
Broadband Alliance of Mendocino County

Broadband Alliance Public Outreach Meeting

Friday, September 6th, 2019 10 am - 12:00 noon

Community Foundation of Mendocino County

Call in Number: **605-313-4876** Access code: 108 1131#

I. Call to Order Simmons 10:01

A. Introductions

Kathy Wylie, Chair, was absent, as her land was under evacuation notice due to fire. **Diann Simmons**, Operations Manager/County Broadband Coordinator from Economic Development and Financing Corporation led the meeting.

Attendees: **Michelle Hutchins**, Superintendent of Schools, Mendocino County Office of Education; **Katie Gibbs**, Member BAMC Steering Committee; **Jim Moorehead**, Member BAMC Steering Committee; **Eric Mills**, community member, Gualala; **Jeff Tyrrell**, community member; **Ted Williams**, Supervisor, 5th District; **Sheba Brown**, Field Representative, Congressman Jared Huffman; **Calvin Sandeen**, Broadband Project Coordinator, Sonoma County Economic Development Board; **Mike Nicholls**, Access Sonoma Broadband; **Brian Bottari**, Government Affairs Manager, Comcast; **Wilder Herbertson**, Administrative Assistant for BAMC, Administrative Assistant and Outreach Coordinator, EDFC.

By phone: **Kinderlin Coddling**, EA/Executive Support, Sonic.net; **Annemarie Weibel**, community member, Albion; **Katie Brun**, community member, Mendocino

B. Revisions to the agenda

Simmons inserted a time for partner updates from providers at the meeting.

Gibbs was interested in a discussion on big-picture future solutions.

Weibel wished to express her concern about fires and wind issues; if towers are incapacitated and the public relies on cell phones, that's a major public safety hazard. **Simmons** assured her that that is a pressing concern on behalf of the BAMC and the County.

II. Update from Elected Representatives:

- Congressman Huffman: [Public Lands Telecommunications Act](#)

Brown, as field representative for Congressman Huffman, explained that the pending bill would allow for public access to internet lines which are passing through federal lands and are already in place. This could increase broadband access to rural communities and make internet more affordable. They are hoping to get a companion bill into the senate. There is lots of talk about 5G deployment on Capitol Hill and Huffman's office is looking for public input. Brown offered to take questions and comments to the staff as part of their efforts to take the county's

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temperature on the subject. Huffman will also be attending a broadband mapping meeting on September 11th in Washington DC. **Simmons** shared that EDFC is working on a survey of public assets that could be utilized for projects such as towers.

Moorehead asked, regarding the Act, if there are any known impacts on Indian Reservations, or how they might benefit or suffer from this act. **Brown** was not aware of any known impacts. **Brown** shared that while the Act would likely not impact Mendocino County to a great extent due to Mendocino's scarcity of federal lands, there are huge swaths of federal lands in the north of the state which could make a huge impact. This Act would provide a structure for negotiating with the forest service and other federal lands. **Williams** asked if other counties had already provided feedback, and if that feedback could be shared with Mendocino County. **Brown** responded that Huffman's office is just starting to receive comments from counties and public input at town halls.

Williams mentioned that more intercontinental fiber is being routed through Mendocino's South Coast, but that the company will not build a switch here. The new fiber will functionally bypass Mendocino completely on its way to the Bay Area. He suggested that situations like this offer some opportunity for new regulations.

- Senator McGuire: [Senate Bill 560](#)

Senator McGuire's field representative was unable to attend the meeting, but Simmons and Tyrell shared a brief explanation of Senate Bill 560: With the rise of emergency situations due to the increasing wildland fires, critical infrastructure, facilities, and agencies are not being provided sufficient warning ahead of de-energizing events, putting lives at risk. This bill will require utilities to report de-energizing of electrical lines outages to first responders, healthcare facilities and telecommunication providers ahead of outages with greater detail.

Simmons called Huffman's office and learned that the bill will be coming to a vote next week.

Nicholls shared that the bill is expected to pass.

- Supervisor Williams

Williams asked that EDFC share their progress on implementing the [Mendocino County Digital Infrastructure Plan: 2019-2025](#). He noted that while the County listed internet connectivity improvement as a high priority, they allocated zero dollars to it. The county is currently \$6 M in debt. **Williams** stressed that the time to make the case for funding is as soon as possible, and while it will be a difficult case to make, being able to show significant progress is critical.

Simmons said that EDFC knew from the beginning that the County does not have funding for broadband projects and that EDFC has assumed they will need to pursue grants for broadband projects, which they are prepared to do. She shared that EDFC is working on a pilot project for a county owned tower, that would be utilized by private providers to deploy service in a currently unserved area and has received cost estimates from engineers. Another project with the County in Round Valley has been put on hold. **Williams** reminded the meeting that the county will soon receive \$20M from the PG&E bankruptcy settlement, and that the five supervisors will

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all be competing for those funds. If BAMC can show that they are putting homes online, it will help make the case for funding.

