

**GRANT COUNTY DIGITAL NETWORK COALITION
BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING MINUTES**

December 18, 2018

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

Dan Becker, Grant County
Josh Walker, Seneca
Brandon Smith, John Day
Nathan McFarland
Denise Porter

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT

None

STAFF PRESENT

Nicholas Green, Executive Director

GUESTS PRESENT

Christopher Mitchell, Institute for Local Self-Reliance
Jessica Keys, Senator Merkley's Office (by phone)
Steve Corbota, Oregon Fiber Partnership (by phone)
Chris Tamarin, Oregon Broadband Advisory Council (by phone)
John Hoskins, ViaSat
Paul Gettler, ViaSat
Erik Orton, Commstructure Consulting
Dan McGraw, Commstructure Consulting
Garrin Bott, Oregon Telephone Corporation

Multiple audience members attended in person and via FaceBook live broadcast through the ViaSat satellite network

Agenda Item No. 1—Open and Note Attendance

Chair Walker opened the meeting of the Grant County Digital board of directors at 6:00 P.M. He noted all board members were present.

Agenda Item No. 2—Approval of Minutes

Chair Walker noted the minutes from prior meetings would be approved at the next board meeting.

Agenda Item No. 3—Appearance of Interested Citizens

Chair Walker welcomed the audience and asked if there were any agenda items they wished to add. None appearing.

Agenda Item No. 4—Introduction of Participants

Chair Walker introduced the board's guests, identified in the "Guests Present" section of the minutes. Several attended by phone.

Agenda Item No. 5—Overview of the Grant County Digital Network Coalition

Green began with a presentation of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats/constraints (SWOT) for deploying broadband in Grant County and closing the digital divide. He described the coalition the board had formed and presented a brief history of the organization. He then discussed the board's role, mission and the SWOT characteristics that we are working with as we attempt to improve broadband access within the county. He emphasized it takes a village and the board is forging strong partnerships with the various organizations present tonight to help us improve the quality and consistency of our digital networks. Green discussed the fact that our economy has been in decline for 20+ years largely as a result of changes in federal policy, and the board is trying to remedy a major component of that decline by improving internet access for Grant County businesses and residents. He discussed the goal of the board as creating economic diversification to help us take control of our economic future, and a key component of that is access to competitive internet at competitive prices, where the private sector can succeed, and government agencies can exert appropriate influence to change our economic outcomes. He summarized by saying this is not about binge-watching Netflix or streaming live movies, although we will be able to do that – it's about the economy and removing one major barrier to economic growth. Green then reviewed the maps on the board, which showed the detailed network planning for the coalition's proposed route from John Day to the county line and the eventual route to Burns.

Agenda Item No. 6—Community Conversation Facilitated by Christopher Mitchell

Chair Walker introduced Chris Mitchell with the Institute for Local Self-Reliance. Mr. Mitchell discussed his perspective on community broadband across the country and the various projects and policies he's been involved. He noted ILSR has been advocating for local community self-reliance for over 40 years and he personally has been working on community broadband advocacy for 12 years. He said each community is unique but there are common themes. One worth noting is that this is a very hard region to serve with private funding only. When you look at companies that are national in operation, they are fighting for subscribers in the major metropolitan areas, so there is not a lot of money left over to try and invest in rural areas where you have lower population densities and therefore a higher cost and premium to serve. The other is that we have a lot of competing technologies from fiber-to-the home to fixed wireless, but that many of the smaller providers using these technologies are operating on very limited budgets and they need smarter government policies in order to have long-term success. Where they see local networks succeeding is where cities have strong policies related to broadband access (currently over 30 networks around the country where local governments have made investments) where services are provided as a public utility or are accessible from multiple internet service providers. Despite increased federal funding, he still says "help is not on the way." Federal agencies are highly risk averse and need to see rural broadband investments that are more secure. Coalitions like this help provide that security. He stressed the importance of local determination and grit, and that it takes time to secure large federal investments. He also emphasized the enduring nature of fiber. We ran an electric wire to nearly everyone in the country and he believes the time will come when there is a fiber optic line to everyone in the country.

Green asked Steve Corbato from the Oregon Fiber Partnership and Chris Tamarin from Business Oregon to speak about the roles of their respective agencies regarding expanding broadband access in Oregon. Mr. Tamarin explained the OBAC is a council of legislators and staff appointed by the Governor representing multiple industries and stakeholders. Senator Ferrioli held the seat in the Senate until his resignation, that seat is vacant, and Rep. Pam Marsh from southern Oregon is the representative from the House. It is an advisory council in its tenth year. Each year it provides a report to the Governor on broadband issues and access for the state. It just submitted its 2018 report on November 1st, which is posted to the OBAC website. The report makes a series of recommendations, though it does not have funding authority. When you look at Grant County and the City of John Day, he stated we are in the forefront of those challenges because in spite of the progress that has been made in satellite and DSL, as well as other technologies over the past ten years, we rank behind most other counties and western states in terms access and service quality. The digital divide continues to be very real, and the urban-rural divide is very significant, and this is made more difficult by the fact that broadband is a moving target – ten years ago the digital divide was between DSL versus dial-up, now it is discussed in terms of speed (megabits versus gigabits) and it’s an ongoing work in progress that will never be completed, but there is growing recognition that broadband internet access is the essential service for any community to enjoy economic growth. The internet is the platform on which the world works for businesses, healthcare, education, entertainment – all our institutions use this platform to function. If you are a community, business or individual family and you do not have quality broadband access, you are at a strategic disadvantage.

