

**KANDIYOHI COUNTY AND CITY OF WILLMAR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION (EDC)
JOINT OPERATIONS BOARD OF DIRECTORS (OB) MEETING
MINUTES
September 10, 2015
EDC Office, Willmar**

Present: Art Benson, Rollie Boll, Donna Boonstra, Gary Gilman, Linda Kacher and Kelly TerWisscha

Ex Officio: Bruce Peterson and Doug Reese

Excused: Robert Carlson

Guests: Troy Gorans, Vice President, and Randy Czarnetzki, Director of the Willmar Curling Club; Steve Salzer and Joanna Schrupp of MinnWest Technology Campus

Media: Carolyn Lange, West Central Tribune

Staff: Steven Renquist, Executive Director and Connie Schmoll, Business Development Specialist

Secretarial: Nancy Birkeland, Legal & Administrative Assistants, Inc. (LAA)

Vice President Linda Kacher called the meeting to order at approximately 11:00 a.m. Added to the agenda under New Business were a digital color copier and 2016 budget; Gary Gilman requested an item be added to the agenda before Progress Reports and Donna Boonstra will give an update on the Executive Director search committee under Unfinished Business.

IT WAS MOVED BY Rollie Boll, SECONDED BY Art Benson, to approve the revised Agenda and the following Consent Agenda. MOTION CARRIED.

CONSENT AGENDA—

- Approve:
1. Minutes of August 13, 2015 meeting
 2. Financial reports as of August 31, 2015, subject to audit
 3. Committee member changes:
 - a. Resignation of Wally Nelson from the Agriculture and Renewable Energy Development Committee
 - b. Addition of Donna Boonstra, Larry Handlin, Paul Smith and Scott Froemming to the Broadband and Advanced Technology Committee
 - c. Removal of Gary Geiger, Leslie Kelly and Jonathan Marchand from the Broadband and Advanced Technology Committee
 4. Payment of invoices:
 - a. REDstar for \$2,472.50 from the Marketing and Public Relations Committee's budget

- b. Lakeside Press for \$1,125 for a half page ad in the 2016 Willmar Lakes Area Guide from the Marketing and Public Relations Committee's budget
- c. James M. Ruff for \$3,688.00

Accept: Committee Minutes

- 1. Agriculture and Renewable Energy Development 7/16/2015
 - a. Ag Investment Subcommittee 8/6/2015
- 2. Broadband and Advanced Technology 7/6 and 8/3/2015
- 3. Business Retention and Expansion/Recruitment 7/15 and 8/19/2015

Willmar Curling Club. Art Benson informed the board he is a member of the Willmar Curling Club, which has exceeded the space at the Blue Line Arena and is researching building a space to accommodate growth they would like to do.

Randy Czarnetzki and Troy Gorans joined the meeting and were introduced. Czarnetzki stated the Willmar Curling Club is looking to build a new facility and is seeking guidance on its expansion. The Club will host the U.S. Junior Curling Nationals in January 2016 for eight to nine days with a minimum of 40-50 participants per event, who will use local hospitality establishments. The Club researched options to build at the Kandiyohi County Fairgrounds without success and are now looking at other opportunities and how to find appropriate property for a new facility. Gorans stated a new facility would be viable for use for any community event, except during the months it would be used by the Club. There are 161 curling clubs and 90 dedicated facilities in the U.S. with an average of 110 members per club. The sport is growing worldwide. A dedicated local facility would be unique and is scarce with the closest facilities being in Brainerd, Cambridge, a new facility being built by the city of Chaska and a facility in Blaine that was built in cooperation with the Fogerty Arena. The club would like its new facility to be close to amenities for tournaments. They have spoken with the city of Spicer are open to any location in the county. The Willmar Curling Club has 120 members, who come from the region. Czarnetzki and Gorans asked for the EDC's input on land opportunities, financing and grant opportunities and creative uses for the facility during its off season from April to October each year.

