

MINUTES
MIFFLIN COUNTY INTERNET ADVISORY COMMITTEE
OCTOBER 24, 2018
MIFFLIN COUNTY COURTHOUSE, MEETING ROOM B – 3:30 P.M.

ATTENDANCE:

MEMBERS:

Clint Aurand, Armagh Township
Craig Bubb, MABL
Mark VanOuse, Nittany Media
Barb Harer, South Hills
Matt Moore, Lewistown Borough
John Rhone, Wayne Township via teleconference
Kristen Ritchey, Comcast
Kay Semler, Mifflin County Planning Commission
Michael Tate, GME Communications via teleconference

OTHERS:

Chastity Fultz, Mifflin County Planning and Development
Bill Gomes, Mifflin County Planning and Development
Brad Kerstetter, Juniata County Planning
Robert Postal, Mifflin County Commissioner
Scott Kramer, SEDA-COG via teleconference
Liz Lose, Centre County Planning
Jim Smith, Granville Township
Gene Wolfkill, Geisinger
Nick Felice, MCIDC
Jeremy Smith, CenturyLink
Alyssa Burd, 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: Kay Semler motioned to approve the September meeting minutes. Matt Moore seconded the motion. All members voted aye.

Webpage Update: There is one issue with the webpage and that is being able to upload the minutes as well as for viewers to download the minutes. Mike Tate shared that CJ Bobeck will change the format of the webpage so that Chastity Fultz can upload meeting minutes to the website and make any minor changes. This will happen within the next few weeks.

Bill added that there was an article in today's Progress edition of the Sentinel on the internet committee.

Provider Follow-up: Jeremy Smith stated that CenturyLink has increased their VDSL footprint, but cannot provide a coverage map. With VDSL, the further out you go, the less speed you get. If a higher speed is needed, please contact Jeremy directly. Bill wants a service area map for CenturyLink. The only map we

have is based on FCC data, which is not very accurate. Municipality maps were provided to Jeremy to obtain this information. The same maps were also sent to Nittany Media. Mark VanOuse wants the county to sign a legal document in order to supply the Planning Department with a pdf with road level service areas. Bill reminded the committee that any service coverage maps obtained from the providers will only be shown as a display and copies will not be shared with anyone.

Clint Aurand wants to differentiate broadband based on definition on the map since CenturyLink DSL offers different speeds and should be differentiated. Bill was originally looking at speeds of 10Mb, but the goal is now looking at speeds up to 25Mb. Kristen Ritchey from Comcast added that close to 100% of their customers have access to gigabyte service, but the typical customer packages are at 50Mb. Kristen went on to explain a discussion she has had with Clint regarding expansion of service to an area in Armagh Township. Currently, the township can collect up to 5% of cable revenue in franchise fees. Armagh Township and others may be willing and open to negotiating these fees in order to expand service. Comcast currently has a model they use in order to determine expansion of service. Comcast determines how many homes are located within a certain distance of the road and assumes 40%-50% of those homes will take the service. If a higher percentage will take service, Comcast may consider funding the expansion in its entirety. Commercial/industrial locations allow for additional allowances for expanding service as well. Comcast determined that the potential project area in Havice Valley contains 19 homes in approximately 2.5 miles as determined by Comcast. Clint has spoken with many of those in the area and counted 26 homes with 14 of those showing interest in signing up for service. Clint will have further discussions with Kristen and is hoping this will become a success story for the committee to show the township and providers working together to expand service. Bill added that by having service areas, we can link this to the survey results to know where to focus our efforts. A large portion of Decatur Township still needs service despite Atlantic Broadband expanding service in the area. Bill wants to look at the townships at the outer edge of the county and work towards the center.

KCI Technologies Proposal: Rick Gordon of the USDA attended the May meeting and provided Bill with two names of organizations he has worked with who could potentially help the committee further their efforts to the next level. The one firm was located in Fleetwood, PA and was not available to talk until November and is more expensive. In September, KCI Technologies met with the commissioners and Bill. A proposal was submitted with a 4-6 month time period for completion that was originally proposed to start in October and end by March. Bill explained that we are not ready for an application at this time. We do not have enough data to have a competitive application. The new USDA program may be available next year and only has \$600 million available nationwide.

KCI's proposal costs \$13,000, which is very reasonable. Bill has outreached to Geisinger, the Chamber of Commerce, MCIDC, the school district and all municipalities to determine their interest in supporting the proposal and has received some positive feedback and support for this project.

