# Range Association of Municipalities & Schools Board Meeting Minutes Thursday, April 22, 2021 – 6:00 P.M. Northeast Service Cooperative Building

**Call to Order:**

President Charlie Baribeau called the meeting to order at 6:00 P.M.

**Roll Call of Board:**

Present: **Charlie Baribeau (City of Virginia);** Cyndi Worshek (ISD 2711-Mesabi East); **Barb Kalmi (ISD 319-Nashwauk/Keewatin); Dale Adams (City of Grand Rapids**); Richard Aldrich (Supt Assn); **Glenn Anderson (City of Babbitt); Bob Berrini (Morse Township); Jim Fisher (McDavitt Township)**; Shane Hoff (City of Silver Bay); Jennifer Hoffman-Saccoman, City of Hibbing; **Paul Kess (City of Ely)**; **Stu Lehman (City of Buhl)**; Kim McLaughlin (ISD 701-Hibbing); **Pat Medure (ISD 318-Grand Rapids); Ron Pittman (Cherry Township); Cal Saari (City of Nashwauk)**; Dr. Noel Schmidt (ISD 2909-Rock Ridge); Dave Worshek (City of Aurora); David Zins (City of Hoyt Lakes)

Absent: City of Chisholm; City of Tower; ISD 2909-Rock Ridge; Nashwauk Township; Great Scott Township

Also Present: **Steve Giorgi, Executive Director;** Costin Group-Jeff Anderson; **Lois Roskoski, RAMS Adm Assistant;** Mike Ralston (Greenwood Township);Mandy Huusko

**(Persons highlighted were present in person; others were via Zoom.)**

**Review and Approve Agenda:**Moved by Fisher and supported by Medure to approve the agenda, as presented. Motion carried.

**Approve Meeting Minutes:**

Moved by Lehman and supported by Anderson to approve the minutes from the regular meeting held March 25, 2021. Motion carried.

**Appearance:**

Jordan Metsa, Fund Development & Marketing Coordinator, provided an update on the Minnesota Discovery Center.

The Minnesota Discovery Center, located in Chisholm, is the largest museum and cultural center north of the Twin Cities. The facility has a 33,000 sq. ft. museum, 14,000 sq. ft. research center, 150 seat indoor movie theater, 1,600 outdoor amphitheater, 19 hole mining themed mine golf course, fine dining restaurant, outdoor covered food court, food truck and gift shop. They are just finishing up on a new bike shop, which offers bike sales, bike rentals and a tune up shop for use at the City owned Redhead Mountain Bike Park.

The MN Discovery Center changed how they did their programming because of Covid, as there is still a massive demand for museum demand. They created three educational videos. 1. Immigrant journey to American and Iron Range. 2. Blue color battleground labor history; 3. Ojibwe culture and the Iron Range. The videos are available for viewing on You Tube. They are also creating educational arts and crafts videos, which are focused around our history. Museum virtual tours are being created, as well as a state of art website for the museum. .

The 2021 10th Annual Iron Range Science and Engineering Festival for 1,400 seventh graders will be held in May. The event is totally funded through donations.

Film workshops are available. Classes include: Intro to documentary filmmaking, digital film production and screenwriting. They are trying to develop an affordable membership program to have full access to the professional equipment. The workshops are offered on the Iron Range and in Duluth, as the Discovery Center services the entire taconite relief area.

The Carnival of Curiosities Exhibit ends in April. The new Water Temporary Traveling Exhibit was delayed and will be available in May.

They are looking to update the lighting and sounds in the outdoor Amphitheater. With Covid, there has been a massive demand for outdoor space and several events have been booked.

Their fine dining indoor restaurant, the Rustic Pig, opened on April 16h. The outdoor food court will reopen in June. Their Trolley Food Truck will be parked at the MN Discovery Center from Saturday to Wednesday.

The Redhead Mountain Bike Park will reopen this May. This is a City owned park, built by IRRRB, with 25 miles of completed of trail. It is free to use, seven days a week, dawn to dusk. A Grand Opening event will be held on June 26. They had approximately 15,000 visitors last year. A grant has been awarded for a dock, which will allow swimming, kayaking and canoeing in Redhead Park. The Mountain Bike League will be holding an event in October and they anticipate 3,000 people to attend.

MN Discovery Center is expanding their mission and focusing on providing recreational activities that tie into history. They are also developing new public and private partnerships.

The Minnesota Discovery Center is working on a new promotional campaign, Ride the Range, to promote all the mountain bike trails. This will be rolled out in May. They want to create northern Minnesota as a destination for mountain biking.

**Director’s Report:**

Director Giorgi provided a few highlights.

* RAMS and Jobs for Minnesotans drafted letters to the Department of Energy with good information and expressing our concerns on the supply chain issues relating to securing precious metals. Spoke with Twin Metals on that issue.
* MN Rural Broadband Coalition is floundering on fundraising. They are the only public lobbying organization to secure funds for border to border grants. Their request for membership dues is on the agenda for consideration.
* Participating on the CDBG Advisory Committee in granting a second round of $850,000 in funds. A third round of funding in anticipated later this year.

