July 30, 2021

Kathleen McNamara  
St. James Township Supervisor  
P.O. Box 85  
Beaver Island, MI 49782

RE: NTIA’s Support Can Connect Beaver Island to the World

Dear Ms. McNamara:

Next Century Cities is a 501(c)(3) focused on supporting over 200 local governments across the country who are prioritizing broadband access and adoption in their communities. We commend cities like Beaver Island, where local leadership envisions a project that would bring broadband Internet access to the most remote inhabited island in the Great Lakes. Though connectivity challenges on Beaver Island are persistent and pervasive, they are solvable.

Beaver Island’s application to the US Department of Commerce’s National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) Broadband Infrastructure Program is an innovative and ambitious proposal that would expand vital connectivity while providing a model for other remote communities. Partnering with the local electric cooperative, Great Lakes Energy, to build an island-wide fiber to the home (FTTH) network and appropriate backhaul to the mainland is an essential and timely proposal which, with NTIA’s support, will equip residents and businesses with the connectivity they need for full societal participation.

The NTIA Broadband Infrastructure Program is intended to enable affordable, reliable, high-quality Internet access in expensive and difficult to reach areas like Beaver Island. Broadband is an essential service for Beaver Island’s 550 year-round residents, 3,000 seasonal residents, and over 30,000 annual visitors, who currently rely on outdated and expensive DSL service which cannot provide the Internet access residents need now or in the coming decades.

Broadband connectivity empowers local economic development efforts and supports residents in various aspects of their lives. The current minimum broadband speed is not enough to support most business functions, and Beaver Island’s businesses lack even baseline broadband access. Fast, robust, and reliable Internet enables local small businesses to compete and thrive in a rapidly changing economy.

Similarly, families rely on Internet access to be able to age in place. Instead of having to leave Beaver Island to find educational, economic, and wellness opportunities, resident should be able to stay and give back to the community. Robust telelearning prepares students for the 21st Century job market. Remote work opens the door to the global economy for those living in and visiting Beaver Island. Telemedicine enhances overall public health and supports ongoing at-home care.
Affordable fiber service provided through Beaver Island’s proposal could make reliable, high-speed Internet access available for to 90% of the Island’s households and businesses through state-of-the-art technology capable of long-term upgrades.

NTIA’s support for this project could enable an inventive, resilient community to connect nearly all of Beaver Island, a place that has remained without adequate broadband access for far too long. Next Century Cities fully supports Beaver Island’s proposal and implores NTIA to invest in a thoughtful partnership that will reap multifarious benefits for residents, businesses, and visitors far into the future.

Sincerely,

Next Century Cities