

Broadband Initiative on Navajo Nation Meeting Notes:

Thursday, February 24, 2022

10 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.

In-Person and Zoom Meeting

**University of New Mexico – Gallup | Student Services and Technology Center Building #10 - Room 200
705 Gurley Ave., Gallup, NM**

*Presiding: Coconino County District 5 Supervisor Lena Fowler
24th NNC Resources and Development Committee Member Kee Allen Begay, Jr.*

Welcome and Introduction – Lena Fowler, Coconino County District 5 Supervisor:

Welcomes everyone to the broadband meeting. Introduces that at today's meeting we will hear from the hospitals and colleges concerning their broadband issues. Lena Fowler has met with Small Business Administration administrator, Isabella Guzman, NN President, NN Vice-president, Diné Chamber of Commerce and with small business in Window Rock to discuss broadband and its impact on small businesses throughout Navajo Nation and rural counties. Ms. Guzman is aware of the current broadband meetings held and of the issues that have been discussed. Lena Fowler notes we are looking to gather as much federal funding as possible, look at strategies and discuss how to move forward. As a multiorganization we are looking on how to work together as meeting participants range from private businesses to state level officials. Notes that we may even involve the State of Colorado in future meetings to expand from their existing infrastructure. Reiterates the need for broadband expansion on the Navajo Nation.

Purpose of Broadband Meetings - Patrick Sandoval, Apache County District 1 Manager:

Notes Tom Platero is present, and he would like to allow Mr. Platero some time to give an unscheduled presentation. Mr. Sandoval then proceeds to give his own introduction as a District Manager for Apache County District 1 and his boss is Supervisor Dr. Joe Shirley Jr. who was asked to be part of this group. They know there is a lot of interest in broadband and are looking at ways to improve the broadband situation on the Navajo Nation. Acknowledges and thanks Lena Fowler and Kee Allen Begay Jr. for their leadership so far and for the awareness they bring. Mr. Sandoval then addresses the need to look at broadband as a regional effort rather than something confined to the Navajo Nation. This is due to the unique development issues Navajo Nation has and the need to connect to outside services to bring them onto the Navajo Nation. Makes note that there are eleven counties that relate to the Navajo Nation and that some county supervisors and other key personnel have ties with being former high level Navajo Nation employees. Due to this former relation, it helps this organization come to a better understanding with Navajo Nation on how to work together to share and achieve goals.

Lena Fowler Comments:

Partnerships are important for counties in gaining funding for providing essential services

such as birth certificate services, tax preparation, telehealth, and other businesses that require good broadband to operate successfully. Having good stable broadband can possibly help with gaining the population back due to poor broadband reception and job loss. We can teach people how to operate computers, remote work, and to start online businesses. A good broadband service will help with accessibility and opportunities.

NN Fiscal Recovery Fund Office– Tom Platero, NN Director of American Rescue Funds:

Mr. Platero introduces himself as the interim NN Director of Fiscal Recovery Fund Office since November 2021. Overviews the allocation of funds that came through their office and the budgeting for various positions including the funding of the broadband office that is over 90% complete. A Department One Management position has been established for the broadband office and they are currently negotiating a salary. Mr. Platero is hopeful to have the person start on March 14.

Lena Fowler Comments:

Thanks, Mr. Platero, for giving an introduction about the new broadband office and acknowledges Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay Jr. for his support in Washington D.C. on broadband.

NN Council Delegate – Kee Allen Begay Jr.:

Thanks everyone for attending and does self-introduction in Navajo. Makes note that there is funding that comes through different levels of the government and departments, and how we can make the best use of these funds. This situation is not just involving one government or department but several governments and departments as the Navajo Nation covers different counties and states. The Navajo Nation is looking to have the State of Arizona to give the rights-of-way ADOT has on highway 191 since the State has given approval for a smart highway between Flagstaff and Kingman. The Navajo Nation is looking to have the 191 as a smart highway through the Navajo Nation at some point. Notes that private companies are laying infrastructure lines from Phoenix through Navajo Nation and up to Denver. Questions how we can approach these private companies and to ask them if they can also serve the Navajo Nation community. Reiterates Lena Fowler's comment that there needs to be a county level effort on behalf of the Navajo Nation to get things done especially with the right-of-way issues. Also brings up the number of schools on the Navajo Nation, especially along highway 191, that can be used to access funds for broadband. With the efforts of these meetings a plan can be brought forth to effect change. Mr. Begay would also like to have the Navajo Nation look at the chapters that have no telecommunication infrastructures, for example Low Mountain. Existing cellular towers and landlines have their limitations due to the vast area they need to cover and the number of homes that are beyond the range of service.

