

Merrill Enrichment Center Committee

Thursday July 16th, 2026 MEETING MINUTES

MEC Conference Room 303 N. Sales Street 2:15pm

Present: Laura Bertagnoli (Chair), Mark Weix (Alderpersion), Gene Bebel, Sharon Harvey, Carol Holz, Jay Tlusty, **(Excused)** Elizabeth McCrank

Agenda

I. Opening (2:15)

Bertagnoli called the meeting to order and welcomed public/church members to the meeting to discuss the future of the annual Thanksgiving meal.

II. Consent Items

1. Motion by Tlusty second by Harvey to approve June meeting minutes. Motion carried.
2. Motion by Holz second by Weix to approve vouchers.

III. Public Comment

No public comment

IV. Operations

1. Director discussed the first two weeks of August's schedule. The MEC will be closed the first week due to the fair setup and opening day. *Our yoga classes will be offered at the VFW for both the first and second weeks of August, as the second week elections will be held in the expo as well.* We are thankful for the VFW's willingness to allow our participants a place to exercise during these two weeks. The MEC will provide the VFW a monetary donation as a gesture of appreciation.
2. The future of the community Thanksgiving Meal was discussed at great length in this meeting. A bit of history - for over 35 years, area churches, along with the Merrill Enrichment Center collaborated to provide a Thanksgiving meal for our community. The main purpose was to *gather people together*; families, friends, and those who *may be spending the holiday alone*. When Covid hit the meals were picked up or delivered, thus losing the community connection intention. Many families were ordering upward to 12 meals for their family gathering. During this time, other churches began offering a thanksgiving meal as well. Recently, our local VFW is also providing a meal on Thanksgiving Day. It was mentioned that the VFW was the organization that started this meal many years ago. Kathy Peterson and Trina Johnson from Our Saviors Lutheran Church attended for the discussion as they would be the next church in line to make the meal. In summary, they shared that many of our area churches are becoming smaller with current parishioners aging. This affects the number of volunteers to help. Funding is also a huge challenge. These factors make it impossible for many parishes to handle the Thanksgiving outreach program. Harvey mentioned that local churches do donate to the VFW for the meal. Brainstorming ideas resulted in the following suggestion;
 - i. Bebel mentioned Ed & Sharons as an option. They are temporarily closed but plan to reopen in September.
 - ii. Tlusty recommended capping the delivery meals to 2 per household so people didn't take advantage of the outreach programs original intention and focusing on people who are home bound.
 - iii. Kathy and Trina will reach out to the VFW to determine if they would be willing to take on making the sit down meals. In addition the will reach out to Mergets Mouthwatering Mayhem, who had cooked for the meal at the VFW for the past few years, to see if he is willing and able to provide for more people. The MEC would be willing to manage the signups, coordinate volunteer drivers for delivery, etc. Bebel recommended the Chamber for volunteers for meal driving as well. Director shared that we have many regular volunteers who really enjoy delivery.
 - iv. Bertagnoli recommend that we revisit this topic in our August meeting. All agreed.
3. MEC Workshops are becoming a bit more challenging to schedule. Director asked the committee to brainstorm alternate offerings. Bertagnoli recommended providing a handout to our participants for ideas. Holz stated that retirement is now a new career where you are asked to volunteer for everything. Organizations are short staffed and looking for volunteers. This may be why our workshops are exhausted. Tlusty mentioned that when you retire you receive a large volume of medical information and that it may be helpful to have an opportunity for men and women to discuss, in separate groups, how to consider this information. Committee recommended having separate workshops for men and women. Bertagnoli suggested providing handouts to participants for ideas.
4. Budget timeline created by Finance Director Ley was shared with the committee. The MEC does not have any capital requests. Director is currently working on MEC's numbers for future budget meetings. As recommended by committee, charts and graphs will be included.

V. Adjournment

Motion by Bebel second by Holtz.

The next meeting will take place on August 20th at 2:15pm in the MEC Conference room. Public attendance is encouraged.

Respectfully submitted,

TMrachek - MEC Director

Enrichment Center Mission *To improve lives through social, physical, and educational opportunities.*