

## Mid-Minnesota Development Commission Commission Meeting Minutes

**Wednesday, September 17, 2025, 6:00 p.m.**

**Grove City Community Center: 210 Atlantic Ave W, Grove City, MN 56243**

**Members Present:** Commissioners, Kevin Crowley, Todd Frank, Tony Hausladen, Jon Hawkinson, Jill Hoff, Doug Krueger, Mike Kutzke, Gabra Lokken, José Luciano, Maureen Melgaard-Schneider, Greg Mertens, Robert Moller, Shawn Mueske, Rollie Nissen, Kiza Olson, Sara Pollmann, Reagan Quinn, Scott Refsland, Yodee Rivera, Dave Sebesta, Carl Shuldes, Darren Sombke, and Berit Spors

**Members Absent:** Commissioners Brent Guyan and Roger Imdieke

**Staff Present:** Executive Director Eric Day, Finance Director Darla Bajari, Finance Assistant Nikki Johnson, Economic Developer Mike Nicholas, Communications Specialist Ben Carlson, Transportation & Community Planner Blake Barnard, and Mobility Manager Terry Smith

**Staff Absent:** Regional Development and Grant Specialist, Carol Lundgren

**Guests:** Lisa Herges, Allen Hillstrom

**Call to Order:** Chair 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 Chair Mueske.

**Introductions:** All present commissioners, staff, and guests provided introductions.

**Approval of Agenda:** Chair Mueske presented the agenda and pointed out the need to correct New Business E – Investment Recommendation, which it had been mistakenly listed as an informational item rather than an action item. With no other additions or corrections put forward, Commissioner Rollie Nissen moved to approve the agenda. Commissioner Robert Moller seconded the motion, which carried with no dissent.

**Approval of June 18, 2025, Full Commission Meeting Minutes:** Commissioner Robert Moller made a motion to approve the April 23 Commission minutes, as presented. Commissioner Jon Hawkinson 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, which was contained within the meeting materials packet. He reported that, on June 1, 2025, MMDC started with a checkbook balance of \$13,229.63. MMDC had checkbook receipts/deposits of \$149,004.19 and expenditures of \$152,339.94, leaving a checkbook balance of \$9,893.88 on August 31, 2025.

Treasurer Crowley then pointed to MMDC's investments, which were listed in the written report, totaling \$970,476.31 as of August 31, 2025.

Treasurer Crowley then made a motion to approve MMDC Treasurer's report, as presented. Commissioner José Luciano seconded this motion, which carried with no dissent.

**Consent Agenda:** The meeting materials packet contained minutes from the following consent agenda items.

- A. MMDC Joint RLF Loan Approval Board Meeting: July 10, 2025
- B. MMRTCC Subcommittee Meetings: June 24, 2025; July 22, 2025, and August 26, 2025.

Chairperson Mueske provided an opportunity for questions and comments on the Consent Agenda items. With no questions or comments, Commissioner Kevin Crowley made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda. Commissioner Scott Refsland seconded the motion, which carried without dissent.

**Correspondence and Announcements:** Day provided meeting guest Allen Hillstrom with the opportunity to introduce himself further. Hillstrom is considering Commission participation as an Information Technology Sector Representative in the Public Interest. Mr. Hillstrom informed the group that he has worked in I.T. since 2006. He started West Central Technology in 2018, and this business now has locations in Willmar, Hutchinson, and St. Cloud. He noted that he offices in Willmar, and that this location has about 28 employees. Hillstrom also mentioned that he has a second, related business and has four to five years of human resources experience which he obtained while working for a large company (approximately 1,400 employees).

Hillstrom went on to say that he's working to determine how he can contribute to the community in a way that aligns with his companies' goals, and that the opportunity to consider MMDC participation was brought to him by Commissioner Jon Hawkinson.

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Day then passed a card of encouragement for Commissioner Lorallen Schmeling, who is currently recovering from a health issue, and encouraged all commissioners and staff to sign it. Day said that he, along with Commissioner José Luciano, will pay a visit to Commissioner Schmeling, who is stepping back from MMDC participation on September 18.

Day informed that the approved commissioner position descriptions were included with each commissioner's per diem form. Day asked that all commissioners review, sign, and return the forms, along with their per diem sheets. He noted that those commissioners who were unable to attend in June would also find the annual conflict of interest form, which should also be completed, signed and returned.

Chair Mueske provided an opportunity for questions or comments on the shared announcements. There were no questions or comments.

