



## EAST CENTRAL REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

December 15, 2025

100 Park Street South

Mora, MN 55051

### Commission Members Present:

Tom Anderson – Isanti Co. Townships  
Wallace Bengston – Isanti Co. Public Interest  
Alan Duff – Isanti Co. Commissioner  
Jack Edmonds – Mille Lacs Co. Public Interest  
Steve Hallan, Pine Co. Commissioner  
Robert Hoefert, Mille Lacs Co. Townships  
Shelly Johnson – Southern School Boards  
Scott Moe - Northern School Boards  
Ben Montzka- Chisago Co. Commissioner  
Rick Olseen, Chisago Co. Public Interest  
Dave Patenaude -Kanabec Co. Townships  
Julena Rahier – Pine Co. Municipalities  
Peter Ripka – Kanabec Co. Commissioner  
Kevin Schieber - City of North Branch  
Dave Waldoch – Chisago Co. Municipalities  
Glen Williamson - Pine Co. Townships  
Dave Youngquist – Kanabec Co. Municipalities

### Commission Members Absent:

Dave Dillan – Mille Lacs Co. Municipalities  
Bruce Fitzwater – Chisago Co. Townships  
Nate George – Isanti Co. Municipalities  
Jeannette Kester - Pine Co. Public Interest  
Genny Reynolds – Mille Lacs Co. Commissioner  
Sara Treiber – Kanabec Co. Public Interest

### Others Present:

Doug Host – CliftonLarsonAllen LLP

### Staff Present:

Bob Voss - Executive Director  
Nicole Klosner - Regional Dev. & Grant Specialist  
Darcy Rylander – Finance Director  
Trish Rydlund - Office Manager  
Michelle Thomas – Community Development Planner  
Jordan Zeller – Economic Development Planner

- A. **WELCOME:** Chairman Montzka called the East Central Regional Development Commission meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited. At this time, Chairman Montzka presented a plaque in recognition of Executive Director Voss on his retirement and 25 years of service to Region 7E.
- B. **AGENDA APPROVAL:** Ripka moved to approve the agenda. Moe seconded - motion carried.
- C. **MINUTES APPROVAL:** Ripka moved to approve the minutes of the October 27, 2025, meeting. Duff seconded the motion. Motion carried.
- D. **FY 2025 AGENCY-WIDE AUDIT PRESENTATION:** Doug Host of CliftonLarsonAllen LLC presented the results of the FY 2025 agency-wide year end audit. CLA noted no significant difficulties during the audit and full cooperation from staff. No significant deficiencies were noted. The audit reflected an increase in the Commission's fund balance of \$74,182, from \$535,036 to \$609,218, and an increase of \$13,271 in Revolving Loan Fund balances. Hoefert moved to accept the FY 2025 single and year-end audit as presented. Hallan seconded. Motion carried.
- E. **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT:** Executive Director Voss brought before the Commission the following items:
1. Executive Director Retirement: Executive Director Voss announced that after 25 years of service with the ECRDC, he will be retiring effective January 15, 2026. Motion by Olseen to accept, with regrets, the retirement of Bob Voss effective January 15, 2026. Seconded by Waldoch. Motion carried.
  2. All-Staff Retreat: Minnesota Association of Development Organizations (MADO) will be hosting and All-Staff retreat for April 29 through May 1, 2026 using funds through the McKnight Foundation.

3. Commission Vacancies: The Pine County Municipalities seat on the Commission has been filled by Sandstone Council Member Julena Rahier. The Pine County Board recently appointed Steve Hallen to replace JJ Waldhalm as their representative. We have received no further word from the Mille Lacs Band regarding the tribal government vacancy but will continue those efforts as well.

F. **PERSONNEL & BUDGET (P&B) COMMITTEE REPORT**: The P&B Committee has met several times since the last Commission meeting. Glen Williamson presented the P&B Committee report.

1. Personnel Policy Change – Paid Family Medical Leave (PFML): In accordance with the new Minnesota Paid Family and Medical Leave (PFML) policy under Statute Chapter 268.B, effective January 1, 2026, the ECRDC updated its Personnel Policies to reflect these changes. Motion by Olseen to approve the Personnel Policy revisions. Seconded by Youngquist. Motion carried.
2. Executive Director Search: The Search Committee interviewed five candidates on December 6 and recommended Natalie Koerber for the position at a starting salary of \$112,865.29 (Pay Grade 9, Step 7) with a proposed start date of January 5, 2026. A hiring letter including salary and benefits will be sent. Hoefert moved that the hiring letter be reviewed by Dan Blake, ECRDC attorney, prior to being sent. Duff seconded the motion. Motion carried.

It was noted that if Ms. Koerber does not accept the offer, the Personnel & Budget Committee will meet to consider a counteroffer. If the counteroffer is not accepted, an emergency meeting of the full Commission will be called.

Hoefert moved, following legal review, Chairman Montzka be authorized to sign the hiring letter and that Executive Director Voss contact Ms. Koerber regarding the offer. Williamson seconded the motion. Motion carried.

