

Mayors' Meeting

March 2, 2018

9:02 a.m.

Present: Lewis County Commissioner Edna J. Fund, Commissioner Robert C. "Bobby" Jackson, Commissioner Gary Stamper, state Director for the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development Kirk Pearson, USDA Single Family Housing Program Director Trudy Teter, USDA Multi-Family Housing Program Director Mary Traxler, USDA Community Programs Specialist Koni Reynolds, USDA Business Program Specialist Jeffrey Peterson, USDA Public Information Officer Philip Eggman, Wes Anderson of the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT), Chehalis City Manager Jill Anderson, Public Information Officer / Trooper Will Finn of the Washington State Patrol, Southwest Washington Outreach Director Dena Horton of Sen. Cantwell's office, Centralia Port Commissioner Peter Lahmann, Morton Mayor Dan Mortensen, Pe Ell Mayor Lonnie Willey, Winlock Mayor Don Bradshaw, Centralia Mayor Lee Coumbs, Toledo Mayor Steve Dobosh, Centralia City Manager Rob Hill, District Director Shari Hildreth of U.S. Rep. Herrera Beutler's office, Deputy District Director Pam Peiper of Rep. Herrera Beutler's office, Vader Mayor Ken Smith, Port of Chehalis Commissioner Randy Mueller, Tamara Greenwell of WSDOT, Napavine Mayor Pro Tem Jim Haslett

Guests: Various members of the public and media

Recorder: Rieva Lester

Former state Sen. Kirk Pearson, the newly-appointed state Director for the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development, introduced himself and gave an overview of his work experiences. He discussed broadband and opioid abuse and indicated that in 2016, there were 64,000 deaths related to opioid overdoses nationwide.

USDA Single Family Housing Program Director Trudy Teter, USDA Multi-Family Housing Program Director Mary Traxler, USDA Community Programs Specialist Koni Reynolds and USDA Business Program Specialist Jeffrey Peterson gave a PowerPoint presentation on various grants, loans and programs available for rural housing and businesses. (Slides included.)

Morton Mayor Mortensen said Morton does not have large amounts of broadband data available. He said even the hospital struggles with downloading information.

Pe Ell Mayor Lonnie Willey said the city has CenturyLink and struggles with connection speed.

Chehalis Mayor Dennis Dawes said the county seems to have a lot of fiber optic lines running through it, but not connecting it. He said there needs to be more competition, which would improve service.

Vader Mayor Ken Smith said Vader also is served by CenturyLink. He echoed the other mayors' concerns.

Centralia City Manager Rob Hill said Centralia is grateful for the service it has but would love to see the holes plugged and service expanded. He said the region is not given the attention it's due.

Napavine Mayor Pro Tem Jim Hassler introduced himself.

Winlock Mayor Don Bradshaw said Winlock is working with ToledoTel to improve Internet services.

Centralia Mayor Lee Coumbs said the area seems to be 10 years behind in broadband technology.

Toledo Mayor Steve Dobosh said he invited Dale Merten of ToledoTel to discuss Toledo's broadband service.

Port of Chehalis Commissioner Randy Mueller said he understands that Lewis County is the last to be invested in as a matter of economics. Randy said the port is working with others to provide "dark fiber," infrastructure from which others can build.

Commissioner Stamper said his rural area has no Internet service. He said infrastructure is even more important these days because of the lack of timber dollars available. He said the county is at risk of being a "fly-over" county. He commended the PUD and TDS for their efforts to make improvements. He said the county needs to move forward in order to be an attractive place to live and work.

Sen. Pearson said President Trump and U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue want to empower the rural areas.

Commissioner Fund said she spoke to a family that chose not to locate in Mossyrock because they could not telecommute.

Public comment

Winlock resident Robert Watson likened broadband to lamp oil of days past. He said those who chose to stick with lamp oil did not continue to exist.

ToledoTel COO Dale Merten said ToledoTel has worked with the USDA to provide service to area homes. He said ToledoTel has fiber in Morton due to its partnership with the PUD. He said it cost \$7,800 to provide service to each home. He said ToledoTel, Rainier Connect and the PUD have worked together to serve the smaller communities. He spoke of the "Last Mile."

