

MINUTES
MIFFLIN COUNTY INTERNET ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MARCH 28, 2018
MIFFLIN COUNTY COURTHOUSE, MEETING ROOM B – 3:30 P.M.

ATTENDANCE:

MEMBERS:

Clint Aurand, Armagh Township
John Rhone, Wayne Township
Kristen Ritchey, Comcast
Kay Semler, Mifflin County Planning Commission
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
Mark Long, Representative Kerry Benninghoff
Lori Comp, Senator Corman's Office
Jeff Molinaro, AT&T
David Kerr, AT&T
Randy Hauk, PPL
Robert Postal, Mifflin County Commissioner
Joseph Mort
Alyssa Burd, The Sentinel

Call to Order: Bill Gomes called the meeting to order at 3:33 p.m. and reminded everyone to sign the attendance sheet.

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

Review Map of Mifflin County School Survey and Comparison of Residential Survey: Approximately 4,938 surveys were sent to student households in Mifflin County, of which 328 responses were received. Once 82 duplicated addresses were removed, 246 responses were netted. Mifflin County GIS created maps based upon these answers to demonstrate household internet service interest and reliability. The map showing whether respondents were felt service met their needs was compared to the residential survey map. The level of satisfaction was much higher through the school survey than the general population. Of the 246 responses from the school district survey, 8 of those responses also responded to the residential survey of 2017. This information was shared with the committee and while the internet provider did not change, satisfaction seemed to have improved from the residential survey to the school survey. Juniata School District also conducted a similar paper version of the survey and had similar results as the Mifflin County School District. Brad anticipated much different results since many areas in Juniata County have no internet service. Approximately 63% of the respondents were satisfied with their internet service. It is unclear why the school surveys yielded higher satisfaction results than the residential survey of 2017.

AT&T Services: Mike Tate initially suggested that Jeff Molinaro of AT&T share information on a service AT&T offers in other states. Mr. Molinaro suggested David Kerr should make the presentation. Mr. Kerr has previously worked with state government and currently works with state and local relations in AT&T. Mr. Molinaro is on the AT&T business team and supports retail locations. Mr. Kerr stated that AT&T has participated in various CAF (Connect America Funds) auctions in other states and deployed fixed wireless local loop at minimum speeds of 10 down and 1 up. The next CAF auction in Pennsylvania will have less money, is more complex and more providers can participate. AT&T is looking to participate in the CAF auction, but Mr. Kerr cannot state they will participate in Pennsylvania. They are also looking at the State Rural Broadband Program that could offer incentives to providers. AT&T also has plans for additional cell sites in Mifflin County, which are primarily fiber to the cell site. Mr. Kerr added that there are 1,000 sites in Mifflin County eligible for CAF funding.

Jeff Molinaro primarily works with wireless internet. The residential grade offers 50 gig with unlimited calling for \$60 per month. This is slightly different than a mobile hot spot since it has a home phone component to it. AT&T provides the box for free with a two-year agreement. For an added fee, a hard stop can be placed to prevent overages. The threshold can be reached pretty quickly and everyone's experience (speed) varies. AT&T has no hardline services in Pennsylvania and has no plans for this since it would be cost prohibitive. If AT&T is successful in the CAF auction, they could bring Fixed Wireless Local Loop to Pennsylvania.

PPL: John Rhone had initially suggested that PPL might be more receptive to leasing fiber. Bill reached out to PPL and Randy Hauk agreed to attend the meeting. Mr. Hauk began by stating that back in 2000, Congress and FCC were reviewing the Telecommunications Act. The resulting legislation pertaining to the electric utilities led to the creation of the ETC (Exempt Telecommunications Carrier), which prompted electric utilities to enter into the telecommunications business. Bill noted that our local electric cooperative has not been receptive to working with broadband communication and hoped PPL would be more receptive. PPL, however, is in Juniata County and not Mifflin County. There is a transmission line at the eastern end of Juniata County that is not intended for access, but slice points may exist and may be able to carry some traffic. PPL has 900 route miles of fiber distribution. If the committee designs and builds a multiple county network, there is a possibility of building to an access point of PPL. PPL could save construction dollars by carrying some of the traffic on a long haul circumstance. The transmission line does extend to Perry County north towards Shamokin Dam and south towards Mechanicsburg. Mike Tate raised the issue of engineering costs associated with attached to poles. Mr. Hauk is not a transmission engineer, but will push the committee's interests through corporate ranks.

