

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

MINUTES

March 18, 2022

EDC Boardroom and Via ZOOM Video Conference

Present: Corky Berg, Sam Bowen, Samantha Crow (via Zoom), Jim Ellingson, Steve Gardner (via Zoom), Les Heitke and Jennifer Mendoza

Excused: Roger Imdieke and Bridget Paulson

Guest: Martin Figueroa, Job Developer and Recruiter of CLUES (via Zoom), and Kelsey Vosika, Director of Family Promise of Kandiyohi County (via Zoom)

Staff: Aaron Backman, Executive Director and Sarah Swedburg, Business Development Manager

Secretarial: Cathy Skindelien, Legal & Administrative Assistants, Inc. (LAA)

Chair Sam Bowen called the meeting to order at approximately 11:00 a.m.

AGENDA—Added to the agenda were introductions and under New Business the approval of Kelsey Vosika to the BRE/R Committee.

IT WAS MOVED BY Les Heitke, SECONDED BY Jim Ellingson, to approve the revised Agenda. MOTION CARRIED.

MINUTES—

IT WAS MOVED BY Corky Berg, SECONDED BY Les Heitke, to approve the Minutes of the December 3, 2021 meeting as emailed. MOTION CARRIED.

INTRODUCTIONS. Vosika introduced herself as the Director of Family Promise of Kandiyohi County, which works with families to reduce the impact of homelessness. She is interested in getting involved in the BRE/R Committee to help out more areas in the community. Martin Figueroa introduced himself as a Job Developer with Comunidades Latinos Unidas En Servicio (CLUES), working with Jennifer Mendoza. Self-introductions of the committee members were made.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS—

Elevate Class Update. Sarah Swedburg reported on the Elevate Community Business Academy, a 12-week business ownership class by Rising Tide Capital. Classes started on March 17, 2022 at The Goodness in downtown Willmar. Eight students were in attendance, with a potential of four additional students at future classes. Because one couple is enrolled, 11 businesses are represented. Several are existing businesses in the food sector. Other industries represented are health care, clothing and a goat farmer looking at

expansion. The first session was orientation, with the first lesson occurring next week. Danny Carranza will be the second instructor. The class focuses on financials, marketing, business structure and insurance. A grant received from the State of Minnesota affords the opportunity to support childcare, transportation and technical needs, such as help with website set-up or meeting with an accountant or lawyer. The course is taught in English, with access to the curriculum in Spanish. Swedburg is receiving quotes for a Somalian translation, which will be paid for by the state grant. Strong support from the Southwest Initiative Foundation enabled the EDC to launch the Elevate program; this will be the third series of classes. The program received a statewide award in 2021.

Applicants for the third session will still be accepted on a rolling basis. One or two more people would be allowed to join. The class meets on Thursdays from 5:30-8:30 p.m. The goal is to have people attend every class. Graduation will occur in June, with a date to be announced.

NEW BUSINESS—

Resignation of Dean Steinwand.

IT WAS MOVED BY Sam Bowen, SECONDED BY Les Heitke, to accept with regrets the resignation of Dean Steinwand. MOTION CARRIED.

Addition of Kelsey Vosika.

IT WAS MOVED BY Les Heitke, SECONDED BY Jim Ellingson, to accept Kelsey Vosika as a member of the Kandiyohi County and City of Willmar Economic Development Commission Business Retention and Expansion/Recruitment Committee. MOTION CARRIED.

Election of 2022 Officers.

IT WAS MOVED BY Corky Berg, SECONDED BY Les Heitke, to elect Jim Ellingson as Chairperson of the Kandiyohi County and City of Willmar Economic Development Commission Business Retention and Expansion/Recruitment Committee for 2022. MOTION CARRIED.

IT WAS MOVED BY Sam Bowen, SECONDED BY Corky Berg, to elect Les Heitke as Vice Chairperson of the Kandiyohi County and City of Willmar Economic Development Commission Business Retention and Expansion/Recruitment Committee for 2022. MOTION CARRIED.

Bowen will continue his role of Chairman of the Workforce Development Subcommittee and Bridget Paulson will remain Chairperson of the Business Support Subcommittee.

Ridgewater College Pursuing Commercial Driver's License (CDL) Grant. Ridgewater College applied for the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) Targeted Community Capital Projects Grant, which is designed to provide funding to acquire and develop facilities toward delivering workforce training education services for underrepresented students. If awarded the \$1.5 million grant, Ridgewater College plans to improve its CDL program by adding a 200 x 300 square foot concrete pad, light poles for training after dark, a power source for simulators, trucks and trailers. Grant recipients will be notified in the next two weeks.

Minnesota State Centers of Excellence brought together 11 campuses to establish or expand CDL training. It applied for a federal Economic Development Administration (EDA) Good Jobs Challenge grant. From this grant Ridgewater College asked for \$500,000 to purchase trucks, trailers and a second training simulator. This grant has no deadline, as funds are awarded on a case-by-case basis.

