

## BERRIEN COUNTY BROADBAND INTERNET TASK FORCE

### [BCBIT](#)

October 5, 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 Commissioner **Rayonte Bell**; Berrien County Administrator **Brian Disette**; Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC) Executive Director **K. John Egelhaaf**; Berrien County Community Development Director **Dan Fette**; Berrien County Geographical Information Systems (GIS) Director **Lex Winans**; DCS Technology Design (DCS) President **Chris Scharrer**; Midwest Energy & Communications ([MEC](#)) Chief Operating Officer (COO) **Terry Rubenthaler**; Southwest Michigan Regional Chamber of Commerce (formerly Cornerstone Chamber of Commerce) Director of Membership & Events **Sarah Spoonholtz**; New Buffalo Township Supervisor **Michelle Heit**; Galien Township Supervisor **Gerald Mast**; Hagar Township Trustee **Peter Colovos**; Baroda Township Treasurer **William Hurst**; Baroda Township **Alan Blind**; Economic Development Specialist Kimberly Fedison.

---

#### I. **ROBIN Grant Discussion.**

**MEC ROBIN Grant Update.** Terry Rubenthaler, Chief Operation Officer (COO) of Midwest Energy & Communications ([MEC](#)) updated BCBIT on the status of his company's ROBIN grant funding through the state's Michigan High-Speed Internet ([MIHI](#)) Office.

**MEC met with the MIHI office on September 19<sup>th</sup> to review addresses for the final ROBIN grant award.** This meeting had good news and some bad news. The good news is easy, the announcement of the final grant award to MEC is forthcoming. For the bad news, 863 addresses in Berrien County will be removed from the initial grant award announcement as a result of the grants challenge process, mainly due to overlapping [CMIC](#) (Connecting Michigan Communities) grant funding, a broadband expansion grant program funded through state appropriations. The challenge process in the ROBIN grant is a 45-day statutory requirement allowing for open comments and objections to the list of addresses published for the initial ROBIN grant recommendations. Addresses published through the initial ROBIN grant recommendation were allowed to be challenged if they:

1. Have 100/20 Mbps service already available to them;
2. Are planned to be connected to 100/20 Mbps service within one year, or,
3. Are part of another federal or state program that will deliver at least 100/20 Mbps.

Of these 863 addresses removed for a variety of reasons (falling within the three challenge categories above). According to MEC, a majority of the addresses removed are addresses already funded through other programs (challenge reason: bullet point #3) such as the state of Michigan's CMIC, [Connecting Michigan Communities](#) Grants Program, and/or RDOF, [Rural Digital Opportunity Fund](#), a program created to disperse broadband project funding for rural communities across the country.

It should be noted, both programs, CMIC and RDOF, view high-speed internet deployment in a census block parameter, meaning if one house in a census block is served, you get the check mark for completing your internet deployment job and payment for fulfilling the requirements established within the grant agreement to deploy broadband. Whether or not anyone signed up for the service is becoming a glaring issue as well.

Specific to CMIC, and how this is affecting us right now, this program was deployed in four (4) phases: CMIC 1.0, CMIC 1.5, CMIC 2.0, and CMIC 3.0. **CMIC Phases 1.0 and 1.5 have projects in Berrien County.** This is where the overlap is occurring. Included at the end of the document are progress reports for CMIC 1.0<sup>i</sup> and CMIC 1.5<sup>ii</sup> posted by the state for projects awarded to Mercury Wireless (CMIC 1.0) and Comcast (CMIC 1.5).

The challenge argument, from the challenger during the ROBIN challenge phase, is the census blocks awarded in the CMIC funding program overlap the house addresses in ROBIN funding; causing an "overbuild". If you ask the person at the addresses dropped, I doubt they feel an overbuild is happening. More likely, funding is "overlapping".

To understand the difference between overbuild and overlapping just ask the folks that still don't have high-speed internet or no internet at all or just a trickle of bandwidth, then question the folks that have grant money in their pocket if indeed folks have what they need to perform basic tasks with their connection, or lack of connection. Keep in mind, previous broadband deployment programs awarded funding by census block and/or population type. Both create fragmentation at the address level as to who has a connection, no connection, an unreliable connection, or can't connect due to high cost whether initial installation or ongoing monthly subscription price.

