

Minnesota Rural Broadband Coalition
DRAFT Meeting Minutes
December 5, 2019

Attendance

On Site: Chuck Ackman, Office of Senator Amy Klobuchar; Bill Black, MMUA; Cliff Bolstad, CoBank; Joe Buttweiler, CTC; Bill Coleman, CTA; Cristina Diaz, Office of Congresswoman Angie Craig; Angie Dickison, DEED; Mark Erickson, Broadband Advocate; Steve Fenske, MN Association of Townships; Steve Giorgi, MN RAMS; Jenny Glumack, MREA; Nancy Hoffman, Chisago County EDA; JoAnne Johnson, MN Public Broadband Alliance; Bernadine Joselyn, Blandin Foundation; Katie Kienbaum, Institute for Local Self-Reliance; Dan Larson, MN Rural Counties; Daniel Lightfoot, League of MN Cities; Becky Lourey, Nemadji Research; Emily Murray, Association of MN Counties; Vince Robinson, Lincoln County; Heidi Steinmetz, Kanabec County EDA; Robin Weis, Southwest Regional Development Commission; and Nathan Zacharias.

On Phone: Mark Boeschen, Kandiyohi County EDC; Marc Johnson, ECMECC; Mark Jones, MN Rural Health Association; Sara Kuglin, Redwood County; Josie Lonetti, MN Farm Bureau; Mark Mrla, Finley Engineering; Briana Mumme, Redwood County; Brenda Nyberg, EDFP; Mary Ann Van Cura, Digital Inclusion Advocate; Mike Weber, Mille Lacs County

Nancy Hoffman called the meeting to order. Attendees introduced themselves and discussed what each of their organizations bring to the table.

Steve Giorgi made the motion to approve the August 8, 2019 meeting minutes, second by Joe Buttweiler. Motion approved.

Financials/Budget

Nancy provided an updated financial outlook for coalition members.

Fundraising/Membership

Brent Christensen and the fundraising committee has been busy trying to get new members. We are grateful to have been approved for a grant from the Blandin Foundation for the next two years. We will receive \$20,000 for 2020 and \$10,000 for 2021. Nancy thanked Jane and Nathan for assisting with the grant application.

Executive Committee/Administration

MRBC entered into a contract with Nathan Zacharias that will go through December 2020. Additionally, the contract with AMC was automatically renewed through the end of 2020.

Office of Broadband Updates – Angie Dickison

Angie Dickison introduced herself to the coalition and gave a background on her work with broadband and her new role at DEED. Angie then provided an update on the current round of Border-to-Border Broadband Grant applications. Deed received 80 applications totaling more than \$70 million in requested funding. There is \$20 million to award for this grant round and another \$20 million in 2020. There is a new requirement in the program this year – those who receive grant dollars cannot use those funds before the date that the contract with the state is signed. Angie expects the announcement on grant recipients will happen sometime after the new year.

Discussion among members and Angie regarding the grant program generally and the challenge process success this year. There was also discussion regarding the difficulties with funding underserved areas when there are still so many unserved areas in the state. Comments to focus on the 2026 goal instead of the 2022 goal and the potential for the state to revisit the goals generally.

Governor's Broadband Task Force

Angie looks forward to working with the Governor's Broadband Task Force and is happy to have four members from the Coalition on the task force. The first meeting will be next week, December 10. Bill Coleman asked if the Coalition could get on the agenda for the second meeting to discuss our work. Angie provided updated maps to Coalition members.

Legislative Update

Nathan provided a recap of the House mini session in October and how broadband played a role. The 2020 legislative session begins on February 11 and Nathan discussed the legislative strategy for session. There will be an ask of \$30 million for the grant program in the supplemental budget. The Coalition sent a letter to Governor Walz in July outlining this request. The November forecast was announced this morning and there is a \$1.3 billion surplus. Some of this will go towards the budget reserve, but overall this is a positive sign for the state. In terms of broadband policy for the 2020 session, the Coalition will look to the Governor's Broadband Task Force to lead in this area and the Coalition will weigh in on the task force policy recommendations. The Legislative Committee agreed we should continue to play defense on several policy areas.

The Coalition will be planning the 2020 Day on the Hill. Likely looking at a day before the Easter/Passover break and before committee deadlines.

Finally, Nathan outlined his work with DEED on scheduling a tour of an ISP that has received grant dollars in the past: CTC, Fond du Lac, and Paul Bunyan are the three contenders. This list has been relayed to DEED and they will be following up. The tour will likely take place in mid-February.

Greater SW Minnesota Communities – Klobuchar Staff Tour

Broadband is a top priority for Senator Klobuchar. Her office is setting up a meeting to discuss broadband in SW MN on December 17. The first stop will be Mankato and then Windom. These meetings are a great opportunity to get advocates in the room to discuss broadband. They will likely have another tour in northern MN next year. The Federal Data Act seeks to update broadband maps nationwide. The bill is out of committee. These initiatives at the federal level are strong and supported by DEED.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 11:40am.