



# EXTENSION IMPACT

## Supporting County Government to Address Broadband Needs

The Dane County Board of Supervisors established the Dane County Broadband task force in 2021 to study access and affordability of broadband in the rural areas of the county. The chair of the task force requested Dane County Extension involvement in helping to plan for task force meetings and facilitate components of those meetings. The task force met for over a year to study the issues and to establish recommendations to the County Board about how to increase Broadband access to those households that lack or have inadequate access to broadband. Year two of the effort is focused on affordability and putting in place structures for implementation of the recommendations.

In response, Sharon Lezberg, Dane County Extension Community Development Educator, supported the Broadband Task Force with planning and facilitation. She coordinated the collaboration with the Survey Research Center at University of Wisconsin-River Falls to develop a survey of rural populations regarding broadband access and affordability.

The Broadband Task Force continues to meet monthly to address the recommendations developed during year one. Extension is part of a team that is building capacity within the County to build a more viable broadband network. Lezberg continues to support the Broadband Task Force through collaboration with other staff members and committee members on planning and communications. Lezberg is part of an Extension team working to address Broadband development statewide.

The Broadband Task Force has advanced the County's response to insufficient infrastructure by detailing the extent of the problem, establishing a map of current infrastructure, and developing recommendations to improve the existing infrastructure so all residents and businesses have access to reliable broadband services.

### The Task Force has accomplished the following:

- Implemented a survey of the rural population to better understand limitations of the current infrastructure
- Developed recommendations as to how the County can support a comprehensive broadband infrastructure
- Hired a consulting firm to conduct a broadband infrastructure engineering assessment to map existing coverage; analyze costs, timelines, business models, and range of high-speed technologies; and coordinate broadband expansion with local units of government
- Secured County Board approval to create a Broadband Coordinator position within the Planning Department

The work of the Broadband task force is ongoing. By the end of 2023, they anticipate having a clear sense of which areas to target for infrastructure development. The newly hired Broadband coordinator will be in place to support municipalities in developing grant proposals for broadband infrastructure development. The project will be successful if Dane County is able to create an equitable, reliable, and comprehensive broadband network capable of addressing the telecommunication needs for the 21st century.

## Extension supports leaders in improving the overall functioning of local governments

*“Sharon Lezberg has been an integral part of the Dane County Broadband Task Force (BBTF). Sharon has so many strengths: an ability to pull out a systematic approach to a messy confusing problem; collaboration with other task force members and a particular skill in drawing them out in their diverse expertise areas. Sharon is able to hold onto the big picture while tending to the minutiae of discerning a solution for a complex and multi layered problem. And on top of all that, Sharon is an amazing group facilitator and recorder of task force responses and ideas. Our Dane County Broadband Task Force would likely not be nearly as far ahead as we are, without Sharon’s expertise, intellect, problem solving, and people skills. We can’t thank Sharon enough for her continued contributions to our BBTF.”*

Dane County Board Supervisors:  
Melissa Ratcliff, Current and Past Chair of BBTF  
Jeff Glazer, Current Vice Chair of BBTF  
Kate McGinnity, Past Vice Chair and current member of BBTF



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