

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

MINUTES

September 11, 2023

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

Present: Duane Anderson, Kelsey Baker, Mark Boeschen, Paul Bolle, Bruce DeBlicke, Jason Hulstein (via Zoom), Michelle Marotzke, Ryan Nelson (via Zoom) and Rollie Nissen

Excused: Jesse Gislason, Roger Imdieke, Tony Kirby, David Sisser and Chuck Stranberg

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

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

MINUTES—

IT WAS MOVED BY Rollie Nissen, SECONDED BY Michelle Marotzke, to approve the Minutes of the August 7, 2023 meeting as emailed. MOTION CARRIED.

GRANTS—

Grant Update. On Friday, September 8, 2023 Sarah Swedburg attended the quarterly meeting of the Minnesota Association of Professional County Economic Developers, where Bree Maki, Director of the Office of Broadband Development (OBD), announced tentative plans to open the next round of Border-to-Border Broadband Development grants in October. Grant rules need to be posted for 60 days before the round begins. Visits to townships with potential projects have been scheduled. Maki addressed the Broadband Line Extension Connection Program. The state has \$15 million allocated for underserved homes that are not included in active projects. Some applications were eliminated because they were located in a cluster of homes that would be better served under a Border-to-Border grant project. Swedburg requested detailed information on those who were not awarded a grant or do not have a provider willing to bid on installation, but expects to receive aggregated information at best. A second round of Line Extension grants is expected.

American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Funds. Chair Boeschen reported there are \$3.147 million remaining in county ARPA funds to be used for broadband projects.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS—

Updates on Additional Potential Projects. Chair Boeschen reported meetings have been scheduled with Colfax, Lake Andrew, Fahlun, Kandiyohi, Genessee and Lake Lillian Townships to discuss funding options on potential projects. Chair Boeschen and Swedburg met with Willmar Township, where they provided a worksheet containing steps to complete prior to identifying a provider. This document will be helpful for future projects.

REPORTS—

Digital Connection Task Force. Digital Connection Committees were formed at the request of OBD by local organizations or individuals. There are approximately 95 committees in Minnesota. Twelve people participated in Kandiyohi County’s committee and all information collected was shared with OBD. Several draft meetings are scheduled throughout the state, with Kandiyohi County hosting the pilot meeting. Marotzke received a thank you note from Maki for the committee’s willingness to host the first meeting. The meeting, which was well-attended, discussed results, activities, methodologies and plans for each committee. Draft plans distributed at the meeting can be found at https://mn.gov/deed/assets/draft-digital-opportunity-plan_tcm1045-587873.pdf. The Digital Connection Committee is in the process of entering survey information and exploring new opportunities. A big concern centers around what happens once access is achieved. Can individuals afford it? Do they know about the Affordable Connectivity Program? Do they have access to devices and know how to use them? What other resources are needed? Education and a push on the providers to ensure they are sharing information correctly will be prioritized.

CURRENT LOCAL PROJECTS

West FTTP—Federated Telephone Cooperative (FTC). The West Project continues the installation phase. Seventeen of the 30 locations for which additional funds were approved have been added to the project thus far, and when the total approaches 30, additional funds will be requested. Installation should be complete within a month.

City of Willmar. Chair Boesch reported the City of Willmar is moving forward with a design for the use agreement between Hometown Fiber, the city and the internet service providers. The design will dictate ownership and roles and responsibilities between all parties. When completed it will be presented to the city council.

Vibrant Border-to-Border Project. Swedburg reported an open house in partnership with Vibrant Broadband is scheduled for December 6, 2023 from 5:30-7:30 p.m. at the Atwater Community Center.

ADJOURNMENT—There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:29 a.m.

NEXT MEETING—The next regular committee meeting is **10:00 a.m., Monday, October 2, 2023** at Room 2057, Kandiyohi County Health and Human Services Building, Willmar and via Zoom video conference.



Broadband Internet Interest

The Kandiyohi County & City of Willmar Economic Development Commission's Broadband Committee has existed for over 20 years to explore and bring better broadband internet to Kandiyohi County. We are committed to supporting broadband access to all households in Kandiyohi County, both through the development of Fiber-to-the-Premise infrastructure as well as through digital equity activities, helping citizens access and afford the internet.

Next Steps

As a Kandiyohi County Township that has expressed interest in partnering to see a successful Fiber-to-the-Premise infrastructure project, you've already taken an important step to prepare for such a project. Infrastructure development takes key partnership, time, and patience to succeed. The Broadband Committee is with you every step of the way. We have additional details and experience with all these steps. This is simply an overview of what needs to be done.

- Step 1: Count passings** - Identify the approximate number of *passings* within your township. *Passings* include premises like homes, farms and businesses where a physical building with electricity is located.
- Step 2: Prepare to financially support a project** - The range of the contribution is estimated to be between \$200 and \$2000 per passing. These dollar amounts vary greatly depending on other funding vehicles like the County, State, and Provider. If nothing else, start at \$1000 per passing. Funding vehicles include cash, subordinated service districts, bonding and levies. Educating yourself on these different *types* of vehicles will come in handy down the road.
- Step 3: Gather information for grants** – Specifically listing farms, businesses, and community anchor institutions with names. Collect letters of support, surveys, or other information from local parties to support the grant request.
- Step 4: Find a provider** – A project can't begin without a provider. The Kandiyohi County EDC Broadband Committee works with a variety of providers to find feasible projects. Providers will use the above information to determine if a project is feasible and may get you to the front of the line compared to other entities.