

NEON Minutes  
September 14, 2017, Biotechnology Advancement Center

Meeting began with the Pledge of Allegiance and Nobles County Administrator, Tom Johnson, presided over the meeting.

Legislative Priorities: Nobles County Commissioner Widboom questioned the intent of 3A. on the Agenda labeled Urban Lawmaker Tour. Administrator Johnson advised we need to invite urban representatives to our area for a perspective on farming operations and big businesses here vs the metro area, as the other representatives' priorities are just in the Cities. Discussion was held on our direct disadvantage with neighboring states of South Dakota and Iowa because of the tax breaks outside of Minnesota and the workers' compensation mandates in Minnesota. Linden Olson, I.S.D. 518, also expressed the importance of inviting diverse legislators to show how our area is reflective of the metro area with issues and opportunities. Representative Mariani, with education, has been in the area several times. Mr. Olson volunteered to contact Rod Hamilton; Commissioner Widboom volunteered to contact the Soybean Growers to help out with the tour; Administrator Johnson volunteered to contact Senator Bill Weber and will contact Commissioner Gene Metz to request that he speak with Representative Joe Schomacker.

Administrator Johnson asked for volunteers for a subcommittee to review and provide input for legislative priorities. Nobles County Commissioner, Bob Demuth Jr., volunteered and suggestions were made to contact Darlene Macklin of the Chamber and Paul Langseth on behalf of the Townships for representation. An email will be sent out asking for more volunteers for representation. Administrator Johnson advised the subcommittee will be gathered to wrap up the priorities by the end of the year when Legislative season kicks off.

Suggestions on the priorities included: 1). Essential Element #1 will be completed for Lewis & Clarke Water System Completion to Worthington MN so Essential Element #2 Infrastructure funding, including roads, bridges, broadband and transportation could be moved up. The support of critical services, such as gas, was also specifically discussed; 2). Keep the document short with each Essential Element having 1 or 2 bullet points; 3). For Education, express the importance of the changes in teacher licensure, the achievement gap, and the soft skills that need to be taught to students as they are no longer taught at home; 4). Daycare Licensing; 5). Small Cities Assistance Roads and 6.) Taxes on online sales.

Lismore Cooperative telephone Broadband Project Update: Administrator Johnson advised LCTC expect to complete fiber in the ground this fall and are now working on permitting the towers with the FAA. The State Road Crossing permits have been an issue. The County is in the process of putting together a bond and putting in a cash infusion for economic development. If not on direct loop, residents can connect through wireless, line of sight.

Where should we focus our efforts?: Administrator Johnson advised broadband was the first focus but asked the group where to focus the efforts next. Doug Knuth, City of Round Lake, advised that roads are still a big issue. Cheryl Janssen, Seward Township, asked if it would be more feasible to get gravel with E & E as new operators of the rail. Mr. Johnson advised the new operator owns a quarry for crushed gravel. The group discussed the different qualities of crushed rock and their value. It is not feasible now but more discussion could be held in the future. Mr. Johnson also advised that the railroad tie pickup project was complete, the tracks are done and the weeds are in better shape.

The group was asked to think about economic development that could take place now that we'll have the water capacity and we have the 60/90 corridor. Linden Olson stated he was not in favor of the School District renewing the Nobles Home Initiative if the bond issue doesn't pass as there is no room for more students. Mr. Olson further explained that the School Board has spent 100's of hours and hundreds of dollars on this and looked at scheduling alternatives. Aaron Hagen questioned if the empty schools could be utilized in the communities of Round Lake, Rushmore and Reading and kids be bussed back and forth. Mr. Olson explained that the costs would be too high with the mandates of bringing those schools up to code. Coleen Gruis, City of Rushmore, stated the small towns died when schools closed. Put schools back in and it will help the economic development. The Rushmore post office has gone to ½ days

and there is very little traffic. Online purchasing has risen and no sales tax is collected on those purchases; however, UPS and Fed Ex trucks utilize our roads, contributing to the wear and tear. The group agreed sales tax on online purchases should be included in legislative priorities.

Around the Table:

Linden Olson/I.S.D. 518 – I.S.D. 518 started the school year with an enrollment of 3250, higher than projected; 50 new staff members out of approximately 200; intangible costs of not having the proper sized schools for our students – the focus will be on the referendum in February 2018; legislation has changed, but not enough, on the licensure for teachers and equitable funding; Public Retirement Plans are still underfunded; Okabena-Ocheda Watershed drain down/fish kill of Lake Ocheda in 2018 could make the lake good for a lot of years.

Commissioner Demuth asked Mr. Olson to explain why the School Board decided to hold the general election on Election Day and referendum on a different date at a cost. Mr. Olson explained the general election is a mandate for a vacancy and the School Board didn't think there was ample time to get information out for the bond. An additional 3 months was needed so that the consultant would help spread the word.

Aaron Hagen/Worthington Public Utilities – As State of Minnesota has approved connection to Worthington, WPU is now working on how to get it here, how to mix it and will build a couple of meter houses. Commissioner Demuth asked if WPU has considered solar panels and Mr. Hagen responded that it is still expense but that it has been discussed and will be reviewed as the technology is improving. Currently, not able to take advantage of tax credits.

Gary Ewert/Heron Lake Watershed District – Watershed is still addressing draining system with petitions continuing to come in; projects are getting completed and the County is redetermining as needed.

Robert Demuth Jr./Nobles County – Enjoyed the opportunity with 28 others to see the Okabena-Ocheda Watershed District from top to bottom on a bus tour. Dan Livdahl did an excellent job.

Cheryl Janssen/Seward Township – No update.

Coleen Gruis/City of Rushmore and Kanaranzi-Little Rock Watershed – City of Rushmore storm water pond wrapped up to help with drainage; working towards paving of roads and bringing back more businesses; Kanaranzi-Little Rock Watershed working on One Watershed One Plan, a 2 year process.

Doug Knuth/City of Round Lake – Road work is done; water tower repairs and maintenance done; Abraham Algadi came to 9/13 Council mtg and a resolution was passed in support of road assistance for a grant application due 12/1, which plan will also include a grant to the DNR for a path for safety.

Donald Linssen/Nobles County – Budget Committee initially was at a 10% levy increase and now at a 5.94% for not to exceed amount; good cooperation received from Department Heads, which many have fixed costs; health insurance continues to increase and Senior Citizens continuing to struggle.

Tom Johnson/Nobles County – 70 miles of bonded road projects essentially done; the Capital Improvement Projects bonded are moving along.

Next Meeting:

October 12, 2017 5:30 – 7:00 pm  
BioTechnology Advancement Center  
1527 Prairie Drive, Worthington, MN 56187

The meeting adjourned.