



Roger A. Bergman
Chairperson

Matthew R. Fenske
Vice-Chairperson

Ottawa County

Board of Commissioners

To All Ottawa County Commissioners:

The Ottawa County Board of Commissioners will meet on **Tuesday, March 9, 2021** immediately following the regular meeting of the Board of Commissioners for a Board Work Session at the Ottawa County Fillmore Street Complex in West Olive, Michigan and via Zoom.

The Agenda is as follows:

1. Call to Order by the Chairperson
2. Roll Call
3. Public Comments and Communications from Staff
4. Work Session Items:
 - A. Digital Inclusion Strategy
5. Public Comments
6. Adjournment

Francisco C. Garcia Joseph S. Baumann Douglas R. Zylstra Allen Dannenberg Randall J. Meppelink
Kyle J. Terpstra James H. Holtvluwer Philip D. Kuyers Gregory J. DeJong

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Digital Inclusion Strategy

Overview

Updated: March 1, 2021



Introduction

For well over a decade, County officials have been working diligently to address gaps in digital connectivity. Despite some successes (e.g. public/private wireless build-out), population density challenges, especially within the County's more rural communities, have continued to leave gaps in reliable, affordable internet access. The global pandemic – which forced students and teachers countywide to remote-learn, employees to telework, and the elderly to receive virtual health services – quickly amplified the inequitable access issues that remain within the broadband infrastructure of the County.

Because the pandemic helped to bring greater awareness of the broadband access inequities, there is no better time than right now to systematically address these connectivity issues which are consistently being reported by frustrated residents and business owners. A robust, coordinated effort is necessary to ensure the infrastructure that exists in the County provides everyone with the access they need to succeed in not only today's world, but tomorrow's future.

Ottawa County's Digital Inclusion Strategy is about establishing complete broadband access across all areas of the County and eventually West Michigan as a whole. Digital Inclusion refers to the activities necessary to ensure that all individuals and communities, including the most disadvantaged, have access to affordable, robust broadband internet service, as well as access to necessary internet-enabled equipment and digital literacy training.

Multi-Phased Strategy

Promptly following the start of the Michigan Stay-Home Order, Ottawa County Planning and Performance Improvement Department and OAISD representatives began meeting as a small work group to lay-out a multi-phased strategy to address gaps in digital inclusion. Once the initial strategy was developed in early June 2020, it was shared with community stakeholders to gain support to help launch the effort. The 4-phased strategy is summarized below:

- **Phase 1: Data Collection, Analysis, and Mapping** (e.g. surveying households, businesses, stakeholders, etc.)
- **Phase 2: Pre-Engineering and Equipment Needs Study** (i.e. Solutions Deployment Plan)
- **Phase 3: Intermediary Solutions Deployment** (e.g. address immediate, readily available opportunities)
- **Phase 4: Ongoing Transformation** (e.g. ensure evolving demands for digital connectivity are met over time)

Work Session

The Board Work Session on March 9 will offer the Commissioners an overview of the repeated challenges the County has experienced with bridging the digital divide over the years – from inaccurate mapping of household access to broadband, to existing grant programs, to private-sector deployment of services – as well as the current efforts being undertaken by the Planning and Performance Improvement Department to implement the Digital Inclusion Strategy.