New Mexico U.S. Senator Ben Ray Luján's Office – Brian Lee, Senior Field Representative:

Mr. Lee thanks everyone for joining the meeting and notes that their broadband goals are the same. Their office is also reaching out to acknowledge the need for broadband. Proceeds to read a letter from Senator Luján. The letter highlights the need for broadband

especially during the pandemic. New funding will change lives with broadband expansion and will help thousands of people. A new law will connect communities and create new jobs. Their office will continue to work with Navajo Nation on these issues.

Update Navajo Nation Council Legislation 0257-21 - Joy Thompson, Acting Director of the Alliance for Navajo Broadband

Ms. Thompson introduces the Alliance as including ETCs Diné College, and other partners. The Alliance was formed several months ago, and they have since been meeting frequently. Their mission is to advocate for broadband through collaboration and their objectives include to increase capacity and affordability. Notes that we need to be more strategic about infrastructure and managing funds. Especially concerning the need for rural addressing and the funds needed to support it. Rural addressing needs to be done as well as the need for cyber security. Currently, their primary concern is funding as we need to approach broadband as a collaborative whole. With funding, this has allowed the establishment of the broadband office. Next, the Alliance would like to develop a strategic plan based on data and input from the public. They are looking to cooperate, interconnect, and not overlap. Their next step is to seek grants.

Question: Should we use Google Plus Codes for addressing rather than spend funds for rural addressing?

Response – Ms. Thompson: She doesn't have the knowledge to answer this question.

Mujtaba "Moosh" Ansari and Monroe Keedo comments: "Moosh" has concerns about the Alliance and being a hodgepodge of people. Monroe feels NTUA is the best company to bring broadband out to the Navajo Nation. He encourages Ms. Thompson to talk with NTUA about strategic planning especially if plans are already done. "Why reinvent the wheel?" We need to work with what's already in place and not just discuss or nothing will get done. Kee Allen Begay Jr. comments: Mr. Begay clarifies that the Alliance is just providing us updates and that they are not doing things separate and different. Also notes the NN Council is reconvening about broadband updates and funding. Funding can't cross state lines. He would like to hear things at the council level for legislative updates.

Response – Ms. Thompson: She responds that she is just giving a status update and not an official update.

Steve Grey comments: The Alliance is looking at the long term and has a process in place to reach to communities. Mr. Grey welcomes all parties to be part of this to have a greater impact. With Ms. Thompson as director of the Alliance they are trying to look ahead and get things done. They are looking to be part of the solution.

Guy Turley comments: He appreciates being part of the Alliance and is looking to have all service providers represented. Clarifies that the Alliance is not looking to compete with others.

Velena Tsosie comments: Notes the Alliance has been having meetings but questions why NTUA was not involved in their meetings. According to their mission statement, are they recognized by Navajo Nation and others?

Response – Ms. Thompson: Choice Wireless was invited but they only got a small response from them. They are still getting by laws established and they currently are not recognized, and they don't speak for the Navajo Nation.

John Badal comments: As a member of the Alliance, Sacred Wind serves Navajo unlike other carriers that just go through Navajo lands. They are looking to expand especially with new technology. Sacred Wind is looking to avoid areas where property is already taken by working together to bring technology to Navajo Nation.

Mujtaba “Moosh” Ansari comments: The Alliance does not include NTUA, and they need to. The Alliance is currently not properly collaborating.

Lena Fowler comments: We need to work together and to put together subcommittees to address these broadband issues.

