

## BERRIEN COUNTY BROADBAND INTERNET TASK FORCE



May 5, 2022

10:00 AM via Zoom+

Berrien County Administration Center

### MEETING NOTES

**Zoom Attendees:** Berrien County Commissioner **Teri Freehling**; Berrien County Commissioner **Jim Curran**; Berrien County Commissioner **Ezra Scott**; Berrien County Administrator **Brain Dissette**; Berrien County Corporate Counsel **Thaddeus Hackworth**; Berrien County Community Development Director **Dan Fette**.

**Zoom Guest Attendees:** Tom Wilson, Sister Lake Cable.

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- I. **Connect with Tom Wilson, Sister Lakes Cable, regarding BCBIT programs.** Tom Wilson from [SISTER LAKES CABLE](#) (SLC) introduced himself and gave the group an overview of his company. SLC is a small, locally owned cable company, that began in 1984, first providing cable TV services, and now provides cable and high-speed internet services. SLC's customer base is specific to residents and businesses in the city limits of Sister Lakes (Keeler Township, Van Buren County), plus lakeside occupants of Round Lake, Little Crooked Lake, Dewey Lake and Magician Lake, up to Pipestone Lake (Silver Creek Township, Cass County). SLC is in the process of replacing all high-speed internet lines with fiber. This construction project brings fiber to the immediate area they serve with an opportunity for outlying areas to consider connection. Though SLC is not in Berrien County, they are a hop, skip, and jump from the Berrien County border. If there is a way they can assist with broadband deployment to Bainbridge and Pipestone Township, and there is a presumable need, as RDOF and CMIC funding may skip over an area thought to be covered but are not. SLC is also working with DCS Technology Design to assist with Van Buren County's technology analysis, reporting, and mapping of the current internet availability infrastructure of the entire county of Van Buren. DCS will report and map what type of infrastructure is deployed along with mapping where the internet infrastructure is located. DCS will identify the unserved and underserved areas of Van Buren County. Precise identification of unserved and underserved areas will allow for more efficient internet connection prioritization. As such, a parcel-by-parcel validation, identification, and mapping of this internet infrastructure, or lack thereof, may have the unintended consequence of identifying funding overlap. Administrator Dissette asked Mr. Watson if it was possible to connect folks in Berrien County within the parameters of a limited timeline, mainly ARPA. Mr. Watson stated, it shouldn't be a problem. His company has stockpiled supplies, getting ahead of the current supply-chain disruptions.
  
- II. **Review and approve scoring matrix for grant applications.** Administrator Dissette and Corporate Counsel Thaddeus Hackworth presented a scoring sheet, or scoring matrix, for use by BCBIT in the evaluation, review, and uniformity in funding recommendations of ARPA Broadband Applications. With an identified and accepted evaluation system, including a point system for rating each

application, will ensure uniformity in evaluating applications and will identify the rationale for funding recommendations. The scoring matrix presented is based on the information contained within the broadband application, a document built from the rules and regulations of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA), with the goal of expanding broadband service to unserved and underserved areas of Berrien County.

**BCBIT Member Concurrence:** BCBIT Members approve the scoring matrix reviewed for use with ARPA Broadband Applications submitted to Berrien County requesting high-speed internet funding.

- III. **Review grant agreements for Oronoko and Bainbridge Townships.** Administrator Dissette and Corporate Counsel Thaddeus Hackworth presented the grant agreement to be utilized with Oronoko and Bainbridge Townships as it relates to ARPA funding granted by Berrien County for use by these two sub-grantees. This grant agreement will allow for a clear understanding of responsibilities, compliance and use of funds.
  
- IV. **Review BCBIT Broadband Correspondence.** Administrator Dissette reviewed the April 29<sup>th</sup> [LETTER](#) sent to municipalities from BCBIT. This correspondence was an overview of milestones accomplished thus far, ARPA Broadband Sub-grantee funding status, additional funding opportunities, and forthcoming strategy initiatives of BCBIT.
  
