



Governor's Empower Rural Iowa Initiative
Growing Rural Iowa Task Force Meeting Minutes
Great River Art Gallery
116 N Riverview Street
Bellevue, Iowa
Wednesday, October 16, 2019
12 p.m.

1. Roll Call:

Present:	Lt. Governor Gregg	Sandy Ehrig	Maison Blead for Sec. Naig
	Whitney Baethke	Mickey Shields	Ron Reischl
	Linc Kroeger	Philip Jones	Tina Bakehouse
	James Hoelscher	Kathy Anderson	Jason Neises

2. Welcome to New Members & Guests

Three new task force members, Tina Bakehouse, Mickey Shields, and Linc Kroeger, were introduced to the group. Each task force member introduced themselves, stated where they were from, and their employment or connection to developing leadership in rural Iowa.

Representative McKean was introduced and welcomed to the conversation. He discussed the importance of the work being done by Empower Rural Iowa in his district and interest in contributing to the continued development of leaders in the region and across the state.

3. Approval of Minutes:

Draft minutes from the September 18, 2019 meeting had been previously distributed for review. Jason made a motion to approve the minutes and Mickey seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved.

4. Welcoming Remarks from Lt. Governor Gregg:

Lt. Governor thanked representatives from the City of Bellevue for hosting and the upcoming tour. He especially thanked David Heiar and the staff of the Jackson County Economic Alliance for coordinating the day. The task force meetings have provided an opportunity to travel the state and

appreciate all rural communities. Thanks too, to Prosperity Eastern Iowa & Water Street Partners for sponsoring lunch and the meeting venue.

Last meeting was in the City of Manning and we will discuss later this afternoon recommendations based on that discussion at the Hausbarn. There will be an update from Liesl on the grants and ERI website, then we will hear from our panelists on the visioning programs their communities have undertaken and the impacts. Gave an update on other task force discussions. Connecting was in Clarion on the 9th discussing telehealth initiatives at Iowa Specialty Hospital and also heard about the importance of broadband in the local school district and community college. Investing was in Hawarden on the 4th discussing abandoned homes. Toured his old school which has been made into city offices and a community center, and their old city hall which has been saved but not completed. Discussed how to make similar government programs more efficient and workable. Reminded task force members that they are always welcome to join the other meetings.

5. Remarks from Co-Chair Sandy Ehrig:

Thanked the City of Bellevue and Jackson County Economic Alliance for hosting. The Empower Rural Iowa Initiative is a blending of all three task forces, and the partnership with IRDC has helped expand opportunities to provide information on both groups. Patty Manual joined her at the recent Iowa Ideas Conference, along with the Lt. Governor, Mark Reinig and Jennifer Crall. IRDC is also working with a membership organization to potentially create a grant program for developing capacity in rural communities which could be a matching grant for the Rural Innovation Grants. On December 18th the IRDC will hold a joint meeting with ERI in Perry, like what was held this summer in Mount Ayr. Also, save the date for the Iowa Rural Summit, April 29-May 1 at the Kirkwood Hotel at Kirkwood Community College.

6. ERI Initiative Update:

The Broadband Grant Program currently underway and closes this Friday. There are 17 applications in process, none yet submitted. Five million is available for this round. The draft on the procedures and policies for rural grants is out to the grants subcommittee for review. Will be presented to IEDA board on Friday for approval. An example project for the Rural Innovation Grant came out of Clarion, outfitting a school bus as a hot spot for kids in disconnected areas to do their homework. The Rural Housing Assessment grant has evolved into an interpretation and implementation grant, partnering with Iowa State University Extension for facilitation of implementation.

Website: Working with IRDC which is doing a website update and that will be main landing page for resources. Will highlight housing, leadership, connectivity, other. There will be an area for best practices and resources. ERI landing page will shift from Governor's website to IEDA website, which will be basic for agendas, minutes, link to IRDC, task force members etc. and information on the two new building rehab/demo program. Might be able to show something in December.

Next meeting will be a conference call on Wednesday, November 6th to discuss the final draft of the recommendations. Additional information will be sent closer to the meeting date. The final meeting of the year will be a combined IRDC meeting in Perry on Wednesday, December 18th.

