

Mayors' Meeting

May 4, 2018

9:01 a.m.

Present: Lewis County Commissioner Edna J. Fund, Commissioner Gary Stamper, state Director for the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development Kirk Pearson, USDA General Field Representative Steve Coyner, Community Outreach Program Manager for the state Department of Commerce Stephen Dunk, Policy Advisor with Gov. Jay Inslee's office John Flanagan, Program Director and Tribal Liaison for the state Community Economic Revitalization Board (CERB) Janea Delk, Southwest Washington Outreach Director Dena Horton of Sen. Cantwell's office, Centralia Port Commissioner Peter Lahmann, Pe Ell Mayor Lonnie Willey, Winlock Mayor Don Bradshaw, Centralia Mayor Lee Coumbs, Toledo Mayor Steve Dobosh, Deputy District Director Pam Peiper of Rep. Herrera Beutler's office, Tamara Greenwell of the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT), Chehalis Mayor Dennis Dawes, state Rep. Ed Orcutt, Mossyrock Mayor Randy Sasser, Kimberly Pincheira of WSDOT, Celeste Dimichina of WSDOT, Lewis County Commissioner Robert C. "Bobby" Jackson (9:12 a.m.)

Guests: Various members of the public and media

Recorder: Rieva Lester

Commissioner Fund, Commissioner Stamper, the mayors and the various guests, county employees and audience members introduced themselves.

Former state Sen. Kirk Pearson, the newly-appointed state Director for the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development, discussed President Trump's focus on rural broadband, telemedicine and the opioid crisis.

Commissioner Jackson joined at 9:12 a.m.

Steve Coyner, General Field Representative for the USDA, discussed the Community Connect broadband grant. He said any entity receiving the grant would have to sign a contract with the federal government and provide service to everyone in its Purposed Funded Service Area.

An audience member asked how Randle would move forward since it has no city government.

Commissioner Stamper said partnerships will be needed. He said he hopes the region's communication giants can come together to create some kind of a plan.

Steve Coyner of the USDA stressed that anyone can apply for the grant, even community improvement groups. He said the maximum per company would be \$3 million.

TO-DO LIST / RECAP

Area entities: Send to former state Sen. Kirk Pearson a list of roadblocks the community faces regarding securing broadband technology.

Rieva: Coordinate with Janea Delk's staff to plan a CERB workshop in Lewis County.

Area residents: Ask federal representatives to have the FCC block off white space channels to provide service to rural areas.

Onalaska resident Harry Bhagwandin discussed TDS's willingness to work with the community.

Steve Coyner discussed a loan program available through the Farm Bureau. He said the loan has a \$20 million cap.

An audience member asked if there is money available for planning. Steve Coyner said there isn't, but that \$600 million has been earmarked to address rural broadband technology. He said the rules and regulations for the money have not been set yet but that it's possible it could allow funding for planning.

A representative of TDS discussed the preplanning required for applying for a grant.

Lewis County PUD Manager Dan Kay said the PUD cannot be the internet provider. However, he said, the PUD can be the "freeway" or "main line" for technology. He said the PUD leases its excess capacity and that the PUD looks to be a partner, not a provider, regarding broadband technology.

An audience member stressed the need to create branch lines to hook up to the main line.

John Flanagan, Policy Advisor with Gov. Jay Inslee's office, discussed Gov. Inslee's efforts to bring back the state broadband office. He discussed the need for infrastructure, such as hubs that can serve surrounding areas. He said public partnerships are a huge help. He said fiber optic lines run \$50,000 to \$70,000 per mile. John discussed appropriation of funds.

State Rep. Ed Orcutt discussed legislation he presented to provide funding for rural broadband. He stressed the importance of rural broadband for students, business owners and other community members, and he note the imbalance of the technology push in Seattle versus what's seen in the rural areas.

Dan Kay said the PUD has built the "freeway." He asked where the bottleneck is.

Dale Merten of ToledoTel said the challenge is the cost to get from the access point to the consumer.

Larry Boehm of TDS Telecom discussed the high costs associated with compression technology, etc.

Dale Merten discussed the use of copper versus fiber optic lines.

An audience member asked about hot spot technology.

Commissioner Jackson left at 9:51 a.m.

Dennis Haberkoin of Onalaska said he is paying full price for high-speed internet but isn't getting the service.

Larry Boehm said TDS is working on fixing service to communities by October.

Former state Sen. Pearson said his agency has created the Office of Innovation to help cut down on red tape and roadblocks. He said he wants to know what roadblocks Lewis County faces.

An audience member from the Mayfield Lake area said technology is moving faster than what providers can handle.

Dale Merten said ToledoTel was one of the first to roll out 1-meg technology, which is obsolete now. He said costs prohibit moving faster.

A Boeing employee who lives in Vader discussed his troubles with losing connectivity.

Janea Delk, Program Director and Tribal Liaison for the state Community Economic Revitalization Board (CERB) discussed the CERB program. She said her board meets May 17. She said applications for the program will be accepted beginning May 21. She said it is a loan program. Janea said it sounds like Lewis County could qualify for CERB help with planning. She said she'd be happy to meet with the "players" in the future to help identify the county's needs and the help available.

Dan Kay said the PUD has some shovel-ready projects it will fill out applications.

Janea Delk of CERB invited the group to sign up for CERB's update. Janea told Commissioner Fund she'd be willing to host a meeting in Lewis County, and she told Tom Crowson that fire districts could certainly apply for help through CERB.

Ron Averill of Centralia discussed the need to provide good service closer to the outlying areas.

Steve Dunk, Community Outreach Program Manager for the state Department of Commerce, introduced himself as the conduit for the Department of Commerce's many programs available. He discussed a handful of grants available through the Department of Commerce.

John Flanagan of Gov. Inslee's office pointed out that most grant topics can be linked back to broadband needs.

Former state Sen. Pearson discussed the availability of U.S. Department of Transportation's newly created Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD) grants.

John Flanagan discussed microwave technology. He urged the audience to pressure federal representatives to ask the FCC to block off white space channels to provide for service to rural areas.

Commissioner Stamper discussed the importance of providing broadband technology for students and businesses.

Harry Bhagwandin said he'd like to see the county provide a list of businesses that offer high-speed internet service.

Roundtable

Toledo Mayor Steve Dobosh praised ToledoTel for its work to provide service to Toledo, which he said has buoyed area students' efforts to attend college and/or find employment.

Dena Horton and Pam Peiper said Sen. Cantwell and Rep. Herrera Beutler are happy to provide letters of support, etc. for grant applications.

Pe Ell Mayor Lonnie Willie said Pe Ell's water line construction project will go out to bid in June.

Toledo Mayor Steve Dobosh said the city received a \$50,000 grant.

Winlock Mayor Don Bradshaw said the city is working to extend the water line to the commercial park. He said sewer work also will take place and that the city's bridge replacement project is moving forward.

Mossyrock Mayor Randy Sasser discussed Mossyrock's upcoming Buffalo Nickel event. He said the city's Blueberry Festival will take place in August.

WSDOT representative Kimberly Pincheira gave an update on WSDOT projects.

Commissioner Jackson returned at 10:35 a.m.

Meeting adjourned at 10:38 a.m.