**Instead of challenging the challenges**, which isn't a statutory step in the process, those 863 addresses kicked out and re-look at them along with the remaining addresses not covered in the ROBIN grant and move forward looking for solutions to reach each address with high-speed internet that is affordable and reliable.

What has happened here is different programs have different time periods for awards and deployment. Lags in deployment for one program then awards for another program create an overlap in service areas (or areas to be serviced) and potential for duplication. However,

duplication only exists if the deployment actually occurred and whether or not the deployment speeds, as tested, are what they funding covered, and what is eligible for newer speeds of service availability and the varying and evolving speed threshold and deployment requirements of new broadband deployment funding.

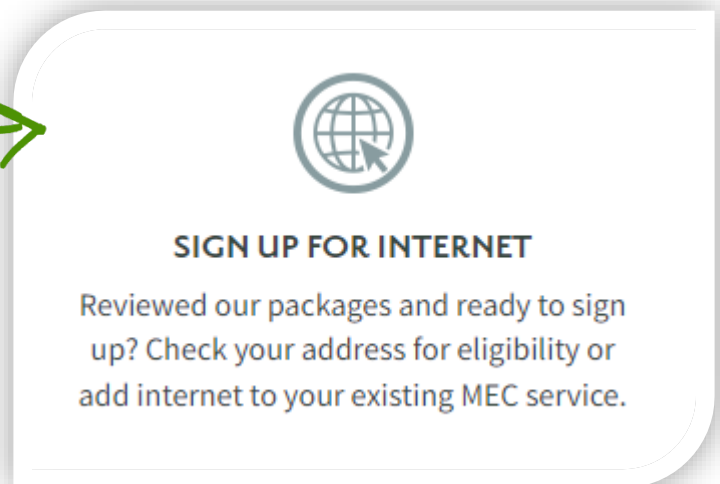
Ironically, out of all of the broadband programs that could overlap anything here in Berrien County, the Connected Michigan Communities (CMIC) grants program is the only broadband grant program funded with state appropriations. The CMIC program has gone through two iterations. The first one in 2018, with required minimum speed set at 10/1, the second one in 2020, where the required broadband service speed was increased to 25/3, which at the time was the minimum standard speed goal set by the FCC for expanding broadband service. CMIC 1.0 project completion ended September 30, 2023. CMIC 2.0 ends September 30, 2025.

**Plan of construction by MEC for the ROBIN Grant** is to start in the south part of Niles in Bertrand Township and work clockwise going up to Weesaw, etc. If anyone complains, just let them know their brilliant ideas – if indeed they were brilliant – would have been done already. Construction will begin once final list is approved and announced. Construction should be completed by the end of 2025, or for the sake of snafus we'll say possibly into early 2026.

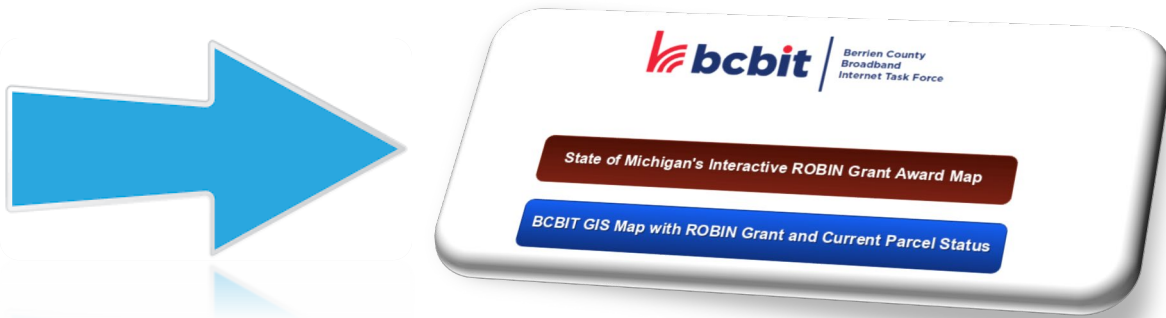


**MEC has requested the following to TOWNSHIP SUPERVISORS or anyone fielding questions about MEC along with inquiring as to whether or not an address is a MEC-ROBIN funded address to PLEASE direct all inquiries the MEC website. [www.teammidwest.com](http://www.teammidwest.com).**

**Select the internet button, punch in your address and it will tell you if it is ROBIN funded or eligible or for internet through MEC.**



In addition to this information, one can also direct folks to the [BCBIT home page](#) to view and select buttons to connect to the [state's interactive ROBIN map](#), [BCBIT's ROBIN Grant and Parcel Status Interactive Map](#), along with [broadband dashboards for each local community](#) and a [Berrien County Broadband dashboard](#). Basically, there's a lot of information being pushed out, with a lot of folks working hard behind the scenes.



