

MINUTES
MIFFLIN COUNTY INTERNET ADVISORY COMMITTEE
DECEMBER 19, 2017
MIFFLIN COUNTY COURTHOUSE, MEETING ROOM B – 3:30 P.M.

ATTENDANCE:

MEMBERS:

Clint Aurand, Armagh Township
Craig Bubb, MABL
Michael Hain, Nittany Media
Barb Harer, South Hills
John Rhone, Wayne Township
Kristen Ritchey, Comcast via teleconference
Kay Semler, Mifflin County Planning Commission
Nathan Smith, FAME/FoxPro
Michael Tate, GME

OTHERS:

Chastity Fultz, Mifflin County Planning and Development
Bill Gomes, Mifflin County Planning and Development
Brad Kerstetter, Juniata County Planning
Scott Kramer, SEDA-COG
Jeremy Smith, Century Link
Nate Smitchko, Mifflin County MIS Department
Lori Comp, Senator Corman's Office
Gene Wolfkill, Geisinger
C. J. Bobeck, GME Communications
Erin Thompson, The Sentinel

Call to Order: Bill Gomes called the meeting to order at 3:31 p.m. and reminded everyone to sign the attendance sheet.

Approval of Minutes: Kay Semler motioned to approve the October meeting minutes. Nathan Smith seconded the motion. All members voted aye.

School District Survey: Doug Cunningham of the Mifflin County School District was unable to attend the meeting due to illness, but did provide a brief update via email through Bill Gomes. The Mifflin County School District is anticipating conducting the survey electronically in January through Family Access, which is located on the school district's website and can be accessed by students and family through login and password. The results will be sent to the Planning Department. He is still waiting to hear from Juniata County School District to confirm their participation.

Net Neutrality: Bill Gomes wanted to discuss the recent decision of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to repeal net neutrality and the anticipated impact. He shared some information from Joe Witmer. Kristen Ritchey of Comcast stated that the recent decision by the FCC to repeal net neutrality will not change the way Comcast operates. Comcast has always been committed to the

principals of net neutrality. Comcast thought that this should have been enacted through legislation rather than through rules by the FCC since rules can change from one presidency to another. Legislation would provide more certainty.

Jeremy Smith of Century Link referred to the copy of the letter from Century Link to the FCC Chairman for Century Link's position on net neutrality. Century Link looks forward to working with the FCC and will wait to comment upon full review of the entire text of the FCC net neutrality order to determine how it will affect the company operations and consumers. Michael Hain of Nittany Media voiced concerns, including whether adding regulations to the internet could open it up for taxation in the future.

C. J. Bobeck of GME Communications was concerned about the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA). He noted that internet service providers (ISPs) are no longer granted amnesty. The DMCA protects against piracy and copyrighted material. C. J. is concerned how this will impact consumers and whether there are better ways to monitor piracy violations. The ISP could potentially be fined for piracy if their users are violating copyrighted material. Nathan Smith added that the ISP is liable currently, but prosecution is targeted and very expensive. The regulations first came about in 2015, but were not fully enacted upon and because of this, not much is changing with the repeal of net neutrality.

Bill's main concern is whether the repeal of net neutrality will have a negative effect on expanding broadband service in rural areas. Michael Hain stated that it will be easier to expand service under the new regulations.

Web Page: The Commissioners approve the proposed web page as long as it is not on the County's site. The web page will be www.mifflincountyiac.org. Nate Smitchko of Mifflin County MIS will continue to work with C. J. Bobeck on getting this page set up. They are hoping to finalize the page in January.

Mike Tate was recently contacted by a residential customer regarding an internet concern. He forwarded the concern to his contact at the provider and the problem was taken care of quickly. After the customer's issue was addressed, it was discovered that the customer never called the provider to voice the problem. Mike wants to be sure that one of the questions will include whether or not they have contacted their provider.

Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) Application Update: Scott Kramer of SEDA-COG was notified by the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) to apply for the Power Grant as there is more money available through this grant. Invitations for application will occur at the end of December for the regular ARC project. However, ARC wants SEDA-COG to apply for the Power Grant. The Power Grant application will be available in February. Announcements are typically made within 90 days after applications are submitted. The Power Grant applies to counties who have had a change in the county due to the coal industry. Betsy Lockwood at SEDA-COG verified that the Power Grant application can proceed even though Mifflin and Juniata Counties have not been affected by the coal industry because the project is regional. Bill's is concerned as to when the money would become available because it can take up to a year under the ARC program. He does not want to lose more time. Scott replied that ARC is keen on funding this project because broadband is the new buzzword.

