



**MARATHON COUNTY
BROADBAND TASK FORCE MEETING**

Minutes

Monday, October 25, 2021 at 4:00 P.M.

WebEx/Room 5, 212 River Dr, Wausau WI

Members	Present/Web-Phone	Absent
Chair John Robinson	P	
Sandi Cihlar		x
Jon Euting		x
Sara Guild	W	
Jacob Langenhahn		x
Milton Olson	P	
Kurt Schoenrock	W	

Also Present: Gerald Klein, Valerie Carrillo

VIA Web or Phone: Jason Hausler, Jean Maszk, Sarah Dowidat, Chris Dickenson, Airrunner Networks, Eric Budleski, Lance Leonard, Steve Schneider, Scott Nyman

1. Call Meeting to Order: Chair Robinson called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m.
2. Public Comments (15 Minute limit) - None
3. **GUILD MAKE A MOTION; SECOND BY OLSON TO APPROVE THE AUGUST 23, 2021 BROADBAND TASK FORCE MEETING MINUTES. MOTION CARRIED.**

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

A. Update on Grant Applications For the Wisconsin PSC’s American Rescue Act Broadband Access Grant

Discussion:

Chair Robinson reported that many applications were submitted for the grant request. Of the 83 awarded, only 1 was to Marathon County to Wittenberg Tell. Letters of support were issued and the county committed \$62,992 toward their project. They were also awarded \$150,000. Of the multiple applications, letters of support, and project proposals, there was \$38,382,600 requested. All \$100 million of the American Rescue Plan dollars were used. Chair Robinson recommended the county meet with the Public Service Commission staff to see why their preference for smaller projects and we can do to strengthen project going forward.

B. Update on Marathon County/Charter application to NTIA

Discussion:

Chair Robinson has a call into Celeste Flynn from Charter Communications. A decision is still expected later this year and there have been no other updates.

C. Update on Rural Development Opportunities Fund

Discussion:

Chair Robinson reported that the Federal Communications Commission held an auction for the person that could provide the service for the least amount of money. CCO Holdings LLC (Charter Communications) and LTD Broadband LLC were the top two awarded at the national level. These were also the bids that were accepted in Marathon County. Currently the FCC has awarded approximately \$1 billion of the \$9.2 billion grants or bids for proceeding nationwide.

D. Potential Federal and State Funding Sources for Broadband Expansion and Affordability

Discussion:

The federal infrastructure bill passed the Senate and is still up for consideration in the House. There is \$65 billion in there for broadband expansion programs. There are also many proposals that deal with access and affordability. The state also has their grant submitted but likely won’t know more until after the first of the year.

5. **Policy Discussion And Possible Action:**

A. Support For Bug Tussel Conduit Bonding Proposal

Discussion:

Steve Schneider is the president of Bug Tussel. Tomorrow evening (10-26-21), the county board will be looking to adapt a final resolution and entering an intergovernmental agreement with several other counties to

provide a public bond issuance to Bug Tussel to expand wireless and fiber throughout Marathon County. The proposal is a guarantee replenishment of debt service fund so there are no outflow of dollars from the county. The proposal includes:

- To provide quickly fixed wireless service that is between 25 and 100 megabits per second to those without other current options. This would be done on towers that would also provide expansion of cellular service in the area.
- Several new towers would be built as well as continued partnerships with existing towers.
- The megabits are only a short term fix. It is anticipated that within 7-10 years, everything will be fiber. Currently, there is approximately 400 miles of fiber expected to be used.
- Bug Tussel will be rolling out Tussel University as a community education program to help teach other about how to use broadband.
- There has been movement to ramping up the timing of the fiber instillation.
- Per the map, the fiber will be run past approximately 15 county properties that include radio communications for law enforcement and fire. The fiber size will vary depending on where it is in the county.
- Currently the fiber lines will go past approximately 4,600 business or residential homes.

Action:

MOTION BY OLSEN; SECOND BY SCHOENROCK; TO MOVE TO SUPPORT BUG TUSSEL LOAN THROUGH THE COUNTY BOARD. MOTION CARRIED.

B. Marathon County's Future Role As A Fiscal Partner For Broadband Expansion

1. Define Role of County
 - Minimum standards for county participation.
 - Once partner with someone, expectation that there will be transparency with fiber routes. It is currently very difficult to understand where the fiber runs.
 - From a planning perspective, there is a need to know where there are potential links to splice into existing fiber to maintain a cost effective, timely manner.
2. Identify Service Gaps
 - Review of Marathon County Broadband Survey and Distribution Plan
 - a) Survey will be beneficial in order to move away from FCC maps that are not accurate and more detailed information.
 - b) What type of survey do we do? Postcard? Supervisors connect with constituents? Still connect with Geo Partners LLC?
3. Commitments: Financial and Other
 - Potential use of ARPA funds
 - a) County will be receiving \$26.3 million that must be committed by December 31, 2024 with the funds spent by 2026. Broadband can be included in these funds.
 - b) Does the county go along with the dollars funded? Should we require a local match from the communities served? How do we connect with the hard to reach areas of the county?
4. Expectations of Internet Service Providers/Partners
 - They should disclose where their systems are located. They are in the public right away and that they are using public dollars. Who do we look to partner with that is willing to disclose this information?
5. Partnerships to extend service too hard to reach areas
 - What can partners do to help reach the areas that are topographically challenged?
6. Staff support for broadband expansion efforts
 - Kathy Johnson has replaced Nancy Anderson at the UW Extension. There is no current replacement for Melinda. There is current discussion if Melinda's position

will be refilled with state and county dollars or if the funds will be moved strictly to the county in a position in the administrator's office. The task force has a consensus that there is a need to provide support to broadband efforts in the county.

C. Development of a Request for Proposals for Broadband Services (based on Kewaunee County approach)

- It was discussed that due to shifting circumstances along with other decisions and opportunities, to not continue pursuing services on a county-wide basis, based on the Kewaunee County approach. Quorum was not present to make a motion.

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6. Next Meeting: Monday, November 15, 2021

7. Adjournment by Chair Robinson at 5:40 p.m. No motion as quorum was not present.

Respectfully Submitted by,
Kathy Johnson