
CITIZENS FOR EDUCATION IN TOWN GOVERNANCE

BROAD BAND

March 22, 2024 - Update

Citizens for Education in Town Governance (CETG) is a group of volunteers in Lac du Flambeau, Wisconsin, dedicated to learning about town governance and sharing such knowledge and information with others. Established in 2016, *CETG* is not a government or quasi-government entity, is independent from Lac du Flambeau's town government, and is non-partisan. This article is just one of several proffered on *CETG*'s website to provide the public with information on issues being addressed by town governance. [Click here to access the website](#)

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BROADBAND

INTRODUCTION

“Coming soon to the Lac du Flambeau Community: **Eighth Fire Communications** - a groundbreaking broadband initiative brought to you by the [Lac du Flambeau Business Development Corporation](#). As a proud venture wholly owned and operated by the community, we are dedicated to transforming the digital landscape of our region.”

“The U.S. Department of Commerce, National Telecommunications and Information Administration Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program has awarded federal funding to the Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians Tribe to enable high-speed broadband services to government, businesses, community institutions, and local internet service providers in Lac du Flambeau, Wisconsin.

The Lac du Flambeau Broadband Infrastructure Deployment Project will construct a complete broadband fiber system owned and operated by the Tribe, via the Tribe’s Business Development Corporation. The system will serve the entire Lac du Flambeau Reservation.” ([Environmental Assessment for Lac du Flambeau Broadband Infrastructure Deployment Project, Department of Commerce, November 2023](#) Page 1). [[Click here for additional information.](#)]

March 21, 2024. The [March 21, 2024, edition of the Daily Cardinal](#) includes an article on the broadband issue.

CHRONOLOGY

2023-2024

February 1, 2023. At the town board meeting on February 1, 2023, Dion Reynolds, Technology Manager for the Lac du Flambeau Tribal Broadband Team, provided an update on the team’s recent activity ([Agenda](#), [Audio](#), [Minutes](#)). Minutes include the following statement, italics added).

Mr. Tuckwell was not able to attend today’s meeting however Emerson Coy along with Dion Reynolds were here to explain that the [letter of support](#) that Mr. Tuckwell presented can be tabled for now. The grant that was planned is not going forward at this time. The tribal entities are working on another grant and they will keep us updated on the progress. No action was taken

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“Broadband Internet Coverage in LDF: Mr. Sommerfeldt spoke regarding the need in the area for broadband internet coverage. He would like a survey put in the next tax letter. He would also like to form a committee to work on the issue. The town received a letter from the Vilas County Economic Development Corporation regarding a project they are working on with the LDF Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians for a feasibility study for the potential introduction and development of an independent provider of internet service at an affordable true high speed service for businesses and underserved residents. Anne Anderson from Access Engineering gave a quick update to the project. There is also a group of students from the tribal education department working with the firm and gave a quick presentation. Bruce Rowell owner of Access Engineering would like to make a presentation to the board and Mr. Gaulke stated that we would schedule that with Mr. Rowell at an upcoming meeting. Mr. Gaulke stated he would like to see what the Tribe is proposing before forming any committees or surveys.”

September 12, 2023 Broadband Discussion. The Lac du Flambeau Business Development Corporation held an open discussion for the community on the project at the Convention Center on September 12, 2023.

December 8, 2023. The December 8, 2023, edition of the Lakeland Times includes a [Public Notice](#) acknowledging a “federal Environmental Assessment for the project” and a “30-day comment period” that began on December 8, 2023.

March 21, 2024. The [March 21, 2024, edition of the Daily Cardinal](#) includes an article on the broadband issue.

CHRONOLOGY

2013-2022

July 31, 2013. Minutes of the town board meeting held on July 31, 2013 include the following statement, italics added.

Access Engineering Presentation: Today’s meeting was scheduled as an informative presentation by Bruce Rowell from Access Engineering who has been working with the Lac du Flambeau tribe for a tribally owned broadband company named Ogema Communications, LLC. Ogema Communications is conducting a broadband study in Vilas County, including the Town of Lac du Flambeau. This effort is to increase the availability of high speed broadband access for residents and businesses of Vilas County. In addition, the study includes the potential for public safety enhancements that will benefit the community. Discussion regarding Access Engineering to collocate on tower: Brief discussion was held regarding the request from Access engineering to collocate on the tower located at the transfer station site. Mr. Gaulke explained that the collocating arrangements/contracts are done by Vilas County. Motion by Mrs. Schwanebeck

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seconded by Mr. Hoover to write a letter to the Vilas County Board recommending they give every consideration for the project and consider a reduced collocation fee. Motion carried.

