

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

MINUTES

December 11, 2024

KCED Boardroom and Via ZOOM Video Conference

Present: Jim Ellingson, Les Heitke, Jennifer Mendoza (via Zoom), Bridget Paulson (via Zoom), and Kelsey Vosika (via Zoom)

Excused: Corky Berg, Sam Bowen, Samantha Crow, Steve Gardner and Mary Warszynski

Guest: Joanna Schrupp, General Manager, MinnWest Technology Campus

Staff: Michelle Marotzke, Business Development Manager

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

Chair Jim Ellingson called the meeting to order at approximately 1:01 p.m. noting there was not a quorum present.

AGENDA—Added under new business was the Economic Development Association of Minnesota (EDAM) intern award and committee member changes.

NEW BUSINESS—

MinnWest Technology Campus (MWTC) Discussion. Joanna Schrupp, General Manager of MWTC, reported MWTC has 16 active projects and 35 completed projects in 2024. Projects usually involve heavy repair, such as furnace replacement. MWTC is working with four tenants that are growing and need additional space. The Gilbertson Management Group is expanding from three offices totaling 700 square feet to an entire floor containing 3200 square feet. A small amount of land will be sold for a convenience store with construction planned in the spring of 2025.

[Les Heitke joined the meeting]

MWTC has grown from 12 businesses employing 130 people in 2009, to 30-33 businesses employing 750-800 people today. The current occupancy rate is 78%.

[Schrupp was excused from the meeting]

[Jennifer Mendoza joined the meeting]

Business Education Network (BEN). Michelle Marotzke reported a BEN meeting will be held next Wednesday. Jennifer Lindquist, BEN Coordinator for the Willmar Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce, is working on presentations for Zero Hour and the Classroom to Career program, where business professionals go into Willmar High School classes and discuss their careers and opportunities in the workforce.

[Kelsey Vosika joined the meeting]

Discuss Possible United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Intermediary Relending Program.

Marotzke reported that plans for KCED to apply for the USDA's Intermediary Relending Program have been halted. Kandiyohi County's Housing Redevelopment Authority (HRA) has a similar program set up for downtown Willmar. Marotzke will share ideas with Jill Bengtson, Executive Director of HRA, to explore a partnership with HRA to make the program county-wide. KCED would make lending recommendations and HRA would handle the paperwork.

Support and Buy Local Campaign. Les Heitke suggested that in addition to helping businesses get launched, KCED should encourage people to buy from existing local businesses. While Ken Warner was President of the Willmar Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce, he wrote an article each December reminding everyone to buy local. Suggestions included writing letters to the editor and including a reminder to support local businesses in the press release for the Elevate Community Business Academy graduation.

EDAM Intern award. Marotzke reported KCED was awarded an internship grant of \$2,000 from EDAM. A 10-week full-time intern position at \$20 per hour, office equipment such as a new laptop and mileage expenses would cost approximately \$15,000, which is not in the budget. One possible responsibility for the intern would be coordinating a BRE survey. The intern would connect with the business community, pull old data, coordinate focus groups, one-on-one meetings and create a checklist. The intern would work with the BRE/R Committee and get everyone engaged. The timeframe for use of the grant is the end of 2025. Comments included groundwork would need to be in place ahead of time and many organizations utilize interns, but advance preparation is necessary. It can become quite complicated with insurance, liability and the new Earned Sick and Safe Time regulations. It was decided the grant will not yet be declined and the topic will be revisited at future meetings.

Committee changes. Marotzke asked if members were willing to serve on the committee again in 2025. Everyone in attendance agreed. Mary Warszynski plans to step down from the KCED Joint Operations Board and this committee. Dawn Lippert has shown interest in serving and will be invited to the next meeting. Heitke suggested Mackenzie Dohman, owner of Pink Apron Bakery, be asked to join as well.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS—

Elevate Class Update. Marotzke reported 20 students and a baby will graduate from the Elevate Community Business Academy on December 13, 2024. The class includes three couples and a pair of sisters. The sisters will handle the decorations for the ceremony and work with another couple on the centerpieces. Coasters containing the Elevate logo on the top and sponsors on the back were made by a student who is a wood worker. Business Assistance Services (BAS-E) will be launched to reconnect with graduates in need of marketing, accounting, loans or legal assistance.

REPORTS—

Business Support Subcommittee Discussion. Bridget Paulson reported there will be no hiring event in Willmar this year. Sam Bowen would like to organize a 2025 Business Service Summit that is similar to the event held in 2022. Preferred Force, Central Minnesota Jobs & Training Services (CMJTS), KCED, the Willmar Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce and other key leaders in the community would be involved. The 2022 Summit featured a national speaker and activities which encouraged new ideas for engaging with the workforce.

Childcare Grant Update. Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center (PWELC) held a fundraiser last summer. Current projects include revamping the road to the Westby Observatory, where a walkway and drop-off will be installed. The Atwater project is on hold pending cost estimates and engineering. Each of these projects were awarded \$250,000 through a DEED childcare grant. PWELC is renovating the Westby Observatory to become a nature preschool, while Atwater is working on special family childcare units to be located in the former Developmental Achievement Center behind Atwater Ford.

Comunidades Latinas Unidas En Servicio (CLUES). Jennifer Mendoza reported CLUES has wrapped up for this year, and is getting ready for 2025, and will offer entrepreneurship training and six-week carpentry classes. Commercial Drivers License (CDL) and Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) classes will no longer be offered. All CDL students from the April and September 2024 cohorts are employed.

CMJTS. Paulson reported CMJTS was awarded a meat processor grant through the Ridgewater College Ag Department that can pay for advanced meat cutting classes. The next semester starts on January 13, 2025. Anyone in Kandiyohi County is eligible for the online class, which includes 15 hours a week working at a meat processing business. CMJTS held a meeting last week at the Career Force center to promote CDL programs. Representatives from Ridgewater College and CES LLC (Commercial Education and Safety) spoke to a group about their CDL programs, how they differ, what they have to offer and what the process is. CMJTS has funding to help people pay for CDL and CNA courses. Expanded disability services help connect disabled individuals with jobs that align with their skill set. Benefits planning assistance is available for those who would still like to work. Supplemental Security Income is for low-income people who have disabilities. If you work, your benefit will be reduced by \$.50 for every dollar earned. Under Social Security Disability Insurance you can earn up to \$1000 per month before payment is affected. CMJTS celebrated its 40th Anniversary in October.

ADJOURNMENT—There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 2:03 p.m.

NEXT MEETING—The next committee meeting is **1:00 p.m., Wednesday, March 12, 2025** at the KCED Boardroom and via ZOOM video conference.