[Czarnetzki and Gorans were excused from the meeting.]

Mission statement. Gary Gilman asked the board to keep in mind the EDC's mission statement "to be a catalyst for economic growth of the greater Kandiyohi County area" in relation to any funding requests that may be made during this meeting.

PROGRESS REPORTS—

Willmar. Bruce Peterson reported the Willmar City Council approved the sale of approximately six acres at the Wastewater Treatment Facility to Willmar Poultry for a brooder facility and approved two hatchery additions in the Industrial Park; all Jennie-O Turkey Store projects have been completed; the city received approval from the state to be the permittee for the school project(s); overall construction in the city has been very good and values are 30-40% ahead of

2014 and may finish at \$60+ million for the year; new projects are being finalized and will kickoff 2016 construction; and the street projects in southeast Willmar, First Street and the Industrial Park will be completed in June 2016.

Willmar Downtown Development, Inc. Steve Renquist reported the Historic 313 project continues to move forward and the Housing and Redevelopment Authority subordinated its lien position to Mid-Minnesota Development Commission; interviews for a new director for the Willmar Area Multicultural Business Center were just completed; the Foxhole Brewhouse opened at Historic 313, other tenants are waiting for completion of the build out and a food distribution center is still being considered.

EDC. Renquist reported next week the EDC will host a site selector for a familiarization tour of the area; this afternoon he will tour the area with a trucking company on possible locations for a terminal; a meeting was held with local financial leaders on an angel investment fund; a motel project in Spicer is still being considered; an individual is interested in reopening the grocery store in Sunburg; Bethesda Homes has met with Southwest Minnesota Housing Partnership about purchasing its Heritage facility and changing it into workforce housing; and planning continues with the University of Minnesota on a technology showcase.

NEW BUSINESS

Digital color copier. Renquist presented a quote from Willmar Business Solutions on options for a new digital color copier (see attached).

IT WAS MOVED BY Gary Gilman, SECONDED BY Art Benson, to enter into a 63-month lease for a new Toshiba e-Studio 3055c digital color copier that includes a buyout and return of the current Toshiba e-Studio 2830c and to enter into a new maintenance/service agreement with Willmar Business Solutions.

2016 budget. Renquist reported the Joint Powers Board authorized him to submit a 2016 levy with a five percent increase to avoid using reserves (see attached). Renquist proposes keeping the 2016 budget at \$522,981. Doug Reese does not recommend going any further into the EDC's reserves and is in favor of the five percent increase. The budget needs to be completed by year end.

IT WAS MOVED BY Gary Gilman, SECONDED BY Kelly TerWisscha, to recommend to the Kandiyohi County and City of Willmar Economic Development Commission's Joint Powers Board that it approve a five percent increase for the 2016 levy and approve a 2016 budget at the same level as 2015. MOTION CARRIED.

Renquist believes the EDC is on course to spend \$522,000 in 2015 and recommended discussion of the 2016 budget begin in October. The Joint Powers Board delayed budget discussions due to Renquist's retirement and the hiring of a new director.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

[Joanna Schrupp and Steve Salzer joined the meeting.]

Inter-City Leadership Tour sponsorship. Joanna Schrupp provided background information on the upcoming Inter-City Leadership Tour to Fargo and distributed an agenda (see attached). The attendees will hear about how companies make weekly presentations to Fargo businesses and hear from Greg Tebben of Emerging Prairie. Following the promotion of Willmar's tour, St. Cloud has approached R & J Tours about a doing a similar tour. Steve Salzer informed the board that Schrupp is working with Lisa Hughes of the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) on exposure of the MinnWest Technology Campus (MWTC) to other communities and MWTC continues to develop a stronger relationship with DEED. Schrupp stated she will be attending a national women in economic development conference with Hughes. Schrupp believes the tour falls under Vision 2040's Goal 2, economic development. Approximately 22-25 people have registered for the tour at a cost of \$339 per person. Schrupp stated a nice cross section of people will be attending. Financial sponsors are the Willmar Area Development Corporation (WADC) and MWTC. Peterson stated WADC was formed to get private businesses involved in economic development and to do things that may need to be kept out of the public eye. WADC has approximately 50-60 members. Schmoll and Donna Boonstra will attend the tour on behalf of the EDC. The group hopes to make good connections and get ideas from the other communities and if it goes well, they may do another tour elsewhere.

