

**KANDIYOHI COUNTY AND CITY OF WILLMAR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION (EDC)
JOINT POWERS BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS ANNUAL MEETING**

MINUTES

April 28, 2022

Community Room, Heritage Bank, Willmar and Via Zoom Video Conference

Present: Julie Asmus, Corky Berg, Marv Calvin, Vicki Davis, Steve Gardner and Roland (Rollie) Nissen

Staff: Aaron Backman, Executive Director and Kelsey Olson, Marketing & Communications Specialist (via Zoom)

Media: Jennifer Kutila, West Central Tribune

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

Chairperson Julie Asmus called the meeting to order at approximately 11:32 a.m. and declared a quorum was present.

AGENDA—

IT WAS MOVED BY Marv Calvin, SECONDED BY Rollie Nissen, to approve the Agenda as emailed.
MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

MINUTES—

IT WAS MOVED BY Steve Gardner, SECONDED BY Marv Calvin, to approve the Minutes of the January 27, 2022 meeting as emailed. All present voted unanimously in favor by roll call.

FINANCIAL REPORTS—Aaron Backman presented the financial reports as of January 31, February 28 and March 31, 2022. Backman noted the balance on March 31, 2022 in the EDC's checking and savings account is \$629,906 compared to last year of \$610,418. He reported loans given through the COVID-19 Business Assistance Loan (COBAL) Program are being paid each month and seven have been paid in full; most of the COBAL loans will be paid off this year. Backman reported the balances available in the various loan programs compared to 2021. Total assets as of March 31, 2022 are \$983,532 compared to 2021 of \$1,006,801. In response to a question about the EDC's credit card policy, Backman stated the EDC has a strong usage policy. The board reviewed the most recent Profit & Loss Statement. Backman noted the EDC paid for two Industrial Hemp Exploratory Subcommittee members to attend a hemp conference in Denver and the EDC will become a member of the Greater Minnesota Partnership this year. Total expenses as of March 31 were \$179,925 compared to 2020 at \$173,559.

IT WAS MOVED BY Marv Calvin, SECONDED BY Vicki Davis, to file the financial reports as of January 31, February 28 and March 31, 2022, subject to audit. All present voted unanimously in favor by roll call.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS—

Boards' Annual Planning Session. Backman noted about 29 people attended this year's planning session, which included board members, committee chairs and community leaders. The board reviewed the 2022 Strategic Planning Session Summary prepared by Cheryl Glaeser of Achieve TFC (see attached). The top five Strategic Focus Areas for 2022-2023 are Maximizing Human Potential, Countywide Engagement, Communications/Marketing, Housing and Business Support. Backman informed the board he met with two members of the Ag Committee, who wanted Ag as a priority, including a staff person, and informed them the EDC continues to support and value Ag projects. Marv Calvin noted MinnWest Technology Campus continues to expand with Nova-Tech Engineering having shrimp production and processing and the City of Willmar giving Nexyst 360 early access to 137 acres in the Willmar Industrial Park. Board members agreed the EDC does continue to work on Ag projects and is doing good work related to agriculture. Calvin reported he will be establishing a housing task force to start addressing issues in the City of Willmar. Leslie Valiant contacted Larry Kleindl to seek county representation on the new housing task force. The task force will consist of 15 to 16 members from suppliers, property owners, real estate agents and builders. Rollie Nissen indicated he would like to see countywide engagement of smaller communities needing help with economic development. Steve Gardner noted housing is an issue throughout the county and appreciates that the EDC recognizes that.

The board reviewed the 2022-2023 Strategic Priorities (see attached). The EDC will focus on the following areas:

- Maximizing Human Potential
- Housing Development—discussion was held on a tiny homes subdivision; tiny homes is in the state ordinance; Woodland Centers built mental health housing in the Welshire Addition; a developer is submitting a proposal the Willmar City Council will hear Monday; encourage smaller communities to include these types of developments; the task force will look at four areas of Willmar to develop new residential subdivisions
- Countywide Engagement (Public Relations)
- Advancing Branding and Marketing Efforts—Calvin noted he is not in favor of changing the legal name of the EDC, but okay to use the abbreviated EDC in local presentations
- Business Support—the Renaissance Zone is in effect for five years from 2020
- Additional Areas, including Broadband, Childcare and Agriculture

Backman stated the Joint Operations Board will review these documents at their next meeting.