G. **TREASURERS REPORT**:

1. October and November 2025 Treasurer's Report: The October and November 2025 Treasurer's Reports was reviewed. Williamson moved to approve the Treasurer's Reports, including checks #12262 through #12305 and ACH payments for October and November 2025. Waldoch seconded – motion carried. The General Journals for October and November 2025 were also reviewed and approved.

H. **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT UPDATE**: Jordan Zeller reported on following items:

1. Revolving Loan Fund: The RLF approved a \$67,500 loan, in conjunction with Frandsen Bank in Braham, to Braham Country Floral & Coffee on November 6. A bankruptcy notice was received for borrower Mando's Pet Depot (Cambridge) with an outstanding balance of approximately \$52,418.16. Legal counsel has been contacted and proceedings are pending. Two new RLF applications have been received and a meeting is being scheduled.
2. Federal EDA rating: The ECRDC was notified by the Federal EDA that our RLF program received and "A" rating for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025. This score is based on a variety of factors including loan portfolio performance, reporting, and administration.

I. **REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION COORDINATION COUNCIL (ECRTCC)**: Michelle Thomas reported on the following:

1. MNDOT Transportation App: At the November 13 ECRTCC Advisory Board meeting, MnDOT provided updates on the Greater Minnesota Transit Plan. Riders in the region are expected to access all public transit agencies through a single Transit App by summer 2026.
2. Age Friendly Transportation Action Team: Staff have taken on the rolls of Co-Chairs of the Age Friendly Transportation Action Team. This committee meets monthly to work on the Transportation Action Plan.

3. Non-Emergency Medical Transportation: This topic is being addressed by Center for Transportation Studies (CTS). The CTS is interested in learning where they can be of service to assist with legislative action to prevent a negative impact to NEMT services in MN.

J. **COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**: Michelle Thomas reported on the following items:

1. Entrepreneurship Workshop Series – 2026 Planning: The City of Isanti, North 65 Chamber of Commerce, and the ECRDC are collaborating to plan and deliver monthly entrepreneurship workshop throughout 2026. The initiative aims to strengthen the local business ecosystem by providing accessible, practical training for new and existing entrepreneurs.

The proposed workshop topics for 2026 include:

- *Idea to Execution: What Problem Does Your Business Solve?*
  - *How to Write a Business Plan (That You'll Actually Use)*
  - *Financing Your Business: Boots & Beyond*
  - *The Business Structure: Legal Steps to Legitimacy*
  - *Basic Bookkeeping & Budgeting for the Non-Accountant*
  - *Pricing Your Product or Service (Profit 101)*
  - *Simple Systems: Time Management & Productivity Tools*
  - *Hiring Your First Employee/Contractor: Rules of the Road*
  - *Marketing on Shoestring: Local and Low-Cost Tactics*
  - *Beginner Digital Marketing: Website, Social, & Reviews*
  - *Customer Service That Keeps Them Coming Back*
  - *Protecting Your Idea: Trademarks, Copyrights, & Patents*
2. Toward Zero Deaths (TZD) Grant: Mille Lacs County TZD partners organized a *Know Your Limit* event on December 11 from 5–9 p.m. at Mugg's of Mille Lacs. This event had was designed to engage community members in a hands-on, educational experience focused on impaired-driving prevention. Seventy-five attendees had the opportunity to voluntarily check their blood alcohol concentration (BAC) to better understand how alcohol consumption affects impairment levels and decision-making. Law enforcement and TZD partners were on site to provide information, answer questions, and share safety resources.
  3. Child Care Facility Exploration: Staff evaluated two potential child care sites in Onamia: Crosier Fathers and Brothers facility and a residential property, to assess feasibility for licensed operations.

K. **TRANSPORTATION UPDATE**: Michelle Thomas reported on the following:

1. Finlayson Comprehensive Plan: The City of Finlayson's comprehensive plan update is completed. We appreciate the opportunity to do this type of work and the funding from Blandin Foundation to support it.
2. Historic Bluff Country Scenic Byway (HBCSB) Corridor Management Plan: MnDOT has asked the ECRDC to assist with conducting an update to the Historic Bluff Country Scenic Byway (HBCSB) Corridor Management Plan. The planning contract totals \$125,000 with completion required by June 2026.

L. **CLIMATE AND ENERGY (C&E)**: Nicole Klosner reported on the following:

1. Energy Audits: Energy audits have been completed for the John Wright Building (Sandstone), Rush City High School/Elementary school, Pine City High School/Elementary School and Sturgeon Lake City Hall.
2. Technical Assistance: Staff met with Isanti County regarding a technology purchase upgrade as well as Chisago County regarding energy Efficiency Conservation Block Grant.

M. **ADJOURNMENT**: Chairman Montzka announced the next meeting will be December 15, 2025, at the ECRDC offices. Olseen moved to adjourn the meeting. Duff seconded- motion carried.



Natalie Koerber, Executive Director



Ben Montzka, Chairman