

Minnesota Rural Broadband Coalition
DRAFT Meeting Minutes
August 26, 2020

Attendance:

Anna Boroff, MN Cable Communications Association; Deven Bowdry, DEED; Joe Buttweiler, CTC; Brent Christensen, MN Telecom Alliance; Bill Coleman, Community Technology Advisors; Paul Deming, GEO Partners; Glenn Fishbine, GEO Partners; Steve Giorgi, RAMS MN; Joe Gould, Gould Government Relations; Nancy Hoffman, Chisago County EDA; Kate Johansen, Mayo Clinic; JoAnne Johnson, MN Public Broadband Alliance; Mark Jones, MN Rural Health Association; Brian Krambeer, MiEnergy; Sarah Kuglin, Redwood County EDA; Tom Lambrecht, Great River Energy; Jane Leonard, Growth and Justice; Daniel Lightfoot, LMC; Becky Lourey, Nemadji Research; Stu Lourey, MFU; Bree Maki, Office of Senator Tina Smith; Molly Malone, CFRA; Susan Morris, Isanti County Commissioner; Briana Mumme, Redwood County EDA; Emily Murray, Association of MN Counties; Patrick Murray, MN AgriGrowth Council; Vince Robinson, Lincoln County; Katie Roche, Candidate for Chisago County Commissioner; Adam Schiff, Office of Senator Tina Smith; Connie Schmoll, Kandiyohi County & Willmar EDA; US Senator Tina Smith; Maggie Snow, Minitex; Paul Solsrud, Cooperative Network Services; Heidi Steinmetz, Kanabec County; Kent Sulem, MMUA; Rich Sve, Lake County Commissioner/AMC President; Britta Torkelson, Capitol Hill Associates; Anne Treacy, Treacy Information Services; Jay Trusty, Southwest Regional Development Commissioner; 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.

Approval of June 2, 2020 Minutes

Motion to approve the June minutes by Nancy Hoffman, second by Steve Giorgi. Motion approved.

Request by Anna Boroff to post minutes from Executive Committee meetings. Since typical minutes aren't taken at these meetings, we will post a summary of these meetings going forward.

Financial Report

Vince Robinson provided an updated financial report. The coalition budgeted for \$59,000 for the year, currently \$19,300 short of that target. Vince outlined the remaining dues that need to be paid this year. Currently obligations of \$20,000 still this year, but only \$8,900 available.

The coalition has a new fiscal host, the Southwest Regional Development Commission (SRDC). There was discussion to refund the SRDC for half of the membership dues they paid the coalition earlier this year (\$500 refund) in exchange for the fiscal host responsibilities. Motion to approve the \$500 reimbursement to SRDC for fiscal host responsibilities by Jordan Zeller, second by Steve Giorgi. Motion approved. (Jay Trusty abstained from the vote)

Fundraising and New Membership

Brent Christensen and Nancy Hoffman updated members on fundraising efforts, including new organizations and groups that they have reached out to recently. There were two fundraising efforts going on at once – for the speed test and membership. Vince provided background on the expense and revenue side of the speed test. Motion to approve the financial report by Brent Christensen, second by Brian Krambeer. Motion approved.

Legislative Update, Special Sessions

Nathan Zacharias provided a legislative update and a review of what's happened during recent special sessions. There wasn't an additional broadband funding bill passed at the end of the regular session. The governor and legislative leaders believed the funding didn't qualify for CARES Act because projects wouldn't be done until next year. Legislators and advocates tried a different route for funding during the June special session by drafting a new supplemental broadband grant program, but they needed to get this done before July 1 and it didn't pass. Nathan is working with legislative authors to see if there's a way for additional funding in the September special session.

US Senator Tina Smith

Vince Robinson introduced US Senator Tina Smith to the meeting. Senate Smith provided a background on the work she has been doing in support of broadband at the federal level. She highlighted the fact that the COVID crisis has only accentuated the lack of connectivity – especially for rural areas, but also in big cities. Senator Smith has been working on expanding access with the ReConnect Program and working on provisions through various packages – the library stabilization program and working with Senator Klobuchar to build out emergency response. She mentioned that the CARES Act package included \$375 million for broadband, with most of the funding focused around telehealth. It is important that we keep this focus on telehealth going as we emerge from this crisis. Senator Smith is excited about a federal full court press on connecting everyone in this country to broadband, focusing attention on three important aspects; 1) creating one place at the federal level to coordinate where we need to go on broadband, 2) addressing the mapping problem we still have, and 3) establishing the right level of funding to get broadband everywhere. Senator Smith thanked coalition members for all they are doing and took questions.

American Connection Project Update

Nathan Zacharias updated the coalition on the American Connection Project, a national broadband coalition led by Land O'Lakes. They invited us to join the national coalition and we are now members. The project was officially launched on July 8 with 49 members and growing. The main goal is to advocate for more broadband funding. They are planning letter writing and social media campaigns in order to advocate for more funding. Nathan has joined the policy subcommittee, which is currently looking at ways to get all the organizations to agree on some points about broadband. Work has currently slowed because of the August recess, but Nathan expects it to pick back up soon.

Broadband Connects America

Similar to the American Connection Project, Broadband Connects America is another coalition that is hoping to have MRBC become a member. There is no fee for membership in the organization. They are coming at it from the non-profit, advocacy side of the issue as opposed to the corporate side of it like the American Connection Project. Decision to table this conversation until our next meeting to hear from one of its members.

MN Speed Test Initiative

Nathan outlined the statewide speed test project and Glenn provided a demonstration and showed the current maps. The speed test was launched on August 3 and over 17,000 speed tests have been taken so far. The goal is to create the most accurate mapping and build out networks in the community. Nathan plans to present the findings of the speed test and the maps to legislators before the 2021 legislative session. Nathan asked everyone to share the link with networks, family, friends, and organizations. We need all the information, regardless of what your connection may be. Nathan is happy to give a

presentation on the speed test to your organization if anyone would like. We also have resources – graphics, flyers, social media templates that everyone can use. These can be found on the MRBC website.

Office of Broadband Development

Diane Wells provided a brief update on the current work happening at the Office of Broadband Development. The pre-application deadline has passed for this year's Border-to-Border grant application process. They had 40 different pre-application notifications, but it is hard to gauge how many applications they will get out of it. They are looking forward to receiving applications on September 30.

Angie Dickison was named the Executive Director of the Office last week. She was acting in that role, but now it is official. Diane Wells is now a full DEED employee and there are two new grant administrators starting in September.

Looking Forward to 2021 Work Plan and Budget

Vince Robinson started the discussion with members on looking forward – focusing on the future of the coalition and what we should focus on in 2021 and beyond. As a coalition, do we want to create a presence beyond the Border-to-Border Grant Program funding and heighten the awareness of the coalition beyond straight lobbying activities? How will we raise money for next year? Discussion from membership on the above questions. There was a consensus from members that the next step should be to call a strategic planning meeting to discuss this further. Vince will work with the executive committee to find a time for this.

Additional Business

NA

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 5:08 PM.