

## Allegan County Broadband Action Workgroup

April 21, 2022

### Minutes

**CTO:** 4:00 pm by Vice Chair Kotas

**BAW Members Present:** Storey (departs 4:55pm), Cooper (v), Kotas, Siler, Williams, Bursma, Beltman, and Marsman (arrived 4:06pm)

**Allegan County:** Administrator Rob Sarro, Executive Director Steve Sedore, Project Manager Jill Dunham

**Public Participation:** Dave and Pat Skutt, 2614 35<sup>th</sup> Street, Allegan (Monterey Twp,) Steve Schulz, Bloomingdale Communications, (4:32pm)

**Presentation:** Marilyn Passmore, Spectrum (Charter) made a presentation to the BAW. Detailed service area and speeds up to one gig. Anyone in their service area can get one gig. No data caps. Said her company features “all-in” pricing. She advised that RDOF funding would enable Spectrum to add 250,000 customers in unserved census blocks. “Building about 30% more than what they were awarded,” Passmore told the BAW. In Allegan, they were awarded 80 addresses under RDOF, received \$87,741 in RDOF funds, but build cost is \$439,000. Said the cost of drop is \$3k regardless of the length of service connection. More information is available: [www.spectrumruralexansion.com](http://www.spectrumruralexansion.com). Passmore described a number of “bulk” programs working through non-profit organizations. Spectrum seeking funds through several federal and state programs and local funds.

**Minutes were approved by consensus.**

**Reports:** Administrator Sarro (more later in meeting); Project Mgr. Dunham: website, Facebook are up and available.

#### **Discussion:**

1. Logo: Dunham presented three alternatives for a workgroup logo for BAW members to discuss and offer opinions.
2. BEAD/CMIC discussion was led by Kotas, who pointed out that 10% of Allegan County is in poverty situation. He outlined that final program outlines are soon to be released. He suggested it is best for the townships to “get their plans together.” If a vendor writes a proposal, it is a stronger case for state/fed support if the community is on board. He expressed concern that one township went from spending all its ARPA funds on broadband to not spend any local ARPA funds. Discussion continued on readying the municipalities to apply for the funds available and working with providers. Noting the poverty clusters are centering on a few townships, Kotas expressed concern that townships should be working now on plans because when federal funds are finally released, there will be a “run” for the money. It should include an adoption policy and the proposals should be structured to be “first in line”. The definition of “underserved” and “unserved” are important criteria in which applications go to the front of the line for federal and state-administered federal funds. Dunham offered to help the townships prepare their applications. Passmore added that one application her company filed totaled 1,000 pages. She also said there are some changes in the fund availability limits. In the first round, the limit for providers was \$5 million; in the current round it is unlimited. She said her company pledged

more than a 50% match in their grant applications. Final details are not known as to what the limits will be. Dunham said in the BEAD program, there is an opportunity to have the grant match requirement waived. Marsman said that perhaps in May the group could develop a workbook for local governments. Dunham said that Connect Michigan will likely start its audit of the served and unserved areas of Allegan County in June.

3. Dunham discussed the timing of the RFP. Said that she will be working on the draft going forward and hopes to be able to present it to BAW at the next meeting. She is waiting for release documents from two providers. She reviewed the proposed timetable for developing and releasing the RFP. A June 30 release date is an optimistic goal. The response(s) to the RFP will help drive the development of a plan.

Kotas and Dunham engaged in a dialogue on the disbursement of ARPA funds under the control of the Board of Commissioners. Sarro was asked about the amount of money to be released. He replied that until details uncovered by RFP responses are known, it is difficult to predict. Kotas noted that the reason for the money being available from the federal govt is to extend service to areas where private providers can't make a business case to build.

Discussion moved to how long to provide RFP bidders to submit responses. Washtenaw allowed seven days. The two providers present, Passmore and Steve Schulz, said a longer period for responding produces better responses, including costs.

4. Sarro said that funds will not be released until the RFP is out and responses come in. He said that the county would not stand in the way of a local govt moving forward. Kotas said he fears that townships will wait. He said there will be some amount of confusion.

**Action:** Survey language review. After short discussion, motion was made and passed to approve survey.

**Public Participation:** no one sought recognition.

Sarro asked for a roundtable reflection on the experience of participating in the workgroup. Marsman said he will ask the members.

Steve Schulz asked whether the survey of the township supervisors was done. Dunham responded that the town hall meeting at Allegan Township provide some feedback. She said that only a few townships decided whether to spend ARPA funds on broadband. Most said they had broadband needs, but still evaluating what to spend ARPA on.

Ted Siler (BPW) reported the Holland city council passed a resolution placing a broadband millage question on the August 2 primary election ballot. Maximum rate requested is 1.5 mills.

Adjournment: 5:47 pm

Respectfully submitted,

Jim Storey, Secretary