

MINUTES
CONSERVATION, EDUCATION & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
WEDNESDAY, MAY 5, 2021
WOOD COUNTY COURTHOUSE, ROOM #114, WISCONSIN RAPIDS WI

Members Present: Kenneth Curry, Robert Ashbeck, Jake Hahn, Dave LaFontaine, Bill Leichtnam

Members Excused: Carmen Good

Staff Present:

Planning & Zoning Staff: Jason Grueneberg, Adam DeKleyn (via WebEx)

Land & Water Conservation Staff: Shane Wucherpfennig, Lori Ruess.

UW Extension Staff: Jason Hausler, Hannah Wendels (via WebEx), Nancy Turyk (via WebEx)

Others Present: Dist. #14 Supervisor Dennis Polach, Dist. #15 Supervisor Bill Clendenning (via WebEx), Dist. #16 Supervisor Lance Pliml, (via WebEx) Ben Jeffrey, Wood County Health Department (via WebEx), Angel Whitehead (via WebEx)

1. **Call to Order.** Chairperson Curry called the CEED meeting to order at 9:00 am.
2. **Declaration of Quorum.** Chairperson Curry declared a quorum.
3. **Public Comments (brief comments/statement regarding committee business)** None.
4. **Review Correspondence.** None.
5. **Consent Agenda.** The Consent Agenda included the following Items: 1) minutes of the April 7, 2021 and April 20, 2021 CEED meetings, 2) bills from Land & Water Conservation, Planning & Zoning and UW Extension and 3) staff activity reports from Laura Huber, Matt Lippert, Nancy Turyk, Allison Jonjak, Jackie Carratini, Hannah Wendels, Kelly Hammond, Rachael Whitehair, Janell Wehr, Caleb Armstrong, Klayton Kree, Lori Ruess, Rod Mayer, Shane Wucherpfennig, Jason Grueneberg, Adam DeKleyn, Paul Bernard, Jeff Brewbaker, Scott Custer, Kim Keech and Victoria Wilson.
 - A. Minutes of April 7, 2021. No additions or corrections needed.
 - B. Minutes of April 20, 2021. No additions or corrections needed.
 - C. Department Bills. No additions or corrections needed.
 - D. Staff Activity Reports. No additions or corrections needed.

Motion by Dave LaFontaine to approve and accept the April 7, 2021 and April 20, 2021 minutes, bills from Land & Water Conservation, Planning & Zoning and UW Extension, and staff activity reports as presented. Second by Jake Hahn. Motion carried unanimously.

6. **Review items, if any, pulled from Consent Agenda.** None
7. **Risk and Injury Report.** None.
8. **Land & Water Conservation Department.**
 - A. Open/approve low bid for Dale and Jason Behrend’s intermittent stream culvert crossing project. No bids were received. Shane Wucherpfennig explained this project was bid out four different times. The first time it was bid out, one bid was received from Kolo Trucking, and the CEED Committee denied the bid because it was considerably higher than the LWCD estimate. Shane added he is not sure why we did not receive any more bids on this project, but he could solicit bids or could do “average cost bidding” and find a contractor to complete the project. The Committee agreed that Wucherpfennig should begin with soliciting bids before doing average cost bidding.

- B. Review/approve resolution to oppose changes in the Wildlife Damage Abatement and Claims program. Shane Wucherpfennig explained the resolution to oppose changes in the Wildlife Damage Abatement and Claims program (WDACP) through Senate Bill 63 and Assembly Bill 49 that would eliminate all County control. Wood County has administered the Wildlife Damage Abatement and Claims program since inception in 1983. Fifty percent of the Conservation Program Coordinator's position is funded through the WDACP and Wood County landowners would lose the local assistance provided by this position. Discussion followed.

Dave LaFontaine commented he feels it is another attempt for the state to take away local control.

Bob Ashbeck asked how the program is funded and Wucherpfennig added it is funded through hunting and fishing licenses. Ashbeck added he would have to vote against the resolution as he feels we are taking advantage of State money.

Motion by Dave LaFontaine to approve the joint resolution with Judicial & Legislative Committee to oppose changes in the Wildlife Damage Abatement and Claims Program. Second by Bill Leichtnam. Motion carried with Bob Ashbeck opposing.

- C. Discuss UW Stevens Point Groundwater Center well testing data set. Chair Curry explained he wanted this on the agenda for discussion, as when he took the resolution for continuing well water testing to the Operations Committee, someone asked why Wood County is providing free nitrate testing when testing is available through Central Wisconsin Groundwater Center (CWGC), UW Stevens Point. Shane Wucherpfennig explained why the Land & Water Conservation Department took on the countywide nitrate testing versus using the CWGC data.