NEW BUSINESS

Replacement for Joint Operations Board Member. Backman announced Abdullahi Awale resigned from the Joint Operations Board effective immediately and a replacement is needed to complete his term, which expires the end of 2023. Backman informed Calvin of the vacancy; Calvin stated the City of Willmar will strongly recommend another person of diversity. If anyone has any suggestions for a replacement, they were asked to let Backman or Calvin know.

REPORTS AND COMMITTEE HIGHLIGHTS

Economic Development Activity. Backman reported a letter of intent has been signed for 137 acres in the unplatted portion of the Willmar Industrial Park; the Willmar City Council approved an early access agreement; and the business hopes to start access of the property in early May. Construction of Block 25

Lofts is coming along; Lumber One is working with Duininck Excavation to remove contaminated soil. FedEx is also working with Duininck.

Backman informed the board that Sarah Swedburg is attending a conference hosted by the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development this week. A report by Swedburg was distributed to the board (see attached).

Last week, Swedburg and Willard Huyck, Willmar Main Street Executive Director, made a statewide presentation at Faribault and she attended the AURI New Uses Forum. The EDC continues to receive contact from entities looking at additional housing projects (twin homes and multi-family housing) around the City of Willmar. Relative to possible blight areas, Calvin noted the City of Willmar hired a rental inspector to address concerns with code enforcement of rental housing. The need for affordable, single-family homes was discussed. Gardner indicated Willmar Lakes Area Vision 2040 and the Kandiyohi County Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA) will be doing a new housing study in the near future. Backman reported there are currently 19 single-family homes available in Willmar and 400+ people are waiting for 72 units that are being built at Unique Opportunities.

Backman reported a party was interested in building a retail business on the EDC's two acres located near Ridgewater College, but has backed off due to the high costs of materials. Backman stated the EDC would like to break even on selling the property and has approximately \$60,000+ into the property.

Elevate Community Business Academy. Backman reported the program is in its third cohort with nine students. The last class will be held June 9th and everyone is invited to attend the graduation to be held June 28 from 6-8 p.m. at the Willmar Education and Arts Center.

Highway 23 Coalition Annual Meeting. Backman reported the Highway 23 Coalition held its annual membership meeting on March 25th at The Park Event Center in Waite Park. An open house for the North Gap was held on April 6th. Backman invited the board to a groundbreaking ceremony to be held on May 6th at 11 a.m. at the Roadside Tavern in Roscoe that will include a meal.

Broadband and Advanced Technology. Backman announced the contract with Connie Schmoll ended on March 31 and all responsibilities are now being handled by Swedburg. He provided information from Swedburg's report (see attached). Calvin reported he and the mayors of Duluth, Edina and Lakeview sent a letter today to the Governor and legislators to authorize \$1.3 billion for broadband, which would cover the entire state. Backman reported the Kandiyohi County Board of Commissioners approved \$444,700 of American Rescue Plan Act funds to bring broadband to 289 households in Hawick and the Long Lake area. Vibrant Broadband, the provider, will provide 50% of the cost and it is anticipated the remainder will be paid by the townships. The total cost of the project is approximately \$1,005,000.

Business Retention and Expansion/Recruitment. Backman reported the EDC's first virtual job fair was held February 23rd with 79 job seekers and 56 businesses attending. And on April 6th was the Spring in-person job fair at Ridgewater College with over 50 employers and 300+ attendees.

Marketing and Public Relations. Backman reported Kelsey Olson started full-time employment with the EDC the end of December and has been working on updating the EDC's marketing materials, creating ads, doing social media posts and updating areas of the EDC's website. Calvin recommended more diversity be shown in the EDC's marketing materials and on the website as the lack of diversity has been noticed by local businesses.

