

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

MINUTES

September 21, 2023

EDC Board Room, Willmar, and Via Zoom Video Conference

Present: Rollie Boll, Kevin Halvorson, Kim Larson, Keith Poier (via Zoom), Nate Reuss and Dan Tepfer

Excused: Noah Hultgren and Dustin Kotrba

Absent: Larry Konsterlie and Dan Lippert

Guest: Curt Yoose, Agriculture Instructor, Ridgewater College

Media: 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 7:35 a.m., and reported a quorum was present.

AGENDA—Sarah Swedburg requested to add under Minutes, approval of the July 27, 2023 Minutes—it was decided that these Minutes will be included in the November meeting packet for approval. Kim Larson requested to add an update from the Ag Innovation Center tour; this will be added after the Ridgewater College Ag Department update.

MINUTES—

IT WAS MOVED BY Dan Tepfer, SECONDED BY Rollie Boll, to approve the Minutes of the August 17, 2023 Agriculture and Renewable Energy Development Committee meeting as emailed. MOTION CARRIED.

Ridgewater College Agriculture Department update. Chair Halvorson welcomed Curt Yoose, Agriculture Instructor at Ridgewater College, who shared the Agriculture Department is beginning its 26th year. Yoose reported there are 75 freshmen enrolled this fall. Enrollment has increased since the 35-40 enrolled during and directly following COVID; 90 freshmen were enrolled in 2015. They are seeing an uptick in students with no traditional agriculture background/experience or no direct ties to agriculture; however, a few students' grandparents were in farming or 4-H. Tepfer inquired what programs students enroll in if they do not have an agricultural background. Yoose reported the two current students are enrolled in the Farm Operation and Management Program as one plans to begin a goat business and the other wants to begin a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) or niche market where she can develop food/animal products to sell at local markets. Ridgewater College started two new certificate programs: 1) Agriculture Marketing & Communications and 2) Agriculture Automation. It is the hope that students in these certificate programs may realize the need for

additional skills and enroll in other programs. These certifications do include other educational classes other than actual agriculture courses. In the past two years, Ridgewater College started an Industry Partner Sponsorship Program where the college solicits industry sponsors at a fee of \$1,500. Industry Partners receive a plaque and additional touch points with students. The industries are invited to staff booths and speak at events. There is also a lunch and learn event where businesses share information about their industry. Currently there are 52 sponsors; the program has been very effective. Yoose shared the first month-long internship will begin on October 5 and end on December 6. They try to be somewhat flexible with the internships and visit with agronomy centers regarding appropriate internships dates.

The Meat Cutting Program is in its second year and has a different delivery model that is more of an apprenticeship model where all lab work is done at a partnering locker plant and the lecture work is done online. Sophia Thommes is the lead instructor and is passionate about meat science/cutting and is doing a fantastic job. There were approximately 14-15 students in the first cohort. The program is designed around stackable certificates: 1) Beginning Meat Cutting; and 2) Advanced Meat Processing. If a student has experience in meat cutting, they do not need to go through the first certification process.

In other Ag programs, lectures and labs are conducted on campus and internships are in the fall and spring. Yoose commented there is a high demand for workers; businesses are hiring directly out of high school. Ridgewater College is looking at an apprenticeship model in the areas of custom applications, ag business, etc. where students would spend four days a week at a business and one day at the college with online lectures. One issue is that the ag classes are normally heavily hands-on and students are not receptive to online lectures.

Incorporated into the Farm Operation and Management Program and the Agri-Business Program are business management components, including estate planning, tax planning, financial statements, etc. Administration is supportive of the two-year agriculture programs.

Boll inquired if the Ag Department has purchased a grade trailer. Yoose responded it is in the works; the funds are in place and earmarked for a grade trailer. Boll shared Ag Professionals had a scholarship program in place for years and it was decided to disband and turn over \$13,000 to Ridgewater College Foundation to be used for the school farm and CDL training. Yoose stated signage will be placed on the trailer to showcase the programs and supporters. He thanked Boll and Ag Professionals for the donation.

Nate Reuss inquired if the programs are aligned with the business needs of the community? Yoose believes they are and stated advisory meetings with industries are held each year to discuss the state of the workforce, etc. In times like this, when workforce is in high demand, businesses prefer a workforce with basic (soft) skills and they will train employees as needed. Years ago, businesses wanted students trained in a specific program(s). Reuss also inquired on the profitability of farming today as opposed to the 1980s (sustainability) model. What is the leading model in farming today? Yoose commented currently the larger farms and dairy farms are getting larger. Most farms now are family farms, although there are some corporate farms. Organic farming is becoming more popular due to its sustainability. Programs used to be designed for a future farmer; however, today we are seeing more need for farm managers than farm owners. He shared Ag manager classes need to be added to the College's agriculture programs. Yoose invited this committee to visit the Ag Department. Chair Halvorson thanked Yoose for sharing this update. Yoose mentioned Fall Field Day is scheduled for Friday, September 22nd.

