

Minutes
Governor's Rural Affairs Council Meeting
November 20, 2003
Illinois Department of Agriculture Building

1. Lt. Governor Pat Quinn called the meeting to order at 2:15 p.m. with a welcome followed by self-introductions.
2. Minutes of previous meeting approved (Walzer/Keyser)
3. Doug Wilson (USDA-RD) suggested that a clear direction and sense of collaboration will strengthen the success of the GRAC efforts. Discussion of a long-range strategy for rural, based on earlier efforts by Rural Partners and others, with performance measures to document outcomes followed. The purposes of such an approach include collaboration among agencies on common themes, documentation of progress toward targets, and maintaining a focus on rural in state and federal government agencies in Illinois. Minnesota Milestones, Oregon Progress Board and other state efforts were mentioned as examples. Lt. Governor Quinn agreed with the concept and suggested that a working group--the OLG staff, IIRA, USDA-RD and Rural Partners--meet to discuss an implementation phase(s). USDA-RD distributed a list of organizations with which it regularly works on rural issues.
4. Carolyn Brown Hodge (GRAC) reported on the All American Energy bill currently before Congress and distributed a report by Ray Fitzgerald summarizing the main provisions of the bill. The Ethanol treatment would especially benefit Illinois by increasing the demand for corn but also by using the byproducts as feed for livestock to encourage the return of this industry to Illinois.
 - a. A discussion followed regarding alternative energy projects including soy biodiesel. The Springfield Mass Transit Agency (Richard Fix) uses soy biodiesel and has had positive experiences but the cost exceeds other fuels. Other transit agencies could use this fuel also. Car manufacturers are producing additional hybrid vehicles that may be able to use soy biodiesel.
 - b. Wind energy projects were discussed with several universities including ISU, EIU and the IIRA engaged in wind energy initiatives. ISU is building a tower to measure wind velocity. The IIRA is publishing a handbook for small scale wind energy projects and will hold several workshops in spring 2004. The Illinois Clean Energy Foundation (ICEF) reported on wind energy projects that it has funded. USDA-RD and other agencies have funds for these types of projects.
 - c. Geothermal is another approach that has received increased use. DCEO, the Clean Energy Foundation (ICEF), and USDA-RD have grants or programs to support geothermal installations and are working with rural

coops on these issues. The question was raised whether state supported construction grants should not mandate greater use of energy efficiency with access to low cost loan programs such as provided by the Illinois Rural Bond Bank.

- d. The LIHEAP program that supports that assists low income residents with high utility bills was addressed along with efforts to work with utilities to make sure that low income or elderly residents are not disconnected when they cannot pay their utility bills.
- e. Governments should be encouraged to used LED stoplights and other equipment available to reduce energy use. The initial cost is higher but the life is longer and they are more efficient in energy usage. The ICEF has funded several similar projects in Illinois.

5. Attention turned next to major events involving health care.

- a. John Record (SIU School of Medicine) reported on a “Charting a Health Care Agenda” workshop in which approximately 40 people met to identify key issues facing rural health. The issues include: infrastructure (including transportation), high cost of malpractice insurance, and shortage of health care personnel. There was discussion of “grow your own” strategies, including subsidizing youth to attend community colleges or universities for training, that have worked in rural areas.
- b. Shortages of mental health personnel in rural Illinois are another issue and counties are trying to recruit child psychologists and related expertise. There may be a cultural reluctance to use these services in rural areas. Telelink services may be one remedy for especially remote areas. A collaborative effort by SIU School of Medicine, the OLG, and a grant from GRAC is working with a school based clinic for health services in southern Illinois. Providing health services through schools seems promising and Gallatin County is trying this approach.
- c. The shortage of dentists in rural areas was discussed next with a connection made between school performance and health dental care. More work is needed on this issue and it is something in which the GRAC is interested.
- d. Rural areas have difficulty attracting Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs). Certification is needed and this training can be difficult to access.
- e. The use and training for Automatic External Defibrillators (AED) should be encouraged because of the importance of time in treating a heart attack. Edgar County mounted a success effort to place AEDs in key locations by

having service clubs raise funds for their purchase. These efforts should be encouraged.

5. Economic development projects were addressed next.
 - a. Carolyn Brown Hodge reported on a project to turn sawdust into wood pellets that can be burned in stoves or by utilities. The GRAC and IIRA have a project underway in Arthur to determine if enough clean sawdust is being generated to support a wood pellet manufacturer. Discussions are on-going with a company in Wisconsin to evaluate the potential.
 - b. Jeri Marxman (UI-Extension) reported on a roundtable regarding factors needed for successful entrepreneurship. The focus was on youth and ways to involve them in starting businesses in rural communities. The themes included: information, entrepreneurial spirit, linkages, structure of economic development planning, and community systems.
 - c. Warren Ribley (DCEO) reported on the regional approach currently underway to deliver services in the future. Three regions have been announced with seven more to occur in the next several months. The programs and projects announced reflect preferences of residents in these regions and will provide a coordinated access to state government services through regional representatives.
 - d. The Digital Divide was discussed next with rural areas still lagging behind metro areas in high speed Internet access and usage. DCEO and USDA-RD have grants available to improve access. Other approaches such as *Wild Blue* were discussed in which telephone coops and similar agencies are becoming involved in Internet service delivery.
6. Attention turned to Public Transportation issues next. PA 93-0185 requires an Interagency Coordinating Committee on Transportation but did not provide funding. (A copy of the legislation was distributed.) This committee was designed to find ways to provide more access to public transportation across the state. GRAC will explore ways to obtain funding for the operations of the committee. Subsequent discussions by Dan Stefanski disclosed that IDOT has provided a grant to Peoria to identify ways to increase services and a Northeastern Illinois task force will start soon. Too little funding is available in the rural transportation programs and reorganization of service delivery systems may be needed.
7. Bill Pluta (IHDA) summarized changes underway in the housing arena with efforts to have a common application process and deadlines and more direct access for local agencies. These initiatives should make Illinois a leader in housing initiatives. Executive Order 2003-18 created a Comprehensive Housing Initiative and named a task force to develop a comprehensive housing plan. This initiative will start soon and involves several members of GRAC.

8. Clean water in rural areas is vital and member agencies were encouraged to work with local governments in the Clean Water Initiative managed by the Office of Lt. Governor Quinn. The Illinois River is a major project and offers recreational opportunities in addition to transportation. Communities such as Havana have projects underway and other communities will also be involved in projects.
9. The 15th annual IIRA, GRAC, and Rural Partners conference will be in Peoria on March 10-11. Themes will include entrepreneurship, industrial retention, technology, health care, and other rural development issues. Past programs have included 330 or more participants.
10. Other projects were briefly mentioned.
 - a. An Agritourism Association is being formed and will offer opportunities for rural areas to expand local economic development.
 - b. There is a growing Hispanic population in many parts of rural Illinois that may affect the ways in which programs will be delivered.
 - c. The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is important for many low income families but they need help in completing the forms. Member agencies were encouraged to organize ways to assist these residents on this issue.
 - d. Rick Chapman distributed materials about the Illinois Community Facilities Fund.
 - e. The National Shooting Sports Foundation has a Project ChildSafe that distributes gun locks. The GRAC is working on a distribution plan. There will be 698,000 gun locks available in Illinois.
11. The next meeting will be in six months. In the interim, member agencies are encouraged to work in groups on the issues discussed and will report progress at the next meeting. The committee to work on a plan for rural development will meet in the near future and report at the next meeting also.
12. Motion to adjourn (Walzer/Watson). The meeting adjourned at 4:10 p.m.

(Respectfully submitted by Norman Walzer)