[Schrupp and Salzer were excused from the meeting.]

Kacher requested the EDC's Funding Request Guidelines be distributed (see attached). Peterson noted this tour will build relationships and has a high potential for future payoff with possible referrals. It is important to network and get Willmar's name out to other communities. Schmoll noted the outcomes of the BRE business survey match closely with Vision 20/40's goals. The EDC will not duplicate what Vision 20/40 is doing, but will partner with them. Peterson also noted any contribution by the EDC would be relatively small compared to the good marketing exposure for the EDC and the county. Vision 20/40 is a community effort not just an organization. Reese would like the EDC to support the tour. Renquist noted much will be gained from inter-relationships and the group may pick up some knowledge from the Fargo-Moorhead area and alliances could be made. Renquist stated he would like to visit communities ranked higher than Willmar by Policom to find out what they are doing. It was noted a funding request by Vision 20/40 for the Boom Town presentation was approved at a prior meeting and this request would be a second request. Kacher stated the EDC's funding guidelines state "an organization may request funding twice in a five-year period, except in the case of an emergency," and "the second time a funding request is made, half of the original financial support may be offered and must be matched." Board members noted that by sending Schmoll on the tour, the EDC was showing its support.

IT WAS MOVED BY Donna Boonstra, SECONDED BY Rollie Boll, to sponsor the Inter-City Leadership Tour. Voice vote was taken with those voting no as follows: Art Benson, Gary Gilman, Kelly TerWisscha and Linda Kacher and those voting yes were Donna Boonstra and Rollie Boll. Motion was defeated.

Board members suggested there needs to be additional discussion and review of the EDC's funding guidelines. Kelly TerWisscha stated he did not think the loss of the EDC's contribution for the tour would have much effect and those on the trip would not have much influence on economic development in Kandiyohi County and suggested if the tour had originated from the EDC rather Vision 20/40, it may have been funded as the trip is economic development.

Executive Director search. Boonstra stated she spoke with Harlan Madsen and was informed that Sharon Klumpp of Waters & Company is compiling information from community interviews. The leaving of a key Waters & Company employee has partially contributed to a delay in the EDC's search. Another meeting date is being set between the search committee and Klumpp. Peterson thanked Boonstra and Gilman for serving on the search committee.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Agriculture and Renewable Energy Development. Schmoll reported the Ag Committee started two new subcommittees, one in regard to an Ag producer survey and one on Ag investment planning.

Broadband and Advanced Technology. Boonstra informed the board she attended Farmfest and distributed responses from the broadband panel (see attached). It is hoped that an impression was made on the state task force to move things forward in regard to rural broadband. Boonstra also attended a telephone conference with Federated Telephone Cooperative (FTC) and learned that until Swift County receives funding, FTC will not consider Kandiyohi County. A letter of intent needs to be sent on behalf of Kandiyohi County to be considered in the next round of grants. Kacher stated if FTC comes into the county, matching funds will be needed for the feasibility study. Members of the Broadband and Advanced Technology Committee will be attending a webinar this afternoon on how to utilize federal funding for broadband. Boonstra also reported on a visit by U.S. Senator Amy Klobuchar on the lack of broadband in rural Minnesota. Klobuchar intends to share the information she learned from this visit on the Senate floor. Klobuchar and U.S. Senator John Thune are working on using federal funds for broadband. Schmoll reported ongoing discussions are also being held with State Representative Dave Baker. Boonstra noted the state commented there were not enough projects to be funded under its broadband grant program, however, applicants must be telcos.

