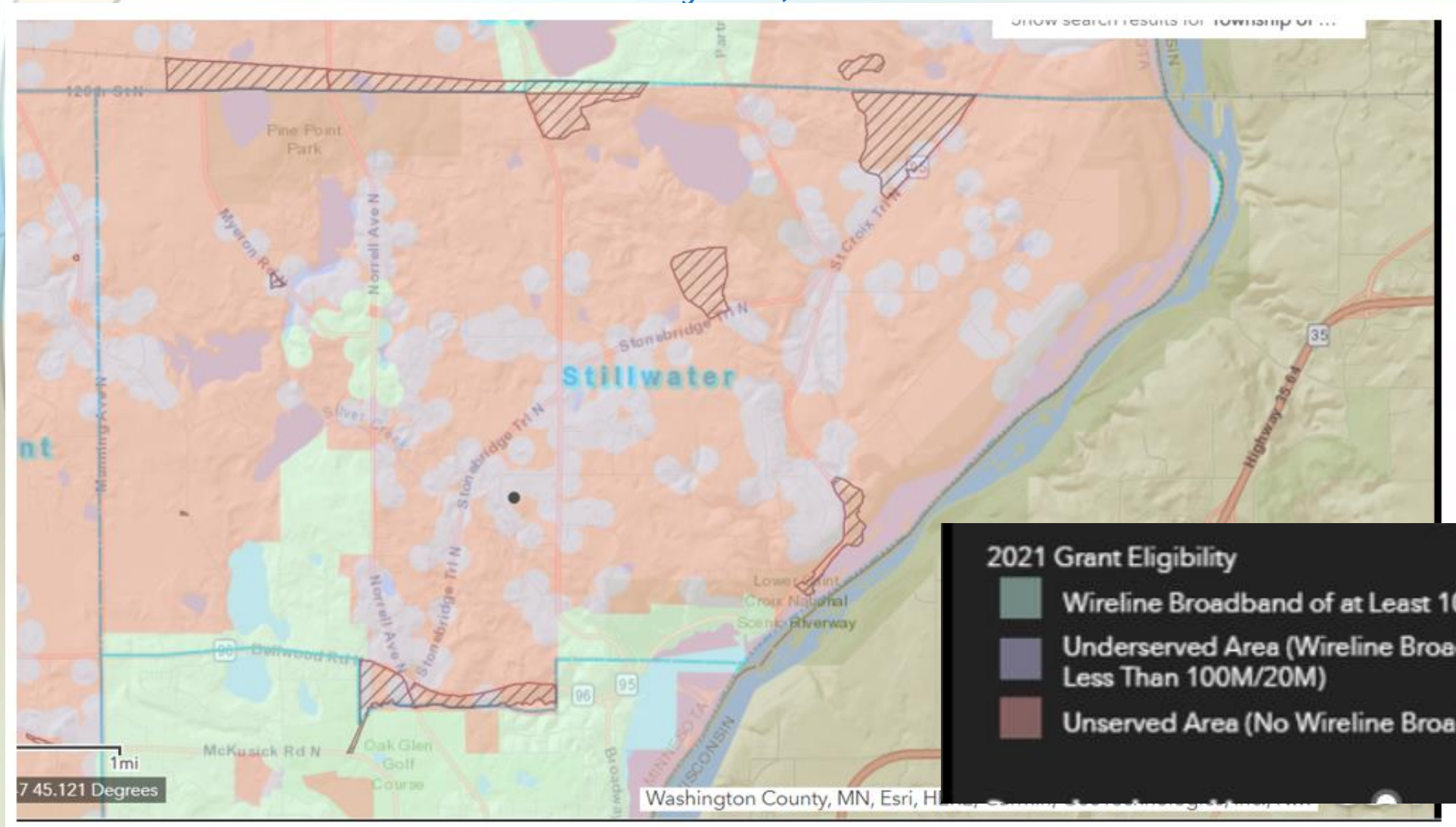
Comcast Fiber Optic Project Plan & Grant Applications

