
Broadband Alliance of Mendocino County

Notes:

I. Call to Order

Chair **Kathy Wylie** called the **Broadband Alliance of Mendocino County** Public Outreach meeting to order, just after 10:00 am on Friday November 2nd, 2018.

- A. Those present introduced themselves, including:** Diann Simmons, Economic Development & Financing Corp. (EDFC), County Broadband Coordinator, Jim Moorehead, former Chair, BAMC, Supervisor Dan Gjerde, Mike Nicholls, NBNCBC Management Team Member/Sonoma Co., Calvin Sandeen Project Coordinator, Broadband, Sonoma Co. Econ. Development Board, Emily Tecchio, Field Representative State Assemblymember Jim Wood, Ruth Valenzuela, District Director, State Assemblymember Jim Wood, Katie Gibbs, Community Foundation Board of Directors, Rick Ehlert, Coordinator, County Emergency Services, County Superintendent Michelle Hutchins, Adrian Fernandez Baumann, owner, Mendo Voice, and Supervisor Georgeanne Croskey, Taylor Morrison, District Representative, State Senator McGuire, Sheba Brown, Field Representative, Congressman Jared Huffman, Steve Dunncliff, County Deputy CEO, Supervisor John McCowen:
By Phone: Heather Gurewitz, ED, EDFC., and John from Lake County

- B.** A slight agenda change was adopted, hearing item IV-B prior to IV-A.

II. Words from the Chair

Kathy Wylie greeted the group, and thanked everyone for coming.

III. Update from Elected Representatives

Ruth Valenzuela, District Director from Assemblymember Wood's Office indicated that the Legislature's 2-year Bill cycle has concluded and reported the success of the infrastructure 'Dig Once' Bill which facilitates better utilization of open trenches within existing construction projects, through notification of contractors and carriers. Potential 2019 broadband legislation for consideration, support or co-authorship will become more clear in the months to come.

In response to Ruth Valenzuela's report, Jim Moorehead stressed the importance of the corporate carrier's coverage maps as integral to planning future telecommunication policy, to which Mike Nicholls related T-Mobile's open cooperation during merger-talks and build-out.

Taylor Morrison, District Representative for Senator Mike McGuire's Office reported that SB 833 the Emergency Alerts Bill was signed into law in September which mandates the formation of a Working-Group to establish state-wide emergency protocols and collaborative improvements to emergency evacuation and response. The Bill resulted from a lack of emergency notification for most residents, following the recent wildfires. Comprehensive planning for emergency notification includes:

text, email, telephone, television and Highway sign deployment. Annual training on technologies needed by emergency managers, including training on alert notification software, is included in the Bill.

Additionally, Senator McGuire's co-authored Senate Bill 822 on net-neutrality was passed into law, but has been met by a federal law-suit, leaving the Bill on hold.

Sheba Brown, Congressman Huffman's Office expressed an interest in listening to the presenters and participating in discussions, where appropriate.

IV. Community Partner Reports

OES/ Sheriff

Rick Ehler Coordinator, Mendocino County Office of Emergency Services (OES) reported that repairs have been made to all EMS and public cell towers and other infrastructure damaged by the extensive fires in 2017-18. However, systematic upgrades have not been included and "Another fire would have the same effects."

Examples of the lack of upgrades to our local communication systems include the fact that fiber optic lines to Willits have been replaced, post-fire, but have not been under-grounded. Also, cell towers continue to lack adequate back-up power or generation. It was noted that recent permits for pending towers include plans for back-up power, primarily among AT&T's fixed wireless systems. The limitation of most existing cell-towers in Mendocino County is that they only have battery back-up, which may last only 1-8 hours.

A meeting between the County Sheriff Dept. and AT&T is being planned regarding [FirstNet](#) with the possibility for adopting the service. [FirstNet](#) is a public-safety broadband option being pitched to the County, but without systematic upgrades it may not provide improvement capabilities to warrant adoption. Conceptually, the service would provide cellular voice/data/video, but AT&T does not have the optimum coverage in our county and switching would require all new hardware. Verizon is simultaneously developing an equivalent service, to remain competitive. The FirstNet spectrum was originally represented as exclusive to public safety, but more recent iterations seem to include availability to businesses, additionally.

Michelle Hutchins inquired about how [FirstNet](#) interrelates to [GETS](#), or Government Emergency Telecommunications Service that aids elected officials during an emergency. Rick responded by describing [GETS](#) as a landline option which prioritizes certain callers during times when switches are overloaded with emergency calls. There are similar offerings to cellular government contracts, he added. Priority advantages of the emergency connectivity differ.

