

**MICHIGAN RURAL DEVELOPMENT FUND BOARD MEETING
DRAFT MINUTES
August 16, 2023**

**Barrel & Beam (Room-Mezzanine)
260 Northwoods Road
Marquette, MI 49855**

Board Members Present:

Justin Horvath, RD Fund Board Member Expired

Erin Kricher, RD Fund Board Member

Victoria Leonhardt, RD Fund Board Member

Tim Boring, MDARD Director

Other Attendees:

Jamie Zmitko Somers, MDARD

Heather Throne, MDARD

Jamie Glenn, SAIL Representative

Susan Estler, Travel Marquette – Executive Director

Nathan Heffron, City of Negaunee – City Manager

Sasha Eliason, MDARD – Virtual

Tracey Barnes, MDARD – Virtual

Zane Stanton, MDARD – Virtual

Sarah Lucas, Office of Rural Development

Karen Anderson, public

The meeting was called to order by Director Tim Boring at 1:00 p.m.

Boring welcomed members of the Board and guests. Introductions were made. Director Boring thanked the board and staff for diligent work. Boring discussed the future of MDARD and agriculture going forward.

Minutes of the March 17, 2023 Rural Development Board Meeting

Justin Horvath moved to approve the March 17, 2023 meeting minutes with no changes. Second by Erin Kricher. Motion carried unanimously.

Public Comment

Heather Throne reviewed the three public comments received, all of which fell within current guidelines.

Request For Proposals Document/ Guidelines

Heather Throne discussed the implementation of Grants Management System by Agate Software that has worked with multiple agencies in the State of Michigan. The 2024 Rural Development grant is to launch October 24, 2023, in the MiAgGrants system. An informational webinar will be available to the applicants to have their applications returned by on December 14, 2023, by 3:00 p.m. The Joint Evaluation Committee evaluation is to be completed in February. The spring board meeting to take place in April due to push back dates of the 2024 grant round. No other changes to the guidelines were made.

Justin Horvath stated he is comfortable with the guidelines. Justin Horvath made the motion to approve, Victoria Leonhardt seconded, the motion passed with no discussion.

Legislative Report

Heather Throne provided copies of the legislative report and reviewed highlights from the report. There has been an influx of cost increases in the grant projects due to impacts of Covid-19 and supply chains. The grants team has been working with the grantees closely to help in assisting with delays and getting them successfully completed on that front. Five projects from 2022 have closed out. From 2021, there are eight open projects and one project, Mackinac Bluff Maple Farms, had to be terminated due to equipment and project delays. Those funds were able to be reallocated into next year's funds. For 2020 only there are two projects open, Bois Blanc and Maple Farms, are dealing with contactor issues so we are issuing an extension. For 2019, there is one open project, Michigamme River Basin, this is a dam renovation. The grants team is conversing with the grantee on next steps as no work plan activities have been performed. All 2018 and 2017 projects are closed.

Office of Rural Development Update

Sarah Lucas provided a presentation on the starting point for rural communities to invest in planning and collaboration across sectors. Office of Rural Development (ORD)'s goal is to help these communities become more competitive and proactive in gaining funds for building readiness & capacity in rural areas. The new Rural Readiness Grant Program is modeled from the Rural Development Fund Grant program to engage rural voices in policy and program development. Executive action made in July; ORD is to move from MDARD to LEO in December of 2023. Victoria Leonhardt asked how we can collaborate the Rural Readiness and Rural Development grant to collide with the applications received. Heather Throne and Sara Lucas both stated opportunities to make referrals interchangeably between the two programs.

Establish 2024 Meeting Schedule

The next meeting of the Rural Development Fund Board will move to April 10, 2024, in Gaylord, Michigan, for the spring meeting. The summer meeting, this will take place on July 23, 2024, in Escanaba, Michigan. MDARD is awaiting appointments for new board members to replace the expired positions. Motion made by Erin Kricher to approve the 2024 meeting dates of April 10 in Gaylord, Michigan and July 23 in Escanaba Michigan. The motion was seconded by Victoria Leonhardt. Motion approved.

Pause

The Rural Development Fund Board took a brief break from 1:56 p.m. to 2:05 p.m. to allow time for the presenters to show up.

Travel Marquette Presentation

Susan Estler and Jamie Glenn provided an update on their grant project to provide accessibility reviews for local business. The goal of the reviews was to allow Marquette to be more accessible to travelers. The group also worked on an accessibility brochure for any individuals seeking travel information.

City of Negaunee Presentation

Nathan Heffron gave an update on the City of Negaunee's grant project. Outlining the upgrades to the Brown Avenue sewer line from their 2019 project and the Teal Lake beach revitalization project from 2021.

Public Comment

No Public Comment

Adjournment

Meeting Adjourned at 2:43 p.m.