

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

**January 9, 2024**

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

Present: Kelsey Baker, Mark Boeschen, Bruce DeBlieck (via Zoom), Jesse Gislason (via Zoom), Jason Hulstein (via Zoom), Roger Imdieke, Tony Kirby (via Zoom), Michelle Marotzke, Rollie Nissen, David Sisser and Chuck Stranberg

Excused: Paul Bolle and Ryan Nelson

Absent: Duane Anderson

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

Chairperson Mark Boeschen called the meeting to order at approximately 10:04 a.m.

**MINUTES—**

IT WAS MOVED BY Rollie Nissen, SECONDED BY Chuck Stranberg to approve the Minutes of the December 4, 2023 meeting as emailed. MOTION CARRIED.

**NEW BUSINESS—**

**Resignation of Sarah Swedburg.** Chair Boeschen reported that Sarah Swedburg, Business Development Manager of the EDC and staff liaison to the Broadband and Advanced Technology Committee, submitted her resignation effective December 28, 2023.

**Election of Officers.**

IT WAS MOVED BY Chuck Stranberg, SECONDED BY Roger Imdieke to re-elect Mark Boeschen as Chairperson and Michelle Marotzke as Vice Chairperson of the Kandiyohi County and City of Willmar Economic Development Commission Broadband and Advanced Technology Committee for 2024. MOTION CARRIED.

**Committee Member Profiles.** Committee members were given instructions to fill out the Committee Member Profiles and return them to the EDC. The EDC has on file all committee members' headshots except Tony Kirby and Chuck Stranberg, who agreed to email theirs to the EDC.

## GRANTS—

**Minnesota Line Extension Grant Update.** Chair Boeschen reported applications continue to be accepted for the Minnesota Line Extension Grant. Emails have been sent to those who were not accepted in the last round. If they do not opt out they will automatically be considered in the next round. The program has limited funds and there were a large number of applications.

**Border-to-Border Grant Applications Update.** Vibrant Broadband and Federated Telephone Cooperative (FTC) submitted applications for the Kandiyohi County projects one day prior to the deadline. Both applications were listed on the announcement made by the Office of Broadband Development (OBD). Following a contesting period when existing providers are notified of project proposals to avoid duplication of efforts, grants will be awarded. TDS may contest a small area around south Lake Florida and 198<sup>th</sup> and 189<sup>th</sup> Avenues around Norway Lake, however FTC is prepared to handle that should it occur.

**American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Funds.** Chair Boeschen reported with current applications taken into consideration there is approximately \$95,722 in ARPA funds designated for broadband use. The committee will need to work with townships or request additional funds from the county for projects in the fall, creating a need for more lead time. Future projects will be considered after the Border-to-Border grants are awarded in March.

## REPORTS—

**Digital Connection Task Force.** Michelle Marotzke reported OBD submitted a draft for the Broadband Equity Access Development program to the National Telecommunications and Information Administration on December 22, 2023. The work done by the Digital Connection Task Force filtered into this draft. The Federal Trade Commission's Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) provides a discount of up to \$30 per month for eligible households. Fadumo Hussein of FAJ Language Services LLC, a member of the Digital Connection Task Force, has done a wonderful job helping non-English speaking residents sign up for ACP. She has helped approximately 20 people and has not been paid for this service. Marotzke suggested part of the remaining ARPA funds could be used to reimburse Hussein. The United Community Action Partnership (UCAP) is also interested in having people available to help with the application if there is funding available. The application is not available in other languages, making it difficult for non-English speaking applicants. Hussein gave Marotzke a quote of \$98 for the enrollment process and \$65 per hour to deal with any issues arising after completion of the application. UCAP has not provided a quote. Marotzke asked OBD to consider providing technical assistance grants to counties to fund programs such as this. Approval of \$15,000 in Kandiyohi County ARPA funds designated for broadband for use in ACP enrollment activities was discussed and the matter was tabled until the February meeting.

IT WAS MOVED BY Michelle Marotzke, SECONDED BY Dave Sisser to recommend to the Kandiyohi County Board of Commissioners that it allocate up to \$2,500 in American Rescue Plan Act funds to reimburse Fadumo Hussein, FAJ Language Services LLC, for her work in the Affordable Connectivity Program enrollment process at \$98 per resident for enrollments occurring prior to January 8, 2024. MOTION CARRIED.

Discussion was held regarding a digital equity plan set up specifically for Kandiyohi County. This would be beneficial when applying for grants, however it is one more entity to create and manage. The plan would locate

resources and document committee activities. Marotzke suggested waiting until OBD's program is federally approved, and she will combine the summary document she did for the state with the OBD approved program for a starting point.

#### **CURRENT LOCAL PROJECTS**

**West Project.** Chair Boeschen reported FTC plans to send out notices to West Project residents asking if they want to sign up for service.

**City of Willmar.** Sisser reported the Willmar City Fiber Committee had a meeting on December 18, 2023. A website is up and running, 11,000 flyers will be sent out and information will be posted on social media to get input from residents regarding the Hometown Fiber project. Findings will be brought to the city council. Because this project model is the first in the state, Hometown Fiber needs approval from the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission. Challenges from other service providers are expected. Engineering has been completed in the Industrial Park and the west side of Willmar. Engineering results will be presented to the city council in February. The funding model has been changed from revenue to general obligation bonds. The city of Willmar will be responsible for the funds and several individuals have called Senator Andrew Lang to warn him of the risk factor. Over 2,100 residents will need to sign up to make the project viable.

**Vibrant Border-to-Border Project.** Conduit is being installed in Harrison Township.

**ADJOURNMENT**— There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:59 a.m.

**NEXT MEETING**—The next regular committee meeting is **10:00 a.m., Monday, February 5, 2024** at Room 2057, Kandiyohi County Health and Human Services Building, Willmar and via Zoom video conference.