Stillwater Township Board Special Meeting

March 1, 2023

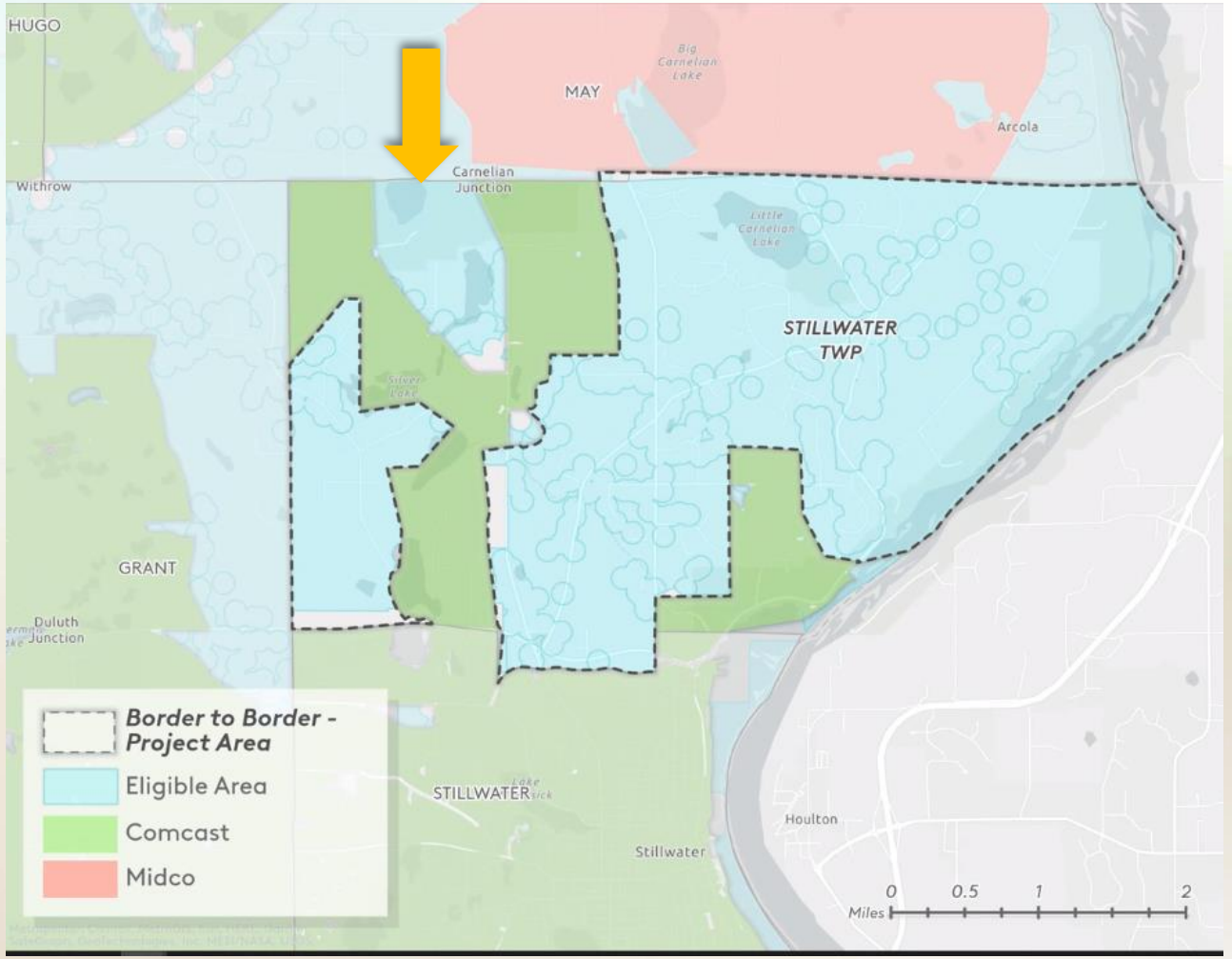
Township state grant eligibility

as of May 31, 2022



Comcast-Xfinity Fiber Optic Build-out Project Plan – Stillwater Twp.