**MMDC Staff Reports:** Chair Mueske pointed to the written staff reports that were contained within the meeting materials packet. He then opened the floor for any report-related questions.

Chair Mueske had a question stemming from Finance Director Darla Bajari's report, related to the U.S. EDA's annual risk-rating letter, which indicated MMDC moved from a grade of A to a grade of B. Bajari, Economic Developer Nate Reuss, and Executive Director Day jointly explained that the reason for this downgrade was due to the fact that MMDC had received several large loan payoffs, which led MMDC to having more cash on-hand than the EDA would like to see. The EDA also dropped several performance categories in which MMDC had previously fared very well. Bajari also added that the EDA is working to change the cash-on-hand threshold, as they agree that it is too low at present. Reuss mentioned that the only consequence of moving from a grade of A to a grade of B was that reporting would need to be done two times per year, instead of one. However, as all RLF reporting is moving to twice annually anyway, there was no real adverse consequence.

Day encouraged commissioners to connect entrepreneurs and businesses in need of gap financing to MMDC. Reuss mentioned that there have been some loans considered in recent months, but they were not strong enough applications to rise to the level of the Loan Approval Board.

Chair Mueske also noted that he read, in MMDC Economic Developer Mike Nicholas's report, that he had attended a training session related to the need for communities to embrace their quirks. Chair Mueske asked Nicholas if he had since started analyzing these community quirks within the MMDC region. Nicholas mentioned that the Economic Development Team can look at these but cautioned that, per the presenter, one may not like the findings of such an examination.

Chair Mueske then asked MMDC Communications Specialist Ben Carlson if there is any demographic or related information available for MMDC's social media followers. Carlson said that there is an extensive amount of information available, related to followers' nationality, age, gender, location, etc. He encouraged commissioners to reach out if they have any related questions.

**Old Business:** There was no Old Business

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

- **Approval of Commissioner Kiza Olson's Continued Participation as a representative of the Healthcare Sector, in the Public Interest:** Day informed that, at the time of MMDC's June meeting, it didn't appear that Commissioner Olson would be able to continue on our Commission, due to schedule conflicts. However, her Wednesday schedule has opened up a bit and she'll be able to continue after all. Day noted that, while this is great news, Olson's name was not on the FY 2026 roster of approved public interest commissioners.

Day pointed to an updated roster of public interest serving commissioners, which was included in the meeting materials packet. Day said that his roster would be accurate if Olson's continued participation was approved and that it would be updated again once an IT Sector representative decision has been made. Day then asked for a motion to approve Commissioner Olson's continued participation.

Commissioner Maureen Melgaard Schneider then made a motion to approve Commissioner Kiza Olson's continued MMDC participation. Commissioner Yodee Rivera seconded the motion, which carried with no dissent.

- **Election of MMDC Vice Chair:** Nominating Committee Chair Robert Moller informed the Commission that, as Commissioner Lorallen Schmeling is no longer able to continue in his Vice Chair role, due to health reasons, a special election is necessary to refill this seat. He noted that this seat must be filled by an elected

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MMDC commissioner, to preserve an elected majority, as is required by MMDC's bylaws. Commissioner Moller noted that Executive Director Day sent, via email, a request for nominations on July 8 and September 11. Moller explained that the person elected for this role will finish out the current Vice Chair term, which concludes June 30, 2026, and will then be eligible to run again for two full consecutive terms. He also informed that one interested commissioner has been identified Commissioner Jon Hawkinson.

Nominating Chair Moller then called three times for any other nominations to the MMDC Vice Chair role. With no other nominations brought forward, Nominating Chair Moller moved to elect Commissioner Jon Hawkinson as MMDC's new Vice Chair for the remainder of the existing term. Commissioner Carl Shuldes seconded the motion, which carried with no dissent.

- **Commissioner Recruitment Update:** Day informed the Commission that, in addition to working to refill the Information Technology Sector seat, he is in contact with the Chair of the Meeker County Township Association, Bruce Dicke. Dicke is working to try and identify a replacement for Commissioner Schmeling, who served the Cedar Mills Township Board.
- **Executive Director Quantitative Performance Measures (SMART Goals) for FY26:** Chair Mueske reminded the Commission that, during the June meeting, Executive Director Day's performance evaluation, which is conducted by the Executive Committee, was discussed with the full Commission. At that time, there was concern over the fact that the evaluation included qualitative measures but lacked quantitative measures.

