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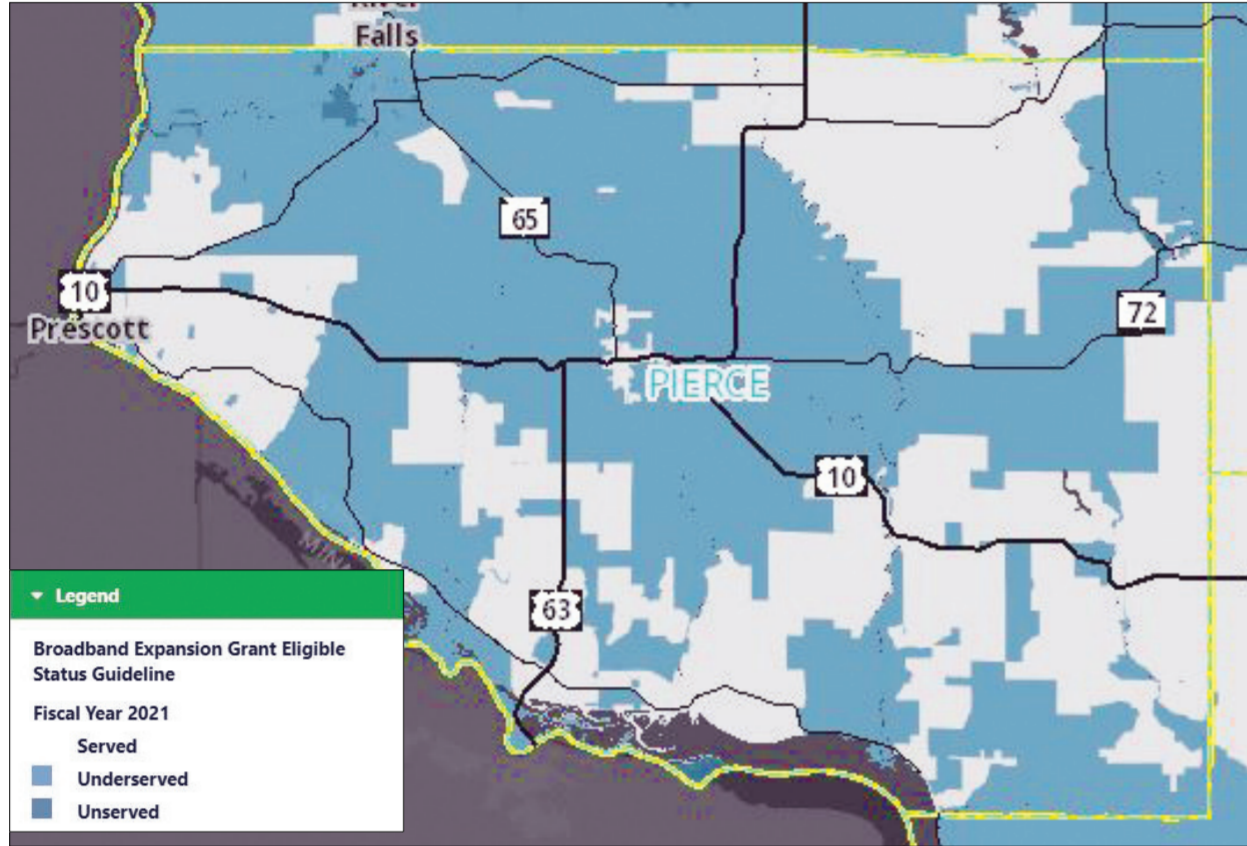


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THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2021

## Western Wisconsin needs broadband: local groups champion for the cause



This map from the PSC shows underserved and unserved parts of Pierce County in light blue and blue. More areas may even be underserved than are indicated. Submitted photo

By Cari Cornelius

Sun-Argus/ Gateway News

PIERCE COUNTY, WI -- Several groups in Pierce County are working diligently to bring the issue of broadband access to light. While legislators discuss this often, little action has been taken to push the project forward and get broadband to rural areas lacking access. This necessity has become even more prevalent during the Coronavirus pandemic with residents working from home, children attending virtual school, and many people utilizing telehealth to receive medical care.

