

**City of Battle Lake
Economic Development Authority
Thursday, February 3, 2022
ANNUAL MEETING**

The Battle Lake Economic Development Authority met for their annual meeting on Thursday, February 3, 2022 at noon at the Shoreline Restaurant with Commissioners Steve Young, Rob Nudell, Sean Belmont, Rich Bullard, and Randy Dorn present. Absent were Josie Schmidt and Don Maslow. Also present was Val Martin, Clerk/Treasurer/EDA Director/Zoning Officer. In attendance were about forty-five visitors for the annual meeting program.

Randy Dorn welcomed everyone and had attendees introduce themselves.

Jordan Rasmusson, State Representative was the first speaker:

- He mentioned the several funding opportunities that the City of Battle Lake has been awarded. #1 in state funding in Otter Tail County last year. He said this was due to the aggressive work of the community on the projects.
- Jordan said that Battle Lake sets an example for other communities when it comes to Economic Development.
- He went through the work the legislature has done so far and mentioned his priorities.
- He mentioned the large revenue surplus and what is being proposed for use.
- Senator Bill Ingebrigtsen has announced his retirement and will be supporting Jordan as he runs for that position this fall.

Dorn introduced Katrina Ball and noted some of the work that has been done for the move to the Hatchery Row building. An LACC Board member attends each monthly EDA meeting to give updates on their progress.

Katrina Ball, Lakes Area Community Center (LACC):

- Discussed the sale of the building and the work with Goodneighbors as they work towards a move to the new Hatchery Row building for the new community center location.
- Lauren Belmont has been chosen as the Executive Director.
- They look forward to the continued collaboration with the EDA.
- They look to the community for any help and if someone is interested in volunteering, please let them know.

Rob Christianson and Ted Thompson – Goodneighbors (Hatchery Row Building)

- Groundbreaking is set for March 10th at 2:00 p.m.
- They have enjoyed collaborating with the EDA and the City and are appreciative of the great community support.
- They are making final plans and have bid some of the work and plan to start in the spring.
- Most commercial space has been committed and some of the residential space is also committed. Thanks for the great community support on this.
- They also commented that they had several local investors in the project and are appreciative of this local support too. Thanks to Dan Malmstrom for helping with this.

Randy Dorn discussed the lack of housing and the priority it has been for the EDA. We have had some recent construction in the last several years and more to come with Hatchery Row and Joe Hammers' project for much needed transitional housing.

Amy Baldwin, Otter Tail County Community Development Agency (CDA)

- The Big Building is a program adopted by the CDA early on and it is a goal of five thousand new or extensively remodeled units by 2025 in Otter Tail County. They have reached 30% of that goal to this point.
- Amy pointed out the projects that have been funded through the CDA in Battle Lake:
 - \$50,000 to help with the purchase of Hatchery Row
 - \$25,000 to assist with the demolition of Hatchery Row
 - \$7500 to help fund a housing survey and housing study
 - Amy stated that Battle Lake could be used as a model throughout the County for all the economic development and housing work being done.
- Workforce is another priority of the CDA:
 - Youth Workforce program
 - Jobs Portal
 - Assistance to help residents get into the workforce
- Broadband continues to be a priority.
 - Dedicating capacity and resources from the County to expand broadband.
 - Smart Rooms and free Wi-Fi throughout the County. One Smart Room is located at Battle Lake City Hall.
- Amy pointed out that the CDA serves as a resource for funding and technical assistance to area communities for development projects along with all the other priorities.

Randy Dorn shared the information on the customer service training at City Hall being done by Leigh Shebeck on February 28th and March 7th. This program is free of charge. He also provided the information on the career fair at the school on April 26th. Businesses are invited to have a booth at the fair. It is a terrific opportunity for students to explore career options and to consider possible part-time jobs while still in high school.

Jeff Wiersma, Glendalough State Park gave an update:

- Another amazing year at the park. Attendance in 2014 was over 85,000 with attendance in 2020 at 127,000 and about the same in 2021.
- The bike trail loop will be getting done with the help of federal funding. This will provide a trail completely off the road. Construction will start late summer or fall.
- \$750,000 bonding money was received for a new trail center.
- Improvements to water access on Annie Battle to allow for easier access and increased number of users.
- Big thanks to Dan Malmstrom for all his work since the installation of the trail in 2014.

Randy Dorn introduced members of the EDA and went over the EDA Year in Review highlighting the following:

- You Tube videos were completed by funding from the City and through the work of the EDA. The videos were done by AMS Digital Productions. There is a City of Battle Lake YouTube channel where you can see these videos.
- Val Martin works to promote the community and businesses in several ways throughout the year. She also provides emails to the area businesses to assist with COVID-19 programs and other vital information.
- A grant was received to build two to three homes in Hidden Meadows. The grant is a joint project with the Otter Tail County HRA. This grant will reduce the price of building the homes by providing Gap financing for prospective property owners. This gap is the amount between the cost of construction and the appraised value of the home.

- COVID-19 assistance was provided through the CDA, City of Battle Lake, state programs and the Battle Lake Emergency Fund. No businesses closed in Battle Lake as a result of COVID-19.
- Communications between most of the organizations and the EDA continue to be a priority.

Randy introduced Kristin Sawyer-Lyman to the group. She has purchased the Lake Affects building and will be opening a bookstore. She grew up in Battle Lake and has had a dream to come back and start this business. She also plans to hold events and have a place for people to come “hang out.” She plans to work closely with the LACC.

Randy Dorn opened up the meeting to comments and/or questions:

- Transitional housing is in short supply – it is difficult to find housing after seniors have moved out of their homes. We especially need additional assisted living.
- There is a huge shortage of skilled nursing in all areas – home care, nursing homes, etc. Jordan Rasmusson stated that the state is working on this and in fact, a hearing was held that morning – there is a bi-partisan effort to help with the labor shortage. Amy Baldwin also said that the CDA is working with the state’s grant program to offer free CNA training – held at MState. This was very successful, and they plan to expand this program with the use of American Rescue Funds. The state is also providing grants to schools to provide what is needed to offer CNA courses at their school. CNA’s wages are also an issue as they are not making a living wage.
- Marjorie Quammen stated she has been involved with the childcare center from the start. They have major labor shortages, mostly due to low wages.
- Seniors also need help in other ways – mowing lawn, cleaning house, etc. – those items that are outside of the nursing care. Randy mentioned that a new business has started which provides that type of service called Thrive in Home Care, LLC. They are out of Fergus Falls but provide service to several communities. It was mentioned that several churches also provide this type of assistance to seniors through a program called “Helping Hands.”
- Someone asked Jordan Rasmusson if there would be a tax rebate check sent to taxpayers from the revenue surplus. Jordan said that he would like to see more of a permanent/long-term tax relief program.
- Kudos to Larry’s Supermarket for offering delivery service to members of the community. They started it way before others were doing it and it is a great service for those that cannot get out of their home.

Valerie J. Martin, Clerk/Treasurer/EDA Director/Zoning Officer