



BROADBAND TASK FORCE MINUTES

Monday, January 11th, 2021
212 River Drive, Room 5, Wausau WI 54403

Attendance:

Present

M. Osterberg

Absent

E. Budleski

K. Olson

Also Present:

VIA Web or Phone:

W. Carrol
S. Cihlar
K. Gibbs
S. Guild
J. Hausler
G. Klein
L. Leonhard
J. Langenhahn
E. McBride
V. Resech, MCDEVCO
J. Robinson, Chair
Two members of the general public

AGENDA ITEMS

1. Call Meeting to Order

The meeting was called to order by Chair Robinson at 4:01 pm. All participants were welcomed.

2. Public Comments

No public comments were presented.

Marathon County Supervisor Maszk has submitted correspondence to the Task Force indicating that residents in the Town of Guenther do not have sufficient high speed internet access.

3. Approval of the Minutes of the December 7th, 2020 meeting

S. Cihlar motioned to approve the minutes of the December 7th, 2020 meeting as presented.

Motion was seconded by E. McBride. J. Langenhahn asked to have the minutes corrected to notate he was absent from the meeting. Motion was carried unanimously.

EDUCATIONAL PRESENTATIONS AND COMMITTEE DISCUSSION

4. Update on Public Service Commission (PSC) Broadband Expansion Grants

Air Net was not able to submit a PSC grant as they had originally hoped. There was \$62 million dollars requested, statewide, during this grant cycle. Total allocations for the grant process from the PSC will only be \$24 million.

5. Update on Rural Digital Opportunity Fund Auction

Charter and Wireless LTD were the large award winners in Marathon County. M. Osterberg has attempted to reach out to them to gauge their interest in working with the Broadband Task Force.

Wireless LTD has been a smaller company to this point, but with their large award of \$1.3 billion, G. Klein commented that the company will need to expand quickly. Desire to connect with them early was expressed to ensure they focus their efforts to Wisconsin and subsequently Marathon County.

6. Report on Potential Funding Options for Broadband Expansion

K. Gibbs presented the group options pertaining to Broadband Funding opportunities as a result of a conversation he had with Mark O'Connell from the Wisconsin Counties Association. Tax exempt financing was discussed, with no clear direction as to if that would be the best course of action.

Public/Private partnerships were also discussed, with more information and outreach to come.

Chair Robinson discussed that the Task Force is learning from other counties as to what financing tools may be available to Marathon County and which ones would provide the best path forward.

POLICY DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION:

7. **Identify Partners and their Role in Expanding Broadband**

A. Data Gathering

S. Guild communicated that she and J. Robinson had discussed MCDEVCO having a more active role in expanding broadband in Marathon County. The Task Force will need to outline tasks that are necessary to expand high speed internet access in Marathon County.

V. Resech relayed that MCDEVCO is in need of specific information for the MCDEVCO Board to review and authorize.

S. Guild relayed the County could enter into a contract with MCDEVCO to move this project forward.

J. Robinson stated that the Task Force needs to clarify roles and responsibilities as soon as possible so that there is a good understanding to ensure an efficient structure for work on future projects.

J. Hausler relayed that UW-Madison Extension is examining its educational role in assisting with broadband expansion efforts and that the Community Development Institute Director will meet with the County Administration and Supervisors Guild and Robinson to communicate this information.

J. Robinson mentioned that data gathering is still a great need as things move forward, especially regarding telehealth and virtual education.

M. Osterberg shared some preliminary data that she was able to generate in Lincoln County pertaining to level of service and the cost for service, which may greatly impact grant submissions in the future.

E. McBride shared information regarding data gathered within school district channels about Broadband service. He mentioned that families have a tendency to either under or over report available service.

W. Carol mentioned that moving forward patients will be asked to do a speed test of their network before scheduling a telehealth appointment.

S. Cihlar asked about existing information regarding town hall connectivity as town halls are important for elections and government operation. S. Cihlar inquired how agriculture producers are being connected with given how much modern equipment relies heavily on technology. V. Resech stated that MCDEVCO will be doing a comprehensive survey in 2021 to businesses in Marathon County and these groups will be included within that survey.

B. Grant Preparation

J. Robinson communicated that he will be meeting with the Greater Wausau Prosperity Partnership to examine additional opportunities for collaboration.

C. Funding

8. **Next Meeting Logistics and Topics**

Future meeting agenda items include discussion of SpaceX, LEO and other high speed internet technologies as well as additional data needs.

9. **Next Steps**

The next Task Force meeting is scheduled for February 15, 2021 at 4:00 PM.

10. **Adjourn**

Due to technology issues, the meeting was abruptly adjourned at 4:53 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Melinda Osterberg