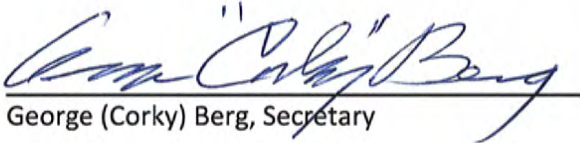
Gardner announced the DREAM Technical Academy is looking for a new location within Willmar. The board requested a letter of appreciation be sent to Schmoll for the extra work she did on behalf of broadband.

ADJOURNMENT—There being no further business,

IT WAS MOVED AND SECONDED to adjourn the meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 1:17 p.m.

NEXT MEETING—The next regular meeting is **11:30 a.m., Thursday, July 28, 2022** at a location outside of Willmar and via Zoom video conference.


George (Corky) Berg, Secretary

APPROVED: 7/28/2022:


Steve Gardner, Vice Chairperson



Kandiyohi County & City of Willmar
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

STRATEGIC PLANNING



2022

Appendices:

- A – 2021 EDC Accomplishments
- B – 2021 Strategic Planning Goals Update
- C – 2022 Business Support Survey Summary
- D – Planning Session Presentation
- E – EDC Strategic Goals/Objectives 2022-2023



Kandiyohi County & City of Willmar Economic Development Commission

2022 Strategic Planning Session Summary April 7, 2022 Willmar Conference Center

Background

The mission of the **Kandiyohi County and City of Willmar Economic Development Commission (EDC)** is to be a catalyst for economic growth of the greater Kandiyohi County Area. The EDC develops organizational priorities on an annual basis by engaging staff, board members, committee chairs and other key stakeholders in fact-finding efforts to identify trends, challenges, and opportunities. The EDC holds an annual strategic planning retreat to prioritize short- and long-term goals with strategic objectives.

Process

The EDC engaged a third-party consultant, Cheryl K. Glaeser with Achieve TFC, to design a process and facilitate a strategic planning retreat with the outcome of developing a shared vision of success and key strategies that will guide the work of the EDC throughout 2022-2023, recognizing the past goal areas and considering the changing needs of the EDC service area.

Discussions gathering insights from EDC staff were used to determine the focus for the Strategic Planning Retreat on April 7, 2022. Insights also guided the materials to be made available to planning participants prior to and during the session. Participants received the following documents (*attached as Appendices A, B and C*): 2021 EDC Accomplishments, 2021 Strategic Planning Goals Update and 2022 Business Support Survey Summary.

Strategic Planning Retreat

EDC staff, Joint Powers and Operations Board members, committee members from the Agriculture and Renewable Energy Development, Broadband and Advanced Technology, Business Retention & Expansion/Recruitment, Finance and Marketing and Public Relations Committees, and other key stakeholders met on April 7, 2022 for a full-day retreat. The presentation used to guide retreat discussions can be found in *Appendix D*.

FRAMING THE DAY

The group began by participating in an exercise to reveal the importance of having diverse perspectives and strengths when working together collaboratively. After reviewing the EDC's existing Mission and Vision, participants reviewed the work to take place throughout the day.

MISSION: To be a catalyst for economic growth of the greater Kandiyohi County Area.

VISION: To provide visionary economic development leadership creating growth, prosperity, innovation, international competitiveness, and enhanced quality of life.

Planning Retreat Expected Outcomes

- *Share insights and explore what we have learned in the past year*
- *Discuss what is working well and what we can improve as we work to be a catalyst for economic growth*
- *Define goals and specific objectives that will make the most difference for the future of Kandiyohi County people and businesses*
- *Strengthen the ways in which we can work together to create and support prosperity, innovation, international competitiveness, and enhanced quality of life*

