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# Broadband Alliance of Mendocino County

## Quarterly Outreach Meeting Report

March 1, 2019

Community Foundation

204 S Oak St, Ukiah, CA

### I. Call to Order

The Public Outreach meeting of the Broadband Alliance of Mendocino County (BAMC) was called to order at 10:00 am with the phone-lines open.

Present: Chair Kathy Wylie, Diann Simmons, Economic Development & Financing Corp. (EDFC) Jim Moorehead, former Chair, BAMC, Ted Williams, County Supervisor 5<sup>th</sup> District, Rick Ehlert, Coordinator of County Office of Emergency Services (MOES), Sheba Brown, Field Representative for Congressman Jared Huffman, Phil Dow for Mendocino Council of Governments, Terry Gross, sole practitioner, Jim Gagnon, member of the public, Jeff Tyrrell, Administrator of BAMC, and by phone Calvin Sandeen, Project Coordinator Broadband Sonoma County Economic Development Board

#### a. Introductions

Chair Kathy Wylie started introductions with Diann Simmons, Program Director of the EDFC

Diann explained EDFC's role in providing support for the County's broadband planning and implementation, and gave background regarding her work with the Broadband Alliance of Mendocino County.

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Jim Gagnon, a resident of Comptche, indicated that he was attending because of the inadequacy of cellular and internet services around the county. Recent communications involve work he has begun researching and initiating USDA Grant opportunities.

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Jeff Tyrrell, Administrator of BAMC, stated that he was recording the meeting to provide minutes.

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Phil Dow, representing the Mendocino Council of Governments (MCOG) introduced himself as the organization's former Director. He noted that across California, agencies and counties are removing cellular-based call-boxes along the Highways because existing cell coverage makes

them obsolete. In the meantime, Highways in Mendocino County still require additional installations, and redundant cellular coverage isn't expected any time soon. The nation's first satellite-based call boxes were installed in Mendocino County to provide for dependable emergency roadside response in areas where cellular service is unreliable or unavailable. We now have a system across all highways in the county at regular intervals. But since the operating cost of satellite systems is approximately 20 times higher per unit than cellular boxes, it is in our interest to increase the availability of cellular service across all of the county. Truly dependable cellular service would render this system obsolete, as they are rapidly becoming obsolete across most of urban California.

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Ted William, 5<sup>th</sup> District Supervisor introduced himself, and expressed the continuing and urgent need to improve the quality and availability of broadband. Services in rural Mendocino County are perpetually behind, when compared to more populous areas. He suggests that the County should take a more active role, and explore creating a county-owned municipal network as a pilot project, to provide internet to an area of unserved residents. Additionally, he suggested that the County should consider acquiring signal measurement equipment to be deployed onboard active county vehicles to collect sufficient quantities of quality data; concluding that good planning should be driving these policy ideas.

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Jim Moorehead, past BAMC Chair, provided a brief background of his 10+ years of involvement with the organization and the issues regarding broadband in Mendocino County.

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Sheba Brown, of Congressman Huffman's office, said that she was glad to be attending and looks forward to the discussions around broadband.

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Terry Gross expressed upset regarding the status of connectivity around the county, and appreciates the need to plan and organize around systematic improvements.

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Also: attending via phone was Calvin Sandeen, Sonoma County Economic Development, and arriving with momentary delay, Rick Ehlert, MOES.

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b. Additions to the agenda

Chair Wylie suggested that the agenda should be expanded to include time for Supervisor Ted Williams, without objection, and added under Item V. Updates from Elected Representatives.

II. Words from the Chair

#### a. Alliance Overview

Chair Wylie explained that a planning meeting was held among a core group of the Broadband Alliance of Mendocino County to develop the agenda and review our mission as county advocates for policies that develop broadband within Mendocino County, and the State. She emphasized the group's responsibility is advocacy work through engagement at the county level. By development and adherence to the County broadband platform, we inform and advocate for legislation, policies, and planning that improves the goals of affordable and widely available, fast, and reliable internet and communications technologies.

