

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

MINUTES

May 6, 2019

Kandiyohi County Health & Human Services Building, Willmar

Present: Mark Boeschen, Donna Boonstra, Bruce DeBlieck, Roger Imdieke, Michelle Marotzke, Les Nelson, Rollie Nissen, Gregg Price, Ramsey Schaffnit, David Sisser and Donn Winckler

Excused: Dean Bouta and Scott Froemming

Absent: Travis Bonnema and Brian Mort

Staff: Connie Schmoll, Business Development Specialist

Secretarial: Nancy Birkeland, Legal & Administrative Assistants, Inc.

Chairperson Mark Boeschen called the meeting to order at approximately 12:00 p.m. Added to the Agenda under New Business is to remove Travis Bonnema from the committee at his request.

MINUTES—

IT WAS MOVED BY Rollie Nissen, SECONDED BY Ramsey Schaffnit, to approve the Minutes of the April 1, 2019 meeting as emailed. MOTION CARRIED.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS—

Presentations to townships and educational meetings. Connie Schmoll reported there have been good responses from the townships. After the presentation to the townships at their annual meeting, she was contacted by four townships who were interested in learning more about expanding broadband in their areas. Schmoll met with Mamre, St. Johns and Green Lake Townships and will meet with Dovre Township tomorrow. Green Lake Township has very few residents who are unserved. Dovre Township has a high served population, but there residents who are unserved are adjacent to other townships. The definition of underserved is having wired service of at least 25Mbps download and 3Mbps upload, but less than 100Mbps download and 20Mbps upload. The definition of unserved is not having service of at least 25Mbps download and 3Mbps upload. Whether or not an area is served is determined by a tract, i.e, if one residence in the tract is served, the state's map shows the area is served. It is believed the state is working on new mapping. Parts of St. John's Township shows it is served where residents report it is not. This can be opposed if a state Border to Border Broadband Grant is applied for.

Schmoll stated Michelle Marotzke has been providing education at the township meetings and Dave Sisser has been providing information on the different services available along with Chair Boeschen. Thus far, the meetings have been with the township supervisors and further education of the residents is needed. The townships have had questions about financing a project. Schmoll invited Attorney Robert Ruppe, who represents townships, and attended the last township meeting. Attorney Ruppe explained how townships

can do bonding for a broadband project. Marotzke stated she informed the townships that unless there is local funding, there will not be a project. If Arvig does a project in Kandiyohi County, the local community will have to contribute to the engineering cost of a study. Hiawatha Broadband Communications will do its own engineering. Both providers have asked for maps and have started investigating potential project areas. Mamre Township has asked this committee to attend another township meeting. Schmoll invited committee members to attend the township meetings. The townships were informed of the costs incurred by Chisago Township. The townships will need to decide if they will participate in engineering costs that could range between \$5,000-\$25,000. It is believed all three townships were in favor of bringing a request to their boards.

Rollie Nissen referred to an article by Mary Ann Barton in the April 29, 2019 issue of *County News* printed by the National Association of Counties, which refers to \$600 million is being made available to expand rural broadband (see attached). It was mentioned a bill was passed by the U.S. House as to coverage and number served and requires the Office of Accountability to make recommendation to the Federal Communications Commission on how to make the maps more accurate. Chair Boeschen believes only one company does all mapping across the United States.

Contacts with providers. Schmoll has had contact with Dan Pecarina of Hiawatha Broadband Communications and Mark Birkholz of Arvig. Schmoll referred them to the Chisago Township project as a basis for a Kandiyohi County project. Both providers are speaking with engineers to find out the cost to do a study. Schmoll provided the previous Kandiyohi County study to the two providers. CenturyLink has not contacted Schmoll again and would only cover a small portion of the area being considered.

