

**MICHIGAN RURAL DEVELOPMENT FUND BOARD MEETING
APPROVED MINUTES**

February 11, 2021

Virtual Meeting via Microsoft Teams

Board Members Present via Teams Meeting:

Justin Horvath, RD Fund Board Member, Owosso, MI
Fred Taccolini, RD Fund Board Member, Marquette, MI
Margaret Minerick, RD Fund Board Member, Sagola, MI
Gary McDowell, MDARD, Rudyard, MI

Other Attendees,

Heather Throne, MDARD, Corunna, MI
Sherri Goodreau, MDARD, Baraga, MI
Jamie Zmitko-Somers, MDARD, Henderson, MI
Erin Kilcher, Traverse City, MI
Melanie Humphrey, EGLE Gwinn, MI
Chuck Squires, Pigeon, MI
James Clift, EGLE, Lansing, MI

The meeting was called to order by Gary McDowell at 10:04 a.m. Gary informed the Board of the release of the Governor's Covid Recovery Plan. In that Plan, is an announcement of the creation of an Office of Rural Development which will be housed within the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Then Jamie Zmitko Somers welcomed members of the board and guests. Introductions were made.

Agenda for the February 11, 2021 Rural Development Fund Board Meeting

MOTION: Fred Taccolini moved to accept the agenda for the February 11, 2021 meeting. Justin Horvath seconded. A roll call vote was taken. Motion carried unanimously.

Minutes of the August 13, 2020 Rural Development Fund Board Meeting

MOTION: Margaret Minerick moved to approve the August 13, 2020 meeting minutes as presented. Seconded by Justin Horvath. A roll call vote was taken. Motion carried unanimously.

Project and Partnership Updates

Sherri Goodreau gave a slideshow presentation to the Board of completed grant projects. The presentation included Slagel's Family Farm, PM Power Group, Corulla Forest Products, and Keweenaw Bee Company.

Recap of 1027-2020 Grants & Review of 2021 Grant Approvals

Heather reviewed the 2021 Rural Development grants that were awarded funding. There were 140 grant applications. This was the largest and most competitive grant process to date, needing 23 JEC members to review, score and give recommendations for funding. Heather Throne informed the board of the status of the grants from 2017 through 2020.

Melanie Humphrey, Oil, Gas, and Minerals Geologist, EGLE. She is located at the UP Geological Repository in Gwinn updated the Board on the future of mining in Michigan. The Eagle Mine is scheduled for 2025 closure. There are currently other areas in the U.P. that are in pre-feasibility or feasibility phases. These potential areas are in Menominee, Gogebic and Ontonagon counties.

James Clift, U.P. Energy Task Force and EGLE, addressed the current energy issues related to the U.P. There is a lack of storage, supply, assistance programs and consumer protection from rising energy costs in the Upper Peninsula. Line 5 has received necessary permits, but the Governor revoked the 1953 easement allowing Line 5 to run through the Straits of Mackinac in November, as well as the Attorney General's office filing a lawsuit to shut it down. The rail system could be a possibility, but they need a special rating to move hazardous material.

James also spoke of the higher energy costs for the Upper Peninsula in general. There are 20 different electricity providers within the U.P. The Task Force is looking for better cooperation between entities to reduce or stabilize costs for consumers. Renewable energy is another consideration.

Jamie Zmitko-Somers, MDARD, briefed the Board on the Michigan Food and Agriculture Housing Task Force Report. MDARD Director Gary McDowell implemented a task force in 2019 to address housing needs for agricultural workers. The Task Force Team identified 5 key areas were identified:

1. Dedicated Funding
2. Legislation
3. Determine Agriculture Workforce Housing Needs
4. Local Planning-zoning issues
5. Agriculture Labor Housing-low-cost rentals for workers or employers

Public Comment

A notice will go out prior to the next meeting for public comment pertaining to the 2022 grant guidelines.

The next Rural Development Fund Board meeting is scheduled for August 17, 2021. If possible, the meeting will be held in Houghton, MI or virtual.

Adjourn

MOTION: Fred Taccolini moved to adjourn the meeting. Justin Horvath seconded. A roll call vote was taken. Meeting adjourned at 11:55a.m.