



August 2026 LCEDC Board Meeting Minutes

Meeting Details: Wednesday, August 19, 2026

10:00 am – 12:18 pm
Lincoln County EDC Office
1101a N. Mill Street, Merrill, WI 54452
Online Access: Microsoft Teams

Board Members (11/13 total): Brian Arndorfer (Vice President), Steve Daigle, Michael “Hob” Habeck, Mike Fick, Renea Frederick (Treasurer), Don Friske, Gary Hartwig (President), Greg Hartwig, Steve Hass, Dave Johnson (Secretary), Val Mindak, Roger Schlegel, Jeff Schneider

Other Attendees (4): Rod Akey (City of Merrill), Sara Guild (EDC Director), Charis Lau* (Tomahawk Chamber), Sarah Brooks* (Merrill Chamber)
*Participated online (2 total)

1. Call to Order & Welcome – 10:00 am by Chair Hartwig

Quorum present: 11

Chair Hartwig welcomed Don Friske as a returning LCEDC Board member and Chair of the Lincoln County Board.

2. Review & Approve Lincoln County EDC Board Meeting Minutes

a. LCEDC Regular Board Meeting: May 20, 2026

Johnson/Arndorfer m/s to approve the May 20, 2026, meeting minutes as presented; motion carried.

b. LCEDC Executive Committee Meeting: August 11, 2026

Johnson/Frederick m/s to approve the Aug. 11, 2026, Exec meeting minutes as presented; motion carried.

3. LCEDC Finance Report: Through July 2026

Guild referred attendees to the finance reports and narrative summary included in the packet. Through July, expenses were below budget projections and net revenue was above projections, although total income remained slightly below budget. Grant reimbursements were lower than anticipated because only 10–15% of Guild’s work time through June qualified for reimbursement under the business assistance grant; since July 1, grant-eligible activity has increased to meet or exceed the 25% target. The Board also reviewed anticipated year-end revenue sources, including the Merrill Area Development Corp’s pledged donation, additional grant reimbursements, Tomahawk’s anticipated annual contribution, early investor renewals, and potential fall event sponsorships.

Guild also confirmed that the LCEDC’s 2025 tax return was filed by the organization’s accountant in early June. In addition, the LCEDC’s Crossbridge CD account was closed in June and all the funds were moved to Park City Credit Union per the Board’s direction. \$15,000 were put into a 6-month CD with 5% interest while the balance went into the organization’s checking account.

Guild has begun preparing 2027 funding requests for Lincoln County and the City of Merrill. The County request for \$50,000 has advanced through both the Administrative & Legislative and Finance committees and will be included in final County budget consideration. The Merrill request will be submitted in September and will include a 2% increase as provided under the joint agreement. Tomahawk’s 2026 contribution, historically funded through its CDA budget, will also be requested this fall.

Daigle/Johnson m/s to approve the August 2026 finance report; motion carried.

4. General Reports

a. Executive Director

Guild provided a one-page written summary of her recent and upcoming key activities, noting that many of the topics will be covered in more detail later in the meeting. There were no additional questions.

b. Strategic Plan Activities Update

Attendees briefly reviewed the updated tracker document. Guild noted that the report includes 9 more businesses that received assistance since May, and confirmed that she tries to monitor which businesses launch or remain open as part of her grant reporting requirements.

c. Lincoln County Broadband Commission

The LCBC Action Team recently added County Board Supervisor and Tomahawk Alderperson Don Nelson; Wickham remains Chair as a resident representative. The June meeting included presentations from local and state United Way representatives about their technology-assistance programs; the August meeting will focus on updating future LCBC goals and action items. Guild also represented the LCEDC and LCBC at Charter/Spectrum's Aug. 4 celebration of the newly implemented Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF) service. Residents continue to contact LCEDC regarding internet-service concerns, including uncertainty surrounding Frontier/Verizon's discontinuation of copper-wire-based services.

d. REV Program/BizLinC

The BizLinC Business Support Program is preparing for a formal fall launch and will be prominently featured on the new LCEDC website. The program will provide personalized assistance to current and aspiring business owners through a network of volunteers coordinated by LCEDC. Guild is also developing a SharePoint-based internal resource system for BizLinC volunteers.

Frederick and Guild also updated the Board on efforts to bring UW-Whitewater's RenewTowns "City Pitch" program to Merrill in 2027. The competitive program combines entrepreneur education with community voting to identify promising businesses and help place them in vacant storefronts. The REV team is now identifying potential landlords and funding sources that could offset contract expenses and first-year business occupancy costs. Board members expressed support for continuing to develop the project.

5. LCEDC Events & Activities

LINC & LEARN SERIES: Guild is finalizing the fall LinC & Learn Business Connections Series schedule and will be promoting it as soon as the remaining details are confirmed. She briefly reviewed the anticipated content for each of the four monthly sessions, noting that sponsors are not yet confirmed for November or December.

SMALL COMMUNITY FORUM: Tomahawk was selected as one of three host communities for this year's statewide Small Community Forums. A state planning team comprised of multiple agencies involved with rural community development efforts oversee most of the program development, marketing, registration, and other key tasks. Guild is coordinating the local planning team, which includes the Tomahawk Chamber, Tomahawk Main Street, and City of Tomahawk. The event will draw attendees from across northern and central Wisconsin and highlight Tomahawk's use of CDI grants and development of the Dream Park project.

ECONOMIC UPDATE EVENT: Per the Board's direction in May, Guild identified UW-Extension Community Economic Development Specialist Matt Kures as a potential presenter for a fall Economic Update event. Kures is available the morning of November 5, and Guild recommended also incorporating local County and city updates similar to the Summit format. The Board supported moving forward and directed Guild to work with Kures on a presentation focused on population movement – including where residents are moving to and from, factors influencing those decisions, and the potential role of tourism in attracting future residents.