According to the Federal Communications Commission, the term broadband commonly refers to high-speed Internet access that is always on and faster than the traditional dial-up access. The current standard for broadband is at least 25 megabits per second (mbps) download speed, and 3 mbps upload speed. Different options currently exist for broadband, including Digital subscriber line (DSL), Cable, Satellite, Fiber and others. Unfortunately, in rural Wisconsin, missing infrastructure required to receive these ser-

vices is a problem. While some companies advertise access, several areas that are listed as part of their service area do not have the speed capacity that meets the standard.

**Broadband Forward Designation**

While some areas in Pierce County have broadband access, there are still those without. The Wisconsin Public Service Commission (PSC) has established a program called "Broadband Forward!" encouraging local municipalities to take a forward-thinking approach to making their communities accessible to Broadband. Several of these presentations have appeared on the local township and village agendas within Pierce and Western Wisconsin counties.

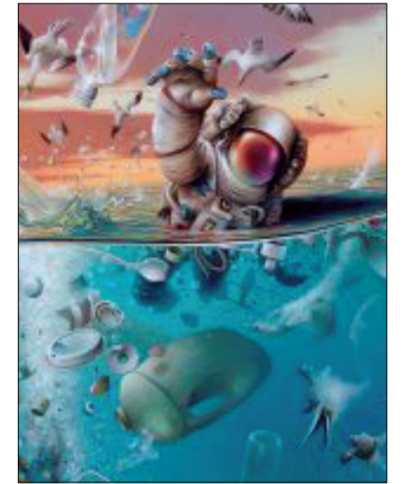
According to the PSC, "Broadband access is increasingly important to our economy, education, and daily life. The state as a whole - citizens, governments, providers, schools and businesses - have an interest in expanding broadband access and usage in underserved areas of the state."

The commission has been authorized to receive these ser-

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What's inside...



PAGE 4: New exhibitions open at the Phipps Center for the Arts. Submitted photo

Photo of the week



White Tank Mountain Regional Park, AZ. Photo by Kathy Nyeggen

Submit your photos to editor@mygateway.news for a chance to have them picked as Photo of the Week!

FINAL results from this month's

### Reader Poll

Do you support the halting of the Keystone Pipeline?

Yes - 31%

No - 69%

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## 'Silvopasture' movement reaches Wisconsin farms

Mike Moen, Wisconsin News Connection

MADISON, WI -- As brutal cold gripped the upper Midwest, some farm animals were getting protection from the wind in forested settings.

They're being raised through a form of sustainable agriculture that's gaining attention in Wisconsin.

Ag researchers say "silvopasture" has long been popular in Europe, and is catching on in the U.S.

It integrates trees, forage and grazing livestock. Producers can either strategically plant trees in a pasture, or have their animals rotate through existing woodlands.

Diane Mayerfeld, senior outreach specialist for the University of Wisconsin Extension, said it benefits livestock by helping protect them from extreme cold or the summer heat, and it can improve a farmer's bottom line.

"Having those three different systems means you have an additional source of income," Mayerfeld explained. "Either income from the trees in addition to the livestock, or income from the livestock in addition to the trees."



Agriculture experts say "silvopasture" is a form of agroforestry that provides environmental benefits but can also improve a farm's financial health. In Wisconsin, it can reduce a farmer's property taxes, too. (ufl.edu)

Michael Fields Agricultural Institute shared information with livestock producers in a panel discussion this winter.

Other partners included the Conservation Professional Training Program, the Iowa County Farmer-Led Uplands Watershed Group, and

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## Now accepting 2021 Grant Applications to Master Gardeners Association

Applications due Monday March 8, 2021

Submitted by Jenny Brazzale, SCVMGA

PIERCE and ST. CROIX COUNTY, WI -- The mission of St. Croix Valley Master Gardeners Association (SCVMGA) is to provide community service through education, environmental stewardship, and provide information on horticulture to the residents of Pierce and St. Croix counties.

The Grant Committee is currently accepting applications for 2021 SCVMGA Community Service Grants. The SCVMGA will consider applications for the following: beautification of public spaces, horticultural education of the public, community gardens, and/or youth horticulture education. We have \$4,000 to give away in grants for gardening projects in Pierce and St. Croix Counties.