Day pointed to the meeting materials packet, which included nine SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Timebound) goals. Day informed the group that these goals were approved by MMDC's Executive Committee, via email. He indicated that his performance in these areas will be considered at the end of the current fiscal year, in addition to the annual survey results, adding that the annual survey may need to be adjusted to gather information on his performance in these areas. Day also stated that he anticipated these goals will be modified and possibly added to each year to ensure continued relevance.

Day said that he would be happy to take questions on these quantitative performance goals. No questions were brought forward. Chair Mueske reiterated that the performance measures would be modified as MMDC continues to evolve as an organization.

- **Investment Recommendations:** MMDC Finance Director Darla Bajari pointed to a prepared investment recommendation, which was included within the meeting materials packet. She informed the Commission that MMDC has a CD that expires on October 27, 2025. This CD is invested through the Minnesota Association of Governments Investing for Counties, otherwise known as the MAGIC fund. She noted that it was the opinion of MMDC staff that reinvesting the maturing CD into the MAGIC fund at a rate of 4.35%, for a six-month term would be the preferred investment option.

Day then stated that he was looking for approval to provide the MMDC Executive Director and Finance Director the authority to reinvest the maturing CD into another six-month CD through the Minnesota Association of Government Investing for Counties, provided that this option remains highly favorable at the time of the current CD's maturity. Commissioner and Treasurer Kevin Crowley made a motion to this effect. Commissioner Berit Spors seconded the motion, which carried, after discussion, with no dissent.

Discussion included a question from Commissioner Robert Moller about whether the anticipated cut in the federal funds rate (i.e., Fed Rate) would affect the investment interest rate. Day said that the Federal Reserve did cut the federal funds rate by 0.25% earlier in the day, and that minimal reductions in this rate were anticipated in the coming year. Day said this could bring MMDC's rates down slightly, but that he didn't expect a major change.

Commissioner Spors asked if Bajari could inform on what the zero-term interest rate was through the MAGIC account. Darla pointed to the number in her report and said that the current daily rate was 4.27%. She added that rates have dropped slightly since the last MMDC investment decision (4.5% in April 2025).

- **FY26 Budget Projection Update:** Day pointed to an update of MMDC's FY 2026 budget projection, which showed MMDC has begun to reduce the projected deficit (originally -\$83,094 and now -\$61,334). He stated that this deficit number will continue to decrease as more projects and grants are added and noted that MMDC has received some interest in planning services from a couple of different communities.

Day also stated that MMDC staff are in the process of submitting two different grant applications (on submitted earlier on September 17 and another to be submitted on September 18). These grants include

the U.S. EDA Disaster Supplemental Grant and a new Small Business Partnerships Program grant through the MN Department of Employment and Economic Development. Day said that while there's a good chance neither grant will be funded, either could balance or nearly balance MMDC's budget projection. Day also said that MMDC staff are working to secure more revenue projects. Day then offered to field any Commissioner questions. There were no questions.

- **MN DEED Small Business Assistance Partnership Program Grant Application Resolution:** Day informed that the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development is seeking proposals from individual organizations, regional coalitions, and statewide entrepreneurial support services providers to provide no-cost small business development and technical assistance services to entrepreneurs and small business owners. He said that DEED requires particular focus on underserved populations and geographies including people of color, veterans, women, people with disabilities, low-income individuals and others in rural areas, but added that this would not preclude MMDC from also serving people who do not fall into those priority categories.

Day explained that grant funded services, which would include individualized technical assistance, workshops, and business trainings, would be intended to support the start-up, growth, and success of Minnesota's entrepreneurs and small business owners and facilitate an economic environment that produces job growth and supports the economic success of Minnesota individuals, businesses, and communities. He said that MMDC is partnering with Southwest Regional Development Commission, both to serve a larger geography and be more competitive.

Day then said that the total request is for \$160,000 per year for two years (\$320,000 total). Up to 15% of the grant can be used for administration and MMDC would receive two-thirds of that amount, as we would serve as fiscal host. The remaining dollars would be split evenly between the two organizations, which have similar populations.

Day informed that matching funds are needed to be competitive, a 50% match divided by the two RDCs or, in other words, \$40,000 per year from MMDC. He said that, in order to commit those matching funds, a resolution is required. He then pointed to the prepared resolution, which was included in the meeting materials packet. Day said that, after reading the resolution, he would be asking for a motion to adopt it by roll call vote, so that MMDC staff can move forward with the grant application, which is due this Friday. He also offered to answer questions on the resolution or the DEED application.

