

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

February 6, 2023

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

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

Excused: Ryan Nelson

Absent: 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 10:06 a.m.

MINUTES— David Sisser requested the following correction under City of Willmar Broadband RFP for High-Speed Internet: The sentence that states “One concern is much of the installed fiber in Willmar is passive optical network fiber, which is run to each block and then goes to the homes via phone lines”, should read “One concern is much of the installed fiber in Willmar is passive optical network fiber, which is run to each block and then goes to the homes via fiber.”

IT WAS MOVED BY David Sisser, SECONDED BY Larry Kleindl, to approve the revised Minutes of the January 9, 2022 meeting. MOTION CARRIED.

[Roger Imdieke joined the meeting]

Introductions. Jesse Gislason introduced himself to the committee, followed by self-introductions. Gislason will replace Donna Boonstra, who completed her term on the EDC Joint Operations Board.

NEW BUSINESS—

Resignation of Larry Kleindl.

IT WAS MOVED BY Duane Anderson, SECONDED BY Michelle Marotzke, to accept with regrets the resignation of Larry Kleindl from the Kandiyohi County and City of Willmar Economic Development Commission’s Broadband and Advanced Technology Committee. MOTION CARRIED.

Addition of Kelsey Baker.

IT WAS MOVED BY Michelle Marotzke, SECONDED BY Rollie Nissen, to approve Kelsey Baker as a member of the Kandiyohi County and City of Willmar Economic Development Commission's Broadband and Advanced Technology Committee. MOTION CARRIED.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS—

State Border-to-Border Development Grant 2023. Applications for the next round of Border-to-Border Broadband Development Grants are due March 2, 2023. \$67 million is available in state funding.

East Lake Lillian and Lake Elizabeth Townships. East Lake Lillian and Lake Elizabeth Townships will be part of one proposed project, with Vibrant Broadband expanding on fiber that already exists in the two townships. Lake Elizabeth Township approved the project and East Lake Lillian Township will discuss approval at its meeting on Tuesday, February 7, 2023. The approximate cost is \$1 million per township. A grant application will be submitted for the Border-to-Border Broadband Development Low Density Pilot Program, which covers 75 percent of the project cost. The townships will be asked to contribute \$200 per passing, or \$20,800 for Lake Elizabeth Township and \$19,000 for East Lake Lillian Township. Kandiyohi County American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds will cover the balance of \$148,125. This project does not include the city of Lake Lillian.

IT WAS MOVED BY Duane Anderson, SECONDED BY David Sisser, to recommend to the Kandiyohi County Board of Commissioners that it approve the East Lake Lillian/Lake Elizabeth Township Project, at a local cost of \$148,125. MOTION CARRIED.

Harrison Township. Chair Boeschen stated Harrison Township will be a separate project due to its higher density. It will include 222 passings, excluding the north and east sides of Diamond Lake, which are already covered by Frontier Communications. Chair Boeschen proposed applying for a Border-to-Border Broadband Development Grant to cover 45 percent of the cost. Harrison Township will be asked to approve the funding of \$44,000 (\$200 per passing) at its February 14th meeting. Kandiyohi County will be asked to contribute \$251,600 from ARPA funds.

IT WAS MOVED BY Roger Imdieke, SECONDED BY Rollie Nissen, to recommend to the Kandiyohi County Board of Commissioners that it approve the Harrison Township Project, at a local cost of \$251,600. MOTION CARRIED.

Lake Andrew and Colfax Townships. Chair Boeschen reported Federated Telephone Cooperative (FTC) is considering a project with Lake Andrew and Colfax Townships, however he is not confident it can be put together by the grant application deadline of March 2, 2023. Cost projections are needed before moving forward, as this project could exceed the \$10 million limit. Another round of funding will likely occur next fall, and with Governor Walz proposing a higher limit on grants, success would be more likely at that time. If FTC is able to provide the cost information in time to apply by March 2, Chair Boeschen will call a special meeting via Zoom for committee approval.

GRANTS—

ReConnect Loan and Grant Program Round 4. Chair Boeschen reported an application was submitted by Vibrant Broadband last November to the United States Department of Agriculture for a ReConnect 4 grant for a small portion of northeast Kandiyohi County. Grant approvals are done on a rolling basis, and Vibrant Broadband has not yet received information regarding approval.

American Rescue Plan Act Funds. Chair Boeschen reported that including the two projects approved at today's meeting, \$3,014,009 of Kandiyohi County's ARPA funds have been allocated, leaving a balance of \$3,279,165. The allocated total includes \$300,000 for a potential line extension program. The remaining balance needs to be allocated by the end of 2024 and spent by the end of 2026.

REPORTS—

Riverwood – Charter. The Riverwood Project is complete.

West FTP – Federated. FTC will hold an open house on February 16th at 5:00-7:00 pm. at the Kandiyohi County Health and Human Services building to discuss the new broadband construction in Arctander, Mamre, Dovre and St. Johns Townships.

City of Willmar. Sisser reported the City of Willmar will hold a meeting on January 26, 2023 to discuss bond revenues and other issues related to broadband installation. The Willmar Broadband RFP Committee's recommendation will be presented at tonight's city council meeting.

Internet for All. Chair Boeschen, Roger Imdieke, Sarah Swedburg and Marotzke attended the Internet for All conference at the Mystic Lake Conference Center last week. Nissen attended on line. Digital equity was discussed. The State of Minnesota is allowing voluntary digital equity groups to sign up and participate in a planning process that will take place in the coming months. Marotzke will lead a group which will be assembled from a list of targeted underrepresented groups provided by the state. The actual use of broadband once it is installed will be emphasized. Signing up as a group creates access to a \$4000 mini grant which can be used to cover stipends for committee members and digital equity activities.

New Vision Academy was discussed, it is an entity that works with immigrant youth on education of coding and technology. A new location will be opened at MidTown Plaza in Willmar. It is currently pursuing a \$20,000 grant from Southwest Initiative Foundation, and needs additional funding. New Vision Academy will be invited to attend the March Broadband and Advanced Technology Committee meeting.

Other comments regarding the Internet for All Conference included:

- It was a good opportunity to meet internet service providers.
- Rural counties were not well-represented.
- The panels could have included more nonmetro people.
- The conference was sponsored by the Department of Employment and Economic Development, the Border-

to-Border Broadband Development Grant Program and the National Telecommunications and Information Administration.

- The conference was well-attended, with 250 people on site and 150 on line.

ADJOURNMENT—There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:01 a.m.

NEXT MEETING—The next regular committee meeting is **10:00 a.m., Monday, March 6, 2023** at Room 2057, Kandiyohi County Health and Human Services Building, Willmar and via Zoom video conference.