

**Meeting Minutes**  
**NDACo Board of Directors**  
**August 24, 2023**  
**NDACo County Office Building**  
**Microsoft Teams – 701-297-2863**

President Lee called the meeting to order at 8:55 AM requesting the roll be taken again, a quorum was declared.

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|------------------|----------------|---------------|
| Members Present: | Carrie Krause  | Steve Lee     |
| Jayne Tenneson   | Shirley Murray | Kelly Vincent |
| Nick Moser       | Steve Forde    | Becky Hagel   |
| Scott Ouradnik   | Perry Turner   | Wanda Knutson |
| Chad Kaiser      | Erica Johnsrud | Lori Hanson   |
| Kim Jacobson     | Dana Larsen    | Robert Wilson |
| Mary Scherling   | Chad Peterson  |               |

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| Members Absent: | Trudy Ruland | Beau Anderson |
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| Also Present: | Aaron Birst, NDACo Executive Director |
|               | Genny Dienstmann, NDACo Staff         |
|               | Michelle Tabbert, NDACo Staff         |
|               | Angie Wentland, NDACo Staff           |
|               | Jason Horning, NDACo Staff            |
|               | Alisha Adolf, NDACo Staff             |
|               | Jeff Eslinger, NDACo Staff            |
|               | Donnell Preskey, NDACo Staff          |
|               | Linda Svihovec, NDACo Staff           |
|               | Bradley Van Deinse, Eide Bailly       |

Lee asked if there were any requests for changes to the agenda. There were no suggested changes. Kaiser moved to approve the agenda as printed. The motion was seconded and passed on a voice vote.

The Board Warm-Up Question was proposed, and each Board member was given an opportunity to respond. The question was: “In light of the difficult hiring environment in North Dakota, what is your county doing to retain current employees and attract new hires?” The comments included:

- For the last couple of employees hired, the county gave a week’s vacation at start of employment. Gave a 6% raise last year and we will be giving a 4% this year.
- Our county is slowly moving in the right direction, but we haven’t been able to give a COLA adjustment the last few years.
- Contacted people directly or spouses of people who I knew weren’t working and asked if they would be interested in working in our county. I used Facebook, phone calls, anything I could to find employees. We used to say our benefits were better, but companies are now very competitive.

- We need to change our slogan to showcase that North Dakota is awesome; we can do a better job of explaining how bad other places are to work compared to our state. We need to go to other states and tell them we love our cops, because we need to recruit law enforcement. We are different and we are better – we need to sell “us”.
- Referral bonuses for employees of \$500 if new employee stays at least 6 months. Commission directed offices to determine what could be done in addition to 3% COLA to pay employees. Forming connections and communications with department heads and staff. We meet formally and informally during work and sometimes after hours to build rapport and trust within different teams. Provided Dale Carnegie training for department heads, which was well received. You need to let people know you care.
- Rural county, openings in departments for over 7 months. Many of our elected officials have been in their careers 40 plus years; many retirements are coming. Trying to give solid pay adjustments, but not sure it is the pay. Getting people into rural communities is hard.
- Have a new auditor and she is keeping a close eye on spending. They have a wage study, but no one is currently following it, so county is planning to review that. Struggle in finding workers for jails.
- Right between Fargo and Grand Forks so there are many choices for employees. The biggest issue is only paying 40% of health plan. A lot of turnover in the county; trying to remedy compensation shortages, but hasn't been done departmentwide. Provide workload adjustments, sign-on bonuses for hard-to-fill positions. Trying to build a place where you are proud to work, need to concentrate on culture.
- We have between 17-21 steps on compensation scale; looking to consolidate that down to 12 steps to simplify. Hoping this will help in recruitment and retain staff. Strategic planning found a need for communication between departments; hired communication position to help in this area. Create a culture that is inviting and people want to stay, it isn't always about the pay; it's doing things to help connect. We are having a company picnic, inviting families, county clothing as an option; bring in a food truck for option for lunches.
- Low turnover rate in courthouse, due to benefits – pay 100% health insurance. The road department just lost two employees, so will need to be hiring. We have had good luck with applicants. Issues in the road department so we are going to be proactive in fixing issues. We did large market adjustments in the road department/ sheriff's department, and it was very well received. Looking to offer life insurance to employees; county paying a portion and employees have the option to increase the benefit at their cost.
- The courthouse is in decent shape, but the sheriff's office is struggling, and the road department has issues too. Struggled with Gallagher compensation study, particularly in the road department, as they didn't have realistic compensation schedules for workers. In the next year, over a third of our staff will be retiring, which is challenging. The commission approved two COLA adjustments and no steps in three years. Asked commission to adjust current employees' wages with some of the retiree salaries to help get them at a better rate. Was also able to increase the starting wage for new hires. We do a referral bonus and are trying to build a good work culture in our department. When we advertise, we use radio and Facebook for our road department; seems to work well. County also offers a life

