

Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission
Minutes of the Meeting
March 28, 2022 – 4:00 p.m.
Cisco Webex Meeting

The one hundred and fifty-fourth meeting of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission was called to order by Chairman Leslie Osche.

Members: Brian Allen, Darin Alviano, Mike Belding, Brad Berlin, Morgan Boyd, Kevin Boozel, Scott Bricker, Douglas Chew, Pat Fabian, Rich Fitzgerald, Ed Gainey, Kim Geyer, Shelia Gombita, Mark Gordon, Joe Grata, Kelly Gray, Lynn Heckman, Sherene Hess, Mark Hilliard, Fred Junko, Sean Kertes, William Kovach, Clifford Levine, Bob Macey, Larry Maggi, Jack Manning, Jeff Marshall, Kevin McCullough, Leslie Osche, Johnna Pro, Mavis Rainey, Bob Regola, Aurora Sharrard, Nick Sherman, Larry Shifflet, Cheryl Moon Sirianni, Byron Stauffer, Diana Ireya Vaughan, and Vince Vicites.

Others: Ann Ogoreuc, Allegheny County Economic Development; Dusty Elias Kirk, Reed Smith LLP; and 7 call-ins.

Staff: Jared Bedekovich, Kirk Brethauer, Mary Brangan, Ronda Craig, Dom D'Andrea, Margaret Fonner, Anthony Hickton, Chuck Imbrogno, Erin Adams Kepple, Tom Klevan, Jenn Lasser, Steve Meredith, Shannon O'Connell, Ailisa Sobien, Vincent Valdes, and Andy Waple.

1. Chairman Osche called to order the March 28, 2022 meeting of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission.
 - a. Quorum – There being a quorum present the meeting proceeded.
 - b. Any Conflict of Interest Declaration on Action Items – None

2. Action on Minutes of the February 28th Meeting.

A motion was made to approve the minutes of the February 28, 2022 meeting by Rich Fitzgerald which was seconded by Commission Fabian. The affirmative vote was unanimous.

3. Public Comment – None

4. Financial Report – Margaret Fonner

FY21-22 Budget	\$13,891,612
Revenue and Expenses:	\$7,163,900
Percent of Budget:	51.7%

5. Regional Connectivity Improvement Program Endorsement – Andy Waple

A regional Connectivity Improvement Plan to deploy high-speed connectivity programs and projects.

- A regional Connectivity Improvement Plan to deploy high-speed connectivity programs and projects.
- Plan to act as a catalyst in proactively assisting the region to collect, develop and prioritize a pipeline of connectivity projects and initiatives in order to secure funding for implementation.
- The COVID-19 virus has demonstrated to the world the role and importance that high-speed connectivity currently and will continue to play in nearly every aspect of our lives.
- For the southwestern Pennsylvania region to be truly globally competitive, the unserved and underserved areas of the region must be addressed equitably and systematically.

Project Team

Current Status Overview

Most of the region falls short of the proposed 100/20 threshold for defining broadband
SMART Goals
Identifying Opportunity Areas & Projects

- The Broadband Access Index and the Adoption and Equity Index helped identify Connectivity Opportunity Areas (COAs).
- The Project Identification Decision Tree guides project identification through the steps needed to meet a given need, according to the existing conditions and type of need.
- The Measures of Effectiveness rate and weight projects according to an extensive set of metrics that include technical qualifications and equitable qualifications.

Regional Governance

Non-profit - Non-profit organizations are eligible to apply many of the federal programs that offer broadband funding, and with the exception of policymaking, are positioned to serve many of the same functions as a government entity.

Government - Government bodies, including joint bodies such as COGs, are well-situated for many broadband functions. Historically, municipal ventures into providing internet service have received pushback from major telecommunications companies.

Authority - As municipal authorities are restricted by law from projects that duplicate or compete with existing enterprises serving substantially the same powers. Thus, a municipal authority likely cannot pursue any projects that may be perceived as competing with an existing ISP.

Electric Cooperative - Rural electric co-ops were established by law in Pennsylvania in 1990 to provide electric service to unserved areas. Given the powers provided in Pennsylvania law, electric co-ops are existing entities that are well situated to provide regional broadband services.

Action on Resolution 1-22 to Endorse the Regional Connectivity Improvement Program (CIP) for Southwestern Pennsylvania – Andy Waple

A RESOLUTION OF THE SOUTHWESTERN PENNSYLVANIA COMMISSION to endorse the regional Connectivity Improvement Program (CIP) for southwestern Pennsylvania.

