

KANDIYOHI COUNTY AND CITY OF WILLMAR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION (EDC)  
JOINT OPERATIONS BOARD OF DIRECTORS (OB)

**MINUTES**

September 14, 2023

Community Room, Heritage Bank, N.A., Willmar and Via ZOOM Video Conference

Present: Art Benson, Abdulcadir Gaal, Les Heitke, Jesse Gislason and Noah Hultgren

Excused: Steve Gardner, Kelsey Olson, Sarah Swedburg, Kelly TerWisscha and Mary Warszynski

Staff: Aaron Backman, Executive Director

Media: Jennifer Kotila, West Central Tribune

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

Chairperson Art Benson called the meeting to order at approximately 11:18 a.m. and declared a quorum was present.

**AGENDA**—Added to the Consent Agenda under Approve was item 5, payment of a total of \$30,160.66 in childcare forgivable loans as listed on the handout and removed from the Agenda under New Business was rebranding.

IT WAS MOVED BY Jesse Gislason, SECONDED BY Abdulcadir Gaal, to approve the revised Agenda. MOTION CARRIED.

IT WAS MOVED BY Noah Hultgren, SECONDED BY Les Heitke, to approve the following revised Consent Agenda:

**CONSENT AGENDA**

- Approve:
1. Minutes of August 10, 2023
  2. Financial reports as of August 31, 2023
  3. Payment of \$17,000 to Willmar Lakes Area CVB under the Tourism Partnership Agreement
  4. Appointment of Noah Hultgren to the Agriculture and Renewable Energy Development Committee
  5. Payment of a total of \$30,160.66 in childcare forgivable loans from childcare grant funds (see attached)

- Accept:
1. Committee/Subcommittee Minutes
  1. Agriculture and Renewable Energy Development 7/20/2023
  2. Broadband and Advanced Technology 8/7/2023
  3. Finance 6/13/2023
  4. Marketing and Public Relations 7/24/2023

MOTION CARRIED.

**UNFINISHED BUSINESS**—There was no unfinished business.

**NEW BUSINESS**—There was no new business.

## **REPORTS**

**Economic Development Activity.** Aaron Backman informed the board Sarah Swedburg is attending the 2023 Connecting Entrepreneurial Communities (CEC) conference hosted by University of Minnesota Extension in New London. Backman noted items from the CEC agenda; speakers include Betsy Bonnema, Swedburg, Kelly Asche, Cameron Macht, Backman and local business owners. The Economic Development Association of Minnesota held an on-the-road event on August 17 in Willmar where the attendees toured Willmar and new development, including Block 25 Lofts and the Willmar Events & Recreation Center. The Coalition of Greater Cities is also planning a two-day event in Willmar on November 16 to include a bus tour. On September 6, MB Rail's purchase of 144 acres in the Willmar Industrial Park was closed for \$1.2 million. Site preparation for the Rail Park should now begin. Backman is now moving ahead with Duinink Concrete's purchase of 13.67 acres in the Rail Park; a survey has been completed and a Purchase Agreement is being negotiated. Another site has been identified for the senior housing that was rejected by the Willmar Parks & Recreation Board. Backman announced that Justice Walker, Planning and Development Director, and Dr. Guilherme Motta, City Planner, both resigned their positions and their last day of employment with the city of Willmar is September 22.

**Elevate Community Business Academy.** Yesterday evening the next cohort started with 17 students. Classes are held at Spurs with Stephanie Lopez and Evelyn Soriano, both alumni, being the instructors. Graduation will be held December 15 at 6 p.m. Another Small Business Assistance grant was applied for with the state for \$204,000 which, if approved, will allow the program to be expanded through business assistance and followup with graduates. To date, there have been five cohorts with 50 graduates, 11 of whom started or expanded a business and generated \$1.2 million in financing. Student's ages have ranged from 19 to 74 with the average being 30-35. The program consistently has a waiting list. See Swedburg's attached report for additional information.

**Child Care Economic Development Grant.** The Child Care Community Coordinator position has been posted on United Community Action Partnership's website. The position is open until filled. Swedburg will monitor the shared position for the EDC. See Swedburg's attached report for additional information.

**Main Street Economic Revitalization Program.** Grants have been approved so work can begin. Paperwork between Southwest Initiative Foundation and the state is still in process.

