

BROADBAND COMMITTEE

Committee: BROADBAND
DATE: SEPTEMBER 26, 2023
TIME: 4:30 P.M.
PLACE: FOREST COUNTY BROADROOM

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Lukas called the meeting to order at 4:30 p.m.

ROLL CALL

Members Present

Board Members: Black, Gretzinger, Lukas, Skallerud

Other Members: Kayla Littleton (LCC), Stephanie Montgomery (E.M. Director), Amber Rehberg (UW – Extension Director), Chris Safer (FCEDP)

Members Absent

Jeffery Marvin (Sheriff)

Quorum Established

Others Present: Representative from Bug Tussel (Mitch Olson), Steve Watson (Digital Navigator), Heather Ostrowski (Digital Navigator Program Manager), Mary Belland (FCEDP), Patrick Voigtman, Tony Weber.

APPROVE AGENDA

Motion by Gretzinger to approve the agenda, second by Black. All present voting (AYE). Motion carried.

APPROVE MINUTES FROM JULY 24, 2023, MEETING

Motion by Black to approve the minutes from the July 24, 2023, meeting, second by Montgomery. All present voting (AYE). Motion carried.

PUBLIC COMMENT ON AGENDA ITEMS

None

DIGITAL NAVIGATOR UPDATE

Steve Watson (Digital Navigator) has been helping the Forest County Finance Committee to use laptops and Excel to assist them in going paperless.

Watson advised September is Scam Awareness month. He attended a scam presentation sponsored by the Commission on Aging at the Water's Edge. There were over 70 people in attendance, and Watson's services were offered to those in attendance.

Watson has obtained and updated ten tablets and ten laptops to be distributed to individuals who need them. He already has two individuals signed up to receive a device.

Watson is continuing to set up other presentations and working on new marketing to continue to service the community.

DISCUSSION WITH BUG TUSSEL ON PROJECT #1 and #2

Project One

Mitch Olson from Bug Tussel provided an update on Projects One and Two. Project One will need to be extended as one tower in the Town of Lincoln is still working on finalizing a location of the tower. The rest of the towers on Project One are scheduled to be ready by the end of the year. Bug Tussel is upgrading the Newald tower from what was proposed by Northwoods Connect. Bug Tussel is working with the Forest County Potawatomi Community to put up additional towers. Bug Tussel has expended most or all the funds for Project One.

Project Two

The project was delayed as Bug Tussel is working out funding. Bug Tussel is working on the permitting, engineering, and equipment acquisitions. The plan is to start construction in the Spring of 2024. The plan is to branch off from Crandon first to obtain connectivity and work east.

Future Grant Funding

The County is not eligible for the next Public Service Commission (PSC) grant cycle. The next big grant cycle will be the Broadband Equity Access and Deployment Program (BEAD) funding.

Reported Problem

Lukas brought up a reported issue related to the emergency services line not being active during the July 4th weekend for the Roberts Lake area. Olson has received the email about the situation and is still investigating the issue.

BEAD FUNDING AND SURVEY

Skallerud provided an update related to information received from the recent Wisconsin Counties Association (WCA) Conference related to the Broadband Equity Access and Deployment (BEAD) grant. There is going to be a 25% match, and it is projected that grant funds will not be released until 2029 or 2030.

UPDATE – FCEDP COORDINATOR

Chris Schaefer (FCEDP Executive Director) advised that on October 25 and 26, the State of Wisconsin and Public Service Commission will host the Broadband Regional Workshop. and update on the Broadband Equity Access and Deployment (BEAD) grant meeting at Nicolet Area Technical College in Rhineland. There is a 25% match, and it most likely won't be until 2029 or 2030, until the funds would be released.

Schaefer also provided an update about the Rural Partners Network (RPN) Signature Project grant. He had asked for a 50 million road project and a 40 million broadband project. All the other communities that are part of the USDA RPN have received funding, and we are the only county that has not yet received funding. Mary Belland (FCEDP) and Chris Schaefer are continuing to attempt to get the funding to get these projects moving forward.

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

No items at this time.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Gretzinger to adjourn, second by Black. All present voting (AYE). Motion carried. The meeting adjourned at 5:23 p.m.

These minutes are not official and are subject to change. They will be officially approved at the next scheduled Broadband meeting.