In discussion regarding the organizational mission, Jim Moorehead added that "The Mission essentially is to help provide ubiquitous high-speed, affordable internet access, throughout the county."

Portions of the existing mission and vision were read aloud, as follows:

**Vision:** The vision of the Broadband Alliance of Mendocino County is affordable universal broadband access for everyone everywhere.

**Mission:** The mission of the Broadband Alliance of Mendocino County is to ensure that the county's population has affordable universal broadband access in their homes, businesses, and transportation to support economic viability, ensure health and safety, and access educational opportunities.

With input, the website will be updated to include the Vision and Mission.

#### II. EDFC and Mendocino County Digital Infrastructure Plan Update

Chair Wylie prompted topic discussion by informing that on Tuesday of the same week the Mendocino County Board of Supervisors unanimously adopted the Digital Infrastructure Plan, presented by EDFC, and said that there were some provisos regarding measurable and achievable goals.

Diann noted the Supervisors discussion, including comments from Supervisor Williams, acknowledging that the Plan gives a strong focus to the current state of broadband in Mendocino County, with the implementation portion given in broad strokes. Diann added that the challenge to create long-range implementation projects is that final outcomes are dependent on outside funding sources and the willingness of providers to participate in specific project areas.

Areas of progress, noted in the Infrastructure Plan, were references to some small wireless providers: Further Reach and SeaKay. Specifically, improvements to coverage on the South Coast, largely attributed to Further Reach, were highlighted.

Diann's report also noted that Supervisors Ted Williams and John Haschak have been named to a broadband sub-committee, which will meet with EDFC's Heather Gurewitz and Diann Simmons to refine the County Digital Infrastructure Plan, including consideration of milestones and measurements of progress.

Diann added that EDFC is working on a program to potentially combine Federal microloan funds with matching grants, like the Community Foundation's Broadband Fund, to offer low-interest loans to local providers who agree to expand into new service areas or improve service in currently served areas.

Another exciting broadband opportunity is EDFC's outreach to CENIC, with support from Tom West, the Manager of the North Bay North Coast Broadband Consortium. CENIC is a state-wide non-profit organization that is increasingly taking on the coordination of regional projects. Their original focus was developing secure internet systems for the UC's and other education institutions in the state. EDFC has set a meeting, in Mendocino County, to consider improvements to connectivity for Round Valley, and a discussion of the needs of the county as a whole.

[From their website: "CENIC connects California to the world — advancing education and research statewide by providing the world-class computing network essential for innovation, collaboration, and economic growth."]

An attorney working with Commissioner Martha Guzman Aceves of the California Public Utilities Committee reached out to BAMC for information about areas where fiber-optic cables have been laid by telecoms but where those companies have not been willing to serve the communities the fiber runs through. Diann, of EDFC, with input from various people in the county, provided a response detailing that situation along Hwy 1 and in Laytonville.

#### IV. Community Partner Reports

##### a. Mendocino County Office of Education

Superintendent Michelle Hutchins communicated with Diann that she could not attend, but indicated that the County Office of Education has been exploring opportunities in proposed federal legislation that provides money to States for rebuilding schools, including expansion of broadband. The Bill, HR 865, is coauthored by Congressman Huffman.

##### b. Office of Emergency Services

Rick Ehlert reported that the Board of Supervisors is developing a county IT-master plan upgrade, which is sorely needed. Part of that is looking at the County's microwave system; improvements will indirectly benefit the public through our library system. The libraries have provided the public's emergency access to internet, in some communities. Certain libraries get their internet access through the county microwave system, and are looking to make

improvements to that system, through funding applications for hazard mitigation grants. The county is submitting grant applications that require matching funds, to implement the IT Plan.

Reliable communication in emergencies will be better served by increased vegetation management around County owned radio sites. During the Redwood complex fire a lot of commercial radio equipment burned, taking out the public safety radio system in areas. The County is working hard on fire preparedness which will benefit the entire County, including fixed wireless and other cellular companies.

