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

**Tuesday, November 30, 2023**

**10:00 a.m. – 12:20 p.m.**

**Minnesota Association of Townships in St. Michael, MN and Virtual Meeting via Teams**

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

**Task Force Members Present Virtually:** Ini Augustine, Gail Hedstrom, Phil Stalboerger, David Wolf

**Task Force Members Absent:** Steve Fenske, John Twiest

**Others in Attendance In-Person:** Graham Berg-Moberg (MAT), Carol Bossuyt (DEED), Bree Maki (DEED), Orion DiFranco (Senator Smith), Kathryn de Wit (PEW), Jake Varn (PEW), Diane Wells (DEED)

**Others in Attendance Virtually:** Hannah Buckland, Joe Buttweiler, Brett Christiansen, Angie Dickison, Barbara Droher Kline, Philip Essington, Brian Frederick, Jennifer Frost, Jared Haas, Karrie Jansen, Laura Kangas, Tom Karst, Todd Kruse, Megan Moudry, Matthew Rantala, Jennifer Salzwedel, Ann Treacy, Matt Varilek, Jim Wasilewski, Mike Wimmer, Nathan Zacharias

1. **Welcome and Introductions**

Chair Bekele called the meeting to order and roll call was taken. Chair Bekele thanked the Minnesota Association of Townships (MAT) for hosting and provided an overview of the agenda.

1. **Introductions and Comments from all Task Force Members**

Task Force members not introduced at the last meeting introduced themselves and stated their interest to serve on the Task Force and what they hoped to get out of it.

1. **Minnesota Association of Townships (MAT)**

Graham Berg-Moberg welcomed the Task Force to the Minnesota Association of Townships office. There are around 1,800 townships in Minnesota. MAT offers support for the townships and their elected supervisors, treasurers, and clerks (about 9,000 people). Around one million people live in townships in Minnesota. Electronic reporting requirements are done by the townships and some struggle with broadband access. Broadband access questions come up a couple times a week. Townships use a grassroots government where annual meetings are held.

1. **NTIA Update**

Tom Karst, Federal Program Officer at NTIA, gave an update about the $652 BEAD funding that will flow through the Office of Broadband Development. Minnesota has drafted and posted Volumes 1 and 2 for the Initial Proposal for public comment. The deadline to make a comment is December 12. The deadline for Minnesota to submit the Initial Proposal to NTIA is December 27. Volume 1 includes the Challenge Process which is how the state can challenge the FCC map for eligible areas for BEAD funding. Volume II includes the application, subgrantee selection requirements, and scoring rubric. Minnesota has done very well and the Border-to-Border Grant Program has been replicated in other states. BEAD is a new challenge to reach every home and business – Internet for All. NTIA has updated the Letter of Credit requirement. Our NOFO left space for alternatives to be defined, so now NTIA has defined the alternatives. The goals of the BEAD program are access, affordability, and adoption and equity. ARPA federal money cannot be used for match for the federal BEAD program.

1. **BEAD Update**

Diane Wells, Deputy Director of the Office of Broadband Development, updated everyone with the timeline for BEAD (plan must be submitted by December 27), Volumes I and II, the public comment period, the two webinars the first week in December, and the BEAD Challenge Process. OBD tried to incorporate as much of the current Border-to-Border program as we could. Once Volume I is approved and Volume II is submitted, we can open up the BEAD challenge process. We are working with a vendor to help us with the BEAD challenge process. The portal provided by the vendor will allow for individuals to challenge their location. Only non-profits, local governments (including tribal governments), and providers can submit challenges to the locations. Once Volume II is approved, we have 365 days to complete our subgrantee selection. We would like our challenge process done by the time Volume II is approved so we are not overlapping challenge process timeline and subgrantee selection timeline. NTIA says they may be done approving Volume II by March of 2024. We will do three rounds, the first two focusing on unserved locations, then funding leftover to underserved locations. Then the final proposal will be submitted and once approved, we can issue contracts with the providers, sometime after March of 2025. Once the contract is fully executed, the provider has four years to finish deploying service. We are years away from shovels in the ground with BEAD funding. For an individual to challenge their location, they will need to do three speed tests and also show documentation to support their situation (such as a letter from an ISP provider saying how much it would cost to provide broadband). Louisiana has 165,000 challenges (not all individual challenges). We are adopting the DSL module where all DSL is considered underserved and fixed wireless the same, and then where the provider needs to prove their coverage. We are having meetings with permitting agencies such as SHPO, DNR, etc. to help out in the future.

1. **Digital Opportunity Update**

Hannah Buckland, Digital Equity Program Lead, gave an update on the Digital Opportunity Program. Minnesota received almost $900,000 for Digital Equity planning from the Digital Equity Act. Minnesota did put in an extension through February to continue to use the funding since NTIA is still curing the Digital Equity Plan that was submitted on November 21. There were 100 community groups that gave feedback for the plan. There were Digital Opportunity Listening Sessions and 304 people attended. There were 66 written comments. Agriculture and public television access were missed in the draft plan, so that was added when it was submitted on November 21. We are also waiting to receive information for all details of the capacity grant that Minnesota will receive.

1. **Welcome from DEED Commissioner Matt Varilek**

Matt Varilek, Commissioner of the Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), told a little about himself and his journey to become the Commissioner as well as what is happening at DEED in regard to the grants distributed by DEED, broadband expansion being a key priority. He welcomed Kathryn de Wit and Jake Varn from the Pew Charitable Trust.

1. **Presentation from the PEW Charitable Trust**

Kathryn de Wit and Jake Varn from the PEW Charitable Trust discussed their Broadband Access Initiative and their research by looking at data from each state. Their research work is in areas of federal and state policy (state leadership, improved accountability, prioritization of fiber, affordability), addressing research gaps (drivers of affordability and cost of service, alternative models of deployment, trends in state broadband policy and future needs), and direct support to states (BETI (Broadband Education and Training Initiative) and educating state officials). Discussion of best practices are community engagement, state funds filling in the gaps, what federal money can be used on what and when, and interagency partnerships.

1. **Broadband Overview**

Bree Maki, Executive Director of the Office of Broadband Development, gave an update on new staff, being a member of the Governor’s Infrastructure Resiliency Task Force, and Border-to-Border Grant Round 9 apps due by December 7. For the Line Extension Connection Program, the 1st Round is wrapping up, we collected 2,300 addresses and we awarded $4.3 million for 823 locations. All remaining and new Line Extension addresses entered into the portal will roll over to next round. An RFP for a cost analysis on what the cost would be to deploy fiber everywhere and for different areas, and discussion with legislature for the upcoming session. Deven Bowdry, our Government Relations Director at DEED, left DEED so Darielle Dannen will take over for him in his help with us at the legislature.

1. **Sub-Group Discussion**

Teddy asked for ideas of presenters that the Task Force would like to hear from in regard to the report that will need to be submitted next year. At this point, there will be three subgroups: Affordability and Digital Equity, Mapping Funding and Policy, and Economic Opportunity. An email will go out to ask for your first and second choice of sub-committee to represent.

1. **Public Comment, Other Business, Future Meeting Plans, Wrap-Up**

Comments were made regarding supplemental funding at the legislature and support for it, Minnesota weather affecting contracts, Line Extension, challenge process and organizations that will be asked to be mobilized and what that will look at, and how to collect the location data for the challenge process. The next meeting will be held on Thursday, January 11 at Braham at ECMECC. The meeting adjourned at 12:20 p.m.