Broadband Advisory Council
Meeting Minutes
September 15, 2021

Event/Meeting: Broadband Advisory Council Regular Meeting

Date/Time: September 15, 2021 at 11:00 AM

Locations: Teleconference via Webex:

Board Members Present: David Antonacci, Bill Bodine, Karen Boswell, Melia Carter, Ryan Gruenenfelder, Rick Holzmacher, Zak Horn, Chris Nelson, Jeff Newell, Matt Schmit, Josh Shallenberger, Anne Slaughter, Lori Sorenson, Jim Zolnierek

Board Members Absent: Representative Keith Wheeler, Senator Jil Tracy, Deb Alfredson, Paula Basta, Theresa Eagleson, Steven Hill, Deno Perdiou, Susan Satter

Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity Staff Present: Katie Stonewater, Tim Laffey, Adrienne Pickett, Shubhika Agarwal, Jeanette Pesamoska, Diamond Ruffin

Call to Order and Introductory Remarks from Chair: The meeting was called to order by Chair Schmit at 11:05 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 May 12, 2021 meeting. A motion was made by Vice Chair Lori Sorenson and seconded by Anne Slaughter. Motion passed by unanimous decision.

Office of Broadband Updates: Chair Schmit provided updates on activities of the Office of Broadband:

- Illinois Broadband Connections Newsletter - newsletter sent out every two weeks with updates from the Office of Broadband and partners throughout Illinois.
- Public WiFi Map- map was developed at the height of the pandemic to provide useful information for the public needing access to the internet. The website still receives up to twenty pings a day and remains a great resource. The map was nominated for recognition at the annual meeting of the National Association of Telecommunications Officers and Administrators (NATOA). The Office of Broadband will be adding more locations and BAC members are encouraged to share the resource with their respective networks.
- Federal Updates:
  - Consolidated Appropriations Act created the Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) to provide a $50 monthly benefit to low income families. EBB launched in late spring and
eligible participants are still able to take advantage. Many lessons can be learned from its implementation. The full $3.2 billion in program funding likely will be spent in the next six months.

- Broadband Infrastructure Program at the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) is a pilot program offering $288 million in funding. The Illinois Office of Broadband put forward an application in August for $65 million that included $29 million in federal funding, a $29 million match from the Connect Illinois program, and 6% from providers. $2.5 billion in funding was requested for this grant program and awards are expected to be announced from NTIA end of the year/early 2022.
- Connected Minority Communities Program is focused on adoption and access. Illinois is well positioned for this program. Applications are due in November 2021 and only available to qualified minority serving institutions.
- American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) made historic broadband investments in schools and community development. Illinois will receive $254 million in a state block grant program through capital projects at the U.S. Treasury. Illinois will distribute these dollars through the Connect Illinois program. In addition, the Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund offers funding to non-entitlement communities through the NEU program through DCEO. If a local government does not have directly appropriated funds through the federal government, this is an opportunity to receive funds for local broadband projects.
- Infrastructure and Jobs Act is pending before Congress. The bill would provide $65 billion for broadband with a focus on infrastructure, affordability (providing a $30/month subsidy), universal service, and digital inclusion and equity. More funding is likely will be available to local governments.
- The level of federal investment and policy direction puts Illinois in a position to make meaningful investment to meet our goals.

**Connect Illinois Broadband Grant Program** – Round Three Notice of Funding Opportunity likely will be announced in the coming weeks. Grant amounts will be awarded up to $10 million, with $350 million available statewide. This round will relax the state match requirement as previous rounds have shown that some applications cannot meet the 50% match. The program still will have incentives in place for applicants to have as large a match as possible. Round three likely will accept and review applications on a rolling basis.

**The Connected Communities Grant Program** focuses on local planning and capacity building. The Office of Broadband announced completion of Round One work and the eight communities that will be part of the Round Two cohort. Round Three Notice of Funding Opportunity will be announced this winter. Chair Schmit showed BAC members a map of where projects are occurring around the state.

**Questions:**

- Jim Zolnierek asked if information will be published when the projects are completed? A: The Office of Broadband is interested in creating a dashboard to track progress of the projects. Expected to implement that tool when Round Two is underway and will be shared through the Connect Illinois website.
- Ryan Gruenenfelder asked if there was an opportunity for those that do not have broadband access to see when service might come to their homes and area. A: Right now, information is not being shared publicly about any plans on exact locations of projects to balance expectations and realistic speed of
project development. Over time, the Office of Broadband will take an active role in identifying
project areas where solutions have not come from the market and will be seeking out partnerships to
provide service in those areas.

- Chair Schmit recognized the contributions to the Office of Broadband from Diamond Ruffin, Illinois
  Science and Policy Fellow with the University of Illinois, whose fellowship was ending. Chair
  Schmit also welcomed the Office of Broadband’s two new Illinois Science and Policy Fellow from
  the University of Illinois, Adrienne Pickett and Shubhika Agarwal. Adrienne will focus on digital
  equity and inclusion, while Shubhika will focus on data and mapping.

- The Broadband READY Program update was provided by Adrienne Pickett. The Office of
  Broadband is working with cohort one on wrapping up projects for the first term. Each region
  proposed a specific project that focused on expanding access or digital literacy. The cohorts are
  working with the Office of Broadband to complete three deliverables – digital indicators dashboard,
  summarizing current conditions for their region, and a digital divide elimination plan. Purdue Center
  for Regional Development will work with the team on deliverables, particularly the digital divide
  elimination plan. Deliverables expected in November with a new cohort announced in January.

