



A Pennsylvania Local Development District

PRESS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

Northwest Commission Awarded Broadband Funding

The Northwest Pennsylvania Regional Planning and Development Commission was notified on May 14, that it will receive a \$171,000 grant to provide broadband outreach, education, and technical assistance. This marks the third consecutive funding period the Commission has received grant funding under the “Broadband Outreach and Aggregation Fund” (BOAF) program. The funding is provided by the Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) through fees paid to the Commonwealth by certain phone companies. Program activities will be conducted between May 1, 2010, and November 2011.

The Commission will work with several other organizations to utilize these funds to the full advantage of the northwest Pennsylvania region. These organizations include the Technology Council of Northwest Pennsylvania, the Growth Partnership division of the Erie Regional Chamber & Growth Partnership, and PA Futures. W. Randy Rice, Director of Community Development and Planning for the Commission says, “This is the first time we’ve been asked to partner with this many different organizations on a BOAF project. I regard this as a testament to the dedication of these organizations and the importance they attribute to high-speed Internet access.”

Prominent among the responsibilities of the Commission is to continue its work with the Bona Fide Retail Request (BFRR) program. Under the provisions of this program a community may “petition” their respective phone company for high-speed Internet service. The petition obligates a residential customer to subscribe to at least one year of high-speed Internet service once the phone company makes it available. When the required number of petitions are completed within a community the telephone company is required, by law, to install high-speed Internet service within 365 days. The Commission will focus its attention on communities that have initiated this process, but not yet completed it to the point to trigger deployment. “There are several dozen communities within the region that are only a few forms away from triggering deployment,” says Rice. “Our commitment to the DCED is to assist at least 15 communities in meeting their deployment goal.” Additionally, the Commission will conduct municipal broadband surveys in 265 municipalities in Northwest PA. The surveys are designed to gather information about broadband and related service availability, subscribership, and pricing. Finally, the Commission will conduct extensive education and outreach to promote high-speed Internet service adoption.

The Technology Council will focus its efforts on conducting highly focused technology assessments within municipalities in Erie County. These assessments will be used to develop an “aggregation plan” whereby municipalities, individual companies, and clusters of businesses could strategically collaborate to achieve potentially significant savings on high-speed Internet access and related services. Additionally, the Council will provide training facilities for training of municipal officials.



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The Growth Partnership division of the Erie Regional Chamber & Growth Partnership and PA Futures have a well-established history of working together to facilitate technology solutions in both Erie and surrounding counties. These two organizations will take leadership for coordinating the implementation of a municipal communications portal designed to lend specific efficiencies to municipal administration. The “eGovernment” is a concept that has been deployment in many larger cities to significantly reduce costs associated with municipal administration. Cost savings are achieved through sharing assets that can be connected over a high-speed Internet connection. Document management will be the initial focus of the effort.

For additional information about the award or project, individuals should contact W. Randy Rice at the Northwest PA Regional Planning and Development Commission’s Clarion office at 814.297.7158 x105 or by email at randyr@nwcommission.org.

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Established in 1967, the Northwest Commission is a regional resource for business and economic development as well as community development and planning. The non-profit agency is composed of a team of skilled professionals dedicated to sustaining economic vitality and growth in the northwest Pennsylvania region by fostering local, state, and federal partnerships across public and private sector lines. The Northwest Commission provides programs such as business financing, government contracting, international marketing, grants, transportation, and technology assistance to eight counties in northwest Pennsylvania including: Clarion, Crawford, Erie, Forest, Lawrence, Mercer, Venango, and Warren.

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