Commissioner Rob Postal is not convinced the KCI proposal is the direction the county wants to go. He thinks we have a lot of data and likes the idea of a project, like the one in Armagh Township. He doesn't want to wait six months to see a list of funding opportunities without getting us funds. He wants to see a model on how a project can be done. Commissioner Postal thinks the proposal will give possibly up-to-date data, but we still won't know what to do with it. Scott Kramer stated that grant agencies are looking to see that due diligence is done and that projects are ready for implementation. Commissioner Postal stated that the county won't own infrastructure and wants to know who the partner will be for an application; maybe an authority will fill this role, but this proposal does not address that.

Clint added that the project in Havice Valley came up earlier this year by asking how much expansion into that area would cost. Kristen provided a cost of \$66,000 for expansion. Clint has spent hours gathering information for this project. He also saw an enthusiastic school board ready to support this project. This project came up from a suggestion made to the Planning Department and then reviewing the Comcast coverage map, Google maps, and talking to Clint and Kristen to find pockets. It took a great deal of time.

Commissioner Postal still doesn't see the KCI proposal getting to the next stage for a project. He asked if Nittany Media and others were going to provide the information requested. Jeremy said the information would be provided from him. Kristen added that this information is proprietary, but she gave it to Bill because she trusts him. Mark later responded that his company would be happy to provide this information. Rob wants to continue to work with townships to find these small projects, work with providers, and develop applications to help fill funding gaps for these projects. He agrees that it will take time to do this.

Mark VanOuse noted that the federal government has made broadband deployment in underserved areas a number one priority and has freed up money for this. Those places that get that funding will be those who have boots on the ground and have done the work to get the data to determine where the underserved areas are located. Proceeding with the KCI proposal will be valuable to get Mifflin County in a position for the federal money. Deployment in rural areas is extremely expensive. Previous generations solved this with electrical and telephone deployment by working together with government and public entities. Government involvement is critical with low interest loans and grants to help solve this problem. He also stated that the actions of the federal government filter down to the state level.

Craig Bubb stated that expansion of any type of service does not make sense if you can't recover costs. He would like to put water into every house in the county, but he will never recover the costs of expansion. He also added that he has spent money for grant proposals and did not receive the grant; however, you have to spend money in order to get money. Bill added that there is no guarantee on anything, but if you don't do anything, we will be in the same position in six months.

Clint sees the Havice Valley potential project with Kristen as the first breakthrough for the committee in two years. Craig thinks service has expanded with improvements in the county since the summit. Some companies have made improvements to enhance service, although new construction has not occurred. Mark VanOuse added that six townships in Mifflin County benefited from expanded service from Nittany Media largely due to the efforts of the committee.

Commissioner Postal wants to replicate successes in other areas and if there is a gap, he would like to focus on how to close that gap with funding. He agrees the price of the KCI proposal is good price if they give us something we can use. He wants to see "skin in the game" by other people. Bill asked if the County was willing to put any money into the proposal. Commissioner Postal would not vote for this proposal as it is, but can't speak for the other commissioners. He wants information to show a definitive path, to get into an application to fill the gaps.

Kristen suggested obtaining a sample report of the finished product from KCI. Kay Semler asked who will be the primary agent to apply for the grant, loan, or whatever is to happen. Bill does not know what will happen, but he has been looking at this for four months and we need more technical information and costs beyond our experience. KCI is interested in the project because they believe we have a good pilot project for the state. The price could be much higher if the consultant expands the scope. Granville Township is

supportive of this project. John Rhone added that Bill is not asking much from the municipalities, which should help garner support.

A question was raised whether the committee had a working budget. Clint noted that we will spend a tremendous amount of man hours to look at projects the way Commissioner Postal indicated. The KCI proposal will take care of this. He also added that there seems to be support for the project, but the opportunity for potential partners could be impacted by the direction suggested by Commissioner Postal. He questioned where the committee goes from here.

Craig stated his biggest concern is that after six months and \$13,000, whether we will get a report to put into a grant/loan application. He also asked who will be the recipient of the grant. The county will not do this from similar past conversations and thinks it will have to be the municipality or it will not go anywhere. Scott Kramer suggested SEDA-COG could be the recipient.

