



BROADBAND TASK FORCE

MINUTES

Monday, February 15th, 2021

212 River Drive, Room 5, Wausau WI 54403

Members	Present/Web-Phone	Absent
Chair John Robinson	W	
Katrina Becker	X	
Eric Budleski	W	
Sandi Cihlar	W	
Sara Guild	W	
Jacob Langenhahn	W	
Emmett McBride	W	
Kent Olson	W	

Also Present: M. Osterberg

VIA Web or Phone: V. Carrillo, W. Carrol, A. Christensen, K. Gibbs, J. Happli, J. Hausler, G. Klein, L. Leonhard, A. Ley, V. Resech, MCDEVCO, D. Swangstu and two members of the general public.

AGENDA ITEMS

1. Call Meeting to Order

The meeting was called to order by Chair Robinson at 4:02 pm. All participants were welcomed.

2. Public Comments

Supervisor Al Christensen asked about what can be done at the Town level to help improve Broadband service. Chair Robinson clarified his comment, asking if he was looking for information about residents or as a town government. Supervisor Christensen mentioned that he was looking for information for town residents. Gerry Klien mentioned that he could share provider information with supervisor Christensen.

3. Approval of the Minutes of the January 11th, 2021 meeting

Supervisor Cihlar motioned to approve the minutes of the January 11th, 2021 meeting as presented. Motion was seconded by Vice Chair Guild. Motion was carried unanimously.

EDUCATIONAL PRESENTATIONS AND COMMITTEE DISCUSSION

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

Gerry Klein shared maps outlining coverage data from providers that submitted PSC grant applications. Bug Tussel, Northwoods Connect and Wittenberg Telephone all submitted PSC grant applications. Broadband technology, via these grant applications, included fiber and wireless connections.

Supervisor Cihlar had a question about NetPro's PSC grant application, which was not submitted, and Gerry Klein indicated that the ISP planned on building the infrastructure without grant assistance.

5. Update on Rural Digital Opportunity Fund Auction

Gerry Klein provided an update on the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund. This is a federal initiative, with nearly 9 billion dollars being invested in this project. Klein mentioned that a reverse auction was conducted to allocate funding, with CCO Holdings and LTD Limited being awarded funds through this initiative. Klein stated that this funding is similar to CAF Funding (Connect America Funds) where funding is allocated only after the work is completed as outlined in the project plan.

Eric Budleski questioned how outlined areas that were awarded funding were chosen, as the data provided did not align with the State PSC data. This process used Federal data that was determined by the Census tract.

Chair Robinson mentioned that 168 million was awarded to CCO Holding, projecting to reach 163,000 residents. Also, 190 million was awarded to LTD potentially reaching 88,070 residents.

Melinda Osterberg stated that she has located a contact with LTD and that they are interested in additional information on areas within the County that lack service.

a. Potential Role for County to Accelerate Projects

6. Report on newer Broadband Technologies, such as StarLink and Leo

Gerry Klein provided an update on StarLink, which has 1,100 satellites in orbit currently, which is starting to provide access to Marathon County residents. It is referred to as low earth technology. Gerry Klein stated that this would be a viable option for rural Marathon County Broadband expansion in the near future. StarLink has promising upload and download speeds as compared to DSL technologies. Currently it is \$500 for upfront costs for equipment and around \$100 per month for the service.

Eric Budleski has stated that StarLink has also shown up in the Minocqua area as well.

7. Update on efforts to expand Wi-Fi hotspots at County facilities

Gerry Klein provided an update on CARES funding allocations to purchase equipment and assist Library branches to expand WIFI access to parking lots and areas surrounding the Library. Klein also mentioned fiber Broadband expansion projects to the Marathon County Highway shop, Marathon County Solid Waste site, Village of Hatley and the DC Everest Elementary School in that area.

8. Update on potential funding options

Marathon County Board Chair Kurt Gibbs, provided an update to the Task Force on potential broadband funding options for Marathon County. Gibbs talked about conduit bonding and the potential for multiple parties to collaborate on those bond issuances.

Kurt Gibbs mentioned that the Wisconsin Counties Association, among others, have been involved in conversations pertaining to bonding for Broadband projects. More discussions are planned to pursue funding options for public/private partnerships with additional Wisconsin Counties.

POLICY DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION:

9. Review of proposed amendment to Marathon County zoning code 17.301 changing telecommunication facilities from a permitted to conditional use

Supervisor Langenhahn mentioned that he would be abstaining from any discussion or action based upon this topic.

Kurt Gibbs provided background pertaining to how this potential zone code change was brought forward. The Marathon County Board of Supervisors will be reviewing the potential code change during their upcoming meeting.

Zoning Administrator Dominique Swangstu gave a presentation about the advantages and disadvantages of such a code change.

Chair Robinson inquired about the criteria used to determine a conditional use permit. Dominique Swangstu provided information outlined in the Telecommunications section of the County code regarding the standard for decisions to be made, with the Board of Adjustment making the final determination after a public hearing. These changes would only apply to the Farmland Preservation Zoning District.

Gerry Klein asked about the language used being Mobile Towers and why that was used compared to communication towers. Dominique Swangstu stated that State Statute uses both terms rather interchangeably.

S. Guild left the meeting at approximately 5:00 PM.

Kent Olson expressed that as long as the process included a conditional use public hearing, he had no concerns with this moving forward. Eric Budleski agreed. Kurt Gibbs stated that no action is needed but wanted to make sure the Task Force is aware of the current process and any potential changes forthcoming.

10. Defining roles of partners in support of Broadband expansion, including funding

Chair Robinson provided an update on partner's roles and responsibilities, including Extension, as it pertains to grant support and project management. Chair Robinson explained that the County needs a streamlined process for engaging internet support providers and the community. The County has met with Extension, MCDEVCO, the

Wausau Area Chamber of Commerce, and the Greater Wausau Prosperity Partnership to determine areas for collaboration.

11. Next Meeting Logistics and Topics

Rural Digital Opportunity Fund

RFP Process for Marathon County

Discussion about extending the Broadband Task Force beyond the April sunset date

Update on State and Federal funding opportunities

12. Next Steps

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

13. Adjourn

Motion by Kent Olson, second by Eric Budleski to adjourn the meeting at 5:21 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,

Jason Hausler