- 614 passings
  - ‘passings’ = homes, churches, businesses etc
- Total cost: $3,985,651
- Northwest area out of scope
  - Pine Pt Regional Park area
  - Low density significantly increases $
  - Eligible for Line Ext. Connection Prgm.
- ‘Last mile’ fiber to 614 homes/passings
- Exact fiber routes tbd
  - During construction planning phase
  - After potential grants awarded



MN State 2023 program: Line Extension Connection Program

- Can be utilized by residents outside Comcast project area – applications submitted directly to OBD (Office Broadband Devel.)
- Awards grants for extension of existing broadband to unserved locations (under 25 mbps down, 3 mbps up)
- OBD sends addresses to each MN bb provider twice a year
- OBD selects lowest bidder, winners have a year to complete work
- Broadband Line Extension Connection Program / Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (mn.gov)

Broadband Grant
Letters of Support

- 72 resident letters of support
- Karen Housley - State Senator signed letter of support
- Josiah Hill - State Representative letter requested
- Gary Kriesel - County Commissioner letter requested

What residents are saying…

We are a family of 6, with 4 children ranging in ages from 3-11, reliable broadband is a must to enable our children to keep up with the rest of their peers at school and live in this highly digital reliant world. I ask of you, please help our family.

Thank you for your work on this project, it is vital to the future of our township.

I personally often enjoy a download speed of 0.5 which makes it very difficult to perform my job.

This would be so wonderful if this happens. Long overdue!

What residents are saying…

I find it very disappointing Comcast is cherry picking the area they wish to serve. I understand the cost issue, but with the fact there is government money available this should be an all or nothing situation.

Would Comcast/Xfinity service also include TV? It would be nice to ditch our satellite dishes.

Thank you for all the work your team is doing. Having reliable broadband is extremely important to me.

Please pass along my letter to those who can help make it happen.

More resident comments…

My family has struggled with poor internet speeds at high costs for far too long. Options available now include old, poorly maintained DSL, spotty/costly satellite and slow, mostly unavailable cell phone options.

None of these are realistic options for a family of 4 with parents that need to work from home….we need a provider, like Comcast, who can provide cost-effective high speed internet.

Please convey our support for Township FINANCIAL SUPPORT for the project. It will absolutely enhance the quality of life and property values across the Township.

My support is contingent upon: construction won't include radiation emitting towers or cables on poles in my neighborhood.

Business Impacts

- **We've personally experienced the limitations of broadband offerings ESPECIALLY IN OUR BUSINESS. This grant would allow Comcast to build its network throughout the neighborhoods, LIKE OUR RURAL ONES, that need it most.**

To effectively do my job in today's world requires a consistent, constant, and quick connection to the internet, something that only high-speed internet service providers such as Comcast can provide. Please do approve the company's application to deploy its reliable network in Stillwater Township. Thank you.

I'm retired and have been trying to do some consulting from my home but limited speed and reliability of our internet connection has made it very difficult to provide consistent, high-quality service to my clients which has negatively impacted my consulting business.

More resident comments

I often go to Stillwater Public Library to gain internet connection in the middle of a busy workday. Up at my cabin in NW Wisconsin, I have fiber optic cable and reliable high speed internet. It's shocking that although I live on a busy county road, close to Mpls & St Paul, my internet service is slow and unreliable. Please award this grant and allow Comcast to build its network here!

We recently moved to Stillwater Township and were forced to connect to a public wifi to submit our DMV application as the current internet in our area could not handle loading the website. We are already underserved and behind; internet is only going to become more of a priority.

