MINUTES
MIFFLIN COUNTY INTERNET SUMMIT
JULY 27, 2016
MIFFLIN COUNTY COURTHOUSE, ANNEX – 10:00 A.M.

Attendee	Company
Aaron Felker	Mifflin County MIS Department
Ann Thompson	Union Township
Barb Harer	South Hills
Beverly Green	First Energy Corp.
Bill Gomes	Mifflin County Planning and Development
Bill Lake	Lake Auto
Bill Shuffstall	Penn State
Brad Kerstetter	Juniata County Planning
Clint Aurand	Armagh Township
Craig Bubb	Municipal Authority of the Borough of Lewistown
Dan Potutschnig	Mifflin County Academy of Science and Technology
Doug Cunningham	Mifflin County School District
Fran Bradley	Atlantic Broadband
Jim Baker	SEDA-COG
John Rhone	Wayne Township
Kay Semler	Planning Commission
Kristen Ritchey	Comcast
Lauren Kershner	The Sentinel
Lincoln Kauffman	Snyder County
Lisa Nancollas	Mifflin County Commissioner
Lisa Smith	Mifflin County Solid Waste Authority
Lori Comp	Senator Jake Corman
Luanne Eckenrode	Valley Rural Electric Coop
Mark Critz	Pennsylvania Rural Development
Mark VanOuse	Nittany Media

Matt Moore	Valley View Retirement Community
Michael Hain	Nittany Media
Mike Buffington	One Stop Communications
Mike Hower	Juniata County Planning
Molly Kinney	Mifflin County Library
Nate Smith	FOXPRO, Inc. and Fame
Rob Postal	MCIDC
Ryan Casner	Oliver Township
Scott Falkner	Falkner Technologies
Scott Kramer	SEDA-COG
Scott Stuck	Standard Steel
Scott Welham	Lewistown Borough
Steve Dunkle	Mifflin County Commissioner
Walt Whitmer	Penn State Extension
Anna Hain	Nittany Media
Mike Tate	GME Communication
Dave Diehl	Atlantic Broadband
Lisa Moist	Mifflin County Public Safety

Bill Gomes, Mifflin County Planning Director, thanked everyone for coming to the meeting. Over six months ago, Penn State decided to move hands on classes in Lewistown to their Worldwide Campus. Penn State thought everyone had access to internet service; however, service is inconsistent in Mifflin County. The Planning and Development Department outreached to municipalities in the county to find that internet service ranges from nonexistent or dial-up to what some consider satisfactory. This meeting is to determine interest and next steps in expanding access to broadband internet access in the county.

Jim Baker, SEDA-COG, has been working on access to internet access for over 16 years. He acknowledged that there is not much help available to expand broadband service. Internet is becoming such an integral part of society that we will not be able to exist without it in the near future. Without reliable access to internet, some individuals/businesses may choose to leave an area and move where there is access. Some places in Mifflin County have good broadband, such as major employers, the hospital and the school district. Jim acknowledged that it is not profitable for companies to spend significant dollars to serve the general rural population. There are several communities who have had similar issues and dealt with them in a number of ways. A list of those articles was distributed with the handout material presented to those in attendance. Jim noted that those communities worked diligently to gain access to broadband. They also worked very hard to access various federal and state

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funding sources aimed at expanding broadband coverage. The USDA and FCC have a significant amount of money to expand broadband, but their rules are very strict and quite complicated. State monies for broadband have essentially dried up and local monies have never existed.

Jim sees three obvious paths to choose going forward. The first and most productive path is to lobby the existing providers to build out and build up what they have. This can be done through public relations and by telling the providers you want the service. Jim recommends notifying them in writing and encouraging your neighbors to contact them as well.

The second path to take is to go to other providers who are not here if the current providers will not expand. Again, return on investment will make the ultimate decision. Alternative suppliers such as local water, sewer or electrical companies have added broadband as part of their services by adding conduit as they lay other lines and then offering that connection to any provider who wants it. This allows multiple suppliers to offer services to the same customers.

The third path and probably the least likely to succeed is to lobby for regulatory reform. The federal government made great efforts to bring high speed broadband to school districts. Most schools have good connection; however, they are not allowed to use it after 4:30 p.m. The Universal Service Administartive Company (USAC) currently receives a universal service fund fee, which is redistributed to companies who provide phone service to offset the cost of the service they provide to customers. USAC is now trying to convert telephone companies to broadband companies. All phone companies, except Verizon, have accepted the funds. USAC is now trying to determine how to distribute the money Verizon has turned down to someone who will provide broadband service to rural customers. This may be a few years away.

