

\*\*\*\*\*

Gibson County Council  
Special Session  
February 19<sup>th</sup>, ~~2019~~ 2020

\*\*\*\*\*

The Gibson County Council met in Special Session on February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2019, at 3:00 PM at the North Annex Meeting Room.

**Members Present:** Included President Jay Riley, Vice-President Craig Pflug, Councilman Michael Stilwell and Gibson County Auditor Sherri Smith.

Absent: Jeremy Overton, Bill McConnell, Derek McGraw, Dan Beard

The Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag was recited and led by President Riley.

**Topic of the Meeting** – Rural Broadband Access in Southwest Indiana

Presented by Audrie Burkett, Vice President & COO, Economic Development Coalition of Southwest Indiana

EDCoSWI is working with is Mainstream Fiber Networks, a broadband provider headquartered out of Brown County.

Ms. Burkett explained that Broadband has its own language, therefore she shared some important definitions. Internet speeds are measured by how much your internet connection can transfer per second, which is megabits of data per second (Mbps). Download speed refers to how many megabits of data per second it takes to download data from a server in the form of images, videos, text and more. Activities such as listening to music on Spotify, downloading large files or streaming videos on Netflix all require you to download data. Upload speed refers to how many megabits of data per second you can send information from your computer to another device or server on the internet. While downloading information is more common, some online activities need data to travel in the opposite direction. Sending emails, playing live tournament-style video games and video calling a friend require fast upload speeds for you to send data to someone else’s server. The minimum threshold speed for Indiana is 10:1, while the minimum for Federal is 25:3. 1000 Mbps equal 1 Gbps (Gigabytes per second). Fixed broadband technology refers to DSL, cable, wireless or fiber optic products.

DSL, Cable, Wireless, and Fiber are all forms of fixed broadband technology; satellite hotspots or cellular data plans are not fixed broadband solutions.

Warrick County is leading the way; they are working on a 100-mile fiber build with Mainstream. EDCoSWI did not want other communities in this area to be left behind therefore, they formed a Regional Broadband Committee and consists of Vanderburgh, Gibson & Posey County LEDOS

along with Council Members, Commissioners, School Corporations, Libraries, Broadband Experts, Passionate Business Leaders, and Community Foundation Alliances from all three counties.

The Broadband Initiative is hoping to accomplish build of the infrastructure as well as digital inclusion/literacy to ensure no one is left behind.

Purdue Extension compiled data from FCC 477; it is from self-reporting providers and is incorrect. Therefore, a 12-question survey was conducted between September 2019 and January 2020 to try and determine the broadband footprint in the three counties. 2518 total responses were received and provided the following information:

32% of households do not have fixed internet access at home.

83% with internet are not satisfied with their service.

37% with no internet access other than a cell phone or hot spot attempt to work from home.

Since these results were tallied, a total of 2800 responses have been received and the numbers continue to climb. 543 or 21% of the surveys were returned for Gibson County.

Gibson County Technology – 23% do not have fixed broadband access; most of the technology in Gibson County is DSL; cable technology comes in second. The survey identified several “Dead Zones”; one of those being Mt. Olympus area. The entire survey provided more than 50% of the responses taking the speed test had slower speeds than 10:1 speed.

EDCoSWI told the Council they should treat broadband opportunities like you would any economic development deal. The Coalition has met with the seven providers in this area and asked them, where they were and where they were going and how the Coalition could help. They received a variety of responses. Broadband is not a one-size fits all solution. We should be thankful to the providers that have currently made investments in the communities, as it is an expensive endeavor to expand internet services to rural areas. Some providers are making small investments; while another provider came forward with interest in providing a countywide fiber to phone option. Most of the providers are unclear of the needs. The Coalition hopes to educate them

Next Level Connections (Broadband Grant Program) has \$70 Million in funding; it is administered by OCRA. The big difference here, is that the Community will not be the applicant, the Internet Service Provider will be the applicant. This is based on eligible census blocks that currently do not have federal broadband funding; shows speeds lower than 10:1; or do not have any fixed broadband solution.