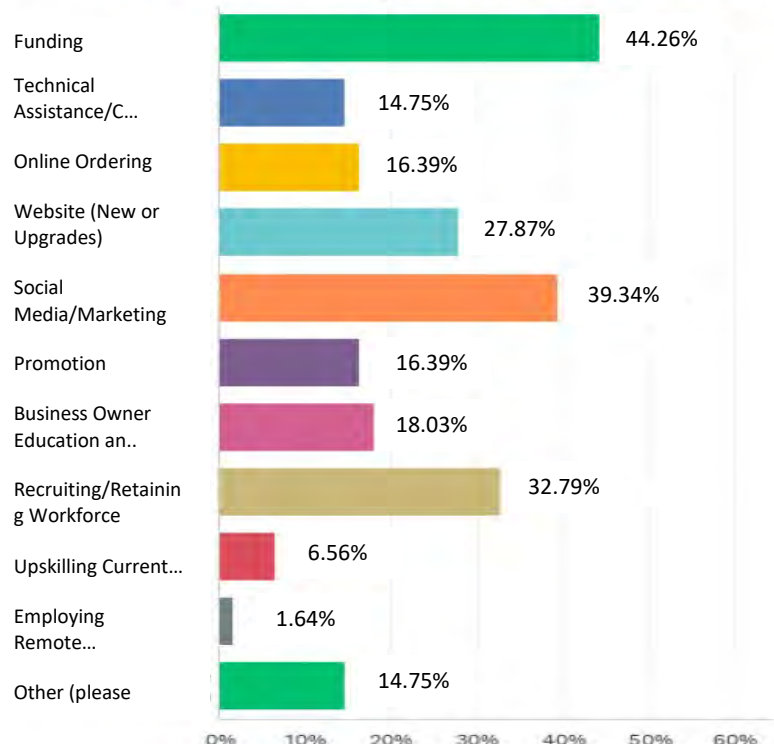
Insights to Guide the Future

Business Insights

Sarah Swedburg, Business Development Manager with the EDC shared business insights collected through the Business Support Survey sent to businesses (see Appendix C). As of April 2022, there were 70 survey respondents. Over half of the respondents indicated that they know how to access EDC resources. When asked about their business operations since March of 2020, 95.7% are still in operation in Kandiyohi County and over half have changed their business operations in response to current realities. Of the business support most needed, **Funding** ranked # 1 (44.26% of respondents). Following closely behind were **Social Media/Marketing** (39.34%), and **Recruiting/Retaining Workforce** (32.79%)

Planning participants heard from business representatives/owners, Hteh Hteh Hta Rue of Chaw’s Asian Market and Ryan Vatnsdal of Erickson Plumbing, Heating & A/C. Both shared the importance of the EDC’s support and funding in helping their businesses. Ryan Vatnsdal shared the challenge of attracting/retaining workers, indicating they will train their own workers but could benefit from having a plumbing/heating program at Ridgewater College. Dr. Craig Johnson, Ridgewater College President, shared interest in offering a program as well as the difficulty in attracting educators to teach classes in this field. Hteh Rue shared her story of her family’s history in grocery store management and her hopes of purchasing a building to expand her operations in the future. As a family-run business-owner, she is grateful that she and her family live in a supportive community like Willmar.

What business support do you need?



Overall, participants shared the following challenges and opportunities of businesses in the area:

Business Insights...

Challenges

- Business expansion is limited by workforce availability/# of employees
- Child care, housing and broadband are still significant challenges for workers/businesses
- Business owners are still hesitant to ask for help or may not know how to ask; a need for increased awareness/education
- Entrepreneurs need stronger business skills

Opportunities

- Funding and technical assistance help increase business appetite
- Technology and investments in marketing can help businesses
- The EDC and Ridgewater College can help with awareness, education and business skills
- Rising gas prices may be contributing to increased local shopping
- Our area is blessed with diverse businesses/people

Highlights of 2021 Accomplishments & Progress Toward Current Goals

Aaron Backman, EDC Executive Director, shared several key 2021 accomplishments and progress toward 2021 goals. (Key accomplishments can be found *in Appendices A: 2021 EDC Accomplishments and B: 2021 Strategic Planning Goals Update.*) Areas of note included:

