Broadband Alliance *of* **Mendocino County**

Steering Committee Meeting Notes
Friday, March 8th, 2013   10:00 am – 11:35 am
The Community Foundation of Mendocino County
204 S. Oak Street, Ukiah, CA 95482 (707) 468-9882

Dial in at (605) 477-2100 Participant access code: 565491#
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No meeting next Friday – March 15th!

1. **Call to Order: 10:00 am**

   a. Attendees: Brian Churm, Greg Jirak, Jim Moorehead, Mike Nicholls, Trish Steel, Steve Turner, Susanne Norgard, Heidi Dickerson, Ray Gifford
   b. Call-in: Mitch Drake, Craig Domeny (Director of Engineering for Carlson wireless), Ginny Feth-Michel (City of Fort Bragg), John McCowen
   c. Changes to agenda: Move MCOG planning grant to first item.

2. **MCOG/MCOE Transportation Planning Grant – Steve Turner**

   a. The application was endorsed unanimously at the recent MCOG board meeting on 03/04/13, so the first hurdle was passed.
   b. Steve brought copies of the proposal which included a timeline, and will work with MCOG staff to develop the full application which is due the first of April. He will have the draft next Friday. He is proposing getting this project finished in one and a half years instead of two, so that the data can become available and put to good use as soon as possible.
   c. Letters of support are required with the application; he is meeting with the Superintendent's Council this morning and will summarize the project goals and will ask each district for a letter of support, along with providing a letter template. Steve will also want a contact within each district, and eventually some of those liaison members will be on the steering committee.
   d. What they want to do with this grant is to determine the status of broadband access for their students, and the economics of it (ie, whether the families are able to afford it) through a survey of all students in grades 7-12. This information will provide us with the ability to provide opportunity information to potential investors, and schools may also benefit in being able to apply for grants for their students and their staff.
   e. To encourage a high response rate from students, the Alliance is considering contributing to this application by providing some sort of incentive to the schools/students.
   f. This application will have the support of the Alliance, which has the weight of 100 letters of support behind it when we asked for businesses to endorse us as their agent.
   g. Having some letters specific to this project is also a goal, and Mike suggested that this would be a perfect project for the Rotary Clubs to tackle. The deadline for these letters is Monday, March 25th as the application is due the first of April.

h. Steve went over the timeline for the grant, and would also like help on this from the Alliance; he will be working on this grant next week.

i. GJ brought up the need to think about database technology and creating a good time stamped data model. The Alliance has been working on our Broadband Access Inventory (BAI) and at a minimum both projects should have the same sort of data.

j. We would also want to organize the data in a way to be compatible with the CPUC data model. It would be good to find out the mapping and database software that the state is using, so that we can drop our data onto their map and it would fit. Cathy Emerson would be able to tell us more about this.

k. Steve will meet with Jim, Greg, and Brian this afternoon for some more planning, define the work program at a high level, and hopefully get an outline. This would also be something that Steve can use for bidding on the RFP.

l. This entire discussion and grant application is both timely and important because the state Department of Education has decided to implement on-line assessment tools for the next school year, and schools will need adequate equipment. The state has projected only needing 20-40 kb of bandwidth per student for these assessments, but is it causing a lot of concern; technical directors of school districts suspect that the implementation will be delayed due to the connectivity issues.

m. The formal complete application is due on 04/02/13 to Caltrans in Eureka.

3. **Golden Bear Broadband update**

a. Mitch Drake reported that the challenge period after grant submission concluded, and they were notified that the GBB application received five challenges. These challenges were from: AT&T, Comcast, Charter, Mediacom, and Velocity.

b. There is no formal rebuttal process, but Mitch may get asked to come to the commission staff (or Commission) and offer an argument on why the challenges are not valid.   The CPUC staff is bound by the legislative process and can't deviate even if there is logic to do so.   The Commission does have the ability to deviate from the process. Mitch may ask members of the Alliance and Sonoma Connect to accompany him to any such meeting that is organized.

c. Brian seemed to express many people's frustration when he said, "I don't get the 'no rebuttal' process."   He also asked what the next step in the process is if we can't rebut the challenges. Can the CPUC over-ride the challenges, or do we have to re-package the project? Should we be contacting decision-makers, as you can be sure that is what AT&T and Comcast are doing.

d. Mitch replied that it was a good question; the commissioners have the ability to write an alternate process, and they started lobbying the commissioners as he believes that is the only way we can get this approved. Golden Bear is asking for more money than what legislation allows for, and at the end a recommendation for approval.

