**Wednesday, April 10, 2024, 6:00 p.m.**

**107 2nd Street North, Atwater, MN 56209** (Atwater Community Center)

**Members Present:** Commissioners Mike Brouwer, Kevin Crowley, Doug Erickson, Brent Guyan, Jon Hawkinson, Jill Hoff, Roger Imdieke, Kevin Krueger, José Luciano, Maureen Melgaard-Schneider, Robert Moller, Shawn Mueske, Rollie Nissen, Reagan Quinn, Lorallen Schmeling, Dave Sebesta, Carl Schuldes, Paul Simonsen, Berit Spors, and Jeff Vetsch.

**Members Absent:** Commissioners , Tiffany Barnard, Tony Hausladen, Thomas McDonnell, Kiza Olson, Yodee Rivera, Christopher Rowan, Steve Schmitt,

**Staff Present:** Executive Director Eric Day, Finance Director Darla Bajari, Economic Developer Nate Reuss, Regional Development & Grant Specialist Carol Lundgren, Transportation & Community Planner Mike Nicholas, Mobility Manager Terry Smith, and Communications Specialist Ben Carlson.

**Staff Absent:** None

**Guests:**  None

**Call to Order:** Chairperson Shawn Mueske called the meeting to order at approximately 6:00 p.m.

**Pledge of Allegiance:** The Pledge of Allegiance was recited by all Commissioners and staff in attendance, led by Chairperson Mueske.

# **Introductions:** All present Commissioners and staff provided introductions.

# **Approval of Agenda:** Chairperson Mueske presented the agenda and called for any additions. Neither Executive Director Day, nor any Commissioners present offered any additions.

# Commissioner Rollie Nissen moved to approve the agenda. Commissioner Jon Hawkinson seconded the motion, which carried with no dissent.

# **Approval of January 24, 2024, Full Commission Meeting Minutes:** Commissioner and Commission Secretary Dave Sebesta reported that he found no errors in the minutes from the January 24 MMDC Commission meeting, which were included in Commissioners’ meeting materials. With that, he made a motion to approve the minutes of the January 24, 2024 Mid-Minnesota Development Commission Meeting. Commissioner Robert Moller seconded the motion ,which carried with no dissent.

**Treasurer’s Report:** Commissioner and Commission Treasurer Kevin Crowley provided an overview of the Treasurer’s Report. He reported that, on January 17, 2024, MMDC had a checkbook balance of $36,870.85. Since that time, deposits totaled $339,009.67. Expenditures were $339,0285.88, leaving an ending checkbook balance of $36,854.64.

Commissioner Crowley also pointed to information, included within Commissioners’ meeting materials packets, showing MMDC’s savings account activity. As of January 17, 2024, MMDC had a savings account balance of $286,243.94. Receipts totaled $365,962.18 and expenditures totaled $408,480.66, leaving a remaining balance of $243,725.46.

Commissioner Crowley then made a motion to move the MMDC Treasurer’s Report forward, as presented. Commissioner Dave Sebesta seconded the motion, which carried with no dissent.

**Note:** A report on current investment values, an accounting of all revenue and expenditures, and a board payment listing were all included within the meeting materials packet.

# **Consent Agenda:** The meeting materials packet contained minutes from the following recent meetings for the consent agenda:

* 1. Loan Approval Board (Legacy): February 9, 2024 and March 25, 2024
  2. MMRTCC Subcommittee: January 23, 2024; February 27, 2024; and March 26, 2024
  3. Transportation Advisory Committee: March 25, 2024

Commissioner Robert Moller made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda. Commissioner John Hawkinson seconded the motion, which carried without dissent.

1. **Correspondence and Announcements:** Executive Director Eric Day took opportunity to share economic data with the Commission, including recent Consumer Price Index/inflation data (inflation was up slightly in March: +3.5% compared with March 2023) and recent unemployment statistics (U.S. Rate of 3.8% in March and local rates also shared for February, the most recent month published by MN DEED).