Additionally, OES provided a thumbnail sketch of different technologies involved in emergency communication systems, and efforts toward built-in redundancies for various contingencies.

Mike Nicholls asked if there has been any talk of increasing capacity to residential customers during times of natural disasters, and Rick Ehlert could not recall any statements from the carriers regarding pending systemic improvements. To the contrary, he added that regional emergency communication may be increasingly impacted, going forward, by PG&E's policy regarding proactive power shutdowns amid 'Red-flag' warnings. Offices of Emergency Services in Mendocino, Sonoma, and Napa Counties are cooperatively re-considering their emergency notification systems and other plans, in response to potential deficiencies of electricity supply during severe weather events. Ehlert concluded, "We're going to see communication outages as a result of PG&E's shut-off program."

Chair Wylie asked about [Team Rubicon](#), an organization out of Texas that assisted with telecommunications immediately after recent fires, while towers were being brought back on-line.

Diann Simmons said that she appreciated that OES has been having meaningful conversations with the large telecom companies.

Schools /MCOE

Mendocino County Superintendent of Schools, Michelle Hutchins updated the Alliance regarding the expansion of California high-speed network to all schools. Of the 11 school districts, most have high-speed internet, except for Northern-most Mendocino County schools. Plans for 2021 will upgrade services to the network in Laytonville, Covelo and Leggett. An immediate issue for school districts improving bandwidth is the legal requirement for a filter to secure internet service. The schools are considering how to come up with the \$100k in funding needed to double the capacity of the current 5-gig filter.

In response to a question from Diann Simmons, Superintendent Hutchins spoke about an innovative program in Alum Rock, Santa Clara County, which she, along with other superintendents, plan to visit that teaches elementary students coding as a language. The program has successfully prepared K-8 students for Advance Placement computer science.

Rural school districts are being left behind, in terms of 21st Century learning. Tech industries are investing in urban districts, but seem to ignore rural counties, where teaching options may not have not evolved beyond the use of chalk-boards. Diann asked about an earlier collaboration with Hutchins to bring a program into the county high schools that involves a high-infusion of technology tools that student groups utilize to take on local issues for real-world learning and service projects. Hutchins is planning a pilot project of the program for disenfranchised youth in the Mendocino Juvenile Hall program, "New Beginnings" will help to build a model program, and if successful the program will be adopted by the county high schools. Heather Gurewitz from the **Economic Development and Financing Corporation** expressed excitement about the program and intends to include the idea in the broadband plan.

Mike Nicholls augmented the schools report by updating progress in Sonoma County which has connected every school to high speed internet, most recently upgrading service to the Kashia Band of Pomo Indians of the Stewarts Point Rancheria.

Fire Depts. – There was no report from Mendocino County Fire depts., but we were given an anecdotal report from Mike Nicholls about the actual need for supplemental carrier services within the Cazadero VFD, illustrating the challenge of adequate contract procurement among desperate Departments.

Diann Simmons also reported that, in a meeting with Fire Chiefs, many local districts reported that lack of younger volunteers will significantly impact their emergency services in the near future. The number of new volunteers is dwindling, in part because of the time and money required for training, often requiring locals to travel great distances.

In a separate conversation with Calfire, she was given a report of "dead areas" along corridors that greatly impact emergency services coordination.

V. Broadband Provider updates and new deployments

No providers represented; comments were voiced regarding the need to access the proprietary service area mapping, as part of comprehensive County and regional broadband plans. Questions arose regarding the reported Verizon ‘throttling’, followed by comments suggesting that Mendocino County’s first-responders were not impacted by ‘data caps’.

Diann Simmons gave updates on the progress of two of our most important fixed wireless providers - Further Reach and SeaKay. Further Reach’s service now extends from north of Point Arena to south of Gualala and east into Anderson Valley, including Navarro. These areas were some of the most underserved in the county previous to Further Reach’s initiating their fixed wireless research project on the south coast. They were able to gain access to the Manchester Trans-Pacific Cable for their back-haul, an unusual coup. They currently are serving about 1,500 residences and businesses, including the recent addition of public radio station KZYX in Philo. Their waiting list is in the thousands. Their incredible back-haul gives them unlimited resource for the south coast future service. The organization has made the decision to stay permanently, instead of trying to find a local community organization to take over their work. Part of their policy is redundancy for every area they connect up.