The FCC has set national service levels of broadband at 25 megabits down and 3 megabits out, and anything less than this is not broadband service.   Many carriers are silently increasing their levels to this level. The FCC also decided rural broad limits should be 10 megabits down and 1 megabit out.

Jim Baker said the first step is to assemble a community broadband vision. You have to assess where the community is. The stakeholders must be engaged, including businesses and residents. The appropriate technology must be chosen. The decision must then be made as to how to run it. This is an active network and you must have people on hand to manage the network. Once you know the answers to all of your questions, you need to determine costs and see if it is potentially profitable or at least break even.

Following Jim Baker's presentation, Bill Gomes mentioned the unsuccessful efforts to secure federal and state funding on improving internet service. He also stated the need for matching funds for the internet survey and a feasibility study. He then turned the meeting over to Mark Critz.

Mark Critz of the Pennsylvania Rural Development then offered a brief update. Mark is an advisor to the governor on all things rural through the Rural Development Council. The federal government developed a power initiative through the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) to help areas who were negatively affected by the downturn in coal. This year, ARC has $50 million as well as another $50

million for next year. Through his federal service, Mark feels that educational opportunity through broadband service is the number one issue everyone faces. He has seen a digital divide that exists between urban/suburban and rural. Currently, 4% of urban residents do not have broadband internet while 27% of rural residents do not have access to broadband internet. Mark has begun talking to the government at the executive level to expand broadband service in rural areas, outside of the school districts. In April, Mark pulled together about 75 people from various backgrounds to discuss the issue of the digital divide. Mark does not have much to report, but they are talking and educating people as to the importance of expanding internet service. This is not a short process. Public water and sewer have been viewed as a key infrastructure for companies to locate to areas. Broadband is now being viewed as a necessary infrastructure. Tennessee recently did a survey and found that 56% of the companies surveyed said that high speed internet was a reason to locate in an area and 36% of companies said high speed internet is a reason they would expand or leave an area.

Mark has outreached to lobby state senators and representatives on this problem. He likened the issue of internet service to the opioid addiction, although not nearly as dramatic. He said everyone is concerned about it because it is a major issue that is taxing resources of rural counties. Our students are falling behind. Rural hospitals have a difficult time recruiting and retaining specialists. Telecommunication is becoming more and more important.

Bill next included Walt Whitmer and Bill Shuffstall of Penn State Extension who facilitated further discussion to review key thoughts and how to move forward. The first question proposed was how internet service affects Mifflin County?

Nathan Smith of FoxPro shared how a company he previously worked for, GE, struggled to recruit engineers due to lack of infrastructure and support services. He also equated internet with roads, just different technology and a different medium; however, it connects point A to point B and requires maintenance. Internet is a critical infrastructure for technology businesses. Without it, businesses will go elsewhere.

Rob Postal of MCIDC feels that internet is important from a population standpoint, as well as quality of place. Millennials do not want to live in portions of Mifflin County where there is no access to high speed internet. He also thinks that we need to think beyond high tech companies. There are other companies that are either moving out of the area or not coming due to lack of high speed internet access, regardless of the type of companies.

One attendee noted the biggest obstacle is the building out of infrastructure. The costs to do this are extremely high. He also shared that if you wait for somebody else to do it, it will never get done. It starts with us. He also noted that other companies are working together to bring access to internet.

Clint Aurand, a township supervisor, shared that it is expensive to access internet as a resident and he is only able to access internet via satellite or a wireless company. He is unable to access the township website from his home and is also unable to stream anything. It is challenging and costly for some residents to access internet. He contacted Nittany Media in June and received no response.

Mike Tate raised the issue of funds and the possibility of taxing internet just as television is taxed to fund the startup of the committee. He had also shared that a client was able to receive funds to expand broadband and Nittany Media stepped up to help. He further stated that when state representatives are contacted, they do not know what to do.

Nathan Smith discussed franchise agreements and restrictions. He feels these agreements need to be reviewed and see if they the agreements should be terminated. Funding options need to be explored above the conventional municipal budgets to determine how and what needs to be done. The steps must be thought through at every level. An accurate map of service available is needed. For some rural areas, wireless internet is going to be the only answer. The starting point is getting a current map of the internet availability. He likened this to needing to know the where the roads exist. Then roads can be built and taken care of afterwards. If the county wants to grow the economy in the area and bring businesses to the area, the municipalities have to drive this.

Lori Comp of Senator Corman's office has received complaints from people who lack high speed internet service. She was under the impression that cable and internet was between the FCC and municipality. She is unsure where her office comes in because they are at the state level and not the federal. Their recommendation has been to contact US Senators and Congressmen as they do not know where to direct them.