Business Retention and Expansion/Recruitment. Schmoll reported the committee is working on its mission and philosophy statements and are moving forward with a BRE survey for Atwater. At its last meeting, the committee recommended approval of a funding request by the Green Card Voices project (see attached) and felt the project met the EDC's goals. A panel of local residents recently shared their immigrant stories. The Green Card Voices project will record 15 immigrant stories from the community. Renquist noted the BRE Committee's budget has available funds for the request. Blandin Foundation has approved a \$5,000 contribution. Board members questioned if the project fits the EDC's mission and funding guidelines. Kacher voiced her opposition to the request as it does not follow the EDC's funding guidelines. Art Benson recommended the committee review the full budget of the project as it appears high.

IT WAS MOVED BY Rollie Boll, SECONDED BY Art Benson, to approve \$2,000 for the Green Card Voices project. MOTION CARRIED.

Kacher recommended these types of projects be initiated by the EDC rather than other organizations, if funding will be requested of the EDC.

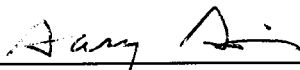
Finance. Renquist reported the committee did not have a quorum, but there were no issues on which to vote. Renquist provided the committee with an update on the EDC's goals and objectives and how they fit with the committee. Renquist tasked the committee with discovering what other communities are doing differently from Willmar and give the county a unique financing advantage over its competitors.

Marketing and Public Relations. Schmoll reported the last meeting focused on the website and the committee's next meeting will be a website working session with a goal of completing it by November 1. Schmoll has also been working with Betsy Bonnema of REDstar Creative on EDC marketing materials.

Leisure Travel. Boonstra reported the committee met at the Old Log Church last month and this week at County Park No. 5 on Green Lake. Discussion included renaming the county parks according to the lakes rather than numbers and receiving updates on marketing and calendar of events.

NEXT MEETING—The next board meeting is **11:00 a.m., Thursday, October 8, 2015**, in the EDC's board room.

ADJOURNMENT—There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 1:26 p.m.



Gary Gilman, Secretary

APPROVED: 10/8/2015



Robert Carlson, President



520 Business Hwy. 71 NE.
Willmar, MN 56201
Direct: 877-625-8040
320-214-7530
Fax: 320-214-7855

September 8 2015

Kandiyohi County Economic Development Commission

Willmar MN 56201

REQUESTED PRICING FOR TOSHIBA DIGITAL COLOR COPIER

Toshiba e-Studio 3055c

- 30 PPM Printing/Copies In Black
- 30PPM Printing /Copies In Color
- First Copy Speed – 6.5Seconds In Black; 8.4 Seconds In Color
- 100 Sheet Reversing Automatic Document Feeder (**Scans Speed - 57 SCM**)
- (2) 250 Sheet Universal Paper Trays (Bond to 140 lb index)
- 100 Sheet Bypass (Bond to 100 lbs cover)
- Fax
- Network Printing – Includes Private, Proof & Scheduled Printing
- Fax and Scan-to-File (Color Scanning); FTP; Email; e-Filing; USB
- 2000 sheet tray
- Automatic Paper Selection
- Automatic Magnification Selection (Reduction & Enlargement)
- 600 x 1200 dpi Laser Print Resolution – Uses patented e-Fine toner & developer, overall image quality is highly improved, text is better, details in graphics and photos is razor sharp, and color gamut has been extended to render richer blues and redder reds.
- **Overwrite Data Kit** - Completely erases all copy/print/scan/fax data that is temporarily written to the hard disk during job processing ensuring that information remains confidential and is not openly exposed.
- **Self-Encrypting HDD** – If HDD is removed and installed elsewhere, all data is completely invalidated.
- 80 GB HD - Allows storage of important company documents. Users are able to store, copy, print, fax and scan documents to the hard drive retrieving from either the control panel or the network.
- Access codes for monitoring and controlling black and color copies.
- **ID Card Copy – Makes copying both sides from ID's & checks very easy.**
- **Color 9" inch LCD Touch Panel**

Purchase price on a new Toshiba 3055c copier \$ 6544.00

Lease 63 months \$ 125.00 per month FMV

Includes buyout and return of Toshiba 2830c Buy out to own on Toshiba \$1950.00

- **Service** is to be billed monthly at \$35.00 includes 3250 copies excess \$ 0.01 copy. Color is to be billed at \$.060 per copy. This includes all parts, labor, travel time, drum, developer and **toner**.

