

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

**MINUTES**

**December 2, 2022**

**EDC Boardroom and Via ZOOM Video Conference**

Present: Corky Berg, Samantha Crow, Jim Ellingson, Steve Gardner (via Zoom), Les Heitke, Roger Imdieke and Jennifer Mendoza (via Zoom)

Excused: Sam Bowen and Bridget Paulson

Absent: Kelsey Vosika and Mary Warszynski

Staff: Aaron Backman, Executive Director

Secretarial: Cathy Skindelien, Legal & Administrative Assistants, Inc.

Chair Jim Ellingson called the meeting to order at approximately 11:12 a.m.

**AGENDA—**

IT WAS MOVED BY Corky Berg, SECONDED BY Samantha Crow, to approve the Agenda.  
MOTION CARRIED.

**MINUTES—**

IT WAS MOVED BY Roger Imdieke, SECONDED BY Samantha Crow, to approve the Minutes of the September 2, 2022 meeting as emailed. MOTION CARRIED.

**UNFINISHED BUSINESS—**

**Virtual Career Fair Update.** Aaron Backman reported the EDC has a contract with Premier Virtual due to the Department of Employment and Economic Development's (DEED) discontinuation of the service. Partners will be obtained to defray the cost and will be charged \$350.00 for one event or \$600.00 for two events per year. Redwood and Renville Counties have agreed to the partnership. Ridgewater College, which currently has 16 job openings, will become a partner and Meeker County will participate in the spring. Partners may hold their own events in addition to virtual career fairs at a cost of \$100 per event. The next virtual career fair will be held in January, 2023. Kelsey Olson sent information to 175 businesses that participated in previous events. Kandiyohi County's unemployment rate is 1.8 percent, which is historically low. There are 3.5 job openings per job seeker. Factors for the lack of workforce include people in transition, such as retirement or moving, having the right workforce skills, many East African community members relocating to the Twin Cities due to a lack of housing options, and childcare constraints restricting people from entering the workforce.

**Elevate Class Update.** Backman reported the Elevate program has 11 students in the fall cohort. Graduation will be held on January 13, 2023 at 6:00 p.m. at the Willmar Education and Arts Center. The first

informational session for the spring class will take place in partnership with Willmar Main Street on December 8, 2022, in the upper level meeting room of the Willmar Public Library. A Spanish version of the class will be taught by Danny Carranza, with Sarah Swedburg teaching the English version. Carranza will hold an informational session at Ridgewater College's Ag Career Fair. Students will be encouraged to participate in Elevate if they are interested in starting a business.

**Ridgewater College Commercial Driver's License (CDL) Grant Update/Next Steps.** Backman reported Ridgewater College, as a recipient of the Targeted Communities Capital Project Grant, has begun the early phase, which includes working with a company to do pre-design work. A contract will be put in place to receive the grant funds after the pre-design phase. The project timeline will become more defined after the contract is finalized. The CDL certification backlog on testing has improved slightly, although challenges still exist. The simulator purchased by Ridgewater College resulted in increased capacity of students getting hours and training. While Willmar has a better situation than St. Cloud, it still needs improvement. The training course costs over \$6000. It is possible to get a CDL without the training, however, access to a semi for behind the wheel training is often an issue.

#### **NEW BUSINESS—**

**Business Support Education Series.** Backman reported the Business Support Education Series will consist of 12 events supporting businesses in January through June 2023. Swedburg has been busy coordinating speakers for each event. The list of topics is growing, which may result in a more frequent occurrence of events. Each event will focus on one specific area, such as cash flow or business transition.

#### **REPORTS—**

**Workforce Development Subcommittee.** Backman reported a job fair was held in September. Although the number of job seekers attending the fair was down, vendors were happy with the quality of people in attendance. Another job fair will be held in the spring of 2023.

**Business Support Subcommittee, Child Care Grant.** The EDC, in partnership with Mid-Minnesota Development Commission (MMDC), was awarded \$200,000 from the Child Care Economic Development Grant through DEED. Seventeen organizations statewide received funds, which totaled \$2.5 million. The EDC's award ranked in the top five. Backman commended Swedburg and Michelle Marotzke for their collaboration in securing the funds. Matching funds will be received from the following:

- Kandiyohi County - \$150,000
- City of Willmar - \$100,000
- Southwest Initiative Foundation - \$100,000
- MMDC and smaller communities in Kandiyohi County – smaller contributions

Total funds available will be \$590,000. Proposed outcomes from the grant include adding 10 home providers and 5 active childcare centers throughout the county. The goal is to create another 140 childcare slots for preschoolers, 90 for toddlers and 60 for school-age children. An offer was made on the Willmar Child Care Center and was accepted by the African Development Center, which could result in a net increase of 100 childcare slots. Eighty percent of the grant funds will be used for forgivable loans with childcare entities. Home providers will be allowed \$10,000-15,000 and childcare centers up to \$50,000. Other portions include technical assistance and training. Loans will be used to add capacity or make changes in facilities, training and licensing. The last report showed Kandiyohi County is short by 935 childcare slots and this program, if successful, will reduce the shortage by one third. A question was asked that if there is a shortage of over 900 childcare slots, where are those children now? Backman responded there is a

significant number of women who would like to come into the workforce but cannot. Waiting lists for childcare are out for over a year. Some parents are taking their kids out of the county. A recruitment plan for home care was discussed. The providers with longevity concerns are those who have been in daycare under 5 years and over 20 years. The over 20-year group may be burning out or planning retirement. Those just starting out may be planning to stay in only as long as their own children are below school age. There is a perception that there isn't enough money in the profession. A mentorship program was discussed. Businesses that want to recruit staff need to become more active in regard to childcare and nonprofits may have facilities that are not maxed out and could be converted for use in childcare. The United Community Action Partnership (UCAP) has a program that assists people who are not English proficient to become daycare providers. Jennifer Mendoza will discuss this program with Swedburg to ensure diversity in the endeavor. UCAP will be contacted for help with the program design aspect of this grant.

Backman reported the City of Willmar was awarded a Transportation Economic Development grant of \$900,000 for the improvement of Highway 40 in the Willmar Industrial Park. Backman proposed a 60-40 split between the grant funds and the city of Willmar on the project, which will cost approximately \$950,000. The award was substantially higher than the original request of \$570,000, leaving room for unforeseen expenses and price increases. This project is one of only a few projects awarded funds in greater Minnesota.

**CLUES.** Mendoza reported the fall CDL program was completed with seven students eligible to take the over-the-road test. There will not be a Certified Nursing Assistants (CNA) course in 2023, as CLUES will concentrate on healthcare positions that can be done virtually. Customer service and banking classes will continue. Although there are not a lot of banking positions in this area, the Twin Cities is looking for more virtual positions. Classes held in 2023 will be more self-paced to help people acclimate to virtual jobs.

**Notables.** The City of Willmar approved the final plat for Lakeland Housing on November 7, 2022. Sanitary sewer service for EpiTopix went live on November 30, 2022. The parent company of EpiTopix, VaxxNova, has interest in additional land in the same area as their existing facility.

**ADJOURNMENT**—There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 12:33 p.m.

**NEXT MEETING**—The next committee meeting is **11:00 a.m., Friday, March 3, 2022** at the EDC Boardroom and via ZOOM video conference.