Mark Critz said that there is some federal funding for programmatic items. States can often fund bricks and mortar. After the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (aka Stimulus), the federal government spent hundreds of millions of dollars spent in Pennsylvania to place backbone fiber throughout Pennsylvania, but it did not extend to the home. The state spent money from Act 30 to help some local municipalities provide internet to the homes. The state has to play a role either by regenerating this act or in some way helping local areas expand the local internet. When Mark says to lobby the state representatives and senators, he knows they hear the complaints of the residents. When they hear from their municipalities that they need to do something, it energizes the government to address the problem. He also noted that there is a lot of fiber in Pennsylvania, but it is not being used to the level it could be. This also goes back to mapping and this is difficult because you cannot state where your critical infrastructure is located as a result of 9/11. State representatives, state senators and Congressmen are supposed to listen to their constituents and carry the issue to government and determine how to solve the issues by possibly creating programs.

Luanne Eckenrode of Valley Rural Electric Cooperative wanted to correct a statement made about the role of government in expanding electric service to rural areas. The government did not fund rural electric expansion as indicated. The federal government provided loans that had to be repaid with interest.

Walt brought discussion around to the essence of the questions. There was a fair amount of consensus for the need of a coordinated committee or group to move forward and begin to build a strategy. He also sees the need for some level of assessment to identify weak spots and issues. Walt asked the

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attendees to fill out the sheet that was attached with handouts to identify what areas they would like to be involved in moving forward.

One participant suggested that the municipalities need to be able to have more input in franchise agreements to ensure better service. The way to change the internet is to build out from a local, private entity. The municipalities must understand the influence they have. Another participant suggested that the municipalities need more resources.

Walt stated the fact that many of the issues raised will not be solved at this meeting. The purpose of today's meeting is to see an overview of the issues and get a movement to further efforts to improve service.

Commissioner Dunkle stated that the township supervisors have two conventions, one in the spring and one in the fall. He feels this is an opportunity to advance the internet system. He encourages finding a speaker and getting in touch with the Township Supervisors Association and getting this issue as a key component of the conference.

Another participant noted that partnership is key. No single company or municipality can do this on their own. There does need to be a plan to develop recommendations. Part of the rationale for the plan is to know where we are starting and what type of internet do we have and where is it located.

One attendee shared that franchise agreements are not exclusive. The federal law outlined in 1984 that any franchise that was exclusive is no longer exclusive as well as any franchises going forward. He also noted that Chapter 30 provided for highlights to build broadband across Pennsylvania. Unfortunately, the cable operators have not received these funds. Any place internet has been expanded has been with the cable/internet providers own funds.

A representative from Nittany Media reminded the attendees of Y2K. He also stated fiber was placed to serve the water company, but has never been turned on. Dial-up is still supported because some customers still prefer this. Wireless service is also prevalent as towers are up and can provide 50 megabit bidirectional simplex. Appropriate technology is important. He is hearing that the summit is primarily looking at dead spots. He is thankful for Atlantic Broadband for providing fiber to Fox Pro. They would not have been able to do this. They used to have a $10 attachment fee to poles. It is now $300-$500 per pole and does not include other fees. They did something similar in Mt. Pleasant Mills at Moonshine Camouflage. This company was then able to stay in their location. DCED did a mapping initiative about 10 years ago and was made available online. Since then, FCC requires the cable provider to submit information by census block. His company does have infrastructure, but most people do not know where it is located. His experience is that the government is here to help, but sometimes mess things up.

Bill Gomes sees an interest in forming some type of advisory committee. Bill asked if attendees have an interest in partnering with this initiative, to please complete the forms in their packets. Bill initially wanted to do a full survey of all county households and businesses, but the cost was overwhelming. He now wants to do a small sampling of each township with the help of Walt Whitmer and Penn State. He

noted that this is not a meeting to criticize the internet providers. He did note that he could not reach Verizon. Bill has looked at how other areas across the country have expanded broadband internet service and the consistent theme is that they had to do something at the local level because many of the private companies were not doing anything. The County wants to be a partner to move this project forward.

Commissioners Dunkle and Nancollas echoed their support of finding cooperative ways to improve internet service and their willingness to appoint an advisory committee. Once the committee is established, Bill would like to discuss the feasibility of developing a survey on what residents have to better evaluate the internet service needs. Following this, a feasibility study could be performed to see how to make internet service better. Current maps of internet service are inaccurate and unreliable. If we can identify dead spots, we can focus on how to improve service.

The meeting ended at noon with people volunteering to serve on an advisory committee or to provide special assistance to help with the project.