Day also shared information on an upcoming speaker event, sponsored by Meeker, McLeod , Sibley Community Health Services. How to Magically Connect with Anyone is the title of the event featuring speaker and magician Brian Miller. This event is aimed at helping people make better and more meaningful connections with those they meet so they can be seen as indispensable to those around them. The event will be held at the Crow River Golf Club on April 29. Day circulated information for those interested in registering for the free event. Commissioner Berit Spors added that space is limited and that the event is filling up fast. She also noted that Miller is a talented speaker and magician.

**Staff Reports:** Chairperson Mueske pointed to the written director and staff reports that were included within the meeting materials packet and provided an opportunity for Commissioners to ask questions. There were no questions.

# **Old Business:** There was no old business

# **New Business – Action Items & Commission Business**

* 1. **Further Introduction to MMDC’s New Regional Development & Grant Specialist, Carol Lundgren:**

Day informed that Lundgren joined MMDC on January 29 and has hit the ground running. He pointed to a short bio of Lundgren that was included within the meeting materials packet and outlines some of her previous experience. Day informed that Lundgren is working to help MMDC get a handle on all of the various energy-related opportunities made possible by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and Inflation Reduction Act, both of which are large. Lundgren has also been involved with two major grant applications as well as a master plan project proposal. Lundgren informed the Commission that she was happy to be working for MMDC and that she was excited to move forward with some projects.

* 1. **MMDC Staffing Update:** Day provided the Commission with an update on MMDC’s staffing situation.He informed that Mike Nicholas, who was originally hired as MMDC’s Transportation & Community Planner, was selected for MMDC’s vacant economic developer position and will be joining Nate Reuss to lead our Economic Development efforts. Day added that he and Reuss interviewed six professionals, including Nicholas. He informed that at least four of them could have been a good fit for the economic developer role. However, at the end of the day Nicholas was at the top of each of both Reuse’s and Day’s ranked candidate list. Day added that he knew when MMDC hired Nicholas that Nicholas had good potential for a number of roles, including economic development.

Day reminded the Commission that Nicholas spent most of his career in leadership roles within the manufacturing industry. However, during this time he also obtained an undergraduate degree in economics and a master’s in public policy. Nicholas has also served 3 different planning commissions in communities of various sizes, which gives him some added perspective.

Day informed that Nicholas will transition into his new role beginning April 16. He stated that this creates a vacancy for our Transportation & Community Planner position. That position is posted and Day hopes to begin scheduling interviews before the end of the month. Day encouraged all Commissioners to feel free to refer those they believe might be good candidates and stated that he would be happy to have a conversation with anyone who is unsure of their qualifications, etc. Day then circulated a printed copy of the position posting.

* 1. **MMDC Evaluation of Director Day and Other MMDC Staff:** Day pointed to a list of questions contained within Commissioners’ meeting materials packets. Day stated that these questions would be sent to all Commissioners in May to give them the opportunity to provide input on Day’s performance as Executive Director. Day encouraged Commissioners to let him know if they believe there are additional questions that should be included.Day also informed that the survey questions would be sent out and collected by Finance Director Darla Bajari, who would provide them directly to MMDC’s Executive Committee. This would then inform the Executive Committee’s evaluation of Day’s performance.

Day then pointed to a form, also contained within the meeting materials packet, that he uses to evaluate MMDC staff, for Commissioners’ information. Day reminded that this evaluation, which occurs in May, determines whether or not eligible staff will receive their cost of living adjustments.

* 1. **Approval of Identified Staff to Sign Checks During Any Unusual Director Absence:** Day informed that, on rare occasion, it could happen that he is unavailable when a check must be signed and time is of the essence. Former MMDC employee Michelle Marotzke was previously selected by the Commission to sign checks in Day’s absence when this was the case. As Marotzke is no longer with MMDC, he recommended that MMDC’s Terry Smith be given this responsibility. Day added that, like Marotzke, Smith would receive an additional $25 each month for this responsibility. He then requested approval of Terry Smith as MMDC’s back-up check signer.