At that time, Commissioner Jon Hawkinson made a motion to suspend Day's reading of the resolution. Commissioner Robert Moller seconded this motion, which carried with no dissent.

Before moving onto a vote on the resolution itself, Chair Mueske inquired as to if any commissioner had questions. Commissioner Robert Moller requested clarification on the matching fund requirement and its impact to MMDC's budget. Day said that, should MMDC's application be selected for funding, MMDC would contribute \$40,000 for each of the two program years. However, MMDC would receive slightly more than \$80,000 annually, so it would have a positive impact on MMDC's budget.

With no further questions, Chair Mueske moved the resolution to a roll-call vote. Day called the role and each commissioner cast their voice vote in favor of adopting the resolution. There was no dissent. The adopted resolution is as follows:

#### **RESOLUTION**

**WHEREAS**, through its Office of Small Business and Innovation, the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) is seeking proposals from individual organizations, regional coalitions, and state-wide entrepreneurial support service providers to deliver no-cost small business development and technical assistance services to entrepreneurs and small business owners in rural Minnesota, with a particular focus on underserved populations, including individuals who are Black, Indigenous, people of color, veterans, people with disabilities, LGBTQ+ individuals, and people with low-incomes.

**WHEREAS** the delivery of these services will support the start-up, growth, and success of Minnesota's entrepreneurs and small business owners, and will facilitate an economic environment that produces job growth and supports the economic success of Minnesota individuals, businesses, and communities.

**WHEREAS** Mid-Minnesota Development Commission wishes to partner with Southwest Regional Development Commission to provide no-cost technical assistance to historically underserved entrepreneurs and small business owners throughout a combined 13-county region (MMDC: Kandiyohi,

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McLeod, Meeker, and Renville Counties. SRDC: Cottonwood, Jackson, Lincoln, Lyon, Murray, Nobles, Pipestone, Redwood, and Rock Counties).

**WHEREAS** Mid-Minnesota Development Commission and Southwest Regional Development Commission are seeking \$320,000 in Small Business Assistance Partnerships Program grant funding (\$160,000 per year for a two-year period), from DEED, to deliver this no-cost technical assistance.

**WHEREAS** the request for proposals indicates the Small Business Assistance Partnerships Program grant review committee will prioritize proposals that demonstrate committed matching funds equivalent to 50% of the funding request, and that state funds cannot count toward this match.

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that the Mid-Minnesota Development Commission authorizes staff to respond to the Small Business Assistance Partnerships Program request for proposals, released by the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, in partnership with Southwest Regional Development Commission, by submitting a joint proposal in pursuit of a Small Business Assistance Partnership grant to provide no-cost technical assistance to historically underserved entrepreneurs and small business owners throughout a combined 13-county region.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that Mid-Minnesota Development Commission is Committed to providing half of the non-state matching funds needed to be competitive for this project, up to \$40,000 per year for a two-year period (\$80,000 total), and that this required local share will be made available upon grant award and is not currently encumbered in any way that would preclude its use toward this project.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Mid-Minnesota Development Commission authorizes the Executive Director, Commission Chair, or, in the Commission Chair's absence, the Commission Vice Chair, to execute the aforementioned grant agreement, and any amendments thereto, with the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development.

Attest:

\_\_\_\_\_  
MMDC Chair

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
MMDC Executive Director (Acting Secretary)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

- **Approval to Use MMDC Dedicated Reserves for the Previously Approved Willmar Rail Park Predevelopment Expense:** Day reminded that, during the June 18 Commission meeting, he had obtained Commission approval to dedicate \$4,000 to assist the City of Willmar with predevelopment costs, for work needed to support their U.S. EDA Grant application to make additional improvements to the Willmar Industrial and Rail Park. Work included a cultural survey, a wetlands report, and a threatened and endangered species report. The total cost of this work was about \$21,000, with the remaining costs paid by Kandiyohi County Economic Development, the City of Willmar, and the property owner.

Day then informed that, at the June meeting, he had failed to obtain your permission to pull the approved \$4,000 contribution from either MMDC's Planning Assistance Fund or MMDC's Community Enhancement Fund. Day said that it would be justifiable to use either fund to cover this expense, as both are intended to make planning and improvements more affordable to our Communities. He pointed to a listing of MMDC's reserve balances, which was included in the meeting materials packet, and said that he was asking for approval to use either the Planning Assistance Fund or the Community Enhancement Fund to cover the \$4,000 expense. Day went onto explain that while MMDC hasn't tapped either of these funds recently, traditionally, the Community Enhancement Fund is used to support local projects. The Planning Assistance Fund, when used, was for a broader geography. Day qualified that there is no hard, fast rule on which fund should be used.