On another note, AT&T continues to pitch their FirstNet program, which is a nationwide Public Safety 4G cellular program. Basically, the FCC has auctioned off a bunch of spectrum to raise money for an RFP that a vendor will then come in and create a nationwide Public Safety cellular network. AT&T was the company that was awarded the RFP. All states had the choice to 'opt in' or 'opt out' of the national RFP, and do their own public safety program. States and vendors were given a 30-day window to determine whether they were going to submit their own RFP; which is kind of short. All 50 states opted into the AT&T FirstNet. There may have been only one additional RFP submitted by a collection of different companies trying the band together. AT&T, under their FirstNet contract, is required to have 98% coverage, nationwide, within the next two years.

[Group discussion ensued about how 98% coverage will be measured, and included additional legislative references to the 98% coverage mandates.]

#### V. Updates from Elected Representatives

##### a. Congressman Huffman's office - Sheba Brown - FCC updates

Sheba Brown indicated that Congressman Huffman has been following quite a few FCC rule-changes, recently. One specifically, brought up by a constituent, regarding UNE forbearance would reduce competition; the Congressman wrote a letter in opposition, which can be shared. UNE forbearance is an FCC rule change proposed by US Telecom to forbear (i.e. discontinue) low-cost leases of Unbundled Network Elements (UNE's) owned by Incumbent Local Exchange Services (ILECs) to Competitive Local Exchange Services (CLECs.)

The group discussed the trend of major carriers toward suspending maintenance of copper-lines, and the effect this transition has and will have on isolated rural communities. Today it is uncertain which negotiation strategy would better protect quality universal service. Despite the inadequacies of the copper legacy, anyone who has a dial-tone gets counted toward 'Universal Life-Line' requirements. Whereas, full broadband deployment may be delayed so long as copper is perceived a suitable alternative.

Calvin anecdotally added: "Following the 2017 wildfires on Mark West Springs Road, a community of about 100 people lost phone service which was provided by copper. When repairs were made, they replaced copper with copper. When asked why they didn't upgrade to

fiber, the response was: “It’s covered by insurance, and copper was the least expensive option.””

Sheba continued that Congressman Huffman is one of the original cosponsors of H.R. 530 : “Accelerating Broadband Development by Empowering Local Communities Act of 2019”. [Which prescribes] “Actions by the Federal Communications Commission in “Accelerating Wireless and Wireline Broadband Deployment by Removing Barriers to Infrastructure Investment.””

The Farm Bill includes increased grant opportunities for Rural Broadband e-Connectivity.

b. State Senate & Assembly Representatives

As both Senator McGuire and Assemblymember Wood had events planned in Mendocino County, neither they nor staff could be present, but they sent the following timely updates:

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Senator McGuire has introduced SB 670 on Outage Notifications. There is no real-time reporting requirement for telecommunications carriers when 911 service or emergency warning system access goes down. In order to provide residents the public safety they deserve, SB 670 would require telecommunications carriers to report outages to OES within one hour of discovery when outages affect 911 service and emergency notification systems.

Following up on SB 833 - Emergency Alerts, CalOES is working on their draft guidelines and will begin reaching out to CSAC and the League of Cities to garner feedback on their draft guidelines. While the bill required their completion by July 2019, CalOES is working to ensure adoption occurs at the local level as soon as possible.

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Jim Wood's AB 183 would require the CPUC to collect and report to the Legislature, as part of the CPUC’s annual report, the impact of a natural disaster on the state’s telecommunications network and the response of telecommunication companies. Specifically, the reporting trigger is narrowed to apply only after a natural disaster is officially declared a “state of emergency” or “local emergency,” pursuant to Gov. Code Section 8558, by the state or federal authority.

In the aftermath of these devastating fires, the state and CPUC have focused heavily on the utilities response to the massive destruction. However, little is known about the impact these natural disasters had on telecommunications networks and how telecommunication companies have responded. We have been left in the dark when it comes to understanding the technology that may be used to rebuild infrastructure and whether companies have put temporary “fixes” in place or, instead, invested in permanent upgrades. Without this information, there is no way to ensure that residents have the same or improved access to a reliable network. For most Californians, reliable voice telephone service is necessary to reach 911 emergency services and

stay in touch with family and employers. Without reliable service, the ability to contact emergency services is limited or nonexistent.

