**MINUTES**

LEGAL SERVICES OF NORTHWEST MINNESOTA

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

MOORHEAD, MINNESOTA

VIA TEAMS/IN-PERSON

February 21, 2024

5:00 p.m.

I.

ROLL CALL, INTRODUCTIONS, WELCOME

The Board of Directors of Legal Services of Northwest Minnesota (LSNM) met via Teams due to a winter storm, on February 21, 2024, at 5 p.m.

The meeting was called to order by President Bob Blatti at 5 p.m. In addition, the following members were present: Amber Gustafson, Christel Croxen, Cindy Gabbert, Deb Kukowski, Destiny Weaver, Leigh Nelson, Missy Becker-Cook, Rachel Prudhomme, Sarah Jones, Sheila Korby, Suzette Sutton, and Stephen Larson.

The following staff members were present: Anne Hoefgen, Shelley Treib, Heidi Uecker, and Ruth Ruch.

II.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF NOVEMBER 15, 2023, BOARD MEETING

The minutes from the Board meeting of November 15, 2023, were presented for approval. Deb made a motion to approve the Minutes. The motion was seconded by Cindy. There being no objection, motion carried.

III.

MISSION MOMENT

Anne read a statement submitted by a client on how appreciative she was for having a staff attorney help her through the divorce process with kindness and dignity.

IV.

2023 LITIGATION REPORT AND UPDATE – HEIDI UECKER

Heidi shared a spreadsheet on case statistics in 2023. She explained two staff attorneys left in 2023, but two attorneys were hired. However, the newly hired attorneys are still “learning the ropes” and it’s taking time to train them. Heidi explained how cases are closed according to the Legal Services Corporation (LSC) requirements. She said there are quite a few cases closed as Counsel and Advice (LSC “A” closing code) as attorneys rotate being Attorney of the Day (AOD), and giving phone advice immediately. Heidi would like to see more advice cases taken a step further and turn them into LSC closing code “B”, which is more assistance with pro se forms, contacting a landlord on behalf of housing cases, etc. She reviewed LSC’s extended case closing codes (F through L) and what each of them meant.

She explained that she will be working on succession planning especially in the area of Social Security denials as Sherry Gruenhagen has handled those for the last 32 years and is considering retiring. She also said new attorneys are being trained as generalists. Heidi asked if there were any questions on her report. There were none. She then left the meeting.

V.

STATISTICS/FINANCIAL REPORT

1. Audit completed. Shelley reported the audit was conducted the last week of January by Brady Martz. She and Anne were told there were no issues of major concern. Bob told members he was also contacted by the auditors as part of their procedures. Brady Martz did not have a proposed deadline of when they would complete the audit but assured they would be ready to give a report at the May board meeting.
2. 2023 Final Stats – 2023 stats were provided to the Board under agenda item 4. by Heidi.
3. Financial Statements 2023 Wrap-up and Year-to-Date. First, Shelley went over the 2023 LSNM Profit & Loss Statement. She pointed out this statement is unaudited. She explained office supplies, staff training, insurance, audit, contracted services and miscellaneous categories went over budget. She asked if there were any questions on the overspent categories or any other questions. There were none.

Next, she reviewed the 2024 Profit & Loss Statement, which shows 8% of the year complete. The Board approved budget for 2024 is $754,441. Then the board reviewed the Statement of Financial Position and Actual vs. Budget 2024 with projections for 2025 and 2026. Shelley asked if there were any questions on those spreadsheets. There were no questions.

d. Proposed SEP-IRA increases. Shelley and Anne propose an increase to the SEP-IRA LSNM offers employees. This plan is provided to all LSNM employees who have performed services for LSNM in at least 3 of the immediately preceding 5 years, and have earned a minimum of $450 in each of the 3 years. LSNM makes a 4% contribution into each eligible employee’s SEP-IRA account through The Vanguard Group. The proposal is to increase that to 5%. Shelley said LSNM does offer a 403(b) plan which about 75% of employees take advantage of. After discussion about how the proposed increase may affect the budget and look at other options other MN legal aid offices offer, it was decided that a SEP-IRA working group be formed to look into it further. The group consists of: Anne, Shelley, Bob, and Deb K.