House Bill 1620: House Bill 1620, if approved, would take the responsibility for approving wireless facilities or microcell towers in public rights-of-way out of the hands of township officials and give the power to wireless companies. Bill sent notes to Lori Comp in Senator Corman's office, as well as

Representatives Benninghoff and Harris, but has not received a response. The bill was referred to the Consumer Affairs Committee on June 26th and no action has taken place since; however, there is a committee hearing scheduled January 9th. Clint Aurand received an email from a township in eastern Pennsylvania who is against microcell towers, which enables 5G. The email suggested that municipalities could lose out on franchise fees because customers could potentially cancel cable services. Lori Comp of Senator Corman's office said that this is not the Senator's area of expertise. He will encourage and support a committee on projects he thinks are good, especially for his district. At this point, there is no similar legislation in the Senate regarding microcell towers. There is a Senate resolution encouraging collaboration, however. Some larger cities have compromised with carriers to improve the looks of the cell towers to resemble pine trees.

*Representative Benninghoff left a phone message after the meeting and he did not believe this bill was moving forward.

Verizon, Century Link, Nittany Media and Atlantic Broadband Follow-up: Kristen Ritchey of Comcast stated that her company is looking at some areas in Mifflin County to expand service, but cannot discuss the details publicly. The map created from the survey showing where service is needed has been shared with others at Comcast.

Century Link has many upgrade projects scheduled for 2018. Atlantic Broadband is in the process of installing internet service to customers in Derry and Decatur Townships.

Nittany Media is continuing work to expand service in the Zampelli service areas. The Longfellow area has been completed. They are still working in Ryde and Little Kansas. Belleville is almost done, but they still need to finish work at Valley View.

Other Business:

GME: GME and Downtown Lewistown, Inc. (DLI) have a participation agreement to offer residents and small businesses unlimited data plans utilizing cellular through AT&T. This is a last resort option for small businesses and residents. GME is not competing with other internet providers. DLI and GME each receive an administrative fee. GME takes care of invoicing, support and collections. The hardware itself is expensive for this option, however.

Further discussion included running fiber at the same time other utility lines are placed to possibly help with grant applications. Participation agreements would have to be made for liability issues that may arise. For example, if a water line bursts and damages fiber line, who is responsible to pay for repairs?

Telemedicine: Gene Wolfkill of Geisinger MIS stated that internet service is critical to the livelihood of the hospital. Much of what the hospital does evolves around the lines and is utilized more and more. Minutes can affect life and death situations, so speed matters. A dark fiber connection is utilized within the hospital for internet access. Outside connections are important for on call physicians. The hospital has partnered with a group through a site accessed by phones or ipads, myvisits.org, that allows patients to have a visit without going to a doctor's office or urgent care for a fee. Insurance companies have identified Metropolitan Service Areas, which includes Lewistown. Medicare pays higher, up to full rates for telemedicine care in these areas. Gene added that he has heard some employees who work from home have difficulties with lack of speed and are forced to go back to work at the hospital.

Telemedicine is being utilized inside clinics where it is difficult to get a physician into the area. Consults with specialists can be set up remotely. They are piloting technology for provider to provider, pharmacist to patient and home health areas. At this point, there is not enough staffing and physicians to provide telemedicine as a way to improve access to physicians. It also can take years to recruit physicians. Recruiting can be easier if remote access is available.

Other States: Bill previously shared articles demonstrating New York actively trying to promote broadband to all residents by the end of 2018 and feels Pennsylvania is falling behind because we are not more aggressively trying to expand internet service. He encouraged Lori Comp to talk to Senator Corman to push efforts to expand internet access.

Nathan Smith would like to see money allocated through grants for broadband expansion without strings attached. Some states have already made this a part of their budget. He does not think it makes sense to focus money into smaller, narrower markets and would like to see money combined to help larger projects through a top-down approach. Mike Tate asked if SEDA-COG will assist in finding more broadband grant money in 2018, where can it be used and whether the committee could come up with a match. Nathan Smith says this money is targeted for one or two businesses and not the entire municipality.

Next Meeting: Following a brief discussion, third Wednesday meeting times seemed to work better for most members of the committee. Bill will follow up with an email poll and try to set up a schedule for 2018. The next meeting has since been scheduled for January 17, 2017 at 3:30 p.m.

Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 5:05 p.m.