

GRANT COUNTY DIGITAL NETWORK COALITION
BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING MINUTES

November 20, 2018

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

Dan Becker, Grant County
Josh Walker, Seneca
Brandon Smith, John Day
Nathan McFarland
Denise Porter

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT

None

STAFF PRESENT

Nicholas Green, Executive Director

GUESTS PRESENT

Rick Hanners, Blue Mountain Eagle

Agenda Item No. 1—Open and Note Attendance

Chair Walker opened the meeting of the Grant County Digital board of directors at 6:00 P.M. He noted all board members were present.

Agenda Item No. 2—Approval of Minutes

Mr. Smith moved to approve the minutes of October 18th. Mr. McFarland seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Agenda Item No. 3—Appearance of Interested Citizens

Chair Walker welcomed the audience and asked if there were any agenda items they wished to add. None appearing.

Agenda Item No. 4—Request for Quotes – ESD 911 Lateral

Green described the proposed lateral connecting the John Day Fire Hall / Broadband co-location facility to the Education Service District (ESD) building on South Canyon Boulevard. He described it as dipping our toe in the water. It will be the first fiber build by the Grant County Digital Network Coalition. It will allow us to test the market to see what kind of bidder responses we get from the RFQ and how many firms bid (and at what price point) before we build the longer, 70-mile segment. He said the board will need to consent to release the RFQ and both the board and the John Day City Council will need to approve the build. Mr. Smith discussed the USDA grant, that we still don't know if it is approved, and that we may not want to invest in this course of action until we know. Green replied that we have already met our 25% matching funds obligation at \$450,000 for that grant, and we would still have about \$1.3 million remaining. Chair Walker stated this is part of our long-range planning and part of our

vision and our long range goals (connecting the schools, city infrastructure and county infrastructure), and we plan to go after other money regardless of whether we win the Community Connect grant, so for this approximate cost, if our bids come in there, it would be wise to utilize the funds we have to do it. Co-chair Becker concurred, we need to show we are building something and this would start in March. We've been held back a year already and people are expecting to see progress. Walker added this was the State's intent and sees it as integral to our plan. Green noted one area our application could have been stronger is, one, Grant County Digital didn't exist – we talked about it in the grant but it didn't exist, so we looked like a startup – two, we are a broker who talked about having money but who wasn't in the market – we didn't have any direct experience managing a fiber optic network. What we brought to the table was policy and money. In any future application, we can say we own fiber optic infrastructure that we're looking to expand. He feels it makes our application stronger but asked Mr. Smith if he feels we're overexposed. Smith clarified he likes the optionality of it – the ability to go back and reassess if this is really what we want to do without knowing about the grant. He asked about the timeline for this award. Green said we won't know what kinds of questions we're going to get back until we put it out for bid. He thinks we've got a strong construction bid set and a pretty accurate opinion of probable cost. If we release it, we should see qualifying bids within 3-4 weeks. If we released it for 30 days, it could be approved at the January 15 meeting of the board and January 22 meeting of the city council. Walker said he thought we should have the Community Connect results by then and we'll have a better understanding of the price range for the lateral bids, then we could decide. Green suggested whoever gets to the bids first could make the approval conditional on approval by the other agency. He said this is a small job and should not take long to complete if we have good bids.

Co-chair Becker moved to release the RFP for competitive bid on Monday for 30 days. Mr. Smith seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Agenda Item No. 5—Public Relations Firm

Director Green described the City of John Day's professional services agreement for EcoNorthwest for economic development services. He said the board could build scope into the same award for their marketing firm, Bell+Funk, to assist with public relations. The board discussed the options and concurred it would be useful to address some of the misinformation and lack of understanding in the community about how it is going to benefit them. Becker discussed the change in leadership on the county court occurring in January and the need for a greater countywide effort, as the county representative, to ensure the court and others understand what we're doing and how they will benefit. Green said we could do something on the order of a not-to-exceed amount for \$20,000 and then figure out the specific tasks and deliverables. He mentioned the website developers tag line, "connecting you and your community" and said that resonated with him as a simple explanation of what we're doing, and we need more of that. Smith talked about how it will (and won't) affect specific groups, in addition to the technical aspects, which has not gotten through to many people. It will benefit them in positive ways and won't harm them in the ways some people are worried. Chair Walker suggested testimonials from ranchers and community businesses that need this infrastructure. Green noted some areas of the county, like Prairie, have abundant bandwidth, while others have very sparse connectivity. This is about equalizing access and creating equity. Green said at the prices they proposed, \$20,000 would get us about 15 hours of support per month for an 8-month period. Smith said we may want it to be more concentrated and flexible. Green said we could also solicit for our own services, that is an option. Becker said we need a combination of local knowledge with an outside firm to get the message across – people within the community who know who to reach working with people outside the community who do this for a living. Green reiterated this is a technology-agnostic proposal – some areas will be serviced by

