

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

MINUTES

March 7, 2022

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

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

Excused: Dean Bouta

Absent: Tony Kirby, Larry Kleindl and Ryan Nelson

Staff: Sarah Swedburg, Business Development Manager

Contractor: Connie Schmoll

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

Chairperson Mark Boeschen called the meeting to order at approximately 10:07 a.m.

AGENDA—

The Agenda was approved as emailed.

MINUTES—

IT WAS MOVED BY Rollie Nissen, SECONDED BY David Sisser, to approve the Minutes of the February 7, 2022 meeting as emailed. MOTION CARRIED.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS—

Vibrant Broadband. Connie Schmoll reported Vibrant Broadband submitted its application for the United States Department of Agriculture ReConnect Grant on Thursday, March 3, 2022. Luke Johnson of Vibrant Broadband gave a presentation at the Kandiyohi County Commissioners board meeting. His presentation was discussed on the *Blandin Blog*, and Ann Treacy commented that Kandiyohi County is exploring all options, and those who do that will win in the end. Johnson emphasized the grant will cover only the sparsely populated areas of the eastern Kandiyohi County townships. Wherever there is a large cluster of housing there may not be service. Kandiyohi County is aware of this. The first step is to get the grant, then address the gaps. Kandiyohi County has not committed any funds to the project at this point, but may fund the unserved areas. This is a challenge because the size of the gaps is not yet known and Vibrant may handle some on its own. Kandiyohi County

previously dedicated \$2 million to a Vibrant wireless project that is no longer happening, so those funds could be diverted. The infrastructure will be there, so it will be easy to expand. Phase I is getting everyone who is under the grant, Phase II will cover those still unserved. These phases could happen simultaneously. The public and press need to understand it is a partial township grant. On a positive note, the ReConnect Grant will service the lower-populated areas, which is the more expensive portion of the project.

Charter. Chair Boeschen reported Charter will be making data changes in the southern and eastern parts of New London Township and when finished it will submit a new cost estimate. Charter's quote will include all of New London Township.

Federated Telephone Cooperative (FTC). Schmoll reported Kevin Beyer from FTC attended a meeting last Tuesday where the Border-to-Border Grant project with Colfax, Lake Andrew and Norway Lake Townships was discussed. Beyer wanted assurance that the townships are totally committed to the project. The conversation then turned to how to proceed, and several tasks were assigned. FTC is also working on a Border-to-Border grant for the 4-township project, which includes Arctander, Mamre, Dovre and St. Johns Townships. The state is now considering changing from two grant periods to one, making it necessary to apply for seven townships at the same time. The delay in the grant program is causing frustration, as one construction period has already been lost. Roger Imdieke suggested a representative of this committee attend each of the township meetings that will be held on March 8, 2022.

American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Fund. Chair Boeschen reported no action has been taken on the \$300,000 designated for funding the last mile. Now there is legislation that could provide funding from the state, but the source of the money has not been agreed upon. Boeschen recommended moving ahead with the county plan, since the state plan has yet to be passed. The issue of double-dipping state and county ARPA dollars has been resolved. Projects can be funded by both Border-to-Border grants and county ARPA funds for this round.

NTIA Grant. Michelle Marotzke announced Kandiyohi County did not receive the NTIA grant. There was no notification, only a list of those who were awarded. Larry Kleindl and Marotzke have attempted to get feedback about the application, but no one has responded. Thirteen projects were funded, none in the state of Minnesota. Most of the funded projects were between \$18 to \$30 million. Money has been approved in the Infrastructure Bill for additional grants. There were 5000 public comments.

REPORTS—

Education/Marketing. Flyers have been created for Lake Andrew, Norway Lake and Colfax Townships, introducing them to the broadband projects and FTC. They will be passed along to the township leaders for their review.

Adoption. Connie Schmoll asked David Sisser for a list of venues that will be used to utilize the information he has gathered.

Minnesota Rural Broadband Coalition. Swedburg reported the Coalition is supportive of the last mile proposal, but it does not want to see it funded through the Border-to-Border grant funds currently committed for large

projects. It would prefer a different source of funding or additional money allocated to Border-to-Border to cover it.

Connie Schmoll. Swedburg reported Schmoll’s contract officially ends on March 31, 2022 and will not be renewed. Swedburg thanked Schmoll for her dedication to broadband. Chair Boesch, Swedburg and Marotzke have dedicated this month to a smooth transition. All providers and township leaders are aware of the change.

Schmoll commented that it was easy and fun working with this committee. The community is aware they are well-represented, and keep up the good work!

ADJOURNMENT—There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:35 a.m.

NEXT MEETING—The next regular committee meeting is **10:00 a.m., Monday, April 4, 2022** at Room 2057, Kandiyohi County Health and Human Services Building, Willmar and via Zoom video conference.