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May 1, 2020

To: Isanti County Township Officers

From: Susan Morris, Isanti County Economic Development Authority (EDA) Chair

RE: Further Exploration of Improving High Speed Internet Access in Rural Isanti County

Because of concerns expressed by residents, businesses and institutions in Isanti County, the Isanti County EDA established a High Speed Internet Taskforce in 2017. The taskforce has done extensive research focusing on rural areas of the county, where it is difficult for private companies like CenturyLink and Frontier to make the investments that are needed in broadband infrastructure and get an acceptable rate of return for their shareholders. After considering various options, the task force identified cooperatives as a desirable option for addressing the challenge of getting broadband infrastructure into lower density parts of the county. In 2018, Isanti County partnered with CNS, a company that provides engineering services to telephone cooperatives and Consolidated Telephone Cooperative (CTC). CTC is a telephone cooperative out of Brainerd, which has successfully partnered with cities, counties and townships in Greater MN to bring broadband service to rural areas. Because of the high capital costs, a variety of funding sources are typically needed to bring broadband service into lower density rural areas (e.g. federal, state, local, private, cooperative).

In November or December of 2020, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) will award funds through the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF). It will be a reverse auction process that could provide substantial funding to rural areas of the county over a ten year period. In order to participate in the October auction, CTC will need to submit a short form application to the FCC. The FCC has not yet stated when the short-form application is due, but it's anticipated to be around June 15th. In order to prevent collusion among telecommunications providers, the FCC requires CTC to identify potential bidding partners in June with the short form application. CTC is working with its attorneys and consultants to develop a consortium agreement. If your township would like to participate in any in-depth discussions with CTC and the county regarding broadband infrastructure in your township after the short form application is submitted in June, you will need to sign the consortium agreement.

This will NOT commit your township to spending money now or in the future, it simply gives you the ability to be in dialogue with the county and CTC as we explore the possibility of participating with CTC as a bidding consortium in the RDOF reverse auction. Signing the agreement will enable us to explore technical issues and financing options during the summer as the county and individual

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townships consider the possibility of bidding with CTC in the fall to bring federal funds to our area to support reliable, high speed Internet access for rural residents and businesses.

If you would like to learn more about the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund, the National Association of Counties is offering a free webinar on May 20 on the RDOF funds. To learn more, see:

<https://www.naco.org/blog/upcoming-webinar-fccs-rural-opportunity-fund-auction> . We are in the process of figuring out other ways to share background information with you, consistent with a concern for the coronavirus pandemic and the need for social distancing.

Please reach out to your county commissioner or me if you have any questions or concerns. Expect to hear from us soon!

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