

BERRIEN COUNTY BROADBAND INTERNET TASK FORCE

[BCBIT](#)

January 12, 2023 12:30 PM

Berrien County Administration Center, Zoom+

MEETING NOTES

MEETING ATTENDEES: Berrien County Commissioner **Teri Freehling**; Berrien County Commissioner **Jim Curran**; Berrien County Administrator **Brian Dissette**; Berrien County Project Assistant **John Faul**; Berrien County Community Development Director **Dan Fette**; Berrien County Geographical Information Systems (GIS) Director **Lex Winans**; Berrien County GIS Mapping Specialist **Helen DeMarsh**; Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC) Executive Director **John Egelhaaf**; DCS Technology Design (DCS) President **Chris Scharrer**; Galien Township Supervisor **Gerald Mast**; Midwest Energy & Communications (MEC) Chief Operating Officer **Terry Rubenthaler**.

I. MIDWEST ENERGY & COMMUNICATIONS (MEC) CONSTRUCTION BRIEFING.

Terry Rubenthaler, Chief Operation Officer of [Midwest Energy & Communication](#) (MEC), briefed the group on his company's construction progress, construction activities, and new customers connecting to the internet throughout Berrien County through **RDOF**¹ funding.

- MEC has completed their [Eau Claire](#) zone of RDOF, which includes [Berrien Township](#) and [Pipestone Township](#). Within these two townships, MEC is actively connecting customers.
- [Bainbridge Township](#) and the [Benton \(Charter\) Township](#) zones of the RDOF are under construction. Plan is to have this completed by March. MEC hopes to start connecting customers soon.
- There are a few parcels in [Hagar Township](#) will be connected a little later in the construction timeline. Once this is complete, MEC will continue on to Van Buren County.
- MEC is doing the final testing and slicing in [Oronoko \(Charter\) Township](#). MEC hopes to start connecting customers yet this month.
- MEC confirmed they have the capacity to do some **ROBIN**² applications to continue their expansion in Berrien County and hope Berrien County can support this effort. ROBIN guidance and application specifics will drop today or tomorrow with a 60-day window to apply.

¹ RDOF = Rural Digital Opportunity Fund a \$20 billion program from the [Federal Communications Commission](#) (FCC) designed to finance the construction designed to finance the construction of high-speed broadband networks in America's unserved rural communities.

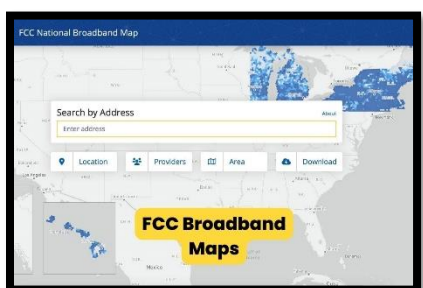
² ROBIN = Realizing Opportunities with Broadband Infrastructure Networks, the state of Michigan's \$250.6 million plan to expand high-speed internet service to unserved locations in the state.

Internet with MEC: If MEC is not your electricity supplier, chances are they are not an option to be your internet provider. If you are an electricity customer of MEC, to sign up for internet and/or check connectivity eligibility, go to www.teammidwest.com/internet.

II. BCBIT MEMBERSHIP/STAFF.

Please welcome Mr. John Faul, Berrien County Project Assistant, to the BCBIT group as a team member. Administrator Dissette will be reaching out to the Berrien County Board of Commissioners for interest in joining BCBIT.

III. FCC BROADBAND ACCESS DATA CHALLENGES.



In November, the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) unveiled its new [National Broadband Availability Map](#). Along with a new map style, the FCC also introduced a challenge process that allows everyone – from governments to citizens – the ability to highlight false claims of availability and ensure that every home and business location is accounted for in the map.

Members of the public, along with local governments and providers, are able to submit *two different types of challenges*: **location** (for example, incorrect location address, incorrect location unit count, etc.) and **availability** (for example, if the map incorrectly lists a certain provider or broadband technology as available).

