

MEETING MINUTES: THURSDAY, MARCH 24, 2022, 10:00 A.M.

Location: Commissioners Meeting Room, Basement.

**Public meetings are being held both in-person and by conference call. To participate in the meeting please dial 1-408-419-1715 or 1-408-915-6290 and enter meeting number 2468097683#*

Call to Order:

Commissioner Erb called the meeting to order.

Moment of Silent Reflection:

Commissioner Erb called for a moment of silent reflection.

Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag:

Commissioner Erb requested those participating in the meeting please stand and recite the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

Roll Call:

Commissioner Erb, Commissioner Burke, Commissioner Webster, Chief Clerk Hemminger and Solicitor Karn.

Others Present:

AC Stickel (Controller), Melissa Harpster and Allison Senkevich (Commissioners Office), Dustin Bishop (SAP&DC), Brandon Carson (ABI), Kay Stephens (Altoona Mirror), Carol A. Dannenberg and Bryan King (Hollidaysburg Community Watchdog Group).

Public Comment:

Commissioner Erb called for public comment.

Bryan King of the Hollidaysburg Community Watchdog Group provided a statement regarding Allegheny Broadband Inc. (ABI).

New Business:

Alleghenies Broadband Inc.:

Brandon Carson requested approval of a County of Blair American Rescue Plan Act (ARP) Grant Agreement by and between Blair County and Alleghenies Broadband Inc. (ABI) in the amount of \$50,000.00 to assist ABI with the costs associated with a regional fiber-optic network design study completed and available for use by ABI and the Southern Alleghenies Counties in designing and developing fiber-optic broadband services within the Southern Alleghenies region.

Mr. Carson stated that ABI, a non-profit agency formed to improve internet access in rural areas, is proposing the completion of a Regional Fiber-Optic Network Design for the counties of Bedford, Blair, Cambria, Fulton, Huntingdon and Somerset, stating that the high-level design will provide a framework for constructing a reliable, high-speed fiber-optic network that will positively affect the economic conditions in this region for decades to come.

Mr. Carson stated the following reasons why this design work is critical to the future success of broadband efforts in the region.

1. The result will be a comprehensive, long-term strategy that will provide decision-makers with the information needed to address the lack of connectivity in the region.
2. The design will assist in leveraging additional state and federal funding to construct the network and will ensure the most efficient use of available funding resources by reducing duplication of efforts from the public and private sector.
3. Current and future investments in fixed wireless services will be supported by the design.
4. Taking a comprehensive, regional approach will facilitate partnerships with local Internet Service Providers.
5. The design work will not only address current needs but will plan for the future broadband needs of the region's residents and businesses.

Mr. Carson stated that the cost to complete this work is \$300,000.00 with each of the six-6 counties asked to contribute \$50,000.00 toward the effort. He stated collaboration among the counties would result in a high-level design for a fiber-optic network that can be constructed in phases, as funding resources are available.

Mr. Carson stated that ABI previously issued a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) and based on the responses received the Foresite Group has been selected to complete the scope of work that will require approximately 6 to 7 months to complete.

Commissioner Webster asked about the risk to the county if for some reason they are ordered to repay the \$50,000.00 they provided to ABI.

Commissioner Burke provided Commissioner Webster a copy of the agreement referencing the agreements indemnification clause.

Commissioner Erb stated that County Solicitor Nathan Karn and David Mitchell a Pittsburgh Attorney, under contract with the county's consultants for ARP funding, were involved with the revisions to the agreement that provide financial protection to the county.

Commissioner Erb advised Commissioner Webster that the agreement provides that ABI is responsible for properly using the grant funds.

Commissioner Webster asked Mr. Carson if the public would be able to examine ABI records. Mr. Carson stated that ABI is not a public agency; however, there is language in the contract to address Right to Know requests.

Discussion followed.

Resolution 103-2022: A resolution approving a County of Blair American Rescue Plan Act (ARP) Grant Agreement by and between Blair County and Alleghenies Broadband Inc. (ABI) in the amount of \$50,000.00 to assist ABI with the costs associated with a regional fiber-optic network design study completed and available for use by ABI and the Southern Alleghenies Counties in designing and developing fiber-optic broadband services within the Southern Alleghenies region.

Motion by Commissioner Erb, seconded by Commissioner Burke and unanimously approved to adopt Resolution 103-2022.

UPMC Altoona:

Requesting approval of a Letter of Support for the submission of an application for a federal grant by UPMC Altoona in the approximate amount of \$2 million with a \$500,000.00 match by the hospital for cafeteria renovations.

Commissioner Erb requested that this item be removed and placed on a future meeting agenda if necessary. **No discussion or action taken.**

Adjourn:

Meeting Adjourned,

Nicole M. Hemminger, Chief Clerk