- CWGC data only consists of wells tested during a certain timeframe.
- Data not shared to public.
- CWGC database is an excellent tool for statistical data use.

Benefits of Wood County Land & Water data

- Able to get a current baseline in Wood County
- Know names, owner, and well depths.
- Data will be helpful if future groundwater study.
- Educational standpoint – brings awareness to landowners.

Discussion and questions followed. Chair Curry shared he wanted this committee and the County Board to know what we are gaining by offering the free nitrate testing. Bill Leichtnam mentioned the well testing is a very good program and we should start thinking about funding for the next step.

Shane gave a brief update on the May 4, 2021 North Central Land and Water Conservation virtual meeting, Matt Krueger, WI Land + Water Executive Director reported on the Governor's budget proposals, which includes funding Land & Water Conservation positions at the level outlined in the Joint DATCP/DNR grant application (first position 100%, second position 70% and third position 50%). Matt encouraged Land & Water Conservation Departments/Committees to reach out to the Joint Finance Committee in the form of a letter, supporting this proposal.

Motion by Bill Leichtnam to have the County Conservationist draft a letter to the Joint Finance Committee expressing support of the restored funding to Land & Water Conservation Departments and have the CEED review before sending. Second by Jake Hahn. Motion Carried unanimously.

D. Committee Reports

- i Citizen's (Wood County) Groundwater Group meeting. Bill Leichtnam shared a recap of the April 19th Citizen's Groundwater Group Meeting. George Kraft, Professor Emeritus, UWSP gave a presentation on "What we've learned from 30 years of

Groundwater Testing". Highlights of the meeting are covered in the Citizen's Groundwater Group Meeting minutes on page 30 of the CEED packet.

The next meeting will be held virtually on Monday, May 17th; the guest speaker will be Russ Groves, Entomologist.

ii. **Health Committee report.** Ben Jeffery shared there are no major updates on AGC. Completed contact information for wells not yet tested.

iii. **Central Sands Groundwater County Collaborative (CSGWCC) committee report.** Nancy Turyk provided an update on the Central Sands Groundwater County Collaborative Committee.

- The six county quarterly meeting was held in April.
- The \$60,000 grant was received.

Bill Leichtnam mentioned a Portage County Groundwater Citizen's Advisory Committee meeting at the Portage County Annex Building on June 3rd at 6:00 pm.

iv. **Golden Sands RC&D report.** Bill Leichtnam shared the next meeting is May 20th. He will have an update at the June CEED.

9. Private Sewage.

Jason Grueneberg reported over 3200 septic maintenance notices have been mailed.

10. Land Records.

Jason Grueneberg shared the Land Information Council meeting was held on April 29th.

11. County Surveyor.

Hosting the County Land Surveyor meeting.

12. Planning

Jason Grueneberg reported briefly on the following projects.

- Wood County Bike and Pedestrian plan is moving forward.
- Working with the Regional Plan Commission on an ATV/UTV economic impact study. Hope to have a report by fall.
- Working on a Wood County ATV/UTV plan/strategy.
- Adam Dekleyn working with several municipalities on Comprehensive Plans and/or Ordinances.

13. Economic Development

A. North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission Update.

Jason Grueneberg and Dave LaFontaine gave an update on the North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission.

- Meeting was held on Wednesday, April 28th, Jason will scan and email information from the NCWRPC meeting packet to the Committee.
- Portage County just signed on to be a member.
- Sprint Grant – deadline May 12th.
- Jason participated in a meeting to develop a strategy for regional recovery from COVID-19. The planning process will take place over the next year.
- The Regional Plan Commission held discussion on forestry. The forestry industry has been drastically affected by the VERSO closure.

B. Update on Economic Development Administration CARES Act funding for recovery efforts in response to the VERSO Mill closure.

Jason Grueneberg shared an article announcing CARES Act funding in the amount of \$144,000 to Wisconsin Rapids following VERSO mill shutdown. Collaborated with Heart of Wisconsin and the City of Wisconsin Rapids to apply for this funding. This is a direct benefit of being a NCWRPC member.

Dave LaFontaine asked about the \$14.1 million Wood County is going to receive through the American Rescue Plan and how that the funds will be used. Jason Grueneberg noted the County is waiting for guidance on the use of these funds. Lance Pliml shared the \$14.1 million will be received in two checks, with the first check arriving sometime in May. Money will be put in interest-bearing accounts until the use of the money is finalized.