NN Executive Director Telecommunications & Regulatory Commission – Chris Becenti

Comments:

Reiterates the need for rural addressing. Mr. Becenti references the hybrid system that the current 911 call center is currently using of being both digital and analog.

Patrick Sandoval comments: He realizes the importance of rural addressing through these broadband meetings. Questions if NTUA has rural addressing done. Notes that with everyone currently present we need to work to get things done simultaneously. They need to establish a subcommittee to work on this, especially with Navajo Nation and the counties. Mr. Becenti comments that funding is needed and requires an assessment for rural addressing. Notes the importance of rural addressing with the new ID.Me system that won't accept Google Plus Codes and requires an address to verify your identity. Also notes other applications and programs require a rural address and will not accept a Google Plus Code.

Lena Fowler comments: She agrees that a subcommittee needs to be created to address this need. She asks Mr. Platero to look into funding.

TCRHCC Chief of Information Officer – Shawn Davis:

Presented a PowerPoint Presentation of how their internet connectivity currently works. One of the issues they are dealing with is the lack of stable broadband in doing their telehealth. They are looking at monitoring patients remotely but the internet in Tuba City is at capacity. Notes the challenges of broadband especially with school kids when the pandemic hit and how hospital professionals are not used to having little to no broadband available causing them to leave. There is no direct fiber connection with Flagstaff, and they have slow access to medical records. They need to get creative on how to stay in touch with staff members. The hospital has looked at Starlink as a possibility since they are currently using a microwave-based internet. They need reliable internet to be able to provide better healthcare to the public.

TCRHCC Chief Executive Officer – Lynette Bonar:

Thanks everyone for attending and for the Alliance for bringing people together. She notes the overcapacity and the overloading of current carriers in the area. Hospital professionals are getting frustrated at not being able to access the internet readily. The hospital would like to connect to fiber from Flagstaff. Due to the lack of stable internet access, they are not able to provide certain programs and keep professionals on staff. Ms. Bonar says that things need to get done especially with legislation, so we don't lose further people due to the lack

of internet service.

Wayne Claw comments: Mr. Claw notes the importance of healthcare for the people and thanks everyone for coming.

Lena Fowler comments: She thanks everyone for coming together and sharing their issues. She notes that she wasn't aware of TCRHCC being on a microwave-based internet service.

IHS Chief of Information – Robina Harvey:

Presented a PowerPoint presentation of their Indian Health Services (IHS) locations and notes that remote locations are provided by microwave-based internet and fiber is limited. Displays map with IHS service units and notes that there are several clinics located within each unit. The pandemic spot lighted the need for broadband and did bring some broadband services but it is not enough. They are still limited in the services they provide and are looking to expand.

Lena Fowler questions: What can they do if they have more bandwidth?

Response – Ms. Harvey: They will be able to provide more services.

Navajo Technical University Vice President of Operations – Jason Arviso:

He thanks Sup. Fowler and others for bringing about today's meetings. NTU is important for the tribes and the communities they serve. They provide a valuable resource in the areas that the college campus presides in. NTU originally started out as a trade school known as the Navajo Skill Center. They have grown since they first started to now offer graduate programs. As the school grew so did their need for internet service. Originally, they had copper internet with only 3 mbps at their main campus in Crownpoint, NM. They currently have four other campuses around the Navajo Nation that are facing their own internet issues. The Tees Nos Pos campus especially has issues of getting adequate internet not only for the campus but for the community. How can we address this need not only for the school but for the Navajo Nation? They would like internet provided from different service providers which will allow customers to choose the best for them whether it's based on cost, reliability, or capacity. With many K-20 schools on the Navajo Nation we need to address the need for good stable broadband to provide a quality education. NTU has since been able to gain faster speeds from their original speeds, up to 100 gb capacity at their main campus, with UNM Albuquerque GigaPoP and Front Range GigaPoP from Denver, CO. They have been working with existing infrastructure to bring better speeds to their campus and this shows that sharing existing resources can be used to reach a greater capacity in communities. They now are basically their own internet service provider. They have a /22 network that has public IP addresses that they can issue out to communities or anyone that subscribes, and they can build a network capacity behind that. They are also in discussion with Starlink and NTU is willing to share their resources to expand internet services to all students in K-20. The cost of service is kept down if they keep within their peer network when it comes to commercial internet use. NTU would like to expand their research department that requires the transmission of a large amount of data. Newer networks will be able to handle the transmission of data and will less likely cause the system to overload. Currently, research data is being outsourced whereas trained NTU students could be processing the information on campus and provide it back to the Navajo Nation more