In addition to the ROBIN Grant information above, a separate [BCBIT ROBIN Grant web-page](#) has been added to the [BCBIT Web-page](#). This is in addition to the ROBIN grant information on BCBIT home page. More information will be added as we move along. Re-posting of the community support documentation now has a home. There are also buttons on BCBIT home page, at the top, for interactive mapping links specific to ROBIN and Berrien County Parcel status.

- II. **DCS Update on ISP Discussion Re: Unbuilt remaining Service Areas.** Once the final list of addresses are released for the ROBIN grant DCS and BCBIT will review unbuilt addresses and areas by working with ISPs and strategic pursuit with BCBIT of funding opportunities. Discussion and possible RFP will soon follow.
- III. **Discuss BEAD Status and the SOM's BEAD Survey.** The Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program provides \$42.45 billion to expand high-speed internet access by funding planning, infrastructure deployment and adoption programs in all 50 states, Washington D.C., Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, and the commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

The current phase in the process in the state's allocation of funds to ISPs is a short survey seeking feedback on the process to allocate these funds for deployment. The request for comments allows interested parties and persons an opportunity to provide input for grant management processes and the requirements of federal funds awards and sub awards. This link was shared in the agenda, but is specific to entities deploying broadband.

In addition to the information above, a separate [BCBIT BEAD information page](#) has been added as part of the [BCBIT Web-page](#) on the [Berrien County's website](#). Information will be added to this web-page specific to BEAD information as we move through this process. More links and information will be added, but this is a start.

Michigan has received \$1.559 billion in Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) funding to close the digital divide. The BEAD 5--Year Action Plan provides a vision and priorities for implementing the BEAD Program. [Read the BEAD 5-Year Action Plan.](#)

- IV. Update from John Regarding Lit Fiber Meeting.** John Egelhaaf, Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC) Executive Director was introduced to [Lit Fiber](#) at a recent conference he attended. John was impressed with this company and will be setting up a meeting. The company's has a mission of equitable access to broadband. John is setting up a meeting with this company and will share the outcome of this meeting in the future.
- V. Review Broadband Strategy Diagram. Request John to Present on the Draft Diagram.** The Broadband Roadmap Strategy Diagram presented at previous meetings for considered was discussed. There have been no changes to this roadmap diagram. John has requested the opportunity to present the diagram at a formalized county meeting and adopted through a resolution as the decision making process moving forward.
- VI. Miscellaneous.** Next Meeting November 9<sup>th</sup>. Expect to hear about the final ROBIN Grant Award Announcement before this meeting.

**CMIC 1.0:** Source: [www.michigan.gov/dtmb/policies/governance/cmhc-grant/1-0](http://www.michigan.gov/dtmb/policies/governance/cmhc-grant/1-0)

