

Governor's Rural Affairs Council
Meeting Minutes September 28, 2023
Bevier Hall, Spice Box Room
905 South Goodwin Avenue
Urbana, Illinois, 61801

1. Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton called the meeting to order at 10:02 a.m.

2. Roll Call

Member Agencies Present:

Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton
Illinois Department of Aging, Elizabeth Vogt (phone)
Illinois Department of Agriculture, Tyler Bohannon (phone)
Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Monica Bristow (phone)
Illinois Department of Employment Security, Tory Davis (phone)
Illinois Department of Human Services, Diane Campbell (phone)
Illinois Department of Natural Resources, Director Natalie Finnie (phone)
Illinois Department of Transportation, Mike Vanderhoof (phone)
Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, Christine Davis (phone)
Illinois Community College Board, Jennifer Foster (phone)
Illinois Housing Development Authority, Amy Bashiti
Southern Illinois University, Laura Kessel
Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs, Sandy Wittig
Illinois Finance Authority, Lorrie Karcher (phone)
Illinois Agricultural Association, Ryan Tate
Rural Partners, Brian Moody

Not Present:

Illinois Department of Public Health, Kristen Nolen
Illinois State Board of Education, Susie Morrison
University of Illinois Extension, Shelly Nickols Richardson

Citizen Members Present:

Sonja Reece (phone)
Norm Walzer (phone)
Heather Hampton-Knodle
Neophansya Robinson (phone)

Guests:

University of Illinois Cooperative Extension Service, Anne Silvis
Illinois Farm Bureau, Steve Ericson
Feeding Illinois, Raghela Scavuzzo
USDA Rural Development, Molly Hammond
University of Illinois iSchool, Karen Jenkins (phone)
Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Development, Kala Lambert (phone)

Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Development, Agnes Masnik (phone)
Illinois Community College Board, Matt Berry (phone)
Nicholas Dale

Lt. Governor's Office Staff Members Present:

Dr. Susan Ogwal, Policy Director
Janelle Gurnsey, Deputy Chief of Staff for External Affairs and Communications
Paris McConnell, External Affairs Manager
Alexandra Flores, Press Secretary
Sloan Smith, Community Outreach Coordinator
Deborah Baker, General Council and Deputy Chief of Staff
Taylor Brown, Communications Manager
Daynah Parker, Scheduling Coordinator
Robert Barren, Senior Advisor to the Lt. Governor
Eryn Jones, Legal Project Manager
Edwidge Labbe, Dunn Fellow

Quorum determined.

Lt. Governor Stratton inquired if there were any corrections or additions to the agenda for today's meeting. Laura Kessel made a motion to accept the agenda. Amy Bashiti seconded the motion. Motion passed.

3. Approval of Meeting Minutes from June 6, 2023.

Lt. Governor Stratton announced that a draft of the minutes from the June 2023 meeting had been provided to council members prior to today's meeting.

Sonja Reece made a motion to approve the minutes. Amy Bashiti seconded the motion. Motion passed. Minutes were approved.

4. Lt. Governor Stratton Remarks

The Lt. Governor welcomed everyone to the third quarterly meeting of the Governor's Rural Affairs Council for 2023. She explained that the purpose of the GRAC is to expand opportunities and enhance the quality of life for rural Illinois residents. Since our last meeting in June, you all have continued your incredible work of uplifting rural communities.

The Lt. Governor thanked Anne Silvis, Patty Palmer, and Shelly Nickols-Richardson and University of Illinois Extension for hosting today's meeting. She noted that the University of Illinois is her alma mater and it feels good to be back on her old stomping grounds. Lt. Governor Stratton requested that Anne Silvis share a few welcoming remarks.

Anne Silvis welcomed everyone to the campus. She shared some statistics about the University of Illinois included that this year's freshman's class was over 8,000 with approximately 75% of those attending from Illinois. She noted that 80 of the 102 counties in Illinois were represented and with 25% being first time college attendees.

The Lt. Governor explained that the administration has invested in education. She is excited about the increase in numbers for the freshman class and the number of students from Illinois.

The Lt. Governor introduced Chef Carter Phillips and requested that he share a few remarks about the quantity food lab. She provided a brief bio included that Chef Phillips is an instructional chef in the Food Science and Human Nutrition and loves to grow things.

Chef Carter thanked everyone for coming. He briefly explained his program and how it impacts future students in the hospitality business. He stated the program is making a direct impact on future students. He then explained his program, "Everybody Eats." This program address food security. He explained that at the café, everyone can eat for free if needed. Tokens are available at no costs. He explained that he solicits donation to help offset the cost of the tokens; thus, the meals. He invited all to eat lunch in the Café.

