

**MINUTES**  
**MIFFLIN COUNTY INTERNET SUMMIT**  
**NOVEMBER 2, 2016**  
**MIFFLIN COUNTY COURTHOUSE, MEETING ROOM B – 4:00 P.M.**

**ATTENDANCE:**

**MEMBERS:**

Clint Aurand, Armagh Township  
Craig Bubb, Municipal Authority of Borough of Lewistown  
Michael Hain, Nittany Media  
Barbara Harer, South Hills  
John Rhone, Wayne Township  
Kristen Ritchey, Comcast  
Kay Semler, Mifflin County Planning Commission  
Nathan Smith, FoxPro and Fame  
Michael Tate Jr., GME Communications

**OTHERS:**

Scott Kramer, SEDA-COG  
Bill Gomes, Mifflin County Planning and Development  
Chastity Fultz, Mifflin County Planning and Development  
Jim Baker

Call to Order: Bill Gomes called the meeting to order at 4:07 p.m.

Approval of Minutes: Michael Tate made a motion to approve the minutes from July's meeting. The motion was seconded by Barbara Harer. All members voted aye.

Bill Gomes noted that he did invite the newspaper to the meeting, but they did not come.

Review of maps from FCC: SEDA-COG developed maps of internet coverage based on FCC data. By law, broadband carriers must report information twice a year. The maps are generated from 2015 data and the data is separated into census block group. As a disclaimer, if one person in that group has coverage, then it will show the entire census block group is covered. On the surface, it appears Mifflin County has good coverage of high speed internet service. Additional data was discovered from the National Broadband Map data set, which is derived from DCED and actual carriers. Scott Kramer of SEDA-COG will add this information to the maps. However, the maps do not seem to show wireless or fiber coverage.

Michael Hain stated that he reports a 477 report, which shows how many customers are in each block, as well as speed and pricing. The report is submitted with separate sections for fiber and wireless. Scott Kramer will look for additional information to further separate fiber and wireless service. Kristen Ritchey had sent a map of Comcast service, but SEDA-COG's GIS team could not do anything with the file. Bill has received a new contact for Verizon and will contact them again to see what they can provide. Any information received needs to be in a shape file preferably.

Plans from current providers to expand service: Michael Hain stated Nittany Media will expand their services if they have customers. Kristen Ritchey of Comcast also stated they would expand in areas where it makes sense. She is not aware of any areas in project mode, but will let Bill know if she finds any that are.

County Survey: Walt Whitmer of Penn State will help with a survey of 2500 households based on per capita per township. There are 812 commercial businesses and 48 industries in the county. Walt will need people to help develop a one-page survey to households and a separate survey to businesses within the next two months. The survey can be mailed in January, after the holidays. Mike Hain, Nate Smith and Mike Tate volunteered to help with the survey. Bill will share their contact information with Walt Whitmer.

Jim Baker suggested developing the purpose of the survey as a first step and deciding what questions need to be answered. He also questioned if there is different consideration for residential versus business, which there is. He also wants to know if the survey is to show that the records we have obtained to create the maps are inaccurate. Are you trying to show demand, including those who want more access to broadband?

Nate Smith asked what the group actually wants to accomplish, what are the goals? He also questioned the lack of forward thinking and whether the group was ready to start a survey.

Bill Gomes stated that he wants to know what service exists and do the residents want more. Also mentioned, as an end result, what type of service will be provided and how much of the county will be covered by that service? Nate feels the group should look at the long term and is concerned with the needs in the next 20 years. He noted the current changes to cable services and that in the next five years those services will look very different. New technology will be via the cloud, which will stream stereo high definition images at 7-10 megabytes per person in each household. Mifflin County is so far behind currently. We need to focus on fiber to each house. Nate knows the limitations of wireless technology. High speeds can be obtained from microwave bursts, but there is a lot of latency and performance drops as more users are added.

Scott Kramer added that there are costs to laying fiber. Value versus costs must be evaluated. Jim Baker also stated that if we do not have money, what changes the vision of the future and what does it cost taxpayers and businesses? Nate stated that it will be cheaper to install fiber today than in 10 years. He feels that wireless is limited and has flaws with capabilities in mountainous areas. Wireless will not have sustainable bandwidth and more towers would need to be scattered throughout the county. Wireless may look enticing, but it is not. Nate would not place a business on microwave.

Michael Hain thinks there is a place for wireless, but we cannot confirm how things will be in 20 years. Towers do have higher frequencies with more bandwidth, but it is directional. Fiber can be placed with a thousand different wave lengths. No wire is able to handle the speeds of video and it has to be compressed. Immediate needs and long-term goals need to be evaluated, but the solution has to be cost effective.

At this point, Mike Tate suggested the group develop a mission statement to identify short-term and long-term goals. He also stated that as people go online for entertainment, there will be less cable subscribers, which ultimately leads to less franchise fees and lack of funds for further infrastructure. The internet may need to be taxed in some way to make up for the loss of funds.

Coordinating with utility companies: Bill spoke with Craig Bubb about installing conduit in trenches in places where the water authority is installing water lines to see if this was possible in order to run the fiber when it is available. Michael Hain also spoke with SEDA-COG about this. Jim Baker stated that gas companies do not want the liability of having anything in their trenches. Roads are repaved every 15 years or so and he thinks conduit could be installed every time a road is paved. The costs of conduit are relatively small. Craig said the water company does not cut pavement to lay pipe, they bore under the roads. Mike Tate said they need to work with water and sewer companies because of the new tariffs in place to add wires to poles making it less cost effective to hang wires.

Nate questioned if one of the goals of the group should be to work with Harrisburg to lower barriers for expansion onto poles and noted that utilities that own the poles are a barrier to broadband. Bill will invite Senator Corman's office to discuss this idea. Discussion further continued as to who else to contact, such as the PUC or even the governor's office. DCED has also helped rural broadband expansion and could be contacted.

Cool and Connected grant: Bill was made aware of a grant titled "Cool and Connected". The application is due November 4<sup>th</sup>. He has reached out to Reedsville and Armagh Township to request a letter of support for the application. The grant brings a team of people to look at how to improve broadband service in downtown areas. Bill hopes to build off of those areas. There is no money involved, just help in terms of free consultants. Jim Baker said to emphasize that we need to expand broadband, but don't know how to do it on the application. The small downtowns Bill would like to include in the application are Milroy, Reedsville, Belleville, Allensville, McVeytown and Newton Hamilton. The process began in the spring as a beta program and Mifflin County was not selected. It is now a regular application process.

Next Meeting: The next meeting will be held December 14<sup>th</sup> at 3:45 p.m.

Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 5:21 p.m.