

Clarke County

BROADBAND IMPLEMENTATION COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 23, 2017



A meeting of the Broadband Implementation Committee was held at the Berryville/Clarke County Government Center, Berryville, Virginia, on Wednesday, August 23, 2017.

ATTENDANCE

Present: Robina Bouffault, Mary Daniel, Scott Kreider, Bev McKay

Absent: None

Staff Present: Brandon Stidham, Planning Director; Matt Rabbitt (Information Technology)

Others Present: Bill Johnston (resident)

CALLED TO ORDER

Mr. Stidham called the meeting to order at 2:35PM.

AGENDA

The Committee approved the agenda as presented by Staff.

Yes: Bouffault (moved), Daniel (seconded), Kreider, McKay

No: none

Absent: none

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The Committee approved the July 11, 2017 meeting minutes as presented by Staff.

Yes: Bouffault (moved), McKay (seconded)

No: none

Absent: none

OLD BUSINESS

Presentation of Broadband Website

Mr. Stidham and Mr. Rabbitt presented the draft version of the broadband website and displayed a live version of the website for the Committee's discussion. Regarding the FCC broadband speed and capacity charts, Ms. Bouffault noted that they were somewhat difficult to read and asked if they could be adjusted. Mr. Rabbitt said that he thought he could improve the resolution for these charts. Regarding the page on the School Board's broadband efforts, Ms. Bouffault reported that she asked Dr. Bishop to review the information and he indicated that this is good for now. She added that

additional information from the Schools will likely be provided later in the year regarding the Kajeet program and results of parent survey. Regarding the appearance of the site, Ms. Bouffault asked if photographs could be included to the page listing the different types of broadband providers, if the gray template could be changed to a different color such as green or blue, and if a County background could be added to the header on the front page. Mr. Rabbitt explained that the hosting company offers a limited number of templates that have limited capacity for editing but that he would work with Mr. Stidham to find a layout that is clearer with a different color scheme. Mr. Stidham suggested adding a watermark of the County outline or logo to the pages to improve appearance.

Mr. McKay was concerned about how residents without internet access would be able to use the website. Ms. Bouffault noted that a lot of residents use the County library's free WiFi. Mr. Stidham suggested adding a page to the website listing the location of free WiFi hotspots in the County.

Mr. Stidham said that once Mr. Rabbitt has made the requested changes he will send the link out to Board of Supervisors and Planning Commission members asking for feedback within one week. He asked whether the Committee wanted to see the changes first and members said they did not. He added that if no substantive changes are suggested by the Board or Commission, Staff would complete the website work and launch it. If there are substantive issues raised, he will consult the Committee before publishing the website.

Ms. Bouffault asked what the entire website package will cost. Mr. Rabbitt replied that an annual subscription costs about \$8.00 per month.

Discussion, Responses to Request for Information (RFI)

Mr. Stidham began by stating that since this is an RFI process as opposed to a request for proposal (RFP) process, the Committee has the flexibility to discuss it in open session and can explore a number of approaches in response to the information received. Ms. Daniel asked whether all of the responses are considered public record and Mr. Stidham replied yes and noted that none of the respondents indicated that the information submitted is proprietary. Ms. Bouffault distributed a chart that she assembled summarizing all of the respondents, their business locations, their recommended business structures, and comments on the information that was provided.

Mr. McKay noted that he has spoken with Mark Bayliss (Visual Link). Although he did not respond to the RFI, Mr. McKay noted that Mr. Bayliss is on a Federal Communications Commission (FCC) technical committee on broadband and that the Committee may want to meet with him. Mr. Stidham noted that the Committee had discussed having a group meeting involving all of the respondents but he did not think that would be a good idea with the makeup of those that responded to the RFI. Ms. Bouffault noted that she has been speaking with Dave Grigonis from SBA Towers regarding a possible future tower site in the County and that he might be a good representative of the tower industry to bring in for a meeting. She also suggested that the Committee consider scheduling meetings in the near term with Mr. Grigonis, Mr. Bayliss, and representatives from Shentel and All Points Broadband. Mr. Stidham asked whether these would be individual meetings and Ms. Bouffault asked if they could be brought in together. Mr. Kreider suggested not meeting with respondents that recommended expensive infrastructure projects. Mr. McKay said that it is important to meet with local wireless internet service providers (WISPs) to determine what they need in order

