

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

December 6, 2021

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

Present: Mark Boesch (via Zoom), Dean Bouta (via Zoom), Jason Hulstein, Michelle Marotzke, Glenn Otteson, David Sisser and Goldie Smith (via Zoom)

Excused: Donna Boonstra, Bruce DeBlieck, Roger Imdieke, Larry Kleindl, Ryan Nelson and Rollie Nissen

Absent: Tony Kirby

Guest: Dr. Ashley Kjos, CEO of Woodland Centers

Staff: Sarah Swedburg, Business Development Manager and Kelsey Olson, Marketing and Communications Specialist (via Zoom)

Contractor: Connie Schmoll

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

Vice Chairperson Michelle Marotzke called the meeting to order at approximately 10:07 a.m.

AGENDA—

IT WAS MOVED BY Glenn Otteson, SECONDED BY David Sisser, to approve the Agenda as emailed. MOTION CARRIED.

TELEHEALTH AND WOODLAND CENTERS—The committee members introduced themselves to Dr. Ashley Kjos, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and licensed psychologist at Woodland Centers. Woodland Centers is a mental health and substance abuse treatment provider with service across seven counties. It provides a wide range of services, including peer support, doctors and nurses available for psychiatric medication management and residential services. Prior to the pandemic, telehealth was limited to psychiatry services, medication management services and therapy. When the pandemic began, every staff member obtained a Zoom account within two weeks and every service became available via telehealth. Two major issues were education and lack of broadband access. Some of the staff members in Kandiyohi County could not work from home because they did not have broadband. Woodland Centers purchased devices that had internet built in to solve the problem. They also provided devices for clients. Today, service is delivered in all three modalities: virtual, in-person and via telephone. Telehealth has become the preferred option due to the flexibility. Clients can meet with a therapist during breaks and lunch hours to avoid taking time off work. If clients do not have access to broadband, they can go into any Woodland office and reach their therapist via Zoom.

The youth and adolescent day program works well with telehealth. It is a three-hour program that begins at 3:15 p.m. Adolescents from the entire seven-county area are able to participate without having to miss school travelling to the program. Blanket coverage across the area is beneficial.

Kjos responded to the following questions:

Sisser: How was Woodland Centers able to get devices for those in need?

Kjos: Woodland Centers applied for a Federal Communications Commission (FCC) grant and received \$118,000 to get new devices for its staff. Clients made use of old devices from the staff and some received new devices as well. A COVID grant from the Department of Health allowed Woodland Centers to purchase 100 small tablets for kids. Old cell phones were activated for six months, with the client responsible for the charges after the six-month period.

Sisser: What percentage of clients had trouble with internet connections?

Kjos: Woodland Centers was not able to track that information, but Kandiyohi, Renville and Chippewa Counties had the biggest issues. The staff in Kandiyohi County also had significant struggles.

Marotzke: How did staff and clients fare during the transition to telehealth? Were there any long-term effects?

Kjos: Young children with ADHD presented the toughest challenge for telehealth. Woodland Centers responded to this challenge with shorter sessions, working closely with the schools and virtual play therapy rooms. Teenagers adjusted well, while many older people resisted and were put on a waiting list for in-person appointments during the pandemic. Access, knowledge and affordability are the biggest issues. The majority of clients served by Woodland Centers are on Medicaid and may not be able to afford broadband. Marotzke suggested this committee could advocate for broadband costs getting covered by medical insurance if therapy is considered medically necessary.

Marotzke: Did the virtual play rooms exist prior to the pandemic or were they created as a result of it?

Kjos: Woodland Centers was not aware of the existence of these rooms until the pandemic. An outside contractor built the rooms and staff members were able to customize them for their own use. Options for the rooms include a library, yoga area and various zen items.

Marotzke: What can this committee do for Woodland Centers or the medical community at large?

Kjos: Getting broadband access across Kandiyohi County is the first step, followed by educating people on broadband use.

Swedburg: Will telehealth continue on a long-term basis and how does providing telehealth help in maintaining the workforce?

Kjos: When Woodland Centers converted to telehealth it didn't know if Medicaid would cover the services. Thankfully the Department of Human Services did a waiver and everything was paid. The waiver is in effect for the next two years, and needs to continue as a resource once the two years is up. Anyone moving out of state could maintain a connection with their therapist. This technology should remain valid for a long time. Clinicians are really hard to find and they could remain employed after relocating. Companies such as Woodland Centers could pull in clinicians from across the country, which would help solve workforce shortages. There are complications, but it is an opportunity. Clinicians would still have to be licensed in the state where they are employed. Retirees who move south could do part-time work. Woodland Centers has flexibility. Clients don't have to drive across the seven counties for service, which eliminates a lot of wasted time.

Marotzke: Have you seen any Zoom burnout from the staff or clients?

