MARATHON COUNTY
BROADBAND TASK FORCE MEETING
Minutes
Monday, September 26, 2022, at 3:00 P.M.
Webex/Assembly Room, 500 Forest St, Wausau WI

Members	Present/Web-Phone	Absent
Chair John Robinson	P	
Jacob Langenhahn		x
Gary Gisselman	P	
Mike Ritter	P	
Jennifer Aarestad	P	
Tony Sherfinski		x
Erick Budleski	W	
Milton Olson		x
Wade Carroll		x
Kurt Schoenrock		x
Jon Euting	W	

Also Present: Valerie Carrillo, Gerry Klein, Kristin Lambrecht
VIA Web or Phone: Kimm Webber, Jean Maszk, Noor Hassan, Celeste Flynn, Scott Bohler, Luke Butzler, Michael Puerner, Tim Neumeyer, Brian Kowalski, Kurt Gibbs

1. **Call Meeting to Order:** Chair Robinson called the meeting to order at 3:05 p.m.

2. **Public Comments** (15 Minute limit) – Tony Omernick expressed concerns about internet service and lack of service repair from Frontier. He is concerned about having reliable internet service and asked what can be done now to have service that can be counted on.

3. **RITTER MAKE A MOTION; SECOND BY AARESTAD TO APPROVE THE AUGUST 22, 2022, BROADBAND TASK FORCE MEETING MINUTES. MOTION CARRIED.**

4. **Educational Presentations and Committee Discussion:**

    A. Update on Grant Funded Broadband Projects

        1. Frontier (PSC 2022) – Scott Bohler presented their fiber update. They are working with state PSC staff to finish the contract. Hopefully they are finalizing agreement in the next month or so. Then they will work with vendors and order materials. Limitations were discussed regarding older copper lines and replacing with new fiber optic cables. They are proposing to have this completed in two years.
        2. Bug Tussel (PSC 2022) – Kristin Lambrecht provided updates in the packet.
        3. Cirrinity (PSC 2021) – Scott Nyman was not present; Chair Robinson gave the update. They have completed the 2021 work and will be submitting for some of the reimbursement. They should be done in the Norrie area.
        4. Charter (RDOF) – Celeste Flynn presented. They have completed 240 passings and will be releasing 552 for October. They have challenges of running into granite rock and locating companies to keep up with the contracted activity. Moving forward, Celeste may have someone else represent Charter as she has a conflicting meeting.

    B. Status Report on Bug Tussel's Project – Kristin Lambrecht gave all updates in the packet.

    C. Speed Test Update – There have been no significant changes to speed test results. There is a new program from the FCC due to congress pushing for more accurate maps. This is being done through the broadband data collection program. Allowing local units to offer feedback regarding data. Will have more reliable date every 6 months.

    D. How the change from 4G/LTE to 5G cellular service has, and will, affect the average citizen? – Luke Butzler presented. His role is education outreach and support in the public safety space. 5G stands on three pillars – increase speeds from 4G, massive decrease in latency, and opening up more capacity on the network. Marathon county has seen increase in reinvestment and network expansion compared to

neighboring counties. Regarding coverage areas comparing 5G to 4G, 5G supports a small geographical area compared to 4G. 5G is more complex rollout with speed as the goal. The area will continue to be supported. They have more cell towers planned to help with service. Gerry gave additional background regarding cell towers and frequency. All towers are in Marathon County are 5G capable, with three currently online.

E. Wausau School District efforts to ensure access to the internet – Jon Euting presented. Jon gave an overview of the district demographics and the pandemic timeline. The provided, free of charge, hotspots to 250 families. They knew there was not adequate cell service for many families. Maps of Wi-Fi accessibility were available as well as adding external antennas to increase access. Approximately 1,700 students lacked internet bandwidth. They added 400 hotspots in fall of 2020. The district offered learning hubs for those without any access and hotspots didn't work at home. Once full back in school, only about 150 hotspots were still active and can be checked out as needed through the libraries. The cost of the hotspots was funded by the school district and then ESSER. Chair Robinson asked, if possible, to get granular data of where the hotspots were used. Jon noted this was done for access and a lack of provider or affordability was not considered.

5. **Policy Discussion and Possible Action:**
   A. Approach to Funding Sources: County, State and Federal
      1. Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program – There is a handout in packet. $42-45 billion to be make available to states in next 4-5 years for broadband expansion. The State thinks we may get up to one billion. These funds can be used for planning and employing internet to unserved and underserved.
      2. American Rescue Plan Act – We have earmarked but not allocated just under $4 million, based on commitments to Cirrinity, Bug Tussel, and Frontier. We pledged about $944,000 to Frontier as a match. We pledged $70,00 to Cirrinity and $142,175 to Bug Tussel. A resolution will need to be passed in relative to the funding. Corporation Counsel is working on a terms sheet for a loan match of $3 million with Bug Tussel that will be taken to the county board.
      3. ReConnect Loan and Grant Program through the USDA. – There is information in packet. $150 million will be available nationwide. Marathon County has not done well with these types of grants and loans in the past.
   B. Process for determining priorities for future broadband expansion efforts
      1. Target Areas Based on Speed Test – We need to continue to work with districts and presenting at the polls. We will also be working with the schools. We need to take the approved project maps and overlay with speed tests to see what areas are served to identify target areas moving forward. The FCC mapping will be out sometime in December and updated every six months. Discussion regarding affordability and access for Marathon County. We can work on better promotion of subsidies for those eligible. We need to work on connecting without using internet to access people that don't have internet access.
      2. Other Factors

6. **Next Meeting Topics**
   1. Digital Equity Update – Alyssa Kenny
   2. Telehealth challenges
   3. Rural school district challenges
   4. Prosperity partnership telework challenges

7. **Next Meeting:** October 24, 2022
8. **Adjournment**
   AARESTAD MOTION TO ADJOURN MEETING, GISSELMAN SECOND. MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY. MEETING ADJOURNED AT 4:30 pm.

Respectfully Submitted by,
Kathy Johnson