- **COVID Business Assistance:** MPR grants to 60 businesses/6 nonprofits (\$844,000 total); Revolving Loan Funds to 4 businesses (\$127,500 total)
- **Industrial Development:** FedEx Distribution Center (a 217,325 sq. ft. facility on a 27-acre site)
- **Housing:** Unique Opportunities (two 72-unit multi-family housing buildings); Preserve on 24th (two multi-family housing buildings with 36 units each); Bethesda North Pointe (Senior housing project in New London with 24 independent living units, 18 assisted living and 18 memory care units); Block 25 Lofts (4-level 58-unit multi-family complex in Willmar's Renaissance Zone)
- **Workforce Development:** In-person Job Fair at Ridgewater College (50+ employers/300 job seekers); Workforce Solutions Summit (74 attendees); Virtual Job Fair (54 employers; 79 attendees); Diverse workforce training (CLUES, Ridgewater, CMJTS)
- **Elevate Community Business Academy:** Education/Mentorship program focused on creating economic opportunities for underserved minorities (12 students representing 10 businesses graduated from the first two cohorts); program recognized statewide through a Small Business Partnership Grant from MN DEED (\$76,000) to fund the program through June 2023 and allow the Fall 2022 class to be translated/taught in Somali. The EDC also received the 2021 Minnesota Association of Professional County Economic Developers' Outstanding Economic Development Program award.

Additional efforts helped advance child care, broadband, agriculture and marketing. Refer to the aforementioned appendices for detailed accomplishments.

Evaluating 2021 Strategic Priorities & Looking Toward Future Priorities

The group considered what areas of current priorities are working well, what might the EDC improve upon, and what might be missing or need greater attention from the EDC moving forward. In small group discussions, the following insights were lifted up ...

What's working well?

- The EDC's ability to collaborate, be innovative, and quick to act (noting that the EDC has a well-functioning team)
- The business support provided during/following COVID helped businesses persevere
- The EDC is effective in developing minority businesses; this was advanced by adding the Elevate program in 2021
- The EDC's involvement in job fairs and the Workforce Solutions Summit is a great start to being more engaged in workforce challenges
- The broad focus of the EDC aids in the support of all people, cultures, businesses
- The EDC's persistence is paying off in areas such as broadband, Highway 23 and child care

EDC's Strengths

- Well-functioning team
- Ability to partner/collaborate
- Quick to act
- Innovative thinking
- Gathers info to understand needs
- Measurable success toward goals
- Persistence – Broadband/Hwy 23

What could the EDC improve upon?

Participants shared insights that revealed six overarching areas with specific ideas for possible improvement (see image below.) Several participants sighted a need from innovative ways to support workforce development and overall business needs all across the county.

What could be improved?

Child Care and Housing

- Intentional focus/strategies
- Working with developers on a variety of housing options
- Incentives, subsidies, funding

EDC Branding/Communications

- Updated branding/logo
- Intentional marketing/awareness of services (particularly outside of Willmar)

Broader Countywide Engagement

- Engage and evaluate the needs of ALL communities in Kandiyohi County

Business Support

- Continue outreach momentum
- Education of services to more businesses
- More RLF/Micro Loans
- Business to business mentors

Showcasing Kandiyohi County

- Showcase the area/our successes
- Volunteers to share/tout area amenities

Greater Diversity on Boards/Committees

- Age, gender, geography, and cultures
- Cultural awareness for event planning

What is missing (or may need greater attention)?

Participants shared the following insights regarding areas that may benefit from more focused attention:

What is missing?

People Attraction/Recruitment

- Bring them back campaigns (students/young families)
- Focus on trailing spouses
- Attract entrepreneurs from other geographic areas

Career/Human Development

- Benefits of technical training/degrees
- Awareness of local jobs/careers
- Youth and adults reaching full potential

Broader Countywide Engagement

- Evaluate needs of ALL communities in Kandiyohi County
- Collaborate with other economic development groups/mayors
- Committee members as ambassadors
- Meetings held in locations across county
- Greater collaboration for tourism

Refugee Resettlement Planning

- Planning
- Awareness and education

Identifying Key Priorities for 2022-23

EDC Board and Committee Members and other participants explored and considered several potential priority areas for the EDC including, Child Care, Housing, Broadband, Maximizing Human Potential (Workforce Development), Countywide Engagement, Communications/Marketing, Business Support, and Agriculture. Discussions about these priorities revealed insights about the importance of these areas in building a strong economy:

