

# FLINT HILLS REGION

## FHRC Board of Directors Meeting Minutes

November 17, 2023

*Kan Equip Building, Alma, KS  
and via Zoom*

Present from Board: **Richard Weixelman**, Wamego City Council, Board President; **Pam Bales**, Alma Mayor; **Terry Cook**, Eskridge Mayor; **Cheryl Grice**, Kansas State University (ex officio) ; **David Fox**, Morris County Commission; **Trish Giordano**, Geary County Commission, Board Treasurer; **Jim MacGregor**, Wabaunsee County Commission; **Sharon Haun**, Council Grove City Council; **Bruce Meininger**, Westmoreland City Commission; **Dee McKee**, Pottawatomie County Commission; **Susan McKenzie**, White City, City Clerk; **Linda Morse**, Manhattan City Commission, Board Secretary; **Kelly Paskow**, Fort Riley (ex-officio) **Angela Schnee**, Ogden, Zoning Administrator.

Absent from Board Voting: **Ryan Armbrust**, Alta Vista Mayor; **Matthew Bea**, Junction City Commission, Board Vice President; **Alex Miller**, Onaga City Council; **Teri Naylor**, Harveyville City Commission; **Jimmy Thatcher**, Clay Center Mayor; **Debi Urbanek**, Herington City Commission; **Deb Werth**, St. George City Council.

Absent from Board – Non-voting: **Ben Van Becelaere**, Fort Riley (ex-officio); **Julie Murphy**, Wakefield, City Clerk; **Perry Wiggins**, Governor’s Military Affairs Council (ex-officio).

Guests Present: **Michelle Campbell**, Westmoreland; **Bruce McMillan**, Bruce McMillan AIA Architects P.A; **Ken Smith**, Mayor Elect, City of Alma; **Representative Kenny Titus**, District 51, **Representative Nate Butler**, District 68; **Senator Brenda Dietrich**, District 20; **Stephanie Imthurn**, Wabaunsee County Economic Development Director.

Present from Staff: **Janna Williams**, Interim Executive Director/Regional Planner.

- Welcome / Roll Call / Establish Quorum** Richard Weixelman, President  
Board President Richard Weixelman called the meeting to order at .  
Roll call showed a quorum did exist.  
Welcome from Pam Bales and Ken Smith, Alma Mayor

**Legislative Update:** Note a full recording of the legislative update is posted at <https://flinthillsregion.org/board-of-directors/>  
Representative Nathan Butler began by stating he is on the Tax Committee and the Veterans and Military Committee stated that the rainy day fund will come up again early in the 2024 session, a large surplus of funds and another fund of 2.5 billion. The governor has pushed for giving a rebate check to people. Property taxes are the other side. Looking to see how to reduce property taxes.

Veteran property taxes is another issue. Currently Kansas is not highly ranked for veteran friendliness, and he is trying to increase that. Potential bills are tax exemptions for disabled veterans. Geary County has the largest percentage of veterans.

A discussion on LAVTR- Local ad valorem tax reduction took place.

Representative Titus stated he is on the Water Committee, Corrections Committee and the Judiciary Committee and spoke about the state grant from the Kansas Water Office for \$35 million, \$17 million a year for technical assistance and construction for five years.

Senator Brenda Dietrich stated she is on the Transportation committee, vice chair of commerce, financial institutions and insurance and education committee. One issue that comes up every year is that employees have not had a COLA increase for years. You will hear about this in 2024.

Transportation plan projects were funded and are ongoing in the FHRC region for roads and bridges, property and income tax, LAVTR and tax on social security. The new tax policy is less burdensome for retirees.

Commissioner Trish Giardino Geary County Commissioner, the veteran bill will impact Geary County residents. Of the 36,000 residents in Geary County, 10,000 are veterans, 5,100 of them are disabled veterans that qualify for this tax relief. That is 12.6% of her community. Geary County did a formulation where they averaged house costs and 63% of those 5,100 have get this relief that is going to affect just the Geary County budget by \$3 million. That could be more, but it could be less, that is not counting city, city county or the city and the school district. Geary County could be looking at a \$5 million impact on the budget just to cover this bill. Commissioner Giardino feels that this bill is made to attract and help the entire state by trying to keep veterans here and that the state should help them because while we have 12.6% of our community are veterans, or disabled veterans.

Senator Dietrich responded this has not been debated but stay in touch and let them know the impacts of this bill.

Commissioner Dee McKee discussed increasing the (4% cap constitutional amendment) valuation exemption, and the negative impact on small counties with no way to avoid the revenue neutral tax reporting to try and keep up managing a city or county of 3,000. That exception on property tax cannot be taken and then continue to do roads and other policies.

Representative Titus spoke on childcare. He attended a special meeting to discuss childcare issues with recommendations to ease childcare regulations and make childcare better. This committee will become permanent. There is discussion about shifting inspectors to state control (currently by county) to make that a uniform experience and make it better for business owners. Also, the state can support parental leave to keep children out of daycare till they are 18 months of age.

