



NORTH CENTRAL PENNSYLVANIA REGIONAL PLANNING and DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

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North Central Board Meeting
Wednesday, May 22, 2024 – 9:30 AM

Members – via Teams

Josh Zucal	Cameron County
Jessica Herzing	Cameron County
Cliff Clark	Cameron County
Dave Glass	Clearfield County
Jodi Brennan	Clearfield County
Kristy Smith	Clearfield County
Matt Quesenberry	Elk County
Tracy Gerber	Elk County
Eric Wolfe	Elk County
Joe Haines	Elk County
Jeff Pisarcik	Jefferson County
Scott North	Jefferson County
Jessica Funk Seary	Jefferson County
Jim Sleigh	Jefferson County
Carol Duffy	McKean County
Mary Ann (Marty) Wilder	McKean County
Doug Morley	Potter County
Nancy Grupp	Potter County
Will Hunt	Potter County
Jill Martin-Rend	At-large – BC3@Brockway
Abbi Peters	At-large – PA Wilds
Carolyn Newhouse	At-large – Bradford Area Alliance

Staff - via Teams or In Person

Jim Chorney
Amy Kessler
Ana Slavik
Ed Matts
Jenn Hibbard
Mary Lou Jessop

Guests

Brad Moore	Congressman Thompson's Office
Christi Martone	DCED

Chair Dave Glass called the meeting to order at 9:30 AM with the Pledge of Allegiance.

QUORUM/INTRODUCTIONS

Roll call was taken and there was a quorum for the meeting.

MINUTES

With no corrections or amendments to the March 27, 2024 Board Minutes, Will Hunt moved to accept the minutes as presented, seconded by Jeff Pisarcik. The motion unanimously passed.

NEW BUSINESS

Financial Reports

As the March and April 2024 Financial Reports were not available for the meeting, this was tabled to the June meeting.

A95s

A95-2758 was presented the Fox Township Toby Water Water System is requesting the right to purchase 67,500 gallons per day on a Peak Day basis through the existing Toby Road interconnection from the St. Marys Area Water Authority per terms of the March 8, 2021, Permanent Backup Water Supply Interconnection Agreement Toby Water System. As this is an ongoing agreement, no project costs were included.

No action was necessary as this is for information only and any discussion is required.

Correspondence

There was no Correspondence.

Purchases

There were several purchases.

We are requesting approval to have Allied Systems, Inc. remove three existing Sanyo mini-split units, one in the IT Department and two in the Economic Development Office. The unit in the IT Department has failed and the two units in the Economic Development office are approximately 25 years old. These units will be replaced with three new Ameristar 24,000 BTU systems. The total installation cost will be \$10,406 and has been budgeted for.

Chair Glass called for a motion to approve the removal of three Sanyo mini-splits and replacing them with three Ameristar units for a total cost of \$10,406.

Matt Quesenberry moved to approve the motion for the removal of three Sanyo mini-splits and replacing them with three Ameristar units for a total cost of \$10,406, seconded by Jim Sleigh. The motion unanimously passed.

We are requesting approval for Perry Sealing & Asphalt Services to provide Asphalt Reheat and Repair 15 spots in the parking lot at North Central at the total cost of \$5,000 which has been budgeted for.

The back parking lot has seen increased traffic with the presence of Keystone Rural Health. We replaced the center portion about 10-15 years ago. However, it is falling apart with some large potholes. We have tried

to fill them with cold patch which really isn't holding up.

Ed stated we reached out to two paving contractors last year to actually cut those sections out again and have them repaired. The lowest bid we received was \$30,000 to cut those sections out and replace them, which is more than we can actually afford.

We then went out to see how much it would cost to just replace that back parking lot, put a coat top and dome some milling the repairing. That cost was \$120,000.

Ed reached out to several contractors and found one in Punxsutawney who will come in and reheat the patches and pull them out. They will add more asphalt into the mix, reheat it all and put it back in.

We are hoping to get three to five years out of these repairs and then look at trying to replace the back parking lot at a later date.

This isn't a permanent repair but it's better than cold patch and is better than anything we can do here and it's only \$5,000. We have had concerns from Keystone Rural Health about the safety of their employees and their patients walking across the parking lot. We want to make sure we address this for obvious reasons. The work will be done on the weekend, so it won't impact any traffic flow.

