Blandin Broadband Communities

People + Process

Agenda

- Welcome
  - Why we became a Blandin Broadband Community
  - Lezlie Sauter, chair/leader
- The Intelligent Community Framework
  - Blandin Team
- Community Discussions
  - By Intelligent Community Element
- Group Reporting
  - Assets and Gaps
  - Desired Outcomes
- Next Steps
- Adjourn

Community Opportunity

Creatively & responsibly allocate and spend up to $100,000 on community-benefitting technology projects

Vision & Brainstorm

Design and Budget

Implement

Track & Evaluate

Achieving BBC Success

The Intelligent Community Framework
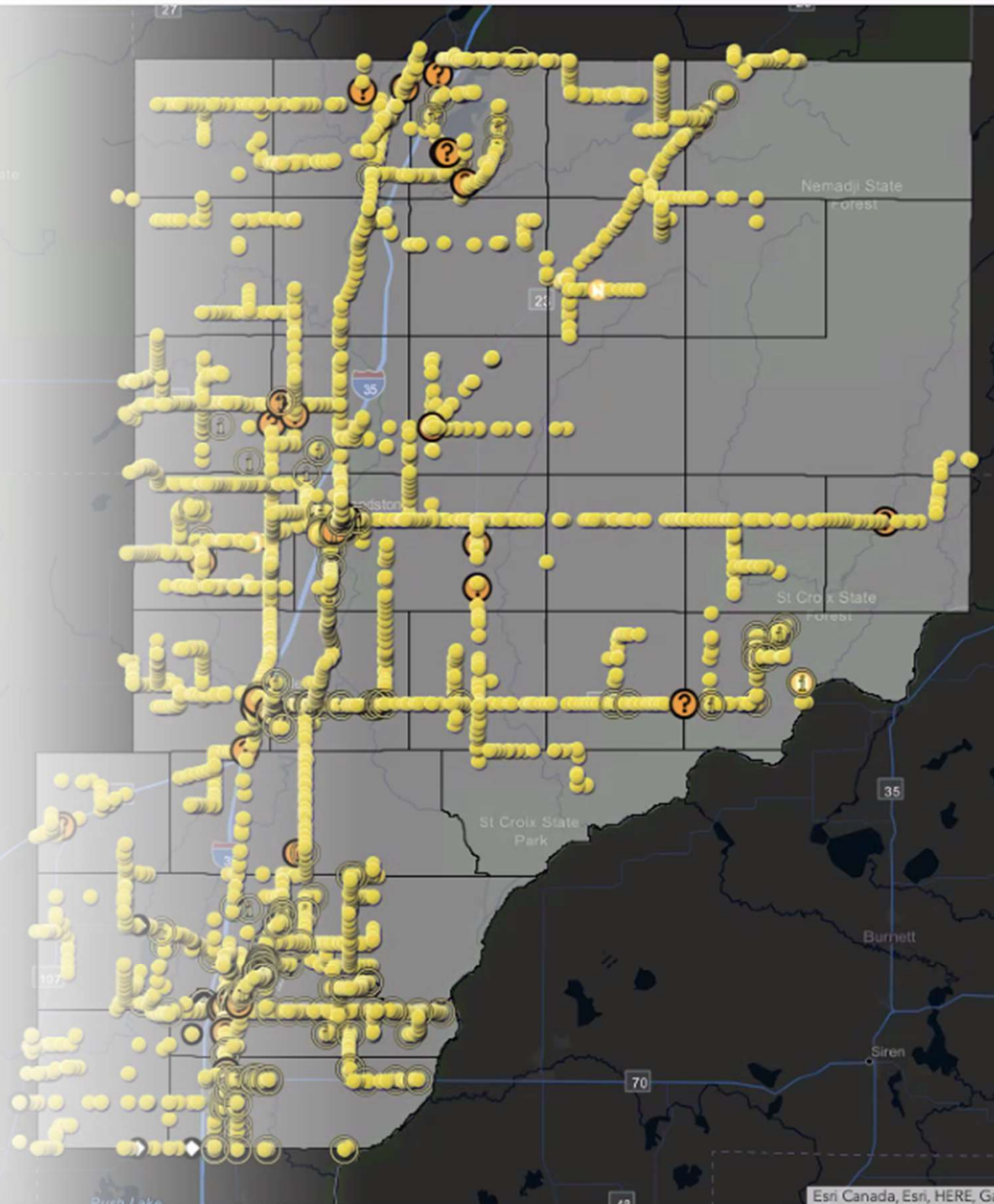

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Broadband Discussion

- How is your broadband?
  - In the cities and towns
  - In the rural countryside
  - For schools, governments and health care
  - For business
  - Via cellular
- Where is Wi-Fi available?
- Who are the key players in this discussion?