III. Community Partner Reports:

- Office of Emergency Services

Our County OES Manager Rick Ehlert recently resigned to take a position with Cal OES, a big loss for our County. In the meantime, the external point of contact is Undersheriff Matt Kendall.

- Schools /Mendocino County Office of Education

Hutchins informed the group that a district superintendent retreat is coming soon, the focus of which will be technology in schools. Currently, she said, technology is mainly used for student assessment and form filling. **Hutchins** hopes to create student opportunities for content creation, collaboration, and expanded communication. There will be a focus on gamification at the retreat.

- Farm Bureau

Tyrell reported that Devon Jones, Executive Director of the Farm Bureau, couldn't attend today but expressed continued interest in partnership with BAMC

IV. Provider Reports

- Brain Bottari: Government Affairs Manager, Comcast

Bottari announced that Comcast recently made the largest expansion of eligibility requirements for internet essentials program (low income) that the company has ever made. At this time, anyone who is eligible for government assistance programs of any kind is now eligible for the program. **Simmons** asked if there is a map, or some way to know which residents do or do not live within Comcast coverage areas, so that the cities might publicize this. **Bottari** doesn't have detailed areas but generally the Cities of Ukiah, Willits and Fort Bragg. **Simmons** expressed to the group that **Bottari**, who is new to this position, has been very responsive and will be a helpful resource moving forward.

V. Discussion of Future Potentials:

Gibbs reminded the participants that California is often ahead of the curve on progressive policy changes. Shouldn't internet access be a guaranteed public utility like electricity? **Gibbs** felt that the market has found the "limits of private enterprise in broadband." In many cases, she said, the internet providers are holding up the infrastructure improvements, as some expansions are not profitable. If one is able to get a neighborhood together, and money to fund it, some providers will still not come. While it's great that so many organizations are working on broadband access, **Gibbs** believed that that approach is not far-reaching enough. She reminded the meeting that in some countries, high-speed internet is a right. **Williams** added that he believes many providers would argue that CEQA and high levels of regulation in the state have made accessibility for these smaller projects unprofitable.

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Williams also brought up Elon Musk's Starlink satellite program that is in early stages of implementation. He asked, how does this effect our long-term planning?

A period of public comment followed, in which **Weibel** expressed concern about the public health effects of launching thousands of low-orbit satellites putting out 5G radiation waves.

Simmons is happy that rural broadband issues are being talked about by presidential candidates. While some of their plans are not in line with what the BAMC wants, she was glad that the important conversation is being had on such a public level.

Mills, as a concerned community member, was curious if there were any updates to the priority areas as outlined in the [Mendocino County Digital Infrastructure Plan: 2019-2025](#). **Mills** shared that his wife has been diagnosed as suffering from sensitivity to electromagnetic radiation, as used by wireless internet and phone services and would be impacted if service is deployed in the area where they live. **Williams** suggested that, in order to have weight in the decision-making process, **Mills** have his physician speak about the issue to the Board of Supervisors or the BAMC. **Sandeen** expressed that public health research is not as high a priority as he would prefer. **Simmons** asked Mills to forward any research concerning this that he has access to.

VI. Calendar of Future Public Outreach Meeting Dates:

- Quarterly: Dec. 6th- 2019; 2020: Mar. 6th, Jun 5th, Sept. 11th, Dec. 4th
- Steering Committee meetings: Nov. 21, Feb. 21, May 21, Aug. 28, Nov 19

Simmons reminded participants that the steering committee meetings are open to the public.

VI. Economic Development & Financing Corporation - County Broadband Coordination

- Transition to in-house administration

Simmons explained that instead of using part of the Community Foundation's broadband fund grant to pay for administration of the BAMC, EDFC is now moving administration in-house. This will reserve the BB fund for match for actual projects, as intended. **Herbertson**, with support from **Simmons**, will now be doing the administrative tasks for BAMC. **Tyrell** expressed his support for this change, and reminded the group that while the website could use improvement, the BAMC Facebook page gets far more hits than the website, with 400-500 views per week.

- NBNCBC Update

Simmons reported that the North Bay North Coast Broadband Consortium, is currently in a holding pattern, (it includes Mendocino, Napa, Marin, and Sonoma). They have applied to the CPUC for a grant to fund the work of each county. Mendocino County will use their portion to help fund EDFC 's work as the County's Broadband Coordinator. NBNCBC has been awarded this grant twice before and is optimistic that another award will be made for a 3-year period.

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Sandeen reiterated that their work in Sonoma has also mostly been postponed until such time as the grant is awarded, although they are still proceeding with advocacy initiatives. **Simmons** explained that one of the things the grant would be funding is contracting with Chico State to provide data for grant applications.

