

Broadband Implementation Committee
January 13, 2021 Regular Meeting 2:00 pm

At a regular meeting of the Broadband Implementation Committee held on Wednesday, January 13, 2021, at 2:00 pm in the Main Meeting Room, Berryville Clarke County Government Center, 101 Chalmers Court, 2nd Floor, Berryville, Virginia.

Members Present: Bev McKay, Doug Lawrence, Buster Dunning, Dr. William Houck

Members Absent: Doug Krum

Staff Present: Chris Boies, Felicia Hart, Tiffany Kemp, Brandon Stidham

Others Present: Mary Ivie

1. Call to Order

At 2:00 pm, Doug Lawrence called the meeting to order and turned the meeting over to County Administrator, Chris Boies.

2. Organizational Meeting

Select 2021 Chair

Chris Boies opened the floor for nominations for Chair of Broadband Implementation Committee for 2021.

Bev McKay, seconded by Dr. William Houck, moved to appoint Doug Lawrence for Broadband Implementation Committee Chair for 2021. The motion carried by the following voice vote:

| | | |
|----------------|---|--------|
| Buster Dunning | - | Aye |
| William Houck | - | Aye |
| Doug Kruhm | - | Absent |
| Doug Lawrence | - | Aye |
| Beverly McKay | - | Aye |

Set Meeting Dates, Time, and Location

| Date | Time | Location |
|-----------------------------|---------|-------------------|
| Wednesday, January 13, 2021 | 2:00 pm | Main Meeting Room |
| Wednesday, April 14, 2021 | 2:00 pm | Main Meeting Room |
| Wednesday, July 14, 2021 | 2:00 pm | Main Meeting Room |
| Wednesday, October 13, 2021 | 2:00 pm | Main Meeting Room |

| | | |
|-----------------------------|---------|-------------------|
| Wednesday, January 12, 2022 | 2:00 pm | Main Meeting Room |
|-----------------------------|---------|-------------------|

Bev McKay, seconded by Dr. William Houck, moved to adopt the meeting schedule as presented. The motion carried by the following voice vote:

| | | |
|----------------|---|--------|
| Buster Dunning | - | Aye |
| William Houck | - | Aye |
| Doug Kruhm | - | Absent |
| Doug Lawrence | - | Aye |
| Beverly McKay | - | Aye |

Doug Lawrence suggested that an evening meeting at times may be needed.

3. Approval of Minutes

- Doug Lawrence page 4: change “Chair Lawrence stated that Shentel is the parent company of GLO Fiber, and it is twice as fast as Comcast.” To “Chair Lawrence stated that Shentel is the parent company of GLO Fiber.”

Dr. William Houck, seconded by Bev McKay, moved to approve the October 21, 2020, minutes as amended. The motion carried by the following vote:

| | | |
|----------------|---|--------|
| Buster Dunning | - | Aye |
| William Houck | - | Aye |
| Doug Kruhm | - | Absent |
| Doug Lawrence | - | Aye |
| Beverly McKay | - | Aye |

4. Rappahannock Electric Cooperative Update

Doug Lawrence highlights include:

- Spoke with the representative from Rappahannock Electric Cooperative (REC) today; he was not allowed to discuss the FCC auction until January 29, 2021.
- Updated the Committee that REC had to pull out of the FCC auction because there was a class-action suit filed.
- Expressed that his view was that if they would have been able to participate in the FCC auction and received enough money, then one (1) of the requirements was to run fiber to every meter in their service area within seven (7) years.

5. Shentel Update

Doug Lawrence Updates:

- Had a phone conversation with Shentel Representative, Dan Meenan, who called into the October meeting. He indicated that we should call back in two (2) to three (3) weeks because the engineers are still studying cost, etc.

6. All Points Broadband

See Item 9. Community Meetings.

7. State and Surrounding Localities Updates

Doug Lawrence indicated:

- In the future, discuss the possibility of partnering with surrounding localities because Clarke may have towers to help Frederick, Warren, and Jefferson, and vice versa, giving the opportunity to come together regionally to examine projects and possible grants.
- Conversed with Frederick County, Patrick Barker, expressed:
 - They applied two (2) years ago for a VATI Grant that they did not get.
 - Last year they made a Request for Proposal (RFP) and had no response.
 - Used some CARES Act funding to get a third-party to hook-up WiFi at some of the fire halls for school students.
 - Working on a \$20 million upgrade project to mostly the Fire & EMS/Law Enforcement equipment that would possibly help with broadband infrastructure.

Dr. William Houck expressed that he liked the idea of joining with surrounding localities so that it does become a bigger project and is more worthwhile for these businesses to come in and provide the service.