WHEREAS, *SmartMoves for a Changing Region*, SPC's Long-Range Transportation and Development Plan identified the need for broadband connectivity as one of the region's most pressing issues; and

WHEREAS, in 2020, in collaboration with Carnegie Mellon University, Allies for Children and a broad coalition of stakeholders initiated the Southwestern Pennsylvania Connected Connectivity Improvement Program to equitably and systematically deploy high-speed connectivity programs and projects to enable the areas of the southwestern Pennsylvania region lacking adequate high-speed internet access and equipment to better connect to jobs, education, health care and to attract new business to all corners of the region; and

WHEREAS, this plan intends to act as a catalyst in proactively assisting the region to research, collect, develop and prioritize a pipeline of connectivity projects and initiatives in order to secure funding for implementation. The process will be equitable in its recommendations to represent all of the region's residents, with the ultimate goal of connecting the southwestern Pennsylvania region (the region) to the world; and

WHEREAS, this strategic plan examines the current, true state of the region's broadband connectivity in relation to the region's demographic and socioeconomic composition to ensure its recommendations help to equitably serve the region's most vulnerable populations who are unserved or underserved by current connectivity. It also examines the locations of schools, other educational institutions, medical facilities, businesses and planned business parks to ensure we are properly connecting our residents, students, as well as our medical and business community to the world; and

WHEREAS, High-speed connectivity should be viewed as an essential form of transportation in the 21st Century. The emergence of the COVID-19 virus over the past year has demonstrated to the world, the role and importance that high-speed connectivity currently and will continue to play in nearly every aspect of

our lives. For the southwestern Pennsylvania region to be truly globally competitive, the unserved and underserved areas of the region must be addressed equitably and systematically.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission hereby endorses the regional Connectivity Improvement

A motion was made to approve Resolution 1-22 by Mr. Fitzgerald which was seconded by Commissioner Boozel. The affirmative vote was unanimous.

6. Build Back Better Challenge Update – Jenn Lasser

Ms. Lasser stated that the Build Back Better Grant was submitted and she believed we got it in about a day early. It went well, there were no issues, we probably will not find out until summertime what it is going to look like. Furthermore, it's not going to be something just as simple as a hey, you got it, let's move forward. There's a lot of additional meetings, conversations, things of that nature, just due to the sheer size of the project. The project came just under \$100 million, it's going to be a significant job creator, it's going to really be a good time for the region in the areas of artificial intelligence, and manufacturing. Ultimately, taking some of the things that we're good and becoming even better. Equity and inclusion were incredibly important in this Grant; not just in the typical terms, but we're talking everything from underserved communities to regional equity. Making sure that there is access to all different types of business resources and education. The ability to work with small businesses, and everybody has the same opportunity to grow their business in those areas. We probably will not find out until summer time, however, we're still going to keep moving forward on it. It's something that this region needs. It's something that SPC and its future plans to make sure we are working in all different types of communities and working in all different types of industries.

Ms. Lasser remarked this is an area of growth for us. We're just really looking forward to see if we get it. We only had one other applicant in the state of Pennsylvania, and I believe there was only 12 applicants that came under the Communities Challenge which, depending on how they're going to grade these grants, I'm interested to see if it's going to be we're just kind of up against those 12. or if that's just kind of an extra few points because we fall under coal communities. I think it's going to be a great jumping off point from here on to make sure that we're working as regionally as possible to really make Southwestern Pennsylvania as competitive as possible.

7. Message from the Executive Director – Vincent Valdes

Mr. Valdes remarked that the county profile lists that were prepared by SPC's communication office. The document is meant to show and highlight the value added by working with the SPC on important priorities that you will have identified for your counties. It provides a snapshot of your investment, and that is to say the dues that you pay on your behalf and a return on investment for those funds. You'll see at the bottom corner, the high percentage of return on investment for your participation and membership in the SPC. It shows a variety of the services that we provide to each of the counties and to our stakeholders on specific funding streams ranging from working on the TIP to development mechanisms, like PREP and Engage! at the state level. Plus, others pieces that we do, for example, data analysis and provision of data. SPC's default mode is going to be to communicate often and intensively, so we will be keeping these updated so that you're fully aware of the value out of working with the SPC.

Next Meeting Date – **April 25, 2022, at 4:00 p.m.**

8. Other SPC Business

Commissioner Osche commented I want to thank Jeremy, especially for being here today. Thank you for the report on broadband, I think it's great and fabulous that we were able to accomplish that today. Also, I want to thank all those who actually came in person and those who were on the line, because it is good to feel like we're kind of back in action. Thank you.

9. Adjourn- 4:47 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Pat Fabian
Secretary-Treasurer