Sincerely,

Bill Dale
Copier Business Solutions



Kandiyohi County & City of Willmar
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

To: City of Willmar
From: Steve Renquist
Date: September 10, 2015
RE: Proposed Kandiyohi County and City of Willmar
Economic Development Commission (EDC) Levy (2016)

2015 EDC Levy:	\$455,000
2016 Proposed Levy	\$477,750

Dollar increase:	\$ 22,750
Percentage increase:	5%

2015 Budget	\$522,981
2016 Draft Budget	\$522,981

Mt recommendation to the EDC Joint Powers Board is to
Reduce the reliance on EDC undesignated reserves in 2016:
2015 budgetary supplement from reserve fund: \$ 46,082
Remaining EDC unreserved funds \$152,269
2016 predicted budgetary supplement \$ 23,332



InterCity Leadership Tour October 6 – 7, 2015

Day 1: October 6

10:00am Registration/Gathering Time @ Chamber office

10:20am Board the motor coach/Leave for Fargo/Moorhead

**11:45am Break enroute. Box lunches distributed and eat on bus.
Great Conversation and networking.**

1:15pm Arrive Fargo/West Fargo/Moorhead

Check out downtown area via walking downtown shops:

- ***Ecce Art Gallery*** - stop in and check it out.
Recommended by Greg Tehven
- ***Unglued*** - stop in. Recommended by Greg Tehven
- ***Zandbroz Variety*** – eclectic shopping with one of a kind book section
- ***Everett's Barber Shop*** – retro/vintage
- ***Pinch & Pour*** – gourmet olive oils, etc
- ***Boiler Room*** – entrepreneurial idea for a bar in basement of a downtown building in the boiler room
- ***Sandy's Donut's*** - Joanna's favorite

2:30pm *Carol Widman's Candy Company* for an after lunch “dessert” option or gift buying (Home of the famous Chippers - hand dipped chocolate covered potato chips).

2:45pm Arrive Fargo/Moorhead/West Fargo Convention and Visitor's Bureau for tour of the CVB and City – Charley Johnson/CVB

4:30pm Check-in at hotel and freshen for dinner

**5:30pm Leave for dinner with speaker
Bill Marcil Jr. – President, CEO and Publisher of Forum
Communications**

**8:30pm Return to hotel for relax time/networking time/free time
around the fire pit area with cash bar (bring your Home2
Suites mug for a free keg beer fill or ½ price bar beverage)**

Day 2: October 7

6:00am –

8:15am Breakfast bar available at hotel

8:30am Board motor coach for 1 Million Cup.

