

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

MINUTES

August 17, 2023

EDC Board Room, Willmar, and Via Zoom Video Conference

Present: Rollie Boll, Kevin Halvorson, Larry Konsterlie (via Zoom), Dustin Kotrba and Dan Tepfer

Excused: Kim Larson, Dan Lippert and Nate Reuss

Absent: Abdulcadir Gaal and Keith Poier

Media: Shelby Lindrud and Levi Jones, West Central Tribune

Staff: Sarah Swedburg, Business Development Manager

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

Chairperson Kevin Halvorson called the meeting to order at approximately 7:34 a.m., and reported a quorum was not present.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Farmtastic volunteers. Sarah Swedburg shared a planning committee for the for the 2024 Farmtastic event at the Stingers game will be formed and a 60-90 minute meeting will be scheduled to determine which commodity groups to invite and potential sponsors. She hopes to have one or two representatives from the Willmar Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce Agri-Business Committee and a volunteer from this committee. Larry Konsterlie, also a member of the Kandiyohi County Corn and Soybean Growers, volunteered to serve on the planning committee. Kotrba inquired as to the number of hours put into past Farmtastic events. Konsterlie shared that Willmar Stingers markets the event and a person from the Corn and Soybean Growers was involved in the planning. Swedburg felt the commodity groups will coordinate most events, i.e., kid-focused activities, etc. Kelsey Olson, EDC Marketing and Communications Specialist, may also assist with some of the planning. Swedburg will contact Krista Willis of Farm Bureau and invite her to be on the planning committee.

NEW BUSINESS

New member applications. Swedburg shared an application from Erik Hatlestad (see attached) and she expects to receive another application. She also shared Noah Hultgren, a member of the EDC Joint Operations Board, will be the new board representative. Dan Tepfer commented it is important to know the applicant's agricultural background and what they are looking to accomplish by serving on this committee. Swedburg commented no action can be taken at today's meeting due to a lack of a

quorum. Swedburg will invite Hatlestad and the other applicant to the September meeting. The committee will take action at the next meeting.

STATUS OF 2022-2023 GOALS—Swedburg reviewed the planning session from last year, the mission and objectives and suggested to begin setting new goals for 2023-2024.

[Levi Jones joined the meeting.]

Swedburg shared Jones will serve as the Ag reporter for the *West Central Tribune*. Self-introductions were conducted.

Dustin Kotrba suggested inviting Dun Agro to attend a future meeting to share information regarding the industrial hemp industry.

The committee had a brainstorming session that addressed the following areas.

Favorite moment(s) from the past year:

- The committee is involved in several ag-related projects, i.e., farmers markets, goat processing, corn, soybeans, etc. and is looking at ways to support area agriculture.
- Looking at diversity and not just traditional agriculture as there are many other facets of agriculture of which to be mindful.
- Personally representing the committee at events by AgriGrowth, Agriculture Utilization Research Institute and Farmfest to help broaden the knowledge of the committee.
- What is done as a group, i.e., focusing on various facets of agriculture, Partners In Ag Innovation Conference, upcoming Farmtastic event, etc.

What healthy momentum does our group have right now?

- To move forward with additional agricultural education for youth regarding what is done/produced locally and across the world.
- Momentum to educate youth as to what agriculture is all about and the role agriculture plays in everyone's life. Learning more about the greenhouse activities at local high schools and to pursue opportunities available.
- Advocacy efforts are solid. The Partners In Ag Innovation Conference is important as the presenters share information in unique agriculture ideas/opportunities.
- This committee needs to take credit for its accomplishments.

What key frustrations need to be addressed?

- The lack of monetary backing for some of the projects.
- In general, farming community is a lower portion of the population and the frustration is the lack of education/knowledge of the general population (urban) knowing what agriculture/farming is all about.
- Find better connections and more resources for people needing financial assistance for agriculture needs.

- Secure (recruit) additional committee members and develop a calendar of upcoming presenters for future committee meetings, which may help increase member retention.
- Are monthly meetings necessary? Currently, the committee does not meet in May or October. Swedburg will compare attendance records for 2022-2023 to determine the natural attendance flow.

When you think about the work over the next year, what comes to mind. . . word, phrase, activity?

