



**MARATHON COUNTY
BROADBAND TASK FORCE MEETING
MINUTES**

**Monday, May 17th, 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	
Emme McBride		X
Kent Olson		X
Wade Carroll	X	
Lance Leonhard		X
Amanda Ley	X	
Valerie Carrillo	X	
Kurt Gibbs	X	
Gerry Klein	X	
Vicki Resech		X
Jean Maszk	X	
Kurt Schoenrock	X	
Sco Nyman	X	

1. Call Meeting to Order

The meeting was called to order by Chair Robinson at 4:04pm. All participants were welcomed. Chair Robinson stated that he has accepted a resignation from the committee from Emmett McBride due to accepting a new position out of state.

2. Public Comments (15 Minute limit)

No public comment

3. Approval of the April 19, 2021 Broadband Task Force Meeting Minutes

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR CHILAR; SECOND BY SUPERVISOR GUILD TO APPROVE THE APRIL 19, 2021 BROADBAND TASK FORCE MEETING MINUTES. MOTION CARRIED.

4. Educational Presentations and Committee Discussion:

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

1. Discussion with RDOF Recipients Charter and LTD Wireless

Chair Robinson and Melinda Osterberg gave an update on a conversation with Charter pertaining to the RDOF. Marathon County stakeholders met with representatives from Charter. Charter staff were located across the State and represented the company's government affairs and construction divisions. During the conversation Charter presented general information on the RDOF and shared maps of their service area. Charter has not provided authorization to share the maps depicting their service area.

The FCC is in the process of reviewing Charter and LTD's applications for RDOF and they are awaiting the results of that review.

Chair Robinson met with LTD Wireless to discuss their RDOF schedule and LTD indicated that they may begin their planning process in later 2021. Board Chair Kurt Gibbs stated that one priority area that LTD mentioned was the Stratford area.

Gerry Klein shared a copy of the RDOF maps with the Task Force. Eric Budleski asked a question about the probability that Charter and LTD expanding in more populated areas than in the rural area where it is needed more.

Chair Robinson communicated that the internet service providers were likely to expand access in more densely populated areas to meet the 40% deployment requirement and that these areas presented a better return on investment. Chair Robinson suggested that the County should continue examining other options for broadband expansion.

B. Report On State And Federal Broadband Funding Opportunities

1. Federal American Rescue Plan

Chair Robinson stated that one of the areas outlined in the American Rescue Plan is funding for Broadband infrastructure. Marathon County's allocation is \$25 million with incorporated municipalities and towns also receiving allocations.

Board Chair Kurt Gibbs outlined some additional areas of opportunity, along with areas for future questions, in the American Rescue plan. Gibbs indicated that additional information is available through the Department of the Treasury website. Chair Robinson indicated that the County could utilize Rescue Fund dollars to accelerate the RDOF deployment and to incentivize service to areas completely lacking telecommunication infrastructure.

2. USDA Reconnect Program

Scott Nyman provided an update on the USDA Reconnect Program. He stated that six hundred million was available with the following breakdowns; Two hundred million available in loans, two hundred million in grants and then two hundred million available in combination grant and loan projects. Previously it had been difficult to find eligible areas in Marathon County due to program requirements. Nyman communicated that with changes to the program, there may be areas in Marathon County that would qualify for funding under this program. Areas eligible for this program cannot be allocated as part of RDOF and the eastern portion of the County should be eligible for participation in the program. Nyman indicated that he anticipates that there will be \$600 million of funding in the next cycle and that the County would be eligible to apply for these funds.

Chair Robinson communicated that the County had funds remaining for broadband expansion and the County will need to work with partners to utilize these dollars. Nyman indicated that there will be another PSC grant cycle and that these could be used for matching funds. Legislation has been introduced to revise grant criteria to include minimum matching funds and prioritization of fiber service.

Chair Robinson indicated that information on how to use the remaining broadband expansion funds would be discussed at the next meeting.

C. Broadband Affordability

1. Emergency Broadband Benefit and other direct to consumer programs

Melinda Osterberg gave an update on the Benefit program, which started last week. Osterberg provided information about how individuals can check their eligibility for the program, along with the benefits available through the program. Osterberg will be sharing links to the Charter process and the national program for the Task Force to share out with their contacts. To apply for Charter's program: https://www.spectrum.net/support/internet/emergency-broadband-benefit?cid=corpcom_EBB_0521 or to learn more about the program: <https://www.fcc.gov/broadbandbenefit>

Board Chair Kurt Gibbs stated that not all Internet Service Providers are not participating in this program.

Scott Nyman stated that Wittenberg Telephone is not participating in this program, however, they have an internal process to address this need directly. Nyman also mentioned that if people call Wittenberg Telephone about this, they will provide information about their specific program and how to access that opportunity. Scott Nyman expressed that they (Wittenberg Telecom) want to make Broadband affordable.

Supervisor Guild shared that she was looking forward to getting the materials about the program as she was eager to share it within her professional circles and with clientele.

5. Policy Discussion And Possible Action:

A. Develop a Process for Investing County Resources for Broadband Expansion Efforts

1. Broadband Project Evaluation Criteria

Melinda Osterberg gave an update on the evaluation criteria based upon the input gathered from the Task Force. The criterion evaluation sheet was shared with the meeting materials. The draft criteria was discussed. The Task Force will examine the criteria for an efficient timeline and how to address density in the evaluation process. The Task Force should establish the criteria at the June Task Force meeting.

B. Information on Gaps and Needs

1. Potential Broadband Survey

Melinda Osterberg gave an update on the Lincoln County Broadband survey and the potential for a survey to be replicated in Marathon County.

Supervisor Langenhan expressed that in order for Marathon County to truly understand where the true level of Broadband in the county, a survey may be needed. This would assist with grant applications and additional pursuits of funding.

Supervisor Guild advised that the Task Force begin with the end in mind and if a survey is conducted that the data gathered is something that we can use long term. Conducting a survey for survey sake is not something that the County should undertake.

Board Chair Gibbs questioned if the survey would help determine the lack of service for those that wanted to pay for service compared to those that would not want to subscribe to service.

Melinda Osterberg said that the primary data that has been collected has been anecdotal and when asked

by Internet Service Providers to provide addresses and concrete data, there are no data points to reference.

Klein stated that the County would have data on service availability, map the exact download/upload speeds, and the internet service providers in the area. The data gathered from a survey would benefit both the Task Force and Internet Services Providers as opportunities for funding continue to roll out.

Supervisor Chilar indicated that the survey would show County leadership and interest in expanding broadband access.

Chair Robinson stated that for the June meeting, a draft survey would need to be prepared, tentative survey population and budget.

6. Next Meeting Logistics And Topics

Chair Robinson stated that at the June meeting, the Task Force will refine the broadband project review criteria, determine how Marathon County can support broadband expansion in the County (Reconnect funds, Public Service Commission grant programs, ISP partnerships) and evaluate information on a potential survey.

There is a conflict with the third Monday of the month with the MCDEVCO Board meeting. There will be a doodle poll to examine the potential for new date and time after the June Broadband Task Force Meeting.

7. Adjournment

**Langenhahn motioned to adjourn, Budleski seconded. Motion carried unanimously. MEETING
ADJOURNED AT 5:41 PM.**