Thanks for your work on this project. Fingers crossed!

Feedback from other application communities (Meghan has updates)

- **Hugo:** City Clerk advised next council meeting March 6. Mayor to send letter of support.
- **Grant:** Committed $150,000
- **Denmark Township:** Special board meeting scheduled Feb 27.
  - Southeast MN Wifi has some coverage in Denmark – their ‘22 application was declined along with Comcast’s, no plans for ’23 application

More Info - MN Broadband Office

- Best NOT to have multiple grant applications from providers: too difficult to assess & manage
  - i.e. Comfrey & Wright County - 3 providers submitted applications, all were declined
- State can choose to 'split out weak parts' of grant applications
  - i.e. state could decide to remove Hugo from application, if existing providers already have footprint in the area or provider can't meet state speed, service and/or construction requirements
- Next grant round unknown
  - Walz proposed budget has $276M for broadband, yet to be voted on
  - Federal money also may be available later this year, 'lots of strings and regulatory rules' with this money

Internet Ad Hoc Committee: March '22 *Objectives Met*

- 1. **Understand current state** – collect township internet speed data
  - Completed August '22
- 2. **Research providers and grant programs**
  - Completed Fall '22
- 3**. Raise awareness among residents of service options** / potential for future improvements thru newsletters/website
  - Completed Feb '23
- 4. **Provide Board with viable recommendations for improved township internet speeds** aligned to state goals
  - Completed Feb '23

Thank you!
Internet Ad Hoc Members & more

- Special Thanks to George Burns, Frank Countryman, Peter Howard – your volunteer time, dedication and insights are awesome!
- Special Thanks to Barb Riehle and Kim Cole for super communications work!
- Special Thanks to Town Board for requesting ad hoc committee & supporting residents in effort to obtain high speed internet.

MN Border-to-Border Grant Details

Comcast-Xfinity will submit one grant application for 4 communities in Washington County – by March 2

- **Stillwater Twp (614), Denmark Twp (553), Grant (250), Hugo (211)**

- Total Passings: 1,628 (Stillwater Twp = 614)
- Total Cost: $12,711,470 (Stillwater Twp = $3.985M)
- Comcast Commitment: $7,076,475 (55%)
- County Request: $635,574 (5%)
- State Grant Request: $4,999,421 (40%)

- Costs are estimated – can change depending on unknowns…
  - How many poles they can get on, how much rock they might hit etc

If grants are awarded…

- Xfinity construction planning expected this summer – project built in 2024 - Comcast meeting with board & residents on products / plans
  - Construction team determines fiber routes
  - Public right of ways most often used
  - Residents contacted for permission if private land needed
  - Residents informed of progress via website, door hangers, Xfinity direct contact by phone
  - Restoration work completed when build-out project is done
  - Residents notified 2 months before project completion of ‘service coming soon’
  - Promotional rates may be offered when project is done

More details on construction phase – residents encouraged to read: **https://Midwest.comcast.com/network-expansion**

MN Broadband Grant Scoring Criteria

Critical Need/Community Participation: *0 to 15 points possible*

Additional scoring points will be awarded for the following:

- Project applications must identify why there is a critical need for the proposed project as it relates to access, affordability, reliability and/or consistency (in addition to being a scoring factor, applicants that do not address the critical need for their project may be disqualified from consideration)
- Verified financial commitment to the project from any qualified community partner(s) [Community partner may be any public, private, non-profit, or philanthropic entity – this would include a business, county, township, city, tribal entity, or community coalition]
- Projects that propose to serve or partially serve federally recognized tribal lands, and the associated tribal entity has provided application documentation of project support
- Project applications that provide substantive evidence of community support for the project

Next Steps

1. Tonight: Q & A with Meghan Shea –

Board discussion / decision on project contribution - affidavit

2. March 2: Broadband grant application submitted

3. Late Spring - Early summer: Grant awards announced