

# White Earth Nation BBC

## Vision Meeting Notes

June 11, 2020

### Broadband

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Internet Providers on White Earth Reservation:

- 3 currently with service on the reservation
  - Century Link, Arvig, Garden Valley
- There is a need to recruit other providers (don't focus on strictly on Arvig)
  - Co-op's typically wouldn't try to take on Arvig, but there have been discussions where co-ops near the reservation expressed initial interest. This conversation was related to spending CARES funding on broadband, but the short time frame made new projects impossible.
- White Earth – perhaps finding a really good wireless company is a solution
  - Possibly form our own co-op, utility commission
  - Is there a possibility for the tribe to build our own fiber optic network, similar to Fond du Lac?
  - White Earth has applied for 2.5Ghz spectrum
    - Obtaining this will provide an asset to the tribe
    - Can use in conjunction with private company to form partnerships

Broadband for all:

- This is a shared vision for the group, but need to define who “all” is.
  - Is this broadband for tribal members living on the reservation or for all residents and businesses within the reservation?
- Barriers for other companies to go up against Arvig
  - Garden Valley is very interested
  - Paul Bunyan doesn't have much interest
  - Possible wireless providers would include the cellular carriers, plus A Better Wireless in Fergus Falls, Midco from Fargo and Advanteum.
- Broadband access as a utility
  - Should internet be classified as a utility?
  - Is broadband now a need?
    - Broadband needs to be designated as a need (much like electricity, plumbing, roof over head, etc.)
- Define what is all (broadband for all)
  - Just reservation?
  - All native people?
  - Elders/youth/etc.
- Federal aid for Arvig
  - What does this entail? Current programs include the FCC's Alternative Connect America Fund and the Rural Development Opportunity Fund reverse auction

- Can White Earth apply for federal aid?
- What other opportunities are there for White Earth?
- Has the tribe talked with Arvig about collaboration?
  - Yes, the tribe has talked to both Garden Valley and Arvig
    - How can we help each other get projects done (time issues seem to be a concern)?
    - Both are willing to help
      - Problems exist – construction schedules have already been set, other priorities take precedent, COVID \$\$ timelines and completion dates
  - Leveraging sovereign rights?
    - Can we exercise our sovereign rights due to them burying their cables on our land, near our water, etc.
    - IT will connect with Land to discuss this further
- BIA has ideas how to leverage sovereign rights on their website (use BIA site as a resource)

## Knowledge Workforce

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- What assets/resources does White Earth presently have?
- What routes do we have to educate?
  - Mass media includes radio – this can be a vital tool to educate
  - Establish an apprentice program
    - Need to have the ability to train and teach people
    - Many positions require college degree which limits workforce
  - There are other ways to gain knowledge beyond college
- COLA problems
  - Students are very visual and hands on – this can be an issue with distance learning
  - Instructors need to be creative
  - Main thing is getting access (limited connection, no connection) for the students
  - COLA supports apprenticeships for immediate employment after school
    - Allow students to receive credits for doing apprenticeships
- Funding from non-profits
  - Bring in trainers to train our people/workforce/students
  - Help to create business plans (need a person to do this full-time)
    - Economic Development presently has open position that fulfills this need
- White Earth needs to apply for additional funding

## Innovation

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- Does the tribe own an energy facility?
- George L. working with tribe on renewable energy
  - George has training for individuals with RREAL Solar
  - Tribe will be rolling out solar arrays which will bring training opportunities and jobs

## Digital Equity

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- Connectivity gap is an issue
- Other reservations have partnered up with AT&T to build towers
  - White Earth has tried this with Verizon with no luck to this point
  - Other tribes radio stations have no cost to utilize towers
  - Fond du Lac has built their own fiber to homes on the reservation
    - Can White Earth follow this model?
    - Utilize Fond du Lac as a resource
- White Earth has limited cell service
  - Dead spots throughout the reservation
  - George has installed a cell booster in his home
    - Not through the internet, works through cell towers
    - Uses little power, could be installed in rural locations and operate 24/7
- Equality vs. Equity
  - Equality is that everyone has the same; equity is that everyone has what they need.
  - Families struggling with kids in school, mental health, other dire needs
    - Some have access to equipment, but no access to internet