



**CHAMPAIGN COUNTY BOARD
BROADBAND TASK FORCE AGENDA**

County of Champaign, Urbana, Illinois
Monday, January 29, 2024 - 6:30 p.m.

Shields-Carter Meeting Room
Brookens Administrative Center
1776 E. Washington St., Urbana

MINUTES – Approved As Distributed

Members Present: Stephanie Burnett, Samantha Carter, Mike Smeltzer, Mike Smith, and Jeff Wilson

Members Absent: Bailey Conrady, M.C. Neal, Kyle Patterson, and Eric Thorsland

Others Present: Michelle Jett (Director of Administration), Tim Arbeiter (Finley Engineering), Craig Hall, Jason Tally, & Katie Akins/Zoom (Nextlink), Peter Folk & Jason Young (VOLO), and Elisabeth Dillingham (Recording Secretary)

Agenda Items

I. Call to Order

Ms. Carter called the meeting to order at 6:35 p.m.

II. Roll Call

Roll call was taken, and a quorum was declared present.

III. Approval of Agenda/Addendum

MOTION by Mr. Wilson to approve the agenda; seconded by Mr. Smith. Upon voice vote, the **MOTION CARRIED** unanimously.

IV. Approval of Minutes

A. August 15, 2022

MOTION by Mr. Wilson to approve the minutes of the August 15, 2022 meeting, seconded by Mr. Smeltzer. Upon voice vote, the **MOTION CARRIED** unanimously.

V. Public Participation

There was no Public Participation.

VI. Communications

There were no communications.

VII. New Business

A. Mission/purpose moving forward

Ms. Jett explained the history of the Broadband Task Force as the last meeting was in August of 2022. The Broadband Task Force has moved from the planning portion to the implementation portion. Ms. Jett explained from a task force standpoint, one of the biggest rules will be keeping the full board informed of the progress. Also, any needs of the project that haven't been accounted for will be identified as well as how the project is looking regarding ARPA deadlines. ARPA has more extended deadlines than the original 2024 cut off for allocation and the 2025 cutoff date for completion. There might even be additional funding available for the project in the future. Ms. Jett stated it would be good for the

57 taskforce to know how the funding can be utilized for the project. The taskforce will need to have the
58 ability to articulate to the board how we can use the funding if we get to the point of receiving additional
59 funding.
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61 Mr. Arbeiter from Finley Engineering was present and stated he is glad to have the task force back
62 together again. There are several activities going on behind the scenes with progress. The broadband
63 landscape is going to be hot & heavy for the next 18-24 months as far as funding, resources available,
64 infrastructure, and digital equity.
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66 **B. Update on Upcoming Funding Opportunities:**
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68 1. Mr. Arbeiter said there are funds available from Connect Illinois. There are two providers the County
69 selected from the study, Nextlink and VOLO. On the near horizon, there are two major funding programs
70 that are coming. The first is the USDA Rural Utility Services Re-connect Program which is a Federal
71 Program and suppose to launch next month. The final rules will be very restrictive.
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73 2. The second program is the Illinois BEAD funding through the State of Illinois. Just last week, the
74 initiation of the map location opened. The challenge process is slightly delayed while waiting for
75 approval from Washington DC. The National Broadband map is being evaluated. The FCC can identify
76 by the map a location is being served or not. The red dots on the national map indicate the area is not
77 being serviced and the green dots on the map indicate they are being serviced. Once the funding is
78 opened, the funding will be immediately available. He spoke highly of the support they have received
79 from Champaign County.
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81 **C. Connect Illinois Round 3 Submissions-Providers Update:**
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83 **1. NextLink Updates**

84 Mr. Arbeiter introduced the Providers. Mr. Craig Hall from Nextlink spoke regarding the history and
85 updates of their process. He indicated they have done a lot of work with State & Federal Funding.
86 Mr. Hall discussed how expensive it is to bury fiber. There are other above ground options utilizing
87 poles and fixed wireless. Mr. Hall stated the grant applications are in, however, they are waiting to
88 hear the responses.
89

90 Jason Tally, the Regional Director from the State of Illinois was also in attendance.
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92 Mr. Smeltzer asked Mr. Hall how the ARDOF applications ended up.
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94 Mr. Hall stated they did receive some funding from ARDOF. Mr. Hall indicated there is some
95 “splatter” on the service map indicating it is hit or miss as far as funding different zones based on
96 FCC and different criteria.
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98 Mr. Smeltzer indicated some of the ARDOF splatting was in Champaign County. He stated
99 Nextlink was the largest awardee of the ARDOF funding.
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101 Mr. Hall stated he was not certain; however, the ARDOF funding was successful.
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103 Mr. Smeltzer added it was the funding was successful good because the planning was based on
104 Netlinks project being successful.
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Mr. Arbeiter will provide a map of the providers that defaulted in service areas. The FCC provides the data.

Ms. Carter asked Mr. Hall if there was a dollar amount for the ARDOF funding Nextlink received that he could share with the committee.

Ms. Akins, Nextlink Government Program Manager, spoke via ZOOM. She advised Ms. Carter she can get those dollars amount numbers for the board.

Ms. Akins conducted a Powerpoint presentation regarding the overall project concept for the eleven different regions. This project will fund areas with Champaign Housing Authority throughout Champaign County.

Ms. Akins also spoke about the Connect Illinois program and the ARDOF fund maps for each area. The project areas and counties were also outlined in the PowerPoint presentation. The total was 81 million dollars for the entire project area. The cost of fiber is broken down into miles and the number of homes needing service. Volo and Nextlink are working in tandem to ensure all areas are covered.

