

**KANDIYOHI COUNTY AND CITY OF WILLMAR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION (EDC)
AGRICULTURE AND RENEWABLE ENERGY DEVELOPMENT(AG) COMMITTEE MEETING
MINUTES
February 18, 2021
Via Zoom Video Conference**

Present: Rollie Boll, Kevin Halvorson, Dustin Kotrba, Kim Larson, Dan Lippert, Michelle Marotzke

Excused: Keith Poier and Dan Tepfer

Absent: Larry Konsterlie

Staff: Connie Schmoll, Business Development Manager

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

Chairperson Kevin Halvorson called the meeting to order at approximately 7:34 a.m.

AGENDA

IT WAS MOVED BY Dustin Kotrba, SECONDED BY Rollie Boll, to approve the Agenda as emailed. MOTION CARRIED.

MINUTES

IT WAS MOVED BY Rollie Boll, SECONDED BY Dustin Kotrba, to approve the minutes of the January 21, 2021 meeting as emailed. MOTION CARRIED.

REPORTS

Industrial Hemp Exploratory Subcommittee. Kim Larson reported the subcommittee met. PROducers of Olivia may be interested in the Buhler building in Willmar, but it is struggling to obtain financial support. Keith Poier and Larson were unable to register for the hemp conference in Denver as it was at capacity. Chair Halvorson reported he attended AURI's 2021 hemp conference. Hemp projects are on hold at the moment. Larson stated he reviewed Kandiyohi County historical data and found that 50 years ago the government supported hemp growers and was needing 4,000 acres for the war effort—the program only ran for two years; he will bring the article to the next meeting. It is believed the hemp equipment was then used for flax. Local communities involved were possibly Atwater, Bird Island and Grove City. The subcommittee also discussed several upcoming conferences and writing a letter to legislators, the Department of Commerce and Department of Agriculture regarding regulations.

Partners in Ag Innovation Conference. Dustin Kotrba reported the planning team met and has a good agenda started for the July 29th conference. One change from prior years is the keynote speaker will kickoff the conference. The concern is that attendees may drop off after the keynote speaker, but the team hopes it will be a good lead-in to the other storytellers. The current challenge is fund raising. They are seeking \$25,000 and have some carryover from last year. The University of Minnesota has contributed \$6,000 and another sponsor gave \$1,500. The prospectus has been done and the subcommittee will be working on the marketing materials. Missing from the agenda is the opportunity to network so they are planning some breakout sessions with a goal of having facilitators lead discussions, which will take more technology. This conference will have more

storytelling and be less educational and will be a bit shorter in length ending at 12:15-12:30 p.m. Kotrba requested feedback as they are open to suggestions from others. Dan Lippert noted the virtual conference he has attended come with appointment links and reminder emails. Larson stated one downfall of virtual conferences is losing personal contacts and the networking that occurs at an in-person conference. Kotrba indicated they also discussed an evening before event to allow for some networking. Schmoll stated an ad was placed in a new ag insert being done by the *West Central Tribune*.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Updated Agriculture and Renewable Energy Flyer. Kotrba reported the subcommittee changed graphics on the flyer and reviewed it, but he is unsure of the current status.

NEW BUSINESS—Chair Halvorson asked for ideas on other topics that may be of interest to the committee for future meetings and what other things the committee could be doing. Michelle Marotzke noted the power outages in Texas caused by recent winter weather could be a concern going forward as far as renewable energy and the general attitude toward renewable energy on a large scale. Texas deregulated its power supply and uses its own power grid, which was not prepared for the recent cold temperatures. Marotzke is not sure how much it impacts Minnesota, but suggested the committee be prepared with a response. Willmar has done a great job of creating redundancy and the power supply mix should be on the Willmar Municipal Utilities website—it gets power from a variety of fuel sources.

[Marotzke was excused from the meeting.]

It was noted low carbon and sustainability is more and more impactful. Kotrba stated one speaker for the conference will speak on sustainability and data capture. Larson spoke about a 60 Minutes interview with Bill Gates about climate change and the effect it will have on agriculture. Kotrba stated Christianson PLLP does a lot of compliance work for California standards. John Christianson is part of the Minnesota Bio-Fuels Association, which is fully aware of climate change and is working on plans with states dealing with it—it will probably come to the midwest. Jamey Cline of Christianson PLLP is also part of the Association and 45Q Carbon projects. Over half of the ethanol plants are signing agreements about carbon sequestration—there is definitely an impact on agriculture. It was suggested that a speaker be brought in to talk about 45Q Carbon. What is the value of making a production change to a farm practice and what will it take to push producers in that direction. Kotrba is working with a client to capture biogas. The Renewable Fuels Association is doing studies to try and obtain the true impact; more information should be done by mid-year.

AG/RENEWABLE ENERGY COMMUNITY EVENTS/PROJECTS. Lippert reported there is a potential for a meat processing program at Ridgewater College. He attended a conference on February 5 where a lot of interest on the subject was shown. Twenty-five out of 30 individuals invited to the conference attended as to investigating development of a program. There have been a lot of conversations about a local shortage of processors. Minnesota West Community & Technical College in Pipestone used to have a program. Ridgewater is considering adding the program and put together an advisory group. Ridgewater is also getting input from the state Ag Department and the industry. Lippert believes there is strong support for such a program. The advisory group consists of AURI representatives, state inspection department, 8-9 meat processors who will attend quarterly meetings. The former instructor at Pipestone cautioned the group and suggested doing a market study as Pipestone closed because there was a shortage of students. It was felt it is a different environment now and there seems to be a demonstrated need in the state. Ridgewater College does not want a kill facility and felt that part could be done through an internship. The Pipestone instructor also cautioned against harming existing businesses. Central

Lakes College in Staples is also discussing a program. Lippert and Larson will attend future meetings. Schmoll noted there is a large need for sheep and goat processing in this area. The processors were very open to inviting people to tour their facilities.

Schmoll reported a broadband project is being planned for Dovre, Mamre and St. Johns Townships. The County Board passed a resolution to contribute \$25,000 per township. Schmoll stated Joel Johnson targeted 15 residents in his township and all were in favor of adding an amount for broadband to their real estate taxes. Schmoll will attend the upcoming annual meeting of the county's townships to find out which ones are interested in being involved in the next project. The only barrier is if state grant funds will be contributed. The Willmar Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce will be holding a meeting to discuss broadband. LTD was recently awarded Rural Digital Opportunity Funds and has six years to complete a project from the southeast area of the county.

NEXT MEETING—The next meeting is **7:30 a.m., Thursday, March 18, 2021** and will incorporate the Ag to Energy Biofuels Workshop co-hosted with Christianson PLLP. Schmoll stated the workshop has been marketed on the EDC's Facebook. The speaker has been given 50 minutes to be followed by a question and answer session.

ADJOURNMENT—There being no further business,

IT WAS MOVED BY Dan Lippert, SECONDED BY Dustin Kotrba, to adjourn the meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:40 a.m.