Dave said he and Jim have talked about this and we need to put a flag on this so at budget time we start putting money aside for this lot. At some point we are going to have to come up with six figures

To let the Board know Jim added that he and Dave talked about this and that as we get money from Keystone Rural Health for the leasing of the facilities, we have been putting about a sum of money each year into an account, but we have only been doing it for a few years so there isn't a significant amount of money in the account at this point.

We are going to continue to put money away and hopefully be able to put a little more away if possible. We also have staff reaching out to see if there's any possibility of a grant or some way to subsidize that paving. That is why we got the quote so we would have a starting price of what to ask for when looking for grant money.

With no other questions or comments, Chair Glass called for a motion to approve Perry Sealing & Asphalt Services to provide Asphalt Reheat and Repair 15 spots in the parking lot at North Central at the total cost of \$5,000.

Joe Haines moved to approve the motion for Perry Sealing & Asphalt Services to provide Asphalt Reheat and Repair 15 spots in the parking lot at North Central at the total cost of \$5,000, seconded by Jeff Pisarcik. The motion unanimously passed.

The CEDS Committee is requesting approval to have Atlas Community Studios (Atlas) provide technical assistance to facilitate discussions related to reprioritizing projects, establishing performance benchmarks and thresholds, and tracking and reporting activity progress. Atlas will develop actionable plans to identify and secure funding for planning or implementing priority projects and will facilitate up to three CEDS work sessions to present benchmark and threshold recommendations to CEDS Committee members, to identify possible areas for revision, and to refine goals or minimum/maximum limits as needed.

The budget for this project will not exceed \$26,500 and work will be carried out June 1 - 30, 2024.

Jim asked Amy to talk a little about this.

The CEDS Committee proposed hiring Atlas Community Studios (Atlas) to provide technical assistance for reprioritizing projects, establishing benchmarks, and tracking progress, with a budget not exceeding \$26,500. Atlas will facilitate up to three work sessions to develop actionable plans for securing funding for priority projects, with work scheduled from June 1-30, 2024.

Discussion emphasized the importance of identifying and communicating regional projects, particularly with a new staff member starting on June 3. The committee struggles with defining growth indicators, such as population increase or job loss decrease, and sees value in guided discussions. An unbiased facilitator with national experience is needed to help the committee move forward, update dashboards, and select impactful projects.

Jodi Brennan suggested committee members bring project ideas that cross borders to the next meeting, potentially forming a subcommittee to develop the scope of work. Jim clarified that the CEDS Committee would prioritize projects based on regional significance, focusing on the big picture rather than smaller local projects. The committee should provide regular updates on project status and solicit new project ideas.

Carol raised concerns about the frequency of updates and the need for timely communication, especially regarding new grants. Jim assured that updates would be provided quarterly, with additional mid-month reports if necessary. Dave supported the idea of concise quarterly reports and emphasized the importance of keeping everyone informed.

With no further discussion Chair Glass called for a motion to approve the budget for Atlas's work, up to \$26,500.

Abbi Peters moved to approve the budget for Atlas's work, up to \$26,500., seconded by Nancy Grupp. The motion unanimously passed.

Loans

Jenn had one loan to present.

Penn-Elkco Inc., St. Marys Elk County, has requested a loan in the amount of \$98,000 from the EDA CARES Act Revolving Lona Fund for 5 years at the rate of 4% for the purchase of equipment. Purchase equipment and related costs including a maxi-coiler and high-temperature oven. The new equipment will increase productivity allowing the company to remain competitive in the larger diameter springs market. North Central's collateral will be UCC-1 filing on equipment to be purchased and existing piece of equipment, as well as the personal guarantee of the majority owner. Ten full-time jobs will be retained within the next three years.

Chair Glass called for a motion to approve the loan to Penn-Elkco Inc.

Kristy Smith moved to approve the loan to Penn-Elkco Inc., seconded by Scott North. The motion passed with Joe Haines abstaining.

RFP for the Microloan Program Development Project

Jim presented the RFP for Board consideration.