FCC and CAF II Update: Bill had forwarded guidelines for the CAF auctions and has spoken with Mark Smith, coordinator of the state program. Mr. Smith will attend the next meeting. The governor's office has offered \$35 million to help incentivize bidding on the CAF auction. March 30th is the CAF deadline and the state program runs from April 2nd to May 4th. The state program is tied to PennDOT. Bill provided a table and maps showing the location of the CAF II locations. There are 970 units in Mifflin County, which are fairly spread out with the exception of Union and Armagh Townships. Dave Kerr added that there are census tracts in every county in Pennsylvania. In order to be eligible for CAF II funds, an eligible telecommunications carrier must provide voice service. Kristen Ritchey of Comcast stated that Comcast is open to exploring the program, but needs to have a better understanding of the program. PPL will not participate in the CAF II auction. The largest coverage area is Verizon. Mr. Hauk suggested reviewing MPLS as an option (Multiprotocol Label Switching), which is both fiber-based and wireless and has multiple links to each location. He also added that 5G is important to electrical utilities and that changes are coming for

operations. Bill acknowledged the need to reach the appropriate personnel at Penelec and shared the example of Tennessee utilizing a public-private partnership where the electric provider became the internet provider. He feels that if incentives are not provided to private providers, internet expansion will not get very far. He acknowledged that the county does not want to get into the internet business. Bill spoke to Mark Smith of the governor's office who shared his frustration as well with the slow progress of internet availability. Bill also noted that New York is finishing statewide access to internet this year. He further noted internet expansions into Oliver and Bratton Townships and Belleville through Nittany Media, as well as portions of Decatur and Derry Townships through Atlantic Broadband. Mark Smith is willing to come to the next committee meeting. Bill would appreciate feedback and input from anyone who participates in the CAF II auction. Mifflin County is one of the few counties who has surveyed and mapped the county. Juniata County could easily be brought up to the same speed. Pre-implementation funds are needed to go to the next level. Mr. Hauk offered to work with the committee in seeing if more could be done with Penelec since they are the primary electric provider.

ARC Application Update: Scott Kramer of SEDA-COG provided an update for the ARC application. The narrative is currently being written, which is a two-page executive summary. Verbiage was added to look for pre-implementation funding based on Bill and Brad's concerns. Bill and Brad's concern is whether the Power Grant is eligible to Mifflin and Juniata Counties based on the fact that there is no coal activity in either county and that is the tie to the Power Grant. The indicators that Scott has received are that they will be eligible as long as they are encompassed within the group that includes coal impacted counties. Bill is also concerned that Mifflin County is further along than the other counties and it could be two years to see action and wants to be open to other opportunities, including USDA. Brad and Bill do not want to stop the ARC application, but want to be looking for other funding opportunities. Other funding opportunities were discussed, but questions remained as to whether Mifflin County would be eligible. Scott mentioned a new program geared towards agriculture, but he has to look further into this. He also noted that to proceed with an implementation project, it has to be determined where the project will take place, who will own it (has to be publicly owned if using ARC funds), and the match portion.

Scott also spoke with the person at Penn State who will be heading up the state feasibility study of broadband. They are not near as intricate, nor cover the data the studies that have we performed. They are conducting online services and assigning geolocations and using Google algorithms to determine what is out there.

Webpage Design: Bill outreached to South Hills to request a student come to the meeting to see what the committee was about and whether they could help to spruce up the web page. The student, Joseph Mort, will work with CJ Bobeck of GME Communications.

Verizon, Century Link, Nittany Media, Comcast and Atlantic Broadband Follow-up: Kristen stated that Comcast is launching 1 gig residential service within the next couple of months in Mifflin County.

Other Business: Mark Long of Representative Kerry Benninghoff is having a policy hearing in Scranton next week. They would be willing to bring a policy meeting to Mifflin County to discuss internet. Attendees would include area legislators and legislators who have impact on decisions, as well as stakeholders.

Next Meeting: The next meeting will be held Wednesday, May 16th. April's meeting will be cancelled.

Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 4:42 p.m.