

RURAL BROADBAND TASK FORCE

Friday, October 18, 2019 9:30 a.m. to 11:00 CDT
Varner Hall, Lower Level, Board Room
3835 Holdrege Street, Lincoln, Nebraska

Video Locations:

11306 Road 32, Sidney, NE 69162
Homestead Bank, 619 Grand St., St. Paul, NE 68873
Pinpoint Communications, 611 Patterson St., Cambridge, NE 69022
University of Nebraska at Omaha, EAB-008, 6001 Dodge St., Omaha, NE 68182

MINUTES

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Ed Toner, Chair, Nebraska Information Technology Commission
Senator Bruce Bostelman, Nebraska Legislature
Mary Ridder, Chair, Nebraska Public Service Commission
Zachary Hunnicutt, Farmer, Hunnicutt Farms
Isaiah Graham, Vice-President, Homestead Bank (Videoconferencing)
Daniel Spray, Owner, Precision Technology
Timothy Lindahl, CEO/General Manager, Wheat Belt Public Power District (Videoconferencing)
Andrew Buker, Executive Director of Infrastructure Services, University of Nebraska (Videoconferencing)
Ron Cone, Director of Network Information Services, ESU 10
Tom Shoemaker, President, Pinpoint Communications (Videoconferencing)
Steve Wellman, Nebraska Department of Agriculture

MEMBERS ABSENT: Senator Curt Friesen, Nebraska Legislature; Anna Turman, Catholic Health Initiative; Tony Goins, Nebraska Department of Economic Development

OPENING BUSINESS, ROLL CALL NOTICE OF POSTING OF AGENDA NOTICE OF NEBRASKA OPEN MEETINGS ACT POSTING

Ed Toner, Office of the Chief Information Officer

Mr. Toner called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m. There were nine voting members present at the time of roll call. A quorum existed to conduct official business.

APPROVAL OF THE SEPTEMBER 20, 2019 MINUTES*

Mr. Spray moved to approve the September 20 meeting minutes as presented. Mr. Hunnicutt seconded. Roll call vote: Toner-Yes, Ridder-Yes, Hunnicutt-Yes, Graham-Yes, Shoemaker-Yes, Spray-Yes, Lindahl-Yes, Buker-Yes, and Cone-Yes. Results: Yes-9, No-0, Abstained-0. Motion carried.

DISCUSSION OF COMMENTS RECEIVED

Mr Toner noted that the task force had received comments from the following organizations since the last meeting on Sept. 20:

- Children's Hospital and Medical Center
- Nebraska Farm Bureau
- Nebraska Power Association
- Center for Rural Affairs
- Nebraska Rural Electric Association
- Windstream
- Nebraska Public Power District
- CenturyLink

- Nebraska Corn Growers Association
- Nebraska Cable Communications Association

Task force members had no additional questions or responses to the comments. Senator Bostelman and Mr. Wellman arrived.

RURAL BROADBAND TASK FORCE REPORT

Proposed Revision to the Definition of “Rural” and Prioritization*

Commissioner Ridder began the discussion regarding the definition of “rural.” The Rural Broadband Task Force had adopted the following definition Oct. 15, 2018:

***Rural areas** are defined as open countryside with population densities less than 500 people per square mile or places with fewer than 2,500 people.*

The Nebraska Public Service Commission’s uses a different definition of rural which could potentially cause confusion. Commissioner Ridder and Senator Friesen had proposed adopting the Public Service Commission’s definition of “rural” as the task force’s definition. The Nebraska Public Service Commission uses the following definition.

***Rural areas** are defined as areas which meet the following criteria:*

- *Census blocks that contains fewer than 20 households with a density below 42 households per square mile*
- *Census blocks not classified as a city or village per census*
- *Census blocks not within census-designated city limits*

After discussion, Ms. Ridder proposed that the task force retain its original definition but include additional information explaining the Public Service Commission’s definition of “rural.”

The task force's definition of rural recognizes that some efforts—particularly those involving public private partnerships and digital inclusion—may require the participation of both small communities and surrounding areas outside municipal boundaries. The definition also recognizes that some small communities may be unserved or underserved.

The Nebraska Public Service Commission allocates high cost funding from the Nebraska Universal Service Fund using a more specific definition of rural. The Nebraska Public Service Commission defines rural areas as areas which meet the following criteria:

- *Census blocks that contains fewer than 20 households with a density below 42 households per square mile*
- *Census blocks not classified as a city or village per census*
- *Census blocks not within census-designated city limits*

The use of this definition to distribute NUSF funds is consistent with the task force's prioritization.

Task force members agreed that this revision clarified the differences between the definitions of “rural” used by the task force and the Nebraska Public Service Commission.

Mr. Spray moved to approve the revision to the definition of “rural” and the prioritization of areas. Ms. Ridder seconded. Roll call vote: Toner-Yes, Ridder-Yes, Wellman-Yes, Hunnicutt-Yes, Graham-Yes, Shoemaker-Yes, Spray-Yes, Lindahl-Yes, Buker-Yes, and Cone-Yes. Results: Yes-10, No-0, Abstained-0. Motion carried.

APPROVAL OF RURAL BROADBAND TASK FORCE REPORT*

In addition to the revised definition of "rural," the Task Force members recommended spelling out the acronym ETC on page 30 of the report.

Mr. Lindahl moved to approve Rural Broadband Task Force Report with the revised definition of Rural and the recommended change to spell out the acronym ETC. Mr. Shoemaker seconded. Roll call vote: Toner-Yes, Ridder-Yes, Wellman-Yes, Hunnicutt-Yes, Graham-Yes, Shoemaker-Yes, Spray-Yes, Lindahl-Yes, Buker-Yes, and Cone-Yes. Results: Yes-10, No-0, Abstained-0. Motion carried.

NEXT STEPS

Interim Hearing on Wednesday, December 4 at 1:00

Tip O'Neill

On behalf of Senator Friesen, Mr. O'Neill thanked the task force as well as staff from the Nebraska Public Service Commission and NITC/Office of the CIO for their work and dedication to this effort. Senator Friesen is pleased with the direction the task force has taken. Interim study hearings on LR166 and LR175 will be held on December 4, 2019 at 1:00 p.m. Members of the public will be invited to provide testimony. After the hearing, a legislative bill which incorporates the task force's recommendations may be introduced.

Plans for Next Meeting Dates and Continuing the Work of the Task Force

After discussion, members agreed that the task force should meet after the conclusion of bill introduction by the Nebraska Legislature. Due to the legislative session, a recess day would work best. Subcommittees will continue to meet as needed.

CLOSING COMMENTS

Mr. Toner thanked the task force members, Anne Byers, Tom Rolfes, and Lori Lopez Urdiales from the NITC/OCIO, Cullen Robbins from the Nebraska Public Service Commission, and Tip O'Neill from the Nebraska Legislature for their efforts and work with the task force. Many members also served on more than one subcommittee. Task Force members would like to be informed when the report has been submitted.

ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Ridder moved to adjourn. Mr. Cone seconded. All were in favor. Motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:25 a.m.

Meeting minutes were taken by Lori Lopez Urdiales and reviewed by Anne Byers of the Office of the CIO.