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# More cell towers heading to Summit County and Breckenridge?

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Summit County and the town of Breckenridge are making small strides forward in the fight to get better broadband service.

A broadband update was presented during the county commissioners work session on Jan. 24. The county had put together a request for information in December, getting responses from eight different wireless companies. County Commissioner Karn Stieglemeier said that some of the companies were willing to work with the more populated areas of Summit, but not the rural areas. Many of the companies say the areas don't make financial sense. (<http://www.summitdaily.com/news/local/summit-county-cellphone-coverage-woes-to-continue/>)

"It's a basic utility that should be provided to everyone, but that's not the way we do it in this country, it is for profit," she said. "We continue to struggle with that."

The county has currently entered into a nondisclosure agreement with a company that could potentially partner to help build cellular towers. Stieglemeier said that they are looking at locations in Montezuma and the Lower Blue, two of the areas in the county that have difficulties receiving service.

During the retreat meeting on Tuesday, the Breckenridge Town Council discussed their next steps for broadband. During the November election season, voters passed ballot measure 2A by a landslide, (<http://www.summitdaily.com/news/breckenridge-to-vote-on-broadband-ballot-measure/>) which made the town exempt from Colorado Senate Bill 152. The bill prevents towns and municipalities throughout the state from seeking funding to create their own broadband networks. Summit County passed a similar measure the year before. (<http://www.summitdaily.com/news/business/breckenridge-looks-into-potential-for-better-broadband-infrastructure/>)

The council approved rolling \$75,000 into this year's budget to seek partners in potentially funding broadband projects.

Breckenridge is taking its first steps toward seeking broadband independence (<http://www.summitdaily.com/news/breckenridge-passes-broadband->

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ballot-measure-in-landslide-vote/). After 2A passed, Breckenridge joined the county's request for information. Brian Waldes, the director of finance in Breckenridge, said that the town is hoping to partner with the county.

"The county has a different set of needs than the town of Breck does, but there's still that potential that we could find the same partner that can address them both," Waldes said. "At this really early stage, that's the hope."

While the county is trying to fix the gaps in service, the town of Breckenridge is focusing on bringing better Wi-Fi to the town. Waldes said that Wi-Fi services may help with some of the cellular capacity issues that the town sees during peak season.

The county has been seeking to improve its broadband service since passing the measure in 2015. The county hired communications consulting CTC Technology and Energy, to do a feasibility study and to find service gaps. Areas in Summit Cove, Montezuma and the Lower Blue were found to have little coverage.

The county began working with AT&T in 2014 to build two cellular towers in locations that would serve these communities. But the company backed out, saying that its business model has shifted away from single tower builds.

In addition to the potential construction of cell towers, Stieglemeier said that the county is investigating white space, which enables a community to use television channels that are not being broadcast on for wireless.

"We're looking at that as a possibility, a combination of towers and using this white space as a way to get at least wireless to the big chunk of the Lower Blue," she said.

Towns in Rio Blanco County may have found another possible solution to broadband woes. The county publicly funded the build-out of a network infrastructure. Their new service, which went live in January, offers one gigabyte of the fiber connection to residents and local businesses in Rangely and Meeker. The towns have brought in a third party to manage and maintain the service.

Nate Walowitz, the regional broadband coordinator for the Northwest Council of Colorado Government, said that Rio Blanco had been running into similar issues with broadband companies not finding the area to be financially viable. So the county went its own route. He added that those towns are now in the process of looking at either expanding current towers, or building a new one in order to provide cellular service to the more rural residents outside of Meeker and Rangely.

"It's a model that could potentially be duplicated and leveraged for use in Summit County," Walowitz said.

The council has been working with counties across the northwestern portion of the state in bettering broadband services. The county has been working with the organization and during Tuesday's meeting, the Breckenridge Town Council directed staff to work with them as well.

"They have a lot of knowledge in this area, they know where a lot of the fiber is in the ground already, they also know what's coming down the pike in

terms of statewide expansions of fiber networks and who's going to own it and how you can partner with them. Because it's not just in town, if you're going to have for example this Wi-Fi bubble in Breckenridge, this Wi-Fi bubble also has to get back to the internet itself," Waldes said.

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