MINUTES
MIFFLIN COUNTY INTERNET SUMMIT
JANUARY 25, 2017
MIFFLIN COUNTY COURTHOUSE, MEETING ROOM B – 3:45 P.M.

ATTENDANCE:

MEMBERS:
Clint Aurand, Armagh Township
Michael Hain, Nittany Media
John Rhone, Wayne Township
Kristen Ritchey, Comcast via conference call
Kay Semler, Mifflin County Planning Commission
Nathan Smith, FoxPro and Fame
Michael Tate, GME

OTHERS:
Scott Kramer, SEDA-COG
Bill Gomes, Mifflin County Planning and Development
Chastity Fultz, Mifflin County Planning and Development
Walt Whitmer, Penn State Extension
Lauren Kershner, Sentinel
Lori Comp, Senator Corman's Office
Rick Gordon, USDA
Beverly Green, Penelec
Bob Chumrik, Penelec
Doug Smith, Verizon
Cody Jackson, GME
Rhonda Moore, Chamber of Commerce
Nate Smitchko, Mifflin County MIS

Call to Order: Bill Gomes called the meeting to order at 3:50 p.m. and reminded everyone to sign the attendance sheet.

Approval of Minutes: Nathan Smith made a motion to approve the minutes from the December 14, 2016 meeting. The motion was seconded by Kay Semler. All members voted aye.

Discussion on Pole Connections and Engineering Fees:
Bill Gomes had contacted PP&L and Penelec for input on pole connections and engineering fees. PP&L indicated that they only have two poles in Mifflin County and did not attend the meeting. However, Penelec sent two representatives.

Nathan Smith reiterated he became aware of the pole issue as Nittany Media began running fiber. Engineering fees ranged from $350 to $500 per pole on top of costs to attach to the pole as well as make ready fees. His concern is that the cost is creating an obstacle for broadband expansion that previously was minimal. Mike Tate recently obtained a quote from Nittany Media which increased from $8,000 to $61,000

due to the engineering fees for the poles. Mike Hain of Nittany Media stated that the fees used to be $10 per pole and have increased to $350 per pole with PP&L. As of January 1, 2016, PPL requires a third party engineer to measure the pole. Prior to this, heights were based on a trust arrangement with the nonutility person taking the measurements as well as pictures. Mike Tate shared that poles are regulated. Each line attached to the pole has height requirements.

Bob Chumrik of Penelec has been tracking the engineering fees and has seen fees as high as $450, but fees are usually $200 - $250 and reflect the actual cost for an engineer to look at the pole. FCC guidelines allow for this fee. If poles have make-ready work, an engineer must look at the pole. He has seen some fibers go underground to avoid poles and suggested careful preplanning. In order to place fiber underground, easements would need to be obtained from property owners and maintenance is more difficult. If a pole is crowded and has transformers, it becomes more expensive in terms of engineering. Cleaner poles have lower engineering fees. One member questioned what requirements the utility company had for an engineer. The requirements to become an approved engineer for Penelec are located on the First Energy website under the "Become a Vendor" section.   Doug Smith from Verizon will check on the fees Verizon charges and provide the information to Bill. Discussion continued to question tracking of the poles that have been reviewed. It was suggested that fees should not be charged if there had already been a review of the pole. It was also noted that with a no franchise territory, you can place several fiber companies on the same pole.

SEDA-COG has a broadband fund of which Mifflin County has already received approximately $30,000 - $45,000 in 2016 with a 40/60 match requirement. Nate Smith has benefited from this grant, as well as a customer of Mike Tate. Scott Kramer will let the committee know if SEDA-COG has any additional grants available.

Follow-up on maps:
Kristen Ritchey provided a map that shows a little different coverage than the map we currently have for Comcast. Nittany Media also has information on the maps and Michael Hain will work with Scott. Kristen also noted that some areas on her map may include Nittany Media. Doug Smith stated that wireless is not shared on the maps and that they are over 99.3% LTE covered, but the land line portion is accurate.

Facebook Comments:
A Facebook group was recently formed to try to expand Comcast service into the Vira, Maitland, Alfarata, Shindle and McClure areas. The creator of the group claimed that Comcast was willing to do a study of the area. Kristen is looking into this. She did note that when a customer calls in, they do a survey of the caller's address. Kristen also stated that Comcast reviews areas to expand in two ways: the County as a whole and when residents request service.