Commissioner Rollie Nissen made a motion to appoint MMDC Staff Terry Smith as MMDC’s back-up check signer. Commissioner Maureen Melgaard-Schneider seconded the motion, which carried with no dissent after a comment from Commissioner Nissen informing the Commission that his Mid-Minnesota’s Regional Transportation Coordinating Council-involved work with Smith has been very telling about the kind of work Smith is capable of performing.

* 1. **Approval of Increase to MMDC’s Professional Service Rate:**  Day pointed to a handout that was included with Commissioners’ per diem/mileage forms prior to the meeting. He then informed that MMDC’s Professional Service Rate is currently at $85/hour and that MMDC hasn’t adjusted this rate for six years. He reported that after discussion with MMDC Finance Director Darla Bajari and a check of rates charged by MN’s other RDC’s, he was interested in increasing MMDC’s professional service rate to $100/hour, effective at the start of the next fiscal year. He noted that this adjustment would not affect service rates for projects started before July 1. He also stated that this adjustment is needed to keep up with the increasing cost of doing business.

Day assured that MMDC will retain the option of discounting our services for smaller communities or organizations who might be more financially strapped. He also reminded that MMDC regularly provides some services without charge, including no-cost consultations, very short-term technical assistance, and other services that are already funded by one of MMDC’s grants.

Commissioner Lorallen Schmeling made a motion to increase MMDC’s professional services rate to $100 per hour, effective July 1, 2024. Commissioner Berit Spors seconded the motion, which carried with no dissent after discussion.

Discussion included a request from Commissioner Jon Hawkinson to revisit this rate more often, perhaps annually. Day stated that he would be happy to bring the issue back to the full Commission each Spring, which would allow MMDC staff the opportunity to have a current figure when budgeting for the coming year.

Commissioner Robert Moller inquired as to if the $15 increase to $100 is enough. Day stated that he and Finance Director Bajari had discussed the matter and $100 was the figure they were comfortable with. He reminded that MMDC also receives some compensation via MMDC’s tax levy, something a luxury a private firm would not have. Day indicated that, especially if the matter is reconsidered each year, the $100 rate would be fair. Commissioner Paul Simonsen noted that this increase would put MMDC right “in the ballpark” with other regional development commissions, whose rates were included in the provided handout.

Commissioner Spors inquired as to whether the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area is served by an RDC. Day informed that the Twin Cities is served by the Met Council, which is a very different type of organization. Day added that the St. Cloud Metro area is also without and RDC, as is southeaster Minnesota and west-central Minnesota, though West Central Initiative does perform some of the same functions as an RDC.

Commissioner Mike Brouwer inquired as to how many billable hours MMDC has in a given budget year. Day indicated that this will vary from year to year. He informed that many projects will be 200 hours plus. Day estimated that billable projects amount to 800-1,000 hours per year. Day reminded that larger revenue streams include grants and service agreements, in addition to the levy, etc. He added that, overall, these billable projects are a relatively small slice of the MMDC budget, possibly in the neighborhood of 15 percent.

Commissioner Brouwer also inquired as to whether Day personally spends much of his time on these billable projects, noting that Arrowhead RDC charges a higher rate for executive director time. Day reminded the Commission that he did not personally come up through the planning profession and that his planning assistance does not likely hold the same value as Arrowhead’s executive director. Day stated that his involvement is typically focused on edits/revisions and consultation. For anything beyond that, Day stated that he is in “learning mode”.

Commissioner Doug Erickson requested clarification that this rate increase would not impact projects already in motion prior to July 1. Day confirmed that was his intent and clarified that projects like the Renville County Comprehensive Planning project would not be affected.

