

Minnesota Rural Broadband Coalition
Meeting Minutes
December 15, 2020

Attendance:

Anna Boroff, MN Cable Communications Association; Joe Buttweiler, CTC; Brent Christensen, MN Telecom Alliance; Bill Coleman, Community Technology Advisors; Naima Dhole, GMCC; Cristina Diaz, Office of Congresswoman Angie Craig; Angie Dickison, DEED Office of Broadband Development; Anne Finn, League of MN Cities; Steve Giorgi, RAMS MN; Cheryl Glaeser, Achieve Consulting; Jenny Glumack, MREA; Dawn Heglund, Upper MN Valley RDC; Nancy Hoffman, Chisago County EDA; JoAnne Johnson, MN Public Broadband Alliance; Janet Keough, Cloquet Valley Internet Initiative; Barbara Dröher Kline, Thrivent; Jane Leonard, Growth and Justice; Steph Lindgren, MN Medical Association; Josie Lonetti, MN Farm Bureau; Becky Lourey, Nemadji Research; Bree Maki, Office of Senator Tina Smith; Sarah Johnson Malchow, Le Sueur County; Molly Malone, CFRA; Scott McMahon, Greater MN Partnership; Mark Mrla, Finley Engineering Co; Emily Murray, Association of MN Counties; Vince Robinson, Lincoln County; Eric Sannerud, GMCC; Connie Schmoll, Kandiyohi County & Willmar EDA; Jason Sjoblom, Koochiching County; Eileen Smith, Hometown Fiber; Rich Sve, Lake County Commissioner/AMC President; Michelle Thomas, ECRDC; Britta Torkelson, Capitol Hill Associates; Ann Treacy, Treacy Information Services; Chris Weiland, RT4MN; 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.

Coalition Strategic Planning Discussion

Cheryl Glaeser provided findings from the initial strategic planning discussion in November and continued the conversation with members. Members met in small breakout groups to discuss coalition goals.

Approval of August 26, 2020 Minutes

Motion by Brent Christensen to approve the August minutes, second by Becky Lourey. **Motion approved.**

Update from Office of Broadband Development

Angie Dickison provided an update from the Office of Broadband Development. Angie discussed the challenges with the current Border-to-Border grant round after the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF) winners were announced last week. Over \$408 million was awarded in MN, with the majority going to LTD. The Office is looking at the applications in the current grant round and gave applicants the ability to remove RDOF areas from their projects if they choose. They are still hoping to award grants in January and will spend the next few weeks analyzing project areas and the RDOF impacts on the projects in front of them. Discussion from members over the RDOF application process and what information will be available after the long-form application is due at the end of January.

Financial Report

Vince Robinson provided an updated financial report. The coalition is currently \$18,000 under budget on the revenue side, currently operating at a deficit. Budget for next year will look almost exactly the same as this year. Vince asked for feedback from members on how we should achieve rounding out our budget for this year and into next year. Discussion from members on how we should solve this shortfall going into the new year as well as a discussion on the budget for the new year. Vince highlighted one of

the strategic planning goals is to expand our circle of influence. He challenged each member to reach out to five of their partners for membership. Brent Christensen and the fundraising committee will pick back up on dues structure and fundraising in order to help expand our membership.

Legislative and State Budget Update

Nathan Zacharias provided a legislative update and an update on the November budget forecast. MMB announced the state would have a \$640 million surplus for the remainder of the current biennium. There is a \$1.27 billion deficit for the 2022-2023 biennium. This is what the Legislature will be working on in the 2021 session and will guide legislators on the decisions they will make. This deficit is much better than the one that was projected in May. We are in a better situation, but still challenging. This has been fueled by federal CARES Act funds helping out local governments and better than expected tax collections. Because of the better financial outlook, Nathan worked with Rep. Ecklund and Sen. Westrom to introduce a bill for an additional \$15 million for the Border-to-Border Broadband Grant Program this cycle during the most recent special session. Ultimately, the Legislature kept a narrow focus on COVID relief spending and didn't include more funding for broadband.

2021 Legislative Priorities

Nathan outlined the coalition's proposed legislative priorities for the 2021 Session:

1. Fully fund the Border-to-Border Broadband Infrastructure Grant Program
 - We have consistently heard that fund the fund is the top priority for the coalition. Past recommendations from the Governor's Taskforce has been \$70 million/biennium. Discussion from members to mention the need for ongoing funding. Nathan will strengthen this statement.
2. Fully fund the Office of Broadband Development
3. Monitor Broadband Policy Bills
 - Protect the integrity of our grant program. Most policy work would be defensive, but won't close the door on good policy ideas. Nathan would bring those items back to the coalition for support.

Motion by JoAnne Johnson to approve the 2021 MRBC legislative priorities, second by Steve Giorgi.
Motion approved.

Recommendations on RDOF Issue

Motion by Brent Christensen to direct Nathan to draft a letter to the Office of Broadband Development strongly urging them to move forward with grant awards and not allow the RDOF announcement to impact decisions, second by JoAnne Johnson. **Motion approved.**

Federal Platform/Priorities

Discussion from members on whether we should consider adopting federal legislative priorities. Comments and a brief update from Bree Maki, Senator Tina Smith's Office, and Cristina Diaz, Rep. Angie Craig's Office, that they will continue to participate in coalition meetings and would love to have the coalition more involved at the federal level.

Motion by Steve Giorgi to introduce a letter to our federal delegation that questions the RDOF process and awards, second by JoAnne Johnson. **Motion approved.**

Fundraising and Membership

Vince Robinson outlined the current membership and committee structure:

- Executive Committee
 - Vince Robinson, Nancy Hoffman, Steve Giorgi, Brian Krambeer, Brent Christensen, Jane Leonard
- Fundraising Committee
 - Brent Christensen, Joe Buttweiler, Nancy Hoffman
- Legislative Committee
 - Nathan Zacharias, Emily Murray, Nancy Hoffman, Stu Lourey, Daniel Lightfoot, Dan Larson, Steve Fenske, Jay Trusty, Joe Buttweiler, Anna Boroff
- Communications Committee
 - Heidi Steinmetz, Dan Larson

Vince is seeking input on how MRBC is governed. Discussion from members on election of chair and current committee structure. The executive committee will pull together definitions of each committee that will be sent to full membership for comments/committee preference for participation. The coalition will meet again in early 2021 to have elections for executive committee and chair. Governance and membership will be included in our continuing strategic planning process.

Outstanding Contracts

Contract with Nathan Zacharias for organizational coordination and lobbying services. Executive committee has made a recommendation to approve the contract. **Motion** by Dan Larson to approve the contract with Nathan Zacharias, second by Connie Schmoll. **Motion approved.**

Contract with AMC for administrative and outreach services. Executive committee has made a recommendation to approve the contract. **Motion** by Dan Larson to approve the contract with AMC, second by Eileen Smith. **Motion approved.**

We expect to see a contract from SRDC for fiscal host services soon. We will take this up at the next meeting.

Additional Business

NA

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 12:04 PM.