



MARATHON COUNTY BROADBAND TASK FORCE MEETING AGENDA

Date & Time of Meeting: **Monday, April 19, 2021 at 4:00 P.M.**

Meeting Location: **Conference Room 5, 212 River Drive, Wausau, WI**

Task Force Members: Katrina Becker, Eric Budleski Sandi Cihlar, Sara Guild, Jacob Langenhahn, Emmett McBride, Kent Olson, and John Robinson

Task Force Purpose: *Develop recommendations identifying the potential role of Marathon County in facilitating the expansion of Broadband access in Marathon County. Review the Report: Broadband for Marathon County Broadband Assessment and Plan prepared by Design Nine and develop broad policies and partnership recommendations relating to the expansion of broadband/internet services throughout Marathon County.*

The meeting site identified above will be open to the public. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and associated public health directives, Marathon County encourages Task Force members and the public to attend this meeting remotely. Instead of attendance in person, Task Force members and the public may attend this meeting by **telephone conference**. If Task Force members or members of the public cannot attend remotely, Marathon County requests that appropriate safety measures, including adequate social distancing, be utilized by all in-person attendees.

Phone #: 1-408-418-9388

Access Code: 962 376 748

When you enter the telephone conference, **PLEASE PUT YOUR PHONE ON MUTE!**

1. **Call Meeting to Order**
2. **Public Comments (15 Minute limit)**
3. **Approval of the February 15, 2021 Broadband Task Force Meeting Minutes**
4. **Educational Presentations and Committee Discussion**
 - A. **Update on Extension of the Broadband Task Force beyond the April Sunset Date**
 - B. **Update on Efforts to Expand Wi-Fi Hotspots at County Facilities**
 - C. **Update On Public Service Commission Broadband Expansion Grant Awards**
 - D. **Update On Proposed Amendment To Marathon County Zoning Code 17.301 Changing Telecommunication Facilities from A Permitted To Conditional Use**
 - E. **Update On Rural Digital Opportunity Fund Auction**
 1. Coverage, schedule and level of service
 - F. **Report On State And Federal Broadband Funding Opportunities**
 1. 2021-2023 State Budget
 2. Federal American Rescue Plan
5. **Policy Discussion And Possible Action:**
 - A. **Statutory Changes That Would Facilitate Broadband Expansion**
 - B. **Support for 2021-2023 State Budget Initiatives to Expand Broadband**
 - C. **Developing a Process for Investing County Resources for Broadband Expansion Efforts**
 1. Transparency, Accountability, and Level of Service
 2. Priority areas for broadband expansion
6. **Next Meeting Logistics And Topics**
7. **Next Steps**
8. **Adjournment**

"Any person planning to attend this meeting who needs some type of special accommodation in order to participate should call the County Clerk's Office at 715-261-1500 or e-mail infomarathon@mail.co.marathon.wi.us one business day before the meeting.

SIGNED /s/ John Robinson

Presiding Officer or Designee

FAXED TO: Wausau Daily Herald, City Pages, and
 FAXED TO: Other Media Groups
 FAXED BY: T. Ranallo
 FAXED DATE: 4/15/2021
 FAXED TIME: _____

NOTICE POSTED AT COURTHOUSE
 BY: T. Ranallo
 DATE: 4/15/2021
 TIME: _____



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

Federal Broadband Programs Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic

There are multiple federal broadband related programs in the American Rescue Plan (<https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/1319/text>) and Consolidated Appropriation Act of 2021. The State of Wisconsin Legislative Fiscal Bureau has prepared a summary of the impact of American Rescue Plan Act: https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/misc/lfb/misc/133_american_rescue_plan_act_of_2021_3_23_21.pdf

Most of the provisions are direct to consumer programs related to adoption and accessibility rather than infrastructure broadband expansion. The following is a summary of recently established federal broadband programs in response to the COVID-19 pandemic:

STATE PROGRAMS

CORONAVIRUS CAPITAL PROJECTS FUND

\$10 billion in funds for State governments intended for “critical capital projects directly enabling work, education and health monitoring, including remote options.” Wisconsin will receive a minimum of \$100 million as part of the Coronavirus Capital Project Fund. Currently it is unknown exactly how these funds will be used in Wisconsin and what provisions will be established by the Treasury Department for their use.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

CORONAVIRUS LOCAL FISCAL RECOVERY FUNDS

The American Rescue Plan included \$65.1 billion in direct payments to state and local governments. The U.S. Treasury has not released specific allocations or official guidance on how these funds can be utilized, however, estimates are based on a per capita formula and preliminary the National Counties Association <https://www.naco.org/resources/featured/state-and-local-coronavirus-fiscal-recovery-funds> has relayed that the following criteria have been established for use of Local Fiscal Recovery Funds:

- Provide government services to the extent of the reduction in revenue (i.e. online, property or income tax) due to the public health emergency.
- Make necessary investments in water, sewer, or **broadband** infrastructure.
- State and local governments can transfer the funds to a private nonprofit organization, a public benefit corporation involved in the transportation of passengers or cargo or a special-purpose unit of State or local government.
- Respond to workers performing essential work during the COVID-19 public health emergency by providing premium pay to eligible workers of the county that are performing such essential work, or by providing grants to eligible employers that have eligible workers who perform essential work.

Marathon County is estimated to receive \$26,316,628 in recovery funds. Please see the following spreadsheet for the estimated municipal allocations.

EMERGENCY CONNECTIVITY FUND

The Emergency Connectivity Act includes \$7.171 billion for eligible schools and libraries to purchase telecommunication equipment for use by students, school staff, and library patrons at locations outside the school or library. Equipment could include hotspots, funds for internet service and devices to be used at home. The specific rules related to Emergency Connectivity Fund are currently being established, with the FCC's response to comments due by April 23, 2021.

BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE DEPLOYMENT GRANTS

Grants to partnerships including state/local units of government and internet service providers for broadband projects in areas eligible for broadband infrastructure expansion. The application criteria and application period have not yet been finalized. For more information:

DIRECT CONSUMER PROGRAMS

HOMEOWNER ASSISTANCE FUND

The Recovery Fund includes \$9.961 billion for the Homeowner Assistance Fund. These funds will be available to States through a grant program to assist homeowners with mortgage payments, insurance premiums, and utility payments. Broadband is considered a utility payment. Assistance in Marathon County through this program is available through North Central Community Action Program: <http://northcentralcap.org>

EMERGENCY BROADBAND BENEFIT

The Emergency Broadband Benefit provides \$3.2 billion dollars in funding to reduce the consumer cost of accessing the internet. The program provides up to \$50 per month for low income individuals (\$75 per month for those residing on tribal lands) to help subsidize the cost of internet service. The Emergency Broadband Benefit program also establishes a one-time reimbursement of up to \$100 for purchase of devices connecting to the internet. This program is provided through internet service and cellular phone providers.

To qualify for this program one member of the household must meet one of the following criteria:

- Qualifies for the FCC Lifeline program <https://www.checklifeline.org/lifeline>
- Is approved for the free or reduced-price school breakfast/lunch program
- Demonstrates a substantial loss of income since February 29, 2020
- Received a federal Pell grant in the current award year
- Qualifies for a participating provider's existing low-income or COVID-19 relief program, subject to FCC approval

Emergency Broadband Benefit providers in Wisconsin and providing service in Marathon County include (<https://www.fcc.gov/emergency-broadband-benefit-providers>):

Broadband Provider Name	Service Type	Offering Connected Devices (Laptop, Desktop, or Tablet)
Access Wireless	Mobile	
AirVoice Wireless	Mobile	✓
AT&T	Fixed/Mobile	
Charter (Spectrum)	Fixed	
Cintex Wireless	Mobile	
enTouch Wireless	Mobile	✓
human-I-T	Mobile	✓
Infinity Mobile	Mobile	
Life Wireless	Mobile	
LiteWire Internet Services	Fixed	
Mediacom	Fixed	
Norvado	Fixed	
Sano Health	Mobile	
Selectel Wireless	Mobile	
TerraCom	Mobile	✓
T-Mobile USA	Fixed/Mobile	✓
Torch Wireless	Mobile	✓
TruConnect	Mobile	✓

