

MINUTES OF MEETING
RED RIVER RETENTION AUTHORITY
COURTYARD BY MARRIOTT
1080 28TH AVENUE SOUTH
MOORHEAD, MINNESOTA
MARCH 20, 2019

The Red River Retention Authority (RRRA) met March 20, 2019, at 8:00 a.m. at the Courtyard by Marriott, Moorhead, Minnesota.

Present were John Finney, Gary Thompson, Rodger Olson, Greg Holmvik and Roger Mischel, Board members; Pat Fridgen and Ted Preister, non-voting members; Keith Weston, RRRA Executive Director; Carol Harbeke Lewis, Secretary-Treasurer; Troy Daniell, Dave Jones and Debra Walchuk, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS); Rob Sip, Red River Watershed Management Board Executive Director; Randy Gjestvang, North Dakota State Water Commission; Mike Ell, North Dakota Department of Health; Darrel Johnson, Kittson County Commissioner; LeRoy Ose, Red Lake Watershed District; Jerome Deal, Bois de Sioux Watershed District; Tracy Halstensgard and Jason Braaten, Roseau River Watershed District; Chad Engels, Mike Opat and Pat Downs, Moore Engineering, Inc.; Jerry Bents, Zach Herrmann and Tony Nordby, Houston Engineering, Inc.; Blake Carlson, WSN Engineering; Nate Dalager and Jake Howe, HDR. Board member Ben Varnson was absent.

John Finney called the meeting to order and introductions were made.

Agenda

It was moved by Gary Thompson, seconded by Greg Holmvik and unanimously carried to approve the order of the agenda.

Minutes

It was moved by Rodger Olson, seconded by Roger Mischel and unanimously carried to approve the minutes of the December 13, 2018, meeting.

Financial Report

It was moved by Rodger Olson, seconded by Greg Holmvik and unanimously carried to approve the Financial Report, as presented.

Bills

It was moved by Gary Thompson and seconded by Greg Holmvik to approve the payment of Checks #1544 through #1552, as presented. Upon roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

2019 tour update

Keith Weston presented a handout with information on the North Dakota Water Education Foundation Lower Red River Basin Tour on June 13, 2019, and the RRRRA tour in late June 2019.

NRCS Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) Outreach Cooperative Agreement 68-6633-16-512

Mr. Weston discussed options for utilizing the \$23,050 balance of funds in NRCS RCPP Outreach Cooperative Agreement 68-6622-16-512.

It was moved by Gary Thompson and seconded by Greg Holmvik to provide funding assistance up to \$9,550 for the Nutrient Reduction BMP workshop on April 16 and 17, 2019, at the University of Minnesota-Crookston. Upon roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

It was moved by Rodger Olson and seconded by Roger Mischel to provide funding assistance up to \$4,980.04 for the Grand Forks County Soil Conservation District soil health workshop on March 25, 2019. Upon roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

The Board tabled consideration of a request until the next meeting from Peter Mead, Administrator of the Becker Soil and Water Conservation District, to provide up to \$4,500 for the Red River Valley Conservation Service Area 1 Soil Health Training and Tour July 24 to 26, 2019.

It was moved by Rodger Olson and seconded by Gary Thompson to approve funding in the amount of \$2,500 for “Know Your Watershed” radio spots. Upon roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

It was moved by Rodger Olson and seconded by Gary Thompson to authorize Keith Weston to expend up to \$1,500 per each additional eligible outreach event, on up to 5 events total. Upon roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

NRCS Contribution Agreement 68-6633-16-517 - official closeout

An official closeout letter was received from the NRCS regarding *Contribution Agreement 68-6633-16-517* for office and technical assistance.

NRCS Agreement 14-C-ND-669 Memorandum of Understanding – request to extend and amend

Mr. Weston provided notes from a meeting with NRCS officials on January 16, 2019. Discussion was held as to what needs to be done to move forward and the possibility of extending and amending the existing *Memorandum of Understanding*.

