

KANDIYOHI COUNTY AND CITY OF WILLMAR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION (EDC)
JOINT OPERATIONS BOARD OF DIRECTORS (OB)
BUSINESS RETENTION & EXPANSION/RECRUITMENT (BRE/R) COMMITTEE
MINUTES
August 2, 2006
Board Room, Heritage Bank, N.A., Willmar

Present: Bev Dougherty, Ron Erpelding, Gary Geiger, Bruce Peterson, Diane Schulte and Jean Spaulding

Guest: Ken Warner, Willmar Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce

Staff: Steven Renquist, Executive Director

Secretarial: Jodie Heuring, Legal & Administrative Assistants, Inc. (LAA)

Co-Chairperson Ron Erpelding called the meeting to order at approximately 10:35 a.m.

MINUTES—

IT WAS MOVED BY Diane Schulte, SECONDED BY Bruce Peterson, to approve the minutes of the May 3 and June 7, 2006, meetings. MOTION CARRIED.

Erpelding introduced and welcomed Ken Warner, president of the Willmar Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce (WLACC).

Confidential Professional Job Openings/Applicants. Erpelding provided a brief background of discussions held about how to handle confidential professional job openings/applicants. Warner stated a job site is something he has discussed with Bruce Peterson and Steve Renquist for quite some time as comments have been made to each of them through business contacts. With respect to DEED and area employment agencies, the jobs included on a new site would be executive jobs that businesses are not comfortable posting with other entities; it is not meant to be competitive with these agencies or offend them. It is intended to be a site where area economic development professionals can compile information, keep it confidential and for their own use to make connections; a database to work with those connections and a tool for businesses. Warner visited with Russ Bennett about possibilities of creating such a secure site. Warner distributed a copy of a possible site layout prepared by Bennett's staff (see copy attached to the original minutes), which he is confident will be kept confidential as this will be a work in progress. The information would reside on Bennett's server. Warner stated he proposes Renquist, Peterson, Warner and Jean Spaulding have access to the site. Warner stated he and these economic development professionals receive various contact information, but they do not always share the information and opportunities may be missed. Discussion was held about entering information into the system and accessing it. Concerns or fears were expressed about keeping it confidential. It was suggested to create the site so Renquist, Peterson, Spaulding and Warner could all input data and access the page relating to job category showing the number of jobs available and persons seeking such jobs; Warner would be the only one who could access the entire site. It is important to impress upon the businesses or people contacting these individuals to place their information on this site that they notify Warner of any changes in order for him to keep the database up to date. Diane Schulte suggested legal advice be sought to insure all legalities are covered relating to this

confidential information. Bev Dougherty stated the Willmar Design Center is looking for new specialty shops for downtown Willmar and asked if this opportunity could be reflected on this site also. All agree that from an employment standpoint, this site would be a spousal network and it is also for a company that may be looking at expanding, but wants to find a particular person prior to deciding when the expansion will take place. It was emphasized that the committee intends to make the site the best it can and to make it a non-compete site. The committee voiced its appreciation to the WLACC to undertake this project as it benefits the entire community. It was suggested to allocate \$500 a year to facilitate this process.

An invitation would be extended to area major employers that recruit, including schools and bank CEOs. It was suggested the human resources person not be contacted, but rather the CEO. As a courtesy, it was suggested Warner talk with the area employment agencies stating it is expected these jobs would be of an executive level that probably would not go to their agency any way and it is intended to fill a void in the community. This project would not be taken to the public level, but would be communicated by word-of-mouth.

The committee's consensus was to:

- 1. Pursue with the WLACC president the development of a system to identify and communicate employment opportunities for professional spouses as well as industries or businesses thinking of expanding.**
- 2. Recommend the WLACC president seek legal counsel regarding this idea and the BRE/R compensate the WLACC for costs incurred to be approved by the BRE/R Committee.**
- 3. Provide courtesy information on the initiative to area employment entities.**
- 4. Allow only the Willmar Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce President access to the entire system.**
- 5. Allow access to economic development professionals within Kandiyohi County to input information and access the job category page.**
- 6. Look into a compensation amount from the BRE/R Committee's budget annually, if the decision is made to go ahead.**

This committee recognizes it is critical to its success that companies working with the system can be assured the information provided is extremely confidential. It was suggested a connection be made with regional economic development professionals within a 30-50 mile radius about this idea.

Grow Minnesota Visits. Warner stated Grow Minnesota! was started in 2003 by the Minnesota Chamber in partnership with 27 local and regional chambers of commerce; that number has grown to 38. This is an effort to visit businesses and retain and grow businesses already located in Minnesota communities; Warner distributed a handout (see copy attached to the original minutes). The objective is to meet CEO to CEO and thank them for doing business in Minnesota and Willmar/Kandiyohi County and inquire if there are any issues the chamber can help with, expansion plans and anything else they need assistance with. The biggest challenge has been to get an appointment; some tend to be very defensive thinking something is wanted of them. Warner stated that during the first year, the most embarrassing thing learned was that in the past, no one had walked in and thanked them for doing business here and some expressed feelings that the economic development professionals were so busy bringing in new business they did not care about those that were here. Warner gave examples of expansion issues learned during a couple visits. The committee that makes these visits meets at 8 a.m., the second Tuesday of each month (the economic development professionals are invited to attend) to share any issues learned during the visits and discuss what is going on around the community that may help develop a list for future visits.

