

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

**MINUTES**

**April 20, 2023**

**EDC Board Room, Willmar and Via Zoom Video Conference**

Present: Rollie Boll, Kevin Halvorson, Keith Poier, Nate Reuss and Dan Tepfer

Excused: Dustin Kotrba and Chris Radel

Absent: Abdulcadir Gaal, Larry Konsterlie, Kim Larson and Dan Lippert

Media: Shelby Lindrud, West Central Tribune

Staff: Sarah Swedburg, Business Development Manager

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

Chairperson Kevin Halvorson called the meeting to order at approximately 7:35 a.m. noting a quorum was not present.

**UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

**EDC Fast Facts flyer.** Sarah Swedburg reported Kelsey Olson has been working on the virtual career fair and childcare grants and has not been able to complete the flyer. Swedburg brought the first page of the flyer to the Agricultural Utilization Research Institute (AURI) New Uses Forum and felt it was a great place to showcase the flyer. She has received information from Kandiyohi Power Cooperative and Willmar Municipal Utilities and anticipates the flyer will be completed by the June committee meeting.

**NEW BUSINESS**

**Downtown Willmar Pop Up.** Swedburg reported on behalf of Chris Radel that they are working on details for the downtown Willmar pop up and when additional details are finalized, Radel will share them with the committee. Swedburg commented with the proposed partnership in 2024 with the Stingers, this 2023 downtown event may be a good opportunity to showcase the work of this committee to the broader community.

**New London Food Co-op.** Nate Reuss shared an update regarding financing for the New London Food Co-op. Eric Hatlestad, President of the Co-op, notified him that the Co-op board met this week and is targeting an opening of Labor Day. Reuss felt the Co-op will request release of the Point of Sale (POS) funds prior to Labor Day. Swedburg reminded the committee that it approved \$1,300 for the POS system. Once the Co-op purchases the POS system, it will provide a receipt to the EDC to receive payment. She stated it is exciting that funding is in place and the Co-op is moving forward.

**Committee membership.** Swedburg reported the committee discussed reinvigorating its goals, which will be done at the June meeting. Swedburg commented it is important to have continued conversations regarding committee make up and how to lead conversations as to members who may be interested in stepping down or if there are other individuals in the community who may be interested in serving on this committee. She is open to

hearing opinions and thoughts on how to proceed. Swedburg commented she wants to provide value to members and wants members to feel their participation is valued.

**Upcoming guests.** Swedburg inquired if committee members would prefer the high school greenhouse representatives to attend a committee meeting or would the committee like to visit the greenhouses at the Willmar High School and/or New London-Spicer High School? The consensus was to visit the greenhouse location(s). Swedburg will work on scheduling. Swedburg will invite guest(s) for the June meeting from Ridgewater College, University of Minnesota Extension, Mid-Central Research and Outreach Center, United States Department of Agriculture or Latino Economic Development Center to provide updates.

[Dan Tepfer joined the meeting.]

**Status of 2022-2023 Goals.** Swedburg shared the RFP for an Industrial Hemp Feasibility Study is 99% complete and will be submitted soon. Rather than focus on one company, the RFP will be submitted to two different companies due to a pricing standpoint. One end user company she has in mind has a lot of investor-ready documents available which would eliminate starting from the ground floor.

Swedburg shared planning for the Partners in Ag Innovation Conference scheduled for July 25 is going well. Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway will not have a speaker at the conference. The planning committee has been notified Carbon Solutions (carbon pipeline) is interested in speaking and she is communicating with it. The committee has solidified a fireside chat with human resource representatives to discuss workforce and employees in the agriculture industry. The committee is also working on obtaining story tellers. It is expected the agenda will be finalized in the next two weeks.

## REPORTS

**Industrial Hemp Exploratory Subcommittee.** The subcommittee has not met recently. Poier inquired if anyone has been in contact with the European company discussed at the last meeting. Swedburg shared the company is planning a second visit to the area and it has been in contact with one or two farmers. The EDC is working on sites for the company to visit. Poier inquired about the company's Indiana facility. Swedburg shared it is actively working on the project, but permitting issues have delayed the project. If Kandiyohi County is able identify a site, it may speed up the timeline for a Minnesota location. The company is looking at a possible site in Idaho. Poier shared Prairie PRODucers has been in contact with him and finances are a concern. Tim Seehusen sent him an article regarding a law passed in Texas that horse feed can contain hemp seed oil.

Swedburg mentioned the EDC's newsletter this month focused on industrial hemp. Stories featured Prairie PRODucers, Lower Sioux Indian Community and an interview with Kevin Ortenblad, owner of Hemponix in New London and Willmar.

**Ongoing Ag-related EDC work.** Swedburg reported on April 14, the Willmar City Council approved a purchase agreement for the sale of approximately 145 acres in the Willmar Industrial Park for a rail line project. She noted the purchase was not made by Nexyst360 as it has brought in additional partners to construct the rail spur. It is hopeful to have some rail built this year. The EDC is working on connecting the company with local contractors and resources to keep the project moving along; the rail spur may also be used by other businesses. Swedburg commented the company will attend a future Willmar City Council meeting to apply for an Early Access Agreement and Early Site Preparation Agreement to allow it to begin moving dirt, etc. before the purchase is finalized. The project will not be completed in one season. Swedburg stated it is important to keep the project moving due to the Transportation Economic Development Grant received for a turn lane along Highway 40 west of Willmar.

EDC staff is working on the Main Street Economic Revitalization Grant program. Southwest Initiative Foundation applied for the program and was awarded \$744,000 for Willmar. The funding will be used for building improvements in downtown Willmar, along the Highway 12 corridor and along Business Highway 71 North. Over 40 applications have been received.

The EDC is also working on childcare grants and housing. Swedburg shared two Border-to-Border Broadband Development grant applications were submitted to the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) in March. She is hopeful the concentration of agriculture and farms in the southeast corner of Kandiyohi County will help raise the applications to the top. Contacts continue to be made with townships relative to broadband and seeking letters of support for broadband projects. Swedburg encouraged this committee to contact farmers who would be willing to write letters of support for a broadband project in their township. Chair Halvorson inquired if the northern portion of Kandiyohi County is in need of additional broadband service. Swedburg commented there is an issue with a current provider in that area that consistently over promises and under delivers. More time and energy have been spent in the southern half of Kandiyohi County as there was a second federal program that was locking out the EDC's Broadband Committee from looking at projects in that area. However, the federal government revoked its award to the previous provider, which means state funds may now be looked at for projects in the southern portion of the county.

#### **AG AND RENEWABLE ENERGY OPPORTUNITIES**

**AURI New Uses Forum.** Swedburg attended the morning session of the New Uses Forum and Chair Halvorson attended the afternoon session. Chair Halvorson commented the forum was interesting. Swedburg felt it was a great opportunity to have a booth; Kandiyohi County was the only county to have a booth, although there were other regional organization booths. Swedburg mentioned she visited with Lisa Hughes, DEED and Harold Stanislawski, AURI, regarding upcoming projects.

**Other.** It was felt this year's snowfall was beneficial for the soil. As to a Texas law passed allowing feed to contain hemp seed oil, it is only allowed for horses and chickens.

**ADJOURNMENT**—There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:20 a.m.

**NEXT MEETING**—The next meeting is **7:30 a.m., Thursday, June 15, 2023** at the EDC Board Room and via ZOOM video conference.