



Board of County Commissioners Agenda Request

2A
 Agenda Item #

Requested Meeting Date: September 29, 2015

Title of Item: Committee of the Whole - Brandband Discussion

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> REGULAR AGENDA <input type="checkbox"/> CONSENT AGENDA <input type="checkbox"/> INFORMATION ONLY	Action Requested: <input type="checkbox"/> Approve/Deny Motion <input type="checkbox"/> Adopt Resolution (attach draft)	<input type="checkbox"/> Direction Requested <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Discussion Item <input type="checkbox"/> Hold Public Hearing* <small>*provide copy of hearing notice that was published</small>
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Submitted by: Ross Wagner	Department: Economic Development
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Presenter (Name and Title): Ross Wagner, Economic Development & Forest Industry Coordinator	Estimated Time Needed:
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Summary of Issue:

On Tuesday, September 29th at 1:00 at the Long Lake Conservation Center, the Aitkin County Board of Commissioners will be holding a Committee of the Whole meeting with area broadband providers invited. The purpose of the meeting will be to have an open dialogue with the providers looking for specific actions we can make together to eventually bring Aitkin County up to the broadband speeds specified by the State of Minnesota.

The following providers were invited: Charter Communications, Emily Cooperative Telephone Co., SCI Cable TV, CenturyLink, Mille Lacs Energy Cooperative, Frontier Communication Systems, and Consolidated Telecommunications Company.

Two documents are attached:

1. A memo to the County Board and broadband providers providing discussion points
2. A copy of the letter sent out to the providers, inviting them to the September 29th COTW meeting

Alternatives, Options, Effects on Others/Comments:

Recommended Action/Motion:

Financial Impact:

Is there a cost associated with this request? Yes No

What is the total cost, with tax and shipping? \$

Is this budgeted? Yes No Please Explain:

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TO: Aitkin County Board of Commissioners & Aitkin County Internet Providers

FROM: Ross Wagner, Economic Development & Forest Industry Coordinator

DATE: September 24, 2015

SUBJECT: Committee of the Whole Broadband Discussion Points

As you are no doubt aware, Aitkin County is listed as having zero percent of our households that meet the State of Minnesota guidelines for broadband speeds. Obviously this is a concern to us as we look towards the present and future development of Aitkin County. We hope as a result of this meeting, we can find ways we could work together with interested partners to begin to rectify this situation.

At an open discussion on Broadband in Aitkin County on September 17th, several concerns with the current state of broadband speeds in Aitkin County were brought up. They include the following:

- As folks look to move into our county or purchase vacation homes, broadband speeds that are currently available are making people look elsewhere. Many areas in “Lake Country” do not have this problem; this leaves Aitkin County at a disadvantage.
- Small business owners that work out of their homes discussed the issues they are having with current broadband. Anywhere from having to hand deliver large files that can’t be sent or received, to pacing their available data, or turning down work. Again, putting Aitkin County at a disadvantage.
- Many people are getting their internet from wireless phone plans that are very expensive and are limited on their data.
- Businesses and agencies that use or would like to implement telecommuting cannot offer it or are limited by the vast areas of the county with very limited internet service.
- Telecomputing jobs such as those offered by Fingerhut and are suited to many of our residents are off limits due to lack of high-speed broadband.
- We have heard from businesses that happen to be in an area such as the City of Aitkin that some customers cannot use their on-line services because the customer’s internet speeds are too slow.
- The future of education, economic development, healthcare and more are dependent on high speed broadband. Our current situation of zero percent of households meeting State of MN guidelines is very concerning to us as we look to the future of Aitkin County.

Below are some of the questions we need answered in order to begin the process of bringing Aitkin County up to speed. We realize that as a large county with a dispersed population and several providers that this is a tough issue.

- What are your present and future plans, if any, to increase broadband speeds in Aitkin County or at least your service area? What are the timelines?
- Do you feel there are alternatives to a fiber to the premise network, what are they and how and when could they be implemented.
- What kind of partnership can Aitkin County be a part of to assist you in your plans that can result in increased internet speeds?
- Grant funds are available through the State of MN Border to Border program; is there something with that or other grant programs that we could help or assist with?
- Are there other incentives Aitkin County could or should offer or explore that would assist in the development of a high-speed broadband network?
- Anything else to add or discuss from your perspective?

September 2, 2015

To Provider:

I am inviting you and other broadband providers to an Aitkin County Board of Commissioners, committee of the whole meeting to discuss broadband in Aitkin County. The meeting will be Tuesday, September 29th at 1:00 at the Long Lake Conservation Center. As you are no doubt aware, Aitkin County is listed as having zero percent of our households that meet the State of Minnesota guidelines for broadband speeds. Obviously this is a concern to us we look towards the present and future development of Aitkin County. We hope as a result of this meeting, we can find ways we could work together to begin to rectify this situation. Some discussion points are below.

- What are your present and future plans, if any, to increase broadband speeds in Aitkin County?
- What can we do to assist you in your plans?
- Grant funds are available through the State of MN Border to Border program, is there something with that or other grant programs that we could help or assist with.

A committee of the whole meeting is a regular meeting of the County Commissioners; however, no motions or other type of actions can occur. It is meant for open discussion and an exchange of ideas. I hope you will be able to attend, we want to hear from you. If you are not the proper person to receive this letter, please let me know who I should contact. A map with directions to the Long Lake Conservation Center is enclosed.

Sincerely,

Ross Wagner, Economic Development &
Forest Industry Coordinator