This is a as part of an initiative of the regional assessment of access to capital study that we had completed just about a year ago and one of the major findings of that that we found is a gap in our financial market for our businesses and entrepreneurs that's identified in the report as a need for a regional microloan program.

Although North Central has one it's very limited capacity. Our funds are depleted right now, so the demand always seems to exceed the supply, but there is nothing broken with our Microloan Program.

What the consultants had identified is a need to not only expand the program as far as the supply of capital, but also to modernize and innovate this program in a manner that's going to be more responsive to the capital needs of businesses that have 10 or less employees or they're self-employed businesses that all that seek loan amounts up to a maximum of \$50,000. This will be a source of capital for those small businesses that are not a good fit for our existing revolving loan funds that require matching participation with bank financing and eligible lending amounts based on full-time job creation and/or retention.

And they did run this by loan committee as well, and they are in support of this.

As you know these loans are higher risk and we used to have a more robust microlending program because we had more money available to us. We ran into some high default rates which caused us to limit what we can do now.

Jim thinks that there are responsible ways to go through and make this program more fiscally responsible, so we have a better return on our investment and it's sustainable for the future. So, when Jen brought this to me, I was in full support of it because I do see a need for this type of blending. It's just how do we do it?

Jenn presented him with some of those examples that are out there, but we want the help of whomever we award this contract to take, give us the best possible what happened to that we have that we can make this program successful.

Dave said to be clear, this is just the RFP, we're not actually approving it. This is just you going out and seeing what's out there to help us.

Jim said that is right. We want to make sure that the board's aware and supports the idea of doing this before we make an investment of money. That's all we're doing at this particular point. We certainly wouldn't want to do this if the board wasn't in support of it.

We never meant for that Regional Access to Capital Study to be something that was going to sit on a shelf. We not only want to identify the gaps in our market, we want to be responsive to them.

Does anybody have any questions?

Abbi asked what is your definition of a window of a microloan? What price range are you thinking?

Jim stated right now what we consider microloans, are loans that are \$50,000 or less and that might end up even decreasing as a result of this study. Sometimes these firms might only need \$5,000 or \$10,000.

Abbi said she would just echo from the PA Wilds Center side. We definitely see this gap this need and it is around \$5,000 to \$10,000 and we see where small businesses are overextending themselves trying to put it on a credit card with just crazy insane interest rates and would love when you get the consultant for us to be part of some of those conversations, again of seeing how we have lots of regional partners of how can they help to mitigate the risk of you know saying hey, they're already marked out opportunities out there that are coming through these other programs.

That could kind of help complement what this does, so really looking forward to the study and what it can mean for the region.

Will asked if there is some documentation or A1 sheet sort of form of what the program covers, some type of summary that he could have in our office to provide through their community development outreach efforts with our businesses.

Jim replied that all he has right now, is just part of a general fact sheet for our business finance program, but it just refers to micro loans available \$50,000 or less for businesses with 10 employees or less interest rate right now is like 5% and that's all it says.

We can get you that Will, but you hit on a great point that, and I think this was even identified in this study when we did it as far as getting that marketing piece out there because we don't do a great job of that either. And that's something that we're going to be working on here in the future as well.

I'm just trying to get that information out so people know the products that they have available to them through North Central and other lenders in the area.

Will thanked Jim and said they are trying to put together a package of information of resources the county has available within the region to support these new businesses and having that details is certainly would be useful and grateful to have for our outreach. So, thank you. If you wouldn't mind sharing, at least with that is then maybe again I missed it and if I did, I do apologize, but I certainly would appreciate seeing further details of that.

Amy stated we can have Brent, our marketing staff, work with Jenn to come up with something and get that communicated out to everybody.

Dave asked if there were any other questions or discussion?

Hearing none, he called for a motion to approve the RFP.

Carol Duffy moved to approve the RFP, seconded by Richard Fry. The motion unanimously passed.

