



GOVERNOR'S
EMPOWER RURAL IOWA
INITIATIVE

Governor's Empower Rural Iowa Initiative
Investing Rural Iowa Task Force Meeting Draft Minutes
Walnut Community Center
415 Antique City Dr
Walnut, IA 51577
Tuesday, March 1, 2022
12-1PM

1. Roll Call:

Sandy Ehrig	David Barker	Carla Eysink	Danna Larson
Chuck Morris	Wayne Pantini	Mark Reinig	Nick Sorensen
Jim Thompson	Kimberly Tiefenthaler		

Virtual Attendees: Jordan DeGree Lisa Houser Shannon Erb

2. Approval of Minutes from November 17, 2021 meeting:

Minutes from the November 17 meeting had been distributed for review. Motion was made by Mark Reinig to approve, seconded by Chuck Morris. Passed unanimously.

3. Welcoming Remarks from Lt. Governor Gregg:

The Lt. Governor was not able to attend but provided a video welcome to task force members and attendees. Discussed agenda for meeting with goal to identify concepts originally supported and see how they are progressing and looking at modifying the grant programs to look at both innovative projects as well as others that may not fit the criteria.

4. Remarks by Co-Chair Sandy Ehrig:

Thanked members and provided an overview of the upcoming IRDC Rural Summit to be held in April. Thanked the Lt. Governor for his leadership and all of his planning efforts he puts forth for this initiative.

5. Panel of Rural Grant Recipients: Jim Moderated.

Bruce Perry – Sac City: City council, Church musician, president of Preservation Iowa, and on Iowa League of Cities Advisory Board:

They just received a Rural Innovation Grant. Have four school buildings in district with movement to close some of the schools. Grant is another step in the process. They knew one school was going to be closed at end of school year. Started a program called Setting the Stage. School was built in 1937 as part of WPA program. Wrote application to be on the eligible for historic tax credits. Wanted to make it attractive to potential investors. Have an active committee working on this. Newer portion open in 1961. All eligible for tax credits. Worked to educate community and build partnerships with businesses. Also took part of ISU Shrink Start study for managed growth or declining population. Partnered with housing committee to begin paving the way. Prepared documentation to have available at Iowa League of Cities conference. Needed to build connections with investors. Needed drawings, proforma financials, with a need to show it is viable to invest in rural Iowa. Received a grant for \$20,000 and got matching funds to contract for a feasibility study and come up with list of possible funding sources. Hoping this can be replicated in other communities with schools being closed. This can also scale up to other buildings, such as their city hotel. Need to connect the building's past to the present, to the future. Need to figure out how to make the story continue. Need community input, community needs assessment, comprehensive plan. Could be used for housing, culinary program, trade school, fine arts center, Business incubator. Could be a model for any large building in Iowa.

Emily Williams – Pocahontas County ED, and ICCC career academy.

Received a Rural Innovation Grant in 2020. Successful in first year. Started Jump Start Accelerator Program to help with innovation and startup. Goals: Startup program for new businesses. Offered two up to \$10,000 grants. During Covid focused on outreach and marketing. ICCC and SBDC provided training that the businesses needed. Had a grant review committee. First round had six applications and awarded three which was more than initial goal. One was the Café and coffeehouse in Pocahontas which offered 20 new job opportunities. Other two – Even Berries – a tourist attraction in the county- a U-pick berry operation, and the third was a local travel agency go grant leveraged business expansion and succession. Helped retain business and jobs in the community. This past year also awarded additional funding for a total of six – five remodel projects in downtowns and over 50 job opportunities. Plan is to offer at least one \$10,000 grant.

6. Public Comment, Wrap up & Next Steps:

Liesl thanked IRDC for sponsoring. The Rural Child Care Market Study grant opened today with information on IowaGrants.gov. Deadline is May 3. Planning on making about 5 awards. Next meeting is on March 28 and is virtual. .

Public:

Mark – this year’s Summit April 11 – 15. Preconference workshop that ISU Ext. will be hosting. Will be bringing 5 communities that have seen success. Will also have a panel of communities. Will discuss zoning, rental inspection, etc. Free lunch – 12:00 – 5:00. At Reiman Gardens and after there is an opening reception. Also the digital manufacturing lab will be open in the afternoon for tours. A few other things in surrounding communities as well. Registration for the two campus activities will be opening soon. Encouraging teams of three.

Carla: Kaufmann Foundation is sponsoring listening sessions the week of March 28 in Iowa. Contracted with KS Leadership Council and doing listening post on barriers to rural entrepreneurship. Fairfield, Belmond, IA, Maquoketa, Marshalltown and one in Marion County.

7. Adjourn