Commissioner Robert Moller made a motion to use MMDC's Community Enhancement Fund to cover the previously approved \$4,000 predevelopment assistance expense. Commissioner Carl Shuldes seconded the motion, which carried with no dissent.

- **Update on MMDC Revolving Loan Funds:** MMDC Economic Developer Nate Reuss pointed to the written report that was included within the materials packet. He noted that the Commission had already discussed MMDC being moved by the U.S. EDA from an A risk rating to a B risk rating but offered to take additional questions on that or any other RLF-related item.

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Commissioner Kevin Crowley inquired as to if MMDC is at any risk of having RLF dollars taken back by the U.S. EDA. Nate indicated that there is no danger of this but said that he appreciated the question.

Day shared that MMDC does have about \$400,000 to lend, at present and again encouraged commissioners to refer businesses and entrepreneurs in need of gap financing. Reuss reminded that, about a year ago, MMDC had very little money available to lend, as it was all out “on the street”. There have been about five early loan payoffs since the first of the year.

Commissioner Maureen Melgaard-Schneider inquired as to how, beyond reaching out to businesses via MMDC’s commissioners, MMDC markets the RLF opportunity. Day said that MMDC’s economic development professionals visit with the local banks in the MMDC region every year, to ensure they are aware of MMDC’s gap financing opportunity, and that bankers also participate on MMDC’s Legacy RLF Loan Approval Board. MMDC Economic Developer Mike Nicholas later added that the Small Business Development Center also refers their clientele to MMDC for the gap financing opportunity.

Commissioner Kiza Olson inquired as to the current loan interest rate. Reuss informed that the rate is currently at 8.5%, but that it would likely drop to 8.25% based on today’s lowering of the federal funds rate. Day added that the rate is always 1.0% more than the prime rate, as listed in the Wall Street Journal.

- **Consideration of 2026 Commission Meeting Dates:** Chair Mueske pointed to the proposed dates which were contained in the meeting materials packet. Executive Director Day then informed that these dates are generally close to the dates used in 2025. He indicated that care was taken to avoid meeting during the Lenten season. He also noted that the December meeting was moved back one week to provide MMDC’s auditors with a bit more time to prepare their FY 2025 audit presentation.

Commissioner Rollie Nissen made a motion to approve the proposed meeting dates for Calendar Year 2026. Commissioner Robert Moller seconded the motion, which carried with no dissent.

- **Commissioner Webpage:** Day informed the Commission that MMDC Communications Specialist Ben Carlson will be creating a Commissioner-specific webpage. This page will include Commission resources, including schedules, bylaws, committee rosters, etc. Once this page is developed, Day will share the link. He added that this page will not hold any private information, at least initially, so no password will be required to access it.

- **Aging Update:** Commissioner Maureen Melgaard Schneider provided an aging report to the Commission. This report included the following:

- Minnesota Board on Aging’s 2025 Dementia Grant: The Minnesota Board on Aging concluded their 2025 dementia grant round. Awards were announced on September 9 and there were no selected grantees from the MMDC region. The level of interest and demand was very high. With \$750,000 available in grant dollars, the MBA received an unprecedented \$5.3 M in funding requests.
- Medicare Open Enrollment: Medicare Open enrollment will begin on October 15 and go through December 7, 2025. This is the time frame in which Medicare consumers can make adjustments to their current plans. 2026 plan information for the annual enrollment period will be officially released on October 1. This is when the annual notice of change documents will be sent to current enrollees by each insurance carrier.
- Senior LinkAge Line Rebranding: For nearly 30 years, the Senior LinkAge Line has been Minnesota’s primary aging resource connecting older Minnesotans, caregivers and others to the services and supports they need. To reflect the continued growth of this critical work and to better connect with the people served, the resource has been rebranded to *Minnesota Aging Pathways*. This rebrand was unveiled on Senior Day at the Minnesota State Fair, sponsored by Minnesota Aging Pathways, following several months of research, surveys and focus groups.

