

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE COCHISE COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
WORK SESSION HELD ON
TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 2022**

A work session of the Cochise County Board of Supervisors was held on Tuesday, November 29, 2022, at 1:00 p.m. in the Board of Supervisors' Executive Conference Room, 1415 Melody Lane, Building G, Bisbee, Arizona.

Present: Ann English, Chairman; Peggy Judd, Vice-Chairman, telephonic; Tom Crosby, Supervisor

Staff Present: Richard G. Karwaczka, County Administrator
Sharon Gilman, Deputy County Administrator
Christine Roberts, Chief Civil Deputy County Attorney
Tim Mattix, Clerk of the Board

Attendees: Joe Casey, Chief Information Officer
Doug Dawson, President, CCG Consulting
Tim Arbeiter, Director, Broadband Consulting, Finley Engineering

Chairman English called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m.

ANY ITEM ON THIS AGENDA IS OPEN FOR DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION

THE ORDER OR DELETION OF ANY ITEM ON THIS AGENDA IS SUBJECT TO MODIFICATION AT THE MEETING

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

Board of Supervisors

1. Discussion and possible direction regarding the Draft Broadband Feasibility Study.

Mr. Casey stated there are concerns with broadband throughout Cochise County, and federal funds available to help with broadband. The County requested a Broadband Feasibility Study (Study). A Request for Proposals (RFP) was issued, with eight responses received. Finley Engineering was awarded the bid and completed the Study.

Mr. Arbeiter, in partnership with Mr. Dawson, presented this information using a PowerPoint presentation. The Study takes a comprehensive look at broadband in Cochise County using various methods of market research. 200 page report was generated. The purpose of the Study was to inform the Board, and give a roadmap for Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to build the broadband by outlining how much it costs and how much grant money is needed.

Mr. Arbeiter stated the study area was everywhere in the County without access to at least 100/20 Mbps broadband. 14,700 homes and businesses do not have that speed.

He reviewed existing ISPs in the area, including telephone, cable, fiber, fixed

broadband, satellite and cellular.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) previously awarded Rural Digital Opportunity Funds (RDOF) for about 5,000 rural homes to get subsidies for broadband. The RDOF program is in limbo and has not yet been funded. FCC may think that wireless is not the best solution for the area. Connect everyone was cancelled. Map was displayed depicting served and unserved areas of the county.

Market outreach was completed with online surveys, speed tests and interviews. The surveys resulted in 7% of homes unable to get broadband, and 2% using cell phones. 46% unhappy with the value received, 37% are unhappy with reliability, 35% unhappy with download speeds, 27% unhappy with customer service.

The average price for broadband is \$80 per month within the county, which is higher than other communities. 66% support the idea of funding for better broadband, 33% might support and 1% do not support the idea. He reviewed speed test charts showing speeds by various technology: DSL, fiber, cable, fixed wireless, low orbit satellite (does not qualify for these grants), high orbit satellite, and cellular .

Mr. Arbeiter outlined key considerations for network design, including: Largest investment, longest estimated life and looked to future not what it is now. This study based on new Federal funding guidelines to help future funding requests.

The Study found that a number of providers are expanding their footprint. The County's low density and topography made a one fixed-wireless solution difficult. Fixed wireless may be a solution in combination with fiber for fringe boundaries. A Network capable of delivering 10-gigabit broadband requires fiber would be 1,127 miles for whole study area and 617 miles in the non-RDOF areas.

Key design point considerations include: fiber network following existing utilities, 10 Gbps, one data center, and extra fiber for future growth.

The cost of the fiber would total \$92 million in rural areas and \$61 million without RDOF. The Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program could provide up to 75% of the grants in the total rural area.

Mr. Dawson stated Congress passed an infrastructure bill with over \$42.5 billion for broadband funding mostly aimed at rural areas. The states will have a say in who gets funding. Arizona's share will be at least \$600 million and can use American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds as matching funds for projects. The state will have several rounds of broadband grants.

Mr. Dawson reviewed strategic questions and next steps, noting that the biggest issue is RDOF areas. He suggested submitting a letter to the FCC to ask them to resolve this for the County. Other steps include to reach out to ISPs, community outreach, review fiber policies and challenge FCC maps.

In response to the Board, Mr. Dawson and Mr. Arbeiter explained how the FCC regulates and established RDOF Funds for broadband funding. Resound Network was awarded one of the largest grants but has not received the funding. Other ISPs in the County may build and install fiber optics with their own funds but cannot receive federal funding for it if Resound Network was previously awarded that area. ISPs may look at the large areas in the County being neglected.

The Board directed Mr. Casey to draft a letter to the FCC regarding the RDOF areas.

Mr. Casey will look at areas not getting the service and will reach out and communicate with local ISPs to go after the funding needed.

Chairman English adjourned the meeting at 2:26 p.m.

APPROVED:

Ann English, Chairman

ATTEST:

Tim Mattix, Clerk of the Board