Green noted that the OBAC is doing at the state level what we are trying to do at the local level – connecting agencies and individuals with spending and policymaking authority with private and public providers who can help close the digital divide. He noted the state appropriation we received in 2017 was a great start, but this is a regional challenge and will require a regional solution.

Steve Corbato discussed his organization and the role of the Oregon Fiber Partnership. It is a partnership of the four research universities in the state – University of Oregon, OSU, PSU and EOU – and it is a product of the State’s desire to own a public education, research and innovation network. They are not trying to compete with the private sector for internet at the home or business. He shared an anecdote of the University of Texas competing for work running a national lab against the University of California system. He defined success as being able to submit a competitive application because the UT system was the only other educational institution that could do it in the country. The analogy he drew was that our ability to compete for federal funds, even though we did not win, is strategically important to the community. From the OFP perspective, they are most interested in reaching the critical public service and education locations in Grant County, particularly those with existing relationships with the research universities. He noted the proposed fiber build from John Day to Burns is of interest to their organization because it gives them a path into Grant County and some redundancy to their network in eastern Oregon. He said he is encouraged by what he’s seeing on the federal front in terms of rural broadband, which seem to favor cities that have done their homework and prepared already. He reaffirmed they supported our initial application and are glad to support our future work.

Agenda Item No. 7—Opportunities for Collaboration

Green discussed the City’s and the Board’s efforts to date to secure additional funding for the broadband trunk line between John Day and Burns. He noted we are not done, we are just getting started. It was a difficult setback not winning the 2018 Community Connect grant, but we have other applications actively in the works and other sources of funding we are pursuing, and we are pursuing

those in partnership with Oregon Telephone Corporation and CenturyLink as our incumbent service providers. He also discussed ViaSat's recent win of the Connect America Fund-II auction and that they attended tonight in order to demonstrate the capabilities of their system. ViaSat has been successfully streaming the meeting live to Facebook over their satellite system and would like to provide a demonstration of their system. *Mr. Gettler then performed a standard speed test of the satellite network while streaming live. The network returned download speeds of about 130 mbps down (download speed) and a little over 3 mbps up (upload speed).* He noted the upload is carrying the live feed and any other data we are pushing through. *He then showed a high-definition video stream from YouTube. The demo concluded with a Voice-over-IP telephone call from the fire hall to the 911 dispatch non-emergency phone number. ViaSat then addressed questions related to their pricing, net neutrality impacts at the state level, and service reliability issues such as data restrictions.* Garrin Bott, President of Ortelco, discussed the importance of having a solution like this in place because there are some remote locations of the county where it is not profitable to provide fiber optic service. Chair Walker noted that the coalition wants to have processes in place to facilitate these options for people – those who can access fiber and those who can't – and that the board views their mission as one of facilitation rather than designating a specific type of service. Green affirmed the board is trying to help understand the market dynamics and all the available options. *Public comment ensued, with some expressing frustration about data caps and having to maintain two different providers to ensure continued access at an affordable rate.*

Agenda Item No. 8—Audience Questions & Closing Comments

Chair Walker opened the public meeting to comments and questions. Mr. Bob Pereira shared his opinion that city and county governments should not be involved in this because "it is competing with the private sector." Audience members immediately contradicted this statement. He continued that "government never runs anything right to start with" and provided some analogies that were unclear. He shared various concerns related to funding, past and present City of John Day projects unrelated to broadband, and the mistake the board made in "giving Nick the Executive Director." He provided additional comments unrelated to the project or anything else discussed during the meeting, his perception that there was not a written plan for the project, provided further comparisons to other government projects unrelated to broadband, and then yielded the floor at the insistence of Chair Walker, who attempted to address Mr. Pereira's concerns but was continually interrupted. Mr. Smith asked if Mr. Pereira had ever attended a board meeting, to which he responded he had not. Chair Walker reiterated the purpose of this meeting and others was to be transparent in our efforts to build this infrastructure for the good of the county. He further stated that he's lived in this county for a long time and he's heard a lot of people complain that we never get any assistance from the west side of the State, but now that we have, we're going to do the best we can to deliver. Mr. Porter, Mayor of Long Creek, asked questions of ViaSat pricing, which Green pulled up on their website for the John Day area. Audience members commented on the importance of this technology for kids, who have adequate access at school but then cannot do their homework at home because the connectivity is so poor. They affirmed the technology gap is real and needs to be addressed, both for K-12 and higher education distance learning.

Mr. Mitchell summarized the meeting by recognizing that it took 50 years to electrify the United States. He said it will take time to reach that point with broadband, but that most U.S. households were served during one of the worst wars we ever fought and during one of the worst depressions. Most of North Dakota, a low population density area, has fiber to the home, which few people realize, so there are examples of rural communities that are succeeding and it's groups like this that make sure John Day will

get it before the other areas. Citizen involvement is essential to make sure there is a good plan and there is hope, but it is stronger in areas like this where people are being active.

Chair Walker concluded by saying we look forward to continuing this process and that our mission is to facilitate affordable, reliable broadband access to Grant County, Oregon. That's what we're going to try to do and we're going to keep working towards it. *Audience applause.*

Agenda Item No.9—Other Business and Upcoming Meetings

No further business was discussed.

Adjourn

There being no further business before the board, Mr. Becker moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:23 P.M. Mr. Smith seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted:

Nicholas Green

ACCEPTED BY THE BOARD ON JANUARY 15, 2019.



By: Josh Walker, Chair