

Carroll, Lee & Whiteside Counties
Extension Council
MINUTES
September 22, 2025

Call to Order:

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. in person and by Zoom.

Attendance:

Gordon Kelm, Karla Belzer, Pam Martinez, Cilvia Rivera, Kathy Book, Kara Schweitzer, Martha Ebbesmeyer, Emily Zimmerman, Eileen Piper, Jennifer Lang, Karen Stenzel, DeeAnn Kramer, Lee Reese, Abbey DeShane.

Public Comment:

None.

Extension Mission and Vision:

The mission and vision were reviewed, including the objective to develop educational programs, extend knowledge, and build partnerships. It was noted that the Extension Advisory Council is required by state law to provide community feedback on programs

Minutes:

The minutes from the May 2025 meeting were reviewed. A motion was made to approve the minutes from the previous meeting as amended, specifically noting that Jennifer Lang's attendance was added to the record. Motion to approve was made by Pam Martinez and seconded by Eileen Piper. Motion carried.

Budget Update:

Karla Belzer shared that budget requests were completed with all three local county boards and that a funding increase was requested. All three counties are supportive of Extension programming and budget requests will be approved at future county board meetings.

Programming Updates:

Educators reported highlights across program areas:

4-H Youth Development (Kathy Book): Highlighted the successful Culinary Creations competition at the Whiteside and Lee County fairs. Reported on current programs including Welcome to the Real World classes, the Art Lit to Go pilot program, and the Fuel and Fit program. She also introduced the new Hometown Leaders program to help high school youth understand county government.

4-H Youth Development (Martha Ebbesmeyer): Provided summer programming updates, including healthy snacks/teamwork and Passport to the World activities at Eastland Summer School. Started a career readiness program using Welcome to the Real World materials with an alternative high school.

Community & Economic Development (Mike Delany): Poverty simulation in Mt. Carroll served more than 40 participants; next scheduled for September 5 in Whiteside County. Strategic planning with Savanna Chamber underway. Entrepreneurship initiatives and statewide Local Government Education Webinar Series continue.

Family Life (Kara Schweitzer): Shared positive evaluation feedback from the Tai Chi for Arthritis and Fall Prevention program, with participants reporting reduced pain, improved balance, and one person discontinuing prescription painkillers. Also reported on the popularity of the Wits Fitness program and new Tai Chi and educational series offerings.

Grants:

CDC Action Grant: Year two of this grant, which was applied for through the Ogle County Health Department, has wrapped up. The Extension's role has been to provide gardening education and poverty simulations in Carroll, Lee, Whiteside, and Ogle counties.

West Carroll STEAM Hub Grant: The unit was approved in 2022 for a substantial amount of money from this grant to bring Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Agriculture, and Math (STEAM) programming to the West Carroll School District. The money will be used for hiring additional staff, buying equipment, and working with teachers. A timeframe for approval is uncertain as the unit is waiting on final sign-off from HUD (Housing and Urban Development).

Plan of Work/Needs Assessment Update:

The plan of work, which is how the unit determines and works to meet local community needs, is scheduled to be wrapping up in the next week.

Old Business:

SNAP-Ed Grant Discontinuation:

The SNAP-Ed (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program-Education) federal grant was not renewed and the program will be discontinued. The council clarified that this cut only affects the education piece of the program, not the food benefit portion. The discontinuation affects more than 200 staff people statewide and three staff in the local unit. Grant funding also pays a portion of the Whiteside County building rent, a portion of the County Director's salary and a portion of an office support salary. The unit must absorb these costs which was a key reason for requesting funding increases from the county boards.

New Business:

Approval of Check Signatories:

A motion was made to approve Karla Belzer, Bruce Black, Marilyn Kemmerer, and Katie Baker as signatories for the local checking account for Fiscal Year 2026. Motion made by Pam Martinez, seconded by Deann Kramer. Motion carried.

Next Meeting:

December 1, 2025

Adjournment:

The motion to adjourn was made by Pam Martinez and seconded by Eileen Piper. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 7:00 p.m.