



COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

BROADBAND

MAY 11, 2021

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

DATE APPROVED: May 18, 2021

Members Present: Commissioner Daleiden, Commissioner Vetsch, Elizabeth Karels, Heather Lemieux, John Holler, Lee Kelly, Lindsey Meyer, Matthew Fomby, and Mark Kellogg

Others Present: Bob Hiiivala, Elizabeth Clow, Greg Kryzer, Gregory Pickard, Michael Smith-Nordquist, Steve Jobe, and Sue Vergin

I. Establish Purpose of Broadband Committee

II. Update on Outreach / Data Gathering

- a. Survey Responses from Cities, Townships, and School Districts
- b. Minnesota Rural Broadband Coalition Speed Test

III. Proposed Projects

- a. County-Owned Infrastructure
- b. Matching Grant Program

Project Administrator Elizabeth Karels shared the American Rescue Plan (ARP) guidance relating to broadband infrastructure. Broadband infrastructure must be designed to provide service to unserved or underserved households and businesses. Service must reliably meet or exceed symmetrical 100 Mbps download and upload speeds. Funds must be obligated by December 31, 2024 and paid by December 31, 2026.

IT Director Matthew Fomby explained his plan to connect all county-owned buildings. In the process of laying fiber to connect county-owned buildings, additional fiber strands would be installed. The Wright County Economic Development Partnership could market the fiber to internet service providers (ISPs) and possibly incentivize businesses. This could be executed for approximately \$9 million. However, the County would not be providing service to households or businesses under this model. Based on the newly released guidance, the county may not be able to use the ARP funds to do this.

Commissioner Vetsch suggested using the funds to award grants. The amount of grant funding would be weighted based on the need of the area. Fomby stated he does not think this is the most cost-effective use of the funds.

IT Technical Services Manager Mark Kellogg stated many other counties also have a need to provide service. Some may be willing to work together to get more done. Karels researched what other counties have done. For example, Cass County used CARES funding to provide grants for ISPs. Companies proposed projects by responding to a Request for Proposal (RFP). Additionally, Le Sueur County had a more strategic approach. They conducted a feasibility study and posted more targeted RFPs. Both counties had success.

Vetsch stated before putting fiber in the ground, the County must have a contract in place with an ISP to ensure utilization. He suggested reaching out to providers to gauge interest. Fomby expressed concerns with establishing contracts with ISPs prior to breaking ground. He does not feel the County can set up contracts fast enough.

Karels stated there was variability in the responses submitted from the survey the county sent out. The MN Rural Broadband Coalition's speed test can provide more detail information.

Communications Specialist John Holler asked if areas of the county have been prioritized. Fomby stated the western portion of the county is underserved compared to the eastern portion. Holler also questioned the cost per mile. Kellogg stated there may be variations in the cost. If the fiber crosses protected areas, DNR permits are required. Alternate routes may save time and money.

Vetsch stated a grant program will incentivize ISPs to provide service in rural areas. Karels suggested collecting data and developing criteria to award the grant funds.

Fomby suggested opening the funds to the installation of cell phone towers as well. Vetsch stated that would be fine but contracts would still need to be in place prior to putting fiber in the ground. Karels urged everyone to keep in mind the project will not be completed at one time. It will take several years.

Holler questioned if the grant program would create competition between ISPs. Fomby stated it is possible. Vetsch stated most companies will expand on their current locations. The closest provider to a particular area will likely bid. Kellogg stated smaller companies could take advantage of the program and service residents of the county.

Kellogg asked permission to lay a redundant line for the training center. Vetsch stated there may be a chance the project will not qualify for ARP funds and the county may have to use its own funds to pay for it. Meyer stated it is abundantly clear in the guidance that there must be a focus on areas that are unserved or underserved.

IV. Action Items / Agenda for Next Meeting

- Karels will contact providers in throughout the County to gauge interest.
- Fomby will work on scaling back the map.
- The Surveyors Department will work on creating a map.
- Next meeting scheduled for Wednesday, May 19, 2021 at 2:00 P.M.

The meeting adjourned at 2:08 P.M.

Minutes submitted by Elizabeth Clow, Office Manager.