



**CHAMPAIGN COUNTY BOARD
BROADBAND TASK FORCE AGENDA**

County of Champaign, Urbana, Illinois
Monday, July 11, 2022 - 4:30 p.m.

Shields-Carter Meeting Room
Brookens Administrative Center
1776 E. Washington St., Urbana

MINUTES – Approved as Distributed August 15, 2022

Members Present: Stephanie Burnett, M.C. Neal, Kyle Patterson, Mike Smeltzer, Eric Thorsland, and Brad Uken

Members Absent: Samantha Carter, Brad Passalacqua, and Jacob Paul

Others Present: Darlene Kloeppel (County Executive), Mary Alice Wu and Dawn Owens (U of I), Tim Arbeiter (Finley Engineering) Mary Ellen Wuellner (Grant Writer), and Mary Ward (Recording Secretary)

Agenda Items

I. Call to Order

Mr. Uken called the meeting to order at 4:30 p.m.

II. Roll Call

Roll call was taken, and a quorum was declared present.

III. Approval of Agenda/Addendum

MOTION by Mr. Thorsland to approve the agenda; seconded by Mr. Smeltzer. Upon voice vote, the **MOTION CARRIED** unanimously.

IV. Approval of Minutes

A. April 26, 2022

MOTION by Mr. Thorsland to approve the minutes of the April 26, 2022 meeting, seconded by Mr. Smeltzer. Upon voice vote, the **MOTION CARRIED** unanimously.

V. Public Participation

There was no Public Participation.

VI. Communications

There were no communications.

VII. New Business

A. Community Survey Results

Maryalice Wu and Dawn Owens, both with CITL at the U of I, gave an overview the Community Survey and how they conducted the project, the results obtained and technical details of the Community Survey. The survey was a statistically valid survey of the County asking how much people supported the idea of the County investing in Broadband and how likely were they to subscribe. Other questions were asked

regarding what they liked about their service, what type of service they currently have, how much they're currently paying and what types of things they do over the internet.

There were four main methods of communicating with people: by mail, canvassing, text blasts and promotion. The County sent out 3,699 postcards each with a unique code. A second mailing went specifically to the rural areas. There was a huge canvassing effort – they were able to contact 2,842 different households. Farm Bureau did text blasts to 1,880 members. Various promotions via an interview on Illinois Homepage, various community Facebook postings, Farm Bureau meetings and Farm Bureau email blasts.

They went over the results of the survey, which can be found at:
<https://www.co.champaign.il.us/CountyBoard/Broadband.php>

Mr. Uken thanked them for all the work they did on the survey.

Mr. Neal asked how the question on value was worded. For the value question and the quality index question it was grouped by region, would it be possible to get that by ISP? The value question was worded like, please rate the value you get for the price you pay. There will be a more comprehensive report coming that will include the survey questions.

Mr. Uken asked what challenges they still see with the data? The Regions weren't the same size and out of proportion. 20% of the responses were from farms and had to do weighting. Mr. Uken suggested they may need to explain weighted/unweighted, so it makes sense online.

Mr. Smeltzer said that one thing is a tiny blip in a great body of work. Thanked them for their work. Ms. Owen asked if there is anything other information needed for the grant writers. Mr. Arbeiter from Finley said that this is a very comprehensive report. Ms. Wu stated that they will also be writing a meta-data report.

B. Request for Information (RFI) Report

Tim Arbeiter from Finley started off by saying hats off to the Task Force, County leadership and the survey group for the fine work on the data. A lot of counties don't move as quickly into action as we have done. Their first key recommendation was to get statistical data. This will make an impact on future funding requests.

The new Federal funding and the State funding that is coming have aligned the definitions of served areas, under-served areas, and unserved. In Illinois there is a fourth definition of highly unserved. Connect Illinois has that fourth level.

The RFI was published to all existing providers and was published on the county's website. The RFI was sent directly to several providers. He then presented the report which can also be found on the Broadband page on the County's website.

He went through the respondents including AT&T, Bluebird Network, CCG Fiber / Pavlov Media, Comcast of Illinois, Digital Infrastructure Group (DIG), Frontier Communications, MFWireless, Nextlink Internet, and Volo.net Internet. Any proprietary information has been redacted from the report. The first question was, "Do you have interest in your county to expand broadband?" The answer is, "Yes". We asked the respondents to look at the six sectors and give us a breakdown of which areas of interests they are interested in.

He went over the RFI Ranking Breakdown and the various tables in that report. He also went over the maps. They show the grant eligible areas and exclude the RDOF areas. The pink areas are eligible for Connect Illinois.

Mr. Arbeiter then went over the large rubric which contains all the information from the responding providers on one sheet. Seven of the nine providers have used grant funding previously. Many of them are planning on going after the Connect Illinois funds.

There is interest; so now, on to the next steps.

C. Strategic Considerations for Bringing Broadband to Unserved and Underserved Areas of Champaign County

D. Task Force Recommendation for July 21 Champaign County Board Meeting

Mr. Smeltzer asked if the chart could be put in the same order as the report. It would be easier to look at it all at the same time. It looks like there are seven providers that look like they are interested in providing to all areas.

Mr. Uken asked to clarify the companies that want to do all fiber to the entire county are: Comcast, Frontier, Pavlov and Volo. Mr. Arbeiter said that the ones that said entire county there would probably be some hybrid; Volo was stronger on the fiber standpoint. Comcast said all county as they ranked all of their sector's number one. When you rank all of them number one, it begs the question of the ability to get it all done in the time frame. He would also say that of others. Most wanted to do fiber with hybrid on a few of these.

