

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

**March 6, 2023**

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

Present: Duane Anderson, Kelsey Baker, Mark Boesch, Jesse Gislason, Jason Hulstein (via Zoom), Roger Imdieke, Tony Kirby (via Zoom), Michelle Marotzke, Rollie Nissen, David Sisser and Brian Zawieruch (via Zoom)

Excused: Bruce DeBlieck and Ryan Nelson

Absent: Goldie Smith

Secretarial: Cathy Skindelen, Legal & Administrative Assistants, Inc.

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

**MINUTES—**

IT WAS MOVED BY Rollie Nissen, SECONDED BY David Sisser, to approve the Minutes of the February 6, 2022 meeting as emailed. MOTION CARRIED.

**UNFINISHED BUSINESS—**

**STATE BORDER-TO-BORDER BROADBAND DEVELOPMENT GRANTS 2023.**

**East Lake Lillian, Lake Elizabeth and Harrison Townships.** Sarah Swedburg and Luke Johnson, Vibrant Broadband, met with each township to identify farms and businesses located therein. The Border-to-Border grant was submitted prior to the deadline. Several letters of support from local residents were received, as well as letters from Representatives Dean Urdahl and Dave Baker.

**Lake Andrew and Colfax Townships.** Charter plans to submit Border-to-Border grant applications on two projects, the first covering unserved and underserved residents in parts of Colfax, Lake Andrew, New London and Burbank Townships (see attached). Chair Boesch brought the information to New London and Lake Andrew Townships without committee recommendation due to time constraints. Charter is asking for letters of support and a financial commitment of any amount that would show local commitment to the project and improve the chances of a successful application. New London Township voted to provide letters of support with no financial commitment. Chair Boesch presented a letter to the Lake Andrew Township board (see attached) listing its broadband options, which includes Federated Telephone Cooperative's Border-to-Border project that will be delayed until the next available funding round, Charter's Border-to-Border project with financial commitment from the township, Charter's Border-to-Border project without financial commitment and

additional talks with existing providers. The board voted unanimously to provide letters of support and \$10,000 to Charter, although the project does not cover the entire township. Residents not included in the project can apply for the Line Extension Connection Program offered by the state of Minnesota. The second project proposed by Charter will compete with the Vibrant project in East Lake Lillian, Lake Elizabeth and Harrison Townships and will not be approved by the committee.

**Digital Equity.** Michelle Marotzke will lead the newly-formed Digital Connection Task Force. The task force has two required responsibilities, to receive and share planning updates from the Office of Broadband Development (OBD) and to allow OBD to list the task force in a public directory. Optional requirements include gathering information from surveys, attending virtual networking sessions, providing feedback on a draft Digital Equity Plan in late August – late September, and create a network of partners. Marotzke applied for a grant of \$4000 to reimburse Mid-Minnesota Development Commission for Marotzke’s time and pay for marketing expenses. Marotzke asked for volunteers to join the task force, which will be active from April through June 2023. The goal is to achieve internet access to the economically challenged and older citizens, and provide hotspots for students who don’t have internet access at home. Internet education will also be addressed, including information on how to avoid being scammed. A facilitator could be provided to make the public aware of related classes offered by the American Association of Retired Persons. Suggestions for potential members of the task force included representatives from the United Community Action Partnership, Willmar Public Library and outlying communities, such as New London. Sisser volunteered to be a member.

## **NEW BUSINESS—**

**2023 Projects – Next Steps.** Future plans for the committee include identifying new areas in need of service, getting ready for the next round of grants in the fall, and having new project conversations with providers. The Cities of Lake Lillian and Blomkest are the next priorities. These projects will be funded with city and county funds from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). Letters of support for these areas should be encouraged now. Information will be gathered from the remaining townships regarding farms, businesses and community institutions. Townships will be encouraged to consider how much they are willing to allocate for broadband purposes. Chair Boesch and Swedburg will attend the annual county township meeting on March 20, 2023, with a message of “help us and let’s get ready.” Vibrant Broadband and Charter are willing to take on new projects. Providers will work with Chair Boesch when organizing new projects.

## **GRANTS—**

**American Rescue Plan Act Funds.** Chair Boesch stated Kandiyohi County has approximately \$3 million in ARPA funds earmarked for broadband that must be allocated by the end of 2024. There will be one or two more rounds of state Border-to-Border grants in that timeframe. The committee will need to decide if it should recommend spending higher amounts on individual projects or return some of the funds to the county for allocation elsewhere. This decision should be made in late 2023 to ensure the commissioners have enough time to reallocate the funds, unless an extension occurs.

## **REPORTS—**

### **CURRENT LOCAL PROJECTS.**

**West FFTP – Federated.** Marotzke attended the Federated Telephone Cooperative (FTC) open house, reporting that FTC has a well-organized system, with everything laid out very well. Approximately 60 people attended with 15 people signing permission slips to have fiber run to their homes. FTC is running ahead of schedule receiving permission slips. Plans are to complete the four-township project this year and the Chippewa County project next year.

