

RURAL BROADBAND TASK FORCE

Friday, March 18, 2022, 1:30 p.m.
Varner Hall, 3835 Holdrege Street
Lincoln, Nebraska

MEETING MINUTES

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Ed Toner, Nebraska Information Technology Commission
Mary Ridder, Nebraska Public Service Commission (video)
Gwen Kautz, Dawson Public Power District (video)
Tom Shoemaker, Pinpoint Communications
Steve Wellman, Nebraska Department of Agriculture
Andrew Whitney, Bryan Health
Andrew Buker, University of Nebraska (video)
Ron Cone, ESU 10 (video)

MEMBERS ABSENT: Daniel Spray, Precision Technology; Tony Goins, Nebraska Department of Economic Development; Zachary Hunnicutt, Hunnicutt Farms; Senator Bruce Bostelman, Nebraska Legislature; Senator Curt Friesen, Nebraska Legislature.

OPENING BUSINESS, ROLL CALL NOTICE

The chair, Ed Toner, called the meeting to order at 1:33 p.m. There were eight 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 March 4, 2022. The agenda was posted on the Rural Broadband Task Force website on March 9, 2022.

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

APPROVAL OF THE OCTOBER 18, 2021 [MINUTES](#)*

Tom Shoemaker moved to approve the October 18, 2021 minutes as presented. Mary Ridder seconded. Roll call vote: Toner-Yes, Ridder-Yes, Wellman-Yes, Shoemaker-Yes, Kautz-Yes, Whitney-Yes, Buker-Yes, and Cone-Yes. Results: Yes-8, No-0, Abstained-0. Motion carried.

INTRODUCTION OF NEW MEMBERS

Ed Toner introduced new members, Gwen Kautz from Dawson Public Power District and Andrew Whitney from Bryan Health. Ed Toner asked members introduce themselves.

UPDATES

Legislative Update

Mike Hybl, Nebraska Legislature

Mike Hybl, Legal Counsel for the Transportation and Telecommunications Committee, provided an update on [LB 1144](#). After the first round of the Broadband Bridge Program, both the PSC and the Legislature have proposed adjustments to the program. LB 1144 would reduce the matching requirement for high cost areas to 25% and allows the PSC to require a provider submitting a challenge to provide speed test results in the

challenged portion of the proposed project area. Section 9 improves the accountability of grant recipients and has generated the most controversy.

The committee amendment to LB 1144 also incorporates five other bills including an amended version of LB 914 which would allow the PSC to develop a broadband mapping program with funding from the BEAD program. The committee amendment also incorporated LB 1234 which would establish an expedited process requesting permission to place line, wire or cable across a railroad right of way.

PSC and Broadband Bridge Updates

Cullen Robbins, Public Service Commission

The first round of Broadband Bridge grant applications were due October 1, 2021. The PSC received 76 applications from approximately 20 different providers. Funding requests totaled approximately \$31 million. There was a 50% match requirement. Challenges were due by the end of October. The PSC awarded \$19.1 million in funding for 61 applications which will connect about 12,500 households. The PSC has opened a docket to consider adjustments to the 2022 round of the program. A hearing is scheduled for March 22.

Applications for the wireless grant program will be due on April 15, 2022. The PSC has allocated \$8 million for this program. The PSC will be conducting a reverse auction for the Frontier-Citizens coverage area with \$13 million available. A workshop will be held on March 29, 2022.

Commissioner Ridder added that the Broadband Bridge docket is also receiving comments and questions regarding overbuilding. She also added that the PSC has opened a docket to gather information to standardize the format for submitted speed test data.

Federal Funding, Program and Mapping Updates

Cullen Robbins, PSC

The FCC is moving forward with its mapping initiative and has chosen CostQuest as the vendor for the serviceable location fabric. The FCC has set September 1, 2022 as the deadline for first submission of broadband availability data using the new data collection methodology. The turnaround time for future data is expected to be much shorter. The data from providers and the fabric data will be made publicly available. The new map may be available in early 2023.

The Department of the Treasury has released guidance on the American Rescue Plan Act Capital Projects Fund. Nebraska has been allocated \$128.7 million. The deadline to submit a 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.

Nebraska will receive a minimum of \$100 million for broadband deployment projects through the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program. The final allocation will be based on the FCC's new broadband map. The NTIA will be issuing a Notice of Funding Opportunity for the program in mid-May of 2022.

Anne Byers added that states can apply for \$300,000 in planning funds to develop a digital equity plan. States which complete a digital inclusion plan could apply for a minimum of \$7.2 million in funding over five years to establish a state digital equity grant program.

Ed Toner mentioned that the State will need to develop several major statewide plans in order to be eligible for further federal funding. At the next RBTF meeting, the task force will likely discuss how to best support these planning efforts.

ADJOURNMENT

Chairperson Toner declared the meeting adjourned the meeting at 2:16pm CT.

Meeting minutes were taken by Tom Rolfes and reviewed by Anne Byers, Office of the CIO.