

Minutes
Governor's Rural Affairs Council Meeting

June 17, 2004

1. The meeting opened at 10 a.m. in Room 403, Illinois State Library.
2. The minutes from the 11/20/03 meeting were approved (Chapman/Shea).
3. Rick Chapman briefed the group regarding loan services and programs available from the Illinois Facilities Fund which is available to not-for-profits including faith-based groups.
4. Carolyn Brown Hodge (CBH) discussed the Illinois Food Bank Assn grant to obtain capacity-building equipment to increase the food assistance provided across the state. The source of these monies is the Ag Premium Fund but numerous other agencies are involved in the effort led by Lt. Governor Pat Quinn. Materials were distributed.
5. CBH described a successful Earned Income Tax Credit assistance meeting in Karnak in southern IL hosted by the Center for Economic Progress at which volunteers worked with residents to file the EITC forms. Joe Dunn and Cheryl Vanderford, Illinois Coalition of Community Services, coordinated the effort. Interest in hosting four additional sites was mentioned.
6. CBH discussed ways to increase access to Broad-Band in rural areas using the Wild Blue approach in which electric coops provide Internet service in other states. Similar approaches in rural Illinois are needed and should be promoted.
7. Lieutenant Governor Pat Quinn joined the meeting followed by self-introductions.
8. The GRAC is working with several agencies to create an IL Emergency Management Response Team with a Mobile Medical Van. The intent is to increase emergency services in remote areas without adequate coverage. When not in use in emergency situations, the vehicle can be used in other capacities. Operational funding will be needed and this project is currently in the planning stages. Specs for the vehicle and a map of state emergency regions were distributed.
9. Several Critical Access Hospitals are being linked with broad band technology and Rushville (Culbertson Hospital) received a grant from the OLG. This program is in partnership with the IDPH, Office of Rural Health, and SIU School of Medicine which has funds for 4 additional sites. The aim is to reduce time needed for processing records and communications among the Critical Access Hospitals.
10. The Rockford School of Medicine (UI) hosts career weekends for rural and minority students with strong science backgrounds to encourage them to pursue medical and/or health careers and then return to rural areas. The GRAC provides funding to support these efforts and they have succeeded in attracting students.

11. A demonstration on using an Automated Electronic Defibrillator was provided by American Heart Association representatives. These largely automated machines can save lives, especially in remote areas with long response times. JR Dietl, American Heart Assn, donated an AED to the GRAC for demonstration purposes. Pending legislation will mandate AEDs in certain locations across the state. A private effort in Edgar County provided AEDs at various locations. These initiatives should be promoted.
12. The Farm Resource Center received a GRAC grant to work with residents in counties in western Illinois affected by the Maytag closing (1,500 jobs). Diverse services are provided to reduce mental health issues that may arise because of the closing. Efforts to build self-esteem and related activities are part of the outreach program.
13. The GRAC contracted with Ed Feser, UIUC, to prepare an overview of Broad Band access across the state based on his experiences in North Carolina with results by the end of the summer. Discussion followed by DCEO and Illinois Century Network regarding the need for Broad Band access to foster economic development. ICN (CMS) will offer greater accessibility to Broad Band access which would greatly increase speed in rural areas. The role of Cable and satellites in rural areas was discussed.
14. The annual Rural Partners Telecommunications Conference was discussed as was the Vital Economy project, led by Frank Knott, in six counties in southern Illinois. This project was to increase connectivity among economic development players. The current plan is not to form a regional organization but, instead, to have various groups work on common projects and interests with training for local officials provided. Partial funding was provided by the OLG and GRAC.
15. Illinois leads surrounding states in the percentage of residents without phones in their homes, based on the 2000 Census. The national average of 2.4% compares with 3% in Illinois. Problems arising in medical emergencies and other issues were discussed. The Universal Telephone Assistance Corporation (UTAC) helps low income residents provides financial support and helps qualified residents gain access to phone service. The GRAC will research this issue further and develop policy recommendations. The issue of cell phones not being included was discounted because the data were 2000 before cell phones gained popularity.
16. Community Based Residential Facilities, designed in cooperation with the Illinois Department of Aging, provides assistance to qualified seniors (means-determined) so that they can obtain affordable assisted living in their communities. Currently, there are seven facilities. The model contracts for special services with external agencies, making it more affordable than completely private alternatives. Pending legislation would make the program permanent allowing Medicaid funds to be used, and change the name of the program. IDHA has helped finance 5 of the existing CBRFs.
17. The Institute for Rural Affairs (IIRA) received a three-year grant from the Illinois

