

Broadband proposal reviews II

October 12, 2021

2 p.m.

Present: Commissioner Pollock, Commissioner Swope, County Manager Erik Martin, Becky Butler, Mindy Brooks, Austin Majors, Eric Eisenberg, Matt Jaeger, Tammy Martin, Tiffanie Morgan, Chris Roden, Willie Painter, Hans Hechtman, Steve Wohld (2:49 p.m.)

Guests: Fred Rider, Trish Geist, Eric Rosane, Jared Wenzelburger, Edlira Kuka

Recorder: Rieva Lester

Lewis County PUD

Willie Painter said Lewis County has an unmet broadband need. Willie said the PUD issued a countywide survey to determine the level of broadband service available locally. He and Chris Roden outlined a proposed communitywide plan that would include 17 service zones, providing services to the 24,000 homes without broadband access and the thousands of others that are underserved.

Chris noted that the PUD had identified the need for broadband service two years ago, before COVID-19 highlighted the dire need.

Chris said the PUD would backstop its program using existing revenues. He said the PUD is exploring grant funding and considering loans in addition to exploring partnering with other PUDs to examine LIDs.

Willie said the 17 proposed service zones include incumbent service providers. He said the PUD has contacted the incumbent service providers and requested feedback but has not received any.

Willie noted that the PUD helped convene the state-required Broadband Action Team. He said the group is open to all purveyors of broadband. Chris said the PUD is in the information-gathering stage regarding securing grant opportunities. Willie said the PUD can have a proposal ready to go with 48 to 72 hours' notice. Erik Martin said the county would like make sure any county efforts are complementary of PUD projects. Chris said the PUD likely will focus its attention on East Lewis County. Chris said the PUD is looking to partner with groups on dark-fiber backbone, etc., and wants to advance connectivity.

Willie said the PUD is proposing speeds of at least 150 symmetrical. He outlined ways the PUD can keep its costs down.

Willie said the PUD is looking at how it can partner with the county to ensure Lewis County is collectively using resources in the best way for the citizens. He said the PUD has shovel-ready network designs and welcomes the possibility of a joint effort, especially on the east end of the county.

Chris said the PUD is looking to be a constructor of a public-private network.

Comcast

Comcast representative Hans Hechtman said Comcast is looking to expand its broadband service to Vader. He provided the following details:

- Comcast would provide 20 percent of its own money toward the project cost of \$19.1 million.
- It would be a “full fiber build.”
- Currently at 1.2 gigs.
- Comcast is a leader in broadband with fastest speed.
- The company held up to an overnight increase of 30 percent during COVID-19.
- Total cost: \$19.1 million.
- Homes passed: 1,632.
- Aerial / underground: 50 / 50.

Hans said Comcast:

- Has not yet reached out to incumbent service providers.
- Has not yet received support from the Broadband Action Team.
- Can meet the speed requirement (100 symmetrical).
- Could not comply with the WBP’s open access requirement.
- Builds, operates and maintains its own networks and wants to keep that proprietary.
- Does not have experience leasing dark fiber.
- Does not believe that broadband is a utility issue.
- Is a 100 percent private equity.
- Receives no government subsidies.

Meeting adjourned at 3:19 p.m.