Ag Innovation Campus tour. Larson gave an update of the tours in which he and Keith Poier recently participated. Larson shared Harold Stanislawski encouraged him to take part in the tour while attending the recent hemp harvest at Hultgren Farms. The bus tour began at Big Iron, stopped at Northern Crops Institute (NCI) in Fargo, North Dakota, for presentations and a tour of Waukon Dairy, a 10,000-cow dairy farm near Gary, Minnesota, then traveled to Crookston, Minnesota, for an open house and tour of the Ag Innovation Campus. Poier was impressed with the Northern Crops Institute tour and commented the dairy farm had a 128-head

carousel and he was impressed with the new soybean crushing and processing. The Ag Innovation Campus processes for Jennie-O Turkey Store and Willmar Poultry. Tepfer inquired if there is an avenue to a small-scale soybean processing in the future, i.e., Atwater Feed Mill, etc. rather than a stand-alone plant? Poier commented when he and Larson report back to Jennie-O Turkey Store and Willmar Poultry, they may show interest in pursuing soybean processing/crushing. Larson distributed and reviewed a flyer on soybean processing data.

Prior to the tour, Larson visited Jennie-O Turkey Store as it hinges on opportunities in local poultry development in feed production. He met with Julia Orth, Human Resources Representative for the Western Live Production, and shared this committee has met with Harold Stanislawski of the Agricultural Utilization Research Institute (AURI) and Mike Youngerberg of Minnesota Soybean Growers Association, who both feel there are opportunities with the new developments of soybean processing in the last few years. Orth plans to share the information at a future vice presidents meeting and suggested Jennie-O Turkey Store representatives tour the Ag Innovation Campus in the future. Larson also met with Beth Wisenek, Chief Financial Officer of Willmar Poultry, who commented its board has talked of having something like this in the area. Recently, Larson also spoke with a Farm Service Co. representative to discuss soybean processing in the area. Tepfer inquired what role would this committee serve if local entities pursue soybean processing? Larson feels the committee would be the connector. Larson commented Stanislawski and Youngerberg are willing to participate in a tour of the two facilities. A brief discussion was held regarding the cost of trucking, zero emission and electric trucks (EVs).

NEW BUSINESS

Review new member application. Swedburg shared there is currently one application; there may be another application to review at the November or December meeting. She shared by approving one new member, the quorum will remain at six. Swedburg highlighted information from Erik Hatlestad's application (see attached) noting his experience in farming and connections with state/federal legislators and renewable energy may be valuable to this committee.

IT WAS MOVED BY Kim Larson, SECONDED BY Rollie Boll, to accept Erik Hatlestad as a member of the Kandiyohi County and City of Willmar Economic Development Commission's Agriculture and Renewable Energy Development Committee. MOTION CARRIED.

Swedburg will present the Ag Committee's recommendation to the Joint Operations Board for final ratification. Swedburg reported Noah Hultgren, a Joint Operations Board member, was appointed to serve as this committee's liaison.

Resignation of Laura Arne from the Industrial Hemp Exploratory Subcommittee. Swedburg shared Laura Arne has taken on other responsibilities in the community and resigned from the Industrial Hemp Exploratory Subcommittee. Swedburg stated a motion is needed to accept her resignation.

IT WAS MOVED BY Kim Larson, SECONDED BY Rollie Boll, to accept, with regrets, the resignation of Laura Arne from the Kandiyohi County and City of Willmar Economic Development Commission's Industrial Hemp Exploratory Subcommittee. MOTION CARRIED.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

2024 goals. Swedburg reviewed the committee's 2022-2023 6- and 12-month goals. Action will be taken on 2024 goals at the November meeting. She highlighted the committee's long-term leadership opportunities: 2024 guest speakers, soybean crushing topics, Stingers Farmtastic event, Partners in Ag Innovation Conference,

and sponsoring another AURI event. As to the short-term goals, the committee reviewed the committee's 2023 budget; Kelsey Olson, EDC Marketing and Communications Specialist, has been working with the Industrial Hemp Exploratory Subcommittee on an article for the *Rooted* magazine, formalizing a marketing plan for this committee, providing more education, i.e., presentations with the Willmar Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce, presentation by Zach Rada, Farm Management Instructor at Minnesota West Community and Technical College on low carbon fuel standards, etc. Swedburg will email potential goals for 2024 to the committee for review/comment; action will be taken at the November meeting.

REPORTS/ATTENDANCE AT AG EVENTS

Dun Agro Industrial Hemp Field Day. Swedburg and committee members felt the article in the *West Central Tribune* was well written. Dun Agro is looking for a location to store hemp bull over the winter; Swedburg will find out the size of building needed and notify the committee. A discussion was held regarding regulatory issues and where a plant would be located. Tepfer commented on the number of acres needed for industrial hemp. Swedburg noted more work needs to be done on finding the proper acreage. A lengthy discussion was held on the industrial hemp issue.

