

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

December 9, 2021

Community Room, Heritage Bank, Willmar and Via Zoom Video Conference

Present: Abdullahi Awale, Art Benson, Rollie Boll, Donna Boonstra, Jesse Gislason, Les Heitke and Kelly TerWisscha

Ex Officio: Julie Asmus

Excused: Justice Walker

Staff: Aaron Backman, Executive Director, Sarah Swedburg, Business Development Manager and Kelsey Olson, Marketing & Communications Specialist

Secretarial: Nancy Birkeland, Legal & Administrative Assistants, Inc. (LAA)

President Kelly TerWisscha called the meeting to order at approximately 11:07 a.m. and declared a quorum was present. Kelsey Olson, the EDC's new Marketing & Communications Specialist, was welcomed followed by self introductions. Olson provided her background information.

AGENDA—

IT WAS MOVED BY Art Benson, SECONDED BY Donna Boonstra, to approve the Agenda and following Consent Agenda. MOTION CARRIED.

CONSENT AGENDA

Approve: 1. Minutes of the November 10, 2021 meeting;
2. Financial reports as of November 30, 2021;
3. Payment of bill from Westberg Eischens in the amount of \$11,350 (\$8,350 from funds budgeted for the audit and \$3,000 from CARES Act funds)

Accept: Committee/Subcommittee Minutes
1. Industrial Hemp Exploratory Subcommittee 5/10, 7/19 and 9/13/2021
2. Broadband and Advanced Technology 11/1/2021
3. Business Retention and Expansion/Recruitment 9/3/2021
4. Marketing and Public Relations 10/25/2021

UNFINISHED BUSINESS—There was no unfinished business.

NEW BUSINESS—There was no new business.

REPORTS

Economic Development Activity. Aaron Backman reported receiving contact from a developer who is interested in development in the east side of the Renaissance Zone. He continues to have discussions with a developer interested in residential development for the southeast side of Willmar. Jesse Gislason reported the city of Spicer will have 52 acres available for residential construction in its TIF district. Sarah Swedburg reported Steve Simon, Minnesota Secretary of State, held a Town Hall in Willmar to speak about voter participation. He was pleased with the diversity of businesses and people who attended the Town Hall and is interested in returning in 2022. Simon and his group visited the mosque, Willmar Sr. High School and another location. Backman reported site work began for the logistics company on November 19th. Olson reported she took photos of construction at the new Event Center. Backman made a presentation to the Lions Club; participated in a transportation multi-modal meeting; and attended a tour of Bushmills. Swedburg reported the tour of Bushmills was a part of the AURI's Renewable Energy Round Table that was to be held in Willmar, but was changed to a virtual meeting at the last minute. Bushmills generates all of its own electricity and does not discharge any water—it is all recycled. They obtained good contacts for Bushmills during the tour. Approval of the Block 25 TIF development agreement was received and was the last approval needed. Swedburg is working with MinnWest Technology Campus (MWTC) and Kandiyohi County to pursue a tax abatement to renovate three buildings that were occupied by three state agencies (Units 6, 7 and 15); the County Board approved going forward with a public hearing. The total renovation will be approximately \$8 million. Nova-Tech Engineering is committed to creating 75 jobs; it exceeded the jobs committed in its first tax abatement. With the addition of these three buildings, MWTC will have renovated 33 of the buildings. Julie Asmus reported the Middle School addition will include the Level 4 students located at MWTC. Swedburg attended a CVN meeting last Friday and met with businesses looking to expand. Conversations are being held between Southwest Initiative Foundation (SWIF) and the Latino Economic Development Commission (LEDC). The LEDC received a grant for SWIF to have an employee serve this area.

Elevate Business Academy. Swedburg reported the EDC received the “Outstanding Economic Development Award” for the Elevate Business Academy from the Minnesota Association of Professional Economic Developers (MAPCED). She, Abdusalaam Hirsi, four County Commissioners, Connie Schmoll, a few Elevate graduates, a representative of Rising Tide Capital from New Jersey and Scott Marquardt of SWIF attended the award ceremony held during the Association of Minnesota Counties Annual Conference on December 7th. The Elevate program also received a \$76,000 grant from the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, which will allow the program to continue for another 18 months. Tonight is week 11 of 12 and 7 students are on track to graduate. HMD Photography took head shots of the students for their businesses. Swedburg invited board members to attend the graduation ceremony for the current Elevate program on December 17,

2021 from 5-7 p.m. at the Willmar Education and Arts Center. Also invited to attend the graduation are the County Board, SWIF's board, media and former graduates. At Les Heitke's suggestion, Swedburg will invite local legislators to attend. They are planning for 75-100 people to attend the ceremony. The keynote speaker is Hudda Ibrahim, an author from St. Cloud. Shortly after graduation, planning for the spring class will begin. The goal is to have the fall 2022 class be taught in Somali. A press release was done for the grant and press releases will be done for the MAPCED award and the graduation ceremony.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Agriculture and Renewable Energy Development. Swedburg reported several members of the Industrial Hemp Exploratory Subcommittee will attend the Northern Hemp Summit on Monday in Fargo. Swedburg attended the Minnesota Ag & Food Summit hosted by AgriGrowth was held at the Minneapolis Convention Center in November, which was also attended by Ridgewater College. She is working with the Willmar Lakes Chamber of Commerce's (WLACC) AgriBusiness Committee to hold an event on January 11 with the CEO of the U.S. Grains Council as the speaker.

