Event/Meeting: Broadband Advisory Council Regular Meeting

Date/Time: February 17, 2021 at 11:00 AM

Locations: Teleconference via Webex:

Board Members Present: Director Paula Basta, Bill Bodine, Melia Carter, Mayor Mike Chamberlain, Ryan Gruenenfelder, Steven Hill, Rick Holzmacher, Zak Horn, Chris Nelson, Jeff Newell, Deno Perdiou, Susan Satter, Matt Schmit, Josh Shallenberger, Anne Slaughter, Lori Sorenson, Jim Zolnierek

Board Members Absent: Representative Keith Wheeler, Senator Jil Tracy, Representative John Connor

Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity Staff Present: Katie Stonewater, Diamond Ruffin, Tim Laffey, Danna MacKenzie

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. Chair Schmit recognized that a quorum of members was present and provided an overview of the Broadband Advisory Council (“BAC”) agenda.

Approval of Meeting Minutes: Chair Schmit asked for a motion to approve the minutes of the December 16, 2020 meeting. A motion was made by Vice Chair Lori Sorenson and seconded by Anne Slaughter. Motion passed by unanimous decision.

Office of Broadband: Chair Schmit provided a brief update of the status of the Connect Illinois Grant Program – Round One projects are getting underway. Round 2 application deadline extended from March 1 to April 12th. Intend to make announcements this summer.

Mapping - updated maps are expected in the next few weeks, with a soft launch planned in March and a public launch after. A preview of the maps will be forthcoming for the BAC.

The Computer Equity Network was stood up by the Office of Broadband, in partnership with Cook County, the Jewish United Fund, PCs for People, and others. The Network is seeking donations of computer devices to supply distribution to the 1.1 million households without a device, identified by the Broadband Affordability Study released in January 2021. Chair Schmit requested BAC members consider and share any sourcing resources to make the Network successful.
Questions:

- Ryan Gruenenfelder asked for clarification for how BAC members can source computers and direct them to the Network? A: Chair Schmit suggested looking internally at individual organizations for used computers, even a few is helpful. Additionally, awareness and help spreading the word about the Network and opportunity for companies or individuals to donate used computers for refurbishing and donation.
- Bill Bodine asked if there will be an update on the status of installation and connections for Round One grant recipients? A: Will wait for the May BAC meeting for a more thorough report. Many projects have gotten underway and connectivity has happened.

Digital Equity Programming – Navigator Program is receiving applications until March 15, 2021. This program provides digital literacy training at the local level.

Presentations to the BAC

IL Health and Hospital Association
Lisa Daniels provided an update to the BAC on telehealth. Broadband connectivity is critical to expanding telehealth access and use. Telehealth can avoid unnecessary emergency room visits; reduce barriers like childcare, transportation, and time off from work; reduced rates of missed appointments; saves $60 million in travel each year; and has a 91% favorability rating among seniors on Medicare. Telehealth is not required by Illinois law – 36 states have telehealth parity policies. IL offers limited Medicaid telehealth.

Illinois State Board of Education
Erich Grauke and Erica Thieman provided an updated to the BAC on the digital divide and virtual curriculum. The pandemic surfaced a lot of equity issues. With federal and state funding, ISBE was able to narrow device shortages for students and teachers. As of fall 2020, 686 school districts had sufficient devices to provide 87% of their student body with devices.

- ISBE encouraged school districts to use CARES Act funding to purchase devices. Over 400,000 devices were purchased.
- To provide support for districts with greatest financial need, ISBE released Digital Equity grants, funded with CARES Act funds. These grants provided an estimated 200,000 additional devices.
- Challenges to connectivity - 97% of school districts report one or more barriers to home connectivity for their students: monthly internet expenses; limited bandwidth; internet service unavailable; lack of devices. 279 districts used grant funds to improve home connectivity for learners and educators.

ISBE agrees with the need to advocate for reliable internet services for Illinois residents at home with true unlimited plans at affordable rates and support improved infrastructure for scalable broadband access, particularly in rural areas. Hotspots are a temporary solution.

AARP
The Illinois AARP presented the findings from the Illinois Disparities Disrupt Study. The report is part of a multi-year initiative. The results of the report identified issues facing people of color over 50 with broadband connectivity.

Findings Include:
- Urban and rural issue
56% of Illinois do not have access to broadband

Biggest barrier is cost, next technology skills. 48% of older adults report need for additional help to use internet

More than 1/3 of African Americans and Hispanic older adults do not have internet access at home

Connectivity positively contributes to mental well-being of older adults, improves connections and increases independence, access to services (SSN, health).

There is a lack of Asian American and Pacific Islander data

AARP will be using this data to support its legislative agenda in the Spring 2021 legislative session focused on economic security, health, and connectivity.

AARP will be issuing a second report focused on social isolation, caregiving, and nursing homes. Expected release date is Fall 2021.

**Federal Broadband Effort**

Chair Schmit briefed the BAC on federal funding and programs created by COVID-19 legislation. The Office of Broadband wants to align federal and state efforts to have optimal impact on federal legislation and funding.

- The Consolidated Appropriations Act provided $7B to improve connectivity in the US and extend the use of CARES Act spending. We are seeing increased investment at the federal level.
  - Emergency Broadband Benefit Program – desire to position the Office of Broadband to take advantage of the program. The Office of Broadband wants to encourage all providers to take advantage of this opportunity so all Illinoisans interested in getting a monthly subscription are able. There is optimism that this program will demonstrate real interest in sustaining a similar program into the future.
  - The Connecting Minority Communities Pilot Program provides funding for HBCUs and other minority-serving institutions. Further details are forthcoming from NTIA.
  - NTIA is seeking partnerships between the provider community and government through the Broadband Infrastructure Program. Details are forthcoming.
  - Telehealth program was oversubscribed from the CARES Act funding, but the appropriations act provided additional funding.
  - Education Stabilization Fund helped schools respond to the pandemic and implement remote learning.

- The American Rescue Plan and Infrastructure Bill will have additional funding. Details are forthcoming. The Office of Broadband has informed the delegation in Washington DC about partnership interest.

- As information becomes available, it will be shared via the Illinois Broadband Connections newsletter.

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

**Working Groups:** The BAC has five working groups currently – access, economic development, education, technology and telehealth. The working groups were critical to jumpstart Connect Illinois and meet our goals. The Office of Broadband intends to reconstitute the working group model over the summer or fall. The Office of Broadband welcomes feedback in the coming weeks on the working groups to build a good understanding of the priorities and build momentum into the summer and fall.
Questions:

- Mayor Chamberlin: one of the issues his community encounters frequently is getting access to high speed broadband at the last mile. This is an economic development issue for the community, without the infrastructure they are not able to run technical buildout for manufacturing or growth at the airport, for example. Proposes bringing all the providers in the region together for infrastructure buildout, which will bring new customers. Suggests providers provide the infrastructure. Inquires what other areas are facing economic barriers to broadband? A: There is great promise to incorporate this discussion into the working groups.
- Ryan Gruenenfelder: asks if Chair Schmit will be taking suggestions for subtopics into the working groups? A: Encourages everyone to have thoughts or ideas to be part of the May meeting. Welcomes additional discussion.

Adjournment: Chair Schmit announced the next Broadband Advisory Council Regular Meeting will be held on Wednesday, May 12th via WebEx. Chair Schmit asked for a motion to adjourn. A motion was made by Steve Hill and seconded by Josh Shallenberger. Motion passed by unanimous decision and the meeting adjourned at 12.51pm.