2027 BUSINESS SUMMIT: The Summit planning team recommended renaming the annual event the *Business Summit* to better reflect and attract its target audience, shortening the formal program to conclude by mid-afternoon, and offering an optional networking event afterward. The Board supported these recommendations and suggested incorporating some facilitated discussion topics into the networking period for added value.

The Board also asked Guild to explore the potential development of a future women's leadership event or group.

11:12 am – Brooks out

6. Development Project Opportunities

CENTERGY/SSG INDUSTRY STUDY PROJECT: Guild and Akey completed a June 3 mock site consultant visit focused on Merrill's Industrial TID 13 site and received positive feedback regarding the community's preparedness. Extension of water and wastewater service will significantly improve the site's development potential. Centergy will promote the site through its annual Site Selector Tours and is considering including Merrill in a 2027 tour. The LCEDC will also receive information to help identify industry development opportunities well suited to the region.

OUTDOOR RECREATION TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (ORTAP): Guild briefly explained how and why Lincoln County was selected to participate in the state's ORTAP pilot program. The program will guide the local steering committee through a process to evaluate opportunities to strengthen their outdoor recreation economy, including a public community workshop in late October. The first meeting was held on Aug. 18 and the program is expected to conclude in December. Board members offered various suggestions for potential areas of focus.

INNOVATIVE CONSTRUCTION CONSORTIUM: Guild and Frederick are continuing to develop the proposal for a Merrill-based construction technology consortium and are identifying potential partners and state grant opportunities to support its launch.

BIOFUEL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY (BDO) ZONE: Guild summarized her preliminary research into pursuing a Biofuel Development Opportunity (BDO) Zone certification, which indicates Lincoln County may be well positioned for a woody biomass facility. Certification would increase the County's national visibility to attract potential biofuel facility developers. The Board agreed the opportunity could benefit the local timber industry and directed Guild to consult forestry/timber-industry experts to complete a self-assessment and further evaluate the proposal's viability.

7. LCEDC Website Updates Preview

Guild previewed the new LCEDC website, which is expected to replace the current site later this month. Board members expressed support for the updated design, content, and features.

8. 2027 LCEDC Strategic Planning Discussion

The Board reviewed the strategic-plan language recommended by the Executive Committee. The draft retained the four existing goal areas while updating language and strategies to better reflect current and anticipated LCEDC activities, including broader language for business assistance and development opportunities and revisions to Goals 3 and 4 for greater clarity and alignment with future organizational needs.

MOTION: Johnson/Mindak m/s to accept the drafted strategic plan language as presented in the packet to be used in developing the final 2027-28 Strategic Plan document; motion carried.

9. LCEDC Partner & Board Member Updates

a. Lincoln County

Friske reported that the County Board has been discussing strategic planning ideas and opportunities, many of which align with the LCEDC's plan, and is exploring more ways to collaborate with the cities.

b. *City of Merrill*

Hass reported that “The River” housing development will break ground on its second complex in October, while units from its first complex will start renting in November. The first JAS duplex near the hospital is up, and construction on Keyes Street is moving forward. A ribbon cutting was held August 14 for Merrill’s new municipal airport maintenance hangar, which is the only one of its kind in 100 miles.

c. *City of Tomahawk*

Guild shared updates on behalf of Roger Schlegel. Construction has begun on a new Dollar General in the parking lot of the Qualheim’s True Value store, which recently announced it will be closing.

Daigle also reported the unexpected closure of Samuel Pressure Vessel Group. The Chamber and regional workforce development partners are coordinating job fairs for affected employees, and Park City Credit Union has offered them financial assistance.

d. *Merrill Area Chamber of Commerce*

Guild read an update from Brooks, which noted that the Chamber is now fully staffed and is updating its website, social media, and member benefits while strengthening member engagement. Its new Sip & Stroll event is scheduled for October 17 and is expected to showcase up to 30 businesses and attract more than 300 participants. Staff attended multiple local and state events in the last two weeks and distributed more than 3,000 visitors guides during the process.

12:07 pm – Daigle out

e. *Tomahawk Regional Chamber of Commerce*

Lau reported that the Chamber has been assisting businesses and employees affected by the recent closures and is also pursuing conversion to a regional Visitors Bureau by early 2027. She is currently seeking support from area towns; if approved, the organization would transition away from membership funding and rely primarily on room tax and event revenue.

f. *Tomahawk Main Street, Inc.* – NOT PRESENT

g. *LCEDC Board Members*

Fick announced that Blue Jay Taxi expects to finalize a Sept. 1 acquisition of K&H Medical, All American Taxi, and United Taxi in Wausau. The acquisition will significantly expand and improve the company’s non-emergency medical transportation services and geographic footprint.

12:09 pm – Lau out

Greg Hartwig noted that Ace Hardware in Merrill is now operating out of its new larger location and provides lumber as part of its expanded products and services.

10. Future Meeting Dates & Topic Requests

The next meeting of the LCEDC Board is scheduled for Wednesday, November 18th, at 10 am at the LCEDC office.

a. *Special Meeting Proposal: Board Strategies for LCEDC Promotion & Engagement*

The Executive Committee received a recommendation to hold a special Board meeting this fall to discuss how Board members can more proactively support LCEDC’s financial and organizational needs by leveraging their individual skills, relationships, and networks. By consensus, the Board agreed to hold the meeting in September or October. Guild was directed to coordinate scheduling a specific date and time.

11. Meeting Adjournment – Frederick/Johnson m/s to adjourn at 12:18 pm; motion carried