



SRDC
SOUTHWEST REGIONAL
DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
2401 Broadway Avenue, Suite 1 • Slayton, MN 56172

Newsletter

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www.swrdc.org

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Climate Smart group - St. James

On January 23rd SRDC Planner Nadya Bucklin had the opportunity to present about home energy conservation practices at a community event, hosted by the Climate Smart group in St. James. Those in attendance were members of Climate Smart as well as other residents of St. James. The presentation included a short introduction to Clean Energy Resource Teams (CERTs) followed by an overview of energy conservation practices that can be implemented in the home. Some of the practices discussed focused on heating and cooling, insulation, air source heat pumps, and water use. Home energy audits, and other energy saving services, were also discussed as a tool to help with targeted home energy conservation practices. Different programs and funding opportunities were presented for energy assistance and home energy projects. Climate Smart - a group focused on sustainability, renewable energy, and energy efficiency - plans to host more events in the next few months, which will be open to the public at the Watonwan County Library. Please contact Nadya Bucklin, at SRDC, for more information.



CERTs informal gathering

Members gathered in November to connect, strategic planning, team building as well as talking about programming for rural businesses/non profits, public sectors, and energy burden.



MN Delegation at conference

Each fall, the National Association of Development Organizations, (NADO), holds its Annual Training Conference. The Annual Training Conference is an opportunity for Executive Directors, Senior Staff and Board Members of Regional Development Organizations across the nation to get together and share best practices, organizational issues, and what's new and exciting. This year's conference was held in Cleveland, Ohio, and there were 430 registrants. Opportunities for learning included Mobile Workshops on renewable energy and brownfields reclamation which were attended by SRDC participants. Also at this year's conference, there were many Conversation Cafes, where attendees get together and talked about specific issues that impact their agencies, such as Aging Programming, State Associations, Housing, and Renewable Energy.



Community Development Director Walker assisting Southwest Health and Human Services develop a strategic plan for their organization.



Currie loop of Casey Jones revitalization

The Friends of the Casey Jones Trail group is hoping to secure enough support to restore other portions of the trail. They have requested \$3.15 million from the State to rehabilitate two segments of the Casey Jones State Trail – the Pipestone trailhead, along with three miles of the trail heading east of the Pipestone and the final segment (3rd phase) of the Currie Loop Trail.

The main issues with the existing Currie Loop section of the Casey Jones State Trail, which was built in the mid-90's, are that the asphalt surface has degraded to the point of being a rough surface with large cracks that make bike riding uncomfortable and the slope of the trail is not within ADA standards and therefore not considered handicap accessible. The trail reconstruction will address these issues plus install accessible bench rest stops and road crossings. The current phase (1st phase) of trail construction, approximately 2 miles, from the state park office to the intersection of County Road 38 and State Park Road, is due to be completed by June 30, 2024. The second phase of the project, which will rehabilitate the section of the trail adjacent to County Road 38 south to Currie, will be completed a year later.

LaCanne Funeral Home expands

Joel and Shannon LeCanne of LaCanne Family Celebration of Life Centers recently purchased Osterberg Funeral Home in Lakefield, MN.

The couple have more than 20 years of experience with the LaCanne Family Celebration of Life Center in Windom opening in 2004. They expanded their business to Jackson where they constructed a funeral home in July of 2022.



Deputy Director Robin Weis pictured with Shannon and Joel LaCanne

The LaCanne's oldest son, Kaleb LaCanne, is earning a degree in Mortuary Science with plans to join his parents in the family business will be a licensed intern in early 2024 and shortly thereafter a licensed funeral director.

The SRDC was happy to assist the couple in their expansion utilizing the Revolving Loan Fund along with Falcon Development Corporation funds.



Joel and Shannon LaCanne are pictured with Jeremy Janssen, Falcon Development Corporation President upon closing their loan for purchasing the Osterberg Funeral Home, Inc. in Lakefield.

Sarah Paws Resort, rural Currie, officially opens

Sarah Paws Resort, located in rural Currie, recently hosted an open house event to showcase their business, which officially opened in August of 2023.

Opening a business is never an easy task, and Sarah's journey was filled with numerous obstacles. However, she was lucky to have financial partners who believed in her dream and helped her make it a reality. The Southwestern Regional Development Commission was one of those partners.

The new facility features 21 separate suites for dogs, with plans to build more. It has an indoor playroom, as well as a large outdoor space, where dogs can enjoy playtime and exercise. Doggy daycare is also available, allowing individuals to drop their pets off for a few hours, the entire day, or even for an extended stay. Cats are also welcome.

