

FLINT HILLS REGION

FHRC Board of Directors Meeting Minutes

March 15, 2024
*The Community Center
Westmoreland, KS
and via Zoom*

Present from Board: **Trish Giordano**, Geary County Commission, Board President; **Dee McKee**, Pottawatomie County Commission, Board Vice President; **Jim MacGregor**, Wabaunsee County Commission, Board Treasurer; **Sharon Haun**, Council Grove City Council, Board Secretary; **David Fox**, Morris County Commission; **Karen McCulloh**, Manhattan City Commission; **Bruce Meininger**, Westmoreland City Commission; **Kelly Paskow**, Fort Riley (ex-officio); **Ken Smith**, Alma City Commission; **Lou Thurston**, City of Hillsboro, Mayor.

Absent from Board Voting: **Ryan Armbrust**, Alta Vista Mayor; **Terry Cook**, Eskridge Mayor; **Richard Foster**, Ogden City Council; **Alex Miller**, Onaga City Council; **Teri Naylor**, Harveyville City Commission; **Jimmy Thatcher**, Clay Center Mayor; **Debi Urbanek**, Herington City Commission; **Richard Weixelman**, Wamego City Council.

Absent from Board – Non-voting: **Ben Van Becelaere**, Fort Riley (ex-officio); **Cheryl Grice**, Kansas State University (ex officio); **Tim Himelick**, Milford, City Clerk; **Susan McKenzie**, White City, City Clerk; **Julie Murphy**, Wakefield, City Clerk; **Matt Stiles**, Hillsboro, City Administrator; **Perry Wiggins**, Governor’s Military Affairs Council (ex-officio).

Guests Present: **Michelle Campbell**, Westmoreland; **Dan Fischer**, USDA Rural Development; **Mark Jack**, Westmoreland Mayor; **Bruce McMillan**, Manhattan; **Matthew Miller**, Chase County; **Rhonda Rice**, Herington; **Jared Tremblay**, FHMPO; **Janet Wade**, Herington.

Present from Staff: **Holly Boice**, Grant Specialist; **Mike Couch**, Executive Director; Janna Williams, Regional Planner.

- Welcome / Roll Call / Establish Quorum** Trish Giordano, President
Board President Trish Giordano called the meeting to order at 9:04.
Roll call showed a quorum did exist.
Mark Jack, Mayor of Westmoreland welcomed the board to the city.
- Approval of February Meeting Minutes** Trish Giordano, President
Dee McKee moved to approve the February minutes, and Bruce Meininger seconded. The board approved the February Meeting Minutes.
- Review and Approval of Financial Reports** Jim MacGregor,
Treasurer
Jim MacGregor presented the financials. Karen McCulloh moved to approve the financials, and Sharon Haun seconded the motion. The board voted to approve the financials.

4. New Business

a. Opening Comments

Mike Couch made opening comments and introduced the guest speaker from USDA Rural Development.

b. USDA Rural Development Presentation

Dan Fischer presented the opportunities available through USDA Rural Development grants and loans. These programs include Community Facilities, Water and Waste Water, Technical Assistance, Business Programs, and the REAP grant, which stands for Rural Energy for America Program.

c. Approve RFQ submission for auditor

Janna Williams presented that FHRC received two responses and one proposal for an auditor. The executive board asked the firm if it would agree to an average fee for three years for \$11,800, and the firm agreed. An audit will begin in June and be completed by September 20. The firm has excellent local references. Karen McCulloh moved to accept the averaged fee for auditing services for three years, and Dee McKee seconded. The board voted to approve the motion.

d. Pursuance of REAP Tag Grant Plan

Mike Couch reiterated information regarding the REAP Tag Grant. The grant would provide for FHRC to offer technical assistance to agricultural producers and rural small businesses that are looking to apply for REAP funds. Projects could range from upgrading freezers at the grocery store to installation of major alternative energy operations.

Bruce Meininger moved to approve applying for the RAP Tag Grant, and David Fox seconded. The board voted to approve the application to the grant.

e. Executive Director Report

Mike Couch reported that the staff went to Beloit, KS to be involved in the first day of the on-site assessment by Main Street America and the USDOT Thriving Communities Program, hosted by North Central Regional Planning Commission. He said staff has been meeting with area cities, and the team is working well together. He thanked the executive committee for the informative Monday executive committee meetings.

f. FHRC President Comments

Trish Giordano said the board needs to do more to make sure their communities know the value that Flint Hills Regional Council brings to them and assist in bringing more information about the council to other communities in the area to increase membership. She stated that Junction City is a member again after learning more about the return on investment FHRC provides. She also said the board and staff need to ensure that communities are using the needs assessment portal to let the council know their requests for assistance.

5. Old Business

a. EPA Brownfield and OLDCC Grant Updates

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Brownfield Grants

Current grant 2022-2024: Janna Williams presented that structural studies will begin in Eskridge on March 22. The contract has been signed for the Eskridge Downtown Corridor, and planning will begin soon. All funds have been spent for the current grant.

New grant 2025: Janna Williams presented that awardees for the new grant will be announced soon. She is studying the application for an revolving loan fund grant for 2025 to assist owners. Funding is available from EPA Region 7 if there is a current need for Phase I/II and area planning.

