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Gibson County Council & Board of Commissioners  
Joint Special Session  
February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020

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The Gibson County Council and Board of Commissioners met in a Joint Special Session on February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020, at 4:00 PM in the North Annex Meeting Room.

**Members Present:** Included President Jay Riley, Vice-President Craig Pflug, Councilmen William McConnell (left before the meeting concluded), Derek McGraw, Dan Beard, Michael Stilwell, Commissioner President Gerald Bledsoe, Vice-President Mary Key, County Attorney James McDonald and Gibson County Auditor Sherri Smith.

Absent: Jeremy Overton, Michael Stilwell, Stephen Bottoms

Also, in attendance was Audrie Burkett, Vice President & COO, Economic Development Coalition Southwest Indiana.

**Topic of the Meeting:** Broadband for Gibson County and Grant Application/Match

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 (first number) 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 (2<sup>nd</sup> number) 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 building 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 overstated and 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 other providers 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; they show 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 LOI were submitted), a community commitment is not included in the Letter of Intent. Mainstream did submit 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. Mainstream would provide 2/3 of the cost or \$1,744,953 and Gibson County Match would be 1/3 of the cost or \$872,477 (County funding is the last funding into the project). This will install a total of 53 miles of middle mile infrastructure and include approximately 2900 passing's in a census block and equate to 2200-2300 homes plus businesses. Mainstream will attend Council meetings in Towns, Cities, and Counties in order to get the word out about their product. They set up an office in Warrick County to do their marketing and sign up new customers. They will target an area, using the surveys on hand and try to reach as many people as they can to build out from that. Ms. Burkett stressed the importance of completing the survey so they can better identify the needs in Gibson County.

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

Councilman Pflug asked how fast the broadband would reach customers once the trunk line is installed. Ms. Burkett said it will take approximately six months for the initial infrastructure build; the EDCoSWI will help the provider decide the zones. They try to determine the area with the most need, which would be those without any internet access. The next levels would be those that have internet issues. All information is derived from completed surveys, thus the urgency for all Gibson County residents to complete these surveys. Once the first zone is decided the Provider will hit the area with marketing and start the install in that zone. Therefore, it could essentially be 6 months for this first install. If they leave that zone and a new customer commits after they leave that zone, it could take a little while to get back to that zone. EDCoSWI highly praised Mainstream in their understanding of the rural broadband issues.

Mainstreams package prices start at \$49.95. The County has 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. EDCoSWI has seen other counties do this in different ways, it is simply up to the County.

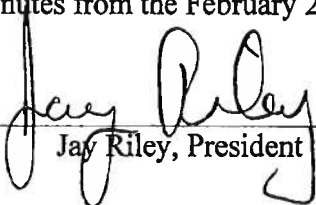
EDCoSWI asked the County if they would commit \$872,477 as part of the local match for Mainstream Fiber's Next Level Connections Grant application for rural Gibson County. Councilman Pflug feels EDIT funds would make for the best match as the County receives approximately \$3 million per year with a spending plan of \$2.6 million. Councilman Pflug made a motion for the County Commissioners to fund this grant with \$872,477 of EDIT funds due in February 2022; seconded by Councilman McGraw. With no further discussion, the motion carried 4-0.

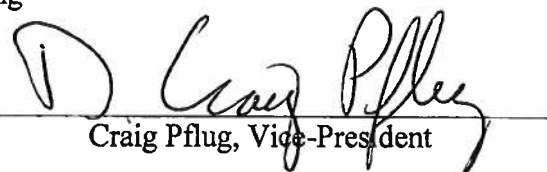
Commissioner Key then motioned to commit the \$872,477 in EDIT funds by February 2022, seconded by Commissioner Bledsoe with a caveat added that the recovery fee be attached with the amount to be decided later. The fee will only be used for additional broadband expansion. With no further discussion, the motion carried 2-0.

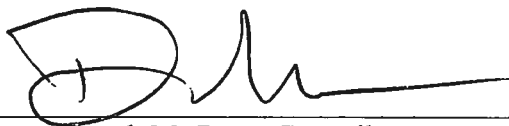
EDCoSWI thanked both the Commissioners and Council for allowing them to present this opportunity as well as other opportunities to Gibson County. Another plea was made for residents to, immediately submit letters regarding their no/poor internet service. The State needs to be able to identify the area's most in need for broadband solutions. The more letters received the better the chance of being awarded grant funding.

With no further business, Councilman McGraw motioned to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Commissioner Key. With no further discussion, the motion carried 6-0.

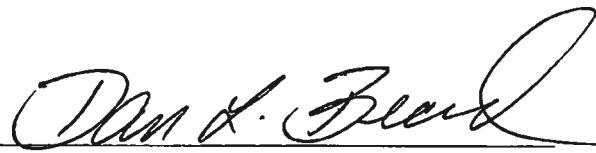
Minutes from the February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020 Special Meeting

  
Jay Riley, President

  
Craig Pflug, Vice-President

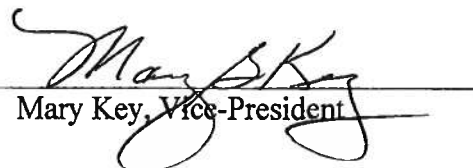


Derek McGraw, Councilman



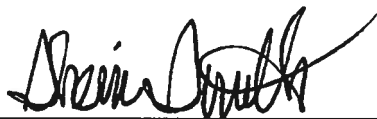
Dan Beard, Councilman

Gerald Bledsoe, President



Mary Key, Vice-President

Attest:



Sherri Smith, Gibson County Auditor