



BROADBAND COMMITTEE MEETING

MAY 19, 2021

Christine Husom, District 1
Darek Vetsch, District 2
Mark Daleiden, District 3
Mary Wetter, District 4
Michael Kaczmarek, District 5

DATE APPROVED: MAY 25, 2021

Members Present: Vetsch, Elizabeth Karels, John Holler, Matthew Fomby, Heather Lemieux

Others Present: Lee Kelly, Greg Pickard; **Attending Remotely:** Greg Kryzer, Mark Kellogg, John Deitering, Frank Petitta, Lori Cocking, John Holler, Alek Halverson, Bob Hiivala, Lindsey Meyer, Michael Smith-Nordquist, Steve Jobe, Schawn Johnson

I. Establish Purpose and Roles of Broadband Committee

Information Technology Director, Matthew Fomby said an independent company will provide residents with broadband, but the County will help get the residents to that point. Commissioner Vetsch said he this committee will help identify options to get broadband to the residents of Wright County, either in the ground, in a tower, or hybrid.

Communications Specialist, John Holler asked if there was a grant, would it be the same as the Cares Act, having to justify requests and if it's not that it would fall back on the County to repay it. Heather Lemieux confirmed that was correct. Project Administrator, Elizabeth Karels said other counties do a reimbursement type grant.

Holler asked if there has been any discussion regarding using the communications tower that the old Sheriff's Office was using, Fomby said it's a possibility but he will have to investigate it. Karels said there are different types of technology that could possibly utilize the tower.

RECOMMENDATION:

Vetsch said there are five areas the committee needs to go after. The first is to identify the need. The next is to identify delivery options. The third is the disbursement of American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds, as it relates to Broadband. The fourth is become a sponsoring agent for ISP Providers for grants through the County, the state or federal. The fifth is being an at-will group to apply for grants on our own to help solidify the infrastructure.

II. Review Example Broadband Development Process

Karels reviewed the broadband development process document from the Blandin Foundation's website. The committee has been collecting data, reviewing maps, and doing surveys. Karels suggest ramping up the surveys. She said the committee has touched a bit on committee members, cities and township roles. The next step is to conduct a feasibility study to get a higher level of understanding for what will work in the community. Karels said it's important to find out where the market demand is, which technology will work best, what it will cost, and how the county should structure a Request for Proposal (RFP) or a grant program.

Fomby said data is being collected and there is a heat map showing different areas. He said the best the County can do is gather as much information as possible and make the best decision for the County.

Karels said she has reached out to the Minnesota Rural Broadband Coalition because they have a speed test initiative on the website. Fomby said they are encouraging people to do the speed test, which the MN Rural Broadband Coalition has said they will share with the County.

Karels said the Minnesota Rural Broadband Coalition suggests having people do the speed test multiple times throughout the day because they average it out.

Human Resource Director, Schawn Johnson suggested working with the Sherburne-Wright Cable Commission because they serve the same purpose with cable, the trenches and upgrades.

RECOMMENDATION:

Vetsch said he would like to see at least three quotes for a feasibility study. Creating a Broadband SharePoint and a Broadband webpage for a quick link to the speed test. Karels will work on a mission statement and Fomby will reach out to Sherburne-Wright Cable Commission.

III. Update on Discussion with Providers

Karels she has spoken with four different providers and has more meetings setup in the next few weeks. All four providers said they don't know where the needs are because they don't have the data. Two of the providers expressed interested in leasing but the right type of agreement needs to be in place. A few of the providers said there are going to be providing service to the area with or without the help of government aid. Other items that were discussed were Department of Natural Resources (DNR) permitting, and right of way permitting.

RECOMMENDATION:

Informational only.

IV. Update from IT

Fomby said he has concerns about leasing. He said he will get the website up but instead of putting it on Facebook it should be promoted directly from the County Website which will help keep the citizens informed.

RECOMMENDATION:

Informational only.

V. Action Items/Agenda for Next Meeting

Vetsch said at the next meeting the committee will review the quotes for the feasibility study, data from the speed test, a rough sketch of the website, and discuss identifying regions of the county from the greatest amount of need to the least amount of need.

The next meeting will be on Wednesday, June 9, 2021 at 2:00 p.m.

RECOMMENDATION:

Informational only.

Minutes submitted by Angie Fisher, Administrative Specialist