



WRIGHT COUNTY  
Economic  
Development  
Authority

**ANNUAL MEETING MINUTES**  
**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY**

**JUNE 8, 2022**

**DATE APPROVED: JUNE 20, 2022**

Darek Vetsch, President  
Christine Husom, Vice-President  
Mark Daleiden  
Mary Wetter  
Michael Kaczmarek  
Phil Kern  
Josh Gehlen

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<b>Members Present:</b>	Darek Vetsch, Christine Husom, Mark Daleiden, Mary Wetter, Mike Kaczmarek, Josh Gehlen
<b>Members Absent:</b>	Phil Kern
<b>Others Present:</b>	Clay Wilfahrt, Elizabeth Karels, Lee Kelly, Jim Jacobson, David Paradise, Melissa Stenson, Norman Bodeker, Greg Eckblad, Kristen Logas, Rachel Leonard, Jessica Stockamp, Pete Zimmerman, Nick Haggenmiller, Jennifer Nash, Bob Idziorek, Jim Bischoff, Jolene Foss, Jim Hallstrom, Zach Doud, Kelly Hinnenkamp, Scott Enter, Bruce Kimmel

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## **I. Economic Development Authority Annual Meeting**

At 6 p.m. Wednesday, June 8, the facilitator for the 2022 Annual Economic Development Authority (EDA) Meeting, Ehlers Public Finance Advisors Senior Municipal Advisor Bruce Kimmel started with a presentation talking about the EDA's background and focal points the group had established. Kimmel highlighted the focal points of facilitating redevelopment of county-owned properties, partnering with local communities, the Wright County Economic Development Partnership (WCEDP), and accessing state and federal resources. Kimmel told those present that he was going to have them break into small groups to share his or her community's top development priorities, strengths and weaknesses, identifying common interests and concerns. He also wanted the small groups to discuss opportunities and challenges that they believed the EDA might be able to help address within the townships and cities. Commissioner Darek Vetsch asked that people also share their unique ideas for economic development.

Everyone present introduced themselves and at 6:30 p.m. broke off into small groups to discuss these topics. At 6:48 p.m. the group came back together to discuss what they had learned. The following was a list of items that had been identified as being the greatest needs within the townships and cities:

- Small cities and townships requested assistance in educating their residents on issues like Tax Increment Financing (TIF) and tax abatement. It was noted that the EDA was currently working on an abatement policy.
- The lack of shovel-ready commercial-industrial sites.
- The lack of developers coming in without the ability to create multi-use living and working environment.
- Broadband dead zones, specifically in regard to the difficulty finding grants and funding for small projects, inconsistent service, the need for redundancy, and the townships' lack of knowledge about who the existing Internet Service Providers (ISPs) were. The group thought older neighborhoods were struggling the most with these broadband issues.
- A lack of commercial and industrial gap financing opportunities specifically for childcare centers. The group pointed out that the existing Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) was only available for industrial and some sites within the county were not feasible to develop. A possible solution could be to have the EDA match funding for these projects.
- Assistance with new and existing infrastructure replacement. The group had a common goal of trying to attract commercial businesses and wondered what funding was available.
- Support when townships and cities write grants.
- Providing infrastructure to additional industrial sites throughout the county.
- WCEDP matching financial support for advertising and marketing the county. The group thought this could help fill open jobs and increase the tax base.
- The need to improve countywide transportation funding policies with the involvement of townships and cities.
- The request for more engagement between the EDA and the county with the cities and townships. The group thought these entities needed to be more cohesive when it came to pooling resources and working together on projects and needs.
- The group pointed out that sometimes county focuses and city focuses for infrastructure improvements were two different concerns and thought the EDA should focus on projects that would happen without these infrastructure improvements.

- There was a discussion about whether an EDA levy could potentially be a good source for funding. There was a clarification that a levy would only happen if members had a chance to opt out.
- There were parts of the county that were landlocked and were still in need of business expansion, i.e. parking requirements. The group thought the county could help facilitate this expansion.
- There was a need for infrastructure improvements as it related to workforce housing development and building affordable multi-family housing. These projects had high construction costs and it had been difficult for the cities and townships to make a project of this nature feasible.
- The group wondered if there was a way for cities and townships to use the county's bond rating to lower costs.
- There was a need for the EDA to stem zoning changes to increase the potential for economic growth and the need for outdoor storage that was not able to be captured due to current zoning constraints.
- There was a need for funding for projects that the state was not covering like market rate housing and retail. The group noted that it wanted to ensure the funding was able to be diversified and that funding would not overlap with other programs.
- The group thought that both the EDA and the WCEDP could focus more on lobbying, marketing, utility inventory, education regarding what programs to pursue, and capacity building.
- Many cities and townships saw a need for utility improvements as a lot of the county was still using propane instead of utilizing natural gas lines. The group thought it could use the county's Geographic Information System (GIS) data to figure out where natural gas lines were located in addition to providing more information about fiber, water and sewer locations. This would be a huge help to small cities that needed engineering plans for expansion. However, it was noted that the EDA did not want to pursue utility planning too aggressively as it was not the Metropolitan Council.
- It was noted that communities with a population less than 5,000 did not have access to gas tax revenue from the state and this was a potential shortcoming the EDA could help compensate.
- The cities and townships wanted to not only focus on infrastructure expansion but quality of life as well. The representatives of these communities saw a need for more parks and other recreational opportunities in order to draw people into the county.
- The representatives from the cities and townships saw a need to market jobs within the county and keep the workforce local. There was a huge need to retain residents to fill jobs within the county as well as bring in people from outside of the county. WCEDP Executive Director Jolene Foss said that 70 percent of residents of working age living in the county worked outside of the county.

Of the list of issues and potential for growth, the group came up with the following list of the highest priority needs:

- Education for smaller communities
- Movement on tax abatement strategic ideas and policy
- The need for the EDA to partner with the WCEDP on projects
- GIS data sharing to provide expansion information
- Addressing the communities' broadband shortcomings

Vetsch emphasized that the EDA and county focus should be on projects that would not happen without infrastructure improvements. Members of the group voiced the concern that small communities did not necessarily benefit from the broad stroke improvements. Foss added that from the WCEDP perspective, she would want to see if the EDA would be interested in matching support for communities as well as work with the WCEDP to ensure there was no overlap in projects or funding. Project Administrator Elizabeth Karels added that if anyone wanted broadband information to please reach out to her. She shared that the Broadband Committee had collected a lot of data and utilized GIS in relation to this conversation. Kimmel added that GIS information could also be used to highlight portions of the townships that had strategic locations for natural gas improvements. He thought this was good to be aware of so the townships could plan for the future.

Commissioner Christine Husom pointed out that the topic that was brought up more than anything else was related to broadband throughout the county. She thought it made a big difference in building the communities and providing the county equal opportunity for growth. Kimmel encouraged fostering conversations about broadband and ISPs in a way that would make it economically feasible. The group thought it was important to focus on redundancy when working with ISPs in order to avoid the whole system being brought down by one outage. Commissioner Mary Wetter thought that satellite service was another way to address the issue rural communities were having with broadband. She did note that satellite was more expensive but still an option. Vetsch concluded the meeting by saying that he wanted to be able to be a resource for communities going forward and thanked everyone for their time and input.

**RECOMMENDATION: Add the discussed items on the agenda for the next EDA meeting.**

Meeting adjourned at 7:29 p.m.

EDA minutes submitted by Laine Stephan, Office Manager