SeaKay, another non-profit service provider, primarily serves residential subscribers. In the last 6 months, they have added about 150 new connections, mostly in the western Willits area. They are also working with a new installer in Laytonville, who is making slow but steady progress to bring service to a very underserved area. In the coming months SeaKay will focus on more connections in the Willits area and will begin tackling Brooktrails, including the Willowbrook area, a large community just north of Willits that BAMC tried for years to find a service provider for.

VI. Mendocino County Broadband Coordination

Heather Gurewitz and Diann Simmons presented an update on the Economic Development and Financing Corporation’s Broadband Surveys. The residential survey has had 500 responses (+/-). While noting that 87% of respondents indicate connectivity, Heather underscored that a deeper-dive

into the data will provide increasing information about the nature of internet activity within sectors of the local economy, rather than simply documenting the bandwidth ‘haves & have-nots.’ These surveys are providing important current data for the County Digital Infrastructure Plan.

Status of the County Digital Infrastructure Plan was presented by **EDFC**, who took on the project in July, starting from a previously developed draft outline of the plan. **In** early 2019, EDFC will vet the draft to communities and providers, followed by an endorsement process for stakeholders, and adoption by Board of Supervisors. The plan will include projects that EDFC will provide support to implement.

VII. Mike Nicholls & Calvin Sandeen/Sonoma - Comments on the state of Broadband

Mike Nicholls spoke about the increasing importance of connectivity in daily life, both at home as well as in business and agriculture. His thoughtful comments recognized that, at this moment in time, modern homes may have dozens of ‘on-line devices’, including door locks and security, or remote lights and thermostats; some underserved areas lack the same options. Additionally, Mike described an example of an automated dairy farms, which would not be possible without seamless broadband. Similarly, improvements to crop-watering cycles are increasingly reliant on wireless data transmission.

Calvin Sandeen presented some of the preliminary concepts of the **Broadband Strategic Plan for Sonoma County**. Sonoma County is investigating an ownership model of infrastructure buildout, where carriers will bid to service customers by filling County-owned conduit with fiber-optic lines. This approach should prove cost effective and improve local control. Funding from the **Economic Development Administration (EDA)** has been applied for to bring internet access to an area near Healdsburg that includes many wineries. The strategy is that this will have a positive impact on economic growth, which is a requirement for an EDA award. This funding round is specifically for fire impacted counties.

VIII. NBNCBC updates

North Bay North Coast Broadband Consortium (NBNCBC) - Oversight meeting

A brief review indicated that the **NBNCBC** will continue its work without change to its regional make-up. The level of expertise of the members of NBNCBC has helped the organization take a leadership position among the state consortiums. Staying together as a 4-county consortium will help to build on that leadership role, allowing **NBNCBC** to step into developing legislation instead of just responding to proposed legislation. Minutes from the most recent meeting are pending.

Mendocino County’s 2018 Legislation Platform on promotion of rural broadband (inset) was cited as the best county legislative platform within the consortium. Diann Simmons is working with the County Admin office for adoption of the same platform with minor changes for 2019.

PROMOTION OF RURAL BROADBAND

- Collaborate with the Broadband Alliance of Mendocino County (BAMC) and the North Bay North Coast Broadband Consortium (NBNCBC) to facilitate the deployment of a robust countywide fiber backbone infrastructure that will enhance economic development and stimulate affordable broadband access to all homes, businesses, schools, libraries, public safety facilities, health services and other institutions throughout Mendocino County.
- Continue to work with other northern California counties to identify and meet regional needs using a comprehensive, integrated approach to expand broadband infrastructure into our communities.
- Support legislative and administrative efforts to address broadband outages impacting our Enhanced 911 (E 9-1-1) services to ensure redundancy and reliable service.
- Advocate for expansion of rural broadband and important issues including: universal right to service which includes maintaining landline connections to those areas without adequate fixed wireless or mobile cellular coverage, adequate funding from state and federal programs such as the California Advanced Services Fund (CASF) and Connect America Fund (CAF) for the deployment of broadband infrastructure projects, and requiring accurate reporting of data used in Broadband mapping.
- Advocate for funding to address and support:
 - Bridging the digital divide.

IX. House Keeping

A. 2019 meeting Calendar:

March 1st, June 7th, September 6th, and December 6th

X. Other updates

XI. Future Agenda items and Final Comments

Follow-up items:

- **Broadband work Plans**
- **Improvements and discussion around mapping**

XII. Next meeting: March 1st 2019