Applications are due Monday

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Prescott elementary students work on an assignment in their outdoor classroom. Funds for the expansion of their butterfly garden were provided by a 2020 community grant through the St Croix Valley Master Gardener Association. Submitted photo

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## Senior advocates optimistic about WI budget proposal

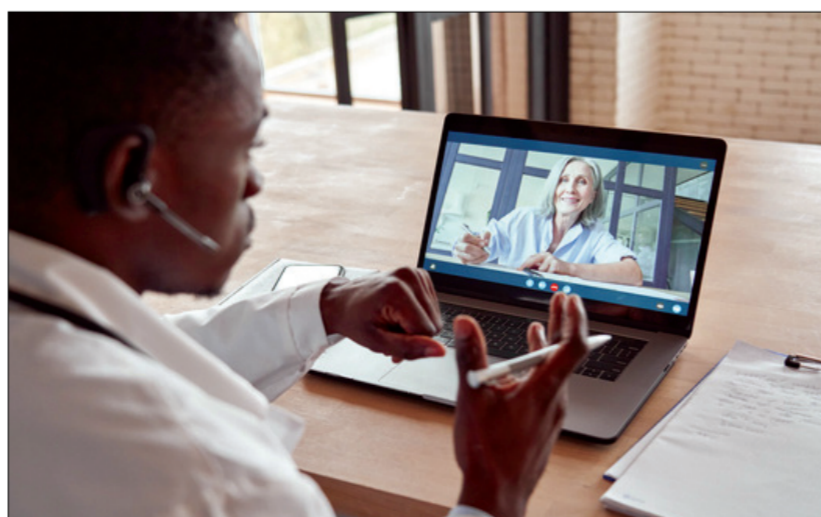
Broadband access, could get bipartisan support  
By Mike Moen, Wisconsin News Connection

MADISON, WI -- Wisconsin's debate over the next state budget is far from over, but the spending plan outlined by Democratic Gov. Tony Evers has strong support from advocates of older residents.

Helen Marks Dicks, state issues advocacy director for AARP Wisconsin, said her group was encouraged to see provisions like a tax credit for family caregivers as well as \$200 million to enhance broadband internet access.

She pointed out it has become a key issue for residents 50 and older with no e-mail address, which is required for vaccination appointments.

"It's a fine example of how not having broadband has taken what should be a simple, social, important thing to do, which is to get older people vaccinated and have barriers in the way that we haven't dealt with," Dicks explained.



Groups like AARP Wisconsin say Governor Evers' plan for more broadband spending could pave the way for more telehealth visits. (Adobe Stock).jpg

Meanwhile, AARP has long advocated for more support for caregivers.

Dicks acknowledged while the \$500 tax credit proposed by Evers is smaller than they'd hoped for, it's a step in the right direction.

Republicans control the

Legislature and have already suggested they would block several provisions. But political observers say certain pieces, such as broadband access, could get bipartisan support.

During the last budget cycle, Republicans ignored several of

Continued on Page 10...

## Helping Texas and other areas experiencing winter weather and power outages

Submitted by the Better Business Bureau

MILWAUKEE, WI -- The Better Business Bureau (BBB) offers giving guidance to those seeking to help people who lost power, heat and/or water as a result of the snow and cold weather that hit Texas and other states. Among other things, BBB recommends donors give a cash donation to BBB Accredited Charities engaged in assistance those in need.

As Texas and other parts of the country have been hit with snow and bitterly cold weather, millions have lost power, heat and/or water. Many donors are seeking ways to help those in need.

As always, we encourage donors to visit Give.org to verify if the charity they choose to support meets the BBB Standards for Charity Accountability (<https://give.org/charity-landing-page/bbb-standards-for-charity-accountability>).

Instead of clicking on links that



Feeding America (is a BBB Accredited Charity) is active in providing groceries to those in need. Submitted photo

others may send you in texts and social media, consider making a cash donation through the charity's own website. In an emergency situation, this is likely the fastest way of sending help. In-kind donations of supplies may be well intended but can sometimes be difficult and costly to manage if the charity does not already have an established means to help distribute them to those in need.

Shelters and Emergency Centers - To help locate available shelters, the

two following organizations are a good place to start as they have local affiliates around the country:

American Red Cross (a BBB Accredited Charity) has announced how they are providing assistance across multiple states. The Red Cross states that in a number of areas it is also providing cots, blankets, water and ready-to-eat meals when requested. For more information, see: <https://www.redcross.org/>

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.../BROADBAND' cont. from Page 1

ized to certify communities as being "broadband ready." This means the local government has taken steps to reduce obstacles to broadband infrastructure investment. This entails the entity passing an ordinance that satisfy the requirements under Wis. Stat 196.504 (4). The PSC states, "This certification ensures that the local unit of government has streamlined its administrative procedures by appointing a single point of contact for all matters relating to a broadband network project, adhering to a timely approval process, charging only reasonable fees for reviewing applications and issuing permits, imposing only reasonable conditions on a permit and not discriminating between telecommunication service providers."

