

**Broadwater County Commissioners**

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**COMMISSIONERS PROACTIVE ABOUT INTERNET FUNDING FOR BROADWATER COUNTY**

To help the residents of Broadwater County obtain both improved service and faster internet speeds, the Broadwater County Commission is considering the creation of a temporary advisory committee for broadband internet. The committee will address FCC (Federal Communications Commission) deadline to appeal for broadband funding, advise the commission of grant and funding opportunities through various entities, and assist the commission in pursuing comprehensive broadband service throughout the county.

Broadwater County is massively underserved in both connectivity and internet speed. NACO (The National Association of Counties) says, “The lack of reliable internet is a major economic barrier and issue of socioeconomic equality.” Additionally, NACO highlights the increasing gap in school and economic opportunities and development due to poor service and connectivity, causing rural communities to fall behind urban counterparts.

Due to imprecise FCC requirements and poor connectivity data collection, internet service providers (ISP) can report both where they are providing service and where they “speculate they could provide maximum service,” according to the NACO report Understanding the True State of Connectivity in America. This means ISPs can include in reporting where they can offer maximum service, even if no one is currently connected. This leads to exaggerated reporting and misrepresentation of service in places like Broadwater County. The result is inaccurate information and improper classification in these markets by the FCC and therefore a lack of funding to encourage ISPs to provide and improve service here.

With new FCC deadlines rapidly approaching, public participation in the FCC map challenge is crucial to Broadwater County’s receipt of funding which will greatly impact service availability in our county. The temporary broadband committee will play a key role in public engagement as well as help the commissioners research and attain funding from additional sources. If approved, the 5-member advisory committee will be chosen at the March 15 commission meeting. Public involvement is encouraged and anyone interested in a committee position or wanting more information, please contact the commissioners at commissioners@co.broadwater.mt.us.