**Old Business:**

1. Arrowhead Intelligent Community Initiative

Director Giorgi provided an update on the Arrowhead Intelligent Community Initiative, who may be submitting a grant request. Their project would be a fixed wireless broadband system for St. Louis County school district. The first phase would work with the school district to secure locations of students and take speed tests and place the information on maps. They would also map out a wireless system using existing tower, if possible, and then find a provider that is willing to build a fixed wireless system. The IRRR, Blandin Foundation, St. Louis County Board and St. Louis County School District may be participants. Director Giorgi will request a $10,000 grant for the first phase of the project.

b. Letter to Senator Smith – Rainy River Watershed

Director Giorgi sent a letter to Senator Smith regarding letter to the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture requesting they reinstitute the two year study and mineral segregation in the Rainy River Watershed. We let her know we were disappointed there was no conversation with the Iron Range, who would be directly impacted by this action. Senator Klobuchar has not taken a position on this issue and declined to sign on to Senator Smith’s letter.

**New Business:**

1. Legislative Update

Jeff Anderson, Costin Group, provided a legislative update:

* The legislative session will adjourn on May 17th.
* There is major pressure for police reform out of the DFL caucus. A lot of metro members are pushing forward aggressively wanting police reforms. The House passed a public safety bill, including a number of policing standards. The Senate passed police reforms last year and will review the new proposals and may consider some of them.
* The House passed a $1 billion bonding bill. The Senate has not held any hearings yet. There should be a compromise bill, if a bonding bill comes forward.
* The House wants to raise taxes on top wage earners and proposed an increase in the gas tax. The Senate has no support for a tax increase.
* If a budget bill is not passed by May 17th, a cool down period will be set. The budget must be passed by July 1st, or the State government will shut down.
* A Senate environment/finance bill passed, including a provision by Senator Tomassoni to reestablish a Wild Rice Counsel. The bill includes $12.5 M in LCMMR projects and $1.9 M for ATV trails in the Voyageur Club.
* Sales tax exemptions were included in the House tax bill. The Senate tax bill did include the exemption for public safety facilities.
* The House and Senate are far apart in the Education Bill. The House bill included a two percent increase that ties to inflation. School Districts may be interested in sending letters supporting the bill.
* The Energy Bill passed and funds are included for expansion of the Heliene Solar Plant in Mt. Iron.
* $30 million in grants for the border to border grants passed.
* Jeff Anderson recommended that the RAMS membership, who have close to shovel ready projects, reach out to Senator Smith, Senator Klobuchar or Congressman Stauber as they craft legislation on infrastructure funding.
* Director Giorgi will try to obtain a copy of the letter sent by school districts in support of the mandates included in the House bill and circulate to the RAMS membership.

1. Letter to Dept of Energy – Supply Chain concerns.

This was discussed under the Director’s report.

c. Annual dues for MN Rural Broadband Coalition

Moved by Fisher and supported by Kalmi to approve payment of the membership dues with the MN Rural Broadband coalition, in the amount of $1,000. Motion carried.

**Board Member Updates:**

Barb Kalmi provided an update on the Nashwauk School District.

* Covid has been devastating to the district, as whole classes are being quarantined.
* They are dealing with budgeting issues and do not want to set one until the funding formula is determined at the State level.
* They are reviewing their administrative model and considering changes.
* The district is moving forward with the facilities project. It was determined that it would cost more to remodel two school buildings, than build one new building.

**Finance Committee Report:**

Secretary/Treasurer Barb Kalmi reported on the Finance Committee Meeting held April 22, 2021:

1. Expenditures for the period March 25-April 21, 2021, in the total amount of $14,659.72.
2. Profit & Loss Budget vs Actual.
3. Balance Sheet.

Moved by Medure and supported by Lehman to approve the reports, as submitted. Motion carried.

Director Giorgi stated a $50,000 investment will mature on May 4, 2021. The Boundary Waters Bank is offering the companion account available at 0.6 percent. He requested permission to continue to search rates for the next week and make a decision.

Moved by Medure and supported by Fisher to provide Director Giorgi the latitude to reinvest the investments that mature on May 4, 2021. Motion carried.

**Member floor privileges.**

Director Giorgi highlighted bills introduced by Representative Spencer Igo.

Director Giorgi stated he will be participating on a DEED webinar on April 23rd regarding $37 million in CDBG funds that may be available. $25 million would be dedicated to broadband projects, with the remaining $12 million used for building renovations, relief funding for utilities, rent, mortgage or Covid impacted situations. This would be a 30 day grant application process.

The League of MN Cities will be holding a webinar at 11 AM on May 5th to discuss the American Rescue Funds. Director Giorgi will send the information to the RAMS members, as advance registration is required.

Director Giorgi will attend St. Louis County Board Meeting next Tuesday to provide an update on broadband and asking them to earmark some funds for the project.

Director Giorgi received from Congressman Stauber’s office stating they may be able to do earmarks again. They are interested in broadband. Director Giorgi will request Congressman Stauber’s staff person to talk to the RAMS Board or the Range Mayors on the infrastructure bill.

**Next Meeting:**

The next RAMS Board meeting will be held at 6:00 PM on Thursday, May 27, 2021.

**Adjournment.**

Moved by Lehman and supported by Fisher to adjourn at 7:55 P.M. Motion carried.