Discussion of data collection for KCI was further discussed. It was noted that the providers will again be asked to share information that has been shared with Bill and the committee. Jeremy added again that he cannot provide a map with node locations and speeds. Bill is looking for more detailed service areas rather than a broad coverage area. Jeremy added that if there is a specific residence identified, he can look into it and provide cost. Havice Valley once again was discussed. This project was suggested when Brad Kerstetter asked Jeremy where he would extend service in Juniata County and Mifflin County in the summer. Jeremy identified Havice Valley in Mifflin County. When Bill tried to obtain information from CenturyLink on this potential project, he was not successful. Comcast was then asked about potential expansion into the area. Brad sees one of the problems with the committee is that the providers seem to be afraid of the others finding out what they are doing. He thought we were all supposed to be open. Clint could not understand why it was initially suggested to extend service four miles into Havice Valley. He realized Comcast ran through Treaster Valley and suggested that we speak to Comcast since they were in close proximity. Jeremy stated CenturyLink has to build from the node out in order to obtain speed and that is the difference in technology.

Mark followed up on Kristen's previous announcement that Comcast is offering 1 Gigabyte service and added that this is significant and requires a big investment from Comcast. He thinks this committee has attracted attention and that is why things have happened in the county. Nittany Media purchased additional systems because of this committee and what was heard. Atlantic Broadband expanded into Decatur and Derry Townships because of this committee. He also thinks that the internet landscape has changed and the survey results would change dramatically if redone. He also urged the providers to create a report demonstrating what they have done.

Brad Kerstetter believes internet providers know where the shortfalls are located. He thinks the providers at the table have stepped up to the plate and the biggest problem at this point is site specific areas. Bill added that we need to work together and questioned where we will be six months from now. We don't know the extent of improvements that have been made. We need enough data to make us competitive in an application. Bill needs some technical information that KCI could provide. If there is no commitment, he doesn't know where we are going.

Kristen asked if the purpose of the proposal was to be ready for a grant application. She also questioned what will happen if the county does not want to apply for the grant. Scott added that for federal money, you need to show the project has been studied and you know what you are going to do. This proposal

brings us to this point. Bill has been told that these new programs, federal and state, will begin early next year. Those areas who are ready to go will more likely receive the funding.

Matt Moore thinks we have enough data and despite having missed several meetings, he thinks the committee seems to be right where we left off at the last meeting he attended (June 2017). He thinks each municipality could help identify potential project areas.

Gene Wolfkill questioned whether providers are willing to share information with KCI. Clint does not think national providers will share this information because it is proprietary, but they have developed models to determine costs. Scott discussed Sullivan County where they used a combination of FCC data and information from random addresses for on the ground information. Clint acknowledged the work of CenturyLink in Big Valley and the fact that Verizon's infrastructure needs to be replaced. Over half of the county has limited service because Verizon will not replace their copper infrastructure. Jeremy added that demonstrating partnerships with providers like Comcast will likely get grant funding or low rate loans on site specific projects. Bill stated one of the questions for a grant application is whether the providers would provide service to areas and meet minimum standards. The county would be a conduit for the grant application.

Bill does not know where to go from here and does not want to continue to have meetings without productive outcomes. Kristen is not sure if or how the committee can move forward if the county is not on board.

Commissioner Postal wants to get to the point where you can do a project, not a list of places where you can get money. If the proposal will do that, he will vote for it and talk to the other commissioners. He is not interested in a report of data and updated information. He doesn't think this advances us. He sees data collection and gaps, but where does that get you? He is not against what the committee is doing; he just does not want to spend money if it does not get us to a project.

Clint is not sure the proposal gives projects and costs. Bill does not know if specific projects will be identified, but it will get us to where we need to be for an application. After reading a portion of the proposal that states giving a cost of infrastructure suitable for multiple providers to use, Jeremy interprets this as giving the county the cost of building fiber big enough to lease to providers. The county would own the fiber. Commissioner Postal stated the county will not own the fiber. The county does not know anything about utilities and would have to contract with somebody to maintain and operate the system. CenturyLink and Comcast would not lease fiber they don't own. Commissioner Postal wants to know what it will take to get providers to extend fiber and fill the gaps. He would like to see the product that was produced in Maryland.

Bill will forward the complete proposal to the board for review in order to receive input and questions from the committee. These questions will be forwarded to KCI.

Next Meeting: The next meeting will be held Wednesday, November 28th.

Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 5:09 p.m.