

BROADBAND TASK FORCE

April 29, 2019

Committee Members Present: Curt Crandall (Chairman), A. Bigelow, T. Boyde, P. Curran, M. Evans, D. Fanton, K. Hooker, D. Pullen, R. Zink (Absent: K. Dirlam, D. Root)

Others Present: C. Knapp, N. Pullen, B. Riehle, P. Stockin, M. Washer

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 10:04 a.m. by Chairman Crandall

Introduction

Chairman Crandall welcomed and thanked everyone for attending the meeting, stating this is only the second time since he has been Chairman of the Board that he has put together a group and appointed himself as Chairman of it.

Chairman Crandall went around the room and had everyone introduce themselves.

Overview of Broadband Project

Chairman Crandall stated back around 2006 to 2008, the Board started looking at a wireless project in Ontario County that provided fiber ring throughout. They met with Ontario County representatives to discuss details; however, at the time it was seemingly out of reach for Allegany County. Later, came the Connect NY Wireless Broadband Program in New York State that the County joined, and had it not been for the prior work done, the County would not have been able to achieve what we have in bringing forth the County-wide Broadband Program.

Chairman Crandall briefly highlighted Resolutions dated back to 2009 that were adopted by the Board to help the County-wide Broadband Program progress.

Chairman Crandall went on to discuss the issues that the County has faced launching this program such as Connect NY and Governor Cuomo's proposal to have fiber in every home throughout New York State.

Chairman Crandall would like the main focus of this task force to be looking at what the future of wireless broadband in Allegany County is, and how we concentrate on areas that are truly in need of this service as well as focusing on what the best way is to utilize the equipment that was obtained through the \$800,000 grant.

Southern Tier West Executive Director Richard Zink stated it is both relevant and true that Armstrong and Spectrum have been charged by the State to put fiber optic into every home throughout New York State. Those companies bid on specific census blocks and are then required to provide fiber optic to every address within that census block. Anyone who cannot be provided fiber optic was granted to HughesNet which equals 18 percent of the County. Mr. Zink continued that if a home is capable of receiving fiber, they aren't going to use wireless, or companies such as Win-Win Wireless. Mr. Zink went on to say that there is a need out there for this Broadband Program to be completed across the County, adding that if they think broadband is useful now for things such as banking, social media, and education, then they should multiple that need by ten for the future. Mr. Zink stated that through Southern Tier West, the State has done a lot of different projects. They have helped put up the tower on Corbin Hill that they then turned over to the County, they put up a tower in Swain to help the ski resort, and also put up some towers in Rushford. Mr. Zink continued that currently, Armstrong has the best price with the best service, and the County needs to keep them in check by having competition that will keep them at a level where they need to compete both in price and capacity.

Chairman Crandall stated that there are Board members who have questioned if the County has invested in something that isn't needed and has been taken over by other entities making it futile to put in any additional effort. Chairman Crandall doesn't believe that's the case, adding they need to be able to convey that message to gain support from the Legislature going forward.

Geographical Footprint

Mr. Zink briefly discussed the schedule as well as steps Armstrong is taking stating that they are currently scheduled to be done by the end of 2019, and while there is some question as to whether or not they will be able to accomplish it, we have to take them at their word. Mr. Zink continued that they have worked closely with Southern Tier Wireless who will be covering the edge of Grove down to Cuba, adding that the vast majority South of I-86 and the upper corner of Birdsall, Almond, and Burns will be left uncovered and granted to HughesNet. Win-Win Wireless representative Nancy Pullen asked why HughesNet was awarded census blocks. Mr. Zink stated that there are some homes that just can't get fiber optic, and in order for the State to "check the box" that says they are serving everyone in New York State, they granted those areas to HughesNet.

