

Minnesota Rural Broadband Coalition
Meeting Minutes
June 2, 2020

Attendance

Chuck Ackman, Office of Senator Amy Klobuchar; Anna Boroff, MN Cable Communications Association; Deven Bowdry, DEED; Brent Christensen, MN Telecom Alliance; Bill Coleman, Community Technology Advisors; Cristina Diaz, Office of Congresswoman Angie Craig; Angie Dickison, DEED; Steve Fenske, MN Association of Townships; Julie Foote, MVTV Wireless; Steve Giorgi, RAMS MN; Nancy Hoffman, Chisago County EDA; Roger Imdieke, Kandiyohi County Commissioner; JoAnne Johnson, MN Public Broadband Alliance; Marc Johnson, ECMECC; Mark Jones, MN Rural Health Association; Bernadine Joselyn, Blandin Foundation; Mena Kaehler, Staff for Candidate Ralph Kahler for MN Senate SD21; Jan Keough, Cloquet Valley Internet Initiative; Katie Kienbaum, Institute for Local Self-Reliance; Tim Korby, HR Green; Brian Krambeer, MiEnergy Cooperative; Dan Larson, MN Rural Counties; Daniel Lightfoot, League of MN Cities; Becky Lourey, Nemadji Research; Mark Mrla, Finley Engineering; Emily Murray, Association of MN Counties; Patrick Murray, MN AgriGrowth Council; Brenda Nyberg, EDFP; Vince Robinson, Lincoln County; Pam Rosenau, MVTV Wireless; Paul Solsrud, Cooperative Network Services; Kent Sulem, MMUA; Anne Treacy, Treacy Information Services; Jay Trusty, Southwest Regional Development Commissioner; Britta Torkelson, Capitol Hill Associates; Nikki Vilendrer, Mayo Clinic; Diane Wells, DEED; Mike Wimmer, Mille Lacs County EDA; Nathan Zacharias, Zacharias Government Relations; Jordan Zeller, East Central Regional Development Commission.

Vince Robinson called the meeting to order and took introductions.

Approval of February 25, 2020 Minutes

Motion to approve the February minutes by Brent Christensen, second by Bill Coleman. Motion approved.

State Broadband Speed Test Initiative

Bernadine Joselyn updated the group on the statewide speed test happening through Blandin Foundation and Steve Giorgi discussed RAMS involvement in the test. They wanted to make coalition members aware that the group has been engaged; welcome feedback and participation. Link will be shared with the coalition. There will be an invite for a follow up meeting to learn more about the speed test.

Office of Broadband Development Update

Angie Dickison provided an update from the Office of Broadband Development, letting everyone know they are planning to release the RFP for the 2020 grant round next month. There will be a similar timeline and process as the 2019 round. Applications will be due sometime in September. Angie suggested that folks refresh applications from last year if there's new information for the applicant to share, but that they do not need a lot of additional information – just timely updates. If there is the potential for additional funding through a special session, they will either incorporate that money into this grant round or have a new grant round.

American Connection Project

Nathan alerted the group to the American Connection Project, a new nationwide coalition similar to ours, made up of groups looking to ask Congress for additional money for broadband. Land O'Lakes has invited MRBC to be a member of the national coalition. The executive committee approved, and we are

now members. Nathan discussed next steps with regards to the national coalition, including outreach. The coalition meets weekly and Nathan will attend the meetings.

Current Federal Broadband Initiatives

Senator Amy Klobuchar's Office: Senator Klobuchar's staff provided an update on federal broadband initiatives. The senator has been very engaged at the federal level – the Federal Connections Act was introduced, which creates a fund at the SEC to cover the costs they are accruing for providing free service. They are hopeful to get some movement on this bill. There was funding for broadband through CARES Act, but it was through the Department of Education. Negotiations haven't progressed as far as they were hoping, but Senator Klobuchar continues to be engaged. What came out of CARES (\$100 million) discussion continues – it's not remotely enough. There is a strong push to get dedicated funding. There are ongoing discussions about a modest infrastructure bill that would include broadband funding. The FAST Act needs to be reauthorized this fall, which could be a place to include broadband funding.

Congresswoman Angie Craig's Office: There is even more focus on the importance of broadband during the pandemic. This is an essential service. Working to find out more details about the CARES Act – in the event of a special session we will be looking into additional CARES Act money that can be used for broadband. We want to help MN get additional funding for broadband. Staff is working to figure out how other states have used the CARES Act funding for broadband reimbursement so MN can as well.

Legislative Update

Nathan provided a state legislative update, including what happened at the end of the regular session as well as the upcoming special session. When there is more information on funding and how it can be spent, the coalition should consider a letter to the governor and legislative leaders. There were three bills that included additional funding for broadband: SF 4494 (standalone), HF 3029 (standalone) and then HF 1507 (House Covid package). Vince suggests drafting a letter/email correspondence for members to use with our elected officials, so we are on the same page when advocating.

Press Coverage of Broadband

Several coalition members have been able to contribute to interviews on broadband. Blandin also put together a great tutorial series over the last several weeks.

Association of MN Counties Blue Ribbon Committee

Nancy provided an update on the MAPCED presentation to the AMC Blue Ribbon Committee– a group of county commissioners focused on what county government changes have happened because of COVID and which of these changes are positive and could be implemented going forward. It was a great opportunity to get in front of commissioners, will be reporting back to AMC for all counties eventually.

New Fiscal Host – Southwest Regional Development Commission

Thanks to Jenny and Winthrop EDA for serving as fiscal host for the last several years. They have requested we find a new fiscal host. Executive committee looked for new options and found the Southwest Regional Development Commission. Jay Trusty is on today's meeting and he is with SWRDC; broadband has been a top priority for them for the last number of years. They are happy to serve in this role for the coalition.

Fundraising and New Membership

Brent provided an update for the coalition. Sent out the first round of solicitation letters last fall. Followed up in the winter and recently sent out another round. We are getting the majority of people

that have contributed in the past to do so again. Numbers show that we are at \$45,000 of our \$60,000 goal. Brent is focusing on people to re-up, Nancy is focusing on new outreach. They have drafted a letter to go out to potential new members. Also reaching out to education associations to join. If you know of a group that would like to join, please let Nancy, Brent, or Vince know so we can get them involved.

Additional Business

NA

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 3:00 pm.