

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

MINUTES

September 13, 2023

EDC Boardroom and Via ZOOM Video Conference

Present: Corky Berg, Sam Bowen, Jim Ellingson, Les Heitke and Kelsey Vosika

Excused: Samantha Crow, Steve Gardner, Roger Imdieke, Jennifer Mendoza, Bridget Paulson and Mary Warszynski

Staff: Aaron Backman, Executive Director

Secretarial: Cathy Skindeliem, Legal & Administrative Assistants, Inc.

Chair Jim Ellingson called the meeting to order at approximately 1:01 p.m.

AGENDA—The agenda was approved as emailed.

MINUTES—There was no quorum to approve the minutes.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS—

One-Stop-Shop Update. Aaron Backman reported the One-Stop-Shop was made up of booths containing information regarding legislative changes. He acknowledged the time spent by Kelsey Olson reaching out to the Department of Labor for clarification on the new laws. A couple dozen people visited the booths, which will remain available until mid-October. Other available resources included human resource professionals and attorneys.

Elevate Class Update. Backman reported the Elevate Community Business Academy has completed five rounds of classes with 50 graduates. Seven graduates have expanded their businesses and four have opened new businesses, leveraging over \$1 million in financing. The fall class will begin tonight with Stephanie Lopez instructing and Sarah Swedburg concentrating on the administrative duties. The group consists of 16 students, 11 of which are female and 3 are black, indigenous, people of color (BIPOC). There is a wait list of around 80 people for the class. Swedburg is working on grant applications with a goal of \$204,000 for a two-year period, which would allow expansion of the program with other business training items. The Spring 2024 session will include English and Spanish classes. When asked why more graduates haven't opened businesses, Backman responded in the current environment it is hard to get financing and interest rates are killing deals. It is not easy to get a business off the ground. Some realized their idea wouldn't work before getting in too deep, which is valuable as well.

Ridgewater College Commercial Driver's License (CDL) Grant Update/Next Steps. Sam Bowen reported it has been nearly two years since starting the CDL grant application process and there is still no contract, although it is close to completion in the hands of the Ridgewater College attorney. In the meantime the CDL program has moved forward, with 71 students completing the class and 69 passing. A number of the students were BIPOC, coming through Comunidades Latinas Unidas En Servicio (CLUES) and the Community

Integration Center. Tony Nelson was hired as the CDL Program Manager and Instructor. He is developing a feature-rich program with a menu consisting of 10 options depending on skill level. There are 300 training providers listed on the CDL Training Provider Registry. Most are employers in need of more drivers. Local businesses send candidates to Ridgewater and are willing to pay \$6000 for the training. Another truck and trailer has been purchased. Things are growing and going well. Work has begun on the range design despite the lack of a contract. Plans are to break ground in the spring of 2024. A vendor for the design should be selected within two months. The range area will be 275 feet x 325 feet, which will provide room for three trucks to do maneuvers. The lighting will be improved and natural barriers added to keep unauthorized people off the range.

NEW BUSINESS—

West Central Minnesota Area Job Fair, Ridgewater College. Backman reported the West Central Minnesota Job Fair will be held on Thursday, September 28 from noon until 4:00 p.m. Fifteen vendors are currently signed up, with more expected. KDJS Radio is a partner in the event and will encourage people to attend through radio ads. This is a great opportunity for anyone looking for a career change, college students, and those who have been laid off.

REPORTS—

Childcare grant update. The EDC received a \$200,000 childcare grant from the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development. The funds will be leveraged at a 2.5-1 ratio with help from the city of Willmar and Kandiyohi County. The funds are used for forgivable loans for health and safety items, technical assistance, transportation, language accommodation and a mentorship program. Additional funding will be pursued in the fourth quarter of 2023.

The EDC will partner with United Community Action Partnership (UCAP) to hire a Childcare Community Coordinator. The position will spend 60% of its time with UCAP and 40% with the EDC. Responsibilities include sourcing grant opportunities and working with providers to make them aware of available resources.

CLUES. CLUES continues to hold classes on customer service, banking, CDL, and certified nursing assistant (CNA), although the state now provides free CNA training.

Willmar WYE project. Backman reported the Willmar WYE project received an America's Transportation Award from the American Association of State Highway Transportation Officials. Twenty-three projects from nine states were nominated in the mid-America region, with seven projects receiving recognition. Jon Huseby from the Minnesota Department of Transportation accepted the award, which was in the medium category (projects costing between \$25 and \$200 million) of Quality of Life/Community Development.

MB Rail. Backman reported MB rail has closed on the purchase of 144 acres in Willmar's Industrial Park. MB Rail is a rail services company based in Lexington, Kentucky. It owns short line railroads and transmodal facilities. It will develop rail, work with tenants, interface with Burlington Northern Santa Fe and organize unit trains. The closing encourages other companies in need of rail services to locate in the Industrial Park.

Housing projects. A number of housing projects are moving along in Willmar. The Lakeland Avenue project will be multifamily, with three buildings containing a total of 200 units. Block 25 Lofts is complete, with amenities including a workout room, fitness area, a roof patio with barbecue grills and underground parking. Southwest Minnesota Housing Partnership has evaluated six locations for development in Willmar and narrowed it down to two locations. Trident Development is considering an assisted living facility with a possible location in the southeast quadrant of Willmar.

Backman is scheduled to speak at New London's Connecting Entrepreneurial Communities Conference on Thursday, September 14, 2023, 3:45 p.m at Goat Ridge Brewery. The topic will be Kandiyohi County Economic Development: A Case Study of Economic Development in Kandiyohi County.

ADJOURNMENT—There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 2:15 p.m.

NEXT MEETING—The next committee meeting is **1:00 p.m., Wednesday, December 13, 2023** at the EDC Boardroom and via ZOOM video conference.



WEST CENTRAL MINNESOTA AREA JOB FAIR

THURSDAY, SEPT 28, 2023 | NOON – 4PM
RIDGewater COLLEGE GYMNASIUM | 2101 15TH AVE NW, WILLMAR

If you're looking for a job or new career challenge, don't miss this exciting one-day event. Bring your resume and dress for success! Meet the area's top human resource directors, business owners, manufacturers and employment services.

Individuals who need a reasonable accommodation to participate in this event please call 320-231-1600 by Sept. 21, 2023.

YOUR OPPORTUNITY:

Your business is valuable to us! This exciting event is an opportunity for you to:

- Find employees — take job applications on site
- Meet job seekers from an 11-county area
- Increase community awareness of your business
- Attract new customers for your products and services
- Network with other businesses

YOUR INVESTMENT:

The cost to participate is \$375 (\$400 after Sept. 21) and you will receive:

- 10-30 second ads to be aired on Fox News, K95 and The Kangaroo letting listeners know you will be at the Business Expo/Job Fair
- 6 foot table for your display area
- Media support with radio mentions in Willmar, Morris, Montevideo, and Hutchinson

Individuals who need a reasonable accommodation to participate in this event please call 320-231-1600 by Sept. 21, 2023.

Upon request, the information in this document can be made available in alternative formats for people with disabilities by contacting 320-231-1600.

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