

**KANDIYOHI COUNTY AND CITY OF WILLMAR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION (EDC)
BROADBAND AND ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE MEETING
MINUTES
May 3, 2021
Via ZOOM Video Conference**

Present: Mark Boeschen, Donna Boonstra, Bruce DeBlieck, Jason Hulstein, Roger Imdieke, Tony Kirby, Larry Kleindl, Michelle Marotzke, Ryan Nelson, Rollie Nissen and David Sisser

Excused Dean Bouta

Absent: Glenn Otteson and Ramsey Schaffnit

Guest: Goldie Smith

Staff: Connie Schmoll, Business Development Manager

Secretarial: Cathy Skindelien, Legal & Administrative Assistants, Inc. (LAA)

Chairperson Mark Boeschen called the meeting to order at approximately 10:06 a.m.

AGENDA—Chair Boeschen added to the agenda a new item 5 to accept the resignation of Ramsey Schaffnit.

IT WAS MOVED BY Bruce DeBlieck, SECONDED BY Rollie Nissen, to approve the revised Agenda.
MOTION CARRIED.

MINUTES—

IT WAS MOVED BY Rollie Nissen, SECONDED BY Donna Boonstra to approve the Minutes of the April 5, 2021 meeting as emailed. MOTION CARRIED.

Resignation of Ramsey Schaffnit.

IT WAS MOVED BY Donna Boonstra, SECONDED BY David Sisser, to accept the resignation of Ramsey Schaffnit with regrets. MOTION CARRIED.

Welcome Guest. Chair Boeschen welcomed guest, Goldie Smith, who would like to join this committee.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS—

4-Township broadband project. Connie Schmoll reported the 4-Township broadband project is moving along. The leaders are working with the townships to identify the number of sites with 911 addresses occupied as a residence or a business. Kevin Beyer from Federated Telephone Cooperative is working on the engineering portion to submit with the state border-to-border grant application. Federal funds are expected by the state for broadband. The leadership group continues to meet; their next meeting is May 12th at which the township attorney will also be present. The group is working on mapping, parcel determination and how people will be

assessed. Beyer has attended these meetings also and has been very helpful answering questions. Other townships (Norway Lake, Lake Andrew, Colfax, Green Lake and Burbank) are asking to be part of the project. They should be included on the next project to possibly begin in January 2022 with American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act funds. Chair Boeschen Holland Township is also interested. The city of Prinsburg is interested in a project, which could be funded on its own through a grant under the state's Small Cities Development Program. The criteria includes meeting an immediate health need, benefitting people of low and moderate incomes and to eliminate a blighted area. The low income level must be at 51%, which would eliminate Prinsburg so they may need to work with a township. Due to the ARP funds, Arvig is interested in doing a project in Kandiyohi County. The EDC will continue to work with Arvig; however, the four townships are the top priority for this year. Larry Kleindl reported that John DeGrote, Superintendent of Central Minnesota Christian School in Prinsburg, contacted him and the mayor of Prinsburg about improving broadband for the school. The school is interested in Arvig as it is two miles away and Hanson Communications is also in the area. Vibrant Broadband through Meeker Cooperative Light and Power Association is interested in working in the northeast part of the county, but it is not all fiber.

ARP funds. Kleindl reported there are no guidelines yet from the U.S. Treasury on the ARP funds. Kandiyohi County has the necessary information ready and just needs guidance to move forward.

Community Development Block Grant Coronavirus (CDBG-CV) Program. The CDBG-CV grant was being considered for a project in Prinsburg. Schmoll asked if there are other communities that could benefit, possibly Hawick? Kleindl reported townships could qualify for this grant, but need a population with 51% low income. Charter is interested in doing broadband at 199th and 141st Avenues by New London and the Chadwick Estates area. Last year Spicer was not in a position to pay the match of \$27,000. The anticipated cost for the Chadwick Estates project is \$197,000, which would require a match of \$94,000. Roger Imdieke thought Vibrant Broadband and Minnesota Underground were doing lateral borings in the area of 199th Avenue in Spicer last week and voiced a concern that Charter may now be interested; Charter continues to service convenient areas, leaving gaps in service. Kleindl agreed this will be a challenge as many providers are calling because they know money is available.

Imdieke suggested the committee should know exactly where and how far out each provider plans to go. Schmoll stated providers are very resistant to sharing information, including where they have fiber and their service areas. The committee discussed whether or not the county could make receiving this information a contingency for using ARP funds. Kandiyohi County has some details of where digging has been done, but does not have a current detailed map. Chair Boeschen stated we cannot force providers to provide service and we do not want to hold up people who already have good service. Schmoll stated the EDC can contest a provider's service area through the state border-to-border grant process, if it is not serving everyone. The State of Minnesota will then ask the provider if it plans to service the area in the next two years, so it will get first chance, which could cause problems for people who are already getting good service in that area. Kleindl asked if Vibrant was going outside its service area, would Kandiyohi Power Cooperative (KPC) allow use of its poles. Ryan Nelson replied that no one has asked yet, but KPC probably would allow it. Vibrant would have to get its own easements and Nelson felt it unlikely that they would ask.

