

**KANDIYOHI COUNTY AND CITY OF WILLMAR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION (EDC)  
BROADBAND AND ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE MEETING  
MINUTES  
May 4, 2020  
Via ZOOM Video Conference**

Present: Mark Boesch, Donna Boonstra, Dean Bouta, Bruce DeBlicke, Tim Furr, Roger Imdieke, Michelle Marotzke, Les Nelson, Rollie Nissen, Glenn Otteson, Gregg Price, Ramsey Schaffnit and David Sisser

Staff: Connie Schmoll, Business Development Manager

Secretarial: Nancy Birkeland, Legal & Administrative Assistants, Inc. (LAA)

Chairperson Mark Boesch called the meeting to order at approximately 12:12 p.m.

**AGENDA**—The Agenda was changed to have New Business following the Minutes and added to Unfinished Business were a letter to legislators regarding the bonding bill and a meeting with Kandiyo Power Cooperative.

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

**MINUTES**—

IT WAS MOVED BY Michelle Marotzke, SECONDED BY Dave Sisser, to approve the Minutes of the April 9, 2020 meeting as emailed. MOTION CARRIED.

**NEW BUSINESS**

**Internet access for students.** Chair Boesch introduced Jason Hulstein, of the IT Department at Willmar Public Schools. Hulstein provided his information. He stated schools were given two weeks notice to provide students access to distance learning; Willmar had three weeks because of spring break. It has been a work in progress. The IT Department called each family to ask what they had for access, devices and how the school could help support the families. Willmar Public Schools had one-to-one devices for grades 6-12 and had devices they could give to those under grade 6. Devices are still being handed out as needed. Each week, documents were mailed to pre-K through grades 5, but now they are online. The school conducted its own broadband survey. The school has tried to identify families who are not checking in and trying to identify their hurdles. Willmar Middle School created a map of families without access, most of which were in town. All have now been able to obtain access; some township residents have connected with hotspots. For those who cannot get access, they use district vehicles equipped with a cellular hotspot. The vehicles park outside a student's house for an hour or so and once done, they move to the next location. Students who are not doing their

work now are those who were not doing the work to begin with. Willmar Public Schools reached out to other school districts and have been hearing similar results. MACCRAY is having difficulties with insufficient bandwidth in Raymond and in rural areas with inconsistent wireless.

Roger Imdieke questioned the percentage of families who have broadband and what percent did not have service? Hulstein stated the school just asked a blanket statement asking if they have an internet connection. He stated most families do not know what they have; they just know they can get online. Hulstein has not heard any issues with families living north of Willmar near Pennock. There is a hotspot for Dovre Township. Hulstein stated it is difficult to supply every family. The school must pay per device so it is pointing to hotspots that are available. Hulstein stated the school is trying to reach out to families again to get more information on learning. A meeting between IT directors across the state showed they are all dealing with the same issues. The school has partnered with the city of Willmar for WiFi. The school is also holding ZOOM meetings with students. Ramsey Schaffnit questioned if it is possible to save money to connect to fixed WiFi in some areas rather than using cellular? Hulstein stated they are using hotspots only where service is not available. Hulstein stated for some families in Willmar, who did not have access, the issue could be financial. Furr stated Ridgewater College was surprised with how many of their students have access, but he believes many may be using cellular hotspots and those may want to update broadband connection to their homes. Ridgewater College sent less than 10 WiFi devices to its students. Hulstein stated they will continue to collect information as much as they can and share the information with this committee. Chair Boeschen stated he spoke with Hulstein about partnering with this committee on a broadband survey in mid-May. Imdieke stated the Association of Minnesota Counties will meet in June with its 11 districts and could possibly create a survey of the counties as to the challenges they are having with their workers trying to work from home.

## **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

**Broadband survey.** Chair Boeschen stated a broadband survey is targeted for mid-May and will include more general comments; the results will include any data Hulstein can share. Connie Schmoll mentioned obtaining computers from PCs for People and the importance of asking about the need for devices. This committee will help the schools as needed. Dave Sisser stated it is a good time to get comments on whether working remotely is working, what are the challenges, what are some of the rewards and what are the issues with connecting remotely. Discussion was held on the broadband survey. Michelle Marotzke suggested doing a survey geared toward employers and how remote workers have impacted their businesses. Chair Boeschen liked the idea of asking for comments via Facebook, the radio stations and newspaper. Sisser suggested also using Twitter and radio call-in shows. Marotzke suggested the Willmar Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce could reach out to its business members, however, Imdieke recommended the survey go to all businesses, not just chamber members. Nissen stated county government has many people working from home and many live in less accessible areas. Dean Bouta stated Bennett Office Technologies has found many people have slow connectivity; anyone with a VPN will have a slow down in their connection. Chair Boeschen noted the problem may be within their homes and their WiFi. Chair Boeschen stated the goal is to make people realize they need more from their service and to make legislators

realize more funding is needed for broadband. Nissen stated people don't know what they do or do not have so education is necessary. Sisser stated if we can generate awareness through media, we will hear success stories and bad stories. A subcommittee consisting of Bouta, Marotzke, Schaffnit, Sisser and Schmoll was formed to work on the survey. Nissen stated he can ask the county to do a survey of its employees and Furr offered to survey Ridgewater College's staff and students. Imdieke recommended the same survey be used by everyone.

## REPORTS

**Minnesota Rural Broadband Coalition.** Chair Boeschen announced the last time minutes uploaded are from December. Schmoll stated she sent a notice to members of the Minnesota Association of Professional County Economic Developers as to a bill in the house and senate asking for an additional \$10 million for the state broadband grant program, \$8 million or \$15 million for distance learning and \$2 million for telemedicine from the CARES Act. Schmoll stated this is a good time for committee members to write letters to their legislators. Imdieke stated the Governor indicated to the Association of Minnesota Counties during a webinar that he is still in favor of a supplemental budget bill and will be asking for \$10 million for broadband. Friday, there was a threat that the bonding bill would be blocked unless the Governor gave up his emergency powers. Schmoll, on behalf of this committee, will send a letter to local legislators urging their passage of the bonding bill.

**Kandiyohi Power Cooperative.** Imdieke stated Kandiyohi Power Cooperative is the most logical provider to consider installing broadband service throughout Kandiyohi County and suggested a small group meet with the new manager and board chair to find out its interest in assisting with broadband throughout the county. Schmoll stated she approached the board when a project was being considered for northern Kandiyohi County, but at that time it was only in support of a monetary contribution. She did attend a public input meeting held by Kandiyohi Power Cooperative where it was indicated they were open to a discussion on doing more in regard to broadband. Chair Boeschen, Imdieke, Glenn Otteson and Schmoll will schedule a meeting with Kandiyohi Power Cooperative.

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

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

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 1:04 p.m.

**NEXT MEETING**—The next committee meeting is **12 noon, Monday, June 1, 2020** via ZOOM video conference.