

# NORTHWOODS RAIL TRANSIT COMMISSION

## MEETING SUMMARY

GLTPA - Rhinelander

April 29, 2022

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### **1./2. Call to Order / Roll Call-Introductions and Public Comment**

The meeting was called to order at approximately 10 am by Chair Wendy Gehlhoff. Those in attendance included the following: Wendy Gehlhoff Florence County Economic Development, Kelly Klein Iron County WI Economic Development, Dale Kupczyk Ashland County, Joe Bonovetz Gogebic County Board, Jeff Ratcliffe Houghton County/KEDA, Russ Fisher Oneida County Board, Bill Korrer Oneida County, Joe Pinardi Iron County Board Chair, Gary Frank Oconto County Board, Randy Detert Lincoln County Board, Dave Baker Marathon County Board, Tim Sondelski Marathon County Board, Marlene Broemer Ontonagon County Board, Al Barkstrom Price County Board Chair, Robert Barron Delta County Board, Ryan VanLanduyt WI Senator Bewley's Office, Dylan Stenz Congressman Tiffany's Office, Tom McNamee MI Senator McBroom's Office, Jim Hoppe PCA, Ken Lucht Watco, Brad Peot Watco, Brian Buchanan Watco, Chris Garcia BLRPC, Jerry Wuorenmaa WUPPDR, Tom Klimek Klimek Rail Consulting, John Varda LSSA-WCG, Jack Miller, Ty Penca, Rich Kedzior WisDOT and Darryl Landeau NCWRPC.

Others may have been in attendance but did not report their presence on the audio line.

There was no public comment:

### **3. Approval of NRTC Meeting Notes from November 12, 2021**

It was noted that Joe Pinardi, Iron County was incorrectly listed for Oconto County.

On a motion by Bonovetz, seconded by Pinardi, the meeting notes from November 12, 2021 were approved as corrected with all in favor.

### **4. Chairperson's Report**

Gehlhoff reported the recent passing of Commissioner Al Koskela of Houghton County MI and asked for a moment of silence in his honor. Gehlhoff then welcomed new members to the Commission stating that the purpose of the NRTC has been to facilitate communications between the counties, the legislature, our railroad partners and others. She referred members to the NRTC website (<http://www.ncwrpc.org/NorthwoodsRail/>) for background information and indicated that the NRTC historical timeline piece would be updated and posted to the site to provide context on the evolution of the

organization. In closing, Gehlhoff indicated that she was retiring from Florence County's Economic Development Director and thus stepping down as NRTC Chair but would be staying on to help for a period.

## **5. Election of Officers**

Outgoing Chair Gehlhoff opened nominations for NRTC Chairperson. Kupczyk nominated Kelly Klein, Iron County. Korrer moved to close nominations and cast a unanimous ballot for Klein. Bonovetz seconded. Motion passed with all in favor.

New Chairperson Klein opened nominations for NRTC Vice Chair. Pinardi nominated Dale Kupczyk, Ashland County. Korrer moved to close nominations and cast a unanimous ballot for Kupczyk. Frank seconded. Motion passed with all in favor.

Chair Klein opened nominations for NRTC Secretary. Pinardi nominated Joe Bonovetz, Gogebic County. There were no other nominations. Frank moved to close nominations and cast a unanimous ballot for Bonovetz. Korrer seconded. Motion passed with all in favor.

Chair Klein opened nominations for NRTC Treasurer. Klein nominated Wendy Gehlhoff, Florence County. There were no other nominations. Pinardi moved to close nominations and cast a unanimous ballot for Gehlhoff. Bonovetz seconded. Motion passed with all in favor.

## **6. WATCO Update on Northwoods Start-up**

Ken Lucht, Brian Buchanan and Brad Peot from Watco provided a report on their operations start up since the acquisition. In December they received STB approval of the acquisition with no conditions and took over operations from CN in the last week of January. The system is now known as the Fox Valley and Lake Superior Railroad System (FOXY). They have a full team focused on growing the business and understanding the expectations of the businesses on the active lines. They are looking at any and all opportunities with requests coming in from across the area.

They are also working on plans to restore out of service lines. They are looking at state and federal grant opportunities because of the large amount of funding that will be needed to restore those lines.

Some of the struggles they have been facing include the state of the infrastructure with emergency bridge repairs and the tightened supply of rail cars. They are slowly trying to grow things back and keep things moving.

The Watco team took a number of questions, and there was wide ranging discussion. John Varda with the Lake States Shippers Association stated they were working to organize local corridor committees to work with shippers, communities and the railroad on restoring service. Klein asked about track inspections and restoration plans for the

lines. Lucht indicated that they were gearing up for the inspections now that the snow is mostly gone. Bonovetz stressed that information and communication are critical.

## **7. Discuss Next Meeting Date**

The next meeting was tentatively set for end of September unless something comes up needing more immediate attention.

## **8. Adjourn**

On a motion by Bonovetz, seconded by Detert, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 11:15 am.