

**Governor's Rural Affairs Council
Meeting Minutes May 16, 2019**

1. Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton called the meeting to order at 9:00 am.

Lt. Governor Stratton thanked everyone for attending today's meeting.

2. Roll Call

Member Agencies Present:

Illinois Department of Aging, Jose Jimenez
Illinois Department of Agriculture, John Sullivan
Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Erika Kennett (phone) & Wendy Bell (phone)
Illinois Department of Employment Security, Jeff Fulgenzi and Shelly Tweedy
Illinois Department of Human Services, Francisco Alvarado (phone)
Illinois Department of Natural Resources, Rachel Torbert and Colleen Callahan
Illinois Department of Public Health, Don Jones
Illinois Department of Transportation, Holly Ostidick
Illinois Farm Bureau, Brenda Matherly
Illinois Finance Authority, Charles Myart
Illinois Housing Development Authority, William Pluta
Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs, Christopher Merrett
Rural Partners & Southern Illinois University, Laura Kessel
University of Illinois, Karen Jenkins (phone)
University of Illinois Cooperative Extension Service, Anne Silvis

Not Present: Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, Illinois Community College Board, Illinois State Board of Education

Citizen Members Present:

Todd Kaeb
Larry Richards
Heather Hampton Knodle

Ex Officio / Nonvoting GRAC Members Present:

Norman Walzer, Northern Illinois University, Center for Governmental Studies (phone)
Doug Wilson, USDA—Rural Development (Illinois)

Lt. Governor's Office Staff Members Present:

Juliana Stratton, Lt. Governor
Charles Watkins, Chief of Staff
Janelle Gurnsey, Community Outreach Coordinator
Dartesia Pitts, General Council

Guest:

Blanche Shoup, Workforce Investment Board of Western Illinois

Quorum determined.

3. Approval of Meeting Minutes from December 5, 2018.

Lt. Governor Sanguinetti announced that a draft of the minutes from the December meeting had been provided to council members prior to today's meeting along with a hard copy today. She inquired if there were any corrections to the minutes.

Don Jones made a motion to approve the minutes. The motion was seconded by John Sullivan. Motion passed. Minutes were approved.

4. Lt. Governor Stratton Remarks

Lt. Governor Stratton again thanked everyone for attending today's meeting. She announced that she is excited to get to know everyone better as we move forward. She thanked the Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) and IDNR Director Colleen Callahan for hosting today's meeting.

Lt. Governor Stratton announced she is committed to the mission of Governor's Rural Affairs Council (GRAC) and is approaching the work ahead with excitement and eagerness to accomplish great things. She mentioned that Governor Pritzker and she have productively crossed the 100-day benchmark.

During the last 120 days, she has been listening and learning. As chair of the GRAC, she wants to play a different role empowered through the partnership with Governor Pritzker. She hopes to use the GRAC meetings to get to know everyone and to know the issues each individual and respective agencies care about.

The Lt. Governor stated that she is concerned about a broad array of rural issues, from ensuring access to Broadband to dealing with the lack of mobility in our rural communities and everything in between. The Office of the Lt. Governor will work closely with everyone to address the major concerns of the council members. The Lt. Governor wants GRAC meetings to serve as informative and productive forum for the council as we continue to serve our state. She announced that as Lt. Governor, she feels honored to be a partner as chair of this committee.

As a reminder, each GRAC member must complete both the ethics training and the sexual harassment training yearly. If you have any questions, please contact the Lt. Governor's general council, Dartesia Pitts.

The next two meetings of the GRAC will be held on August 8 in Springfield, which is also the first day of the Illinois State Fair. The fall meeting will take place on November 7.

More details and the location of the meetings will be determined in the near future. GRAC members will be advised about those upcoming meeting logistics. If you have suggestions or questions, please contact her office.

Lt. Governor Stratton introduced her staff: Charles Watkins, Chief of Staff, Janelle Gurnsey, Community Outreach Coordinator, and Dartesia Pitts, General Council.