- V. **DCS Mapping Contract.** The Berrien County Board of Commissioners (BOC) approved the proposal from [DCS TECHNOLOGY DESIGN](#) for broadband mapping services with Resolution [F2204255](#) dated April 28, 2022. DCS will develop a parcel-level, GIS-based map of broadband availability and infrastructure within Berrien County. DCS has previously developed similar maps for Washtenaw and Leelanau counties through a "boots on the ground" approach to collecting and mapping data. Currently, DCS is mapping Van Buren County. Berrien County will be next. With their boots on the ground approach, they will visually survey 1,581 square miles, and drive over 2,300 road miles, including those indeterminable private roads to complete the first task of the project: identification of ALL existing technologies.
  
- VI. **ARPA Grant Application Deadline Discussion.** Currently, Berrien County's American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) [Broadband Applications](#) are due on a rolling basis through July 1, 2022. Pushing out the ARPA Grant Application deadline to October will allow the DCS parcel data to be included with the applications requesting funding and support for high-speed internet deployment. With respect to resolution particulars, the application itself being modified, BCBIT will revisit this discussion in June. The likelihood of extending the deadline is high, with the possibility of creating a tally of dollars needed to fund high-speed internet to every citizen in Berrien County. We will continue to encourage communities to utilize Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC) as our contracted broadband opportunities grant resource expert.

## VII. Miscellaneous.

- **Next Meeting.** Next BCBIT Meeting is May 19, 2022 at 12:30 PM following the Board of Commissioners Meeting.
- **GIS Shapefiles & Broadband Mapping Layers.** Commissioner Freehling asked if it would be a good idea to request our GIS Department to add a layer to the County's GIS mapping with available shape files posted. RDOF Funding and CMIC Funding have shapefiles posted: [RDOF-ESRI-SHAPEFILE-LINK](#) and [CMIC-ESRI-SHAPEFILE-LINK](#). Also, look into Opportunity Zone locations.
- **Non-Disclosure Agreement with American Electric Power (AEP).** Administrator Dissette will follow up with AEP regarding non-disclosure agreement.
- **Request for Proposal (RFP).** We have two municipalities ready move forward into the RFP process. Administrator Dissette asked [Public Sector Consultants](#) (PCC) for a draft RFP. For comparison, Community Development Director Dan Fette and SWMPC Executive Director John Egelhaaf, along with Corporate Counsel Thaddeus Hackworth will assist with this process and review.

## COUNTY ADMINISTRATION

- County Administrator
- Personnel
- Corporate Counsel



701 Main Street  
St. Joseph, Michigan 49085  
Telephone: (269) 983-7111, Ext 8095  
Fax: (269) 983-5788

April 29, 2022

To our municipal partners:

As you know, Berrien County is committed to partnering with you to offer high-speed broadband to all residents as we work to provide critical access to information, eliminate socioeconomic inequity and enhance the overall quality of life.

Since establishing this as a County priority in April 2019, we have taken a number of steps, including:

- 2020 -Establish the Berrien County Broadband Internet Task Force (BCBIT).
- 2020 -Host a series of public meetings to begin gathering data.
- 2020 -Connect with community stakeholders, local leaders and chambers to engage our business community.
- 2021 -Contract with Merit Network, Inc. to conduct a countywide survey of broadband access.
- 2021 -Contract with Southwest Michigan Planning Commission to take the Merit survey results and create [GIS Storymaps](#)
- 2022 -Dedicate \$6 million in ARPA funds to provide broadband services to un- and undeserved County residents.
- January 2022 -Solicit applications from municipalities for sub-grants of these ARPA funds.
- April 2022 - Award the first two sub-grants – \$562,500 to Bainbridge Township and \$700,000 to Oronoko Township

We appreciate all the municipalities who have expressed interest in taking advantage of these funds. To date, we have received three applications and anticipate many more are likely to be submitted. Based on the applications and the pending applications, it appears the requested grant funds will outstrip the funds we have dedicated to this important initiative.

