Minnesota Rural Broadband Coalition
Meeting Minutes
April 15, 2021

Attendance:
Chuck Ackman, Office of Senator Amy Klobuchar; Anna Boroff, MN Cable Communications Association; Joe Buttweiler, CTC; Brent Christensen, MN Telecom Alliance; Angie Dickison, DEED Office of Broadband Development; Julie Foote, MVTV Wireless; Steve Giorgi, RAMS MN; Cheryl Glaeser, Achieve Consulting; Jack Gottfried, UMVRDC; Kyle Hoffman, MN Farmers Union; Nancy Hoffman, Chisago County EDA; JoAnne Johnson, MN Public Broadband Alliance; Marc Johnson, ECMECC; Bernadine Joselyn, Blandin Foundation; Barbara Dröher Kline, Thrivent; Logan Kuschel, MRBC; Dan Larson, MN Rural Counties; Jane Leonard, Growth and Justice; Daniel Lightfoot, League of MN Cities; Stu Lourey, MN Farmers Union; Bree Maki, Office of Senator Tina Smith; Molly Malone, Murray County Commissioner; Michelle Marotzke, MMDC; Mark Mrla, Finley Engineering Co; Briana Mumme, Redwood County EDA; Emily Murray, Association of MN Counties; Vince Robinson, Lincoln County; Ryan Severson, Roseau Electric Coop/NorthStream Fiber; Abby Strom, AAEDC; Michelle Thomas, East Central RDC; Britta Torkelson, MN Rural Education Association; Ann Treacy, Treacy Information Services; Jay Trusty, SRDC; Nikki Vilendrer, Mayo Clinic; Darla Waldner, NWRDC; Diane Wells, DEED Office of Broadband Development; Mike Wimmer, Mille Lacs County EDA; Nathan Zacharias, Zacharias Government Relations.

Vince Robinson called the meeting to order.

Welcome and Introductions
Vince welcomed attendees and took introductions of all participants.

Approval of February 4, 2021 Minutes
Motion by Brent Christensen to approve the February minutes, second by Joe Buttweiler. **Motion approved**.

Legislative Update
Nathan provided an update on the legislative session so far. Broadband funding is in the Agriculture Omnibus Bill (SF958/HF1524).
- Senate GOP bill includes $40 million for the grant program - $30 million in the first year, $10 in the second
  - Potentially could include a total of $120 million (with federal funds) broken down as $30 million in first year, $10 million in second year as guaranteed funding and the federal funding would allow for up to $80 million more.
  - There are policy provisions included that we oppose: addition of fixed wireless to broadband definitions in statute. Also include provisions to instruct the office of broadband development to do additional mapping, and a portion of the $40 million is earmarked for unserved communities only. Also upped the threshold the state could pay up to 55% instead of 50%.
- Governor supports $50 million in 2022 in his proposal
- House DFL at $30 million in one-time spending in 2022
  - House won't use federal funding yet since we haven't received guidance on how to use those funds. Won't commit federal funds until we get that guidance from treasury.
- Both House/Senate have $350K/year for the OBD.

The Senate passed the Ag bill off the floor last night. House Ag bill will be up on the floor next week. After that, there will be a conference committee appointed. Last day of session is May 17. Be prepared to have a special session depending on how budget negotiations go in the coming weeks.

Update from the Office of Broadband Development
Angie Dickison provided a brief update on behalf of OBD. They are waiting on guidance from Treasury, like everyone else. NTIA working closely with Treasury on the guidance. Hopefully we have a MN edge there as Danna Mackenzie is working with NTIA and assisting folks at Treasury on this. OBD is also anxiously awaiting the outcome of session. They are doing everything they can to be prepared to roll out a grant program as quickly as possible if funding is provided. OBD is also thinking through the possibilities of what federal funding might mean to us. LAC did approve the community development block grant funding for broadband. Not sure when that RFP will go out, will keep this group posted when we hear about the release of the RFP. $25 million in funding for small cities. DEED will administer that program through the Community Finance Office. Expect we will see an application/process that is similar to B2B. Won't be identical, but similar.

