



## INTERIM DIRECTOR'S REPORT APRIL 2023

**Childcare Grant:** Held the 3rd in person meeting for childcare strategy.

**Umbrella Entity:** First Friday Coffee in April was a discussion led by Dave Daughton. **Outcomes:** Lance Lange has contacted a few city councils/mayors about financial support for a full time position for WCDC. Support requests are based on \$10 per person in their city. Dave Daughton will provide a copy of a contract from UNI for consulting.

- **Office:** Dropbox installed on front of building.
- **Website:** More updates have been added to the Walldog page.
- **Grants:** We didn't receive the Destination Iowa grant that we applied for through the city. Nancy applied for a Cultural Affairs Grant for \$10,000 for the Walldog event. Waiting to hear from GRM on a \$1500 grant for the UNI proposal for childcare. Met with Ethan Pitt from Iowa Area Development Group and Sara Wampler, local Walldog committee chair, to begin the process of applying for a larger grant for Walldogs. Amber Rodgers recommended a CAT (Enhance Iowa) grant but this program hasn't been funded for the upcoming grant period so the timing doesn't work for our Walldog project.
- **Walldogs:** Mailed donation letter with self addressed and stamped return envelopes to 120 businesses. Brett Fetters created a flier for the fundraiser scavenger hunt and a meeting was held to tweak the clues and rules. Sara Wampler prepared a press release for the Seymour Herald. Themes, Leads and Locations have been finalized. Nancy has started the building owner agreements and she requested an event insurance estimate from MLB.

### **Economic Development:**

- Conducted 1 childcare meeting and provided light supper.
- Held a special board meeting to open sealed bids for the meal site building. Legion was the high bidder.
- Attended Iowa Rural Summit Conference. See outcomes below.
- Added WCDC as the contact for the Southern Iowa Junk Journey.
- Began research on funding for cleanup of county lakes and reservoirs. Discussions with John Glenn of RRWA and Mike Mathes from PACT resulted in a contact person to follow up with. They did a previous project that would be similar in scope to ours. This involves federal funding and Zach Nunn. The contact is out of the country until early May.
- Met with Darrell Sarmiento of SBDC/Indian Hills by phone.

### **Outcomes from Iowa Rural Summit Sessions:**

- **Public Libraries Driving Innovation:** most of the panelists are revamping libraries to be more of a social place than just books. Some host their food pantries; some have escape rooms; some have children's activities, crafts, quilting, crocheting. They're using their space for more groups. Most are funded by the city / government.
- **Addressing Rural Food Access:** covered farmer's markets and food pantries. Discussion on food pantries was big: keep them up for underprivileged people without access to good food - they don't have access to good meat, fresh vegetables. Talking about how to do that - in the summer it's easier, such as running campaigns to encourage gardeners to "plant an extra row" and donate produce. Some had stands with take one / give one food items (like a little free library). Need volunteers to make sure things aren't spoiled, but it's not a heavy lift.
  - Unclear how many food pantries there are in the county and how they work.
- **Leveraging a Downtown Assessment Team Visit:** We've already done one, and Amber left it for Nancy. The assessment came to the downtown and the group walked around and shared what was good / what needed to be improved. Jimmy T (the speaker) said many times there are funds available and we expect you to act on these recommendations. Nancy asked Stacy about who went, who from the locals are on it, and what they're doing about it (and whether WCDC should help Corydon with it).



- **Recent Child Care Successes:** The solution that you think going in is probably not your actual outcome. This looks different for every town - our deficit is 230 spots, but Corning has a 1200 spot deficit. Corning's solution is a 174-spot center, but that barely scratches the surface and isn't finished yet. Idea to do a registered home provider plan, with grants to start or improve existing home providers. New home providers could get \$7k to start, then additional funding as they improve.
- **FINDing Rural Healthcare Professionals:** FIND program available through Delta Dental (often co-sponsored by REC or other local groups) to do major loan forgiveness for dentists who commit to 5+ years in a rural county.
- **Local Cheerleaders and Welcome Wagons:** Several communities spoke about how they welcome newcomers to town. Ottumwa has a strong program partnering with local businesses who recruit execs (like hospital, college, bigger factories) to pair someone who's being recruited with a local who will show them around town and help them understand Ottumwa (even before they decide whether to move).
- **Rural Hospitals as Economic Engines:** asked the audience to think about their EMS structure and how the hospital is owned and funded. Main takeaway was that Wayne County Hospital was a complete unicorn because EMS is run out of the hospital.
- **Expanding Community Assets through Leaders and Volunteers:** Job opening section on the development website that they edited to include volunteer opportunities there as well. A lot of talk about having students on the chamber or city council to bring a different perspective. Started a scholarship for kids who did volunteer work in the city / county. Some discussion about how people are more willing to volunteer when they're comfortable with the group and have been exposed through something they're excited about (like arts).
  - Potential awards ceremony for volunteers? One group had a meal for volunteers in the town square.
- **Rural Business Continuity, Succession & Worker Cooperatives:** opportunity to do business continuity planning confidentially to businesses in the area. Also encourage businesses and family farms to think about their internal succession plans well in advance (3-5 years, and ongoing). Focus it on "if you get hit by a truck, the business would go on" and that you want to make sure you're set up to have a sellable entity or some other continuity plan. Some talk of setting up worker cooperatives to buy a company, but most convo was focused on succession planning.

**Potential focus areas:**

- More focus on growth and succession coaching and leadership development for businesses in the 2-8 year time frame
- Food pantry "little free library" idea
- Focus on welcome wagons and welcoming people into town more effectively (possibly through opening up volunteering opportunities to them)
- Revisit existing downtown assessment to evaluate what needs to be done
- Award ceremony for volunteers every year to encourage engagement
- More thought on leadership development for next generation of community leaders (in government or volunteer roles)