Commissioner Doug Krueger indicated he thought the $100 rate was good. He noted that McLeod County has used MMDC for a couple of recent projects. He also stated that he has encouraged McLeod County staff to consider using MMDC for projects, when MMDC is qualified and has capacity to take on the project at hand.

* 1. **Consideration of Auditing Firm Proposals:** Finance Director Darla Bajari pointed to a handout provided with per diem/reimbursement forms prior to the meeting. Bajari informed the Commission that she had sent requests for proposal out to approximately one dozen auditing firms. Only two firms responded to the RFP, including MMDC’s longtime audit provider, Conway Deuth and Schmiesing (CDS). Bajari reported that MMDC is aware that, due to limited workforce, many firms are no longer interested in responding to requests for auditing proposals. She noted that there is at least one other RDC, in the northern part of the state, who struggled to find an auditor for almost three years. Bajari went on to say that, after discussion with Executive Director Day, the staff recommendation would be to stay with CDS, despite the fact that their rate has increased and is not the lower of the two rates quoted. The primary reason for this is the fact that CDS is familiar with MMDC and with how RDCs work. This means they will require less time to learn and will require less MMDC staff time, which could quickly outweigh any savings realized by going with the slightly lower-priced firm.

Executive Director Day added that he was in agreement with Finance Director Bajari and said that, over the years, CDS has been very professional, friendly, and efficient. He then stated that both he and MMDC Finance Director Bajari believe it would be wise to maintain CDS as MMDC’s auditing firm for the fiscal years of FY 2024, FY 2025, and FY 2026.

Commissioner Doug Krueger inquired as to if there are new guidelines that MMDC needs to be cognizant of when selecting a firm. He indicated his understanding of the fact that there had been some changes, at least on the county level. Finance Director Bajari stated that the RDCs do not face the same regulations and, in fact, aren’t required to put auditing services out for bid, however it is good to do due diligence to ensure the Commission receives good value for dollars spent on these services.

Commissioner Rollie Nissen moved to approve Conway, Deuth, and Schmiesing as MMDC’s auditing firm for the 2024, 2025, and 2026 Fiscal Year. Commissioner Jon Hawkinson seconded the motion, which carried with no dissent after some additional discussion.

Additional discussion included a question from Commissioner Roger Imdieke as to whether the Baker Tilly firm audit RDCs. Day stated that he believed the firm had but not at MMDC, at least in recent history. Commissioner Imdieke also noted the additional barriers Kandiyohi County faced when the State of Minnesota made auditing changes, noting that things ended up a year behind with their audit.

Commissioner Paul Simonsen inquired as to how many years MMDC had used CDS for auditing. Neither Day nor Bajari were able to answer that question offhand. However Day stated that they pre-dated his time as an MMDC Commissioner, so prior to FY 2019. Simonsen then inquired if there was concern over the fact that the same firm was doing the audit year after year. Bajari explained that CDS typically incorporates at least one new staff member on their MMDC audit team each year, to ensure fresh perspectives are incorporated. CDS staff have also rotated audit responsibilities each year, so they are not looking at the same categories they analyzed the year prior.

* 1. **Investment Recommendation:** Finance Director Bajari pointed to an additional handout provided to Commissioners prior to the meeting. She informed that MMDC’s current 4M investment will mature on April 15. She also informed that she checked rates on April 9 and that the Minnesota Association of Governments Investing for Counties (MAGIC) fund is currently offering the best rates. Bajari reported that she and Day agree that it would be prudent to lock into the MAGIC fund for a one-year term. While the rate may change slightly, as of April 9 the rate was 5.1 percent.

Commissioner Moller inquired as to whether rates have been dropping. Bajari said that, for the last couple of weeks, rates have indeed been dropping.