C. Discuss implementation of Wood County Rural Economic Development Plan.

Jason Grueneberg and Nancy Turyk reported.

- The REDI plan was adopted by County Board in April.
- A lot of work to work towards implantation.
- Looking to structure lead to move forward with broadband group.
- Goal is to have Nancy Turyk or Jason Grueneberg attended one of the group meetings.
- Anyone who wants to be part of the initiative can participate.
- Hope to see groups forming.
- Discussion with CEED on grant program
 - Proposals
 - How to distribute funds

Discussion followed which led to the next agenda item - Discuss 2022 Economic Development Budget.

D. Discuss 2022 Economic Development Budget.

Jason Grueneberg shared he is looking for direction on how to structure the 2022 Economic Development Grant program. He would like a decision by the June CEED meeting if the same procedure as last year should be followed or if changes are needed.

Dave Lafontaine mentioned it would be very helpful to look at the REDI plan. We need to know where money will be allocated to and what partners we need to implement the REDI plan.

Lengthy discussion followed.

Chairperson Curry stated Grueneberg should send the same information/application forms as last year and look at groups for initiatives. It was the consensus of the CEED that Jason have the information/application forms ready to send out shortly after the June CEED meeting.

E. Broadband grant update and discussion.

Jason Grueneberg handed out an article on broadband connectivity that was in the State Journal. He also gave an update on the broadband grant. Bug Tussel Wireless received approval for grant funding of about \$1,000,000 from the Public Service Commission (PSC) for broadband expansion in Wood County. In addition, County Board approved a resolution to provide Bug Tussel Wireless a \$1,000,000 loan. Bug Tussel has started to do some work in the county and a request for payment of the upfront work could be coming soon.

Chair Curry mentioned Wood County should be working on how to structure the grant with Bug Tussel Wireless and this should probably be on the Operations Committee meeting agenda for discussion on drawing up an agreement with Bug Tussel Wireless. Jason Grueneberg will check with Lance Pliml on this.

14. Extension

A. General Office Update.

Jason Hausler shared a Wisconsin Extension Association (WEXA) meeting is taking place at 10:00 a.m. today (May 5), to formulate by-laws, update procedures, etc. Jason did not know if Wood County paid their \$50 WEXA dues and added, if the CEED is in favor, future dues could be put in Extension Department's budget.

Lance Pliml was in a meeting with Mark O'Connell, Executive Director of the Counties Association, and Mark joined the CEED meeting virtually to answer questions on WEXA dues.

He explained the dues are \$50/county to take care of travel; zero dollars are going to the association. He will check if Wood County has paid last year's dues.

The new format for the monthly staff report was put on hold. Hope to have it in the June CEED packet.

The 2020 Wood County Extension Annual Report was in the CEED packet and is being shared far & wide. If you have any questions on the report, please let Jason know.

B. Update on Board Chairs Return to Office Request

Jason Hausler shared 100% county paid employees will return to working in the office by June 1. July 1st is the target date for State staff members to return to the office.

C. 2022 Extension Contract Update.

Jason Hausler referred to the Educator's contract information on pages 57 and 58 of the CEED packet. He explained there is a projected \$4,000 increase in the Educator's contract budget from 2021 to 2022 based on true cost adjustments for health insurance and other benefits. It should also be noted that the baseline cost-share for professional development in the budget will sunset in 2022.

D. Educator Presentation – Hannah Wendels, *FoodWise Nutrition Educator*

Hannah Wendels, FoodWise Nutrition Educator shared highlights of the FoodWise program.

- In January, started monthly nutrition lessons with Ho-Chunk Head start – this will wrap up in June.
- Teaching virtual nutrition classes at Mead and Howe Elementary.
- New partnership with Wisconsin Rapids Food Services Director – implemented "harvest of the month" program, which promotes Wisconsin grown vegetables.
- Working on "in person" summer programs at the YMCA and Food Pantry.

Dave LaFontaine asked if Wood County schools outside the Wisconsin Rapids School District qualify for support under the FoodWise Program. Jason Hausler and Hannah explained the guidelines for qualification and added at this time no other school district in Wood County qualifies.

15. Requests for per diem for meeting attendants.

None.

16. The next regular CEED meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, June 2, 2021 at 9:00 am., at the Wood County Courthouse in Room 114.

17. Agenda items for next meeting.

A. Agenda items for the June meeting need to be submitted by May 26th.

18. Schedule any additional meetings if necessary.

19. Adjourn. Chair Curry declared the meeting adjourned at 11:45 am.

Minutes by Lori Ruess, Land & Water Conservation Department