

Broadband Task Force

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



January 16, 2024 Meeting Minutes

In 2024, our meetings are Jan. 16, April 9, July 9, and October 8

1. Roll Call

Paul Egnatuk
Chad Frein
Dr. Monique French
Angela Myers
Mike Nofs
Paulette Porter
Kelli Scott
Angela Semifero
Haley Snyder
Dr. Paul Watson
Lorie Upright
Lucy Blair
Lynn Meikle
Michael Watza

Not in Attendance:

Lee Adams
Jeff Albaugh
Sonja Elder
Jim Haadsma
Art Kale
Tommy Miller
Marc Newman
Derek Perry
Tina Rasey for Robert Stahelin
Barry Skutt Jr.
Kathy Szenda Wilson

2. Approval of minutes from the Oct. 10, 2023 meeting

Moved to adopt the minutes by Commissioner Hailey Snyder seconded by Commissioner Monique French. Minutes approved, unanimously.

3. BEAD Update

Communications Director Lucy Blair gave background information on the Broadband Expansion and Development (BEAD) funding. The Michigan High-Speed Internet Office (MIHI) has submitted proposals 1 and 2 to the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) for approval. Volume 1 of the proposals outlines the map challenge process, while Volume 2 provides guidelines for the grant process. MIHI has submitted 4 modifications to the map challenge process regarding DSL and fixed wireless technologies, and area challenges. MIHI recommended pursuing area challenges, with ISPs required to demonstrate their service levels. Albion was identified as an area where FWA is considered served, prompting the need for a challenge. Following the challenge, an eligible list will be compiled, and meetings with ISPs will be arranged. The application process is expected to open in June or July, with construction targeted to begin in 2025.

4. State's Map Challenge

Blair stated map challenges will mainly focus on availability and speed. Merit will provide a website to aid individuals through the challenge process, and MIHI will also have a website where eligible challengers will be able to submit.

Strategies for the challenge include contacting township supervisors, utilizing direct mail in targeted areas, and employing targeted Facebook ads. Hailey Snyder proposed the idea of using their community ambassador position in Albion to help connect with residents, while Commissioner French suggested using QR code cards to engage residents in the Claude Evans Clarke area.

MIHI is aware of the issue with fixed wireless, if it is considered served. Staff has been attending Merit's weekly working group.

5. Digital Equity Subcommittee Update

Angela Semifero, Chair of the Digital Equity Subcommittee, providing an update. She emphasized the importance of digital equity, particularly in identifying stop gap solutions, what already exists in the county, while infrastructure improvements are underway. Angela highlighted the involvement in digital literacy of various sectors such as libraries, senior centers, healthcare, and government. The digital equity survey was done about what resources are available, and the information collected was put on the broadband website. Also, some referral trees were created. Angela outlined the goals set for the committee in 2024.

- Explore digital literacy hub models locally and nationally to understand what's working in other locations
- Identify other agencies in Calhoun County that might like to participate in digital equity efforts (such as digital literacy hubs) but don't for any reason
- Develop talking points for community partners about the importance of this work to assist with advocating for public support
- Identify possible funding sources, locally, state-wide, or federally, that can assist with developing digital literacy solutions in Calhoun County
- Educate the community about digital literacy resources that are already in Calhoun County

6. Legislative Update

Attorney Mike Watza presented a Legislative and Regulatory update, highlighting several key points. BEAD money can now go directly to governments, and he emphasized the need to address PA224. Netflix's is wanting to exempt themselves from cable franchise fees. The 357 Broadband Deployment Act seeks to exclude municipalities from telecommunications involvement. Congress is working on extending the ACP (Affordable Connectivity Program), originally a \$14 billion initiative, with the FCC proposing an additional \$7 billion. And the FCC is focusing on net neutrality and their attempts to impose restraints on ISPs.

7. Member Updates

8. Citizen's Time

9. Adjournment 3:50pm

This meeting is capped at an hour. If we reach an hour before getting to citizens time, please send your questions or comments to Calhoun County staff at information@calhouncountymi.gov.