Commissioner Kevin Crowley requested a refresher on the MAGIC fund. Bajari explained that it is an investment tool that can be accessed by municipalities, including RDCs. It is managed by U.S. Bank. Commissioner Crowley inquired as to whether the MAGIC fund is FDIC insured. Bajari reported that it is not.

Commissioner Roger Imdieke made a motion to reinvest the maturing 4M fund into the Minnesota Association of Governments Investing for Counties (MAGIC) fund for a one-year term. Commissioner Berit Spors seconded the motion, which carried with no dissent after further discussion.

Further discussion included a comment from Commissioner Roger Imdieke that MAGIC fund works with a lot of local government units. He commented that he thought it was a safe and secure investment. Commissioner Doug Krueger noted that McLeod County does not use the MAGIC fund and that he has some reservations over the fact the MAGIC fund is not FDIC insured. He also noted that McLeod County works to stay with local banks and said that they have been doing alright with investment rates. Finance Director Bajari noted that the local bank with the highest rate is less than the 4M rate, and that the 4M rate is lower than the MAGIC rate. Commissioner and Treasurer Kevin Crowley noted his belief that the 4M fund is not insured either, which Finance Director Bajari confirmed.

* 1. **Liability Coverage Waiver Form:** Finance Director Bajari pointed to the tort liability coverage waiver form and a separate explanation that was included in the meeting materials packet. Bajari noted that, in previous year, MMDC has elected to not waive liability tort limits and stated that it is the staff recommendation to continue not waiving those limits. A form to that effect must be submitted each year.

Commissioner Kevin Crowley made a motion to once again not waive tort liability limits. Commissioner Mike Brouwer seconded the motion, which carried with no dissent.

* 1. **Revolving Loan Fund Updates:** MMDC Economic Developer Nate Reuss pointed to the revolving loan fund summary information that was included within the meeting materials packet. He noted that, since the time that summary was written and submitted, another prospective lending project has entered the loan pipeline. This project would require an additional $35,000 from MMDC’s Legacy Revolving Loan Fund. If all projects in the lending pipeline come to fruition, that fund, which currently has almost $130,000 available, would be left with about $15,000.

Commissioner Roger Imdieke inquired as to MMDC’s current lending rate. Reuss stated that the current rate is 9.5% and reminded that MMDC is always one point over the prime rate, as published in the Wall Street Journal. Day added that there are 40 loans in MMDC’s portfolio, all of whom are in good standing as of the time of this Commission meeting.

* 1. **Aging Related Information/Update:** Commissioner Maureen Melgaard-Schneider passed information to all Commissioners and staff about the work that is being done by the Minnesota Board on Aging to reorganize and enlarge Minnesota Indian Area Agency on Aging. This entity used to be comprised of four Minnesota tribes. The formula for the allocation of federal Older Americans Act dollars, which support senior services led to the Minnesota Indian Area Agency on Aging getting less funding than needed. Commissioner Melgaard-Schneider informed that the remedy was to adjust the funding formula, which is based on geography and population.

The Minnesota Board on Aging also opened up a process in which all 11 Minnesota Tribes were invited to join an enlarged Minnesota Indian Area Agency on Aging. While this was a major undertaking, 10 of the 11 tribes have joined. The Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community did not sign on, as they had no financial need. The Red Lake Nation will now serve as the lead agency for the Minnesota Indian Area Agency on Aging. Commissioner Melgaard-Schneider noted that both the Upper Sioux and Lower Sioux communities will now be served. The Minnesota Board on Aging must now work to set the Minnesota Indian Area Agency on Aging up for success, something Commissioner Melgaard-Schneider noted she believed was lacking previously. The April 3 press release, which Commissioner Melgaard-Schneider circulated and in which she was quoted, called this development a historic change.

