



**MARATHON COUNTY
BROADBAND TASK FORCE MEETING**

Minutes

Monday, February 28, 2022 at 3:00 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		x
Milton Olson	W	
Kurt Schoenrock		x

Also Present: Valerie Carrillo, Noor Ali Hassan

VIA Web or Phone: Kurt Gibbs, Andy Faust, Eric Budleski, Jean Maszk, Steve Schneider, Scott Bohler, Celeste Flynn, Bill Flood, Gerry Klein, Mitch Olson, Adam Raschka, Haley Tollefson, Kimberly Young, Jason Hausler

1. Call Meeting to Order: Chair Robinson called the meeting to order at 3:02p.m.
2. Public Comments (15 Minute limit) - none
3. **MADE A MOTION; SECOND BY CIHLAR TO APPROVE THE FEBRUARY 21, 2022 BROADBAND TASK**

FORCE MEETING MINUTES. MOTION CARRIED.

4. Policy Discussion And Possible Action:

The task force has received five applications. There was a brief review of the criteria for grants. Sandy Cihlar asked if it was possible to get an indication or request for finalization from the ISPs. Chair Robinson stated the money is not fronted and will only be paid after the fact. The PSC also has guidelines for completion.

A. Review and Recommend Partnerships for the Wisconsin PSC’s Broadband Access Grant

1. Determine Criteria for evaluation of requests

Bug Tussel - Mitch Olson presented: He defined the area between Hwy 29 and east, the towns of Gunther and Knowlton, and the Village of Kronenwetter as the current expansion area. This would cover approximately 770 households, including the 150 already covered by the middle mile. Bug Tussel would be willing to work with a loan from the county but they may ask for more funding if only a loan is available and not grant money.

LTD Broadband - Haley Tollefson presented: She commented that they submitted their proposal one day before the PSC updated their mapping guidelines. She stated they will need to rework the proposal due to the updated mapping. They are willing to help fill gaps in the county not covered by others. They are willing to work with grants and/or loans. Currently, their RDOF long form is submitted but it is a long process. They are hoping to hear back in the next few months. She stated the FCC does not give timelines.

Charter Communications - Celeste Flynn and Adam Raschka presented: Adam stated that their grant route is different from the ARPA route. They are looking for those without access to 25 by 2. The current area is less than the last grant proposal. They are looking for opportunities to partner with the county. They also mentioned that the PSC does require providers to submit reports every 6 months on project progress.

Cirrinity - Scott Nyman presented: Scott stated they have submitted their proposal and with the new mapping, their proposal is still viable. They have acquired \$70,000 of matching ARPA funds with the Town of Reid. They will be building 39 ¾ miles of fiber past 368 homes. This will start in the fall of 2022 with completion fall of 2023.

Frontier - Scott Bohler presented: They will be providing fiber to the home for a little over 4000 locations. They have reviewed the map overlap and would prefer to increase rather than decrease project area due to adverse economic impact. They are not interested in a loan from the county. They are asking for 10% from the county with

a 40% match from the state.

Chair Robinson stated that he reached out to the county CPZ department regarding the maps. Preston analyzed the maps submitted by the ISPs and was able to give a summary of overlaps but he was not able to reproduce the maps themselves with overlay. The excel sheet shows the area of providers for each community but does not necessarily mean household overlap. The question was asked about how the map determination was made. Chair Robinson clarified the maps vs excel sheet do not reflect expansion of current services with grant applications.

2. Determine role of Marathon County and expectations of other parties including local governments

Chair Robinson said there are options of awarding grants at county level. There was a discussion of loan and grant option combinations. The county could do a loan only and also assist with letters of support. Chair Robinson suggested a concept of lowest unit cost \$190 per unit served (Cirrinity) and make that cost a forgivable loan with unit served as a base level. If the ISP was interested in a loan, there may be long term, low interest rates available. Board Chair Gibbs stated there are multiple ways to approach the financial options. In order to treat everyone fairly, if the ISP is meeting the criteria, we should offer the lowest dollar amount to all ISPs. This gives a fixed dollar amount of a forgivable loan. The ISP could then choose where to go from there for remaining needed funds.

Supervisor Guild felt the idea would help serve the task force goals and asked how would this impact the dollar amount of what providers are asking for? Chair Robinson stated the ISP would need to decide if they are interested in a loan or not.

Valerie Carrillo brought up the definition of affordable and how some projects may cost more than others due to area. Board Chair Gibbs Kurt clarified that he was referring to affordability in the cost of the service to the resident.

Supervisor Guild stated that looking at numbers given to move at \$235 level, using the current dollar amount, there would be \$2.2 million of a forgiven loan. Then the committee would need to look at the cost options above that. Chair Robinson discussed the amount of money for what the loans would be and the concepts of how it could work out with requests. He discussed past practices of proposal approvals. He reminded the task force that decisions are time sensitive as the grant applications are due March 17.

Sandy Cihlar stated she likes the deliberative approach with the ARPA funds. She asked Mitch from Bug Tussel if they have had a conversation with local governments to get local buy in from the communities and residents. Mitch noted that they have not had the conversation yet but will as soon as they get approval from the county. Their requests will depend on town capacity of funds and where Bug Tussel can expand with the funds from township. Chair Robinson hopes that ISPs will work together to minimize overlap and he did not believe this should be a county function.

Motion to forward with a recommendation to both the Infrastructure and HR Finance and Property committee to consider the proposals for the \$235 per unit recommendation. And to view that in combination with a potential loan that would be paid back by the partners to the county; made by Guild, Second by Cihlar.

Jon Euting asked for clarification of the motion. Clarification was made. **All in favor. Motion carried.**

Chair Robinson asked how the task force would like to move forward with the proposals. ISPs are willing to have conversations regarding refinement and continued negotiations of the relative service area. He would encourage ISPs to work with communities as well.

Kimberly Young with LTD asked for clarification of a loan versus a grant usage. Chair Robinson clarified.

Motion to recommend moving forward with all five of the project proposals while continuing to finalize the

details due to newer mapping and potential other partnership opportunities, encouraging the providers to find ways to reduce duplication in order to strengthen the viability of the applications, while still considering the specific funding avenues of the previous motion; made by Guild, second by Olson. All in favor. Motion carried.

3. Identify steps to support the applications

Chair Robinson stated the next focus will be getting letters of support. He will work with the ISP to help connect for more support. He also noted that there will be a resolution going to the Infrastructure committee relative to permit fee structures.

5. Next Meeting Topics

1. Identify Focus Areas

7. Next Meeting: March 28, 2022

8. Adjournment

CIHLAR MOTION TO ADJOURN MEETING, OLSON SECOND. MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY. MEETING ADJOURNED AT 4:01pm.

Respectfully Submitted by,
Kathy Johnson