

Broadband Task Force

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



Sept. 19, 2023 Meeting Minutes

These meetings take place the second Tuesday of the month at 3 p.m.

1. Roll Call

In Attendance:

Lorie Upright
Angela Semifero
Paul Egnatuk
Mike Nofs
Chad Fairley

Paulette Porter

Tina Rasey for Robert Stahelin
Barry Skutt
Haley Snyder
Angela Myers
Kathy Szenda Wilson
Dr. Paul Watson

Not in Attendance:

Chair Michael "Mac" McCullough
Lee Adams
Jeff Albaugh
Sonja Elder
Monique French
Jim Haadsma
Art Kale
Tommy Miller
Marc Newman
Derek Perry

Staff in Attendance:

Kelli Scott
Lucy Blair
Lynn Meikle
David Hackett
Brent Thelen
Eric Cummings
Mike Watza

2. Approval of minutes from the July 11, 2023 meeting

Action: Approval of Broadband Task Force meeting minutes

*Moved to adopt minutes by Member Semifero seconded by Member Egnatuk.
Passes unanimously.*

3. Digital Equity Subcommittee Update

Communications Director, Lucy Blair gave the update about the digital equity subcommittee. Communications staff presented at Heritage Commons, educating senior about the Task Force and Affordable Connectivity Program. Staff has also sent out promotional materials to school districts in hopes to educate staff, students, and families about affordable internet options. Education will be ongoing.

The subcommittee has been meeting monthly, including at Willard Library in August and Marshall District Library in September. The location's representative has presented to the group what technical services and resources they provide visitors in regards to digital equity.

The latest ACP enrollment in Calhoun County from June 2023 is 11,285 households enrolled in the program. This is most likely due to the outreach that the county has done as well as a state push of promotion. CTC's Broadband report from the beginning of the year stated 5,073 households were enrolled at the end of December 2022. Around 15,000 households are eligible in the county. Work is ongoing.

The digital equity survey has been sent out to township and non-profits. The committee is gathering the survey results and will be analyzing the data. County staff will forward the list of who has participated in the survey to the Task Force.

Angela Semifeo has accepted the position of chair of the sub-committee. Marshall District Library has been a leader in digital equity in the County.

4. Broadband, Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Grant Timeline in Michigan – provided by Merit

Communications Coordinator, Lynn Meikle provided an update. County staff has been part of the Broadband Working Group hosted by Merit. At the last meeting Ben Fineman from NTIA and Eric Fredrick from MIHI gave updates on Broadband Equity Access and Deployment (BEAD) program. So far, the BEAD 5 Year Plan has been submitted to the NTIA. The state's BEAD initial proposal will have 2 volumes to it, the first volume on the State Mapping Challenge Process coming out in late September and the second volume on the BEAD Competitive Grant Process mid-October, with time for comments on both and them being submitted to NTIA in December. The BEAD application process should start in May or June 2024.

The state Mapping Challenge Process will be conducted in mid-January and will run for 90 or 120 days. Meikle stated the county should be looking at the NTIA model challenge process that has been released and start gathering information now. MIHI will be using this as their basis for the state mapping challenge process as well as adding 3 modules to make it more robust – broadening the list of community anchor institutions, using speed tests, and allowing area challenges using census blocks.

Blair gave additional background as to why we are doing this.

5. Discussion of map or local broadband workforce development

County staff has been meeting to create a map of the unserved and underserved in Calhoun County, in preparation of meeting with ISP's for BEAD funding. A call for help in creating the map was voiced to the Task Force. Staff will be reaching out to members.

Regarding workforce development, Blair asked if Calhoun has the skilled workforce for broadband deployment. We have heard from NTIA that we should concentrate on being an internet friendly community. Are plans underway to support deployment. Is there anything we can do to facility colleges and ISP collaborating.

6. Member Updates

Blair announced that Chair Mac McCullough is resigning from the Task Force, and the chair position is open. Blair will be reaching out to the Task Force to gauge interest on who would like to take over as chair.

Attorney Mike Watza explained that the FCC has chosen it's 5th member, so there should be movement and reversals on issues like net neutrality, small cell, cable funding and PEG support that may be in favor of local municipalities now that there can be a majority. Watza expressed that the next issue needing attention is getting some of the BEAD money into urban centers for broadband.

Watza also explained that thanks to county staff and his work with Merit, the description of local governments being a barrier to broadband deployment has been changed in the Municipal Barrier for Participation section of the final version of the MIHI BEAD 5 Year Plan to much softer language.

7. Citizen's Time
None

8. Adjournment
3:45 p.m.