



**MINUTES**  
**TELECOMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE**  
**Thursday, April 28, 2022 – 10:00 AM**  
**Zoom Videoconference**  
**Watertown, New York**

The Development Authority of the North Country Telecommunications Committee met in regular session via Zoom Videoconference, Watertown, New York on Thursday, April 28, 2022 at 10:00 am.

**Members Present**

Brian McGrath – Committee Chair  
Mary Doheny  
Mark Hall  
Thomas Hefferon  
Eric Virkler  
Carl E. Farone, Jr., Executive Director  
David Wolf, Telecommunications Division Director

**Staff Present**

Carrie Tuttle, Chief Operating Officer  
Angela Marra, Executive Assistant

**Committee Members – Absent**

**Other Board Members Present**

Margaret Murray – Board Chair  
Steve Hunt  
Alex MacKinnon

**Guests Present**

1. Committee Chair McGrath called the meeting to order at 10:02 AM.
2. Roll Call was taken and a quorum of the committee was established.
3. Three County Broadband Initiative –

C. Farone explained the purpose of this meeting was to discuss the lack of proposals received for the RFP issued for Telecommunication Services. An update will also be presented to the full committee by D. Wolf regarding the three county broadband initiative in the effort to supply broadband to unserved and underserved areas.

D. Wolf reviewed the activities involving Jefferson, Lewis, and St. Lawrence Counties and where we are today. D. Wolf stated that all three counties were holding multiple meetings each month involving the planning department, IT, county managers, and administrators. These meetings have helped to refine the areas of need among the unserved and underserved population, as well as provided time to discuss alternatives and funding. Several projects have also been implemented.

Jefferson County was fairly well served, but work has been done on their maps and a master spreadsheet was created to help provide good documentation throughout the process. The potential of an NBRC grant was explored, but ultimately it was determined that there are other more appropriate funding opportunities. Hudson Valley Wireless was hired to do an RF Study to determine the coverage area from the existing county owned tower in Redwood. Spectrum was contacted for cost information in the underserved area of Lake of the Woods.

C. Farone stated this is a collaborative effort between the county and Authority staff.

Lewis County was provided assistance in the development of the CDBG Grant for the installation of wireless broadband in Harrisville and Lyonsdale, as well as the NBRC Grant for Copenhagen. The Authority also assisted in writing the RFPs for the wireless service provider and assisted in selecting the vendor. We will also help with some testing at the end of the project to ensure the county received the awarded services.

C. Farone asked how many individuals this would serve. D. Wolf responded it would be close to 1,600, with 70% of those currently unserved.

D. Wolf continued by explaining that we also assisted with a NTIA Grant with Spectrum which was not awarded to anyone in New York State. They have continued to work on mapping to help reduce the total number of unserved lines; reducing the number by 700 in the Lewis County area.

St. Lawrence County has been working closely with us. There is no actual project but we are working on field verification and have worked with SLIC and Spectrum to obtain inventory updates since the study was completed. The county planners were able to provide us with the specific property class codes to indicate those that are vacant. Residents, seasonal residents, and students were also able to be determined within the mapping. An NBRC Grant was discussed in St. Lawrence County as well, but they also decided it would be better to wait. The Authority assisted with an RFP to assess interest in the ReConnect Grant, however even though all providers attend a pre-bid meeting no one responded to the bid. This is possibly due to timing or the rural area. The Authority has also worked with BOCES and Cisco to discuss services for the schools. With all of the efforts made in refining resources, the number of unserved homes has decreased from 7,400 to 3,000 in St. Lawrence County.

4. Upon a motion by M. Doheny, and seconded by E. Virkler, the committee moved in to Executive Session to discuss the proposed acquisition, sale, or lease of real property at 10:17 AM.

Upon a motion by T. Hefferon, and seconded by E. Virkler, the committee moved out of Executive Session at 10:47 AM

Committee Chair B. McGrath stated there was no action taken during Executive Session.

## 5. Discuss Request for Proposal for Telecom Division Strategic Plan –

C. Farone reviewed a memo explaining the committee's background and how we arrived at the discussions being held today for M. Hall, the newly appointed committee member. While the initial mission of the Authority was focused on business and industry with much of those goals having been accomplished, COVID helped bring to light that the residential aspect was still lacking. Once the underserved areas in our three county region are better served, these projects will be viewed as more of an economic project rather than a revenue generator. If this was a profitable initiative it would already be in place, but because there is not a large profit margin due to it being so rural, the Authority has become involved. Authority time is being spent on such initiatives that are beneficial from an economic development and a quality of life perspective. ,

C. Farone continued by explaining that it was decided to issue an RFP to retain a telecommunications consultant to look at how the Authority could maximize the utilization of our network for the benefit of Jefferson, Lewis and St. Lawrence Counties. 52 firms downloaded the RFP, 18 participated in the pre-proposal meeting, and none of the firms responded to the RFP. We did reach out to several of the different firms in an attempt to figure out why, and found that most of the firms expressed being too busy, lacking in time, lacking in staff, or lacking in resources; resulting in them deciding not to respond at this time.