In May, Commissioner Melgaard-Schneider will attend a State-Tribal relations training. She has asked members of the Board on Aging’s governance committee to join as well. If this undertaking is successful, the tribes will be able to receive services they have not received previously (e.g., home and community based services – homemaker, assisted transportation, caregiver support, health promotion). Commissioner Melgaard-Schnieder also noted that an Indian Elders Coordinator position was funded and is being created. She noted that the position has been calibrated to attract highly experienced/high quality candidates. Commissioner Melgaard-Schneider stated that she would continue to keep the Commission updated.

Commissioner Melgaard-Schneider informed that Dr. Joe Gaugler will be speaking on Alzheimer’s Disease: What It Is And What Can Be Done About It, on April 25. The event will be held at Bethesda North Pointe, in New London, from 2:30 – 4:00 and at the Atwater Community Center from 5:00 – 7:00. The second event will include a complimentary meal, though registration is required. Commissioner Melgaard-Schneider will provide Day with the information on the events so that it can be distributed to the Commission.

Commissioner Melgaard-Schneider then mentioned that the Legislative Task Force on Aging is more than halfway through their work. The first draft report on their work has been completed. As it is, it looks good, per Melgaard-Schneider, who noted there are a multitude of aging programs in the state and that it is no wonder people have difficulty connecting with the most appropriate services when they need information or assistance. Commissioner Melgaard-Schneider will continue to push the Legislative Task Force to develop an effective inventory of services available.

Commissioner Berit Spors inquired as to if the new and improved Minnesota Indian Area Agency on Aging will impact the Senior Linkage Line. Commissioner Melgaard-Schneider said that Minnesota’s tribes are receiving assistance through the Senior Linkage line but that the Red Lake Nation will train and staff individuals to provide better, more complete and appropriate services.

* 1. **Items of Interest from Other Elected or Public Interest-Representing Commissioners:** Commissioner Rollie Nissen noted that the Highway 23 Coalition will have their annual meeting on Friday, April 12, in Marshall. If any Commissioner’s county, city, or organization is a member of the Coalition, they are welcome to attend. Commissioner Imdieke noted that construction on the “South Gap” between New London and Paynesville has been underway for several weeks.

Commissioner Roger Imdieke noted that there has been growing concern over emergency services reimbursement and recruitment. Commissioner Imdieke informed that he serves on the Association of Minnesota Counties Task Force for Emergency Services but said that the MN Legislature is a bit ahead of AMC at this point. He noted that the Governor currently has $16 million suggested in his supplemental bill for EMS services. Both the MN Senate and the Minnesota House are proposing funding at much higher levels (approximately $120-$140 Million). Commissioner Imdieke urged Commissioners to support funding at these higher amounts when speaking with any state legislator.

Imdieke also noted that the New London-Spicer high school now has a grant to train high school students as emergency medical service providers. This program has now received an achievement award from the Association of Minnesota Counties.

Commissioner Imdieke also explained that one of the concerns is that EMS may respond to a call that doesn’t result in the provision of transport to a medical facility. In other cases, the victim may be transported by helicopter instead of by ambulance despite the fact that the ambulance arrived on the scene to provide assistance. When either of these situations arise, the local EMS service doesn’t receive payment and this causes financial hardship.

* 1. **Update on MMDC Grant Work In Progress:** Day informed the Commission of several grants that have been recently submitted or are in-process to assist MMDC stakeholders. Day first reminded the Commission that MMDC received a $285,000 ($95,000 per year for three years) grant from the Minnesota Department of Commerce to help stakeholders connect with clean energy opportunities made possible by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) and Inflation Reduction Act (IRA).

Day reported that Regional Development & Grant Specialist Carol Lundgren is working on a separate MN Department of Commerce grant that would provide planning funds to small communities (less than 15,000 residents, though Day had incorrectly stated less than 10,000 residents during the meeting) who are interested in developing energy focused plans for their communities. If funded, MMDC would award funding to communities, who could then select their planning provider, which could be but wouldn’t necessarily have to be MMDC.

