

**Carroll, Lee & Whiteside Counties
Extension Council
February 2, 2026**

Call to Order:

The meeting was called to order in person and via Zoom by Gordon Kelm.

Attendance:

Gordon Kelm, Pam Martinez, Karla Belzer, Teresa Galloway, Eileen Piper, Lee Reese, Mike Delany, Martha Ebbesmeyer, Susie Welch, Daniel Swihart, Nathan Jacobs, Karen Stenzel, Lupita Serrano, Sasha Logan, Bruce Black, Mardi Ybarra

Public Comment:

None.

Introductions:

Council members and staff introduced themselves. New members and guests shared their roles in the community, including representation from local churches, food systems, education, Extension staff, and partner organizations.

Karla Belzer reviewed the purpose of the Extension Council, noting that it is required by state law and serves as the voice of the community by providing feedback on programs, identifying emerging needs, and advising on local priorities.

Election of Officers:

Nominations were opened for Council officers. Pam Martinez volunteered to serve as Chair. With no objections, Pam Martinez was confirmed as Chair.

A volunteer was requested for Vice Chair. Daniel Swihart agreed to serve. No formal ballot was required.

Minutes:

The minutes from the previous meeting were reviewed. A correction was noted regarding names/attendance. A motion was made by Mardi Ybarra to approve the minutes as amended, seconded by Eileen Piper. Motion carried.

Budget Update:

Karla Belzer provided an overview of Extension funding, describing the three primary sources of support:

1. County Tax Dollars – Local funds requested annually from county boards. Requests for the current fiscal year were approved by all three counties. Whiteside County approved a slight increase; Lee and Carroll Counties maintained level funding.
2. State Match (Illinois Department of Agriculture) – State funding is based on local dollars raised. Extension currently receives approximately a 75% match for every local dollar raised. Illinois ranks lowest in state funding among North Central region states, and there has not been an increase in state match funding since approximately 2010. Extension continues advocacy efforts with state legislators.
3. Federal Funding (Smith-Lever Act) – Federal dollars provide additional support. Local funding remains the most controllable and critical source.

Karla emphasized the importance of maintaining strong relationships with county boards and legislative partners.

Grants and Funding Updates:

West Carroll STEAM Grant: An update was provided regarding federal funding secured in December 2022 to support STEAM programming in the West Carroll School District. Although the grant was awarded, funds have not yet been released. Revised timelines have been submitted, and approval to proceed may occur within the next one to two months. The total grant is approximately \$435,000 over two years and will support equipment purchases, program delivery, and classroom renovations.

Additional 4-H Funding Opportunity: A potential pilot grant to support 4-H programming is under discussion. Meetings at the campus and state levels are forthcoming. An update is expected at the next council meeting.

Extension State Advisory Council (ESAC) Update:

A report was shared regarding the most recent ESAC meeting held on campus. Council members toured university facilities and received updates on statewide Extension initiatives and budget considerations.

Discussion included clarification regarding the discontinuation of SNAP-Ed funding. It was noted that while SNAP-Ed nutrition education programming was discontinued, broader Extension funding was not reduced beyond that program.

Old Business:

SNAP-Ed Discontinuation: Council members discussed the impact of the discontinued federal SNAP-Ed program. The program previously provided nutrition education to SNAP-eligible individuals. Clarification was shared that the discontinuation affects education services only, not SNAP food benefits.

New Business:

No additional business was discussed.

Next Meeting:

May 2026 (exact date to be confirmed).

Adjournment:

A motion to adjourn was made by Karen Stenzel, seconded by Teresa Galloway. Motion carried. The meeting adjourned.