Office of Local Defense and Community Cooperation (OLDCC)

Janna Williams presented that the 2024/25 OLDCC grant is underway.

Other pending grants include Thriving Communities grant and Safe Streets and Roads for All grant for the City of Ogden. Kansas Water Office grants will be announced by the end of March. The FHRC Regional Micro-Grant Program will begin in April. Entrepreneur Convening grant is underway. Janna also met with the Black Entrepreneurs of the Flint Hills to discuss regional endeavors and partnerships.

c. CDBG and Kauffman Updates

Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Update

Holly Boice reported that the Kansas Department of Commerce has a list of competitive CDBG grant categories on the commerce website and encouraged communities to look at them and consider application. She reported that the competitive category grant deadline was moved to September, so there is more time to put together applications. Three categories which do not have city-wide low to moderate income requirements include ADA Improvements, Youth Job Training, and Non-Profit Childcare and Early Education Facilities.

Alta Vista CDBG park project administration is going well. The environmental report was approved. Next steps include the city creating a bank account for the funds and preparing an invitation for bids using the city's procurement policy. A first monitoring will take place after the first construction draw down. The next quarterly report to the Kansas Department of Commerce is due March 31.

EDA Disaster Supplemental Update

Holly Boice reported that the Kansas State University/Kansas Forest Service project grant application is in the final stages. Feedback from EDA resulted in narrative edits and budget changes which delayed submission. The application deadline was changed to May 1, however the application is expected to be submitted by the end of March.

6. Community Updates

Alma – Ken Smith

Alma has had ads out to hire a pool manager in the past couple months but hasn't had luck so far. There are a few upcoming cross country biking events that will go through Alma. June 1 is Unbound Gravel Ride – 600 and 200 people have signed up for two different distances. Alma will have a checkpoint along the trip. The Rock Ridge Gravel Ride will be June 27 and 28 and will begin and end in Alma.

Chase County – Matthew Miller

The county has regained interest in the Flint Hills Regional Council and is encouraged by what FHRC is doing in the area. The senate assessment and taxation committee passed a bill on Wednesday that would require any city or county that grants property tax exemptions to remain at the revenue neutral rate. This could eliminate many tools used for economic development.

Council Grove – Sharon Haun

The city is starting on upgrading sewer and water. There is energy surrounding current projects in the city. The city is preparing for Spring.

Geary County – Trish Giordano

The upcoming community forum, paid for through the Kauffman grant, will be filled to capacity next week. Geary County is part of a childcare desert, and the childcare coalition in the county will be holding a childcare business summit on Friday to look at potential opportunities to solve the issue.

Herington – Janet Wade

Herington received a grant to assist a developer to add houses to a housing development that was put in place many years ago but only had three houses put into it so far. The medical clinic the Abilene Memorial Hospital is working on since the hospital closed will be opened in May. The new Casey's in the city is newly opened. The local dollar tree store is closing. The fair board is holding an ATV/UTV event in April. Disc Golf is the

second week in April. Historical tours of the cemetery will be on that Sunday. On the last weekend in April will be a model railroad show.

Hillsboro – Lou Thurston

Shipping container homes have been approved. The city is helping them walk through how to do that process. The city has a contract with a developer to put in 12 duplexes, which will be income-based living units. There could be 30 new housing units in the city in the next 12-18 months. The city has received funds for a childcare center through a CDBG grant and is getting that process started. The construction should take about 12 months. The city is working on developing a strategic plan.

Manhattan – Karen McCulloh

The city is still working to resolve childcare issues. A grant was acquired for an incubator which will assist with what childcare providers need. The city is still looking for a city manager and has an acting city manager in the meantime. The city is working on the highway 24 and gateway projects and zeroing in on new housing opportunities.

Morris County – David Fox

The county is going through an assessment of the winter storm. FEMA probably won't recognize the winter storm as a disaster unless more communities report their damages. The county had a lot of damage to equipment and gravel which puts more burden on taxpayers. The county's reports came up with just under \$925,000 worth of impact to the county. There are reports that 1,000 head of cattle were lost in the county due to the winter storm, and snow removal cost a lot, but neither of those count in the impact for FEMA assistance. He suggested that the surrounding counties put in their reports to increase the possibility that the area will receive assistance from FEMA. Area impact must be 5.5 million or more to receive FEMA assistance.

Pottawatomie County – Dee McKee

There has been a lot of discussion on a study about annexation in Manhattan. Citizens move out of Manhattan because of taxes, which is an important aspect of the situation. Cities and counties are trying to get the state to give back the local tax reduction fund. She suggested that people continue to contact legislators about the local tax reduction fund so counties and cities can receive those funds.

Wabaunsee County – Jim MacGregor

A tornado touched down east of Alta Vista a few days ago. Damage was minimal. Several town halls were hosted regarding childcare. The K-State Extension offices have set up recurring conversations on the challenges and how to collectivize childcare micro-businesses, so they are not competing. K-State 105 is a great grant program.

Westmoreland – Bruce Meininger

The city recently had to close its pool because of mold and other issues. The city is working on redoing the city hall, so they aren't able to focus on fixing the pool right now. Bruce Meininger thanked people for coming to the city for the FHRC board meeting.

7. Adjourn

Trish Giordano, President

The meeting was adjourned at 11:02. The next meeting will take place in Alta Vista on April 19.