

Lincoln County Broadband Commission Meeting Minutes

Meeting Details: Thursday, May 28, 2026

5:32 pm – 7:26 pm

Lincoln County Service Center (801 N. Sales Street Merrill, WI 54452)

County Board Room (#255/257/260)

Online Access:

<https://meet.google.com/bjz-oiso-gpx>

Action Team Attendees (6/9 total): Tom Backen (Vice Chair), Sara Guild (Secretary), ~~Amber Lambrecht~~, ~~Tim McFadden~~, Donald Nelson, ~~Heidi O'Hare~~, Amanda Patterson*, Earl Welker, Ken Wickham (Chair)

Other Attendees (4 total): Andrew Caylor*, Christina Luna* (PSC), Travis Spoehr*, Lisa White* (7:03 pm arrival)

*Participated online (5 total)

1. Call to Order – 5:32 pm by Wickham

Action Team Quorum = 5 (Backen, Guild, Patterson, Welker, Wickham)

2. Welcome & Introductions

Wickham led introductions in the room and online.

3. Public Comment - NONE

4. Review & Consider Approval of Prior LCBC Meeting Minutes – March 23, 2026

Welker/Backen motioned to approve the March 23, 2026, minutes as presented; motion carried.

5. Consider Approval of 2026-27 LCBC Action Team and Executive Team Members

Wickham reviewed the proposed slate of Action Team members as presented in the packet, which included renewing Patterson, Welker, and Wickham for another 3-year term and replacing Jennifer Bishop with the newly designated Lincoln County Board representative, Supervisor Donald Nelson, for the remainder of her term following Bishops voluntary resignation from the Action Team.

MOTION 1: Welker/Backen m/s to nominate Donald Olson to fulfill the remainder of former LCBC Action Team member Jennifer Bishop's term, to expire in May 2027; motion carried.

MOTION 2: Backen/Olson m/s to approve renewing the slate of Action Team candidates as presented in the packet for 3-year terms ending in May 2029; motion carried.

The proposed slate of 2026-27 LCBC Executive Team candidates was presented in the packet with no changes from the prior term. Wickham noted that he has been Chair since the original Committee was formed and that, while he is willing to serve one more term as Chair, he would like to see new leadership identified by next year to help ensure the continuity of the organization. Executive Team nominations commenced as follows:

Welker/Olson nominated Wickham for Chair; no other nominations were brought forward.

Wickham/Welker nominated Backen for Vice Chair; no other nominations were brought forward.

Olson/Welker nominated Guild for Secretary; no nominations were brought forward.

MOTION: Welker/Olson motioned to approve the slate of LCBC 2026-27 Executive Team candidates as nominated; motion carried.

6. Monthly Updates from LCBC Leadership & Partners

a. *Commission Chair* - NONE

b. *Public Service Commission (PSC)*

Luna presented the following information on behalf of the PSC:

i. *BEAD Program Updates*

The PSC's BEAD website now includes a BEAD awards summary Excel spreadsheet that can be downloaded and filtered to view details on each project. Most BEAD grant ISP agreements are still being finalized. Construction cannot begin until final contracts are signed and NEPA reviews are completed.

The State Broadband Expansion Grant application period is now open until July 27. \$60 million is available to support projects to bring service to areas that will remain underserved even after BEAD is completed. It is a competitive grant program that will prioritize fiber projects and/or ones that leverage public/private partnerships. Information is available on the PSC's website. An informational webinar is scheduled for June 8th at 11 am and will be recorded. <https://psc.wi.gov/Pages/ServiceType/Broadband/GrantsStateExpansion.aspx>

Luna explained how the public can access and use the PSC's online broadband maps, including the updated Wisconsin Broadband Expansion map and the PSC Broadband Almanac. The Expansion map can be used to find the status of internet service for a specific location, while the Almanac provides an interactive platform to get detailed information about served locations and download speeds at the county and municipal levels. SOURCE: <https://psc.wi.gov/Pages/ServiceType/Broadband/BroadbandMaps.aspx>

c. *Internet Service Providers (ISPs)*

i. *Charter RDOF Project Implementation*

No RDOF updates since the last meeting. Guild briefly noted that she was contacted that morning by someone asking why Charter customers were unable to call 911 after a vehicle ran into a pole and damaged the Charter service box that was attached to it, even though Frontier customers were still able to do so. The County and City were both also contacted about this issue and she asked anyone with additional information on how to fix this issue to please reach out.

ii. *Other ISPs*

Wickham and Guild reported that Todd Kruse's position with Frontier/Verizon was eliminated recently and his last day as the LCBC's local contact will be June 5th. Attendees expressed their appreciation for Kruse's support and engagement over the years and disappointment over this decision. Guild noted that Kruse has already provided contact information for other Verizon staff.

Attendees also briefly discussed the recent thefts of Frontier's copper wiring from various internet service boxes across the rural areas of Lincoln County.

