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Enhancing Broadband Access in Wisconsin

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Wisconsin Broadband Summit

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November 16, 2021

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Executive Director, Grow North
Chair of the Governor’s Task Force on Broadband
Brittany Beyer

- Director of Grow North: overseeing 8 counties and 3 Tribal Nations in the Northwoods (one of the 9 regions of economic development in state)
- Blue Ribbon Commission on Rural Prosperity
- Chair of the Governor’s Task Force on Broadband
Governor’s Task Force on Broadband

- Named in July 2020 via executive order by the Governor. Report due to the legislature. Delivered June 30, 2021
- Governor Evers named 2021 “Year of Broadband Access”
- 25 members met August 2020-May 2021. Work to resume in the fall 2021
  - subcommittees on policy, funding, mapping and data, community network building, and digital access

PSC of Wisconsin

Wisconsin Broadband Office
Resilient: Every Wisconsin community will have access to at least 1 gigabit per second symmetrical broadband service to anchor institutions such as schools, hospitals, government buildings, business parks, and enterprise centers by 2024.

Accessible: 97% of Wisconsin homes and businesses will have access to at least one internet service with minimum speeds of 25 megabits download / 3 megabits upload (25/3 Mbps) by 2025.

Affordable: 75% of households with income below 200% of the federal poverty level have access to fixed home internet service at a cost of less than $25/month by 2025.

High Performance: 75% of Wisconsin homes and businesses will have access to at least one internet service with a minimum speed 100/20 Mbps with preference on symmetrical service, no usage limits and latency low enough to run interactive video applications by 2025.
Closing the Broadband Gap:

KEY ISSUES from first Report

- The 3 A’s: ACCESS, AFFORDABILITY, ADOPTABILITY
- Speed goals, mapping improvements, and FUNDING
- NETWORK of collaborative efforts is being built NOW. You can be part of this!
Top Recommendations from the Task Force on Broadband’s Report

- Explore hybrid models of broadband infrastructure development—public/private partnerships
- Increase construction and permitting coordination
- Increase Broadband Expansion Grant funding
- Collect internet data from all ISP’s at a household and business level of granularity
- Increase broadband consumer protections and pricing transparency
- Establish a State Internet Assistance Program
- Establish a statewide Digital Equity Fund
- Assess broadband adoption and lack of adoption among households not connecting—cost, need, barriers
- Increase funding for broadband administration
- Establish a coalition of willing, engaged broadband leaders to connect communities and providers, local and regional partners, planning and technical assistance opportunities, funding, and resources
- Create planning and implementation grants for regions and communities
Closing the Broadband Gap:
The 3 “A’s”

- **ACCESS**: infrastructure is absent or cost of connection is unaffordable or does not deliver speeds necessary
- **AFFORDABILITY**: cost is too high because of income OR cost of expensive connection
- **ADOPTION**: lack of access and training on equipment to use without issue
Solutions for Closing the Gap (Urban and Rural) in Broadband: the 3 “A’s”

**ACCESS**
- Grants need to be available to make the private investment work—especially in rural areas
- Needs new NETWORKS of support to address this on a local level
- Blessing of COVID—understood as cross-cutting need to enter 21st Century equitably

**AFFORDABILITY**
- Emergency Broadband Benefit—available right now (FCC)
- More competitive with choice between providers (absent in some places)
- Department of Public Instruction and other agencies will continue to rise to the occasion

**ADOPTABILITY**
- Create a Digital opportunity fund (room for philanthropy to amplify funds)
- Digital navigators—some grass roots orgs are already doing this. Can we make this statewide?
- Clear racial, equity, and inclusion issue. ALL Wisconsinites need access and to be able to use Broadband
Closing the Broadband Gap:

Proposed Speed Goals

- Acceptable base level of Broadband speed received:
  - By 2025, 25 Mbps download and 3 Mbps upload (Governor’s goal)
  - By 2028, 50 Mbps download and 10 Mbps upload
  - By 2031, 100 Mbps download and 50 Mbps upload

- In near future, 1Gbps+ is necessary
  - Currently: 17.7% of state has access to 1Gbps
  - By 2025, 50% of the state has access to 1Gbps
  - By 2030, 90% of the state has access to 1Gbps
Closing the Rural Broadband Gap: Mapping

- FCC maps allow for a provider to claim full census blocks if ONE residence is served
- Census blocks in rural areas are much larger
- Mechanisms for verifying speeds noted by providers are not in place
Closing the Broadband Gap: MAPPING

- FCC is currently refining its mapping – March 2020 congress pushed for better measures from FCC. Unclear on the date it will be released
- Local Innovation: County level and state GIS mapping work; Publicly available data layers
- What is your county, region doing to work on this issue?
Closing the Broadband Gap:

Funding for infrastructure buildout

- Providers say: the areas that have clear return on investment have been served
- Public dollars needed to close the gap. State and Federal programs
- These are complex, multi-million dollar projects
- Public-Private partnerships, municipal broadband, etc. are part of the answer
Funding for infrastructure buildout

**State**
- APRA related $100 Million grant cycle (funded projects announced)
- $129 Million in state budget ('21-'23)

**Federal**
- Existing / regular channels: USDA, FCC (RDOF), NTIA
- COVID and New: ARPA, Infrastructure Bill

- Federal project management in rural communities: make sure expertise is present to manage (see network building)
- Area to support: stack state grant dollars with federal grant dollars for projects (when appropriate)
Closing the Broadband Gap: Network Building

- Fall of 2020, WEDC and PSC jointly ran a Broadband Connectors Pilot
- 96 communities applied in a two week window; 6 communities selected
- We’re watching what is working in other states and learning: technical assistance and training, comprehensive planning grants, collaborative learning, matchmaking, etc.
Closing the Broadband Gap:

In closing

- Real work still ahead to close the gaps- active participation
- Find out who is already working on this- county level (ideal partner for towns), regional planning commission, regional economic development, etc.
- This situation is not unique to Wisconsin- we have many items stacked in our favor
- Grant funded projects are a major way to support the buildout
Questions?

Thank you ~

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