



**MARATHON COUNTY  
BROADBAND TASK FORCE MEETING  
MINUTES**

**Monday, June 21st, 2021 at 4:00 P.M.  
Conference Room 5, 212 River Drive, Wausau, WI**

<b>Members</b>	<b>Present/Web-Phone</b>	<b>Absent</b>
Chair John Robinson	X	
Randy Fifrick	X	
Eric Budleski	X	
Sandi Cihlar	X	
Sara Guild	X	
Jacob Langenhahn	X	
Jon Euting	X	
Milton Olson	X	
Wade Carroll		X
Lance Leonhard	X	
Kurt Gibbs	X	
Gerry Klein	X	
Melinda Osterberg	X	
Jean Maszk	X	
Kurt Schoenrock	X	
Scott Nyman	X	
Damien Sweeny	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 (15 Minute limit)**

No public comment

**3. Approval of the May 17, 2021 Broadband Task Force Meeting Minutes**

**MOTION BY SUPERVISOR CIHLAR; SECOND BY OLSON TO APPROVE THE MAY 17, 2021 BROADBAND TASK FORCE MEETING MINUTES. MOTION CARRIED.**

**4. Welcome and Introduction of New Task Force Members**

Chair Robinson introduced three new Broadband Task Force members Jon Euting, Kurt Schoenrock, and Milton Olson. Participants introduced themselves and relayed their interest in broadband expansion.

**5. Educational Presentations and Committee Discussion:**

**A. History and Overview of the Broadband Task Force**

Chair Robinson provided an overview of historic efforts to expand broadband access in Marathon County, including the 2009 Broadband Gap Analysis, 2020 Design Nine Broadband Assessment, meeting with area Internet Service Providers in March 2020, creation of the Broadband Task Force in late 2020 and further conversations with ISPs to expand broadband access. \$250,000 has been allocated in the Capital Improvement Fund for broadband expansion, some of which was allocated to Wittenberg Telephone as part of their PSC Broadband grant project.

There are several items that have posed a challenge for the Broadband Task Force's work, including: Wisconsin Statutes limiting the County's work in expanding broadband access, internet service providers concerned about low return on investment in low density rural areas, internet service providers reluctant

to use or rent fiber if owned by the County, and fiber being prioritized over other technologies by state and federal governments.

Administrator Leonhard relayed that the reason leasing of fiber worked in other jurisdictions is that the regulatory environment is different, allowing County government to directly provide broadband service.

Damien Sweeny, NetPros, indicated that his company would be interested in leasing fiber from the County. Klein relayed that historically the internet service providers had not demonstrated interest in working together to expand broadband access.

Chair Robinson relayed there are opportunities for broadband expansion, including the FCC Rural Digital Opportunity Fund and the 2021 WI PSC APRA Broadband Expansion grant program. The RDOF auction winners are finalizing contracts with the federal government with buildout 5-6 years from now. The County has been in communication with Charter about accelerating their timeline. There is \$100 million in funding available through the PSC ARPA grant program, with applications due July 27th. The PSC establishes a minimum speed of symmetrical 100 Mbps service. The County has also received ARPA funds which could be used for broadband expansion.

## **6. Policy Discussion And Possible Action:**

### **A. Approaches to Broadband Expansion**

#### **1. Legislative Changes to Foster Broadband Expansion**

Guild, Gibbs, Robinson, and Leonhard met with Senator Petroski to discuss legislative changes to foster broadband expansion. County representatives relayed that State funding is necessary to assist with broadband expansion.

Schoenrock indicated that there is an urgency to broadband expansion, particularly to assist with talent recruitment. Chair Robinson relayed that Bug Tussel has a Road to Digital Equity which is a staged approach including fiber to towers providing fixed wireless infrastructure, with eventual fiber to the home.

County Board Chair Gibbs stated that there could be a statutory change to allow counties to provide internet service, where incumbent ISPs do not want to provide service, however, there are significant burdens to that change.

Langenhahn indicated that additional information would be helpful prior to asking for legislative change.

Supervisor Cihlar stated that a legislative change would make a huge difference in broadband expansion and suggested that the County work with other stakeholders to advocate for this. Cihlar stated that the County should advocate for better broadband mapping at the State level.

Klein indicated that Brown County is working with a company to automate speed test data to demonstrate need to internet service providers.

Nyman indicated that homeowners could use assistance with connecting their home to existing fiber infrastructure.

Budleski stated that the County should partner with other local governments and stakeholders to advocate for local provision of broadband services.

Chair Robinson stated that the Task Force should create a document that summarizes legislative suggestions and present this at the next Broadband Task Force meeting.

## 2. 2021 WI PSC ARPA Broadband Expansion Grant

Marathon County stakeholders met on June 14 with Internet Service Providers to determine interest in partnering on a PSC ARPA Broadband Expansion Grant with a July 2nd deadline for partnership proposals. The Task Force will need to meet on July 7 at 4:00 PM to review any partnership proposals.

## 3. Kewaunee County Approach to Broadband Expansion

Chair Robinson relayed that Kewaunee County did a simple Request for Proposals for a countywide broadband expansion project. Scott, Kewaunee County Administrator, is willing to meet with the Task Force to share additional information on this project. Kewaunee County selected one Internet Service Provider to work with in pursuing grant funds and broadband expansion.

County Board Chair Gibbs stated that the County could follow a similar format, perhaps with multiple internet service providers. It was the consensus of the Task Force to ask the Kewaunee County Administrator to share information on their project at a July meeting.

## 4. Rural Broadband Survey

Osterberg relayed that the Task Force had discussed the benefits of conducting a rural broadband survey. Internet service providers have requested this information and this information can be helpful in demonstrating need in grant applications.

Olson stated that this information is necessary and his Town is interested in conducting a broadband survey. Budleski stated that the survey would help educate the general public while also providing information to the County. It was the consensus of the Task Force to move forward with a broadband survey of Marathon County, with the exception of the incorporated City of Wausau. A draft version of the survey will be sent to the Task Force on July 1st, with the Task Force reviewing the draft survey at the July 7th meeting.

## 5. Other Ideas from Committee

Nyman relayed that the NTIA funding applications are due in the next week and there are discussions of another round of funding for the Reconnect program. Nyman commented that fiber optic cable has a 70 week lead time and there are significant supply chain issues.

Langenhahn inquired how the ARPA funds would be allocated. Robinson reported that there will be a series of public listening sessions on how to use those funds and that Administrator Leonhard is working with Department Heads to determine where there was revenue loss.

## 6. Next Meeting Logistics And Topics

Chair Robinson stated there will be a special meeting on July 7th and the next regular meeting will be July 26th.

## 7. Adjournment

**Langenhahn motioned to adjourn, seconded by Olson. Motion carried unanimously. MEETING ADJOURNED AT 5:49 PM.**