The Lt. Governor thanked Chef Phillips for his remarks. She noted that food security is an issue that concerns everyone on this council. She explained that students often go hungry and she is happy to share the model with the Governor.

5. New Business

The Lt. Governor announced that today's presentation will be from Raghela Scavuzzo and Steve Ericson about the Farm to Food Bank Program. She noted there were brochures on the table to explain their program and also stated that these were emailed to everyone prior to today's meeting.

Raghele Scavuzzo and Steve Ericson explained their program and how it worked. They explained this provided new market opportunities for farmers. These opportunities provide income for the farmers and also help address food needs for those in need.

They explained that surplus produce exists. This is sometimes ugly, but not bad produce which might not meet all of the regulations from the USDA to be sold. Using these seconds to provide food to the food banks helps meet food security. In the last three years, the Farm to Food Bank Program has provided three million pounds of food seconds (fruits and vegetables) and provided just under three million dollars to farmers. They explained the three models they have piloted using funds from the USDA LFPA (Local Food Purchase Assistance) grant to purchase emergency food. They are currently researching and developing other possible models.

The Lt. Governor thanked Ms. Scavuzzo and Mr. Ericson for their presentation. She opened the meeting for questions and comments related to Farmers Feeding Illinois and their Farm to Food Bank Initiative.

Laura Kessel mentioned that often medical students and even employees of SIU are in need. She asked is there was a way to connect the program to what SIU is doing. Steve Ericson said she just needed to reach out and start a conversation.

Ms. Scavuzzo also explained that there are various programs available. She mentioned private/public partnerships and that insurance companies often have available funding.

Molly Hammond wanted to know whom to contact to connect producers to the food banks. Mr. Ericson stated to contact him.

The Lt. Governor thanked them for their wonderful and enlightening presentation. She noted it is so important to bring awareness to this topic and we all should think about ways to support our local farmers and serve our community.

6. Committee Updates

The Lt. Governor requested an update from Laura Kessel on the Telehealth Project.

Laura Kessel stated there was an issue with technology and she is still trying to get the telehealth pilot started. Ms. Kessel mentioned that the committee will meet soon to determine what other items to work on and areas to look into.

The Lt. Governor thanked Ms. Kessel for her update.

The Lt. Governor requested an update from Dr. Norm Walzer and Amy Bashiti for the Economic Development and Infrastructure Committee.

Dr. Walzer announced he was planning the 35th Annual Rural Community and Economic Development Conference. The conference will be held February 28 and 29, 2024. The theme will be “Converting Opportunities into Trends.”

Dr. Walzer announced that the webinar series was continuing. Other ideas include: transitioning small business to new owners and a guidebook for retaining small businesses.

Amy Bashiti noted that they are also researching rural land banks. She announced that rural land banks can assist with back taxes; therefore, put houses back on the market.

Ryan Tate announced that the Illinois Farm Bureau has been piloting a program for rural development grants. This should be announced soon.

The Lt. Governor thanked Dr. Walzer, Ms. Bashiti, and Mr. Tate for this report. She noted that the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity and Main Street Illinois already had a resource for a guidebook on retaining businesses.

The Lt. Governor asked Sandy Wittig if she would report in place of Dr. Merrett.

Sandy Wittig announced that the Rural Development Resource Guide was almost ready and with any luck the website would be live next week. She demonstrated how the website will work. She noted that those agencies/organizations who had requesting semi-annual updates.

Ms. Wittig also announced that Duran or Erie had recently completed the MAPPING Program would be willing to host a GRAC meeting.

7. Member Updates and Reports

The Lt. Governor opened the floor for member updates She also noted that the updates could be put into the chat.

Amy Bashiti announced that is a new grant to eliminate blight and put abandon properties on the market.

Laura Kessel announced that SIU was awarded \$170,000 for distance learning with telemedicine from USDA.

Monica Bristow announced she has been assigned to research Illinois rural development. She noted that she would be reaching out the Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs.

Ryan Tate announced the Illinois Farm Bureau Meeting would be in Chicago, Illinois on December 2 - 5.

The Lt. Governor announced she was proud to be Co-Chair of the Illinois Opioid Committee. There has been \$65 million in settlements that can be used to address the opioid issue.

8. Public Comments

The Lt. Governor asked if there were any public comments.

Nicholas Dale stated he was filing a complaint against various police departments, judges and the State of Illinois.

The Lt. Governor thanked him for his comments.

The Lt. Governor announced the next quarterly meeting will be November 2, 2023. The meeting will start at 10:00am and run to 11:30am.

She thanked everyone for their continued contributions to the GRAC and rural Illinois. She then requested a motion to adjourn.

Laura Kessel made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Ryan Tate seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 11:27 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted:
Sandy Wittig and Chris Merrett
Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs
Western Illinois University