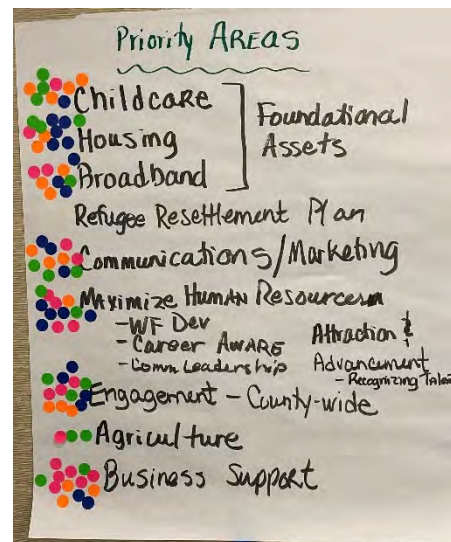
- Child Care, Housing and Broadband are key foundational assets
- Maximizing human potential includes:
 - Developing our current/future workforce
 - Building awareness of career opportunities
 - Recognizing talent/opportunities for advancement
 - Developing community leaders
 - Attracting people from outside the area
- Communication/marketing includes:
 - Improved branding/marketing of EDC and its services
 - Increased marketing of Kandiyohi County area—why live, work, play here
- Business Support—need to continue the momentum started through COVID
- More intentional countywide engagement can help ensure the EDC is supporting the economic development needs all across Kandiyohi County

Top Priority Areas

- Child Care
- Housing
- Broadband
- Maximizing Human Potential
- Countywide Engagement
- Communications/Marketing
- Business Support
- Agriculture

Following small and large group discussion, individual participants selected their top 4 priorities. The blue dots represented their top priority, the other colors are their second, third, and fourth rankings. Through this process and further discussion, participants ranked the key as follows:

1. Maximizing Human Potential
2. Housing
3. Countywide Engagement
4. Communications/Marketing
5. Business Support
6. Broadband
7. Child Care
8. Agriculture



Strategic Focus Areas for 2022-23

While all of these areas are important and will be part of the EDC’s efforts over the next 12-24 months, participants agreed that strategic focus and specific action plans should be developed for the priorities shown below. Breaking into groups according to their personal interests, the group worked to generate ideas for specific action items for each of these strategic focus areas. More detailed strategic goals and objectives can be found in *Appendix E*.

Strategic Focus Areas for 2022-2023 (As selected by participants)

Maximizing Human Potential

Helping every individual in Kandiyohi County reach their full potential through career awareness, training, and development

Countywide Engagement

Intentional outreach and engagement in communities all across Kandiyohi County to determine needs and provide awareness of EDC support and services

Communications/Marketing

Improved EDC branding and marketing strategies to reduce confusion about who we are/what we do

Housing

Developing alternative housing options to increase the availability of affordable workforce housing stock countywide

Business Support

Continued momentum of supporting existing businesses and fostering the growth of new business opportunities through appreciation, awareness, technical support, and access to funding

Next Steps

Participants of the 2022 EDC Strategic Planning Session made significant strides in developing a shared vision of success and key strategies that will guide the work of the Commission over the next 12 to 24 months. Initial action plans drafted for each focus area can be reviewed as *Appendix E: EDC Strategic Goals/Objectives 2022-2023*. EDC staff and committees will further define specific action items for each of the five priority areas and plans will be brought to the EDC Boards for further consideration.



Kandiyohi County & City of Willmar
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

2022-2023 Strategic Priorities As of 4/7/2022

Maximizing Human Potential

GOAL: Helping individuals in Kandiyohi County reach their full potential through career awareness, training and development.

