



County of Augusta
Internet Initiative (Broadband Committee)
PO Box 590
Verona, VA 24482

Thursday, January 28, 2021 7:00 pm
In Person and Via Electronic Means Due to COVID-19

MINUTES

PRESENT: Mr. Lawhorne, Riverheads District
Mr. Carter, South River District
Mr. Henderson, Pastures District
Mr. Kirby, Wayne District
Ms. Thornton, North River District
Ms. Carter, Board of Supervisors Liaison
Ms. Whetzel, Deputy County Administrator
Ms. Kiracofe, Asst. Superintendent for Instruction & Technology

ABSENT: Mr. Powell, Middle River District
Mr. Journell, Beverly Manor District

VIRGINIA: At the regular meeting of the Augusta County Internet Initiative (Broadband Committee) held on Thursday, January 28, 2021 at 7:00pm via in person and electronic means. The Government Center was open to the public on the date of the meeting but some attendees participated through electronic means due to COVID-19.

Call to Order

Meeting started at 7:00pm. A quorum was present.

Adoption of the Minutes

Minutes of the December 3, 2020 meeting were not approved as a physical quorum was not present in accordance with Electron Meeting Policy.

Comments by the Public

Each member of the public was given the opportunity to speak by roll call.

Bill Rogers inquired about movement on last mile installations on the east side of I-81.

Barley and McQuillans spoke to service on east side of I-81 and information needed for future grant funding.

David Smith with Lumos noted that they are interested in getting more involved in Committee meetings and of the ACAM funding for future fiber builds. Lumos is interested in presenting at a future Committee meeting.

Craig Smith of MGW Networks spoke of community mindfulness and working with other providers.

Paul Comes of Comcast noted that they look at data as it relates to County RFIs and that Comcast has been successful in writing grants on other rural projects.

Special Presentations

None

Matters to be Presented by Sub-Committees

None

Matters to be Presented by Staff

CARES Fast Track Broadband Update – At the December meeting Ms. Whetzel reviewed the project areas on the map, total project cost, and grant amount. On December 23, 2020 Congress extended the deadline for expending state and local government CARES Act funding from Dec. 30, 2020 to December 31, 2021. Project were originally set to be completed Dec. 25, 2020. New Hope Telephone Project - Staff received notification that the project was complete (construction, splicing and testing) on December 17, 2020. Installations began on Monday, December 21, 2020. Company was paid in full (grant and County match) on January 6, 2021. Lingo Networks Projects – #1 Swoope Tower and 36 FTTH – Tower contractor finished installing equipment on the Swoope Tower on December 18, 2020 and Lingo Networks aligned equipment on December 21, 2020. Current Lingo customers in the tower service area can be upgraded to use the new equipment and as of December 30, 2020, new customers are added as service inquiries come in. #2 36 FTTH Installation – Easements were finalized and fiber splicers were working on getting service to new customers. Project #1 – Swoope Tower will be paid in full (grant and County match) February 9, 2021. Project #2 – 65% has been paid to date (grant and County match).

VATI Action items since Dec 3 meeting:

- Dec 8, 2020 Ms. Whetzel received notification from DHCD that Rural Digital Opportunity Fund auction results were released. County areas appear to be a Cooperative to south and SpaceX in other areas.
- Dec 16, 2020 DHCD requested GIS shapefiles for the project areas in the VATI application. Ms. Whetzel sent MGW and RBNS files (from providers) to DHCD on December 31, 2020. MGW's files were accepted immediately by DHCD as working files matching the application. Staff worked with RBNS and County GIS to prepare shapefiles for RBNS application. They were submitted January 7, 2021 and accepted by DHCD.
- Dec 22, 2020 Ms. Whetzel received notification from DHCD re: VATI guidelines regarding the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF). Forwarded the letter to RBNS and MGW. MGW responded that they thought they were in the 4th paragraph (several applications were unaffected by RDOF).
- January 26, 2021 Governor's office announced 5 awards for VATI grant. More awards are forthcoming after consideration of RDOF and re-scope.

Mr. Martin, Director of the Augusta County Service Authority, solicited comments from the Committee concerning the future of a cellular tower adjacent to the White Hill Water Storage Tank. Several parties are interested in the tower and a public process will be followed to sell or lease the tower. The Authority Committee will meet and make a decision next week. They are in the business of water and sewer and not in the business of owning cell towers. Ms. Whetzel noted that if a provider goes on the tower they will investigate the structural condition and follow zoning requirements. A lease would be income to the Authority. Mr. Lawhorne noted that the tower should be in the hands of a private provider.

Senator Warner has sponsored a Senate Bill 4131 to make high-speed broadband internet service accessible and affordable to all Americans, and for other purposes. As of 07/01/2020 it was read twice and referred to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation. He also co-Sponsored Senate Bill 4411 to amend the Communications Act of 1934 to establish in the Federal Communications Commission the Broadband Development Grant Program. As of 08/04/2020 it was read twice and referred to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

DHCD distributed information about the EPIC Grant Program on January 27, 2021. Applications are due February, 2021 19. Ms. Whetzel inquired as to definition of community.



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Ms. Whetzel read an e-mail from the Wrights about their success in getting internet service to their residence by working with a provider in their area, utilizing their stimulus funds from the Federal government, and including a neighbor.

The Committee has inquired as to the role of Economic Development and the Economic Development Authority in broadband. The department assists in gathering information for writing grants. They also support the Staunton Creative Community Fund and Small Business Development Center in supporting small business. The Authority is the conduit for grants to private businesses for broadband and will consider Agreements and received updates as projects arise.

Ms. Whetzel inquired as to a budget request for the County's FY2022 budget. Ms. Carter noted that the cost to create a plan to improve service throughout the entire County. A Plan would be helpful to seek out funding sources.

Shentel is offering a service called Beam in the northern part of the County.

Matters to be Presented by the Committee

None

Old Business

None

New Business

A copy of the 2019 Internet survey conducted by the Committee was included in the agenda packet. Ms. Whetzel inquired as to the need for a new survey. It was suggested that 2020 challenges be included in a new survey, including the Economic Development needs. Additional questions could be Did you work from home in 2020? and If you had better service would you be able to work from home? Broadband should also be more clearly defined.

Nominations for 2021 Officers were made: Chairman – JR Lawhorne, Vice-Chairman – David Henderson.

Adjournment

The next meeting will be held February 25, 2021 at 7 pm in a format to be determined. With no further discussion by the committee, the meeting adjourned.