

Lincoln County Broadband Commission Meeting Minutes

Meeting Details: Thursday, June 19, 2025

6:30 pm – 8:10 pm

Lincoln County Service Center (801 N. Sales Street Merrill, WI 54452)

County Board Room (#255/257/260)

Online Access: <https://meet.google.com/bjz-oiso-gpx>

Action Team Attendees (6/9 total): Tom Backen (Vice Chair), ~~Jennifer Bishop~~, Sara Guild (Secretary), Clyde Nelson, ~~Heidi O'Hare~~, ~~Amanda Patterson^~~, ~~Gordan Sennet~~, Earl Welker, Ken Wickham (Chair) ^PROXY = Andrew Caylor for Amanda Patterson

Other Attendees (3 total): Brian Arndorfer, Chris Crawford* (Charter), Dave Dyer (Town of King)

*Participated online (1 total)

1. Call to Order – 6:30 pm by Wickham

Action Team Quorum = 6 (Backen, Caylor^, Guild, Nelson, Welker, Wickham)

2. Welcome & Introductions

Wickham welcomed all attendees and led introductions.

3. Public Comment - NONE

4. Review & Consider Approval of Prior LCBC Meeting Minutes – April 24, 2025

Welker/Nelson motioned to approve the April 24, 2025, minutes as presented; motion carried.

6:34 pm – Crawford arrival

5. Consider Approval of 2025-26 LCBC Action Team Members

O'Hare, Nelson, and Sennet's LCBC terms expire this month. O'Hare and Nelson have agreed to remain on the LCBC but Sennet is moving out of the area and will not be renewing. Therefore, the LCBC will seek nominations to fill his seat and will vote on that approval at the next LCBC meeting.

Caylor/Backen motioned to nominate Heidi O'Hare (Tomahawk Public Library) and Clyde Nelson (Merrill Area Chamber of Commerce) to the Lincoln County Broadband Commission for a 3-year term effective June 2025; motion carried.

6. Monthly Updates from LCBC Leadership & Partners

a. Commission Chair

Wickham, Backen, and Guild recently participated in an online meeting with representatives from the City of Racine to discuss ideas related to digital resource utilization; he postponed the complete update to Item 8.

b. Public Service Commission (PSC)

The PSC rep was not available, so Guild and Wickham provided an update. Last week, information was released outlining significant changes to the BEAD program. A new process, referred to as the "Benefit of the Bargain" (BOB), restarts the ISP application review process and updates the criteria that can be used. States now have 90 days to complete their application reviews and submit final proposals to the federal government for approval. The BOB process removes the emphasis on fiber-based service and does not give additional points for local community support. Attendees discussed the available information and potential impact of the changes on Lincoln County. Guild and Wickham will bring additional information to the July meeting.

Welker also noted that Verizon activated a new tower near Hwy 17 and Sunrise Road last week, and is now offering 5G service to residents at a very affordable price, but only has capacity to hook up 100 people. Caylor reported that T-Mobile also recently activated a tower with 5G service near the airport.

c. *Internet Service Providers (ISPs)*

i. *Charter RDOF Project Implementation*

Crawford reported that RDOF installation activities are continuing in the southeast, northeast, and western parts of the county. Charter aims to complete all installation activities in Lincoln County by the end of 2026. Guild will work with Crawford to finalize and share an updated RDOF status map.

7:26 pm – Crawford out

ii. *Other ISPs – NONE PRESENT*

d. *Action Team Members - Provided under Item 6b.*

7. Annual Review of Lincoln County Broadband Plan

Wickham, Guild, and Backen shared feedback on their review of the 2024 Broadband Plan. The first 4 chapters were found to be historical and thus do not require updates. Chapters 5-8 provided opportunities to assess if the LCBC is on track and progressing towards the recommendations. Attendees discussed highlights from the plan, including the need to ensure “affordable” broadband remains a focus area. It was agreed that the LCBC’s recent activities, as well as the current discussions related to digital resource utilization, align well with the original plan’s recommendations. Caylor/Guild motioned to approve the annual review of the Lincoln County Broadband Plan; motion carried.

8. Digital Resources Utilization Pathway Project Goals, Timeline, and Activities

Following the LCBC discussion in April with UW-Extension about options to continue actively supporting broadband utilization in Lincoln County, LCBC’s Exec team spoke with representatives from the City of Racine in early June to learn more about how they pursued community engagement related to broadband services. A key takeaway was their recommendation to do focused outreach instead of general community surveys, targeting people who regularly engage with the primary audiences. They also noted that most people prefer one-on-one services to help improve technology skills, not group classes, and thus services like a Digital Navigator program can work very well.

Attendees discussed how this information could be utilized in Lincoln County, and debated the types of information and services that would be most valuable to residents. Following an in-depth discussion, it was agreed that the LCBC’s next steps should involve holding strategic conversations with local stakeholders and then using the information from those meetings to identify the best options to address the key concerns for this area. To start this process, the LCBC will develop a list of key stakeholders to invite to future meetings during the July LCBC meeting.

9. Future LCBC Meetings Information

a. *Future Agenda Topic Suggestions*

The July LCBC meeting agenda will include nominations for a new LCBC Action Team member, updates on the BEAD program changes, and preparation of a key stakeholders outreach list.

b. *Confirmation of Next Commission Meeting Date/Time/Location*

The next Lincoln County Broadband Commission meeting will be held on Thursday, July 24, at 6:30 pm in the Lincoln County Service Center; online access will be provided.

10. Meeting Adjournment – Meeting adjourned by Wickham at 8:10 pm.