## 6. Next Steps –

Suggested alternatives for consideration:

- I. Re-issue the RFP
  - We may get the same result
  - Could widen the net
- II. Complete the 5-year Strategic Plan with internal resources
  - We already know the business
  - We would not get an external perspective
- III. Table the Plan
  - Focus on fiber and broadband within underserved areas
  - We could revisit this in a year

E. Virkler stated that his initial thought is there is a lot going on at the moment and he can envision reissuing, but at another point in time. Doing the work ourselves does not make sense.

T. Hefferon concurred that doing it ourselves doesn't make sense. He also stated that he doesn't mind tabling it for a short time, but not for too long as the enthusiasm of the committee is a great asset and we need to be looking where we should be going and how to maximize our assets and staff. He sees the value in what we are doing, but does not want the staff to have to do it. He also expressed that he would not be opposed to reviewing the RFP and sending it back out, and further commented that nationally we are all facing a staffing problem.

M. Doheny agreed with E. Virkler and T. Hefferon, stating this should not be given to the staff to complete. A benefit of going through a consultant would be getting an outside perspective. If we do decide to reissue the RFP she doesn't feel we should wait too long because there is so much happening in respect to Telecommunications, but at this time it may not be worth the effort to reissue the RFP when we had zero return. She asked if there may be another alternative, or another resource available, or another way to gain information about what is happening internationally, nationally, or statewide regarding services provided in rural areas.

A. MacKinnon commented that when there is no response to an RFP, it shows more about there being no one who is willing or able to do this. While it is a good idea to have it reviewed by someone from the outside, it is also telling if you cannot find someone to do the work. He further stated that if the power authority has confidence in the Authority to participate in this project, we have good standing in this business. He hopes the committee will consider tabling this for a period of time, but not to be disbanded or forgotten. The telecommunications committee is very valuable and this business changes quickly resulting in what we are looking at today not being something we need to look at tomorrow.

M. Hall commented that right now there seem to be buckets of money available to do this type of work. He feels we should be focused on deployment rather than the RFP. He asked if putting together the RFP identified inefficiencies we could do better. He further stated that someone in the trenches may provide a better perspective than bringing in a consultant, even though the consultant could provide an outside perspective. M. Hall stated his opinion right now to be that with the money that is being spent, we should use our resources to get as many people served as possible. He further stated that he looked at the Authority's Strategic Plan and was highly impressed. Telecommunications is in the Strategic Plan, and at this point he expressed he would be in favor of moving forward as we have been without worrying about the RFP at this point.

C. Farone shared an email received during the meeting from R. Piche in favor of broadband projects and stating Lewis County is very pleased with D. Wolf and his staff.

B. McGrath stated everyone on the committee is proud and thankful to have D. Wolf and his team as part of the organization. This committee has provided new insights into what a talented telecommunications team we have at the Authority, and stated that the depth of their knowledge, subject matter, and vision within is impressive. He continued by stating his opinion regarding the alternatives suggested during this meeting. He is against option two, completing the 5-year Strategic Plan with internal resources, as it defeats the purpose of what the committee has been focused on and would be a drain on staff resources. B. McGrath also agrees with other committee members that we should table the RFP for a short period of time and then reissue it, as there is not a lot to be gained by reissuing it right now unless there was a sense that an additional 30-60 days would afford the necessary time for those who stated they did not submit due to time constraints.

D. Wolf commented that those he spoke with seemed to indicate that they are very busy right now, and that they may have more time months down the road. The majority

of the inquiries seemed to be construction or equipment people looking to stay in touch because they know the work we do and quickly dropped out. He further commented that a large RFP like this may be too much for any one organization and we may want to look into breaking it up and asking for specific information on the industry and technology. D. Wolf expressed he was most excited to look at internal processes and see if we could gain efficiencies. There are also people we could bring in to discuss each piece, including Scott Rassmussen from the State Broadband Program Office, to discuss what is going on with the industry in New York State. However, this may not result in one concise document to assist with planning for the next five to ten years.

B. McGrath stated that the goal was to have a comprehensive picture so we could plan where we want to go with the division and what would make the most sense with our mission and our staff. He recommended that the RFP be tabled until Q3, subject to alternative ideas from the committee, and that we revisit the RFP during a September committee meeting as this industry can experience a great deal of change in just a few months.

E. Virkler commented that M. Hall had stated there is so much work right now that we shouldn't be concerned if we do not meet on this again until Q3 or if it ends up being tabled beyond that time.

B. McGrath agreed and further stated that at the next meeting an update will be given on this as well as other projects we are working on to help better determine the outcome of reissuing the RFP.

C. Farone agreed, and stated that from this committee's perspective we will be meeting about how to deploy services in the rural areas as some of this will be different than what we have done in the past. He further stated that before signing any agreements this will be discussed with the committee and presented to the full Board.

Upon a motion by T. Hefferon and seconded by M. Hall , the RFP will be tabled until Q3 when there will be another committee meeting held to determine how to proceed at that time, and was unanimously approved by the Telecommunications Committee.

This motion will be reported at the Board meeting on May 26, 2022.

7. Upon a motion by E. Virkler and seconded by M. Hall, the committee moved to adjourn at 11:14 AM.

Respectfully submitted,



Brian McGrath  
Telecommunications Committee Chair