

**KANDIYOHI COUNTY AND CITY OF WILLMAR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION (EDC)  
MARKETING AND PUBLIC RELATIONS COMMITTEE**

**MINUTES**

**December 27, 2021**

**Multi-Tech Conference Room, MinnWest Technology Campus and via Zoom Video Conference**

**Present:** Donna Boonstra (via Zoom), Melissa Knott and Pam Rosenau

**Excused:** Elizabeth Dyrdal, Jesse Gislason and Emily Lien

**Staff:** Aaron Backman, Executive Director and Kelsey Olson, Marketing and Communications Specialist

**Secretarial:** Cathy Skindelien, Legal & Administrative Assistants, Inc.

Vice Chairperson Pam Rosenau called the meeting to order at approximately 12:08 p.m.

**AGENDA**—There were no changes to the agenda.

**MINUTES**—Because no quorum was present the November 22, 2021 minutes will be approved at the January 24, 2022 meeting.

**RESIGNATION OF BRITTANY VANDERBILL**—Because no quorum was present the resignation of Brittany VanDerBill will be approved at the January 24, 2022 meeting.

**SOCIAL MEDIA STATISTICS**—

**Social Media Statistics.** Aaron Backman reported the website had 1561 users, including 126 new users and a bounce rate of approximately 78 percent. Searches were approximately one-half organic and one-half direct. LinkedIn had visitors on December 11, 23 and 25. Visitor demographics included community and social services, support, business development and engineering. Twitter had 560 followers. Melissa Knott suggested EDC's reach could be improved by adding information about the growth of existing businesses. Businesses such as Vaxxinoa US and NovaTech could be featured.

**Facebook Statistics.** Post reach is similar to last month. Top posts are as follows:

1. Multilingual journalism opportunity. Ridgewater College is offering a free 5-week introductory course in January.
2. New Marketing and Communications Specialist at the EDC. The EDC announced the hiring of Kelsey Olson as its Marketing and Communications Specialist.

3. Midtown Plaza awarded a Grant. EDC congratulated Zack Mahboub on being awarded an \$80,000 Minnesota Cultural Mall Operator Grant, part of the Main Street COVID Relief Grant package.
4. Central Minnesota Jobs and Training Services (CMJTS) Opportunity. CMJTS is offering a Women-on-the-Move 30-hour virtual course for a career in manufacturing.
5. Holiday Lights. Celebrate the Light of the World was held at Robbins Island Park in Willmar.

#### **UNFINISHED BUSINESS—**

**Broadband Project.** Olson reported the United States Treasury determined local funds can match the State's Border-to-Border grant that will be funded through Federal Capital Project funds. National Telecommunications and Information Administration grant awards have not been announced, and the State Border-to-Border grant program has yet to be opened. The broadband project on the east side of Kandiyohi County with Vibrant Broadband (Meeker County Cooperative Light and Power Association) may become part of a larger project proposed for a USDA ReConnect grant.

Full fiber will be utilized. Larry Kleindl, Kandiyohi County Administrator and Connie Schmoll, broadband contractor for EDC, met with Tim Mergen, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and General Manager of Meeker County Cooperative Light and Power Association. Mergen was pleased to see the support from Kandiyohi County. Additional marketing activities will occur later in January, along with strategizing at the EDC Broadband and Advanced Technology Committee meeting.

Dr. Ashley Kjos from Woodland Centers attended the December Broadband and Advanced Technology Committee meeting, speaking about telehealth and the effects of a lack of broadband, from both a client and staff perspective, on their mental health services. Woodland Centers received several grants to assist in purchasing technology for its clients to use for appointments.

**Elevate update.** Graduation went very well. Approximately 50 people attended. The ceremony was held in the auditorium of the Willmar Education and Arts Center (WEAC). Danny Carranza, a recent Elevate graduate, will take Elevate instructor training in January and become an assistant instructor for the Spring class. New dates for Elevate classes will be set the first week in January, and targeting information sessions will be held in late January or early February. Classes will be held March through May, with graduation in June. There are 10 entrepreneurs interested in the Spring English Elevate class and two additional inquiries.