insurance policy for staff. Trying to develop an internal CDL training to meet the new federal requirements.

The Board paused the Warm-Up Question discussion as the auditors were available to present the audit. Steve introduced Bradley Van Deinse of Eide Bailly, who presented the audit of FY2022 financials. Lee then asked for a motion to accept the 2022 audit. Larsen moved to accept the FY2022 audited financial statements as prepared by Eide Bailly. After receiving a second to the motion, the motion passed on a voice vote.

The President then asked Genny to explain the federal 990 form required of not-for-profit corporations and respond to questions. It was moved by Tenneson to accept the 2022 NDACo form 990 as presented. The motion was seconded and passed on a voice vote.

Before going back to the Board Warm Up Question, Aaron shared he is in preliminary discussions with the AGC and GNDC to look at options to provide CDL certification training as an option for counties. Lee then asked for continued discussion on the Board Warm-Up Question.

- Nelson County used County Salary Survey and created a step system for the county. Done appreciation meals and picnics for staff. The county is competitive with benefits with employers in our area; trying to be the employer of choice, but we are seeing turnover. We recently combined positions such as auditor/treasurer.
- Completed a wage study, but commission has not followed it. Corrections and road departments are the hardest positions to fill. Wages are not great, benefits are ok, but private is catching up and government is no longer the employer of choice. Moving from a 2% to 2.5% increase in steps system, but we are still trying to play catch up. Finally filled a position that has been vacant for a year. Teach at the University and use that as a recruiting tool.
- We don't have a lot of issues because we are the only employer in town. We treat our employees well, we gave substantial raises across the board. We do monthly pot lucks, it's a small operation, but it works.
- We compete with the oil/gas industry, so it is difficult. Adjusted the vacation schedule for new employees. We currently do not pay 100% of NDPERS, and now are creating a tiered structure, where long term employees will have 100% of contributions paid by employer. Adjusted step increases, offering employee engagement; team building activities, quality of life activities through JDA; brand new Ag Expo to bring in events, building day care facility. Changed health insurance plan to now incorporate preventative care options. Looking at the holiday schedule, changing Christmas Eve to a full day holiday. Preloading sick leave hours for new employees, helping younger families to retain them.
- Compensation study has helped, increased the steps. Have an HR Advisory Committee to discuss issues within the county, full health/dental and vision. Providing large percentage increases for our newer employees.
- Commissioners gave a 10% adjustment to road department, which didn't go well with other departments. Have two department heads retiring, so in a small county, it is difficult to attract employees. Will be offering full paid health insurance.
- We had to increase pay for road department positions to attract positions, and hourly wage is currently at market. Competition between city and county, city may

be contracting services. Treasurer resigned and gave no notice, so changed the position to auditor/treasurer and will make it an appointed position. Gave adjustments for the position and deputy for taking on extra responsibilities. Working with families in our community to find out if any of their children are interested in coming back to the community to work.

- Sounds like there is a shortage in staff all around the state, we may need to follow our strategic plan in partnering and doing job sharing among and between counties.
- Staffing in courthouse has been fairly stable. We had a number openings due to retirements in our law enforcement center, and have been able to fill those positions. High turnover rate in corrections, but have been able to keep them filled. Highway Dept had 3-4 openings with no applications. County did a one step increase for our road crew, which helped. Changed the commute time for road department workers from 30 minutes to 60 minutes. We also offer to pay for CDL training and do not require a contract to stay at the county. Theory is if they don't want to be in our county, don't force them to stay. Developed flexibility in departments, can work 10 hour days, adjust to make sure office is open 5 days a week, but leave it up to each department. Pay employee's share of retirement and health insurance. Preliminary budget, we are looking at 8% salary adjustments.