## **COMMITTEE REPORTS**

**Agriculture and Renewable Energy Development.** The committee will meet next week.

**Industrial Hemp Exploratory Subcommittee.** Noah Hultgren reported Dun Agro Hemp Group of the Netherlands held a demonstration day at Hultgren Farms on September 7<sup>th</sup>. Albert Dun, founder of Dun Agro, and Niki Vandenburg, co-CEO, attended and spoke about the process of harvesting hemp and the end products that can be developed, including hempcrete and a replacement for plastics. Hultgren Farms has 60 acres planted in hemp with 30 being harvested during the field day. It was a good demonstration with approximately 75 people attending, including representatives from Minnesota Department of Agriculture, Agriculture Utilization Research Institute, Kandiyohi Power Cooperative and county commissioners. This was the fifth visit to the county by the Dutch company. Dun Agro shipped the hemp harvester from the Netherlands for this harvest. Hultgren noted it is an easy crop to grow, grows fast and would be a good crop for rotational purposes. A front-page article of the *West Central Tribune* featured the field day. See Swedburg's attached report for additional information.

**Broadband and Advanced Technology.** Federated Telephone Cooperative is currently installing fiber in the northwest portion of the county. The next state grant application is due in October. The county has been using its American Rescue Plan Act funds to expand broadband in the county. Willmar hosted the first listening session for the state Digital Opportunities Plan. See Swedburg's report attached.

**Marketing and Public Relations.** Backman reported the committee has been identifying target audiences for the EDC's website.

[Gaal was excused from the meeting.]

The EDC hosted a Virtual Business Resource One-Stop-Shop that focused on the new laws that affect all Minnesota businesses. This morning Kelsey Olson sent out invitations to manufacturers to attend a free virtual career fair for Minnesota Manufacturing Month in October. Backman highlighted other areas of Olson's report (see attached).

Backman reported last week Swedburg gave presentations to the Margaret A. Cargill Foundation and Blandin Foundation.

**Business Retention and Expansion/Recruitment.** Backman reported the committee held its quarterly meeting last week. An update was received from Sam Bowen on Ridgewater College's Commercial Driver's License program. Backman reported that Farm Rite is under construction, Case New Holland purchased the former Buhler building and is interested in accessing the new Rail Park.

**Finance.** Backman reported the Finance Committee approved a loan this week to Intuition Brewing, LLC, which will be moving into the Foxhole Brewhouse location in downtown Willmar. Heritage Bank is the lead lender. Intuition Brewing will be purchasing its equipment from Foxhole.

IT WAS MOVED BY Jesse Gislason, SECONDED BY Les Heitke, to approve a loan to Intuition Brewing, LLC under the Kandiyohi County and City of Willmar Economic Development Commission's Revolving Loan Fund in the amount of \$40,000 at 7.5% interest for a term of seven years and second security position under a UCC

Financing Statement behind Heritage Bank, N.A. with interest-only payments for the first three months. MOTION CARRIED.

**Leisure Travel.** Chairperson Benson noted the county has been having a good summer season.

**WHAT'S UP**

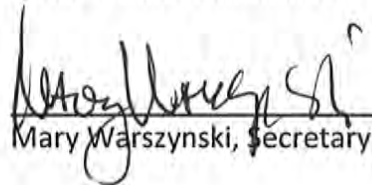
- Heitke announced activities for Welcoming Week started last Saturday in downtown Willmar with free food, music, dancing, arts and crafts. More than 400 communities across the United States celebrate Welcoming Week.
- Gislason announced that the Mayor's Bike Ride is tomorrow evening ending at Robbins Island in Willmar and bowling season is beginning for Alley on Ash.
- Hultgren announced a group that harvests silage for area farmers completed last week, which is earlier than normal; Hultgren Farms is currently harvesting edible beans and will start harvesting sugar beets in October.
- Backman announced the Willmar Wye project was 1 of 7 projects out of 23 that was recognized for a transportation award by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials.

**ADJOURNMENT**—There being no other business,

IT WAS MOVED BY Jesse Gislason, SECONDED BY Noah Hultgren, to adjourn the meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 12:58 p.m.

**NEXT MEETING**—The next regular board meeting is 11:00 a.m., Thursday, October 12, 2023 at the Community Room of Heritage Bank, Willmar, and via Zoom video conference.