immediately. Funding is currently easier to obtain due to NTU being a higher-level school and being on the Navajo Nation. They have money allocated to them, like other minority colleges across the nation. They are looking to extend their internet service to Diné College in Tsaile, AZ, like they have done with their NTU Chinle campus and still be affordable. Mr. Arviso notes the need for rural addressing and how it impacts governmental contract approval. He also notes that the development of capacity is needed for quality education.

NN Department of Diné College System & Programming Manager – Brent Nelson

Thanks, the previous presenter and to all those that are attending in-person and virtually. Diné College has a lot of students on Navajo Nation that spans the three states. The pandemic highlighted the importance of broadband. They are facing several struggles due to the lack of broadband. They don't know if remote learning is engaging the student and where the student is doing their remote learning. They would like to see competitive pricing on Navajo Nation compared to other locations that are charging less. Better broadband can help with telehealth and provide access to better education. Included a personal note of his daughter doing remote learning but not liking it. Mr. Nelson also makes note of the long process of getting broadband built due to the long and antiquated processes on the Navajo Nation even if funding is available. Sometimes building broadband on Navajo Nation involves short comings due to cutting short these processes. Overall, they need to look at the future of the kids. The quality of education can greatly improve with better internet not only for the student but the communities. They need to expand and learn and look at other businesses and programs to operate better. Notes that different broadband meetings mention the need to cooperate but when will it really happen? When will this need be addressed?

Lena Fowler comments: That they need to create subcommittees to deal with the issues being discussed. Education is important and they need to see how students from kindergarten to college are dealing with remote learning. They also need to put together talking points to get things going with the various partners they are collaborating with. She also notes NN Council Delegate, Nathaniel Brown, notes that he would like to sponsor a meeting location in Kayenta, AZ. Indicates that the business community has not presented and possibly at the next meeting they will be able to. Thanks, the presenters of today and those who have showed their support.

Patrick Sandoval Comments:

Originally, he didn't pay attention to County Supervisor Fowler and others, but now he sees we need to pay attention to everyone. Mr. Sandoval will note what was spoken today to move forward. He doesn't view being part of the Alliance as a hodgepodge and looks forward to working together. Broadband is important to improve the quality of life as we all come together to collaborate and support. Next meeting will be on Friday, March 18, in Phoenix, AZ, sponsored by Jeff Sobotka. Exact location and time will be announced later. Thanks everyone, especially those not recognized today, and says, "stay encouraged."

Final Comments, UNM Small Business Development Center Manager - Cyndi Jarvinson:

Ms. Jarvinson notes the personal hardship her mother faces living in a remote area with no

access to 911. The need of rural addressing is essential for people like her mother but especially for small businesses where Google Plus Codes are not accepted on business registrations. The challenges of trying to inform other business entities that there is no official address for these small Navajo Nation businesses when an address is not recognized. Questions how do we start the process of providing rural addressing? Notes broadband is necessary for businesses to manage inventory, operating points of sale, and coordinated shipping. Thanks, people, for inviting her for being a part of today's meeting and a host location.

MEETING ENDS

PROVIDED CONTACT INFORMATION:		
NAME & TITLE	PHONE	EMAIL
Kee Allen Begay Jr. – Council Del.		keebegay@mfcouncil-kbjr.com
Jeff Sobotka – State Broadband Director AZ Commerce	602-432-0004 – cell	JeffS@AZCommerce.com
Tom Platero – Dir. NN Div. of General Services & Fiscal Recovery Fund Office Dir.		t.platero@navajo-nsn.gov