REPORTS—

Workforce Solutions Summit. Aaron Backman reported the Workforce Solutions Summit was held on January 20, 2022, at Willmar Conference Center. Seventy-four people participated, primarily representing Human Resources. There was a good cross-section of types of employers. Luke Greiner from DEED spoke on labor market trends and Mike Henke, a national speaker from Omaha, addressed the future of the workforce. Della Ludwig from DEED covered equity inclusion and diversity. A post-summit survey was distributed and 40 participants responded. Ninety-five percent responded the summit provided the expected information with relevant take-aways. Survey results will be shared with BRE/R Workforce Subcommittee members. Roundtable discussions were held with 13 groups of four to six people. Topics discussed included the need for online applications and bilingual job application forms, the workforce environment, working remotely and conflict resolution.

West Central Minnesota Job Fair Recap. Bowen reported a job fair was held in-person at Ridgewater College in October. Fifty vendors participated as well as approximately 300 job seekers and Ridgewater students. Overall the vendors were pleased with the results. A new in-person job fair is scheduled for April 6, 2022. Twenty-five vendors have signed up thus far, with 2.5 weeks to go. Bowen anticipates up to 60 vendors participating. Other job fairs are scheduled at Ridgewater College in Hutchinson on April 21, 2022 and at Willmar High School on May 10, 2022.

Virtual Job Fair Recap. Swedburg reported the first virtual job fair was a success. Software for the event was provided by CareerForce. Businesses created booths and job seekers created profiles. Over 50 businesses participated, offering 250 different types of jobs. There were 767 job vacancies and 78 job-seeker profiles created. Job seekers from Chippewa, Hennepin, Kandiyohi, Renville, Stearns, Swift and Wright Counties participated. There was considerable activity in higher-level positions. The job fair had live-chat capability and every organization reported some chat activity. There were 45 resumes submitted, and one interview occurred. At least five people were hired as a result of the event. Most businesses felt it was a good value worth doing again. Backman commented feedback was received from 26 of the 54 participating businesses. Two-thirds are interested in participating again.

Goals for next time include managing the communication with partners to ensure they are actually marketing the event. Geographic boundaries will be set for the businesses, but job seekers will be accepted from anywhere. Job seekers will be recruited earlier in the process to avoid scrambling at the end. Radio stations should put out the information the weekend before instead of the day before. Mendoza added that CLUES has a Facebook page that has good traffic and volunteered to post information on future virtual job fairs.

Business Support Survey. Swedburg reported the purpose of the business support survey was to stay in touch with businesses that received COVID help. Three hundred businesses were surveyed, and 60 businesses responded, all reported they continue to operate. Resources needed include funding, social media assistance, website assistance and workforce. Twenty percent requested business owner education, which presents a good opportunity to promote the Elevate Community Business Academy.

CLUES. Mendoza continues to develop the CLUES Facebook page, which has been helpful for recruiting during COVID. Classes have begun for 2022. A customer service and banking course has been completed with a second session underway. Mendoza is instructing the course and would like to find a local banker to assist. Backman recommended James Miller at Heritage Bank. CLUES is currently recruiting for a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) program to begin in May, with a bridge course starting next week. Participants need a General Education Development (GED) certificate or high school diploma. Mendoza is investigating

employment options for future CNAs. Bethesda and Rice are typical venues. Mendoza plans to partner with Bethesda, which currently has 60 job openings.

Figuroa reported his role at CLUES consists of supporting the Twin Cities offices and greater Minnesota, including Willmar and Austin. He works with employers to ensure the graduates of CLUES classes are being sent to quality locations. Backman suggested collaboration with Nova-Tech Engineering, which needs bilingual employees due to its South American operations. The Project Turnabout residential facility and Fortress, a men's residential facility, were also discussed, as potential partners

CLUES will be offering classes for a Trained Medication Administrator (TMA) in the future. A TMA is trained to dispense medication in the absence of a Licensed Practical Nurse. There is a work requirement of approximately six months to be eligible to enroll. Bethesda requested Ridgewater College consider a TMA class because it had six people available for training. Ridgewater College contacted three other facilities and established a class of 17 people.

Chair Bowen reported the Minnesota Department of Health made a change to its CNA testing vendor, from Pearson Vue to Headmaster. Because of the transition, Ridgewater College has had no testing completed since the end of January. Prior to the transition it was averaging one per week. Testing should resume by April 15, 2022.

Strategic Planning Session. Backman encouraged everyone to participate in the upcoming strategic planning session. Committee members are considered partners and are welcome to attend. Last year 30 people attended, with lunch provided. The planning session will be held from 9:00 a.m.–2:00 p.m. on Thursday, April 7, 2022 at the Willmar Conference Center.

ADJOURNMENT—There being no other business,

IT WAS MOVED BY Les Heitke, SECONDED BY Jennifer Mendoza, to adjourn the meeting.
MOTION CARRIED.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 12:26 p.m.

NEXT MEETING—The next committee meeting is **11:00 a.m., Friday, June 3, 2022** at the EDC Boardroom and via ZOOM video conference.