

14 Apr 09
Upper Rio Grande Economic Development Council
Regular Meeting Minutes
Boogie's Restaurant Del Norte, CO

The meeting was called to order by President Don Van Wormer.

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved on a motion by Robert Hagedorn and a second by Jim Clare.

The Treasurer's report mentioned that we are still waiting on several peoples dues and that there was a bill for postage. Approval of the report and paying the bill were made on a motion from TJ Brown and a second by Dusty Hicks.

TJ Brown then took the floor and led a discussion about the idea of promoting events that are specific to the valley since they are economic drivers and thus economic development. It was suggested that we help organizations with advertising ideas. We can place these events on our web page calendar and provide links to the events to aid people who want information about what, when, and where. The intent is to promote valley events outside the valley in pursuit of weekend travelers. The selection of what to promote would be based on events that are not available on the Front Range or in the surrounding areas. There are a couple of people with strong marketing backgrounds that we may be able to engage. Possibly a coordinated advertising of the events seasonally would yield more coverage for less revenue. The final decision was that the Board of Directors will work on this a little and try to come up with a cohesive plan to be looked at and reviewed by the membership.

Ken Swinehart of Amigo.net then did a presentation on a Broadband Stimulus Grant. RUPRI research is showing that power and decision making is being revolved away from local control. The stimulus has provided a large amount of money to Colorado for grants to be administered by USDA. The program leaders in Denver are John Connelly and Professor Weiser. When asked if they had consulted with rural Colorado they responded positively that they had been to Greeley, Pueblo, and Colorado Springs.

Ken showed a graph of the projected broadband usage over the next 5 years and the only method of handling the size of the load is with Fiber optics. He believes the only way to not be passed over in this round of infrastructure improvements is to not leave this to Denver and the State legislature. He is suggesting a Special Corporate Entity (LLC) with a possible Board of up to 50 members. This would be a Public / Private partnership to obtain an IRU (Indefeasible Right of Use). The probable 100 fiber lines would be split 50/50 between the private and the public stakeholders who would be based on an equity share. In this project, cost of use would be determined by cost of maintenance and not by cost of construction, which would provide a lower barrier of entry for smaller companies. Fiber could not be run to every home in the valley so at key points the 100mbps signal would be picked up by wireless and transmitted from towers on San Antoine, Aqua Ramon, Methodist, and Saguache Peak. The funding he is targeting is earmarked for challenged communities. This would center in Alamosa where a data center would be built. The remoteness of Creede has its own problem and will probably have to be reached via microwave transmitter.

There is currently fiber running the I25 corridor so the connection to the valley would come off at Walsenburg and come over La Veta pass. Each of the 100 fibers can be treated and traded as a unit. This would allow building down to the NM state line and hooking to their fiber system, and by trading one of ours for one of theirs. This would create a redundancy system that if interrupted on La Veta Pass could be re-routed into NM and then back up to us in the valley. His hope is to get surveys in to the water bills and obtain public input.

This is a potential \$20,000,000 project with a 20% match required. Ken felt the \$4,000,000 match could be financed out of Silicon Valley where the value of the product is already known and priced. He suspects that just hooking up the schools in the valley will take close to \$5,000,000. The value to the public sector is in public safety, police, fire, schools, ambulance, hospitals, courts, and other emergency services. The open architecture design of this will be opposed by Qwest who did a similar system 10 years ago, but never completed or activated it. Part of the reason to engage every Municipality and County Government in this project is to increase the impact in Denver. The RFP is still not worked out. The private sector would be responsible for the maintenance due to their realizing the revenue stream. Whether the public sector has a liability position or whether the public sector can realize any revenues from this is yet to be worked out. He is purposing a meeting the first part of May to address the legal issues involved.

The Six Steps to be accomplished in 30 to 45 days include getting surveys, holding public meetings, soliciting letters of support, acquiring the 20% matching funds, negotiating for IRUs, and creating a business plan.

Monte Vista will be visited by our new US Senator Bennet on Saturday the 18th with a tree planting and then a Town Hall style meeting at the Visitors center. Also this weekend (18th and 19th) is the Home and Garden Show at Ski Hi Park. Adams St in downtown is having the paving stones in the crosswalks replaced with colored, stamped concrete to eliminate a series of problems and this is going well. The new Sonic Restaurant is moving quickly. The City received a large CDBG grant and has projects for the summer. Don also commented on the high barriers to entry on the stimulus money that the rural communities are facing. Congress wasn't thinking of us when they passed this bill. Monte Vista will also be changing their street lights to LED's to reduce costs.

Del Norte has made a grant request for the monies to buy and start renovating the Potato Growers warehouses. On the 17th of August there will be a hearing on the first round of grant money for the Airport Runway Expansion. Nancy Schrader reminded everyone of the Hospital Fund Raiser "Fiesta de Mayo" to be held at Ski Hi Park in Monte Vista on the 2nd of May.

South Fork is working on adopting the Smart Codes. The RR is storing cars on the tracks again which is due to shipping being down 40% nationwide and there being an abundance of unneeded cars.

Suzanne reminded everyone of the Geo-thermal meeting in Salida on the 30th of April. It should be a lot of good information.

The next meeting is in Monte Vista on the 12th of May.

Submitted,
Marty Asplin, secretary