

MINUTES
MIFFLIN COUNTY INTERNET ADVISORY COMMITTEE
FEBRUARY 21, 2018
MIFFLIN COUNTY COURTHOUSE, MEETING ROOM B – 3:30 P.M.

ATTENDANCE:

MEMBERS:

Clint Aurand, Armagh Township
Michael Hain, Nittany Media
Barb Harer, South Hills School of Business and Technology
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 via teleconference
Jeremy Smith, Century Link
Lori Comp, Senator Corman's Office
Doug Cunningham, Mifflin County School District
Alyssa Burd, The Sentinel

Call to Order: Bill Gomes called the meeting to order at 3:35 p.m. and reminded everyone to sign the attendance sheet. Bill also introduced everyone to the new Sentinel reporter, Alyssa Burd.

Approval of Minutes: Approval of January's meeting minutes was postponed due to the lack of a quorum.

School District Survey: Mifflin County School District distributed a survey on internet service to the district's parents and guardians. Doug Cunningham said the survey was sent to 4,938 families. In order to keep costs down and be able to organize the data collected, the survey was sent via the Family Access on the school's website. The elementary schools were able to access the survey via the Skyward Mobile App, but secondary schools could only access the survey through Family Access. Chastity Fultz shared the results of the survey with 328 responses at a 6.64% response rate. Of the initial responses, 82 were from duplicate addresses which were removed, netting 246 responses per address. The response was disappointing considering the number of people the survey was sent to. Of the responses received, 8 had also completed the residential survey mailed last year. Doug wants to know if the answers were the same on both surveys. Chastity will review the information. The overwhelming majority felt they had service that met their needs. Only 50 of the responses indicated they either need service or improved service. Bill mentioned that the committee had conducted a broad residential survey last summer, which showed that approximately 54% of the population in the county had poor or limited service.

Brad Kerstetter shared that Juniata County School District sent paper copies of the survey to 2,800 students and received 1,003 responses. Two issues he has encountered include the fact that the survey was double sided and the second page was not always completed, as well as the fact that addresses were not provided on the survey. Brad does know which school the surveys were from, however.

Jeremy Smith lives in the Juniata County School District and did not receive a survey from either of his children. Scott Kramer would like to see the results of the Mifflin County School District survey on a map and compare it to the results from last summer. Bill will ask Mifflin County GIS to map the results.

Mike Tate suggested trying to resurvey the school next year and provide paper copies in hopes of a better response rate. There was a concern as to whether families had internet access, or even desktop computer access to be able to respond to the survey. Doug will have to check with the Mr. Jim Estep. Mike Tate would like to share the survey results on the website with a note that there was only a 6% response rate. This may help encourage people to complete future surveys. Bill was concerned with sharing results that look like there is not a problem with service.

Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) Application Update: Scott Kramer shared that the application deadline for submission of the ARC Power Grant will be May 1st, which will be followed by a 30-60 day approval period. The deadline for submission of the second cycle of applications will be July 27th. If the first application is denied, it can be resubmitted in the second cycle. Betsy Lockwood of SEDA-COG has spoken with DCED and was told that they are looking to fund this project. Scott shared a draft proposal with the committee. He initially wanted to conduct a feasibility study with a master plan as a final result. After ARC wanted SEDA-COG to submit a Power Grant application, Scott thought they could do an implementation application. However, with the short time frame available to prepare the application, he does not feel there is enough time. He had to go back to a feasibility project with a model RFP. They will conduct a full web-based survey along with a postcard survey mailer of each county and identify three key areas with the worst service. They will then use the model RFP for another round of funding or another funding source for implementation in one of those areas. Scott is hopeful to receive funding this year.

Scott has verified some of the budget information through the Design Nine company who has been very helpful. He wants to obtain an estimate from another firm to compare numbers. Scott is concerned that Design Nine may not be eligible to bid on the project if they continue to help develop the scope of work and RFP process. He is hopeful that if they get multiple inputs from multiple vendors, they will be fine. Approximately \$20 million is available through the Power Grant. Scott will need letters of commitment from all counties involved in the grant. Each county will provide \$10,000 and the ARC grant application will be for \$50,000.

