

## MICHIGAN RURAL DEVELOPMENT FUND BOARD MEETING

September 6, 2017

Village of Mackinaw City  
102 Huron Street  
Mackinaw City, Michigan

### Board Members Present:

Laura Braun, RD Fund Board Member  
Margaret Minerick, RD Fund Board Member  
John Walters, RD Fund Board Member

### Board Members Absent:

Fred Taccolini, RD Fund Board Member

### Other Attendees:

Jason Allen, MDARD  
Heather Throne, MDARD  
Gretchen Spedowske, Newaygo County RESA  
Kent Rabish, Grand Traverse Distillery LLC  
Emily Goodman, Superior Watershed Partnership

The meeting was called to order by Jason Allen at 1:01 p.m.

Jason Allen welcomed the Board to the meeting.

**MOTION: Margaret Minerick moved to approve the May 17, 2017, meeting minutes. Seconded by Laura Braun. Motion carried.**

Presentations were given by three awarded grant projects:

***Gretchen Spedowske, Newaygo County RESA***, provided an overview of their skilled trade infrastructure project in Newaygo County. Gretchen highlighted the Amatrol training equipment, along with drone and robotic training equipment, to target the workforce gap issue. The training equipment is housed at the Newaygo County RESA Career-Tech Center campus and utilized by career-tech students, college students and employees from Nestle Gerber and other manufacturing partners.

***Emily Goodman, Superior Watershed Partnership***, discussed how their grant benefits rural counties of the Upper Peninsula -- specifically Marquette, Alger, and Delta counties. Over the past four months, the SWP Great Lakes Conservation Corp has assisted each county with implementing prioritized on-the-ground natural tourism improvement projects including, but not limited to: public beach access, multi-use trails, boardwalks, interpretive signage, community/beach clean-ups, restoration of degraded natural areas (beach grass restoration, tree planting, invasive species removal, etc.), erosion control, litter removal and more.

**Kent Rabish, Grand Traverse Distillery**, presented on the expansion and growth of his distillery. He plans to double production of their craft whiskey from 225 barrels per year to 450 barrels per year. Grant funds are being used to purchase a new whiskey-designated still, a bottling line, and labeling machine. This project allows GTD the potential to increase revenues. Their suppliers will see a significant increase in the product and service purchases by GTD.

The Board discussed recommendations received for grant process and criteria changes for the upcoming grant cycle. Proposed changes discussed include establishing a funding cap for projects, the elimination of state agencies as eligible applicants, and requiring a letter of viability for projects.

**MOTION: Laura Braun moved to approve a \$100,000 cap for grant awards. Seconded by Margaret Minerick. Motion carried.**

The Board discussed leaving guidelines with the required 30% match and eligible counties with populations of 60,000 or less and Micropolitan statistical area as defined by the United States Office of Management and Budget for all grant projects. The list of eligible counties will remain the same as last year.

The board also discussed, per the Rural Development Fund Act criteria, preference must be given to projects in the region in which revenues are generated. They spoke about last year's preference being given to the following counties: Marquette; Alger; Delta; Menominee; Dickinson; Iron; and Baraga. It was decided the preference area would only be noted for this year's round as Marquette County.

**MOTION: John Walters moved to establish Marquette County as the only priority area to receive preference. Seconded by Laura Braun. Motion carried.**

**MOTION: Laura Braun moved to eliminate state agencies as an eligible applicant. Seconded by Margaret Minerick. Motion carried.**

**MOTION: John Walters moved to have the two senior board members serve on the Rural Development Joint Evaluation Committee and have the full board review the JEC recommendations for approval at a meeting in March 2018. Seconded by Margaret Minerick. Motion carried.**

It was discussed that the next meeting be scheduled in March 2018 in Mackinaw City. The Board requested MDARD to schedule the meeting.

There was no public comment.

**MOTION: Margaret Minerick moved to adjourn the meeting at 2:43 p.m. Seconded by John Walters.**