7. Vision Planning Panel

James initiated the panelist conversation by asking Jason to provide a definition of visioning. Rural communities often feel that they know everything about the citizens of their community and how the community feels about the strengths and weaknesses of their town but often the conversation never reaches what individual citizens really feel about their community. Visioning is an asset-based approach to consider what communities truly value and strives to avoid a negative narrative of what is missing in a community. The challenge is in bringing the right core people to the table, but to also involve a broad base, including children, elderly, and new citizens. The overarching goal of visioning processes is to attract and keep the community talent by making the community attractive to those who already live there, then attract others.

James facilitated panelists: and asked panelists to provide info on themselves.

Claira: Bellevue native.

Jessica: works for the Manchester Chamber of Commerce but lives in Dyersville, serves on the school board, and coordinator for rural reading program.

Patti: wears several hats, lives in Preston, a community of 1,000, and was involved in the Trees Forever process.

Stephanie: works for Jackson County Economic Alliance and is on the Maquoketa Hometown Pride Committee.

David: started as the Bellevue City Administrator, worked for 20 years in Manchester, then Dubuque, and then Jackson County Economic Alliance. Is the Hometown Pride coach for Jackson County.

James: asked David and Stephanie to discuss Hometown Pride.

David: Hometown Pride started from Parks to People which was a region of 3 counties tasked with developing a plan for connecting communities and natural spaces. After the Parks to People initiative ended, there was so much momentum that the community wanted to keep moving forward. The result was to become a Hometown Pride county.

Stephanie: Kicked off in December 2017 and the first big success was a spring clean-up day. The committee used facebook surveys to determine what the community wanted. Outcomes included a dog park, concert series, skate park, and continued clean-up days. The cost was \$2,500 for communities of 5,000 or more, less for smaller communities.

Patti: Preston recognized that it was in a dangerous position as a community of 1,000 that did not want to shrink. Worked with Trees Forever which is a combined program with Iowa DOT, Living Roadways, and Iowa State University. The committee, including two youth, worked with a coach for 9 months. They looked at where they came from, where they were, and where they were going. At the end they had a plan with some clear goals, and were able to leverage that plan to start a TIF District since they did not have a comp plan or master plan. The cost was nothing to participate but the city had to contribute \$2,000 to a product that was an outcome of the program. Outcomes were a vision plan with great data as well as a funding guide. Overall the plan focused on parks and streetscapes.

Jessica: Manchester has been active for a few years, starting with a group called “Good to Great” which meets monthly and was instrumental in developing the whitewater park, booster club, and broadband connectivity. There is also a group for millennials to encourage their investment in the community. While these groups are still active, it was unclear what was next. Contracted with McClure after a series of community visits to develop a full creative placemaking plan. First step was to identify 5 priority areas. Currently in the middle of the 4 phase process (5 available but only contracted for 4), total cost was \$50,000. Deliverable will be a vision plan and implementation plan from McClure.

Claira: Bellevue started the Heart & Soul process 3.5 years ago, they received a grant from USDA for the first year of the process. They partnered with schools, surveyed the citizens, and made sure to get a diverse group at the table. They asked “What makes our town special” and common themes were developed from the responses. The common themes and priorities were presented to city council. Findings have been used in grant applications and now they are continuing to work towards implementation.

Jason: Bellevue isn’t doing all 4 steps of Heart & Soul because they are a Hometown Pride community.

James: All of these plans will continue to live on beyond just the creation of the plan. Asked the panelists to share successes and challenges.

Stephanie: A success was that Maquoketa is going through a comp plan process right now and some of the new leaders in that initiative came from the Hometown Pride work.

Claira: A challenge was bridging the gap between new residents and natives to Bellevue. The community is learning how to tell those stories together. The citizens were all re-surveyed after the results were compiled to ask if they resounded with them.

David: Making Bellevue a more welcoming community was one of the goals of the process and students are taking on that task.

Jessica: A challenge is to get people to think big picture, and not to get complacent with success. The concept of an indoor pool was discussed often but an outcome of this process was to realize they did not have the capacity or funding to make that a realistic goal.