10:45 Emerging Prairie/Greg Tehven conversation

**11:45am Board motor coach for lunch
Economic development Commission
Chamber of Commerce**

2:00pm Brewery tour/tasting

3:00pm Board motor coach to return to Willmar



FUNDING REQUEST GUIDELINES

1. All requests for funding through the Kandiyohi County and City of Willmar Economic Development Commission (EDC) must be by written application in a form that can be obtained from the EDC Office, 333 Litchfield Avenue SW, Suite 100, P.O. Box 1783, Willmar, MN 56201, telephone 320-235-7370, edc@kandiyohi.com, along with a proposal and project budget.
2. Once a funding application is received by the EDC, an EDC staff member will review the application with the applicant and, if appropriate, forward the request to an EDC standing committee for consideration.
3. Funds contributed by the EDC must be matched dollar-for-dollar by funds from the requesting organization making the application, which funds may be raised through other organizations.
4. Applications, if approved, may receive the full funding requested or a portion thereof as determined by an EDC standing committee or the EDC Joint Operations Board.
5. An organization may request funding twice in a five-year period, except in the case of an emergency, which will be determined by the EDC Joint Operations Board. The second time a funding request is made, half of the original financial support may be offered and must be matched.
6. Applications will be assessed on the following basis:
 - a. Does the application relate to an EDC standing committee's goals and the EDC's goals and overall mission?
 - b. Does the application detail the use of the funds requested?
 - c. Does the request duplicate efforts and work already being done by another entity?
 - d. Does the request show significant evidence of cooperation and collaboration with other entities?
 - e. Is the request within the reviewing committee's budget limits or the EDC's community contribution line item?
7. If the above criteria can be positively answered and an EDC standing committee approves the funding request by a majority vote, the committee's recommendation will be presented to the EDC Joint Operations Board for consideration at its next monthly meeting.
8. If the request is for more than an EDC standing committee's budget allows and the committee approves the request, the committee may request the EDC Joint Operations Board to allocate additional funds.
9. All funding requests for tourism-related activities will be forwarded to the Willmar Lakes Area Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB) for consideration and determination.
10. If the CVB deems the funding request appropriate, the CVB may make an additional request for funding from the EDC to fund unique tourism-related events. If approved by the EDC Joint Operations Board, additional funds will be transferred to the CVB and the CVB will be responsible for how those monies are spent.

11. If a funding request is not appropriate to be referred to an EDC standing committee, EDC staff will review the funding request and, if deemed appropriate, present it to the EDC Joint Operations Board for consideration at its next monthly meeting.
12. In no event, will an approved funding request be used to fund personnel unless the request is for a feasibility study.
13. If a request is for a one-time unique request, the EDC Joint Operations Board may consider using its reserve funds.

Revised by EDC Joint Operations Board 8/14/2014
Adopted by EDC Joint Operations Board 3/8/2012
Ratified by EDC Joint Powers Board 4/26/2012

Farm Fest 2015 - Broadband Day

Lisa Hughes, Department of Employment and Economic Development

“Broadband affects where people want to live and where businesses choose to locate.”

Need broadband with adequate speeds to increase “brain gain” (the 30 to 49 year olds that return to small towns after having lived in the metro areas since graduating from high school).

“83 million millennials have taken over the workforce and for them, broadband is a way of life.”

“All small communities struggle. . . . If we do not get this done, we move further behind.”

Dave Glehar of SpecSys

Currently using 8 different options for internet connection – need fiber optics

“In an environment where it is increasingly difficult to keep good employees, we need high speed internet to compete in securing and retaining employees.”

Kent Kelly, General Manager of Fortune Transportation

“Without the options we located and implemented for high speed internet, we would have simply moved our company elsewhere”

Paul Lanoue, Farm Business Management Instructor at Mn West Technology Campus

T1 lines costing farmers \$500 per month. To have ROI they need connection – need to transfer data, get information to those who can interpret the data.

Every farmer creates a \$1 million impact on the economy

Getting basic coverage to everyone is most important.

Jason O’Flanagan, North American Field Marketing and Sales Support Manager for Advanced Technologies Solutions Group FUSE Technologies

“FCC has money for rural America but the rules are much too difficult.”

95% of lines are in 35% of the land mass. (I believe he was referring to lack of lines in rural- agricultural areas) yet, only the army has higher technology data requirements than precision agriculture technologies today.

Jerry Johnson, Founder & CEO, Superior Edge

Big Data – Farm Equipment producing and using big data and drone generated data – 160 acre field can produce 1000 images. Smarter machines with more sensors equal an urgent need for high speed internet.

Mike Macrie, Sr. Vice President and Chief Information Officer Land O Lakes

Can analyze all U.S. farmland. A program was purchased from FRANLE. Large files with imagery need high speed internet to make it work.



