

County has broadband vision



Patrick Garry
Guest columnist

Redwood County ranks 85th out of 87 counties in the state of Minnesota with access to an internet speed of 100 Mbps download, and 20 Mbps upload speed (100/20 Mbps). The state goal is that every household and business is served a minimum of 25/3 Mbps by the year 2022, and 100/20 Mbps by 2026. At this time, Redwood County is not positioned to meet either of the goals. To provide perspective, a gig of speed is 1,000 Mbps symmetrical.

I have been leading and participating in the Blandin Foundation Community Broadband Resource (CBR): Accelerate program, along with community activators from varying industries and perspectives. Over the past 15 weeks the committee has worked together to create a strategic plan and bold vision for the future of broadband in Redwood County. Committee members include: Stephen Lien, Connie Lechner, Darin Prescott, Stacey Heiling, Gabrielle Rohlik, Sarah Kuglin, Heather Koffler, Briana Mumme, and myself.

After undergoing weeks of technical training the committee has formed this vision – which has been endorsed by the CBR committee, County EDA Board, and County Board of Commissioners: Every resident and business in Redwood County will have access to an affordable, reliable, high-speed internet connection delivered by committed community partners skilled in operating and maintaining a successful fiber broadband network.

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During the visioning process, the committee focused on a technology, which would best serve the broadband needs of today and the next 50 years. A fiber-optic network is a superior technology, which deploys faster, consistently and at greater internet speeds. While it is the more expensive technology, fiber technology is worth the investment to future-proof the county to remain a competitive and relevant county.

The unified vision establishes a framework for decision making as a fiber network is planned in partnership

with internet service providers. To achieve the funding required to bring projects to fruition, we are striving to maximize the federal and state broadband dollars available and be application-ready when funding programs become available. Additionally, ARVIG is deploying ACAM funds, a federal program, to deliver fiber to the home throughout a good portion of the townships in the county. These rural projects are underway with anticipation of completion by 2026.

It's time to disrupt the status quo of rural America. We know an initiative of this size is challenging, but when there is a challenge, it brings out the best in our community and the people who live here. This is an investment worth fighting for, and we cannot postpone it any longer! As a county, we see the return in the county to be greater than any other investment to date. The cost of inaction is greater than the cost of action.

In Redwood County, we believe in a fiber future for all. We look to be bold today, so we can be bold tomorrow.

Interested in learning more or would you consider extending a letter of support, contact me at Patrick_g@co.redwood.mn.us or 507-637-1362.

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