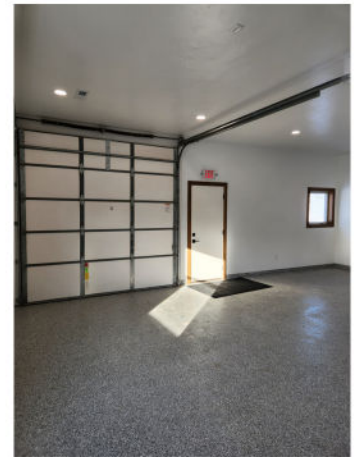
The facility includes a space for grooming, which takes place on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. On Wednesdays, grooming appointments are available starting at



Sarah Willhite, owner of Sarah Paws Resort is excited to be open and accepting pets

12:30 p.m. and running until approximately 6:00 p.m. Sarah offers a range of grooming services including the standard groom (bath, ear cleaning, ear plucking, nail trim, and full body cut), as well as bath and brush, and bath and blowout. Sarah also provides cat grooming. Sarah is also a certified dog trainer and now offers puppy and dog training.

Hills Daycare Project



Hills recently completed a nearly three-year project renovating a dilapidated tax-forfeited building and turning it into a beautiful daycare project. According to Mayor Keith Elbers the city looked at various avenues for the building. Like many small communities, Hills had seen a drop in in-home childcare providers - losing at least six providers in the last 10 years.

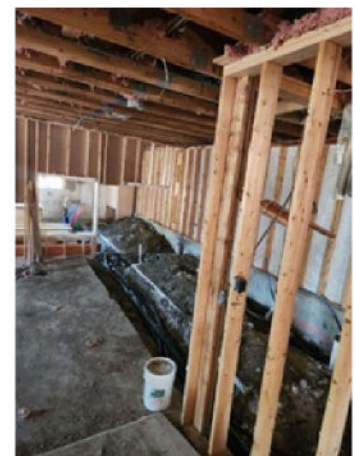
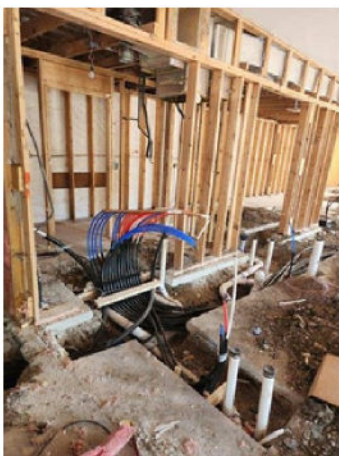
With the help of grants and funding, the city turned a tax-forfeited property into three new spaces for independent childcare providers to use. Those providers only need to pay for utilities, allowing those who want to provide services the space to do so without having to use their own homes. All three spaces have providers occupying them with each having their own separate entrance.

Each space has its own kitchen and bathroom areas. A hallway connects to a large common play area. Additionally, once the weather warms, an additional play area will be created in an outdoor space.



Hills has become a model for other small communities facing similar situations. But like with any project, there were numerous roadblocks and setbacks throughout the process which is what Elbers hopes to help other communities avoid.

The SRDC assisted with grant writing, invoices, progress reports, and project coordination of the Hills Childcare Project. An Open House was held on Friday, January 19th which included a panel of speakers, tour, and lunch.



Clean Energy Resource Teams (CERTs):

Seed Grants: The projects funded include: three lighting upgrade projects – two in Slayton (at the library/senior center and in the 4-H building) and one in the Comfrey municipal building, a manufactured home building basics training project by Slipstream, an air-source heat pump feasibility assessments project by SWMHP, a home education and energy saving program by UCAP, and an energy efficiency video storytelling project by Erika Gilsdorf.

SOUTHWEST REGION

- City of Comfrey: Comfrey Lighting Upgrade — Comfrey, Minn.
- City of Slayton: City Library and Senior Center LED Retrofit — Slayton, Minn.
- Murray County 4-H: Lighting Upgrade for Murray County 4-H Building — Slayton, Minn.
- Slipstream Group, Inc.: Manufactured Home Building Basics Training — Southwest MN
- Southwest Minnesota Housing Partnership: Air Source Heat Pump Feasibility Assessments — Southwest MN
- United Community Action Partnership: Home Education and Energy Saving Program — Southwest MN
- West Central Initiative: What Fuels You? Ways That Make 'Cents' Video Series — Southwest MN



Seed grants are for projects that:

- Help people learn about clean energy and get energized.
- Build community by engaging a variety of partners.
- Remove barriers, making clean energy more accessible for everyone.
- Are highly visible in the community and can be an example for other communities.