VII. Pending or Recent Legislation:

- [Restoring Local Control Over Public Infrastructure Act](#) Feinstein
- [Deployment Accuracy and Technological Availability Act](#) Wicker

Moorehead explained that the proposed Act by Wicker has bipartisan support. As it was just introduced in June, there is not a lot of information out about it yet. It addresses the very inaccurate internet service mapping across the US. Currently, the data is self-reported to the FCC by carriers and is based on census tracts. If a single property in a census tract has service, the entire tract is counted as served. As of this meeting, the list of sponsors does not yet include representatives from California. **Moorehead** recently spoke with Huffman who was not aware of the bill but said that he might be interested in introducing it to the House.

Post Meeting Update as of 9/13/2019: SB 1822 now has 49 co-sponsors including California Senator Harris

Tyrell described the proposed act by Feinstein. The bill will overturn a FCC ruling that establishes federal control over local permitting to allow 5G placement.

VIII. Mike Nicholls & Calvin Sandeen –

- Updates on Sonoma County and regional broadband activities

Sandeen described himself as tech neutral; prioritizing the best quality service that a community can get over the type of technology itself. His long-term goal as a Broadband Project Coordinator is to get service expansion to underserved communities, by fiber, etc. This can be an expensive aim, and take a while to do. In the short term, his organization and the Sonoma County Library have developed a program where community members with library cards can check out a Verizon wireless hotspot from the library for free. After a two-week rental, they can check it out again. The hotspots have been incredibly popular, and they are expanding the program by 200 devices. **Sandeen** himself has cancelled his previous expensive internet service and uses the device. To emphasize the impact that free internet from the library has had, he told an anecdote of a homeless woman who was able to complete her schooling on-line, using the library checked out hot-spot and get a job. **Sandeen** noted that there is a CPUC adoption account grant that is willing to pay for programs like the library hot-spot check-out. He also said that Sonoma County is exploring implementing public-private initiatives for broadband service. The county is looking at applying for grants to pay for underground conduits, then contracting a provider to install fiber and operate the service.

- AB 1366 public hearing

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In association with 3 Commissioners including Matha Guzman Aceves, **Sandeen** has set up [a public meeting on telecom service quality, scheduled for September 23rd at the Monte Rio Community Center, from 6 – 8 PM.](#)

Post-Meeting Update: The CPUC Hearing has been postponed, with no new date set. This is due to AB 1366 (see below) being pulled from a vote in the CA Senate session that ended on 9/13/19. EDFC will be gathering information about long delays in service responses from providers, in the event the Commission will request input in the future.

The CPUC commissioners are hoping to “hear directly from elected officials, first responders, customers, and all other stakeholders so that we can better address” the issue of poor service quality. This meeting ties into the CPUC’s recent report analyzing data from 2010-2013, which shows a significant lack of public understanding about the differences between traditional phone lines and Voice Over Internet Phone (VoIP) services, especially in relation to emergency communications and power outages.

Sandeen noted the link between this issue and the upcoming AB 1366 public hearing, which would take away state/CPUC regulatory authority over VoIP services. While major incumbents support the bill, the CPUC is in opposition to the bill. This is because there is a clause in the bill that allows service providers to postpone reinstating service to properties indefinitely, if they feel certain conditions are met. With recent wildfires, **Sandeen** explained how many citizens of Sonoma waited for many months before internet service was reinstated. This meant that for those with VoIP home phones and no cell service, they were completely cut off from emergency services and basic connectivity. He stressed that internet connection is a public safety issue. In a survey of those who were affected after recent wildfires, 30% of people lost all landline capacities, and an additional 34% lost partial services. This is why the market confusion around VoIP and regular lines is so concerning. While not all landlines are able to maintain connectivity in a power outage, none of the VoIP services can unless a backup battery is installed; and then, only for the life of the battery.

IX. Other Updates, Final Comments and Future Agenda items

Weibel reiterated her concern about the potential public health effects of cell radiation from towers, and expressed her frustration that the public often has very little information about new projects in their area. She suggested that fiber to homes should be the standard. **Williams** agreed that that would be ideal, and recommended that she involve herself in either finding funding for such a project or brainstorming another alternative that is cost-effective enough for BAMC and Board of Supervisors to support.

Williams commented that he has been working with RCRC (Rural County Representatives of California) on a project to pelletize biomass and selling it to buyers in Japan as a fuel source, as the country is making an effort to shift away from nuclear energy and fossil fuels. The main challenge has been the extensive level of tracking that the biomass requires, though if communities were to come onboard with this initiative, perhaps the funding for the biomass

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project could go toward improving local connectivity. The biomass project could also be a boon to solving fire suppression issues.

X. Next meeting: Friday, December 6th, 2019