Kjos: That is definitely an issue. Woodland Centers has been studying internal burnout and vicarious trauma for the past year, and individuals are managing decompression through vacations and other time off. Some staff members use a combination of in-person meetings and Zoom meetings. Clients also prefer in-person meetings from time to time. Woodland Centers allows that flexibility.

Schmoll: Do you have the ability to calculate how often people aren't able to use telehealth because they don't have the internet speed and where they are located?

Kjos: I will try to get an estimate from our unit directors.

Marotzke commented that this is important information for grant applications. Marotzke thanked Kjos for attending the meeting.

MINUTES—

IT WAS MOVED BY David Sisser, SECONDED BY Glenn Otteson, to approve the Minutes of the November 1, 2021 meeting as emailed. MOTION CARRIED.

RESIGNATION OF GLENN OTTESON—Glenn Otteson announced he sold Communications Network Engineering (CNE) in April of 2021 and will remain with them solely on a consulting basis after the first of the year. He plans to move to Arizona. He encouraged the Broadband Committee to keep Hanson Communications in mind when working with Holland and Edwards Townships in the future. CNE remains an option to work with the Broadband Committee and Otteson will be the contact.

IT WAS MOVED BY Jason Hultgren, SECONDED BY David Sisser, to accept with regrets the resignation of Glenn Otteson. MOTION CARRIED.

NEW BUSINESS—

USDA ReConnect Grant Program. Schmoll reported ReConnect is a grant program funded by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). This grant will allow matching funds from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act. Schmoll has been working with Luke Johnson, Operations Manager and Tim Mergen, CEO at Meeker County Light and Power Association to identify broadband needs in eastern Kandiyohi County. ReConnect can provide a grant, loan or combination of both. Applicants can be local government, a cooperative or a corporation. It will fund up to 100% with a cap of \$25 million. Any costs above \$25 million could come from a loan of up to \$25 million from the same program. The deadline to apply is February 22, 2022. There is a lot of legwork involved, including geological and archaeological studies. Ninety percent of households in the proposed area must lack sufficient broadband speed, defined as 100 megabits per second (mbps) download/20 mbps upload. The following points are awarded in the grant application:

1. Rural areas (100 miles from a city with a population of 50,000 or more) - 25 points
2. Areas with internet speed of less than 25 mbps download/3 mbps upload - 25 points
3. Areas showing economic need by the United States Census Small Areas income and poverty estimates – 20 points (if 75% score 20% or higher)
4. Affordable broadband prices – 20 points
5. Labor standards, prevailing wages for contractors and subcontractors – 20 points

6. Service provided on tribal lands – 15 points
7. Partnerships between local governments, non-profits and cooperatives – 15 points
8. Service provided to socially-vulnerable communities – 15 points
9. Addressing net neutrality – 10 points
10. Offering wholesale broadband services – 10 points

Schmoll, Marotzke, Mark Boeschen and Larry Kleindl will meet with Mergen on December 17, 2021, 10:00 a.m. at Meeker Cooperative. They will assess whether 90% of the residences lack sufficient service in Burbank, Roseville, Irving, Harrison and Genessee Townships. This project must be fiber to meet the speed requirements. The current cost estimate of \$17 million is probably low due to the required prevailing wage standards.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS—

Arvig’s Broadband Plans. Prinsburg signed all documents and is ready to launch its broadband project. Arvig is currently working on a different project, but anticipates completing the Prinsburg project by the end of next year.

National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) Grant. The announcement of NTIA Grant awards has been delayed until early in 2022.

Border-to-Border Grant. Swedburg reported the Border-to-Border Broadband Grant will be funded through a federal allocation applied for by the state of Minnesota. The U.S. Treasury sets the time line for applying for these funds and receiving payment. Whether American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds can be used in addition to the Border-to-Border Grant is still an issue. The Border-to-Border Grant program will receive \$70 million for the biennium, but the state qualifies to apply for \$180 million. The Governor’s broadband task force sent a letter to the governor requesting the state apply for the full \$180 million to eliminate the ARPA fund dilemma.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS—

Education/Marketing. Swedburg attended a broadband meeting held by Colfax, Lake Andrew and Norway Lake Townships. Township newsletters were discussed as an avenue for education about broadband. Swedburg and Kelsey Olson will provide the townships with topics and information for use in these newsletters.

Grant Writing. Schmoll reported she will be busy gathering information for the ReConnect Grant.

ADJOURNMENT—There being no further business,

IT WAS MOVED BY Glenn Otteson, SECONDED BY Jason Hulstein, to adjourn the meeting.
The meeting was adjourned at approximately 10:59 a.m.

NEXT MEETING—The next regular committee meeting is **10:00 a.m., Monday, January 3, 2022** at Room 2057, Kandiyohi County Health and Human Services Building, Willmar and via Zoom video conference.

