



MARATHON COUNTY BROADBAND TASK FORCE MEETING MINUTES

Monday, April 19, 2021 at 4:00 P.M.
Conference Room 5, 212 River Drive, Wausau, WI

Members	Present/Web-Phone	Absent
Chair John Robinson	X	
Katrina Becker		X
Eric Budleski	X	
Sandi Cihlar	X	
Sara Guild	X	
Jacob Langenhahn	X	
Emmett McBride	X	
Kent Olson		X
Wade Carroll	X	
Lance Leonhard	X	
Amanda Ley	X	
Valerie C	X	
Kurt Gibbs	X	
Gerry Klein	X	
Vicki Resech	X	
Milton Olson	X	

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 presented.**

3. **MOTION BY GUILD; SECOND BY CIHLAR TO APPROVE THE FEBRUARY 15, 2021 BROADBAND TASK FORCE MEETING MINUTES. MOTION CARRIED.**

4. **Educational Presentations and Committee Discussion**

A. Broadband Task Force beyond the April Sunset Date

The Broadband Task Force has been extended until April 2022.

B. Update on Extension of the Update on Efforts to Expand Wi-Fi Hotspots at County Facilities

G. Klein provided an update on Wi-Fi access at Marathon County libraries, leases are being updated to allow for installation of updated wiring. The revised agreements have been provided to the communities and the equipment has been purchased.

G. Klein relayed the CCITC is currently researching "shovel ready" broadband projects, particularly at the two County campgrounds and installation of fiber service at Memorial Park. High speed internet access has been expanded at East Gate Hall, Hockey Arena and at other sites at the fairgrounds.

Supervisor Cihlar communicated concerns regarding potential liability concerns regarding expanding Wi-Fi access at public facilities. Administrator Leonhard gave an update that several municipalities have expressed concerns regarding content available through public Wi-Fi which the Library Board is balancing with mitigation strategies.

C. Update On Public Service Commission Broadband Expansion Grant Awards

Chair Robinson provided an update on the status of the four County supported PSC grant applications. The Wittenberg Telephone Application was ranked 4th Statewide. Chair Robinson relayed that the PSC did not want to overlap with the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund and had a preference for fiber technologies.

D. Update On Proposed Amendment To Marathon County Zoning Code 17.301 Changing Telecommunication Facilities from A Permitted To Conditional Use

Chair Robinson communicated that the County Board did not make the suggested change and telecommunication facilities will remain a permitted use in the subject zoning district(s).

E. Update On Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF) Auction

1. Coverage, schedule and level of service

Chair Robinson updated the Task Force that CCO (Charter Communications) and LTD Broadband, a company located in Minnesota, were awarded large portions of Marathon County through the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund Auction.

M. Osterberg relayed that she had contacted Charter and their representative was interested in attending the May Broadband Task Force meeting and that Charter would appreciate any information regarding addresses outside of the RDOF where the County would be interested in expanding access. Most of the area that is currently served by Frontier is within Charter's RDOF Area.

G. Klein provided a map depicting the areas of the County awarded funding through the RDOF.

Chair Robinson communicated that he had contacted LTD Wireless and that they were planning on installing fiber in the areas they were awarded through the RDOF. LTD Wireless is interested in identifying ways to accelerate the project timeline.

F. Report On State And Federal Broadband Funding Opportunities

1. 2021-2023 State Budget

The Governor's budget proposed \$204 million for broadband expansion. Chair Robinson outlined how the Governors Broadband budget request was broken down and how it relates to grant applications.

2. Federal American Rescue Plan

M. Osterberg provided an update on the research she conducted as it relates to the Federal funds and how it intersects with other efforts - such as the Emergency Broadband Benefit where low income populations can get a broadband connection device and fiscal savings to support that device. Broadband infrastructure expansion grant was mentioned but details about that process is to be determined at the Federal level.

M. Olson communicated that the Town of Weston is interested in pooling funds from other entities to expand Broadband infrastructure. He stated that the Town does not anticipate expenses related to COVID that many other municipalities are experiencing so utilizing their funding to focus on Broadband would be a priority for them.

Administrator Leonhard provided a brief overview from NACO (National Association of Counties) as it relates to the Federal American Rescue Plan. Board Chair Kurt Gibbs also provided an update as well and reiterated they are still waiting on guidance from the Federal Government and the US Treasury. Chair Gibbs relayed that additional clarification would be available at the end of April.

5. Policy Discussion And Possible Action:

A. Statutory Changes That Would Facilitate Broadband Expansion

State Senator Petrowski requested information from Marathon County on what statutory changes could be made to facilitate broadband expansion.

E. Budleski relayed that restrictions on local government in relation to broadband infrastructure has limited broadband access in rural areas.

Supervisor Guild stated that there was a rationale to the provision limiting local government involvement in broadband expansion, however, local governments should have the option to proactively assist in expanding broadband access. She mentioned that perhaps joining other counties in this effort may have broader reach with state officials.

Chair Gibbs stated that the County needed to be very specific in its requests to the State legislature.

Supervisor Robinson recommended discussing this at the May meeting. He will conduct research on what other counties are doing and if the Wisconsin County Association is leading any action on this topic.

Supervisor Cihlar inquired if what education the Towns Association was providing on the American Rescue Funds use and inquired if there could be information provided to the Marathon County Towns.

Administrator Leonhard communicated that the League of Municipalities, Towns Association, and the Counties Association is coordinating information on the Fiscal Rescue Funds, but they are also waiting for direction from the Treasury on how the funds can be spent.

Resech relayed that she serves on the North Central WI Regional Planning Commission COVID Recovery Task Force and that the Task Force has identified access, accessibility and adoption as issues in the County.

B. Support for 2021-2023 State Budget Initiatives to Expand Broadband

Marathon County is expressing support for the broadband related initiatives in the State Budget.

Supervisor Guild motioned to direct Chair Robinson to communicate the Task Force's support for the funding in the Governor's budget allocated for broadband and that they include funding for broadband expansion in the final state budget. Motion seconded by Supervisor Cihlar.

C. Developing a Process for Investing County Resources for Broadband Expansion Efforts

1. Transparency And Accountability

Chair Robinson communicated that the Task Force had established a minimum service level of 50 Mbps/10Mbps previously.

E. Budleski communicated that 50/10 is the minimum level of service and the proposal should be scalable.

Supervisor Guild inquired if this would be a baseline for determining if the County could provide funding assistance and suggested preference for applications providing a higher level of service, greater number of households and businesses served.

Chair Gibbs stated that different technologies have varying speed capacities and that there is a preference for fiber to the home. Gibbs suggested a separate criteria for non-fiber technology.

2. Priority areas for broadband expansion

Last year's focus was on the northern towns with deteriorating copper infrastructure. Chair Robinson stated that the utilization of RDOF funds may lead to some prioritization.

M. Osterberg stated that when prioritization was shared with Charter, that was not helpful for them. Rather they wanted addresses of customers that wanted to be served or needed expanded service.

E. Budleksi stated that education is needed on what constitutes high speed internet and broadband service. Supervisor Cihlar asked about telehealth opportunities covered by the Lincoln County survey.

M. Osterberg replied that was the third use that survey respondents would use broadband to access telehealth care.

6. Next Meeting Logistics And Topics

Chair Robinson stated that at the next meeting the Task Force would continue discussion on coordinating with internet service providers with hopefully having internet service providers present to discuss the RDOF, additional information on the American Rescue Plan, opportunity to partner with Towns, and continue discussion on how to determine priorities for the County.

7. Next Steps

8. Adjournment

CHAIR ROBINSON ADJOURNED THE MEETING AT 5:28 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Jason Hausler