

Unit 27 Council Meeting
September 17, 2026
11:00a.m. – 1:00 pm

MINUTES

The meeting was called to order by Curtis Marshall at 10:57am. Verbal introductions were made around the table, and name cards were placed before each attendee. Civil rights information slips and the meeting sign-in sheet were circulated around the room.

Council members present:

Alexander/Pulaski	Johnson	Massac	Union
Curtis Marshall Don Patton	Evan Coulson Patti Powell	Tracie Key Don Robbins Dale McReynolds	Harry Brockus Hannah Godfrey Hunter Boyd

Staff present: County Director Jody Johnson, John Shadowens, Kristi Stout, Dena Wood, Erin Garrett, Monica Meyer, Barb Britton, Sarita Sawyer

Guest: Karla Patton

Meeting minutes from May 28, 2026 were reviewed. Motion made by Don Patton and seconded by Patti Powell to approve prior minutes. Motion carried.

Council Business

Unit Council and Extension Board Records

- o Council members were asked to review their information for accuracy and were reminded of the Illinois Open Meetings Act electronic training requirement.
- o Extension Board member information was also reviewed for accuracy.

Proposed Check Signers

Alexander/Pulaski	Johnson	Massac	Union
Closed	Jody Johnson John Shadowens Kristi Stout Anne Townsend	Closed	Closed

County Director Johnson explained that the former county checking accounts have been consolidated into one account and that checks require two signatures. Motion was made by Tracie Key and seconded by Harry Brockus to approve Jody Johnson, John Shadowens, Kristi Stout, and Anne Townsend as check signers. Motion carried.

Unit Holiday Schedule for FY27

- o November 26 and 27, 2026 are campus holidays.
- o Unit 27 offices will be closed Thursday, December 24, 2026 through Friday, January 1, 2027, and will reopen Monday, January 4, 2027.
- o January 18, May 31, and June 18, 2027 are campus holidays.

County Extension Director Report

Plan of Work / Community Needs

- o Johnson reviewed Extension's strategic plan focus on community needs and partnerships and noted that the next formal needs assessment is planned for 2028. Council members were encouraged to continue sharing emerging needs between meetings.
- o Health-care concerns included the anticipated loss of long-term residential psychiatric services in the region, the potential effect on EMS and patient transportation, and pediatric behavioral-health access. A medical respite partnership for unhoused patients was also discussed, with a target opening in 2028.
- o Shawnee Development Council reported continued demand for utility, rent, and basic-needs assistance. The LIHEAP program is scheduled to reopen October 1, and updated income guidelines may allow additional households to qualify.
- o Housing rehabilitation remains difficult in parts of the region because of a shortage of qualified contractors. Shawnee Community College workforce-training efforts were identified as a possible long-term resource for developing needed trade skills.

Budget

- o The Unit trust balance was reported at approximately \$200,000. Local property tax receipts are approximately \$180,000 and are eligible for state matching funds.
- o Smith-Lever support was reported at approximately \$300,000 for the current year, up from approximately \$250,000 the prior year.
- o Revolving funds include program fees and other program income. The Unit continues to use grant and Unit resources when possible, so youth are not asked to pay the 4-H program fee directly.
- o Gift/Foundation accounts include both restricted and unrestricted funds that may be used strategically and, when transferred to the trust for an eligible purpose, can leverage state matching funds.
- o USDA Healthy Food Financing Initiative grant funds continue to support grocery-access work. Union County Commissioners also committed an additional \$2,000 to help address the Unit's funding shortfall. Johnson noted that the Unit remains financially constrained following the loss of SNAP-Ed funding.

Facilities

- o Three Unit offices are located in facilities owned by nonprofit organizations; the Union County office remains in privately owned leased space. Johnson plans to revisit lease concessions, with approximately two years remaining on the current lease.
- o Massac County office improvements are being planned, including flooring work, with possible assistance from Shawnee Community College's workforce-training program.

Civil Rights and Public Access

- o Monthly staff reminders continue to document civil-rights compliance and efforts to reach underserved audiences.
- o Johnson reviewed staff preparation for "First Amendment audit" visits to public offices. Monica Meyer reported a recent visitor who filmed public areas of the office; she followed established guidance by remaining professional, respecting public-access areas, and directing attention to clearly designated staff-only space. Council members were encouraged to use the incident as a training example within their own organizations.