PIDA Master Agreement Amendment for Funding to PA Wilds Center for Entrepreneurship

Jim noted this agreement started back in 2016 and is an agreement between the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania acting through the Pennsylvania Industrial Development Authority (PIDA) and the North Central Commission to include administrative funds from the Small Business First (SBF) Program for the

support of the PA Wilds Small Business Ombudsman position as an employee of the PA Wilds Center for Entrepreneurship Inc. This amendment will cover a period beginning May 1, 2024 and ending April 30, 2026. This is the fourth amendment to our Master Loan Agreement for the administrative support of the Ombudsman position that provides business development activities in the PA Wilds.

They are required to do a report which we submit on their behalf, but it doesn't require anything administratively from North Central and we've been more than happy to be that conduit for them.

Dave called for a motion to approve this PIDA Master Agreement Amendment for Funding to PA Wilds Center for Entrepreneurship.

Carol Duffy moved to approve this PIDA Master Agreement Amendment for Funding to PA Wilds Center for Entrepreneurship, seconded by Jeff Pisarcik. Motion passed with Abbi Peters abstaining.

Jenn wanted to make the Board aware of two events that are just in the process right now. North Central and the PennWest Clarion Small Business Development Center will be co-hosting two Lender Brunches.

The first one is going to be held on Thursday, June 20 at the Six&Kane Building in Kane from 10:30 am – 12:30 pm. This informational event will focus on regional programs and resources available for business financing and assistance featuring speakers from North Central Regional Planning, Pursuit, The Progress Fund and PennWest Clarion SBDC.

We are also planning another one for our Southern counties, probably going to be in Clearfield County and we are looking at a date of August 7 to hold the same event.

The information will be sent out to the board as well, and you're more than welcome to attend.

PERSONNEL - PROPOSED LOAN ANALYST POSITION

Jim stated we are proposing a Loan Analyst Position. There's a couple of reasons for this. First, as you heard Jenn talk about the microloan program and the RFP that she's putting out, she's also involved in conversations of trying to establish a potentially an Angel Fund within the region and she's continuing to look at the capital needs assessment to try to look at all of the different things that were recommended for the region. And obviously that takes time.

It takes a lot of Jenn's time and Jenn does all our loan underwriting for all our loan program. She does have one staff that helps her out with a lot of the day-to-day administrative work.

But what we're trying to do with this position is create an opportunity for Jenn to continue to pursue these opportunities for the region that could potentially bring more money and investment into the region. That's part of it.

The other part there is opportunity because last year we had two of our programs increase the funding. So, this allowed us the ability to be able to consider adding the capacity. This will be the second year for that funding. We always take that cautiously when we see new funding come in that it's going to be there for the foreseeable future, and we now feel comfortable that it will be. So, we feel that this was a natural fit.

The position that Jenn has currently has some additional duties that are being asked of that position outside of the loan Department. Most of our programs require a lot of additional information, and we're going to be utilizing that position to help fill that void or gap that we have.

So there's a lot of things, all the stars kind of came into alignment with this, and we felt that this was a natural fit to be able to take some of this work off Jenn's plate to allow her to pursue some of the things we want to see her do and still continue the high level that the loan program she has produced year and year out.

I don't know Jenn or Ana, if either of you have anything else that you want to add to this.

It will help Jenn and bring in more revenue for North Central. So, we're excited about that.

Jim thinks it probably ties a lot into what is just being proactive. We know we're going to need staff capacity. I think for our microloan program, I think it's an exciting time for the loan program, but he doesn't even want to call it just the loan program anymore. He thinks it's going to be something that's going to be known. More is probably more general business finance, and the loan program is a huge part of that, but he thinks we're looking at expanding business finance in general. So, we're going to need that capacity.

Carol asked if the job description had been developed through human resources.

Jim Chorney replied it had been and thought that had been included in the board packet.

Jim stated that when the job description was completed, it was submitted to NFP, who was the same Consulting Group that helped us with the wage study. And if it wasn't sent out in the packet, we will make sure to send it out after the meeting.

Dave asked if anyone had any more questions or further discussion on this. Hearing none, he called for a motion to approve this proposed position.

Abbi Peters made the motion to approve his proposed position, seconded by Carolyn Newhouse. Motion unanimously passed.

BUILDING UPDATE

Ed reported the construction is complete and we came in about \$1,800 under budget. All the bills have been paid so we were able to keep it under what we said we would. And we didn't have to make any compromises. We have everyone pretty much moved in and everything is going as planned.