Elevate was awarded a state Small Business Partnership Grant, which will help fund the program through 2023. A press release is being finalized announcing an award received from the Minnesota Association of Professional County Economic Developers (MAPCED). Chris Breitenburg from Rising Tide Capital (RTC) attended the award ceremony, which created an opportunity to discuss the larger-scale vision for the program, including a Somali translation of the curriculum. A planning session for this translation project will take place on January 10, 2022 between RTC, Southwest Initiative Foundation (SWIF) and the EDC.

[Backman was excused from the meeting]

**Fall/Winter Newsletter Discussion.** The first EDC newsletter will be released in January 2022 using Constant Contact. Highlights will include Elevate, Block 25, the logistics project and 2021 in review. The newsletter will be launched in digital form with hard copy a possibility in the future. Constant

Contact records the clicks on the newsletter, which provides valuable information about the audience's interests. Knott recommended FlipSnack as another possible format. The date of the newsletter release was discussed. Backman suggested delaying the first newsletter until the logistics project was closed. Olson preferred setting a consistent date on the first of the month. Knott agreed consistency is necessary to build audience loyalty, and Donna Boonstra agreed. Olson will take the suggestions to Backman for review. The template of previous newsletters will be used initially and changes will be discussed for the second quarter at the next meeting.

## **NEW BUSINESS—**

**Completed Projects.** Olson reported the following marketing projects have been completed:

1. Elevate. This includes graduation invitations, diplomas and other promotional materials. Olson worked with RedStar, which designed the previous Elevate material, and was able to maintain a consistent font. Templates need to be created for the EDC for future projects.
2. Workforce Summit invitation, including a Save the Date announcement. Reverse logos were suggested for future use to avoid white backgrounds.

Olson and Swedburg will take pictures of local businesses to be used in updating promotional materials. An iPhone 13 will be used to save editing time.

**Projects In-Progress.** Olson is compiling a Workforce Summit media list that will encompass a 90-mile radius of Willmar. Quotes for advertising are being collected. This committee recommended the following:

1. Negotiate the price and placement of the ad. Ask for free color.
2. Ask if digital ads are included at no cost, these are easily tracked.
3. The time, price and frequency of radio ads is negotiable. Ask for a recording so the ad can be recycled.
4. Use ads no smaller than two inches by three inches. One-quarter page is ideal, one-half page can be used, but don't waste the money on a full-page ad.
5. Check if the media company will create the ad. If they create the ad, ask if they will provide the elements to maintain consistency in future projects.
6. Keep a calendar noting the publication dates of local agricultural magazines and newspapers.

Other projects in progress include the following:

1. Industrial Park flyer update. The map will be revised and the city's image added to the flyer.
2. Prospectus update. Connie Schmoll's information will be replaced with Swedburg's, and new pictures will be included
3. The Opportunity Zone and Renaissance Zone flyer. These will be divided into separate pieces.
4. Press passes for the Workforce Summit.
5. Press packets profiling the speakers at the Workforce Summit.

**Future.** Future projects include marketing materials for the virtual job fair in January and a press release regarding the Vibrant broadband project.

**Long-Term Goals.** Website design was discussed. REDstar designed the current website using WordPress due to the complexity of the site. WordPress was described as robust and intuitive, with huge storage space and it allows changes in the layout and adding of content. The website has not been redesigned in five years and needs refreshing and clean-up. Existing businesses will be highlighted. A survey will be sent to businesses asking about growth and what information they would like shared with the public. A Facebook calendar will be created for topics that can be revisited each month, creating a consistent format. An update the EDC logo will be discussed at future meetings.

**NEXT MEETING**—The next meeting is **12 noon, Monday, January 24, 2022** in-person at the Multi-Tech Conference Room, MinnWest Technology Campus and via ZOOM video conference.

**ADJOURNMENT**—There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 1:22 p.m.