



GRETCHEN WHITMER  
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN  
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

DR. TIM BORING  
DIRECTOR

**MICHIGAN RURAL DEVELOPMENT FUND BOARD MEETING  
April 11, 2025, DRAFT MINUTES**

**Ralph A MacMullan Conference Center  
Manistee River Board Room  
104 Conservation Drive  
Roscommon, MI 48653**

**Board Members Present:**

Justin Horvath, RD Fund Board Member  
Erin Kricher, RD Fund Board Member  
Victoria Leonhardt, RD Fund Board Member  
Christopher Germain, RD Fund Board Member  
Jamie Zmitko-Somers, MDARD, proxy for Director Boring

**Other Attendees:**

Heather Throne, MDARD via Teams  
Tracey Barnes, MDARD  
Sara Lucas, LEO Office of Rural Prosperity via Teams  
Sasha Eliason, MDARD  
Kayla Chingman, MDARD  
Kyle Apsey, Apsey Farms via Teams  
Melaine Humphrey, EGLE via Teams

**Absent:**

Tim Boring, MDARD Director

The meeting was called to order by Jamie Zmitko-Somers at 12:02 p.m. Zmitko-Somers welcomed members of the Board and guests. Introductions were made by all in attendance. Justin Horvath moved to approve the agenda as presented. Christopher Germain seconded. Motion passed.

**Minutes of the July 25, 2024, Rural Development Board Meeting**

Christopher Germain moved to approve the July 25, 2024, meeting minutes with no changes. Second by Justin Horvath. Motion passed.

**Recap of 2021-2024 Grants**

Tracey Barnes presented information on past grants from 2021 through 2024. Tracey Barnes stated there was no significant issues to report. Kayla Chingman added that most of these extensions were due to equipment prices increasing since Covid and just needed more time to complete some projects.

### **Labor and Economic Opportunity's (LEO) Office of Rural Prosperity Update**

Sarah Lucas gave the Office of Rural Prosperity update to the Board. Informal conversation and discussion around the Rural Readiness Grant Program, eligibility, grant writing capacity, early phased programming and leadership trainings. Round one for fiscal year 2025 awarded \$1.3 million in projects. For the next round there is \$1 million proposed in the governor's budget to continue that grant program in fiscal year 2026.

### **Review 2025 Grant Projects – Rural Definition Discussion**

Kayla Chingman presented on the awarded 2025 Rural Development grant projects. Funding was for 21 projects, for a total of over \$1.8 million, 13 of the projects are in the Upper Peninsula and eight are in the Lower Peninsula. Information was also presented for the 2025 grant guidelines and timeline. A presentation was also provided to the board on various rural definitions and criteria. Information was provided on the definition language from MDARD's Rural Development Fund boilerplate, USDA, the Farm Bill, the Office of Rural Prosperity and the Census Bureau.

### **Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes & Energy - Mining Update**

Melaine Humphrey presented information to the board about the Ferris metallic mineral mining projections and updates. Justin Horvath questioned if any mining will take place in the Lower Peninsula or if exploration opportunities are being presented. Melanie was able to confirm no metallic mining will be taking place but exploration for minerals is highly possible.

### **Presentation – Apsey Farm**

Kyle Apsey presented on the Apsey Farm project that received funding from the department in 2021. Kyle stressed the important work that MDARD does to help local businesses and small communities survive, thrive and grow. Kyle addressed the challenges, competitiveness and the economic struggles for his farm. Apsey Farms is partnering with more farms and processors across the state to continue growth and serve more consumers.

### **Discussion July 2025 Meeting**

July 16, 2025, meeting date was discussed and approved with discussion on potential locations in the Upper Peninsula. MDARD will look at different locations along with tour options.

### **Public Comment**

Zmitko-Somers opened the floor for public comment. No public comment was received.

### **Adjournment**

A motion was made by Christopher Germain. Second by Justin Horvath. Motion passed. Meeting Adjourned at 1:50 p.m.