to expand service. Mr. Stidham said that Ms. Bouffault's recommended list includes two local WISPs, a local fiber optic provider, and a national tower construction firm. Ms. Daniel likes the idea of having representatives from different parts of the industry meet with the Committee to tell us what is coming in the future and what is feasible for the County.

Ms. Bouffault stated that it is likely that any providers the Committee meets with will ask how much money the County has available for broadband expansion, and she added that the County currently has not committed any funding to this effort. She recommended that the Board of Supervisors begin setting aside funds each budget year for broadband infrastructure projects. Mr. McKay said that we need to find out if any of these providers can expand without County funding. Mr. Stidham added that we should ask the providers how the County can facilitate broadband expansion short of committing taxpayer dollars for infrastructure. If the providers say that the County does need to invest in the effort, he said the next questions that need to be asked are what we should invest in and how much we need to set aside. He also said that the timing is good because the Committee can work on this issue through the fall and provide a budget recommendation in January when all budget requests must be submitted.

Ms. Bouffault asked the members whether they were comfortable with scheduling a meeting with the four providers that were previously mentioned. Mr. McKay replied that it would be better to meet with them individually as he was concerned that the group approach may discourage open discussion. Mr. Stidham noted that the meeting or meetings would have to be conducted in open session. Ms. Daniel said that one of the Committee's goals is to be public with the work to improve broadband access.

Mr. Stidham pointed out the list of meeting dates in the packet memo. Following discussion among the members, the Committee agreed that they could all meet on Monday, September 18 and on Thursday, September 21 in the morning only. Mr. Stidham said that he would attempt to pair the providers up in meetings but not have the WISP providers meet together. He added that he would inform the providers that the Committee wants to know how the County can facilitate broadband expansion without spending taxpayer dollars and if County investment is necessary, what should the County invest in and how much money should be set aside.

Ms. Bouffault said that separately from meeting with providers, the Committee should move forward with developing the letter to residents and businesses about the County's broadband efforts. She also suggested as a future County project the development of a "broadband café" that would provide residents and business owners with another location to access free broadband internet. Mr. Stidham said that once the Committee approves a draft letter, it must go to the Board's Finance Committee for funding approval before it can be distributed. He said that he would prepare a draft letter for the next meeting. Mr. McKay said that a countywide mailing will likely cost several thousand dollars and he was not sure whether it would be the best use of funds and Ms. Bouffault disagreed. Members discussed the possibility of omitting Town of Berryville residents from the mailing to reduce costs since the Town is already served by Comcast. Mr. Stidham noted that it might be more labor-intensive and costly to create a specialized mailing list and also noted that Town residents may be interested in broadband options other than Comcast. Mr. McKay asked whether it would be cheaper to send by postal patron and Mr. Stidham said that would potentially save postage and assembly

costs. Ms. Daniel asked what the purpose of the letter is and Ms. Bouffault replied that it is to inform people of the options that are available to them for internet access. Mr. Stidham added that it would notify residents and businesses of the information being made available on clarkeconnect.org. Mr. Johnston asked whether it would be a cheaper alternative to take out a public notice in the Clarke Observer. Ms. Daniel said that it would be expensive but does go out to all residents. Ms. Bouffault noted that a lot of copies are thrown out unread. She added that an envelope with "County Broadband Information" on the outside would be noticed by residents and business owners. Mr. Stidham said that he would attempt to get cost information for the next meeting.

Mr. Kreider asked whether there will be a separate business meeting in September. Mr. Stidham said no and that he will schedule the business items to be discussed after the meetings with the providers are completed.

The meeting was adjourned by consensus at 3:41PM.



Brandon Stidham, Planning Director