

**Range Association of Municipalities & Schools**  
**Board Meeting Minutes**  
**Thursday, March 23, 2023 – 6:00 P.M.**  
**Northeast Service Cooperative Building**

President Pat Medure called the meeting to order at 6:00 P.M.

**Roll Call of Board:**

Present: Pat Medure (ISD 318-Grand Rapids); **Barb Kalmi (ISD 319-Nashwauk/Keewatin); Dale Adams (City of Grand Rapids); Bob Berrini (Morse Township); Jim Fisher (McDavitt Township); Gary Friedlieb (City of Virginia); Shane Hoff (City of Silver Bay);** Jennifer Hoffman-Saccoman (City of Hibbing); **Norma Jean Jofs (City of Aurora);** Pamela LaFrenier (ISD 2711-Mesabi East); **Julie Lucas (French Township); Philip Medure (Great Scott Township); Ron Pittman (Cherry Township); Cal Saari (City of Nashwauk); Warren Stolp (Nashwauk Township);** John Tuorila (City of Calumet); **Dr Rae Villebrun (ISD 319-Nashwauk/Keewatin Supt Assn); Cal Warwas (Clinton Township); Jim Weikum (City of Biwabik); David Zins (City of Hoyt Lakes)**

Absent: City of Babbitt; ISD 701-Hibbing, Supt Assn; City of Ely; City of Chisholm

Also Present: **Steve Giorgi, Interim Executive Director; Kristen Kranz, RAMS Admin Assistant; Jeff Anderson; Miriam Kero**  
**(Persons highlighted were present in person; others were via Zoom.)**

**Review and Approve Agenda:**

The agenda was amended to include 8.e: Donation request from MN Discovery Center. A motion to approve the amended agenda was made by Fisher and supported by Warwas. Motion carried.

**Approve Meeting Minutes:**

A motion to approve the regular meeting minutes from February 23, 2023, was made by Pittman and supported by Kalmi. Motion carried.

**Appearances:**

The Board was joined by Miriam Kero of Northspan, Senior Consultant and Northland Connection Program Manager. Northspan is a non-profit out of Duluth that started in the 1980s and is broken down into two sides: consulting (community development, organizational development, and business development) and programs (Northland Connection, Northforce, and Welcoming Community).

Northland Connection is a commercial real estate and economic development research program in the northland. It provides economic development data and analysis to recruit, expand, and retain business across the region. Examples of data requests include utility rates, pay range for occupations, and properties meeting search criteria.

Northforce takes in applicants and posts jobs. It also helps coordinate job fairs around the area, connects employers with potential employees, and markets the area for these events and openings.

Welcoming Community prepares communities to understand differences and embrace change within communities. To draw in the workforce by making the area more appealing, helping people feel like it's a good place to land, and helping the region stay solvent.

**Director's Report:**

- Interim Executive Director Giorgi discussed his activities for the month of March. (See handout)
- More trips to St Paul to testify.
  - Things are happening very quickly in St Paul.

### Old Business:

- A. As of today, we have received 4 applications for the Executive Director position, plus one voicemail inquiry tonight. The ad will stay open until March 31, with interviews taking place on April 6.
- B. Giorgi testified for Rep Pursell's bill on broadband. The bill provides for funding of broadband based on the Governor's initial recommendation of \$138M each of the next two years. That money would go to the Office of Broadband for Border to Border grants. This year, the funding allowed for \$25M for broadband grants that provide for up to a 50% grant allowance, \$5M max. There was a pilot program called Low Density Areas with a \$30M allocation that Rep Ecklund fought for. The grant allows up to \$10M and up to 75% grant allowance. Applications went out in February and closed about two weeks ago. For the \$30M grants, there were \$75M in applications. This clearly demonstrates the need, the desire, and the willingness by the providers for these projects. Rep Pursell's new bill is included in the Agriculture Omnibus bill, so far. Giorgi also testified on the Senate broadband bill which included the amendment to continue with the Low Density grants.
- C. Rep Lislegard introduced his bill calling for the total elimination of the Social Security tax, provides for basic PERA police and fire pension to get a subtraction because they are not eligible for Social Security, along with Federal pension workers like postal workers. Rep Hanson also presented a bill that allows for changing the current Social Security tax system in the state to allow for up to \$80,000/year in earnings, did not provide for the Federal or basic plan pension deductions, changed the taxable income that the feds use to be a little more liberal for Minnesotans. It would provide relief to a number of people currently paying the tax. 18 people testified, including Giorgi. This is a \$1.2B impact on the state budget and that number will grow as the years go on. The House needs 68 votes to eliminate the tax and they don't have it. The Senate needs 34 votes to pass, which they probably do have.

