**Governor’s Task Force on Broadband Minutes**

**Thursday, January 11, 2024**

**10:00 a.m. – 12:20 p.m.**

**Braham High School in Braham, MN and Virtual Meeting via Teams**

**Task Force Members Present In-Person:** Teddy Bekele, Marc Johnson, Bruce Crane, Brian Hood, Adam Hutchens, Daniel Lightfoot, Paul McDonald, Melissa Wolf

**Task Force Members Present Virtually:** Ini Augustine , Steve Fenske, Gail Hedstrom, Briana Mumme, Phil Stalboerger, John Twiest

**Task Force Members Absent:** Dave Wolf

**Others in Attendance In-Person:** Carol Bossuyt, Hannah Buckland, Carlos García, Terry Lovgren, Dave Minke, Dennis Rice, Diane Wells, Nathan Zacharias

**Others in Attendance Virtually:** Hannah Buckland, Joe Buttweiler, Scott Cole, Anna Boroff, Stephanie Devitt, Angie Dickison, Barbara Droher Kline, Rochelle Garrow, Allison Gray, Brian Isom, Karrie Jansen, Laura Kangas, Tom Karst, Todd Kruse, Bree Maki, Megan Moudry, Anna Norcutt Preuss, Michelle Rebholz, Bryan Stading, Ann Treacy, Michael Wimmer

1. **Welcome and Introductions**

Chair Bekele called the meeting to order and roll call was taken. Shawn Kuhnke, Principal of Braham High School, welcomed the Task Force to Braham School. Chair Bekele thanked Marc Johnson and the Braham school for hosting the Task Force.

1. **Approval of minutes from the September 19 and November 30 Task Force Meetings**

The minutes from the Task Force Meetings on September 19 and November 30 were approved.

1. **School Broadband Landscape**

There are a lot of public-school cooperatives in Minnesota. ECMECC (East Central Minnesota Education Cable Cooperative) started in 1983 – with cable, studios in the schools and ITV. ECMECC uses MNIT as provider. ECMECC consists of14 high schools and Pine Technical College. ECMECC provides educational opportunities, career academies, classroom technology, and hosts a conference in the summer; it also provides live streaming for events, network information and security; and it does advocacy – especially related to broadband. In Central Minnesota there is a WAN (wide area network) that ECMECC just took over for schools and libraries. There are other cooperatives in other parts of Minnesota that do the same. Coops capture E-rate funding and telecom equity aid from the State. Full gigabit access or more across the network, with access aggregated to save considerable funds.

1. **BEAD Update from Diane Wells, Deputy Director, Office of Broadband Development**

**Minnesota will get $652M as its Broadband Equity, Access and Deployment (BEAD) allocation. NTIA will administer that funding. We need to file many reports, with a Fiver Year Action Plan filed last July and an Initial Proposal submitted on December 22. On Monday, we received comments from NTIA on Volume 1 and are working through those comments. We are working on getting an estimate to get ubiquitous broadband and assume it is more than $652M.**

**Once you have Volume One approved and Volume Two submitted, a state can begin its BEAD Challenge process. We are using a third-party vendor to host the BEAD Challenge process. The timing for the BEAD Challenge process depends upon when NTIA completes its review and gives approval and we do not know the timing. To date, only one state has received approval of its Volume 1 and 2; and five states have recently received approval of their Volume 1.**

1. **Digital Opportunity Update, Hannah Buckland, Digital Equity Program Lead**

OBD submitted the revised Digital Opportunity to NTIA on November 21. NTIA recommended further revisions. OBD is incorporating these revisions and will resubmit the plan to NTIA by February 13. The notice of funding opportunity (NOFO) for the State Digital Equity Capacity Grant program still has not been made available, nor has the award amount been shared with OBD. This hinders OBD’s progress. The Digital Equity Competitive Grant NOFO is also still unknown.

1. **Broadband Overview, Diane Wells, Deputy Director, Office of Broadband Development**

OBD just received the latest round of Border-to-Border and Lower Population Density grant applications, including31 Lower Population Density applications requesting for 4 times the funding available and 38 Border-to-Border applications asking twice what’s available.

Line Extension bids are in process with awards expected to be made in March.

1. **Benefits from Border-to-Border Broadband Grants and ECE Deployment, Dennis Rice, Broadband Manager, East Central Energy**

Dennis Rice indicated that they were excited to see the quality of broadband ECE is able to build after the area has had to deal with lesser solutions in the past. In the last six months, ECE has been building out fiber. ECE started a trial with a test group, and it’s gone well. We’re going live in that community on Monday. We’ve received three state Border-to-Border grant awards. The grants have made a big difference in ECE’s ability to build fiber. ECE has applied for a few grants in and out of Minnesota. ECE believes that its services are quality internet with 100Mbps download/100Mbps upload as entry level service for $64.99 monthly (nearly halved with ACP benefit applied for that that qualify). Fiber is easily scalable to faster speeds as the need arises.

1. **Sub-Group Discussion**

There are three groups: Affordability & Digital Equity, Mapping, Funding & Policy, and Economic Opportunity & Workforce.

Groups will provide feedback on speakers and outline challenges and make recommendations for annual report. Someone will be the subgroup lead and will report on progress or activities of their subgroup. The subgroups are not a huge commitment.

1. **Public Comment, Other Business, February 15th Meeting Plans, Wrap-up**

Public Comment: Terry Lovgren, Pine County Commissioner: We are county 86 out of 87 in terms of broadband service available. The map shows that she is served, and Commissioner Lovgren indicated that she is not. She is very concerned about the mapping. It’s not adequate. There’s a local B&B, they want broadband but have been told it will be $18,000 to deploy. She indicated they have township leaders who can’t get broadband access. Please help us to help you.

Public Comment: Nathan Zacharias, Association of Minnesota Counties– indicated that he had spoken to NTIA about the BEAD Challenge process. Counties do not have expertise and staff to complete the challenge and mapping work, nor can they afford consultants. He requested that the state work with NTIA to make it possible for counties to challenge efficiently.

The meeting adjourned at 12:20 p.m.