

**KANDIYOHI COUNTY AND CITY OF WILLMAR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION (EDC)  
BROADBAND AND ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE MEETING**

**MINUTES**

**September 13, 2021**

**Kandiyohi County Health & Human Services Building, Willmar and Via ZOOM Video Conference**

**Present:** Mark Boeschen, Donna Boonstra (via Zoom), Dean Bouta (via Zoom), Bruce DeBlieck, Jason Hulstein, Roger Imdieke, Larry Kleindl, Michelle Marotzke, Rollie Nissen, David Sisser and Goldie Smith (via Zoom)

**Absent:** Tony Kirby, Glen Otteson and Ryan Nelson

**Guest:** Nathan Reuss, Mid-Minnesota Development Commission

**Staff:** Sarah Swedburg, Business Development Manager

**Contractor:** Connie Schmoll

**Secretarial:** Cathy Skindeliem, Legal and Administrative Assistants, Inc. (LAA)

Chairperson Mark Boeschen called the meeting to order at approximately 10:32 a.m.

**AGENDA**—Chair Boeschen revised the room number for the October 4, 2021 meeting from 2057 to 2075. The revised Agenda was approved unanimously.

Nathan Reuss from Mid-Minnesota Development Commission (MMDC) was welcomed and introduced to everyone in attendance.

**MINUTES**—

IT WAS MOVED BY Rollie Nissen, SECONDED BY Michelle Marotzke, to approve the Minutes of the August 2, 2021 meeting as emailed. MOTION CARRIED.

**UNFINISHED BUSINESS**—

**Arvig.** Schmoll reported she met with the Prinsburg city council a few weeks ago. Kandiyohi County will be asked to contribute \$330,000 in American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds toward the Prinsburg broadband project. Arvig drew up an agreement, however, fiber to the premise was not mentioned as it had plans to go only to those who wanted services. Connie Schmoll challenged this, citing use of county and federal funds, and Arvig agreed to set up service for everyone. At least 209 will be served, possibly more. There is a meeting tomorrow morning to discuss the exact number of residents and businesses.

**Charter's Expansion Plans.** Chair Boeschen and some committee members meet with Charter today to discuss its revised plans. They will report on that information next month. Charter's plan for 141<sup>st</sup> Avenue has been approved and will use coaxial cable. They will not apply for a Border-to-Border grant. Kandiyohi County will need to do a subrecipient agreement with Charter before any of the ARP dollars can be spent.

**Vibrant's Expansion Plans.** There is no update on Vibrant Broadband. The language on how the ARP funds can be spent is still an issue. Boeschen will try to get clarification this month. Vibrant's ability to provide 100 megabits per second (Mbps) download/20 Mbps upload speed remains an issue.

**National Telecommunications & Information Administration (NTIA) Grant.** Schmoll reported the NTIA grant application has been submitted for seven townships in Kandiyohi County. If the NTIA grant submission is unsuccessful, the committee will apply for the Border-to-Border grant for the four townships (Arctander, Dovre, Mamre and St. Johns) this year and the remaining three (Colfax, Lake Andrew and Norway Lake) next year. The state will not put requests for proposals out until the NTIA grants are awarded at the end of November. Border-to-Border is waiting for rules on ARP and requests for proposals may not be out until January of next year.

The NTIA has requested follow-up information on the grant application, which is a good sign. Marotzke reported it has requested three pieces of information:

1. Clarification about whether the grant applicant was subject to an approval process from the state. This is not a requirement in Minnesota.
2. Census tract numbers were submitted, but needed to be re-submitted on a spreadsheet.
3. Expanded information on the budget for the project, submitted on a spreadsheet.

The information will be submitted in the next few days. The NTIA estimated it could fund 200 grants. Two hundred and thirty applications were received, and dollar-wise the requests were 10 times higher than the available funds. Grant recipients will be announced on November 29<sup>th</sup>. If the NTIA grant is awarded to Kandiyohi County, the Border-to-Border grant will not be necessary for the seven townships. Roger Imdieke asked if the committee could find another project for Border-to-Border funds if the NTIA grant is awarded. A Vibrant project with Burbank, Green Lake and New London Townships was suggested. Larry Kleindl reported they are still working on whether two federal funding streams can be used for Border-to-Border. Cory Becker, District Outreach Representative for U.S. Representative Michelle Fischbach, is aware of the situation as is State Representative Dave Baker. The total cost of the four-township Border-to-Border project is \$10 million. If it becomes necessary to apply for the Border-to-Border grant, the request will be for 48-50% of the project cost. Kandiyohi County would provide \$1.3 million. The state could decide to allocate funds other than ARP, which would solve the problem of two federal funding streams.

## **REPORTS—**

**2021 Township Broadband Projects.** Colfax, Lake Andrew and Norway Lake Townships are now starting communications. The committee needs to discuss if ARP funds should be used. If the NTIA grant is not awarded, these townships will apply for the Border-to-Border grant next year. This again raises the question of whether Border-to-Border and ARP funds can be used on the same project. The original total expected from ARP funds was \$4.1 million. The County Commissioners agreed to 75% which would add another \$2 million. Schmoll will notify the three townships that the Broadband Committee is in favor of requesting ARP funds from Kandiyohi County for their project. Kleindl asked if the Committee should start working with LTD Broadband in the southern part of Kandiyohi County. Chair Boeschen responded that LTD Broadband should be approved on

a federal level before discussions can start. Schmoll suggested that LTD Broadband could be used to focus on the islands that are left out after the other projects are completed.

**SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS--**

**Education/Marketing.** Sarah Swedburg reported that the EDC has gone through the interview process and has a final candidate for its Marketing and Communications Specialist position. The new person will start in mid-November or early December. This will be a good resource for the Broadband Committee.

Marotzke reported the Southwest Minnesota Broadband Forum will be Thursday, September 16th at 1:00 p.m. The Blandin Foundation is holding these throughout the state. MMDC is working with the Upper Minnesota Valley Regional Development Commission in Appleton and the Southwest Initiative Foundation to promote the forum. Bree Maki from Senator Tina Smith's office will be joining to talk about broadband. Todd Hagen from Ehlers will speak about public finance options. Ryan Lange from Lange Ag systems will discuss how broadband impacts the agriculture industry. There will be a Question & Answer session afterwards. The forum will be virtual, and people can also participate from the MMDC office.

**Grant Writing.** Schmoll may need last-minute letters of support, particularly from farmers.

**Adoption.** Schmoll requested a plan or timeline for getting information into the hands of the users. Dave Sisser will work on that.

**Rural Broadband Coalition.** Swedburg reported the Rural Broadband Coalition met last month for an update session. Information was shared about the Blandin Foundation's regional broadband meetings, which will lead up to its Broadband Conference on October 12-14. The conference will be virtual, 3 hours each day from 9:00 a.m to noon.

**ADJOURNMENT**—There being no further business,

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

The meeting was adjourned at 11:08 a.m.

**NEXT MEETING**—The next regular committee meeting is **10:00 a.m., Monday, November 8, 2021** at Room 2075, Kandiyohi County Health and Human Services Building, Willmar and via Zoom video conference.