

**KANDIYOHI COUNTY AND CITY OF WILLMAR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION (EDC)  
AGRICULTURE AND RENEWABLE ENERGY DEVELOPMENT(AG) COMMITTEE MEETING  
MINUTES  
January 21, 2021  
Via Zoom Video Conference**

Present: Rollie Boll, Kevin Halvorson, Kim Larson, Dan Lippert, Michelle Marotzke, Keith Poier and Dan Tepfer

Excused: Christy Kallevig and Dustin Kotrba

Absent: Larry Konsterlie

Guests: Andrew Gomer and Shelby Groen of Nova-Tech Engineering, LLC; and Carolyn Lange, West Central Tribune

Staff: Aaron Backman, Executive Director and Connie Schmoll, Business Development Manager

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

Chairperson Kevin Halvorson called the meeting to order at approximately 7:33 a.m.

**AGENDA**—There were no changes to the Agenda.

**MINUTES**—

IT WAS MOVED BY Rollie Boll, SECONDED BY Kim Larson, to approve the minutes of the December 17, 2020 meeting as emailed. MOTION CARRIED.

**Presentation by Andrew Gomer.** Connie Schmoll introduced Andrew Gomer, Business Strategist with Nova-Tech Engineering, LLC, who provided his background and position with Nova-Tech. Gomer provided the history of the business, which started in 1985 by Marc Gorans, who was doing claw removal and in 1992 established Nova-Tech Engineering. In 2013, Nova-Tech was established in China and opened an office there. As of 2020 the company has 235 local employees, is represented in 58 countries servicing 600+ hatcheries and over 1,600 systems have been installed. Nova-Tech has processed 11.8 billion turkeys, 15.9 billion chickens and 1.3 billion ducks. Many customers have been with the company for 20+ years and it continues to build relationships. Education of staff, producers and vets around the world is key. Gomer spoke of the company's presence in foreign countries and how the government affects their business. Nova-Tech has had to be creative with its technology during the pandemic and has been moving forward. Gomer showed a chick start training video developed for producers in India. Nova-Tech helped create two organizations, International Poultry Welfare Alliance (IPWA) and U.S. Roundtable for Sustainable Poultry & Eggs, to collaborate with the poultry supply chain on bird health, animal welfare and sustainability. Gomer shared the IPWA's strategic plan for 2020-2023. Nova-Tech has an internal education program and is now collaborating with Ridgewater College and the University of Minnesota on the new Poultry Training Program. The company has had a challenge finding machinists and local staff with foreign language skills willing to travel. It has also had some difficulty recruiting engineers from the metro area to come to Willmar. Reasons given include a lack of amenities, such as variety of restaurants, grocers and shopping. Shelby Groen, who is in the human resources department, stated she sometimes takes potential employees on a

drive around the area to show them what is available. The company's interview process is very personal and generally consists of several interviews.

[Gomer and Groen were excused from the meeting.]

## **REPORTS**

**Industrial Hemp Exploratory Subcommittee.** Schmoll reported the Industrial Hemp Exploratory Subcommittee will meet next in February. She continues to forward to the subcommittee information she finds relative to industrial hemp. Prairie PROducers is working with the state and continues to look at Willmar for a site. Michelle Marotzke stated she will be attending the 2021 Industrial Hemp Forum.

## **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

**Partners in Ag Innovation Conference.** Schmoll reported the planning team is moving forward with a theme of change and is currently working with Mark Pearson, who will talk about post pandemic ag and commodity marketing and Becky Bruns will speak about her shrimp and poultry business. They continue to work on obtaining other speakers.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### **Election of 2021 Officers.**

IT WAS MOVED BY Kim Larson, SECONDED BY Michelle Marotzke, to re-elect Kevin Halvorson as chair and Dustin Kotrba as vice chair of the Kandiyohi County and City of Willmar Economic Development Commission's Agriculture and Renewable Energy Development Committee for 2021. MOTION CARRIED.

**Resignation of committee member.** Schmoll read a resignation letter by Christy Kallevig, who is moving from the area.

IT WAS MOVED BY Michelle Marotzke, SECONDED BY Rollie Boll, to accept, with regret, the resignation of Christy Kallevig. MOTION CARRIED.

**AG/RENEWABLE ENERGY COMMUNITY EVENTS/PROJECTS.** Boll announced the EDC Joint Operations Board is looking for Schmoll's replacement. Schmoll announced she will be retiring on May 31, 2021, but will remain involved in a new EDC program, Rising Tide, and its broadband efforts for as long as needed. Backman stated a Staff Transition Task Force was created; it revised the job description and developed an ad that will be placed. If approved by the Joint Powers Board at its January meeting, the position will be advertised. Backman would like someone hired by the end of April. Keith Poier reported he has been working with an individual in Olivia for hemp processing, but the business is in need of a financing package. Marotzke provided information on Mid-Minnesota Development Commission's Revolving Loan Fund and a new Revolving Loan Fund from CARES Act funds. Dan Tepfer stated renewable energy continues to be a big issue on which he works. Great River Energy will be shutting down its coal plant in 2022 and will be using a power supply that is 90% carbon free. The energy sector continues to decarbonize the power supply. Larson spoke about a storage battery being considered in Hibbing. Tepfer stated Connexus Energy has two solar sites that are integrating large scale battery storage—battery use is experimental

and a short-term power supply. Marotzke referred to an energy saving program done by Willmar Municipal Utilities and its rebate programs. Dan Lippert noted the livestock market has been very good and stated there is a growing need across the state for local meat processing. Schmoll reported she and Marotzke have been in contact with a potential processor. Backman reported before it was shut down, he toured Willmar Municipal Utilities as to whether or not the building could be reused. Backman stated the Buhler building will be available and may work for hemp processing. Schmoll announced there are very few registrations for the January 27<sup>th</sup> biofuel conference and it may be postponed.

**NEXT MEETING**—The next meeting is **7:30 a.m., Thursday, February 18, 2021** via ZOOM video conference.

**ADJOURNMENT**—There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:09 a.m.