

**KANDIYOHI COUNTY AND CITY OF WILLMAR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION (EDC)  
BUSINESS RETENTION AND EXPANSION/RECRUITMENT COMMITTEE MEETING  
MINUTES  
March 5, 2021  
Via ZOOM Video Conference**

**Present:** Sam Bowen, Samantha Crow, Jim Ellingson, Les Heitke, Jennifer Mendoza, Les Nelson, Bridget Paulson, Ranae Rahn, Kelly TerWisscha, Roger Imdieke and Dean Steinwand

**Guest:** Jeff Miller, Dean of Instruction, Ridgewater College

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

Chairperson Sam Bowen called the meeting to order at approximately 9:03 a.m.

**AGENDA—**

IT WAS MOVED BY Ranae Rahn, SECONDED BY Les Heitke, to approve the Agenda as emailed. MOTION CARRIED.

**MINUTES—**

IT WAS MOVED BY Dean Steinwand, SECONDED BY Ranae Rahn, to approve the Minutes of the February 5, 2021 meeting as emailed. MOTION CARRIED.

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

**NEW BUSINESS**

**Meat Processor Education Planning.** Jeff Miller, Dean of Instruction for Ridgewater College was introduced. Miller stated he would like Ridgewater College to embark on a stackable 16-credit certificate program for meat processing that would begin in August 2022. The first half would deal with industry specifics and the skills needed and the second half would cover regulatory compliance. A planning committee will be developed and consist of representatives from the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA), meat processors, area market people and area producers. Central Lakes College is the only other college applying to do the program. Ridgewater College would like to include customized education, including a political topic such as animal rights, but its primary focus is to educate and promote processing. Backman mentioned that Jennie-O Turkey Store specifically needs trained people to employ and could hire over 100 people. Ridgewater College needs to do an environmental scan to see if there will be a saturation of the market. MDA could be used as a source as it has already collected

such data. Miller asked if the EDC has access to information for direct marketing and encouraged referrals for others to be on the planning committee. The goal is to be current, relevant, vibrant and informative.

Ridgewater College needs to garner local support and determine what is meat processing and what is not. Miller asked those attending to use their connections with industry partners to market the program. Ridgewater College will be seeking grant opportunities for graduates to establish their own businesses. As to customized training, Chair Bowen stated there could be some quick interim training or specialized parts of the programming could be done for specific business needs, such as Jennie-O Turkey Store's current need to fill positions. Backman and Miller mentioned Iowa State's interest in partnering on certificate and degree programs.

[Jennifer Mendoza joined the meeting.]

Miller stated Ridgewater College is interested in adding small, short-term, a la carte training with flexible delivery and times when it comes to butchering game animals. Bowen stated they have had a lot of great public comment.

[Miller was excused from the meeting.]

## REPORTS

**CLUES Updates.** Mendoza reported CLUES has been evolving and tasks are being added. They had their first graduate from the commercial driver's license program (CDL) on March 3<sup>rd</sup>. Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) graduation is in January 2022. Graduates will see an increase in salaries. Mendoza is learning about a new grant program that started in January, which includes housing for participants. Participants are registering for classes at Ridgewater College. Mendoza stated having laptops is helpful for the student's ability to participate and do research, homework, etc. Other items provided are bags, gloves and piggy banks. Mendoza's office is downtown in the same building as Rick's Cycling.

**CMJTS CDL Program Update.** Bridget Paulson stated, as last reported, there are three in Central Minnesota Jobs and Training Services' (CMJTS) CDL program. Through the Incumbent Worker Training Program, businesses can apply for up to \$125,000 to promote workers and backfill positions with dislocated workers. The funds can also help pay for the cost of training people to use new equipment. The program is open to farm businesses, but currently only manufacturers are using the program. CMJTS is located in Litchfield and serves 11 counties. Paulson will send a flyer and contact information to Schmoll to forward to the committee. Backman also promoted the Incumbent Worker Training Program. Backman suggested getting a CDL trainer to speak about the CDL program at a future committee meeting and asked Bowen if he could find the presenter.

**COVID Response Program Update.** Backman reported there is a housing project planned for the Renaissance Zone. Six to seven housing developers are currently interested in Willmar. Backman stated Unique Opportunity's second building is already booked prior to the completion of construction. The need for local housing remains. The West Central Association

of Realtors reports there is currently one-half of the inventory they had last year; this is affecting our businesses' ability to secure a workforce and with manufacturing expanding, this is an issue.

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

IT WAS MOVED, SECONDED AND CARRIED to adjourn the meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 10:16 a.m.

**NEXT MEETING**—The next committee meeting is **11:00 a.m., Friday, April 2, 2021** via ZOOM video conference.