Our Broadband Story

- 86th out of 87 counties for wireline speeds that meet the state goal of 25 Mbps down and 3 Mbps up.
- Fiber exists in the ditches but is not connected to residences
- *"Our internet is terrible, and we are just yards off of highway 61. My kids were quarantined due to covid for 24 days and each day we would have to load up and sit in the local McDonald's parking lot because our internet wouldn't load their Google classrooms."*

Community Survey Response

- 85% are not satisfied with how reliable their service is
- 74% "make it work" with hotspots, DSL and satellite
- 15% cite cost as the reason they do not have internet
- Others say the available speed and poor reliability isn't worth the cost
- $26-75/month is the price range people would like to see

Knowledge Workforce Discussion

- How would you describe your local workforce?

- What are the strengths?

- What are the shortcomings?

- What assets do you have for improving workforce skills and availability?

- Who are the key players in this discussion?

Our Workforce Story

Current population = 29,359

- Total labor force = 13,452

Median age = 45.8 years (state = 38.3)

89.4% with high school diploma (state = 92.4%)

7.8 % unemployment rate (state = 6.2%)

- 1168 unemployed workers
- Highest unemployment rate among 16-19 & 20-24

Labor force projected to decline from 13,403 to 12,570 from 2020-2030

Pine Technical & Community College

- Workfast
- Pine County College Initiative

Community Survey Response

- Those with NO internet or ONLY cellular hotspots were asked: "If you had internet access at this location, would you use it for:"
  - 54/155 (35%) said for Education
  - 73/155 (47%) said to Earn Income
- 113/608 (18%) of Pine County respondents either:
  - Work from home
  - Operate a home business
  - Attend school online
- *"Pine County will see exponential growth as more and more individuals decide to move north; as well as the shift in culture where younger adults want to stay closer to home with the uncertainty of the world around them. Speaking from recruiting experience, we are seeing phenomenal pools of candidates from both local and commutable distances. During the interview process, candidates want to relocate to this area but express concern with the lack of local business (options), housing, and internet service. Those three areas must be focused on to retain and maintain a high-quality workforce."*

Include

Digital equality means computers, skills, and access for all!

Digital Equity Discussion

- Who in the community is being left behind on technology?
- What are the biggest challenges?
    - Internet connectivity
    - Computers and devices
    - Skills
- How can the responses made during the pandemic be carried forward?

Our Digital Equity Story

Most cities are connected to higher-speed reliable broadband

- Schools
- Health care systems
- Government buildings
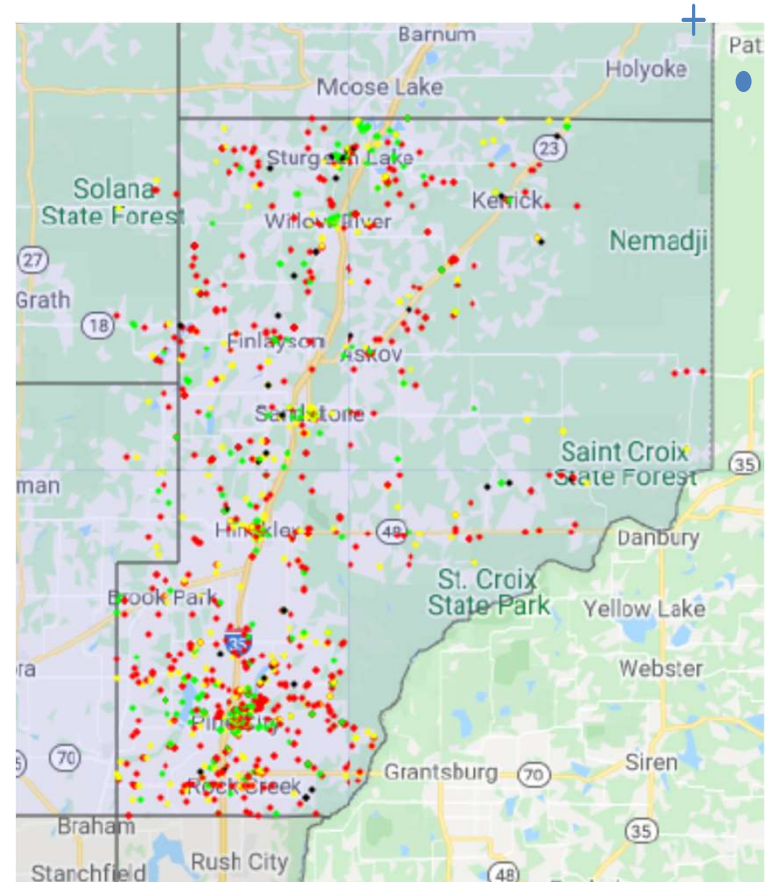
Rural residents & townships are not well connected