In "The White Paper: Exploring the benefits of High-Speed Broadband for Pierce County" provided by Joe Folsom, Executive Director of the Pierce County Economic Development Corporation (PCEDC), several steps are outlined to help accelerate broadband growth. Number one on this list: Support and apply for the Broadband Forward! Certification offered by the State of Wisconsin's Public Service Commission.

**Getting the word out**

A recent "Broadband Forward!" presentation was completed by Folsom at the Town of Gilman February meeting. Gilman, on the outskirts of the Village of Spring Valley is an area that is fortunately serviced by the local telephone and broadband provider, Spring Valley Telephone. While Gilman is a rural township, the residents are fortunate enough to have access to the critical service of broadband.

The Sun-Argus reached out to Spring Valley Telephone and spoke with Steve Marek about the issue of broadband, and why the Town of Gilman has access while other municipalities on the borders of larger entities do not.

One point of interest was to whether the company footed the expansion bill themselves or was able to utilize a grant. According to Marek, Spring Valley Telephone

chose to install their own fiber lines utilizing a loan of approximately 6 million dollars around 2009-2010. When asked if they have ever utilized any of the state grants in place, Marek replied, "The grants are actually somewhat difficult to get. There is much paperwork and hoops to jump through to receive one, so we just opted to do the work and foot the bill ourselves."

The loan they received enabled them to be able to run fiber to more than just Spring Valley - including the Town of Gilman - giving hundreds of Pierce County residents access to broadband. In the years since the expansion, they have added faster broadband options - a tool vital for businesses located in these rural areas.

While the company would like to expand further to help serve residents in other rural townships like El Paso and Olivet, right now it's about supply and demand - as well as infrastructure.

The Town of Gilman is not alone in receiving this presentation from Folsom. So far, he has brought the Broadband Forward model ordinance to the Town boards of Martell and River Falls. A presentation is also scheduled for the Town of Ellsworth. Currently, Martell has adopted the ordinance, it is in process for the Town of River Falls, and it is on the agenda for the March meeting in the Town of Gilman.

According to Folsom, he became aware of the Broadband Forward! Program through his work as the Executive Director of the PCEDC, but he is also a member of a newly emerged Facebook group, called "Western Wisconsin Needs Broadband."

Folsom said, "We approached the County a year ago for a county Broadband Forward designation but, were turned down. We were planning on approaching the town boards in the areas needing broadband when the Western Wisconsin Needs Broadband Facebook group materialized. This grassroots organization provides a means by which residents can move this initiative forward in their respective townships." Said Folsom.

**Grants and Initiatives**

While receiving a Broadband Forward designation does not solve the broadband access problem, it can make receiving a grant to fund the required projects easier. According to Jerel Ballard, of the PSC, "Grants are evaluated on seven statutorily defined priority factors. Matching funds, public-private partnerships, existing broadband service (unserved), project impact scalability, economic development, and effect upon broadband service to adjacent areas."

Applicants for these grants can meet one of these seven criteria by demonstrating a public-private partnership, which the Broadband Forward designation does. In addition to these criteria when someone submits an application for a broadband grant, Ballard also stated, "As part of weighing the above factors, the evaluation committee and Commission will consider the following: The total number of persons served by a given application when compared to applications of equal priority. The degree to which the proposed project will duplicate existing broadband infrastructure. The degree to which the proposed project will enhance the ability of individuals to access health care service from home. The degree to which the proposed project will enhance the ability of students to access educational opportunities from home. The download and upload transmission speeds the application proposes to provide. The degree to which the application demonstrates that the broadband service provider is prepared, from both an operational and financial perspective, to undertake the proposed project."

Once an application is submitted, the general timeframe for the materials to be reviewed is approximately three to four months.

While different information is available regarding what areas of Pierce County have true broadband access, I shared a map with Folsom obtained from the PSC website indicating which areas of Pierce are underserved for broadband access. His response, "The grey area on the map you shared constitutes the

majority of the underserved area, most of which is area that historically has had telecommunications service from Centurylink and ATT. Accurate broadband service maps are not available. Areas theoretically served by fixed wireless offering the speeds shown on the map are theoretically provided but, due to factors such as terrain, trees, weather, and volume, limit being able to meet those delivery parameters. The conclusion: Western Wisconsin needs broadband."

