



BROADBAND TASK FORCE MINUTES

Tuesday, July 28, 2020
212 River Drive, Room 5, Wausau WI 54403

Attendance:

Melinda Osterberg
John Robinson, Chair

Present

Absent

Also Present:

VIA Web or Phone:

Katrina Becker
Eric Budleski
Sandi Cihlar
Andy Faust
Randy Fifrick
Kurt Gibbs
Jeffrey Glazer
Sara Guild
Gerard Klein
Lance Leonhard
Amanda Ley
Emmett McBride
Kent Olson
Peter Weinschenk, Record Review
Brian Kowalski, City Pages

AGENDA ITEMS

1. **Call Meeting to Order**

Meeting was called to order by Chair John Robinson at 10:33 a.m.

2. **Welcome and Introductions**

Participants introduced themselves and discussed their interest in high speed internet.

POLICY DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION

3. **Review of Broadband Task Force Charter**

The Task Force Charter outlines the responsibilities and the duties of the task force to help the Marathon County Board move forward to develop policy and to determine its role in expanding Broadband services to the residents. Tasked with identifying strategies, partners and funding resources that will support Broadband services addressing public safety and access needs.

4. **Past Marathon County Broadband Efforts/Studies**

A. **Design Nine**

Consultant was hired in 2019 after inclusion of broadband expansion was identified in Marathon County's updated Strategic Plan. This study provided an analysis of how the County could expand access to high speed internet.

B. Internet Service Provider (ISP) Meeting in March 2020

Current ISPs include Charter (cable) in the urban areas, Frontier (DSL), Satellite, and Cell Phone Hotspots. Frontier uses old copper phone lines that were installed in the 1950s and run their internet technology over those lines. They received major funding to expand their DSL capability and are still in the process of building out this service, which is very slow. Wireless ISPs include companies that deliver internet service by broadcasting a Wifi signal, however, this only service is limited to 10-15 homes per area. Wireless ISP can only go where they can see (literally), this is often referred to line of sight.

C. Public Safety Concern

Frontier has filed for bankruptcy and regular landline service has been compromised. Many rural area homes do not have cell service or internet service. Residents cannot call 911 which presents a significant public safety concern. Phone companies are no longer required by State Statute to provide service. Many existing and new homes have no access to any telecommunication infrastructure.

D. Routes to Recovery and Other Funding Opportunities

There are State and Federal funding opportunities and representatives from Senator Baldwin and Johnson offices have stated their interest in helping where they can.

EDUCATIONAL PRESENTATIONS AND COMMITTEE DISCUSSION

5. Presentation on the Statutory Authority for Provision of Broadband by: Jeffrey Glazer, Clinical Associate Professor UW Madison Law and Entrepreneurship Clinic

Jeffrey Glazer provided a broad overview of the Statutory framework regulating the governmental provision of broadband service. Many rules are designated at the municipal level. Statutes do not address rules at the county level. The provision regulating broadband is contained within two (2) sets of statutes, 66 and 196. Statute 66 regulates municipalities and Statute 196 regulates utilities. No local government can directly or indirectly construct, own or operate a facility for Broadband service to the public unless the government meets certain conditions, including:

- Holding a public hearing on a proposed ordinance that would authorize the municipality to proceed with the project
- Thirty days before the hearing, the local government would need to make available a report estimating all costs and revenues

Several “grandfather provisions” do apply allowing municipalities to be exempt from the default rules

- Provided public television prior to 2004
- Verifying with an ISP if they intend to cover an area. If the service provider indicates they are not interested in serving an area, the municipality can provide that service
- A for profit and governmental entity partnership

Discussion was held on the municipal statutes and their effect on Marathon County’s smaller municipalities. In light of the current health situation with COVID-19, will there be impetus to update these statutes to allow our municipalities to provide infrastructure.

Attendees thanked Jeffrey Glazer for his presentation.

Gerry Klein reported that funds from the CARES Act could be used to fund rural broadband. Funds would need to be incurred prior to November 5th. The County is examining ways to use these funds to increase broadband access to underserved areas. We are looking to hear from the County’s school districts on

where students have difficulty accessing high speed internet. The County has also asked for input on ISPs on underserved areas. DC Everest is looking at options with different technologies. The County should also examine strengthening internet access in existing central areas such as libraries, job centers or schools where it could be offered at no charge. The County should also examine a cooperative model.

Next Meeting, Logistics and Topics

6. Next steps should include:

- Examine use of Routes to Recovery funding to develop a pilot project and/or expand hot spots
- Confer with the Wisconsin Counties Association on the County's role in providing high speed internet
- Andy Faust of the North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission is on the Governor's Broadband Task Force and can act as a liaison between The County and State

7. Next regular meeting: Melinda Osterberg will send out a Doodle poll to determine a meeting time on August 17 or 18.

8. Adjournment

There being no further business to discuss, meeting adjourned at 12:31 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Nancy Anderson