



**Whitman County
Broadband Action Team**
*Monthly Meeting
(2nd Monday, 3-4pm)*

Purpose: Collaborative, working group to expand broadband service in Whitman county, communicate with county stakeholders about broadband needs and opportunities, and enhance broadband use to improve quality of life for all who live in and visit Whitman County.

Members: Port of Whitman County (Kara Riebold, Calvin Johnson), Avista Utilities (Paul Kimmell), Whitman County Rural Library District (Cody Allen), Partners for Rural WA-Eastern Region (Jody Opheim), WSU and Whitman County Extension (Janet Schmidt)

**Agenda & Notes
December 12, 2022**

1. Administrative

a. Guests and general updates (Jody)

Nick Pappin with WSU Extension will be joining the BAT.

b. Digital Navigator grant update (Cody)

Cody gave a general overview for Nick's benefit and a general update on progress. Almost all branch locations have added the extra 4 hours per week and there was an all-staff training last week so librarians are feeling more prepared and informed about the DN program. A laptop application is being developed for those who qualify for a free laptop and WCL has talked with a supplier to make sure they can have the laptops delivered by early Spring. The DN webpage on the WCL site will be made public before the holidays.

c. SBO NOFO #2 – potential projects? (Kara)

The Port of Whitman County will be submitting a project for round 2 of SBO funding consideration. The project will capture addresses on the outskirts of the 5 towns that recently received FTTX and a few addresses near Johnson, WA. There was discussion about FTTX in Lamont, but with fiber to the 2 wi-fi towers serving the town, and fiber to anchor institutions, FTTX is not as high a priority. The BAT will prepare a letter of support for this application.

The next big area of focus for Whitman County is connecting all the farms. SBO has a rapid design program that will be of help in this effort.

d. PWB 2023 application (continue monitoring for release of NOFO)

Jody will look into any 2023 funding NOFOs (PWB is conducting public hearings on changes to their broadband funding program, but Kara is not aware of any funding opportunities for 2023). *From Sheila at PWB: It will be late spring or early summer, but we hope to open a low interest rate state loan cycle. We may or may not have some state grant dollars to add, but not a lot. In late 2023 or most likely early 2024, we hope to be opening a federal grant cycle with federal BEAD funding.*

2. Communications

a. Emails to towns regarding FCC map (Jody)

Jody has emailed all of the town clerks in the county to make them aware of the FCC broadband map and the importance of checking the map for accuracy, and asking for their help in getting the word out to residents. All WCL branches will also be working to make people aware of the map and how to check their address (and letting people know the libraries can assist if needed). The deadline is January 13.

b. Invitations to new members and ACP enrollments (Jody)

Jody is compiling a list of emails for key stakeholders throughout the county that will be invited to join the BAT starting in January and will send out email invitations. She will share the list with the team and we will add to it as needed. If anyone has specific recommendations, please contact Jody. Tom Handy will be invited to join on behalf of Whitman County.

c. Updates from around the state (SBO, WSU Extension, NTIA, NoaNet, etc.)

Pullman School District (Garren Shannon) was awarded \$750,000 for deployment of wireless infrastructure around the county working with First Step.

The Port of Whitman County was awarded \$400,000 by SBO for the Malden/Pine City fiber project, ensuring that everyone will be connected. The Port's project in Steptoe/Diamond will commence when weather allows.

WCL is working with the WSU Murrow College of Communication on an NSF grant application to teach 8-14 yr old children critical thinking skills around misinformation in science and media.

3. Infrastructure and Planning

a. Mapping progress (Whitman County shape files) (Kalvin)

Kalvin has shape files ready of the county and will share them at the January meeting.

b. BAT plan development (Access, Affordability, Adoption) (N. Pappin)

Nick spoke about some of the content that will need to be included in the county's broadband plan (infrastructure plans, asset list, providers). We will follow the NTIA template as the state will use county plans to prepare the state's 5 year broadband plan required for BEAD funding. WSU Extension will share the NTIA template with county and tribal BATS and other officials by the end of this year. Corrections to the FCC map will be critical to obtaining BEAD funding. We anticipate that our plan will need to be completed by early April, and Jody will schedule additional meetings and public workshops starting after the holidays so we have time on everyone's calendar.

4. Potential Projects List

- a. Digital Equity and Inclusion (DE planning pieces?)
- b. Affordability – ACP toolkit
- c. Workforce Development (Porchlight certification for communities, AWB remote online cert)
- d. Economic Development (Mashup Labs course for would-be entrepreneurs)
- e. Healthcare (online mental health services – PRC has an 8 mo backlog!)
- f. Agriculture
- g. Education
- h. Social Services
- i. Local governments
- j. Devices
- k. Public safety

GENERAL DISCUSSION:

The Port of Whitman County is beginning to work on material needed to submit an application to fund rural connections throughout the county and will need address information. Avista Utilities may be able to provide this information and Paul will work with Nick on details needed to arrange for the transfer of information, if approved.

Kara brought up that of the 5 towns most recently provided with FTTX, only 60% of residents were utilizing the fiber. It would be very helpful to know why the other 40% is not. WCL will try to obtain this information through its branch locations via the Digital Navigator program. Jody will also check with town clerks to see if they can offer any insight or assistance in increasing the number of people using FTTX.

NEXT MEETING JANUARY 9, 2023