Funding Request

\$2,000 for the event: Green Card Voices

The fiscal host is the Willmar Multi-cultural Business Center

Project planned by Vision 2040, Goal 1, Attracting and Retaining Newcomers,
SubCommittee: Improving Acceptance of Immigrants

Information from the Green Card Voices Planning Committee

What is the community improvement project you are working on?

Attracting and Retaining Newcomers to Willmar with a specific goal of improving acceptance of immigrants living in Willmar and their families. See below for specific goals.

Describe how funds will be used.

The funds will be used to partner with Green Card Voices of Minneapolis to host a traveling exhibit of immigrant stories. In addition, a kickoff event will feature three local immigrants and their personal story of coming to the US and selecting Willmar as home. Lastly, the project would allow for 10-15 Willmar immigrants to be in a video that will be showcased in the community through partnerships with schools, community clubs, churches, public libraries and by Green Card Voices.

Total budget

13,800

The funds will be used to record local immigrant stories following the proven format of Green Card Voices. These videos and immigrant photos will be available in the community through partnerships such as Pioneerland Public Library, Kandiyohi County Historical Society, Willmar Arts Council, Willmar Public schools, businesses and organizations. The intent is to make the videos and exhibit available to neighboring school districts, elected officials and online for public viewing on demand. Willmar immigrant stories will also become part of the Green Card Voices traveling exhibit collection. A reception and program will be held following the completion of the videos. A initial kickoff exhibit using GCV current immigrant stories is being held on July 30, 2015.

Amount requested from all sources and description

\$5000 Blandin Foundation (pending)

\$3000 Vision 2040 (Kickoff Exhibit Reception, GCV Facilitation and 2 videos secured)

\$600 Vision 2040 (in-kind marketing secured)

\$2000 Kandiyohi County and City of Willmar Economic Development Commission (pending)

\$1000 Affiliated Community Medical Center (pending)

\$2000 City of Willmar and neighboring communities and business sponsors (pending)

\$200 Thrivent (pending)

Connie's Notes:

The 2014-2015 Kandiyohi County Business Retention & Expansion Visitation Program revealed the businesses leaders' concern that we as a community, have a long way to go to be perceived as a community that embraces the diversity that exists. Specific findings include:

Diversity. We have opportunities for business development, growth and an increased workforce because of our immigrant base and history. There is a great possibility for continued increase in immigration of different cultural groups to the Willmar area. Although ethnic diversity is seen as a strength in Kandiyohi County by most of the business leaders, there is much work to be done to become a community that is perceived as embracing diversity. Many residents currently see the immigration issue as a threat and will continue to do so unless we work diligently to understand the culture and history of our immigrant populations, consistently provide culturally appropriate services, use language and culture specific processes in our workplaces and schools, hire certified interpreters to conduct business when needed and become accepting of the differences that exist in our community.

Leadership. Comments in the data report also indicate concern over community leaders and school personnel being against diversity and closed to engaging in processes that can be understood and followed by new immigrants.

This project has potential to make an impact for our community and for our businesses as it directly tackles the issues identified in the BRE Visitation program.

What outcomes do you expect to accomplish?

1. Educate Willmar community on immigrants
2. Increase cultural awareness and understanding
3. Build common ground between existing and new residents
4. Help Willmar positively view immigrants and the benefits and opportunities that various cultural backgrounds bring to the community.
5. Empower immigrants and their children to set goals and be involved in the community.

Since this fits as a project for the EDC, especially in response to our BRE Visitation Program, I am proposing that the Kandiyohi County and City of Willmar Economic Development Commission invest \$2,000 toward the costs of the project plus assistance with marketing the event. The funds could come from our countywide development budgeted dollars (\$5,000 remains of \$6,000 budgeted).

Please consider this request.

Connie Schmoll

Connie Schmoll
Business Development Specialist