Broadband Coalition. Schmoll asked what other tasks the committee wants to be doing? Marotzke stated she and Donn Winckler identified steps to take in creating a county broadband coalition. Chair Boeschen asked how to move a project forward with the townships and create a coalition? Marotzke suggested if a project is successful with the townships, the townships could be brought in to help create a coalition, which would also help develop champions. Sisser stated St. Johns and Mamre Townships were discussing that all residents will be charged whether they participate in a project. It was noted the townships could charge a broadband fee. Also mentioned was using a special taxing district. Township boards stated they are not hearing from their residents about broadband, however, Imdieke noted that maybe residents do not think about contacting their township boards. Letters of support will be needed if a state grant is applied for, so the committee should keep in mind individuals who would write such a letter. It was suggested to focus on the townships that are interested in getting broadband and later identify individuals to help form a coalition and assist with education. Schmoll stated she requested townships identify possible champions. Discussion on a coalition will continue next month. Nissen commented he spoke with a Stevens County farmer who said they are going away from GPS as they do not have adequate internet connection.

Winckler questioned if there is a local realtor, who could estimate sales lost due to properties not having broadband and estimate the increase in a home's value if it has access to broadband.

NEW BUSINESS—

Membership. Chair Boeschen reported he received an email from Travis Bonnema, who is moving from the state of Minnesota and requested he be removed from the committee.

IT WAS MOVED BY Roger Imdieke, SECONDED BY Michelle Marotzke, to accept, with regrets, the resignation of Travis Bonnema from the Kandiyohi County and City of Willmar Economic Development Commission's Broadband and Advanced Technology Committee. MOTION CARRIED.

It was recommended a replacement for Bonnema be another individual in the ag field. One suggestion was Megan Iiams, IS Consultant with Haug Implement. Other suggestion can be forwarded to Chair Boeschen or Schmoll.

REPORTS

Minnesota Rural Broadband Coalition. Schmoll reported she emailed information on Broadband Day at the Capitol to the committee. The event was attended by Donna Boonstra, Nissen, Chair Boeschen and Schmoll, who met with many legislators. It is very important for this committee to attend this annual event. The state wants to see Kandiyohi County apply for a grant for another project. Legislators stated they are addressing funding this year and not policy. The House is recommending \$35 million for broadband for the biennium and the Senate is recommending \$30 million for one year. Rep. Pat Garofalo still opposes funding as he is in favor of satellite, which does not require funding. Letters of support for broadband funding should be sent to Senators Torrey Westrom and Andrew Lang and other local legislators. Chair Boeschen indicated legislators were receptive and focused on funding. Imdieke stated MVTW Wireless contacted Three Sisters Furnishing about providing service, but it could not get a clear line of sight. It was noted LTD Broadband has also been contacting area residents.

Schmoll requested this committee create a legislative subcommittee.

IT WAS MOVED BY Michelle Marotzke, SECONDED BY Roger Imdieke to create Legislative Subcommittee of the Broadband and Advanced Technology Committee. MOTION CARRIED.

Anyone interested in being on the subcommittee, which Boeschen volunteered to lead, should let him know following this meeting.

ADJOURNMENT—

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

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 12:53 p.m.

NEXT MEETING—The next committee meeting is **12 noon, Monday, June 3, 2019** at Kandiyohi County Health & Human Services Building, Room 2057, Willmar.

\$600 million available for rural broadband

County News, National Association of Counties, April 26, 2019

<https://www.naco.org/articles/600-million-available-rural-broadband>



USDA will begin accepting the first round of applications for the Rural e-Connectivity Pilot Program, with deadlines coming in May, June and July

The U.S. Department of Agriculture recently announced it will begin accepting the first round of applications for the Rural e-Connectivity Pilot Program (ReConnect Program).

Last year, Congress provided \$600 million to USDA to expand broadband infrastructure and services in rural parts of the country.

USDA is now making up to \$200 million in grants, \$200 million in loan and grant combinations and \$200 million in low-interest loans available. The application deadlines are:

- May 31 for grants
- June 21 for loan/grant combinations
- July 12 for low-interest loans

Applicants can visit reconnect.usda.gov to apply; [those needing technical assistance from USDA can fill out a contact form here: https://www.usda.gov/reconnect/contact-us.](https://www.usda.gov/reconnect/contact-us)

Those who may apply include counties, internet service providers, rural electric co-ops and telecom companies.

