

Broadband Proposal reviews

October 12, 2021

11:01 a.m.

Present: Commissioner Pollock, Commissioner Swope, County Manager Erik Merten, Becky Butler, Austin Majors, Eric Eisenberg, Josh Metcalf, Matt Jaeger, Mindy Brooks

Guests: Eric Rosane

Recorder: Tammy Martin

Erik Martin said that as we received ARPA funds, we have issued a RFP for broadband infrastructure in Lewis County. The meetings today are to help the Board better understand the proposals submitted. A pre-application is due Monday October 18, 2021. There are grant funds available to assist with funding the grants.

Dale Merten said the project ToledoTel submitted is an expansion to the 200 customers they currently serve. They would like to cover Vader, Winlock and Napavine. ToledoTel has a MOU with Lewis County PUD. This would be buried fiber down through the rights of way and directly to the consumer without a cost to the consumer to connect. Commissioner Swope asked how long it would take for service to complete the whole project. Dale said it would have to be complete by 2026. Commissioner Swope asked if having more personnel would assist in the completion of the project and Dale said no. They focus on retaining good employees. This would be a significant expansion of the customer base. Erik Martin asked if there had been any plans in place. Dale said all their software is compatible with all their departments to allow for efficiencies. He did say they would be more technical staff to provide customer service. There is very minimal maintenance with the fiber being buried. Dale feels ToledoTel can meet all the requirements. They have a network speed of 10 megabits. Dale said the wholesale requirements are about 15% off the consumer prices. The consumer prices are posted on their website. The project states the owner must be in control for 25 years. This would be a county-owned in order to meet application requirements. ToledoTel no longer seeks exclusive access. The build out would be through 2026 and the grant says the project needs to have all costs to be billed/incurred by 2024, Eric Eisenberg did ask if they could meet that requirements. Becky Butler said the projects have to be obligated by the 2024 and expensed fully by 2026. Commissioner Swope was concerned about supply chain issues and clarified with Dale that ToledoTel has supplies to complete 600 residents. Commissioner Pollock asked about ToledoTel purchasing rights after 25 years and he said he feels based on the broadband guidance that would not be a possibility.

ToledoTel can provide the 10% match that is required and the collateral up front. There would be no financial obligation to Lewis County to start the project. The County would be the lead grant applicant and the owner of the infrastructure in the future. Eric Eisenberg inquired about meeting Prevailing wage requirements. Dale Merten said the employees are paid a prevailing wage.

Meeting ended at 11:30 a.m