November 21, 2013. Minutes of the town board meeting held on November 21, 2013 include the following statement, italics added.

Broadband Survey: Mr. Sommerfeldt brought to the board a request to put in the upcoming tax letter a survey on broadband internet service in our area. He is asking that this survey be placed on the back of our tax letter with instruction on how to return it for review. The staff of Ogema Communications will compile the data. He is working with Joni Theobald from the tribe and also with Bryan Hoover. After discussion the board requested a copy of the questions for review before final approval. Mr. Gaulke called for a Special Town Board Meeting Monday November 25, 2013 at 1:00 p.m. The time was later changed and reposted to 10:00 a.m.

November 25, 2013. Minutes of the town board meeting held on November 25, 2013 include the following statement, italics added.

Broadband Survey: A request for a survey to be put onto the back of the tax letter was requested by Mr. Sommerfeldt. The questions were put together by Joni Theobald, Mr. Hoover, and Mr. Sommerfeldt and brought to the board for approval before a final decision was made. A copy of the questions will be attached as part of the record. Mrs. Schwanebeck made two revisions to the questions submitted and they were reviewed and accepted. Mr. Ouimette from the Lac du Flambeau School spoke stating the need for high-speed internet is greatly needed to help students after school hours at home. Many of the students do not currently have access. Mr. Gauthier from the chamber also expressed that he has received many requests from out of town visitors for the need of internet access. Mrs. Messinger reported that the additional cost for the printing of this survey would be approximately \$35.00. The town will pay for this printing. The surveys will be returned to the town hall and the information will be compiled by the Ogema Communications Company that is currently working with the tribe. Motion by Mr. Hoover seconded by Mrs. Schwanebeck to approve the questions and the mailing of the survey with the tax letter. Motion carried.

October 7, 2015. Minutes of the town board meeting held on October 7, 2015, include the following statement, italics added.

Broadband Internet Services-Northwoods Connect: Paul Osterman from Northwoods Connect presented a short presentation today on wireless internet service. Northwoods Connect is currently providing service to Rhinelander, parts of Minocqua, Hazelhurst, Squirrel Lake, Town of Lynn and are expanding to other areas. They have faster speeds and are able to penetrate the trees better than other services. Speeds range from 3-8Mbps and future upgrades will allow +25Mbps. Prices range from \$40-\$80/month. No Contracts, bundles, termination fees or data caps. They have received many calls from LDF residents asking when they can come to this area.

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Mr. Gaulke mentioned to Paul that we do have a 300 ft. tower that we own along with Vilas County and if that would be something they could use. Paul stated certainly. They like to stay at least 250 feet. Mrs. Schwanebeck asked what is required of the board or community to get this going. Paul replied that the equipment is very expensive, about \$40,000 per tower site. There is funding available with state grants and you must have a public/private relationship which the Town of Hazelhurst currently has. The distance of service area can go as far as 5 miles, but they can mostly guarantee 2 to 3 miles. Mr. Mayer stated it is very important to move forward and would like Paul to inform the board of what financial obligations we might have to budget for in the future. The board thanked Paul for coming and to keep us informed of any updates.

[NO DOCUMENTED MENTION OF THE TOPIC AT A TOWN BOARD MEETING FROM OCTOBER 7, 2015 UNTIL APRIL 20, 2021]

April 20, 2021. At the Annual Lac du Flambeau Town Meeting on April 20, 2021, elector Jim Sommerfeldt questioned the status of the Town's participation in the regional effort that began years ago ([June 25, 2013, Lakeland Times](#)) to provide broadband in Lac du Flambeau as well as the greater region.

Individuals attending the meeting who spoke to the issue on included Emerson Coy (Tribal Planning and Department, Manager), Larry Ouimette (Lac du Flambeau Public School, Superintendent), Jim Tuckwell (Chairman, Vilas County Economic Development Corporation), and Karl Zimmerman (Lac du Flambeau Public School, Systems Administrator for Information and Technology).

Following discussion and comments highlighting a need for the Town Board to support the regional approach, Town Board Supervisor, Gloria Cobb, said she would pursue the topic further with the Tribe, and Jim Sommerfeldt volunteered to participate in the process.