The timeline presented shows that applications were released December 10, 2019 and Letters of Intent were due February 6, 2020 (126 were submitted), but a community commitment was not included in the Letter of Intent. Mainstream did submit as a placeholder for Gibson County with

the census blocks included. There is a challenge period in which the providers are reviewing. The challenges will be published. The full application is due April 10, 2020 with a review period to follow and the award announcements on June 1, 2020. This will be a very competitive grant. Ms. Burkett expects the \$70 million to be awarded and this grant to be concluded.

Ms. Burkett reviewed what Posey and Vanderburgh counties are building and their county's investment. Posey is leaning toward Rainy Day Funds, while Vanderburgh is looking into TIF to provide the match.

**With Grant funding secured:**

Proposed project cost for Gibson County would be \$5.569 million for a total build. The State Grant would provide 53% or \$2,951,570. Gibson County Match would be \$872,477 (County funding is last funding into the project).

The County could have an opportunity to capture back some of their investment as some counties have charged a recovery fee, in which the provider issues those recovery fees back to the County. The County can then decide to apply that back to the initial build or create a new build with the money received. This recovery fee can be in place until the County discontinues the fee.

Once the grant agreement is signed in June, the clock starts ticking and Mainstream, or any Provider would have 24 months to completely build the project as outlined in the grant. The County's funding would be needed in February 2022.

EDCoSWI asked the County if they would commit \$872,477 as part of the local match for Mainstream Fiber's Next Level Connections Grant application for rural Gibson County. They need to know if the County is going to make this commitment as soon as possible and no later than Wednesday of next week.

President Riley asked if the speeds are guaranteed. Ms. Burkett said there are threshold holds they will have to meet for various parties. This grant is fiber into the home.

Councilman Pflug asked if the County were to make this initial investment, would there be additional investment involved at a later point if the provider decides to go beyond the grant boundaries and the answer is no.

Councilman Pflug would like to commit the money for a lifetime investment from EDIT over 2 years, even though it will short the road paving funds. He feels this is a good Economic Development Project for future generations. A consensus felt once EDIT funds are committed, the County has to use these funds and another fund can not be used as substitute.

Councilman Pflug questioned the fact that the maps look biased in that they show more of a need in the I-69 Corridor wrapping back around to northwest Gibson County. Ms. Burkett explained that the Haubstadt and Ft. Branch area have federal funding. Watch Communications is a provider in this area. They recently purchased Sit-Co; they are a wireless company and place

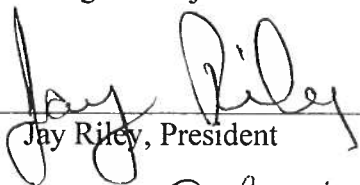
towers on high structures such as grain bins, etc. EDCoSWI has been engaged in conversation with them to see how they can help them expand. They have received some federal funding and are going to be upgrading their infrastructure.

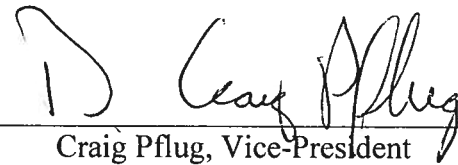
Councilman Pflug is interested in the recovery fee from users of \$3.00 - \$5.00 per month.

Councilman Pflug feels a meeting between the Commissioners and the Council should take place to discuss this matter where both parties can vote. It was decided that a Joint Special Meeting with Commissioners & Council will be held on February 25, 2020 at 4:00 p.m.


Minutes from the February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2019 meeting.

This meeting was adjourned 4:22 p.m.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Jay Riley, President

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Craig Pflug, Vice-President

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Michael Stilwell, Councilman

Attest:   
\_\_\_\_\_  
Sherri Smith, Gibson County Auditor