# Range Association of Municipalities & Schools Board Meeting Minutes Thursday, September 24, 2020 – 6:00 P.M. Northeast Service Cooperative Building

**Call to Order:**

President Pat Medure called the meeting to order at 6:04 PM.

**Roll Call of Board:**

Present: **Pat Medure (ISD 318-Grand Rapids); Charlie Baribeau (City of Virginia);** Richard Aldrich (Supt Assn); **Glenn Anderson (City of Babbitt); Bob Berrini (Morse Township)**; John Champa (City of Chisholm); Dale Christy (City of Grand Rapids); Jim Fisher (McDavitt Township); Shane Hoff (City of Silver Bay); Jennifer Saccoman-Hoffman (City of Hibbing); **Barb Kalmi (ISD 319-Nashwauk/Keewatin); Stu Lehman (City of Buhl);** **Milan Luzaich (Great Scott Township);** Kim McLaughlin (ISD 701-Hibbing); **Ron Pittman (Cherry Township); Cal Saari (City of Nashwauk)**; Alan Stanaway (City of Mt. Iron); Gail Baribeau (ISD 706-Virginia); Warren Stolp (Nashwauk Township); Doug Gregor (City of Aurora); David Zins (City of Hoyt Lakes)

Absent: ISD 2711-Mesabi East; Supts Assn – 1 member; City of Ely

Also Present: **Steve Giorgi, Executive Director; Lois Roskoski, Administrative Assistant**; Costin Group-Jeff Anderson, Gary Cerkvenik

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

**Review and Approve Agenda:**

Moved by Kalmi and supported by Baribeau to approve the agenda, with the addition of a letter of support to Enbridge added to New Business, Item E. Motion carried.

**Approve Meeting Minutes:**

Moved by Saari and supported by Lehman to approve the minutes from the Regular Meeting held August 27, 2020. Motion carried.

**Appearance:**

Roy Smith, MN State Director of Talent Development, presented information on the Applied Learning Institute. The Applied Learning Institute (ALI) has been an effort over the last 12 years to renew career technical education in Northeastern Minnesota. The majority of new job growth in our area is focused on two year career technical programs. ALI was created through partnerships with RAMS, Colleges of Northeast Higher Education District and 15 taconite area schools. ALI has grown to include 22 high schools. Enrollment has remained steady around 1,500 students, while districts have struggled with enrollment. Students that take these classes usually remain in Northern Minnesota. They focus on five areas, which begin with entry level courses in tenth grade: health care, industrial technology, construction trades, advance automotive, pre engineering. The classes are taught in conjunction with the colleges. Students are required to spend time at the college in the program they are interested in during the school year and get work experience during the summer. They are working on recruiting more young women in the ALI courses.

A suggestion was made to hold a day seminar with students in the fifth or sixth grade to make them aware of the classes. Another recruitment suggestion was made to ask former students of the ALI program to come back and speak to the students.

Roy Smith suggested the RAMS Board members thank the legislators for the tremendous support they have shown the ALI program and support the program when talking to people in their communities.

Roy Smith also reviewed a project they are working on with the Northeast Higher Education District, called “Vision Northeast”, which is the restructuring of five community/technical colleges to a model that brings them under a one college unit. They are currently united under one president, but operate as five separately accredited institutions, which is expensive. "Vision Northeast” was formed to make the colleges more cost efficient by moving towards a one college model, with five separate campuses. They are currently bringing the staff together to establish a process and work on a transition plan. Roy’s role is facilitation of project teams and external communication and stakeholder engagement. By the fall of 2022, they want one campus model for these colleges. Roy will send questions to Director Giorgi to send to the RAMS membership, which include: In what ways do you interact with colleges in NE Minnesota? What has worked well? What has been challenging? What opportunities to do you see under one college model?

**Director’s Report:**

Director Giorgi gave an updated on a conference with Governor Walz office staff and the DNR regarding the Mesabi Metallics project. Minimal construction has been going on with the concentrator. Payments for royalties or judgements awarded Itasca County have not been made. Mercuria, an investment firm, has expressed interest in financing. Stelco, a steel making company, has also indicated interest in the project. The lease agreement allows the State of Minnesota to pull the state leases within one year. Both Mercuria and Stelco would be interested if the State decided to take the lease away from Mesabi Metallics. If the lease is not pulled by January, 2021, they will stay with Mesabi Metallics and the DNR would have no recourse. Representative Sandy Layman suggested that a Mining Task Force be formed, as it was successful in the past with Eveleth Taconite. Director Giorgi suggested that RAMS support that idea and follow up with a letter to Governor Walz. Last month RAMS drafted a letter to Mesabi Metallics, which resulted in Itasca County and Nashwauk receiving checks for delinquent property taxes.

**Old Business:**

1. Enbridge request for Amicus brief – update

Director Giorgi stated he had spoken with attorneys regarding RAMS filing an amicus brief in support of the Enbridge court case. The RAMS Board approved spending up to $3,000 in legal fees to investigate the possibility of filing the amicus brief. Because of time constraints, it was the consensus that RAMS send a letter to Governor Walz in support of the Enbridge Line 3 project, with a copy sent to Enbridge so they could attach it with their court filing to show community support. A letter was received from Enbridge, thanking RAMS for their support.

b. Follow up on regional survey on state positions in the TAA

Director Giorgi stated he received a list of the State agencies that are located in the Taconite Assistance Area. He will create a cover letter and share the information with the RAMS members so they can tally up the State agencies that are in the TAA area. This information will be valuable to have on hand, due to the anticipated budget cuts next year. We don’t want the cuts to these agencies in our area to be automatic.