- Fiber exists but isn't used to full capacity or with upgraded equipment

Cellular service is currently an unreliable source for data

- Unavailable in remote areas

Community Survey Response

- 44% of survey respondents indicated that they do not have fixed internet because it IS NOT OFFERED

- *"As the library system that serves Pine County, we hear regularly from patrons who have trouble accessing broadband. Our hotspot loan program has been a help, but it's not enough."*

- *"I, personally, was not able to sell some real estate in Partridge Township when I had a willing buyer who found out how bad the internet access was. I believe this happens more often than we know."*

Innovation

Innovation refers to doing new things and doing old things in new and better ways

Innovation Discussion

- Which people or organizations in the community are doing great things with technology?

- Which sectors/organizations are falling behind?

- What are we doing to support entrepreneurs?

- How does our community handle change?

Our Innovation Story

Local units of government stream meetings

- County
- School Districts
- Some cities

Pine County History Center streams events

- Offering smart phone training

Large gatherings offered in hybrid format

- Region 7E Broadband Conference
- Inventors & Entrepreneurs Club

Pine City Area Chamber of Commerce

- Social media & google mapping training

East Central Regional Library

- Hotspots available for 2 weeks (check-out like books)
- Offer training on digital devices (ipads, phones, computers)
- Locations in Pine City, Hinckley, Sandstone

Community Survey Response

Pine County residents have knowledge and capabilities but...

"I wish it was possible for my family to have a smart house. It would make me feel safer to get a reliable internet connection at the speeds we would like to have for our big family. During the pandemic, it became clear to us that our internet was in our favor. We had two of our family members working from home. While one would be in a meeting, the other would not be able to do anything. We had to disconnect everything from our internet if we wanted to try to have a good signal and make sure that the internet itself didn't drop off from having too many connections. We can't make our house a smart home due to not being able to have a lot of devices connected as it slows down the traffic due to having so many on our network."

Sustainability is economic development with the future in mind

Sustainability Discussion

- Has the community had conversations about sustainability as an important goal?

- Which local organizations have included sustainability in their operating practices, including ongoing measurement of energy use, carbon footprint or waste reduction?

Our Sustainability Story

More people are working from home & not commuting as much

Pine County businesses and organizations are seeking ways to be sustainable (solar installations, etc.)

A plastic bags-for-benches program in Pine City was quite successful.

Community Survey Response

- *Many people desire utilizing sustainable resources such as geothermal or solar, but cost greatly impacts the ability of the average of Pine County resident to do so.*

- *A plastic bags-for-benches program in Pine City was quite successful.*

- *Making sustainability programs known and easy to participate would help.*

- *Fast reliable internet is none negotiable. Sustainability is not something you discuss when it should be considered a basic need. As an example, we don't seem to discuss sustainably for electricity. This is simply something we know we get.*

Engage

Community Engagement Questions

- How do local organizations communications with community members? Is this a two-way discussion? How is technology used?

- What are the messages, and through which means are they transmitted, is the community sending out to the world to attract people and investment?

Our Community Engagement Story

January 2021: Pine County Board of Commissioners identified broadband as one of its top priorities.

February 2021: Over 50 community members shared their broadband stories at a special meeting with County Commissioners

March - June 2021: 19 community members participated for 15 weeks in gaining broadband leadership education, gathering local broadband information and establishing broadband goals as a community.

July 2021: Pine County hosted meetings with cities and townships regarding the American Rescue Plan Act funding and eligibility of broadband.

September 2021: Over a dozen community leaders have agreed to help steer the community's vision for improving access to technology & broadband, by identifying projects throughout the County which can use Blandin grant funds to execute their community's plans.

News releases of all milestones & facebook posts sharing progress

Community Survey Response

We have one of the best state parks white water rafting in the Midwest. Vacationers are not happy with slow Internet service when they try to send videos or photos of their adventures.

Also, we have an outstanding environmental center with over 4000-7000 people attending in one year. The number one complaint by most was slow Internet service.

A number of organizations in Pine City are using social media well to connect with users and constituents.

Small Group Discussion

- What are our strengths in this area?

- Where are our gaps in this area?

- What could we hope to accomplish in the next 18 months (our desired outcomes) that would really make a positive difference in our community?

Discussion Group Reporting

Next Steps

- Brainstorm Meeting
- Project voting and volunteering
- Project development and budgeting
- Blandin grant application
- Implementation

Adjourn