

**MINUTES**  
**MIFFLIN COUNTY INTERNET ADVISORY COMMITTEE**  
**BROADBAND EXPANSION KICK OFF CONFERENCE CALL**  
**APRIL 17, 2019**  
**MIFFLIN COUNTY COURTHOUSE, MEETING ROOM B – 3:00 P.M.**

**ATTENDANCE:**

**MEMBERS:**

Clint Aurand, Armagh Township  
Craig Bubb, MABL  
Michael Hain, Nittany Media  
John Rhone, Wayne Township  
Kristen Ritchey, Comcast  
Kay Semler, Mifflin County Planning Commission  
Gene Wolfkill, Geisinger via teleconference

**OTHERS:**

Sheri Collins, Governor's Office  
Lori Comp, Senator Corman's Office  
Chastity Fultz, Mifflin County Planning and Development Office  
Michael Gerber, DCED  
Bill Gomes, Mifflin County Planning and Development Office  
Jeff Hackenberg, Penn State Extension  
Brad Kerstetter, Juniata County  
Kevin Kodish, Mifflin County Commissioner  
Scott Kramer, SEDA-COG via teleconference  
Mark Long, Representative Benninghoff's Office  
Liz Lose, Centre County Planning via teleconference  
Phil Lucas, Mifflin County 911  
Sascha Meinrath, Palmer Chair in Telecommunications at Penn State's Donald P. Bellisario College of Communications via teleconference  
Robert Postal, Mifflin County Commissioner  
Jeff Raykes, RedNet Inc. via teleconference  
Cristy Schmidt, Penn State Extension and Center for Economic and Community Development  
Donald Schwartz, Bedford County Planning  
Eric Welty, Noovis

Call to Order: Bill Gomes called the meeting to order at 3:34 p.m. and reminded everyone to sign the attendance sheet. Everyone introduced themselves.

Approval of Minutes: Kay Semler motioned to approve the March meeting minutes. Craig Bubb seconded the motion. All members voted aye.

State's perspective on broadband and its initiative: Sheri Collins, Acting Executive Director of the Governor's Office of Broadband Initiatives explained how this office was set up a little over one year ago. However, she is the only person in the office. The office was created in response to the CAF II (Connect

America Fund) auction. PennDOT manages the entire process. Three organizations received money through the CAF II process. Communication is continuing and projects will begin to appear shortly. Ms. Collins focus has been responding to numerous complaints from those who have problems with internet service. She is also building relationships with providers.

Ms. Collins also serves as the governor's state alternate to the Appalachian Regional Commission. She has worked with ARC for the past five years as she worked at the Department of Community and Economic Development.

Ms. Collins recognizes there are many hurdles to broadband expansion, including topography limitations. She understands electric companies are also an impediment to expanding broadband. Ms. Collins is trying to be diligent about serving the communities that are attempting to solve their broadband problems. Ms. Collins can help with ARC funding. ARC Power awards are for communities impacted by the downturn in the coal industry. The state is trying to partner in discussions with broadband implementation.

Governor Wolf is proposing the Restore PA Initiative, which would impose a severance tax on the natural gas industry in order to help fund and support a number of infrastructure initiatives, including broadband. She realizes some people do not want to impose a severance tax on the natural gas industry, but the reality is that if we don't do something today, we will still have the same issues ten years from now. Ms. Collins is a resource who will work to resolve some of the existing issues. Ms. Collins is looking forward to seeing Sascha Meinrath's report demonstrating speeds throughout the commonwealth. She sees no reason PA communities should not have access to high speed internet in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is holding our communities back along with our students and educators. She added that even EMTs have problems using their equipment in certain areas due to lack of internet.

Bill Gomes previously shared what the committee has done with Ms. Collins. He acknowledged that we looked at the ARC Power grant program, but it was not a good fit.

Preliminary findings from Noovis contract: Eric Welty of Noovis provided a brief update to the committee. He recognizes there is no simple solution and we have to offset funding in some way. He looked at on the ground areas and developed cost ranges so that the county had some actual data to review going forward.

Mr. Welty looked at several areas and some unconventional options to get the last mile connection to residents. He concentrated on three areas, including Summit Road in Decatur Township, Ertley Road in Decatur Township and River Road in Bratton Township. The area along Summit Road is rural, but more densely populated than the areas in Ertley Road and River Road, which are rural and low density. This area also is located mostly along the roadside and has limited make ready work. The other two areas are at a greater distance from the road. Mr. Welty used cost assumptions for aerial placement of \$3.50 - \$4.00/foot aerial cable. This averages \$20,000 per mile with an average of 160 feet between poles plus pole attachment fees. Mr. Welty obtained his pole attachment fees from Mark VanOuse of approximately \$300-\$600 per pole. He has not seen this engineering fee in Maryland.

Ms. Collins asked to further discuss pole attachment fees. She recognized that utility companies have fluctuating costs associated with pole attachment fees. Currently, the FCC has jurisdiction authority over pole attachments, but there has been a recent request for the PUC to take over this authority. The FCC sets the rates based on maintenance issues. The engineering fee is outside of this. PennDOT permits may be required in some places for pole attachments.

Mr. Welty estimated a cost for infrastructure of \$160,000-\$184,000 for approximately 134 homes along Summit Road and Route 522 with an average of \$1,290 per home. There are 39 homes along Mail Pouch Road to Ertley Road, which would have an estimated cost for infrastructure of \$104,000-\$121,000 with an average of \$2,900 per home. There are 28 homes along River Road, which would have an estimated cost for infrastructure of \$56,000-\$65,000 with an average of \$3,000 per home. This does not include pricing for electronics to get the service to the home. This is just for the infrastructure.

Mr. Welty based his prices on a Nokia fixed wireless system as an unconventional solution utilizing the unlicensed spectrum in the wireless space. It is a short range, high speed Wi-Fi system. A fixed wireless system stops some of the costs at the pole since it does not run fiber to the home. A case study showed that most of these systems are located where homes are closer together where up to eight homes can be fed off one access point. The distance from the access point to the home should be less than 100 meters, which could be difficult in rural areas. A receiver is required to access the signal from the pole, which would be located inside the home. The access point at the pole requires power. At the end of the day, a great deal of cooperation is needed among the internet service providers, power companies and others to help with funding.

In summary, Mr. Welty's preliminary findings revealed an average cost for infrastructure of \$20,000 per mile and \$3,000 per home. Not all residents will want internet service. Fixed wireless can offset the final connection costs to the home, but an ISP is still required to connect to the signal. In order to offset some of the costs, a co-operative could be explored along with a forgivable bond as was demonstrated in New Hampshire where they offset the bond with a monthly fee. Geisinger provided a forgivable loan to Montour County to deploy broadband to the community. Mr. Welty will have a final report by the end of May.

Michael Hain stated that he uses wireless where he can't afford to place wire and noted that there are still pocket areas where it is not economical to expand service. He also reminded everyone that you need to look at long-term maintenance costs and upgrades. Ms. Collins acknowledged that there needs to be a mechanism in place in order to help with upkeep and enhancements to existing service.

Bill Gomes would like existing programs in the state to incorporate broadband funding. He acknowledged that providers are reluctant to accept public money because of the strings attached. Kristen Ritchey of Comcast stated that the landscape is changing and Comcast is working with a number of states over the past year with public private partnerships. She added that one of the big things for Comcast is they want to own the network so that they can manage it and the customer experience. Sheri Collins thinks that incorporating broadband funding into existing state programs will create an imbalance because it would take money from other programs and projects. Bill's issue with ARC is that it takes too long and can become a two year process. The USDA program only provides \$600 million across the country and has requirements in terms of proving the download speeds available to an area that may be problematic.

Other Business: Kristen Ritchey shared that Scott Kramer has approached Comcast and other providers about a possible project. She has spoken to the senior level at Comcast and received the go ahead to talk about potential projects. Comcast is eligible for federal funding. If we have a good, solid project with good information, we can approach Comcast to see if it would be a good fit.

Michael Hain shared information about a high altitude balloon that is capable of staying up for six months until it has to be refueled with helium. Up to 36 cell towers can use this for signal. The balloon provides a

stable platform because it can fly above the weather to maintain its position. It is capital intensive, however, at a cost of over \$4.5 million. This type of technology may not fill the needs of Mifflin County.

Next Meeting: May 15, 2019

Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 4:40 p.m.