotten on track with a strong effort for a third/new crop and it is now making some progress in industrial hemp. He feels there is a future for the crop although it will take time.

- **In a few words, what key frustration needs to be addressed?**
 - Poier:
 - Lack of financial support in the committee’s projects. He felt there are limited supplies of dollars for certain projects from the EDC and lending institutions due to legal issues. There is a need for cooperation within the various entities, including hurdles that need to be crossed in order to have a smooth start-up for projects.
 - Larson:
 - Having an agricultural representative on the EDCOB and mentioned reading past EDCOB meeting minutes that included a conversation about the Ag Committee being the least essential and possibly eliminating the committee. He was shocked and referred to the quote from the cover of the 2017 Ag Producer BRE Report.
 - Halvorson:
 - A portion of the Ag Committee’s purpose is to be available to assist when issues arise. Larson commented, if it wasn’t for the Ag Committee, Bushmills Ethanol would not be in Kandiyohi County.
 - Radel:
 - Reiterated financial support for projects. There are many people who want to try projects, but do not have traditional lending options due to conditional restrictions.
 - Reuss:
 - The difficulty when meeting with smaller entrepreneurs attempting to launch non-traditional agricultural projects. He would like to move the needle and would like to see a big project that is on the front page and connects across industries and urban and rural areas. There is a rich history of doing those things in Kandiyohi County, but there are headwinds they are trying to identify. He shared it is easier to launch smaller pilot projects and commented he wished the shrimp farms, chicken/egg companies, goat meat processing and industrial hemp could expand more rapidly. The pioneers are taking risks; how do we walk them through the process?

Swedburg inquired if there are frustrations with committee logistics, communications, etc.? Larson mentioned having an ag brochure; Swedburg commented this will be discussed later in the meeting.

- **What are our three primary priorities for agriculture in the community?**
 - Larson:
 - Expanded markets for ag products; Swedburg inquired if the expanded markets are for shrimp, goat meat processing, industrial hemp products or for products already grown? Larson commented it is all of the above or it could be commodity processing.
 - Poier:
 - There are a couple of groups in the area (not in the county) that process plant-based beans, which could be another market opportunity for Kandiyohi County. Halvorson shared some rural counties are experiencing a decline in agriculture vendors, suppliers and services. Poier commented, several years ago, there were many

attendees at the Chippewa County Livestock Feeders Association meeting/shows and now the closest one is in South Dakota. Since he began farming in 1968, he has seen tremendous changes in agriculture. One change he misses is the comradery of seeing neighbors at the fence lines. He doesn't feel the problem with the growers in the industry has been solved, i.e., delivery of parts from offsite/state vendors. He feels that should be the prime priority of agriculture. It is important to make the commercial and social structure of our communities strong again.

- Halvorson:
 - He agreed that the closeness of the agriculture community has diminished.
- Radel:
 - Easy access to enhanced farmers markets, food education, etc. He feels they are inaccessible to the majority of the area's population and would like to close the gap in Kandiyohi County. He briefly shared he is involved in asparagus farming and would like to replicate it for more farmers. Poier inquired how can a family be supported for 12 months on a vegetable garden and inquired if it would be possible to study how to accomplish this possibly through the use of greenhouses or have the EDC conduct a study of the concept. Radel felt there should be a priority of putting energy into watching newer entities doing something in a new way, i.e., Ben Larson of MNyou Youth Garden and The Land in Spicer, which plans to grow fresh produce for its restaurant menu items; it also buys fresh produce from other vendors.
- Reuss:
 - The large number of asparagus farmers in the county and the possible opportunity for cauliflower farming. Poier commented the agriculture economy is going to more automation and is on a supersonic freeway. The conversation about growing asparagus or other fresh vegetables is turning back to labor-intensive farming.

Swedburg commented if members have additional priorities to let her know.

- **What benefits will come from bringing awareness into these priorities back in the County?**
 - Larson:
 - Converting priorities into action might fill up the meeting room again with members who will be active and interested. Swedburg commented this is her biggest vision to foster conversations regarding actions, but the frustration is the lack of "so now what?" She suggested identifying high-level priorities and action items and bringing them back for review throughout the year and sharing results.
 - Poier:
 - The benefit to having these discussions is the need to keep asking the questions as things evolve. Bring more people back to the table and also to the county.
- **What is one action we will commit to for increased community engagement that will reinvigorate our agricultural roots and values?**
 - Reuss:
 - Energy and effort in resources regarding industrial hemp as it covers a lot of what has been discussed at today's meeting. Hemp as a crop requires more time in the

field. One outcome is construction materials, i.e., hempcrete, textiles and other products that are tied to the community.

- Larson:
 - Inquired if community is defined as the public or ag producers? Engagement of producers is going in one direction and what would be the action steps regarding engagement with public? Swedburg shared both are important and are directions the committee could go, but they require different action steps.
- Radel:
 - Ben Larson's farmers market will begin at Robbins Island on June 18 and feels it will benefit the community. Larson plans to give children \$2 coins to purchase an item at the farmers market.
- Poier:
 - Concurred with Larson's comment about the need to look at the various smaller communities within the larger community, jobs, marketing, faith community and involved individuals. If the entire community is behind a concept, the more successful it will be.

Swedburg thanked members for the interesting and robust conversation and input. Swedburg plans to arrange visits and interview members not able to attend today's meeting and ask the same questions and obtain input. At the next meeting Swedburg will share the goals identified; members will discuss priorities and work on action items.