The new National Broadband Map matters for two reasons: **verification of services** and **allocation of funding** for future broadband construction and service upgrades. Verification of services is: Does the map show that broadband service is available at your location, or does the map say you have internet when you do not? Are the services provided accurate? Individuals taking a few minutes to review their location’s reported information will increase the accuracy of this map.

Future broadband construction and service upgrades is for the Federal Broadband Equity, Access and Deployment (BEAD) funding that is based on the state’s unserved population (internet speeds under 25 megabits per second download and 3 megabits per second upload). Other state and federal programs also base funding off of their definitions of unserved and underserved. If this map is inaccurate, your location may be mistakenly listed as served. If that happens, state or federal sources are less likely to fund new service or upgrades. By reviewing and verifying or challenging the map, you will help create a realistic picture of service in our state.

Interestingly enough, the underlying dataset produced for the creation of the new FCC Broadband Map is proprietary with access controlled by the broadband consulting firm [CostQuest](#). With that, to access CostQuest’s proprietary data, entities must enter into a third party limited licensing agreement prior to receiving login credentials.

This process takes up to two weeks, mainly because you and everyone else in the nation is requesting access. Many thanks go to Dan Fette, Community Development Director, for taking the lead in getting us registered to submit challenges. Chris Scharrer, DCS Technology Design, is working closed with Berrien County GIS Director Lex Winans and Berrien County GIS Mapping Specialist Helen DeMarsh as they extract data for potential parcels eligible to challenge. To paraphrase, if you have not already executed a license agreement with CostQuest to submit bulk challenges you will need to do this first.

For a comprehensive understanding of the BDC system, one can access the [BDC Help Center](#). This resource is a one-stop-shop for all information relating to the program. Among other resources, the BDC Help Center has a link to the [BDC Filer User Guide](#). The Filer User Guide provides step-by-step instructions on using the BDC system and making filings.

The Help Center also has a link to the [BDC Availability Data Specifications](#). The Availability Data Specifications provide detailed information on the format of data submissions. Filers should review these specifications in order to understand how certain data files should be uploaded to the system and the requirements for entering data appropriately. Filers should reference the Availability Data Specifications while completing their data submission to ensure that all data is filed according to FCC requirements.

The BDC Help Center also has instructional video tutorials and webinars. It is recommended to view these videos before beginning the filing process in order to familiarize yourself with the BDC system³. In reference to this citizen participation, information to check information was published in a press release and is loaded to the BCBIT Web-page. Individual challenges are pretty simple. The bulk challenge for Berrien County is being handled by Chris Scharrer, Lex Winans and Helen DeMarsh.

We will submitting bulk challenges grouped together in logical Proposed Funded Service Areas, or PFSA's, which is broadband-language for a contiguous geographic in which an applicant proposes to provide served at the Broadband Grant Speed. Now, looking at the DCS Technology Design Dashboard and map of broadband availability in Berrien County, there are certain chunks that go together in Berrien County. We are trying to bring high-speed internet service to the unserved and underserved and get this completed with a few dollars left over.