Day also informed that, in partnership with other regions, he and Lundgren and have also been involved with a U.S. Department of Energy grant application. In short, if awarded, this grant would bring $10,000,000 to much of southern and western Minnesota to pay for solar installations on public buildings. The goal would be to help communities lower their public building-associated utility costs. Installations would be “behind the grid”, meaning that the power generated onsite would be used onsite. Day noted that this could be a good fit for facilities like water treatment plants who have relatively high utility bills due to constant power needs. Funds would not be limited to that type of facility, however. Day said that this is a major federal grant and informed that it is, therefore, very competitive. However, he did note his belief that a solid proposal was submitted. Partners would include Region 9 Development Commission (lead applicant), Southwest Regional Development Commission, Upper Minnesota Valley Regional Development Commission, and West Central Initiative Foundation.

Day then informed on a Minnesota Department of Agriculture Grant related to workforce development. This grant would provide funds to help train and retain workers in the meat processing industry. Focus would be placed on moving people into jobs with small to midsize meat-cutting businesses. This grant might support tuition assistance, retainment bonuses, and other supportive services. Day stated that things are still in process but it appears this grant will also include two other RDCs (SRDC and UMVRDC), two employment services providers (Central MN Jobs and Training Services and Southwest MN Private Industry Council), Ridgewater College, and Farmers Union.

Finally, Day informed that, this week, MMDC applied to the Moving Greater MN Forward Program, that is being administered by MnDOT. He noted that MMDC is aware that transportation options for nondrivers, including older individuals, people with disabilities, and people of little financial means, are scarce during evening and weekend hours. While there a small handful of rideshare drivers (Uber/Lyft, etc.) who reside within our region, Day noted that they often travel to St. Cloud or the Twin Cities to provide rides, as they can enjoy higher ride volumes and earn more money. If awarded, MMDC’s plan is to identify six individuals to work as rideshare drivers within the MMDC region. Drivers would need to qualify through their selected rideshare service. They would then receive a supplement to provide the rideshare service within 15-20 miles of MMDC-identified communities (Willmar, Glencoe, Hutchinson, Litchfield, and Olivia). To earn the supplement, they would need to be “on duty” and providing rides within their prescribed territory at least 30 hours per week after 2:00 p.m. during the week or anytime on weekends and holidays. The supplement would start at $450/week (equivalent to $15/hour x 30 hours) and would decrease by $50 every 4 weeks over the course of 6 months, when the supplement goes away. The goal is to give these drivers ample opportunity to develop a local customer base so they can earn more through their rideshare apps as the weeks progress, making up for the decreasing and eventually disappearing supplement. Day stated that he is not 100 percent sure if this will work but that it would be an opportunity to try something that is fairly innovative and easy to replicate in any small community where there is a need to supplement public transit services.

Day cautioned that it’s possible none of the grants will come to fruition but noted that MMDC would “miss 100 percent of the shots it doesn’t take.”

Commissioner Robert Moller inquired if the U.S. Department of Energy Grant could assist farms interested in adding solar power to their operations. Day stated that the U.S. DOE grant would support installations on public properties/facilities only.

Commissioner Roger Imdieke noted that public entities can receive a 30 percent credit for solar installations. He wondered whether this grant would impact that at all. He also inquired as to if the money was for planning or for actual installations. Day informed that the money would be for actual buildout and that the hope was that public entities would use that 30 percent credit to build out even more. Commissioner Imdieke asked if MMDC was aware of any entities that do the required analysis to determine if a project makes sense. Day noted that finding such services is a bit of a bottleneck. However, Clean Energy Resource Teams (CERTs) and the Minnesota Technical Assistance Program (MnTAP) are two places to start.

Commissioner Brent Guyan inquired as to whether the Department of Energy grant would be used for energy production or energy creation. Day clarified that the dollars would be used to pay for the solar installations. Commissioner Robert Moller inquired as to if local government units could pay for solar installations at electric vehicle charging stations. Day said that this could be one option. Day also provided an example of a city placing a solar installation on a building like Atwater’s combination community center-fire station. Day noted that there is likely a good deal of equipment that needs to be charged on a constant basis and a solar installation could cover much of the building’s needs. Day suggested that it would make the most sense to install these solar improvements on buildings where there is a constant energy draw.

