

BERRIEN COUNTY BROADBAND INTERNET TASK FORCE



October 6, 2022 9:12:00 PM

Berrien County Administration Center, Zoom+

MEETING NOTES

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**; Berrien County Information Systems (IS) Director **Chris Swihart**; Berrien County Geographical Information Systems (GIS) Director **Lex Winans**; Berrien County GIS Mapping Specialist **Helen DeMarsh**; DCS Technology Design **Chris Scharrer**; Pipestone Township Supervisor **Doug Davis**; Pipestone Township Clerk **Karen Basham**; Eau Claire Village Clerk **Shawn Foster**.

- I. **DCS Briefing & Status Update.** Chris Scharrer from [DCS Technology Design](#) briefed the group on the results of his company's parcel level survey of internet technologies available in [Berrien County](#). The final study, along with construction budget forecasts (system engineering and construction estimates component) will be presented to the Board of Commissioners on October 13, 2022.

This study will provide Berrien County a framework that can be used to help with planning and working with potential funding sources and Internet Service Providers (ISPs) as we roll out high-speed internet access to residents and businesses in Berrien County. **This study is an accurate snapshot of what technologies are available, and some of what is being planned across the Berrien County.** Though this final report is technical in nature it will be compiled in a format that is informative to all readers and highlight gaps of coverage in areas that do not have availability.

Knowing what is planned and funded for is just as important as what is not there to avoid over-build and additional unnecessary costs. As an example, a portion of a township may not have internet, or limited internet right now; however, it may be coming (DCS tracks this closely). If the infrastructure is coming, and a request is granted to build new, this results in a double, sometimes triple funding and overbuild. This leads to not enough money for areas that have nothing. DCS Technology Design, through industry knowledge, and research of federal funding, can pull this information in to give an accurate snapshot of what we have in the ground, on the poles, wireless, and serviceable; along with what is coming. For areas that need broadband it may be as simple as contacting an ISP to extend a line to a few houses they erroneously may have skipped over.

In addition to this report, DCS Technology Design is working closely with Lex Winans and Helen DeMarsh, [Berrien County GIS](#), to integrate their maps with [Berrien County's GIS mapping system](#). In conjunction with this integration, Helen DeMarsh, Berrien County GIS, is building dashboards to view broadband data and progress at the County level, along with each of the 39 municipalities having their own broadband data dashboard to view and track progress.

This conversion and dashboard build is going well, and should be up and running soon. The initial data set includes upcoming projects, as such, Chris Scharrer has requested a list of applicants/municipalities SWMPC is working with, and the status of these projects. This will be included in mapping and data tracking. This list is important because we have some applicants already in the RFP process, some revising their application, and some showing signs of interest. SWMPC will provide a list of municipalities and their status in the application process to Chris Scharrer.

Action Item 1: DCS Technology has requested a list of applicants from SWMPC applying for Berrien County ARPA Broadband funds, along with status of where these municipalities are at in the process.

- II. **Schedule Next BCBIT Meeting Session.** We will resume our regular cadence of bi-weekly task force meetings. Next meeting will be two weeks from today, October 20th at 12:30 PM. Administrator Disette presented to the group that we will need to discuss a replacement person for our application/grant tech reviews. Ben Fineman, previously a [Merit Network](#) Consultant, has accepted a job with the federal government. Ben is no longer be available to review projects. Chris Scharrer, DCS Technology Design, would be a seamless tech review consult able to come onboard with little to no back tracking, and has a proven record with [Washtenaw County](#) and [Leelanau County](#) in his ability to tech review and oversee broadband deployment.

Action Item 2: Fill unexpected vacancy of technical review expert for evaluation and feasibility of broadband applications and grants.

- III. **Discuss SWMPC Contract (Grant Writing Services) Status & Possible Renewal.** The contract with SWMPC to write grants on behalf of BCBIT is up for renewal. As background, on March 17, 2022, the Berrien County Board of Commissioners approved a contract with Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC) for broadband grant work not to exceed \$20,000 [[F2203217](#)]. This amount has been spent down.

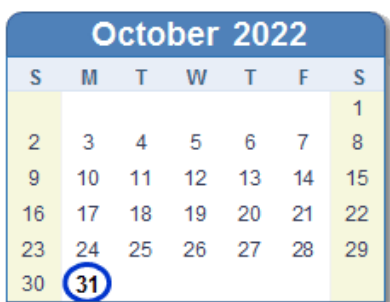
Administrator Disette discussed the possible renewal of this contract through December 31, 2024, mirroring the ARPA deadline to allocate funds to specific projects. Administrator Disette has requested a contract for \$50,000. Commissioner Freehling emphasized a need to define measurable outcomes, set milestones, solidify expectations, and list report out requirements in this contract extension with SWMPC. Additionally, as part of this renewal, any and all grants must follow Berrien County's process for grant approval, beginning a minimum 30-days out. This allows proper time, with some leeway, for committee approval, followed by full Board of Commissioners approval.

As part of the contract discussion, Dan Fette proposed the need for technical knowledge and know-how oversee build out and project management. Though SWMPC is ideal for grant writing; we need an expert with experience in broadband construction build to oversee and manage the actual infrastructure build. DCS Technology is a likely partner.

Action Item 3: Contract renewal with SWMPC for broadband grant writing services through December 31, 2024 at \$50K. Contract will need to include measurable outcomes, milestones, reporting requirements, and process expectations.

Action Item 4: Pursue contract with DCS Technology Design for technical review of funding requests, grant applications, and project management services for broadband infrastructure build outs.

IV. BCBIT Broadband (ARPA) Grant (Application) Submittals Deadline. Remains at October 31, 2022.



October 2022						
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The deadline for municipalities to submit to Berrien County their American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Broadband Proposals is **October 31, 2022.**

As reference, the Berrien County Board of Commissioners approved the **ARPA Fund Broadband Request Application** on **January 27, 2022** [[B2201191](#)]. The original application stated a deadline of July 1, 2022. This deadline was extended to October 31, 2022 on May 12, 2022 [[F2205282](#)].

Monday, Oct 31st 2022

Administrator Dissette stated, though some municipalities have requested an additional extension; however, the October 31st deadline is final. Commissioner Freehling stated we need to get moving on broadband deployment. After the October 31, 2022 deadline, BCBIT will need to make a hard pivot to focus their grant writing efforts on other broadband funding opportunities.

V. Miscellaneous. Next BCBIT meeting is October 20th. At this meeting, Berrien County GIS will present project work completed on interactive broadband dashboards. The County has an overall broadband dashboard, and each municipality has their own broadband data dashboard.

Action Item 5: At the October 20 BCBIT, as an agenda item, allow time for Berrien County GIS to present interactive broadband dashboards.