

**KANDIYOHI COUNTY AND CITY OF WILLMAR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION (EDC)**  
**MARKETING AND PUBLIC RELATIONS COMMITTEE**  
**MINUTES**

**February 27, 2023**

**Heritage Bank, 310 First Street South, Willmar and via Zoom Video Conference**

Present: Ben Carlson, Jesse Gislason, Ann Winge Johnson, Emily Lien and Pam Rosenau

Guest: Sam Romain

Staff: Kelsey Olson, Marketing and Communications Specialist

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

Chairperson Pam Rosenau called the meeting to order at approximately 12:05 p.m.

**MINUTES—**

IT WAS MOVED BY Emily Lien, SECONDED BY Jesse Gislason, to approve the Minutes of the January 23, 2022 meeting as emailed. MOTION CARRIED.

**NEW BUSINESS—**

**Addition of Sam Romain.** Sam Romain introduced himself, followed by committee self-introductions. Romain is the father of two boys, ages two and three. He is involved in several businesses, including the Mill Pond Salon, Art of Integrity Salon and Hemponix. His main business is Romain Berg, a website design and development company that has been in business for 8 years and has a staff of 30 full-time members.

IT WAS MOVED BY Ann Winge Johnson, SECONDED BY Emily Lien, to accept Sam Romain as a member of the Kandiyohi County and City of Willmar Economic Development Commission's Marketing and Public Relations Committee. MOTION CARRIED.

**Possible Invitation to Tiffani Hains.** Kelsey Olson suggested Tiffani Hains of Atwater be added to the committee. Hains will be invited to the next meeting.

**Website and Branding Planning.** The contract with Redwood Valley Technical Solutions (RVTS) has been finalized. Olson, Sarah Swedburg and Aaron Backman were given questionnaires, which they will complete, discuss and return to RVTS. Pictures and images have been requested. RVTS will do an audit of the current website, the EDC will write new content and VantagePoint Consulting will be involved. The process will take 12 weeks. The committee will be kept up to date on progress.

**UPDATES—**

**Community Survey Results.** The community survey was sent out to businesses and job seekers using Google Drive, which worked well on personal emails, but many businesses had problems accessing it. Olson received approximately 20 responses, sent out a reminder email and received an additional 20. Most responses were positive in regard to feeling represented by the EDC's marketing efforts. Top priorities included broadband

accessibility, housing development and Highway 23 projects. Ambulance service was identified by the City of Raymond, citing personnel and vehicle issues. Willmar is the only community with advanced life-support equipment and other communities in Kandiyohi County are required to connect with a Willmar ambulance to pick up equipment before going on a call. Townships listed roads as the biggest challenge. Senior housing was mentioned frequently and will continue to be an issue, since housing studies recently completed in Kandiyohi County and the City of Willmar predict future population increases in the age groups of 55 plus. Olson suggested a workforce summit for the healthcare community to help with staffing issues at facilities for seniors. The survey will be left open until one week before the EDC planning session, where the compiled information will be discussed. Township elections will be held the first week in March, and newly-elected officials will be surveyed as well.

**Virtual Career Fair Survey Results and Future Planning Event.** Olson reported the virtual career fair survey is closed, with no additional responses since the previous Marketing Committee meeting. The majority of businesses plan to participate again, even though they didn't feel this one was worth their time due to the shortage of qualified job seekers. An in-person high school jobs and career fair will be held on May 9, 2023 at Willmar High School. The EDC will send out email blast invitations to Willmar High School, the DREAM Technical Academy and the Alternative Learning Center. Olson will request this fair be opened to all area high schools.

The next virtual career fair will be held on May 18, 2023. Renville, Redwood and Meeker Counties will be partners. Job seekers will be allowed to log in and register without submitting a resume. The virtual career fair will be from 11:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m., and remain open until 8:00 p.m. to allow job seekers to search and apply for jobs without live chat capability. Job seekers can search for jobs by category or by business. Companies are required to have at least one job posted and a link to their website. Olson will recommend the partnership with Lakeland Broadcasting be discontinued, as no one reported registering due to radio advertising at the first virtual career fair, and only 5 of 30 did at the last one. The partnership cost is \$1300. Renville County has a Lunch and Learn series, which is an opportunity for Olson to explain the benefits of job fair participation. A meeting will be held with the partners to identify a marketing strategy. Partners will handle their own social media advertising.

