

DANE COUNTY BOARD CHEERS RURAL BROADBAND EXPANSION

Meeting Wednesday December 6th in Village of Cambridge on new federal and state monies for rural broadband expansion

One of the more pressing problems in rural Wisconsin remains poor Internet service.

And with data usage rising and networks strained, things have gotten worse in many areas.

But help is on the way.

On Wednesday, December 6th starting at 6:30 PM, Dane County Board Supervisor Bob Salov is hosting an informational meeting on \$751 million in new federal money going to TDS Telecommunications to boost rural broadband expansion.

The meeting is at 6:30 p.m. in the Village of Cambridge Amundson Community Center at 200 Spring St. in Cambridge (bottom floor meeting room).

"After much frustration I'm feeling positive about finally getting faster Internet service into our rural areas," said Salov, who represents the villages of Cambridge, Rockdale and Deerfield along with the townships of Dunkirk, Rutland, Albion, Christiana and Deerfield as well as ward 7 of the City of Edgerton in Dane County.

Salov will be joined Wednesday December 6th by town of Vermont Plan Commission member John Hallick, who also serves on the town of Vermont's Citizen Broadband Task Force,

Hallick will speak about rural broadband access, partnering with providers, available grants and other potential funding for local governments.

"There's a lot of good things happening and we want to make sure everyone understands what the next steps will be," Salov said.

In January, TDS announced it will receive approximately \$75.1 million a year for the next 10 years from the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) Alternative Connect America Cost Model. TDS will leverage the funds to expand and improve broadband service to nearly 160,000 homes in 25 states, including Wisconsin, over that time frame.

Funding for the program, also referred to as the Connect America Fund (CAF), will support the buildout of rural broadband networks. Depending on location, most TDS customers in rural areas eligible for CAF funding will receive guaranteed broadband speeds of 25 Mbps download and 3 Mbps upload. Most of the remaining customers will receive speeds of 10/1 Mbps.

The Dane County Board has long urged expansion of rural broadband and in 2015 passed a resolution urging state and federal officials to move forward with badly needed funding.

Wisconsin has been something of a laggard in extending high-speed Internet into rural areas after it turned down \$23 million in federal stimulus money in 2011. But the new federal monies are a major step forward, Salov said.

"We are at a critical point when broadband is no longer a luxury but a necessity and a public utility," he said. "Rural businesses and households cannot function without it."

The meeting Wednesday December 6th is open to the public.

Salov can be contacted at salov@countyofdane.com