Committee: BRE Subcommittee: Workforce Development

Key Partners: Ridgewater College, CMJTS, Mid-Minnesota Development Commission

Strategic Objectives:

Career Awareness/Marketing

- Videos highlighting area careers
- Informing people of career opportunities through job fairs, social media
- Marketing materials/social media strategies to showcase Ridgewater College courses/Customized Training and Continuing Education and local careers

Youth/Adult Career Development

- Supporting/developing secondary school programs to feed workforce pipeline
- Aiding employer engagement with their future workforce

Alternative Career Pathways

- Guidance/Training toward new career entrances/pathways
- Upskilling/training for employees (retention/efficiency)
- Reentry into the workforce through new pathways

Housing Development

GOAL: Developing alternative housing options to increase the availability of affordable workforce housing stock countywide.

Committee: Business Retention and Expansion/Recruitment (BRE) Committee

Key Partners: Vision 2040 Housing Committee, Kandiyohi County HRA, local City Council representatives, local realtors/developers

Strategic Objectives:

Developing NEW Housing Concepts/Opportunities

- Reimagining housing; exploring alternative and affordable housing options (e.g., reinvent mobile home parks, incorporating bungalow courts)
 - Developing housing that can grow with families (home design includes the full-sized end product, but the home can be built in stages, as family size and incomes grow)

- Evaluate/improve zoning requirements to allow expanded opportunities
 - Consider allowances for the construction and incorporation of accessory dwelling units (backyard guest house for grandparents, adult children with disabilities, etc.)
 - Consider allowances for smaller lot sizes—more households per linear foot of street, sewer, etc.
 - Consider establishing a tiny homes subdivision

Rehabilitation of Existing Housing Stock

- Maximize the use and quality of existing housing stock
- Work with developers/property owners to fix existing housing stock
- Reduce absentee landlords (consider ordinance adjustments that require landlords or their representatives to live within 30 minutes or similar)

Cross-Agency Collaboration

- Work with multiple agencies/governmental units to increase affordable housing stock countywide over the next five years (set specific goals for # of units)

Countywide Engagement (Public Relations)

GOAL: Intentional outreach and engagement in communities all across Kandiyohi County to determine needs and build connections to EDC support and services

Committee: Marketing and Public Relations

Key Partners: City Councils; Local Economic Development Groups; Chambers of Commerce, Local Businesses/Community Members

Strategic Objectives:

Intentional Outreach to Build Relationships, Awareness and to Gather Insights

- Connections with community banks and businesses across the County
- Town Hall meetings to hear needs/priorities
- Identify community representatives for ongoing communication and diverse participation on board/committees

Expanding Meeting/Event Locations

- Host EDC Board/Committee meetings, Elevate and other events in a broad array of communities

Sharing Countywide Success Stories

- Lift up success stories of businesses/communities all across Kandiyohi County to help promote opportunities and quality of life all across the County

Advancing EDC Branding and Marketing Efforts

GOAL: Positioning the EDC with updated branding to enhance its ability to reach target audiences and increasing targeted outreach to Kandiyohi County and beyond.

Committee: Marketing and Public Relations

Key Partners: Potential focus group participants: local marketing professionals, business professionals, Chambers of Commerce representatives

Strategic Objectives:

EDC Branding Refresh

- Updates to brand, logo, taglines to aid brand consistency and understanding of EDC (who we are/what we do/how we can help)
- Website updates and enhanced functionality

Developing Targeted Messaging/Outreach

- Identify key audiences and associated key messages
- Share relevant information of importance to key audiences
- (Note: Refer to marketing-related strategies within other goal areas)

Intentional Kandiyohi County Marketing

- Identify strategic opportunities to tout Kandiyohi County as a place to live, work, play
- Intentional marketing of the County as THE place for entrepreneurs (effort to attract entrepreneurs to Kandiyohi County)

Business Support

GOAL: Continued momentum of supporting existing businesses and fostering the growth of new business opportunities through appreciation, awareness, technical support, and access to funding.

Committee: BRE Subcommittee: Business Support

Key Partners: Local Lenders; Lending Partners

Strategic Objectives:

Relationships with Businesses

- Intentional outreach to businesses all across Kandiyohi County to identify countywide needs/opportunities
- Focused support for emerging entrepreneurs and diverse businesses through technical assistance and programs such as Elevate Community Business Academy

Awareness/Education of EDC services

- Align identified business needs/opportunities with EDC and partner support/services

Encourage Business Growth/Expansion

- Identify and work to support businesses struggling with workforce challenges (see Human Potential Goal)
- Utilize Opportunity/Renaissance Zones to aid business growth/expansion

Additional Areas (Addressed by Existing Committees/Groups)

Broadband

Strategic Objectives: Continue objectives defined during 2021 planning including education, awareness, and advocacy for countywide broadband.