To learn more about limited broadband access, you can visit [www.psc.wi.gov](http://www.psc.wi.gov) to view maps, grant applications and more. You can join the discussion in the Facebook group "Western Wisconsin Needs Broadband," or you can speak with your local municipality board about adopting the Broadband Forward Designation.

.../SILVOPASTURE' cont. from Page 1

the Savanna Institute.

Keefe Keeley, co-executive director of the Institute, which advocates for more Midwestern farmers to adopt agroforestry, said there's a lot of trial and error, including keeping livestock from stomping over growing trees.

But he emphasized it isn't a reason for farmers to stop trying.

"When you're talking about climate change and how do we get more atmospheric carbon in our landscapes, planting trees in open pastures is where that possibility is really strong," Keeley contended.

According to the most recent Ag-Census Survey ([https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Full\\_Report/Volume\\_1\\_Chapter\\_1\\_State\\_Level/Wisconsin/](https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Full_Report/Volume_1_Chapter_1_State_Level/Wisconsin/)), nearly 1,100 Wisconsin farms said they practiced some form of agroforestry, and while researchers say it's hard to determine how much of that is silvopasture, they estimate it accounts for a significant portion.

.../GRANTS' cont. from Page 1

March 8, 2021. Grant awards will be announced by Thursday, April 22, 2021. The 2021 Community Grant

application with instructions and project specifications is available online at [www.scvmga.weebly.com](http://www.scvmga.weebly.com). and can be found under the "Forms" tab on the left-hand navigation of the site. For questions, please email Jenny Brazzale at [jenbrazzale@yahoo.com](mailto:jenbrazzale@yahoo.com).

.../SENIORS' cont. from Page 1

Ever's proposals. However, Dicks believes the impact of the pandemic might open the door to more bipartisanship.

During his address, Evers cited some of the effect as he issued pleas for support.

"People across our state and country spent the better part of the last year worried," Evers stated. "Worried about how you'll see a doctor or afford your prescriptions."

Lowering prescription drug costs is another provision supported by AARP.

Dicks said because a lot of the issues have been studied by special task forces in recent years, it shouldn't require a lengthy debate on whether to act.

"So we're in a good position to move forward and resolve some of these problems," Dicks stressed.

The state has until July first to finalize a new budget, which would cover the next two fiscal years.

.../TEXAS' cont. from Page 1

[about-us/news-and-events/news/2021/red-cross-responds-to-winter-storms.html](http://about-us/news-and-events/news/2021/red-cross-responds-to-winter-storms.html).

Salvation Army (the national office is a BBB Accredited Charity) also indicated they are providing warming centers in some areas. Check with their local affiliates for additional information about specific assistance available in a particular community. <https://disaster.salvationarmyusa.org/news/2021/02/13/the-salvation-army-midland-division-warming-centers-are-open-in-missouri-and-illinois->

Food Banks - Feeding America (a BBB Accredited Charity) is active in providing groceries to those in need. One can access a directory of food banks via this link: <https://www.feedingamerica.org/find-your-local-foodbank>.

org/find-your-local-foodbank.

Crowdfunding - There are already crowdfunding campaigns being set up for those in need on sites like GoFundMe. While some may be drawn to providing direct assistance to individuals, we offer the following tips:

Give to people and organizations you know. It is safest to give to crowdfunding postings of people you personally know. If that is not possible, consider a posting that is being managed by an established charitable organization that can be checked out.

Not all crowdfunding sites operate alike. Some crowdfunding platforms do a better job of vetting postings and projects that appear on their site than others. Review the site's description of its procedures. If they do take precautions, they generally announce that fact loudly to help encourage giving.

See if the posting describes how funds will be used. Vague descriptions of how the collected funds will be used should also be a yellow caution light. Thoughtful collections will take the added step of identifying and verifying needs before money is raised.

Don't assume pictures represent an official connection to the person or family identified. Unfortunately, some crowdfunding postings may be using pictures of needy individuals without their permission. As a result, you can't assume an official connection. Again, each site has different rules on what they allow.

Your contribution may not be deductible as a charitable gift. If a crowdfunding posting is claiming to be helping a specific named individual or family, donors in the U.S. generally cannot take a federal income tax deduction, even if the individual or family is in need. See IRS Publication 526, for more information on this subject.



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