

Broadband Task Force

315 W Green St, Marshall, MI 49068 | calhouncountymi.gov/broadband



February 14, 2023 Meeting Minutes

1. Roll Call

Task Force Members in

Attendance:

Angela Stewart
Kathy Szenda Wilson
Paul Egnatuk
Sonja Elder
Paulette Porter
Art Kale
Mike Nofs
Derek Perry
Haley Snyder
Robert Stahelin/Tina

Task Force Members Absent:

Michael "Mac" McCullough
Jim Haadsma
Lee Adams
Marc Newman
Dr. Paul Watson
Gary Tompkins
Lorie Upright
Barry Skutt Jr
Jeff Albaugh

Others in Attendance:

Kelli Scott
Lucy Blair
Lynn Meikle
Brent Thelen
Erin Cummings
David Hackett
Mike Watz
Ziggy Rivkin-Fish

2. Final Report from CTC

Communications Director Lucy Blair explained the full report from CTC was received and distributed to the Task Force. Blair highlighted what was in the report including 3 possible models and recommendations from CTC – issue an Request for Proposal (RFP) which the County has done, focus on pilot projects, leverage funding opportunities, increase Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) enrollment in the county, continue to engage with MIHI. Blair also highlighted in the report the poor connectivity in rural areas, maps that were included in the report, ACP program and data, and phone survey results that CTC conducted. This report will be promoted in the County.

3. **Application for ROBIN Grant**

Administrator/Controller Kelli Scott gave a background of how the County and Task Force started the broadband initiative and where it is at today. The real value of the CTC Road Map report is the smaller recommendations in the exhibits, data and maps as the County moves forward with the RFP.

The RFP was sent to Internet Service Providers (ISPs) in the Calhoun County area and, five responses were received. Staff is in the process of finalizing recommendations to partner with the Realizing Opportunity for Broadband Infrastructure Network (ROBIN) grant that is due March 14th.

Scott explained the Broadband Equity Access and Deployment (BEAD) Grant and the ROBIN Grant. She explained some of the guidelines of the ROBIN grant, including that county can not apply directly for the funds. ISPs are interested in serving the majority of the unserved in the County, so staff is currently working on designating more County American Rescue Plan Act funds to possibly provide a match for the grant, so the opportunity is not missed. Scott said staff will be reaching out to community institutions for support for the ROBIN Grant. The pilot program being considered is about \$25 million.

Blair talked about drafting letters of support for the grant process.

4. **ACP Plan**

Communications Director gave some background of the ACP. In Calhoun 34% of household are eligible roughly 18,000, and only 5,000 are enrolled. Staff is working on a plan to increase enrolled and get people connected. Starting with a County education campaign and targeted outreach by target groups: colleges, senior centers, Public Health Department, Veteran Affairs, governments, schools, libraries, rural and NHBP tribe. The plan also lists out in detail who is eligible. Staff would meet with groups to explain the program and give them the tools they need to promote the program. Grant dollars are also available for promotion.

Scott stated the bigger goal is to drive down cost with competition. The initial results of the RFP show that we won't have more than one provider in an area, so we don't necessarily have the lowest cost plans.

5. **FCC Map Challenge Update**

Communications Coordinator Lynn Meikle updated the Task Force about the map challenge. Meikle and GIS Manager, Brent Thelen submitted the bulk availability challenge for Calhoun County to the FCC. They have attended meetings with Merit's Broadband Data Challenge Working Group on how to best submit. 9558 challenges were submitted, and once reviewed by the FCC and sent to providers, providers have 60 days to respond.

Next will be a location challenge, however Thelen has done a once over of the addresses and for Calhoun, the addresses are looking accurate and is not finding any big discrepancies.

Meikle will follow up with MIHI on what the State submitted as challenges for Calhoun.

6. Listening Tour Reminder

Blair reminded the Task Force to pre-register on MIHI website for the Listening Tour in Battle Creek on Thursday, February 16. This is an opportunity to talk to the MIHI office and give feedback about the problems Calhoun has with broadband and share what the county has going on.

Scott reiterated we want MIHI to know we are serious about expanding broadband, and it is in the best interest of the County to have a good relationship with MIHI, and figure out if there are ways to prioritize our County.

7. Member Updates

None

8. Citizen's Time

None

9. Adjournment 3:55 pm