U.S. Cellular

Fixed/Mobile

Verizon

Fixed/Mobile

AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN 2021 DISTRIBUTIONS MARATHON COUNTY Rescue pl

	Marathon	Clark	Wood	Shawano	Total
City of Abbotsford	\$63,264	\$157,469			\$220,733
City of Colby	\$50,908	\$141,752			\$192,660
City of Marshfield	\$87,087		\$1,738,781		\$1,825,868
City of Mosinee	\$402,519				\$402,519
City of Schofield	\$214,110				\$214,110
City of Wausau	\$15,747,334				\$15,747,334
County of Marathon	\$26,316,628				\$26,316,628
Town of Bergen	\$63,165				\$63,165
Town of Berlin	\$93,315				\$93,315
Town of Bern	\$59,014				\$59,014
Town of Bevent	\$109,428				\$109,428
Town of Brighton	\$63,857				\$63,857
Town of Cassel	\$91,437				\$91,437
Town of Cleveland	\$147,782				\$147,782
Town of Day	\$113,085				\$113,085
Town of Easton	\$113,184				\$113,184
Town of Eau Pleine	\$80,860				\$80,860
Town of Elderon	\$63,165				\$63,165
Town of Emmet	\$92,722				\$92,722
Town of Frankfort	\$69,986				\$69,986
Town of Franzen	\$56,542				\$56,542
Town of Green Valley	\$57,136				\$57,136
Town of Guenther	\$35,883				\$35,883
Town of Halsey	\$68,009				\$68,009
Town of Hamburg	\$93,018				\$93,018
Town of Harrison	\$36,871				\$36,871
Town of Hewitt	\$63,462				\$63,462
Town of Holton	\$92,821				\$92,821
Town of Hull	\$78,388				\$78,388
Town of Johnson	\$94,600				\$94,600
Town of Knowlton	\$200,864				\$200,864
Town of Marathon	\$109,329				\$109,329
Town of McMillan	\$207,883				\$207,883
Town of Mosinee	\$216,779				\$216,779
Town of Norrie	\$98,752				\$98,752
Town of Plover	\$67,713				\$67,713
Town of Reid	\$127,517				\$127,517
Town of Rib Falls	\$103,395				\$103,395
Town of Rib Mountain	\$681,179				\$681,179
Town of Rietbrock	\$96,038				\$96,038
Town of Ringle	\$172,099				\$172,099
Town of Spencer	\$166,662				\$166,662
Town of Stettin	\$244,556				\$244,556
Town of Texas	\$156,085				\$156,085
Town of Wausau	\$218,361				\$218,361
Town of Weston	\$68,503				\$68,503

AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN 2021 DISTRIBUTIONS MARATHON COUNTY rescue pl

Town of Wien	\$86,395				\$86,395
Village of Athens	\$106,462				\$106,462
Village of Birnameood	\$1,582			\$75,719	\$77,301
Village of Dorchester	\$494	\$85,011			\$85,505
Village of Edgar	\$142,542				\$142,542
Village of Elderon	\$21,154				\$21,154
Village of Fenwood	\$15,322				\$15,322
Village of Hatley	\$59,014				\$59,014
Village of Kronenwetter	\$798,613				\$798,613
Village of Maine	\$254,441				\$254,441
Village of Marathon City	\$149,067				\$149,067
Village of Rothschild	\$520,646				\$520,646
Village of Spencer	\$185,641				\$185,641
Village of Stratford	\$155,887				\$155,887
Village of Unity	\$19,177	\$13,444			\$32,621
Village of Weston	\$1,499,266				\$1,499,266
	\$51,670,998	\$397,676	\$1,738,781	\$75,719	\$53,883,174