

## **BROADBAND TASK FORCE**

**June 26, 2019**

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

**Others Present:** A. Mann (Win-Win Wireless), D. McDonnell, B. Riehle, T. Ross, M. Washer

**Call to Order:** The meeting was called to order at 10:07 a.m. by Chairman Crandall

### **Approval of Minutes**

A motion was made by Legislator Curran, seconded by Mr. Pullen, and carried to approve the April 29, 2019, Broadband Task Force minutes.

### **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.

### **Wellsville Tower**

Win-Win Wireless representative David Pullen stated that after the last Broadband Task Force meeting, he contacted the owner of the tower on Meservey Hill who was under the impression that the County is who walked away from the deal. Mr. Pullen stated there has been confusion regarding the situation, and Legislator Curran and he have confirmed that electricity to the tower is still on; however, it had been turned off for approximately one year. Mr. Pullen went on to say that given where the tower is located, it can serve over to the easterly side of the village and some of those areas. The tower is in the shadow of the westerly side of the Genesee River, but given what they have done in other places, it is possible to create another microcell and have it feed off the Meservey Hill Tower which will then allow service over to the westerly side of the Genesee River. The original agreement was to provide internet service to the owner's residence in exchange for putting radios on their tower; however, the owner was later told that the County could not do that. Mr. Pullen indicated that at this point, Win-Win Wireless has offered to pay for the owner's service in consideration of being able to use the tower and begin marketing and serving the easterly sector of Wellsville. Southern Tier West Executive Director Richard Zink asked how long the antennas have been on the tower. Mr. Pullen stated two years; they were active for one year and inactive for one year. Legislator Curran reminded Mr. Pullen that Win-Win Wireless has access to those radios, adding that if they have rights as the last mile provider and pay for it then they are the only last mile provider allowed on the tower; however, if ACTDC pays, then other providers are allowed on the tower as well.

### **Technology Issues**

Mr. Pullen discussed the technology issues that have recently been brought forward. The most common reception band is 3.65 GHz; however, it is going through some major restructuring by the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC). It is Mr. Pullen's understanding that in June 2020, all current radios that include 3.65 GHz radios will become unusable. New radios with new technology will be required, so going forward, they need to have a decision made as to what radios need to be on the towers. Mr. Pullen noted that if they start marketing and signing up customers on those radios, they will become "boat anchors" a year from now. Chairman Crandall stated first and foremost, the Wellsville tower is up and running, electric is being paid, and they can access certain areas from that tower with the possibility of expanding their customer base in

the future with microcell towers. Mr. Pullen stated that is correct; however, there are technical issues that need to be solved first before they are comfortable investing a lot of money. Chairman Crandall asked if the bigger issue now is that Win-Win Wireless won't invest until the technical issue is solved. Mr. Pullen stated the Wellsville tower is the only 3.65 GHz radio; all of the other towers have multiple radio technologies on them such as 5 GHz and 900 GHz. Legislator Curran stated the product belongs to the County; therefore, it is a County decision, not ACTDC. This issue just came up, and they haven't even had a chance to discuss it, and it will boil down to whether they invest in the system or not, adding that it's the same situation as the maintenance agreement. If they don't invest in those kinds of things, it will fall apart. Mr. Pullen stated that Win-Win Wireless has added a new technology called TV White Space which is unused broadcasting frequencies in the wireless spectrum. Television networks leave gaps between channels for buffering purposes, and this space in the wireless spectrum is similar to what is used for 4G; therefore, it can be used to deliver widespread broadband internet. This new technology allowed Win-Win Wireless technician Alex Mann to put a radio on a tower in Rushford Lake. Prior to that, they could only reach cottages over the waterfront, but not in the back of the woods. As of today, that additional radio serves the wooded area, and the customer is receiving good service. Mr. Zink asked what they considered good service. Mr. Mann stated up to 20 Mbps download speed, and 15 Mbps upload speed. Mr. Pullen stated they are excited about this new technology and plan to market it soon as they have many customers who want service, but some live in the woods, and Win-Win Wireless has been hesitant to offer service without being sure they could deliver. Legislator Fanton asked if they can take signals from towers and convert it to TV White Space and serve areas from there. Mr. Pullen stated, yes, adding that if they put TV White Space on the tower, it enables them to directly serve areas. Legislator Root stated that what she is hearing is that come next June, the County's radios are obsolete, and Mr. Pullen stated, yes, the 3.65 GHz radios will be obsolete. Legislator Root asked if Mr. Pullen is recommending they upgrade to TV White Space. Mr. Pullen stated that is a policy decision above their level. The task force briefly discussed the towers with multiple bands and what they can and cannot serve.

County Administrator Debbie McDonnell asked who ACTDC is and if the County has a map that shows where our towers are located and what areas they serve. Legislator Curran stated that ACTDC is the Allegany County Telecommunications Corporation that was created by the Board of Legislators to act as a go-between group for the County and the last mile providers, and they essentially purchase and re-sell signal to the last mile providers. Mr. Pullen stated that 911 would have the maps that Ms. McDonnell is referring to and noted that the broadband radios piggyback off the 911 towers. Ms. McDonnell stated that she wants to understand the demographics, who and what they are serving, as well as what is missing so they know what needs to be invested. Ms. McDonnell continued that it's important to look at TV White Space and whether or not it will provide better coverage. Ms. McDonnell suggested that mapping it out will give the full Board a better idea, so when they decide to invest money, they understand the capacity of service. Chairman Crandall stated that if you were to look at the information that is available, it looks like the County is pretty well covered when we're not, and he doesn't feel that it's necessary to concentrate on the entire County when they know there are specific areas that need broadband service but will never have it. Chairman Crandall stated they need to have a handle on the cost, options, etc. in order to properly convey what the full Board needs to do.

Mr. Pullen discussed Armstrong who came along after the County started their broadband initiative stating that Armstrong is a New York State initiative who have received millions of dollars to deliver broadband service to everyone in the state. Mr. Pullen has tried to talk to Armstrong but cannot get a straight answer from them on who they can serve. Mr. Pullen recently spoke with a Houghton resident who currently receives service from Spectrum; however, has seen Armstrong putting up new poles on the corner of his property lot to offer service. Mr. Pullen continued that the area already has cable, internet, and phone, yet Armstrong is putting up new poles that meet

their specs, adding that this initiative was supposed to be unserved or underserved residents. Mr. Pullen never sees Armstrong working in those areas such as Granger, Allen, etc., and he finds it upsetting to see them working in areas who already receive high-speed services. Legislator Curran stated they need to focus on the County's situation and not the ones they have no control over. Mr. Pullen indicated that situation is a part of the County's problem, adding that if Armstrong does what they say they will, then the Board will say the County doesn't need to have their own broadband. Mr. Zink stated that he wholeheartedly disagrees with Mr. Pullen, adding that they have seen the maps from Armstrong, and they are not covering 100 percent of the County, and Mr. Pullen cannot say that is the case as it's bad omen to the County. Mr. Zink continued that satellite is not the answer, and this wireless solution is what the County needs to do, and they need to figure out how to do it.

### **Outside Funding**

Legislator Fanton asked what grant money is available to them. Mr. Zink indicated that Appalachian Regional Commission Power Grant has agreed that satellite service is not adequate. There is a clause in the power grants that the County cannot compete with Spectrum; however, they can compete with HughesNet, and because the County has been designated as a distressed County, the funding would be a 70/30 split rather than 50/50. Legislator Fanton asked if there are any current applications available. Mr. Zink stated currently, no, because the next cycle hasn't been announced yet; however, it should be around October. Legislator Root indicated that in order to make that next application cycle, they need to have these issues worked about by October, noting they have their work cut out for them. Chairman Crandall asked if it would be better if Allegany County applied for the grant separately or if Southern Tier West applied on our behalf. Mr. Zink stated that last year when Southern Tier West applied, the application indicated that it would serve parts of all three counties, and they are happy to apply on the County's behalf. Chairman Crandall asked if it benefits the County more or less to apply or ourselves or have Southern Tier West apply on our behalf. Mr. Zink indicated it wouldn't matter either way as long as the County has the same letters of support. Mr. Pullen asked where Southern Tier West's potential grant funds are going to serve. Mr. Zink stated mainly the north and northwest portion of the County which equals approximately 3,000 to 4,000 people and 120 businesses. Mr. Pullen asked if there is anything preventing us for applying south of I-86. Mr. Zink stated absolutely not, and they could even include north of I-86 as long as it's a cohesive application. Chairman Crandall asked how much can be applied for. Mr. Zink stated there is no minimum, and the cap is \$2.5 million. The task force briefly discussed the additional processes involved with applying for the grant. Chairman Crandall asked with all of the options they have to look into, how specific does the application need to be. Mr. Zink stated we will need to be very specific and briefly went through the steps taken to come up with a logical explanation for the amount of money being requested.

### **Next Steps**

Chairman Crandall stated that part of moving forward and being prepared will be getting the full Board up to speed and comfortable with the next steps. If that piece isn't maintained, it will diminish, and the County will be missing a very important piece of what's needed in the future. Legislator Fanton asked what a major TV White Space unit on a tower would cost. Mr. Mann indicated they could use the existing structures on each tower to cover 360 degrees, and the cost would be \$12,000 per tower for the 13 towers. Legislator Fanton stated they are looking at \$150,000 to upgrade the County's 911 towers to TV White Space. Legislator Curran indicated they don't need to do that because we already have working radios on the towers even with the 3.65 GHz radios going away. Legislator Root stated that she feels this issue would fall under the Planning & Economic Development Department as it's been a highlighted topic to work on and is also included in the Comprehensive Plan. Legislator Root suggested assigning it to that

department so they can start pulling together options to choose from, adding that they cannot go in front of 15 legislators without a plan. Ms. McDonnell stated that without an action strategy nothing gets done, and it sounds like there are resources they need among the task force in order to move forward. Ms. McDonnell is hesitant to send this issue to the Planning Department as she doesn't know that they have the capacity and knowledge to add value other than with GIS. Ms. McDonnell suggested a couple of members getting together to look at an action strategy, and how they plan to present it to the Board, noting that she wants this to be simple and understandable. Chairman Crandall agreed stating without the Board having a handle on the importance of this on a basic level, then they aren't going to get the support they need. Legislator Root suggested that they need to make the community aware that progress is being made. The Board has gone silent on this issue, and they only hear about Armstrong so they need to put something positive out there regarding the County's continued efforts. Chairman Crandall reiterated that something needs to be done outside of the task force as they cannot keep having meetings and just talking about the issues at hand. Mr. Zink briefly discussed doing a propagation study and suggested letting some of the task force members handle this now and leaving the Planning Department out of it as anything he may need or question, he can contact Planning Director Kier Dirlam directly. Mr. Zink asked if there is going to be an issue if the County has a tower show up on the propagation study that is covering a portion of a county outside Allegany. Chairman Crandall stated he didn't think that was going to be an issue because the County would be able to get service to more people which will further enhance our overall system and help it grow financially. Ms. McDonnell asked that as Mr. Zink works through this process, he maintain communications with her.

### **Service Calls**

Clerk of the Board Brenda Rigby Riehle stated that people are starting to call and ask for providers and asked for confirmation if Win-Win Wireless is currently the only last mile provider offering service. Legislator Curran indicated that they seem to be the only active provider at this time. Mr. Pullen stated that TelStar has approximately 20 to 30 customers. Mrs. Riehle asked for suggestions on the best way to handle a citizen's call. Legislator Curran stated if they are looking for service then give them Win-Win Wireless. Radio Technician Matt Evans suggested giving the individual all providers and let them make the decision. Mr. Pullen stated that Southern Tier Wireless is also a provider and suggested to send all calls to Win-Win Wireless, and if they cannot offer service, they will recommend them to another provider. Mrs. Riehle expressed concern about showing favoritism, and asked that we receive a list of every available provider or suggested just referring them to ACTDC. County Treasurer Terri Ross stated that the County needs to be careful on recommending a particular provider because if the constituent does not have a good experience, it could come back on us. Mr. Zink asked if Mrs. Riehle has received any additional calls that a constituent was not able to find service, and Mrs. Riehle stated, no, she has not. Mr. Zink suggested that if that were to happen, direct the individual to former Senator Young's office because we need to continue to make a compelling case to the state that what they did was just a partial solution.

### **DPW Facility**

Mr. Pullen addressed the Public Works facilities stating there is a site in Angelica that they could put a microcell tower up and then provide services to Angelica residents they currently cannot reach. Chairman Crandall asked what the cost to the County will be, and Legislator Curran indicated the cost of a telephone pole. Mr. Pullen added that it will also need to be made available to any last mile provider. Mr. Zink expressed concern regarding wood utility poles that can bend with the heat and cold and losing signal. Mr. Mann stated they could put up another tower for those reasons as well as grounding; however, he doesn't think the amount of bending will cause

that big of an issue. Legislator Curran indicated they cannot use a utility pole without going through a strenuous application. Legislator Fanton expressed concern at putting a privately owned business on County-owned property. Legislator Curran stated that County Attorney Carissa Knapp will more than likely suggest that ACTDC should be the owner and not the last mile provider. Legislator Fanton stated if ACTDC buys the pole and puts it up then he's okay with it; however, he has issues with putting a privately owned business on County-owned property. Mr. Evans stated that the area they are discussing is already an area serviced by Armstrong and asked why they are concentrating there after just discussing that they should be focusing on unserved areas. Legislator Fanton stated the County has no requirement to stay away from Armstrong.

### **Future Meetings**

The next task force meeting will be held on Wednesday, July 24, at 10:00 a.m. in the Legislative Chambers.

### **Adjournment**

Chairman Crandall adjourned the meeting at 11:58 a.m.