

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

September 12, 2022

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

Present: Mark Boeschen, Dean Bouta (via Zoom), Bruce DeBlieck (via Zoom), Jason Hulstein (via Zoom), Roger Imdieke, Tony Kirby (via Zoom), Larry Kleindl, Michelle Marotzke, Rollie Nissen and David Sisser

Excused: Donna Boonstra

Absent: Ryan Nelson, Goldie Smith and Brian Zawierucha

Staff: Sarah Swedburg, Business Development Manager

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

Chairperson Mark Boeschen called the meeting to order at approximately 10:03 a.m.

AGENDA—The agenda was approved as emailed.

MINUTES—

IT WAS MOVED BY Rollie Nissen, SECONDED BY Michelle Marotzke, to approve the Minutes of the August 1 and 29, 2022 meetings as emailed. MOTION CARRIED

[Bruce DeBlieck and Dean Bouta joined the meeting]

UNFINISHED BUSINESS—

West Project—Federated Telephone Cooperative (FTC) Border-to-Border Grant. Chair Boeschen reported a town hall meeting was held on August 14, 2022, to update residents on the West Project. Over 60 people attended and Swedburg received several calls from non-attending residents seeking information about the meeting. The challenge process for the Border-to-Border grant was completed on September 8, 2022, and FTC is awaiting the results. Challenges can occur if an area within the grant request is considered already serviced or if the provider's ability to complete the project in two years is questioned. If a provider doesn't complete a project in the two-year window, it will not be able to apply for subsequent grants. Border-to-Border grant awards are expected to be announced in late fall.

Vibrant Broadband. Hawick and the south side of Long Lake have been completed, while Vibrant Broadband is still working on the permits necessary to complete the north side. Vibrant Broadband has mailed information to prospective customers in the completed areas and it is up to the homeowner to request service. Nissen reported Vibrant Broadband is working to install high-speed internet in the entire city of Litchfield. Marotzke stated Vibrant Broadband and FTC may qualify for U.S. Economic Development Association (EDA) funding. Vibrant Broadband sent articles of organization to the EDA to make that determination. If they qualify, Kleindl suggested they run fiber to the Green Lake Sewer plant, as that would be considered a sewer and water project, which ranks high under EDA guidelines.

Charter. Chair Boeschen reported Charter is waiting for fiber to complete Riverwood Circle. Amanda Duerr is no longer employed by Charter and the new representative has been very responsive. Imdieke reported he has received phone calls from residents upset about rumors regarding Charter's ability to provide service. Chair Boeschen suggested the EDC put broadband project updates on its website, with a section for frequently asked questions. Anyone looking for information regarding meeting dates, project progress, etc. could be referred to the website. A press release was discussed and the education task force will handle it. Kleindl reported Charter came in under bid on a recently completed project and reduced Kandiyohi County's final payment by \$5224.41. Charter has applied for two Border-to-Border grants, one with county approval. The unapproved project would service Lake Florida and a small area to the east of the lake.

Kandiyohi County Line Extension Grant. Chair Boeschen reported the grant language needs to be amended to include companies along with individuals, and it will be ready for the October meeting. The possibility of the EDC managing the grant was discussed. The funds need to be disbursed through the providers. Providers will be contacted in advance to ensure their willingness to participate.

Mediacom Lakes Project. Chair Boeschen reported the Mediacom Lakes Project has been delayed due to concern about the seasonality of the residents around the lakes. A survey is being sent to all residents in the area, with results expected in approximately two weeks. It was suggested that an ad be published in the *Lakes Area Review* encouraging people to respond to the survey and emphasizing broadband's effect on the resale value of their property. It is likely the project will go forward, however, the bigger issue rests with TDS starting a project in the same area. The original goal was to get this project finalized before the challenge process for Border-to-Border grants was completed, so the TDS project could be challenged if necessary. The Mediacom representative has been responsive and is pushing internally to get the matter resolved.

American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Funds. Kleindl reported at the last County Board meeting he presented a request to use ARPA funds for a \$5000 annual stipend for Chair Boeschen for 2022, 2023 and 2024 for his work related to the county's broadband projects. The agreement, pending approval by the EDC, will stipulate that as long as Chair Boeschen remains active on the committee, he will receive payment in October of each year. Chair Boeschen was not involved in this request.

REPORTS—

Education Task Force. Chair Boeschen asked if any educational materials need to be prepared to comply with the Border-to-Border grant application for the West Project. Marotzke responded that FTC has programs and resources already in place and the Broadband Committee will act as a partner helping to promote the project.

National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) NTIA is managing funds from the Infrastructure and Investment Jobs Act. Allocations have been made to the states, with Minnesota receiving \$100 million. An additional \$650 million for Minnesota is being finalized.

USDA ReConnect Grant. Vibrant Broadband was not awarded the ReConnect 3 Grant for the east side of Kandiyohi County. It will apply for the Reconnect 4 Grant, which is accepting applications through November. The Broadband Committee will again promote the project, which is planned for the same area stipulated in the ReConnect 3 Grant. Post cards, letters of support and speed tests will be updated. The Education Task Force will submit information to the *Lakes Area Review* about the speed test, send out new post cards and contact everyone who sent letters of support, asking if the letters can be used again with a revised date.

Imdieke reported Nathan Zacharias, former lobbyist for the Minnesota Rural Broadband Coalition, is now on staff at the Association of Minnesota Counties. There is a transition in leadership at the Minnesota Rural Broadband Coalition. Blandin Foundation has officially stepped away from supporting broadband. Initiative foundations may step in to help in the interim. Marotzke was asked to consider joining the Coalition's Executive Committee and she informed the Chairman, Jay Trusty, that she is interested. The Blandin blog will continue into the first quarter of next year.

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, October 3, 2022** at Room 2057, Kandiyohi County Health and Human Services Building, Willmar and via Zoom video conference.