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c. Broadband providers: No Broadband providers were present.

d. Supervisor Ted Williams

Continuing the conversation about the potential of a mesh-network, as a county pilot project, Phil Dow reiterated the availability and fractional cost of obsolete call-boxes, statewide. Supervisor Williams described the concept, and considered the relative regulatory advantages of municipal networks being developed through the county, along its right-of-ways, with cooperation.

Each node would be dynamically linked to one or more of the successive adapted utility boxes. Where the linked nodes pass a residence, customers could purchase connectivity through a node that links into the mesh-system. The public, public safety, emergency medical services and volunteer fire departments would be served by closing gaps in coverage along county roads.

Mesh networking: (Source Wikipedia)

A mesh network (or simply meshnet) is a local network topology in which the infrastructure nodes (i.e. bridges, switches and other infrastructure devices) connect directly, dynamically and non-hierarchically to as many other nodes as possible and cooperate with one another to efficiently route data from/to clients. This lack of dependency on one node allows for every node to participate in the relay of information. Mesh networks dynamically self-organize and self-configure, which can reduce installation overhead. The ability to self-configure enables dynamic distribution of workloads, particularly in the event that a few nodes should fail. This in turn contributes to fault-tolerance and reduced maintenance costs.

As an action item, Ted suggests working with the County Department of Transportation to review any regulatory restraints and explore of feasibility.

In addition to the enhanced county-wide communication coverage of a municipal network, multiple commenters affirmed community interest in call-boxes or pay-phones, perceived as needed for emergency response in disparate areas of Mendocino County.

VI. North Coast North Bay Broadband Consortium updates

The Consortium continues its work with the four member counties for planning of implementation of broadband plans, while working on a new application for the California

Advanced Services Funds grant program to be ready when the California Public Utilities Commission opens the next funding round.

The NBNBC Manager expects to schedule the next Oversight Committee meeting in April.

#### VII. Update from Sonoma County- Mike Nicholls & Calvin Sandeen

Calvin Sandeen reported that Sonoma County recently completed its draft Strategic Plan, with their presentation to the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors has been delayed due to fire and flood related issues taking priority. They are focusing on their work with Access Sonoma Broadband and the NBNBC, including implementation of the Strategic Plan. They are reviewing models of municipal broadband infrastructure, with hopes to implement that within their county. They are also considering shifting the broadband program from Economic Development to another program, such as the Office of Community Recovery and Resilience. Potentially this change will help streamline interagency communications.

Additionally, an organization called Neighborly.com sent out a notification to cities that might be interested in partnering on development of 'municipal broadband' policy; Sonoma County applied and was chosen as one of 35 community participants.

#### VIII. Report from Jim Gagnon - USDA Reconnect application

Two weeks prior, Jim Gagnon started looking into different USDA grants and loans that are being offered for broadband connectivity, primarily the Re-Connect Program.

His approach has been to examine portions of the unfunded Golden Bear Infrastructure Plan to study what would be most effective toward County broadband goals. He's chosen the project of a fiber line from Ukiah, through Willits, to Laytonville, across Branscomb Road to Fort Bragg, that would connect 3 of Mendocino County's largest cities. Adjusted for inflation, based on project research described, the costs would be around \$8 million.

Jim is also interested in USDA electrification in rural areas. He suggested that this might be helpful toward creation of a micro-grid project for areas like the unserved miles between Comptche and Ukiah.

#### IX. Future Agenda items and Final Comments

With time for comments and agenda suggestions, Chair Wylie thanked everyone for the informative reports, and noted the date of the next meeting.

Next meeting June, 7<sup>th</sup>, 2019

Spoken reports were consolidated for continuity, but intend to reflect the sentiment and cogent details presented by the individuals.