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KENT COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS CHAIR ESTABLISHES BROADBAND SUBCOMMITTEE

Stakeholders from public and private sectors to develop strategies and identify funding to close service gaps

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (February 15, 2021) – Kent County Board of Commissioners Chair, Mandy Bolter, recently announced that she will convene a new Kent County Broadband Subcommittee charged with assessing barriers to broadband service throughout the county, developing collaborative strategies to break down the barriers and identifying federal, state and local funding models to support the strategies.

“The pandemic has made it clear: access to broadband internet service can no longer be considered ‘optional’ for residents of Kent County,” said Bolter. “For almost a year, thousands of our residents have worked from home, our children have attended school online, and patients have relied on telehealth services for critical medical and behavioral health appointments. We need everyone in Kent County to have access to those opportunities through a quality broadband network.”

The group will assess existing broadband coverage countywide; prioritize areas where gaps are most significant and where the population is growing; identify regulations, policies and issues that may stand as barriers to service installation; monitor relevant statewide and national efforts; study successful models in other communities and recommend for the Board’s consideration collaborative strategies to address the challenge.

“There are many roadblocks we have to take into consideration when addressing the need for broadband throughout the County,” said Kent County Commissioner Michelle McCloud. “Our solutions will have to be creative and we will have to tap into the skillset of each subcommittee member.”

They will also study the feasibility of establishing an organizing structure, such as an authority of local units of government that could work together to implement the strategies and administer funding to fill the service gaps over time.

Kent County Commissioner Ben Greene will chair the subcommittee. “I am eager to start working with this group to ensure our residents are able to access the services and information they need,” said Greene. “Information technology has become a critical component of the county’s infrastructure. Each member of this subcommittee will bring unique perspectives and expertise into the conversation.”

Members include:

- Ben Greene, Kent County Board of Commissioners and Subcommittee Chair
- Mandy Bolter, Chair, Kent County Board of Commissioners
- Michelle McCloud, Kent County Board of Commissioners
- Ken Yonker, Kent County Drain Commissioner
- Steven Warren, Kent County Road Commission Managing Director

- Tim Beck, Director, Kent County Information Technology
- Ruth Gaudard, Area Manager – External Affairs, State Legislative & Regulatory Affairs, AT&T
- Tim Mroz, Vice President, Strategic Initiatives, The Right Place, Inc.
- Marilyn Passmore, Director, State Government Affairs, Charter Communications
- Ryan Peel, Vergennes Broadband
- Jeff Snyder, Manager, External Affairs, Comcast – Heartland Region
- Natalie Stewart, Vice President of Government and Public Affairs, Switch

The subcommittee will begin their work in March and will be asked to provide a progress report to the full Board of Commissioners at the end of 2021. Depending on the progress and recommendations made at that time, the board may extend their work into 2022.

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