

BROADBAND TASK FORCE

July 24, 2019

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

Others Present: C. Knapp, A. Mann (Win-Win Wireless), D. McDonnell, N. Pullen (Win-Win Wireless), 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 Fanton, seconded by Legislator Curran, and carried to approve the June 26, 2019, Broadband Task Force minutes.

Review of Coverage Map

Southern Tier West Executive Director Richard Zink stated there is a printed map available for anyone to view that shows current CONNX towers operating at the three different spectrums. They know that the northern part of the County is pretty well covered; however, the southern and far eastern parts still have numerous pockets unserved, and residents can only receive satellite service. Planning Director Kier Dirlam stated the map comes from the propagation study done in September 2017 when they officially completed the grant application to turn in for reimbursement. IT Director Keith Hooker asked if they are finding the propagation map is accurate to what the County can deliver. Win-Win Wireless representative Dave Pullen stated it's accurate to the impact of the foliage, trees, evergreens, noting that some of those areas are being addressed with microcell towers. Mr. Pullen continued that Win-Win Wireless has started using TV White Space on a Rushford Lake tower, and it has been very effective getting through the trees; however, it's very expensive, and they hope the price will come down. Mr. Pullen went on to say that there may be some grant money available, and if we could qualify for that to deploy the TV White Space technology, it could get them closer to servicing those areas they currently are not able to.

Mr. Dirlam indicated that he sometimes hears that the County is helping do things on the towers that is for private entities, and stated that has always been the plan. All of the equipment is County owned and has been since day one, and it is up to the County to maintain it. ACTDC was created with the intent that the legislature wouldn't have to deal with issues on a daily basis noting that it was done on purpose and is a County function. Mr. Dirlam went on to say that the microcell locations were laid out, and the Board passed a resolution approving agreements with ten fire departments, all of which signed off on the microcell locations. Unfortunately, when this project started, they found that not only is it way more expensive than anyone thought to put up an 80-foot tower, more money had been spent to fill out the 13 main towers. Six towers were in the original plan; however, the number increased to 13 when 911 received \$5.1 million to put up towers. Mr. Dirlam noted that better planning could have happened along the way, but the maintenance of this is now most important. Mr. Dirlam asked if the County is committed to maintaining the equipment because they accepted the grant money because typically there is an expectation that the equipment has a lifespan, and the County would keep it functional during that time. Chairman Crandall stated that he is unaware of those specifics, and reminded everyone that mid-stream into this project, the state came out and said there's been a change in plans. Chairman Crandall asked with the coverage that we currently have as well as what is needed to fill in the gaps, is it achievable with some additional microcell towers. Mr. Dirlam stated if there is an opportunity for the County to get a grant to upgrade to TV White Space, noting they need to be careful where they pick as some areas are already well covered, then it would be worthwhile for ACTDC to go after. Mr. Dirlam reminded the task force that if the County or ACTDC applies for it, then it will be a County asset. Legislator Fanton stated that the County didn't want this to be a

long-term project; however, they thought there would be more money and then the state came in and changed everything. Mr. Dirlam stated it's obvious the state isn't going to help us, so we need to look at who will, adding that more than likely it's going to have to be federal money.

Service Contract

Chairman Crandall stated that this group needs to know where the service contract lies and receive some direction so it can be cleaned up and taken care of, noting that it's not an ACTDC contract; it's a County contract. The task force further discussed the details as well as the needs of a maintenance agreement.

Makeup of Allegany County Telecommunications Development Corporation

Membership

Chairman Crandall stated that currently the ACTDC Board of Directors is comprised of four individuals: Philip Curran, Jonathan Denehy, Dwight Fanton, and Brent Reynolds. Chairman Crandall noted John Margeson also serves; however, his term is to set expire in the near future. Michael Johnson who previously served has indicated that his letter of resignation was submitted, and he should not be listed as an active member. Mr. Dirlam stated while the current members are fine board members, they are missing individuals with a technical background and suggested they find some new members that have no conflict of interest and can add some technical expertise. The task force briefly discussed various entities and businesses they could reach out to for new members.

By-Laws

Mr. Dirlam indicated that it is up to ACTDC to review and make any necessary changes to the By-Laws. Chairman Crandall stated if there are things that we could do to help enhance them, it is important to address them now.

Grant Funding

Chairman Crandall referred to previous discussions on federal grant funding and asked for an update on any conversations that have been had since the last meeting. Mr. Pullen stated he was intrigued by what Mr. Zink shared last month, noting again that the expense of TV White Space is daunting. The base station costs \$4,000, and the County would need a total of four to cover 360 degrees. That cost totaling \$16,000 is not doable for Mr. Pullen's small organization; however, grant funding can make it viable. Mr. Pullen discussed a conversation he recently had with a resident at Rushford Lake who happens to have a background with putting up large towers and is thinking about installing a 400-foot tower in his area. Mr. Pullen indicated this individual has done this on his own with no grant funding, adding it's been a business activity he makes money at. Mr. Pullen continued that if there is grant funding available, and it needs to be based upon the unserved and underserved, those funds, along with a modest contribution from the County or ACTDC, could provide the additional coverage to help them get back to where they originally were 5 years ago with TV White Space, better coverage, and getting prices down to a more attractive rate. Mr. Zink stated the grant money Mr. Pullen is referring to is not only a lot of money to build one 400-foot tower, but that Rushford Lake resident cannot be a co-owner of that tower when grant money is involved. Mr. Zink continued that if the County has 13 towers, then TV White Space technology will be enough to cover, so wanting to put up a brand new tower doesn't make sense. Legislator Fanton asked if we can send out TV White Space signal through the current signal we have. Mr. Dirlam stated you need the same technology on both ends. Legislator

Curran stated they could leave the current radios and broadcast to a TV White Space receiver that would then broadcast out. IT Director Keith Hooker stated they do not need a complete overhaul of the system and can leave the backbone as it is and build off that. Legislator Fanton asked what the cost will be to receive the signal and send it back out. Mr. Pullen stated a base station radio is \$4,000. The County would need four to cover 360 degrees; therefore, they are looking at \$16,000. Mr. Pullen noted there will be an additional cost of approximately \$500 to put a receiving end on a customer. Chairman Crandall stated of the 13 towers the County currently has, some already provide great coverage, so it's not a situation of "all or nothing." Win-Win Wireless representative Nancy Jo Pullen indicated that if even if they put TV White Space on the towers, they will still need to put up the additional microcell towers. Mr. Dirlam indicated that is due to all of the valleys. Legislator Fanton stated that eventually they are going to have to change the equipment on the towers and asked if the grant money that is available allows them to make that change now. Mr. Zink stated, yes, they could put a grant application together and make that case, adding that they can look at the need for broadband in so many different ways and provide several examples of broadband benefits. Mr. Zink noted that there are enough partnerships out there that if the County makes their case, we could have other ways to move things along faster without just relying on grant money.

Next Meeting

The next Broadband meeting will be held on Wednesday, August 28, at 10:00 a.m. in the Legislative Chambers. Chairman Crandall indicated he would like to have a report back on both the service contract and coverage map.

Adjournment

Chairman Crandall adjourned the meeting at 11:52 a.m.