- The potential opportunities for agribusiness, agriculture activity in the region to share ideas.
- Continue to look at ways to educate the next generation and community regarding agriculture, including is the EDC available to assist in those areas.
- Exposure of agriculture at various events: Minnesota State Fair, Food and Ag Summit, Ag Expo, Farmtastic to broaden the knowledge and gain contacts in agriculture and agriculture business.

What is an action we will commit to for increased community engagement that will continue our momentum to reinvigorate our agricultural roots and values?

- Continuation of the Farmtastic event and keep commitment alive regarding educating the next generation to agriculture.
- Making connections; it is important to make things happen and being representatives.

Swedburg will look at the schedule of presenters for the upcoming year and meeting frequency and create a framework to review. Having more people involved in committee meetings and/or inviting the public to attend a committee meeting via Zoom, especially on the business side would be beneficial.

2024 goals. Swedburg showed a list of ongoing ideas created from last year’s planning session and commented a lot of these ideas have been discussed. She will compile a list of goals for the next year generated from today’s meeting keeping mind last year’s list for the next 6- and 12-month goals. She will check with the Willmar Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce regarding the lunch and learn session held last year with Zach Rada and contact Rada about attending a future committee meeting. Swedburg has invited Ridgewater College Agriculture Recruitment to a meeting this fall. Kotrba suggesting having a presenter to give a carbon update; he feels it is important to have representation of the Minnesota farming community at the table when the state meets and makes decisions on electric vehicles (EVs). A discussion was held regarding awareness and education of EVs. The committee felt today’s process and discussion regarding the 2023-2024 goals went similar as last year; Swedburg feels today’s discussion went better.

REPORTS

Industrial Hemp Exploratory Subcommittee. Swedburg reported the European company interested in industrial hemp will visit the area for the fifth time. A field day will be held at Hultgren Farms on September 7th from 9:30 a.m. to noon. There will be a presentation and a field visit to watch the harvest. Invitations will be sent.

Partners In Ag Innovation Conference. Kotrba commented the conference content was solid, well organized and informative. The conference coordinator did an excellent job. There were 100 in-person attendees and 50 online attendees. Positive comments have been received. Swedburg commented

attendees remained at the conference until the end. They did well in sponsorships and gained one new sponsor. Swedburg shared a recording of the conference is not yet available; she will inform the committee when it is available.

Farmfest. Swedburg thanked those who volunteered (Halvorson, Reuss, Tepfer and Swedburg); she will distribute T-shirts to the volunteers. Discussion was held regarding the cost of the both; the plan is to have a booth again next year. Suggestions for next year included having a give-away for attendees, having an activity for those who stop by or having a prize drawing or a coupon. It was noted Farmfest typically has approximately 30,000 attendees.

North Central Regional Food District Center. Nate Reuss will provide an update at the September meeting.

Ongoing Ag-related EDC work.

- Working on rail park projects. Rail development may begin later this fall.
- Broadband grants. The next round of childcare grant applications will be reviewed today. Swedburg is expecting additional applications in September. Work is going well.
- The EDC will be sharing a part-time childcare advocate and engagement position with United Community Action Partnership.
- Harrison Township is expected to begin development on its border-to-border project this fall. A Reconnect Grant was awarded to Burbank, Irving and Roseville Townships in the northeast portion of Kandiyohi County. Work along Lake Elizabeth and East Lake Lillian Townships will be built out next year. Federated Telephone Cooperative has made a lot of progress on its West project in Arctander and St. Johns Townships; lines may be going to homes soon. The Vibrant Broadband grant is a separate \$19 million, which is tied into the entire system. The EDC's Broadband Committee will attend various township meetings to present proposed broadband projects.
- Simply Shrimp is getting close to its build-out.

Ag and renewable energy opportunities. Swedburg announced the Ridgewater College Agriculture Department will give an update at the September meeting. The following upcoming events were announced:

- Minnesota State Fair, August 24-September 4, 2023.
- Minnesota Ag & Food Summit hosted by AgriGrowth, Minneapolis Convention Center, November 9, 2023.
- MN Ag Expo, Mankato, January 16-18, 2024.

ADJOURNMENT—There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:00 a.m.

NEXT MEETING—The next meeting is **7:30 a.m., Thursday, September 21, 2023** at the EDC Board Room and via ZOOM video conference.