5. New Business

Lt. Governor Stratton asked everyone in the room and on the phone to quickly introduce themselves and tell her one issue that you believe is an obstacle or opportunity for rural communities in Illinois. She stated she has been on a listening tour throughout the state learning about rural issues. She mentioned that if you happen to have historical knowledge about the GRAC or rural issues please enlighten her staff. The Lt. Governor also wanted to acknowledge the “wisdom is in the room” and how important it is to hear from everyone present. She noted that she plans to visit Polk County in the next 30 days. Those in attendance offering the following ideas:

- Brenda Matherly, Illinois Farm Bureau (IFB): Population outmigration and economic stability for farmers.
- Anne Heinze Silvis, University of Illinois Extension: Improve local community leadership and development skills.
- Doug Wilson, USDA—Rural Development: Broadband accessibility and affordability for rural places.
- Laura Kessel, Rural Partners and Southern Illinois University – Healthcare access and affordability.
- Blanche Shoup, Workforce Development – Development of the current and future rural workforce.
- Jose Jimenez, Department of Aging: Social Isolation and the importance of conducting an accurate 2020 Census count in rural places.
- Larry Richards, Citizen Member: Healthcare and Ambulance Quick Response in sparsely populated places.
- Rachel Torbert, Department of Natural Resources (IDNR): Population outmigration and access to online services.
- John Sullivan, Department of Agriculture: Broadband accessibility for unserved and underserved places.
- Holly Ostdick, Department of Transportation (IDOT): Broadband accessibility.
- Francisco Alvarado, Department of Human Services (IDHS): Broadband accessibility.
- Erika Kennett, Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO): Workforce development and funding for minority business development.
- Charles Myart, Illinois Finance Authority (IFA): Developing partnerships with rural communities to help fund new projects.
- Norm Walzer, NIU Center for Governmental Studies: Address the problem of depopulation and declining tax revenues by combining local governments.

- Wendy Bell, Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO): Water and sewer infrastructure and housing rehabilitation.
- Kara Jenkins, University of Illinois: Educational sources to teach computer, smart phone usage, and broadband utilization.
- Don Jones, Department of Public Health (IDPH): Access to health care, with a specific emphasis on the dearth of OB/GYN or prenatal care.

Lt. Governor Stratton stated that it appears we need to know where the gaps are for healthcare, broadband, housing, and workforce. She asked Chris Merrett if the IIRA could gather this information. Chris said yes the IIRA could make maps of these items.

- Jeff Fulgenzi, Department of Employment Security: Local leadership and workforce development.
- William Pluta, Department of Housing: Community revitalization with an emphasis on affordable housing.
- Chris Merrett, IIRA: Several issues including the outmigration of youth, workforce development, broadband accessibility, and inadequate rural transportation / transit.
- Heather Hampton Knodle, Citizen Member: Business transition or succession planning, transportation access, local grocery store access, and tax credits to community foundations.
- Shelly Tweedy, Department of Employment Security: Workforce development, real time information on careers for young people, impact of teacher shortage and teacher salaries on K-12 education, the quality and breadth of the curriculum in rural schools.
- Todd Kaeb, Citizen Member: Business transitioning / succession planning, tax incentives to spur new business startups, business education in rural schools, workforce development, and the quality and supply of the labor force.

Lt. Governor Stratton thanked everyone for sharing his or her thoughts. She stated again, “Wisdom is in the room.” She announced she plans to figure out how the council can support and not duplicate what other agencies are already addressing. She mentioned that awareness of resources and making sure that the public is aware of said resources is a goal of marketing the GRAC and our collective resources.

She stated she heard several issues repeated. These issues include: broadband and infrastructure, healthcare and social isolation, outmigration especially in youth, economic and community development, 2020 Census, transportation mobility, education, and housing. She stated that we need to see where we have been and decide as a group where we need to focus.

6. Member Updates and Reports

Laura Kessel – Rural Partners

Laura mentioned that they are seven Rural Partner board members present at today’s meeting. She stated that Rural Partners was created at the same time as the GRAC and the IIRA.

Rural Partners will be hosting the “National Partners of America” conference in August 2019. Everyone is invited to attend. Contact her for more details.

Anne Heinze Silvis – University of Illinois Extension

Anne stated that Extension is focusing on five broad issues. They are attempting to address and fill in the gaps in the following areas: nutrition, agriculture development, economic development, community development, and community leadership.

Heather Hampton Knodle asked Anne if her organization stills holds Leadership Training programming. Anne stated they did and the first session begins on May 17.

