



EAST CENTRAL REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

December 20, 2021
The Grand Event Center
2025 Rowland Rd.
Mora, MN 55051

Commission Members Present:

Bob Bollenbeck - Kanabec Co. Public Interest
Tish Carlson – Isanti Co. Municipalities
Loren Davis - Isanti Co. Public Interest
Jeanette Kester - Pine Co. Public Interest
Tom Lawlor – Chisago Co. Public Interest
Jeremy Miller – Kanabec Co. Municipalities
Scott Moe - Northern School Boards
Ben Montzka- Chisago Co. Commissioner
Genny Reynolds – Mille Lacs Co. Commissioner
Kevin Stenson-Chisago Co. Municipalities
Jim Swenson - City of North Branch
Glen Williamson-Pine Co. Townships

Staff Present:

Bob Voss - Executive Director
Ashely Eckdahl – Community Development
Brenda Hughley - Finance Officer
Karen Onan - Community Development
Trish Rydlund - Office Manager
Penny Simonsen – Transportation
Michelle Thomas – Economic Resiliency Coord.
Jordan Zeller, Economic Development Director

Commission Members Absent:

Carolyn Cagle – Chisago Co. Townships
Dave Dillan – Mille Lacs Co. Municipalities
Carla Dunkley- Tribal Representative
Linda Evans - Mille Lacs Co. Public Interest
Richard Hansen - Isanti Co. Townships
Robert Hoefert, Mille Lacs Co. Townships
Dave Patenaude -Kanabec Co. Townships
Peter Spartz – Pine Co. Municipalities
Terry Turnquist-Isanti Co. Commissioner
JJ Waldhalm, Pine Co. Commissioner

Others Present:

Doug Host, CliftonLarsenAllen CPA
Eric Smedsrud, CliftonLarsenAllen CPA
Jill Brown, Northern Lights Express Rail

1. **WELCOME:** Chairman Montzka called the meeting of the East Central Regional Development Commission to order at 7:00 p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

A moment of silence was held in remembrance of Gene Anderson, Kanabec County Commissioner, who passed away December 8th.

2. **AGENDA APPROVAL:** Moe moved to approve the agenda as presented. Williamson seconded - motion carried.
3. **MINUTES APPROVAL:** Lawlor moved to approve the minutes of the October 25, 2021 meeting. Stenson seconded- motion carried.
4. **PRESENTATION ON FY 2020-2021 YEAR END AUDIT:** CliftonLarsonAllen LLP conducted the field work for the FY2021 year-end audit. For the first time ever, the ECRDC received over \$750,000 in federal grant funds. Since the ECRDC received these funds, there needed to be a single audit conducted which required more federal testing to be done. Doug Host and Eric Smedsrud presented the results of the audit which indicated: \$135,699 increase in the Commission's General Fund balance from \$285,382 to \$421,081, increase of \$17,284 increase in the Historic EDA Revolving Loan Fund balance from \$382,511 to \$399,795 and the new Covid EDA Revolving Loan Fund balance of \$384,045. Deficiencies were noted. Motioned by Lawlor to approve to the FY21 audit as presented. Williamson seconded – motion carried.
5. **NORTHERN LIGHTS EXPRESS RAIL UPDATE:** Jill Brown, Public Engagement contractor with the NLX


Passenger Rail Alliance, gave a presentation on the NLX. This project will use 152 miles of existing BNSF Railway Tracks. This will run from Target Field Station to Duluth. Station stops would be in Coon Rapids, Cambridge, Hinckley, and Superior. They are looking at 4 round-trips per day at 2.5 hours each way. A one-way ticket fare would be about \$30. Motioned by Stenson to write a letter of support for the NLX project. Williamson seconded – motion carried.

