

Lincoln County Broadband Commission Meeting Minutes

Meeting Details: Thursday, August 27, 2026

5:30 pm – 7:35 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 (8/9 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 (4 total): Vicki Bender, Scott Doerr*, Christina Luna* (PSC), Travis Spoehr

**Participated online (4 total)*

1. Call to Order – 5:30 pm by Wickham

Action Team Quorum = 8

Arrived after *Call to Order* = Doerr (5:50 pm)

2. Welcome & Introductions

Wickham led introductions in the room and online.

3. Public Comment – NONE

4. Review & Consider Approval of Prior LCBC Meeting Minutes – June 25, 2026

Nelson/Backen motioned to approve the June 25, 2026, minutes as presented; motion carried.

5. Monthly Updates from LCBC Leadership & Partners

a. Commission Chair

Wickham reported a relatively quiet summer. He was contacted by two residents seeking confirmation of their Spectrum/Charter service activation dates. He also reported that recent Broadband Expansion Grant applications included two proposed projects in Lincoln County, submitted by Bertram and Brightspeed.

b. Public Service Commission (PSC)

i. BEAD Program Updates

Luna reported that all four Lincoln County ISPs have completed their BEAD contracts and are now working through NEPA and other required processes. Tentative implementation timelines are included in the contracts. The PSC is also recommending that counties pursue "Broadband Forward Certification" to help expedite broadband infrastructure installation. Wickham noted that Lincoln County had declined to pursue certification in prior years, but the Commission could revisit the issue to determine whether circumstances have changed. Luna will provide links to additional information available on the PSC website.

The PSC received 93 applications for the State Broadband Expansion Grants, significantly exceeding available funding. The state is now conducting the challenge process and addressing overlapping or conflicting applications. Portions of Lincoln County were included in applications from both Bertram and Brightspeed. Final funding awards are expected in late fall or early winter. Luna also reported that NTIA plans to release an updated Digital Equity competitive grant opportunity later this year.

c. *Internet Service Providers (ISPs)*

i. *Charter RDOF Project Implementation*

Charter/Spectrum held an event on August 4 to recognize the near-completion of its RDOF project in Lincoln County. Guild spoke on behalf of the LCBC and LCEDC, and representatives from several other government agencies and community organizations attended.

Guild received an updated list of RDOF installation dates earlier that day. A preliminary review indicated multiple recent service activations and that most remaining areas are expected to be online by the end of October. The information also indicated that most installation delays are related to private easement issues. Wickham briefly shared his experience resolving a private easement issue on his road, noting that it was a positive interaction.

Attendees briefly discussed recent resident concerns, including confusion about determining which ISPs serve specific locations and varying reports regarding the cost of extending fiber to individual homes. Reported experiences ranged from no additional cost to reasonable or significant installation expenses.

ii. *Other ISPs*

Frontier/Verizon recently sent notices indicating that copper-based telephone service, including DSL internet service, will be discontinued by mid-November. The notices indicated that affected customers will need to transition to alternative available services and may incur higher costs for replacement technology. Attendees discussed the information and resident feedback received to date, including increased interest in Starlink satellite service among those who can access and afford it. Concerns were raised about both the financial impact and the challenges some residents may experience transitioning to new technologies. LCBC leadership was asked to contact Verizon to determine whether additional information or resources are available to help affected residents navigate the transition.

d. *Action Team Members - NONE*

6. Discuss & Consider Updates to the LCBC Mission, Vision, Goals, and/or Focus Areas

Attendees reviewed the current LCBC Organizational Guidelines and discussed information gathered through recent roundtables, guest presentations, and general outreach. Affordability for rural and low-income residents was identified as a key issue, along with cybersecurity and online safety for residents of all ages. Attendees also discussed the appropriate role of the LCBC moving forward, recognizing the Commission's capacity and funding limitations.

7:12 pm – Luna out

Following an extended discussion, attendees reached consensus that the LCBC will continue to have an important role in supporting internet access, technology use, and digital readiness in the years ahead. Action Team leadership was asked to use the group's feedback to draft updated Mission, Vision, and/or Goal statements for review at the next meeting. The proposed updates should reflect emerging priorities related to technology and education while retaining the organization's core purpose and functions.

7. Future LCBC Meetings Information

a. *Future Agenda Topic Suggestions*

Future meetings will include review of the proposed Mission, Vision, and Goal statements, followed by discussions to identify specific strategies for advancing the approved goals.

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

The next Lincoln County Broadband Commission meeting will be held on Thursday, Sept. 24, at 5:30 pm in the Lincoln County Service Center; online access will be provided.

8. Meeting Adjournment – Meeting adjourned by Wickham at 7:35 pm.