



RURAL BROADBAND EXPANSION COUNCIL

Minutes of Regular Meeting
10:00 a.m. on Wednesday, September 15, 2021
State Capitol, Room 4S.5

1. Welcome / Call to Order / Establish a Quorum

- Sen. Leewright called the meeting to order at 10:06 a.m. and ordered the roll to be called.
- Present: Drew Beverage, Darlene Brugnoli, James Leewright, Logan Phillips, Jack Smiley, Sammie Valentino, Daniel Webster, Brian Whitacre, and Brandy Wreath.
- Absent: Cliff Agee, Mike Berube, Patrick Grace, Steven Harpe, Roger Neal, Billy Staggs, and Jerry Whisenhunt.
- Chair declared that a quorum of the Council was present.
- Reminder that this meeting is being recorded.

2. * Approval of Minutes of the July 21 and August 18 meetings

- **Motion #1** by Mr. Beverage to approve the minutes as amended; Ms. Valentino seconds. Motion approved.

3. Remarks from Co-Chairman Sen. James Leewright

- Sen. Leewright had no remarks and turned the meeting over to Rep. Phillips.

4. Remarks from Co-Chairman Rep. Logan Phillips

- House Interim study on Transportation, Infrastructure, and Broadband infrastructure will be presented next week. American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) activities are ongoing and legislative meetings are being livestreamed.

5. Report of the GEOGRAPHIC BOUNDARIES sub-committee by Mr. Brandy Wreath (5 minutes)

- We've had emails and conversations among sub-committee members and staff, but no meeting since last Council meeting; therefore, no motions or recommendations.
- The Oklahoma Corporation Commission (OCC) may secure mapping services from South Carolina through the Oklahoma Universal Service Fund (OUSF). It's very useful for testing of the \$300 million in broadband infrastructure OUSF has funded over the years. We will update the Council as we proceed.
- Leewright: Please coordinate with Kirk Martin on mapping activities by Commerce.

6. * Discussion and possible action on recommendations of the Geographic Boundaries sub-committee (10 minutes)

- Whitacre: If OUSF purchases mapping services or content from South Carolina, how will that correspond with Oklahoma's mapping efforts?

- Wreath: The South Carolina map would be a supplement to the maps Commerce is developing. We will move forward only if the information is very open and available to overlay with the work being done by Commerce.

7. Report of the ADOPTION RATE sub-committee by Dr. Brian Whitacre (5 minutes)

- The Adoption sub-committee had a Zoom meeting this month. We have no motions or recommendations, but have information to share with the Council.
- **Slide 1:** Emergency Broadband Benefit Enrollment 5-digit ZIPs 9/1/2021. It shows, in terms of EBB sign-ups and participation rates, Oklahoma is still in the Top Five.
- Received confirmation that the Infrastructure bill being considered by the U.S. House lowers the monthly benefit from \$50 to \$30/month, but keeps the benefit for eligible households at \$75/month on tribal lands, which include most of Oklahoma.
- **Slide 2:** AARP Rural Library Digital Navigators proposal. Working with AARP Oklahoma, we got a \$20,000 grant to hire “digital navigators” to work in five or six rural libraries helping people sign up for EBB, get low-cost service or devices, demonstrate telehealth, and develop partnership for future digital equity grants. This pilot program lasts only through the end of this year and is designed to improve adoption of broadband technology. The lessons learned from this pilot may help guide future program design.

8. * Discussion and possible action on recommendations of the Adoption Rate sub-committee (5 minutes)

- Wreath: OCC has a couple of full-time outreach agents to promote broadband for schools, hospitals, and communities, so if we can partner in any way, let me know and we’ll be happy to make them available.
- Phillips: Why are sign-ups so high in the two areas around Hughes County?
- Whitacre: It could be that local providers are highly active – likely co-ops or tribes.
- Phillips: What was the price for the digital navigators?
- Whitacre: The grant is for \$20,000 and it will pay digital navigators in five locations an hourly fee to provide services. We envision 10 hours a week.

9. Report of the POLICY IMPACTS sub-committee by Ms. Darlene Brugnoli (10 minutes)

- The sub-committee met to discuss the upcoming legislative session and legislation needed to further the goals of the Council. We discussed bills that didn’t pass last session, such as the Pole Attachment bill and Easement bill. We also discussed bills that did pass that may require further legislation, such as the Grant bill. We agreed to meet to discuss compromise language for the pole attachment bill. We will look at similar bills in Georgia, Arkansas, Maryland, and Michigan.
- We also discussed the ARPA work at the State Capitol and Mr. Fina provided a good summary of the work going on there. He also explained his role in providing guidance to municipalities in securing and spending funding from ARPA. He also discussed the role of Guidehouse, the Project Management Office (PMO).
- The sub-committee recommends inviting Guidehouse to brief the entire Council on their role and the processes to be used relative to grants from the ARPA fund.
- The sub-committee recommends developing principles for considering grant applications, e.g., being technology neutral, to present to the full Council.

