

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

**MINUTES**

**August 19, 2021**

**EDC Board Room and Via Zoom Video Conference**

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

Absent: Larry Konsterlie and Dan Lippert

Excused: Dustin Kotrba

Guests: Melanie Dickman, Kandi Land Farm and Chris Radel, Energy/Safety Outreach Coordinator, Willmar Municipal Utilities

Staff: Sarah Swedburg, Business Development Manager

Secretarial: Diane Beck, Legal & Administrative Assistants, Inc.

Chairperson Kevin Halvorson called the meeting to order at approximately 7:35 a.m. noting a quorum was not present.

**KANDI LAND FARM PRESENTATION**—Sarah Swedburg reported she invited Melanie Dickman to give a presentation on an agricultural venture she and her husband are beginning. Kandi Land Farm is located on Highway 40 west of Jennie-O in Willmar and is focused on educating the public about agriculture with a fun and family-friendly experience. Adam and Melanie Dickman both grew up on crop and animal farms and are excited to give back to the community. Kandi Land Farm will be open weekends this fall beginning September 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> through November 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>. Various themes/attractions will be featured each weekend, including a corn maze, barn yard petting area, pumpkin patch, hay slide, sand play area, sunflowers, hayride, Monarch butterfly trail, scavenger hunt, playground, food truck and vendors and information on agricultural job opportunities. A pumpkin smashing festival will be held the last weekend.

[Dan Tepfer joined the meeting.]

Admission is \$7.00 per person and free for children under two years of age. Kandi Land Farm will donate a portion of its earnings to local community charities and organizations, e.g., FFA, 4-H, etc. Dickman shared they would like this to be an annual seasonal business. She has had interest from schools to attend. Swedburg inquired if there is anything this committee can do to support the venture. Dickman felt it would be beneficial for the committee to promote the farm as she feels it is important for the public to be informed of the importance of agriculture.

## **AGENDA—**

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

## **MINUTES—**

IT WAS MOVED BY Keith Poier, SECONDED BY Dan Tepfer, to approve the Minutes of the July 15, 2021 meeting as emailed. MOTION CARRIED.

Guest Chris Radel was welcomed and provided information on his position as Energy and Safety Outreach Coordinator at Willmar Municipal Utilities. Radel is interested in becoming a member of this committee.

## **UNFINISHED BUSINESS—**

**Updated Agriculture and Industrial Hemp Flyers.** Swedburg reported the Industrial Hemp Subcommittee suggested changes to the Agriculture and Industrial Hemp flyers and shared both fliers will be finalized when the EDC's new Marketing and Communications Specialist is hired. Radel inquired as to the purpose of the flyers. Swedburg shared the flyers provide statistical information and photos promoting agriculture in Kandiyohi County and are distributed at various meetings and conferences, including to site selectors. Swedburg shared she recently attended a Community Venture Network meeting where she met one-on-one with some company representatives. She shared information on a bioplastics company that may be interested in locating to Kandiyohi County. Discussion was held regarding vacant buildings that could house such a company, i.e., the Buhler building in Willmar and the Dahmes Stainless building north of New London. Incentives and the importance of having information available to attract agricultural businesses to the county were discussed.

**Removal of Nate Hultgren from Industrial Hemp Subcommittee.** Swedburg shared the Industrial Hemp Exploratory Subcommittee approved Nate Hultgren's request to be removed from the subcommittee. Hultgren's schedule is becoming busy after being appointed to serve on a national board.

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

## **REPORTS**

**Industrial Hemp Exploratory Subcommittee.** Poier shared information from the July subcommittee meeting, including discussion on having subcommittee members attend the NoCo Hemp Expo in

Denver in March 2022. Laura Arne attended an industrial hemp conference in Florida last year and will provide an update at a future Ag Committee meeting. Tim Seehusen of Prairie PROducers in Olivia continues to work on the possibility of starting an industrial hemp processing plant.

**Partners in Ag Innovation Conference.** Swedburg shared Dustin Kotrba's report on the Partners in Ag Innovation Conference held on August 29<sup>th</sup> at MinnWest Technology Campus (see attached). Swedburg stated they were pleased with attendance, but noted the low attendance by producers. Discussion was held regarding incentives to attract producers to future conferences. There were 125 registered with 43 attending in person and 53 online; other registrants may have attended some online sessions. The planning committee will schedule a recap meeting in September.

**Farmfest.** Farmfest was held August 3-5. Tepfer reported he attended two days and noted there were fewer vendors and booths than in previous years and it was not held in 2020 due to the pandemic. Forums were recorded and are available online. When the EDC's Marketing and Communications Specialist is on board, the possibility of the EDC having a booth at a future Farmfest will be discussed.

**Community Venture Network.** Discussion was held regarding the importance for this committee and EDC staff to continue attending seminars and conferences to attract new businesses to Kandiyohi County. Swedburg commented labor availability is one of the most important things site selectors look for in a community right now.

**AG/RENEWABLE ENERGY COMMUNITY EVENTS/PROJECTS.** Radel inquired if the Ag Committee deals with water conservation issues. Chair Halvorson commented water conservation has not been a topic at meetings. Radel asked who he could talk with as to conveying the drought conditions with producers. Larson suggested contacting Nate Hultgren. Discussion was held regarding the low level of aquifers in Kandiyohi County. Tepfer shared the use of irrigators is up 40% for Kandiyohi Power Cooperative. Radel inquired how to contact Karen community members to inquire as to their interest in renting land for micro farming. Swedburg suggested inviting someone from the MNyou Youth Garden to speak at a future meeting on its deep winter greenhouse.

#### **ADJOURNMENT—**

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

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:11 a.m.

**NEXT MEETING—**The next meeting is 7:30 a.m., September 16, 2021, in the EDC Board Room and via Zoom video conference.

## Report on Partners in Ag Innovation Conference by Dustin Kotrba

- 126 total registered:
  - o Going in we felt that if we ended up with around 85-90 attendees we would be doing well based upon Sara's experience with dropping attendance numbers.
  - o 43 in person
  - o 53 online
  - o 30 N/A (didn't come in person but might have watched some online)
  - o We are still quite low on number of producer attendees.
- Viewship metrics: 115 views on-line with 150 hours viewed, so some came and went during the conference or watched the sessions that interested them the most.
- Typically we share some of the survey feedback comments looking for themes.
  - o 21 responses.
  - o We had the highest ratings across the group of presenters so far in the conference series so that was a big positive.
  - o Those who would promote the event to others scored it as a 9 out of 10 which was great.
- Thank yous went out to the sponsors the week after the event.
- All prizes have been sent out?
- Articles were in the West Central Tribune and Clara City Herald,
- We will meet in September to talk about planning for next year.
- Costs were covered by sponsorship, I believe will have some surplus, do you have a final budget?
- Ask committee members about their feedback on the event and what they liked or didn't like and where they would like to see the conference improve.