

## **RURAL BROADBAND TASK FORCE**

Monday, October 18, 2021, 9:30 a.m.

Varner Hall, 3835 Holdrege Street

Lincoln, Nebraska

### **MEETING MINUTES**

#### **MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Ed Toner, Nebraska Information Technology Commission

Senator Bruce Bostelman, Nebraska Legislature

Mary Ridder, Nebraska Public Service Commission

Dan Curran for Tony Goins, Nebraska Department of Economic Development

Zachary Hunnicutt, Hunnicutt Farms

Tom Shoemaker, Pinpoint Communications

Daniel Spray, Precision Technology

Andrew Buker, University of Nebraska

Ron Cone, ESU 10

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** Senator Curt Friesen, Nebraska Legislature and Steve Wellman, Nebraska Department of Agriculture

#### **OPENING BUSINESS, ROLL CALL NOTICE**

The chair, Mr. Toner, called the meeting to order at 9:33 a.m. There were nine members present at the time of roll call. A quorum existed to conduct official business. The meeting announcement was posted on the Nebraska Public Meeting and Rural Broadband Task Force websites on July 8, 2021. The agenda was posted on the Rural Broadband Task Force website on October 4, 2021.

A copy of the Nebraska Open Meetings Act was posted on the south wall.

#### **APPROVAL OF THE SEPTEMBER 8, 2021 MINUTES\***

**Mr. Curran moved to approve the September 8, 2021 minutes as presented. Mr. Shoemaker seconded. Roll call vote: Toner-Yes, Ridder-Yes, Curran-Yes, Honeycutt-Yes, Shoemaker-Yes, Spray-Yes, Buker-Yes, and Cone-Yes. Results: Yes-8, No-0, Abstained-0. Motion carried.**

#### **UPDATES**

##### **NEBRASKA BROADBAND BRIDGE PROGRAM**

Cullen Robbin, Public Service Commission

The first round of Broadband Bridge grant applications were due October 1. Seventy-six applications were received from approximately 20 different providers. Funding requests totaled approximately \$31 million. There is a 50% match requirement. Notices of intent to challenge were due last week. Approximately 30 notices were received. Applicants have until November 5 to submit responses to challenges. Awards will be announced on January 4.

## INTERIM STUDIES

Andrew Vinton reported that two interim studies were introduced on topics related to rural broadband:

- **[LR 193](#) (Introduced by Senator DeBoer)**—Interim study to examine broadband mapping and broadband speed testing in Nebraska.
- **[LR 233](#) (Introduced by Senator Friesen)**—Interim study to review issues relating to the collection of agricultural data in precision farming.

Hearings have not yet been scheduled for these interim studies.

Mr. Vinton informed the Task Force that three broadband-related bills remain on general file and could be potentially heard in the upcoming session:

- **[LB 215](#) (Introduced by Senator Hughes)**—Change 911 service surcharge provision
- **[LB344](#) (Introduced by Senator Friesen)**—Change provisions of the One-Call Notification System Act and create the Underground Excavation Safety Committee
- **[LB 498](#) (Introduced by Senator DeBoer)**—Require the Public Service Commission to implement a broadband service testing and mapping program

## Federal Funding

Since the last meeting, the Department of the Treasury has released guidance on the American Rescue Plan Capital Projects Fund. Anne Byers provided a brief overview of the program. Nebraska has been allotted \$128.7 million. The deadline to request funding is December 27, 2021. The deadline to submit the grant plan for the use of the funding is September 24, 2022. There are three categories of presumptively eligible projects: broadband infrastructure projects, digital connectivity technology projects, and multi-purpose community facility projects.

## DISCUSSION OF PUBLIC COMMENTS

No public comments were received.

## APPROVAL OF RURAL BROADBAND TASK FORCE REPORT

Mr. Toner asked members for any minor edits to the report. Andrew Buker had noted that his title has been changed and needed to be updated in the final version. No other minor edits were suggested by members.

Senator Bostelman proposed some edits to the findings and recommendations on broadband data and mapping. The proposed edits were included in the meeting materials. Senator Bostelman stated that his intention on the changes was to keep broadband mapping and speed testing in the forefront. There was no further discussion or comments from the Task Force members on the proposed changes to the broadband data and mapping findings and recommendations.

Members did not have any additional suggestions or edits to the report.

**Mr. Spray moved to approve the Rural Broadband Task Force report with the revisions to the broadband data and mapping findings and recommendations and the minor edit discussed earlier. Mr. Cone seconded. Roll call vote: Cone-Yes, Buker-Yes, Spray-Yes,**

**Shoemaker-Yes, Honeycutt-Yes, Curran-Yes, Ridder-Yes, and Toner-Yes. Results: Yes-8, No-0, Abstained-0. Motion carried.**

Mr. Toner thanked the task force members, Cullen Robbins, Anne Byers, Tom Rolfes, and Lori Lopez Urdiales for their dedication and work on the Task Force. The final report will be submitted to the Legislature and Governor Ricketts by November 1.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

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

The meeting was adjourned at 9:52 a.m.

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