This was not the first time that Mr. Sommerfeldt raised the broadband topic before the Board. According to the minutes of the Town Board meeting held on [June 19, 2013](#),

“Broadband Internet Coverage in LDF: Mr. Sommerfeldt spoke regarding the need in the area for broadband internet coverage. He would like a survey put in the next tax letter. He would also like to form a committee to work on the issue. The town received a letter from the Vilas County Economic Development Corporation regarding a project they are working on with the LDF Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians for a feasibility study for the potential introduction and development of an independent provider of internet service at an affordable true high speed service for businesses and underserved residents. Anne Anderson from Access Engineering gave a quick update to the project. There is also a group of students from the tribal education department working with the firm and gave a quick presentation. Bruce Rowell owner of Access Engineering would like to make a presentation to the board and Mr. Gaulke stated that we would schedule that with Mr. Rowell at an upcoming meeting. Mr. Gaulke stated he would like to see what the Tribe in proposing before forming any committees or surveys.”

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August 18, 2021. At the town board meeting on August 18, 2021, Dion Reynolds, Technology Manager for the Lac du Flambeau Tribal Broadband Team, provided an update on the team's recent activity. Click here to listen to the complete update, approximately [minute 3:40 – 35:40](#), and here for the [document provided](#) at the meeting. ([Agenda](#), [Audio](#), [Minutes](#))

Town Supervisor Gloria Cobb is the town board's representative on the team. Other team members include Brian Gauthier, Gail Huycke, Andre Virden, Dion Reynolds, John Young, Christina Rencontre, Jim Tuckwell, Emerson Coy, and Jarett LeBlang.

Meeting weekly, the team's objective is "To provide access to reliable, affordable, high speed internet services throughout the Lac du Flambeau Reservation to support education, telehealth, economic development, and redundancy of broadband service."

During the discussion, town officials acknowledged that the town received \$183,536.31 of American Rescue Plan Act funds in June and is scheduled to receive more than \$480,000. 00 of such funds, which may be used for broadband services. Despite ongoing encouragement for the town to partner in the overall effort now, Town officials said they will consider starting to plan in October 2021. Town officials were first encouraged to support the effort in 2013.

Minutes of the meeting include the following statement.

Broadband Update: Dion Reynolds IT manager from Business Development Corporation in Lac du Flambeau was present for today's meeting to give us an update of Broadband in Lac du Flambeau. He stated that since April 2020 when covid hit a lot of people had the need to work from home/school and found that the internet speeds in the area were just not effective enough to get work done. They have been searching for solutions to get the speeds increased. They are looking at options and partnerships, community support. They are working with Vilas County Economic Development and tribe. Ultimate goal is to get the fiber to the home as now it is by cooper wire which just cannot support the speeds needed. Dion would like people to test their speeds and get that information back to him. His email is dion@ldfbd.com. The goal for the wireless solution is 1-2 years. Fiber to the homes 2-5 years. There are approximately 3700 households, 1700 year round and 20% have less than 25 GHz. They are looking for solutions for good service at costs that can be affordable. They are looking for grants for the infrastructure. They are working with engineers for costs involved in the projects. Dion stated he would be happy to come back and give us quarterly reports on the progress.

March 2, 2022. At the town board meeting on March 2, 2022, Dion Reynolds, Technology Manager for the Lac du Flambeau Tribal Broadband Team, provided an update on the team's recent activity ([Agenda](#), [Audio](#), [Minutes](#)). Minutes include the following statement.

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Broadband Update: Dian Reynolds was present at today's meeting. He stated that they have not heard back regarding the NTIA Grant that they had applied for last year. They have applied for another USDA Grant which would bring in a fiber backbone from Fifield. He stated that the timeline they are working with is 2-5 years. He will keep us updated on the process.

October 5, 2022. During the town board meeting on October 5, 2022, discussion focused on the use of ARPA funds ([Agenda](#), [Audio](#), [Minutes](#)). Minutes include the following statement, italics added.

Chairman Gaulke reviewed the previously approved allocations and budgeted amounts as well as what has been paid out to date. Jim Sommerfeldt questioned any ARPA money being used for broadband collaboration. Supervisor Cobb reiterated our intention of collaborating with the Tribe, once broadband is brought to the township.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

[Development of Survey, 2013](#)

[Results of the Survey Administered in 2013](#)