

Wisconsin Agricultural Education and Workforce Development Council
Full Council Meeting
Hybrid Meeting (Microsoft Teams Meeting)
April 28, 2025
1:00 – 5:00 p.m.

MEETING MINUTES – APPROVED

Members Present: Karl Martin; Betsy Leonard; Michael Orth; Bob Hagenow; Larry Lee; Brad Brusveen; Shelly Mayer; Andy Bensend; Erik Huschitt; Nick Stadnyk; Alicia Pavelski; Jeffrey Wright; Sec. Amy Pechacek; Sec. Randy Romanski; Josh Robinson; Gwen Boettcher; Kurt Popp; Greg Cisewski

Others Present: Emily Hein; Ashley Andre, Matthew VanRemortel; Kietra Olson; James Emerson; Rachel Harvey; Pat Lonergan; Ellie Hartman; Jen Cole; Sally Ladsten; Julia Halopka; Jeff Curry

I. Call to Order and Opening Remarks

Chair Shelly Mayer called the meeting to order and welcomed those in attendance, encouraging members to freely share ideas for a productive meeting. Sec. Romanski provided a safety announcement due to potential severe weather during the meeting.

II. Introduction and Roll Call

The roll was called, and the individuals present were recorded in the meeting minutes.

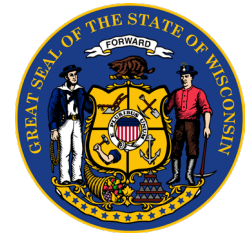
III. Approval of the Dec. 9, 2024, Meeting Minutes

A motion was made by Jeff Wright to approve the Dec. 9, 2024, meeting minutes. Larry Lee seconded the motion, and the meeting minutes were approved unanimously and without correction.

IV. Election

Chair Mayer introduced the yearly election for the Council Chair, Vice Chair, and Secretary. Bob Hagenow made a motion to keep all three members in their current position: Shelly Mayer as Chair, Greg Cisewski as Vice Chair, and Larry Lee as Secretary. Erik Huschitt seconded the motion, and the positions were approved unanimously.

V. Agency Report Outs

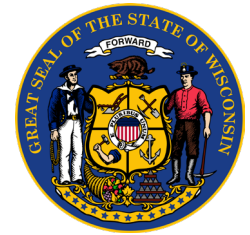


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Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection (DATCP) Secretary Randy Romanski provided an update on ongoing budget conversations that include many agricultural items. He highlighted the meat talent development program which was initially proposed in a prior budget. ARPA funding was used to get the program started and it gives youth hands on experience in the industry. Dozens of students have gone through the program and are now working in the state. Additionally, DATCP is about to announce the 6th generation of its Youth Council. It is exciting to connect with high school seniors to get them focused on career pathways in agriculture in WI. The Dairy Innovation Hub is also in the budget, under higher education. This has been a great step forward for WI and people across the world ask about it. External funding for the Hub surpassed state funding and Michael Orth emphasized the impact of leveraging multiple funding resources.

Sally Ladsten provided an update for the Department of Public Instruction (DPI). DPI included budget items connected to Career and Technical Education (CTE) including \$10 Million in state funding to expand CTE and career pathway offerings. This funding would support current programs as well as new programs. An expansion would allow aid for running programs and increase spending flexibility for school districts. In the last school year there were 65 teacher changes with 30 filled by new teachers. The Agricultural Education analysis will be coming out soon. A lot of programs are interested in starting new chapters and private schools are expressing interest in starting Ag Ed programs. There is a lot of interest and now the focus is on sustaining programs. Enrollment in programs is high but there are discrepancies between programs, and teacher retention is an issue. The largest shortage area is the K-9 education spaces. Of the teacher changes, we see people leave for retirement, switch subjects or change industry. Often, the FFA workload influences teachers to change subjects. Additionally, a lot of female teachers leave due to young families. Erik Huschitt added that this is an area for the Council to understand better and hear from a teacher with a strong program. What does the support network look like? Gwen Boettcher added that additional work is being done to teach younger members how to set strong boundaries. Sectional support is also a teacher, adding to the workload and there is also only one state support advisor and there is a lot of expectation on this one person.