Ed also pointed out that when you come to the office you will notice the front landscaping has been updated. New rocks were put in and shrubbery is going to be put in. Keystone Rural Health volunteered and approached us to see if it was okay if they could do that for us. One of our loan clients is doing the landscaping.

GOOD OF THE ORDER

Jim stated he and Dave talked a little bit about broadband potentially being a conversation for this meeting because of the April 29 NW CCAP meeting.

Nolan Canala did a presentation on Open Access Networks because of all the BEAD funding that is coming out and how counties may be able to administer that. After that presentation Jim was approached by several Commissioners asking what North Central's role might be in something like this?

We thought that this might be an opportunity to talk about it because there was interest among some of the Commissioners as to potentially combining with the Northwest region to look at a feasibility study.

Dave said he attended the meeting and said Cameron expressed quite a bit interest. He also said that Clearfield's not going to be part of it just because they don't feel there's enough time before the BEAD grants roll out.

First, in order to do this right, you're going to have to have some kind of an authority built. No County's going to want to take this on their own. Then after you build the authority you have to figure out how to pay for all this. So, Clearfield is kind of sitting back on this one. He thinks there is merit in it but doesn't think they have the time to do it. That's just my opinion, but I'll be very interested to see if NW counties prove me wrong.

Ed said as the IT director here, we'd have to be careful of how we would assist, because we would want to be considered as one of the providers of the Open Access network. So, he wouldn't actually be able to help you with the actual build out of the fiber and getting it to everybody. That would be insider trading and that wouldn't go over very well. We'll give as much assistance as we possibly can.

Jess Herzing said Cameron County did decide to move forward with the Northwest Group that went forward. Part of what we're expecting is to be a part of that feasibility study to have them look at our county in addition to the region. What they're going to explore is on a region and then individual setting and for the cost for that feasibility study and the timing of everything, it just made sense for our county to move forward with them to be a part of the feasibility conversation to figure out what our next steps might look like to get connectivity throughout our counties.

Dave noted that based on what Ed just said, he's not sure at this point that North Central has much of a role to play because if you can't help a group build out the infrastructure, which is kind of where we're at right now, then the counties are either on their own or coordinating on their own outside of the North Central paradigm.

Ed thinks that's why they were kind of partnering off the Northwest study because they can help you with some of the feasibility of it. It's going to be a big lift for anybody to do. It's going to be a lot of money and there will be a lot of money in the match you'll need to come up with. And the county will be responsible for the actual basically running of the point the network in its entirety, and then the county will get paid from the providers that are delivering services to recoup their cost.

Dave thinks it's a really good idea, but with everybody in the whole state, really, the whole nation kind of doing the same thing at the same time, he as a County doesn't want to be responsible for potentially finding the labor to do this. He doesn't think physically there are going to be enough bodies for everybody to get this done by the end of 2026. You know that that puts pressure on us and frankly, most of us don't know anything about building infrastructure like that.

Then you have to find the right partners and you have to do it in a really short time frame after BEAD the if the BEAD doesn't get to everybody, and even though they say it'd supposed to, I don't think they will.

That may be a better time for us to look at working together with surrounding counties and see how we can fill those final gaps.

Ed thinks you'll find some of those final gaps will be on the borders of the counties.

Dave agreed and from our perspective, I look at our northern border with Cameron and Elk and that Northern tier of our county is pretty remote. Is anybody even going to apply under BEAD for those areas? He has his doubts so that maybe somewhere where we look to help partner with Elk and Cameron counties as an example.

Ed thinks we'll see a lot of those holes because they won't want to be responsible for the upkeep of the network. When those trees fall into fiber, which never happens around here, and they have to be able to be responsible to get it repaired, is there money to actually do that?

Jim had a good conversation yesterday with Brandon Peters about some of the things that the broadband authority is doing and one of the things I asked about was the direct wireless, does it still have a place in, in what's going on with BEAD and everything else?

And he said absolutely, he said that they're going look at a cost benefit analysis and there may be opportunity and they're willing to fund direct wireless. It's just not going to be a high priority. But in circumstances like you're talking about, Dave, I think that could potentially be the solution to that problem.

