

Gogebic Range Broadband Committee
January 27, 2021 meeting notes

Norman McKindles opened the online Zoom meeting at 12:00pm.

Participants: Norman Mckindles (primary/secondary education), Glen Ackerman-Behr (Gogebic Community College), Amy Nosal (Extension Iron County), Joe Bonovetz (Gogebic County), Kelly Klein (Iron County Economic Development), Richard Theide (Oma), Brandon Yuchasz (GogebicRange.net), Jerry Wourenmaa (WUPPDR), Rita Franzoi (Hurley Chamber of Commerce), Thomas (Tom) Stephenson (Connect MI), and Rich Jenkins (Your Daily Globe)

Tower Updates: Brandon updated the group that work on the Fisher Lake Tower will resume as weather allows. Other tower updates in the Mercer area like Lake of the Falls/Musky Point are currently in communication with the PSC to obtain approval to change funding structure.

Additionally, Brandon provided an update on the Wakefield township updates, which have been completed for a few months now. There are lots of new customers now getting service, and current customers getting upgrades. There may be potential to expand services south of US 2 beyond the SE end of Wakefield's city limits.

Future Projects & Funding Sources: Norman placed this topic on the agenda with PSC in mind, and it also relates to Tom's Regional Digital Opportunity Auction update below. Norman, Brandon and Kelly have been talking supplementing Iron County's broadband access with LTE technology. There are places in Iron County where people are being turned away because access is filling up.

Tom talked about [ReConnect](#), the USDA broadband loan and grant program which will have 900 million dollars back into it. Most recently Michigan got a few grants in the lower half around the Hastings and Alpena areas. The [TIA](#) (Telecommunication Industry Association) will have money too. Michigan just closed applications for [Connecting Michigan Communities Grant 2.0 program](#), and winners will be announced later this year. COVID continues to cause project implementation delays, generally there isn't a lot of action due to a shortage of labor and materials.

Jerry mentioned [InvestUP](#) is prioritizing broadband and looking for U.P. wide collaboration; currently they are working on list of stakeholders and providers, coordinated by eastern region, with the goal to connect and update everyone. Gogebic already has a provider list, so now time to expand to other western U.P. counties. These lists include schools like ISDs. If you know folks who should be involved, tell Jerry!

[Regional Planning Commission Survey Response Data:](#) Kelly shared an update that from our last meeting he had close to 800 responses, but another push before Dec. 20 increased the total to 924 Iron County responses (in 2013 the total was 804). The Planning Commission is currently entering the data, which should be ready as initial draft and map around summer, with a final report in fall.

Community Education Subcommittee: Glen noted the subcommittee has not met yet but shared relevant updates. There's a collaboration of western U.P. partners creating the [Tomorrow's Talent Series](#) spearheaded by Michigan Tech; it's a series of videos where employers tape a day in the life and share

on their website. Glen is helping to create curriculum for 7 and 8 graders, with the understanding we have to get young people and businesses interested now so that they can start to improve training options, resources and connections. Glen also noticed that [Intuit](#) is in the top ten for county recruitment.

Business Center / Shared Workspace: Kelly mentioned that he, Amy and Glen were networking across the region on the topic of shared workspaces. For Kelly, a takeaway was to not think about such opportunities as standalone businesses because there is not enough revenue. Instead, it might work in a setting within a larger entity like Gogebic Community College, as Glen is exploring. Mixed use spaces seem to be good, with an anchor tenant and tech support. The City of Bessemer is another area partner working on something similar. Kelly noted it would be nice if we could promote a shared workspace to our remote workforce. All around stakeholders want resources and networking. Tom said it mirrored what he is seeing working with others.

Bug Tussel Broadband Expansion Initiative: The group has not heard an update on the [PSC grant](#) yet. The public comment period just ended, it will be up to the governor to announce awards, maybe in February or March. Bug Tussel is building some new cell towers in the area, and worked with this group on the grant application for broadband equipment; it might be a long shot for Iron County but we'll see! Bug Tussel has several live towers now in Gurney, Kimball, Island Lake, Springstead and HWY 182, Saxon, Schamburg Park and Flambeau Damn Road (carrying AT&T signal).

WXPR Radio Interview on Tele-Commuting in the North Woods: Kelly was reached out to last fall, and the story came out this month: [Following Lead of World Bank Employee, Iron County Seeks to Attract Remote Workers.](#)

Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (FDOF)/904 Auction: Tom explained that this funding opportunity accepted applications in July, announced winners in December, and currently is writing project contracts. These projects include up to a 6 year build out timeline and subsidies will cover 25% of costs (so, still significant private investment). This competitive funding was up to a total of \$16 billion, but not all of it has been awarded yet. A Phase 2 will occur as 905 auction (Leftover \$7 billion with \$4 billion for \$11 billion). There is now a law that digital opportunity data collection to make the maps better, but the legislature did not add money to accomplish such when the law first passed; it has since been added. New chairman at FCC, Rosenworsell, is putting Phase 2 on hold until the better maps are created.

Tom also shared a variety of other broadband updates: Charter's been picked up by Time Warner, and working a next phase of grants. [Connect MI](#) grants are about filling in spots still without service. Space X (Elon Musk) and satellites have some money; focus groups using the Beta system say it's fast but a little expensive (\$500 modem and \$100/mo. for service). FCC says Space X may not be a long-term solution, lots unknown yet.

Community Resources: Amy explained that after some time brainstorming and connecting with regional partners, [FeLiveLife.org](#) is currently building its latest action plan, which will aim to improve connection to community resources.

Next meeting will be online Wednesday, February 24, 2021 @ 12 noon.

Meeting concluded at 12:51pm.

Submitted by Amy Nosal