Commissioner Roger Imdieke asked Day to clarify why Day thought it might be difficult for MMDC and its collaborators to secure the Department of Energy funding. Day explained that, whenever there is a federal application, there is a good deal of competition, including competition from areas with more disparity, which is something the federal agencies will consider. Commissioner Guyan requested that Day send a copy of the grant applications submitted. Day indicated that he would do so.

Chairperson Mueske noted that Ridgewater College’s meat cutting program is still very new. To date, most instruction has been online with an internship component. The college is now going to incorporate instruction space on-campus. Day noted that he had learned from Ridgewater Instructor Sophia Thomas that most of the students in that program are women, which he found interesting.

Commissioner Melgaard-Schneider inquired as to the typical starting wage for an entry-level meat cutter. Economic Developer Nate Reuss indicated that the wage is typically around $19.00 per hour and that there is significant opportunity for promotion and movement via succession in the industry. Day added that this grant will focus more on the small operations and won’t involve large players in the industry, such as Hormel/Jennie-O. Day also shared his opinion that the most important component of the USDA grant application, if awarded, would be the career counseling and support participants would receive from Central Minnesota Jobs and Training Services and/or Southwest Minnesota Private Industry Council. Commissioner Jill Hoff, an employee of Central Minnesota Jobs and Training Services, mentioned that the organization has additional funds that can be used to help participants train and onboard.

Commissioner José Luciano asked if the incorporation of battery storage will be allowed in the U.S. DOE grant and also asked if a public entity could overbuild a solar installation to the point they could sell energy back to the grid. Day said that he believed there was some allowance for battery storage. However, there was no desire to build installations that generated more power than the individual facility required. Day noted that there are places where the grid cannot handle additional electricity, so it’s important to keep these installations “behind the grid”.

Commissioner Doug Krueger stated that McLeod County looked at installing solar on their government center. He said that concerns over possible roof damage prevented them from moving forward with the idea. Commissioner Krueger also expressed his frustration over the fact that garbage burning isn’t included as an allowable activity for power generation under any of the known grants.

**Other:** Day reminded all commissioners that MMDC’s June Commission meeting will be held at 4:00 p.m. on June 12, likely on the MinnWest Technology Campus, in Willmar. Day reminded that this meeting includes the annual public hearing on MMDC’s budget and levy, at 5:00, as well as a casual Commissioner and Staff appreciation dinner. Day is also working on arranging a topical presentation prior to the annual meeting.

Commissioner Robert Moller inquired as to which Executive Committee positions were up at the end of the year. Day said that he would get this information out to all Commissioners via email.

Commissioner Berit Spors informed the Commission that MMDC’s Terry Smith will now be sitting on the PrimeWest Health Equity Council. She wanted the Commission to understand that this is an exclusive group. Commissioner Doug Krueger noted that he is concerned that PrimeWest Health is using Kaizen Health to broker rides, stating that this is something MMDC should be doing instead of a private entity. He would like Smith to report on this to the Commission. Smith did provide a short explanation but a more in-depth explanation can be brought forward in the future.

**Adjournment:**

With no further business, Commissioner Kevin Crowley moved to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Kiza Olson seconded the motion, which carried with no dissent.

Chairperson Shawn Mueske adjourned the meeting at approximately 7:30 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

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Eric Day, Acting Secretary

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Dave Sebesta, Secretary

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Lorallen Schmeling, Vice Chairperson

**The Next Full MMDC Commission Meeting Will Occur on Wednesday, June 12, at 4:00 p.m.**

(Likely on the MinnWest Technology Campus. Specific building location to be determined)