



## BROADBAND COMMITTEE MEETING

JUNE 9, 2021

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

DATE APPROVED: [DATE]

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**Members Present:** Vetsch, Daleiden, Elizabeth Karels, John Holler, Matthew Fomby, Mark Kellogg, Lee Kelly, Lindsey Meyer, Heather Lemieux, Greg Kryzer  
**Others Present:** Nathan Zacharias, Alek Halverson, Steve Jobe, Michael Smith-Nordquist, Shawn Johnson, Gregory Pickard, John Deitering

**THESE MINUTES ARE IN DRAFT FORMAT AND REQUIRE APPROVAL BY THE COUNTY BOARD**

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### I. Minnesota Rural Broadband Coalition – Speed Test Data and Legislative Updates

Nathan Zacharias introduced himself to the committee. He is currently a lobbyist for the Minnesota Rural Broadband Coalition and Project Manager for the Minnesota Speed Test Initiative. The Minnesota Rural Broadband Coalition was formed in 2015.

Zacharias said a special legislative session will be held June 14, 2021. There is an agreement between the House Speaker, the Majority Leader in the Senate, and the Governor for a \$70 million for Border-to-Border Broadband Grant program. The funding would be spread over two years with \$35 million allocated each year. Applications for the grant funding would be due in the fall, funds would be announced in January, and projects would begin next summer. The money is coming from the Capital Projects Fund, which is part of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). There are suggestions that the amount of funding may be increased. The bill needs a super majority in the State Legislature in order to pass.

State and local funds from ARPA are eligible for broadband use under certain criteria; they must be reliable, future-proof, and meet speed requirements. Communications Specialist John Holler asked if investing a portion of federal ARPA funds in broadband would increase or decrease the County's chances of obtaining additional funds from the state level. Zacharias stated the state border-to-border broadband program scores applications by community, giving more weight to applications that have community buy-in; ultimately increasing the chance of receiving additional funds.

Commissioner Vetsch stated the source of funding has changed from previous funding allocations. He questioned if the funds would be tied to bonding requirements that would be different than previous rounds of grants. Zacharias said it is in the bonding bill, but general obligation bonds or appropriation bonds will not be used to pay for it. The bill will direct the state to spend the money from the Capital Projects fund from the ARPA.

The state has not changed the requirements for speed. In order to qualify for a grant from the State of Minnesota, through the border-to-border program, the project has to have at least be 25 megabits per second (Mbps) download speed and at least 3 Mbps upload speed and be scalable to 100 download by 20 upload. The state is not interested investing in outdated technology. It wants future-proof networks. The project that has better speeds is more likely to receive the grant funds.

Zacharias showed the committee the map of Speed Test Data. As of Wednesday, May 26, 2020, there was a 3 percent participation rate based on total households in the county. Approximately 42.5 percent of the test results are below 25 Mbps. Another 40 percent are between 25 and 150 Mbps. 15 percent are about 150

Mbps. Generally speaking, more populated areas provide better speeds than rural areas. Some areas have what is called the “donut hole phenomenon” where the rural area surrounding a municipality provides better speed. In a municipality, many times existing infrastructure must be removed for installation.

Zacharias gave a tutorial of Speed Test map features. The blue dots on the map are Census blocks and show where funds have been deployed in the past. Data can be pulled from a particular township or an area drawn on the map. The purpose of the map is to provide data that can be used when applying for grants. Zacharias encouraged the county to have as many households participate as possible. He has granted the Project Administrator Elizabeth Karels access to Wright County data.

**RECOMMENDATION: Informational only.**

## **II. Feasibility Study Proposals**

Karels stated five proposals were received. The RFP asked proposals to answer the following questions:

- What is the current state of broadband in the county?
- Where does broadband need to be improved?
- What is the strategy that creates the greatest opportunity to meet broadband needs within the county?

Information Technology Director Matthew Fomby stated he narrowed the selection to Geo Partners and Design Nine. Each provided something different. The group discussed the pros and cons of each proposal, taking the timeline into consideration. The group agreed to move forward with Design Nine.

**RECOMMENDATION: Approve the contract with Design Nine pending the reference checks and an interview. Karels will conduct the reference checks and a meeting will be scheduled with Design Nine to present and answer questions.**

## **III. Webpage Review**

The group viewed the Broadband Committee web page. Additional information will be added to the page as it becomes available.

**RECOMMENDATION: Informational only.**

## **IV. Other Staff Updates**

Holler mentioned using the blank side of the Parks and Recreation flyer as a marketing space for broadband. Marketing at the County Fair and post card mailings were also discussed.

**RECOMMENDATION: Informational only.**

## **V. Action Items/Agenda for Next Meeting**

Set the next meeting date at a future County Board meeting.

Adjourned 2:58 p.m.

Minutes submitted by Elizabeth Clow, Office Manager