

KANDIYOHI COUNTY AND CITY OF WILLMAR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION (EDC)
BUSINESS RETENTION & EXPANSION/RECRUITMENT (BRE) COMMITTEE

MINUTES

November 6, 2020

Via ZOOM Video Conference

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

Excused: Aaron Backman, Roger Imdieke and Kelly TerWisscha

Staff: Connie Schmoll, Business Development Manager

Secretarial: Diane Beck, Legal & Administrative Assistants, Inc. (LAA)

Chair Sam Bowen called the meeting to order at approximately 9:02 a.m.

AGENDA—

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

MINUTES—

IT WAS MOVED BY Jim Ellingson, SECONDED BY Bridget Paulson, to approve the October 2, 2020 Minutes as emailed. MOTION CARRIED.

REPORTS

CLUES Update/Diverse Classes. Jennifer Mendoza reported she is working on recruitment and announced the diverse CDL class at Ridgewater College will start soon. CLUES was thinking of going with another instructor, but there were issues with participants needing permits. To date, four individuals have been accepted with two additional participants waiting for acceptance; applications remain open. Mendoza shared it is difficult for some individuals to fill out applications due to a lack of internet experience. Mendoza shared information about the COVID-19 Housing Assistance Program (CHAPS), a statewide grant program to provide housing assistance payments to help prevent eviction, prevent homelessness and maintain housing stability for eligible renters and homeowners. Local administrators will review applications from individuals and families requesting assistance, verify eligibility and process payments for eligible expenses on behalf of households. Mendoza commented the program does not assist with mortgage payments, but does provide rent assistance. Applicants can fill out the application at www.211unitedway.org and find out if they qualify. Mendoza shared another CNA class will begin soon.

EDC Ag Committee Events. Connie Schmoll reported the EDC Ag Committee meets monthly, except in May and October. A biofuels webinar will be held January 27, 2021 with Jamey Cline of Christianson PLLP as the presenter on the interaction of the agriculture and renewable fuels industries. It is open to the public; the flyer will be posted on Facebook and emailed to committee members. The Ag Committee will partner with MinnWest Technology Campus to hold the 2021 Ag Innovation Conference on July 31, 2021. If the conference can be done on site, it will also be available virtually.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

COVID-19 Business Assistance Loan (COBAL) Program. Schmoll reported at the beginning of COVID and the Governor's Executive Orders to reduce or close businesses, the EDC Boards approved using EDC reserve funds to offer loans to businesses in need. The Boards allocated \$150,000 for zero percent 24-month loans (\$5,000 maximum loans) with 6 months of deferred payments. The EDC received 36 applications with 27 being approved (15 were from diverse businesses). Approximately \$127,500 has been loaned. The program will be open until the end of November.

Childcare Grants. In May, the EDC provided grants to homebased childcare providers to assist with the costs of PPE, cleaning supplies and other COVID-related expenses. The EDC provided \$25,000 plus a \$5,000 gift from the Willmar Area Community Foundation to provide \$325 each to 88 childcare providers. Included with the check was a letter thanking the daycare providers and acknowledging them as a business.

Immigrant Business Disaster Relief Grant Program. Schmoll shared the Southwest Initiative Foundation provided the EDC with \$25,000 to disburse grants in the amounts of \$500 to \$750 to immigrant businesses that had been in business seven years or less. Twenty-five applications have been received and \$17,450 has been expended. The program remains open until the end of November.

CARES Pandemic Relief (CPR) Grant Program. Schmoll reported with the CARES Act passed by Congress in March, funds were distributed to states to distribute to counties, cities and townships to use for COVID-related expenses, etc. Kandiyohi County received \$5,235,792 and formed six teams to distribute funds to various entities. The EDC was asked by the County to chair the Small Business and Nonprofit Planning Team. The planning team developed grant applications for small businesses and nonprofit organizations and a calculation process. The EDC hired a consultant, Cheryl Glaeser of Achieve, TFC to assist with marketing, including press releases, website postings, etc. The nonprofit grant program concluded on October 23rd and the small business program ended on October 29th. As of October 30th, the EDC received a total of 231 small business applications (198 applications from 10 different cities and 33 applications from 17 different townships), 46 of those applications were from diverse businesses. A total of \$2,259,500 has been awarded to small businesses. The average business grant was \$9,781 with the largest being \$13,500. The average years in business was 14 and the average business loss was 60%.

A total of 38 nonprofit applications was received with an average grant award of \$26,782; the average loss was 36%. The total grants distributed to nonprofits was \$1,017,750 for a total disbursed through the CPR Grant Program of \$3,277,000. Heitke inquired if the Willmar Area Lakes Chamber of Commerce was able to apply; Schmoll shared the Chamber was eligible and received a grant award. Schmoll reported award recipients are now completing and returning their Expense Reports, which are due 60 days after receiving the grant. Schmoll shared Jean Spaulding, Kandiyohi County CARES Coordinator, was in constant contact with the EDC and the other five teams.

Chair Bowen expressed kudos to the planning team. Les Nelson gave a shout out to Aaron Backman and Schmoll for their work in the program. Schmoll announced the EDC Finance Committee of which Nelson is a member, met 27 times since March.

West Central Minnesota Job Fair (10/20/2020). Chair Bowen reported he spoke with Doug Hanson of KDJS regarding the October 20th job fair. Attendance was low due to the snowstorm and most likely COVID. Employers are attempting to fill their workforces. Paulson shared she attended the job fair for a short time; the set up was well done. She mentioned Hutchinson held a job fair on October 22nd. Chair Bowen mentioned the job fair was moved back to the Willmar Conference Center as Ridgewater College is not allowing public meetings due to COVID.

CDL Program with Central Minnesota Jobs & Training Services, Inc. Paulson reported CARES Act funds allowed Central Minnesota Jobs & Training Services (CMJTS) to offer free CDL training for low-income women and women of color. She shared recruitment has been difficult. Currently there are two students; the goal was five to six. After students complete the training, CMJTS will assist with interview training and connecting students with employers. CMJTS is also promoting the Women-on-the-Move Training held via Zoom for women of color and low-income women to learn the basics of manufacturing concepts/skills and workplace safety. There is also an in-person Forklift training available at Ridgewater College. Paulson stated some applicants have difficulty with technology, which hinders applying for courses. Mendoza also mentioned the CDL recruitment is difficult due to the season as potential CDL students are busy driving sugar beet trucks. She inquired if anyone has contact information for Jeff Stamer, a large employer of truck drivers, to let her know. Heitke shared the Community Integration Center may be a location to market recruitment materials; Paulson will look into his suggestion.

Workforce Needs Forum. Chair Bowen mentioned at the last committee meeting he suggested holding an open workforce forum with industry groups to learn of employment opportunities. He has not been able to move forward on a forum. Mendoza is interested in working on the forum with Chair Bowen. Chair Bowen shared Jennie-O Turkey Store is offering free college tuition to its employees and their families and feels the program will be very impactful.

NEW BUSINESS—Jim Ellingson reported he attended a Zoom presentation by Dion Warne regarding the Willmar Ten investment group's interest in purchasing the former JC Penney's store for the Willmar Community Center, Willmar City Hall and WRAC-8. He inquired if committee members would be interested in hearing the presentation at a future committee meeting. Heitke is interested and commented it would be a multi-million-dollar project, which could be partially

funded by the local option sales tax. Ellingson will contact Warne to see if he is willing to give a presentation and inform the EDC office.

ADJOURNMENT—There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:49 a.m.

NEXT MEETING—The next committee meeting is **9:00 a.m., Friday, December 4, 2020**, via ZOOM video conference.