Committee Budget. Swedburg shared each EDC committee is allocated dollars each year. This committee's budget generally has the second highest dollar allocation. The 2022 budget is \$11,450 and the proposed 2023 budget is \$12,650 (see attached). Swedburg encouraged members to review this proposed budget over the next two weeks. The budget planning process begins early and is submitted to Kandiyohi County at the end of July. The amounts for conferences, training travel and administrative services have been increased. There is currently \$5,000 in the 2022 budget to help with an ag project. The budget will be discussed at next month's meeting. Larson commented on the decrease in meeting refreshments; Swedburg commented this line item could be increased if needed. A discussion was held on holding a breakfast meeting. She will revisit the committee's budget with members throughout the year.

REPORTS

Partners in Ag Innovation Conference. Swedburg announced the conference is scheduled for 7:30 a.m-12:30 p.m., Tuesday, July 26th at the MinnWest Technology Campus. Breakfast and lunch will be included in this free event. Matt Roberts is the keynote speaker and will include four storytelling sessions and a broadband panel. Currently, registrations are at 75 which are mostly in-person attendees. She encouraged members to sign up and invite others; she will send the link to committee members.

Kelsey Olson, EDC Marketing and Communications Specialist, announced the EDC's summer newsletter will be coming out approximately July 1st. She is thinking of including an industrial hemp update and/or highlighting a farmer(s) in the community. Larson mentioned Chad Willis, who is

completing his term as chairman of the U.S. Grains Council and Nate Hultgren, who was appointed Chair of the Board of the American Sugarbeet Growers Association. Larson feels these two individuals would be important to interview. Olson will contact both individuals. Olson visited area cooperatives and left a supply of flyers for the Partners in Ag Innovation Conference. She announced digital signs have been rented and placed at locations throughout the county to advertise the conference.

EDCOB Members. Swedburg shared EDCOB members are recommended by the city of Willmar and Kandiyohi County Board of Commissioners. This year, the city recommended, Abdulcadir Gaal, owner of Somali Connection in downtown Willmar to replace Abdullahi Awale, who resigned before the end of his term. Swedburg will research whose term will be coming up at the end of 2022. As the year goes on, she suggested the committee be thinking of an agriculture candidate.

Ag Flyer. Swedburg shared Olson and the EDC Marketing & Public Relations Committee will be working on updating the current Ag flyer and designing an education piece on industrial hemp for the *Rooted in Local Agriculture* magazine published by the *West Central Tribune* in the fall.

[Larson was excused from the meeting.]

Industrial Hemp Exploratory Subcommittee. Swedburg will schedule the next meeting date for the Industrial Hemp Exploratory Subcommittee and will reach out to Tim Seehusen and Kevin Ortenblad.

Ongoing Ag-Related Work. Swedburg provided an overview of ongoing ag-related projects by the EDC:

- The following Kandiyohi County businesses received grants from the Minnesota Department of Agriculture: \$12,000 to Kandi Acres for a refrigerated trailer to transport goat meat; \$100,000 to Happy Halal for equipment; and \$36,000 from the Good Food Access Program to Amin Grocery in downtown Willmar for coolers and freezers.
- Swedburg attended the Willmar Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce's fifth grade Ag tours of Meadowstar-Louriston Dairy near Pennock and CoJo Dairy in Grove City. The annual Aggie Open golf tournament, sponsored by the Willmar Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce will be held on June 17th at Eagle Creek in Willmar. The tournament supports scholarships to students pursuing ag-related education at Ridgewater College.
- This week, Swedburg is attending a site selector conference in Columbus, Ohio, with two others from Minnesota. Those individuals are interested in partnering in sponsoring a booth to increase economic development visibility at upcoming 2023 national conferences/expos.
- Olson is working on updating the EDC's agriculture flyer; the summer newsletter and an article for the *Rooted in Local Agriculture* magazine published by the *West Central Tribune*.

- An agriculture distribution business will be built in the Willmar Industrial Park in the future—Nexyst 360 is involved in the project. Swedburg feels this may be a project for this committee to support. Additional details will be available soon.
- The last date to sign up for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service, 2022 census is June 30, 2022.
- FarmFest will be held August 2-4, 2022 in Redwood Falls.

[Radel was excused from the meeting.]

Chair Halvorson inquired if last fall's event at Kandi Land Farm was a success. Swedburg will contact the owner and share information at the next committee meeting.

ADJOURNMENT—There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:20 a.m.

NEXT MEETING—The next meeting is **7:30 a.m., Thursday, July 21, 2022** at the EDC Board Room and via Zoom video conference.

2023 Proposed Budget and Comparisons	2023 Proposed Budget	2022 as of 5/31/2022	2022 Budget
Agriculture and Renewable Energy Development			
Ag Projects	\$ 3,500	\$ 478.00	\$ 5,000
Conferences/Seminars/Trainings (including Industrial Hemp)	\$ 3,000	\$ 2,579.45	\$ 2,000
Meals/Meeting Refreshments	\$ 200	\$ 17.16	\$ 400
Mileage/Travel	\$ 1,000	\$ 161.47	\$ 1,000
Partners in Ag Innovation Conference Sponsor & Marketing	\$ 1,500	\$ 1,500.00	\$ 1,500
Professional Services			
General Administrative Services	\$ 2,700	\$ 1,357.50	\$ 1,300
Supplies (office or program)	\$ 250	\$ 77.24	\$ 250
Other	\$ 500	\$ 325.00	
Total Ag Committee Expenses	\$ 12,650	\$ 6,495.82	\$ 11,450