Broadband and Advanced Technology. Swedburg reported the National Telecommunications and Information Administration grant awards have been postponed until the beginning of 2022. The USDA has officially opened its Reconnect Grant Program, which can cover up to 100% of a project; applications are due February 2022. The committee will target the Vibrant broadband project for the Reconnect program. An article was recently printed in the *West Central Tribune* on the Prinsburg project. Swedburg reported Kandiyohi County approved the Subrecipient Award for the project. It is anticipated the project will start in late summer 2022 and be completed within 2022. The city of Prinsburg approved the tax abatement bonds.

Business Retention and Expansion/Recruitment. Backman reported The Workforce Development Subcommittee has held several meetings between partners relative to a Workforce Solutions Summit to be held January 20, 2022 from 1-4:30 p.m. A number of presenters are being sought, including Mike Henke of Nebraska, who will be the keynote speaker and Luke Greiner, who will speak on state and local trends. Attendees will break up into small table discussions. The cost is \$20 and registrations will be done through the United Way. A social networking event will be held after the Summit. The partners have a goal of 80-100 people to attend. The partners are Ridgewater College, Central Minnesota Jobs & Training Services, Inc. (CMJTS), United Way, SWIF and WLACC. Swedburg reported a virtual job fair will be held in partnership with CareerForce in February. The EDC will have a "community booth" and show the community video. It is hoped there will be some anonymity in holding a virtual job fair. Swedburg is working with Bridget Paulson of CMJTS to develop a survey for those businesses that received a grant through the EDC during COVID and how to stay connected to Elevate graduates.

Finance. Backman noted the committee will meet next Tuesday with the main topic being Cheers of Raymond. Swedburg reported she has been communicating with United Prairie Bank

and Trevor Johnson's estate attorney. The manager, Jessica Berghorst, is interested and willing to purchase the business from the estate and assuming all debt.

IT WAS MOVED BY Art Benson, SECONDED BY Donna Boonstra, to approve Jessica Berghorst assuming the \$25,000 loan given to High Intensity Fitness of MN LLC, doing business as Cheers of Raymond, subject to the Kandiyohi County and City of Willmar Economic Development Commission's Finance Committee's review and approval of the assumption and to defer payments for three months (January-March 2022). MOTION CARRIED.

Marketing and Public Relations. Backman reported the Marketing and Public Relations Committee was introduced to Olson and discussed getting back on track with doing regular newsletters with the first one being done in January. Olson is working on updating all of the EDC's marketing flyers. She spoke with Betsy Bonnema of REDstar Creative to obtain the EDC's marketing files and will be learning the software that was used. She will also be speaking with Golden Shovel to obtain the prospectus for the Renaissance Zone. Olson will create a virtual save the date for the Elevate graduation ceremony. She will also be looking at some printed materials in light of broadband being an issue locally. She will begin full-time the last week of December.

Leisure Travel. Art Benson reported the Leisure Travel Committee held its most recent meeting at the Barn Theatre and met Willard Huyck, the new Executive Director of Willmar Main Street. The resorts had a good summer. Committee members signed up to attend the tradeshow next year. The Barn Theatre spoke about its show schedule and the art display in its lobby area. Backman indicated the conferences being held in the county are increasing. The pandemic impacted the Willmar Lakes Area Convention & Visitor Bureau's (CVB) budget. Discussion on the EDC's contribution to the CVB was discussed; it was noted the EDC's funds are not used for operations, but for external marketing. Benson stated the committee discussed new avenues of marketing. Backman stated Beth Fischer appreciates the EDC's participation in providing funds for marketing.

President TerWisscha stated his company is opening up employment to remote workers. Backman noted Jennie-O Turkey has a need for approximately 300 employees. Abdullahi Awale noted he is hiring several Micronesians for his department at Jennie-O, but companywide there is a staff shortage. He noted Plant 1 will be closing and staff will be moved to the Willmar Avenue plant.

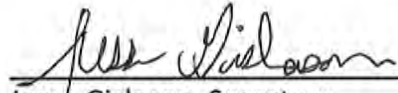
WHAT'S UP?

- Asmus reported the developer for the City Hall/Community Center is looking at two different sites; a budget was passed for the City Hall. The City Council is waiting to see how much local option sales tax funds will come in.
- Benson reported several curling teams are holding events. Glacial Ridge Curling is working on raising funds for a new facility and has applied for a few grants. The turkey bonspiel will be held in January.

- Donna Boonstra reported the Highway 23 Coalition obtained St. Cloud and Pine County as new members. The J-Turn project by New London has been stopped until further notice. Boonstra's personal business is very busy and she has a big project that will start January 3rd in Spicer. Her son's business is moving forward with remodeling of the buildings he obtained from Simply Shrimp.
- Heitke reported there is a problem with weeds and carp in local lakes and the lake associations are speaking with fishermen about what can be done. They have spoken with the DNR about harvesting carp and selling it to restaurants.
- Gislason noted Alley on Ash is busy.
- Rollie Boll reported this is his last meeting on the board as he has served three full three-year terms. He noted it has been very interesting to serve on the board. He will continue to serve on the Ag Committee.
- TerWisscha reported work has been very busy. He appreciates working with local municipalities compared to working with other municipalities.
- Backman noted developers have looked at the Kandi Entertainment Center building, but no one has moved forward. Plans were to plat the property and Tidal Wave would own its parcel.


NEXT MEETING—The annual board meeting is 11:00 a.m., Thursday, January 13, 2022.

ADJOURNMENT—There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 12:51 p.m.



Jesse Gislason, Secretary

APPROVED: 1/13/2022



Kelly TerWisscha, President