North Central Regional Food District Center. Reuss provided an update of the North Central Regional Food District Center. A meeting was held last evening regarding this project. A package is available for two \$50,000 grants for projects in the area; the projects will be prioritized to target investment. He also announced beginning in January 2024, there will be another six grant programs available for up to \$400,000 from the United States Department of Agriculture and the Minnesota Department of Agriculture. Reuss recently contacted a long-term client in the goat farming business who is applying for a preexisting grant. If the application aligns with one of the new grants, he felt it would be worth looking at. He is keeping the grants local and does not want similar programs competing for the same grant. Reuss commented these grants may be a possibility for Ridgewater College for its meat cutting program, soybean oil, small farmers, etc. Reuss and a representative of Christianson PLLP are doing value mapping and will develop a target goal; they plan to write a broad wide-open goal. The purpose of this program is to help target the delivery of federal dollars for projects and prioritize projects appropriately. It may be a six-year program.

Ag and renewable energy opportunities. Swedburg shared the following opportunities:

- 2023 Minnesota Ag & Food Summit hosted by AgriGrowth, Minneapolis Convention Center, November 9
- MN Ag Expo, Mankato, January 17-18, 2024
- AURI and MnDOT will host a Hemp Erosion Control Product Field Day in Monticello on September 27. Swedburg will email information to the committee and encouraged participation

ADJOURNMENT—There being no other business,

IT WAS MOVED BY Dan Tepfer, SECONDED BY Rollie Boll, to adjourn the meeting. MOTION CARRIED.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:25 a.m.

NEXT MEETING—The next meeting is **7:30 a.m., Thursday, November 16, 2023** at the EDC Board Room and via ZOOM video conference.

**Application for Appointment to
EDC Agriculture and Renewable Energy Committee**

The Agriculture and Renewable Energy Committee exists to sustain, identify and develop agriculture, agribusiness and renewable energy opportunities by targeting activities that leverage Kandiyohi County's assets in agriculture, with a special emphasis on ag business, manufacturing, bioscience, technology, renewable energy and research.



Applicant Information

Name: Erik Hatlestad Date of Application: Aug 10, 2023
Phone No: 320-905-1543 Email: erik.w.hatlestad@gmail.com
Address: 104 3rd Ave SE New London

What prompted you to make application for this committee? Why do you want to serve on this committee?
I have a robust set of knowledge about federal grant, loan, and tax incentive programs made through the
several recent federal investments. I am eager to help land federal investments in Kandiyohi County.

Are you a farmer? If so, tell us about your farm: I farm with family on an 850 acre farm in Lake Andrew
Township. I will be the fifth generation on this farm. Over the last century our farm has been involved with
many farm cooperatives. We currently grow corn and beans, and rent pastureland for beef.

List any special background or experience you have which would be helpful to this Committee:
Author of Rural Electrification 2.0 Report, worked to create and pass the Empowering Rural America
Program (New ERA) a \$9.7 billion program for rural electric cooperatives which was based on this report.

List your educational background: Bachelor of Arts - Concordia College - Political Science, History

List any social, fraternal, patriotic, governmental, or service organizations, which you have or currently are serving on:
Minnesota Farmers Union, New London City Council, Glacial Lakes Sanitary Sewer and Water District,
Norway Lake Lutheran Historical Association, and the New London Food Cooperative.

If you are employed, please provide the name of your employer and your position:
CURE - Energy Democracy Program Director

Please return completed application to: Kandiyohi County & City of Willmar EDC
222 20th St SE
PO Box 1783
Willmar, MN 56201
Or email to edc@kandiyohi.com

Questions, call 320-235-7370 or email us.

Erik Hatlestad

New London, MN | 320-905-1543 | erik@curemn.org

Professional Experience

CURE | Energy Democracy Program Director 2013 - Present

- Authored the Rural Electrification 2.0 Report, which examined barriers to the clean energy transition for rural electric cooperatives.
- Cofounded a national coalition to advocate for investments in rural electric cooperatives.
- Led advocacy efforts to pass the Empowering Rural America Program (New ERA) and the Powering Affordable Clean Energy Program (PACE) in the Inflation Reduction Act. Both programs were inspired by recommendations made in the Rural Electrification 2.0 Report.
- Directed multiple projects engaging rural electric cooperatives on clean energy and governance.
- Conducted public education campaigns on a variety of rural clean energy and climate issues.

MPIRG | Rural Campus Organizer 2013 - 2016

- Led grassroots student public policy and regulatory engagement projects.
- Coached multiple distributed teams over a wide geography.
- Led several joint student and local community climate resiliency initiatives.

Relevant Experience

Hatlestad Brothers Incorporated | Assistant Farmer 2008 – Present

City of New London | City Councilor 2016 - 2022

New London Food Cooperative | President & Founder 2018 – Present

Minnesota County Farmers Union | County President 2017 – Present

West Central Clean Energy Resource Team | Steering Committee Member 2017 - 2020

Glacial Lakes Sanitary Sewer and Water District | Commissioner 2020 - 2022

Minnesota Climate Action Framework | Clean Energy & Efficient Buildings 2022

Education

Concordia College, Bachelor of Arts 2012

Major: Political Science | Minor: History