



BROADBAND TASK FORCE MINUTES

Monday, December 7, 2020
212 River Drive, Room 5, Wausau WI 54403

Attendance: **Present**
M. Osterberg

Absent
K. Becker
W. Carroll
J. Langenhahn

Also Present:

VIA Web or Phone:

E. Budleski
V. Carrillo
S. Cihlar
A. Faust, North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission
K. Gibbs
S. Guild
J. Hapli
J. Hausler
G. Klein
L. Leonhard
A. Ley
E. McBride
K. Olson
V. Resech, MCDEVCO
J. Robinson, Chair
Three members of the general public

AGENDA ITEMS

1. **Call Meeting to Order**
The meeting was called to order by Chair Robinson at 4:00 pm. All participants were welcomed.
2. **Public Comments**
No public comments were presented.
3. **Approval of the Minutes of the October 26, 2020 and November 16, 2020 meetings**
Cihlar motioned to approve the of the October 26, 2020 and November 16, 2020 meetings as presented. Motion was seconded by Guild. Motion was carried unanimously.

EDUCATIONAL PRESENTATIONS AND COMMITTEE DISCUSSION

4. **Update on State Public Service Commission Broadband Expansion Grant Applications for the Wittenberg Telephone Fiber to the Home and the Marathon County Wireless Broadband Expansion Projects**
Wittenberg Telephone and Bug Tussel confirmed they submitted applications for funding under the State of Wisconsin Public Service Commission Broadband Expansion Grant program. The Marshfield Clinic has indicated that they will contribute up to \$30,000 for projects that receive funding through the State program in Marathon County.
Cihlar inquired if there was the possibility of leveraging the Marshfield Clinic donation and initiating a challenge to other community partners to invest in broadband efforts moving forward.
5. **Update on WIFI Access at Library Facilities.**
Klein provided an update on expanding Wi-Fi access at library locations. Klein indicated that six wireless access points had been ordered and that installation was in progress. Klein also relayed that fiber has been installed in the Hatley area and will be connected in the near future.

POLICY DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION:

6. Discussion of Task Force 2021 Work Plan

A. Develop a process for allocating County resources for future projects.

Robinson explained the need for the Task Force to develop a formal request for proposal process. The request for proposals process would enable the County to evaluate projects in a transparent, efficient manner. As part of this process, the Task Force will need to establish minimum levels of service associated with broadband proposals that Marathon County would want to support.

McBride indicated that 25/3 Mbps speeds are only sufficient for single student households, but can be problematic when multiple students and parents are working from home. McBride also communicated that students often exceed set data limits.

Budleski indicated that the Task Force should demand levels of service comparable with what is available in urban areas. Budleski indicated that 25/3 Mbps is barely sufficient for two adults and two children working remotely. Budleski communicated that 10/3 Mbps would be fine if service was provided free of cost, 50/10 Mbps is feasible and would be an acceptable minimum.

Olson indicated that the Task Force should also consider the economic feasibility of demanding higher speed internet access in rural areas.

Budleski requested that the Task Force examine encouraging municipalities to become Broadband Forward communities as part of the 2021 Work Plan.

Cihlar indicated that the Task Force should examine how proposed legislation would impact broadband expansion.

B. Examine Role of Marathon County in Rural Digital Opportunity Fund

Robinson explained that the County should reach out to the companies that were awarded funding under the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund to determine if there are opportunities to accelerate the process or improve the resulting service. This topic will be addressed at the January Broadband Task Force meeting.

C. Evaluate Finance Tools, Including Conduit Financing

Robinson communicated that Bug Tussel Wireless has used conduit financing to expand high speed internet access in other Wisconsin counties. This is a tool that Marathon County should have available to internet service providers, which enables providers to have low cost access to financing, guaranteed by Marathon County.

Chair Gibbs relayed that there may be an opportunity to partner with Wood County on joint financing for the Bug Tussel project.

D. Develop Recommendation on Policy for Use of County Towers and Facilities for Broadband Expansion

Leonhard relayed that the County Board would appreciate the Task Force's insight on what should be evaluated when the County reviews proposals for co-locating on County facilities.

E. Develop a Process to Leverage Community Resources to Support Broadband Expansion

1. Identify funding partners.

The Task Force will examine fully engaging MCDEVCO in 2021 and identify funding partners, similar to the support the Marshfield Clinic provided the 2020 PSC Grants

2. Develop engagement plan.

The Task Force will examine development of a plan to engage potential partners, such as with the Greater Wausau Prosperity Partnership. Cihlar relayed that Boulder Junction could be a good example of how to engage the public in broadband expansion. Olson indicated that clearly communicating the work of the Task Force is important. Robinson communicated that the Task Force should examine creating a FAQ document to help communicate its work.

7. **Next Meeting Logistics and Topics**

The next Task Force meeting is scheduled for January 11, 2021 at 4:00 PM.

8. **Next Steps**

The Task Force will meet every 3rd Monday of the month at 4:00 PM in 2021.

9. **Adjourn**

The meeting was adjourned at 4:53 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Melinda Osterberg