Verizon has a social media team that watches any comments and they respond back to the individual. Doug requested the information found on Facebook and will have his team respond to the individual.

Cohen Law Group Press Release:
Doug shared information regarding a recent news release from the Cohen Law Group. It stated that Sprint, AT&T, Verizon and T-Mobile drafted a bill for the Pennsylvania General Assembly that would strip municipalities of their right to control the construction and location of wireless facilities in the public rights-of-way. Doug stated that this is misinformation. There is no such bill in Pennsylvania and Verizon is not involved, engaged in, or aware of this activity. AT&T was surprised as well with the press release.

He did state that there are state bills in and around us that could be presented. Doug also noted that the level of DSL is not up to where it could be. The federal definition of broadband internet is 25 x 2.

Further discussion stated that copper lines in the area are so bad that even phone lines won't work at times. The local technicians know the problems and are able to work around them to make the system work. DSL has limitations in that the further away you are from the substation, the slower the speed.

County Website:
Nate Smitchko of the County MIS Department provided screenshots to show how information could be added to the existing website for the Internet Advisory Committee. There will be a place that minutes can be added and read by just clicking on the link. A place to leave comments could be added at a later date, but there needs to be a way to track them.

Survey Follow-up:
Walt Whitmer shared two updated surveys, one for residents and one for businesses. A link to the surveys could be placed on the county website. Rhonda Moore from the Juniata Valley Chamber of Commerce will use her existing list to distribute the survey to every possible business in Mifflin County. There are over 850 businesses listed in her database. Assessment has estimated approximately 800 commercial/industrial based properties in the county. She has used her database in this manner before with a positive response. Rhonda can work with Walt to do a face page as well. Career Link and MCIDC may also have distribution lists that could be used to distribute the business survey. A disclaimer can be added to the survey that it is being distributed through multiple listings to ensure everyone receives one. The surveys should only take 5-10 minutes to complete. Responses could be directed to complete the survey online or returning by mail. Mike Tate offered two staff members to keep in touch with Walt regarding other ideas on the survey, including possibly conducting the survey through Google rather than Survey Monkey. Lauren Kershner offered to do a story for the Sentinel specifically on the survey itself a few days before it is sent.

USDA Rural Development General Field Representative:
Rick Gordon provided a presentation on USDA Rural Development programs that might interest the committee. The telecommunication section of USDA was formed in 1948 through a fund for rural phone companies. In 1990, funding began for rural broadband. Focus was placed on areas without service, which is considered less than 10 x 1. A minimum of 15% of the population must be considered underserved. USDA provides a loan that requires broadband service at 25 x 3 to all in the area. This loan would fund construction. There are two application periods; one opens in July and closes in September while the other recently opened and will close in March. In 2016, $50 million was available nationwide at a 2.9% interest rate. This loan is for a fiber project with an 18-20 year term and requires 3 years to build the network and 2 years to service installations. There is a one-year deferment and payment is only on funds borrowed.

USDA also has a grant program, but the Northeast does not do well. One of the requirements for the grant is for everything to be underserved, or less than 4 x 1. It is based on economic needs as well. Special considerations are given to tribal areas, promise zones and poverty areas of which Pennsylvania does not meet. In 2016, only 6 grants were awarded and went to very needy, unserved and very rural areas.

Both programs verify broadband speeds by going door to door and researching. Speed tests are conducted at approximately 4 p.m. when the system is taxed. The application process is the hardest

part of the process and there are reporting and service requirements if the loan is awarded. The biggest issue is proving the loan can be repaid. This loan program is not for individuals, but rather to build networks.

Develop Mission Statement:
Mike Hain motioned to approve the mission statement that was presented by email as follows:

To develop options and opportunities to improve broadband internet service in Mifflin County through a collaborative effort of residents, businesses, internet providers and local government. Effectively addressing both the existing and future telecommunication needs of the County is our central goal.

Nate Smith seconded the motion and all members voted aye.

Next Meeting: Future meetings were discussed including moving the meeting time up 15 minutes to 3:30 p.m. Future meeting dates for 2017 will be February 15, March 15, April 19, May 17, June 21, July 19, August 16, September 20, October 18, November 15, and December 20.

Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 5:35 p.m.