

Gogebic Range Broadband Committee
May 27 2020 meeting notes

Norman McKindles opened the meeting with the online Zoom meeting at 12:05 pm.

Participants: Norm McKindles (primary/secondary education), Kelly Kline (Iron Co. Economic Development), Brandon Yuchasz (Gogebic Range.net), Joe Bonovetz (Gogebic County), Jim Lundberg (Merit), Glen Ackerman-Behr (Gogebic Community College), Richard Thiede (Oma Township), Amy Nosal (UW Extension), and Opal Roberts (Iron County Supervisor).

Gogebic County update: There was a 15 county meeting where Bonovetz explained the program with which our committee has been involved. Senator McBroom asked for contact information for the WI Public Service Commission. Bonovetz is not aware of any state grants for rural broadband. The Fed may be pushing for more money for the states. Lundberg said Merit Moonshot has a number of resources available.

McKindles had not received any feedback from MI schools. Not all students are participating in the online classes. Communication is a chore for some students.

Ackerman-Behr was asked about the college's ability to provide online service to classes that need hands-on training. He reported they are using a mixed mode of teaching. The state allows some face to face. Looking to finish class person to person this summer. Unlike K/12 the college can give credits for online learning. The college is actively recruiting for online students. In a survey he had read 40% of families may continue home schooling. Even at 10% this would mean a significant change to how schools operate.

Iron County update: McKindles had provided a draft list of internet providers and asked for input as to other companies not included in the list. It was suggested that the list include contact names and numbers. Adding the cost of each service would be difficult as charges for their services often change. Thiede volunteered to work on the list. It was mentioned that people may not know the choices they have. Realtors would be very interested in this list.

Brandon reported that Spider Lake is a priority and should be available in mid-June. Saxon Harbor is online and serving customers. Working on power to the Fisher Lake site which will require an easement from Iron County. The Mercer network antennae have been upgraded to a mega bit connection. He has contacted Rick Graser at Mercer Water and Sewer about adding a micro-pop on the water tower. He hasn't heard back from him but thinks this will be approved. At Lake of the Falls he reached out to Musky Point but hasn't heard back from them.

Kline asked if the Mt Zion upgrade is able to provide service to the Kimball area. Brandon said it has been available to some customers. He doesn't know if the upgrade could be charged to the grant. The PSC may not agree to fund an out of state tower even though it serves Iron County residents.

Thiede asked if Brandon had coverage maps for his services. Brandon will put something together.

Internet Access Survey: Kline reported that a confirmation letter from the EDA about the grant should arrive soon.

He attended a Tele-Health webinar and found it very interesting.

A discussion was held on the possibility of a Tech Center or shared workspace where remote workers can come for conferencing. This would attract professional people to the area. A private party is building one in Spooner. We can see how they are progressing and follow their example.

Ackerman-Behr informed the committee that this is on their radar at the Community College. There was a question as to how big the space should be. The college would need to market the space. Kline suggested a small start then expand when needed. Lundberg gave an example of a family working and home

schooling and running out of broadband space for conferencing. This would be an excellent resource for them.

Thiede explained that remote is working so well some companies are closing or reducing their office space. The college Tech Center may not be practical to serve the southern half of Iron County. The old ranger station in Mercer could be used for something like this. It would be a question as to whether the town would be willing to take over the old station.

Community Resources: (Notes sent in by Amy Nosal) “FeLiveLife.org has just started adding in-person events, making a particular point to encourage proper safety measures and kindness. I'm working on a longer term plan to keep the project going thru the year.

Neil has 2 summer interns and while we are working at home they are coming up with plans to keep 4-Hers engaged online thru the summer and working on a promotional video.

Also, I appreciate Glen's ideas on the ISP listing, especially as included in a general list of area resources. Iron County Health Dept was working with NorthLakes on a community resource guide, but it might have been lost in the COVID-19 shuffle.

Tom Bergman and Dustin Filippini have discussed this kind of shared-worker space idea; it could be fun to loop them in too. Exciting times for the college, no doubt! And then too Charly and Bessemer...hadn't heard of that yet.

Along those lines, tangentially, GCC commercial kitchen as a business development space!”

Other: none

Meeting adjourned at 1:05 pm.

Submitted by Opal Roberts