IV. PROPOSED BROADBAND ROADMAP.

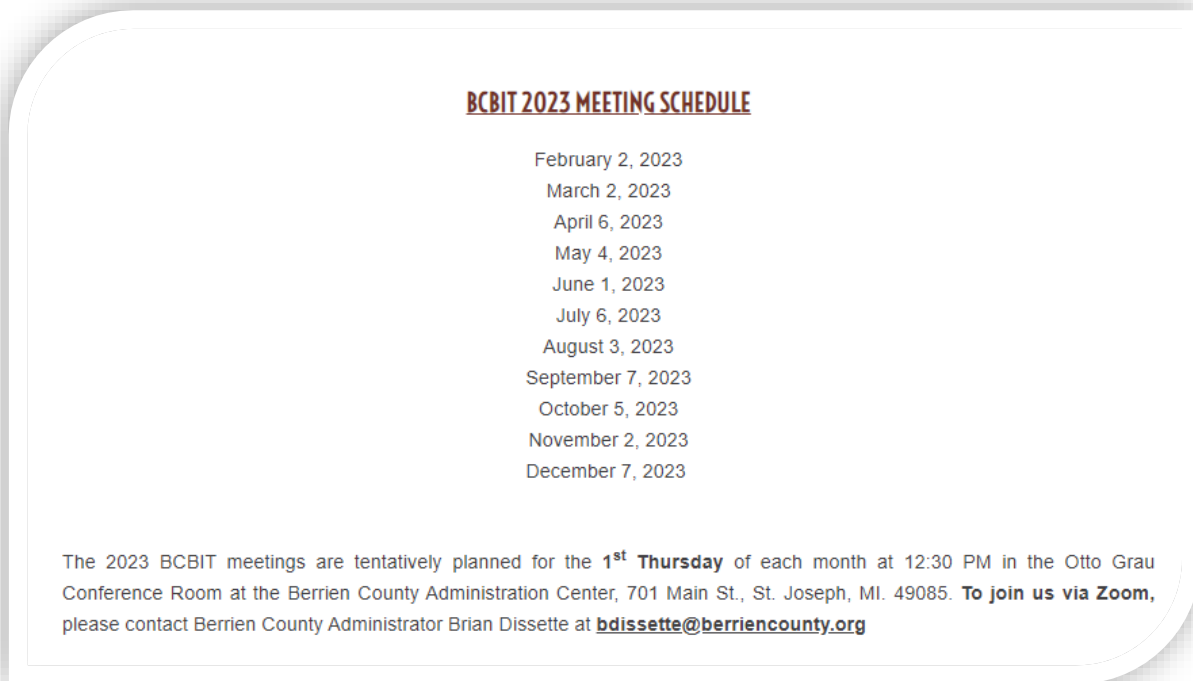
The proposed BCBIT Broadband Roadmap presented for discussion by John Egelhaaf at previous meetings will be tabled at this meeting due to time constraints. The initial document, presented at previous meetings is still in an outline format, with hopes of becoming a strategized guidebook to expand high-speed internet in Berrien County with measurable milestones, definable timelines and

³ The BDC Help Center also provides ongoing system updates, public notices, and other news relating to the BDC, as well as answers to frequently asked questions about [using the BDC system](#), and understanding the [Location Fabric](#).

deadlines, and tasking responsibilities for carrying out recommended activities. We will pick up this discussion at a future meeting. Since we're building this airplane as we fly, we might need a flight schedule instead of a roadmap. In the meantime, John Egelhaaf will sit down with John Faul to review the roadmap.

V. MISCELLANEOUS

- **Next Meeting: February 1, 2023**
- ROBIN Funding is dropping tomorrow. We'll have 60-days to turn around an application. Chris Scharrer will be working with Berrien County GIS and ISP's to get this completed. Other particulars are yet to be determined such as a PPP⁴ with an ISP⁵. We are aware that Comcast and MEC⁶ will be applying for funds. We will work with ISPs to get them the data they need.
- **BCBIT 2023 Schedule: 1st Thursday of the month - [Posted](#).**



BCBIT 2023 MEETING SCHEDULE

February 2, 2023
March 2, 2023
April 6, 2023
May 4, 2023
June 1, 2023
July 6, 2023
August 3, 2023
September 7, 2023
October 5, 2023
November 2, 2023
December 7, 2023

The 2023 BCBIT meetings are tentatively planned for the **1st Thursday** of each month at 12:30 PM in the Otto Grau Conference Room at the Berrien County Administration Center, 701 Main St., St. Joseph, MI. 49085. **To join us via Zoom,** please contact Berrien County Administrator Brian Dissette at bdissette@berriencounty.org

The BCBIT 2023 Meeting Schedule posted to our BCBIT web-page, along with time, location, and contact information for this meeting. For 2023, BCBIT will be meeting the 1st Thursday of the month at 12:30 PM in the Otto Grau Conference Room at the Berrien County Administration Center, 701 Main St., St. Joseph, MI 49085. To join us via Zoom, please contact Berrien County Administrator Brian Dissette at bdissette@berriencounty.org.

⁴ PPP = Public-Private-Partnership

⁵ ISP = Internet Service Provider

⁶ MEC = Midwest Energy & Communication located in Cassopolis, MI