Program	GRANT ID	APPLICANT	PROJECT NAME	PROJECT COST	MATCH	GRANT AWARD	Match %	LOCATIONS TO BE SERVED PER GRANT AGREEMENT	LOCATIONS NOW WITH SERVICE AVAILABLE	LOCATIONS SUBSCRIBED	SPEED OF SERVICE	PRICE OF SERVICE OFFERED	Updated	Average Max Price
CMIC 1.0	2021-003	Barger Creek	Montmorency Oscoda	\$4,401,301.00	\$1,167,683.00	\$3,233,618.00	27%	4,965	2686	397	15/3 to 300/100 Mbps	\$29 to \$319	1/31/2023	\$183.86
CMIC 1.0	2021-004	Comcast	Comcast Armada	\$3,394,420.00	\$360,214.00	\$3,034,206.00	11%	414	464	236	35 to 1200 Mbps	\$9.95 to \$119	11/30/2022	\$119
CMIC 1.0	2021-006	LakeNet	Brant Fiber Project	\$1,372,537.42	\$412,664.00	\$959,873.42	30%	531	531	241	10 to 1000 Mbps	\$55 to \$125	6/30/2022	\$125
CMIC 1.0	2021-007	Marq6 Broadband	Delta Schoolcraft	\$913,282.00	\$100,542.00	\$812,740.00	11%	978	411	96	50 to 100 Mbps	\$60 to \$80	11/30/2022	\$80
CMIC 1.0	2021-008	Mercury Wireless	Berrien and Cass	\$547,228.92	\$136,807.23	\$410,421.69	25%	757	2462	0	30 to 150 Mbps	\$50 to \$99	12/31/2022	\$99
CMIC 1.0	2021-009	Mercury Wireless	Calhoun	\$368,000.00	\$92,000.00	\$276,000.00	25%	207	543	0	30 to 150 Mbps	\$50 to \$99	12/31/2022	\$99
CMIC 1.0	2021-010	Mercury Wireless	Calhoun Eaton Ingham Jackson	\$1,043,598.20	\$260,899.55	\$782,698.65	25%	1,243	3197	0	30 to 150 Mbps	\$50 to \$99	12/31/2022	\$99
CMIC 1.0	2021-012	Mercury Wireless	Hillsdale	\$436,800.00	\$109,200.00	\$327,600.00	25%	273	818	0	30 to 150 Mbps	\$50 to \$99	12/31/2022	\$99
CMIC 1.0	2021-013	Mercury Wireless	Hillsdale Lenawee	\$1,066,579.70	\$266,644.92	\$799,934.77	25%	2,044	4311	6	30 to 150 Mbps	\$50 to \$99	12/31/2022	\$99
CMIC 1.0	2021-014	Mercury Wireless	Lenawee, Monroe Washtenaw	\$1,342,788.46	\$335,697.12	\$1,007,091.35	25%	2,793	4594	10	30 to 150 Mbps	\$50 to \$99	12/31/2022	\$99

**CMIC 1.0 Grant Timeline:**

Public Comment	February 4 – 15, 2019
Application Period	July 1 – August 30, 2019
Initial Award Recommendations Published	May 27, 2020
Comment and Objection Period	May 27, 2020 - July 27, 2020
Grant Awards Announced	October 8, 2020
Completion Date of the Project: CMIC 1.0	September 30, 2023

ii CMIC 1.5: Source: <https://www.michigan.gov/dtmb/policies/governance/cmhc-grant/1-5>

Program	GRANT ID	APPLICANT	PROJECT NAME	PROJECT COST	MATCH	GRANT AWARD	Match %	LOCATIONS TO BE SERVED PER GRANT AGREEMENT	LOCATIONS NOW WITH SERVICE AVAILABLE	LOCATIONS SUBSCRIBED	SPEED OF SERVICE	PRICE OF SERVICE OFFERED	Updated	Average Max Price
CMIC 1.5	2021-016	Comcast	Comcast Buchanan	\$350,257.00	\$106,014.00	\$244,243	30%	91	49	16	1.2 Gbps / 35 Mbps	\$9.99 to \$119	5/31/2022	\$119
CMIC 1.5	2021-020	Lennon Telephone	Hazelton Broadband	\$192,338.00	\$21,157.00	\$171,181	11%	104	44	5	15 to 100 Mbps	\$54 to \$70	4/30/2022	\$ 70
CMIC 1.5	2021-021	Mercury Wireless	Calhoun and Kalamazoo	\$571,200.00	\$142,800.00	\$428,400	25%	612	1332	7	30 to 150 Mbps	\$65 to \$99	6/30/2022	\$ 90
CMIC 1.5	2021-022	Mercury Wireless	St Joseph County	\$300,000.00	\$75,000.00	\$225,000	25%	523	198	0	30 to 150 Mbps	\$65 to \$99	6/30/2022	\$ 70

**CMIC 1.5 Grant Timeline:**

Public Comment	February 4 – 15, 2019
Application Period	July 1 – August 30, 2019
Initial Award Recommendations Published	November 23, 2020
Comment and Objection Period	November 23, 2020 – January 25, 2021
Grant Awards Announced	April 13, 2021
Completion Date of the Project: CMIC 1.0	September 30, 2023