Legislator Curran who also serves as Chairman of the Allegany County Tele-Communications Development Corporation (ACTDC) gave a brief overview of what the group does. They are primarily an in-between group between the County and the last mile providers. Their job boils down to the purchase and re-selling of signal to the last mile providers. Win-Win Wireless and TelStar do all of the last mile work for their customers who belong to them, noting that ACTDC has nothing to do with that portion of the process. Legislator Curran went on to say that to date, they have borrowed \$250,000 above and beyond the original \$200,000 the County invested to help get them up and running. Ideally, they were set up to provide internet signal and with the money they do make, put it back into the 911 system. If they can get up to 1,000 customers, they should be turning back decent money to the County.

Win-Win Wireless representative David Pullen stated as of right now they have approximately 50 customers and it has been very slow getting started. Seventy-five percent of their customers are in the area Mr. Zink described as being served by Southern Tier Wireless. Mr. Pullen noted that while they aren't marketing against Southern Tier Wireless, some are switching over to Win-Win Wireless due to not receiving the speed they desire and being very unhappy with their current service. Chairman Crandall asked if the County's Broadband system has the capability to offer above what is brought in by Southern Tier Wireless. Mr. Pullen stated he can't speak to that as he is not privy to all that Southern Tier Wireless can do. What Win-Win Wireless can provide is up to .5GHz bandwidth through the 911 backbone, adding that if someone wanted 100Mbps, they could provide that as well. Mr. Pullen went on to say the dilemma they are experiencing is that wireless requires line of sight, and if they can't see the property, they can't serve it. Mr. Pullen continued that the 911 towers were located primarily for use by 911 with broadband use being incidental. Where they have a complaint is with the original plan design that he was aware of which was to piggyback, and ACTDC was going to build 10 microcell towers. ACTDC then hired full-time Executive Director Ryan Cool. When the money ended up being unavailable, only two microcell towers were constructed; one of which is located in Wellsville and is not operational; therefore, they cannot provide service to that area. Chairman Crandall asked why the tower is not operational. Legislator Curran stated it is privately owned and the owner was promised service from the tower; however, there is no way to get service to the owner, so they will not allow us use of the tower. Chairman Crandall asked if the equipment on the tower can be utilized somewhere else. Mr. Pullen indicated, yes, it could be placed at another location. Legislator Fanton asked how much service the tower can provide to Wellsville if it can't even

reach the owner's property. Mr. Pullen stated that based on where the homeowner is living, they are blocked. Legislator Fanton stated that we have put equipment on a tower that we can't use, and asked if there is any other way to get service to the owner. Mr. Pullen indicated that they have offered service at no charge if they allow the tower to be turned on. If it means they have to put up a relay just to serve them, it would be worth it for the amount of service they can provide in Wellsville. Legislator Fanton stated they need to focus on that tower and getting it turned on and asked if there is anything the Legislature can do to assist in that process. Mr. Pullen stated they did approach them at one point in time, but have since gotten distracted because they started looking at the tower located behind the Village of Wellsville Police Department. They have since found out that even though it is located in the Village, it is owned and run by Verizon, so they are unable to use it. Mr. Pullen continued they can approach the homeowner in Wellsville again; however, they would also need direction from ACTDC as he cannot speak for them. Chairman Crandall indicated that with a little negotiating, it seems like the Wellsville tower can cover a lot of ground, and that should be looked into before they move the equipment to another location.

Mr. Pullen provided another example of a customer who was quoted \$123,000 by Spectrum to run service to their home. The County is unable to serve from either of the three towers in their general area due to the amount of hills obstructing the view, so they are anxiously awaiting news that Armstrong will be able to provide service to them. Mr. Pullen continued that Southern Tier Wireless is located in the town of Rushford and they have been told by the Recreation Lake District that the service around the lake is abysmal. ACTDC has just put up a tower with a license from the Lake District, and they are hoping they can provide service options of 6Mbps, 12Mbps, or 25Mbps. Mr. Pullen noted that if someone wants a higher speed, they can provide it; however, they aren't receiving calls for service above 25Mbps as most want the \$40 per month level.