Current B2B grants – contracts are executed for most grant awards from the last round. Close to having those all completed. Projects should get started soon.

Speed Test Update:
Nathan introduced Logan Kuschel to the coalition. The coalition has a re-energized push on the speed test through social media. The coalition has the contract to work on the speed test through August with GEO Partners; Nathan and Logan will work on this through May. Logan also started an Instagram page for the speed test initiative. How to get the word out to all ages – not just about the speed test but about broadband in general. Logan put together a video series, targeting different age groups. Reach out to Logan if you'd like to show your perspective/have your voice heard in the video series.

Fundraising Update/Financial Report
Thea coalition's financial report doesn't look great right now, we are operating in a deficit. We need support from all of you. We are in desperate need for members to pay their membership for this year. If you need an invoice, please let us know. The report also includes a few updates to what we pay Nathan because the amount he billed did not include the updated numbers for this year.

Motion to accept the financial report by JoAnne Johnson, second by Joe Buttweiler. **Motion approved**.

Strategic Planning Update
Vince re-introduced Cheryl Glaeser to the coalition. The coalition has been working with Cheryl on governance/membership over the past few months. How we want to get members, keep members, and how we want to fund the organization.

Cheryl updated attendees on what she's been up to on behalf of the coalition. Cheryl conducted one-on-one interviews with members on the topic of governance and sustainability. She also conducted a survey for all members to answer. Cheryl went over the key insights from the survey and interviews.

Key insights from interviews:
- Need the coalition to still exist, pointing to Nathan's work as the key lobbyist
- Nearly all want membership to not be tied to "pay" but understand the need for funding
- Budgeting/fundraising timeline/schedule/process improvements came up as an opportunity

- Outreach in rural areas came up as a potential opportunity
- Nearly all thought we need a bit more clarity/structure on governance piece

Key insights from survey:
- 31 people took the survey
- Agreed that membership should require paying dues
  - Almost everyone said they like the idea of having membership dues
    - However, at what financial level they'd be willing to contribute, over half said $100-$500
    - 1/3 said $500-$1,000
    - Very few could go beyond that
- Voting privileges – gets a bit more challenging

Where do we go from here? Look at existing membership – about 70 members, of which 50 are contributing members and of those, 30 are contributing about an average of $500. Those averages don't get us to meet our financial objectives which is about $60,000/year.

Options:
- Increase number of paying members
- Increase number of membership dues
- Increase non-dues revenue opportunities (fundraising/multi-year pledges)
- Combination of above

Cheryl worked with the executive committee on a few options to consider. Cheryl noted that there has been a lot of discussion about not leaving anyone out. As we've grown, so has the work and the budget needs. There was discussion on the draft membership opportunities as well as sponsorship opportunities. The coalition could also use more members helping with the work – invoicing, fundraising, etc. We need both paying and engaged members.

Bring feedback from this meeting to the executive committee for further recommendation. The executive committee will come back with a proposal for the full coalition membership. If we get a majority thumbs up vote we will go with it, if we get a majority thumbs down vote, we won't go with it.

The executive committee will also come back with a recommendation on governance. Separate executive committee by types of industry groups? Also increase the number of people on the executive committee? This will be part of the executive committee discussion, will put this out as a separate thumbs up/thumbs down for coalition membership.

Election of Coalition Chair
Vince thanked the coalition for allowing him to serve as chair. The executive committee has visited about our chair going forward and has a recommendation in Jay Trusty.

Motion to nominate Jay Trusty as the new chair by JoAnne Johnson, second by Nancy Hoffman. Having received no other nominations, nominations were closed. **Motion** for a unanimous white ballot to nominate Jay Trusty as the next coalition chair by Steve Giorgi, second by JoAnne Johnson. **Motion approved**.

Additional Business
NA.

Adjourn
Motion to adjourn by Steve Giorgi, second by Joe Buttweiler. **The meeting adjourned at 12:08 PM**.