**New Business:**

1. Legislative report

Jeff Anderson, Costin Group, provided an update on the legislature, which convened for the fourth session of 2020. We knew a bonding bill was highly unlikely. A quiet period went to September 20, which meant no debt could be initiated. Legislators were hopeful they would be back in session on September 21, but that did not happen. It appears Democrats and Republicans are in agreement on a bonding bill, which must originate in the House. House Minority Leader Daudt stated they are close to a deal on a bonding bill. Over $70 million in projects are included in the bonding bill for Northeast Minnesota. Gary Cerkvenik is hopeful that a bonding bill will pass before the November general election. He will make sure that our projects are not targeted for reductions in the bonding bill. The tax bill is tied with the bonding bill and $200 million in business tax breaks are included in the tax bill. A supplemental budget bill is also out there, if the bonding bill passes.

1. RAMS Annual Meeting & Dinner

Director Giorgi asked for feedback on holding the annual RAMS meeting and stated the harsh reality is that we cannot hold it because of COVID restrictions. An election will still need to be held to fill the board seats. An Election Committee was appointed, with Glenn Anderson, Charlie Baribeau and Jim Fisher volunteering for the committee. A meeting will be set up soon and a recommendation will be presented at the October Board meeting.

1. Annual review of Director

It was the consensus of the board to follow the same process as last year for the annual review of the Executive Director. The Executive Committee will meet to perform the annual review of Director Giorgi. Director Giorgi will review the Administrative Assistant and present to the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee will also discuss the 2021 budget at the same meeting.

d. Broadband Update – State wide speed test map

Director Giorgi stated the broadband speed test has gone State wide. A partnership agreement has been made with AARP to start promoting the speed test through their communication network. The University of Minnesota college system, Chamber of Commerce, Association of Minnesota Counties and MSBA have also agreed to promote the link and speed test. This week, an exclusive project was started for the St. Louis County School District, which includes five individual schools that are virtually unserved. This creates a huge challenge for distance learning. Governor Walz and the Department of Education will be contacted to determine what can be done.

1. Letter of support for bonding bill.

Moved by Anderson and supported by Baribeau to approve sending a letter in support of passing the bonding bill to the Senate Majority and Minority Leaders, Speaker of the House and House Minority Leader. Motion carried.

A list of the bonding bill projects for Northeastern Minnesota will be emailed to the RAMS Board, as it was not available when the agenda was distributed.

**Board Member Updates:**

Barb Kalmi provided an update on the Nashwauk School District:

A new principal/superintendent is in place, as their superintendent resigned. The district will be going to a hybrid learning method, where elementary will go to school every day, but high school students will alternate a few days a week. The School Board is proposing a referendum and is counting on electronic media and word of mouth to inform the public.

Dave Zins provided an update on the City of Hoyt Lakes:

Hoyt Lakes has one major street project, at a cost of $2 million. The wastewater treatment plant will be upgraded over a three year period, at a cost of $12 million, to meet the mercury discharge standards. They are hoping to obtain $10 million in funding. The City is also busy working on the 2021 budget.

**Finance Committee Report:**

Charlie Baribeau reported on the Finance Committee Meeting held September 24, 2020:

Moved by Kalmi and supported by Zins to approve the expenditures for the period August 27-September 23, 2020, in the total amount of $18, 030.38. Motion carried.

Moved by Saari and supported by Berrini to approve the Profit & Loss Budget vs Actual Report. Motion carried.

Moved by Christy and supported by Lehman to approve the Balance Sheet as of September 23, 2020. Motion carried.

**Other:**

Director Giorgi stated RAMS is an apolitical organization and has never endorsed candidates. Director Giorgi stated RAMS hosts regular meetings for the Range Mayors, where he serves as the conduit. Unfortunately, Virginia Mayor Cuffe made a comment in Duluth and said the decision for a group of Mayors to endorse a Presidential candidate came out of a RAMS sponsored Range Mayors meeting, which got to the media. Director Giorgi was contacted by Duluth News Tribune regarding the statement by Mayor Cuffe. Director Giorgi clarified the situation and stated there was no discussion at the Range Mayors meeting regarding the election. Cal Saari, Nashwauk Mayor, also stated he was in attendance at the Range Mayors meeting and confirmed there was no discussion on the support by the Mayors for the Presidential candidate. Also, there is a petition in Chisholm regarding their Mayor endorsing the Presidential candidate and language in the petition references Mayor Cuffe’s statement that the endorsement was done through RAMS. Director Giorgi wanted to clarify the situation to the RAMS Board and reiterated that RAMS does not endorse candidates.

Discussion was held on reviewing the by-laws or addressing the endorsement of candidates in a Code of Conduct. President Medure asked the Board to give it some thought and bring it up at a future meeting.

**Next Meeting:**

The next RAMS Board meeting will be held at 6:00 P.M. on Thursday, October 22, 2020.

**Adjournment.**

Meeting adjourned at 7:45 PM.