

Minnesota Rural Broadband Coalition
Meeting Minutes
February 25, 2020

Attendance

On Site: Cliff Bolstad, CoBank; Anna Boroff, MN Cable Communications Association; Brent Christensen, MN Telecom Alliance; Bill Coleman, Community Technology Advisors; Cristina Diaz, Office of Congresswoman Angie Craig; Nancy Hoffman, Chisago County EDA; Katie Kienbaum, Institute for Local Self-Reliance; Daniel Lightfoot, League of MN Cities; Becky Lourey, Nemadji Research; Emily Murray, Association of MN Counties; Vince Robinson, Lincoln County; Paul Solsrud, Cooperative Network Services; Ann Treacy, Treacy Information Services; Jay Trusty, Southwest Regional Development Commissioner; Diane Wells, DEED; and Nathan Zacharias, Zacharias Government Relations.

On Phone:

Joe Buttweiler, CTC; Steve Giorgi, RAMS MN; JoAnne Johnson, MN Public Broadband Alliance; Marc Johnson, ECMECC; Mark Jones, MN Rural Health Association; Brian Krambeer, MiEnergy Cooperative; Brenda Nyberg, EDFP; Connie Schmoll, Kandiyohi County; Mike Wimmer, Mille Lacs County EDA;

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

Becky Lourey made the motion to approve the December 5, 2019 meeting minutes, second by Vince Robinson. Motion approved.

Coalition Chair Position

Brent Christensen made the motion to elect Vince Robinson as the new Coalition Chair, second by Becky Lourey. Motion approved.

Discussion of 2020 Border-to-Border Broadband Grant Recipients

Diane Wells provided an update from DEED. The Office of Broadband Development was able to fund \$23 million in projects. There were 78 applications filed on time, two came in late, 80 applications totaling \$70 million. Because of the new administration, the announcement was later than expected. This will be the 2019 round even though the projects were awarded in January in order to limit confusion when they do the 2020 round. Local funding did provide applicants extra points. Expecting another robust round of applications this fall. Trying to identify towns that might be able to be served without receiving grant money.

Legislative Update

Nathan provided an update on the first weeks of the 2020 legislative session. The February Forecast will be announced later this week, and Nathan is optimistic that with the economic outlook of the state there will be additional broadband funding in the supplemental budget. The other major work this session will be to put forward a bonding bill. The governor's proposal is around \$2 billion in capital improvement projects. The House has hinted at having a bill over \$3 billion, but Senate Republicans are likely to support a bill closer to \$1 billion in bonding.

SF 3049 (Draheim) and HF 3029 (Ecklund) – broadband funding bill would include an additional \$30 million for the grant program in 2021 and ongoing each year going forward. There is great bipartisan support in both the House and Senate for these bills. SF 3049 was heard on Monday in the Senate

Agriculture, Rural Development, and Housing Finance Committee and the House Greater MN Jobs and Economic Development Finance Division will hear the bill on Wednesday.

Earlier this year, there was a press conference to announce the broadband grant award recipients and the governor announced his support for \$30 million in one-time funding for the grant program. The governor will likely release his supplemental budget in the coming weeks, will know more after the budget forecast on Thursday.

There has been some discussion on broadband policy bills that might be introduced this session. The coalition will not be putting forward any policy changes, but if there are any introduced, we will react and see how they might impact the coalition.

Steve Giorgi proposed the idea to provide a draft letter on the MRBC website for people to use and send to legislators in support of the additional funding.

Day on the Hill

Thursday, March 12 is the 2020 Broadband Day on the Hill. Registration will be open soon and will be on the website. We will be in room 300 of the State Office Building. The day will start with registration at 8am and will conclude at 2pm. Nathan is working on confirming speakers and legislator meetings. Discussion of whether we should have an identifying item to wear that day – for example, beads that have the broadband coalition logo. We are also hoping to get sponsors for the Day on the Hill activities.

Fundraising/New Membership

The fundraising committee has been busy trying to get new members. Budgeted revenue is \$63,000 from memberships and contributions and \$2,000 from Day on the Hill registrations for a total budget of \$65,000. We have raised \$41,540.00 so far. Few new members, including the MN Cable Communications Association. There are 34 entities that contributed last year that have not yet this year. Brent will be communicating with these groups. Discussion on how to target health care groups and others to become members.

Additional Business

Discussion on the next meeting date – likely after the Easter/Passover break and before the end of the legislative session on May 18. Potentially April 29 at 3pm. The Governor's Task Force on Broadband will meet that day from 10-2pm.

Adjourn

Motion to adjourn by Brent Christensen, second by Bill Coleman. The meeting adjourned at 4:32pm.