Minnesota Aging Pathways is a service of the Minnesota Board on Aging in partnership with Minnesota’s area agencies on aging. It is the state’s resource for all things aging, including:

- Connecting people to resources, services and support.
- Coordinating resources such as assessing, support planning, helping people return or remain in their homes and long-term follow-up to help ensure success.
- Statewide public outreach through coordination of messaging and information available across the state.

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- Conducting nursing facility pre-admission screening to confirm the level of care needed for the individual and to connect the individual with lead agencies for supportive services for mental illness and/or developmental disabilities.

More information: Minnesota Aging Pathways can be reached Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. by calling 800-333-2433 or via live chat online at [mn.gov/aging-pathways](https://mn.gov/aging-pathways).

- 2025 Age Friendly -Minnesota Regional Exchanges - This fall, Age-Friendly Minnesota and its regional partners will present a series of six forums across Minnesota to connect with communities, celebrate the age-friendly movement, and discuss opportunities ahead. Join us to learn and share what's happening in your region!

Event highlights include:

- Update on Age-Friendly Minnesota and the Multisector Blueprint on Aging
- Regional Showcase of Age-Friendly Efforts
- Panel Discussion of Elected Officials and Regional Leaders

The Southwest Regional forum will be held in Willmar and hosted in partnership with the [Minnesota River Area Agency on Aging](#), the [City of Willmar](#), and [Bethesda](#). More details to follow.

Provided resource: <https://www.agefriendlymn.org>

**Items of Interest from Other MMDC Commissioners:** Chair Mueske opened the meeting for other commissioners to share items of interest from their respective communities, organizations, or industries.

Items of interest included:

- Commissioner Todd Frank informed that a large number of MN's school boards will have bond requests on their ballots, so they can maintain services, etc. Chair Mueske asked if there has been a trend in the passage rates of bonds/referendums. Commissioner Frank said that the Minnesota Association of School boards is watching this. While there has been no clear trend, up or down, with regard to passage, the number of bonding requests is tracking in an upward direction. More will be known after the November elections.
- Commissioner Yodee Rivera provided an update on the new walking bridge in Glencoe. Because work wouldn't be finished by the end of the construction season, it was delayed to the beginning of the 2026.
- Commissioner Rivera also informed that Glencoe recently celebrated the grand opening of their new pickleball courts, which are getting good use. It appears users include those who are coming to Glencoe from surrounding communities, as well as local residents. The courts have received good reviews from regular pickleball enthusiasts.
- Commissioner Rollie Nissen noted that the section of MN Highway 23, along the Willmar bypass, which wasn't completed in the 1970s (was left as a 2-lane, despite the fact that the entire bypass was designed as a four-lane and quite a bit of the site preparation was already complete), still does not have funding, despite some recent work toward that effort. The contracted engineering firm is currently advising against a Transportation Economic Development (TED) funding request. It will likely be looked at again for the 2030 construction season.
- Commissioner Nissen noted a need for economic development and other community studies, which require funding, so the potential impacts of continued Highway 23 development can be assessed. Some of the communities along the highway are resistant to the idea of being bypassed, from a local economic standpoint. (Background: The Highway 23 Coalition is working on the continuous improvement of U.S. Highway 23, with an eventual goal to have a four-lane divided highway from I-90 in the southwest to I-35 in the northeast.). There will be a Highway 23 Coalition meeting on October 3, 2025, in Roscoe, MN. Commissioner Maureen Melgaar-Schneider thanked Commissioner Nissen for his participation on the Highway 23 Coalition. She noted that her husband was recently hospitalized in St. Cloud and said that the recent highway improvements between Willmar and St. Cloud (now 4-lane, divided for the entire stretch) were appreciated.

**MMDC Region (EDR 6E) Economic Report:** Day pointed to a brief regional economic report that was contained within the meeting materials packet. He shared that his goal was to provide a general

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understanding of how the region is doing economically. He added that, while there is a good deal of uncertainty at present, by most objective measures the MMDC region is doing fairly well. He also admitted that, as soon as the report is prepared, it is often out-of-date, as new stats are released on a regular basis. Day encouraged Commissioners to let him know if there is specific economic information that they would like for him to include in future reports. If he can find sources, he's happy to include more or different information.