### New Business:

- A. Targets have been set for all the committees on funding. Targets generally come out a week or two before the session ends. This was historic. Leadership of all committees will meet with top leaders and will determine what the final number for their committee will be. The Governor's first proposal was about \$54B for the biennium, it is now \$78B.
  1. \$3B= Tax, aids, and credits
  2. \$2.9B= Bonding
  3. \$2.21B= K-12 education (15-20% on formula first year)
  4. \$1.17B= Children and Families
  5. \$300M= Early Education
  6. \$1B= Housing
  7. \$668.3M= Paid family and medical leave
  8. \$650M= Higher Education
  9. \$600M= Pension (PERA 2.5% increase)
  10. \$240M= Lead water lines
  11. \$100M= Broadband

Lislegard has done an amazing job in the tax division. Property tax is impacted by city, township, county, and schools, not the state. Local government aid is about half the budget for a city. Lislegard asked for \$150M for LGA and \$150 for county aid (hopefully a positive impact on property taxes). After targets were set, it seems like he will be at about \$100M for each. He also has a rent credit included.

- B. The Range Delegation Breakfast on March 2, 2023, went well and had good attendance. This was the first time the new delegation was able to get together, minus Rep Davis. Some tension between Representatives was brought to the breakfast and was disappointing. Good conversation about new leadership and it is important to help foster these relationships. RAMS members that attended were Warwas, Pat Medure, Kess, Aldrich, Grose.

- C. A new committee was formed to look over the structure of membership dues. The members are Kalmi (school), Friedlieb (city), and Fisher (township). The committee will meet in April before the next regular meeting.
- D. There will be a RAMS hosted lunch and learn regarding LGA and bonding on April 5, 2023, at the Northeast Service Cooperative building. Lunch will be served at 11:30, with the event starting at noon. There will be a 40-person max, with 32 already signed up.
- E. RAMS has received a donation request from MN Discovery Center for the annual Iron Range Science and Engineering Festival. A motion to approve \$1000 was made by Fisher and supported by Pittman. Motion carried.

#### **Board Member Updates:**

Jim Fisher gave an update about the McDavitt Township.

- In the winter, we have hockey rinks, sliding hills, and ski trails. It has been difficult with the amount of snow and wind this year.
- We have 2 ball fields that the Cherry High School girls use. Normally they would be ready to go by this time, but they are not ready yet.
- The amount of snow this year has been difficult!

Dale Adams gave an update on the city of Grand Rapids.

- SW Grand Rapids: \$9.5M in projects, including roadwork, sewer and water, and a roundabout.
- Arena: \$16.5M project, \$6.5M from bonding. Started 2 weeks ago, needs to be done before hockey season returns.
- 48 units of housing will start this spring
- 132 unit apartment building on the north side of the school property, starting construction this summer.
- 90 unit income based workforce housing
- Forest Lake school project starting this summer, 24 different types of units, similar to townhouses.
- Justice Center has another year to go
- \$40-50M in new investment and building in Grand Rapids this year

#### **Finance Committee Report:**

Kalmi reported on the Finance Committee Meeting held March 23, 2023:

1. Expenditures for the period of February 23 – March 22, 2023, in the total amount of \$13,459.73.
2. Profit and Loss Budget vs Actual is on track (15%).
3. Balance Sheet as of December 21, is \$452,057.06

A motion to accept the financial reports was made by Zins and supported by Warwas. Motion carried.

**Other:** Itasca County is hosting a housing summit at the Timberlake Lodge on May 4<sup>th</sup>. They are targeting mayors, housing developers, economic development in your community.

#### **Member Floor Privileges:**

#### **Next Meeting:**

There will be a special meeting on April 6, 2023, at 5:30pm, at the Northeast Service Cooperative building. The next regular Board meeting will be April 27, 2023, at 6pm at the Northeast Service Cooperative building.

#### **Adjournment.**

Meeting adjourned at 7:32pm.