8. Clarke County/Comcast VATI 2019 Project Recap

Doug Lawrence Updates:

- Talked to one customer who took advantage of the service in White Post. The full bundle was roughly \$200 a month and they are happy with the service.
- Would like to know how many took advantage of the service. Brandon Stidham expressed that the only residents who may have trouble with using the service were the ones who are in the newer subdivision Greenway Vista who were under Winchester Wireless because they went in roughly a year before the Comcast project and wired the homes with roof-top antennas; those residents may still be in a contract with Winchester Wireless.
- Believe Comcast ran fiber up Russell Road and Cather Road within the last year; will have discussions with Comcast to get more information.

9. Community Meetings

Doug Lawrence Updates:

- At the November 2020 Legislative Priorities Meeting, Delegate Dave LaRock mentioned that the best way to get broadband is for neighbors to band together and complain. If they get a spokesperson and enough commitments, projects will happen.

- Need to come up with a strategy to make it more open to private-sector competition to get business to come into the County and complete projects.
- Businesses are busy right now due to COVID-19, so one function for the local government may be to get neighborhood groups together to ensure that it will be a worthwhile project for these businesses. Once the groups are formed then those individual communities can push the projects. Gave the example of Wadesville Road; if those neighbors join together and the County helps them connect with the right personnel at these businesses, they can figure out options that will work best for that area.
- In some areas, they may be able to get two (2) businesses to band together to provide the best services to underserved areas; for example have Comcast run fiber to a certain point and then set up a tower for Winchester Wireless to reach the homes.
- Another idea to think about and explore using VDOT right-of-ways to run the fiber then use beam technology from the road to the homes. Bev McKay stated that Visual Link was a promoter of the beam technology but is no longer in business. Doug Lawrence confirmed that Visual Link was bought out by All Points Broadband who services some of the County. Buster Dunning expressed that All Points Broadband, roughly a year ago, did not seem interested in coming South of Berryville.
- Buster Dunning added that Virginia Air Networks also known as LiveStream has a plug-and-play device that is wireless; it is a one-time fee of \$399, then you choose the package, most expensive one is \$100 a month. Brandon Stidham stated that he believes this is a 4G LTE product, where they use cellular capacity.
- Brandon Stidham expressed that Winchester Wireless has a similar service; it works for those residents who have no line-of-sight, adding that with these types of products, there is a data cap. Further explained that these products go to a tower, but they are cellular, so a clear line-of-sight is not needed.

Brandon Stidham expressed that before the Community Meetings begin, it may be a good idea to get the representative from Comcast to come to a meeting to discuss if they would realistically do a project if a neighborhood group went in together to get a project done. Adding that just this week, he had a conversation with a resident who is close to where Comcast is already available in the area; they stated that Comcast quoted them a high cost just to run the fiber to their home, the residents said he would pay the cost, but then Comcast never responded. Fear that if there are these Community Meetings and those neighborhood groups go to Comcast, then Comcast will not be able to fulfill the service; feel that there should be a commitment from a Comcast representative before those groups start asking.

Chris Boies stated that his experience with Comcast is that they have not been very responsive. Explaining that last year Clarke offered to do all of the work on a grant that would have paid for infrastructure to be installed and we had customers who were willing to connect once available, and Comcast never responded. Believe that Comcast is so busy that our projects are not large enough for them to consider.

Bev McKay conveyed that possibly the best starting point for Clarke is Shentel since they have all of the wireless beam frequencies and they have both wired and wireless options.

Felicia Hart explained that Shentel Glo Fiber is currently doing a media outreach on Facebook, having citizens put in information to see if their service is close to the area. If you are not in close proximity to the service they will put you on a waiting list.

Chris Boies suggested that staff and this Committee should compile all of the information and options for citizens. Agree with Bev McKay that Shentel may be the group that will help Clarke the most. Need to form a relationship with Shentel and discuss areas to target for the VATI grant. Doug Lawrence confirmed that he would call the Shentel representative the first week of February; Felicia Hart stated that she would also find the best contact for Shentel.

Doug Lawrence explained that Virginia received \$238 million from the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF) auction, spread among 16 winning bidders, will research that information.

Doug Lawrence reiterated that Clarke needs to work on lining up projects and partners to apply for the Virginia Telecommunications Initiative (VATI) grant. The part that hurts Clarke County is the density because we are on the lower end of the spectrum.

Health aspects:

Dr. William Houck stated that he went online and the answers for all world health organizations, all agree that there is very minimal risk looking specifically at 5G causing cancer.

10. Next Meeting

April 14, 2021, 2:00 pm, main meeting room, hope to have an update on surrounding localities and information from Shentel.

Brandon Stidham explained that if committee members get questions about internet from constituents to bring up the WISPs, like All-Points, Wave2Net, Virginia Air, etc., because they are all in competition with each other and most likely have new products to keep up with one another. Many people do not understand the difference between satellite and WISPs.

11. Adjournment

At 2: 44 pm, Chair Lawrence adjourned the meeting.

Minutes Recorded by Tiffany R. Kemp and Transcribed by Brianna R. Taylor