

MINUTES
MIFFLIN COUNTY INTERNET ADVISORY COMMITTEE
SEPTEMBER 18, 2019
MIFFLIN COUNTY COURTHOUSE, MEETING ROOM B – 3:30 P.M.

ATTENDANCE:

MEMBERS:

Clint Aurand, Armagh Township
Doug Cunningham, Mifflin County School District via teleconference
Michael Hain, Nittany Media
John Rhone, Wayne Township
Kristen Ritchey, Comcast

OTHERS:

Bill Gomes, Mifflin County Planning and Development Department
Tiffany Brought, Mifflin County Planning and Development Department
Brad Kerstetter, Juniata County
Mark Long, Representative Benninghoff's Office
Liz Lose, Centre County Planning via teleconference
Scott Kramer, SEDA-COG
Colton Fogleman, Representative Hershey's Office
Jeremy Smith, Centurylink
Alice Gray, Juniata County Commissioner
Alicia Mathews, Comcast via teleconference
Lucas Lenze, Lewistown Sentinel

Call to Order: Bill Gomes called the meeting to order at 3:37 p.m. and reminded everyone to sign the attendance sheet. Everyone introduced themselves.

SEDA-COG Rural Broadband RLF Pilot Project: Scott Kramer provided an overview of the Rural Broadband Revolving Loan Fund Pilot Project that they are establishing that will impact Mifflin, Juniata and Perry Counties. Beginning in April of 2019, SEDA-COG has been engaged with Juniata, Mifflin and Perry Counties by facilitating a round of meetings between local leadership, planning directors, emergency communication directors and the local ISP's to address the lack of adequate broadband in the rural regions of each county.

Mr. Kramer said that SEDA-COG is aware of the counties tower assets due to prior projects with emergency communications so their initial proposal to the counties was to leverage their existing vertical assets to build a county operated wireless network capable of servicing the rural regions of the county. Alternatively, a point to point backbone network model was also proposed, which could then be leased to the local providers.

Mr. Kramer stated that our three counties, like most in the SEDA-COG region, do not wish to be in the ISP business. ISP's are hesitant to buildout on networks they themselves did not build or control and the lack of return on investment is why the ISP's are not expanding their services areas.

SEDA-COG, with the support of the regional legislators, has secured \$300,000 within the state budget under Keystone Communities Program for the purpose of facilitating the expansion of rural broadband. What they have proposed, in addition to the making the county owned vertical assets available to ISP's, is to also establish a low interest (1%) Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) for the purpose of incentivizing ISP's to provide minimum 25mb down and 3mb up service in the selected pilot project areas. Mr. Kramer said the SEAD-COG feels this approach gives the providers the tools they need to expand their network infrastructure while creating competitive environment for broadband access.

Each of the three counties have proposed pilot project areas. In Juniata County the areas are Academia, Doyles Mills, Pleasant View and Seven Pines. Mifflin County the areas are Alfarata, Maitland, Shindle and Wagner. In Perry County project areas are Bixler, Elliotsburg, Green Park and Loysville.

Mr. Kramer said that the next steps for the project are to finalize the loan guidelines, submit a Keystone Communities Application and publish the competitive RFP. They hope to have the finalized Revolving Loan Fund Guidelines by mid-October.

Rural Broadband Deployment – Comcast as a Partner: Alicia Matthews of Comcast provided information on their partnerships that promote wide participation in Broadband Grant Programs. The aspects of this initiative include targeting unserved areas for best use of scarce funds; technology neutral; competitive bidding to reach the largest number of locations at the highest possible speed; flexibility in protecting taxpayer dollars; reasonable match requirement; and reasonable construction timetable with make-ready provisions.

Comcast has partnered with public and private grants in Massachusetts, Maryland, Virginia and Vermont. To date with the Comcast partnered grants they have connected 3,149 homes in Massachusetts, 68 homes in Maryland, 7,882 in Virginia and 277 in Vermont. Ms. Matthews said that in Massachusetts they partnered with Massachusetts Broadband Institute and the state government, which has approved a state bond in the amount of \$50 million to help in the expansion of broadband in western part of the state. She mentioned three programs: Broadband Extension Program for partially served cable towns, Last Mile Program and Flexible Grant Program for the unserved towns.

Ms. Matthews also discussed the expansion of broadband in Virginia. Comcast is partnering with Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) and Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission (TRRC). The two programs she mentioned that facilitate this initiative were, the Virginia Telecommunications Initiative (VATI) through the DHCD and the Last Mile Broadband Program through the TRRC.

Bill Gomes asked if Comcast was currently involved with legislation in Pennsylvania. Alicia responded not at this time, but they are willing to meet and discuss solutions. Michael Hain asked if they are following Pennsylvania Senate Bill 835 that helps with partnerships. Kristen Ritchey with Comcast said they were and have been in discussion regarding this.

Kristen Ritchey had hoped to have updated information on the Atkinson Mills Proposal, but she was waiting on information from their construction management team. She said she will have this information for the committee at the next meeting.

Other Business: Michael Hain with Nittany Media, Inc., said that they now have the poles licensed and contractors will be running cable into Bannerville next week. They are not yet into Belltown, because they

have to get a Franchise Agreement with Decatur Township. Mr. Hain said that he believes that Decatur Township already has a Franchise Agreement with Atlantic Broadband. He is not aware of the future plans for Atlantic Broadband to expand services, but Nittany Media will proceed with their plans.

Next Meeting: November 20, 2019

Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 4:41 p.m.