Department of Workforce Development (DWD) Secretary Amy Pechacek provided a brief recap of 2024 accomplishments including hitting record high job creation, low unemployment, high Registered & Youth Apprenticeship enrollment, and an increase in the employment rate for people with disabilities. Coming into 2025, job numbers are staying high in the first quarter, however federal policy initiatives, tariffs, and cuts have increased the volatility in the stock market. Hiring is starting to slow down, and the unemployment numbers are ticking up slightly, though WI remains lower than the national average. DWD is starting to hear of ICE raids up north and is monitoring the impact on the workforce. DWD's budget initiatives include \$2 Million to expand the Teacher Apprenticeship program, \$140 Million to continue Workforce Innovation Grants which have directly impacted local communities to expand access to childcare and affordable housing, and \$15 Million to address AI challenges to workforce across the board. The Governor is leading efforts to reduce the impact of reductions to the federal workforce through targeted recruitment efforts. 70% of DWD's budget comes from the federal government and any cuts will impact the work at DWD. Karl Martin shared that they were



notified that their AmeriCorps program may be eliminated. Sec. Pechacek shared that DWD is monitoring communication as it comes out.

VI. Subcommittee 1 & 2 Report Outs

Gwen Boettcher provided updates for Subcommittee 1. The committee is still determining what impact can be made to develop resources to help retain teachers. Additionally, the committee was working on assessing where students are introduced to Ag Ed and identify areas of improvement. Greg Cisewski provided an update on the 2+2 education model. Deans are meeting consistently and have been working on making the transfer process more efficient by creating consistency in program names and numbers between WTC and 4-year colleges. As students get certifications, the school district can get tech grants which can go back to buying equipment for classrooms. Currently the available certifications are outdated, and the committee is exploring technical diplomas that could be created and offered at high schools. Having students start this process earlier should be explored because Seniors are often busy and exploring many classes. There is no cost to the student, and it could bring in technical dollars to the school district. Sally Ladsten added that recognized certifications are being added and a new application for shortage areas will open at some point. It would be beneficial for the Council to identify what is working for other industries and what could work for us.

Sec. Romanski provided a brief update on Subcommittee 2. A video template has been shot and edited but a decision needs to be made regarding official branding. Ben Huber is working to bookend the video. It has been used at career fairs and seminars and has been well received by youth. Two more videos are close to being ready and all three can be shared at the June meeting. The Council will need to decide how to share the projects, who the key audience is, and where the videos will 'live'. From there, an outreach plan can be developed.

VII. Subcommittee 3: WAEWDC Draft Strategic Plan Outline

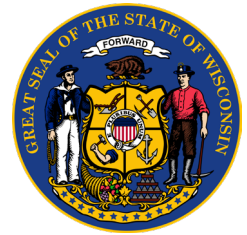
Dr. Ellie Hartman provided the Council with an update on the draft outline for the strategic plan. Dr. Hartman reviewed the statutory responsibilities of the Council and how those responsibilities informed the creation of four strategic initiatives: Strengthen ag, food, and natural resources education, Build partnerships, Identify strategies for outreach and promotion, and Grow ag, food, and natural resources workforce.

VIII. Breakout Sessions

The WAEWDC members each convened to their respective breakout sessions to further discuss and provide input on each strategic initiative.

IX. Reconvene & Discuss Initiatives

The WAEWDC reconvened from the breakout sessions and each group reported a summary of the discussions that took place during the breakout sessions and the progress that was made on their respective initiatives. Council members discussed each



initiative along with the short, medium and long-term goals. Subcommittee 3 members will take the information from today's discussion, merge any duplications and share a cleaned-up document with the Full Council prior to the next meeting. That meeting will be a working meeting, and the Council will react to the goals, action items, and discuss who will take the lead.

X. Approval of Strategic Initiatives and Goals

Chair Meyer entertained a motion to approve the strategic initiatives and goals as discussed. Larry Lee requested a roll call vote be taken.

- Michael Orth – Aye
- Bob Hagenow – Aye
- Larry Lee – Aye
- Brad Brusveen – Aye
- Andy Bensed – Aye
- Erik Huschitt – Aye
- Alicia Pavelski - Aye
- Jeffrey Wright - Aye
- Sec. Pechacek - Aye
- Sec. Romanski - Aye
- Gwen Boettcher - Aye
- Greg Cisewski - Aye
- Josh Robinson - Aye
- Kurt Popp - Aye
- Karl Martin - Aye
- Chair (Shelly Mayer) – Aye

Result: Motion passed with 16 ayes.

XI. Other Business

a. Public Comment

Larry Lee shared with the group that the DNR is working with DATCP on conservation agronomy curriculum. Interested to see where this goes. It is important to find new outlets because it is competitive.

No other public comments were offered.

XII. Adjournment

A motion was made by Bob Hagenow to adjourn, and Erik Huschitt seconded the motion. There were no objections, and the meeting adjourned.

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