- The Digital Indicator Dashboard was previewed by Chair Schmit. The goal is to identify indicators,
  data and best practices for communities to better understand what is working at the regional level
  and translate it into a statewide dashboard. The dashboard will include information on state, federal
  and local funding and programmatic impact.

- Illinois Broadband Lab is an effort with University of Illinois and other higher education
  stakeholders on mapping access, data, publication and research. The Lab has not been formally
  announced, but this website will house the broadband maps being developed by the Office of
  Broadband. Those maps offer more granular and detailed data than what is offered at the federal
  level and will be made available to communities and researchers across the state. Chair Schmit
  previewed the Broadband Lab website to BAC members, showing maps such as county level data
  and served vs underserved vs unserved.

Illinois Computer Equity Network: Andrea Lindsay with PCs for People updated the BAC on the
Computer Equity Network.
- Two brick and mortar locations have opened in Illinois in Belleville and Oak Forest and will be
  serving the state.
- Erin Sherwood is the new managing director at the Cook County office in Oak Forest.
- Andrea called on BAC members to get involved or encouraged BAC members to share this
  information with their networks to boost broad participation. Close to 3,000 computers have been
  sources and distributed statewide, but there is a great need statewide for computer access. Private
  companies, school districts or others have donated. Distributions have occurred in 105 zip codes in
  Illinois and there are many more to reach. PCs for People welcomes any partnership suggestions
  from BAC members.
- PCs for People is hosting American Connection Core Fellow to help with broadband adoption.

Question:
- Lori Sorensen asked if it was possible for PCs for People to share general information with BAC
  members to help promote this with companies and organizations across the state. A: Andrea
directed BAC members to information on their website and will share brochures with the Office of Broadband to distribute.

- Chair Schmit added that having collaborations with external partners is key to helping the computer equity network meet its goals. Computer sourcing is the process of taking resources already available in communities and redistributing them to meet community needs. The National Association for Information Destruction certifies data security for PCs for People and has a zero-landfill policy. Trucks will pick up computer equipment at no charge, except for CRT tubes because mercury recycling is at a cost.

**Illinois Broadband Maps:** Chair Schmit provided a visual overview of the Illinois Broadband Maps to BAC members. Maps showed where service exists, speeds offered and number of households unserved. Static maps will be available through the Illinois Broadband Lab collaboration. Interactive maps will allow users to work with different data.

**Question:**
- Ryan Gruenenfelder asked if the maps were available on the Connect Illinois website. *A:* Yes, under the “Interactive Mapping” tab.

**Working Groups:** The Office of Broadband would like to establish working groups this fall and welcomes conversations with any BAC members on the makeup of the working groups and topics of discussion. Proposed working groups are Digital Equity and Inclusion, Smart Cities, and Rural Innovation. BAC members heard from three experts on how the BAC could engage potential working group topic areas in digital equity, smart cities, and rural innovation.

**Digital Equity**

*Amy Huffman – Policy Director, National Digital Inclusion Alliance*

- NDIA represents partners on the ground doing digital inclusion work. There are over 600 affiliates in 44 states. NDIA advocates in Washington D.C. informing on policy and bringing awareness to digital inclusion.
- Amy offers that states should think about how they can coordinate efforts and there is money available for states for planning for digital equity planning. Funds can be used to create a plan and a framework to tackle the divide. States have convening power, local communities look to states for advice and leadership.
- The pandemic has shown that closing the digital divide is about more than access and computers. Trust and understanding from individuals is a key factor – the EBB program has had slow up take rates, highlighting the complicated nature of the program from the consumer perspective. There are many layers for residents to figure out and underlying mistrust that the program is a scam.

**Question:** Matt Schmit asked how a working group focused on digital inclusion could lend itself to that effort. The *Broadband READY* program is focused on regional engagement and could be used as a launching pad toward statewide digital inclusion plan. *A:* Amy believes Illinois is on the right path, engaging regional areas that already have relationships.

**Smart Cities**

*Denise Linn Riedl – City of South Bend, Indiana*

- Communities can leverage data, technology and design to improve city services and quality of life outcomes for residents. Smart Cities are not smart because of the technology, but because individuals know how to use it and when to invest in it. Projects such as upgrading infrastructure in
the public way – smart street lights, bus kiosks – these are new tools to provide efficiencies.

- If you are shaping how broadband policy impacts infrastructure deployments and upgrades than you are shaping how smart cities impact communities. This can have major equity implications.

Rural Innovation
Matt Dunne, Center on Rural Innovation

- The 2008 recession hit rural communities particularly hard. While urban areas bounced back, rural communities did not. By 2020, not even half of rural counties have recovered from 2008. Rural America represents 15% of the nation’s workforce, but only 5% of computer and math jobs.
- In order to close that gap, core infrastructure needs to be invested in for rural communities – high speed internet, fiber to the home, in order to scale economic development. Communities should also invest in coworking spaces and areas that can create density to spur collaboration. Programmatic elements such as digital economy training programs are needed to help place people in jobs. Support traditional accelerator programs in rural communities and capital to support an inclusive tech culture.

Public Comment: Opened at 12.47 pm. No public comment was received.

Adjournment: Chair Schmit announced the next Broadband Advisory Council Regular Meeting will be held on Wednesday, December 8th via WebEx. Chair Schmit asked for a motion to adjourn. A motion was made by Lori Sorenson and seconded by Ryan Gruenenfelder. Motion passed by unanimous decision and the meeting adjourned at 1.02pm.