### **Regional Transportation Coordinating Council (RTCC) Update and Broader Transportation Discussion:**

Day circulated information on the Mid-Minnesota Regional Transportation Coordinating Council (MMRTCC). This information included an explanation of the purpose of the MMRTCC, the definition of mobility management, a brief description of public transit limitations, and an explanation of MMRTCC funding. It then went on to highlight recent MMRTCC activities, including technical assistance to transportation providers; volunteer and professional driver recruitment; MMDC's/MMRTCC's Rideshare Support pilot project (provides a tapered weekly subsidy to two rideshare drivers as they establish a critical mass of customers, provided they operate at least 30 hours per week after 2 p.m. on weekdays and anytime during weekends or holidays); rider outreach, education and troubleshooting; and facilitation of the MMRTCC Advisory Council. Finally, this printed information provided suggestions on how MMDC's commissioners can support RTCC efforts. These suggestions included:

- Keeping abreast of MMRTCC Activities.
- Recognizing the need for improved and expanded transportation services for our region's nondrivers.
- Referring those with transportation needs or those considering the launch of a new transportation-focused business to Mobility Manager Terry Smith for consultation and resources.
- Considering becoming a volunteer driver and/or promoting this opportunity to those in your circles.
- Continuing to support MMDC's contribution of local funds to the RTCC project.
- Sharing your own transportation solution ideas

Day then asked if commissioners had transportation concerns or ideas to share. Day indicated that, via the RTCC, MMDC staff are willing to try other new and innovative approaches at addressing transportation issues. Comments included:

- Commissioner Kiza Olson commended staff on the new Rideshare Support effort and suggested that staff be sure to share information with the various healthcare providers in Kandiyohi County (the location of the pilot project). Day assured Commissioner Olson that this has and will continue to happen.
- Commissioner Todd Frank indicated that food shelf patrons might be a population to prioritize when developing transportation solutions. MMDC Mobility Manager Terry Smith informed that the Family Promise organization, which has a location across the street from the Kandiyohi County food shelf, in Willmar, expressed interest in devising a contract with the Rideshare Drivers, during a recent outreach event. There may be more opportunities for similar arrangements.
- Commissioner Maureen Melgaard-Schneider asked if the drivers involved with the Rideshare Support pilot project might be interested in starting their own transportation businesses, beyond rideshare, and remarked that MMDC's RLF programs may provide some needed financing. Smith indicated that one of the two rideshare drivers is interested in eventually expanding his transportation business. Day added that this driver is even considering the incorporation of autonomous vehicles, when that technology and the legislation surrounding it is ready.
- Commissioner Gabra Lokken informed that she used to drive for both Uber and Lyft but said that she had to travel to the Twin Cities area to make enough money for her operation to be worthwhile. She indicated that she is eager to hear how the program goes and recommended that the rideshare information be shared with all the local bars in the service area. She added that the metro area's culture is to use rideshare when there is a chance the driver may be impaired. In rural areas, it's more common to see impaired drivers take chances and drive, often on secondary roads. Finally, she noted that she would be surprised if these drivers wouldn't need a weekly supplement, at some level, to continue making service worth their time and expense. Day conceded that this may be the case and noted that the pilot project is giving them an opportunity to learn. He also mentioned that business cards have been ordered, and flyers printed, for the drivers, who are also participating in outreach, including outreach to local bars and other businesses.
- Meeting guest Allen Hillstrom stated that he thought the Rideshare Support program could help to drive more rideshare services to the MMDC region, and that this is needed. He said he had questions about whether the initial drivers will continue to provide service once the subsidy is gone and whether other drivers will jump into rideshare to serve the newly developed customer base. He asked if entities like

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United Community Action Partnership, Family Promise, and others could be approached to see if and how they might be able to help support this transportation effort. Day admitted that he is unsure if the rural rideshare service will be sustainable without a weekly subsidy and reiterated that staff are looking forward to the learning that comes with this project. He indicated there may be more opportunities for organizations to work with the rideshare drivers and that this could be explored. Day then reminded the Commission that, as taxpayers, we all contribute significantly to the cost of public transit rides, and that it could be that support for something like rideshare may cost a similar amount. Day added that the region's public transit services do good work but said that they cannot do it on a 24 x 7 basis.

