

**Meeting Minutes**

**OKANOGAN COUNTY & CCT**

**BROADBAND ACTION TEAM MEETING**

**July 27, 2022**

**2-3 pm**

**Meeting started: 2:00 PM**

**Introductions: Attendees by Zoom/call in:**

Roni Holder-Diefenbach (Economic Alliance Executive Director), James Lightfoot (ACRS), Joanna Bastian (MethowNet), Devin Gombosky (COM), Rachel McClure (Gov. Newhouse Office), Kellie Conn (OK CO WSU Ext.) Chris St. Germaine (Ziply Fiber), Greg Mendonca (OCEC), Kim Herman (Partners for Rural Washington), Brandi Schwerdtfeger (ACRS), Hanna Kliegman, Kayla Wells-Yoakum (OK CO WSU Ext.) Frederic Feit (Tilson), Chelsea Bagwell (COM), Stafford Strong, Scott Graham (CEO Three Rivers Hospital), Mike Ellis (Family Health Centers).

Minutes from the June 23rd BAT meeting were approved.

**Presentation: Kim Herman (Partners for Rural Washington)**

Partners for Rural Washington’s first broadband project was 2016-17. At the same time their group worked on expansion of the Puget Sound islands as well as assisting one of the tribes to open a youth/community center for broadband. Began to focus on rural areas in the Spokane Valley where they work with local community and economic development by providing need studies. Set up a telehealth clinic in Garfield, WA as well as an upgrade in the city of Harrington, WA. Was able to help Whitman County health district by obtaining $50,000 of federal ARPA money to keep a nursing home open. The group has been able to bring in around $96,000 to rural areas in eastern Washington. They do not accept fees for their consultant work. Kim helped create the Housing Trust Fund and spoke on assisting rural housing needs. Chelsea Bagwell shared the website: <https://www.commerce.wa.gov/building-infrastructure/housing/housing-trust-fund/>

James Lightfoot (ACRS) asked for grant recommendations for state or federal programs for telemedicine? Kim has no specifics; will ask Jody the consultant.

Roni Holder-Diefenbach (Economic Alliance Executive Director)- Do we have access to your grant writer? Yes, they would need an inquiry and an outline of what they are interested in accomplishing, add background such as preliminary work. Will arrange for Jody and Kim to meet with Roni soon.

To learn more about Partners for Rural Washington: <http://www.partnersruralwa.org/>

**Grant Application Update-**

**James Lightfoot (ACRS) –** Reconnect 3 applications were awarded recently about $400 M worth. The Middle Mile applications are due at the end of September. Submitted draft of amended Study Plan, with 21 service areas, estimate of $117 M.

**Devin Gombosky (COM) -** Applications- NOFO will be delayed until late 2022. NTIA has $25 M additional matching funds for Federal programs such as Reconnect. (Infrastructure funding)

Reconnect 4 out in Aug-Sept 2022, no release until Reconnect 3 has been finalized.

We have launched [a survey](https://urldefense.com/v3/__https%3A/survey.alchemer.com/s3/6803644/DEFSurvey__;!!JmPEgBY0HMszNaDT!sBIYkVfVPQ_-pbda12ls7Zyr2krdtjoj5TLdKX9x3lKKJMs6y9qeMIq-VWuEDPtxvCHbvVjHqGSi8N1kUXRxAAWMGYe398v-iQ$) in collaboration with the office of equity to learn about internet access in Washington. We are looking to get a diverse response that accurately reflects all of Washington’s residents’ needs.

Have launched an RFP for additional Digital Navigator Grants. These grants are separate from the first round that was launched last year. All current programs have been extended and this RFP is for new programs. I am coordinating this RFP for our office and if folks have any questions, please email me directly. mailto:devin.gombosky@commerce.wa.gov

[Broadband Bulletin - July 2022 (govdelivery.com)](https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/WADOC/bulletins/3251b5c)

[Request for proposals: Washington State Broadband Office Digital Navigator grant program (govdelivery.com)](https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/WADOC/bulletins/32140b7)

**Chris St. Germaine (Ziply)-** Moving forward with WSBO and NTIA Improvement Program Funds, received letters of award from WSBO, provided project development sheets and the letter of match commitment back to WSBO. Environmental assessment went to NTIA, waiting to hear back. Most of site work and engineering is done. WSBO expects $12M to roll out with a new NOFO in October.

**Chelsea Bagwell (COM)-** No additional updates.

**Greg Mendonca (OCEC)-** Wrapping up final stages of feasibility study, will be ready in August. Summary meeting with Methownet and study developer, we have a model, and a design will see where it goes.

**Rachel McClure (Gov. Newhouse Office)-** Middle Mile funding, will write letters of support.

**Scott Graham (CEO, Three Rivers Hospital)-** Gov. funding for telemedicine services to patients is still a bit questionable as to whether it will stay in place once we get past the Covid-19 situation. Medicare has been slow in letting us know their long-term telemedicine plans. Positive communication from our patients on how well telemedicine is working for them. We have a tele hospitalist from Providence Hospital out of Spokane that offers evening coverage.

**Frederic Feit-(Tilson)-** Federal funding stream will continue for a few years; the state programs are based on the American Rescue Plan. Next year, the next round of funding will be flowing through the WSBO that is based on the Infrastructure Investment of Jobs Act, inside of that the funding program for broadband infrastructure is called the BEAD program. They haven’t announced the amount of funding per state yet, however the estimations or forecasts as to what the state allocations would be for Washington State are quite high. Frederick Feels that the Methow Valley is eligible to receive BEAD funding.

**Joanna Bastian (MethowNet)-** We are well poised to enter the next round of state administered grants.

**Roni Holder-Diefenbach Economic Alliance Executive Director)-** Update for next meeting: As of this time we do not have a guest speaker for the August 25th meeting; if no presenter, we will go over an overview of the draft plan.

Meeting was adjourned at 2:47 pm. Next meeting is August 25th at 2 PM.

Respectfully submitted by Kellie Conn, WSU Extension Okanogan County.