Clean Energy Foundation to monitor wind speeds across the state to document the viability of wind turbine projects. This project will work with small scale operations such as schools or groups of farmers to place towers and anemometers at 10 or more locations each year in which investors are possibly interested in erecting a wind turbine. The data will be placed on the Internet for use in grant applications and to evaluate opportunities. IIRA also is working with educational institutions in six counties in western Illinois to place anemometers on their properties to evaluate wind conditions and determine whether a small scale turbine is feasible.

18. The OLG and GRAC, working with the Illinois Clean Energy Foundation, provided support for energy efficient LED traffic signal upgrades in municipalities. The bulbs are brighter and last longer. The grant competition is closed but there was a strong response.
19. Green Products made a presentation on using Soy Polymer roofing materials and other products that have proven superior in performance to comparable petro products. The John G. Shedd Aquarium project was discussed briefly. There also are tax advantages to using these products and several companies have formed to manufacture these products. The products are consistent with the national push for green buildings and will provide expanded markets for Illinois agriculture.
20. The Illinois Soybean Association is supporting BioDiesel tax credits to help create markets for soybeans and to reduce reliance on foreign oil. Several schools are using bio- diesel in their busses and this program should expand. More fuel stations are needed to encourage greater use in private vehicles. The B-20 blend is the only alternative renewable fuel that meets the federal clean air standards and an effort is underway to have fuels blended at the refineries. LtG Quinn asked about a program with IDOT to use BioDiesel in its vehicles. An ADM settlement has promoted this fuel in certain regions of this state and efforts are now underway to work on non-settlement areas.
21. The Transportation Coordinating Committee is now in operation with a strategic plan and intends to hire a staff person. Two main objectives are to: implement the Job Access Reverse Commute (JARC) recommendations and to bring public transit to the counties that currently do not have this service. The intent is to transport low income residents to and from work. RIDES, South Central, and IDPA also have a brokerage arrangement to take clients on medical trips and other needs. This model may be viable in other areas and should be considered.
22. The Illinois River Coordinating Council is sending mud from the Illinois River to the Chicago area to put on a slag field to make a park. Currently a project is under evaluation to transport mud to Banner Marsh, a former strip mine. The IRCC is looking for other sites to follow the same procedure. This is a win-win situation for all concerned.
23. The IRCC provided a grant to the Center for Neighborhood Technology for a Rain

Garden Initiative to help alleviate flooding along the Des Plaines River. Through this project, school children will learn about native Illinois plant and animal species, microclimates and green infrastructure projects designed to reduce flooding.

24. The GRAC has launched a benchmarking project for rural parts of Illinois. The intent is to document progress on a variety of policy issues and concerns following a model such as used in Oregon and Minnesota. Insights into future directions and needs will be based on comparisons of the data. A report on the benchmarks should be presented at the next GRAC meeting in December.
25. The IIRA is currently compiling the 2004 annual report to the Governor and General Assembly on the status of rural. This year, it will be shorter with bulleted items, some photographs, and will probably be 25 pages or less. The main issues addressed will be trends in rural issues, All American Energy, Affordable Housing, Health Care, Digital Divide, Water Quality, Public Transportation, and Economic and Community Development. GRAC grants to address these issues will be discussed as will an introduction to the benchmarking project. An agenda for FY05 in terms of legislative needs as well as innovative programs that could be brought to Illinois will be included as well. The intent to have a draft by the end of August and several GRAC member agencies will be contacted for information in July.
26. A federal proposal has been made to reduce the number of banks included under the Community Reinvestment Act which mandates that banks respond to client needs and evaluates them on their actions. Under the new approach, the federal legislation would reduce the number of banks covered from approximately 200 to 44. Another less restrictive proposal would reduce the number from 200 to 74. If enacted, these changes would adversely affect rural areas.
27. The meeting adjourned at 12 noon.

(Respectfully submitted by Norman Walzer)