

Minutes  
Governor's Rural Affairs Council  
May 22, 2007  
Old State Capitol

1. Carolyn Brown Hodge (CBH) opened the meeting at 2 p.m.
2. The minutes from the previous meeting were approved.
3. Chris Merrett, IIRA, discussed on-going research on Ethanol production and the impact of these plants on regional development. This is a grant from DCEO. IIRA also has several projects underway on Wind Energy and alternative fuels.
4. CBH discussed the upcoming Rural Telecommunications Congress to be held in Springfield on October 14-17<sup>th</sup>. GRAC members should spread the word about this event and encourage presenters to send ideas to Karen Poncin, [IIRA@wiu.edu](mailto:IIRA@wiu.edu).
5. Doug Scott, IEPA, discussed the Chicago Climate Exchange which is an effort to work with businesses to reduce carbon emissions and decrease greenhouse gases. This initiative is in conjunction with the Global Warming Task Force that seeks to decrease greenhouse gases to 1980 levels by 2020 and to 60 percent by 2050.
6. Paul Hahn, Mackinaw Valley Vineyard, discussed the current state and recent growth in Illinois wineries. The recent cold snap hurt vineyards in southern Illinois but central and northern Illinois were not affected as much. The number of Illinois wineries has increased from 12 to 75. Previously funds were provided to hire a wine expert and to help market Illinois wines. An additional \$250,000 more would help to hire expertise in the state.
7. Norman Walzer, IIRA, discussed an IIRA project sponsored by the Verizon Foundation and the Stark County Economic Development Partnership to help small businesses expand their markets using the Internet. The project includes 30 businesses and helps them design or improve their web pages and market the county as a region.
8. Lt. Governor Pat Quinn described an initiative in which schools, during commencement, recognize the students who have gone or are going into the Armed Services. This will bring recognition to these students. Other schools should be encouraged to consider this approach.
9. Kristin Lessen, Abraham Lincoln Hospital, described difficulties associated with a lack of dental care for indigent residents in rural areas. In 1997, a mobile van service was started in conjunction with the Center for Rural Health in IDPH. They are currently working with 2 dentists and are trying to recruit others. The program has been well-received by residents.
10. Roger Hannan, Farm Resource Center, discussed efforts by the Illinois Rural Health Association to increase access to mental health services especially in rural areas including approaches such as loan repayments for students and tele-psychiatry. Efforts to make psychiatry eligible for Medicaid reimbursement were discussed.
11. Larry Berg described the results of working with low income residents to help them file

Earned Income Tax Credit forms. Many residents do not file and therefore don't receive the benefits to which they are entitled. Cities including Marion, Kernak, and Macomb had significant results in helping residents file the forms and become eligible for refunds. Residents in Kernak qualified for \$304,000. There has been a considerable increase in the number of people taking advantage of these services and they are looking for partnerships.

12. CBH discussed the positive results accomplished from the food banks across the state. The proposed budget has funds for 8 food banks with interest in raising \$1-\$2 million for additional support.
13. Joe Dunn, Illinois Coalition for Community Services, presented the results from several action forums aimed at providing opportunities for poverty residents. These forums are based on the concept that freedom from poverty is a human right. The rising costs of utilities is a major issue facing residents in poverty.
14. Joe Colgan, Illinois Community Action Agency, described the FAN Club activities in which a GRAC grant has been used to purchase fans for elderly and residents in poverty when air conditioning is unaffordable. This initiative has involved several community action agencies and more than 1,200 fans were distributed. GRAC wants partners in this initiative. Contact CBH if you can help.
15. Lewis Edelson, Illinois Housing Development Authority, distributed a folder summarizing the activities and programs of the agency during the past year. There are opportunities for low and moderate income housing with second mortgages at 0 interest. In addition, programs are available for first time homeowners. The 2007 Housing Plan was also included distributed and briefly discussed.
16. George Weber, IDOT, described recent expansions of the Amtrak lines in Illinois. Because of state investment, services were doubled on three downstate corridors. Ridership exceeds expectations with the Chicago to St. Louis train up 103 percent and the Chicago to Quincy line up 44 percent. There also is interest in new service including trains to Rockford, Dubuque, Quad-Cities, and Peoria. Several feasibility studies are currently underway or have been completed. Clearly the gasoline prices are contributing to the ridership increases. Efforts are also underway to improve the on-time service. In some instances, conflicting traffic with freight is an issue and this problem is being explored.
17. Keith Sherman, IDOT, distributed brochures and discussed the outcomes of the State Transportation Plan update. IDOT has conducted many hearings, roundtables, and venues to obtain input from residents and stakeholders. The aim is to obtain sufficient information to create a well-balanced transportation system across the state to help prepare Illinois to participate effectively in the Global Economy. IDOT wants information to help it plan to meet the needs of residents including increased accessibility to telecommunications and other needs of both businesses and residents. Comments are welcome.
18. Kelly Murray, ILARC, distributed materials and discussed the Human Service Transportation Planning process current underway. Eleven areas have been defined in Illinois and 7 part-time or full-time regional coordinators will be responsible for coordinating the planning process. The aim is to reduce or eliminate duplication and overlap in rural transportation planning and delivery. A diverse group will be assembled in each region and the plan must be approved. Priorities will be set and then the plan implemented with oversight by IDOT, GRAC, and other stakeholder organizations.

