Lincoln County Broadband Commission Meeting Minutes

Meeting Details: **Thursday, June 25, 2026**
5:31 pm – 7:16 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), Sara Guild (Secretary), ~~Amber Lambrecht~~, ~~Tim McFadden~~, Donald Nelson, Heidi O'Hare*, ~~Amanda Patterson~~, Earl Welker, Ken Wickham (Chair)

Other Attendees *(5 total)*: Andrew Caylor* (MAPS), Emily Conklin* (United Way WI), Mark Leonard* (PSC), Debbie Moellendorf (Merrill Area United Way), Travis Spoehr (Lincoln Co)
**Participated online (4 total)*

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1. **Call to Order – 5:31 pm by Wickham**
   Action Team Quorum = 7 including 1 proxy (Backen, Guild, Nelson, O'Hare, Caylor for Patterson, Welker, Wickham)

2. **Welcome & Introductions**
   Wickham led introductions in the room and online.

3. **Public Comment –** NONE

4. **Review & Consider Approval of Prior LCBC Meeting Minutes – May 28, 2026**
   Welker/Nelson motioned to approve the May 28, 2026, LCBC minutes as presented; motion carried.

5. **Monthly Updates from LCBC Leadership & Partners**
   a. *Commission Chair*
      Wickham has continued to observe a lot of activity as Charter enters the final months of installing its RDOF fiber services. Resident inquiries about the project have largely ceased by this point.

   b. *Public Service Commission (PSC)*
      i. *BEAD Program Updates*
         Leonard reported that 20 of the 28 BEAD grant awardees have executed agreements for all their projects, including Frontier, Brightspeed, and SpaceX in Lincoln County. Bertram requested an extension and now has until July 3rd to execute their contract. A number of BEAD awarded project adjustments were announced last week but they did not impact Lincoln County. The PSC's BEAD web page can be referenced for additional updates and data information.

      Leonard also shared information about the PSC's *State Broadband Expansion Grant*, which is due July 27 and can be used to bring service to currently unserved locations, including sites that already have other funding pledged via programs like BEAD. However, applicants must explain why these sites need additional state funding if they are already scheduled to receive service through BEAD or other funding sources. Lincoln County has 6,149 potentially eligible locations, including 189 locations that are not part of any other in-progress projects. Most applicants are expected to be ISPs but public-private partnerships are encouraged; UW-Extension will be hosting a webinar on June 29 with more information about this process. More details, including interactive maps, are available on the grant web page: https://psc.wi.gov/Pages/ServiceType/Broadband/GrantsStateExpansion.aspx

c. *Internet Service Providers (ISPs)*

i. *Charter RDOF Project Implementation*

Guild has received most of the Q3 updates for the RDOF implementation schedule and will be uploading a new map as soon as the final details are verified. She noted that a lot of areas are almost fully complete pending final easements or limited make-ready work. She also encouraged anyone monitoring specific areas to check the updated map because some of the timelines have been adjusted by up to three months, although most are still on track to be completed by fall. She also informed attendees that Charter is preparing to hold an event celebrating the completion of the RDOF project in Lincoln County and that LCBC members and local government officials will be receiving emailed invitations later this year.

ii. *Other ISPs*

Guild made contact with Lincoln County's new Verizon/Frontier representatives this week and they have been added to the LCBC email communications list.

d. *Action Team Members*

Multiple attendees commented on the extensive fiber installation activity occurring throughout the county due to Charter's RDOF project. Welker also noted that he is aware of several people who recently switched to Starlink satellite internet service due to the very affordable deals currently being offered.

6. Digital Pathways Program

a. *United Way Presentation: Techquity Program and Digital Navigation Services*

Wickham welcomed Debbie Moellendorf, Executive Director for the Merrill Area United Way, and Emily Conklin, Program Director - Connected Communities for United Way of Wisconsin. Conklin shared a PowerPoint presentation that explained the history and impact of United Way's Techquity device lending and digital navigation program. The program began in Milwaukee in 2020 and has evolved over the last six years to become a statewide initiative. The program currently focuses on distributing laptop devices to low-income individuals who do not already have a device in the home. It also offers personalized digital assistance services to qualifying clients. The device lending program's grant ends this year but the United Way is exploring options to continue Techquity's services into 2027 and beyond.

Moellendorf confirmed that 75 people have been enrolled in the program through Merrill Area United Way and described the enrollment and participation processes. She noted that United Way's funding partners strongly support the program. Community service partners are the primary source of referrals and support.

Conklin and Moellendorf answered questions related to how the Digital Navigator program works, how it is supported, and the types of assistance that are provided. Conklin shared information about the United Way's CommunityUpskill.org website, which provides free online digital skills training for the general public. Attendees discussed ideas for how to support and/or compliment the Techquity program locally, such as adding links for digital resources to the Broadband web page, finding additional donors for the laptop device program, and/or assisting Moellendorf with updating her list of free wi-fi locations. The LCBC will continue discussing ideas at the next monthly meeting.

6:54 pm – Moellendorf out
6:57 pm – Conklin out

7. Annual Review of LCBC Organizational Guidelines

Attendees completed the annual review of the LCBC Organizational Guidelines. They felt that the mission and goals may need to be updated to better reflect the anticipated shift from service installation to service utilization and agreed by consensus to bring this topic back to the next meeting. They briefly discussed reducing the LCBC meeting schedule frequency but decided to keep scheduling meetings monthly so that they were prepared to be responsive to time-sensitive items and to cancel meetings as appropriate. No other changes were recommended.

Wickham briefly revisited the PSC Broadband Expansion Grant topic. He offered to contact Charter/Spectrum to determine whether they plan to pursue this funding opportunity as a means to complement their RDOF project. Attendees agreed by consensus that he should reach out and, if appropriate, also offer non-monetary support consistent with the support offered to ISPs during the original BEAD process.

8. Future LCBC Meetings Information

a. Future Agenda Topic Suggestions

The next LCBC meeting will focus on reviewing the information gathered during the Digital Pathways outreach activities that took place throughout the first half of 2026 and then use that feedback to create or update the LCBC's primary goals, action items, mission and/or vision statements.

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

Attendees agreed by consensus to cancel the July 2026 LCBC meeting due to some potential scheduling conflicts and a lack of time-sensitive topics. The next LCBC meeting will be held on **Thursday, August 27**, at 5:30 pm in the Lincoln County Service Center; online access will be provided.

9. Meeting Adjournment – Nelson/Welker m/s to adjourn at 7:16 pm; motion carried.

Minutes Approved: 08/27/2026 by LCBC, recorded by SG