

NEON Minutes
December 10, 2015, Biotechnology Advancement Center

Meeting began with the Pledge of Allegiance and County Administrator, Tom Johnson, presided over the meeting.

Keith Stubbe provided information on the Minnesota Public Broadband Alliance, which has been around for a year consisting of publicly held fiber, Cities and Counties with the goal of collaborating on purchases and bringing high speed internet to all of Minnesota. The original 5 stakeholders are still in place: SMBS (Southwest Minnesota Broadband Services), WindomNet, Scott County, St. Cloud and Monticello. Monticello leases fiber while Scott County and St. Cloud provide the transport to different people as a "pass through." WindomNet almost has the route done to Omaha. Other members now include Arrowhead, Cross Lake and Sherburne County. It is anticipated that Rock County, Dakota County and Lake County will join.

The Minnesota Public Broadband Alliance is very legislative oriented and is active in lobbying. This alliance is funded by membership at the cost of \$5,000 per year. It is structured as a non-profit and has more buying power. NEON could join as a joint power (City/County/School) but this would need to be discussed and agreed upon.

Robert Demuth Jr. provided information on a breakout session that took place at the AMC (Association of Minnesota Counties) annual conference relating to economic development tools. The presenter stated that Counties can't do it themselves and that they need to have dialogue with the City, Water & Light, Chamber and local Economic Development. Mr. Demuth stated that our community is already doing that with NEON and feels we are doing exactly what the presenter was suggesting.

Donald Linssen provided information on a public safety meeting that took place at the AMC conference. The Commissioner of Corrections spoke that serious crime seems to be down but the number of prisoners is up. Although the state of our economy is better, there appears to be more crimes that are directly related to alcohol or drugs. From an economic development standpoint, there are many new cells that need to be added and there is a big push to open another prison. The cost is estimated at \$30 million to run a prison for one year. Many prisons are over capacity and there are many issues that come with that. It is expected that we are all going to see a tax increase in the future for public safety.

Marvin Zylstra provided information on the Buffer Law and the mapping of public waters. The Buffer Law is more of a water quality law. This will occur in 4 phases: making the digital data available; contacting Cities and Watersheds for data, public hearings; and approval in the summer of 2016 based upon the public hearings. There is an appeal process for the determination of benefits. When the law was written, it was very vague making enforcement difficult. Freeborn County is the only county that has had all ditches viewed/redetermined and it took them 15 years. There are 5 counties out of 87 that are already enforcing the 16 ½ foot buffer on all ditches. Residential lake property is exempted but there are very few exemptions.

Around the Table/NEON priorities:

- Tom Johnson/Nobles County Administrator-Attended broadband meetings and infrastructure committee at AMC Annual Conference. AMC generates their legislative platform from what was voted on at the annual conference.
- Jorge Lopez/SW MN Housing Partnership-Just completed 48 rental units in Jackson and Storm Lake. Working on 48 units for the City of Worthington and hope to start in September 2016. They are having issues with the lack of workforce and are looking for construction, HVAC, etc. laborers. There has been discussion about forming some type of alliance to provide classes, education for achieving their licenses for contract work and help them to start a business and to house the business. Julie Foote, MVTV Wireless, asked the group if they had heard of "Work Up" in Willmar where they had repurposed a building for businesses. She will email the "Work Up" link to Tom Johnson. Kurt Lintelman mentioned that the Private Industry Council

- has statewide funds and MNWest would have access to programming and funds for the skills trades.
- Matt Widboom/Nobles County-In February of 2016, the Governor will be hosting a water quality summit.
 - Gary Ewert/Heron Lake Watershed District-Working on the Buffer Initiative. Benefit determination needs to be done to facilitate landowners. Money can't be paid appropriately based off 1920 standards.
 - Cheryl Janssen/Seward township-Had first trial on snow removal with the new snow plow purchased. The township needs gravel badly as do many others.
 - Bob Demuth/Nobles County-Ducks Unlimited purchased 640 acres from the Jones Foundation and are beginning to restore the site back to native prairie and wetlands while ensuring no negative impacts to adjacent private land and associated drainage. Ducks Unlimited plans to donate the land to the Minnesota DNR in 2016 or 2017.
 - Darlene Macklin/Chamber of Commerce-Getting to the end of the Highway 60 project which should result in no more detours. Re-elected Stephen Schnieder as Chair for the Highway 60 project group. The Chamber's annual conference will be held on March 8, 2016. It was suggested that it would be a good opportunity to invite the County and the City as the Legislators are expected to all be there.
 - Rodney Sankey/City of Worthington-Attended a broadband conference in November. The Broadband's mission statement will soon become official and be released. Rod shared that it is expected that if we are using 20 MB of bandwidth now, in 10 years we will need a GB. Fiber is being used with any new construction, not copper. MVTV will soon be providing wireless internet to Olson Campground on a "pay as you go" basis. Campers can purchase 1 day, 3 days, etc. with a credit card. MVTV is waiting for the City to provide electricity for their equipment.
 - Gary Hoffman/Worthington Public Utilities-Storm Water and Electrical Rates are not going up. This is a clarification from a report given in the previous meeting's minutes. The wells are recharging. They are not as high as in the past, but the increase is great to see.
 - Julie Foote/MVTV Wireless-MVTV provides wireless to those who cannot get fiber. A broadband grant would provide speeds for those out in the middle of nowhere, keeping people in their homes longer. MVTV has provided a FREE Public Hotspot Broadband Internet Service to several areas and of those, Bigelow and Dundee have yet to go live.
 - Larry Janssen/City of Worthington-Attended a meeting regarding the golf course and Larson Crane has completed digging in the Industrial Park.
 - Abraham Algadi/WREDC-Economic Development had 2 annual meetings with organizations and reviewed same issues. The State Auditor spoke of a tool for Capital Investments. WREDC is moving forward with the mall. Abraham reminded everyone not to believe rumors and to wait for the final results of the appraisal.
 - Marvin Zylstra/Nobles County-Mr. Zylstra reported on county ditches and the JD#45 hearing. JD#45 is mostly in Jackson but there is a small amount in Nobles and the tile system was installed 100 years ago. Commissioners Zylstra, Metz and Widboom serve on Joint Ditch Authority.
 - Tom Johnson/Nobles County Administrator-Brewster has torn down two tax forfeited properties and the County is getting ready to take one down in Ellsworth. NEON is looking for volunteers to visit 15-20 homes as 300 homes need to be surveyed for the feasibility study. 28 PC'S were given out at the 12/2 PC's for People event in Adrian. Have applied for 3 new Blandin Broadband grants. Tom asked the group what is the next big project and the only response was gravel for townships. The County's legislative meeting will occur in February for the 9 counties in SW Minnesota.
 - Donald Linssen/Nobles County-At the A.C.E. meeting, the need for volunteers for the survey was discussed.

The meeting adjourned.

Next Meeting:

January 14, 2016 5:30 – 7:00 pm
BioTechnology Advancement Center
1527 Prairie Drive, Worthington, MN 56187