Mr. Thorsland felt he needed more time to look at the information. Who's interested in the full area of the county and using fiber and then look at things like speed. If they said they were interested in the whole county and then listed priority areas, does that mean they were interested in doing those areas first? Mr. Arbeiter said there really is no interpretation on that. He will do some more analysis on the fiber vs fixed wireless hybrid combos.

There is a lot to look at and digest and its great information for the Task Force.

Mr. Smeltzer asked for Finley's thoughts on putting out an RFP to see if there's a provider willing to do the whole county and not consider any partial. If there is a provider willing to do the whole county, the next step is finding out what are they estimating the total bill to be knowing there's only so much support the county is willing to provide. You would do this with a number of the providers that indicated county wide. He would also encourage those that have bigger swaths or multiple sectors, while it is tempting to go with one provider to do the whole county, you have to ask the competitiveness of the application. It is a large amount of territory to cover. The time is good as Connect Illinois reopens in the fall. Connect Illinois has a 90-day rotation cycle. It could be one provider or multiple proposals from multiple providers. There are nine opportunities, which ones do you want to advance the conversation with?

Mr. Neal asked what scenario provides the best chance of getting funding? We don't know all the dynamics at this point. Those proposals that have county support, whether that support is through a monetary match, will definitely strengthen the proposals. The State asks for the project area, timeline, milestones and can you meet the timelines. It really comes down to the numbers and what's being asked for. They will look at those with the highest number of points in those areas.

Would it be better to do interviews, RFPs, or RFQ's to learn providers milestones, timelines, etc.? It would help to do some interviews with those you are interested in advancing forward. They should be able to estimate, from their company perspective, the total bill cost, type of support they are looking for from the county.

Mr. Uken thinks interviews are the next step and he could give the ones he thinks we should interview along with reasons to interview them and reasons not to do the other four.

Mr. Thorsland agreed. He is hesitant to do nine companies and go to the state. It would be hard to coordinate. With two to three strong contenders the main question is do you have the manpower and equipment to do the whole county, and can you do it within the timeframe given the amount of money we think we are going to have. If they are hesitant, they may not be a great contender; if they have good answers then they are. He sees a couple of strong contenders and agrees interviews are the way to go. He asked about the timeline and recommending what to the County Board on July 21.

Mr. Uken talked about timeline. There is a desire to come up with a report or recommendation for the July 21 County Board meeting. We may have until the August board meeting. At that time, we would have to have a final recommendation. We would have to have had the interviews and here is our recommendation.

Ms. Kloepfel stated that timeline she's been discussing with Brad has to do with the budget that has to be approved. The second ARPA funds have been received. It needs to be allocated and committed by the end of 2024. It also needs to be in the budget otherwise it's not allocated money. It doesn't have to have a specific company picked out at that time but need an amount to be allocated to Broadband.

Mr. Thorsland doesn't think we can do interviews and have a recommendation by July 21. Mr. Uken thought that Finley would be the one to set up the interviews as they have the contact information, etc. Mr. Smeltzer asked about the procurement process. Ms. Kloepfel said we are not actually purchasing anything, it's a partnership. We are selecting a partner to partner with the County.

Mr. Uken said the companies he would like to interview include: Comcast, Frontier, Pavlov and Volo and the fifth one is NextLink. His reasons are they want to do the entire county and the first four want to do fiber. And NextLink, while they are hybrid, they are proposing to cover the entire county. The other four; MFWireless does not meet the speed test, AT&T and Bluebird are fiber but only part of the county and DIG didn't follow directions.

Mr. Thorsland agreed. He excluded the same four and has a high degree of interest in the five. Mr. Smeltzer also felt that those were the right five to interview. It makes sense to leave NextLink on the list as they are the RDOF winner and have shown they are willing to invest money in Champaign County. Mr. Patterson added that it makes sense to narrow the list down and do interviews. Mr. Neal said he agreed with the first four on the list. He did not have NextLink on his list, but he has no problem adding them.

Ms. Kloepfel felt interviews would be a good next step. Do we want the whole committee to interview or use a sub-committee?

Mr. Arbeiter agrees interviews should be next and can get to next level questions. Interviews are part of the process and part of the agreement of the county. They can also help come up with the questions.

Mr. Thorsland asked about the process for the interviews.

We need to give the providers some time to prepare and if we know the questions in advance, we could send those to them.

Ms. Kloepfel said the group could decide questions as a whole and a sub-committee could do the interviews. The interviews could be more confidential. The sub-committee would report back to the Task Force. The final selection would need to be at a public meeting. The sub-committee would need to be a committee of two task force members and could include MaryEllen and/or Tim. These could also be done on Zoom.

Mr. Thorsland nominated Mr. Smeltzer as he always has great questions and Mr. Uken as the chair or Mr. Neal has the technology background. Mr. Patterson agreed.

The consensus is to do interviews with Comcast, Frontier, Pavlov, Volo and NextLink. The sub-committee will consist of Mike Smeltzer, Brad Uken, Tim or Sean from Finley and someone from the Executive's Office.

Interviews will be the next step. Discussion then centered on the questions that will be asked. Mr. Thorsland asked if the questions could be emailed and not Reply All.

After discussion it was decided to send an email to get the questions and topics for questions. Mr. Uken will work with Tim on coordinating dates, times and questions.

VIII. Other Business

A. Date of Next Meeting – July 14, 2022 at 4:30 p.m.

The meeting scheduled for July 14 has been cancelled.

IX. Chair's Report

There was no Chair's Report.

X. Adjournment

Mr. Uken adjourned the meeting at 6:20 p.m.

Please note the minutes reflect the order of the agenda and may not necessarily reflect the order of business conducted at the meeting.