

MINUTES
MIFFLIN COUNTY INTERNET SUMMIT
DECEMBER 14, 2016
MIFFLIN COUNTY COURTHOUSE, MEETING ROOM B – 3:45 P.M.

ATTENDANCE:

MEMBERS:

Clint Aurand, Armagh Township
Craig Bubb, Municipal Authority of Borough of Lewistown
Michael Hain, Nittany Media
John Rhone, Wayne Township
Kristen Ritchey, Comcast
Kay Semler, Mifflin County Planning Commission
Nathan Smith, FoxPro and Fame
Matt Moore, Valley View and Lewistown Borough

OTHERS:

Scott Kramer, SEDA-COG via conference call
Bill Gomes, Mifflin County Planning and Development
Chastity Fultz, Mifflin County Planning and Development
Mike Starner, Comcast
Walt Whitmer, Penn State Extension
Lauren Kershner, Sentinel
Mark Critz, Pennsylvania Rural Development Council
Lori Comp, Senator Corman's Office

Call to Order: Bill Gomes called the meeting to order at 3:51 p.m. and reminded everyone to sign the attendance sheet.

Approval of Minutes: The minutes from the November 2, 2016 meeting were accepted.

Follow-up on maps:

Scott Kramer stated there was a question at the last meeting whether the data was correct when the maps were compiled previously. He discovered there was missing data and reconstructed the maps to indicate this. The Verizon and Nittany Media maps did not change much. The Comcast map now shows the addition of underground and aerial lines. Kristen Ritchey of Comcast will review the map for accuracy.

Bill stated that he has not been able to contact anyone from Verizon even after obtaining a direct email address. He has had one contact with this person and no response since. Mark Critz of Pennsylvania Rural Development Council suggested copying himself and Congressman Marino's office to get a reply. Kristen Ritchey also has an external affairs contact.

It was noted that the maps only reflect 4-5 large carriers although there are multiple smaller carriers. Carriers are to report coverage as of December 31st and new maps could be provided after that.

Develop Survey Mechanism: Walt Whitmer, Mike Tate, Michael Hain and Bill Gomes met December 6th to discuss the development of a possible survey. Walt proposed two surveys to the committee, one to businesses and a survey based on a random sample to residents. The residential survey would include approximately 1,800 households, proportionately distributed according to number of households in the municipality. The residential survey will be paper-based so as to not run the risk of selection bias. The business survey will be sent electronically based on a mailing list provided by the Chamber of Commerce using Survey Monkey, which will not cost anything.

Mike Tate will follow up with the Chamber of Commerce regarding the survey. Michael Hain offered to obtain a copy of the school district survey; however, Craig Bubb went ahead and reached out to a contact and was having the school survey and results forwarded to him and he will forward the information to Bill. Clint Aurand stated that the survey will include information as to whether you have access to internet and if you have a digital device.

Mr. Whitmer shared surveys he found from Wisconsin that he felt was a good basis for both surveys. Discussion included how to phrase questions for the residential survey that would appropriately reflect on the issue of affordability and whether or not to include income ranges as an optional last question. It was also discussed that the type of internet and speed were more important than provider information, but some people may only know who the provider is. It was also suggested to ask all options currently available for internet. A question could be added to ask future plans and needs as well for the business survey. It was also suggested to add the question that if affordable broadband was not available, would the resident consider leaving the area and moving. The addition of an open text box was suggested for general comments as well as an area to include the township/municipality the resident lives in. The age of the respondent should be included as a question as well.

Walt Whitmer indicated that a good cover letter will help to show people why they need to fill out the survey. It needs to show that the survey matters to the residents. A good communication plan is also needed by having articles in the paper and identifying who is on the committee. Contact has been made with the County MIS Department to add a link to the County web page for everything involved in the internet. This would not only include information on the Mifflin County Internet Advisory Committee, but also give people a place to register internet related issues and ask questions.

Mark Critz shared that the Governor's office realized that internet access is a statewide issue and assigned one person solely to this broadband issue under DCED. A report was prepared and they are trying to figure out what to do, but there is a budget issue with the state. Bill has spoken with Joseph Witmer at the Public Utility Commission (PUC) who stated this is a national issue. It has become a necessity to get high speed connection to homes and businesses. During the discussion, there was also mention about Verizon not accepting FCC funds to expand broadband service and the concern these funds could be auctioned to another state. Bill stated that we also become less competitive for economic development purposes as well and noted that GE is leaving the area. Mark further mentioned that younger residents are also migrating away and the less savvy elderly are left behind who do not use the internet like those younger residents. The issue becomes similar to building a roadway with no cars. This digital divide leaves our students behind in being successful and getting good jobs.

Mark also noted that with more small projects that develop similar to what is occurring in Mifflin County, the more momentum it adds to the need for a statewide discussion. In working with the legislative branch, it has to be determined how the government plays a role and if the government can afford to play a role.

Craig Bubb also noted that in working with Rob Postal of Mifflin County Industrial Development Corporation (MCIDC), when a site was up for a potential new industry, Rob sends a survey to the water, sewer and gas companies. Five years ago, the survey wanted to know water and sewage capacity, as well as electric and gas service. Within the past year, the survey now asks if broadband internet is available. If it is not available, the site is not considered.

Mr. Whitmer will send a new draft survey to Bill after January. Bill will know by the next meeting whether the county website will be able to be used. A suggestion was made to use social media to notify residents of the survey as well. A link to the business survey could be added to a Facebook page as well as a link to the county website. The residential survey cannot be added to the link due to the nature of the random sample and to minimize the sample margin of error. Matt Moore suggested using the EG channel for school students and identifying Xfinity hot spots where users can log on as a guest. Kristen Ritchey will find out where these hot spots are located.

Lauren Kershner of the Sentinel suggested sending a post card giving a link with an option to take the survey online or request a paper copy. Mr. Whitmer said that he would have to add a unique identifier to the survey, but this could reduce costs, especially with data entry. Walt's major concern is to maintain the reliability of the survey and avoid distortions.

Develop Mission Statement: The Commissioners want to see how we can improve broadband internet service in the county. Kay Semler suggested a general mission statement as follows: To assist the residents and businesses of Mifflin County in improving internet service. To be proactive in the trends of future forms of communication so that Mifflin County is prepared to meet future needs. This will be accomplished by involving persons from the community with the technical and engineering experience as well as assistance from our local government. Walt Whitmer will work on this and create a couple of drafts for review.

Other Business: Bill Gomes submitted the application for the Cool and Connected Grant. The grant focuses on small downtowns. Since Lewistown does not have an issue with broadband, he focused on Milroy, Newton Hamilton, Allensville, Reedsville and McVeytown. Belleville opted out due to having further access to Nittany Media. Bill is hoping to develop mini hubs at each area and expanding out from there.

Nate Smith asked if the PUC was able to be contacted to attend our meeting in regards to unregulated pole attachment fees. The attachment fee used to be \$10, but has climbed to as high as \$350. This is a barrier to expansion. When Bill spoke to a contact at the PUC, they were sympathetic, but felt this is an FCC issue. The FCC regulates pole rates, but these are engineering fees. It is not known if anyone controls the engineering fees. He will contact Beverly Green at Penelec, but does not have a PP&L contact.

Next Meeting: The next meeting will be held January 25th at 3:45 p.m.

Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 5:12 p.m.