e. Brian asked if there was any way to influence them to make a positive recommendation. Mitch answered that the three different broadband meetings in Sacramento next week will be telling, and that he will be vocal.

f. The Alliance is not surprised at the challenges, but the feeling is that it's very aggravating because AT&T and Comcast won't deploy in Mendocino County, and they are attempting to deny GBB the ability to deploy.

g. Jim shared the story of the 2009 AT&T CASF application for Comptche, Albion and Little River. Comcast challenged AT&T in Albion and Little River where Comcast has a small service footprint. Rather than engage in a dispute with Comcast, AT&T dropped the two communities from the application and was awarded a grant only for Comptche. Bottom line for Little River and Albion – neither AT&T nor Comcast has expanded their service to the hundreds of unserved residences in the two communities.

h. Mike Nicholls also connected Mitch with the real estate director of the Sonoma/Marin Area Transit (SMART), Laura (didn't catch her last name). In her prior work with BART she handled all the leases with companies for deploying fiber along the track beds, so she is very knowledgeable and recognized that deploying fiber along the track beds is a good opportunity to develop revenue for BART. The SMART is building a new railroad from Centerfield to Airport Road in Sonoma County, and she asked Mike how and with whom we were going to connect in Petaluma for our Route One Corridor Project (R1CP). Mike felt there was some synergy there, so he passed this information on to Mitch, who called her immediately to introduce himself, and send a project summary. He will be following up with her today, and report on these fronts in the coming weeks.

i. Heidi Dickerson has been working to help get the Eb5 application that has been stuck in USCIS for 23+ months "unstuck". She noticed that since Yolo County is affected as well, it would be helpful to have Yolo County's congressman call as well about the application. Mitch thought it was good advice, and since he has contacts in both those areas he will do so and was thankful to her for the suggestion.

j. MN will be meeting with Senator Padilla regarding Legislation for an additional 100 million for the CASF grant program.

k. Heidi also talked to Glenda Humiston (USDA) looking for alternative ways to secure the twelve million dollars needed for the project in matching funds. She sent Glenda the project summary

l. Jim and Mike are also meeting with Robert Tse (USDA Rural Development) next week in Sacramento to discuss agricultural technology telecom needs, and the intersection of broadband and the need for agricultural water reductions. MN is also meeting with a lobbyist for the water agency that week.

m. Our kick-off permitting meeting with Sonoma County is planned for March 27th here at the Community Foundation.

4. **Forbes Article: *Why High Speed Broadband Fibre Is Becoming Irrelevant* - Brian**

a. Brian sent out this link to Steering committee members, and Jim thought it was important enough to add to our agenda for discussion. The link to the article: http://www.forbes.com/sites/timworstall/2013/03/04/why-high-speed-broadband-fibre-is-becoming-irrelevant/

b. The main point of the article is that everything is moving to wireless and therefore fixed assets (fiber, copper, etc.) are rendered irrelevant.   AT&T is trying to end fiber to the home projects, and they are playing on some current media trends.

c. This is hand in glove with the current pitch Verizon and AT&T are giving to our representatives in Washington and Sacramento. Brian wanted us to be aware of this industry-driven trending of information flow; this point of view is being put in our representative's ears by their many lobbyists.

d. There are some facts presented and they are running in credible sources like Forbes, but it's also disingenuous in many ways. These are opinion pieces presented as facts, and paid for by telecom companies. Forbes put a by-line on one piece that said as much, but a second article didn't run that byline.

e. **What is being left out of this viewpoint:**

   i. Yes, it's true that everything is becoming wireless. That's not in question. So while your phone, laptop/desktop, television, Netflix, etc. will be soon 100% wireless, you still need a fiber backbone to the base antenna. *Wireless has to connect to an infrastructure*. The wireless nodes have to connect to the internet by some fashion, and that is still a fixed asset like fiber.

   ii. Wireless has some major limitations of physics because of the high frequencies (60 Ghz) they use, which impact its performance and reliability. Wireless can be tricky!

f. And for Mendocino County in particular, as we know because of our geography, terrain and dense forests, there has to be a middle-mile infrastructure that can put an antenna at the curb *at a bare minimum*. You still need that infrastructure, and projects like Golden Bear have to proceed forward.

g. Susanne asked if there was any organized voice in response to this industry flow of information. There is some at the national level, but this is what is running in the mainstream media right now. It is really a war of ideas, and they can get into Forbes and we can't.

h. Susanne also suggested putting something about this on our website, and everyone thought that would be a good idea.

i. JM said that at the MCOG presentation, John Pinches pointed out that AT&T has 120 lobbyists in Sacramento, and Mendocino County has ZERO.