A problem observed about 5-10 years ago was the absence of a trust relationship between professionals, i.e., county and cities; we are fortunate to have developed a trust relationship here now. What validates the whole program is the follow through, i.e., find out the issue and the professionals make a visit right away to address them. Warner would like to see more women CEOs involved in the visits; currently, there is only one woman involved. Warner indicated they communicate with local DEED representatives so they are not visiting the same businesses and more area is covered. The process is not to step on toes; it is to find out the information and make connections to solve issues. Schulte stated DEED representatives meet with the CEOs of businesses and DEED appreciates the involvement by other professionals visiting area businesses.

Warner stated they go out in teams of two (one take notes), they mail the data acquired to WLACC and then it goes into a database at the Minnesota Chamber and is shared with DEED; an annual report is produced (see copy attached to the minutes). Warner stated additional survey questions can be added for a specific area, i.e., downtown Willmar. They are in the process of completing their visits with downtown businesses and the composite will be shared with the Willmar Design Center.

Erpelding stated if elected officials were present, this dialogue would reassure them that in our county all agencies are communicating, dialogue is taking place and services are not being duplicated.

Another benefit of Grow Minnesota! is when the State of Minnesota receives a request by a business looking for a particular building, all participants receive that information and Warner forwards it to area economic development professionals. We all need to do a better job of thanking the businesses that are here and be concerned about how to keep them here. The common outstanding issues are such things as affordable health care, workforce training and finding professional people.

Dougherty announced the HRA relendable funds will be ready in September and can be used for such things as store fronts and operating costs.

Renquist stated Grow Minnesota! is a very good program doing very good work, but he believes there should be a cycle of company visitations once every five years. Renquist indicated there are a lot of other businesses that need to be visited and, at its present rate, Grow Minnesota! will not be able to cycle through the necessary businesses on a five-year schedule. It was suggested a BRE/R team be mobilized to call on some of the rural areas and maybe coordinate the lists. It was also suggested to include other area economic development groups, i.e., New London Improvement Association. A recommendation was to meet CEO to CEO every ten years, but someone else within the business every five years.

This topic will be placed on the September agenda and Warner was invited to attend. Erpelding referred the committee members to Goal 8 (invite development of a broader-based business visit system). An attempt will be made to identify cornerstones to a plan for an overall objective and how do we collectively do it.

[Ken Warner was excused from the meeting.]

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Angel Capital Program. Renquist stated the meeting has been rescheduled per Harlan Jacob's request for 7 a.m., August 30 at Gallery 7 of the Willmar Conference Center. Renquist obtained additional names to invite. There is an invitation list of about 77 and the meeting is by invite only. The Willmar Area Development Corporation (WADC) will now be involved. Renquist stated a joint letterhead will be created with invitations to go out August 10, again August 20 and then they will follow through with a joint calling campaign. Renquist reported Harlan Jacobs has facilitated the EDC meeting with 20 metro companies; three of which toured the MinnWest Technology Campus and, as of yesterday, two chose the campus if funding can be found. Renquist stated there is one minus in that Jacobs gets the EDC in front of startup entrepreneurs who, without exception, need capital that is outside of the type of lending programs available through local government entities.

Renquist presented a half year result report to the WADC this week. He believes the WADC will continue the original pledge of \$25,000 for one year and analyze at the end of the year whether to continue the relationship with Jacobs.

Other. Erpelding suggested discussions for the September meeting agenda include additional talk about business visits and Goal 9b (participate in manufacturer's week in October). Peterson stated in the past this has been done by a variety of things, i.e., a prominent manufacturing business offered a tour and opened to various economic development groups. They have not had a lot of success with businesses opening their doors for this. It is a state program started sometime ago. Erpelding asked Renquist, Peterson and Spaulding to discuss what could possibly be done and bring it to the September meeting for discussion.

TASK FORCE REPORTS—There were no reports at the time of this meeting. Upcoming task force meetings are listed below:

Technology—August 10
Airport Business—October 11
Health Industry—October 24

NEW BUSINESS

Schulte will be attending a meeting in Duluth and plans to share information about the EDC's Bring Them Back Home program. Schulte will be contacting Kathy Schwantes and EDC staff for this information. Schulte reported the acting commissioner, who helped write the JOBZ for the MinnWest Technology Campus visited the area, was impressed with the campus and has mentioned it at many settings.

ADJOURNMENT—There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 11:35 a.m.

NEXT MEETING—The next regular committee meeting is **10:30-11:30 a.m., Wednesday, September 6, 2006**, at the board room of Heritage Bank, N.A.