



February 2026 LCEDC Board Meeting Minutes

Meeting Details: Wednesday, Feb. 18, 2026

10:01 am – 11:58 am

Lincoln County Service Center, Room 156

801 N. Sales Street, Merrill, WI 54452

Online Access: Zoom Meeting

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/84668011845?pwd=s1E1r6bQ50fOaomokSmPBKEyEnFJVP.1>

Board Members (8/13 total): Brian Arndorfer (Vice President), Jesse Boyd, Steve Daigle, Mike Fick, Renea Frederick (Treasurer), Gary Hartwig (President), Greg Hartwig, Steve Hass, Dave Johnson (Secretary), Val Mindak, Roger Schlegel, Jeff Schneider, Steve Taskay

Other Attendees (3): Rod Akey (City of Merrill), Sara Guild (EDC Director), Charis Lau* (Tomahawk Chamber)

*Participated online (1 total)

1. Call to Order & Welcome – 10:01 am by Chair Arndorfer

Quorum at start = 8

Arndorfer welcomed all attendees and stated that he would be serving as Chair in President Hartwig's absence.

2. Review & Approve Lincoln County EDC Board Meeting Minutes: November 19, 2025

Frederick/Johnson m/s to approve November 19, 2025, EDC meeting minutes as presented; motion carried.

3. LCEDC Finance Reports

a. 2025 Year-End Finance Report (preliminary)

Guild briefly reviewed the preliminary 2025 finance report. Income was \$21,000 more than 2024 but still well below budget goals. Expenses were identical to 2024, although spending between the categories changed significantly. Total net income was -\$11,340, indicating the gap is closing but the organization is not yet breaking even. She also confirmed that the EDC's money market account was closed in December per the Board's direction. \$40,000 was moved to a 6-month CD at Crossbridge and the balance was shifted to the EDC's Park City checking account.

Johnson/Mindak m/s to approve the preliminary 2025 year-end finance report as presented; motion carried.

b. 2026 LCEDC Budget Updates – Review & Approve

Guild reviewed a list of requested 2026 LCEDC Budget adjustments that were identified after the budget was approved in November. Most changes were related to the Executive Director's salary & benefits. Due to increased insurance premiums plus other plan changes, Guild decided to use a health share program combined with Anovia Health services for her health benefits in 2026. These services cannot be paid for using pre-tax monies, so Guild's health reimbursement account (ICHRA) was closed and her base salary for 2026 was increased by an amount equivalent to the 2025 benefits allocation.

Other adjustments included updating the anticipated grants income to match the maximum USDA award amount, removing Summit fees for the facility and speakers, and increasing the QuickBooks budget in order to upgrade the EDC's subscription to a version that allows for in-system budget tracking and class-based reporting. The updated 2026 budget reflects potential for a slight revenue gain in 2026. The packet also included a 2026 budget-by-month overview using the new QuickBooks budget report layout.

Hass/Hartwig m/s to approve the updated 2026 LCEDC budget; motion carried.

c. *January & early February 2026 Finance Report*

Guild briefly explained how to review the updated QuickBooks reports, which compare actual year-to-date spending to the LCEDC's budget projections, both as a total annual budget comparison and by looking at actual-vs-budget projections for each month. She also noted that the Financial Position/Balance Sheet report now reflects changes since the start of the year instead of 12 months prior.

Mindak/Johnson m/s to approve the January & early February 2026 finance report; motion carried.

d. *Technical Assistance Grant Programs Update*

Guild reviewed the two different grants the LCEDC was awarded in December to support developing a technical assistance program. The USDA's Rural Business Development Grant (RBDG) will reimburse up to \$21,960 with a 20% match through 12/31/2026 (1 year). The state's WEDC Small Business Technical Assistance (SBTA) grant will reimburse up to \$16,800 with a 50% match through 12/31/2027 (2 years). Both grants will pay for salary, marketing, supplies, and mileage that are directly related to executing technical assistance program activities. Attendees briefly discussed program marketing opportunity ideas.

