



March 14, 2022

Steffany Powell Coker
Secretary to the Commission
Public Service Commission
North Tower, 6th Floor
Hill Farms State Office Building
4822 Madison Yards Way
Madison, WI 53705

Re: Economic Impact of Improving Broadband in Rural Oneida County per PSC Grant Talking Points – In Support of Bug Tusssel’s Oneida County Middle Mile/Final Mile Infrastructure Project

Dear Ms. Coker,

Per your application guidelines regarding Economic Development and Economic Impact:

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- **A discussion of potential economic impact the project could have for an individual business located in the project area:** *Access to rural broadband would dramatically increase economic activity in Oneida County by providing broadband access to seasonal and recreational housing units. There are 13,904 seasonal or recreational housing units in Oneida County (44.8% of all housing units) per a University of Wisconsin Extension study. Of those, through another University of Wisconsin Extension survey, 52.9% did not have acceptable internet access. Through further research, it is estimated that non-residents using seasonal or recreational homes would spend an additional 37 days per year in Oneida County. Each extra day results in \$67 in additional local spend (food, entertainment, etc.). Rolled up this would be an economic activity increase in Oneida County of \$18,200,000 per year if all could be connected. This activity would benefit MANY businesses in Oneida County.*
 - **An explanation of how an improved download and upload transmission speed could better support a specific business in the project area:** *As an economic Development Corporation, we have been forced to limit our searches for property for new businesses to the Rhinelander area to assure access to acceptable broadband speeds. Rural communities and properties are left out due to either no broadband access, or very slow speeds (less than 25/3 service). Improved speeds county wide would open up much more of Oneida County for business.*
 - **An explanation of the likely impact improved broadband service could have on residential property values, supported by local sales data if available:** *Anecdotal, but*



real estate professionals in our area we have talked to value internet access at a minimum of \$10,000 in home value. Often potential buyers will not consider a home without good internet access – it is a very big deal in the rural Oneida County real estate market.

- **A demonstration of how improved broadband service to a residential portion of the project could benefit a telecommuting population:** *Working from home is becoming a permanent way of life post pandemic. Improved transmission speeds will be critical to support this effort and get people back into the workforce. I am unable to work from home reliably due to the lack of rural access to plus 25/3 service (I only have access to fixed wireless service at my home, generally less than 15mbs). Oneida County Economic Development Corporation estimates there more than 500 work from home potential employees in Oneida County unable to take advantage of the work from home business model. Often these are women who cannot find childcare and are forced to stay home with their children. We also get many calls from seasonal residents who would move their businesses or home offices to Oneida County if they had access to acceptable broadband access.*
 - **A demonstration of how the speeds and service being offered by the project fits with current and future economic needs of the community and local businesses:** *The proposed project provides 225 miles of middle mile fiber plus significant final mile hookups for rural customers throughout Oneida County. Fiber would guarantee acceptable speeds now (at least 100mbs) and would increase as technology improves.*
 - **How the proposed project will affect the ability of individuals to access health care service from home, including any impact upon the costs of those services.** *Telemedicine is becoming the norm in rural areas of Wisconsin, augmented by Zoom and other video conference platforms. High speed access to the internet is essential. A single Office visit costs upwards of \$150, whereas a telemedicine visit is \$45 or less (Teledoc) and is generally covered without deductible by insurance.*
 - **How the proposed project will affect the ability of students to access educational opportunities from home:** *Broadband access to students is critical in rural areas, creating a tremendous disadvantage compared to non-rural areas. This is especially acute in the Three Lakes and Lakeland school districts. Those who can get internet access are typically slower than 25mbs, taking an average of 22 seconds for a single web page to load. In Rhinelander where 100mps fiber service is available, that same web page takes only 7 seconds to load. Many parents are forced to take their children to public establishments that have free wi-fi to complete their homework.*
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- Additional Subject/Comment from WXPR (Wisconsin Public Radio):

“The way we consume news has changed. People are looking for digital options to receive their news and entertainment. This has created an environment where daily newspapers have disappeared, and television and radio news departments have closed or realigned their focus. This has created a “news desert” for many rural areas. A healthy democratic society depends on a well-informed public, especially at the local level. This loss of local media can be observed at the local level in Oneida County.

The economic impact of the pandemic has also driven the rapid adoption of digital technologies and is prompting change in news operations. WXPR Public Radio, along with 80 other public media outlets, has pledged to carry out a digital transformation plan, guided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

This new normal has created a unique opportunity for WXPR to adapt and reinvent ourselves as a digital leader in news and public safety information, at a time when the area is in need of these services.

Reliable broadband technology will revolutionize the way news services and information are provided to the citizens of Oneida County, ensuring our public has access to the information it needs, from trusted news sources.”

Jessie Dick – WXPR <jessie@wxpr.org>

With best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeff Verdoorn".

Jeff Verdoorn
Executive Director
Oneida County Economic Development Corporation