With the upgrades in service through Nittany Media acquiring the Zampelli systems, Atlantic Broadband providing service, and Century Link providing better service through increased speeds, the committee was not sure if the results from another survey would be much different than those from last summer. Bill asked the providers to find out how many new customers they have since last June. This may show if there has been improvement. Mike Tate added that the return on investment is not there for providing service in some areas. Fixed wireless is available in some places as well, although it still has limitations.

Web Page: Mike Tate questioned the future plans of promoting the website. He suggested looking at having a presence at community events such as the youth fairs and also through the Chamber of Commerce. Brad Kerstetter suggested promoting this on Facebook, but Mike Tate feels the response will be overwhelming. The committee discussed having the Planning Department create a brochure about the committee to include the mission statement and share what the committee does.

Bill would like to add a statement to the web page to make sure people are contacting their provider before submitting requests. The mission statement should also be added to the web page. The committee wants to include “and surrounding areas” to the mission statement. Discussion continued on ways to spruce up the web page as well. Barb Harer will see if an intern would be available to help with the design of the web page. Once a request is submitted on the web page, an email should be sent back to the individual confirming receipt of their submission. This feature may not have been turned on.

FCC Ruling on CAF II Petition: Bill shared an email from Joe Whitmer regarding the FCC ruling on Pennsylvania’s CAF II petition. He said the petition was vague and without financial commitment like New York. Kristen Ritchey previously shared an email with Bill stating that Comcast does not have a position on the FCC ruling, but due to recent tax cuts, Comcast will be investing \$50 billion over the next five years in infrastructure to improve and extend broadband plant and capacity. While details are not available, Kristen will make sure Mifflin County is on the list for consideration.

Mike Hain will be attending a seminar on February 27th regarding the CAF II funds and will be able to gather more information and find out what the requirements will be.

Jeremy Smith stated that Century Link’s funds did not go to auction because they accept the funds. They are also ahead of meeting their goals set by the CAF funds.

Other Business: Mike Tate shared that five microcell sites are going live with Verizon in the next several months, including the Port Royal Speedway. These sites will be able to handle approximately 900 connections.

Mike Hain offered to include a survey with their billing to supplement information we currently have. Mike will work with Bill. A question was also raised as to whether or not to include a survey with the water authority’s bill. There were issues with this method, however, and was not pursued. Jeremy noted that these surveys will reach the more densely populated areas that already have faster service.

Bill Gomes shared an email that John Rhone reached out to PPL and they are willing to talk about hooking fiber lines onto their poles. Mifflin County is limited with one PPL line. Brad Kerstetter noted that PPL already works to allow access to their poles. The problem is the time and cost associated with this process. Agreements need to be in place with the electric companies to attach to their poles. Penelec is not willing to work with transmission lines. Valley Rural Electric is easier to work with, though their rates are a little higher. Bill will reach out to the PPL contact.

AT&T recently announced that they are offering fixed wireless internet in rural and underserved areas in nine new states. The AT&T government account sales representative has been invited to come to the next meeting to speak about this. Bill is still awaiting a response. Mike Tate was asked to talk to the representative as well about coming to a meeting. The costs of this service seem reasonable.

Mike Hain would like to further discuss small cell towers and 5G coverage. According to Jeremy, this service is only good in very short ranges since it is a line of sight only type of service. A dish-type setup would be required for this service. Mike Tate has a video he will share at the next meeting.

Verizon, Century Link, Nittany Media and Atlantic Broadband Follow-up: Nittany Media is providing backbone for Atlantic Broadband and Comcast. Work in the McVeytown area continues. Century Link is continuing to upgrade to the new DSL2, but has no plans for new builds as far as devices.

Next Meeting: The next meeting will be held Wednesday, March 21st.

Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 4:45 p.m.