

## **1. CALL TO ORDER**

Chair Laven called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. at South Central Service Cooperative.

## **2. APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

Cooling moved to approve the agenda. O'Connor seconded. Motion carried.

## **3. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

## **4. ROLL CALL**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Jean Anderson, Jeff Annis, Sarah Berry (7:08 arrival), Andrea Boettger, Dave Borchert, Jim Branstad, Steve Cooling, Chris Dalton, Marie Dranttel (virtual), Elroy Glidden, Robert Goblirsch, Hunter Jordan, James Kotewa, Dawn Kratzke, Brad Krause, Liz Krocak, Lynda Kruse, Mike Laven, Christian Lilienthal, Tom Loveall, Mary Milbrath, Bob Nielsen, Shanon Nowell, Patty O'Connor, Matt Peterson, Billee Rabbe, Gary Richter, Steve Rohlifing, Phil Schafer, Scott Schlueter, Julie Tesch, Luisa Trapero, Rob Wilkening (virtual)

MEMBERS EXCUSED: Paul Harris, Mike Pfeil, Rita Rassbach, Pam Rodewald

OTHERS PRESENT: Alejandra Bejarano, Jessica Beyer, Kristian Braekkan, Sabri Fair, Jazmine Flores, Nathan George, Joel Hanif, Stephanie Hilpipre, Sarah Janovsky, Mark Plotz, Tom Polich, Samuel Sharp, Lisa Callahan

There was a quorum.

## **5. APPROVAL OF CONSENT AGENDA**

Cooling moved to approve the consent agenda. Dalton seconded. Motion carried.

## **6. REPORTS**

### **a. Chair's Report**

Chair Laven reported that communities across the region, including Mankato, are experiencing significant community responses to recent federal immigration enforcement actions. He noted that these issues are not unique to one jurisdiction and encouraged commissioners to continue working collaboratively within their respective communities in ways that best fit local needs. Chair Laven emphasized that Region Nine Development Commission (RNDC) staff are available to provide guidance on connections to resources and communities for jurisdictions seeking support on these matters.

### **b. Interim Executive Director's Report**

Deputy Director Jessica Beyer reported on her role as Interim Executive Director following activation of the internal succession plan on November 12. She summarized efforts to manage the organizational transition, maintain operations, coordinate with staff and partners, and support the Board Chair during this period. She noted ongoing work to address financial stabilization in collaboration with the Treasurer and Finance Director, including expense management and maximizing reimbursable staff time.

Ms. Beyer highlighted positive developments, including receipt of \$50,000 in McKnight Foundation funding, collection of county levy payments, and a reduction in insurance premiums. She also outlined upcoming initiatives, including formation of an ad hoc committee to review RNDC bylaws, continued regional outreach, and preparation for Board discussions regarding next steps to fill the Executive Director position.

### **c. Finance Director's Report**

Finance Director Stephanie Hilpiper presented a comprehensive financial status update, outlining a return to prior reporting formats to improve clarity and transparency. She reviewed cash balances, receipts, expenses, and transfers between operational and revolving loan fund accounts, noting significant reconciliations completed since the December report. Adjustments included transferring funds to appropriate revolving loan fund accounts and correcting previously misallocated deposits.

Ms. Hilpiper reported that RNDC's adjusted operating cash balance was \$751,335 after excluding restricted McKnight pooled funds. She also provided an overview of ongoing financial clean-up efforts, including assistance from former finance director LuAnn Vanderwerf, timelines for completing reconciliations, upcoming audit preparation, budget amendments, and development of future budgets. Additional updates included clarification regarding 1099 reporting requirements and administrative processes.

## **7. EMPOWERING SMALL MN COMMUNITIES RURAL EMS PRESENTATION**

The Commission received a presentation on rural Emergency Medical Services (EMS) challenges and opportunities led by Stuart W. Grande, Ph.D., Associate Professor at the University of Minnesota School of Public Health, with participation from Brown County Commissioner Dave Borchert and RNDC Transportation Planner Joel Hanif. The presentation summarized findings from an Empowering Small Minnesota Communities project focused on the sustainability of rural EMS systems across the region.

Dr. Grande discussed research based on a literature review, key informant interviews, and regional listening sessions, identifying workforce shortages, reliance on aging volunteer service models, financial instability, training and recruitment barriers, and increasing service demands from aging rural populations.

The presentation emphasized that volunteer-based EMS models are increasingly unsustainable and highlighted the need for regional collaboration, policy reform, improved funding structures, and consideration of EMS as an essential service. Commissioners discussed local EMS challenges, collaborative service models, funding constraints, and potential regional solutions, with presenters noting that additional research, pilot projects, and funding opportunities are being pursued to support rural EMS sustainability within Region Nine.

## **8. REGION NINE DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION 2025-2026 AREAS OF WORK OVERVIEW & ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION**

As part of this agenda item, RNDC staff provided a high-level overview of major projects, initiatives, and priorities across the organization's areas of work for 2025–2026, including administration and finance, communications, economic development, revolving loan fund activities, environmental sustainability, food recovery, energy, and transportation planning. Staff highlighted current efforts, recent accomplishments, and upcoming initiatives aligned with the RNDC strategic plan.

Following the presentations, Commissioners participated in small-group roundtable discussions led by Jessica Beyer and organized by jurisdiction type to provide feedback on RNDC services, identify regional needs and opportunities, and discuss ways RNDC can continue to support communities across the nine-county region. Staff collected input for consideration in future planning and program development.

## **9. OTHER BUSINESS**

Hunter Jordan, Public Interest High School Age Commissioner, presented on the BRIDGE Club (Building Regional Impacts through Development, Government, and Engagement). He described the club's mission to engage high school students in community involvement and leadership by supporting Region Nine projects, including volunteer efforts related to food access and energy efficiency. Mr. Jordan highlighted current activities, partnerships, and future opportunities for collaboration with RNDC staff and communities across the region.

Commissioners gave updates from their communities.

## **10. ADJOURNMENT**

Nowell moved to adjourn. Rabbe seconded. Motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:11 p.m.