Mr. Wilson asked what the basis was for choosing the homes on the map that will receive service.

Mr. Arbeiter stated a feasibility study analysis map was created from farms and businesses that have no internet or little internet. The grant eligible locations were determined from that study. Underserved on unserved homes for Internet purposes are eligible.

Ms. Carter asked about the amount of the previous estimated price quote of 95 million dollars to cover the project. The recent quote was provided at \$81,000. Ms. Akins Clarified the \$81,000 was just the portion for Nextlink's applications.

Mr. Arbeiter indicated there has been a price increase for the original estimates due to the time lapse of a year and a half to two years. The inflationary factors of the grant estimates include the costs of material, labor, and regulations.

Mr. Smeltzer asked about the geography of the maps as to whether the locations are primarily farms or Urban areas of Broadlands.

Ms. Akins clarified the locations must all be contiguous. Nextlink took some of the more rural spread-out areas to focus on. VOLO is taking the denser areas.

Mr. Smeltzer asked if it was fair to say most of the 376 properties are farms, businesses, or urban residences.

Ms. Akins believes the properties are homes.

Mr. Hall stated they are multi-acre properties that meet the business model for Nextlink and VOLO.

Mr. Arbeiter located the data points for the ARDOF numbers which authorized 2,490 properties for service. LTD defaulted which makes these properties eligible for the program through Nextlink or VOLO.

Mr. Wilson confirmed it costs \$26,000 to hook up each house. He also inquired as to inflation and asked if they cut service to account for the inflation costs.

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Mr. Arbeiter replied that it becomes a state obligation to make good on the budget, timeline, and the contents of the agreement for the investment being made. Most providers build in a contingent ceiling to account for price fluctuations.

2. **VOLO Updates**

Mr. Peter Folk spoke from VOLO regarding the infrastructure and digital equity.

Peter Folk, the founder of VOLO, stated he is excited about the project, and he has thousands of campus customers including many urban areas. He appreciates all the funding his company has received thus far.

VOLO shared a Champaign Housing Authority Project (VCHAP) presentation by Ms. Laura. There has been 9.4 million dollars allocated for the project.

Mr. Folk spoke about the current price of routers being so expensive. Mr. Folk stated the focus of his company is helping the subsidized housing areas and less fortunate communities to obtain Wi-Fi & internet service to assist in facilitating education and medical needs. This project would help 1,360 people including children, seniors, and disabled citizens. He spoke about the AFP (Affordable Connectivity Program). This enables citizens to afford broadband service. The VOLO Champaign Housing Authority Project (VCHAP) Action Plan was explained. There are two phases of this project. Phase I should be completed by May 2025. Phase II should be completed by December 2027. The funds awarded for these projects are now taxable. Mr. Folk spoke about the interest rates and inflation which makes it very challenging for a project of this magnitude. He is hoping the current bills going through the state and senate will alleviate these tax laws.

Ms. Carter asked about the speed and quality of the fiber optic that is currently installed in Champaign-Urbana.

Mr. Folk said the fiber will last 50+ years. Those fibers are facilitating Champaign-Urbana and this VOLO project will service areas outside of Champaign-Urbana. Maps of the coverage areas were provided on the Powerpoint.

Ms. Carter requested a breakdown of the funds that were granted to the companies to see what funds were provided and what funds Champaign County matched.

Mr. Arbeiter stated he would provide the information to the committee when all the data is compiled. He also thanked the committee and the Champaign County board for all their support which grabbed the attention of the State and Federal agencies.

Mr. Jason Young from VOLO stated the process took some time because the MOU needed created for VOLO and Nextlink prior to applying for grants and locating an Engineering firm. Careful attention was also made to ensure areas needing service were not omitted.

Mr. Smeltzer reiterated although it seems like a long time since the initial planning, the companies have not missed any funding opportunities. He stated that VOLO would be first in line for funding opportunities.

Mr. Young stated that Mr. Smeltzer was correct in his assessment.

Ms. Carter thanked the representatives and companies for their hard work. She stated she realizes how time consuming this project is.

216 Mr. Wilson asked who is doing the actual labor of the project.
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218 Mr. Folk replied that it depends on the company.
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220 Mr. Hall said they try to do most of the work themselves, but they do not always have the equipment
221 to do so.
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223 Ms. Carter inquired about a goal setting place for minority contractors, specifically, women. She
224 asked that the Providers provide her the numbers of the data.
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226 Mr. Folk stated the vendor he bids out will have the minority requirements as well.
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228 Ms. Jett asked Samantha if she would like to add a minority reporting function like we do for
229 construction projects.
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231 Ms. Carter said she would like that.
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233 **3. Update from Finley Engineering**
234 Mr. Arbeiter will follow up with the board on the previously discussed action items.
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236 Mr. Folk added that VOLO previously completed a lot of community outreach to determine the needs
237 of the community. He stated he received over 200 letters from citizens that were quite compelling.
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239 Ms. Carter spoke about her business and personal costs with Internet service. She was appreciative of
240 the resources being provided.
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242 **VIII. Other Business**
243 A. Date of next meeting-TBD. April or May 2024.
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245 **IX. Chair's Report**
246 There was no Chair's Report.
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248 **X. Adjournment**
249 Ms. Carter adjourned the meeting at 8:05 p.m.
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251
252 *Please note the minutes reflect the order of the agenda and may not necessarily reflect the order of business*
253 *conducted at the meeting.*