Team members affirmed that Bertram is not expected to provide an update on their BEAD program installation plans until after their final contract is signed.

d. *Action Team Members*

Guild shared an update on Ollhoff's behalf; Ollhoff had a conflict today but has expressed a desire to engage in LCBC activities more regularly moving forward. Ollhoff recently received a stack of fliers from a satellite internet provider called Viasat that outlined programs they offer targeting low-income households, including CAFIL and Lifeline. She gave the fliers to Guild so they could be distributed to any organizations who are interested in providing them to their clients. Guild asked anyone who wanted a flier to contact her.

Welker reported that he was finally able to get Verizon to provide internet-only service at a reasonable price without requiring him to bundle it with other services, proving that they could negotiate when asked.

7. **Annual Review of Lincoln County Broadband Plan**

Wickham reminded attendees that they were required to review the Lincoln County Broadband Plan annually to ensure the LCBC's activities remained in alignment with the recommendations and that the plan was still valid.

Guild provided a brief overview of the plans' history and key sections. She noted that Chapter 7 (*Goals*) and Chapter 8 (*Recommendations & Conclusion*) contained the most relevant information for the annual review.

Attendees noted that much of the plan's focus was on getting broadband service throughout the County, which will be largely accomplished by 2030 thanks to the RDOF and BEAD programs.

6:14 pm – Spoehr arrival

LCBC members discussed ideas for executing the remaining recommendations, which included promoting affordable broadband and supporting broadband education. They also discussed if and how to update the plan.

MOTION: Welker/Backen m/s to approve the 2026 annual review of the Lincoln County Broadband Plan as complete and to leave the document as written at this time but to consider making updates to the Plan during the 2027 annual review; motion carried.

8. Digital Pathways Program

a. Roundtables Updates & Stakeholders Discussion

Wickham and Guild provided a recap of the three rounds of stakeholder roundtable meetings as follows: PUBLIC STAKEHOLDERS: Two in-person meetings were held on Feb. 5 (12 stakeholders, 9 LCBC reps) and Feb. 10 (4 stakeholders, 9 LCBC reps). 25 people completed the online survey (27% response rate). BUSINESS STAKEHOLDERS: One in-person meeting was held on Apr. 9 (3 stakeholders, 4 LCBC reps). A second roundtable scheduled for Apr. 14 was cancelled due to low registrations. 4 people completed the survey out of approximately 90 invitees.

COMMUNITY/NONPROFIT: Two roundtables were cancelled after being scheduled for May 7th & 12th due to low registration numbers; registrants were invited to attend today's meeting instead and two RSVP'd but did not show up. 7 people completed the online survey out of more than 40 who received the invitation.

Attendees discussed some of the key takeaways from the stakeholders meetings and survey results, noting that affordability and reliability were big issues for all the groups. Other important or unexpected outcomes included the importance of having internet service available even when residents do not prioritize it (ex: "getting away" to rural areas but still needing it for telemedicine and banking) and challenges stemming from young people not using technology the same way as older generations.

Patterson provided an update on how the MAPS school district has been adapting its career readiness skills training methods based on community feedback to ensure students are receiving relevant training experiences. She also noted that this spring each middle and high school teacher visited a local business to learn more about what employers actually want from students/employees. These visits revealed that employers were more concerned about students having a "lifelong learner" mindset than they were about the students knowing specific skills, such as Microsoft Office.

6:51 pm – Luna Out

b. Potential Program Goals, Focus Areas, and Next Steps

Attendees discussed the purpose of a "Digital Pathway" program and considered how the results of the stakeholder roundtables and surveys could be used to guide the LCBC's next steps. Ideas for providing support and/or resources included offering one-on-one assistance, group education programs, and leveraging AI technologies. However, attendees also felt additional information was still needed to adequately understand the current issues and help identify how the LCBC can positively impact them.

7:03 pm – Lisa White joined online

Many of the proposed ideas fell under the concept of "Digital Navigation" and attendees expressed interest in learning how other communities and agencies provided these services. Guild was asked to reach out to the United Way's "Techquity" program and/or Forest County's digital navigator program and invite them to attend a future LCBC meeting to share their experiences. The LCBC will then use this information to help develop a plan for providing future services and resources in partnership with others.

9. Future LCBC Meetings Information

a. Future Agenda Topic Suggestions

Future meeting(s) will include presentations from other Digital Navigation programs followed by a discussion on how the LCBC can incorporate the desired concepts into a local program or system. The next meeting will also include a discussion on potentially adjusting the LCBC's regular meeting schedule.

b. Confirmation of Next Commission Meeting Date/Time/Location

The next Lincoln County Broadband Commission meeting will be held on Thursday, June 25th, at 5:30 pm in the Lincoln County Service Center; online access will be provided.

10. Meeting Adjournment – Olson/Backen m/s to adjourn the meeting at 7:26 pm; motion carried.