Schmoll asked if the committee should work with Charter on the three areas of interest. Kleindl stated Charter is interested in having a conversation at the committee's next meeting. Chair Boeschen stated the committee could invite Charter to the next meeting to see what it is proposing. Imdieke suggested Charter be asked to provide a map of what it would service. It was suggested the committee set a minimum percentage for coverage or a formula to use, including coverage of the last mile. Kleindl recommended the committee provide expectations and set ground rules. Every Minnesota county will be applying for ARP funds so we cannot set the

rules too strict. Charter provides 100 Mbps download and 20 Mbps upload speeds, but not necessarily with fiber.

On the current project for the four townships, the county will accept the lowest bid from whoever will service the entire area. Then the county would move on to the next townships. Chair Boeschen mentioned that lack of competition is an issue; there are some areas that have only one provider. Schmoll will request proposals from local providers and invite Charter to attend the June meeting.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS

Education/Marketing. Michelle Marotzke reported that the subcommittee is just starting. A presentation is ready for the county. It was recommended that marketing should start for the townships for the next project. The next action item is to go out to the citizens of the four townships to request they sign a petition supporting the project. An attorney will need to answer whether the township board members can handle the petition, otherwise we will need a champion for each township. Marotzke will work on a two-page handout for the petition. Kleindl said the committee was on KWLM's Open Mic to educate people on the importance of broadband. Marotzke stated it could be beneficial to have a booth at the Kandiyohi County Fair, if it is happening this year.

Grant Writing. Schmoll reported the subcommittee is working on language for the grant application, but the application form for this year is not yet available. The subcommittee will continue to work on obtaining letters of support. The EDC currently has 50 letters of support, including from the Willmar School District, but no other schools have responded. Nissen will request a letter from Rohner's Auto Parts.

Adoption of Broadband. Sisser reported he met with Jason Hulstein and Schaffnit on April 12th on what needs to be done. Sisser will put information together and email it to the committee.

NEW BUSINESS

LTD Broadband discussion. Chair Boeschen reported he met with LTD Broadband and Federated. LTD stated the more business we give them the faster it will get done. The state grant program will not allow LTD and Federated to work together. LTD now services a section of St. Johns Township with turkey barns. These areas are determined by Federal Communications Commission (FCC) criteria. Schmoll stated LTD is willing to provide service to anyone in the sited area, who is without service. Federated wants its project to be contiguous; it will go right up to LTD's area, but no farther. LTD was informed this committee would not pay anything in addition to the federal funds it received.

Strategic Planning Session. Schmoll reported three priority issues were identified at the EDC's Strategic Planning Session with broadband being first followed by workforce development and business services. Also identified were childcare and housing. The facilitator recommended all of these issues be combined into one committee as infrastructure, but the EDC's boards elected to leave the Broadband and Advanced Technology Committee as it is. The overall goal for this committee is to educate, lobby, collaborate and secure future broadband service throughout Kandiyohi County. The two-year goal is to have 50% of the county receiving 100 Mbps download and 20 Mbps upload service and 100% receiving it in five years. The planning session process is not complete and the boards will continue to finalize it. Chair Boeschen added that this committee's objectives should be ranked as follows: 1) educate, 2) collaborate and 3) lobby. Schmoll will make these changes in the priority summary sentence.

REPORTS

Rural Broadband Coalition. Schmoll attended the last part of the last meeting and Marotzke the first part. Schmoll reported that ARP funds were discussed. It was clarified that when the state talked about having to use ARP funds first, it was not for the counties, but that the state would use those funds for the border-to-border grant program. The state Senate was looking at \$30 million for broadband with up to \$120 million. The Coalition concentrated on its strategic planning process. It is having trouble with funding and paying its lobbyists. The EDC contributed additional funds at the end of 2020. Everyone needs to contribute to keep the lobbying. The Coalition is deciding on its fee structure as many involved in the Coalition have not been paying anything. An intern is working on its social media. The Coalition also discussed the speed test initiative and will be doing another push for that initiative. The FCC speed test was only measuring mobile devices.

Schmoll reported Carris Health has joined a telehealth group in support of broadband, which is a positive step. Schmoll will follow up on this.

ADJOURNMENT—There being no further business,

IT WAS MOVED, SECONDED AND CARRIED to adjourn the meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 11:02 a.m.

NEXT MEETING—The next regular committee meeting is **10 a.m., Monday, June 7, 2021** via ZOOM video conference.