

Lincoln County Broadband Commission Discussion Summary

Meeting Details: Thursday, December 19, 2024

6:32 pm – 7:37 pm

ONLINE ONLY

Online Access: <http://meet.google.com/cyt-wxgo-nsq>

Action Team Attendees (3/8 total): Tom Backen (Vice Chair), Jennifer Bishop, Sara Guild (Secretary), Clyde Nelson, Heidi O'Hare, Gordon Sennet, Earl Welker, Ken Wickham (Chair)

Other Attendees (7 total): Brian Arndorfer, Andrew Caylor, Kassie Soukup (Bertram), Travis Spoehr, Chet Strebe, Pat Voermans, Lisa White (arrived 6:47 pm)

**All attendees were online (10 total)*

1. Call to Order – 6:32 pm by Wickham

Action Team Quorum = 3 (Wickham, Backen, Guild)

NO QUORUM – Meeting transitioned to an informational discussion ONLY; no formal actions taken

2. Welcome & Introductions

3. Public Comment - NONE

4. Approve Lincoln County Broadband Commission Meeting Minutes – October 24, 2024

Postponed to next LCBC meeting due to lack of quorum.

5. Commission Chair Updates

Wickham has been communicating with four different ISPs who have expressed interest in possibly submitting BEAD project proposals in Lincoln County – Bertram, Charter, Frontier, and Bug Tussel.

On Nov. 26, Bertram's CEO and its Strategic Partnerships Manager met with Wickham, Backen, Guild, and Spoehr to share information about their company and the unique technology they use to provide internet service. Once the project units are announced, they will provide more detailed information about how they could offer their services.

Wickham is finalizing a meeting date with Frontier in early January; he has reached out to the other ISPs, as well. Everyone is still waiting to see the final project units before sharing any details about their proposals.

6. Action Team Membership Update

John Heckendorf has stepped down from the Action Team. Wickham is waiting to hear back from a potential new member. If anyone else is interested in joining the Action Team, they should notify a member of the Executive Team.

7. Public Service Commission (PSC) Updates

a. BEAD Project

PSC reps were unable to attend tonight's meeting. Most updates will be covered under Webinar Highlights.

8. Internet Services Provider (ISP) Updates

a. Charter RDOF Project Implementation Updates

Crawford was unable to attend but sent updated RDOF project information. Wickham and Guild shared an updated map outlining the "Under Construction" (blue) and "In Progress" (yellow) unit areas. Wickham has observed Charter installing conduit (no fiber) in the northeast corner of the county, which is not an "active" area on the map; he believes this prep work may be happening in other areas, as well. He will ask Crawford to clarify what is considered "In Progress" and how to identify where preparatory work is being completed.

b. Other ISP Updates

Soukup had no formal updates but reaffirmed Bertram's desire to work with Lincoln County on BEAD projects.

6:47 pm – White joined

Attendees briefly discussed Bertram's unique infrastructure features, as well as their installation & service abilities, company history, and anticipated timeline.

9. BEAD Program Activities

a. December 17th PSC Webinar Highlights

Multiple Commission members joined the PSC BEAD webinar on Tuesday. It gave an excellent "big picture" summary of the project's history, goals, and timeline, as well as recommendations for the next phases. The PSC is currently completing the ISP Letter of Intent review process and hopes to release final project units the first week of January. Round 1 will open on Jan. 13 and close on Feb. 25; it will focus on fiber-only projects. Guild will share the slides from the webinar presentation with the Commission email list.

Community Engagement will earn ISPs up to 5 points – 2 for providing evidence that a public meeting was held, 2 for getting a letter of support from the town(s) primarily impacted by the project, and 1 point for a letter from a community organization whose served population will be positively impacted by the project.

The County Board must provide a formal endorsement of the recommended projects. In addition, all local governments are encouraged to support BEAD projects by sharing their local knowledge, helping with tasks that can streamline installation activities (permitting, right-of-way, etc.), and holding ISPs accountable throughout the project implementation.

b. County Support Activities Options & Timeline

Attendees discussed the challenging timeline for getting both town engagement and County Board approval. The County Board endorsement must happen at the February 18th Board meeting. Ideally, all impacted towns should submit their letters of support prior to that meeting. Most town boards meet the second week of the month, which is the week of Feb. 10. Therefore, public outreach must happen at or before those meetings, which is less than a month from the Round 1 start date.

The Executive Team will offer to meet with each of the ISPs in mid-January to get their official proposals and begin assessing options for assisting the ISPs with community engagement. The Commission will review the proposals at its Jan. 23 meeting and discuss if/how to assist with any remaining public outreach; members outside of the Executive Team may be asked to attend town meetings. The Commission meeting date may be adjusted if needed to be more responsive depending on how the program and outreach timing evolves.

10. Action Team Member Updates & Inquiries - NONE

11. Future Meeting Topic Suggestions

The next meeting will focus on reviewing and responding to the BEAD project proposals.

Voermans asked the Commission to include a discussion on Wisconsin's Digital Equity Plan at a future meeting.

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

The next Lincoln County Broadband Commission meeting will be scheduled for Thursday, January 23, at 6:30 pm in the Lincoln County Service Center; online access will be provided.

13. Meeting Conclusion – Meeting was concluded at 7:37 pm by Wickham