10. * Discussion and possible action on recommendations of the Policy Impacts sub-committee (5 minutes)

- Phillips: This Council's role in the process of awarding ARPA grant is limited.
- Brugnoli: Yes, the sub-committee invites all parties to be represented as we develop recommended principles.
- **Motion #2** by Sen. Leewright to request a briefing by Guidehouse on the grant and funding processes for ARPA funds and the role of the PMO. Mr. Beverage seconds the motion. Motion approved without objection.
- **Motion #3** by Mr. Beverage to permit the Policy Impacts sub-committee to recommend principles for considering grant requests. Ms. Brugnoli seconds the motion.
- Leewright: When this Council was created, it was designed to give the private sector a large voice in advancing broadband in the state. ARPA changed the amount of money involved tremendously. I will support this motion if we all understand that the principles developed should avoid infighting or leaving anyone out.
- Motion approved by roll call vote.

11. Report of the ADVISORY sub-committee by Mr. Mike Fina, Oklahoma Municipal League (OML), for Director Steven Harpe, Office of Management and Enterprise Services (OMES) (10 minutes)

- No motions or recommendations.
- Following the process set forth in ARPA, the State requested its funds in early August and has 30 days to write its rules. The State will receive from the U.S. Treasury \$1.87 billion for investment into projects that will benefit all Oklahomans. In addition, the State will receive from Treasury an allocation of \$1.32 billion for Non-Entitlement Units of Local Government (NEUs). NEUs are local governments that typically serve a population under 50,000. Local award amounts are based on the population of the NEU.
- OML has worked closely with OMES and legislative leaders to write rules and develop policy.
- At the recent OML conference, 60 cities signed up through the state portal. This involved teams from OML, OMES, and Guidehouse. We found some technical difficulties with the state portal and have been meeting daily with Guidehouse to improve the portal. We expect it to soon work well for the rest of the eligible cities and towns.
- The federal legislation was written with municipalities in mind more than counties. OML is encouraging the counties to partner with municipalities on projects. In talks with legislators and state leaders, I consistently hear that regional projects will be scored higher and so I expect final policy to reflect that. Using "match" money from multiple jurisdictions is a smart strategy to leverage available funding and do bigger, transformative projects.
- Three things are killing rural Oklahoma: lack of economic opportunities; lack of educational opportunities; and lack of healthcare. Broadband won't fix all of these, but it will get us a long way in all three areas.
- From a legislative perspective, the process for deciding how ARPA funds are spent is very different from the CARES Act money, when a very small group of people made all the decisions. With ARPA, the Legislature is really in charge. You may hear that Oklahoma is behind in planning, but we're in the best position of any state I've seen because we waited, because we hired a PMO involved, and because we have the Legislature involved.

12. * Discussion and possible action on recommendations of the Advisory sub-committee (5 minutes)

- Leewright: Everything I'm hearing is that scoring will be weighted to favor projects with multiple partners. Some county governments in Oklahoma had to give back some of the CARES Act money and I don't want to end up in the same situation again.
- Phillips: How did the portal sign-ups go? Was it cumbersome?
- Fina: It was simpler than I thought it was going to be. We were able to sign them up on their own phones. We were able to get the time down to five minutes.
- Rep. Phillips turned the meeting over to Sen. Leewright, who recognized Phillips for the next agenda item.

13. Report of the GRANT RULES sub-committee by Representative Logan Phillips (5 minutes)

- No motions or recommendations.
- We have been waiting for the initial meetings of the ARPA groups, which have now met, so we will meet next week. The ARPA working group on Transportation, Infrastructure, and Broadband will meet next Friday, so the ORBEC Grant Rules sub-committee will probably meet again shortly after that. We will meet virtually.
- If you want to be on the Grant Rules sub-committee, contact my legislative assistant.
- A quorum of the Council may not be on a sub-committee [because of Oklahoma Open Meeting Act requirements].

14. * Discussion and possible action on recommendations of the Grant Rules sub-committee (10 minutes)

- No discussion or questions.
- Sen. Leewright turned the meeting back over to Rep. Phillips.

15. Discussion of possible agenda items for next meeting

- Presentation by Guidehouse (PMO).
- Leewright: Invite 929 Strategies to present, along with Guidehouse.

16. Announcements

- Next regularly scheduled meeting: 10:00 a.m., Wednesday, Oct. 20, 2021, in Room 4S.5, State Capitol. [Members must attend in-person in order to count toward quorum, speak, and vote.]
- Throughout 2021, Council meetings are set for the 3rd Wednesday of each month at 10:00 a.m.
- Interim Study on State Broadband Assets will be next Monday.
- ARPA working group on Transportation, Infrastructure, and Broadband will meet next Friday.
- Encourage you to listen or participate in these meetings.
- Rep. Phillips turned the meeting over to Sen. Leewright.
- Leewright: Much of this process is "hurry up and wait," but emergency meetings may be called.
- Phillips: The State's grant portal to submit project ideas will launch on October 1.

17. Adjournment

Sen. Leewright declared the meeting adjourned at 10:40 a.m.

* Indicates anticipated action.

Prepared by: Kirk Martin, Oklahoma Department of Commerce
 Approved by Council, as presented, on 10/20/2021.