

**Gogebic Range Broadband Committee**  
**October 28 2020 meeting notes**

**Norman McKindles** opened the online Zoom meeting at 12:02 pm.

**Participants:** Norm McKindles (primary/secondary education), Kelly Klein (Iron Co. Economic Development), Joe Bonovetz (Gogebic County), Glen Ackerman-Behr (Gogebic Community College), Jim Lundburg (Merit), Keason Sanvordenker (Merit Community Engagement Manager), Amy Nosal (UW-Extension), Richard Thiede (Oma resident), Mike Shouldice (Mercer resident), Dean Gustafson (Mercer resident), Opal Roberts (Iron County Supervisor) and Richard Jenkins (Daily Globe).

**UW-Extension:** Amy is working with the resource calendar establishing a regional and broader economic focus. We need to educate businesses to online resources in the area. Example is the county using the Smart Screen for online meetings. Amy explained some of the programs Neil Klemme has been working on or moving forward.

Glen stated the college is ready to do Workspace but the campus is in a two week lock down due to a COVID spike. The Keweenaw has had a bumper crop of visitors. The UP still has too many gaps in coverage. He does not think we have reached a critical mass of users where it will be imperative to provide service to a large number of the public.

Kelly reported hearing from realtors and contractors who are arriving in the area due to having more remote work options. Bug Tussel (AT&T contractor) contacted Kelly about placing broadband equipment on their proposed towers in locations like White Cap and Island Lake. He (Kelly) will be having a phone conference with Bug Tussel tomorrow. AT&T cell towers are usually 300' high.

Jim said Porcupine Mountains has been seeing a record number of visitors. COVID is showing corporations they do not need as much office space.

Dick Thiede said the present occupant of their rented cabin is a psychiatrist who is working from there.

**Tower Updates:** Since Brandon wasn't in attendance Norm and Kelly gave the tower updates. Fisher Lake Tower is not constructed yet but will be going up soon. Foundation and building is already there. The tower will be on battery power until the utility company can get to the project next spring. Norm attended the Mercer Sanitary District October meeting and they indicated they are ready to go with the micro-pop equipment of the water tower. Households south of the water tower will be able to get service and those north of the tower may be able to get access as well. Brandon met with the Lauers (Musky Point Resort) and he felt it went really well. They are very interested in getting service to the area via a micro-pop on their property. May be able to get concrete for that in the ground this year.

Norm stressed the need to write a Thank You to Jack Schuett for all his support in locating a site for a tower in the Lake of the Falls area. His help has been invaluable.

**Regional Planning Commission Survey:** Klein reported the survey is still on target. Should be ready to mail out November 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup>. He will send out a press release soon explaining the purpose of the survey and how important the answers will be to future projects. The survey will give us coverage data and possible economic impact. Also how interested the public is in learning technology.

**Community Education Subcommittee:** Glen reported he engages with the schools on numerous occasions and there are a number of complications with going to online learning.

**MI Moonshot Program:** Keason gave a presentation on the Moonshot program. Their purpose is as a resource for bringing broadband to rural areas. There is data and mapping, funding policies, education, and other resources available. The first steps for entities interested in bringing broadband to their communities is the build support for the project and get together a team. Next is to establish goals. Then on to data collection where measuring and defining our needs leads to a feasibility study. After the study is the planning and building of the network, then how to operate and maintain the project. Merit's goal is to help entities help themselves.

Lots of effort going on downstate with businesses, foundations, counties, townships and energy companies working strongly on broadband. No so much in the UP.

There followed comments on how broadband is handled differently in MI and WI. Funding is not readily available in MI as it is in WI. Not much money available from downstate for projects up here. Good to see these initiatives going on in WI. Most broadband entities are operating off the Merit backbone network. Merit is owned by twelve MI Universities. Big companies are not interested in rural areas so groups like ours are much needed. Discussed pros and cons of wireless versus fiber.

Possible partners might be Superior Connections who have been at our meetings off and on. Glen stated we do not work enough with the tribes to expand service. Dick Thiede will reach out to Bad River again and try to get them to our next meeting. Jim said that our broadband committee is blessed with being able to work with Gogebic Range.net and Iron County. State Representative Beth Meyers, who is on the state broadband committee, is very supportive of our efforts.

Next meeting will be online, Wednesday, December 2nd at noon.

Meeting adjourned at 1:21 pm.

Submitted by Opal Roberts