



CHIEF ELECTED OFFICIALS Meeting
Marathon County Public Library, Wausau, WI
May 21, 2026 · 10:00 a.m.

Minutes (approved)

CEO Members Present: Rick Pease (Adams County), Bill Bialecki (Lincoln County), Steve Maier via Teams (Langlade County), Stacey Morache (Marathon County), and Janell Wehr (Portage County), Michael Tautges (Oneida County), Ann Konopacky via Teams (Vilas County), and Bill Leichtnam via Teams at 10:06 a.m. (Wood County).

CEO Members Excused: Tamaney “Sam” Augustin (Forest County)

Staff Present: Brian Kalish, Ginger Keymer, John Cokl at 10:04 a.m.

- 1) **Call to Order/Roll Call** – Quorum reached. Meeting called to order at 10:00 a.m. by Chair Pease.
- 2) **Approve Chief Elected Officials' Minutes from February 19, 2026** – Morache moved to approve the minutes from February 19, 2026; seconded by Bialecki. Motion carried.
- 3) **Accept Treasurer's Report** – Tautges moved to accept the Treasurer's Report; it was seconded by Morache. Motion carried.
- 4) **Consideration & Possible Action on Program Year 2026 Budget (PY26 07/01/2026 – 06/30/2027)** - Morache moved to approve PY 2026 Budget; it was seconded by Bialecki. Motion carried.
- 5) **Approval of New Board Member Nominations** – Bialecki made a motion to approve the new Board Member Nominations **Sara Guild** (Lincoln County Economic Development Corporation and **Brandy Thorne** (North Central Health Care); it was seconded by Tautges. Motion carried.
- 6) **Review and Approval of WIOA RFP Evaluation Results** – Bialecki made a motion to approve the procurement process evaluation result, selecting Forward Service Corporation as the WIOA service provider for Program Year 2026-2027; it was seconded by Morache. Motion carried.
- 7) **Review Meeting Dates for New Program Year and Draft of CEO Appointees & Chairs** – Keymer presented a draft PY2026 meeting schedule, CEO appointees for the term beginning July 2026, and current county board chairs for the nine-county region. Due to morning conflicts on the third Thursday of the month by Kalish and Leichtman, the group found consensus meeting on the third Thursday at 2pm beginning August 20th. June 25th will be the last 10am meeting. Keymer asked for confirmation from CEOs on their continued appointment and current county chair.

- 8) **Review 2026-2028 CEO Consortium Agreement** – Kalish and Keymer presented a draft of the CEO Consortium Agreement. Tautges noted the need to replace or remove NCWWDB from the document. Keymer will send the Agreement via email to all nine County Clerks and County Chairs in our region by Friday, May 20th followed by a DocuSign request to the nine County Chairs.
- 9) **Updates from the Executive Director – Wisconsin Rapids Job Center** closed last year. Since fall, slowly transitioning some of those services to McMillan Library using the Job Pod model. Funding for our staffer at our **Access Point in Marshfield** ends June 30th. Working with FSC and Mid-State to continue offering services in Marshfield. June 1st the official opening for the new location of the **Marathon County Job Center** at 11 Scott Street in Wausau. Leases for the **Northern Advantage Job Center** location will end in May 2027. None of the lease partners want to renew at the current location. DWD's Department of Education and Training (DET) has said they will not renew a lease in Rhinelander. AWE, FSC, DVR, Veterans, and others are interested in a continued physical presence in Rhinelander. Will be looking for potential space for these remaining partners. Tautges suggested looking to Oneida County Economic Development for potential space. They host a small business development center at that location and may have office space to spare or share. Over the last year we've been transitioning to a new name, **Advance Wisconsin Employment** and **rebranding** the entire organization to that name. Keymer is working on legal and logistical requirements to make those changes with the State of Wisconsin, the State Department of Financial Institutions, and the Internal Revenue Service. Greenleaf Media is working on the final stages of our website which should be completed this summer. To offset revenue loss, we are relaunching a past program called, **LifeWork\$**, which will serve justice involved re-entry population and adults with disabilities with soft skills and hard skill training. Crytal Finishing, Greenheck, Schutte Metals, and Wausau Tile agreed to partner as employers to provide interviews and potential job placement. First re-entry cohort will begin August 17 and first vocational rehabilitation group will run in October. This pilot is a way to serve a barrierred and underserved population and could grow to be a substantial revenue source.

10) Discussion on Workforce Issues in Each County

- a) **Adams** – Pease reported that Adams continues to struggle with housing and getting developers to come in and build. South Wood County is trying to help Adams build onto their YMCA, possibly with a daycare center. Synergy provided a \$50,000 grant, so that's a positive, but daycare and housing are real challenges. Tourism is up. Sand Valley continues to expand and always needs workers. Chula Vista is talking about a \$34 million expansion on the south end of the county, with J1 workers, as local workers are difficult to recruit.
- b) **Forest** – No report
- c) **Langlade** – Maier reported that Angie Close is now working with Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation. Melissa Kieper promoted to Angie's former role, from CoVantage. The Boys & Girls Club of Northern WI received \$1 million in congressional funding towards a new facility. In the midst of fundraising and possibly partnering with the local school district to build near Bradely Middle School. First annual Business Expo held on April 25th with 35 vendors and hundreds of attendees. NTC Antigo campus received a gift from Remington Foundation towards onsite housing for students. Two units, Timberlake Cabins, will open this August, housing six to eight students for four to eight week technical training courses.
- d) **Lincoln** – Bialecki highlighted the third annual Lincoln County Economic Summit in April. Around 120 attended, 50 local businesses and 70 from outside the area. New apartments and single family homes are filling up faster than they can build them. Along the riverfront, building began on three 24-unit complexes with an estimated fall completion date. New housing projects also in Tomahawk and Town of Bradley, as well. Bialecki mentioned the \$3.2 million federal grant received by NTC to support the North Central WI Firefighter/Paramedic Apprenticeship program at the Merrill Public Safety Center.

- e) **Marathon** – Morache reported on the \$200,000 of ARPA funds to Childcaring. Led to scholarships for 15 participants, new family childcare, and expanded childcare options in the county. RFPs open for Thomas Street and River Drive. Accepted proposal from Center for Civic Engagement and Venanga Theater to utilize space on former UW Marathon County campus. Bridge Street Mission has opened. Hub City Wind Alliant Energy plans on placing between 28-38 windmills in west Marathon County. Solar on the east side of the county. Mixture of support for these projects and push back against them.
 - f) **Oneida** – Tautges reported the first 112 unit in the Minocqua TIF District is beginning to rent out units. Not all of the buildings are completed, but demand is high. Good reports from small business owners on finding summer employees. First quarter sales tax numbers are strong. Manufacturers, particularly in Rhinelander, are struggling to find people they need. There are good number of housing projects across the County which will hopefully help address the need for new employees.
 - g) **Portage** – No report
 - h) **Vilas** – Konopacky mentioned a new brewery in Boulder Junction and some business turnover in St. Germain. Cost of housing still averages above \$400,000, which is out of reach for entry level workers.
 - i) **Wood** – Leichtman mentioned the AI hyperscale data center proposed for the northeast side of Wisconsin Rapids. A decision expected by the WI Rapids Common Council in May but postponed to June due to uprising in the community. Citizens very concerned about experiences in Fort Atkinson and Port Washington.
- 11) **Adjourn** - Pease adjourned the meeting at 11:36 a.m.

Next CEO meeting | 10:00am Thursday, June 25, 2026