

RURAL BROADBAND TASK FORCE MINUTES

Friday, October 13, 2023, 1:30-3:30 p.m. CT
Varner Hall, Board Room--Lower Level
3835 Holdrege Street, Lincoln, Nebraska
and Zoom videoconferencing

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Ed Toner, Nebraska Information Technology Commission
Dan Watermeier, Nebraska Public Service Commission (video)
Senator Mike Moser, Nebraska Legislature
Senator Bruce Bostelman, Nebraska Legislature
Dave Dearthmont, Nebraska Department of Economic Development
Hilary Maricle for Sherry Vinton, Nebraska Department of Economic Development
Zachary Hunnicutt, Hunnicutt Farms (video)
Tom Shoemaker, Pinpoint Communications
Gwen Kautz, Dawson Public Power District
Andrew Whitney, Bryan Health
Ron Cone, ESU 10
Andrew Buker, University of Nebraska (video)

MEMBERS ABSENT:

OPENING BUSINESS, ROLL CALL NOTICE OF POSTING OF AGENDA NOTICE OF NEBRASKA OPEN MEETINGS ACT POSTING, WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS OF NEW MEMBERS

The chair, Ed Toner, called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m. There were eleven 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 September 22, 2023. The agenda was posted on the Rural Broadband Task Force website on October 10, 2023. A copy of the Nebraska Open Meetings Act was available on the wall.

APPROVAL OF THE JUNE 23, 2023 MINUTES*

Senator Moser moved to approve the June 23, 2023 minutes as presented. Gwen Kautz seconded. Roll call vote: Toner-Yes, Watermeier-Yes, Dearthmont-Yes; Maricle-Yes, Hunnicutt-Yes, Shoemaker-Yes, Kautz-Yes, Whitney-Yes, and Cone-Yes. Results: Yes-9, No-0, Abstained-0. Motion carried.

UPDATES

FCC Precision Ag Task Force and LAST ACRE Act

Julie Bushell, CEO of Ethos Connected, serves as Chair of the FCC Precision Ag Task Force's Encouraging Adoption of Precision Agriculture and Availability of High-Quality Jobs on Connected Farms Working Group. The Task Force will meet on November 6 and will approve the reports and recommendations of the working groups. The reports and recommendations will be available on the FCC website. Recommendations will include cybersecurity and data privacy standards.

Ms. Bushell also provided information on the LAST ACRE Act introduced by Senator Deb Fischer and Senator Ben Ray Lujáns. The act would provide funding for wireless farm connectivity through USDA. Senator Fischer and Senator Amy Klobuchar also introduced the Precision Agriculture Loan Act of 2023 which would provide dedicated financing through USDA Farm Service Agency to help producers purchase precision agriculture equipment.

Nebraska Broadband Office and BEAD

Patrick Haggerty, Director of the Nebraska Broadband Office, provided an update on the office. The Broadband Office is now an office of four staff members. Plans are to increase staffing to nine. The Office is focused on implementation of the BEAD grant program, including improving the state broadband map and website. The BEAD 5-Year Plan and Initial Proposal Volume 1 have been submitted.

DISCUSSION: COORDINATION BETWEEN RURAL BROADBAND TASK FORCE AND NEBRASKA BROADBAND OFFICE

Chairman Toner began the discussion by sharing that the task force will continue to meet, but that Director Haggerty or another member of the Broadband Office will attend all meetings. Task Force agendas will include an update from the Broadband Office. The task force can serve as an advisory group to the Broadband Office.

REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2023 REPORT*

Members reviewed sections of the report. The following changes were suggested:

- In the broadband availability section, Gwen Kautz suggested including information on the data collection methodology.
- In the public-private partnership section, Senator Bostelman suggested that the wording of the sixth bullet be changed to "Encourage the Broadband Office to work to involve providers and agriculture consumers to better understand the complexities and needs in expanding broadband statewide."
- In the NUSF and Digital Inclusion sections, Cullen Robbins suggested updating information on the E-Rate Special Construction Matching Program to reflect a new order approved by the Commission.
- In the Digital Inclusion, Homework Gap, and Leveraging E-Rate Funding section, Anne Byers suggested making revisions to the information on the Affordable Connectivity Program that had been suggested by Vanessa Castro, ACP Outreach Coordinator for the Southeast Nebraska Economic Development District.

Senator Moser moved to approve the findings and recommendations for the 2023 report with the four changes suggested by members. Gwen Kautz seconded. Roll call vote: Toner-Yes, Watermeier-Yes, Dearmont-Yes; Maricle-Yes, Hunnicutt-Yes, Shoemaker-Yes, Kautz-Yes, Whitney-Yes, and Cone-Yes. Results: Yes-9, No-0, Abstained-0. Motion carried.

ADJOURNMENT *

Mr. Shoemaker moved to adjourn. Mr. Whitney seconded. All were in favor. Motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:20 p.m.

The meeting minutes were taken by Lori Lopez Urdiales and reviewed by Anne Byers of the Office of the CIO/NITC.