5. **Comcast Internet Essentials (IE) Program**

a. The Comcast Internet Essentials program was mentioned by JK at an Executive Committee Strategic Planning meeting, but no one really knew much about it, so JM asked Trish to do some research into this program.

b. Trish gave an update on what she discovered, and presented it to the meeting.

   i. The program was launched in 2011 and is available to low-income families to help bridge the digital divide. At this point, it's available in 39 states, and have connected 150,000 families

   ii. There are four requirements: 1) you must reside in the Comcast service area 2) you must have at least one child enrolled in the National School Lunch Program and be able to verify that your child receives free lunch 3) You do not have an

over-due Comcast bill or unreturned equipment, and 4) you have not subscribed to any Comcast Internet service within the last ninety days.

    iii.   The IE program has a complex and evolving relationship with the federal program Connect2Compete (C2C), which is the federal umbrella non-profit set up by the FCC as a condition of the Comcast/NBC Universal merger. The C2C is set up as a clearinghouse as they provide no service themselves; they compile pledges from internet and software companies to get computers and internet access to the underserved.

    iv.   If a partnering company offers a low-income program, then that program replaces the C2C. In Mendocino County, the Internet Essentials program fulfills this role.

    v.   Trish also found on-line anecdotal criticisms of the IE program, with the most common complaint being that the low-income program is not advertised and that many families are ineligible for various reasons.

    vi.   In Mendocino County, only those low-income families with children enrolled in the Child Nutrition Program at school and in the Comcast service area are eligible for the discount, leaving many families unable to afford service.

  c. After putting this on the agenda, Scott Adams (Comcast) contacted the Alliance to come and make a presentation on the program. He is scheduled to attend our meeting on the Friday, March 22nd and we look forward to his presentation. Some questions that we would like to ask him include: What is the current adoption rate of the IE program in Mendocino County, what public outreach about the program has been done, what are the boundaries of the Comcast service area and what school districts are eligible, how long is Comcast required to provide this service, what are future plans for expansion, and how can the Alliance partner with Comcast to increase participation.

6. **Planning for 2013**

  a. The Alliance Executive Committee met on March 1st to do some strategic planning, and Greg Jirak (chair of strategic planning) gave an update from that meeting.

  b. The Alliance has embraced the term "Digital Divide" because it is a simple and easily-understood term that communicates the disenfranchisement that people feel when they lack adequate broadband access.

  c. The Committee recognized that the digital divide is a complex problem, with access being only one of ten dimensions to the problem. The other ten issues are: coverage, bandwidth, capacity, cost, equipment, redundancy, diversity, adoption, expertise, and money.

  d. By embracing this term, we can communicate our mission more easily – to eliminate the digital divide in Mendocino County.

  e. Our strategies and actions were codified: we are transparent, and will work with anyone who will work with us.

  f. Our ongoing cycle of identifying need, turning that need into opportunity for providers, connecting providers with funding sources which lead to broadband deployment is our ongoing process.

g. All projects require matching funds, and identifying investors and developing a local funding source is critical. This sort of local investment in our infrastructure is called "hi-impact investment."

h. The Alliance will be starting up more public outreach this year, and our website (which is currently targeted to professionals), will have a portal for public education about broadband issues, with cross-links between the two.

i. Our involvement in SB 1161 showed us that legislative advocacy can cost us a lot of time and resources without any return for that investment; we would like to avoid such detailed involvement in the future.

j. Greg will produce and present a work plan and budget for the coming year.

7. **Community Foundation Challenge Grant**

a. Jim announced that the Community Foundation Challenge Grant goal has been reached! He would like to thank everyone for their hard work and contributions.

b. Carole Brodsky will work on something to help us announce this with the most impact; maybe a newspaper article. Any ideas are welcome.

c. We will also work with the CF for a possible check reception.

8. **CPUC/CETF/CASF broadband conference March 12, 13, 14th in Sacramento**

a. Each consortium gets only five slots for attendees, an as part of the Redwood Coast Connect Jim will be our attendee. Mike Nichols will be attending as part of the Sonoma membership in the UCCConsortium.

b. They will report back after the meetings.

9. **Meeting Adjourned at 11:35**

Next meeting: March 22nd, March 29th