Commissioner Dee McKee said that schools can get involved. Representative Titus stated there is a role for school districts. Senator Dietrich stated the YWCA or Boys and Girls Clubs can be contracted with for daycare or use an empty classroom and create a daycare out of an empty classroom. It is very prohibitive and highly regulated. Representative Titus stated there is no easy solutions.

Commissioner Jim MacGregor spoke on property taxes in Wabaunsee County. The county cannot be much more efficient than it currently is now with 40% of their property taxes going to roads and bridges. 20% goes to employee benefits. Wabaunsee County is not a county that has a large staff and you can take your perks off as two or one because then you don't have any depth, so he believes it is an expense problem for this county anyway. In the name of reducing taxes there is a potential bill to do sales tax from point of origin to point of destination. One third from Wabaunsee County sales tax comes from online sales. If that is lost that is 2 or more mills lost.

Commissioner Morse asked if it was possible to adopt a 4% flat tax on the whole state. The average person should be concerned about the proposal for flat tax expense.

Senator Deitrich noted there may be an opportunity for Kansas to vote on a constitutional amendment to change this. Encourage the board to stay in touch and let them know how they can help during the session. It will be an interesting year.

Representative Titus noted it is good to hear from you even if you don't always agree with him. He really appreciates the regional council.

Representative Butler stated there is a lot going on in Topeka with an election year coming up. He would love to come out and speak to groups as one of the most important things is being informed .

## 2. **Approval of October Meeting Minutes**

Linda Morse, Secretary

Pam Bales moved and Trish Giardano seconded to approve the minutes. The board approved the October Meeting Minutes.

## 3. **Review and Approval of Financial Reports**

Trish Giordano, Treasurer

Trish Giordano presented the financials and asked if there were any questions. Linda Morse moved to approve the financials and Terry Cook seconded the motion. The board voted to approve the financials.

## 4. **New Business**

### Director Search

Janna Williams reported the applications for the executive director are due November 30<sup>th</sup>. The job was advertised on IEDC, KC Star and Wichita Eagle. Interviews will be in early December.

### Audit Report

Janna Williams noted that the 2022 audit was sent out to members, there were no findings and the 990 filing was completed on time.

**Vote:** Dee McKee moved to approve the audit , and Trish Giardano seconded. The board voted to accept the 2022 audit.

### 2024 Budget

Janna Williams presented the revised 2024 budget which was emailed to members in their packet. The format is based on the grants now as requested and is easier to read.

**Vote:** Pam Bales moved to approve the 2024 budget, and Linda Morser seconded. Motion carried.

### 2024 Elections

Janna Williams wanted to inform the board that the FHRC bylaws state that the elections be advertised no fewer than 10 days and no more than 90 days prior to the election. The members discussed the

schedule and decided the nominating committee will be selected in January 2024 at the regular board meeting and elections will be held at the February 16th, 2024 board meeting. Trish Giardano made a motion to create a nominating committee in January 2024 and elections be held in February 2024. Bruce Meininger seconded, motion carried.

#### **Affiliate Membership Kansas Main Street**

Janna Williams noted that FHRC has had a Kansas Main Street affiliate membership in the past and would like to renew the membership for 2024. The fee is \$400 for the Kansas affiliate membership and provides training and resources for our members to attend. Pam Bales noted that we need to advertise this to members to utilize. Trish Giardano made a motion to renew the Kansas Main Street Affiliate membership, Sharon Haun seconded, motion carried. Jim MacGregor noted that the 2024 budget reflect this new budget item.

**CDBG Administration Proposal:** The City of Horton sent an invitation to submit an RFP for CDBG grant administration services for a CDBG CVR grant. If the board is interested in the grant specialist pursuing these proposals, staff will need approval. Jim McGregor asked how the fee is determined. Williams stated the RFP has a list of deliverables, Holly will research the hours required for the tasks plus a markup. There is a cap on CDBG grant administration. Linda Morse stated she is supportive of this. Cheryl Grice stated the K-State 105 initiative and extension may be a way to support this and obtain training. Stephanie Imthurn had concerns that Holly is writing water grants for Wabaunsee County which is very important to them. Jim McGregor noted that there is an opportunity cost related to these proposals. Angela Schnee commented that this a great way to bring in funds.

Linda Morse made a motion to submit the proposal for the CDBG CVR grant administration and Bruce Meininger seconded, motion carried. Discussion continued that there needs to be a discussion with the grant specialist and their work priorities.

## **5. Old Business**

#### **Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Brownfield Grants**

Janna Williams reported the EPA Brownfield Grant application was submitted for \$1,500,000.00 for the 2024 Assessment Grant on November 13th. The final decision will be in April. The city of Eskridge will start their area planning through KSU TAB and Stantec soon. Work continues on the SoDo downtown plan for Manhattan.

