

HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE
September 17, 2024

Present: Jessica Moser, Chair; Thomas Kalamas, Vice-Chair; Vincent Nortz; Josh Leviker; and Barry Lyndaker.

Legislator Moser called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m.

Legislator Moser moved to approve the August 20, 2024, committee meeting minutes as recorded, seconded by Legislator Kalamas, and carried.

The following dockets were reviewed:

1. Appropriating funds in the amount of \$43,988.00 in the Community Services account lines for the increase in funds due to additional State Aid from the 2.84% COLA increase which was effective on April 1, 2024 and due to a modification in State Aid disbursement.

AYE 5 NAY 0

The following motion was made:

1. Legislator Moser moved to authorize Public Health employee Stephanie Houser-Fouse to attend the Together We Thrive Conference in Toledo Ohio from Monday October 7th through Wednesday October 9th 2024, with expenses being covered by Bridges Out of Poverty grant funding, seconded by Legislator Nortz, and carried.

Legislator Moser requested a recess at 1:32 p.m. until the presenter Brittany Davis was present.

Legislator Moser moved to resume the meeting at 1:37 p.m., seconded by Legislator Nortz, and carried.

Naturally Lewis update – Brittany Davis, Executive Director of Naturally Lewis

Naturally Lewis, Inc. was created in October 2023. This organization is a 501c3 nonprofit with their own board of directors. Lewis County contracts with Naturally Lewis for economic development services as well as the “I LOVE NY” grant funding. Naturally Lewis, Inc. is the umbrella that covers Lewis County Industrial Development Agency, Lewis County Chamber of Commerce, and the Lewis County Development Corporation. Naturally Lewis has staffing agreements with each of these organizations, while each of the organizations have their own separate board of directors.

The current staffing at Naturally Lewis consists of Brittany Davis, Executive Director; Cheyenne Steria, Director of Development; Jenna Lauraine, Programs and Partnerships Director; Kristen Aucter, Director of Tourism; Kaylee Tabolt, Economic and Tourism Development Specialist; and Trish Michael, Finance and Operations Manager. All of these team members work together on all things that make Lewis County the place to be, such as Business Development & Support Services; Property & Site Developments; Tourism Development & Promotion; Placemaking; Marketing & Promotion of Lewis County; Member Services; and Events & Collaboration with Communities.

Some of the things that Naturally Lewis does are educational events; Lewis County promotion; their own projects; incentives; placemaking events; regional partnerships; member specific promotion; grants/loans; and general support for businesses in the area. Each of these categories encompasses several specific items that they handle such as PILOTS; Food Truck Fridays Leadership Academy; Member Awards Night; Riverfest; Lyons Falls Mill Site; Trail maps; Cuisine Trail; Business Leaders Breakfast; Sales Tax Incentives; Emergency Loan Fund; Vacant Property Revitalization; Business Planning; Grant Assistance; and Discover Tug Hill Regional Partnership.

Under Business Development & Support Services Naturally Lewis has assisted with the flood relief effort by creating a Reboot Fund that raised a total of \$89,162.00 to benefit nine local businesses who were negatively impacted by the extreme flooding this summer. Lewis County Development Corporation used \$250,000 of the Vacant Property Revitalization program funding to help one business who had extreme damage from the flooding and the CEDP Emergency Loan fund earmarked \$200,000 including a \$25,000 donation from the local Community Bank which helped one business also affected from flooding.

Under Business Development & Support Services the CEDP grant program has allocated \$192,000 in grant funding for community economic development programs since 2023 which has created \$607,500 in total project investment in Lewis County. Some of the Lewis County IDA incentives are getting properties off pilot agreements and back on tax rolls they have effectively done this with Otis, Red Barn Meats, and Grand Slam Safety which created 161 new jobs. They also successfully assisted Lowville Medical with a pilot agreement that has created 27 new jobs. Through their business support they have impacted roughly 380 businesses through general entrepreneurial support and projects.

Under Property & Site Development Naturally Lewis assisted with creating a Vacant Property Revitalization program and has used \$690,500 to assist local businesses which created a total project investment of \$5,585,928. Some of the completed projects are double play community center and grand slam safety LLC. The Tourism Economic Impacts through the Chamber of Commerce shows that from 2020 to 2023 visitor spending has increased to \$63 million and tourism direct employment has increased to 492 jobs. One of the goals of Naturally Lewis is to drive local growth through entrepreneurship. Over 70% of businesses in Lewis County are 10 employees or less. Since 2020 the number of micro-businesses in Lewis County has increased by 10%.

The Economic Development models have been evolving. The original approach was always deal centric, which meant creating more jobs, trying to attract big businesses, centering around project and deals, working with sites slash real estate, creating incentives, marketing that we are open for business, big game hunting, and taking years to create a win. The current approach is human centric, which still means creating more jobs but focusing on quality jobs and careers, strengthening the economic base, asset based, targeted industries, clusters, supply chains, more data-driven, quality of place, Main Street Revitalization, collaborative economic development, workforce and education, talent attraction, housing, small business, entrepreneurship and innovation, and taking less time to create several small wins.

The 2025 through 2027 strategy for Naturally Lewis is to develop assets such as businesses, properties, tourism, place; To develop people such as leaders, entrepreneurs,

youth; to develop partnerships such as regional, state, local; and to sustain the organization such as memberships, partnerships, and investors. In the Village of Lowville Naturally Lewis has had at least 50 separate touch points in assisting local businesses. Legislator Moser and Legislator Frost are current members on the Board of Directors for the IDA. Chairman Dolhof is a current member of the Lewis County Development Corporation Board of Directors.

Legislator Kalamas voiced the idea of going after a big company but more so to get remote workers or people who can live here and work from home, thinking about businesses such as Micron and Amazon as he felt there is lots of opportunity for remote workers. Legislator Frost commended the Naturally Lewis team for all their hard work stating that he has been to several Business Leader Breakfasts and enjoyed them. Legislator Nortz commended Naturally Lewis on their recent Excellency Award for the Discover Tug Hill brochures they created.

There being no other business to come before the committee, Legislator Moser moved to adjourn at 2:01 p.m., seconded by Legislator Kalamas, and carried.

Respectfully submitted,
Cassandra Moser, Clerk of the Board