6. **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT:** Executive Director Voss provided his report and brought forth the following action items:
 - a. Onan Performance Review: Based on a favorable performance appraisal Moe moved to approve a one-step increase from Pay Grade D Step 6, \$57,436, to Pay Grade D Step 7, \$59,007, effective January 16, 2022 for Karen Onan. Stenson seconded – motion carried.
 - b. ARPA Tourism Grant Authorization: Staff are developing an application to EDA for a tourism grant under the federal ARPA program. Total cost of the 3-year project would be approximately \$450,000. This would include a \$90,000 (20%) match from the ECRDC over the three years. Motioned by Kester to authorize application for the ARPA Tourism grant. Williamson seconded – motion carried.
7. **TREASURERS REPORT:** The Board reviewed the October and November 2021 Treasurer's report. Reynolds moved to approve the Treasurer's Report to include the checks written #11089 through #11129 along with ACH payments October 1 through November 30, 2021. Stenson seconded - motion carried. General Journals were reviewed and approved for the period October 1 through November 30, 2021.
8. **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT UPDATE:** Jordan Zeller reported on the following items:
 - a. Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Annual Update: The CEDS Strategy Committee undertook a survey of local units of government to learn about future economic development related plans, the current state of their infrastructure, and community / economic development initiatives. The EDA requires the annual update be approved by the ECRDC Board. Davis moved to approve the CEDS annual update. Seconded by Bollenbeck – motion carried.
 - b. Barnstorming Visits: Staff and economic development partners have been making “Barnstorming” visits to banks, credit unions, and city halls in the region this fall.
 - c. EDA Grant Opportunities: The U.S. Dept. of Commerce / Economic Development Administration (EDA) received \$3 billion from the 2021 American Rescue Plan Act, with much of that available for grants for economic development projects. There are currently three applications into EDA from our region, one each from the City of Princeton, the City of Isle and Pine Technical College in Pine City. We are working with several other potential applicants.
9. **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT RESILIENCY UPDATE:** Michelle Thomas reported on the following items:
 - a. COVID-19 Revolving Loan Fund Activity: There will be a Covid RLF meeting on December 22nd to review two new loans both for \$30,000 each. One in Chisago County and the other in Isanti County. If both are approved there will be \$16,450 remaining to loan out before June 30, 2022.
 - b. East Central Energy Broadband: On November 19, the ECE Board of Directors voted to move forward with developing a plan for a full fiber to the home project. A completed feasibility study has indicated that with the appropriate funding from grants and other sources, it is reasonable for ECE to provide fiber throughout their service territory. ECE will be spending the next few months putting together a comprehensive plan for the businesses and residents in their 14-county service territory. Upon completion, the board will make a final determination on the overall project. The plan will be designed based on fiber only and will lay out a phased approach for a project that could cost as much as \$300M.
 - c. Pine County Childcare Program: First Children's Finance is compiling data collected during phase one of this childcare project. Over 200 Pine County parents and 36 businesses participated in the survey and 18 providers were interviewed.

10. **TRANSPORTATION:** Penny Simonsen reported on the following funding opportunities:
- Surface Grants:** All five counties will be submitting grants for the Surface Grants with a deadline of January 3, 2022. The Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) will be meeting February 10th to score and prioritize District 3 applications. The Integration meeting for Metro District is set for January 25th in Lindstrom.
 - US Bike Route 41 Review:** MnDOT has request that the ECRDC to review and write a report on different things that have been happening along the route. The bike route runs through Chisago and Pine counties.
 - Active Transportation Funding:** Active Transportation is defined as, "Using human-powered means of travel to get from one place to another, which includes walking, bicycling, and the use of mobility assistive devices; and may also incorporate other human-scale modes like electric powered, electric-assisted, or micro mobility devices such as e-bikes and e-scooters."

This is State funding and has no match requirements and is available to non-profits. Planning assistance solicitations will begin in early 2022 and additional solicitations in Fall 2022.

11. **REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION COORDINATION COUNCIL (ECRTCC):** Ashley Eckdahl and Karen Onan reported on the following items:
- Interviews are being aired on KBEK 95.5 radio every other Friday at 8:45 a.m. In January, Sue Siemers, Minnesota Dept. of Transportation, will be speaking on the 5310 Bus program and Natalie Matthewson and Wendy Galanius, Central MN Council on Aging, will be talking about transportation for seniors. All previous interviews can be listened to on the East Central Transit website, www.eastcentraltransit.com.
 - Continued work on the Local Human Services Transit Coordination Plan.
 - Continued work with Arrowhead Transit on the survey to redetermine the transit needs in Isanti and Chisago counties.
 - Working on marketing strategies starting with Timber Trails.
12. **ADJOURNMENT:** Chairman Montzka announced the next meeting will tentatively be in person at the ECRDC office on February 28, 2022 at 7:00 p.m. Davis moved to adjourn the regular meeting of the ECRDC. Carlson seconded- motion carried.



Robert L. Voss, Executive Director



Ben Montzka, Chairman