#### **Office of Local Defense and Community Cooperation (OLDCC)**

Janna Williams said two grants are being closed out, and she is in the process of writing the new grant. Williams stated she will also complete the dues letter and membership outreach during the holidays.

#### **Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Update**

Janna Williams reported for Holly Boice who is submitting the environmental review for Alta Vista grant. The Junction City CDBG CVR grant application was not awarded.

#### **EDA Disaster Supplemental and HUB Update**

Janna Williams reported for Holly Boice that she is working with the City of Manhattan and Kansas Forestry on two grant applications. Holly is working with Morris County on a water project. The Kansas Water Grant applications will be due as well.

Williams reviewed the Kansas Water Office grant requirements for technical assistance and construction of water and sewer projects. They are due on December 29<sup>th</sup>.

## 6. Community Updates

Richard Weixelman, President

**Alma** – Pam Bales: Alma is trying to get gas from Wamego to Alma. The city is currently looking at interviewing marshal applicants and setting up interviews. She looks forward to Ken taking over as Mayor.

**Manhattan** – Linda Morse noted that downtown Manhattan will be under construction for the next two months. Manhattan also kicked off a study with Stantec looking at the Highway 24 corridor which will take 18 months.

**Eskridge** – Terry Cook: December 2<sup>nd</sup> is the Christmas bazaar. Justin Rush is no longer on the city council. New council member will be Jason Eberts

**Council Grove**- Sharon Haun: held elections and the mayor and Sharon was reelected. Christmas events are going on. 177 will be open next Wednesday and the sales tax will be monitored after reopening.

**Geary County** – Trish Giordano: Geary County voted on new redistricting map. One commissioner had all of Fort Riley. One district had no one in an unincorporated area. Matthew Bea was not re-elected. Milford has rejoined the council and is platting a subdivision and a new road. Main Street is thriving in Junction City.

**A presentation to the board members who are retiring from the executive board:** Williams made a presentation of a small token of appreciation to Linda Morse and Pam Bales thanking them for their service to the Flint Hills Regional Council. Linda Morse commented that decisions are made by those that show up. Your presence really does matter.

**K-State – Dr. Cheryl Grice:** Dr. Grice commented she is from a rural community in Arkansas worked with grants and workforce development and transitioning soldiers. The work that is done by FHRC is really important and as her role is shifting to communication within the president’s office, she will keep us informed on the 105 project on opportunities in childcare, workforce sustainability, global food security. Her objective is to connect individuals with others internally and to their communities. They would like to know how extension could engage with the council via community vitality specialist or regional directors and how they can assist. The board responded they would prefer a regional director to engage with them. The board noted they would like to have a presentation from K-State 105. Linda Morse noted they might want to reach out to other Kansas regional councils. Dr. Grice and Janna Williams will meet regarding a presentation to the board. In early 2024.

**Wabaunsee** - Jim Macgregor: Please stop at the newest business on the way out of town on highway 99. It is called Unique Woods. Richard Weixelman noted the location is 3 miles south of Wamego. Jim McGregor corrected Councilman Weixeleman stating it was 9 miles north of Alma.

**Morris County** – David Fox noted that we need winter moisture.

**Westmoreland**– Bruce Meininger: Westmoreland has had a citizen submit a letter of approval for a new middle income duplex to bring in more housing in Westmoreland.

**Pottawatomie County** – Dee McKee: Transportation issues, a wreck on the bridge today. Jack Allston did retire. Please participate on the ad valorem tax issue. She thanked everyone for their contribution and conversations.

**Fort Riley** – Kelley Pascow: Fort Riley appreciated the opportunity to host the regional council board meeting in October and the tour through the new museum. She will share our director position advertisement to transitioning soldiers and military spouses. Live fire exercises are going on with 2,100 soldiers gone now with the combat aviation brigade in Europe. The annual tree lighting will be held on November 30th.

**Ogden**- Angela Schnee: Ogden is working on three federal grants as well as a regional grant for a letter of interest for Thriving Communities technical assistance grant for a tri-county trail with the MPO, Geary, Riley and Pottawatomie County.

**Wabaunsee County Eco Devo**- Stephanie Imthurn: Wabaunsee County established a county land bank, a resolution on a neighborhood residential rehab program, water grants, housing grants, and held a grand opening for a new business.

**White City - Susan McKenzie**: White City is working with Holly on ballfield improvements in town. A KDOT grant replaced brick streets on Main Street with another \$1.25 million for another three blocks on Highway 4 for 2025.

**Wamego- Richard Weixelman**: Annual Christmas events are ongoing.

**Manhattan – Linda Morse**: It is important that we weigh in with our legislators. Manhattan replaced four of its five commissioners. One of them, Karen McCullough, served on the council before.

### **Adjourn**

Richard Weixelman, President adjourned the meeting at 11:13 a.m. The next meeting will take place on January 19<sup>th</sup>, 2024. The location to be determined.