

Northwoods Rail Transit Commission

Members: Ashland, Florence, Forest, Iron, Langlade, Lincoln, Marathon, Marinette, Oconto, Oneida, Price, Rusk and Vilas Counties of WI and Baraga, Delta, Dickinson, Gogebic, Houghton, Iron, Marquette, Menominee and Ontonagon Counties of MI

Meeting Summary

Great Lakes Timber Professionals Association - Rhinelander WI

10:00 am May 19, 2017

1. Call to order

The meeting was called to order at 10:01 a.m.

2. Introductions of Attendees and Public Comment

Commissioners in attendance were: Sherry Abitz, Marathon County, WI; Andy Albarado, Rusk County, WI; Mike Cassidy, Marinette County, WI; Al Christensen, Marathon County, WI; Wendy Gehlhoff, Florence County, WI; Ron Heikkinen, Price County, WI; Kelly Klein, Iron County, WI; Kevin Koth, Lincoln County, WI; Dale Kupczyk, Ashland County, WI; Tom Laabs, Gogebic Coounty, MI; Roger Luce, Oneida County, WI; Joe Pinardi, Iron County, WI; Jeff Ratcliffe, Houghton County, MI; Steve Schenden, Marquette County, MI; Jay Verlhurst, Vilas County, WI; Ed Wenger, Florence County, WI.

Others in attendance were: Rick Bliese, Lincoln Wood Products; Brian Buchanan, CN; Kari Divine, Renewable Resource Solutions; John Duncan Varda, Wisconsin Central Group; Nick Giuere, Niagara Development; Jeff Hagan, Eastern Upper Peninsula Regional Planning & Development Commission; Doug Hill, Senator Baldwin's office; Steven Kienitz, Wisconsin DOT; Bill Korrer, Wisconsin Counties Association; Layne Leitner, Progressive Rail; Tim Lynott, Highland Copper; Gerald Piche, Menominee County, MI; Walt Raith, East Central Regional Planning Commission; Steve Schenden; Henry Schienebeck, Great Lakes Timber Professionals Association; Mitch, Wisconsin DOT; Lon Vangert, Progressive Rail; Peter VanSteen, Central Upper Peninsula Planning and Development Regional Commission; Jerry Wuorenmaa, Western Upper Peninsula Planning & Development Region; Representative, Rail Holdings, Inc.

3. Election of Officers

- A. W. Gehlhoff's letter of resignation as Chair was accepted.
- B. W. Gehlhoff opened nominations for Chair. R. Luce nominated A. Albarado for Chair. W. Gehlhoff called for other nominations two additional times, and hearing none determined that a motion was in order. On a motion by R. Luce, seconded by M. Cassidy, nominations for Chair were closed and a unanimous ballot was cast for A. Albarado with all in favor.
- C. A. Albarado opened nominations for Vice Chair. R. Luce nominated D. Kupczyk for Vice Chair. A. Albarado called for other nominations two additional times, and hearing none determined that a motion was in order. On a motion by K. Klein, seconded by G. Verhulst, nominations for Chair were closed and a unanimous ballot was cast for D. Kupczyk with all in favor.
- D. A. Albarado opened nominations for Secretary/Treasurer. R. Luce nominated A. Christensen for Secretary/Treasurer. A. Albarado called for other nominations two additional times, and hearing none determined that a motion was in order. On a motion by G. Verhulst, seconded by J. Pinardi, nominations for Secretary/Treasurer were closed and a unanimous ballot was cast for A. Christensen with all in favor.

4. Approval of Meeting Notes from January 27, 2017

On a motion by S. Abitz, seconded by G. Verhulst, the meeting notes of the January 27, 2017 meeting were approved with all in favor.

5. 2017 Administrative Services Invoice

An invoice for administrative services provided by Renewable Resource Solutions to the Northwoods Rail Transit Commission for 2017 was presented in the amount of \$6,500. On a motion by W. Gehlhoff, seconded by G. Verlhurst, the invoice was approved for payment with all in favor.

6. Letter of Support for Rail Holdings' Efforts

A letter of support for Rail Holdings efforts was presented. On a motion by S. Abitz, seconded by G. Verhulst, the letter of support to Rail Holdings Inc. was approved with all in favor.

G. Verhulst requested goals and accomplishments of the NRTC be shared with all County Representatives, who will in turn share it with their County Boards. A. Albarado will put together the requested information based off the 2017 work plan that was presented at the January 27, 2017 meeting and with the assistance of R. Luce and W. Gehlhoff who can provide the history of accomplishments. In addition, S. Abitz shared the freight station information that was historically provided to NRTC representatives. The freight station information will be posted on the NRTC website.

7. WI-DOT/MI Data Collection Project Update

W. Gehlhoff, D. Kupczyk and R. Luce met with WIDOT staff Donna Brown Martin and Dan Thyes to discuss the project. WIDOT has approval to contract a consultant to conduct the study. WIDOT is currently reviewing the MN study which was published in June of 2016. MnDOT collected and analyzed manufacturer's input in the northwest part of the state. The report includes interview methods, traded-industry cluster analysis, as well as implementation strategies based on manufacturers' inputs and can be accessed at the following link: <http://www.dot.state.mn.us/d2/docs/mp-report-final.pdf>. WIDOT will use this study as a model and will insure that the study focuses on developing actionable steps and incorporates what potential businesses could use rail. Currently the study timeline is unknown, but it's anticipated to take at least one year to complete.

8. Northern Minnesota Iron Range Regional Rail Initiative

D. Kupczyk met with representative from the Northern Minnesota Iron Range Regional Rail Initiative are faced with a similar situation as the NRTC and are willing to partner. A. Albarado and D. Kupczyk will pursue a joint meeting with NRTC and Northern Minnesota Iron Range Regional Rail Initiative representatives to explore partnership opportunities. The Initiative will be an agenda item for the next NRTC meeting. A handout on the initiative is including as an attachment to the minutes.

9. Status of collective Industry/WCG/NRTC Efforts

The Michigan Forest Products Council initiated a Michigan/Wisconsin Forests Freight Advocacy Coordination meeting in Escanaba, MI on March 16, 2017. A Focus Group developed an action agenda based on the meeting, and expects to disseminate the finalized version, "Competitive Freight Rail for the Great Lakes Forests Region, An Action Agenda" in late May. This could be used to promote transportation initiatives in the future.

A discussion was held around the potential for transporting salt by rail for counties. Ashland County has a large holding area that may be of use for those counties without a holding area.

B. Buchanan indicated that CN has no plans to re-open at Ashland at this time.

T. Klimek indicated that E & LS is not yet certified to build new cars at the Escanaba shop.

10. Mining Moratorium Removal Support

The draft NRTC letter of support for legislative removal of mining moratorium was reviewed. A public hearing regarding removal of the moratorium will likely be held in the fall. A. Christensen moved to send the letter to Senator Tiffany as is, J. Pinardi seconded. Discussion was held around the language in the letter and whether Michigan counties should abstain from the vote. A. Christensen revised the motion to send the draft language contained in the letter to Senator Tiffany with an inquiry of whether this was the kind of support the legislature is requesting. The second of the revised motion stood, and it was unanimously approved.

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11. Next Meeting Date

The next meeting will be set as the discretion of the Chair, as information becomes available and as action items arise. Agenda items for the next NRTC meeting include the newly imposed timber tariffs. J. Varda will put together information on the tariffs.

12. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn at 11:16 a.m. by J. Pinardi, seconded by K. Klein, and unanimously passed.