

**Carroll, Lee & Whiteside Counties
Extension Council
MINUTES
February 10, 2025**

Call to Order:

The meeting was called to order at 6:03 p.m. in person and by Zoom.

Attendance:

Gordon Kelm, Lupita Serrano, Teresa Galloway, Kara Schweitzer, Eileen Piper, Karen Stenzel, Daniel Swihart, Pam Martinez, Silvia Rivera, Bruce Black, Mike Delany, Kathy Book, Abby Noble, Abbey DeShane, Martha Ebbesmeyer, Karla Belzer

Public Comment: None.

Extension Mission and Vision:

A reminder of the University of Illinois Extension mission was provided: Developing educational programs, extending knowledge, and building partnerships to support people, communities, and their environments. A simplified version was shared: Lifelong learning, lifelong impact.

Reports:

Election of Officers:

Elections were held for the positions of Chairperson, Vice Chair, and Secretary.

- **Chairperson:** Gordon Kelm (elected)
- **Vice Chair:** Pam Martinez (elected)
- **Secretary:** Position remains unfilled; current system of notetaking will continue.

A motion to approve the election results was made by Teresa Galloway, seconded by Karen Stenzel. Motion carried unanimously.

Minutes:

The minutes from the December meeting were reviewed. A motion to approve the minutes was made by Pam Martinez and seconded by Teresa Galloway. Motion carried unanimously.

Budget Update:

The University of Illinois Extension is currently in a quiet period for budgeting, with FY26 planning set to begin in March. The organization remains in a strong financial position, with all expected state funding received as of November. Harry Clore, the Extension CFO, will retire in June after being recognized for his significant contributions to funding stability; interim leadership will be appointed during the search for a permanent replacement. A new budget planning tool, Days to Zero, has been introduced to evaluate operational sustainability in the event of funding interruptions.

Programming Updates:

Extension staff highlighted various initiatives across departments. The Horticulture Program hosted successful pesticide applicator testing sessions with record turnout in Carroll County and planned future sessions; it also saw increased enrollment in its Intro to Horticulture class and progress on student honors projects. 4-H Youth Development introduced career simulation and budgeting curriculum in schools, engaged students through hands-on activities, and planned a Horse Bowl event and additional programs. The program area also welcomed a new educator, expanded career-oriented and STEM programs, and launched initiatives promoting healthy living. Family Life expanded Tai Chi for Arthritis and brain health programs, with presentations on wellness topics. Community and Economic Development launched the "Hometown Leaders" project, held Poverty Simulations, and engaged in economic development efforts in Carroll County. Exciting plans for spring and summer programs were also underway across departments.

Grants: West Carroll STEAAM Hub, CDC Action Grant

Karla Belzer provided a brief update on the West Carroll STEAAM Hub, including that funding not yet impacted initial plans, as 4-H staff and Extension representatives collaborated with Carroll County school administration to establish a preliminary program. Middle school science classrooms will begin receiving programming this spring. Once grant funding is received, classroom renovations, equipment, teacher supplies, and other initiatives will begin in earnest. Limited programming will proceed until the funds are secured. Under the CDC Action Grant, poverty simulations are continuing as planned. Bruce Black is preparing for summer gardening projects, and a more detailed update will be provided at the May council meeting.

New Business:**Strategic Planning Discussion**

Illinois Extension completed its 2024 strategic plan and is now focused on local-level implementation. A needs assessment process will evaluate community needs through key informant interviews and data analysis, drawing insights from leaders, volunteers, and program participants. These qualitative findings will guide the Extension's plan of work. The May council meeting will center on a needs assessment discussion, with members receiving questions beforehand to ensure diverse perspectives from various sectors and organizations are incorporated.

Needs Assessment Process:

Interviews with key partners and stakeholders will be conducted, using data from county health reports, census data, watershed information, and prior community assessments to ensure a thorough understanding of community needs. Members are encouraged to recommend individuals or organizations to include in the assessment. Interviews are set to conclude by June 30, with data analysis continuing through the summer, and plans of work due by September 30. Staff meetings will support internal planning and discussions throughout the process.

Staffing Update:

The unit is now fully staffed for the first time since 2021, marking a celebratory moment. New hires include Katie Abell, Marketing EPC with a background in ad communications; Molly Johnson, Whiteside and Carroll County Ag and Natural Resources Program Coordinator, replacing Mary Nelson; and Kathy Book, returning as Youth Development Educator. The team discussed the positive energy and opportunities introduced by these new team members.

Extension Funding Advocacy Initiative:

Illinois Extension ranks near the bottom in per capita and per acre funding compared to other states. A proposal has been made for an additional \$10 million in state funding to support 27 new Extension Educator positions, 27 Community Program Coordinators, and 27 additional roles in Community and Economic Development. Research shows a 10:1 return on investment for Extension funding. Legislative advocacy efforts, including an email campaign targeting key legislators and volunteers, were discussed, with council members encouraged to support the funding request and engage local representatives.

Discussion: Community Needs and Efforts to Target Underserved Audiences:

The council discussed strategies for identifying and supporting underserved communities, with a focus on small rural areas that often lack sufficient Extension services. Existing partnerships, such as work with Self-Help Enterprises, were highlighted, and members were encouraged to share additional opportunities to reach underrepresented groups.

Other Business:

Next Meeting: **May 19, 2025**

Motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:05 p.m. made by Lupita Serrano, seconded by Pam Martinez. No further discussion. Motion carried.