It was moved by Rodger Olson and seconded by Greg Holmvik to send a letter to Mary Podoll, North Dakota State Conservationist, requesting to extend and amend *NRCS Agreement 14-C-ND-669 Memorandum of Understanding*. Upon roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

NRCS Report

Debra Walchuk reported on meetings and conferences attended. She presented an update on the status of Minnesota RCPP Agreements. Mr. Weston suggested requests for extensions should be submitted immediately. He will discuss this at the upcoming Red River Watershed Management Board meeting. Challenges relating to the economic analysis were discussed. Ms. Walchuk will pass along information regarding the Farm Bill as they receive it. They continue to focus on how to bring success to these projects.

Executive Director report

Mr. Weston said he will continue to monitor updates regarding the Farm Bill to see if it will help the RCPP Projects. The NRCS and RRRRA put together a postcard with RCPP information, which is also posted on the RRRRA website. Collaboration continues on various grants and agreements.

Roseau Watershed District - Whitney Lake RCPP Watershed Project

Tracy Halstensgard informed the Board they are close to having a completed plan for Whitney Lake; however, the allocated funding is not sufficient to finish the remaining tasks to complete the plan. She submitted a letter outlining the timeline to complete the tasks and to request additional funding.

Mr. Weston said there are 3 options; do nothing, allocate additional funding or work with NRCS to request transferring funds from an agreement that has been terminated. He asked Ms. Halstensgard if they would still finish the plan and if so, how much time it would take to do so. Ms. Halstensgard said the economic analysis was submitted to the NRCS in Little Rock, but Roseau Watershed District has suspended work for now. She does not anticipate more work will be done on their own. If they cannot access the benefit of going through this process, they will go back to their standardized way of doing a project. Mr. Weston pointed out that the plan is still valuable, whether or not federal dollars are approved for construction of the project. Ms. Halstensgard strongly encouraged the RRRRA to request transferring funds between watersheds in order to see some of these plans completed. John Finney said it is a good project and suggested waiting to see what comes back on the economic analysis and then consider requesting a transfer of funds between watersheds. They could then look at dollars available to fund project design. Mr. Weston said he would assist with drafting a letter to the NRCS, based on the economic report expected in the next few weeks.

Agency and partner reports

Pat Fridgen said the legislative session is winding down and the budget will be coming out next week. There will be a fair amount of funding available for project development in the next biennium. The 2017 legislature directed the State Water Commission to develop a process for projects over \$1 million that are subject to an economic analysis. A guidance document has been developed and that process will now be implemented.

Mr. Finney asked about the need for this process. Mr. Fridgen believes lawmakers are looking at the return on the dollars invested on water projects in the state. Mr. Olson questioned why the analysis could not be weighted on state dollars against local cost.

Mr. Thompson believes a favorable vote by property owners in the watershed should be adequate. Chad Engels pointed out the frustration that not all water projects over \$1 million have to provide an economic analysis. Mr. Fridgen said he understands the frustration, but they have to follow state statute.

The Secretary-Treasurer read an email from Kent Lokkesmoe, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. Mr. Lokkesmoe said in the last session, the legislature passed a bonding bill that included \$20 million for flood hazard mitigation projects. Most of those funds will be directed to community projects. Halstad and Moorhead are two within the valley that will receive funding. Halstad will receive \$2 million to finish their levee project. The amount to Moorhead is yet to be determined. Impoundment projects in the Red River Watershed will get some funding to continue work. The projects that are being discussed are the Roseau Lake Bed project and the Redpath project.

Meeting schedule

The next meeting will be held on June 26, 2019, at 1:00 p.m. at the Cass County Highway Department, in West Fargo, North Dakota.

Adjournment

There being no further business to be considered by the Board, the meeting adjourned without objection.

APPROVED:

Gary Thompson
Co-Chair

John Finney
Co-Chair

ATTEST:

Carol Harbeke Lewis
Secretary-Treasurer