Broadband Advisory Council
Meeting Minutes
November 18, 2020

Event/Meeting:
Broadband Advisory Council Regular Meeting

Date/Time: November 18, 2020 at 11:00 AM

Locations: Teleconference via Webex:

Board Members Present: Deb Alfredson, David Antonacci, Director Paula Basta, Bill Bodine, Karen Boswell, Melia Carter, Mayor Mike Chamberlain, Ryan Gruenenfelder, Steven Hill, Rick Holzmacher, Zak Horn, Kim McCullough (for Theresa Eagleson), Chris Nelson, Jeff Newell, Deno Perdiou, Susan Satter, Matt Schmit, Josh Shallenberger, Lori Sorenson, Jim Zolnierik

Board Members Absent: Anne Slaughter, Representative Keith Wheeler, Senator Bill Cunningham, Senator Jil Tracy, Representative John Connor

Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity Staff Present: Katie Stonewater, Diamond Ruffin, Jeanette Pesamoska

Call to Order and Introductory Remarks from Chair: The meeting was called to order by Chair Schmit at 11:00 am. Katie Stonewater conducted the official roll call. After roll call, Chair Schmit provided an overview of the Broadband Advisory Council (“BAC”) agenda.

Chair Schmit asked members of the public to hold comment until such time that the floor was opened. Chair Schmit recognized that a quorum of members was present.

Approval of Meeting Minutes: Chair Schmit asked for a motion to approve the minutes of the May 19 and September 15, 2020 meetings. A motion was made by Vice Chair Lori Sorenson and seconded by Mayor Mike Chamberlain. Motion passed by unanimous decision.

Office of Broadband: Chair Schmit gave an overview of the first round of the Connect Illinois Grant Program. Grant agreements are being executed. There are 28 projects among 18 applications to connect 26,000 Illinois businesses, homes, and farms. Round 2 was announced in October with $50 million available for grants up to $5 million through four distinct categories (broadband access, broadband equity, broadband innovation, and urban broadband). Generally, a nonstate match of at least 50% is required; for projects in the “broadband equity” category, project difficulties such as high unemployment or population sparsity may warrant a relaxation of 50% requirement. Application deadline is March 1, 2021. An
informational webinar has taken place and a second is planned for early December.

Kim McCullough asked if an applicant could apply across multiple categories. Chair Schmit responded that an applicant should choose the category that makes the most sense to their project, and that the Office of Broadband is willing to have conversations with applicants regarding category selection. Details will also be provided via the informational webinars and grant program FAQ.

**Digital Equity:** The Office of Broadband announced the Digital Equity Package this week. The package consists of the *Digital Navigator Program* to build digital literacy skills at the community level. Applications are due January 11, 2021 and; the *Broadband READY Program* to drive regional collaboration for engagement, evaluation, planning and progress within Illinois regions for broadband access, adoption, and utilization. This program will also provide some context and contour to the mapping effort. $250,000 is available, up to $50,000 per regional applicant. The deadline is December 23, 2020. In addition, a second round of the *Illinois Connected Communities Program* is open through January 25, 2021. $150,000 is available statewide, up to $15,000 per community. The Office of Broadband and Benton Institute are partnering to run the program. Details for all of these programs are available on the [Connect Illinois website](http://connectillinois.com).

**Computer Refurbishing:** The Office of Broadband is working to build a computer refurbishing and redistribution network to ensure households have access to devices. In September, the Illinois COVID-19 Response Fund awarded the nonprofit, PC’s for People, $1.5 million to launch operations in Illinois. The funding helped secure joint warehouse/retail space in the Metro East region.

Questions were received from BAC members:

1. Karen Boswell asked two questions: (1) Has the connectivity map has been updated with the results from Round 1? Chair Schmit responded the map is currently being updated with results from Round 1 Connect Illinois projects as well as USDA ReConnect awards. (2) Is the computer refurbishing effort described in addition to plans for the Universal Telephone Access Corporation (UTAC) funds? Chair Schmit responded that the statewide computer refurbishing program would utilize UTAC funds, if approved by the Illinois Commerce Commission.

2. Deno Peridou inquired about the role of the Illinois Innovation Network. Chair Schmit responded that IIN is comprised of public higher education institutions and is collaborating with the Office of Broadband on the Broadband READY Program.

3. Ryan Gruenenfelder asked two questions: (1) How can the BAC partner more with community organizations to understand broadband challenges, particularly in BIPOC communities? Chair Schmit responded that all projects are seeking to have diverse community participation and webinars will get into details how an applicant or project partner can collaborate. (2) Given the need to connect people in nursing homes for things like virtual visitations, how can these programs benefit such populations and the facilities that serve them? Chair Schmit responded that all of these programs could be of use; he encouraged a follow-up conversation to explore the opportunities.

4. Kim McCullough stated that the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services would welcome to partner with the Office of Broadband to reach out to nursing homes and providers in disadvantaged communities that have trouble accessing telehealth and health care. Chair Schmit welcomes that opportunity and will follow up with additional information about the programs launched and additional opportunities.
**Broadband Affordability Study:** In May, the Illinois General Assembly directed the Broadband Advisory Council to conduct a study on broadband affordability. The report is due January 1, 2021.

The BAC received an update from researchers conducting the study: Dr. John Horrigan, Senior Fellow, Technology Policy Institute; Dr. Colin Rhinesmith, Associate Professor, Simmons University; Dr. Brian Whitacre, Professor, Oklahoma State University.

Dr. Horrigan shared that data relies on the 2019 American Community Survey and the metrics followed focus on wireline broadband subscriptions at home; computer ownership; and access to computer or tablet devices.

Dr. Whitacre will quantify the metrics and findings developed by Dr. Horrigan to determine what short-term and long-term solutions for affordability could cost in Illinois. Preliminary findings will be available for the next meeting in December.

Questions were received from BAC members.

1. Deno Perdiou asked if cost analysis considered operations expenses in addition to capital costs. Chair Schmit responded that the methodology is focused primarily on capital expenses that were reported in state and federal grant applications.

2. Jim Zolneirik asked for clarification if the study will estimate providing free broadband to those that lack access now as opposed to providing free broadband to all residents in Illinois. Dr. Whitacre responded the study will review both categories.

Chair Schmit asked for additional questions from BAC members. None were received.

**Public Comment:** Chair Schmit opened the floor for public comment. No public comment was made.

**Adjournment:** Chair Schmit announced the next Broadband Advisory Council Regular Meeting will be held on Wednesday, December 16th via WebEx. Chair Schmit asked for a motion to adjourn. A motion was made by Vice Chair Sorenson and seconded by Ryan Gruenenfelder. Motion passed by unanimous decision and the meeting adjourned.