fiber, others by satellite or improved DSL, but all have areas that need to be improved. We also have tools as a public agency to help close the gaps in the private networks, like local improvement districts, which they do not have access to – but there has to be give and take with those companies. We have to be able to set expectations and help people understand our limits. Walker noted he was present at the beginning and he feels that one false rumor, that we would tap the county road fund to pay for broadband, turned people against it. As soon as we put that rumor to bed, people just wanted to know how quickly we could get to them. He thinks some form of public relations will be useful to help us put our best foot forward and keep residents informed. The board concurred. Green also noted we are a state-funded agency, looking to become a state and federally-funded agency, but we have spent exactly zero dollars of local money. We will need funds to sustain our operations, but those funds will come from lease agreements with the private sector providers, they won't come from the local tax base, and people need to be aware of that. Walker noted there are many people who ask, "when is the other side of the state going to help us out," and now that they have, we need to capitalize on it. Green said this is how the digital divide gets closed in our county – by working with state and federal agencies and with the private sector. It's the only way to do it. Green said the scope would include public relations, some help with branding and logo design, managing content on our website, and help with messaging that we are a state funded organization and we're actively working with both public and private sector partners to fulfill our mission. Green said he doesn't have an exact amount, but he is estimating \$20,000 would be enough to make progress in each of these areas.

There was a consensus from the board to proceed with building additional scope into the agreement for services, as discussed.

Agenda Item No. 6—Grant County Digital Website Update

Director Green presented the design of the landing page for the new website. Mr. Smith recommended we have background pictures of ranches, forests or fields (or all three), something that speaks to Grant County residents. Board commented on the design and Green informed them that the draft site should be usable internally in January. It will also have a newsletter option and people will be able to come and search for information, with a category specific to residents and another to businesses looking to work with us. The board reviewed the color scheme and provided additional comments.

Agenda Item No. 7—December Town Hall

The board discussed how to structure the December town hall event. Green discussed the individuals interested in participating, including Christopher Mitchell (ILSR), Tre Hendricks (CenturyLink), ViaSat, Ortelco, Oregon Fiber Partnership, Oregon Broadband Advisory Council and others. The board talked about Grant County Digital's role as a broker, how to get an honest conversation about strengths and weaknesses, how to incentivize competition without competing someone out of the market, and using Christopher as a moderator so that it stays productive. By having a larger panel, it takes the focus off us and makes it part of a broader, regional and national conversation, and in the process, we educate the public. We will also likely have an answer on the Community Connect grant by that point. Smith asked what the overarching goal would be for this meeting? He said he thinks it should be an opportunity to communicate to the public where we're at, and also what the other players are doing, so the public will see the challenges we're all up against and what the options are to get there. Green said he agrees, and also sees it as an opportunity prior to the meeting to negotiate with the private sector providers. Walker suggested we give time for public questions at the end but also thought we'd answer a lot of questions throughout the meeting. Green said we'll have a DSL provider, a satellite provider, a fiber provider and a

public internet provider, all talking about solutions. We're showing we have a portfolio of options – there's more than one gun for the fight – but it will be stronger coming from them. Board discussed the format for the work session and public meeting. Smith noted he would be open for us to have our own work session prior to the event so we can address any planning considerations.

Board discussed timing for a work session and agreed to meet on Thursday, December 6th.

Agenda Item No. 8—Other Business and Upcoming Meetings

Chair Walker reviewed the upcoming meetings. Becker discussed highway funds that may be released for broadband funding, like what USDA did last year, which is a funding target to be aware of. He also noted he pared down the mission statement online and Green said he would make the site available to the other board members. The board conclude the meeting with a brief discussion of Congressman Walden's visit and the call with USDA related to the Community Connect grant.

Adjourn

There being no further business before the board, Mr. Smith moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:23 P.M. Mr. Becker seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted:

Nicholas Green

ACCEPTED BY THE BOARD ON JANUARY 15, 2019.

By: Josh Walker, Chair