City Pool Planning Webinar:

Planner Webb organized a 3-person panel discussion on future planning for municipal pools nearing the end of their life cycles. There were 14 registered participants from all over Greater MN. Planning for city pool improvements, or replacements can be a large undertaking with not a lot of grant funding opportunities available. The webinar took place on Wednesday, January 24 at 2 pm. The panelists included:



Ken Ondich - *Community Development Director,*
City of New Prague

Over 20 years' experience in city planning/community development

A key member of the transition team in New Prague that led to a new indoor aquatic facility in 2017

Tom Schaeffer -

President & Founder, USAquatics, Inc.

Over 40 years' experience in construction management and consulting on aquatic facilities
Worked on many city-owned facilities in Greater Minnesota

George Eilertson -

Managing Director of Public Finance,
Northland Securities

Worked in Public Finance since the early 1990's
Provided recommendations on different approaches to finance large city projects

West Central Research and Outreach Center

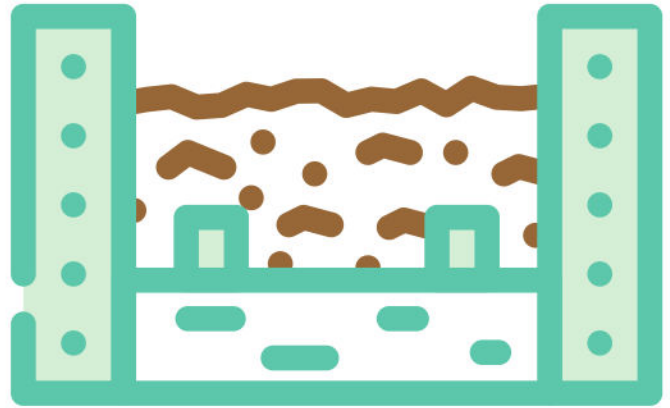
and the U of M campus in Morris, MN. This was a visit coordinated by Southwest RSDP (Regional Sustainable Development Partnership) staff, to help the World Mart food truck project gather ideas for their solar panel installation. Nathalie, World Mart's founder, was also able to make the trip to Morris for the tour. Planner Bucklin started the day at the WCROC facilities, with a tour of the grounds including the windmills, the renewable hydrogen and ammonia pilot plant, numerous solar panel arrays and solar thermal generation and storage, robotic vehicles for



agricultural use, and two solar trailers. The second part of the tour took place at the U of M Morris campus, with a look at a battery storage project, a biomass heating plant, and some of their green building projects such as building with insulated concrete foam. The solar trailers were a highlight for the World Mart project team, as they gave the team lots of ideas and information on how to install solar onto their own trailer. The WCROC and U of M Morris Campuses are truly inspiring when it comes to innovative sustainability and renewable energy projects.

Solid Waste Regional Plan

All counties in Minnesota must submit a solid waste plan to receive SCORE funds and apply for additional grants from the MPCA. Doing this as a 12-county Joint Powers Agreement decreases individual county costs, helps pull together resources, and arrange materials exchange for counties in the Southwest Minnesota Solid Waste Commission.



There are several issues and topics that will be addressed in the plan. This includes support for 100% SCORE funding to counties for Solid Waste and Recycling activities, staff constraints on individual counties, Construction and Demolitions landfill capacity and the need for financial support from the state, and the education of the public and policymakers on the importance of sanitation services as a foundation for public health.

The Solid Waste Administrators met on January 19, 2024. SRDC Executive Director Trusty reviewed the current plan and facilitated a discussion that outlined the information each County Solid Waste Administrator will need to provide to write the plan. Despite the impending request to the MPCA to extend our current plan by two years, work will continue on the new plan. A draft plan is due to the MPCA by June 1, 2024.

North Central Regional Food Business Center:

The SRDC continues to reach out and meet with various groups and individuals seeking ideas and suggestions. The Southwest Development Commission North Central RFBC (Regional Food Business Centers) Action Plan was developed and written to provide room for growth and enhancement over the next 5 years. Ideas and suggestions gathered through a comprehensive and inclusive approach include but are not limited to:

- Strengthening sustainability for local meat processors and small local grocery stores
- Increasing capabilities and efficiencies in providing meals to families
- Creating new markets to get local food to grocery stores, food shelves, and other institutions.
- Education for producers, sellers, and consumers
- Local commercial kitchen access for local producers
- Mobile meat processing
- Development of deep winter greenhouses for non-traditional producers
- Food delivery or transportation for residents to travel to local grocery stores, farmer's markets, and food shelves.



The Southwest Regional Development Commission is committed to working to boost Southwest Minnesota's food systems in response to supply chain weaknesses, small business challenges, and other difficulties exposed by the recent pandemic. The SRDC will begin publishing RFBC updates and opportunities via local newsletters (Farm Service Agency & Other Ag-related), the SRDC Website, and on social media.