According to the USDA, funds will be awarded to projects that have financially sustainable business models that will bring high-speed broadband to rural homes, businesses, farms, ranches and community facilities such as first responders, health care sites and schools.

If you're not sure what sort of broadband speeds are in your county, well, there's an app for that.

NACo is helping its members test their county broadband signals across the country thanks to a new app, TestIT. So far, there have been more than 7,300 downloads of the app and more than 38,000 tests.

Users can test broadband speeds in their area and see how those speeds compare to FCC minimum standards. The app was created by Measurement Lab or M-Lab.

NACo is partnering on the test with the Local Initiatives Support Corporation and the National Association of Development Organizations.

For more information about the app, [contact NACo's Arthur Scott at ascott@naco.org](mailto:ascott@naco.org) or (202) 942-4230.

More help on the way for broadband?

Rural America's anemic broadband network may see an injection of \$20 billion thanks to funding from a reverse auction of 5G spectrum to broadband networks over the next decade.

The news was announced April 12 by Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Chairman Ajit Pai at a White House ceremony.

"From precision agriculture to smart transportation networks to telemedicine and more, we want Americans to be the first to benefit from this new digital revolution, while protecting our innovators and citizens," Pai said.

"And we don't want rural Americans left behind."

The FCC will create the new \$20.4 billion Rural Digital Opportunity Fund at the FCC to extend high-speed broadband to up to 4 million homes and small businesses in rural areas.

The news is being met with some skepticism. "I think we need to see the details," said communications attorney Gerard Lederer.

"According to the Democratic commissioners there is no new money and what the President and Chairman Pai announced is nothing more than a repackaging of existing programs under another name."

FCC Commissioner Jessica Rosenworcel, a Democrat, noted that the type of spectrum that is being auctioned to fuel the fund is off base.

"If we want a bold wireless future—for urban and rural communities alike—the U.S. needs to refocus our spectrum efforts on the airwaves that mix capacity and coverage," she said. "It's time to pivot to mid-band spectrum. Stat."

She explained that "we are relying on high-band spectrum for which the network densification costs are exceptionally high and unlikely to be economically viable in vast swaths of this country," she said. "If we truly want to deploy 5G service to everyone, everywhere, we are going to have to pivot to mid-band, and the time to do it is now."

The Rural Broadband Association noted that they're waiting on more details of the plan to be revealed.

"As the rules of this program are further developed, our members look forward to working with policymakers on these initiatives and to furthering their critical role in delivering on the promise of sustainable and affordable broadband for rural America," said Shirley Bloomfield, CEO of the Rural Broadband Association, headquartered in Arlington, Va.

The announcement comes after a \$4.5 billion federal grant program to expand wireless internet in rural areas is on hold while the FCC researches incorrect data submitted by broadband providers that overstate broadband coverage on maps used to allocate grants. [See the map here.](#)

Before the map was challenged, the FCC said that "approximately 100 percent of the American public lives in geographic areas covered by mobile LTE with a minimum advertised speed of 5Mbps/1Mbps."

If a map shows there is broadband in an area—and telecom companies were saying that an area was “covered” if just one person in a Census block could get high-speed access—then a company could not apply for those funds.

Investigation of broadband coverage?

Earlier this month, the U.S. House passed an amendment authored by Rep. Abigail Spanberger, a Democrat who represents Virginia’s 7th District, that requires the Government Accountability Office to examine the accuracy of FCC mapping of broadband coverage and to make recommendations to the FCC on how to accomplish accurate mapping.

“The digital gap between our rural and urban communities is real, and I hear about it from the people I serve every day,” Spanberger said.

“In Central Virginia, farmers and producers are disadvantaged, because the lack of broadband makes doing business harder,” she said.

“In our district, constituents driving their kids to a McDonald’s or to neighboring counties so that they can complete their research projects for school,” she noted. “And what’s happening in our district is happening nationwide.”

A 2017 USDA survey says that 30 percent of rural areas lack broadband access.