

**Nebraska Information Technology Commission
Community Council
Thursday, April 1, 2021
2:30 P.M. CT
Zoom Videoconferencing**

The meeting was held as a virtual meeting of the Nebraska Information Technology Commission conducted pursuant to Neb. Exec. Order No. 21-02 (<http://govdocs.nebraska.gov/docs/pilot/pubs/eofiles/21-02.pdf>).

MINUTES

ROLL CALL NOTICE OF POSTING OF AGENDA NOTICE OF NEBRASKA OPEN MEETINGS ACT POSTING

Members Present via Zoom: Pam Adams, Chris Anderson, Jay Anderson, Rod Armstrong, Randy Bretz, Johnathan Hladik, Nichole Reiner, Megan McGown (joined late), Judy Petersen, Mary Ridder (joined late) and Cullen Robbins alternate for Mary Ridder, and Holly Woldt

Members Absent: Connie Hancock, Shonna Dorsey, Mehmet Can Vuran, and David Young

The meeting was called to order by Rod Armstrong at 2:30 p.m. Ten members were present via videoconferencing. A quorum was present.

Meeting notices were posted on the Public Meeting and NITC websites on March 19, 2021. The agenda was posted on the NITC website on March 29, 2021. A copy of the Nebraska Open Meetings Act was available online at https://nitc.nebraska.gov/documents/statutes/NebraskaOpenMeetingsAct_current.pdf.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

APPROVAL OF NOVEMBER 14, 2018 MINUTES

Judy Petersen made a motion to approve the May 29, 2020 and November 12, 2020 minutes. Randy Bretz seconded the motion.

Roll call vote: Adams-Yes, C. Anderson-Yes, J. Anderson-Yes, Armstrong-Yes, Bretz-Yes, Hladik-Yes, Reiner-Yes, Cullen Robbins for Mary Ridder-Abstained, Woldt-Yes. Results: Yes-9, No-0, Abstained-1. Motion carried.

DISCUSSION ITEMS AND UPDATES

NROC and Economic Development Districts Broadband Planning—Tom Bliss

Tom Bliss from the Southeast Nebraska Economic Development District shared information on the broadband planning grant that the Nebraska Regional Officials Council (NROC) and the regional economic development districts received from the Economic Development Administration. The economic development districts have contracted with GeoPartners to set up a broadband speed testing program. Nebraskans can take speed tests by going to <https://www.nebraskaspeedtest.org/>. GeoPartners is using MLab to conduct the Nebraska tests. A map of results can be viewed at the website. The regional economic development districts are also working with NEDA, NACO, NIFA, NPPD, NREA, OPPD, AARP and BCom on the project. A webinar with Christopher Mitchell from the Institute for Local Self- Reliance

is planned for next week. Tom Bliss indicated that he was willing to share speed test data with other organizations. He also said that he could have maps of the results made for specific geographic areas like school districts, public power districts, or legislative districts. The program also allows administrators to prepare preliminary engineering designs and cost estimates for building out broadband in an area. Commissioner Ridder asked if results for mobile and fixed broadband can be segregated. Mr. Bliss will check and send Ms. Byers that information.

Lead for Nebraska— *Rebecca Johnson and Brent Comstock, BCom*

Brent Comstock explained that Lead for Nebraska will work to reduce the digital divide between rural and urban communities and will empower rural Nebraska communities for growth. The program will place recent college graduates as fellows in participating rural communities for two years. Participants will receive training with participants in the Lead For America program before their placement in communities. Host communities are asked to provide funding to aid in living expenses and are asked to help provide housing and office space. The estimated cost is about \$30,000. Matching funds have been provided from state and national level sources. BCom is currently recruiting participants. Anne Byers asked if BCom would be interested in participating in a work group to help identify and develop resources for digital inclusion planning. Mr. Comstock said he would be willing to participate.

Discussion and Possible Action Item: Resources for Developing Digital Inclusion Plans— *Anne Byers*

Anne Byers explained that LB 388 would establish a broadband grant program. Underserved areas with a digital inclusion plan would be among the areas eligible for funding. She proposed forming a working group to identify existing resources and develop other resources if needed to help communities develop digital inclusion plans. Holly Woldt suggested asking Amanda Sweet from the Nebraska Library Commission. Pam Adams and Brent Comstock volunteered to participate in the work group.

Updates on the Rural Broadband Task Force and Broadband Legislation and Funding

Anne Byers noted that updates were included in the meeting materials. Cullen Robbins said that he would also provide updates on some legislation in the PSC update.

PSC Updates—*Cullen Robbins and Commissioner Ridder*

Cullen Ridder gave an update on two bills:

- LB 338 would set up a community-based option to a reverse auction. It also changes the definition of broadband for boundary changes to 100 Mbps down and 20 Mbps down. Any new projects funded must be able to provide 100 Mbps up and down. The bill also requires speed tests for recipients of support.
- LB 388 would establish a state broadband grant program and was introduced by Senator Friesen at the request of Governor Ricketts. The first round of grant applications would be due Oct. 1. Telecommunications providers do not have to be Eligible Telecommunications Carriers (ETCs). The program would include a challenge process. The maximum award would be \$5 million. Commissioner Ridder and Mr. Robbins expressed concern that the 50% match requirement could be a barrier. Jay Anderson commented that counties could use funding from the American Rescue Plan for a match.

The Commission has instituted a new process for distributing support for price cap carriers in which they have to inform the Commission where they are going use their support.

Mr. Robbins also gave an update on NUSF contribution reform. Residential voice connections contribute \$1.75 per month. The Commission is looking at moving businesses to a per connection fee. The Commission is close to a final decision.

The Commission is also making changes to the telehealth program to better align with the FCC Healthcare Connect program. Health care providers can get up to a 65% discount through the federal program. The PSC would provide up to a 25% discount through the telehealth program.

Homework Gap and Library Broadband Update —*Tom Rolfes and Holly Woldt*

Holly Woldt said that seven Nebraska libraries are getting fiber as a result of the Special Construction E-Rate Matching Program. Bancroft Public Library, Bayard Public Library, Beatrice Public Library, Clay Center Public Library, Verdigre Public Library, and Wymore Public Library received matching funds from the Nebraska Universal Service Fund. North Bend Public Library did not require matching funds for fiber construction because fiber was already very close to the building. Ms. Woldt shared a map with more information on each library. The map is available at:

<https://www.zeemaps.com/view?group=4074707&x=-98.480918&y=43.961874&z=12>

Tom Rolfes shared that K-12 educational entities in Nebraska have received \$853 million in COVID-19 relief funding. The funding may be used for devices and broadband connectivity for students. Mr. Rolfes has worked with the Department of Education to develop and provide resources for school administrators. Six approaches to providing connectivity are being piloted. The American Rescue Act passed in December 2020 created a new \$7.1 billion Emergency Connectivity Fund to support remote learning for schools and libraries.

Membership

Anne Byers shared that the Community Council has several openings. Two library representatives—Steve Fosselman and Jessica Chamberlain—have resigned. Holly Woldt and Sam Shaw have identified two library directors below are interested in serving on the Community Council

- Karen Connell, Director Columbus Public Library
- Deb Robertson, Director York Public Library

Also, Connie Hancock has retired. Charlotte Narjes has served as Connie's alternate. She is willing to serve on the Community Council. Rod Armstrong is no longer with the AIM Institute but is still interested in remaining on the Community Council. Tim Lindahl has accepted a position out of state so his position is also vacant.

Commissioner Ridder suggested that Ms. Byers put together a list of current members and vacancies and send it to members.

Other Updates

There were no other updates.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:30 p.m. CT.