Guild will primarily use the USDA grant funds first, since it has a shorter timeline and lower match level. She spoke with a USDA representative the previous day about various grant program requirements including displaying mandatory federal posters, reporting Board and client demographics, and following certain office accessibility guidelines either at the EDC's main office or by identifying an appropriate alternative meeting location for clients with disabilities or other limitations.

e. *EDC Investors Update*

Guild shared a new EDC Investors tracking report. She noted that all three 2025 investors were retained and six new investors have been confirmed for 2026 thus far. Attendees briefly discussed ideas to recruit additional investors. Guild will share a "Top 10 Targets" list developed by the Investments Subcommittee. Board members will sign up to indicate which organization(s) they will reach out to.

4. General Reports

a. *Executive Director*

Guild briefly highlighted some of her key action items from the last three months, which included: creating and presenting a 2025 summary report to both City Councils and the County Board; launching the new *LinC & Learn* program; opening registration for the 2026 Economic Summit; holding two Digital Pathways roundtables; starting a 6-week online training class (*Leading Economic Transformation*); and assisting 14 different businesses. Looking ahead, her priorities include executing the Economic Summit, adapting and growing the *LinC & Learn* series, completing additional Digital Pathways roundtables, submitting the Q1 grant reports, updating the LCEDC website, and potentially coordinating a move to a new EDC office.

b. *Strategic Plan Activities*

The packet included the 2025 Strategic Plan activities recap report that was prepared for the local government presentations in January as well as a 2026 year-to-date report to capture new activities related to the Strategic Plan goals since the start of the year. Both reports reflected the new layout requested during the November 2025 Board meeting. There were no questions or additional suggestions.

c. *Lincoln County Broadband Commission*

The Broadband Commission met on Dec. 4th and Jan. 22nd; its next meeting is on Feb. 26th. The LCBC's primary focus has been on gathering information for its new Digital Pathways Initiative, primarily by sending out surveys and holding in-person roundtables to get feedback on common barriers to internet & technology usage. The first two discussions were on Feb. 5th and 10th with "public agency" stakeholders. Future roundtables will be held with private businesses and community & nonprofit stakeholders.

5. LCEDC Upcoming Events

a. *LinC & Learn Business Connections Program Series*

The first LinC & Learn session will be held the following morning at 7:30 am at Johnson's of Merrill; Guild is anticipating 15-20 attendees. The second session is on March 19th at the PCA training center in Tomahawk. The rest of the 2026 schedule will be finalized later using attendee feedback from these sessions. Guild briefly answered questions related to the program's goals, partners, and target audience.

b. *2026 Economic Summit*

Registration opened this week for the Summit. The 2026 theme is "Energizing the Small Business Spirit." Guild encouraged Board members to promote the event by sharing the fliers, promo emails, and/or social media posts. 17 sponsors have been confirmed, including 7 from 2025 (two of which increased their level) and 10 new sponsors. The *Business After Hours* event still needs sponsors to support providing free food, drinks, and giveaways. Board members affirmed they will pay for their tickets again this year. Upon learning the EDC may need to rent a few round tables for Reserved Table requests, some Board members offered to investigate getting some donated for the day. Mindak asked Guild to research methods to help identify which Summit attendees are also Board members, sponsors, and/or investors. Guild asked Board members to consider volunteering to help with the event set-up on Monday, April 27th after 4 pm and/or take-down following the *Business After Hours* gathering on the evening of the 28th.

c. *Future Events & Activities*

Guild is speaking with the Langlade County EDC's Director next week to discuss if/when they will try to hold the "Government Contracting Opportunities" event that was cancelled in October.

Board members briefly discussed ideas for holding another larger event in the fall, similar to the Federal Reserve event held the prior October, as a way to help maintain momentum from the Summit during the latter part of the year. Guild was instructed to work with the Executive Team to explore ideas for a half-day or shorter event and bring the proposal back to the Board for final review.

****AGENDA ORDER CHANGE: COMPLETED TOPICS #7 (Partner Updates) and #8 (Next Meeting) BEFORE #6 (New Office)****

6. Tour & Discussion of Potential New LCEDC Office Space *(completed after #7 & #8)*

Guild shared a quick recap of recent activities related to the potential EDC office change, following up on an email sent to the Board in December. In late 2025, she was notified that the EDC office's current location was going to be moved to a different part of the Service Center due to renovations related to County department location changes, and the new EDC location was going to be behind an additional layer of security protocols. During this same time, some REV program interviews indicated that the general public was either largely unaware of the EDC or assumed it was a County department due to its location and name, both of which were negatively impacting EDC utilization.