- Commissioner Reagan Quinn inquired as to if rideshare services could be used for young people. She said that there are many who require transportation to various appointments, employment, etc. and noted the trend of some young people waiting longer to get their drivers license, for various reasons. Day said that, for the Rideshare Support Program, drivers have been told that they need to follow the policies of their rideshare platforms but said that staff are also interested in finding transportation solutions for young people. He said that it could be that Uber and Lyft are not the most suitable platforms for the rural area but said that MMDC has started with these platforms as they are the ones with which many people already have some level of familiarity. Commissioner Lokken noted that there was an instance when she was providing rideshare services, when a mother put their 13-year-old daughter in the car with her and sent her off alone. Commissioner Lokken shared that she had reservations about this but was glad to know that the young girl was safe when she was with her. Commissioner Quinn noted that the Central Community Transit bus will transport children.
- Commissioner Melgaard-Schneider inquired as to if the two engaged rideshare drivers have done any outreach with local industry, as there may be workers who require rides. Smith said that some outreach has been done with Jennie-O/Hormel, but that this is the only intentional industry outreach to this point.
- Commissioner Melgaard-Schneider also suggested that the engaged rideshare drivers get their information to the Willmar airport, for those who fly into the area and require transportation.
- Commissioner Melgaard-Schneider then asked about the rideshare-focused instructional sessions that are being offered at Willmar's Community Center in October. Smith provided more details on these sessions and confirmed that the intent was to help those less familiar with rideshare, so that they can take advantage of the service. He added that the platforms continue to develop and that there are new ways to arrange rides for others (e.g. an adult caregiver arranging rides for their aging parents).
- Commissioner Melgaard-Schneider then asked if it would be possible for rideshare drivers to deliver prescriptions, etc. Smith said that many rideshare drivers also provide some level of courier services (e.g., Uber Eats).
- Commissioner Sara Pollmann suggested that it would be a good idea to get the rideshare information to local cannabis dispensaries. Day said that this was an excellent suggestion, and that it might be a way to provide transportation for those who are impaired and keep them from driving themselves.
- Day noted that one of MMDC's engaged rideshare drivers is bilingual. Smith then provided a little more background on each driver. Blanca, who is new to rideshare but has some experience delivering Amazon packages, is a retired youth corrections officer. Chris has been a rideshare driver for several years. When he first started, he would get about eight rides per month. Chris is semi-retired from the West Central Tribune and is interested in, one day, incorporating more autonomous technology. He is happy to be able to operate locally, rather than traveling to more populated areas to provide rides. Smith added that, in addition to helping those with transportation needs, the Rideshare Support project provides an economic benefit to drivers.
- Day informed that Smith has worked to increase the number of wheelchair accessible vehicles (WAV). Central Community Transit currently has one WAV van and is planning to add a second. Parents Inspired, the operator of a new volunteer driver program in Hutchinson, has applied for a grant that would fund the purchase of two WAVs for their service, and has already received a smaller AARP grant that can be used to cover the required matching contribution. Day said that, as more WAVs become available, there will be more opportunities to get wheelchair users to important occasions, such as weddings and funerals, in addition to their medical appointments. Smith added that he has had some recent discussions with KB Transportation, and that this business is serving the Willmar area, with a WAV incorporated into their service model. They have been called upon to help get customers to weddings, the dialysis clinic, and other important venues.

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- Day forecasted that there may come a time when neighborhood associations incorporate shared autonomous vehicles but again stated that the laws surrounding autonomous vehicle use will likely be slower to develop than the technology itself.
- Commissioner Berit Spors noted that small communities also have residents who need rides, including rides to worship services, when public transit isn't an option.
- Commissioner Rollie Nissen shared his experience volunteering when the Superbowl was in Minneapolis. He noted that, when he was stationed at the airport, many people asked him where they could find the Uber stand. Day said that one key to MMDC's Rideshare Support program will be to make sure that the entire population is comfortable using Uber, including those who are less technologically savvy.

Chair Mueske encouraged all commissioners to bring forward topics for future Commission discussions. Day shared that he has been in communication with Commissioner Brent Guyan about the possibility of facilitating a question-and-answer session surrounding energy. Guyan, who was unable to attend this Commission meeting due to an unavoidable conflict, has experience in various aspects of the energy sector, including wind, solar, natural gas, and ethanol. Day said that he would likely request commissioners' questions prior to the meeting so that Commissioner Guyan has an opportunity to put more thought to his answers.

**Adjournment:** With no further business, Commissioner José Luciano moved to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Rollie Nissen seconded the motion, which carried with no dissent. Chairperson Shawn Mueske then adjourned the meeting at approximately 7:35 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

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Eric Day, Acting Secretary

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Shawn Mueske, Chairperson

**The Next MMDC Commission Meeting Will Occur on Wednesday, December 3, 2025, at 6:00 p.m., Likely at a Kandiyohi County Location (specifics to be confirmed).**