**City of Willmar.** Sisser reported the City of Willmar will move forward with an open-access fiber network provided by Hometown Fiber. The installed fiber will be initially owned by Hometown Fiber and eventually by the City of Willmar. Providers will be allowed to join the internal network. Hometown Fiber will secure the bonds at no risk to the city. Providers will pay to use the network. Hometown Fiber will receive fees for service until the bonds have been paid and the installed fiber becomes property of the city. Willmar will become the first open access project in the state of Minnesota. The possibility of using this model throughout Kandiyohi County was discussed.

**ADJOURNMENT—**There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:57 a.m.

**NEXT MEETING—**The next regular committee meeting is **10:00 a.m., Monday, April 3, 2023** at Room 2057, Kandiyohi County Health and Human Services Building, Willmar and via Zoom video conference.

## Lake Andrew Broadband Options 2/28/2023

### History

**July 2021** - The EDC Broadband Committee, along with Lake Andrew township, started talks with Federated Communications in a three-township project (Northwest). This project would depend on the West project (St. Johns, Mamre, Arctander, Dovre) being awarded. Total cost was estimated at \$20 million. Due to the total cost, the fact that the maximum project is limited to \$10 million for Border-to-Border grants, it was decided that this may need to be divided into smaller projects and would still depend on the awarding of a Border-to-Border grant for the West project.

**October 2021** – Federated, along with the Broadband Committee and Lake Andrew township submitted a USDA NTIA grant application to cover seven townships, including Lake Andrew. This grant application was ultimately denied.

**July 2022** - Mediacom, working with the Broadband committee and Lake Andrew township, submitted a proposal to cover the entire Lake Andrew township and parts of Colfax township without a Border-to-Border grant application. The County was asked to contribute \$227,400 and Lake Andrew township was asked to contribute a minimum of \$75,000 to the project, both of which were approved. This project was canceled by Mediacom due to concerns about the number of seasonal properties along with the potential of TDS construction in the area.

**August 2022** - The final West project application with Federated included four properties within Lake Andrew township due to needed engineering. Federated will pay for these four properties.

**December 2022** - The West project with Federated was awarded the State Border-to-Border grant. The project is expected to be completed by January 2025. The Office of Broadband Development also announced a new round of grant applications due March 2023.

**January 2023** – Started talks with Federated in a one or two-township project due to the previously estimated cost of the project. Mediacom was not interested due to other commitments.

**February 2023** - Due to the timing of receiving the estimated funding calculations, it was decided to forego the March 2023 round of Border-to-Border funding for this project and continue discussions with providers and Lake Andrew township. Received Charter proposal on 2/21.

### Current Options

- 1. Federated Border-to-Border Project:** This project would cover all underserved and unserved passings in Lake Andrew township. The total estimated cost of the project is \$10 million. Federated would apply for a 50% grant from Minnesota Border-to-Border in the next available funding round (expected late summer or early fall 2023). Federated would contribute 25%, ask the Broadband Committee and County for up to \$2000 per passing, with Lake Andrew township funding the remainder (estimated \$1 million).

#### Pros +

- i. Covers entire township
- ii. Complete fiber network
- iii. Individual fiber to each property

#### Cons -

- iv. Project price
- v. Completion not until at least 2025



## Lake Andrew Broadband Options 2/28/2023

2. **Charter Border-to-Border Project:** This project would cover portions of the underserved and unserved passings in Lake Andrew township, mainly around the lakes. The total estimated cost of the full project (including all parts in Colfax, Lake Andrew, New London, and Burbank townships) is \$9.5 million. Charter would apply for a 35% grant from the March 2023 round of Border-to-Border funds. Charter is requesting a letter of support and a small financial commitment to contribute with the grant application. This would need to be completed before March 2, 2023.

Pros +

- i. Complete fiber network
- ii. Small financial commitment from township
- iii. Increased score for Border-to-Border application due to 35% funding ask

Cons -

- iv. Does not cover entire township
- v. Completion not guaranteed before 2025

3. **Charter Border-to-Border on their own:** Charter intends (does not guarantee) to submit an application for this project to the Minnesota Border-to-Border grant program whether there is support from Lake Andrew township or not. This would then not cost Lake Andrew township anything. However, the project would receive a lower score due to not being supported with a letter or funding from the Township.

Pros +

- i. Complete fiber network
- ii. No financial commitment from township

Cons -

- i. Does not cover entire township
- ii. Completion not guaranteed before 2025
- iii. Decreased score for Border-to-Border application due to lack of community support

4. **Continue additional talks** with existing providers to create a project that meets all expectations, with or without Border-to-Border grant funds.

Pros +

- i. Complete township could be included

Cons -

- ii. Completion date unknown
- iii. Township contribution unknown
- iv. Funding opportunities unknown
- v. Internet provider unknown

### Requested Action

- 1. Letter of support if approving a project.
- 2. Resolution of funding if approving option 2.
- 3. Provide feedback on desired township direction with option 1b or 4.
- 4. Do nothing.