



Broadwater County Broadband Advisory Board Meeting
Thursday, June 22, 2023 at 4:00 p.m.

Board Members Present:

**Vic Sample, Chairman; Roger Flynn, Vice-Chair;
Members, Joe Gill; Adam Six,
Absent; Warren Smeltzer, Secretary**

Broadwater County (BC) Staff Present:

Lindsey Richtmyer, Commissioner Liaison

Admin/Assistant:

Melinda Reidy

The meeting was called to order at 4:00 pm. All members were present except for Joe Gill and Warren Smeltzer. Adam Six had a prior responsibility and attended when he was able. A quorum was met at the middle of the meeting. Lindsey Richtmyer; Commission Liaison was also in attendance. Brian Obert from MBAC and Dean Nelson from Montana Option were also present.

There was no public comment and role was taken

Brian Obert through MBAC and BCDC has been trying to get adequate broadband for Broadwater County for the last 20-30 years. Chairman Sample asked who has service in Broadwater County? It is understood that Montana Internet is here, Blackfoot, and Global net have some options, Century Link is a mystery and various cellular companies are offering some home internet services. Brian Obert commented that he had received a report from the Department of Commerce that had a list of media utilities in Broadwater County. AT&T owns 60 miles of conduit and a hut on River Road and still pays taxes on them both. Zayo has bought out Touch America and it is paying taxes on 340 miles of fiber in the county. At the south end of the county, 3 bundles of conduit were found and 2 of the 3 are believed to belong to Zayo. The last one belonging to AT&T. Brian was able to get the GPS coordinates to the huts and will supply Roger with that data.

Dean Nelson stated that Zaya has fiber that follows the railroad. With the Encroachment Permits that say that the conduits have fiber in them but that is not true.

Chairman Sample had spoken to Howard S. and Howard will contact NWE to inquire about their help to see who the power company is supplying. The one drawback is the that the power company does provide power to non-household structures. Montana Opticom is currently asking for funding through Reconnect 4. If that falls through, these properties would be candidates for BEAD funding. It would be interesting to see if any media is being voided for each program funding.

Dean brought with him different maps depending on what information is being looked at. The surveys that were completed seemed to be convoluted due to the size of the sample size and the facts it shows. The official announcement for BEAD funding will be out June 30. This will show the allocation of funds to the different states in the country. Without challenging the BCD map, it is unlikely that Montana will receive an impartial allocation.

Opticom put a bid for Reconnect for 25 million dollars and combine that with ARPA allocations, there are some areas east of the lake that this could benefit. With the infrastructure in place, the BEAD funding could enhance the opportunity of service on the northern part of the eastern side of the lake. The new rubric for determining points will be coming out soon. Non-profits and Co-ops will have the overall advantage points. It would be beneficial for the Broadband Advisory Board to contract with a company and submit a bid/proposal. The Middle Mile Program was announced last week and was oversubscribed by 710%.

Opticom turned in their proposal for ARPA in May and are awaiting a contract. Out of the 310 million that was up awarded, only 148 million has been allocated. The recommendation from staff was to fold any unused funds to BEAD. Opticom had to submit a schedule and budget to the state for approval. The schedule will have some construction this year. This will be in the south end of the county due to the time of year and the fact is there is already infrastructure, and it would be easy to add to it. The plan for ARPA will be a 3-year plan, but most of the south end of the county will be completed by the end of the project. Reconnect 4 is a 5-year project. Also, when submitting for these projects, it's for time and not necessarily for the number of houses served. This will help with the population growth that will indeed happen in those number of years.

If funding for the Reconnect 4 (5 Year Program) was awarded, Opticom would potentially build infrastructure to Winston and to Radersburg. The properties along the Meagher County line would be difficult due to permitting through the National Forrest.

With city services, Opticom would have to compete with Spectrum and Blackfoot, but Dean also mentioned that their services are aerial and Opticom would like to put their utilities in the ground. The maintenance would be much cheaper, but it is more expensive to put in. Dean stated that over 30 years, this would be the most cost affected way to go.

Angie and Lindsey commented that Blackfoot has laid some fiber in the ground, but it is only to a cell tower. Currently only 13% of Blackfoot's customers are served by fiber and they tend to want to deal with Commercial vs. Residential customers. With the development of census blocks, if one customer is served in a block, the whole block will show served, even though they are not. Opticom could not bid on these blocks because they showed they were already served.

Dean has spoken to Apple Technology in Manhattan, Mt about maybe providing fixed fiber in Broadwater County due to the amount of opportunity.

Adam stated that it may be the board's responsibility to get our rural population options for service so we can answer the "what about me" questions.

Chairman Sample stated that there are many companies coming into Montana, and he asked Dean if our county were to work with companies, to help our residence, would they be able to help us decipher who the legitimate ones would be and who would be beneficial to work with. Dean stated that is not necessarily their position to make those calls, but if they find something, Illegal, they have an obligation to report that. He also stated public access for community Wi-Fi with restrictions cannot be used by public funds.

BEAD will have the most Regulations. ARPA has the least number of regulations. Opticom will have lines that will not be completely open because they have a Commercial aspect of what they want to accomplish.


(What map?) Last year, only 21.4 % of Broadwater County was unserviceable when Opticom's bid was submitted for the BEAD grant, currently that same map shows 69% unserviceable. Depending on what is considered served in Broadwater County will depend on the qualifications of what is needed in the BEAD program. Between Starlink, Blackfoot, and Century Link, the majority of Broadwater County is served.

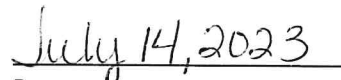
The board discussed and asked questions about what Opticom expectations. Opticom discussed what their plan would be if they received Reconnect 4 funding and/or BEAD funding. The maps are currently quite different and

will be on our website at www.broadwatermt.com, under Broadband Advisory Board Tab. All information and Maps with serviceable areas (according to the different programs will be provided.

Most items on the agenda were tabled due to discussions with guests from MBAC and Opticom.

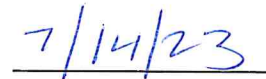
Respectfully Submitted:


Melinda Reidy, Assistant


Date

Approved:


Vic Sample, Chair


Date