Chairman Crandall started a brief discussion on how to solve the issues they are experiencing with no line of sight. Mr. Zink stated one option is to place the equipment higher on the towers. If they were to place the equipment at 100 feet on the Corbin Hill tower, they can see a radius of two to three miles; however, if they place it at 280 feet, that radius increases to 8 to 10 miles. Mr. Pullen indicated that the highest they are going is 30 to 70 feet which covers a couple of valley's. Chairman Crandall asked if there is a different type of unit they could place higher on the towers. Mr. Zink stated it comes down to capacity. A bigger antenna on a bigger tower can handle a greater capacity while a smaller antenna on a 40-foot tower will serve approximately 40 houses. Mr. Zink continued that they could put larger antennas on smaller towers, but they will start to get into infrastructure issues, and they would need to be engineered. Radio Technician Matt Evans stated that the new towers are approximately 250 feet and are engineered; however, going up higher on the towers will cost money. The County was originally on a 400-foot tower in Angelica, and as soon as they found out Broadband was going to be on there, the price went up to \$500 per month. Mr. Evans indicated that if they decide to get off the County towers and move onto commercial towers, they're going to be paying big money. Mr. Pullen added that there are two commercial towers in the Fillmore area and Win-Win Wireless will never have enough customers to cover the amount of money they want monthly.

The task force briefly discussed that Superintendent of Fillmore Central School Ravo Root had once stated that between 40 and 50 percent of their students do not have adequate broadband service. The students have laptops and tablets with broadband available while in school; however, when they go home, they don't have service which leaves them at a disadvantage to communicate with teachers and do their school work. Mr. Root looked into funding that would allow all of his students to have service at home, but struggled with the percentage of students that could actually be served. Mr. Zink stated because all of the students couldn't be served, they decided it wasn't beneficial to spend school dollars when only 20 percent

would have service. Chairman Crandall asked if any other school districts have looked into anything similar. Mr. Zink stated not to his knowledge.

Funding Opportunities

Chairman Crandall asked if there are any known funding opportunities that could help move this project forward. Mr. Zink stated the Appalachian Regional Commission Power Grant is for coal affected communities. Allegany County has been deemed coal affected, so they have put in an application to be awarded \$800,000 for Broadband. There is a caveat they have to guarantee that the only places they will serve are allocated to HughesNet. Mr. Zink briefly discussed 4k TV's and how they require at least 15Mbps download speed, noting that if the County wants people to continue buying homes, they need to have these services available. Mr. Zink continued that he receives calls regarding people who want to work from home or do online schooling, and while it may seem frivolous to some because they can live without it, it is a big part of decisions being made when buying homes.

Department of Public Works District Shop

Mr. Pullen stated they were approached by the County's Department of Public Works to serve shops around the County. They are able to serve the Birdsall shop; however, Public Works decided to go a different route as they could get more bandwidth from another provider. Mr. Pullen noted that he doesn't believe they need anything more than 25Mbps, and he is unsure of what they are doing that requires more. Legislator Fanton stated it is his understanding that it is not something they just chose to do, and it still has not been confirmed that the Birdsall shop can see the tower to get service. Mr. Pullen indicated that he did reach back out to the Superintendent to confirm they can serve that shop. Win-Win Wireless cannot serve Main Street or the Fairgrounds, but they can get service to Peacock Hill Road, the site where the village offices are located as well as to the Town Hall. Mr. Pullen continued that if they were able to put up a tower at the Birdsall site, they can then relay from it and cover the entire Village of Angelica. Mr. Pullen went on to say that the best site to put up a tower is at the Angelica site where the village offices are located; however, because they are too new and too small, they were unable to obtain a particular type of insurance coverage that the insurance agent is requiring be held. Mr. Pullen noted they have since found a company that will provide \$1 million in coverage for \$5,000. County Administrator Timothy Boyde stated they need to take a look at what they can do with the Department of Public Works.

Future Meetings

The task force briefly discussed when future meetings could be held, and the following were scheduled:

- Wednesday, May 29, at 10:00 a.m. in the Legislative Chambers
- Wednesday, June 26, at 10:00 a.m. in the Legislative Chambers

Adjournment

Chairman Crandall adjourned the meeting at 11:54 a.m.