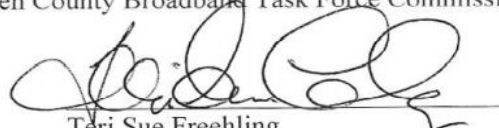
To ensure we are responsible stewards of public dollars and approach our broadband needs fairly and comprehensively, the County is going to delay awarding any additional sub grants so we can work to secure additional state and federal dollars to supplement the funds we have already allocated. We have begun looking at additional revenue sources from the State of Michigan and Federal Government, (examples include, but are not limited to: USDA Reconnect, BEAD, and CMIC grants,) in order to ensure we have a bigger pool of resources to meet municipal needs.

We have also contracted with DCS Technology Design, LLC to conduct a more comprehensive broadband survey that will allow us to provide pinpoint specific needs on a parcel-by-parcel basis to our local partners. While the Merit survey provided an important snapshot of broadband needs, we realize the benefit of having something more detailed and granular to guide our investment decisions. DCS intends to start its survey in May with a timeline of delivering its final report and recommendations in October.

There are few initiatives as important as this for the future of our County. We truly appreciate your partnership – and your patience as we work to ensure Berrien County has the appropriate funding and the proper tools needed to undertake this critical work.

Sincerely,  
Berrien County Broadband Task Force Commissioners

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Jim Curran  
District 11 Commissioner

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Teri Sue Freehling  
District 8 Commissioner

  
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Ezra A. Scott  
District 9 Commissioner

**TO THE HONORABLE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS OF BERRIEN COUNTY:** Your County Finance Committee respectfully recommends the adoption of the following:

**RESOLUTION**

**WHEREAS**, a sub-committee of Commissioners were appointed to the Berrien County Broadband Internet Taskforce (BCBIT) and their work continues in an effort to expand the infrastructure, bringing Broadband to those unserved and underserved areas of Berrien County; and

**WHEREAS**, while the Berrien County Board of Commissioners have contracted for multiple services related to this work, there still remains a need to inventory all the broadband connectivity and technologies that are currently in place and/or are planned in Berrien County; and

**WHEREAS**, DCS Technology Design, LLC has provided a proposal to conduct a rural broadband inventory survey of the 2,300 road miles and 1,581 square miles across Berrien County in the amount of \$185,300; and

**WHEREAS**, this information will be crucial in applying for State funding options related to broadband infrastructure; and

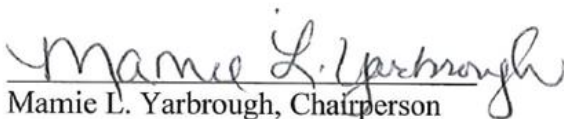
**WHEREAS**, members of BCBIT have reviewed the proposal and deemed it necessary for the County to competitively apply for this newly added funding source available through the State of Michigan; and

**WHEREAS**, the County Finance Committee concurs with the BCBIT recommendation; and

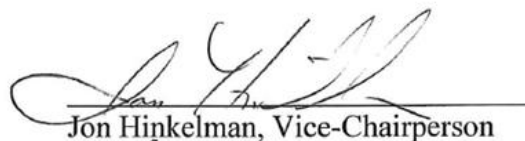
**WHEREAS**, funding of this service is not eligible for ARPA funding and will come from contingency.

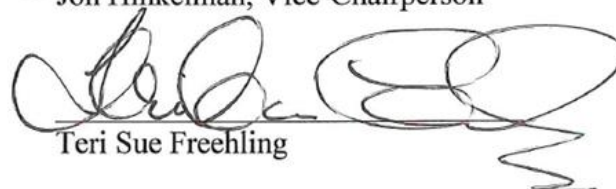
**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED** that the Berrien County Board of Commissioners approves the proposal from DCS Technology Design, LLC for broadband mapping services for all of Berrien County and authorizes the County Administrator to move forward with the purchase order to the vendor.

**RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,  
BERRIEN COUNTY FINANCE COMMITTEE**

  
Mamie L. Yarbrough, Chairperson

  
Ezra A. Scott

  
Jon Hinkelman, Vice-Chairperson

  
Teri Sue Freehling