Child Care

Strategic Objectives: Reinvigorate Rural Child Care Innovation Program group and assist in the reassessment of goals/strategies for 2022-2024

Agriculture

Strategic Objectives: Continue targeted activities that leverage Kandiyohi County's agricultural assets and provide education of new opportunities, such as industrial hemp.

TO: Joint Powers Board

FROM: Sarah Swedburg
Business Development Manager

DATE: April 27, 2022

RE: Business Development Manager Updates

The past several months have been busy with Broadband and Elevate activities, as well as the Virtual Job Fair! The Business Development Manager has also been assisting a number of entrepreneurs interested in expanding their existing business or starting a new business. Throughout the past quarter, she has participated in the following notable events:

- International Economic Development Council (IEDC) Entrepreneurial & Small Business Development Strategies and Business Retention & Expansion Courses
- University of Vermont Extension Virtual Industrial Hemp Conference
- AURI New Uses Forum
- Minnesota Rural Broadband Coalition Virtual Day on the Hill
- Rethos Buildings on Main Street Conference (Presentation with Willard Huyck on Renaissance Zone)
- Willmar Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce's Business Education Network 8th grade job presentations (Presentation about Economic Development and Public Sector Jobs)
- Community Venture Network (Currently pursuing two new business prospects)
- 2022 Minnesota Redevelopment Conference

In partnership with Mid Minnesota Development Commission, the local Rural Child Care Innovation Program (RCCIP) group was reconvened. Finally, in partnership with the New London Area Chamber of Commerce, we were notified that New London's host city application for the Connecting Entrepreneurial Communities Conference (CECC) was selected for the 2023 Conference! CECC will take place in Red Wing, Minnesota in 2022.

Broadband

Connie's broadband contract ended on March 31st and the Business Development Manager has now fully taken over the responsibilities of our broadband work. Charter projects in the Spicer/New London area, as well as the Arvig project in Prinsburg are all on track to complete construction this year. Vibrant has proposed a new project in Hawick and around Long Lake.

Staff is working with Irving and Roseville Townships to complete the funding needs for this eleventh project in Kandiyohi County.

Advocacy work continues as we near the end of the State Legislative session. At this time, we are asking the State Legislation for four items: (1) an allocation of general fund dollars to the Border-to-Border (B2B) grant program, (2) an increase in the award percentage limit from 50% to 75%, (3) an increase in the single project award limit from \$5MM to \$10MM, and (4) allocate the remaining \$110MM of Capital Project Funds (CPF) to B2B. As of April 27th, the House approved HF4366 allocating \$25MM to B2B, and increasing the limits as stated in items (2) and (3) above. We would like to see at least \$100MM allocated from State General Funds into this grant program. We are still waiting for Treasury to approve the State's Grant Plan to release CPF; during the 2021 legislative session, legislators allocated \$70MM from CPF to B2B, but \$110MM remain available from CPF for the State of Minnesota.

While we wait for this legislative session to conclude to determine what final allocations and grant program changes will be made, the Broadband Committee is working with providers on projects that do not require these B2B funds.

Elevate

The Third Semester of the Elevate Community Business Academy began with orientation on Thursday, March 17th. There are nine students in this semester's class, eight of which own existing businesses. 77.8% of the students are women, and 44.4% of the students identify as BIPOC. Additionally, three of our students are single moms, two of which we are assisting with child care costs.

These nine students are very engaged and participatory. They are currently working on perfecting their elevator pitch's, and this week's class will cover Breakeven & Pricing concepts. We are on track for our last class to take place on Thursday, June 9th. Graduation will be on Tuesday, June 28th at 6pm at the Willmar Education and Arts Center (WEAC). All Joint Powers Board members are invited, and this event is open to the public!