Whitney: Could a city do a visioning process themselves or do they need a facilitating group?

Claira: Depends on the community.

David: City needs to be at the table but should not be driving the initiative.

Jason: Helps to have a non-partisan groups leading the effort.

Philip: Growing leaders in the community who may not be the city staff but the city can equip them.

Patti: leaders are grown from the visioning process, it is a leadership garden.

Bill Menner: During time at USDA, initially concerned about granting funds for Heart & Soul or other visioning programs but it results in a plan and then the communities can determine if they want to be a Main Street, Hometown Pride, etc.

James: We will send a survey to all task force members to collect their thoughts from the discussion after this meeting.

8. Recommendations Discussion

James provided a recap of the conversation during the meeting in Manning, including the development of an exchange program designed after the old ABI program, providing resources to leadership programs, and developing an incubator or bootcamp for communities interested in starting a leadership program.

Lt. Governor introduced the first part of the draft recommendations. The first part is to support the development of leaders, to create a leadership garden. Benefit in project-based opportunities for young and new people to get involved, multi-generational engagement. Recognizing that there is a need for leadership even to initiate one of these programs. After listening to the panel, there is a connection between literally developing leadership programs in Iowa but another method is to help communities go through this type of visioning process.

Jason: Heart & Soul is often pitched as a leadership development tool.

Ron: Community input meetings are a way to identify where people's passions lie and then plug them into those initiatives.

Philip: Question to the panelists, what was the initial push for you to get involved in these programs?

Claire: I am passionate about Bellevue and saw a void so tried to fill it. Then I could bring others to the table. The goal is to find people who can bring others, using that enthusiasm and passion to attract others who are not involved.

David: Often a personal invitation makes a difference. Invite different groups and circles.

Jessica: When creating the young professionals group, we did personal invites, indicating that they had a skill the group needed.

Kathy: Powerful to change the mindset and conversation from "woe is us" to "holy cow, this is exciting! What part can I play?" Having a plan is a shift in thought.

Jessica: Absolutely a culture change from "we've always done it this way."

Maison: From the ag perspective, is FFA or something similar involved in the schools and part of this conversation to attract students back?

Bellevue Students: Yes, we have FFA, Bellevue BIG, and others. There are community service projects and generally engagement of the youth is huge in the community.

Lt. Gov.: Need to connect leadership and visioning better in these recommendations to both truly train leaders but also to develop and engage new leaders. Combine the leadership program recommendations into one recommendation. Approach the recommendations as a

two-part strategy: support leadership programs that currently exist and support the development of leaders through community visioning. Asks panelists how the state can support visioning efforts.

Jessica: Regional training are often preaching to the choir. A mentor or partner would be a useful approach or trainings with an action plan.

Claira: Regional trainings can be useful depending on where in the process the community is and what type of community it is.

Jessica: Bring trainings to communities who have started to think bigger or are implementing a vision plan.

Stephanie: Online resources are great but in person or virtual meetings are better.

David: Include League of Cities, COGs, and community foundations.

Ron: Providing online tools is a great resource, including draft surveys which can be a starting point for communities considering these efforts and needing to determine which program to use.

Jason: Important to include community demographics in the process.

Philip: Utilize the Iowa Profile Tool for demographics.

Mickey: Important for communities to feel empowered to just get started as many rural communities have not had a plan in years.

Whitney: A matching grant could be a powerful tool.

Lt. Gov.: Inquired if anything was missing from the list in the draft recommendations. Potentially a facilitation or coaching aspect.

Claira: Training on succession planning for leaders.

Mickey: Grantwriting and programming.

Jason: Increased funding for COGs and Community Foundations as facilitators of these types of programs.

Lt. Gov.: Important to prioritize those programs that utilize broad community surveys, students, etc. Additionally increased rural set-aside for established state programs. Also looking at the definition of rural.

9. Public Comment

No public comment.

10. Wrap Up & Next Steps

Next meeting will be a conference call the afternoon of November 6th to review the final recommendation draft. There will be a joint meeting with IRDC on December 18th in Perry. The Governor will be attending from 2:00-3:00. Details to come.

11. Adjourn