Lt. Governor Stratton wanted to know if GRAC could use Extension to help train local leaders. Chris Merrett mentioned that the University of Illinois Extension webinar series is great for local leaders. Anne stated that Extension webinars are an easy way to connect to others and glean community economic development information.

Holly Ostdick – Illinois Department of Transportation

Holly announced her agency has several initiatives current taking place. She passed out a handout, “Preserving Our Roads and Bridges: Asset Management at IDOT.” Her agency is currently changing how they do business and have several policy changes including a long-range transportation plan overview of how the agency should operate.

Holly announced there are several funding opportunities including: Local Rail Highway Crossing and Rural Planning Funds. Also a local community enhancement program starts in October that will provide funding for alternative transportation such as biking, with associated infrastructure such as street lighting.

The Lt. Governor asked if the IIRA could gather info about funding opportunities to share. Chris stated that the IIRA currently has a database with funding opportunities by agency, but that the information should be updated. He suggested that the Lt. Governor could send a letter to agency representatives asking for updates to the various agency funding and technical assistance programs. Charles Watkins stated that he is planning to discuss these issues with Chris.

Colleen Callahan, Illinois Department of Natural Resources

Lt. Governor thanked Colleen Callahan, Director of Department of Natural Resources for hosting the meeting. Colleen thanked everyone for attending and apologized that she was late to the meeting.

She mentioned that she never imagined that she would be involved in this position. She announced that the Lt. Governor’s staff had actually called to visit her agency. She also stated that while on a tour of the Illinois State Museum, she overheard a staffer stating this was the first time the Governor had requested to visit since Governor Thompson had been in office.

She said that she feels that we are entering an era where the GRAC is welcome to be involved and to identify issues and initiatives. She will be glad to help in any way that she can.

Chris Merrett, Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs

Chris provided a handout with a brief overview of the IIRA. He stated that the IIRA provides back office support to the Lt. Governor and her staff. He then thanked various agencies that fund the IIRA programs. Items of interest include:

1. Management and Planning Programs in Non-Metropolitan Groups (MAPPING) – working with several community to create community and economic development plans. MAPPING is also working to help plan for affordable day care in rural areas (with support from a DCEO grant).
2. MAPPING & Peace Corps Fellows (PCF) – worked with Mattoon, which recently received a \$325,000 Google Impact Challenge Award (with support from a USDA-RD grant).
3. Value Added Sustainable Development Center (VASDC) – working on food desert and rural food insecurity issues (with support from a USDA-RD grant).
4. Small Business Development Center (SBDC) – working with Prison Entrepreneurial Program and with student pitch competition for new businesses (with support from a DCEO grant).
5. Rural Transit Assistance Center (RTAC) – working to address rural mobility issues, including helping communities plan rural transit services (with support from an IDOT grant).

Todd Kaeb mentioned that the labor pool is low and transportation often adds to this problem. Employees can't make it work, if they do not have a license. Transportation is needed in rural areas to address this issue.

Chris mentioned that opioid abuse is also effecting economic development in the broader context. This is especially evident in rural areas. He announced the upcoming Opioid Conference, which is being sponsored by the USDA-Rural Development.

Chris also announced that the IIRA Conference will be held on February 26 & 27, 2020 at the Abraham Lincoln Hotel in Springfield. Please note the date change.

Heather Hampton Knodle, Citizen Member

Heather announced that Illinois Agri-Women will host a hemp production and processing conference in May 2019. Also, the Women Changing the Face of Ag will be on March 6, 2020 at the Richland Community College in Decatur.

Lt. Governor Stratton thanked everyone for the member updates.

7. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

8. Adjournment

The Lt. Governor stated Governor Pritzker asked her to head up the Justice, Equity, & Opportunity Initiative. Everything she has heard today relates to this initiative due to barriers to access across the state. She stated these issues effect not only rural areas, but also Chicago. We (GRAC & the Lt. Governor) have the opportunity to address these issues. She thanked everyone for sharing. She stated she is excited to have her team start working on these issues. If you need any assistance, please contact her staff.

William Pluta made a motion to adjourn. Larry Richard seconded the motion. Motion passed. The meeting was adjourned at 10:31 am.

Respectfully Submitted:

Chris Merrett
Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs
Western Illinois University