

RECAP & NOTES

Gogebic Range Broadband Committee Meeting

Noon, Wednesday, September 28 ♦ Iron County Courthouse, Hurley, WI

Participants: Norm McKindles (primary/secondary education), Kelly Klein (Iron Co. WI Economic Development), Opal Roberts (Iron Co. WI Supervisor), Jim Lorenson (Gogebic County College [GCC]), Rita Franzoi (Hurley WI CofC), Steve Lasco (Project Manager, WUPPDR), Joe Bonovetz (Gogebic Co. MI Board), Tom Bergman (Iron Co WI Zoning Administrator). **Media:** Richard Jenkins (*Ironwood Daily Globe*)

Norm called the meeting to order at 12.04 pm.

Introductions/Attendance Sheet: Steve Lasco introduced himself to the incumbent committee members. He replaces Erik Powers, who left WUPPDR at the end of September. Steve expressed his eagerness to “get up to speed” on committee business. Joe vouched for Steve’s abilities. Steve was advised that the WUPPDR committee member is the scribe, and agreed to continue those functions. The sign-in attendance sheet was distributed and signed. Steve provided his contact info (see bottom of these notes if you need it).

Infrastructure Updates:

Gogebic Co.: Jim noted that “there’s not much going on” and that he is “not sure where we go” due to the lack of funding in Michigan. Wisconsin’s program is funded, and slated to expand, while Michigan’s is not funded. The efforts of the committee and WUPPDR at broadband certification of the six western counties have resulted Discussion ensued about the status and future of the broadband certification project in the western U.P. Jim explained that the counties that lack interest are holding back those that are working, or already have worked, to achieve certification, and that the new V2.0 certification requirements, which are more stringent than the previous requirements, may preclude the already-certified agencies from meeting that new threshold. Discussion ensued with no clear resolution. Joe noted that Gogebic County is taking over the Ontonagon County veterans’ program in interests of efficacy.

Iron Co.: Kelly noted that the WI Public Service Commission is funding their program, not the federal government (via CenturyLink Connect America). He noted that WI funded its program at \$1.5M this year and is expected to offer more next year due to “public pressure” for rural broadband improvements. Some of this pressure, he noted, results from the fact that MN funds its rural broadband system at even higher levels than WI, which in turn does much more than MI. There is no Comet in Michigan. “Fixed wireless is the best option we have,” said Kelly.

The communities of Saxon and Montreal now are online.

The DNR fire towers are available. The Springstead tower is not located in managed forest lands, so it is a go-ahead for broadband use. Iron County plans to purchase this tower and the Pine Lake tower, perhaps as quickly as this year.

Kelly noted that, on Wed., Nov. 9, the committee, the WDNR Secretary, and the WI broadband director all are coming up to the region for the announcement. The next day (Thu Nov. 10), Gov. Walker and the other officials, who will be in the region for Walker’s Northern WI Economic Summit, will participate in an visit to and event at the Pine Lake tower near the Town of Oma. GRBC members are encouraged to attend.

WI Broadband Boot Camp: Kelly noted that the daylong event is slated for Tue., Dec. 6 in Wisconsin Rapids and that he will participate in the panel discussion. The boot camp will explore “models that work”. The WI PSC is happy with the efforts and results of Iron County.

Broadband Summit Planning Update: The summit has been moved to Spring 2017, but remains on our monthly agenda as a placeholder/reminder and to spur discussion and planning. Jim was asked if GCC can serve as a physical host and he affirmed. Mid- to late spring is the targeted time.

UW Extension / Badger Foundation Grant: A focus group, Focus Group to Analyze Senior Citizen Broadband Accessibility Throughout Wisconsin, meets tomorrow (Thu 9/29) at 2 pm to discuss seniors’ access to broadband and the ability of technology improvements to assist seniors in remaining productive, independent, and living in their homes (rather than care facilities). The discussion includes 6-8+ persons and lasts 1-1.5 hours, with the target of taking focus group input (this group and others like it) for analysis that results in data to pursue grant funding for broadband for seniors.

Next Steps / Other: The opportunity to map the Vertical Asset Inventory was presented and the group agreed that this would be a good idea.

Next Meeting: **Wednesday, October 26, noon at Iron County Courthouse**

Respectfully submitted,

Steve Lasco

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