

Gogebic Range Broadband Committee
April 28 2021 meeting notes

Norman McKindles opened the online Zoom meeting at 12:01 pm.

Participants: Norm McKindles (primary/secondary education), Kelly Klein (Iron Co. Economic Development), Joe Bonovetz (Gogebic County), Glen Ackerman-Behr (Gogebic Community College), Thomas Stephenson (Connect MI), Jay Kangas (Ironwood Township Supervisor), Marie Graser (Ironwood Township Treasurer), Richard Thiede (Oma resident), Dean Gustafson (Mercer resident), Mike Shouldice (Mercer resident), Dan Hance (Watersmeet Township Internet Taskforce), and Opal Roberts (Iron County Supervisor).

Tower Updates: The Fisher Lake Tower is halfway completed. The Water Tower micro-pop contract and agreement is in hands of the Sanitary District attorney for review. Possibly online by June first. Still waiting on the PSC for permission to change the construct of the Lake of the Falls/Musky Point tower. The proposed upgrade with LTE equipment on the Popko Circle tower may reach some of the Lake of the Falls area.

Bug Tussel Grant for Iron County: Kelly is working on a meeting with Bug Tussel. Currently Bug Tussel is looking at September to start installation of Broadband equipment on about nine towers. These towers are spaced far enough from Gogebic Range.net towers so little overlap is expected.

Tom reported the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) is providing over 4,000 hotspots for MI students, all in rural areas. All the schools are in lower MI because no UP schools applied for the grant.

Business Center/Shared Workspace: Glen reported the college is still interested in hosting the workspace and others are working on similar spaces closer to downtown Ironwood. A possible workspace in Mercer was suggested by Thiede. It would make an excellent internet café and revitalize an important historical building in downtown Mercer. He will take the lead and check on the feasibility of this project.

Community Resources: The Vilas County virtual meeting was promoted as a resource for remote workers to meet up and Kelly and Amy Nosal thought this is something Iron and Gogebic Counties could do. Glen agreed that a virtual workshop for remote workers, especially for newcomers to the area to establish connections to the community, would be a good project.

Several hospitals are offering telehealth services. Some clinics are eligible for \$250,000,000 in grants for this.

Grant information: Wisconsin governor has proposed \$200,000,000 for Broadband expansion. The Federal government recovery program may add another \$200,000,000 to that.

FCC Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF): Dan Hance asked about any activity from RDOF. Joe Bonovitz reported no follow up on the meeting they had. Dan asked if there are activities we can do to promote this project. McKindles referred to the fact that splicers are in short supply. We do not know what skills the workers on the installation of the lines would need. Thiede asked if GCC had any courses planned for these skills. Companies need to approach GCC and ask for specific courses Glen replied. As of now the college is waiting to hear of what requirements these jobs entail.

According to Tom AEG will be here in two to three weeks and they have established an office in Escanaba.

SpaceX should be up and running by the end of the year. SpaceX is running a beta testing in several areas and the questions will be about cost of the service and limitations.

T-Mobile is offering home internet but do not know if it has reached our area at this time.

The Emergency Broadband Act, which will be launched in the next couple weeks, will offer a 50% discount for students and senior citizens.

Next meeting will be May 26th at noon via Zoom. On the agenda will be an item to discuss in person/online meetings and a possible time change.

Meeting adjourned at 12:47 pm.

Submitted by Opal Roberts