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EP well represented on Broadband Task Force

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What does it say about Eden Prairie that two of the 20 appointed members of the recently formed statewide Ultra High-Speed **Broadband** Task Force are from the city? "That we take this issue as a community pretty seriously," said City Manager Scott Neal.

Neal said that many businesses in Eden Prairie depend on a reliable high-speed **broadband** network.

As for Eden Prairie, a city task force concluded that most residents have two choices of **broadband** service, usually a DSL choice or a cable modem choice. In addition, many businesses, especially in the Golden Triangle, have as many as five or six choices of providers.

Neal said that Eden Prairie would like to have that many choices available to the entire business community and is looking for ways to encourage private providers to actively build networks here.

"That's one of the main things that group is working on," he said of the new task force.

Rick King of Eden Prairie, executive vice president and chief operations officer of Thomson Reuters North American Legal, is chair of the task force and representative of metropolitan area business citizens at-large.

King agreed that creating a goal for the expansion of **broadband** networks is one of the tasks of the group. The group is to create a recommendation for a policy and goal for the state on **broadband** by November 2009.

He expects the group's final report to include goals for speed and availability as well as timelines for achieving those goals.

His involvement in the issue came about as he and others from Thomson Reuters worked on the creation of the initial law, testifying in its favor, mobilizing others in the industry to support it and encouraging other legislators to support it, he said.

He said of himself and his employer, "We believe that, in order to have the best kind of employees to recruit from in the community that we need to continue to have a real advantageous high-tech work environment and that a solid high-speed **broadband** network is a key element of that technology infrastructure."

would bring more companies with technology-oriented jobs to the community.

In addition, he said his business was interested in making sure that employees could work from home with the same access to products and tools, like videoconferencing, used at work.

"That is to our advantage as a business when we set out to recruit people," he said.

King said he would continue his work on Eden Prairie's Flying Cloud Airport Advisory Commission and Budget Advisory Commission. King is also on the board of trustees of the Science Museum of Minnesota and a board member of the University of Minnesota China Center. He said he is not interested in pursuing elected office.

"What I've said to elected officials is that I'm here to help in an appointed manner however I can for the city or the State. I don't have any interest in running for office," he said.

"I'm just glad there are people that want to."

King is familiar with controversy after his work on the Airport Commission. He said that he could anticipate a few contentious issues on this task force as well. One issue that he expects to come up is with municipalities that are interested in being their own service provider.

"It's safe to say that the industry side does not think that's a great idea."

He said another issue is working with current providers who have the most invested in current technology.

"You can't just jump away from where you are today. You have to evolve cognizant of the investment you've made," he said.

Eden Prairie resident Joanne Johnson is also on the committee. As manager of government and external relations for the central region states with Frontier Communications, she is a representative of telephone companies on the commission.

Johnson said she works on lobbying, as well as with local communities to implement programs like training on using **broadband** to its fullest.

She said she is impressed that Minnesota included a medium sized provider like Frontier on the task force.

"We're just thrilled to be part of the conversation," she said.

She said that Minnesota has a lot of potential and is starting from a "great place."

"Minnesota is poised to be extremely successful in trying to tout itself as a technologically sophisticated place to live, educate your children and start a business," she said.

"That is probably the overriding goal for everybody on the task force."

She said she expects an "inclusive, comprehensive look at how we're going to get to the top of the heap."

"**Broadband** is a great thing. I hope we can promote the state's welfare as well as we can promote the technology itself."

The group's first meeting is set for Aug. 15. For those interested in learning more about the commission, information is to be posted at www.ultra-highspeed-mn.org. Staff writer Leah Shaffer contributed to this story.

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