Dave agrees with you totally and thinks that's going to be the end game for some people in remote locations.

Ed stated we have deployed some new gear that we can do short hops and deliver up to a gig of Internet if we need to.

Carol stated that McKean County was fortunate to have Verizon be awarded with the last round of BIP funding. So right now they are sitting and waiting to see what the scope of their project actually is. What they submitted maybe changed based on what the Pennsylvania Broadband Authority decides to do. So we're holding steady waiting to see what is not going to be addressed. Verizon had a very significant match in McKean County.

Carol Duffy noted affordability was talked about quite a bit too just for the benefit of everybody here on this call, affordability was talked about quite a bit, but it's not really defined. And for our rural and our aging population, they really need to define what is affordable, especially with the ACP, the Affordable Connectivity Program, being no longer in existence from the federal government. That is something we all need to pay attention to as well.

Ed stated the Broadband authority has said \$54 a month is what they're looking at for affordable pricing. What they're telling you is your lowest package has to be \$54.00 a month, and that's rural providers. Can we actually make a dollar on a \$54.00 bill? We may not be able to by the time we pay for all the infrastructure. We'll get through it somehow.

Dave said the bottom line is kind of a little bit of wait and see, and he knows Cameron's part of the feasibility study. He's to see what that looks like, even though Clearfield County is not going to participate.

And then we'll see what happens with that.

Dave asked Jim if he had anything else to discuss?

We were approached by Deborah Pontzer from grow rural PA about she's doing an event over at the Red Fern on June 7 from 12 to 2. They're going to be looking at solar power and Hydrogen, and it's primarily about the hydrogen in mineral extraction.

Deborah was able to get a grant through the Department of Energy at the federal level and we were asked to co-sponsor this event and basically all she was asking us for is to be able to send this out to our networks or our list of folks and promote this.

We're going to be learning a little bit more later this week regarding specifically what they're going to be talking about, but we did provide that information to the board. Please share that with anybody that may be interested in that. I think this has the potential to be something that we could look at as a regional project that could be replicated in other areas. Jim thinks it'll be interesting to hear what they have to say.

Also on Monday, June 17 at 1:00 PM we will be hosting, through North Central PREP, a Cyber Security Event. More information will be forthcoming. Please register for this event to Mikala Biondi at mbiondi@ncentral.com

Amy congratulated Cliff Clark on the EPA Award the County received.

Cliff said they worked with the consulting firm called Montrose Environmental and submitted a \$1.5 million EPA Brownfield Assessment Grant. We will look at six sites within Cameron County to determine what their condition is, and what needs to be done to make them developable.

They are just in the early stages of right now, as they just received the award, and now working on the paperwork. We have to submit an RFP for a qualified environmental professional, which will be done towards the end of the year. And they won't have any funding until October of this year. It will be a four-year process narrowing down the sites, assessing them, doing phase one or phase two environmentals, and then developing the plans for each of the sites, assuming they will be able to be redeveloped.

Jodi Brennan had an update she wanted to share regarding the regional project through our Rural Transportation Committee.

You probably recall us talking about identifying the top #1 local bridge and going in on a bundle bridge bundle project for federal funding and we are now. We just submitted our third application, and hopefully the third time is the charm. Every time we have sat through a review critique of our application, we learned from each one.

So, this is the third and probably final time and Jodi wanted to thank Amy for all her time and effort. We spent a lot of lot of energy on this; and she also thanked PennDOT Districts 2-0 and 10-0 as well for all the teamwork they did. Fingers crossed maybe third times a charm.

The last thing Jim wanted to mention is because we are now done in complete with the construction and the building that we're going to go back to our original schedule of the odd months (January, March, May,

July, September and November) being the Hybrid meetings, in person or virtual. Jim encouraged anybody who is interested in seeing the completed construction to attend our July meeting and we can give you a tour.

To be clear Dave said the June meeting will be Virtual and July will be Hybrid.

ADJOURNMENT

With nothing else to be discussed, Chair Glass called for a motion to adjourn.

Carol Duffy oved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Jeff Pisarcik. Motion unanimously passed. The meeting adjourned at 11:00 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Joseph Haines
Secretary/Treasurer