Mayor Dobosh said people are moving to Toledo because of its fiber. ToledoTel COO Dale Merten said Toledo saw 30 new homes built in 2017, and the homeowners indicated they selected the city because of its broadband capabilities.

Onalaska resident Harry Bhagwandin said fiber infrastructure is paramount. He said the rest of the county could see the type of growth Toledo has experienced. He asked about the \$7,800. Dale Merten said the figure reflects the costs to ToledoTel. He used Morton as an example of a success story: ToledoTel routed from the PUD to the medical center, which then applied for reimbursement for its costs.

Lewis County PUD Manager Dan Kay said ToledoTel is the "Last Mile" provider and the PUD is the "Middle Mile" provider. He said laws prevent the PUD from providing broadband service itself. Dan said high-speed Internet is becoming a basic necessity.

Commissioner Jackson discussed a return trip from Texas during which a fellow airline passenger from Toledo discussed his ability to run several businesses from his home because of its broadband services.

Sen. Pearson suggested having the USDA's field representative from Vancouver attend the monthly Mayors' Meetings.

Former County Commissioner Lee Grose said the nitty gritty is that the county needs some "cloverleaves" to provide connectivity to the residents that live along the "superhighway." Lee commended the efforts of Wave, which provided service to the remote areas. Lee discussed the red tape holding up plans for a sewer facility in Packwood. He said the government needs to focus on how to facilitate, not regulate.

Winlock resident Matthew Conrow said he and his wife spearheaded an effort to secure broadband for Winlock. He said the lack of service is more than an annoyance, he said service is an economic lifeblood. He commended ToledoTel for its efforts and said Winlock begged ToledoTel to save Winlock residents. He said high costs prevented ToledoTel from being able to serve Winlock. Matt said high-speed Internet is needed so kids can do research for school and laid-off employees to go online for training, etc. He said all the little towns are being left behind in the world of broadband.

Former County Commissioner Ron Averill discussed service providers opting to ignore areas in Lewis County because of the lack of residents to use those services. He said he would be interested in speaking with the USDA about ways to draw visitors to the outlying areas.

Theresa Charboneau of Winlock, who has a small mobile home park, said the lack of access to broadband is a safety concern. She said CenturyLink had provided service but that it cut the cables to homes in her park as various residents moved out.

Commissioner Jackson left at 10:30 a.m.

Lewis County Public Health and Social Services Deputy Director J.P. Anderson and Lewis County Public Health and Social Services Community Health Services and Contracts Coordinator Katie Strozyk spoke about the opioid epidemic. Katie said there were 34 fatal overdoses in Lewis County between 2012 and 2016, a rate that mirrors the state rate. Katie said the county has five outpatient services and one detox facility. Katie said EMS is equipped with Naloxone. She said law enforcement also has been equipped with Naloxone. Katie said a newly-formed task force is focusing on medication storage and disposal as well as syringe disposal.

J.P. Anderson discussed his work with the local Drug Court program. JP said the community rises to any opportunities presented. Sen. Pearson asked to be invited to any future meetings.

Mayor Dawes asked whether there would be a liability if an officer administered Naloxone but that the overdose still proved fatal. Katie said the state has the Good Samaritan Act that would protect the individual. Mayor Dawes discussed a recent surgery after which he was prescribed 90 pain killers. Katie said the state Department of Health is pushing for a prescription monitoring program.

JP discussed working with pharmacies, etc. to combat opioid abuse.

Sen. Pearson invited the audience to visit the USDA's website at www.usda.gov/topics/opioids for information about opioid abuse in rural America.

Shari Hildreth of Rep. Herrera Beutler's office said Rep. Herrera Beutler is keenly interested in broadband. She also said President Trump wants to earmark funding for infrastructure. She urged individuals to contact legislative assistant Anna Breen (anna.breen@mail.house.gov) with any concerns regarding broadband or opioids.

Dena Horton of Sen. Cantwell's Office discussed the need to prevent overprescribing. She said the expansion of Medicaid has allowed individuals to seek treatment. She said cuts to Medicaid would put that in jeopardy. Dena said Sen. Cantwell also is keenly interested in affordable housing.

Meeting adjourned at 10:46 a.m.