**CVB Leisure & Travel Committee Update.** Olson reported the CVB is using the Shrapa website, where influencers are paid to tour the area and post stories at a cost of \$5000 per year. There are 11 stories posted, 10 of which are in the New London-Spicer area. It was requested that a re-visit of the CVB allocation agreement be added to the March agenda.

**Website Updates.** Olson reported the addition of a landing page for the Minnesota Main Street Economic Revitalization and Child Care Economic Development grants. The link to the Main Street Economic Revitalization grant page shows the boundaries of the program, who is eligible and how they can apply. The grant was received by the Southwest Initiative Foundation and will be administered by the EDC. Broadband projects can be found in the development area. Currently awarded projects are listed as well as Line Extension grant information and the latest Border-to-Border project, which includes East Lake Lillian, Lake Elizabeth and Harrison Townships. Letters of support are encouraged.

**Summer Schedule of Events.** Olson requested volunteers for area summer events. Olson plans to participate in the Lake Lillian Centennial parade, where she will ride in a car on which EDC magnets will be displayed.

## **DISCUSSION ITEMS—**

**Updated Documents.** Olson presented the final draft of EDC brochures and flyers, asking the committee to identify any last edits. A few minor changes were discussed and the documents are now ready for print.

**Housing Study Newsletter.** A newsletter will be created to highlight the Kandiyohi County and City of Willmar housing studies. It is very basic, identifying the top areas, which include taking care of seniors, the needs of small towns and the shortage of rentals. The spring newsletter will highlight construction and industrial hemp. The Lower Sioux Indian community has housing projects using hempcrete, which is derived from industrial hemp.

**Budget Review for 2023, Calendar Year 2023 and Fiscal Year 2024.** Discussion is tabled until after the EDC planning session.

Planning Session Reminder—The annual EDC planning session will be held on March 16, 2023.

**ADJOURNMENT**—There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 1:24 p.m.

**NEXT MEETING**—The next meeting is **12 noon, Monday, March 27, 2023** in-person at the Community Room, Heritage Bank and via ZOOM video conference.

What are the current challenges or obstacles your township/city are facing?

35 responses

Housing

Many

Housing development

Road repair, housing single family, law Enf. Needs a B.C.A. Lab here locally, lab ballistics and other lab work from St.Paul taking sometimes over a year, this leaves dangerous criminals in our streets. Our drug trafficking is at its highest in Willmar.Gang activity usually follows the drugs and unfortunately for our young easily impressionable kids it has.

Empolyees - not enough or not qualified

Food dessert, business, EMT shortage. very challenging.

Building Reserves

Economic growth, population growth building of new housing (we have build ready lots)

childcare & housing

Housing, workforce availability, childcare

Affordable housing

Priority is always roads

loosing properties towards the cities limits of town of willmar

Housing primarily

The obvious answer for townships is roads, otherwise it would be fiber optic broadband.

funding for large projects, small staff, and mostly part time

Road and bridges, county gravel roads

Broadband, also feel county needs to consult township boards more. They leave us hanging with certain development issues and seem to think township are not a priority.

Rising costs (inflation)

Internet service

Broadband access

Housing - single family, Childcare

Very Poor internet

High water and sewer rates, making sure that everyone is represented.



Ambulance Service (understanding of funding)

Lack of businesses in town

Roadway repair funding. Consistent zoning enforcement.

The City of Lake Lillian is at a crucial juncture in its history. While once a thriving community with a growing population and thriving businesses that supported the family farm, we have faced numerous setbacks. The loss of rail service in 1972 and the trend towards large corporate farms have contributed to a long period of economic decline. However, we cannot let these challenges define us. To secure a bright future for our city, we must adapt to changing circumstances and seek out new business opportunities that will entice a younger generation to call Lake Lillian home. By embracing innovation and working together, we can revitalize our community and build a prosperous future for generations to come.

Broadband

Working with other city in the county

Concerns with tax increases on Ag land, waterway issues and roads, along with high-speed internet access

Housing. But we are in the process of a building complex.

Broadband, Road issues

Lack of land availability