  
Mary Warszynski, Secretary

APPROVED: 10/12/2023

  
Jesse Gislason  
Vice President

Childcare forgivable loans approved in August for approval by the Joint Operations Board:

Terri Athmann	\$ 3,090.56	28030 Roseville Rd	Paynesville
Christy Collins	\$ 5,629.20	6602 161st Ave NE	New London
Laura Frank	\$ 2,690.90	5400 97th Ave SE	Willmar
Karisa Van Eps	\$ 12,500.00	12630 90th St SW	Raymond
Jean Wolff	\$ 6,250.00	7790 189th Ave NE	New London



Joint Operations Board Meeting  
September 14, 2023  
Business Development Manager Update

- Elevate kicked off last night with a full house – 17 students will be a part of this class and all showed up at Spurs last night. Stephanie Lopez and Evelyn Soriano, both alumni, are our instructors this semester. Graduation will be December 15<sup>th</sup> at 6pm
- At the end of August, we submitted a Small Business Assistance Grant application to the State of Minnesota. Our idea budget to maintain current Elevate CBA and expand into additional education and mentorship for alumni & second-stage businesses is \$328,000 for the next 2 years. We've asked the State for \$203,500. The remainder of this budget (\$124,500) would come from SWIF and other foundations that we're actively building relationships with.
- We officially completed the grant period for our 2022-2023 Small Business Partnership Grant on August 31<sup>st</sup>. Sarah is working on reporting.
- UCAP Shared Community Child Care Coordinator position was posted on Monday – we expect movement on this hiring process by the end of this week.
- Child Care Economic Development Grant administration and programming continues to go well – and a few of the last programs will kick off as soon as we have this new Coordinator on board who can dedicate time to the remaining pieces. This grant is complete by the end of this year.
- For Main Street Economic Revitalization projects that need to keep moving forward, we have authorized them to begin work. Paperwork is in progress of being caught up with SWIF and the State.
- Ag Committee hasn't met yet this month. Industrial Hemp Subcommittee is working on the creation of an ad with Kelsey for the Rooted Magazine. We had a great showing for our Hemp Fiber Demonstration Field Day on September 7<sup>th</sup> – great mix of representation and over 70 participants! Thanks West Central Tribune for a great front-page article on the event – Dun Agro was very pleased with both the event and the article.
- Mark and I have met with 4 of 6 Townships that we will be working with for the next round of Border to Border grants that are due to open in October. We're ahead of the game here and feeling good with where we're at.
- Michelle is working with the Chamber, Vibrant, and Federated to plan some ribbon cuttings for the work they're currently doing.
- The State is currently accepting feedback on their draft Digital Opportunities Plan that our Digital Connection Committee had direct support in providing information for. We hosted their first listening session at the Willmar Library. This process leads us to the opportunity for additional funding opportunities in the future for Digital Equity activities.



Joint Operations Board Meeting  
Willmar, MN  
9/14/2023  
Marketing and Communications Update

- Personas for our Target Audiences have been created with the MPR Committee. These have been applied to the website site map proposed by RVTS and that process continues to move forward.
- The Virtual Business Resource One-Stop-Shop which focused on summaries, compliance steps, and resources for most of the new laws was launched. This is open until October 13<sup>th</sup>. Thus far, nearly 70 small businesses and human resource representatives have registered. This was done in partnership with JR Business Solutions. The link can be found on our website, and all are encouraged to write, learn from, and share this resource.
- Minnesota Manufacturing Month in October. In support, we are hosting a free virtual career fair. Premier Virtual is offering its recruitment services for this event.
- Marketing support for the Cargill visit, Industrial Hemp Field Day, Elevate events, Connecting Entrepreneurial Communities Conference, and Welcoming Week have occurred.
- Funds from SWIF were acquired in cooperation with Willmar Main Street (the financial holder), The City of Willmar, MMDC, and CLUES for the creation of a video that will define what Latino means in Kandiyohi County in celebration of Hispanic Heritage Month from September 15<sup>th</sup>- October 15<sup>th</sup>. This includes new attendance in the Latino Provider Network meetings.
- Support for the Child Care Economic Development grant continued through August with a few projects continuing in September. This includes working with a location in Atwater and Spicer to create child care centers/preschools and also recruiting and coordinating the mentorship program.
- The summer newsletter was published in August. It was an updated newsletter with an open rate of 44% with a growth of 55%. New newsletter subscriptions came as a result of our attendance at FarmFest.
- The fall newsletter will be published in October with the theme that Kandiyohi is and historically has been, a place where immigrants can prosper as entrepreneurs.
- Re-branding conversations continue with two prospective new names. These logos should be available for introduction and discussion in October.
- Assistance was given to the city of Lake Lillian for an ordinance issue that was identified through outreach efforts. Recommendations for solutions and continued support were made. This is a perfect example of how showing up to celebrate communities and learn more about them helps the EDC identify areas of needed support.