

**Nebraska Information Technology Commission  
Community Council**

**Monday, October 25  
1:30 P.M. CT**

**Nebraska Public Service Commission, Hearing Room  
1200 N Street, Suite 300  
Lincoln, NE 68508**

**MINUTES**

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

**Members Present:** Jay Anderson, Rod Armstrong, Randy Bretz, Mary Ridder, Mehmet Can Vuran,

**Members Present via Zoom (Non-voting):** Pam Adams and Johnathan Hladik

**Members Absent:** Chris Anderson, Charlotte Narjes for Connie Hancock, Megan McGown, Judy Peterson, Danny Rockhill, Holly Woldt, and David Young

The meeting was called to order by Rod Armstrong at 1:30 p.m. Six members were present in person. A quorum was not present.

Meeting notices were posted on the Public Meeting and NITC websites on Oct. 8, 2021. The agenda was posted on the NITC website on Oct. 8, 2021. A copy of the Nebraska Open Meetings Act was available on the wall.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

There was no public comment.

**APPROVAL OF April 1, 2021 MINUTES**

Approval of the minutes was tabled.

**Membership**

Three Community Council nominees were present via Zoom and introduced themselves: Debora Robertson, director of the Kilgore Memorial Library in York; Karen Connell, director of the Columbus Public Library; and Rick Nelson, general manager of Custer Public Power District and interim general manager of the Nebraska Rural Electric Association. Members voiced their support for their nominations.

**Updates**

**PSC and Broadband Bridge Update.** Commissioner Ridder reported that the Broadband Bridge grant program is going well so far. Seventy-six applications were received requesting approximately \$31 million in funding. Approximately 20 providers submitted applications. Challenges are due November 5. Grant awards will be announced in early January.

**Rural Broadband Task Force Update.** Commissioner Ridder and Anne Byers highlighted key recommendations from the Task Force's 2021 report to the Legislature and Governor Ricketts. Key recommendations include:

- Initiate a program to map broadband availability for serviceable locations in the state augmented by speed test data.

- Evaluate the results of the Nebraska Public Service Commission's expected reverse auction of NUSF support.
- Coordinate the distribution of NUSF support with other funding sources to avoid duplication of funding and to target funding to areas most in need of support.
- As funding from multiple sources is being utilized for broadband deployment projects, state and federal policymakers will need to develop mechanisms to ensure that broadband networks are being supported.
- Express appreciation to Governor Ricketts and the Legislature for recognizing the importance of broadband to Nebraska and for providing funding for broadband through the Nebraska Broadband Bridge grant program and the Remote Access Rural Broadband Grant program.
- Review the initial round of awards from the Broadband Bridge Grant Program to determine the impact of the program.
- Encourage local and regional broadband planning.
- Establish a state goal of having broadband access to every farm or ranch headquarters. • Focus a portion of broadband funding on the highest cost areas. • Review the initial round of awards from the Broadband Bridge Grant Program to determine if adjustments to program requirements could aid in funding extremely high cost rural areas.
- Encourage public libraries and schools without fiber connections to apply for support for new fiber construction from the E-Rate Special Construction matching fund.
- Encourage school districts, ESUs, public libraries, and communities to implement programs such as Wi-Fi on buses, hotspot lending programs, low cost pay-by-the-month internet access, or alternative wireless deployments for student access on school-issued devices in order to reduce the number of unserved and underserved students.
- Encourage communities and regions to develop digital inclusion plans to address multi-generational needs.
- The telecommunications industry, the state's community colleges, local school districts, and economic development and workforce development agencies should engage in conversations about recruitment of technicians as well as developing training and apprenticeship programs.

Jay Anderson commented that it would be helpful for providers to have a map of ag headquarters when they are planning network builds. Local extension service staff were suggested as a possible resource

**Federal Funding Updates.** Anne Byers gave brief updates on the NITA Broadband Infrastructure Program, American Rescue Act Capital Projects Fund and American Rescue Act Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recover Funds. The Legislature is expected to appropriate federal funding when the Legislature convenes in January.

### **Other Updates**

Anne Byers and Nichole Reiner discussed tentative plans for a broadband conference with Shawna Silvius from MAPA.

Nichole Reiner is working on an economic development score card which includes broadband availability.

Can Vuran shared that the University of Nebraska was awarded a \$100,000 planning grant from the National Science Foundation to address rural broadband connectivity for agriculture.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:00 p.m. CT.