Partnerships and Staffing

- o Johnson highlighted partnerships with Johnson County 2000, Inc.; the Johnson County CEO program; and Friends of the Shawnee National Forest. The CEO program is in its second year, has grown from 9 to 15 students, and offers participating students high-school credit and six hours of dual credit through Shawnee Community College.
- o Friends of the Shawnee National Forest and the Forest Service are working on a \$30,000 project agreement that may create opportunities for Extension participation in funded work.
- o Sarita Sawyer has returned to the Unit through EFNEP, and Holly Gibson has joined the Community Economic Development grocery initiative in a part-time role. Recruitment is also underway for an additional 4-H program coordinator/outreach position, while new Health and Community Wellness positions are expected to serve the region.
- o Council members were encouraged to follow Unit 27's YouTube channel, website, and social-media platforms for continuing program updates.

Unit Reports

4-H Youth Development – Kristi Stout and Dena Wood

- o Stout focused on the 4-H Teen Teacher/Teen Leader model, which prepares youth to teach younger students while building leadership, lesson-planning, classroom-management, public-speaking, and career-readiness skills.
- o The program began in 2014–2015 with 26 youth from six schools. The most recent training included 197 teens from 11 counties, with the Unit 27 model now being replicated with neighboring Extension units. National 4-H interest in the model helped generate \$70,000 in grant support to Illinois for the program.

- o Unit 27 has five youth slots for the Ignite by 4-H experience in Washington, D.C., in March. Teen Leaders also receive campus visits, 4-H Memorial Camp experiences, public-speaking and exhibition opportunities, and pathways to state ambassador roles.
- o For the prior 4-H year, Unit 27 reported 943 enrolled members, 67 classroom-club teachers, and 142 Teen Leaders. Wood reported 70 teachers already enrolled in classroom clubs for the new year, exceeding the prior year's total, with teacher training planned for October.
- o School-based programming continues to include Health Rocks, financial literacy, classroom clubs, cooking schools, embryology/butterfly activities, and Welcome to the Real World. Welcome to the Real World events are planned for December 10 and March 10, with community volunteers needed.
- o Council discussion also explored development of a hands-on health-care career experience for middle-school youth, potentially involving health-system staff and other careers that support hospital operations.

Natural Resources, Environment, and Energy (NREE) – Erin Garrett and Anne Townsend

- o Master Gardener training is underway through November with five participants.
- o Fall youth programming includes an October event in partnership with the Shawnee National Forest and Friends of the Shawnee National Forest at the Cache River Wetlands Center, with community organizations invited to participate.
- o Garrett reported that Unit-developed NREE programs continue to attract statewide and national interest, including efforts to prepare reusable program kits and to train partners outside the region to replicate successful programming.

Community Economic Development (CED) – John Shadowens and Holly Gibson

- o The CED team continues to focus on independent grocery viability, food access, and strategies that help locally owned grocers compete in a low-margin industry.
- o A four-week meat-cutting and retail-merchandising pilot is beginning with eight participants, including three connected to stores served by the program, in partnership with higher-education collaborators.
- o The second annual Retail Independent Grocer Summit is scheduled for October 7 at John A. Logan College, with sessions on profitability, social-media marketing, specialized diets/"food is medicine," and practical uses of artificial intelligence.
- o Shadowens and Gibson are developing an independent-grocer podcast, and the broader partner network is exploring a new nonprofit structure, "Viable Food," to sustain food-access and grocery-support work beyond the current HFFI grant period.

EFNEP – Sarita Sawyer

- o Sawyer is returning to nutrition education through the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program and plans to begin the Teen Cuisine curriculum in the Cairo classroom in October for youth in grades 6–12.
- o Teen Cuisine will emphasize hands-on food preparation, nutrition, food safety, recipe-following, and cooking skills. Opportunities to expand Illinois Junior Chef and related

programming into additional counties will depend on scheduling, facilities, and volunteer support.

Dates and Times of Future Council Meetings

- o December 10, 2026 @ Vienna – 11am–1pm (NREE staff)
- o February 18, 2027 @ Vienna – 11am–1pm (CED staff)
- o May 20, 2027 @ Vienna – 11am–1pm (Reflection & updates)
- September _____, 2027 @ Vienna – 11am–1pm (4-H)
-

Motion to adjourn made by Harry Brockus and seconded by Dale McReynolds. No objections, meeting adjourned at 1:01pm.

Respectfully submitted:

Monica Meyer

Unit 27 - Office Support Specialist

For Unit 27 Unit Council secretary, Tracie Key