1. Moorhead Office Roof Quotes. After review of the updated roof quotes from Herzog (up $13,000 from last quote) and CentiMark (an increase of $20,000 to their original quote), Shelley proposed accepting Herzog’s quote as they are a well-known contractor and have a good reputation. Shelley would use Minnesota Funding source for the cost, but Anne will get permission from LSAC first. Rachel made a motion to accept Herzog’s quote and for Shelley to schedule a date to have the repairs done. The motion was seconded by Kristine. There being no objection, motion carried.

VI.

LSC

1. 2024 Eligibility Guidelines. Anne proposed LSNM adopt the updated federal poverty guidelines set by the Department of Human Services for 2024, (LSNM uses 125% of the guidelines with the maximum amount of 200%) that were emailed out to Board members. Missy moved to approve the guidelines retroactive to January 17, 2024. The motion was seconded by Kristine. There being no objection, motion carried.
2. Self-Inspection. Anne told the Board the self-inspection report that is done annually for LSC is underway and explained what that involved. Anne will report the results to the Board at the May meeting.
3. Report on Non-Priority Cases. There were none.

VII.

DIRECTOR’S REPORT

1. Strategic Planning Update. Anne handed out a document showing a snapshot of the Strategic Plan and what has been accomplished to date. She will update the Board at every meeting about the ongoing progress of the Plan.
2. Personnel Manual Updates (review needed.) Anne asked for volunteers for a working group to review LSNM’s Personnel Manual since it has been a few years since it has thoroughly been reviewed. Rachel, Sheila and Kristine offered to be a part of the group. Anne will send out a Doodle poll to get a date set for a meeting.
3. By-laws (review needed.) Anne also asked for volunteers to review LSNM’s By-laws since it has been a few years since that that has been reviewed. Sheila, Suzette and Bob volunteered. Anne will send out a Doodle poll to get a date set for that meeting.

VIII.

CLIENT ISSUES – CLIENT ENGAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Anne said the Client Engagement Committee met on February 15, 2024. Kayla Swanson, LSNM’s Intake Coordinator, virtually shared LSNM’s intake process in LegalServer with the members. Cindy asked to get a report of what types of cases are closed with LSC’s A & B codes to get a sense of the type of legal problem these cases are. The members gave input on many of the questions LSNM asks in its intake process. The committee will meet again one week before the May meeting.

IX.

BOARD ISSUES

1. Financial Training. Anne asked that Board members save March 26, 2024, as the date for the virtual financial training by Propel. She will ask if it can be recorded to share with members not able to attend the virtual training and to use in the future for onboarding new members.
2. Law Day – May 1, 2024, Board meeting. Anne announced the next Board meeting will be held in Mahnomen, MN, at 5 p.m. Staff will be in trainings during the morning and afternoon. There will be a social hour for staff and the Board to meet at 4 p.m., and staff have been invited to attend the Board meeting.
3. Christopher Huether Board Fee Waiver – previously approved by the Executive Committee. Bob reported that the Executive Committee approved a fee waiver request by Judicare attorney Chris Huether, as expediency for such approvals are outlined in the Judicare Fee Schedule. He asked if there were any questions. There were none.
4. District Bar Awards.
   1. 7th District – Thornton & Pemberton Law firms
   2. 14th District – none
   3. 15th District – none
   4. 16th District – none

Anne said she wanted to let the Board know of the firms picked for the Judicare Advocacy Achievement Award in the 7th District. She asked if there were any questions. There were none.

X.

OTHER BUSINESS

With no other business, Rachel made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Kristine. There being no objection, motion carried, and the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Missy Becker-Cook, Secretary-Treasurer