After a short break, the President then asked for consideration of the Consent Agenda with a request to pull the NDIRF report for discussion. Kaiser moved to approve the Consent Agenda with the pulling the NDIRF report, including the Board Minutes from the May 25, 2023, meeting, NDACo General Fund checks #37801 through #38020 and DJS Account checks #7854 through #7869 and ACH payments made from April through June 2023. The motion was seconded and passed on a voice vote. Aaron shared that NDIRF will not be providing a conferment of benefits for this year. NDCCA will be proposing an amendment to their bylaws to increase the term limits on the NDIRF board from two terms to three terms on the board, giving the option to serve up to 9 years on the board. An update was also given on the ND Fire and Tornado Fund coverage.

Krause was asked to give the Governance Report in Committee Chair Ruland's absence. Krause began by explaining the process to identify a candidate for NDACo 3<sup>rd</sup> Vice President. She announced that they are recommending Cavalier County Commissioner Nick Moser for 3<sup>rd</sup> Vice President. Krause moved approval of the nomination. The motion was seconded and passed on a unanimous voice vote.

Krause then indicated that the Governance Committee reviewed, but is not recommending, any changes to the Constitution and By-Laws. She continued with a review of the results of the 2022 Board of Director's Governance and the New NDACo Board Member Appraisals. She finished with mentioning that the Individual Board Member Self-Evaluation is included in the meeting materials and asked all Board members to complete and turn it in before leaving today's meeting.

Jason began the County Financial Partnerships report by explaining the status of the funding changes coming to the 911 fees and shared a copy of the Joint Powers Agreement that will be sent to each county to have NDACo administer the 911 payments from the telecoms. Aaron and Kim Jacobsen followed with an update on the Indirect Cost Reimbursement Services. Aaron continued by explaining the contract signed with AE2S to

seek out highway funding grants for counties. He finished the Cooperative Services portion of the agenda with an update on the Juvenile Justice Grant Administration Report.

Alisha was invited to present the Professional Development Report, providing attendance numbers on various trainings and explaining multiple partnerships that have been developed. She ended the report announcing approximately 80 hour-level award recipients will be honored at the convention.

Jeff next reported on the Conference Planning Report, highlighting the various workshop topics and the keynote speaker. He announced the EICG award winners and continued with an update on the number of exhibitors and sponsors that are confirmed. Michelle gave reminders on Board members' attendance at the conference, rooms at the Radisson, voting delegates, and their responsibility to make calls to encourage new officials to attend the conference. Aaron finished the report with an update on the pre-conference caucus meetings that will be held in the coming weeks.

Under Member Outreach, Chad and Steve discussed the June Tour to the counties of Pierce, Bottineau, Rolette and Benson. The dates of the August and September tours were mentioned.

President Lee asked Aaron to begin the Legislative Report. Aaron asked Genny to discuss the DOT funding projects available to counties/townships and then Aaron gave a summary of interim committee activities. He noted that the NDCCA Resolutions Committee is scheduled to meet on Monday, August 28<sup>th</sup>. He went over the three new resolutions they'll be considering, along with the 2022 adopted resolutions. Genny concluded with a report on the expenditures related to legislative activity.

Under Other Business, Linda shared information on assistance they have given counties with regard to the Salary Survey data.

Perry Turner and Robert Wilson were called on to give the National Participation Report, sharing highlights from the national conference in July.

The next Board Meeting date of December 14, 2023, was announced. Board members were encouraged to attend the Board Gathering on Sunday, October 8, and the Delegate Council Breakfast and Meeting on Tuesday, October 10. The President instructed the members to complete their Board meeting evaluation.

There was no further business, so the meeting was declared adjourned at 12:45 PM.

Approved by: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_