19. Kelly Murray, ILARC, discussed the “Greening Illinois” Plan which is supported by Lt. Governor Pat Quinn and the GRAC. This effort will establish a Green Counties program and encourage counties to adopt a plan to encourage local agencies to make more use of alternative fuels, soy roofs, and other initiatives that reduce reliance on foreign energy and, at the same time, increase use of Illinois’ agricultural products.
21. Frank Dunmire, Rural Water Association, discussed the need for additional funding to help rural water system operators especially non profit agencies. Funds were lost in 2007 but the need has increased. Mobile training vans are under consideration to provide training across the state. Innovative approaches such as sales tax exemptions for non profit organizations offering water should be considered. There are currently more than 50 NP organizations in this category.
22. Bills Under Consideration. Several bills are currently being watched by the Governors Rural Affairs Council. Several were briefly discussed:
  - HB 33 (Marc Miller) involves promoting dam safety
  - HB 987 creates the Wabash/Ohio River Coordinating Council that Lt. Gov. Quinn will chair
  - HB 1200 involves efforts to provide food safety and address issues related to increases in organic food production.
  - SR 157 (Jean Follett) promotes historic barn preservation for tourism and will provide low interest loans and grants based on experiences in other states.
  - SJR 53 (Dale Flach) The Rural Health Task Force published a report with recommendations including infrastructure; scholarships; and work force training among other issues. LtG Quinn supports implementing the recommendations.
  - SB660 would offer tax incentives for arts districts based on successful programs in other states. The GRAC supports these initiatives.
  - SB678 would provide wireless services on Amtrak trains.
23. Mike Wayland, Illinois State Treasurer’s Office, presented a series of programs available through the Treasurer’s Office aimed at helping to finance new business opportunities. These programs work with existing financial institutions to assist entrepreneurs with a broad range of business ventures including alternative crops and related activities including more traditional businesses. Funds are also available for first time home buyers, National Guard, Reservists, disabled populations and other target groups. Work is underway on soybean roofs and energy efficient mortgages.
24. Eric Watson, Illinois Finance Authority, provided updates on activities of IFA. The agency is recognized nationally for issuances and has had a positive impact on rural with the most recent issue of \$6.9 million for seven groups being the largest ever. A single page application has been created for local governments and the approval process has been streamlined.
25. Karen Mauldin-Curtis, IIRA Peace Corps Fellows Program, described the operation and activities of the Fellows program that allows returning Peace Corps Fellows, after their two-year service overseas, to earn a degree in one of six departments at Western Illinois University. The students then serve an 11-month paid internship in a rural community or an agency that works with rural communities. The program has received several national awards and is highly respected by the Peace Corps as a model program. It has been replicated in several other states.

26. Jeri Marxman, UI Extension, presented materials and discussed several programs aimed at educating and informing local public officials. The Certified County Officials program provides three levels of training for county board members. These efforts can substantially improve the management capacity especially in rural counties without full-time administrators. Marxman also discussed the Tomorrow Leaders program that, in conjunction with the Illinois Municipal League and Illinois Association of County Officials, makes secondary school students aware of how local governments work and opportunities for involvement. In addition, a statewide TeleNet conference on Tax Increment Financing is scheduled as one of a series of four such conferences.
27. Diana Dummit, UI College of Medicine, described an NSF grant application (\$21 million) to work with chemistry teachers. Slots are currently available.
28. Norman Walzer, Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs, discussed the Annual IIRA Rural Community and Economic Development Conference in Peoria co-sponsored with GRAC and Rural Partners. The conference, in its 18<sup>th</sup> year, was well-received and had 340 participants. National speakers provided information on a broad range of activities including telecommunications, community foundations, and other initiatives in Illinois and other states.
29. Norman Walzer, IIRA, distributed copies and briefly reviewed the annual GRAC and IIRA report to the Governor and General Assembly. The report followed the same format as in the past with a brief review of the state of rural Illinois, legislative initiatives proposed or followed by GRAC member agencies, and an agenda for the future. Copies will be distributed to members of the General Assembly, libraries, and other agencies.
30. Ken Rogers, Illinois Community Action Agency, described activities of the ICAA in working with member agencies on a variety of issues including drinking water, utility board training, best practices, and other topics. The ICAA works in 30 communities on these issues.
31. Wende Dallian, Chicago High School for Agricultural Sciences, discussed the concept and operations of the CHSAS. It is one of only two in the nation and the only one in the Midwest. It started in 1985 and is designed to expose students to the more than 200 careers in agriculture available. It is located on 72 acres of agricultural land in Chicago and now has 600 students, the maximum that it can accommodate. It works with large animals and horticulture. Legislation has been introduced to purchase additional land on the north side of Chicago to allow CHSAS to expand. It has a high graduation rate and 85 percent of graduates attend college. It focuses on applying skills to agricultural related careers and includes a job shadowing program.
32. Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted by Norman Walzer, Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs