Meeting Notes

Tuesday, May 9th, 2023
11:15AM to 1:00PM
(Following PSC Listening Session at Seven Winds)
Flat Creek Restaurant - Hayward

1. Welcome & Introductions

Members present:
Ashland: Dan Grady, Bayfield: Mark Abeles-Allison, Burnett: Sid Sherstad, Iron: Kelly Klein, Price: Jeff Hallstrand, Rusk: Terry Wedwick, Sawyer: Ed Peters, Washburn: Linda Featherly

Members absent:
Representatives from Douglas County and Bad River Tribe

Others Present:
Sheldon Johnson and Crystal Rohde – Visions Northwest, Gail Huyke – UW Extension, Tom Boron – Washburn County IT Director

2. PSC Local Planning Grant Program

a. County & REDO Participants

Sheldon and Crystal provided the committee with an update on the state's structure for the BEAD planning grants. Allocations and regional vs. County/Tribal structure can be found in this document:
https://apps.psc.wi.gov/pages/viewdoc.htm?docid=462300

b. Regional BEAD Committee Members

Sheldon and Crystal provided an overview role of the Regional Broadband Committee members, etc. Members will help guide and shape the use of the BEAD planning funds for our nine counties and one tribal entity that submitted letters of intent to work through a regional approach. Each county/tribe has (or will) appointed one person to the regional committee.

c. Overview & Timeline – Grant contract with the Public Service Commission + Visions Northwest will be through May 2025 – preliminary deliverables due to PSC by June 19th, 2023.

3. Key Barriers and Opportunities related to "Internet for All" in our Communities and Region Discussion/Development

Key Barriers	Number of Responses
High Cost to Build Infrastructure (due to low population density and large geographic areas)	14
Short Construction Season for Infrastructure	4
Topography/Rural Terrain of Region	4
Cost of Maintenance/Sustainability of Infrastructure	4
Education and Training on Importance + Opportunities	3
Affordability/Costs to Consumers	3
Availability of trained workforce to install/maintain infrastructure	3
Supply Chain Issues	3
Lack of ISPs/Competition	2
Grant Funding	2
Regulation issues	1
Middle-line connections	1
RDOF – can't receive additional awards that are currently committed/awarded	1
Availability	1
Grant writing	1
Needs to be looked at as a utility	1
People to champion the process in rural areas	1
Momentum – transparency	1
Expectations too low – as it relates to speed	1
Amount of subsidy to providers	1

Key Opportunities	Number of Responses
Improved Quality of Life: Telemedicine	7
Improved Quality of Life: Remote Work	6
Improved Quality of Life: Remote School/Education	5
Population Growth (Which Grows Tax Base)	5
Increased Economic Development - Small Business Growth	5
Attraction + Retention of Young People	3
Equity through Access to Broadband (employment opportunities, business interconnectedness, etc.)	3
Increase in Tourism Economy	1
Improved Public Safety	1
Broadband as Employee Benefit (Paid for by Employer)	1

4. Preliminary Regional Broadband Vision and Draft Goals - Discussion/Development

Draft Vision:
To have future-proof broadband services throughout Northwest Wisconsin.

Goals:
1. Strengthen and expand broadband infrastructure in various forms.
2. Every household and business will have access to broadband.
3. The region will have access to quality, affordable, and reliable broadband services.
4. Coordinate and facilitate relationships with Internet Service Providers.
5. Increase education and awareness of benefits of broadband.

5. Round Table

It was discussed that we should coordinate an opportunity to engage our committee in a meet + greet with regional providers to connect and learn about future planning efforts.

6. Adjourn & Next Meeting

Staff will follow up with next meeting date.