



Governor's Empower Rural Iowa Initiative
Investing in Rural Iowa Task Force Meeting Minutes
Conference Call
Wednesday, November 6, 2019
2:30 p.m.

1) Roll Call:

Present:	Lt. Governor Gregg	Jim Thompson	Maison Bleam (for Sec. Naig)
	Senator Lofgren	Joanie Bond	Hunter Callanan
	Chuck Morris	Joshua Merchant	Shannon Erb
	Sarah Thompson	Wayne Pantini	Tim Ostroski
	Lisa Houser	Terri Rosonke	David Barker

- 2) **Approval of Minutes:** Draft minutes from the October 4th meeting had been previously distributed for review. Josh Merchant made a motion to approve and Chuck Morris seconded. Passed unanimously.
- 3) **Welcoming Remarks from Lt. Governor:** Lt. Governor Gregg thanked all for attending the call. Today we will run through the draft recommendations that were distributed and provide final input prior to the joint meeting in December. There, the Executive Committee will present the final recommendations to the Governor, and they will be acted on.
- 4) **Remarks by Co-Chair Sandy Ehrig:** Liesl informed that Sandy was unable to attend as she is on her way to Kansas City to the National Rural Economic Developer's Association Conference and will join some colleagues with from the IRDC and rural electric partners. Also, she, Sandy and Bill met in Perry recently to review the facility for the joint meeting and discuss itinerary.

5) Recommendations Discussion:

The Lt. Governor provided an overview of the drafted recommendations. There are a number of detailed recommendations which include: Streamlining programs, application deadlines, funding cycles, etc.; Re-do of the current Building Remediation Loan Program; Increasing funding of rural set-asides and add another level, and increase funding for the DNR program; Expand the RISE program to include housing developments; Continue to support current housing programs such as the Empower Rural Iowa grant initiatives and Workforce Housing Tax Credit program.

Streamline eligibility and application processes – Discussion:

- LG: We have several similar programs. Should we consider combining them or are they different enough that we want to keep and consider?
- Chuck: Thinks the format outlined will give us a good view down the road. Maybe then we can look at consolidation.
- Tim: At the Vinton meeting there were comments that you might be able to apply for the Cat program and not the Derelict Building – there was a scaling of time. Has there been consideration about taking care of that? LG – There are reasons why you should apply for one before the other and thinks that with these recommendations it might help solve the problem of getting an applicant into the right program at the right time.
- Joanie: City leaders want awareness and education. How does this get communicated? LG – Good point. Thinks it might go under regional trainings and tool kits, but beyond the language of the recommendations. It's part of Liesl's role to help communicate. The recommendations make them accessible, but they still must be in front of the people, so they know the programs exist. Need more education at local level.
- Tim: The COG's can help with publicity with email, newsletters, etc.
- Wayne: Would be good to have a pre-workshop about the programs themselves. LG – Great idea.
- Terri: What about the one-stop-shop that we've discussed where communities can learn from others best practices, funding sources involved, challenges, obstacles, etc.? Liesl – We will be using the IRDC website to help increase visibility and stories. It will be a combination of processes, best practices and a listing of available resources. Work on the website is underway. If you can share community stories with her, they can be highlighted. Was asked if we could develop some type of Q/A format where a community could input a question and then receive information. Liesl – we are planning to create a flowchart so they can walk through where they are and what the next steps are. Trying to figure out how that would look like on each page, also on how people can submit ideas.
- Joanie: Dawn Connect with the OCIO's office might be able to help with the directory or getting it listed.
- Lt. Gov: This would be a good group to test the website development process. Will need to offer that up to Sandy and Bill. Regarding a standardized application, we have had much conversation on this. When applying for a board or commission, you put in standardized information for each, and then go on from there. There is similar information required for many of the programs.

Nuisance Property and Abandoned Building Remediation Loan Program – Discussion:

- No discussion, agree.

Increase funding and rural set-asides – Discussion:

DNR Derelict Building Grant: Currently funded at \$400,000 annually, but applications outpace availability. Recommending increasing funds.

- Tim: Agrees that more money be provided. Would this be an increase in tonnage fee, or would money come from a different source? LG – They are researching the details on

the current funding. Not sure if that is all that is collected or if there is other revenue dedicated elsewhere, or if it is a need to request funds from another source. Would recommend not getting into details about where funding comes from or the amount, just that this is worthy of additional resources and then let the Governor's office make the determination.

Community Catalyst Building Remediation Grant: 40% of the funds go to communities of 1,500 or less population, but others might also benefit. Recommends a 30% set-aside for communities 1,500 to 5,000 in population. This would be inline with the DNR program which is at 5,000 or below. Also, this is not an appropriation, just what has been dedicated by the IEDA director. Would like to find a consistent funding source and not be contingent on annual budget.

- No discussion, all in agreement.

Main Street Challenge Grant: Currently capped at \$1 million, suggested removing cap.

- Dave: Removing and increasing, or just putting on a new cap? LG – looking at moving to a \$2 million cap, but this is not being reflected in the recommendations.
- No further discussion, agreement.

Expand RISE Grant: The DOT RISE grant is a state program supporting infrastructure for economic impact, but right now only road. Recommends expanding to view housing developments as economic development and be useable for road infrastructure there.

- Sarah: This would be a good change.
- Lisa: Agrees. This would be a big win for rural communities.
- Tim: Good idea. Has some concerns as to where the money would go related to population thresholds. Waukeg, or smaller towns? Also, RISE is effective and is used a lot in industrial park work. But if a road is 20-years old in a park and in need of repair, the DOT can't go in and do repairs because it would not create or retain any jobs. There are a lot of projects in existing parks that need updates, but also need housing. LG – Recommendation would be for rural housing, maybe using a different match requirement for different population towns and a tiered match. He's not familiar enough about the program threshold amounts and repairs but can research.
- No further discussion, all in agreement.

Support existing programs that address housing needs – Discussion:

- Lt. Gov: Recommends maintaining the Workforce Housing Tax Credit program as set up last year and continue funding support for the Empower Rural Iowa grant programs.
- All agree.

6) **Public Comment:**

None

7) Wrap-up and Next Steps:

Liesl will work with IEDA staff to polish the recommendation for a final copy for presentation and distribution.

Lt. Gov: Last year for the joint meeting we sought volunteers from the task forces to report out to the Executive Committee on the recommendations. We would again like to have the members engaged in that. Liesl will be reaching out to members to request volunteers, so please watch for that email and consider.

Please hold the calendar for the December 18th meeting in Perry. Members are welcome to attend for the day. IRDC will meet at 10:00, followed by lunch then a presentation on Perry projects. The formal ERI meeting will be held from 2:00 – 3:00 with the Governor in attendance, so if you cannot make the full meeting, please try to attend this.

8) Adjourn: