



Governor's Empower Rural Iowa Initiative

Combined Task Forces Meeting Agenda

La Poste

1219 Warford Street, Perry Iowa 50220

Wednesday, December 18, 2019

2:00 p.m.

Members Present:	Co-Chairs:	Lt. Governor Gregg	Sandy Ehrig	
Kathy Anderson	Tina Bakehouse	Stacy Besch	Jennifer Crall	
Rob Denson	James Hoelscher	Jenae Jenison	Ashley Moyer	
Jason Neises	Mickey Shields	Susan Kozak (for Sec. Naig)		
Rick Young	Barb Baker	Rachel Geinlenfeld (for Emily Schimtt)		
Chris Ball	Dustin Blythe	Ryan Boone	Sandee Buysse	
Kevin Cabbage	Dave Duncan	Dennis Fraise	Caleb Housh	
Billi Hunt	Katie LaBree	Danna Larson	Deb Lucht	
Patty Manuel	Grant Menke	Tom Petersen	David Barker	
Hunter Callanan	Shannon Erb	Gene Gettys	Lisa Houser	
Sen. Mark Lofgren	Tim Ostroski	Wayne Pantini	Mark Reinig	
Terri Rosonke	Nick Sorensen	Jim Thompson	Sarah Thompson	

1) Welcome remarks from Sandy Ehrig

Thank you to the City of Perry for your hospitality. The Iowa Rural Development Council (IRDC) held our meeting earlier today, so we understand what initiatives are. We appreciate the partnership in the Empower Rural Iowa (ERI) Initiative.

2) Remarks from Lt. Governor Gregg

It is an honor to serve as a co-chair of the ERI Initiative with Sandy and the IRDC is a good partner. I'm glad we've taken time at each meeting site to explore the host towns and many thanks to Deb Lucht for helping to organize today's meeting. La Poste is an incredible location and an even better story. Thanks to La Poste, Hotel Pattee, Perry Chamber of Commerce, Perry Economic Development, Raccoon Valley Bank, Minburn Communications and DMACC for sponsoring today's meeting. Perry is doing a great job of telling their story through art. We all want to be the "Nudgers", those serving as a driving force for economic development.

We started this year with a joint meeting in Mount Ayr in July and then at the Iowa State Fair in August. Task forces met in communities all around the state; Connect met in Coralville and Clarion, Investing met in Vinton and Hawarden, and Growing in Manning and Bellevue, so we've been to every corner of the state.

Today, Gov will speak and then we will move into recommendations. The Executive Committee will take the vote on the recommendations to present to the Governor. Looking forward to presentations and next steps. None of this would be possible without the Governor looking at rural importance.

3) Remarks from Governor Reynolds

Thanks to the community for the great Perry tour, it's a great testament to the work you've done. Last time she was with the task forces and IRDC was in Mount Ayr, and it is clear great things happen with collaboration. Thanks to members for putting the work into the recommendations and to Sandy and the Lt. Governor for your leadership. Thanks also to Liesl, who jumped on board and went to work in July. From last winter's day at the Capitol, to the bill signing at Wilton you have kept the momentum rolling. People are paying attention to what you are doing and have a sense of optimism. Based on last year's recommendations we asked for \$20 million for broadband grants. We received \$5 million and want to go back for \$15 million. We've gone a long way with the grants, leveraging state money with private funds. Plus, the exciting USDA announcements in Stanton and before that, in Hawarden to announce ReConnect Grants. Also, in workforce housing, we were able to get rid of the backlog for small cities set-aside and are using the tools for housing assessments. And we can think outside of the box about programs using the innovation grants. Success is spread by success and these will serve as models for other communities. Finally, the Center for Rural Revitalization is up and running as a resource across the state. The Year 1 accomplishments are why she is excited for what next year can bring.

4) Connect Task Force Recommendations – Katie Labree:

Over the past year the task force developed the following recommendations, based on feedback from citizens, entrepreneurs, students and others across the state.

- a. We are grateful for the funds received for the broadband grants, but more work needs to be done. Last year the Governor requested \$20 million and received \$5 million. We recommend funding should meet or exceed the original request, so a minimum of \$15 million appropriation for 2021. Also recommend a higher state match scaled for projects providing higher speeds and service.
- b. The Office of the Chief Information Officer over the last year has improved broadband maps, but inaccuracies still exist. Recommend continuing improvements and updates.
- c. Continued support for the Rural Innovation grants. Iowan's are creative problem solvers so let rural Iowan's help to outline programs.

5) Grow Task Force Recommendations: James Hoelscher, Jason Neises, Stacy Besch:

- a. James: As we met with Iowan's through panels, meetings and community visits we identified many leadership and visioning programs already in place. Still an urgency to move forward. Iowa must figure out how we can step forward for sustainable leadership.
- b. Jason: Rural towns are not looking for handouts, the people, ideas and resources are there so we need to give them the right tools and framework to build a better community. Recommend creating a matching grant program for community visioning for support for leaders. How to build skills to find stories, reach across differences and bring those not normally involved to get them involved. Move beyond the 15 that normally help. Second recommendation – community visioning through rural set-aside in quality of life programs that currently exist. Many towns don't have professional planners so

pairing up towns that have utilized programs can help. Grants will help the emerging leaders build connections to rural communities.

- c. Stacy: Support existing programs and build new ones, with an exchange of ideas at an annual event. Develop a model program template based on existing programs and have a statewide incubator event for those that don't have a program. She has seen firsthand how important a program is – pride, volunteering, people taking on leadership roles. Also, a mentorship program that can be available throughout the year.
- d. Continued support for the Rural Innovation grants.

6) Invest Task Force Recommendations: Shannon Erb, Mark Reinig, David Barker:

- a. Shannon: Recommends streamlining eligibility and application processes for existing state programs impacting abandoned or derelict buildings. Lamoni, population of 2,200 plus students, is an example of where this would have been useful. Over the last three years they've experienced the devastation of one block. This was an emergency situation with empty buildings and potential destruction. They have been working with the city and Council of Government and have funding for asbestos abatement, however there is a limited number of contractors which extends project length. This extension didn't allow them to take advantage of other programs.
- b. Mark: Recommend increased funding for existing programs. The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Derelict Building Grant is funded at \$400,000 but need outpaces available funds. The IEDA Community Catalyst Building Remediation Grant program has been very popular and there is a 40% set-aside for communities under 1,500, but funding is inconsistent. Recommend funding a consistent line item and adding a 30% set-aside for communities of 1,500 to 5,000 which would help to align with the DNR program. There is a \$1 million cap on IEDA Main Street Challenge grants which have been very successful, recommend raising the cap. Also recommend that Department of Transportation's Revitalizing Iowa's Sound Economy (RISE) Grant be applicable to housing developments, with a city match tiered based on population.
- c. David: Nuisance property is not a big problem in Perry, where the restorations are great, but many towns in Iowa are not that fortunate. The Nuisance Property and Abandoned Building Remediation Loan Program provides low interest loans for towns but is underutilized, with only eight applications since the 2015 inception. It is a revolving loan program with no or low interest rates depending on community size, but when passed through to a business or non-profit the interest rate is tripled. Recommend making interest rate the same. Also adjust rates to current rates and provide more education and technical assistance to communities. Alternatively, move some funds from program to a loan guarantee for bridge financing.
- d. Continue the small cities set-aside in Workforce Housing Tax Credit program and continue support to Rural Innovation Grants and Rural Housing Assessment Grants.

7) Vote on Recommendations:

Jenae Jenison motioned to approve the recommendations to be presented to the Governor, with Mark Reinig seconding. A polling of members of the Executive Committee members was taken, with all members voting Aye. Motion carried.

8) Wrap-up:

No formal meetings will be held until next summer, but there will be ways to stay engaged, such as the upcoming day at the Capitol during session, and the opportunity to be on the grant review and grant creation committee. Details to be determined.

9) Adjournment: Meeting adjourned at 2:45 pm.