After discussing this information with both the Executive Team and the REV group, it was recommended that the EDC office consider moving to a different location instead of staying in the Service Center. Guild shared this proposal in her January presentations to the City Councils, County Board, Merrill Chamber, and via the Board email and asked anyone interested in providing free space to the EDC for 1-2 years to contact her. She received two offers. Akey offered the EDC use of an office at Merrill City Hall. Frederick offered the EDC space inside the Prairie River Property office building located outside of FreMarq's main facility. After reviewing both options, Guild and the Executive Committee recommended the Board consider transitioning to the Prairie River office building.

Attendees discussed the benefits and challenges of moving the EDC office to the proposed location. Guild and Frederick clarified that another REV program idea is to eventually create a "one-stop-shop" for business support in the Merrill area, and that the proposed space's extra offices could help provide a testing ground for some of these ideas before investing too much time and resources into this proposal. Following the discussion, attendees took a short tour of the space and discussed additional questions related to the proposed set-up and utilization.

MOTION: Johnson/Hartwig m/s to accept Prairie River Properties' offer of office space for the LCEDC and to authorize the LCEDC's President, Vice President, and Secretary to develop a lease for the office space with assistance from the Executive Director; motion carried with Frederick abstaining.

Mindak Out: 11:55 am

Next two topics were covered prior to the Office Discussion/Tour

7. LCEDC Partner & Board Member Updates

a. Lincoln County

Hartwig noted that County Board activity is expected to be light until after the spring election in April, and that construction has started in the Service Center in anticipation of moving the Social Services and Health Departments into that building later this year. He also reminded attendees that the County will not have ARPA funding for the LCEDC in 2027 and will instead need to find funding in their regular budget, which will be very challenging. He recommended discussing this with County leadership after the election. He also asked Guild to make sure all current and potential new Board members are invited to the Summit.

b. City of Merrill

Hass reported that JAS Construction has been approved to build four duplexes at 703 S Center Avenue, near the hospital. In addition, ODC's request to rezone the former Highland Church was approved. The riverfront development project continues to move forward, and housing inquiries have started to come in.

c. City of Tomahawk

Guild reported that Mayor Taskay is not running for office again but there are two other candidates running for mayor. Michael "Hob" Habeck is a local business owner and member of the Police & Fire Commission. Jeff Koth is very active with the Lion's Club, having served as the local President as well as a Zone Chair. Both were in the audience when she gave her presentation to the Tomahawk City Council in January.

d. Merrill Area Chamber of Commerce – NOT PRESENT

e. Tomahawk Regional Chamber of Commerce

Lau reported that during yesterday's Chamber Board meeting, the Board decided to change their "Quitting Time" event structure to be a quarterly event, with two larger gatherings and two smaller specialized events. The Chamber will also be adding "Resource" days by collaborating with other economic development partners, as well as holding more special workshops for key topics. The Chamber is also busy preparing for many of their regular 2026 events.

f. Tomahawk Main Street, Inc. – NOT PRESENT

g. LCEDC Board Members

Mindak: Dunkin' Donuts recently received its state permits so more construction will be happening in the upcoming weeks. They are still targeting a late spring opening in the Park City building.

Hartwig asked if there were any updates on filling the soon-to-be vacated Ace Hardware building in downtown Merrill. Akey, Hass, and Guild have been monitoring opportunities for leads and are aware of some possible interested parties, but nothing has been confirmed at this time.

8. Future Meeting Dates & Topic Requests

a. May 20th: LCEDC Annual Meeting

Guild reminded the Board that the next meeting is on May 20th at 10 am; location is TBD. This is the Annual Meeting and seven Board Member's terms are up for renewal, including all four local government representatives (Boyd, Greg Hartwig, Hass, and Taskay) plus Fick, Mindak, and Schneider. If anyone does not plan to renew their term, they should let Guild know so the Board can begin recruiting a replacement.

New Office Discussion/Tour Happened at this Point

9. Meeting Adjournment – Schneider/Hass motioned to adjourn at 11:58 am; motion carried.

Minutes Approved 05/20/2026 by LCEDC Board; recorded by SG