



**MARATHON COUNTY
BROADBAND TASK FORCE MEETING**

Minutes

Monday, January 24 at 4:00 P.M.

Webex/Assembly Room, 500 Forest St, Wausau WI

Members	Present/Web-Phone	Absent
Chair John Robinson	P	
Sandi Cihlar	P	
Jon Euting	W	
Sara Guild	W	
Jacob Langenhahn	W	
Milton Olson	W	
Kurt Schoenrock	W	

Also Present: Gerry Klein, Valerie Carrillo, Jason Hausler, Noor Ali Hassan

VIA Web or Phone: Kurt Gibbs, Valerie Carrillo, Andy Faust, Eric Budleski, Lance Leonhard, Randy Fifrick, Scott Nyman, Jean Maszk, Jonathan Fisher

1. Call Meeting to Order: Chair Robinson called the meeting to order at 4:02 p.m.
2. Public Comments (15 Minute limit) - none
3. **CIHLAR MAKE A MOTION; SECOND BY LAGENHAHN TO APPROVE THE NOVEMBER 15, 2021 AND DECEMBER 14, 2021 BROADBAND TASK FORCE MEETING MINUTES. MOTION CARRIED.**
4. **Educational Presentations and Committee Discussion:**

- A. Update on RDOF progress

Discussion:

Charter and LTD – Gigabyte service

- B. Update on NTIA Grant Application

Discussion:

No update at this time.

- C. Discussion of Other Funding Opportunities

Discussion:

Supervisor Robinson provided updates on other funding opportunities that are in discussion. Funding opportunities being considered include grants and loans and Supervisor Robinson stated he has been engaged in online training regarding future funding opportunities.

Supervisor Robinson stated that \$65 Billion was set aside for Broadband Expansion in the Infrastructure Bill. It is mostly tied to access but there is increasing conversations about affordability with that funding.

Supervisor Robinson expressed that the Marathon County Board would be getting a presentation tomorrow night regarding the County’s utilization of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds.

- D. Update on Bug Tussel

Discussion:

Supervisor Robinson stated that Bug Tussel has secured bonding and 25 million of that bonding was for Marathon County. This includes 370 miles of fiber in their plans to use the funding.

Gerry Klein and Supervisor Robinson provided updates about the Bug Tussel project as outlined in their presentation given during the MLK Jr. Day Presentation. Slides of the presentation are available.

Supervisor Robinson stated that Bug Tussel was still in need of additional funds.

Supervisor Cihlar asked which areas of the project would be impacted by the lack of funds, which Supervisor Robinson stated he was not sure. No commitments have been made at this time. Supervisor

Cihlar stated that this is a lot of information to take in at this time and that consistent updates as they are available would be appreciated. He stated that Noor Ali Hassan has a weekly meeting with Bug Tussel and will be able to provide updates as they come.

Kurt Schoenrock expressed that he has gotten questions from the public about what the task force is working on and thus asked if the information available is understandable by the general public. He stated that the information is available online but question if the general public understand what it all means. Eric Budleski agreed. Supervisor Robinson mentioned that there is an opportunity to put something together in the future once things are solidified more.

Supervisor Cihlar echoed the comments about putting something out to the public, either online or comparable, that could help educate the general population and build capacity and support for projects and initiatives moving forward.

Supervisor Gibbs expressed some concern about putting too much information out at this time due to many variables changing on a consistent basis. He expressed that once things are firm and turned on and ready for implementation, we share at that time.

Milton Olson asked Supervisor Robinson if there is a minimum investment requested from Marathon County Towns for Broadband work moving forward. There is no policy or benchmark set at this time. Supervisor Robinson expressed that any investment would help out. Administrator Leonhard agreed and said financial investment goes above and beyond a simple letter of support.

Eric Budleski stated that communicating all the good work that is being done is important, whether through TV or a Press Release, a one pager or elevator speech is vital to keeping projects heading in the right direction.

Supervisor Robinson said that he will work on an outline of information to share with the hope to have something available in the near future.

5. Policy Discussion And Possible Action:

A. Public Education on Use of GeoPartners Survey Tool of Unmet Needs

Andy Faust provided an update on GeoPartners from the North Central Regional Planning process. He mentioned there were some licensing issues being worked out at this time but things are moving forward. Andy outlined some of the speed tests that have come in and how to input data and share out the resource to others.

Supervisor Robinson asked some about entering additional information into the system and Andy Faust stated that he has some additional information that he would share with him and how to start sharing it out within the County. Andy Faust expressed that starting with County employees may be a good first step as things roll out.

Jon Euting asked about comparing data within the system to gauge impact over time as it relates to the work of Bug Tussel and others. Andy Faust mentioned that while he is not an expert in the software, he does believe you can pull data by date ranges.

Supervisor Cihlar expressed that working with our Town Clerks would be important to underscore the needs for Towns to get involved in these efforts. Seeing where the 41 Towns and their clerks are at relative to Broadband would be significant. Other contact groups were brainstormed.

B. Partnership Opportunities for the Wisconsin PSC's Broadband Access Grant \$100 Million

Supervisor Robinson stated that applications are due the 17th of March. County is looking at 50 upload and 10 download speeds in the grant application to future proof their investment. He stated that there is \$114 thousand left over from last year that could be leveraged in this grant application process, along with ARPA funds.

Scott Nyman from Cirrinity mentioned that he liked the process that the County took last time in

approve projects to move forward in the process. Due to the application deadline being soon.

1. Internet Service Providers

A letter will be crafted and sent out to ISP's asking them to submit proposals for county funding support and the Task Force will look to review those requests at the next meeting (moved up a week to February 21st). Once those proposals are moved forward, letters of support will be requested. **Deadline for submitting proposals, via a scoping statement, would be due by February 14th?**

2. Other Units of Government

3. Use of Unallocated Capital Improvement Funds for Broadband Expansion

Motion to move capital expense dollars forward, total of \$114 thousand, from 2021 to 2022 was made by Guild, second by Olson, motion carried.

C. Potential Legislative Changes that Could Expand Access to Internet Services

Supervisor Robinson sought ideas from the Task Force about full disclosure of Fiber Connections?

Supervisor Langenhahn mentioned that private providers not sharing information limits the ability of public officials to move forward with their efforts to help the community.

Supervisor Gibbs updated the Task Force on the conversations he had with the Wisconsin Counties Association and that there may be potentially something moving forward about a provision to getting data from private entities where public dollars are used. This would include both county funds along with ARPA dollars. Supervisor Langenhahn was cautious about moving this forward as it may make the county less attractive to partners moving forward. Clarification was had about who was moving this forward and it was discussed.

Supervisor Gibbs was going to connect with NACO about how Marathon County can help move this forward.

6. Next Meeting Topics

1. Making information available to the general public
2. Promotion of GeoPartners
3. Application letter to ISPs
4. Draft on transparency of infrastructure policy

7. Next Meeting: February 21, 2022 (Scheduled meeting was moved up one week to allow for processing.)

8. Adjournment

OLSON MOTION TO ADJOURN MEETING, CIHLAR SECOND. MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY. MEETING ADJOURNED AT 5:44pm.

Respectfully Submitted by,
Kathy Johnson